

EDITORIAL

Transformative Potentials of Drama in Language Education in the Globalized Contexts

For almost a decade, there witnesses a growing field of applied drama/theatre education and second language learning research and practices at various educational levels and contexts worldwide (Stinson & Winston, 2011; Winston, 2012; Piazzoli, 2018). For Asia, forces of globalization have complicated the issues of languages, power and identity as people are fighting with a double-edged sword – embracing the cultural and economic influences while fighting to define or re-define one's identity collectively or as individuals. Concerned applied drama practitioners/scholars, and language educators alike, have inevitably come upon such struggles for power and identity in defence of the democratic space in education. The needs for understanding, examining and theorizing the relations between drama and languages, be that of the learners' native language or second/foreign language, have become more urgent and imperative than ever before.

At this time and space, we present this special themed issue on Drama and Languages, pulling together applied drama practices and research that attempt to respond to or interrogate language education in the existing socio-historical or political situations. The five papers in this themed issue take us around concerns of applied drama and theatre practitioners in the use of drama/theatre pedagogy in both secondary/foreign and first language education in the contemporary Asian-Pacific contexts and beyond. They offer the readers views into the transformative potentials of applied drama/theatre practices in language education and ways that those potentials could be further strengthened, pedagogically and methodologically, when drawing intellectual resources and insights from across the disciplines.

The first three papers in this issue share a similar context where the high socio-political status of English has impacts on language education and classroom practices as a second language in Hong Kong and as a foreign language in Japan. The three papers illustrate the possibilities drama

could create to respond to English language education in those specific contexts.

Law and Pratley's paper concerns drama pedagogy and English as a second language (ESL) learning in Hong Kong under the influence of neoliberalism. In light of the Freirean tradition of critical pedagogy and Prentki and Stinson's notion of drama as "relational pedagogy", the paper analyses students' first experiences with their English teachers' first process drama attempts. It then opens up discussions of how the dialogic and humanizing potentials of drama pedagogy may re-establish humanness in English language education (ELE). On this note, Law and Pratley share Davis' (2014) concern about "the crisis of humanity" (p.4) and his critique of education at the service of the globalizing neo-liberal agenda resulting in "society's madness and injustice" around the world (p.21). Their paper has provided the readers an opportunity to look into ways that applied drama may critically negotiate and challenge neoliberal values in existing ELE in Hong Kong and, probably, elsewhere in the globe.

Wales and Araki's paper reports on an experimental attempt that employed process drama and digital storytelling in a Japanese university English as a foreign language (EFL) course, aiming to move the learning beyond the textbook. The paper analyzes how students took advantage of the filmic and the visual languages "to create a rich, sophisticated and engaging story in English, layered with symbolic and metaphorical meanings that intelligently communicated its issues to both local and global audiences". It also discusses the importance of developing the EFL learners' intercultural understanding and awareness of being global citizens. Wales and Araki offer a timely discussion of English learning and socio-cultural identity, echoing with the socio-political concerns articulated in Law and Pratley's paper and in line with Davis' (2014) critique elsewhere. The cross-/trans-disciplinary frames of learning and analysis that Wales and Araki have adopted in their paper makes valuable contributions to theorizing EFL learning through drama in the Asian-Pacific contexts.

The discussion about EFL learning in Japan continues in Reid's paper. He examines the learning opportunities offered by collaborative playwriting for performance in improving English oral communications in a Japanese high school. He has adopted the task-based learning

and teaching (TBLT) approach to English teaching in theorizing the theatre task and analyzing the survey data. His students, Reid reports, seemingly benefited from using “simple English and familiar phrases effectively” when devising and performing a play. They, however, were challenged by the “creative aspects” of the theatre task as they lacked familiarity with theatre practice. Reid then proposes that both English teachers and theatre educators need to see to the artistry of theatre making. In this regard, Reid echoes Dunn and Stinson (2011) who have discussed the importance of mastering the artistry of drama as pedagogy in additional language, a topic worthy of further investigation particularly in relation to how drama pedagogy operates in the broader contexts of the school and the English curriculum.

The last two papers by Wang and Papadopoulos in the themed issue examine drama and first language primary education in mainland China and Greece respectively. Wang’s paper looks into the role of drama pedagogy in revitalizing the aesthetic and affective dimensions of classical Chinese poetry learning. While classical Chinese poetry has been considered archaic and has lost its everydayness in cultural making in mainland China, Wang argues the case that teaching classical Chinese landscape poetry through drama could serve to re-enliven the playfulness of the language of poetry. She proposes a series of process-drama-based teaching plans underpinned by Huizinga’s (1970) theory on play and reception aesthetics with the attempt to reclaim the aesthetics of sounds in language learning in general and poetry learning in particular.

Papadopoulos’ paper presents drama/theatre education in Greece where drama has been integrated into first language primary education since 1990 aiming to teach Greek for communicative purposes. He investigates the current conditions of theatre education by conducting a content analysis of the theatre activities and the learning opportunities in the primary textbooks. His study reveals that there is a privilege of speech over body movement in the textbook activities. He proposes that in order to develop students’ communicative competence, certain aspects need to be prioritized over speech when using drama conventions in the language learning and teaching. Those aspects include bodily expressions, students’ self-expression, reflective dialogue, sense of community feeling in the group, transformative function of creative

imagination, stage action, the dynamic and comprehensive approach of human experience and eco-society.

The papers in this volume of themed issue share a common understanding that drama/theatre pedagogy is inclusive, democratic and relational, and that it has the capacity to address the complex and messy socio-political, cultural contexts that position both the learners and their teachers. Together, the papers bring an important message home to drama educators—the power of drama/theatre pedagogy in transforming language education comes along with its problematizing the wider social world. They call into question the mainstream language educational practices that are being shaped by the dominating social order and its success criteria.

The themed issue, as a whole, contributes to re-examining what language education would and could mean in the contemporary globalized world from the lens and practices of applied drama and theatre education. The different interdisciplinary frames the papers adopt usefully demonstrate how concerned drama practitioners and language educators may go further in researching and theorizing our practices.

References

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Muriel Law & Dora Pratley
(Editors of the themed issue)