Acting For Transformation: An Esl Teacher And Her Adult Immigrant Students Dramatize The Students’ Life Stories

Dana Horstein
SIT Graduate Institute

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ACTING FOR TRANSFORMATION:
AN ESL TEACHER AND HER ADULT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS
DRAMATIZE THE STUDENTS’ LIFE STORIES

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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BY
DANA HORSTEIN

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IPP ADVISOR: KATHLEEN GRAVES
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Abstract

This paper documents the implementation of a year-long drama project that was conducted with adult immigrant English as a Second Language (ESL) students at Asian Human Services, a community-based organization in Chicago. Throughout the year, during the fall, winter, and spring terms, three classes of students dramatized their life stories. This paper provides background for the project by explaining the history and role of drama in language education. It also considers the teacher’s motivations for the project and its design; its ultimate challenges and successes; as well as the insights that it provides about what it means to be a teacher and a student, and how these roles may at times blur. Classroom videos document the students rehearsing, performing, and offering feedback on their dramas. These videos then serve as the basis for an analysis of the drama lessons, together with student comments and teacher reflections.* In addition, a detailed account of the dramatic lessons that were used throughout the year, as well the primary resources that inspired them, is provided in the appendix. In the conclusion, these experiences are used as a rationale for making recommendations about teaching drama to adult ESL students. Finally, the implications of this project are considered for the future of drama in language education.

*Permissions were secured from all persons who appear in the video. If you would like to view the videos, please email the author at danahorstein@hotmail.com.
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) Descriptors

Adult Education
English (Second Language)
Drama
Dramatic Play
Classroom Techniques
Active Learning
Teacher Developed Materials
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“To learn is to face transformation. To learn the truth is to enter into relationships requiring us to respond as well as initiate, to give as well as take. If we became vulnerable to the communal claims of truth, conversion would be required”
(Palmer, 1993: 40).

-- Parker Palmer

“There’s something about catapulting yourself into a different experience, and seeing how it was lived out, but then manipulating it to your liking—adding a funny walk for effect. Drama seems to be all about seeing the effect that your presence, your body, your language, can have on others. The fact that you, as a second language learner who is nervous and uncomfortable, can influence and entertain others’ feelings and emotions is kind of incredible. There is great power in acting. There is great power in transforming one’s self and, in turn, in transforming the viewers and the energy in the room. There is great power in self-expression when it is permitted to live, breath, and change.”

-- personal journal entry, May 21, 2009
Chapter 1
A Teacher’s Story: Opening Story for the Drama Project

“True personal freedom and self-expression can flower only in an atmosphere where attitudes permit equality between student and teacher and the dependencies of teacher for student and student for teacher are done away with. The problems within the subject matter will teach both of them” (Spolin 1999: 5).

--Viola Spolin

Spring Term, 2009

It is 9:10 a.m. on a Tuesday morning. I am sitting in the basement of an old Chicago church, in a space that doubles as both my office and my classroom. With ten minutes left to go before starting class, I am sweating. Even though the lesson for my drama class is planned, I am still nervous about teaching it. How will my students respond to it? How will I feel teaching it? I sit at my desk, thinking about facing my class of twelve adult immigrant ESL students, and wondering what the result will be. And thus, the stage for this classroom drama is set.

We begin with homework, as we usually do. I ask the students to discuss their homework in pairs. They were supposed to have made a list of “good” and “bad” things that Americans think about immigrants. This was an extension of a conversation from the previous day, when I had given my students a newspaper article about how adult education students in Virginia were fighting for funding for their English classes. While we had been discussing the article, several of my students had suggested that perhaps
Americans did not want to give more money to these classes because the students were immigrants.

After that class, I decide that it might be interesting for the students to explore the idea of what Americans think about immigrants by acting out the two sides in a role play. I envision two lines of students facing each other, with each pair speaking at the same time. Every few minutes, one line of students would move down one spot, so that they could continue talking with different partners. These conversations would give each student the chance to more fully exchange their views. Moreover, I think that playing the role of an American might be an interesting change for the students, enabling them to take on a perspective that they do not ordinarily have.

Although the idea of doing the role plays appeals to me, given the controversial nature of the topic, I am unsure how it would work to substitute them for a regular class discussion. Do the students have enough preparation to feel comfortable playing their parts? Will they have enough thoughts on the topic to take part in the conversation? But in addition, there is another issue lurking in the back of my mind. I have just found out that two teachers-in-training will be observing my class, and I am concerned about how the students will feel discussing such a sensitive issue in front of strangers. On the other hand, I am also worried about losing momentum if we do not discuss the topic on this day. I decide to go for it.

“How many students have the homework?” I ask. Everyone but Irma raises their hand.

“Why not, Irma?” I ask. “What happened? Did you not have enough time?”

“No, I had the time,” she says.

“Did you understand the homework?” I ask.
“Yes,” she says.

“Okay,” I say.

Clearly, there is something that Irma, a middle-aged Mexican woman, does not want to tell me. I asked the other students to discuss their homework with a partner, and then I go over to speak with Irma privately.

“Irma,” I ask, “is something wrong?”

“I don’t like this topic,” she says.

“No?” I say.

“No,” she says. “I don’t like talking about this. It makes me feel bad.”

Adisa, a Bosnian woman who is Irma’s partner, chimes in, saying, “I don’t know much about this topic. I don’t know what to say.” I am surprised. Adisa had been living in the U.S. for five years. She does not have any thoughts about the topic?

“Okay,” I say. “You guys don’t have to talk about this then. You can talk about something else for a few minutes while the other students finish. Don’t worry.”

I reconvene the class, and we proceed to review the lists that the other students have prepared for their homework. I dutifully write down their ideas on the board, but my mind had already moved on to another matter.

“Okay,” I said. “You have thought about the good and the bad things that Americans think about immigrants, but now I have a different question for you. I want to go back a little bit. Maybe this wasn’t the best question to ask you. I think that some students don’t feel comfortable talking about this subject, and if even one of you doesn’t feel comfortable talking about it, then we shouldn’t continue. How many of you don’t feel comfortable?”
About half of the students raise their hands: Irma, Adisa, Teresa, and Luz, and Hasiba. This half happens to be sitting clumped together on the left side of the room. The other students, who are all sitting on the right side of the room, indicate that they feel fine discussing the topic. Those students are: Tino, Mutita, Olga, Abi, Tere, and Joaquin. We all look at each other. The tension in the air is palpable. I have no idea what I am going to do next and everyone in the room, including the observers, seems to know it.

I begin by stating the obvious: “Okay, we’re about 50/50…. and it’s pretty interesting that you guys are already sitting on different sides of the room.” I pause to think for a minute. “Well,” I say, “Why don’t you talk with your partner about why you do or don’t feel uncomfortable talking about this issue?”

Okay, good. I have a plan for the next five minutes. The students are talking energetically with their partners about the question that I had posed to them. I start walking around the classroom. I need a break from being at the front of the classroom, and I think that the students probably need a break from it, too. As I walk around, I can see the observers watching the students and taking notes. I do not talk to them.

Now, I am back at the front of the room again. It is time to stop the student conversations. “Okay,” I said. “Now I’d like you and your partner to write down your ideas for why you do or don’t like talking about this topic. Make a list,” I said. The students get busy talking and writing their ideas down on paper.

From there, things begin to unfold more naturally. Once the students are finished writing their ideas, I know that I can have pairs from either side of the issue stand up, meet, and compare notes and opinions. As the students move around the room, some of the tension in the class dissipates. Once the students sit down again, I ask everyone to
share their thoughts. To do this, I have a particular exercise in mind that we had done before, and which usually keeps everyone engaged and focused.

“Okay,” I said. “I need one student to come to the board to write. You are the writer. The writer is going to listen to what the other students say, and then write down their exact words. Don’t change the language. You have to write down exactly what you hear. When you are finished writing down one idea, choose another student to be the writer.”

On the board, I have drawn a chart with two sides: “Why you like talking about Americans and immigrants” and “Why you don’t like talking about Americans and immigrants.” Ironically, this chart very much resembles the one that I had given the students for homework. However, this one provides the students with an opportunity to discuss their feelings about a personal and highly sensitive topic indirectly. Also, the purpose of filling out the chart has changed. Before, I had asked the students to fill out the chart at their house, and they had had no idea what I had intended to do with the information (At the time that I gave out the homework assignment, I did not know what I intended to do with it either.). Now, however, they are filling out the chart collectively, and they know that the purpose is to continue sharing differences of opinion. The students seem comfortable carrying out this exercise. Moreover, I think that it appeals to all of us because it unites a class that has become fractured.

One by one, the students volunteer their feelings about discussing Americans’ feelings towards immigrants. One by one, their words go up on the board. And soon, with this linguistic exercise underway, the class is back in its comfort zone. The words themselves, in effect, act as the filter for our collective tension. They provide some
necessary structure and definition to a class that has been destabilized by the exposure of raw emotions (in retrospect, not necessarily a bad thing). The words provide a layer of abstraction and, by doing so, offer distance from and clarity on what has become quite a nerve-wracking situation.

It is almost time for break, which means that I have almost survived the lesson. The students have shared their ideas about a sensitive topic both orally and in writing, as well as in pairs and as a class. As a teacher, I have revealed myself by acknowledging that I have put some of my students in an uncomfortable position, and by giving up my control over the direction of the class. By now, everyone seems a lot more comfortable than before. But there are still ten more minutes left to go. What else is there to do? I looked around the room and think…. Well, why not?

I ask the only two people whose voices had not yet been heard to weigh in on the issue. For the first time since I had introduced the observers at the beginning of the class, I look over at them, and invite them to come to the front of the class. “Why don’t you tell us what you think of all this?” I said. “Do you have any comments?” I have a good feeling about these observers, especially since they had made the students feel at ease when I had introduced them.

I switch places with the observers, and head to the back of the room. What would they say about all of this, I wonder. They do not delve into the topic at length. Instead, they speak about being impressed with the students’ ability to carry out their conversation in English, and that they inquire about the students’ lives. They are kind and good at making conversation with the students. Eventually, I actually have to stop the conversation because it is break time. Finally, this lesson has come to an end.
However, before we all leave, I check in with the students, asking them “How do you feel now? Do you feel okay or, at least, better than before?” They nod yes, and after considering how tense everyone was at the beginning of the class, I feel greatly relieved. “Good,” I say and then, in a moment of absolute honesty, I add, “Me too.” It is not until this moment that I realize how shaken I have been by the entire experience. And with that, the students and I go on break.

When I come home that evening, I feel exhausted. Although I am proud of the fact that I have managed to spontaneously restructure the lesson, I am most conscious of the fact that I feel drained and shaken. I realized how exhausting it is to feel responsible for a group that lacks a clear direction. Since I had given up control of the instruction, nobody knew what was going to happen next, and we had all had to act in the moment—something that did not typically happen—and certainly not with such an emotional topic at stake.

I have thought a lot about what happened in the class on this day. In particular, I have thought about how I had originally intended for my students to use role play to express their feelings about the opinions that Americans have about immigrants. In other words, I had planned for my students to act in a drama for which there was no script. However, at some point in this lesson, the roles had become reversed because I had ended up feeling like the actor without the script. Although I had been prepared to let my students discuss some incredibly personal feelings—in front of observers, no less—I was the one who ended up feeling scared and in the spotlight. Needless to say, the spotlight did not feel like a very safe or easy place to be. I had been forced to make up my own act as I went along; I had been forced to improvise.
On the one hand, it was exhilarating to be in this role because I had no idea what I would do or say next. But on the other hand, it was frightening to be in this role precisely because I had no idea what I would do or say next. So, this was drama—the glory and the terror of it. I had entered the classroom thinking that I was going to teach my students a thing or two about drama, but I ended up learning a lot about it myself. Now, I was no longer simply the drama teacher. I was also the drama student, and the line between the two roles had become irrevocably blurred.
I begin this paper with a story from my classroom for several reasons. First, I want to ground my research and analysis in a real classroom portrayal, since I believe that all of my academic work is for naught if it cannot inform what is actually happening in the classroom. Second, I want to illustrate the two primary concerns that I trace throughout the following chapters. My first concern is how to teach drama to adult immigrant ESL students at a community-based organization. My second concern is a more personal one, which is how delivering this type of instruction affects the power dynamic between a teacher and a class of students. Finally, this paper opens with a story because stories were my original inspiration for using drama to teach language. In chapter three, I take additional time to explain my rationale for this project. I also describe the setting for it by giving an overview of the language program in which I conducted the project, and the students that it serves.

Chapter four describes the research that I did to prepare for teaching drama in the language classroom. This research addresses both my concern about how to teach drama, and about the power dynamic between a teacher and students. I began researching drama in language education in the fall of 2008 and continued throughout the year, ending in the fall of 2009. I have divided up my findings into two parts: the benefits of using drama with language students and the challenges of using it with language students. After providing this background, I offer a context for my particular project by surveying the
research that I found to be relevant to it, as well as that which I found to be less relevant, and why.

Chapter five outlines the approach that I took to analyzing this project. Chapters six, seven, and eight make up the analysis section, which is the primary portion of this paper. In this section, I document the lessons that became the drama project itself. I discuss my rationale for teaching them and evaluate them according to my students’ feedback and my own thoughts on them and on teaching, in general. This evaluation is structured according to six areas of pedagogical concern that highlight the challenges that I faced while working on the project. I identified and named these concerns once I completed the project. Additionally, I have included videos of my students acting and discussing their stories from all three terms of the project: fall, winter, and spring. In the appendix, I also provide a detailed list of the drama lesson plans that I used, as well as the primary resources that I used to create these lessons. All of my resources are listed in the bibliography.

In chapter nine, the penultimate chapter, I review the drama project again in order to identify changes that I would make if I were to teach drama to adult immigrant language students again. Each of these changes is related to one of the six areas of pedagogical concern. Also, where relevant, I relate research as background for these recommendations. Finally, I consider how this project fits into the larger field of drama in language education.

To close, in chapter ten, I offer an anecdote about an experience that I had as a student not long after I finished the drama project. Thus, I bookend my description of this project with two narratives: one about my experience as a teacher, and another about
my experience as a student. My hope is that, together, they will highlight how the roles of a teacher and a student overlap and inform one another, thus lending greater compassion for the challenge that individuals in both positions face.
Chapter 3

Rationale and Setting for the Drama Project

Rationale

I like stories. I like stories a lot. I read stories. I listen to stories on the radio. I write stories. Stories, for me, are therapeutic. They are tales to get lost in and tales by which to connect to people. Stories illuminate the hidden lives of those living around us, lending new dimensions and perspectives to strange names and faces. There is a Native American proverb that says, “It takes a thousand voices to tell a single story.” I want to hear those thousand voices.

I like drama too, but I have never had an overarching fondness for it. Drama has always been something that other people did or paid attention to. So, my idea to have students dramatize their stories did not stem from a strong interest in drama; rather, it came from the stories themselves.

I have been asking my students to share stories about their life experiences for the past three years. (I always make a point of sharing my own stories with the students before I ask them to share their own. This gives them a model for what I want them to do, and it also gives me a chance to reveal something about my own life to them, just as I ask them to do for the class.) When I began asking students to tell their stories, I immediately saw that it had great potential. The students loved telling their stories! They were practicing English for a very real communicative purpose—so much so that, at times, they seemed to forget that they were using a second language. Suddenly, their non-native language really seemed to be about them; they wanted to explain their story in English, so that they could share something important about themselves.
As the tales were told, I watched heads come closer together. I heard the storyteller’s voice rise and fall with emotion. I watched the listener’s eyes probe those of the storyteller, while asking questions to more fully understand the meaning behind the words. Once, I saw a storyteller shed tears in front of the class, as she relived a particularly painful experience, in which her husband had had a serious, debilitating accident. Unquestionably, these student stories were powerful.

However, that said, I must acknowledge the role that my own fondness for stories has had on asking students to share their own in class. As a result of hearing my students’ stories, I have gained tremendous wisdom and insight into the world, my community, and myself. I can safely say that my life has been transformed by my students’ life stories.

Consequently, I have often thought about how I would like other people to be able to hear these stories as well. In the spring of 2008, I had a conversation with Terri, my supervisor, about the stories that my students were telling in the classroom. During this conversation, I had the idea of having my students perform their stories. Terri then suggested that they could start by presenting their stories to students in the other classes. I thought that the students would be excited by this idea. They certainly enjoyed telling their stories in class, so I figured that they would also have fun making their stories “come alive” for their peers. Moreover, just as storytelling provided a meaningful and authentic way for them to practice English, I thought that drama could do the same thing.

I also had the notion that my students could be “empowered” by presenting their stories. First, they could feel proud because they would be telling their personal stories—stories that were important to them. Moreover, they would be using English to convey
these stories to an audience. Also, they could feel proud because they would have completed a project. For a long time, I had been thinking about how to incorporate more long-term projects into the curriculum, precisely so that my students could feel a greater sense of accomplishment than what they might feel from just doing individual language activities day after day.

Finally, I also hoped that the pride that the students might develop in the classroom would extend beyond the school walls, giving them the motivation and confidence to do whatever they wanted to in their lives. As a teacher of adult immigrants, I am aware of the many struggles that my students face, due to language, social, and economic barriers. Consequently, I cannot help but hope that the education that they receive in my classroom will help them to overcome these barriers.

**Setting**

When I began working on this project, in the fall of 2008, I had been teaching adult ESL for five years. I was teaching at Asian Human Services (AHS), a community-based organization (CBO) in Chicago, where I had been working full time for four years. The name Asian Human Services is actually inaccurate with regards to the agency’s adult education program; the program had a predominantly Hispanic population, as well as a mix of students from many other regions, including Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most of the students were mothers in their 30s, a group that the program tended to attract because it had free daycare, and also because it met for 20 hours a week, which made it difficult for working people to attend. Some students had a high school or university education from their country, but most did not. They had been living in the U.S.
anywhere from between a few months to several decades. So, generally speaking, an average class at AHS was made up of students from a variety of ethnic, educational, and linguistic backgrounds.

When I began this project in the fall of 2009, my class was very small. I had around 6 students. In the winter term, I had a few more students, and by the spring, I had about a dozen. The class was small for two reasons. First, the program had just moved to a new neighborhood and so, especially in the fall, it was just getting established in the new location. Moreover, the majority of the students who attended the program were at a beginning level, but I was teaching an intermediate-level class, the highest one that the program offered. This was my first time teaching this level, so the core curriculum was new for me, in addition to the supplementary drama material that I was trying out for the first time.
Chapter 4

Research: Drama in Language Education

Introduction

When I began to research drama in language education, I was unfamiliar with the field. I had not heard of any other teachers who were using drama in the language classroom, nor had I seen any materials on the subject. As it turns out, this is partly because the area of drama in language education did not emerge out of the larger area of drama in education until the late 1980s. Consequently, I was hoping that my research would clue me in to some important pieces of the puzzle, such as who was using drama to teach ESL students, why they were doing it, how they were doing it, and to what effect. Throughout the year-long period of my research, I found many answers to these questions, which I will discuss in this section.

First, I will present the benefits of using drama with students, and with language learners in particular. I will discuss these benefits by explaining the ideas of the leading educators and linguists who have influenced the field of drama in language education, since they are the primary ones who have identified, documented, and researched reasons for using drama in the classroom. Next, I will discuss the challenges and drawbacks of using drama with language students. This information also comes from leading ESL drama proponents, who themselves, have encountered challenges to implementing this form of language instruction. Finally, I will highlight how all of this research informed or, in some cases, failed to inform, my specific project.

However, before going into greater detail, I would like to note the process by which I conducted my research since, as I discovered, the subject of drama in language
education occupies a relatively obscure niche in the overall field of language learning. My research moved from initial Internet searches (“ESL drama” and “TESOL drama” yielded some of the best Google results) to identifying published materials that cover the theories behind drama in language education, as well as information about the types of drama activities that one can use with students. Eventually, these searches also helped me to make contact with a handful of teachers and theater artists who are using personal stories to create theater with youth, community members, and language learners. These individuals include Kathleen Klose, founder of the Immigrant Theater Group at the Immigrant Learning Center in Malden, Massachusetts; staff members from Somos Mayfair, a community organization in Mayfair, California that creates Spanish-language theater about social issues that are relevant to the community members who perform it; David Feiner, executive and artistic director of Albany Park Theater Project, a Chicago-based neighborhood theater organization that works with teenagers to create theater about their stories, and those of other mostly immigrant community members; and finally, Michael Rohd, a community theater artist and the author of *Theater for Community Conflict and Dialogue: The Hope is Vital Training Manual*, which served as my primary source for drama activities. From these conversations, I took away recommendations for drama resources, such as books by Michael Rohd and Viola Spolin, the founder of improvisational theater. Moreover, these conversations helped me to place my project in a context of other community theater projects that are also using individuals’ stories as inspiration.

Similarly, when I stumbled upon the TESOL drama listserv, which hosts a 6-week annual online workshop that is available to TESOL members, this greatly helped me to
contextualize my project. Moreover, it introduced me to the fact that there is an active community of drama language educators out there, and it is an extremely international one. Without this listserv, I doubt whether I would have realized that such a group exists, or that it is one from which I can learn, and to which I can contribute. Thus, although my research began with an abstract search for some sources on the Internet, it ultimately led to the discovery of a group of likeminded fellow teachers.

**The Benefits of Using Drama in the Language Classroom**

The publications on drama in the language classroom suggest many potential benefits of using drama to teach language learners. To more clearly understand these benefits, I have compiled them into a table, which I have divided up into three categories: instructional approaches, classroom environment, and language learning. By reviewing this list, one can see the potential impact that drama can have on students from a macro-level (It encourages project-based learning.) to a micro-level (It can help with voice projection.).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas of Potential Impact for Drama</th>
<th>Benefits of Drama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Instructional Approaches          | 1. Enables problem-solving  
                                         2. Encourages project-based learning  
                                         3. Encourages cooperative-based learning  
                                         4. Promotes student-centered learning |
| Classroom Environment              | 5. Builds classroom community  
                                         6. Uses student-centered topics  
                                         7. Provides an avenue for discussing sensitive topics  
                                         8. Provides a forum for exploring cultural issues and identities  
                                         9. Provides opportunities for play, fun, and relaxation  
                                        10. Fosters creativity and imagination  
                                         11. Enables physical movement  
                                         12. Encourages empathy  
                                         13. Encourages risk-taking  
                                         14. Boosts self-confidence |
| Language Learning                  | 15. Showcases students’ natural speech  
                                         16. Provides an authentic use of vocabulary and grammatical forms  
                                         17. Promotes fluency  
                                         18. Encourages the use of gestures and body language  
                                         19. Encourages voice projection  
                                         20. Emphasizes pronunciation |

Table 4.1 Benefits of using drama in the language classroom.

I dedicate the most space to writing about the effect that drama has on the macro-level, that is to say, on the instructional approaches utilized by the teacher. These approaches make up the foundation of classroom instruction, as well as the backbone of why educators and linguists support using drama in the language classroom. After
establishing this foundation, I then address the benefits that drama can have on the classroom environment and on the process of language learning itself.

Before discussing these benefits in detail, I must emphasize that I did not conceive of them myself. Rather, I depended upon the experience of those drama in language practitioners who have come before me to identify the benefits of using drama. In particular, most of the items on this list were culled from three sources: a paper by Gary Carkin entitled “Teaching English through Drama: The State of the Art,” and the books *Stage by Stage* (Burke and O’Sullivan 2002), *Role Play* (Ladousse 1987), and *Drama* (Maley 1987).

Historically, proponents of drama in education and drama in language education, specifically, have embraced drama as a teaching approach because it emphasizes the role that students play in their own learning. The use of drama in the classroom can significantly shift the power dynamic from the teacher, who is traditionally the authoritative figure in the classroom, to the students. Since students use their imagination and creativity to develop dramas, they typically have more control over their learning than they do in more traditional classroom activities, such as fill-in-the-blank exercises and rote memorization, which are more teacher-centered activities that only have one correct answer.

Viola Spolin was a Chicago-based educator during the 1960s who recognized and commented on the importance of the power dynamic between teacher and students. She is regarded as one of the original practitioners of drama in education (as well as being considered the founder of improvisational theater.) Spolin said,
True personal freedom and self-expression can flower only in an atmosphere where attitudes permit equality between student and teacher and the dependencies of teacher for student and student for teacher are done away with. The problems within the subject matter will teach both of them. (Spolin 1999: 5)

Drama affords students the ability to strive towards personal freedom and self-expression by enabling them to wrestle with the “subject matter,” the dramatic task at hand, in a cooperative fashion. The end results are an unknown entity that is dependent upon the students’ creative energies, rather than having been pre-determined by the teacher.

Dorothy Heathcote is another leading pioneer of drama education. She also firmly believes in students taking responsibility for their learning. She created “process drama,” in which the students, and sometimes the teacher, take on roles in an unscripted drama. With “process drama,” there is never any performance; rather the focus of the drama is solely on the creative process of making it. As the drama unfolds in the classroom, the students take responsibility for the actions of their characters, and must make decisions about what will happen to them. As a result of this decision-making process, the students become the experts over their own dramatic experience. Consequently, this process represents the real learning of this exercise, rather than the drama itself.

Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal, a Brazilian educator and theater artist, respectively, from the 1960s, have also been recognized in drama education circles for advocating that students take charge of their own education. In his highly influential book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire promoted the “problem-posing method.” He said that the teacher should not act as an authority figure, but instead, should take on the role of a facilitator who, by listening to students, identifies their real-life concerns and
poses them back to the students as problems, so that they have an opportunity to take
action on these issues. Gary Carkin, a drama language teacher at The Institute for
Language Education at Southern New Hampshire University, and a contemporary leading
advocate of drama in language learning, highlights how Freire’s beliefs about the
relationship between the teacher and the students are similar to those of the original
drama educators:

For Freire, education implied an ethical, moral, and political consciousness on the part of the
teacher not to be applied in any authoritarian fashion, but communicated through inductive
reasoning and dialogue with a purpose. The purpose was to be ‘liberation,’ and by this, Freire
meant liberating the learner from being only a passive receiver of the dominant culture, but an
active participant in changing it. (Wallerstein, 1987, as cited in Carkin 2007: 8)

Freire’s philosophies have also been noted for their relevance to the education of
adult immigrant ESL students, which was my student population for this project. Nina
Wallerstein, author of Problem-Posing Education: Freire’s Method of Transformation,
says,

Problem-posing is particularly applicable to immigrant and refugee English as a Second Language
(ESL) students…. The majority of ESL students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds with
restricted access to education in their home countries. In the United States, they work primarily in
unskilled or low-skilled jobs; they often experience social or emotional barriers to learning
English, cultural conflicts, lack of self-esteem and a feeling of vulnerability in their new society.
(Wallerstein, 1987, as cited in Carkin 2007: 8-9)

Because these students often experience difficult circumstances in their daily
lives, the classroom can represent a safe place where they can do something concrete to
change their lives. However, it must also be noted that the classroom also poses a similar
opportunity to the teacher, who surely has the need to work towards self-improvement as
well. Indeed, when Viola Spolin asserts that personal freedom and self-expression can occur only when teacher and students regard each other as equals, it is worth noting that she does not specify of whose personal freedom and self-expression she is speaking. Thus, she implicitly implies that the capacity for this development lies within both the teacher and the student.

Augusto Boal was concerned with issues similar to those written about by Freire, who was a major influence on him (“Augusto Boal,” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia). Boal founded Theatre of the Oppressed, a theater movement that was intended to provide the oppressed masses with a method of viewing and changing their reality. In this theater form, a member of the audience (one of the popular masses) is invited to come on stage to act in the role of the character who is being oppressed, in order to try out different methods of overcoming this oppression. The rest of the audience has the option of calling out the actors if they think the character’s strategies are unrealistic. Boal’s theatrical ideas have had a great influence on the community theater artists, such as Michael Rohd, who cites Boal as being a significant influence on his work (Rohd 1998).

However, in reviewing the major influential figures of the drama language movement, individuals representing the language aspect of the movement are noticeably absent. As several articles, books, and radio programs on the subject have noted, there simply have not been many linguists who have studied the effects of drama on language learning (Carkin 2007; Wessels 1997; Diamond 2009). In fact, unfortunately, one must go all the way back to the mid-20th century to find a leading linguist who has significantly influenced the field of drama in language learning. That linguist is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky is a Russian language theorist whose ideas about how children learn
language had a major impact on the field of second language acquisition during the 1960s, when his book *Thought and Language*, was first published in English (It was published in Russian in the 1920s.). Moreover, Gary Carkin has noted significant parallels between Vygotsky’s ideas about cooperative learning and those promoted by Spolin, Heathcote, and Freire about student-directed learning (Carkin 2007).

Vygotsky very much believed that students’ interactions with each other and with the teacher increases the potential for language learning. He termed the “space” where this type of learning can occur the “Zone of Proximal Development,” which he describes as “The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (Vygotsky, 1978, as cited in Carkin 2007: 11). Carkin notes that these words are remarkably similar to those used by Freire to explain his ideas in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: “Group work, cooperative endeavor, problem-posing and problem-solving comprise a praxis that drives the evolution of the learner to new levels of interaction with external reality. This happens when teacher and students learn together as a team” (Freire, 1967 as cited in Carkin 2007: 9). Although Vygotsky is speaking about the process by which children learn, while Freire is discussing the means of impacting one’s daily reality, they clearly agree on one fundamental premise: The group is greater than the individual. In other words, the best way for students to maximize their learning is for them to learn in cooperation.

Many supporters of drama in language education believe that one of the greatest attributes of learning a language through drama is that students become wholly engrossed
with what they are saying, or the content of the language, rather than how they are saying it, or the form of the language. Charlyn Wessels, in her book Drama, writes,

Drama can generate a need to speak by focusing the attention of the learners on creating a drama, dialogue, or role play, or solving a problem... In each of these activities, learners have to be active participants, using their imagination and interacting with each other; almost unconsciously they are acquiring communication skills in the foreign language. (Wessels 1982: 9) [italics in original]

Wessels also notes that the theories of Stephen Krashen, a leader in the field of second language acquisition, support the importance of this type of learning. He says,

“Language acquisition… requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the message they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Wessels 1982: 12). In essence, drama changes the focus of the task from learning a language for the sake of the language itself to learning it for the concrete purpose of creating a drama. In this sense, it shares the same goal as other popular language learning approaches, such as task-based learning or content-based learning.

The collaborative aspect of creating a drama is one reason why students can, in effect, forget that they are learning and practicing a language. The playful aspect of it is another. It is important to remember that drama is inherently a form of creative play. When actors act out a role, they are said to be “playing a part.” Also, another word for a dramatic production is “a play.” Academic linguists both past and present, such as Lev Vygotsky and Guy Cook, have also noted the importance of play in language acquisition and retention (Carkin 2007; Cook 2000).

Imagination and movement are two integral aspects of play that are essential to drama games, which are a routine part of any drama warm-up. These games encourage
students to come in close proximity, and even in contact, with each other, and they are
designed to build trust and cooperation. In other words, when students move, they begin
to relax. Gary Carkin cites recent neurobiological research, which shows that movement
is necessary for language learning (Carkin 2008). Additionally, movement lowers
students’ affective filter and, as Krashen and other language acquisition researchers have
noted, having a low affective filter is a key to improving second language acquisition
(Carkin 2008). In other words, drama allows students to have fun, or play, which in turn
lowers their inhibitions about taking risks with using a new language.

Drama prompts language students to confront the potentially uncomfortable
performance space that is similar to the one that they face when they must speak to
strangers in the “real world”. In situations like these, as my students like to say, the brain
“freezes”. Gillian Ladousse, author of Role Play, explains,

   The overall aim of both these types of activity [simulations and role plays] is very similar: to train
students to deal with the unpredictable nature of language. Whether they are playing themselves
in a highly constraining situation (as in simulations), or playing imaginary characters in more
open-ended situations (as in role plays), they need to think on their feet and handle the skein of
language as it unravels. (Ladousse 1987: 6)

The language that students use in dramas is usually more meaningful and
authentic than typical classroom language, which is often modeled upon the formulaic
speech that appears in language textbooks. Many drama in language books, such as Role
Play, Body and Language, Drama, suggest that teachers use this dramatic language for
follow-up language activities, such as watching videotapes of the drama, doing writing
assignments based on the dramas, or working on specific grammar or vocabulary points
that arise in the dramas. Drama, then, can help teachers to personalize language instruction and tailor it to specific student needs.

Beyond the more formal aspects of language, such as grammar and vocabulary, many drama educators also suggest that drama can be used to work on those aspects of language that are often overlooked, such as body language and pronunciation (Wessels 1987; Burke and O’Sullivan 2002). Wessels explains: “The use of drama would involve a consideration of most (if not all) of the aspects of genuine communication discussed earlier – background, emotions, relationships, status, body language, and other paralinguistic features” (Wessels 1987: 11). All of these forms of communication are likely to be more internalized by students when they appear in dramas because the dramas contextualize them and make them more memorable (Ladousse 1996).

Interestingly, the language that students practice during the planning and rehearsal stages of a drama is very different from that which they use during the performance of a drama, which is for an audience. There is some division among drama in language educators about whether creating a drama production benefits students, or whether they should simply practice classroom drama activities. The question may be viewed as one of product versus process (Kelner 2008). Some sources note that asking shy students to perform when they are not ready can actually inhibit them (Dodson 2009), while others concentrate on how performance can actually increase the self-confidence and motivation of other students (Ladousse 1987; Wessels 1982; Burke and O’Sullivan 2002).

Teachers of adult immigrant ESL students have noted that one way of making learning more meaningful and motivating—especially for this population—is to incorporate these students’ life experiences into their classroom learning, as I did by
asking them to dramatize their life stories. Since these students have many responsibilities to take care of, if they do not feel that a class is relevant to them, they often stop coming to school. However, this is less likely to happen if students feel that their life experiences are recognized and utilized in the classroom. Saskia Akyil, a community college ESL teacher who wrote the article, “ESL Students Bring You the World: Creating a Project-Driven Course for Adult Immigrant ESL Students,” frames the idea this way: “I had to engage their existing knowledge of the world so that the new information they absorbed could be placed into their preexisting framework of knowledge” (Akyil 2006: 247).

To echo Akyil, I believe that “engage” is a key term for all of the linguistic, educational, and dramatic theories that I have examined thus far. On one hand, “engage” is important when considering how the teacher engages the students in the process of learning, and with how the students engage each other in this same process. These are areas that Spolin, Heathcote, Freire, Boal, and Vygotsky all respectively address. On the other hand, “engage” can also be considered with regards to how the teacher and students relate to the classroom material. In particular, Spolin and Krashen examine the need for students to engage with this material authentically, so that they can learn from it in their own fashion, and according their own needs, rather than according to those that are predetermined by the teacher. All of these educators and linguists were convinced that, for real learning to happen, teacher and students must approach each other on equal terms. If this happens, the students are not just rendered passive recipients of information that is supplied by the teacher, but instead, can determine the course of their own studies and
direct their own learning, as well as influence that of the teacher, who will, of course, be learning all the while as well.

Advocates of using drama in the language classroom believe that drama is a great vehicle by which students can influence their own learning. Drama is a creative, cooperative, problem-solving, and project-based process that students are likely to become invested in because they are the co-creators of its outcome. They often become so involved in these processes that can forget that they are using emerging language skills to participate in them. And yet, ironically, most drama in language educators believe that students end up acquiring greater language skills as a result. The question then is, why do so few language teachers use drama with their students? The following section addresses this question.

The Challenges of Using Drama in the Language Classroom

The question of why drama is seldom used in language classrooms was a particularly salient one for me at the beginning of this project, because I had many anxieties and reservations about doing it. My insecurities were tied to two main concerns: my lack of a drama background, and how my students would regard this unconventional form of instruction. As it turns out, these are two of the primary challenges that are described by most of the materials about using drama in the language classroom.

In fact, concerns such as these are so commonly accepted among drama language educators that most of the available resources on the topic devote a full section to addressing these challenges. A survey of some of these section headings give a good idea
of how much energy is devoted to the idea of teachers and students dismissing the use of drama in the classroom: “Reasons That Teachers Do Not Try This Type of Class,” (Stage by Stage), “Where does drama fit into language teaching?” (Drama), and “It Wouldn’t Work with My Class” (Role Play). Generally speaking, drama is regarded less as a serious educational tool, and more as a fluffy, enrichment activity that is appropriate for children, but not for adults (Dodson 2009). To demonstrate this point, one can look at the dearth of research on how drama affects language learning, or the lack of inclusion of dramatic activities in adult language textbooks. Without such professional contributions, it is unlikely that more administrators or teachers will view drama in language education as an area in which it is worth investing money, time, or energy.

There are many reasons why teachers may not be interested in investing their time and energy into including drama in their classroom instruction. Wessels details some of them: “Currently many teachers view [drama] simply as something enjoyable (but fraught with dangers and difficulties) to be used mainly with easy-going extrovert students during classes in spoken communication skills. The result is that many teachers tend to steer clear of it” (Wessels 1982: 8). Also, if teachers do not have a drama background themselves, they may feel ill prepared to teach others this type of activity (Dodson 2009). Finally, if teachers do feel insecure about teaching drama, there are few materials that walk them through the process of how to design a drama lesson or how to help students create a drama production.

Then there is the matter of the students, the ones who really must believe in the rewards of drama if they are to benefit from it. Some books point out the fact that students may pick up on a teacher’s own uncertainty about what they are doing, and this
could be cause for apprehension about this method. Also, students, like teachers, usually
do not come from a background of seeing drama used in the classroom, so they may not
see the point of doing it; they may feel that although the games and activities are fun,
you cut into the time devoted to their “real studies”. Wessels notes,

Not all students will perceive [the drama project] as being inherently useful, and so will fail to
bring with them the high degree of ‘motivation readiness’ essential for the success of such a
project… It is difficult to convince serious post-graduate or academically-oriented students of the
value of the project. The only thing that will attract them is the success of the project, and the
rapid progress made in the target language by those students who have volunteered for it. (Drama
1987: 10)

To this end, Wessels recommends that teachers make a point of telling students exactly
what it is that they are learning while they are engaged in dramatic activities.

Finally, there is the issue of how to work with introverted students, who are likely
to feel anxious about acting, even in front of their own classmates. To deal with this
situation, the books encourage teachers to be mindful of shyer students by creating a
comfortable atmosphere, and not asking them to do too much too soon (Wessels 1987
and Ladousse 1996).

Although teachers of adult language students already face a number of
instructional challenges, such as varying ages, cultures, skill-levels, and academic
backgrounds, those who wish to try out dramatic instruction face a host of additional
challenges. Perhaps the biggest of these is that, unlike with general language instruction,
there is not an array of workshops, publications, and support that are available to assist
drama language teachers. Thus, teachers who want to try out this form of instruction
must largely go it alone, and create their own materials as they go along. This requires a
significant time and energy commitment by the teacher, which can be especially daunting when there is no standard path to follow.

**A Survey of the Field in Relation to the Drama Project**

After conducting a year’s worth of research on drama in language education, I did not find many language teachers who were creating dramas about their students’ stories, or who were doing so with an adult immigrant population. Most of the publications that I found on the topic are generally geared towards creating drama using pre-existing scripts, or with children or adult students who are studying English at universities. The majority of the teachers who belong to the TESOL drama listserv seem to work with these two populations. Thus, in both published material and in the drama in language education community, I found few individuals who could comment on using drama with adult immigrant students at a community-based organization (CBO).

That said, I do want to highlight the materials that I found most relevant to my project, but also to point out the significant ways in which they differed from my project. For example, an interview with Kathleen Klose in the Massachusetts adult education publication, *Field Notes*, details how she creates dramas using her students’ life stories. However, she has her students rehearse the dramas based on scripts that *she* writes, rather than on ones that the students write themselves. Reading Rhonda Naidich’s “On Creating Theatrical Collages with ESL Students,” was helpful for learning the process that she carries out to develop dramatic presentations with her adult students, but she asks her students to collectively develop new stories for dramas, rather than to create ones about their personal experiences. Maria Guida also creates dramas with her adult ESL students,
as she explains in “Creating Theater in the ESL Classroom” but she uses classic theater scripts for this purpose. Finally, on the Pacific Resources for Education and Learning website, Daniel Kelin offers a wonderfully detailed step-by-step account of how he creates student dramas in “Telling Stories: Drama Strategies for ESL Students.” This account also includes video footage from his classroom. While Kelin’s process seemed to be most in-line with how I was interested in creating dramas, like Naidich, he works with stories that are not necessarily about the students’ own experiences. Also, he works with young children, not adults.

I believe there are many explanations for why there is such a lack of resources and attention devoted to drama projects for adult immigrants at CBOs. Most notably, as I have mentioned, using drama in language education is not a very common or accepted practice. Moreover, generally speaking, using drama in education is a far more accepted practice with children than with adults, as is suggested by the far greater number of published materials that discuss using drama with children.

Additionally, most of the authors who have written about using drama in language education seem to teach international students at universities. I will venture that the teachers who have the time and means to publish probably come from a university setting because they have the resources to do this kind of work. By contrast, teachers who work at CBOs are likely to work part-time and do not typically have the same resources. This distinction is important because, judging by the content of these publications, their authors seem to have written them with university students in mind.

I often found that the content was inappropriate for adult immigrant language students. First, most of the scripts that the authors suggest using are at a minimum of an
intermediate level, (for example, *Stage by Stage, Ten Plays for the ESL/EFL Classroom, Improvisations for Creative Language Practice*). This is because the majority of international students must have a relatively high level of English to enter into university, or into a university bridge program. This is not typically the case for programs that serve adult immigrants. In fact, in most of the CBO programs that I am familiar with, immigrant students usually peak at the intermediate level, in part because state and federal funding sources do not support higher-level classes, at least not in Illinois.

Also, as a result of a lack of affordable educational opportunities in their home countries, many immigrant students have significant literacy issues. For instance, many of my students stopped going to school after the sixth grade. Consequently, they tend to feel even more uncomfortable than usual reading a text in a second language, let alone in their first language.

Moreover, on the occasions when I tried to use a text as a starting point for some of my initial drama activities—even a text such as a dialogue written by the students themselves—I found that my students felt hindered by it. I observed that they were far less likely to take verbal risks with the language when they knew that there was a “correct” printed version of their words (or someone else’s words), to which they felt like they had to measure up. Daniel Kelin has noticed the same thing. In his, “Step-by-Step Instructions for a Story,” he suggests, “Avoid reading the story, as this leads students to rely on the wording in the book and to look for the ‘correct’ way to explore the story or the character’s words” (Kelin 2005).

Furthermore, in an ESL class with adult immigrants, I believe that there is an even greater impetus for creating drama that is based on students’ personal stories, instead of
using scripts. As I have stated before, for these students to remain motivated to come to class, it is extremely important that they feel that their needs are being addressed. One way to do this is to use student stories as language material. In this way, students will not only be able to see the link between their lives and the dramatic activities, but they will also be more likely to enjoy the experience of participating in drama, since they will be acting out stories about themselves and their classmates.

Moreover, in general, student motivation for doing drama activities is an issue that can vary between the international and adult immigrant student populations. For example, many times international students at a university have the luxury of choosing to do study drama as an elective or an extra-curricular activity. In other words, it is their choice to study drama and, thus, they will have already made some investment into the class. By contrast, most adult immigrants take just one language class, and they do not choose which one they take. For example, at a school like mine, they are placed into a class depending on their language level. Consequently, if drama happens to be taught in a language class, it is not a subject that the students signed up for, nor is it one that they were probably expecting to be taught, since it is not a traditional teaching method. Although many of the materials on teaching drama address the fact that students may not be receptive to drama, they do not mention that this can be an even greater issue with adult immigrants.

Also, because adult immigrants do not pay for class, and have busy schedules that frequently cause them to drop classes, they are less likely to attend class as regularly as international students. This lack of class continuity is critical because successful drama activities depend upon building skills up over time, as well as on developing group trust...
among the students, so that they feel comfortable taking risks with the language and with their bodies in front of audiences. In my class, for example, I struggled to explain to students who were absent during the weekly drama lesson what we had done during the previous week’s lesson. Also, since my program had open enrollment (which is a feature of adult ESL programs at many CBOs), several months into one term, I received some new students. They were noticeably more awkward and uncomfortable when doing the drama activities than the students who had been in my class since day one. None of the materials that I found on teaching drama address this issue of class continuity, as caused by student absenteeism or fluctuating class rosters.

Similarly, most of the books do not talk about strategies for teaching drama if classes meet infrequently, as they commonly do at CBOs—again because of funding issues and varying student schedules. For example, many ESL programs meet only two days a week, while university classes tend to meet more frequently. Fortunately, I taught at a program with an exceptionally intensive schedule. I met with my students for 20 hours a week, although we only worked on drama for a maximum of three hours a week. Although the number of hours that we devoted to drama did not seem like enough, my students and I spent so much time together that it made it much easier for me to foster classroom relationships and develop a community of trust. I am not sure how one could create a drama production, or even teach a regular series of drama lessons, within the framework of a class that only meets face-to-face a couple times a week, especially a class in which drama is not the sole focus.

In short, although the resources that I found on drama in language education did help me to place my drama project in a context of other forms of ESL drama instruction,
they did not significantly help me to find drama activities, or a process for teaching drama, that was particularly suitable for my students. Consequently, the drama in language field, as small as it is, could sorely use more contributions about how to teach drama to adult immigrants and, in particular, about how to create drama using their personal stories. This paper, which details the methods that I used for delivering drama instruction, the highlights and the challenges that I faced along the way, and, finally, the knowledge that I gained as a result, stands as one such contribution to the field.
Chapter 5
Approach to Analyzing the Project

My year-long drama project was divided up into three phases, in correspondence with my school’s academic calendar: fall 2008 (September – December), winter 2009 (January – April), and summer 2009 (May – June). In keeping with this structure, I have divided up the following three chapters along the same lines.

For each section, I offer examples of drama lessons that are representative of the work that my students and I created during that period. Each lesson includes general information, such as the date that it took place, the students who were present, their respective countries, and background information. The lessons also include videos of the student dramas, as well as some footage of the students rehearsing the dramas and giving feedback on them. (The procedure for each of the lessons that I taught as part of this project, including a description of the drama games and activities that I used, appear in the appendix. The lessons that I describe in this section are marked with an asterisk.)

The bulk of this section is made up of my reflections and analyses of these lessons, in which I consider what I learned from teaching the drama lessons, both in terms of my own teaching and my students’ developing dramatic and language skills. These reflections include some of the thoughts that I had immediately after teaching the lessons, but they are largely informed by the impressions that I had after watching the videos critically, which I did in the fall of 2009, upon the completion of the project.

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1 The summer term was cut short for reasons that will be explained in chapter eight.
These reflections are also interspersed with student feedback about the lessons and the project as a whole, which I collected throughout all three terms.

I have grouped my reflections about the drama lessons according to six areas of pedagogical concern that became reoccurring themes for me while I was teaching, and which I named and organized upon watching the videos in the fall of 2009. Within each area, I also list a group of defining features. However, since all of these features are not noteworthy for each of the lessons, I address them selectively in my analyses. The six areas of pedagogical concern and their respective features appear in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Pedagogical Concern</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student Playfulness</td>
<td>• fun&lt;br&gt;• spontaneity&lt;br&gt;• creativity&lt;br&gt;• imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Student Acting</td>
<td>• body language&lt;br&gt;• ability to relax&lt;br&gt;• comfort level in front of an audience&lt;br&gt;• rehearsal&lt;br&gt;• group dynamics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Student Language</td>
<td>• formal aspects of speech, i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation&lt;br&gt;• frequency with which students speak&lt;br&gt;• comfort and spontaneity with which students speak&lt;br&gt;• authentic language&lt;br&gt;• culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teacher Instruction</td>
<td>• dynamic of student/teacher control in lesson&lt;br&gt;• teacher in student role (teacher’s experience of being a student in another discipline)&lt;br&gt;• lesson dynamics, i.e., scaffolding, pacing, examples&lt;br&gt;• selection of student story to be dramatized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Logistics</td>
<td>• presence of video camera&lt;br&gt;• classroom space&lt;br&gt;• student attendance&lt;br&gt;• contact hours with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reflections</td>
<td>• teacher’s immediate reflections&lt;br&gt;• student comments and feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 Areas of pedagogical concern for drama lessons.
Chapter 6  
Fall Term 2008

Background Information

I taught just two drama lessons in the fall. During this period, I was more concerned with conducting research for the project, in part so that I would have a better idea of how to conduct lessons. However, I also led a few lessons, so that I could see how the students would respond to the idea of dramatizing their life stories.

Lesson 1 (October 2, 2008), “Rude Behavior”

Videos: #1 - #3

The Class: 7 intermediate level students, all women between the ages of 30-60

3 Mexican women (Miriam, Oralia, and Norma)
1 Bosnian woman (Adisa)
1 Chinese woman (Xiufang)
1 Rwandan woman (Christine)
1 Vietnamese woman (Thao)

The Drama Pairs (“Miriam” and “Michael”)

Pair 1: Xiufang and Christine
Pair 2: Oralia and Thao
Pair 3: Adisa and Miriam
Pair 4: Dana and Norma
Lesson Background

In this first lesson, I asked the students to perform one of their stories without much warm-up or dramatic preparation. I wanted to assess their dramatic strengths and weaknesses, and to get an idea for what I would need to teach them in future lessons.

This lesson revolved around the word “rude.” A few days before the lesson, I had had explained “rude” to my students in reference to a story that I told about a recent birthday dinner that I had invited some friends to at a restaurant. In the story, I explained that my friends had paid for my dinner since it was my birthday. All of my students were immediately fascinated because, according to their cultural customs, if the person who invites friends to a restaurant does not pay for the meal, he/she is regarded as “rude;” this person is regarded as the host/hostess of the dinner and therefore, it is only considered appropriate that he/she pay. A lively conversation ensued about these differences in expectations. I decided to use this energy to segue into a storytelling lesson, in which I asked the students to share their own stories about examples of rude behavior that they had encountered in the United States.

One student, Miriam, had a particularly engaging story. Many years ago, she had gone on a dinner date with an American man, Michael. Michael proceeded to be late for their date; escorted Miriam to a downtown restaurant on the bus, instead of in a car or a taxi; and then abruptly left Miriam at the restaurant as soon as their dinner was over, without ever checking to make sure that she had a way home, or knew how to get there. Depending on your perspective, Miriam’s story was either a classic case of cross-cultural communication gone awry, or just plain rude behavior. Needless to say, Miriam did not have fond memories of her date. However, her recollection of it made for a grand story,
which the rest of us loved. With Miriam’s permission, I decided to extend her story into the first drama activity of the term.

Initially, I asked pairs of students to write a hypothetical conversation between Miriam and Michael. Then, they used this script as the basis for a dramatized conversation between the couple. First, the pairs practiced reading the script a couple of times. Then, to help the students become less dependent on the script, I had them practice doing the conversation with puppets, which can be seen in the video. One puppet represented Miriam, and the other one represented Michael. I used the puppets because I have found that when students have objects in their hands, they tend to be less self-conscious about their speaking ability. Next, the students picked out clothes to use as costumes, which were, again, intended to reduce their anxiety. Finally, the students performed these conversations in front of their classmates with their costumes, while acting out the role of either Miriam or Michael.

[Video 1: “Miriam’s Story, Part 1,” Students practice conversation with puppets; Christine and Xiufang perform their conversation in front of the class.]

**Student Playfulness**

The first thing that struck me in watching the video is the sense of playfulness that acting immediately inspires in some of the students. For example, before the conversation begins between the characters played by Christine and Xiufang, I ask them where “Miriam” is. Xiufang, who plays Miriam, indicates that she is “Miriam” by coming to the front of the class and pulling her red and white scarf (a prop) over her
shoulders. Thao, another student who is watching her, calls out, “Very beautiful!” a comment which Xiufang regally acknowledges raising her head high in the air. And thus, Xiufang is ready to begin acting.

This playful spirit is significant because it signals that the students feel comfortable with the class and the classroom material. Indeed, when I solicited student feedback after this session, several of the students told me that it was fun to watch the others perform. This playful spirit is equally important because, although my students certainly laugh and have fun during my classes, I do not typically see them demonstrate such uninhibited spontaneity. Moreover, the mood and context that they create with their playful exuberance and imagined scenarios enables them to define their own learning experience. Thus, in this brief interaction between Thao and Xiufang, I can see the potential for drama to help create a more enjoyable, student-centered classroom.

[Video 2: “Miriam’s Story, Part 2,” Thao and Oralia perform their conversation in front of the class.]

[Video 3: “Miriam’s Story, Part 3,” Miriam and Adisa perform their conversation in front of the class. Then Miriam and I perform the conversation together.]

**Student Acting**

When I watched the students act out their conversations in the classroom, I immediately realized that teaching the students how to act would have to be one of my
primary emphases. As the students took turns speaking in front of the class, almost all of them looked terribly awkward. In the video, a few instances of this stand out.

First, in the conversation between Thao and Oralia, they shake hands for several seconds longer than what is normal. Second, the students often stand with their backs to the audience, making it difficult to see or hear them. Generally speaking, as a result of their nervousness, the students appeared uncomfortable and uncertain of how to move or present themselves.

Furthermore, several of the students opt to narrate what is happening in the story, rather than say their lines, or to act them out in character. For example, at the beginning of the scene with Christine and Xiufang, Xiufang looks like she is unsure what to do or say, so instead of diving into her role, she chooses to explain it: “First we meet. I walking here. 1:00. I’m early… I’m on time to here.” In the scene with Adisa and Miriam, Miriam winds up explaining much of the action as well. Although she does not appear nervous, I am presuming that she chooses to explain her scene because she was not prepared to act it out, nor could she think about how to improvise in the moment. Her narration goes likes this, “We go to the bus…. Then we arrive to the restaurant. We need to wait ten minutes. They give us a table. Finally, they go to the table.”

Afterwards, Oralia also noted that she did not feel comfortable having this conversation because she forgot her lines from the script. Other students then echoed her sentiment, saying that they felt like what they said in front of the class was not nearly as good as what they had written down.
These scenes, in combination with the student comments, indicated to me that it was too much for the students to think about their language and acting at the same time. Kathleen Klose relates a similar idea in *Field Notes*:

I realized right away the difference between giving [the students] a script that was written and letting them act something out without words because all their energy and creativity could go into the expression of what was happening. They didn’t have to worry about *Is this the right word? Am I pronouncing it the right way?* and all those things. (Oakley 2005, 14)

I decided that I needed to dedicate separate time to developing language skills and acting skills. For the rest of the year, I tried to devise drama lessons that would help my students relax and feel comfortable acting with their bodies—an element of language learning that is often overlooked.

That said, however, in this video, Adisa, who plays Miriam, does give some terrific acting examples. While she is waiting for Michael to arrive, she puts her hand to her forehead to search for him, checks her watch, and then uses her hand to scan for him again. You can hear the audience giggle in appreciation of her predicament. Later, after Michael abruptly informs Miriam that he has to leave the restaurant after they have barely finished eating, Adisa, as Miriam, buries her head in her hands and exclaims, “What? Oh my god!” Again, laughter comes from the audience that commiserates with this unlucky woman.

This moment suggests the power of theater, since each time Adisa expressively exhibits an emotion, the audience gives an audible response; they are connecting with her, and they are letting her know that. It is also worth noting that although Adisa was not an extremely extroverted student, she was quite comfortable being a student at this school. In particular, she was also quite comfortable being a student in my class, since I
was Adisa’s first teacher when she entered the school as a beginning language student over a year before this video was recorded.

On a related note, just as the students needed more general acting practice, I also saw that they needed rehearsal time to become more comfortable acting and speaking in front of an audience. In the video, it is clear that the shyer and more introverted students needed this rehearsal time, in particular. In all four versions of Miriam’s story performed by the students (and by me, in one instance), the student/teacher who plays Michael is the more extroverted and dominant one, while the student who plays Miriam is the more introverted and passive one. Not surprisingly, these roles follow typical gender patterns, as the more aggressive student ends up playing the more dominant male role, while the less aggressive student represents the female role.

This is especially evident upon viewing Miriam’s and Adisa’s version of the story, and then viewing the version of the story that I performed with Miriam. In the former version of the story, Miriam, who has much better language skills than Adisa, dominates the performance, barely letting Adisa get a word in edgewise. (Although, Adisa does not necessarily look unhappy about this situation!) However, when I act out the scene with Miriam, the roles are reversed; in this situation, there is clearly no contest as to who is the dominant one in the scene—it is me, the teacher, the native English speaker. This time, it is Miriam who can barely get a word in edgewise. When I watch this video now, I cannot help but feel guilty about this, as it is painfully clear that the stakes of performing in front of classmates are much higher for Miriam than they are for me. Although the difference between the language abilities and comfort level for Miriam and me is extreme, it is useful for me to keep in mind that this same dynamic probably
also exists whenever I pair together any high- and low-level students, or extroverted and introverted students, for a dramatic exercise such as this one.

**Student Language**

In retrospect, I can see that these student performances demonstrate many opportunities for language practice, but I never chose to act on any of them. For instance, there is some common language from a typical restaurant scene that most of the students use incorrectly or not at all. In the scene between Christine (“Michael”) and Xiufang (“Miriam”), neither of them use the modal “would,” to order food, such as “What would you like to eat?” and “I’d like….” Instead, Christine asks, “What kind food do you like” and Xiufang responds, “I like order Western food.” This type of mistake would have been easy enough for the students to practice and correct and, moreover, it would have been appropriate for their level.

In retrospect, I can see how these scenes provide many linguistic teachable moments, but at the time—and for most of the year—I was less concerned with the linguistic aspect of my students’ presentations than with the performance aspect of them. I noticed that they needed particular practice with dramatic elements, such as body language, improvisation, and spontaneity. In addition, perhaps I focused on these dramatic aspects because they were new to me, and I was unsure of how to teach them.

My students also noticed that I did not concentrate on language. When I asked the students whether they liked doing the drama, Xiufang expressed concern with it, saying, “It’s not grammar.”
Teacher Instruction

When I watch the video, after recognizing the potential for a student-centered classroom, ironically, the next thing I see is my desire to impose order and structure upon the conversations that the students present. After I ask the students which character they are playing, I ask them to indicate the different locations in the story by asking questions like, “Where is the bus stop? Where is the restaurant?” even though I had never asked them to think about these details before. I realize now that by asking these questions, I am essentially pushing the students to turn what had merely been an assignment to practice a conversation in front of the class into a skit in which they act out different scenes in the story—something they had not been prepared to do.

Seeing my last-minute directive reminds me of the importance of defining for myself ahead of time what my objectives are for the drama activities, and then of making sure to inform the students of these goals. Moreover, even when these objectives are clearly communicated to students, I should have an idea of how much I am going to interrupt their performances, and what the consequences of giving these directions in the middle of their presentations may be. For example, what affect will these interruptions have on the students’ comfort level with the material, their sense of accomplishment with their presentation and, in turn, with their confidence in their language skills and their ability to use these skills independently of their teacher?

Indeed, by asking the students to be responsible for more elements of the story, I manage to assert my control and dominance over the activity, which is ostensibly supposed to be a conversation that they create. Moreover, by adding to their agenda, I probably add to their nervousness. In essence, I undermine my students’ ability to
succeed at the task that I set for them by changing it at the last minute. Thus, I ensure that my authoritative role persists to the end.

I am glad that I was able to participate in one of the skits with my students because it gave me some insight into the anxiety that one experiences when performing in front of an audience without preparation. Moreover, I discovered firsthand that when one does not know what to do or say, imitating what has already been done before is instinctive—which explains one reason why rehearsal is so important. For example, when I performed the restaurant scene with Miriam, I found that I ended up copying what Miriam had done in her previous role as Michael, which was to call the waiter over to order food, and to do so by using hand gestures. In other words, even with the security of speaking English as a native language, and of being the teacher, I still did not always have the wherewithal to think on my feet or be terribly creative when I was under pressure. The rehearsal process, as I learned, is instrumental to giving students the opportunity to craft and define a story according to their own logical and creative impulses; if they are not provided with this opportunity, it is likely that each version of the story will be more or less similar to the ones that came before it.

A more subtle issue that this exercise demonstrates is the question of whose student stories are performed by the class, and how they are chosen. In this case, I decided to have the class concentrate on Miriam’s story because it was the most inherently dramatic and appealing one, not to mention the one that was best articulated, due to her higher language skills and natural dynamism.

But, that said, I honestly do not know how the other students felt about acting out Miriam’s story, and I never asked their opinion about it. In future lessons, I did ask for
student input about which story they performed. However, I always struggled with being unable to ask each of the students to perform their stories, due to logistics such as time and class size. I found that an alternative way around this issue was to enable students to effectively make another student’s story their own by allowing them to develop the dramatization of the story according to their own imaginative ideas. Nevertheless, it is important for me to note the way that I selected Miriam’s story because I can now see how it might be easy for me or the students to overlook the stories of those who have lower English skills, are quieter, or simply are not the best storytellers.

**Logistics**

The question of when to use the video camera, and how, plagued me throughout the year of my experimentation with drama. There were so many good reasons to use a video camera, and also many good reasons not to use one.

Mostly, the reasons to use one pertained to my desire to record the dramas so that they could be used later on—either for the viewing entertainment of my students, to identify language issues to work on with the students, or for my research and documentation. However, unquestionably, the presence of a video camera hindered my students’ ability to perform because it made them more self-conscious. Sometimes, I would try to deal with this fact by directly talking about the camera’s presence. Inevitably, the students told me that they did not like it because it made them nervous.

One time, I asked another student to be the “director” in charge of the camera because I was hoping that a student presence behind the camera would reduce other students’ acting anxiety. (I could not tell if this worked or not, and I only recorded in this
manner one time.) Other times, I tried not to talk about the camera and to carry on as normal, half-heartedly hoping that my students would do the same. However, I know that as much as I was sometimes able to ignore the fact that there was a camera in the room, it is highly unlikely that my students were ever able to do this.

**Reflections**

After the students had showcased their “rude” conversations, Miriam made a particularly thoughtful comment about her own performance in a feedback session. “How can I tell if other people understand me?” she asked. Miriam’s question reminded me that, from a performance perspective, the audience members have a role that is as important as those of the actors. In other words, they should be shouldering some of the responsibility for the learning that can take place from the student dramas. I thought to myself, “How can I make sure that the students who are watching the performance are not just watching it for fun, but that they have a task demonstrating that they are engaged with the performance and understanding the language that is being used in it?” This is a question that I tried to answer in various ways throughout the year, as I will discuss in my comments about some of the future drama lessons. However, to put it simply, just as asking the students to practice specific language skills ended up taking a backseat to having them develop acting skills, so, too, did the role of the audience end up taking a back seat to that of the performers. Although I was conscious that I should address these concerns, most of the time, I needed to focus all of my energy on simply planning and executing the basic lesson itself.
Lesson 2 (October 2008), “Crime Stories”

Videos: #4 - #8

The Class: 7 intermediate level students, all women between the ages of 30-60

2 Mexican women (Oralia and Norma)

2 Bosnian women (Adisa and Jasmina)

1 Chinese woman (Xiufang)

1 Rwandan woman (Christine)

1 Colombian woman (Amanda)

The Drama Groups:

Group 1: Oralia, Adisa, Christine, and Amanda

Group 2: Jasmina, Xiufang, and Norma

Lesson Background

In this lesson, the students worked on their acting skills for the first time. We were covering a chapter in the book that concentrated on crime and the use of the past progressive, so I decided to have the students share stories about crimes that had happened to them. I was looking for a way in which they could share their stories and immediately work on dramatizing them all in the same lesson, instead of separating the storytelling and dramatizing lessons, as I had done with the “rude stories.” I did not want to take up two class periods, and I did not want to have to try to regain the momentum from the first day of the process on the second day, like I had before. Also, I wanted the
lesson to primarily concentrate on developing the students’ acting skills, which I had determined that they needed to work on in the previous lesson.

In this lesson, I used a different process for developing the student stories and acting skills than I had the last time. To enable the students to share their stories collectively, so that they could develop their dramas with this shared knowledge, I gathered everyone in a circle, and asked them whether they had ever experienced a crime. Two students had stories to tell, and the other students asked them questions about their experiences, which helped them to identify with the story and personalize it. For the acting portion of the lesson, I used warm-up drama games for the first time, which the students enjoyed, and which served the intended purpose of relaxing them before they created their dramas in groups. One of those games is described below.

I also sat in the circle. I spoke with the students about the presence of the video camera, which I had brought again, and why I was using it. I felt guilty for not having had this conversation with the students before. I remember telling the students that I was doing a project related to my teaching degree, and that I wanted to document what we were doing in the classroom for that project. I did not, however, want to tell them of my overarching plans to have them perform these dramas for an audience, since I did not want to increase their anxiety. In fact, throughout the year-long project, I never really knew how to explain to the students what I was doing or why I was doing it.

[Video 4: “Drama Games”]
Logistics

This video shows the second warm-up activity, Greetings, in which students are asked to greet each other with various emotions, and in the role of characters in a particular relationship, such as best friends, grandchild/grandparent, and boyfriend/girlfriend. Although the students are clearly enjoying themselves in this activity, due to the proximity of the pairs, they are also largely mimicking each others’ behaviors, instead of displaying original ones. If I had had a larger space to work in, I would have subsequently tried to distance the pairs from one another. Similarly, in the next video, you can see Group 1 being distracted by Group 2. Eventually, I did begin clearing the space by moving the chairs, and this helped to give the students their own private space.

[Video 5: “Drama Preparation”]

Teacher Instruction

In this video, you can see me interrupt Group 1 to ask them to consider their body language and facial features while they are portraying their characters. I remember thinking that I had hoped that they would transfer the body language that they used during the warm-up exercises to their drama rehearsals. I am also fairly sure that I had asked them to remember to use body language before they began dramatizing the story in groups. However, as the video shows, I saw that this was not happening. The question that I then needed to answer is, “Why not?”
I eventually realized that teaching drama is like teaching a language in that, for both situations, the material has to be thoroughly explained, demonstrated, and scaffolded in order for the students to produce the desired result. In other words, asking the students to produce body language is a skill that is completely distinct from creating a dramatization of a story; before I could expect them to accomplish both tasks successfully, they had to be addressed separately—much like, in the previous lesson, how I had realized that acting and language skills needed to be taught separately. As the year progressed, I became better at understanding how to present and scaffold different dramatic skills.

[Video 6: “Christine and the Two Thieves;” Group 1 performs]
[Video 7: “A Robbery at Norma’s House;” Group 2 performs]
[Video 8: “Drama Evaluation;” feedback session]

Student Language

These scenes highlight the question of whether the activity focused the students on practicing their language or acting skills. When I had asked the students to share their crime stories, I had not realized that these types of stories were the perfect vehicle for physical action, and possibly the least perfect vehicle for speaking. Although I intended to focus more on acting than on language in this lesson, I did expect the students to use language in their scenes. So, I was surprised when I saw that the students hardly had to speak in order to communicate what happened in the crime stories. It was at that point that I realized that crime stories, by their very nature, are largely action plots that often
have little to no speech. I kept this in mind in for future drama lessons, when I more closely monitored the types of stories that I asked the students to dramatize.

However, interestingly enough, in the video, when I ask the students how the experience of acting out the crime stories compared to acting out Miriam’s story (Miriam was absent on this day.), they unanimously say that they prefer recreating the crime scenes. For example, Xiufang, commenting on the crime scenes, says excitedly, “Very interesting. Very true. Look like a movie!” It is especially interesting that Xiufang appreciated the action stories more than Miriam’s story because she was the one who had vocalized her concern that there had not been enough language used in the dramas!

Adisa can be heard concurring with Xiufang, saying, “This is better because now is many actions. First story [Miriam’s story] was slow.”

It is difficult to know whether for Adisa, “slow” means that the action and conversation were literally slow, or just boring. Also, did Xiufang say that the crime scenes looked like a movie because all of the actions made the stories seem more real, or because the students felt more comfortable racing around the classroom and grabbing things than they did standing in one place and talking? My guess is that both ideas are true. Ironically, although the aim of my drama project was to get the students to use verbal and body language together, the comfort and pleasure that they took from almost exclusively using body language does suggest how drama can lower their affective filter, making it easier for them to learn and retain a language.
Student Acting

There is a wonderful moment during the feedback session when Norma, who had told a story about a crime that happened to her brother, explains how she had a revealing moment during the drama lesson. She says, “I know how my brother felt when he called the police. I can feel how he feel…. In my brain, I think, ‘Oh, uh-oh, he do it that way.’” To me, it is pretty amazing that Norma could have this empathetic experience given the relative crudeness of the drama lesson, and of the students’ portrayal of the stories. However, Norma’s experience also indicates the power of drama to engender empathy. It is also interesting to note that since Norma did not have an acting part in her brother’s story, she came to this realization not by performing the story herself, but either by helping to create the dramatic narrative, or by observing a performance of it.

Reflections

There was one point during this feedback session when I invited student comments, only to be met with an awkward silence. This part of the session is not on the tape. The silence occurred towards the end of the session, after the students had discussed what they liked about their classmates’ performances. At this point, I treaded into a different territory by asking for critical feedback about one group’s performance. I said, “What do you think they could change about their stories to make them better?” The students just sat there; they did not respond to this question. I imagine that this is because they probably did not know what sorts of things I thought might make the stories “better,” and because they felt awkward making comments that might seem critical of their classmates.
When this line of questioning fell flat, I realized that, in the future, I would have to teach students the types of constructive comments that they could make when giving feedback, as well as to devise a way for them to do so in a manner that felt helpful, rather than critical. So, as with acting, I came to feel that I was asking the students to engage in a new skill for which I had not appropriately prepared them. As a teacher, I was trying to develop new ways of explaining how to give constructive feedback. In fact, although I returned to the question of how to structure feedback sessions throughout the year, I never figured how to run them effectively, either because time constraints did not allow for them (a convenience that I embraced) or because I simply could not think of how the students could give feedback in a safer and more helpful manner.

Teacher Instruction

I left time to solicit student feedback after the performances. This time, instead of conducting the feedback session in the traditional classroom format, in which I was in front of the students at the chalkboard, I brought the students back to the circle format with which we had begun, although I was not completely part of the circle, since I was asking questions from behind the video camera.

When I watch this video, the dialogue seems forced and awkward. I see myself relying upon my dominance to impose order on the discussion that I had hoped, at least theoretically, would allow for equal participation and openness. The following exchange between one of my students and me illustrates this dominance, which undercuts the value of the students’ needs and ideas:
Dana: “This was the second time doing the acting, the movies, yeah? How did it compare to the first time?”

Oralia: “I don’t know, you tell us.”

Dana: “No, what did you think? Was it similar or different for you?”

In this conversation, I shut down a student’s desire to find out my impression of their dramatic creation, which is a natural request since I am both their teacher and the only uninvolved observer. When I watch this conversation now, my thoughts go in two directions. One is that of the classroom teacher, when I wear the hat of authority because I feel that I am trying to do what is best for the students (insist on hearing their reactions instead of giving my own), even if they do not “recognize” that it is the best thing for them. The other is that of the reflective teacher, which is the side of me that sees that, while I might have had good intentions by wishing to solicit student reactions instead of giving my own, there might have been fairer and more respectful ways of handling this situation.

For instance, at the very least, I might have honored Oralia’s request by explaining my thoughts, as she had requested, and then asked to hear the students’ opinions afterwards. Or, alternatively, I could have said that although I preferred to hear their thoughts first, so that they would not be influenced by what I had to say, I would explain my own thoughts immediately afterwards. Then, I could have followed up this suggestion by asking the students if this plan would be okay for them. In this way, the students’ voices and opinions would at least be acknowledged and listened to, instead of allowing my voice, that of the teacher, to dominate without question.
In general, I have found that when I am anxious, I tend to assert more control when I teach, and I want to clamp down on a class so that it will run according to my plan. Indeed, my lack of familiarity with drama made me more anxious about teaching the drama lessons than any other lessons that I can remember. That said, as hard as it is for me to embrace the unexpected moments in a lesson, I believe that it is worthwhile to try to do so, since as my opening anecdote illustrates, these are the ones that oftentimes yield the greatest learning.
Background Information

In the winter term, I experimented with different types of drama games and activities to prepare the students for dramatizing their stories. Most of this work continued to focus on getting the students to relax and to use their bodies expressively. Like the fall term, the drama lessons in the winter term were only occasional. I was still experimenting with which activities worked and which did not, so that I would be more prepared to teach weekly drama lessons in the spring.

At the same time as I was creating the formal drama lessons, I found myself inserting dramatic activities into more traditional reading, speaking, and grammar lessons. Ironically, although I did not initially intend to infuse my regular language lessons with drama, I found that the ideas just came to me—sometimes even in mid-lesson—since I pretty much had “drama on the brain” during this year. For the drama activities in these lessons, there were no warm-up activities; I would just give the students time to work out a short scene, and then they would perform it for the enjoyment of the class. Examples of these lessons included when the students did reader’s theater with skits from Carolyn Graham’s book, Role Plays; when they acted out movements to complement songs that they were singing (A favorite movement was when all the students spun their hands around in circles while singing “rolling, rolling, rolling on a river” from Proud Mary); having them act out stories and depictions from news articles;
and having them create scenes in which one action was happening (the past continuous
tense), only for it to be interrupted by another one (past tense).

The students really enjoyed these dramatic infusions, many of which seemed to be
less stressful for them than the regular drama lessons. I think this was due to several
reasons, including the fact that these dramatic scenes were shorter than the ones about the
students’ personal stories; sometimes the students could read words off of a paper, as
with the reader’s theater activities and the song; and, generally speaking, in these more
traditional lessons, the dramatic activity was not the focus of these lesson, but just a part
of it.

In any case, these types of activities were so successful that they were also largely
responsible for convincing me of the transformative effect that drama can have on the
classroom. I wrote about this after the first class in which I spontaneously asked the
students to act out a story that was not their own,

“There was a bit of anxiety as soon as they understood what I meant by choose a person from the
story and act it out like a TV show. But then came the laughter. And I didn’t have to do a damn
thing. For once today, I didn’t feel like I was trying to force them to bond or communicate with
each other; the bonding and communication came spontaneously as they discussed who should say
what or do what.”

When I saw this spirit of excitement and student camaraderie, I felt like I was doing my
job well because the students were clearly learning and enjoying themselves at the same
time.

It was also during this term that I gained some insight into why I was asking my
students to perform drama in the first place. I realized this in connection with a class
assignment that was totally unrelated to drama. I had assigned my students homework to
talk to their neighbors for several weeks in a row. However, after a while, I realized that this assignment was probably far more difficult and intimidating than I had realized, so I thought that to better understand what I was asking my students to do, I would go talk to my Spanish-speaking neighbors, who I did not know well (I am a beginner Spanish speaker.).

This was an eye-opening experience. First, I gained a better appreciation for just how intimidating this exercise was, since I felt terribly nervous at the mere idea of ringing the doorbell of my neighbor’s house. Additionally, though, I came to realize that I was the one who had recently become a bit obsessed by developing stronger relationships with my neighbors. I was the one who felt exhilarated by talking to strangers and have a conversation with them. So what was I doing as a result? I was having my students do this. At this point, much to my surprise, I realized that drama was actually my unacknowledged pet interest, and that, perhaps, I was the one who had a desire to perform. And yet, instead of acting upon this desire myself, I was asking my students to do it!

While I believe that it is only natural for a teacher’s personal interests to inform and influence the classroom content and that, in fact, this is what makes each classroom so unique and enriching, I do feel that it is important to acknowledge and recognize how these interests can affect other classroom dynamics. For example, surely the strong feelings that I harbored for performing drama were at least partly responsible for the degree of control that I wished to have over the dramatic activities that I was asking my students to do. In fact, I remember how shocked I was when I realized that the activities
that I was assigning to my students stemmed from my own interests. The strength of my reaction, alone, signaled to me how important the drama project was to me.

**Lesson 1 (February 5, 2009), “Freeze”**

**Videos:** none  
**The Class:** not recorded  
**The Drama Groups:** not recorded

**Lesson Background**

This drama lesson differed from all the others that I had planned up until this point because it was not designed to have the students dramatize a personal story. Rather, it just featured a string of games that were scaffolded in their degree of difficulty. This might have been okay if the students had felt successful after completing the activities, but the fact is that they did not. Once again, I found that I was throwing too many different activities at them without enough explanation or preparation.

**Student Language**

The culminating exercise, Freeze, turned out to be an extremely difficult one for the students to do. In this game, two people are acting and talking when one person in the audience says, “freeze,” taps one of them on the shoulder, and assumes this person’s position by using it as the starting point in an entirely different scene. In hindsight, having given just this brief description, I can see all the layers of new elements that would make this exercise difficult for my students to manage: speaking and acting at the
same time; speaking spontaneously without the benefit of rehearsal; volunteering to assume a position in which everyone will be watching; and conceiving of a new scene.

Suffice it to say, the students did struggle with this exercise. In fact, the very aspect of the game that I was most excited about, which was that the students would have to speak spontaneously—and which I thought would be good preparation for performing their drama skits—was probably the most difficult one for them. The initial two students ran out of things to do and say pretty quickly, at which point they looked more and more uncomfortable as they stood waiting for someone from the audience to say freeze and replace them. Of course, the more uncomfortable they looked, the less likely it was that another student would want to replace them! In one very sad moment, Olga, one of the students waiting to be replaced, turned to her classmates and pleaded with them to help, saying, “Pleassse.” But even her appeal did not help. Finally, I replaced one of the students, but this activity ended up being a very short-lived one.

Nevertheless, it was only by asking my students to do this activity that I fully appreciated its degree of difficulty for them. This recognition was particularly interesting for me because I had personal memories of playing Freeze in many summer camp programs, but it became apparent to me that playing it as a child in one’s native language is far easier than playing it as an adult in a second language. Out of all the drama games that I played with my students during the year, this game stood out to me as one that best demonstrated how a seemingly easy dramatic task can actually be quite complicated and difficult for language students to manage.

In the spring term, I was proud when I successfully tried out a game that I had read about, and which seemed like an easier adaptation of Freeze. I call this game Two
Lines because students must form two lines to play it. The two students at the head of the lines are the first to begin talking. Then, at a point of their choosing, the next two students must at some point tap the first two on the shoulder, move to the head of their respective lines and continue the conversation. When I did this with my students, initially I would give them a topic to talk about, but eventually they were able to start and continue the conversation on their own.

Two Lines seemed to put less pressure on the students than Freeze did. Because all of the students are in lines, the two at the front do not have to face an audience. They also do not have to think about doing actions at the same time as they are talking. Moreover, if the students behind the two front ones are slow to take their place at the front of the lines, the other students who are waiting are sure to push them forward! Usually, after moving through the line once, the students start to loosen up and they actually enjoy themselves during the next two cycles. In fact, since I viewed this exercise as a speaking activity, I was surprised when the students noted that they really liked listening to their classmates’ conversation. Indeed, they had to listen acutely in order to know how to continue the conversation when they took their place at the head of the line. This is a good example of a drama activity that I scaffolded and structured into a more manageable and productive language learning experience for my students.

Lesson 2 (February 19, 2009), “Mother-in-Law Stories”

Videos: #9 - #15

The Class: 8 intermediate level students, all women between the ages of 30-60
4 Mexican women (Irma, Tere, Teresa, and Luz)
2 Bosnian women (Adisa and Hasiba)
1 Thai woman (Mutita)
1 Nepalese woman (Saraswati)

The Drama Groups

Group 1: Mutita, Luz and Saraswati
Group 2: Irma and Adisa
Group 3: Hasiba, Teresa, and Tere

Lesson Background

At this early point in the term, I once again found that I had all women in my class. One day, during a class discussion, the subject of mother-in-laws came up. This topic immediately interested all of the students, all of whom were married. One especially high level and vocal student, Mutita, was having issues with her mother-in-law at the time. She did not hesitate to share these concerns with the class.

In no time at all, just the mention of Mutita’s mother-in-law was enough to peak the class’s interest. I tried to capitalize on this interest by inviting the students to share stories about their mother-in-laws. And they did. Although the majority were stressful accounts of interactions with their mother-in-laws, some demonstrated affection for them as well. In short, the mother-in-law theme became a great source of class bonding and, more generally, of female bonding. I found that I had not only uncovered a meaningful commonality among these women of varying ages and backgrounds, but that, on a
personal level, as the lone single woman in the class, I had also uncovered a glimpse into married life!


[Video 10: “Mutita’s Mother-in-law Story”]

**Teacher Instruction**

Besides the fact that Sarawati takes directions from Mutita, she is also the least dominant person in the group in part because of her casting: she plays the part of a two-year old boy who does very little talking. As a result, she gets little opportunity to practice her language skills. When I saw students create scenes such as this one, in which some students had few to no speaking parts, I realized the need to establish expectations that would include clear directives like, “Every student must speak at least twice in the scene.” Of course, these expectations would have to be made clear before the students began rehearsal. Although I never did end up setting such expectations, I still think that doing so is an important step towards having students establish more balance in terms of verbal and cooperative participation.

**Student Language**

The student who has the biggest speaking part in this scene is Luz. She stumbles over her words and is clearly nervous, as she says towards the end of the video, once the
scene is over. Her struggles to speak fluently highlight a great opportunity to follow-up these scenes by working on language activities. These language activities could have allowed Luz to feel a greater sense of accomplishment, and could have enabled the other students to benefit from her performance as well.

[Video 11: “Mutita’s Mother-in-law Comments”]

Reflections

This video shows the feedback session after Mutita’s story. There is an awkward feeling during this session, when I ask the students open-ended questions that they are unprepared to answer, such as, “What did you think?” and “What did you think of the mother-in-law?” When I do not get any responses, I resort to picking on people who give any sort of reaction, such as Tere, who is laughing (possibly nervously): “Tere, you’re laughing. Why are you laughing?” I feel bad watching these moments because, yet again, I can see that I am sacrificing the feelings of one student in order to save my own face, so that I will not feel awkward about having a silent classroom.

However, eventually, I do ask one question that prompts the students to start genuinely communicating with each other about the story. “Do you have any questions for Mutita?” I ask, and Irma follows up by asking Mutita about the verity of her story, saying, “Is this true?” When Mutita responds to Irma’s question, she winds up going on for eight minutes about her extensive troubles with her son and mother-in-law! A couple of students occasionally jump in, giving her suggestions for how she should handle her
son, and asking additional questions about her mother-in-law, but by and large, Mutita dominates the conversation.

This video helps me to realize that I need better strategies for handling group discussions. First, I need to give the students who are watching the dramas more structured questions to think about before the dramas, so that they have adequate time to think about them. I also need to find ways to involve more of the students in the discussion, and I need strategies for handling students, like Mutita, who can easily dominate a classroom. Perhaps one way of handling this situation is to train the student whose story it is, such as Mutita, to run the feedback session by soliciting questions and comments from the other students. In this way, her own comments would be held in check, and she would have the opportunity to directly engage her classmates in a conversation about her story, and thus, she would also learn the impact of her story in a more direct fashion.

From another perspective, I consider this discussion to be successful because it indicates that one approach to getting the students to feel comfortable commenting on their peers’ performances, and to making the stories more meaningful, is to ask for students’ responses to the stories themselves, rather than to the language or the acting. As some of the students’ questions for Mutita indicate (Was it true? What happened after the story was over?), they are curious to learn more about the narrative itself. In this sense, the students are like me, since I was initially inspired to have students dramatize their stories because I connected to them and thought that they were powerful; presumably, the students would be able to connect to the stories as well. Consequently, if I were to carry out this type of feedback session again, I would try to ask the students to
identify one thing that they found interesting, surprising, or familiar about the stories while watching them.

In fact, I can see now that throughout the drama project, I largely viewed the dramatic scenes as the culminating activity related to the student stories. I focused all of my energy towards getting the students to dramatize these scenes when, perhaps, the greater accomplishment would have been in using the dramas to lay the groundwork for the students to collectively discuss their thoughts and feelings about the stories. Then these scenes could have been catalysts for further student-centered discussions and meaningful second-language communication.

[Video 12: “Hasiba’s Mother-in-law Story”]
[Video 13: “Hasiba’s Mother-in-law Comments”]
[Video 14: “Adisa’s Mother-in-law Story”]
[Video 15: “Adisa’s Mother-in-law Comments”]

Reflections

The discussion that follows Adisa’s story is probably the “best” one that occurred throughout the year as a result of the student stories. I say “best” because everyone in the classroom participates, looks engaged and, as a result of the conversation, seems to connect in a deeper way with Adisa’s story.

Every time I watch the video, I remain surprised that Adisa willingly answers as many personal questions as she does for the class—and for the video camera—the latter fact being one that is not lost on Hasiba, who pointedly reminds Adisa to be careful what
she says about her mother-in-law in front of the video camera. As I said with regards to a drama lesson from the fall term, I believe that Adisa’s comfort level is largely due to the fact that she had been my student for so long. For instance, in this discussion, she willingly talks about some very personal topics and, in the process, she takes the class with her on an unexpected emotional journey.

One can see the mood in the class change as Adisa transitions from answering surface questions about her story to responding to deeper ones about how she feels about her decision to move to the U.S. to marry a man who she hardly knew, or about living so far away from all of her family in Bosnia. When she spoke about these situations in class, I could feel the other students connecting to what she was saying. As presumptuous as it may sound, I had the sense that they were, in essence, asking her the questions that they would have asked themselves about their own lives. If nothing else, Adisa’s story seemed to trigger many thoughts in the room. By the end of the discussion, no one had much to say, and everyone seemed to be in a private, introspective state. Because of Adisa’s candor, it seemed like we had all been forced to come face-to-face with some difficult thoughts and feelings.

I had no idea how to continue the discussion at this point, so I ended up simply stating my own situation, which is that although I, too, moved away from my family, this was by choice. By refocusing the conversation back to my life, even at the time, I realized that I was essentially diverting attention away from the original conversation. However, I could not figure out another way to handle the conversation. If I had to do it again, I would probably ask the students to talk about their thoughts in pairs, instead of
keeping the entire discussion focused on the group, which can make it difficult for some people to express their feelings.

Since that class, I have thought of ways that this discussion could have been continued in later classes. On a concrete level, the students were curious about the unusual way in which Adisa’s romance with her husband started as a result of her mother-in-law’s initiative. However, I think there were also deeper and more abstract issues that could have been explored, such as what it is like to take a risk, which is what Adisa did when she got married and moved to the U.S. Or we could have explored how one’s expectations can be different from a given reality, such as what one expects from a new country before moving there, as compared with what they find to be true after the fact.

I could have followed Adisa’s story by doing a story-sharing lesson on either of these themes: risks or expectations. At the time of the lesson, however, as I have said before, I was not thinking about how the drama stories, or their themes, could be extended past the performance phase, and so I never did these things. Nevertheless, to this day, I remain grateful and amazed by the courage that Adisa displayed by sharing her story and her feelings with the class. The openness of the discussion that followed her story went a long way towards helping me to recognize the power of the students’ stories, in general, and of teaching me to respect the emotions that these stories can evoke in both the storyteller and the listeners.
Chapter 8
Spring Term 2009

**Background Information**

In the spring, in order to prepare the students for an end-of-term performance in front of other students in the school, I wanted to teach a drama lesson twice a week. In addition to seeking resources that would help me teach the students performance skills (body language, enunciation, pronunciation, projection, facing the audience, etc.), I was also spending more time recording my thoughts on teaching these lessons. For this purpose, I used a series of reflective questions that I found in *Learning Through Drama*, a book on drama in education by Ken Robinson, a British advocate of arts in education.

I also began thinking about the parallels between the instruction that I was delivering in my classroom and that which I have received as an African dance student over the past eight years. Many years ago, I had begun to appreciate the parallels between learning a dance and learning a language. I had come to realize that dance is a language, only it is one that is physical, not spoken. I had also thought about how I felt as a student, compared with how many of my students seemed to feel in my class. For instance, just as my students had “on” and “off” days when they found it more or less easy to focus on learning new material, I did too. I also thought about the differing forms of instruction that my teachers used to help us learn new dance steps. Sometimes they modeled everything for us, so that we could copy them, and other times, they modeled very little. One of my teachers would ask half the class to perform in front of the other half, so that we could watch each other. Another teacher never did this; we always
performed as a whole group. Similarly, one of my teachers would occasionally ask each student to dance in the middle of a circle, with everyone watching. My other teacher never did this. Often, these variations in instruction reminded me of the different approaches to language teaching that I had studied in graduate school.

At some point several years ago, after I had been taking dance classes for at least five years, I also thought about how I really wanted to show someone outside of my dance class what I had been learning for so long, instead of just showing up week after week, dancing with my classmates, and then going home to wait for the next class. I wanted to perform so that others could recognize what I had been working on and this, in turn, could serve as a measure of my accomplishment. Also, I had taken a few dance workshops that had culminated in dance performances. Not surprisingly, I have very positive memories of these performances, and of the excited energy that my classmates and I generated as we prepared for them. Perhaps, somewhere in my mind, when I thought of preparing my students to perform dramas, I was channeling my experience of performing in my own classes.

This spring, though, besides thinking about my dance performance experiences, I also found myself wondering exactly what I had to show for all of the time, effort, and dedication that I had devoted to African dance for the past 8 years. Sure, I knew some steps in a general way, but without a teacher at the front of the class to lead me through them, would I be able to do them on my own? And did I even have the confidence to try?

I decided that something was wrong with this picture, and that this something was also the same thing that was wrong with most of my language classes. Sure, my students could speak English within the comfortable confines of the classroom, and in the
presence of the teacher and classmates who they knew would not reject them, but what would happen if they went out in public? How many of them had told me that they were too scared to speak to people whom they did not know, or that if they tried to speak, their brain would “freeze?” Had I not experienced the same anxiety myself as a dance student, when I was put on the spot to demonstrate some recently learned moves in front of my peers?

This was fundamentally a pedagogical problem, I decided. Teachers—teachers of any subject—are not doing their job if they are only producing students to be dependent upon them to do the skill that they are trying to learn—students who can do little more than imitate them. Rather, to be truly effective, teachers must encourage students to perform without their aid, and they must help them acquire the tools and confidence to do so. Once I formulated this belief in the spring, I was even more committed to teaching drama to my students, and to hoping that giving them practice with speaking spontaneously would help them transition into speaking English more comfortably outside of the classroom.

Lesson 3 (May 21, 2009), “Love Stories 1”

Videos: #16 and #17

The Class: 11 intermediate level students, 9 women and 2 men between the ages of 30-60

5 Mexican women (Erika, Maria, Marta, Tere, and Luz)

1 Mexican man (Tino)

1 Nepalese woman (Saraswati)
1 Honduran woman (Olga)
1 Cuban woman (Yudit)
1 Indian woman (Suman)
1 Montenegrin man (Redzep)

**The Drama Groups:**

Group 1: Suman, Olga, Tino
Group 2: Yudit, Maria, Erika, Marta
Group 3: Luz, Aferdita, Tere, Redzep

**Lesson Background**

If “mother-in-law” was the buzzword for my class in the winter term, then “love stories” was definitely the buzzword in the spring term. Early in the spring, I had introduced the students to “Love Letters,” a story featured in the *Easy True Stories* book about a bizarre romance that occurs between a woman and a mailman (Heyer 1994). We used this story to practice reading in the past tense, which is the grammar topic that we were studying at the time.

The students enjoyed the story, so I asked them to write about how they met their husband/wife (all the students were married). Groups of students then peer-edited these stories. After this, I asked each group to choose one story that they wanted to dramatize. What resulted were the “love stories,” otherwise known as Aferdita’s Love Story, Hasiba’s Love Story, and Yudit’s Love Story, and Suman’s Love Story. This was the first of several drama lessons I did in which I asked the students to portray the love
stories; each time, I hoped to build on the previous lesson in order to create a cumulative project that could be performed. Some of these stories exhibit examples of charades that the students had been working on in warm-up exercises for several weeks. I was videotaping on this day in order to capture the stories in their raw form.

Unfortunately, on this day, I also learned that there were plans for observers to come to my class. There were three observers, and I knew that they, in addition to the video camera, would only make my students feel more anxious. I felt that I was in a bit of quandary, since I would not have time to do another lesson for a few days and by that time, the excitement about the love letters stories would be diminished. I decided to go ahead with my plans.

Although I knew that my students were unlikely to feel comfortable with the observers there, I did not fully appreciate how uncomfortable they would feel. Later, they told me that they had felt very nervous, especially because the observers had been sitting in chairs that were very close to where the students were standing when they performed their scenes. However, for me, the observers had become like part of the background and I had almost forgotten about them.

(I used a digital camera to record the videos in this section, instead of a video camera. As a result, the visual and sound qualities are not as good as the previous videos. Please see Appendix 1 for a transcript of videos #16 - #17.)

[Video 16: “Suman’s Love Story 5.21.09”]
This video is interesting to me because it highlights a group that features Olga, a student who I had originally taught as a beginner student. Olga has an extroverted personality, but it is somewhat compromised by the difficulty that she experiences with speaking English. Olga likes to explain her ideas and tell interesting stories, but she becomes anxious and frustrated when she tries to explain herself.

In this scene, Olga displays both sides of her personality. On one hand, she draws attention to herself by doing moves like the sexy walk (Here, I think she forgets that she is supposed to be playing a male character!) On the other hand, she clearly struggles with her lines; her speaking is probably the least fluent of all the students in the class. When I watch Olga in this scene, my heart goes out to her because she is trying to behave in an extroverted manner, as she normally does, but the pressure of having to produce language on-the-spot trips her up even more than usual. When I see students like Olga struggle so much with the language, I realize how, with more language practice, drama could have really helped them to gain confidence.

For example, I could have asked the students to write down the dialogue that they said, thus creating scripts of their scenes. Because the students would have performed the stories first, and created the scripts second, I doubt that they would have felt the stress of performing from a script, as they had when the scripts served as the basis for their initial performance. I can only imagine how empowering it might have been for Olga if her words had been scripted, so that she could have rehearsed them until they became more fluid, and she felt more comfortable saying them in front of an audience.
(Maria, who was probably my shyest student, did not feel comfortable in her role, so she only makes a small appearance at the end of this scene.)

**Student Acting**

Out of all three scenes, the two students performing in this one, Erika and Yudit, look the most comfortable as actors. Over time, I saw that these two students were not only extroverted, but that they had natural performance instincts as well. However, in addition, I am proud to see that the work that the students had done with the charades earlier in the lesson is displayed to great effect in these performances. When Erika and Yudit both adopt the open-arms position as a symbol of the airplane that goes back and forth from the U.S. to Cuba, they are picking up on one of the gestures that was developed during charades. This reoccurring gesture is entertaining, and it draws great laughs from the crowd.

**Lesson 4 (May 28, 2009), “Love Stories 2”**

**Videos:** none

**The Class:** not recorded

**The Drama Groups:** not recorded

*This class was observed by Terri Cusick, my manager, who provided feedback on the class on June 1.*
**Lesson Background**

In this lesson, I wanted to try to build on the success of the previous charades lesson. Also, I thought that by asking students to depict various activities in the locations where their love stories took place, I could expand on the charades activity while also taking a step closer to preparing scenes for a performance.

**Student Acting**

Once again, the students did well with charades and, in particular, with the extended charades activity. As an example, I had given the students the example of “buying a movie ticket,” and the extended charade version of this turned into a series of three actions: standing in line for a movie ticket and looking up at the list of showings to pick one; buying the movie ticket with cash; and then buying popcorn and drinks for a family, and carrying them into the movie theater.

After this example, when I asked groups of students to create activities for a specific place, they did a great job. In particular, one group devised a scenario in which a library patron who is talking on his cell phone is, first, engaged in the conversation; second, another patron goes to tell the librarian that he is talking too loudly; third, the librarian asks him to leave the library. The students executed the actions well, given that they successfully told a story without words. The students, too, seem to enjoy the process of brainstorming in groups and practicing which activities should happen in what order.
Lesson 5 (June 2, 2009?—unsure of exact date), “Video Recordings”

Videos: none

The Class: not recorded

During one of the first weeks in June, I did finally show my students the video recordings of their love stories, which they had performed several weeks ago. I had wanted to show the students the videos of their drama scenes soon after they performed them so that they could enjoy watching them and work on some language skills, such as pronunciation. However, due to technical and scheduling difficulties, it took far longer to do this than I had expected to do this.

Also, as it turned out, the quality of the recordings were not good enough for the students to hear the dialogue well, so listening to the recordings with a critical ear was impossible. Although I was unable to use the recordings for in-class language purposes, as I had hoped, at the very least, I was glad that the students could finally see the recordings of themselves and their classmates acting. As a result, the discomfort that they felt while being recorded had not been completely in vain. Indeed, the students laughed at several points during the scenes, such as when Olga did her sexy walk or when Erika and Yudit walked around with their arms extended outwards in order to mimic an airplane. Moments like these did not need any language in order to communicate something funny and universal.
Lesson 6 (June 4, 2009), “Love Stories 3”

Videos: #18 and #19

The Class: 8 intermediate level students, 6 women and 2 men between the ages of 30-60

3 Mexican women (Erika, Martha, and Luz)
1 Mexican man (Juan)
1 Ecuadorian man (Joaquin)
1 Honduran woman (Olga)
1 Cuban woman (Yudit)
1 Indian woman (Suman)

The Drama Groups:

Group 1: Luz, Yudit, Suman, Juan
Group 2: Olga, Erika, Martha, Joaquin

The following two videos were also recorded with a digital camera. Please see Appendix 1 for a transcript of videos #18 and #19.

[Video 18: “Aferdita’s Story Group 2 Body and Language 6.4.09;” Group 2 performs]

Student Language

When I first saw this scene, I remember being surprised by the authentic language that surfaced in it. Suddenly, I heard my students sizing up one of the male characters by
talking about whether or not he had “a six pack”, and laughing about it. Where on earth had they learned this term, slang for a well-muscled male abdomen?

This is just one excellent example of the “real life” language that emerged when my students created their dramatic scenes. This is language that I would have never thought to teach them, but which is clearly a part of their world. Examples like this one, in which real language comes to the forefront of the class, yet again demonstrates the potential that drama has to provide instruction for the students and the teacher.

Indeed, it might have been fun to follow up this scene with a cultural lesson on slang and pick-up lines that are used by men and women. Although this is not necessarily language that one would find in textbooks, it is language that everyday students would find meaningful. Moreover, the language of romance and flirting is also very much an important aspect of a country’s culture.

**Student Playfulness**

The end of this scene was not captured in the recording. This is unfortunate because it turned out to be a terrific and unexpected ending, engineered primarily by one student, Joaquin. After Aferdita (Olga) and Faik (Joaquin) continue to have difficulty communicating, they finally have an agreeable conversation, which, naturally, leads to romance. The next thing you know, they are walking down the aisle to get married (I found that student dramas tend to take many sudden, soap operatic turns.). However, as they are walking down the aisle, Joaquin suddenly rounds his hands over Olga’s stomach to indicate that Aferdita has become pregnant! Apparently, this is no ordinary wedding,
but a crazy shotgun wedding. The students and I were laughing hysterically at this last-minute turn of events.

Actually, I am pretty sure that the pregnancy was a last-minute affair for all of the other actors, including Olga. For Joaquin, who is extroverted and an incredible prankster, it was probably an irresistible impulse to make Aferdita suddenly become pregnant at her church wedding. This was just one of many times when Joaquin would inject an unexpected twist into the drama activities. The drama lessons seemed to be the perfect forum for him to let loose some of his creative, jokester energy.

In these later drama scenes, which are far longer than the earlier ones from the fall or spring terms, it is possible to see the creative energies of students like Joaquin emerge. As the students felt more comfortable working with drama and performing in front of their peers, they began to change the initial student narrative. The students no longer felt the need to stick exactly to the original version of the story, in part because they had already rehearsed these stories for several weeks, and in part because of the dramatic skills that they had developed. Although some students felt more comfortable than others improvising new material, they all worked together to create a scene that, ultimately, belonged much more to the collective group than to the original storyteller.

[Video 19: “Aferdita’s Story Body and Language 6.4.09;” Group 1 performs]

**Student Playfulness**

This version of Aferdita’s story is a far more developed one than that which a different group of students had performed one month earlier. As a result of several weeks
worth of charades activities, some of which included asking the students to imagine typical scenes in a library—the setting of Aferdita’s story—this scene feels much to closer to being a fully-fledged drama. Before, the library setting was an almost non-existent backdrop; it was simply a pretext for two students who were studying to meet each other. Now, however, the library is a place where additional foibles enhance the characters’ romance. There is a librarian who checks out books; there is a cell phone that rings; and there are rules to be followed, which means that the cell phone user must talk outside, no exceptions made—not even for budding romantic conversation.

Student Acting

Also, in this version, the students look far more comfortable being actors (There were no observers in this class, but, obviously, the video camera was present.) In contrast with the initial fall scene, in this scene, the students move around the space instead of standing rigidly in one spot; they use body language to demonstrate that they are holding books, instead of pulling a real book off of one of the shelves in the classroom; they use body language to convey the emotions that their characters are feeling; and, perhaps most wonderfully, all of the students have significant speaking parts. Moreover, when they speak, their conversations are far more fluid and natural-sounding than the brief, staccato remarks that the students made in earlier scenes. Also, in this dramatization, the performance seems to be a blend of rehearsed and improvised dialogue and movement. One gets the feeling that the students feel comfortable enough to make things up as they go along; they have succeeded in transitioning from students who are doing a classroom exercise into actors who are in role. In essence, the students
Early June - Conversation with Terri about the Purpose and Value of Drama

During this week, I met with my supervisor, Terri. As I had noted in the lesson description from May 28, she observed the drama lesson that I taught on that day. She needed to observe one of my classes for a routine annual evaluation, but she observed that particular one at my request. Since I had been teaching competently at the school for the past four years, Terri suggested that I could use the observation as an opportunity to get another perspective on something new or different that I was trying out in the classroom. I immediately thought that I would like to have her observe my drama lessons, since I had been teaching them without any outside perspective for many months. Also, Terri had been one of the first people with whom I had brainstormed the idea of dramatizing student stories almost exactly one year earlier. At this point, Terri knew about the drama lessons that I was doing as part of my thesis, but only in a general way.

I did not ask Terri to observe for anything specifically, so she took notes, and then sent them to me a few days later. These notes threw my project—and me—for a huge loop. Terri expressed strong reservations about the drama project that I was in the middle of implementing. When we spoke about her observations, Terri articulated her reservations more fully.

She said that her concerns stemmed primarily from the fact that, during the class that she had observed, there were no specific language activities; all of the activities were

have become performers, and the audience, which is captivated by their actions, is waiting to see what they will do next.
dedicated to developing the students’ body language skills. This also concerned her because she could identify points in the lesson when language could have been introduced. Moreover, she observed students speaking incorrectly in English without correction, and students speaking in Spanish without any comment from me. She also said that following her observation, some students had told her that they did not feel comfortable with the drama activities because they were not practicing much language in them.

In short, Terri questioned whether it was worth devoting so much time to teaching drama to adult immigrant students, especially since, she said, what they really need is survival English for their immediate needs. Essentially, she said that the time that I spent teaching the students body language activities could be far better spent teaching them meaningful vocabulary. As a result, she suggested that I stop teaching the drama lessons.

After this conversation, I recognized that, indeed, I had been so consumed with focusing on acting, and the fact that my students had been getting a lot of unstructured language practice during their rehearsals, that I had almost completely overlooked any formal language instruction. I knew that Terri had a point. However, I also felt that the drama did have an inherent value that was worth exploring, even if it was not immediately apparent, or if I was unable to teach it in a totally competent way, since it was a new instructional approach for me. In many drama lessons, I had seen the students come alive and become energized by their own creations; drama seemed like too good a tool to dismiss on the basis of one observation.

In my conversation with Terri, I acknowledged that, it was true that I probably had not focused on language enough. But, I said, this was my first time teaching this
material, and I was learning how to do it as I went along. There were no models for me, I explained. I told her that I would like to at least continue to teach the drama activities through the summer term, which was scheduled to last another two months. This would allow me to complete the classroom research that I had set out to do for my thesis.

At this point, Terri suggested that perhaps I could find ways of integrating drama into other language activities, or at least tie them to the rest of curriculum. She offered to help me think about how to do this, if I wanted. This seemed fair to me; after all, I had always worried that the drama lessons somehow stood too far apart from the rest of the class activities and that their isolation diminished their effectiveness. This is where we let things stand. However, in addition, it had also been decided that I should talk to the students about the drama lessons, so that they could better understand what we had done together, and what we might continue to do. I felt like I needed to regain their confidence in me and in using drama as a language learning tool.

Lesson 6 (June 11, 2009). “Drama Decision/Health”

Videos: none

Lesson Background

This lesson was my first effort to more purposefully connect drama to language in a drama lesson. Before we began the lesson, I spoke to the students about how I had been primarily concentrating on body language, instead of verbal language. I explained what my rationale had been (to help them relax, so that they would feel more comfortable
using language later on), and I said that I would try to spend more time on verbal language.

I had decided to stop focusing on the “love stories,” which we had rehearsed for a while, even though they were exactly the type of scenes that I had always envisioned my students acting out in an end-of-term performance. Instead, I decided to let the lesson be inspired from the topic that we were studying in the regular language lessons: health. The initial drama game began with a brainstorm of words related to a “waiting room,” since the students had spoken a lot about their frustration with waiting long hours in waiting rooms. Later, when the students performed waiting room scenes, the actors were instructed to use both body language and verbal language, and I also asked students who were not acting to narrate the action that they saw from the sidelines. This activity became mangled as the “narrators” ended up talking over the “actors,” and it became difficult to hear either of them. At the end of the lesson, I noted some of the language problems that I had heard.

Generally speaking, the lesson felt fragmented. This seemed to reflect my state of mind, as I struggled to reconcile the tension between the unexpected challenge to the drama project, and my need to plan my lessons differently, in order to more deliberately include both drama and language.

3rd Week of June: Conversation with Barth and Terri about Drama Project

During this week, I had another conversation about the drama project with Terri and Barth, my director. Terri had spoken with Barth about her observation of my drama
class, and her concerns had raised concerns for him. He wanted to speak to me more about the drama lessons that I was conducting.

Although Terri and I had worked out a compromise that would allow me to continue working on the drama project through the end of the term, while tying it more intentionally to language, when we met with Barth, he told me that he shared Terri’s concerns, and that he was not sure whether I should, in fact, continue the project. After we could not reach an agreement about this on our own, we decided to leave the decision up to the students. We agreed that I should write up a questionnaire to give to my students. This is the form that my students received shortly thereafter:

“In this class, we have been practicing drama every week. We have talked about why we do the drama activities. Some of these reasons are: to help students relax, speak spontaneously or in the moment, use body language for self expression, and to communicate ideas to a group. We have also used the stories to work on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.” [I had done a little of this at different points in the term.]

1) Do you feel these activities have helped your English? If yes, how? If no, why not?

2) Do you want to continue doing drama activities?
   ____ No, I don’t want to continue.
   ____ Yes, I want to continue 1 time a week.
   ____ Yes, I want to continue 2 times a week.

3) Do you have any other comments?
Before giving the students the form, I explained to them that Barth, Terri, and I differed in our perceptions of drama, but that since the class was for them and thus, their opinion was the most important one, they would have the final say. I then gave them the questionnaire and left the room, telling them to come get me when they were done. Ironically, this all felt a bit dramatic, but things had reached a point where it seemed like the most practical thing to do.

Upon looking at the filled-out questionnaires, it was clear that the students had reached a consensus. They had unanimously voted for the middle option: to continue the drama, but only once a week, instead of twice a week. Additionally, however, their comments revealed a variety of insights into their thoughts about doing drama. Here is a sampling of them, which I have copied verbatim from the questionnaires:

“If it has got speaking, it help my English. I think, in all the activities must be speaking. Because speaking is more important for us.”

“Yes, I feel drama activities helped my English. If I didn’t understand any world, I understand with body action.”

“I want to continue drama 1 time a week. But I want to practice de language. And correctly us bad words.”

“For me is very good because this practice help me to much. Now I understand more vocabulary and correctly some mistakes when I need ask something gin diferents places…. I think this activity help us when I have to much nervous. Is important too because practice with real history and some times many classmates have similar situacion and they can understand more.”
“Yes, because we are practicing conversation, it will be more difficult for us learn english, If we just let the teacher speak. I feel that’s the way for correct our mistakes when we speaking.”

“Drama is good for me but I need more speaking because everybody looks nervous.”

A few days after the students filled out the questionnaire, I told them the results (which they were obviously already aware of with), which was to continue doing drama lessons once a week. However, I do not have a record that indicates whether we, in fact, did wind up having more drama lessons subsequent to this decision. This is because at around the same time that I had my meeting with Barth and Terri, circumstances that were larger than any of our ideas about drama had a lasting affect the fate of the project.

**Late June: An Unexpected End to the Drama Project**

By June 2008, the downturn in the economy had affected Asian Human Services’ funding sources. The state of Illinois was our primary funder, and due to uncertainties with the state budget, the fate of our adult ESL program, along with most others in Chicago, was in jeopardy. Basically, no one knew whether we would receive any money from the state once the new fiscal year started on July 1, 2009.

In response to these uncertainties, Barth cut classes short by a month. Thus, instead of having classes end in the middle of August, as was typical, they were scheduled to end in the middle of July. Additionally, staff members were told that their jobs would be in jeopardy after this point. Suddenly, the original summer curriculum was
no longer completely appropriate. Instead, all of the teachers tried to identify the most vital instructional material that they could squeeze into remaining weeks of the term.

For me, this meant giving up the drama project. In spite of the dedication and energy that I had poured into the project since the fall of 2008, this turned out to be an easy and obvious decision. Because of the small number of instructional hours left in the class, I did not think that it would be possible to see the project through to the planned conclusion, a performance in front of the other students in the school.

But, additionally, I also recognized that I was at a point in the project where I really did not know how to proceed. During the first couple months of the summer term, the drama lessons had been effective and had provided many learning opportunities for the students and me. However, even if the schedule of the summer term had remained the same, I knew that in order to really push forward with the project, I would have had to make some major revisions to my lessons, and to my overarching plan. But at this point, I was not sure how to do this—especially with this group of students.

In general, I could see that the project had been losing steam for the past month. The students had been losing energy for doing drama, and I had been losing energy for teaching it. I decided that even though we had not met the goal that I had set out to accomplish in the fall of 2008—for the students to perform their dramas for an audience—ultimately, the project had run its course. It was time to stop.
Chapter 9

Recommendations for Teaching Drama in an Adult ESL Classroom

When I embarked upon the year-long drama project with my students in the fall of 2008, I had an idea in mind for how the project would unfold. During the fall, I would explore the subject of teaching drama by examining books and articles to see how other teachers had taught drama to language students; during the winter, I would try out some of the new drama activities that I had read about; and during the spring, I would devote more class time to drama instruction in order to prepare my students for a dramatic performance that they would present to an audience of students. While I ended up following most of this plan, it obviously did not end in the way that I had imagined.

Along the way, significant obstacles arose, the most significant of which revolved around the use of language in the drama lessons, or the lack thereof. I struggled to meet my students’ linguistic needs within a drama context; my students became frustrated that they were not practicing more English; and, with two months left to go in the project, my supervisor and director suggested that I stop the project because they felt that there was not enough relevant language learning being taught.

Although I sensed that my students were not completely satisfied with the drama lessons even before Terri observed my class, at the time, I was essentially unprepared to alter the plan that I had created. To quote Parker Palmer, I was unable to “face transformation.” Palmer explains, “To learn is to face transformation. To learn the truth is to enter into relationships requiring us to respond as well as initiate, to give as well as take” (Palmer 1993, 40).
I think that one of the reasons why I was unable to change is because, just as doing drama for the first time overwhelmed my students, teaching it for the first time overwhelmed me. I could not figure out how to teach them language and acting at the same time anymore than they could figure out how to perform both skills at the same time. As a result, I decided to dedicate nearly all of my energies to teaching acting and to allow language to take a backseat. While this was okay for me as a teacher because I already felt comfortable teaching a language, it was not okay for my students because, obviously, learning English was their top priority!

As a result of these missteps, I have generated a set of recommendations about integrating drama into a language curriculum with adult students (something that I have not had the opportunity to do since this project finished). These recommendations make up the rest of this section. Indeed, it is important for me to offer the insights that I have gained into teaching drama to language students, both for my own learning, but also for other teachers who may wish to pursue this type of instruction. Moreover, as I have noted before, there are relatively few materials that are devoted to this subject, especially ones geared towards adult immigrant students. The immediate skepticism with which both of my supervisors responded to my struggles to include drama in the classroom makes the need for these guides even more apparent. Hopefully, when there is more documentation about drama in language education, the field will gain greater legitimacy.

I organize my recommendations according to the six areas of pedagogical concern that I identified in my critical analysis: student playfulness, student acting, student language, teacher instruction, logistics, and reflections. For the reader’s convenience, in
addition to explaining these suggestions in detail, I have also compiled them into a table, which appears in Appendix 1. In addition, I relate many of these recommendations to my research. Finally, I use these recommendations as the basis for an outline of a 16-week integrated skills drama language curriculum. This outline appears in Appendix 2.

**Student Playfulness**

“Student playfulness” is the first area of pedagogical concern, and it encompasses variables that are particularly difficult to teach or assess, such as “fun, spontaneity, creativity, and imagination.” Nevertheless, this difficult-to-pin-down factor is a key reason why drama is regarded as valuable to language learners. As Krashen and other language researchers have noted, play lowers students’ affective filter, which, in turn, increases second language acquisition. Although it is difficult for me to say with certainty that my students learned more language as a result of their apparently lowered affective filters, in most of the drama lessons, I did see them visibly relax and enjoy themselves as they engaged in the drama warm-up games and rehearsals, when they planned out their skits with other group members.

It is also worth noting that I began all of the drama lessons with warm-up games. I never heard any students question doing these games because they seemed childish or because they did not think that they were helping them learn a language; rather, they seemed to enjoy the opportunity to get out of their seats, especially if the game was a competitive one. Granted, it could be that my students never wanted to tell me that they did not like the games, but most of the time when they indicated that they felt that drama was not helping them to learn a language, they cited examples from the scenes that we
practiced, and not from the games. The only time I remember seeing a lack of enthusiasm was when a new student entered the class more than halfway through the spring term, and therefore, was very clearly unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the idea of playing games.

Based on my observations, I saw that the games enabled the students to laugh, enjoy themselves, and to build cooperation and trust. However, that said, I do not necessarily feel that drama games need to be part of every drama lesson. Given the difficulty that I often encountered in trying to squeeze the games into a 1½ hour lesson that also included rehearsal time, performance time, and feedback time (which I ended up cutting in almost every lesson), I think that it would make more sense to only use drama games occasionally, or when there is sufficient time for them. If one had to select certain classes in which to play the games, I would also say that they should be played at the beginning of the term, when students are getting to know each other, and could really use ice-breaker and community-building activities. And, if the warm-up games sometimes have to be sacrificed, then that is one less item that the teacher has to plan!

**Student Acting**

The second area of pedagogical concern, “student acting,” is the one that I concentrated on the most throughout the project, especially with regards to body language. In addition to body language, this area includes elements such as, “ability to relax, comfort level in front of an audience, rehearsal, group dynamics, empathy with characters, and props.” Not surprisingly, I have many ideas for how I would address this area differently if I taught drama again, beginning with the idea that all drama lessons do
not have to expressly include attention to acting. Also, acting, as well as drama, should be introduced to the class slowly. I suggest both of these changes because it can take a while for students, as well as for a new drama teacher, to adjust to doing drama in the classroom.

Gillian Ladousse makes this very point in *Role Play*, saying “Role plays can be performed for other students, and they can be videoed. A lot may be learnt from such follow-up, but it is not essential and should only be done when students are well-used to role play, or when they are particularly extrovert” (Ladousse 1987: 11) [italics in original]. Although I had read remarks like this before beginning the project, I did not fully appreciate the need for students to become acclimated to drama until once the project was finished. Now I see that instead of introducing drama to my students slowly, we began doing it quite quickly since, within the first month of the spring term, I was leading two “drama lessons” a week. Moreover, I had never explained to the students that the purpose behind these lessons was to create an end-of-term performance.

Another rationale for scaffolding drama relates to the quote by Saskia Akyil, which I cited earlier as a reason for using student stories with adult ESL students. Akyil says, “I had to engage their existing knowledge of the world so that the new information they absorbed could be placed into their preexisting framework of knowledge” (Akyil 2006: 247). Although Akyil is discussing ways of personalizing material so that it is relevant to adult language students, the same precept is true of making any new and unfamiliar material more accessible—it should be couched in a familiar context. This is certainly true for drama.
Indeed, in both my classes at Asian Human Services, and in my more recent classes with international students at a university, I have found that language students do not typically respond adversely to drama activities if they are only one part of a lesson that is on a familiar language point, such as a reading or a grammatical structure. In such cases, drama functions as a way to apply the language that is being practiced, rather than as a special skill that is being taught for its own sake. I have also observed that when there are no warm-up activities or feedback sessions about the drama scenes, and when the drama activity is not called a “drama lesson,” students experience far less anxiety about performing in front of their classmates because there are less expectations surrounding the process. Of course, at some point after students become comfortable with drama, if a teacher and students want to pursue developing a dramatic performance, then I would recommend doing so, but only if, as Ladousse says, a majority of the students seem to enjoy doing drama—and if they explicitly know that this is the end point towards which they will be working.

The idea that students should have a clear understanding of a lesson’s purpose relates to the fact that a teacher should also have clear objectives for a lesson, and be able to communicate them clearly to students. Although I never felt good about not explicitly telling students that we were working towards a drama performance, by not telling them, I was essentially putting my interests before theirs. Really, I had a responsibility to tell them of my plans because, first, the class was for them, and second, because this was a big reason why I was devoting so much time to acting.

I also discovered the need to have clear objectives for individual drama lessons, and to try to stick to them. For instance, in an early drama lesson in the fall, I told the
students that I wanted them to perform their conversations in front of the class, but then, once some students went to the front of the class, I started piling on additional questions about the scenes, such as asking where the “restaurant” was. In short, when I did not have clarity about what I wanted my students to do, I found that this left open more room for me to surprise them with additional responsibilities. Not only was this unfair to the students, but critically, such situations also did not permit them to develop as much independence from me, so that they could become more self-sufficient learners. Essentially, when I did not have clear expectations for the students, the class became less student-centered and more teacher-dominated.

In addition to recognizing the need for clear lesson objectives, I also learned that it is important to include a variety of acting activities in the lessons. I have already mentioned one example of this, which is to not necessarily begin every drama lesson with a warm-up game. Similarly, though, during the spring term, I learned that it is better not to dwell on the same point, such as body language, over and over again. For about a month in the spring term, I worked almost exclusively with the students on body language, as well as on the same student love stories. Consequently, both my students and I burned out on practicing both of these items, as well as on doing drama altogether. Really, this is not much different from how students become weary of going to class when they study the same language point over and over. In other words, they need variety, both of subject and of activity, or order to maintain their motivation and interest. Although I already understood this idea as it related to language, I had not previously recognized it with regards to drama. I had to teach it in order to appreciate it.
Another key to student motivation is group dynamics. In some instances, I observed groups of students in which individuals dominated the groups by talking a lot and making most of the decisions during the planning stages of the drama. Inevitably, they also ended up acting the part of the most dominant character, who, not surprisingly, would have the most lines. I have a few ideas for how to combat this tendency.

First, in cases in which there are clearly dominant and passive characters, the teacher could assign these roles to specific students so that the more passive student would act the part of the most dominant character, and vice-versa. Or, alternatively, the students themselves could select their roles, but the shyer students should be allowed to pick first. Additionally, I think it would be useful to tell the groups ahead of time that all group members need to speak a minimum number of times. In this way, students could become more conscious of making sure that everyone participates in the scenes to a relatively equal extent.

Another factor for the teacher to consider is the type of story that students act out. As I discovered when I asked my students to reenact their crime stories experiences, some types of stories lend themselves better to dialogue than others, and crime stories certainly are not one of them.

Finally, a significant reason for doing drama with students is that drama can foster empathy for the characters’ experiences. Since these characters are the students’ classmates, this empathy can help the students to strengthen and deepen their relationships with each other. I realized this upon watching the video of the classroom discussion about Adisa’s love story. I saw how the dramatization of Adisa’s story enabled the students to deeply connect to the portrayal of the story in a way that probably
would not have happened if she had just explained it. It was after viewing this conversation that I realized that student dramas do not necessarily have to be an end unto themselves, but that they can actually be a means for further meaningful discussion on topics that are relevant to the students.

**Student Language**

If student acting is an area about which I have many suggestions to make because I experimented with it so much, then student language is one about which I have many suggestions precisely because I experimented with it so little. As a result, I can now see how I could have done much more with it. This area includes “formal aspects of speech (i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), the frequency with which students speak, how comfortably and spontaneously students speak, the use of authentic language, and culture.”

The first and most basic idea I have for addressing student language in drama is simply to dedicate more time to it, so that students will be more invested in the dramas, but also so that their language can improve more. In particular, although my students gained a lot of general conversation practice during rehearsals, they did not gain much practice with fluency or accuracy. Two students in particular, Luz and Olga, come to mind when I mention this idea, since they both visibly struggled to articulate themselves in the drama scenes. During these classes, they only got one try to get the language right, and to say it smoothly and confidently. However, if they could have reviewed this language in structured activities, and then performed the same scenes again, then I believe that they would have benefited much more from the drama lessons. In all
likelihood, their language would have improved and their confidence would have increased as a result.

Students like Luz and Olga underscore the importance of enabling students to concentrate on form-based exercises in relation to drama, rather than solely on meaning-based ones, which are generally the type that I led. During my drama lessons, I paid little attention to the students’ grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, in spite of the fact that their scenes offered such a wealth of authentic language from which to work. In fact, even in my research, in which I talk about this issue of meaning versus form, I focus more on how drama is valuable because of the opportunity that it provides for students to practice meaning-based exercises. This is probably because it has been my experience that language classes tend to focus far less on meaning-based exercises than on form-based ones. However, I can see now that it is necessary to make all language exercises, dramatic or not, more holistic so that there is a balance between the form- and meaning-based ends of the language learning spectrum.

To establish this balance, there is an array of reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities that students can do to hone their language skills using the language from their dramas. For instance, if the teacher makes an audio or video recording of the drama scenes, then students can listen to it and write down the dialogue. Or, based on their memory of what they said, groups of students can collectively write scripts of their scenes. These scripts can then serve as devices for noticing grammatical errors, which can be addressed in later lessons. These grammatical points can also be used as the stimuli by which new scenes are developed. For example, if the class is studying modals, then perhaps students could create scenes that incorporate at least two modals.
Alternatively, these scripts could serve as a springboard for standard reading activities, such as cloze activities, comprehension questions, ordering, or dictation. Also, reading the scripts aloud would aid with identifying pronunciation difficulties. They could also highlight important vocabulary that might either already be in the script or should be included in the script if it is relevant. All of these language points could be listed and posted on a wall in the classroom, to help students become more aware of how the dramatic scenes correlate to and aid in their language learning. I think that strategies like these would go a long way towards helping students like Luz and Olga improve their language skills.

However, they may not help Luz and Olga with their general shyness or performance anxiety, which could greatly lower their language abilities at the very moment when they need them the most—in front of an audience. Moreover, as I noted in my research, this critical moment in front of an audience is similar to other pressure-filled moments in everyday life when students must use their language in public places like stores or doctors’ offices.

Props are an excellent way of helping students to relieve their anxiety. Time and time again, I have found that when students hold an object in their hand while they are talking, they become less self-conscious because their concentration shifts from their language production to the object. For this reason, in the very first drama lesson that I did in the fall, I had the students practice with puppets, which can be made from materials as simple as a plastic spoon, some googly eyes, and string for hair and facial features. However, I never had the students practice with puppets after this, probably because I became so focused on the use of student acting.
I have also had students do storytelling activities with Cuisenaire rods, which are another easy object for them to hold. Each rod can represent a different character in a story, much like a puppet. Using objects like these might also be particularly helpful if the students are performing scenes about controversial topics that they might not feel comfortable depicting if the focus is only on them. Although I have never used masks in my class, I imagine that these would also help shy students feel less inhibited. Finally, my students became very animated the one time that I brought in clothes for them to pick out as costumes. When I have told other teachers of adult students about using these types of objects to aid students’ language production, their initial response has usually been to question whether students will find them childish. But no matter what the level or age of my students has been, I have found that once they begin speaking with the objects, they become immersed in what they are doing, and enjoy themselves.

Another way to reduce anxiety is to give students plenty of rehearsal time. I saw that when I did not give my students enough time to plan out what they were going to do and say in their scenes, they felt less comfortable acting in them. Although I never tried this in my classroom, another idea to help shyer students feel more comfortable performing would be, time permitting, to have them rehearse in front of a small group of students before “performing” in front of the rest of the class and the teacher. If these students could get an initial rehearsal under their belt, they would probably have more self-confidence during future presentations.

Among the stories that my students acted out, the only one that explicitly dealt with culture was that of Miriam and Michael, which offered an illustration of “rudeness.” However, I think that drama would be a great vehicle for doing intentional cultural
exploration, since it is an entertaining and visual way to depict everyday behaviors. It might be interesting, for example, to ask students to create scenes depicting a typical survival skill topic, such as health in their country and in the U.S. These scenes would probably reveal interesting cultural information that one would be unlikely to learn about otherwise, and they would also indicate where students’ experiences and interests with the topic lay. In addition, these stories would offer an easy way of designing a unit of instruction that would be immediately engaging and relevant to students. Other ideas for depicting cultural scenes include asking students to depict folktales native to their respective countries, and asking them to create scenes around an emotion that they might not often have much opportunity to express in English, such as anger, sadness, or surprise.

**Teacher Instruction**

The issue of selecting a student story to be dramatized is one that I consistently struggled with, and therefore I identified it as an element of “teacher instruction” that I needed to examine. Early in the project, during the fall term, I picked out a student story that I thought would be appropriate for the class, which is how the class wound up portraying Miriam’s story in “Miriam and Michael.” However, later on, I tried to find ways of including more students in this decision-making process, such as when, during the spring term, I asked groups of students to pick a favorite story. This is how the class ended up dramatizing Yudit’s, Hasiba’s, and Aferdita’s love stories. Now, I think that there are times when it is nice to use an individual’s story and that, other times, it is nice
to show a story that has been created by a group. So, as with the language and the acting work, I return to the idea that striking a balance is often a good goal for which to strive.

The other issue relating to teacher instruction that I am concerned with is the power dynamic between the teacher and students. Throughout this paper, I have identified many ways in which I asserted my control and dominance during the drama lessons in spite of the fact that I did not want to. In fact, there are at least two occasions in which I explicitly say that I decided to go ahead with my plans even though I was pretty sure that doing so would expose my students to awkwardness and discomfort.

Interestingly, I feel that a description that I wrote earlier about one of these occasions goes a long way towards revealing both the problem and a potential solution to it. On page 78, I say,

Although I knew that my students were unlikely to feel comfortable with the observers there, I did not fully appreciate how uncomfortable they would feel. Later, they told me that they had felt very nervous, especially because the observers had been sitting in chairs that were very close to where they were standing when they performed their scenes. For me, the observers had become like part of the background and I had almost forgotten about them. However, from listening to my students afterwards, I realized that they could not forget about them. I had not fully appreciated how vulnerable my students felt—especially when they had to perform.

If I had realized how vulnerable my students had felt in this situation, I believe that I would have been less likely to put them in this situation. Consequently, I believe that it is crucial for the teacher to experience a student role, or something like it, so that one knows what it feels like to be in a situation in which another person tends to have the decision-making power.

Unfortunately, in my research, I did not come across any materials that directly deal with this very real tug-and-pull of teacher versus student control. I do know, though,
that at least to some extent, Dorothy Heathcote’s process drama tries to address this unequal balance by asking the teacher to act in tandem with the students, rather than just asking the students to be the actors. While I have not yet tried this dramatic approach, I would like to explore it if for no other reason than that it would be far more difficult for me to interrupt students during rehearsals and presentations if my own mental energy was absorbed with trying to responsibly play my own part in a class drama!

**Logistics**

On the same day that I asked my students to perform in front of observers, I recorded them with a video camera. The presence of the video camera was one of my greatest difficulties with regards to logistics, another area with which I encountered difficulties. I never felt like more of the big, bad wolf than on those days when I wielded a video camera. The presence of a camera uncovers all pretenses about there being a balance of power; it immediately renders a situation into a case of “me and you”, that is to say, the teacher (the one with the camera and the power) and the students (the ones without the camera or the power).

One time, in effect, I tried to reverse this balance of power by asking one of my students to take over the video camera. I think that this is a pretty good idea, but since I only did it one time, I am not really sure how much it might lower my students’ anxiety about being watched and recorded. Another tactic would be to simply have the video camera present during all rehearsals, so that students simply become accustomed to its presence, thereby greatly reducing its effect. In fact, a video camera could even be present during lessons that do not have anything to do with drama. I think that having the
camera become an everyday part of the classroom, rather than a special tool that is only brought out in pressure-filled situations, is probably the best solution to this problem.

Another consideration is that since flip-videos, cellular phones, and digital cameras are now becoming more commonplace, these smaller and more unobtrusive recording devices might be less intimidating to students. I doubt that the solution is that simple, however, since people always seem to feel different when they know that they are being recorded. If one does choose one of these alternative devices for recording, I would recommend practicing with it in a simulated circumstance in order to make sure that the sound quality is good enough for students to be heard. In a couple of instances, I recorded with a digital camera out of necessity, and as my transcripts in the appendix indicate, the sound quality is not good enough to make out what the students are saying.

This was particularly disappointing, not just because the students could not hear themselves when they watched the recordings later on, but because without a good audio recording of the scenes, there is less opportunity for the students to do follow-up language work. Similarly, without the video recordings, as a teacher, I would have had to rely on my memory to critically reflect on the lessons. Moreover, I doubt that I would have fully appreciated the dynamic of power that existed between my students and me if I had not been able to see it as an “observer” watching the videos afterwards. So, in short, quality videos are critical for both student and teacher development.

Another logistical element that teachers often do not have much control over is classroom space, and the space surrounding the classroom. Early in the spring term, during one of my reflections about the drama lesson, I wrote about the fact that a couple of students were sitting down during the drama activities. By sitting down, they were no
longer fully participating in the class and this could easily affect other students’
motivation. However, I realized that one simple solution to this problem, besides talking
to the students to make sure that there was not some physical reason why they needed to
sit down, was to simply remove the chairs from the space. After this, it became a ritual at
the beginning of the drama lessons for the students to help me move the tables and chairs
to the sides of the classroom in order to clear the space.

Another way of dealing with this issue is to have the students go outside the
classroom into a hallway or another unused space, if it is available. I have asked the
students to do this sometimes, and it works out well. Also, I believe that getting out of
the classroom helps the students to practice doing the drama without having the very real
fear that the teacher will be monitoring what they are doing, and might interrupt them. A
relatively private space is imperative for giving students a sense of safety during the
rehearsal process, when they are being asked to take risks by experimenting with the
language and with their roles.

Student absences are another uncontrollable logistic with which teachers have to
contend. However, I did find some ways to get students up to speed and to quickly
incorporate them into the activities. Just like with language practice, I would carefully
review the work that we had done in previous lessons with some opening examples. But
I would also pair the absent student with a reliable student who had been present, so that
the latter could walk the former through what he/she had missed, and answer any
questions that the absent student had.

I did not necessarily find an equally good solution to the problem of students
entering the course late in the term, which often happens with adult immigrant ESL
classes. In many cases, the late student will simply have missed too much of the initial community-building activities, and drama activities, to be able to catch up. But again, this is no different from the situation with regular language lessons.

In my research, I also raise the issue of how it would be difficult to do dramatic presentations with those adult classes that meet more infrequently than my classes did, such as once or twice a week, which is common for many adult ESL classes. Indeed, with this scenario, I do not think that there is enough time to balance the language curriculum of the class and the preparation for a drama performance. However, although a performance might not be possible in these classes, upon reflection, I do think that it is quite realistic to be able to incorporate drama into routine language activities.

In fact, at the same time that I was teaching drama to my regular morning class, I had an afternoon class of low-level parents that only met two days a week. In one class, after we had talked about the present tense and everyday schedules, I asked the students to dramatize an average daily activity. The students loved acting out scenes from their day! In particular, two sisters, who were ordinarily extremely shy, enjoyed showing me how they would go over to each other’s houses for breakfast each morning, and talk about routine matters, such as how a husband always left his clothes on the floor. Suddenly, the class really connected to their lives. Thinking about lessons like these also helps me to realize that if I, as a teacher, am willing to adapt my dramatic objectives to the given parameters, then it will probably be much easier for me to include some type of dramatic work in my lessons.
Reflections

Finally, there is the question of teacher and student reflections about the drama lessons. I know that I would not have had many of my insights into drama instruction if I had not kept journals about my classroom experiences and, especially, if I had not been able to view the videos of the class. For me, and I suspect for most teachers, reflection is one of the few ways to step back from a lesson, and examine it to see how it can be improved upon for next time.

Student feedback was also helpful for gaining perspective on the lessons. However, I had read so much about students who do not take drama seriously that I think that I was almost overly concerned with checking in with the students about how they felt about doing drama. At several points, I asked them about their feelings towards drama, and talked to them about different reasons for doing it. But I think that by talking about drama so much, I created a situation in which the students inevitably felt that it stood apart from the rest of the language curriculum. So, I would caution other teachers about conducting excessive conversations that justify or explore reasons for doing drama.

In contrast, though, I wish that I had spent more time eliciting student feedback about the individual drama scenes. Throughout the year, I was often bothered by the fact that the students would perform the drama scenes for their classmates, but that their classmates would only watch the scenes for entertainment. Just as teachers commonly give students a language task when they watch a movie in class, I wanted to give the students in the audience a task to carry out while watching their classmates’ drama scenes. However, I encountered two primary obstacles to this idea.
First, I always seemed to run out of time for these feedback sessions. One way around this problem would be to just have one group of students perform their scenes on a given day, and then have a feedback session about only that group. However, then I feel like the other students who would also go through the warm-up games, exercises, and rehearsals, would be short-changed if they did not have a chance to act out their scenes on the same day. An easier option would be to use the video recordings as the basis for a feedback session on another day. This is not ideal, since the students’ immediate thoughts and feelings would be lost. However, perhaps it would be good enough to allow time for just the students who had performed that day to give their impressions, and allow others to talk later, with the video recordings available to help jog their memory.

Generally speaking, I feel that time constraints represent one of the biggest challenges to doing quality drama work.

The second obstacle that I encountered to having students give feedback about the scenes is that on those occasions when I did ask students to immediately comment on them, I felt like I was pushing them to saying things when they had nothing to say, or worse, that I was pushing them to give critical feedback when they did not feel comfortable doing so. As a result of these challenges, I have come to view the ability to give feedback as another skill. Like language learning and acting that, it also needs to be taught in an intentional way that includes a lot of scaffolding.

I would introduce students to the idea of giving constructive feedback by first asking them to comment on scenes in which they are not the actors. To get them started thinking about the areas of performance that they could comment on, I would show them movie scenes or, ideally, videos of former students presenting drama scenes. By using
these neutral examples of acting and speaking, we could generate a list of things to look for, such as body language, gesture, clear pronunciation, fluency, etc. During this time, I would also make sure to have the students practice giving positive feedback first, and then constructive feedback.

By the time the students felt comfortable with giving feedback, they would also hopefully have enough experience doing scenes in the classroom so that they would not feel quite as anxious about having other students make comments about them. In addition, though, to lessen the actors’ anxiety about receiving feedback, I would instruct the students on how to lead the feedback sessions, instead of leading them myself. Since a teacher’s presence generally introduces more stress and tension in the classroom, especially when situations of evaluation are involved, I believe that the students would be more likely to make honest comments and feel more comfortable with a student facilitator.

To achieve this goal, I would first model how to facilitate the feedback sessions, and I would also post a list of questions for the student facilitator to ask. These questions would be derived from the ideas about acting and language that the students would have generated from their viewings of movies or student scenes. Finally, to ease the tension of having the students comment on each other’s scenes, I would give the student actors the first opportunity to make comments, so that they could process and comment on their own work before anybody else.

Through this feedback process, the experience of making and performing the drama stories would come full circle for the students, since the feedback would enable them to consider what they had learned and what they felt that they needed to work on—
both in terms of acting and language. In a similar vein, I think that it would benefit the student whose story is being dramatized to be the facilitator, so that they could answer any questions about it, and also connect with their experience in a new way.

Having completed my reflections on the drama project, I find that I still believe in the power of drama to help students learn a language. Time and time again, I saw my students come alive while making the scenes about their stories. They also seemed to really care about the scenes that they were creating—scenes that reflected their personal experiences and imaginative renderings. Certainly, it is also true that drama will not be every student’s cup of tea, nor is including drama in the language classroom necessarily an easy adaptation for the students or the teacher to make. Nevertheless, one thing is clear in my mind, and that is that using drama with language students—particularly drama about students’ personal stories—presents a real alternative to standard language instruction, which is usually wholly dependent upon textbook material. Unlike textbooks, which do not typically relate to students’ lives, drama can provide a showcase for students’ ideas, feelings, and experiences. When students act out drama, the language that they are using is clearly about and for them. Learning a new language is suddenly transformed from an abstraction to a concrete way of describing their experiences.

Although the value of drama has commonly been overlooked in language education, of late, it seems to be gaining more recognition as a valid instructional tool. For instance, as a result of my participation in the TESOL drama listserv, I know that there is an international group of teachers who are using drama to teach language to their students. Among this group, there are also several strong promoters of drama in language
education, such as Gary Carkin, who is pushing for more scientific research about using drama in language learning, and for graduate TESOL courses that focus on teaching drama.

Second, the value of using drama in the classroom has recently gained attention in mainstream media outlets. In September 2009, Paul Tough wrote a lengthy article in the New York Times Sunday Magazine detailing the benefits of using dramatic play in the classroom. He cites Lev Vygotsky as one of the primary proponents of such teaching methods (Tough 2009). Tough also cites Adele Diamond, a cognitive developmental neuroscientist who also happens to have a dance background, as a current researcher who is a big supporter of drama in the classroom (Tough 2009). Moreover, in November 2009, Diamond was interviewed on “Speaking of Faith,” a nationally syndicated program on National Public Radio, about the need for including creative movement in education (Speaking of Faith 2009). Although both the print and the radio pieces focus on the use of drama with children, and make no mention of adult students, this growing interest in the role of drama in education gives me hope that it is gaining greater recognition and legitimacy among students and teachers alike, as well as in the general public. In the not-too-distant future, perhaps other language teachers who want to try drama instruction will find more resources and support to assist them in this important endeavor.
October 28, 2009

I am still mulling over the pedagogical idea that I first identified in the spring of 2009, which is that teachers need to encourage students to act independently from them. I realized that I wanted to talk with Idy, my African dance teacher, about this idea. However, it was also interesting to note that just the thought of talking to him about how he ran his class made me a little anxious. Suddenly, I was in the position of the humble student who felt scared when faced with confronting the authority figure.

Nevertheless, a few weeks ago, I did talk with Idy, who teaches many hours of African dance classes a week to both children and adults. I said to him, “Idy, have you ever taught a class where, instead of showing the students a routine, and having them copy it, you give them the basic steps, but then they make up their own routine?” This was the best description that I could come up with for thinking about how dance instruction could correspond with the student-centered form of language instruction that I was trying to deliver with the drama project.

“Actually,” he said, “I do that sometimes with my classes for kids. I teach them the steps, and then I make each kid responsible for a different step. Then they choose how they want to put them together.” His words seemed like a revelation to me. So there was a way to teach dance in a more student-centered manner and, in fact, Idy had already done it! I then asked him why he had only taught this type of class to kids. Idy did not have an precise explanation for this choice; he simply said that he taught different classes
in different ways. I wanted to ask him if he would try teaching our class that way, so that I could see how it felt, but I resisted the urge at that time.

Fast forward to three weeks in the future. I am ready for another African dance class to begin. All of the students are standing in their respective rows, ready to start the warm-up exercises that Idy always leads from the front of the room. However, now Idy is saying that he wants us to form a circle. Suddenly, there is no front, and there are no rows. Idy says that one by one, each of us in the circle should lead the others in an exercise.

I was so excited. We had all done these exercises a million times; surely we could collectively lead a halfway decent warm-up. And sure enough, we did. Each person in the circle successfully demonstrated a stretch, and the rest did the same. Sure, the exercises might have been more effective if Idy had been leading them, but this was a good start. I felt that with more time and practice doing this type of collective warm-up, we would only get better. Or, to view the situation another way, if Idy did go back to leading exercises again, I had a feeling that we would all be paying closer attention to what type of exercises he did, and to how he did them.

As it turns out, in the weeks following this class, Idy returned to his old style of leading the warm-up routine. On the last day of the eight-week session, I asked Idy whether it would be possible for him to lead the next class in the same manner that he sometimes does with his kids, making each one responsible for a different movement. “Sure,” he said, smiling, “anything’s possible.” Oh, I thought, “Anything’s possible.” Although this was not the definitive answer that I had been hoping for, his words did give me faith that I might yet experience another type of dance instruction as a student, and
that it might be one in which the teacher was not necessarily highlighted as the primary one to watch.

Yesterday, I went to the first night of my dance class with a twinge of anxiety. In fact, this was the first time that I had felt anxious about going to the class since I had started taking it over a year ago. To what did I owe this unexpected feeling? I was waiting to see if Idy would, indeed, change the class. However, as it turned out, on this night Idy was sick, and there was a substitute teacher. As a result, I am still waiting to see what will happen in next week’s dance class. I am left waiting with the promise of Idy’s casual response ringing in my ears: “Sure, anything’s possible.”
Appendix I

Recommendations for Addressing Challenges of Teaching Drama Lessons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Concern</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Suggestions for Addressing Areas of Concern</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Student Playfulness</td>
<td>• fun • spontaneity • creativity • imagination</td>
<td>• use drama games only occasionally, or at the beginning of the term</td>
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<td>2. Student Acting</td>
<td>• body language • ability to relax • comfort level in front of an audience • rehearsal • group dynamics</td>
<td>• all drama lessons do not have to explicitly be about acting, or be called a “drama lesson”</td>
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<td>• scaffold drama/acting - introduce it slowly, beginning with incorporating it into “regular” language lessons</td>
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<td>• tell students directly the goal for doing the drama lessons</td>
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<td>• have a clear objective for individual drama lessons, along with clear expectations for students</td>
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<td>• include a variety of topics and drama exercises</td>
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<td>• assign roles to students to prevent some students from dominating, or allow shyer students to pick roles first</td>
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<td>• set a minimum number of times that all members need to speak during the scenes</td>
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<td>• select stories that lend themselves to dialogue and not just action (such as crime stories)</td>
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<td>• use stories as a means for furthering discussion on meaningful topics</td>
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<td>3. Student Language</td>
<td>• formal aspects of speech, i.e., grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation • frequency with which</td>
<td>• balance the time dedicated to acting work and language work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• balance the time between meaning- and form-based language work</td>
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<td>• to improve language used in scenes, review and practice it in</td>
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4. Teacher Instruction

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| students speak | • comfort and spontaneity with which students speak  
• authentic language  
• culture |
|  | a variety of extension activities; then allow time to repeat performances  
• have students write scripts of scenes  
• post a list of language points from the scenes which the class has studied  
• use props to help relieve student anxiety during performance  
• give students plenty of rehearsal time so that they feel prepared for presentations  
• allow groups to rehearse scenes for each other before doing them for the class and teacher  
• explore culture by asking students to create scenes on a relevant topic, emotion, or a native folktale |
|  | • dynamic of student/teacher control in lesson  
• teacher in student role  
• lesson dynamics, i.e., scaffolding, pacing, examples  
• selection of student story to be dramatized |
|  | • teacher should experience student role to experience not being the authority figure  
• try process drama, in which teacher acts out scene together with students |

5. Logistics

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|  | • presence of video camera  
• classroom space  
• student attendance  
• contact hours with students |
|  | • to relieve anxiety about camera, have students make recordings, instead of teacher or have camera present in class frequently  
• use smaller recording devices, such as flip phones or photo cameras  
• test out sound quality of recording devices beforehand  
• provide students with designated drama space by moving chairs and tables  
• if more space is required, allow students to rehearse outside of the classroom |
| 6. Reflections | Teacher’s immediate reflections  
Student comments and feedback | To deal with student absences, review work at the beginning of each lesson and pair the absent student to a reliable student who was present  
For classes with few contact hours, adjust objectives and consider only including drama as an extension activity  
Keep journals in order to gain more objectivity on lessons, and record insights  
When possible, watch videos of lessons  
With students, do not dwell excessively on purpose of drama and rationale for it; this only creates the sense that drama is distinct from other class work  
Assign students in the audience a task while they are watching dramatic scenes  
Rearrange structure of lessons, and use video recordings, to allow time for feedback  
Teach the process of giving positive and constructive criticism as a scaffolded skill  
Train students to lead feedback sessions  
Spend more time |
### Appendix 2

**Curriculum Outline for Teaching Drama in a 16-week Integrated Skills Adult ESL Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weeks 1-3</th>
<th>Weeks 4-8</th>
<th>Weeks 9-10</th>
<th>Weeks 11-16 (culminating in possible performance)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drama</strong></td>
<td>• Charades</td>
<td>• Integrate drama</td>
<td>• Warm-up games</td>
<td>• Develop scenes from student stories, survival</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Ice-breaker games</td>
<td>into 4 skills lessons</td>
<td>• Develop scenes</td>
<td>skills, and cultural topics</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
<td>• Act out vocabulary and</td>
<td>• 4 skills</td>
<td>• 4 skills</td>
<td>• 4 skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>verbs</td>
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<td>• pronunciation</td>
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<td>• voice projection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• enunciation</td>
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<td><strong>Acting</strong></td>
<td>--</td>
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<td>• use props</td>
<td>• use props</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• body language</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• gesture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• blocking</td>
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<td><strong>Feedback</strong></td>
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<td>• develop criteria for</td>
<td>• students lead feedback sessions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>constructive feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• teacher leads</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>feedback sessions</td>
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Appendix 3

Video Transcripts

**Transcript 1: Video 16: “Suman’s Love Story 5.21.09”**

Suman [coral shirt] = Suman

Olga [red shirt] = Suman’s boyfriend

Tino = friend of Suman’s boyfriend

Olga: Oh, look at that beautiful lady! Oh!...

Tino: Ask her name!

Olga: ’Scuse me?”

Suman: Yes?

Olga: What is your name?

Suman: My name is Suman.

Olga: Oh, nice name!

Suman: Oh, yeah.

Tino: Don’t worry, I keep in the, in the door. I watch the teachers and the, and the other students.

Olga: Okay, okay!

Tino: You can see….

Olga: I can walk with me?...

Suman: Okay, a little time.

Olga: I go the classroom. [Olga and Suman walk together.]

Olga: I can… Are you can… I go the… park?... One moment, a little moment.

Suman: Yeah.
Olga: Okay. [They walk together to the “park.”]

Olga: Do you have boyfriend?

Suman: Yeah.

Olga: No like me?

Suman: Not…. [“Not bad.” (?) cannot hear recording]

Olga: [She says something and gestures sexily.]

Suman: I can go with you.

Olga: I come the… go the, go the, a go the, goes the movies… theater?

Suman: Uh-huh.

Olga: Okay, come.
Transcript 2: Video #17: “Aferdita’s Love Story 5.21.09

(Story #1 Aferdita’s Love Story”)

Luz [peach shirt] = Faik, Aferdita’s boyfriend
Aferdita [black and cream blouse] = Aferdita
Tere [black shirt] = friend of Aferdita

Luz: Hey, excuse me, can you give me the name?...
Aferdita: My name?
Luz: What is your name?! What is your name?!
Aferdita: What you need it for my name?
Luz: Oh, sorry! [She walks away.]
Aferdita: Go!
Tere: Why you no say your name?
Aferdita: I don’t know who is, who is he, and he is tall, and I am short…..
Tere: Oh, that’s no problem. [laughs]
[Luz enters again.]
Aferdita: Hi.
Luz: Hi.
Aferdita: Can I sit?
Aferdita: Thank you. Thank you…. What’s your name?
Luz: It’s Faik…. And you?
Aferdita: Aferdita.
Luz: Now you don’t angry with me no more?
Aferdita: Yes, yes, sure…. How old are you?

Luz: 18 years. And you?

Aferdita: 16.

Luz: Maybe do you like to go to the park tomorrow?

Aferdita: Yes, sure…. What time is it?

Luz: 11:30.

Aferdita: Hmm, thank you.

Luz: You want to go?

Aferdita: Yes.

Luz: I can go with you?

Aferdita: Okay.
Transcript 3: Video #17: “Aferdita’s Love Story 5.21.09

(Story #2: Yudit’s Love Story)

Yudit [black shirt] = Yudit

Erika [white blouse] = Sammy, Yudit’s boyfriend

Maria [blue shirt] = Yudit’s father-in-law

Yudit: Come on. Hi, Sammy.

Erika: Oh, Yudit.

Yudit: Oh. [They hug.]

Erika: The U.S.A.

Yudit: He come back to Cuba in 1999…. Come back to Cuba.

Erika: Okay, I come for Cuba, Cuba, Cuba…. Oh, hi Yudit! You… do you remember me?

Yudit: Oh, yeah, Sammy! [They hug.] Oh, you are man!

Erika: Oh yeah, you are a beautiful man… woman!

Yudit: Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Erika: You are a beautiful woman.

Yudit: That’s great. How’s your trip? Good?

Erika: Good. Very, very good…. So, em, eh… I am happy, eh because I am… I stay here with you.

Yudit: Oh, I happy too… to see you again.

Erika: Okay. That’s good.

Yudit: Uh, go to walk or friends around the city?

Erika: Yes, yes, we can.

Yudit: Come on!
[They walk around.]

Yudit: Oh, Sammy!

Erika: Oh, I need to go to the United States, so I’m sorry….

Yudit: Write me.

Erika: Yeah. And you can call me.

Yudit: Bye.

Erika: Bye.

[Erika flies back to Cuba.]

Yudit: Hello?

Erika: Hello?

Yudit: Who’s calling?

Erika: I am Sammy.

Yudit: Oh, Sammy! How are you?

Erika: Oh, Yudit, how are you?

Yudit: Fine, fine. How is your work?

Erika: Good, good.

Yudit: And your family?

Erika: It’s good. When come the… maybe you come back the U.S.A.?

Yudit: Oh…. You come again to Cuba?

Erika: Maybe in two months…

Yudit: Oh my god!

Erika: When I come back, I… you… you want to marry me?

Yudit: Yeah, sure!
Erika: Oh, that’s good. Very good.

Yudit: I want to call you!

Erika: Okay.

Yudit: See you soon!

[Erika and Maria, Sammy’s father, return to Cuba. Erika and Yudit get married.]
Transcript 4: Video #18: “Aferdita’s Story, Group 2 Body Language and Speaking

6.4.09;” Group 2 performs

Olga [black sweatshirt] = Aferdita
Erika [light grey sweater] = Aferdita’s friend
Martha [dark grey sweatshirt and pink shirt] = Aferdita’s friend
Joaquin = Faik, Aferdita’s boyfriend

Joaquin: Oh, hey! How are you?
Olga: I’m fine.
Joaquin: What’s your name?
Olga: Forget it.
Joaquin: What’s your name?
Olga: What did you need my name?
Joaquin: ’Cause. What happened?… What’s your name?… What’s your name?… What’s your name, lady?
Olga: [cannot understand recording]
Joaquin: What’s your name? Please?
Olga: [Olga talks to her friends.] Come here… Help me!
Marta: Hi.
Olga: Hi.
Erika: How are you? [The friends hug.]
Joaquin: What’s your name?
Erika: Are you okay?
Olga: This man’s crazy! Touching me.
Marta: Oh!
Erika: Why you touch her?
Joaquin: I need the name.
Erika: Why?
Joaquin: Because.
Erika: You need information about [cannot hear recording]?
Joaquin: I love her.
Erika: Ohh! He loves you.
Joaquin: What’s your name?
Olga: Bye. [The friends leave.]
Joaquin: Finished.
[The friends talk about Joaquin.
Marta: You love him?
Olga: Nothing.
Erika: You no like?
Olga: No like.
Marta: Why?
Olga: I like people with [gestures towards her stomach]
Erika: … a six-pack?… Do you like a man with a six-pack?
Olga: Yes. This one, no like…
Erika: Maybe, he…
Olga: … exercise.
Erika: Exercise…. Maybe he, maybe you can talk to him.

Olga: I go to walking?

Erika: Okay.

Marta: [asks a question]

Olga: No. No, it’s okay.

Erika: Okay, go to the shopping.

[The women go shopping. Later, Olga approaches Joaquin.]

Olga: Hi. What time is it?

Joaquin: No have watch.

Olga: You have watch.

Joaquin: No.

Olga: What time is it?

Joaquin: It’s mine.

Olga: What is your name?

Joaquin: [cannot hear response]

Olga: What time is it?

Joaquin: I don’t have watch. It’s broken.

Olga: Do you… can you, um… movie theater?

Joaquin: Maybe.

Olga: No… Why not?

Joaquin: Mmm, ask me another time.


Joaquin: Bye.
Erika: What happened?…

Olga: [cannot hear response]

Erika: Is good person or not?

Olga: [gestures that Joaquin is so-so]

Erika: Did you talk to… about why?

Olga: He no tell me, he tell me don’t have watch, and he say watch.
Transcript 5: Video #19: “Aferdita’s Story Body Language and Speaking 6.4.09;”

Group 1 performs

Luz [grey sweatshirt] = Aferdita

Suman [white sweater] = Aferdita’s friend

Yudit [brown sweatshirt] = Aferdita’s friend/librarian

Juan = Faik, Aferdita’s boyfriend

[Aferdita and her friends are studying together in the library.]

Juan: She’s beautiful.

Yudit: Did you study?

Juan: I have to know her.

Luz: No, I don’t study, but…

Juan: I have to….

Suman: Go to the library.

Juan: I feel my heart beating.

Yudit: At what time?

Luz: 6:00.

Suman: Yeah, let’s meet tomorrow.

Luz: See you.

[They walk away. The next day, they meet at the library.]

Yudit: Hi, Aferdita. Can you explain me that question, please?

Juan: Hello, guys. How are you?

Yudit: Fine.

Juan: What are you doing?
Suman: We are studying for test... we have our test.

Juan: I can help you.

Luz: No, please cannot. Don’t bother me.

Juan: Let’s do something.

Luz: Don’t bother me.

Juan: I can help you... if you say me your name.

Luz: Don’t bother me.

[He walks away. The women continue studying.]

Luz: I understand that one, but....

Yudit: I don’t understand.

[The women look over at Juan.]

Luz: Oh him...? [Recording is difficult to understand in this part.]

Yudit: ...He’s very handsome....

Luz: Very handsome.

[The women walk way. The next day, they come to the library, and Yudit is the librarian.]

Suman: Hi, good morning.

Yudit: Morning.

Suman: I want to take this book.

Yudit: Okay, what’s your name?

Suman: Suman.

Yudit: Suman... [difficult to hear] the book at 2:00.

Luz: Hi, how are you?... Fine, thanks.
Yudit: Okay, here you go the book.

Luz: Okay.

[Juan walks by Luz.]

Juan: Hey! Chi!

[Juan and Luz wave. Juan approaches Yudit.]

Juan: Hello.

Yudit: How are you today?

Juan: Fine.

Yudit: Juan… okay… here you are.

Juan: Do you know her name?

Yudit: Why? … For what?

Juan: Please.

Yudit: For what?

Juan: Okay. I have to get her name.

Yudit: Her name is… Luz. Luz.

Juan: You know, I found her keys.

Suman: Aferdita!

Yudit: Oh, yeah. Aferdita.

Juan: Oh, okay. Thank you. [Juan starts to walk away.]

Yudit: Come on, come on! Why you…?

Juan: Because I found, I have her keys.

Yudit: Ohhhh. Good luck! Good luck!

Juan: Thank you. [Juan walks over to Yudit.] Hi, how are you?
Luz: I’m fine. I’m very happy.

Juan: Aferdita, right?

Luz: Yeah. And you?

Juan: Juan.

Luz: Oh, nice to meet you.

Suman: Excuse me, please speak slowly [She means quietly.]…

Luz: Oh, sorry.

Juan: Slowly? Why?

Suman: … because I’m disturbed because I have a test tomorrow. Okay?

Juan: Do you know her?

[Luz and Juan continue chatting, while the library patron goes to talk to the librarian about them. Yudit goes to talk to Luz and Juan.]

Yudit: This place is only for studying. Everybody have to studying.

Juan: Please give me one minute.

Yudit: No. No one minute.

Juan: Why not?

Yudit: No, no one minute. This place is only for studying. Okay?

Juan: First, you tell me good luck and, now, you are…

Yudit: You know what…

Juan: You know what…

Yudit: … get out!

Juan: Here you go your book.

Yudit: Get out!

[Luz and Juan walk out of the library together.]
Appendix 4

Drama Lessons

* = lesson is described in the “Critical Analysis of the Drama Project”

**Fall 2008**

* Lesson 1 (October 2, 2008), “Rude Behavior”

*Day 1 (Story Sharing)*

1. I retell my story about rude behavior using Cuisenaire rods.
   - **Cuisenaire Rods** - The rods serve as visual representations for the people and places in the story. If the people in the story do actions, such as jumping or walking, then I show the rods “jumping” or “walking.” For example, perhaps the blue rod is “Dana.” In the story, maybe there is a house. I would put four purple rods together in the shape of a square to form a house. In the story, when Dana walks to her house, I show the blue rod “walking” to the “house,” or the four purple rods. Etc.

2. I ask students to share their own stories using the Islamabad technique
   - **Islamabad technique** – My understanding is that Earl Stevick first created the Islamabad technique, which involved students using Cuisenaire rods to illustrate their memory of a place. In this adaptation, which I learned of from representatives from the Spring Institute in Denver, Colorado, the teacher initially uses the rods to depict a story. The teacher then asks the class to help retell the story. Perhaps, then, a volunteer student retells the teacher’s. At this point, Cuisenaire rods are given to the students. They
can initially just retell the teacher’s story in order to become comfortable with using the rods. Or, if they are already comfortable, they can then use the rods to tell their own story to a partner. As a listening activity, the partner can repeat the other students’ story. Finally, volunteer students can be asked to share their personal story with the class.

3. Students share their story with the class.

Day 2 (*Dramatization for Miriam’s story*)

1. I draw a series of pictures on board representing Miriam’s story. In pairs, students orally review story.

2. Students write a dialogue of the conversation between Miriam and Michael.

3. Students use puppets to practice the conversation without looking at the written dialogue. In effect, the puppets become the focus of their language, instead of the language itself.

4. Students select clothing props, and practice the conversation with the clothes, but without the puppets.

5. Students perform the conversation for classmates and the video camera.

1. Discussion about purpose of drama project and presence of video camera

2. Circle Share (topic: Have you ever experienced a crime?)

   • Circle Share – I adopted this method of sharing stories from the Way of Council, a form of intentional communication that is also conducted in a circle. Once all the students and I were seated in a circle, I asked if anyone had had any experiences with the topic. Some students told stories, and the other students in the circle asked questions. Then, I asked the other students to repeat the stories that they had heard their classmates tell. I asked them to do this to make sure that they understood the stories and to enable them to take partial ownership of this storytelling process.

3. Pass the Clap

   1. This is a good focusing and trust-building exercise. It is also easy, and creates an immediate energy among the participants. The students and teacher form a circle. The idea is for everybody in the circle to “pass” a clap around the circle. For example, perhaps the teacher starts by turning to face the student on his/her right. The teacher and student then try to clap at the same time. They keep trying until they can do so. Next, the student turns to the classmate on his/her right and those two people try to clap at that same time. This action repeats until the clap has been “passed” around the circle. Eventually, when this exercise is done successfully, a rhythm is established as each series of two people successively clap to the beat. After the initial round, the teacher can ask
students what makes it easier to clap in time with the person next to them. Usually, some of the students will guess, “eye contact,” which is correct.

4. Greetings
   - This exercise is used to help groups relax and explore body language through the customs that are associated with greetings. This exercise is done in pairs. The teacher calls out various relationships, such as “mother/child,” “teacher/students” “boyfriend/girlfriend,” and the pairs must greet each other accordingly. This exercise is also useful for exploring cultural variations in how people greet each other. As an extension, respective students can teach others how people from their country greet each other.

5. Students rehearse stories

6. Students perform stories for their classmates

Winter 2009

*Lesson 1 (February 5, 2009), “Freeze”

1. Count to 10
   - This a good focusing exercise that also promotes group bonding. Students stand in a circle with their eyes closed. The aim is for the group to count to ten. There is no particular order to the counting, but nobody can say more than one number at a time. If two people say a number at the same time, then the counting must start over. As with many of these games, it might be a good idea to have a student repeat the directions, to make sure
that everyone understands. When I played this game with my students, I only discovered afterwards that one student did not understand how to play the game, and that was why she did not participate. That said, this is also a good beginning game because participation is voluntary.

2. Actions and Sounds

• This game encourages students to use their bodies and their voices creatively. It also helps them to relax. Students stand in a circle. One student begins by doing an action, which everyone then repeats. The next student does a different action. Everyone then repeats the first action and the second action. This activity continues with each student adding a new action to the collective, until everyone in the circle is doing all of the actions. As a variation on this, students can do the same thing with sound, or actions and sounds. This game is good preparation for the classic drama game, “Machine,” in which, one by one, participants add new actions and sounds to create the look and sound of a machine.

3. Silent Movie

• This activity can be done with pairs or small groups. It can be used to encourage cooperation and the use of body language. One student is designated the director. This student’s job is to get the other student(s) to depict a story using only actions. The story should be told in three parts: beginning, middle, and end, and an action needs to be created to represent each part. The other students in the class can then guess what is
happening in the story, or silent movies. Roles are then reversed, and the process is repeated.

4. Freeze

- This is an improv game that involves body language and speaking. Because students need to use both skills at the same time, it can be quite challenging for them, and it requires a lot of preparation. Two people stand at the front of the group. They start a scene together. Then, one of the audience members voluntarily taps one of the people on the shoulder; this is a signal for both people in the scene to freeze. The audience member switches places with the person who he/she tapped. The audience member must then begin a new scene from the position in which the person was frozen. The scene continues, until another audience member comes up. Play continues, with the two people at the front continually rotating in and out. This game has voluntary participation, but, as I discovered, if none of the students feel comfortable participating in it, it will not succeed.

Lesson 2 (February 12, 2009) “3 Objects and Some Grammar”

Procedure

1. Pass the Clap

2. Mirror

- This exercise encourages cooperation. Students get into pairs, stand face-to-face, and, just as the name of this exercise suggests, they mirror each
others’ actions. Initially, the students decide ahead of time which of the partners will be the leader and which will be the follower. However, for an additional challenge, no leader or follower is designated, so the line between who is mirroring whom is becomes blurred.

3. Relationship Wheel

- This exercise facilitates both body language and spontaneous talking.

Students are in pairs, and they are given a specific relationship and activity, such as a brother and sister who are playing a game, or a teacher and student who are checking homework. Initially, the students are told to silently demonstrate this task. Then, when the teacher says, “Talk,” they can begin talking. I found that because speaking is initially something that is a constraint, once it is finally allowed, the students are eager to do so. However, when I read about this activity, it was suggested that students silently act out the activity for a minute; my students could not stay silent for this long because they ran out of actions that they could perform, and started getting antsy. I would recommend starting with a shorter amount of silence, especially at first. Otherwise, my students enjoyed this activity a lot.

4. Rehearse story with three objects in the past tense

5. Perform story
*Lesson 3 (February 19, 2009), “Mother-in-Law Stories”*

I did not record the procedure for this lesson, but I believe that the students wrote their mother-in-law stories in this class. I do not think that we did any drama activities.

Lesson 4 (February 25, 2009), “Frozen Pictures”

1. Pass the Clap

2. Walking in Numbers
   - This game helps students to relax. A fairly big space is needed. Students begin walking around in any direction in the classroom space. The teacher then calls out a number. Students must immediately stop walking and form groups that have the same number of members as the number that the teacher called out. The students who do not make it into a group are “out.” Play continues until there are not enough students left to play the game. This game was not very effective in my classroom. The students shrieked and yelled a lot, but unlike the other games, it did not seem to enhance their cooperative or trust-building skills. That said, however, I am still not convinced that I played this game correctly, since I have never seen it demonstrated before.

3. Object Transformation
   - (There was not time to do this exercise in this lesson; I describe it in a later lesson.)

4. Frozen Pictures

5. Rehearse Scenes with Frozen Pictures
6. Perform Scenes

Spring 2009

Lesson 1 (May ?, 2009), “Greetings”

1. Pass the Clap
2. Greetings with Emotions
3. Greetings with Different Relationships
4. Greetings with Emotions and Relationships
5. Cultural Greetings
6. Reflection about Greetings
   • For an explanation of these activities, see Fall 2009, Lesson 2.

Lesson 2 (May 14, 2009), “Improv Games”

1. Pass the Clap
2. Word Association
   - whole group, specific topic
   - whole group, any topic
   - partners, specific topic
   - partners, any topic
   - partners demonstrate for whole group
3. Pretend Objects
   - Demonstration
   - partners
4. Birthday Present

5. Reflection/Feedback

*Lesson 3 (May 21, 2009), “Love Stories 1”

1. Pass the Clap

2. Word Association

3. Charades
   - I do example
   - 2 students do an example
   - small groups
   - each person does one for whole group

4. Story Groups (Love Stories)


1. Review Student Stories
   - identify plot and location of scene

2. Pass the Clap

3. Walking in Different Ways

4. Charades
   - simple charades
   - brainstorm about qualities of different charades
- 3-part charades (charades that are developed into 3 parts: beginning, middle, and end)* (give reference)

5. Rehearse Stories (w/place?)

6. Perform Stories

*Lesson 5 (June 4, 2009), “Love Stories 3”

1. Zip Zap Zop

2. Walking in Numbers
   - fast/slow
   - like animals
   - with emotions

3. 3-Part Charades
   - I demonstrate
   - old students teach new students
   - everyone picks an action, rehearses, performs

4. Brainstorm new locations for stories

5. Groups randomly choose a location

6. Rehearse love stories

7. Reflection?

*Lesson 6 (June 11, 2009), “Drama Decision/Health”

1. Drama decision
   - body, then speaking
2. Brainstorm waiting room words
3. Sculpting (in response to waiting room words that I select)
4. Rehearse waiting room stories (one student is the narrator)

**Lesson 7, (June 18, 2009), “2 Line Freeze”**

1. Human knot
2. Brainstorm emotions
3. Circle of gestures based on emotions
4. Circle dash
5. Pass the orange (no time)
6. Word association
7. 2 line freeze
Appendix 5

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