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Using drama-in-education to Facilitate Active Participation and the Enhancement of Oral Communication Skills among First Year Pre-service Teachers

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Abstract

This study provides an evaluation of a program in drama-in-education aimed at enhancing the English oral communication skills among a cohort of 63 first year intermediate phase (English second language) teachers and to establish to what extent they would be prepared to use such creative approaches in their classes as potential teachers. The data for this in-depth qualitative case study was collected through observation of their dramatic presentations, informal interviews with them based on their drama-in-education experiences and written accounts of their learning. The findings suggest that the potential of drama-in-education to enhance oral communication skills amongst English second language trainee teachers is phenomenal. A number of trainee teachers also indicated that they would definitely implement drama in education in their classes as potential teachers, since their exposure to this technique had contributed to the development of their critical and creative skills and their confidence.

1 Introduction

Many students enrolling for teacher education programs at South African institutions of higher learning (specifically universities), are second language speakers of English, but had little exposure to English at primary and secondary school level. The medium of instruction at most South African universities is English (only three universities still use Afrikaans), and students initially encounter challenges expressing themselves in English especially during their first year of study. They tend to underestimate their ability to use English during the lecture sessions, as they lack the confidence out of fear of being ridiculed by their peers.

It is with this background in mind that this study provides an in-depth account and evaluation of the practices and approaches adopted in a first

year education module (PICL 203; Curriculum Studies: Literacy) to facilitate active student participation and an enhancement of oral communication skills amongst a cohort of first year pre-service intermediate phase teachers (grades 4-6) specializing in English language teaching. Initially the students appeared to be detached from the classes and unwilling to speak English. Consequently the majority of them did not participate in lectures, were generally disinterested and tended to be passive recipients. In an effort to enhance their oral communication skills I implemented drama-in-education approaches in my class. Since they are future ESL teachers themselves, I felt it was important for them to experience drama-in-education as participants, so that they could later, in their roles as teachers, experiment with such strategies in their classes.

The research questions that guided this study were:

- To what extent could the use of drama-in-education lead to active participation and an enhancement in English oral communication skills in lecture contexts?
- To what extent are pre-service teachers prepared to use such creative approaches in their classes as potential teachers?

2 The Context of the Study

The study involved a cohort of 63 first year Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6) trainee teachers registered for the PICL 203 (Curriculum Studies: Language) module. The latter, which is a 10-credit module offered over a year, focuses on the teaching of language and literature in the intermediate phase (grades 4 to 6) and the strategies that teachers could implement in their classes to facilitate learning.

The students were multi-ethnic in composition reflecting the demographics of South Africa and included 41 Afrikaans, 12 isiXhosa and 10 English mother tongue speakers.

Drama-in-education (DIE), also known as process drama, is an approach to teaching and learning where teachers and students work collaboratively to create a fictional world in which they assume roles to explore issues that are of concern to them (Verriour 1994: 9). According to McCaslin (1990: 10) the objective of the exercise is understanding, rather than playmaking, although a play may be made in the process. The process as highlighted by Landy (1982: 5) requires both logical and intuitive thinking, personalizes knowledge and yields aesthetic pleasure. The role playing for the purposes of drama-in-education is improvisational, not scripted, and the emphasis is on drama as an intentional teaching strategy to enhance learning in a particular curricular area (Wagner 1998: 5).

The use of drama-in-education offers countless opportunities for language learning and has many advantages. According to Phillips (1999: 6), one of the most significant advantages of drama-in-education is that it encourages

children to speak and motivates them to communicate, even with limited language, by using non-verbal communication such as body movement and facial expression.

Phillips (ibid: 7) further asserts that by taking on roles, children are able to escape from their everyday identity and lose their inhibitions. This is particularly beneficial to children who are reluctant to speak English and/or not used to working in groups. The special role that they are able to portray as outlined by Phillips (1999) enables them to be a certain character which is different from their own selves and to abandon their shyness or inhibitions. In drama, the learners make decisions as a group, listen to each other and value each other's suggestions. As pointed out by Fennessy (2000: 4), these strategies involve the use of creative thinking, problem-solving and decision-making. The learners thus have to co-operate to achieve their aims, find ways of settling their differences and use the strengths of each member of the group to complete the task (Phillips 1999: 7). In this sense the arts, especially drama, bring out the best in children as they interact, working towards the achievement of a common goal (Fennessy 2000: 10). This view is shared by O'Neill (1985: 160) who contends that creative drama in the classroom is most valuable both educationally and aesthetically when its construction is shared and its meanings are negotiated.

3 Methodology

This article provides an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of a program in drama-in-education amongst a group of pre-service teachers, and their views on its value to their own teaching as potential teachers. The evaluation of the students' growth and experiences was based on observation of their participation in various drama-in-education activities, feedback sessions, their written and oral reflections, and dramatic presentations.

While I observed the students during all their group work sessions, I focused on their level of interest and participation in the range of group work activities, interaction with other members within the group, and their ability to use English in the range of drama-in-education activities. I also observed their participation in the dramatic presentations and their ability to express their ideas in English.

In addition to normal classes which involved general principles of didactics relating to English language teaching, the students were also introduced to drama-in-education activities by means of workshops which focused on the creation of frozen images and role plays based on a short story.

During the first month of lectures, the students were exposed to various approaches that they could use in their classes, and the language issues and challenges that they would have to contend with as potential teachers. The approach that I used during the first month of classes was predominantly teacher-centered, in that I presented material to the students and asked questions. It was evident from their apathy, disengagement from the classes and lack of participation that they were not interested in the lectures and appeared

to be bored. I then resolved to use drama-in-education to facilitate active participation in the classes. Since I had used drama-in-education techniques in my classes in the past, I was aware of the immense value and significance of the approach to facilitate active student participation and the enhancement of oral communication skills. It was with this in mind that I decided to implement drama-in-education in my class to establish to what extent similar positive results could be achieved in this particular classroom context. I designed a series of workshops based on drama-in-education, using a short story entitled *I aint got no home* by Elder and Wood (1964) as the starting point for the transformation of my traditional teacher-centred approach. The students participated in drama-in-education group work activities in a series of four workshops each of which lasted about two hours and took place during the designated lecture time slots. The drama-in-education workshops replaced the traditional lecturer-dominated classes.

After each workshop session, the students provided oral feedback on their experiences and their views on the use of such activities within the context of a classroom setting as potential teachers.

In their learning diaries, they reflected on their experiences with drama-in-education techniques and approaches and wrote in depth about their insights.

3.1 The First Drama-in-education Workshop

During the first drama-in-education workshop I commenced the lesson with the story *I aint got no home*, which focused on the life of a street child and his experiences in a big city. The short story was selected as it provided the students with an example of the kind of reading material suitable for grade-4 learners. The aim was to enable them to participate in the series of activities based on the short story, but also to gain first-hand experience in the kinds of drama-in-education activities that they could implement in their classes as potential teachers.

After reading the short story together, the class was divided into seven groups consisting of nine members per group of diverse language backgrounds. This approach necessitated the use of English as lingua franca during the drama-in-education activities. Initially, there was resistance to this approach as the students preferred to work with their friends. However, after the first workshop session that focused on the creation of the frozen images, they felt increasingly comfortable working with each other. There were no major linguistic challenges as all the students could communicate in English even though their level of proficiency varied. They could communicate their ideas to the rest of the group and, after the first workshop, felt comfortable enough with each other to work together in the subsequent workshops. Even though the groups were culturally and linguistically diverse, there did not appear to be any cross-cultural tensions; the students' diary entries do not report on any tensions, neither did I observe such tensions within the class as such.

Generally the students related well to each other in spite of their linguistic and cultural differences which might have contributed to the overall success of the workshops and the dramatic presentations. An analysis of the diary entries on the students' group work participation is effectively summed up by one student: "I think that I developed in a big way because I got to work with people I didn't previously work with and it was fine." Another student describes her experiences as follows: "It was awesome to work with students from other linguistic groups". One of the African (Xhosa speaking) students was more specific about her interaction with people of different skin color: "I benefitted socially getting to mingle with others and it was a great experience because I have never worked with Whites and Coloureds being the main character. I am glad they believed in me and I was capable to do it."

In their groups the students were required to discuss the key issues and themes of the story, link the topic of street children to their own experiences and provide feedback on their viewpoints to the rest of the class. Thereafter I demonstrated the frozen image technique to the class so that they had a good understanding of what it entailed and how to create a frozen image.

On the basis of their understanding of the story each group had to create a frozen image based on any part of the story. In the creation of their frozen images they had to reflect on who they were, where the scene was taking place and what was happening. The other students in the class were required to question each of the participants in the frozen image to place the scene into context, thereby leading to a more in-depth analysis of the key issues and concerns being depicted. The class could ask the various members of the groups questions such as *Who are you? What are you doing here? Why are you here?* One of the advantages of this exercise was that it involved the students in interactive learning, as they had to engage with the participants in the frozen scene while the participants were required to respond to their questions. According to Burgess and Gaudry (1986: 17), although the interactions of characters and events hold the students' interest in the drama, their real life experiences are essential to the creation of personal symbolic meaning. In this sense then, participation in the dramatic process involves the students in experiential, expressive and communicative modes of action. The students discussed what they thought was happening in the scene, and thereafter each group explained what their frozen scene aimed to depict.

During this first session when I facilitated the group work activities I observed that some of the more well-spoken students were dominating the discussion and there was also a measure of resistance from some of the other students. I then introduced the students to a process which involved passing on a stick from one member to the next so that each member had an opportunity to articulate their viewpoints on an issue. In order to accommodate the shy, withdrawn students, all the groups presented their frozen images simultaneously. This approach appeared to be effective and less intimidating since they were all participants and I was the only person observing. Thereafter the groups who felt more confident were invited to present their frozen scenes to their fellow

students, who could then question the characters in role and acquire a better understanding of the frozen scene.

This approach worked very well as those learners who were more reserved felt at ease since they were not required to present their frozen scenes to the whole class. The groups that volunteered to present their scenes succeeded in motivating other groups to also present their frozen images after they realized that the activity was a non-threatening one. Eventually all the groups presented their frozen scenes to the class and responded to the questions posed by their peers.

After the frozen image presentations, I discussed the technique with the class to establish what they thought about this approach to teaching and learning and the extent to which they considered the approach beneficial in school contexts. The class provided positive feedback and returned to their groups to commence with role biographies of the frozen image characters, based on their responses to the questions posed by their peers. The written biographies provided an outline of who they were, where they were, what they were doing there, why they were there and how they felt about what was happening within the context of the scene. The purpose of the role biographies was to improve the student's written language skills, to inspire them to reflect more carefully on their roles within the context of the frozen image and expand on their characters for the purposes of the subsequent role plays.

3.2 The Second Drama-in-Education Workshop

In the second workshop the students, shared their role biographies with the other members of their groups, posed questions and discussed their characters. The task now was to convert their frozen scenes into role plays through creative use of their own dialogues, assisted by the initial frozen images, the role biographies, and the group discussion. The transformation of the frozen images into role plays worked well and the students were becoming more engaged and focused on their presentations. I observed that students were co-operating with their group members and that they were enthusiastic about their dramatic performances.

3.3 The Third Drama-in-Education Workshop

While the students' presentations in the first and second workshops were based on the short story *I aint got no home*, the third workshop was not confined to the story and thus provided them with the opportunity to examine the topic of street children from multiple perspectives. The aim of this workshop was to enable them to think creatively on the topic and to examine and portray issues of street children in their role plays that were of significance to them.

In their groups, the students discussed their role plays and decided what aspect of the street child's life they intended to portray. After each role play had been presented to and discussed by the class, the students went back into their

respective groups, examining some of the issues emerging from their depiction of the scene, and reflecting more carefully on the plight of street children. This activity enabled the students “to go beyond the here and now and even walk in the shoes of another” (Boudreault 2010: 2).

The scenes depicted street children in multiple perspectives. While some groups focused on crimes committed by street children such as stealing, others tried to demonstrate what the community needs to do to assist street children. One of the groups presented a very creative role play in which they depicted flames from a hearth with each flame representing some abstract element or aspect of the street child’s life such as hope, love and goals. This vivid portrayal inspired the rest of the class to reflect on all aspects of the street child. The students were growing in confidence and their ability to speak English fluently as gauged from their participation in the role plays as well as their articulation of their experiences during the subsequent reflections. The learners’ contributions served to draw many students into the discussion as they talked about the various aspects of the street child’s experiences. One of the students expressed the view that using the role play scene as a starting point for a discussion on a topical issue could motivate learners in the intermediate phase classes to become more engaged in the lesson as they could also use their prior knowledge to flesh out the role plays. The role plays could thus be used as an important springboard for the interrogation of key issues affecting society at large.

3.4 The Fourth Drama-in-education workshop and follow-up classes: Dramatic presentations

During the fourth workshop the students were guided to create their own theatrical pieces. They were introduced to the writing of scripts, characterization, movement, costume and props to provide them with a background for dramatization. This was done by a combination of the lecture presentation, discussion with questioning and group work presentations. Each group was provided with a few props which they had to use to create a short role play and which they presented to the class. This activity enabled them to apply theory to practice.

The students were required to focus on contemporary issues that they felt were of particular relevance and significance to their lives. The aim of the dramatic presentations was to enable them to incorporate the previously learned drama-in-education techniques into their plays.

The students worked in their groups and brainstormed ideas on issues they intended to highlight in their plays. Initially most of the students struggled, but I facilitated the process by assisting each group to flesh out their ideas and by guiding them to create a framework for their production. At the end of this workshop each of the groups had decided on a theme for their plays. The groups were requested to record all their experiences within the group in their diaries and to write about the process, their feelings and all related challenges.

After this workshop there were three two-hour follow-up sessions aimed

at focusing on the challenges that students were experiencing and providing appropriate guidance where necessary. During the first followup session it became evident that the groups were experiencing a number of challenges like apathy from some members, difficulties in writing the script and deciding on a director for their plays. As the facilitator I afforded each group an opportunity to share these issues with the rest of the class and, through joint discussion, guidance and mutual support, the students were able to resolve these issues.

The second and third follow-up sessions focused on a similar reflective exercise and aimed at assisting the students to work on the development of their scenes. In the second session the students appeared to be more confident and the groups were excited about the design of their dramatic presentations. By the third session they had finalized their plays and were discussing the finer details such as props and costumes. The groups met during their free time to discuss their plays, while the class meetings focused on providing a support system for the students and creating a forum for them to discuss their challenges. The groups selected their own topics which tended to focus on disturbing issues as outlined below. In order to guide them through these topics I created ample opportunities for reflection throughout all three sessions. These reflective sessions enabled them to talk about their roles and guided them to an understanding of the topic, and also served to make them feel comfortable with the portrayal of their respective roles..

Eventually each of the seven groups worked on all aspects of the creation of their plays including topics, design, costume and props, and presented them to the class. The students participated actively in the design of their dramatic presentations and incorporated creative ideas into them, including frozen scenes, music, dance and choral verse. The plays were presented to the class, and after each presentation the students had the opportunity to discuss the issues highlighted and to pose questions to the groups. I also facilitated in-depth reflections on their dramatic presentations and the roles they portrayed within the plays so that they could gently be guided out of their roles and could be guided to link their experiences within the play to issues affecting society at large. In the dramatic presentations highlighted below the students presented images and scenes that portrayed helplessness, anger and grief after crucial, disturbing, and often violent experiences. In addition to these negative images the plays also focused on images of hope associated with addressing these challenges in a positive manner by highlighting the kind of support that could be provided to victims of atrocities like rape or xenophobia. The dramatic performances thus ended on a positive note in that the participants demonstrated the kind of support that could be provided to the victims to enable them to come to terms with grief, loss, fear and pain.

The students chose topics that focused on issues prevalent in South African society at large such as xenophobia, breast cancer, rape, hypocrisy and HIV / Aids. The first dramatic presentation entitled *One Last Time* was based on the topic of rape and provided an account of how a group of intoxicated young boys rape a young girl who later discovers that she is HIV positive. The

second play, *Uncertain Future*, focused on the topic of gangsterism in society and provided an account of how a gang terrorise a community and rape a young girl. The play examined the plight of the rape victim. The topic of the third play, *I don't I live I do I die*, revolved around HIV / Aids and related the story of how a young girl from a poor rural background who obtains a university entrance qualification has to relinquish her dream of becoming a doctor after she engages in unprotected sex with a male student and contracts the dreaded Aids virus. The fourth play *Seeing is not believing* depicted a priest who abuses his congregation's trust by engaging in an adulterous relationship with one of the members of the congregation, thereby highlighting the hypocrisy of highly esteemed members in society. The fifth play, *The love I lost*, examined the topic of death and its effect on the members of a family who lose a loved one. In the sixth play, *Big girls don't cry*, the group illustrated the topic of breast cancer and particularly the discrimination experienced by three women suffering from breast cancer. The seventh play, *Rainbow nation or outright discrimination*, examined the theme of xenophobia in society with particular reference to the xenophobic attacks on a Somalian shopkeeper and his family, as well as the devastating effects of these attacks on their lives.

These are all disturbing themes, but as highlighted above, the actual scenes flowing from the topics were not presented graphically to the class, but in a way that focused on a portrayal of the issues in a more abstract way through frozen scenes, dialogue, song and dance. Furthermore the students were guided both during the preparation phase for the dramatic presentations and after the plays, to reflect on their roles in the dramatic presentations as a whole and on how to support the victims of such societal atrocities.

4 Findings

4.1 Changes in Students' Attitudes

In the first workshop when the story of the homeless child was read and discussed, some students participated in the class discussion, whilst others tended to be rather passive and detached from the lesson. When the groups presented their frozen scenes, the whole class participated actively by posing interesting questions to the members of the group who portrayed their roles convincingly in their frozen images. The class had never been this interactive and excited before.

The degree of interest and enthusiasm amongst the students was also increasing as became evident in the second workshop when they shared their biographies with the members of their group and used these as the basis for their role plays. The students incorporated their biographies into their group role plays in very creative and convincing ways, and the level of participation by all members in the respective groups was impressive. It was clear that, judging from their active participation in their role plays they were becoming more confident and were enjoying this interactive approach to teaching and learning.

The role plays that they presented in the third workshop based on the topic of street children served to demonstrate how their confidence in the use of English was improving. The students were starting to lose their inhibitions and as their confidence improved they felt more comfortable to use English in the classroom.

4.2 Students' Views on Frozen Images

The students, in reflecting on the use of the frozen image technique with reference to the short story on street children, felt that it enabled the entire class, including the shy students, to participate in the variety of activities and created opportunities for them to tap into their prior knowledge and experiences.

The trainee teachers regarded the idea of questioning characters in role as an excellent technique since it enabled the learners portraying those roles, to reflect more carefully on their roles within the frozen scene, and simultaneously enhanced fluency, creativity and critical thinking skills of the other learners in the class who were posing the questions. A significant feature of the frozen image technique as summed up by one of the students is that it “helps learners not to be nervous, but to question and to talk to others.”

The learning experience created by the frozen image technique helps the participant to empathise with the character in the story, in this case the homeless child, on a deeper level. This view is very succinctly summed up by one of the student teachers who articulated her view as follows:

The story of the homeless learner makes one think about those less fortunate than ourselves and instills compassion and pity in the hearts of people. The fact that we dramatized the story made us step into the life of helpless/hopelessness and abandoned people and we could gain a little more insight into these people.

This viewpoint was further developed by a student who expressed the view that drama-in-education is an excellent approach to teaching and learning because it “places you in that person’s shoes, teaches you their situation and feeling and you learn to respect and understand such situations.”

The trainee teachers felt that it was an extremely good idea to start with the frozen image technique during the first session as it created a safe space for shy students and those who were not so fluent in English to become actively involved in the lesson. They also felt that the frozen image technique is an excellent base from which to go on to the creation of role plays and dramatic presentations. This view was summed up by one of the students who contended that: “It is the base of your plays as from the frozen image you can progress.” Another student felt that it was effective because it prepared one for the real role play and also enabled one to “get to know your group better before doing the actual play.” She added further that the class also understood the role play better after having participated in the frozen scene by posing questions.

A number of students provided positive accounts of their learning as a result of their involvement in the frozen image scenes. As pointed out by one of the

students the frozen images worked well because “one could be critical and have practical experience of the story and see others’ creativity as well as one’s own.”

The teacher trainees were convinced that the drama-in-education programme with its various facets including the creation of frozen images and the dramatic presentations “enables one to think outside the box and move outside of a limited viewpoint.” Furthermore the interactive nature of the process ensures active student participation which reduces boredom and apathy within the context of the class as it, according to one of the students, “makes class more interesting since we don’t just sit in the class and listen to the lecturer for an hour. We are active most of the time and it gives us a chance to be creative.” The interactive nature of drama-in-education, according to the students, provided them with opportunities to improve their social relationships and to learn about each other and themselves. This view was expressed by one of the students when she maintained that “you get to know other students at a deeper level.”

In their analysis of the drama-in-education process the students commented on the immense possibilities of implementing drama-in-education in one’s class in their roles as potential teachers and the benefits that learners could derive from the process. This view was summed up by one of the students who contended that she would definitely use the frozen image technique in her class as a potential teacher “because one learns a lot and it involves group activity.”

4.3 Students’ Feedback on Drama-in-Education Presentations

The groups exercised care in the design and presentation of their dramatic presentations and used the individual talents of their group members in the field of dance, music, mime and poetry to enhance their efforts.

Their first-hand experiences in drama-in-education gave them the necessary skills that they believed would enable them to implement such activities in their classes as potential teachers. A number of students indicated that they were impressed by some of their generally very shy, withdrawn peers who became more confident and seemed to blossom after their active participation in the dramatic performance. A number of the students indicated that they were initially reluctant to participate in the dramatic presentations, as they had never acted in plays before. However, in reflecting on their experiences, it emerged that their participation in the plays gave them the confidence and served as a vehicle for the discovery of their hidden talents that they never thought they had. One of the students contended that her involvement in the dramatic presentation made her to, as she put it “believe in myself and to appreciate my fellow students”.

The students’ involvement in the dramatic presentations enabled them to express themselves in ways that they were not used to. Most students also indicated that their growth was phenomenal as highlighted by the following viewpoint expressed by one of them:

The play allowed me to explore my inner self and present a part of me others were not used to seeing. The play also developed me not to be

shy and to have fun in front of the whole class. It certainly prepared me to go out and be a teacher with confidence.

Students felt that, judging from their own personal growth as a result of their first-hand experiences in drama-in-education, creative approaches such as these could make a significant contribution to the facilitation and enhancement of oral communication skills in language learning.

5 Discussion

The study indicates that drama-in-education has the potential to improve oral communication skills and to facilitate language use. The use of the short story was an effective starting point as it served as a basis on which the drama-in-education exercises could be based. Furthermore, since the students could relate to the theme on a personal level, they were afforded opportunities to use the second language more spontaneously and to present their thoughts and feelings in creative ways. The latter was showcased in their frozen scenes based on the short story, their role plays and their dramatic presentations. The range of drama-in-education activities served to ensure that the students were actively engaged throughout the process.

The students were particularly impressed with the interactive nature of the activities which ensured that they were active participants rather than passive recipients throughout the entire process.

Initially the second language English speakers were hesitant to participate actively in their group discussions because they lacked the confidence and felt inhibited. However, once they were provided with a safe space within which to work, their confidence improved and they started to communicate more in English. Even though some of them were not as fluent as the L1 English speakers, they were not intimidated as their responses were valued and affirmed. Furthermore the English L1 students who were placed in each of the groups motivated the English L2 students to communicate in English and guided and supported them. This was observed during all the workshop sessions, the preparation for the dramatic performance, and the reflection sessions.

Most students expressed the view that they felt motivated to use drama-in-education in their classes especially since their own experiences taught them that it assists learners in better understanding a story.

A number of the students said that they experienced frozen images and role plays as excellent teaching and learning techniques, because they were hands-on activities with the potential to keep learners actively engaged in the lessons. The advantages for classroom contexts are that learners will be motivated to speak in public and will feel comfortable to present their views in class. In the context of teaching and learning this makes learning easy and fun because as summed up by one of the student's "you enjoy what you are doing while learning." Simultaneously teaching becomes relevant and exciting

for the teacher because “you interact with the learners on a deeper level and get to know them personally.”

The study indicates that second language speakers could underestimate their ability in the language if they are not afforded ample opportunities to be active participants. The drama-in-education approach built their confidence and motivated them to use the language. The traditional lecture approach, on the other hand, tends to confine the students to being passive recipients, which could stifle their creativity and critical thinking skills.

Since drama-in-education involves a two-way communication process between teacher and student (or student and student), both parties are able to learn from each other as they engage in the process of meaning making that arises out of the context. The fact that the students are able to identify and empathise with the characters within their drama presentations leads to more authentic and engaging learning experiences that encourage active student participation. In this way as suggested by Maley and Duff (1979: 80), students’ involvement in the negotiation and construction of meaning during participation in a drama provides them with insights into the relationship between context and language, which enables them to link the language they are learning to the world around them.

Teaching and learning with drama-in-education is a developmental process that has different outcomes in different contexts. As pointed out in this study, some of the students were, at the outset, very reluctant to participate in the activities, but later grew in confidence and even the shy learners were successful. In this regard one of the students stated “I learnt how to overcome my shyness through drama-in-education.” One of the students in her diary entry describes the process of putting the play together as “a really stressful and challenging process as there was a fear of disaster.” She states that she was initially very skeptical about the process and doubted whether her group would be able to present a meaningful piece of work. Later on in her diary she describes the play as “magical” and her development as follows: “If I have grown this much in one year, it can do wonders for my learners.”

The very nature of drama-in-education is that it is an approach that builds up and scaffolds learners. Since the relationship between the students and the drama-in-education facilitator is one based on mutual understanding and trust, they feel affirmed and valued. Furthermore, since the students’ oral contributions are valued they are motivated to participate more actively in all the activities. In this way they make maximum use of the opportunities created to practice their second language in the classroom.

The fact that many of the students indicated that they would implement drama-in-education in their classes as potential teachers illustrates the immense value that they derived from the experiential learning opportunities during the workshops. One of the students said that she would use drama-in-education in her class because “learners learn better when they can see and act it out” while another student indicated that she would definitely use the approach in her class because “it keeps the learners involved and active”. In her analysis of the

approach as a prospective teacher one of the students felt that the approach was probably one of the best to use in the class since “through group discussion, frozen scenes and role play itself we as learners are given opportunities to be drawn out of our comfort zones and participate in learning.”

The study illustrates that the implementation of drama-in-education in teacher training programmes could serve a dual purpose in that it could enhance the oral communication skills of pre-service teachers, as well as motivate them to implement interactive approaches in their classes instead of merely adopting the teacher-centred approach.

This confirms the findings of Kaaland-Wells’ study conducted in 1994 (quoted in Wagner 1998) that showed that teachers who had taken a college drama course were more likely than others to feel that drama-in-education should be part of all teacher training and they were more likely to view it as effective teaching and learning techniques.

6 Conclusion

The study involving the implementation of drama-in-education to facilitate language use specifically in English amongst a group of first year pre-service trainee teachers indicates that the drama-in-education approach can lead to active participation and the enhancement of oral communication skills. The outcome of the learning for both the lecturer and the students was a positive and engaging experience that contributed to their personal development and enrichment. Initially students tended to be detached from the classes and unwilling to speak English, but after the implementation of the drama-in-education activities frozen images and dramatic presentations, the students’ ability to use and confidence in their English improved tremendously. They also actively participated in the reflective process, engaged with topics and roles, and provided accounts of their experiences during the process. Engaging in reflective practice also served to enhance their communication in the second language as they learned to talk about their feelings and experiences.

During the process, students became more engaged and focused, which motivated them to use English more spontaneously and fluently. The trainee teachers were also convinced of the immense value of using drama-in-education and indicated that they were definitely motivated to use such creative approaches in their prospective classes. The study thus illustrates that the implementation of a drama-in-education programme has the potential to improve English second language trainee teachers’ oral confidence and simultaneously enable them to reflect on how the strategies could be implemented in their classes as potential teachers.

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