

## 英語授業におけるドラマ活動の意味

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### Consideration for the Meaning of Drama Activity in EFL Classes<sup>1</sup>

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#### 1. When does students' drama become an art?

I saw a piece of clay-work with no head. It was made by a student who had been terribly bullied. Its title was "Myself in mind." I watched the clay-work for a while. How hard his life had been! What I had done to him as his homeroom teacher!<sup>2</sup> It was really disgusting to see that ugly shape and to have to blame me as incapable teacher to be with him. But moreover, it surprised me and opened my eyes that a mere, so immature thirteen-year-old child could create such work full of his cry, while others made in normal shapes and copied some features from characters in comic books. He created it by looking inside of himself and put into that form. It was, for me, really an art, "The Shock of the New (Hughes, 1991)<sup>3</sup>".

Art should be attractive, appreciative, touching or beautiful, but these natures are for the observers of the work of art. What is art for the creator? Oxford dictionary says art is "a pursuit or occupation in which skill is directed towards the gratification of taste or production of what is beautiful". Read (1990) writes in his *The Meaning of Arts*<sup>4</sup>, art is:

...an attempt to create pleasing forms. Such forms satisfy our sense of beauty and the sense of beauty is satisfied when we are able to appreciate a unity or harmony of formal relations among our sense-perceptions.

Art is a pursuit and an attempt. It is a process which should mean incompleteness

will be accepted. It is a process in which a creator tries to express what he perceives in some form. What was happening in him in the process of his work? He thought about himself and perceived how he was, what occupied in his mind and what he was like at that moment, then he arranged his perceptions into a shape / form faithful to his present state of his mind. His arrangement corresponded with his emotion. This is not a superficial demonstration of his mind. When he arranged perceptions into that shape / form, his artistic sense of form must have worked autonomously. To me, as an observer, his clay-work was certainly an art, and also to him, the process in which he was working with it as well as the completed work must have become an art. (He looked confident in his work whereas usually he behaved very timidly in class.)

Here in the example of my student's clay-work and Read's statement, there seems to be a separation of an observer / audience and a creator or an artist / a participant. It may be because they are visual arts. Forms of completed work are crucial, for the work stays there in front of observers, never vanishes unless it is broken or taken away. We can see the work only when it is completed. To the creator, it becomes an art in process but to the observer it becomes only at the end.

How about drama as an art? Drama has a lot in common with visual arts and it has its own particular natures, as well. In drama completed work in some form with theatre skills, presentation or performance is not always necessary because it is not the goal of students' drama in education. And drama does not keep staying. It is made spontaneously, everyone sharing time and space together and exploring meanings, where learning and perception is operated, although "...learning might be potential and passive, which means implicit." (Bolton, 1982) Students are learning in the process of drama creation, working collectively, where personal engagement is required to make every action and every word significant.

...aesthetic meaning or significance is not an element of the thing created...it is a special quality of attention in the creator or observer.<sup>5</sup>

Students are also focusing attention on creating a fictional context. Here, the arrangement of the perception is being operated. Students and the teacher are also consciously thinking about forms, tension, symbolization and focus in drama.

There should be also a consciousness on the part of the group that a form is being created... The conscious creation of an art form is a sophisticated group responsibility that requires tacit or explicit agreement on choice of focus, injection of tension, and sensitivity to shared meanings that may resonate from the continual focus on a particular object or action or language / image.<sup>6</sup>

Drama has its significance in its process. Students learn, thinking why and exploring meanings. In this process, there must be disturbing what they already know, correcting it and acquiring new things. This must become a kind of shock of the new itself for the participants. This happens not only at the climax or after the drama. And also, in drama students make implicit explicit with the help of their sense of beauty, consciously with art form of drama: focus, tension, symbolization. As the result, presentation, when required or volunteered, can become a completed work or art if it has been created according to this process. Here is no deliberate intention to make drama appreciative, touching and attractive, but consciousness to the art form, learning by their own group responsibility.

Drama should become an art, but not exactly the same sense as of visual arts to the observers. Students should be conscious in the art form and whether they will be or not is partly the teacher's responsibility. Students can surely become conscious in the art form in the process of drama autonomously with the help of the teacher's skilled conscious injection.

When drama is used as a learning medium for a cross-curricular activity, it gives the students' knowledge accessibility and the true sense of perception, but it might be hard to reach the place where students' autonomy is emerged in using the art form. The teacher can give these to the students, but it might be likely to end up at the stage where they are just "puppets operated within the teachers' manipulation." The objectives to use drama in other subjects, however, can be slightly different. It does not have to become always an art.

## 2. The usage of drama as a media of understanding in reading English

It is almost impossible and not necessary at all to dramatize the whole story just to show a series of events. The learners can learn "the reason why" through language

in drama. The teacher and the learners can spend some ten minutes of one session on experiential learning of “the reason why” and people’s feeling in the story in the text. The learners can do some drama work such as writing a letter or a diary in one of the roles in the story they have just finished reading. Some activities can be applied as preliminary work for reading.

## 2. 1 Examples of the activities in English reading class

These are a recipe for compromise in considering the limited time. The followings are some examples for reading class which I was in charge of in 2016.

- Text and Material: *Pay it forward* (DVD)<sup>7</sup> and its scenario
- Students: 25 first graders of business administration department

Each learner majored accounting, business planning or business administration. The proficiency of their English had a wide variety, however, in the main, it was in the third grade of *Eiken*<sup>8</sup>.

- Goal: To get familiar with the listening and reading the daily English conversation and to be able to summarize the story in simple English

Activity 1: Making still images of the attitude of Trevor, the hero of this story before and after he begun “pay it forward”

The students make groups of four or five and do this activity. If they are accustomed to still images, they may be asked to show the mind of Trevor. The still image here does not require the learners to speak any words so that it may be suitable for those who have less command of the target language.

Activity 2: Hot seating<sup>9</sup> (Teacher in role of Trevor or Mr. Shimonet, Trevor’s social studies’ teacher)

The students will discuss in groups what they want to know to reveal the event and the feeling of Trevor or Mr. Shimonet, and if they need, write down the questions they want to ask. What kind of questions should be asked depend on when the teacher places this activity in the process of reading on this story. The teacher answers their questions in role. If the students have extra questions individually in the process, it should be highly encouraged. The learners are not good at asking questions usually, so this could be a very good exercise for asking questions as well.

### Activity 3: Thought tracking of Trevor's grandmother

The students will take a role of Trevor's grandmother and think about what they would do if their smart grandchild Trevor is leaving home against their daughter, Arlene's decision of living with DV husband, giving up the relation with Mr. Simonet. They discuss in pairs, where the teacher in role of Trevor comes to the students in role of Trevor's grandmother and they show their attitude and say what they would say to him. This requires a great command of the target language because they have to speak in their own words.

### Activity 4: Writing a diary in role of Trevor's mother, Arlene or Mr. Shimonet of the day when Trevor was killed

This should be a very hard task for the students but can be richer in affection than just writing about "what do you think of the story?"

## 2. 2 The significance of teacher in role

It could be ideal if both the teacher and the learners managed all the activities in the target language and the teacher had less hesitation and fear in teacher in role. I think that the teachers' talk in the target language as much as possible is kind of building belief for setting a language learning situation, where the learners accept the lesson as it is and are very much encouraged to be exposed in the language. Teacher in role is also of a help to build belief when the learners have to be engaged in role and have some fear that "we are in drama, but the teacher is not."

## 3. Does the teacher of EFL have to be a drama specialist?

If we try implement the terribly difficult drama improvisation, the teacher will be put in a dilemma: "Do I have to be good at acting and know about drama very well when my aim of teaching EFL is to help my students acquiring the target language?" I have not yet assured myself whether the teacher of EFL have to be a drama specialist or not, but it can be hopefully suggested that the job of the teachers in both fields are not far from each other.

The teachers of EFL should be those who bring the best of the students and help students acquire language, providing them with the meaningful context, which is, to our

regret, extremely rare to be seen in the actual classrooms in EFL in the present situation. And, in this sense, the language teacher and the drama teacher have a lot in common. The teacher of EFL have to, anyway, learn and devise some methods of teaching the target language to their students. Drama can be said to be one of those methods. It would, however, be inconsiderate to ignore the dilemma of the teachers of EFL.

Drama improvisation develops simulation and role-play. All invite self-expression from the students, in the sense that they are required to respond spontaneously to whatever is happening, but improvisation involves tension, focus and symbolization.

These elements which are unique to drama, especially tension, will give students more meaningful context where the target language should be used and this can give them stronger motivation than simulation can do. If it is not genuine context with tension and symbolization which we have in real life and we could not feel really like influencing on others and outer world with the language. It is doubtful whether the students are really learning the target language.

Improvisation also engages the students to investigate the feelings of the characters in the texts from which they can find a universal aspect of humans, and to empower themselves to challenge and invest into their future. The teacher is not forcing their limited pattern on to the students or manipulating them so that they should accept things as they are now, but allowing them to have more room for maneuver. And this is what education should be. Education is to pass some power of ability to think about and challenge the world of humans on to children. Even language teachers involve in, because they are not just an instructor who train people to absorb information and to master language skills.

Although having mentioned these benefit of improvisation, there might arise some problems which threaten the security of both the teacher and the students.

The students can feel a little securer in doing simulation or role-play. It is easier for them to start to attend to, than a terribly difficult improvisation. It appears that there is not a huge gap between what they have already acquired and what they must be going to tackle now and it is not too heavy burden for them who do not have a very good command of the target language. When there is less room that they feel forced to fill in, they can be relaxed and secure. The students should not be given unnecessary discomfort and fear in learning the target language.

The teacher can feel securer in doing simulation or role-play as well. When there are certain structures and vocabulary that must be taught and cannot be put aside, simulation or role-play can easily contain them. The structures and vocabulary are to be presented in contexts, or the room for the students to fill in with them is to be offered in contexts. The students can easily guess what they are required to do there and exercise fairly smoothly. The teacher is required to do less work for preparation of the lessons and can concentrate on making the students familiarize the target structures and vocabulary. It is extremely difficult to set up the situation for the grammar or translation lessons, infusing tension and symbolization, and so on to make it to be improvisation where most of the language is spontaneously uttered.

#### 4. Implication for further English teaching through drama

The feeling of security and comfort of the Japanese teacher of EFL in not using improvisation may come from unnecessary of being a marvelously fluent speaker of English. In improvisation, the students are required to respond spontaneously in a certain context, which means the teacher should be ready to handle the students' dilemma that they have something they want to say or write but just do not know how to express it in the target language. As long as most of the teachers have the same dilemma as the students, improvisation is a horrible terror for the teacher. The teacher would be afraid and ashamed that the students may regard her/him as a poor speaker of English.

More and more ALTs<sup>10</sup> are taking part in teaching English with JTE<sup>11</sup>, and it makes it easier to set up the context more effectively, because they demonstrate the dialog in English and show some genuineness than the Japanese teacher takes two roles and pretends to be two at the same time or just using a tape recorder. Believing in what should be done in teaching EFL as one teacher, we should choose the right thing and promise ourselves to teach always in the true sense of development and improvement of the students, and then dilemma should be solved, though it is not easy.

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### Notes

1. EFL means English as a Foreign Language.
2. It was when I worked at an after-school care class for children as a volunteer teacher.
3. Hughes (1991) *The Shock of the New: Art and the century of change*. London: Thames & Hudson.
4. Read (1990) *The Meaning of Art*. London: Faber & Faber.
- 5, 6. Bolton (1986) *Drama as Education*. London: Longman.
7. *Pay it forward* (2000) is an U.S. movie directed by Mimi Leder. It is a story that a young boy attempts to make the world better place after his social studies teacher gives him the assignment: “think of something to change the world and put it into action”.
8. It was the result of *Eiken* IBA (institution based assessment) held in the beginning of this class in 2016.
9. It is one of the drama strategies. “A character is questioned by the group about his or her background, behavior and motivation. The method may be used for developing a role in the drama lesson or rehearsals, or analyzing a play post-performance.” *Drama Resource* (n.d.) Retrieved January 10, 2017, from, <http://dramaresource.com/hot-seating/>.
10. ALT means Assistant Language Teacher.
11. JTE means Japanese Teacher of English.

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