

Train The Trainer: An Analysis of Cecily O'Neill's Process Drama Approach in Teacher

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Abstract

The study investigates the effectiveness of process drama in achieving an outcome based empowering education in secondary school teacher training. A case study design was adopted as the operational framework for data gathering. Data were collected from 16 in-service teachers from a secondary school in Mashava, 13 males and 3 females'. Performance –based data analysis were employed to this study. Through the workshop session, the researcher used performance modes of analysis as a way to identify with the participants' lived experiences. This study will, through the data gathered and synthesised results, argue that process drama is effective when interwoven into education as it promotes literacy, multiple interpretations, problem solving, empowerment, liberation and collaboration among students. Thus through the presentation of the research findings, we argue that there is need for teacher training institutions in Zimbabwe to consider drama and theatre as a teaching and/ learning strategy in their curriculum to equip educators with effective instructional methods which prepare them for the varied educational challenges in the society and school system.

Keywords: process drama, empowerment, liberating, and outcome based education

INTRODUCTION

The study investigates and explores the effectiveness of process drama in achieving outcome based empowering education in secondary school teacher training at Mashava District in Masvingo. Drama is a literary composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue and typically designed for theatrical performance (Nicholson 2011). Existing literature suggests that drama offers several opportunities for educators to promote learning and development such as engaging, motivating and empowering learners to be active agents in educational settings (Anderson 2013; Edmiston 2013; Nicholson 2011; Neelands 1998; Warner 1995). Styslinger (2000) adds that when drama is interwoven into education it promotes literacy, multiple interpretations, problem solving and collaboration among educators and students.

Process drama is described as a tool that explores a problem, a situation, theme or series of related ideas or themes using the artistic medium of unscripted drama (Neelands 2000; Heathcote & Bolton 1995; O'Neill 1995; O'Toole 1992; Way 1967). Bolton, (1999) understands process drama as a dynamic way of working that requires teachers to reflect-in-action constantly dealing with unique situations that require novel approaches. This novel and dynamic way of teaching/ learning approach has its roots in dramatic play, where normally developing children in every culture in the world create their own imagined worlds, often with the co-participation of an empathetic adult in role. Saka, Ebenezer, Çakır, & Saka (2016) understand process drama as creative

play based on an idea, concept or event that uses theatre techniques. It creates a learning environment that enables students to access new knowledge and skills based on their prior experiences. The teaching and learning approach in most secondary and primary schools (sometimes tertiary institutions) in Zimbabwe adopt (consciously and/ or unconsciously) the banking concept in education where a learner becomes a passive, resistant and 'empty' vessel into which the all-knowledgeable teacher has to fill with ideas and understanding. This has become known by Shor (1996) as the Siberian syndrome.

Drama in Zimbabwean secondary schools is largely considered for recreational purposes (Chivandikwa 2004), yet O'Neill (1996: 117) emphasises that (process) drama should give access to dramatic elsewhere, imagined worlds in which learners may experience new roles, novel perspectives and fresh relationships. At its most ideal, process drama displays essential empowering qualities through interactive, challenging and collaborative teaching/ learning process. In the same view as Donnellan & Simpson (2015), Stinson & Winston (2011) reiterate that process drama must allow learners to use their creativity and imagination in a constructive environment where all students are working towards similar goals. Burke (2013: 19) also observes that process drama's distinguishing factors (from theatre) are its use of role-play as a means to include participants/ learners in the educational environment by having them act as if they are someone else in a given situation with a "particular focus and purpose." In the Zimbabwean context, all these beneficial characteristics of process drama have not been

explored and experienced in teacher training and/ or learning environment. While efforts have been made through provision of scholarships to study the various Drama for life applied theatre programmes at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, not much has come out of this personnel development investment. Out of the eight trained students, by 2011, only two had come back to Zimbabwe and are not effectively sharing the acquired knowledge and experience with learners, teachers and/ or student teachers. This presents a gap in the field of theatre in Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework

The study discusses process drama through the lens of constructivist pedagogy educational theory. Constructivist pedagogy suggests that learners use their experiences to actively construct understanding that makes sense to them, rather than acquiring understanding by having it presented in an already organized fashion (Eggen & Kauchek, 1994; Prawat & Floden, 1994). This contemporary viewpoint draws from the constructivist perspectives of Piaget (1954) and Vygotsky (1978). Bhattacharjee (2015) notes that constructivist theory views learning as an active process in which learners construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through action and reflection. Thus in this study, data was gathered through the lenses of the characteristics of constructivist pedagogy. These include: attention to the individual and respect for students' background and developing understandings of and beliefs about elements of the domain (this could also be described as student-centered); facilitation of group dialogue that explores an element of the domain with the purpose of leading to the creation and shared understanding of a topic; planned and often unplanned introduction of formal domain knowledge into the conversation through direct instruction, reference to text, or some other means; provision of opportunities for students to determine, challenge, change or add to existing beliefs and understandings through engagement in tasks that are structured for this purpose; and development of students' met awareness of their own understandings and learning processes. (Wood, Nelson, and Warfield, 2001 and Cobb et al, 1991).

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed following a case study approach that allowed the exploration and understanding of complex issues, and is considered to be a robust research method particularly when a holistic, in-depth investigation is required (Zainal

2007). One of the reasons for the recognition of case study as a research method in this study is that it provided holistic and in-depth explanations of the problem in question. To gather data, the researcher used interviews and participant observation. Reflection in action, post action reflection, participant observation, and teacher in-role were the strategies employed in the implementation of the process drama project study. These were also deployed as frames of reference in the analysis of the process drama project study.

Purposive sampling of participants

This qualitative study took place in a high school teacher classroom in which the researcher utilized drama activities for multiple purposes. The research site was secondary school in Mashava, Masvingo. In this classroom, there were 16 purposively sampled in-service teachers who agreed to participate in this study. The purposively sampled research participants were made up of 3 females and 13 males in the in-service secondary school teachers whose ages ranged from 25 to 50 years. All the participants had prior knowledge of drama but had never been exposed to process drama. Because the participants had knowledge of drama and theatre performance, volunteering to take roles and responsibilities was not a challenge. Some of the roles that were created for the purposes of the process drama were; chief, headman, fathers, cattle head boys, chief's wife, community drunkard and women in the community.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected through participant observation and interviews in the form of teacher in role and teacher out of role discussion and reflection. The data gathering process was guided by a lesson plan which was set to direct participants towards the Stone Age era. The lesson plan was designed through these stages: dramatic contact, pretext, the happening or process and reflection. Dramatic contact was conducted through warm up games and exercise to help build trust and develop concentration. These stages assisted data collection in an attempt to understand and appreciate the effectiveness of process drama in teacher training. Thus as part of the lesson plan I managed to extract two pictures inserted below. The pictures were used to create an imaginary community. Participants were asked to interpret the pictures by creating an ideal Stone Age community using stones and sticks and logs they gathered outside the classroom.



1. Picture by Robin A. Brace. August 2nd. 2013.
<http://nathandavis.squarespace.com/blog/2010/3/11/>

2.

Study Findings

This study revealed a wealth of findings which will be used to weigh the effectiveness of process drama in achieving an outcome based empowering education in secondary school teacher training. Of note, these were drawn outcomes from the study;

- A well thought out pre-test yielded a successful process as researcher maintained a degree of decision making power. The facilitator retained some degree of decision making power in working within the structure for the attainment of the learning aim.
- The participant used imagination and knowledge to create the world around them. Besides the fact that none of them had lived during the era they were subjected to. The use of a suitable pre-text stimulated imagination among the participants and aided them to create the dramatic elsewhere.
- When the idea of changing a 'god' which seemed foreign to them, the participants expressed different views for and against this change. They expressed their proudness in their values towards the introduction of foreign ideologies.
- Negotiation through dialogue proved effective in facilitating discussions and development the plot, particularly when the participants negotiated the tension to change their 'god'.
- Roles created a get-up-and-go scenario as presented from the drama. The participants were dared to adopt certain attitudes and perspectives retort fittingly to them.
- Voluntarism in choosing roles by participants aided them with the freedom to craft and develop their roles as they progressed with the process, and it also enhanced students' imaginative skills, and allowed participants to see things from another perspective.
- The research established that if tension is not well negotiated with, the desired objective of the process achievement may go in vain. To that note, the researcher discovered different types of tensions which are tension of task,

misunderstanding, surprise, shock, mystery, intimacy, ritual and irony.

- Controlling or working within the lesson proved to be effective, as it provided an opportunity for the teacher and students to create a fictional world together, establish imaginary situations, modelling appropriate behaviour and language, assigning roles, directing scenarios and maintaining tension.
- Dramatic time played a big role in separating the participants from the subject and in providing background information. Though the drama was set represented the Stone Age era dramatic time was utilised to denote the passage of time which heightened the tension when it came to decision making.

Based on the findings there is need for teacher training institutions in Zimbabwe to consider drama and theatre as teaching and/ learning strategies to equip them in case of varied educational challenges in the society and school system.

DISCUSSION

Pre-text

The findings gathered are also in line with Heathcote's (1995) thoughts which suggest that the facilitator should retain some degree of decision making power to work within the structure to attain the learning aim. Bowel and Heap (2001) also suggested that a facilitator should take note of the following planning principles when structuring a process drama theme: context, role, frame, sign, and strategies. While the facilitator might establish the parameters of the process, it is important that there is a conscious acceptance and collaboration of the participants. The facilitator holds the power to establish parameters by deciding on the pre- text. O'Neill (1995) confirms this when he says that a decision must be taken by the facilitator from the starting point which will elicit imaginative transformation amongst the participants.

Surprising enough, participants mentally created a setting in Stone Age in which none of them had never lived but instead all used their imagination and knowledge to create this world, thus, dramatic elsewhere was created in the sub-conscious inspired by the images above. To this end, the use of a suitable pre-text elicited imagination among the participants and enabled them to create the dramatic elsewhere. This was empowering when it came to decision making moments later in the drama. They could easily interact with images, roles, situations; make the decisions easy because they were dealing with their own world that they had created. (O'Neill 1995) supports the imaginations as it allowed the social and political empowerment of the participants in "their" world

Context

The study clarified that pre-text builds the context of the drama but a discovery came out that the context on its own has significance. The gathered results share a common understanding with O'Neill (1995) in that the first thing to consider is the issue of context in laying out a ground plan to execute process drama. The initiation of context must be drawn from the students/ participants rather than a superimposed curriculum design. O'Neill, further observes that student imaginations can be stimulated by current events, novels, short stories, or life experiences of participants. During the process drama, much as the theme was chosen by the facilitator prior to the workshop, it was validated by the participants themselves who went ahead to build the context, the imaginary world. This imaginary world enlisted the participants' imagination as they interacted with roles and performed their duties in the created Stone Age community.

Part of the learning aim of this process was to explore how participants responded to change from what they are used to. When the idea of changing a 'god' that the people in the community were used to was introduced, the participants expressed different views for and against this change. Their expressions lived up to O'Neill's idea of alienation, in which he argues that if an ironic approach is used to initiate process drama, it will draw the participants into the dramatic world, challenge them to active response, and promote both judgement and interpretation. This provided a framework for investigation and permitted the kind of negative reaction that, ironic and constructive. Irony provided a perspective within which students safely encountered and articulated controversial issues and ideas, discovered their own values and experienced the consequences of their actions.

Negotiation

Negotiation through dialogue was effective in driving discussion and the development the plot. Just as

emphasised by O'Neill (1995) negotiation was a valuable activity that ran throughout the drama process, whether it was in the negation of a fictional world among students as they worked together in pairs or small groups, or as they prepared for performance to other class members. It is this negotiation to do with the context, roles, images and situations that provided the basis for change in understanding, which according to Bolton (1999) is the essential purpose of process drama. In the process drama project, there was an indication of change in understanding the issues of change when the participants negotiated the tension to change their 'god'. Although this was at a distance, the concept was related to their negotiation to change to the outcomes based and empowering education system in Zimbabwe.

Roles

The process established that roles drive the drama and they become the object of inquiry. O'Neill (1991:322) who posits that "roles which are doubled or denied will immediately give direction, tension, and complexity to the unfolding event". Once the dramatic elsewhere has been created, then roles within it become clear and it is from then that the participants are free to embellish their characters depending upon development of the scenarios. The participants were challenged to adopt certain attitudes and perspectives and to respond appropriately. To do this, participants reflected upon the situation and the ethical perspectives involved. Again, they constructed the drama based upon 'if' rather than upon 'what should we do?' They engaged in the dramatic elsewhere. It was indeed after the dramatic elsewhere in the form of a Stone Age community, was created, through pre-text that the participants created the imagined roles and relationships that enabled them to interact with the challenging situations.

Roles were chosen voluntarily and not imposed on participants, this gave the participants freedom to craft and develop their roles as they progressed with the process. Ladousse (1992) suggests that these students are liberated by role play as they no longer feel that their own personality is implicated. In the *Mutiusinazita* imaginary community, there was a chief, a chief's advisor, the spiritual medium and members of the community. These roles and relationships were empowering when it came to making decisions especially when the tension was introduced. At this point, the chief's making use of the power in his role called for a community meeting to discuss the issue with the involvement of everyone in decision making. The participant who was role playing the spirit medium had to interact with new images, roles and ideas because the people of the community expected counsel from him since he was the one in touch with the spirits. He had to

imaginatively make decisions and his position provided the empowerment. This role-playing builds self-confidence rather than damage it (Ladousse, 1992). This was the same for the chief, his advisor and all community members. All this was made possible because of the participants' suspension of disbelief and living in the dramatic elsewhere. Cowley, (2007) sums the importance of role play by noting that it enhances students'/ participant's imaginative skills, it creates an understanding among participants why some people behave the way they do and it allows participants to see things from another perspective.

Tension

O'Neill (1995) notes that a successful process drama is built from tension which builds resistance, drives the plot, and creates room for dialogue. However, the research established that if tension is not well negotiated the desired objective of the process might not be achieved. The teacher in-role should always be alert and constantly refer to the desired outcome of the lesson plan. O'Neill (1995) suggested that tension is a powerful element in process drama and can only be powerful if the participants are engaged in the 'dramatic elsewhere'. This then provides challenging situations and dilemmas. Tension may rise from the direct confrontation, as a way of harnessing the energy or resistance of the class; it may appear more subtly as a dilemma, a veiled threat, pressure posed by an outside agency, or by such factors as a time pressure which demands immediate response (O'Neill, 1995). This is what happened when the facilitator in role suggested that the community discards its own 'god' and embrace a new one. This was a challenging situation for the chief that a community meeting had to be called. During this community meeting, the discussion became heated due to the different points of view. Participants engaged into novel perspectives that they never thought they would.

Teacher in Role

The study gathered that controlling the lesson from within can be operative as emphasised by O'Neill, (1995) who noted that teacher in role is one of the most effective ways of beginning a process drama session. By working from within the drama, teacher and students can create a fictional world together, establish imaginary situations, modelling appropriate behaviour and language, assigning roles, directing scenarios and maintaining tension. However, the study revealed that it can be challenging and it requires a facilitator or researcher who is alert as he/she might get carried away by the discoveries of the process. This technique was extremely utilised in our process drama since the researcher took up various roles that helped to further edge participants into role. The researcher, utilising teacher in role technique, introduced the tension about changing the

'god' that challenged almost every participant to negotiate and decide.

Dramatic time

Dramatic time solves problems of participation, maintains distance, allows for reflection and sustains the spontaneous development of the event as postulated by O'Neill, (1995). It is the dramatic time that supplies the plot and the text with background (orientation toward past), present (confrontation or encounter, a challenge, surprise, or reversal, a trial or decision) and moves the plot to the future or forward the event with, developing expectations. In the drama workshop under analysis, the element of dramatic time played a big role especially in alienating the participants from the subject and providing background information. The drama was set up during the Stone Age era. But even within the drama, dramatic time was utilised to denote the passage of time which heightened the tension especially when it came to decision making. Through dramatic time, the days the chief had given the spiritual medium to consult the 'gods' had passed; the tension was heightened as the participant had to give counsel to the chief. With time passing, the participant had to quickly use his imagination by interacting with images and ideas to come up with sufficient counsel. In fact, Bolton (1999) sums up the importance of time when he notes that the potential for living through drama expands, making a cascade of possibilities if the present embraces the past and the future.

Improvisation

In process drama implementation, immediacy and spontaneity of improvisation will lead to a retrospective approach. As O'Neill (1991) observes, an understanding of the way in which scenes relate to each other and of the way in which units of action may be chosen to develop the drama, its depth and complexity creates a significant experience. The focus of a process drama session can change due to the individual participants' understanding of a moment and could lead the entire group into a completely different exploration. This is achievable through improvisation which involves "students making an imaginative leap from their actual situation or roles into a supposed one" (McGregor, Robinson, & Tate, 1977:11). This was evident in our process although it was so much of retrospective analysis. The harvest, worship and community meeting scenes were unconsciously set up and led to development of a significant experience. However, the facilitator played a big role in shaping the first scenes of the drama with a particular temporal orientation. Possibly, if this activity had been carried out more consciously, an even rich experience would have been achieved.

Rituals

Rituals and ceremonies when introduced in process drama bring a sense of harmony and fulfilment. Ritual is a way of understanding and celebrating life, in the context of the community embodying significant alteration in the turning points of personal and social life such as marriage, maturity, change of status and/ or death. Through the ritual of harvest offering and worship, most participants understood and celebrated their lives as people of the Stone Age. This enhanced their engagement with the dramatic elsewhere and some alteration in understanding was a likely outcome. These rituals involved the participants interacting with objects and ideas and making meaning out of them. At this stage in the process it was clear that process drama helped participants to shape their understandings into a public form.

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed O'Neill's assertion that well-crafted successful process dramas can have an overpowering effect on the participants. Through this study, it was discovered that process drama helped place emphasis on participants and enabled them to experience personal growth through an exploring their understanding of the issues within dramatic experience. The student and teacher shared equal places in the development, analysis and production of the drama in trying to achieve outcome based empowering education. Thus, process drama qualifies to be a tool to be employed by facilitators/ teachers in Zimbabwean secondary schools. From the experience of this workshop and others, I would like to state that an appropriate context and captivating tension are the pillars of a worthwhile process drama.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

- Colleges and tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe need to consider drama and theatre in their curriculum so as to equip educators with more effective instructional methods to prepare teachers for the challenges of society.
- The study strongly recommends those in the field of applied drama and theatre to research on how best process drama can be incorporated in the execution of not only teacher training but also in teaching of primary and secondary curriculums in Zimbabwe.

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