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DRAMA FOR CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY (CALD)

Applying drama with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australian educational settings

Richard Sallis and Carol Carter

Introduction

In this chapter we report on the findings of a joint study between two Australian universities: the University of Newcastle (NSW) and the University of Melbourne (Victoria). The findings indicate that applied drama and applied ethnodramatic theatre can be powerful pedagogical strategies to apply to culturally and linguistically diverse students in a range of educational contexts.

It is widely acknowledged that the term cultural and linguistic diverse (CALD) is broad. According to UNESCO, linguistic diversity is closely connected to, or a subset of, cultural diversity. UNESCO asserts that

...languages play a vital role in development, not only in ensuring cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, but also in attaining quality education for all and strengthening cooperation, in building inclusive knowledge societies and preserving cultural heritage....

(2017, paragraph 3)

Culture, as a “fuzzy concept”, is highly complex and problematic to define. For the purpose of this chapter we define culture as the value systems, spiritual elements, artefacts, beliefs, and traditions of groups of people that contribute to defining who we are and how we view the world. Cultural diversity describes the coexistence of groups of people and is a rich resource for sharing unique ways of knowing, being, and viewing the world. Socioculturally diverse experiences, contexts, and backgrounds inform the way language is accessed and used. Honouring, respecting, and celebrating cultural and linguistic diversity and providing opportunities for supporting additional language learning through drama as well as for students to use their own language are important considerations and foci in our respective teaching, learning, and research.

This chapter features three case studies as part of an umbrella research project spanning our two universities (Carol, the University of Newcastle; and Richard, the University of...
Melbourne) which showcase the use of drama education and applied drama techniques, processes, and strategies with CALD students including those who come from a range of backgrounds and follow different religions, traditions, values, and beliefs. Each case study is used as a springboard for discussion and critical, reflective conversations between the authors to explore and extend knowledge, skills, thoughts, and understandings of applying drama in Australian educational settings. Our intention is to engage our readers to similarly reflect on, develop, and subsequently share their own viewpoints and perspectives.

**Background**

This chapter is informed by our ongoing, cumulative research and experience of drama pedagogy in the field of CALD, enabling inclusion and intercultural understanding. Our teaching-informed research and research-informed teaching is underpinned by our use and promotion of drama pedagogy in a variety of educational contexts. Revitalising our drama pedagogy to support diversity and cross-curriculum priorities is a key objective for our work in general, and in particular the case studies discussed in this chapter. The case studies we share are:

- Postgraduate students taking part in the Introduction to Contemporary Australian Schooling (CAS) program at the University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education;
- Pre-university students in the Foundations in Education course at the University of Newcastle; and
- The experiences of a Chinese-born pre-service teacher using drama with her English as an Additional Language (EAL) primary school class.

In formatting this chapter, we have been informed by the case-study narrative approach outlined by Norris et al. in their text *Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach* (2000). In their model, a drama practitioner shares an example of a critical incident of their work in the classroom and then invites a peer to comment on their account. Subsequently, they respond to the feedback they have received, articulating how this exchange has shaped and refined their understanding of the incident and their practice more generally. We have also adopted a *research-based theatre* (Belliveau & Lea, 2016) or *research-informed theatre* (Sallis & Bird, in press) approach which draws on the traditions of ethnodrama and ethnotheatre (Saldaña, 2005, 2011). As such, what follows is a dramatised dialogue between the two authors based on our shared interests and experiences of using drama to teach CALD students in postsecondary courses. We view the narrative as being a dramatic one because the content has come from Zoom sessions we have engaged in which we shared our experiences relevant to this chapter. We also feature excerpts of performed-research writing based on experiences of pre-service teachers from the Master of Teaching course at Richard’s university.

**Locating the case studies**

**Case study 1: Introduction to Contemporary Australian Schooling**

At the University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education, the Introduction to Contemporary Australian Schooling (ICAS) program is an optional component of its Master of
Teaching courses (Early Childhood, Early Childhood/Primary, Primary, and Secondary). From second semester 2020, it also became part of the faculty’s Master of Education degree, which is a master’s-level course for those who already possess a teaching degree. The first of its kind in Australia, the ICAS program has been established for international students who have recently arrived in Australia or who are Australian-born citizens who have completed the majority of their compulsory schooling and/or undergraduate post-compulsory education overseas. For the purposes of the research project it is deemed to be what we refer to in our research as an enabling program because it is intended for students who require further academic preparation or confidence-building, as is the case for pre-degree enabling programs. The greatest fear for the pre-service teachers who undertake the ICAS course is their teaching placements. In response, ICAS provides advice, modelling, and assistance in this regard.

Case study 2: Foundations in education (pathways and academic learning support centre)

This case is based on work with pre-university students located at the University of Newcastle. The participants are students undertaking enabling courses, or what are sometimes referred to as bridging or access programs in the Pathways and Academic Learning Centre (PALS), formerly known as the English Language and Foundation Studies Centre (ELFSC). ELFSC was established in 1974, long before enabling and widening participation became popular notions. It is the largest enabling and language centre in Australia.

In addition to the English Language Intensive Course for Overseas Students (ELICOS) programs, there are pathway programs offered at the University of Newcastle for those who do not have the qualifications for entry into an undergraduate degree. These are Open Foundation for over-20-year-olds, Newstep for under-20-year-olds, and Yapug particularly for enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island students. The students can select from a wide variety of courses which are designed to teach the foundations of the different subjects available as well as embed academic literacy skills into the course.

The Foundations in Education course, which is the particular location of this case study, admits students from Open Foundation, Newstep, and Yapug. This course can be taken full time (six months) or part time (face to face or online, one year). At the time of writing, due to the COVID-19 virus, all courses have gone online, which presents unique and different challenges to using drama to support the learning that takes place. On the surface the enabling students may appear to be a fairly homogeneous group as they are all either Australian citizens or have permanent residency status and are largely classified as of low SES. However, they are a diverse group of students and include recent permanent residents or citizens and students who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Differences in ages, backgrounds, and experiences also account for differences in religion/spirituality, traditions, values, and beliefs. Drama strategies and techniques have been used and responded to in this Foundations in Education space.

Case study 3: Active Pedagogies in an English as an Additional Language (EAL) class

This case study is focused on Susie (pseudonym), in her experiences with drama in two university subjects and in her teaching in primary schools. In one of the subjects, Active Pedagogies, a number of drama-in-education techniques, are explored which can be
applied to the teaching of a wide variety of learning areas and contexts. A key concept is embodied pedagogy, that is, “learning that joins body and mind in a physical and mental act of knowledge construction. This union entails thoughtful awareness of body, space, and social context” (Nguyen & Larson, 2015, p. 332). Embodied pedagogy acknowledges “our bodies as part of whole sensate beings in motion-inscribed, living, emerging and inscribing subjectivities. That is, the body is always in a state of becoming, at once as a representation of self, a site of experience, sensation and affect, and a mode of creation in progress” (Perry, 2009, p. 5).

Active Pedagogies culminate with a micro-teaching task where, in small groups, students take their peers through a series of drama activities, as if for a given cohort of school students. Susie and three others from the class chose to run a session for primary school EAL students. The topic was “professions” and consisted of a number of drama warm-up activities and role-plays, where the students were asked to “imagine being in a profession and using the language of that profession”. The students started by brainstorming (in words and hand-drawn pictures) tasks and associated language of their chosen profession. The facilitators then used Teacher in Role to guide the students through a series of simulations where they needed to use “as much verbal and body language as possible of [the chosen] profession” to portray their character. Significantly, the nature of the activities that Susie’s group of facilitators used was partly drawn from those she had experienced by participating in the ICAS program.

### A research-informed dramatic narrative

**Case study 1: Performed research in a program for international pre-service teachers studying in Australia**

**Richard:** At the University of Melbourne’s MGSE, students enrolled in a Master of Teaching degree can opt to participate in the ICAS enabling program. Overwhelmingly the students who elect to participate do not have a background in drama/theatre education. The drama components of this program are accordingly structured and conducted within this context.

From 2018 to 2020 I interviewed pre-service teachers (PSTs) within the ICAS program about their in-university and out-of-university selves and I observed them taking part in the ICAS classes (those that I took and others). This revealed insightful contextual information in regard to the worthwhileness of the ICAS program and, in particular, the drama components within it. While most of the international students reported that they were having a positive experience in their pre-service teaching course, they did highlight the issues and challenges they faced. Of particular relevance here are the following:

- Developing English-language proficiency – especially the Australian vernacular;
- Learning academic and school-based discourse;
- Learning to teach in an unfamiliar classroom (teaching) environment;
- Learning and living in a different culture.

Significantly, a number of the issues identified correlated with the findings of a recent research project into the experience of international students in Australian higher education (Arkoudis et al., 2019).
According to the research participants, the ICAS program in general, and the drama component in particular, has helped foster a sense of belonging and community for them that they had not experienced otherwise in their course. This, they attest, can be attributed to a combination of drama-in-education techniques and conventions such as ensemble-building, role-playing, Mantle of the Expert, Writing in Role, Conscience Alley, and Spectrum of Difference, with a focus on their emerging experience as a PST. Students role-play typical scenarios they may face as a beginning teacher, and reflecting on these scenarios they try out, through improvisations, how they might react in these situations. Not only does working through drama provide a supportive environment in which the students can work, it also asks the participants to be active contributors, not merely observers.

Another technique employed is to present ethnodramatic (Saldaña, 2011) or performed research (Belliveau et al., 2020) monologues based on the professional experience of PSTs and their mentor teachers. The dialogue for the ethnodramatic text is formed from interview transcripts and field notes, video/audio recordings generated during the research. Given that most of the PSTs in the ICAS program were born and/or schooled overseas, one of the monologues performed for them is called, *I Didn’t Think You’d Be a Drama Kind of Person* (Sallis, 2019). “Cecilia” (pseudonym) is a graduate Master of Teaching Primary teacher who was born and schooled in Japan. In the monologue, she recounts an incident that took place from her pre-service placement experience.

On one occasion, Cecilia asked her Mentor teacher, Mary, if she could run a process drama as part of a unit her Grade 4 students were studying on climate change and endangered species. Mary responded with, “I didn’t think you’d be a drama kind of person”. Reflecting on that moment, Cecilia turns to the audience and in an aside states, “Is that because I look Asian? Or is it because I appear introverted? Is it because Mary mistakenly reads my deferential and respectful demeanour as my being shy and reserved?” Cecilia explains to the audience that when she told her Mentor that “drama was one of my favourite university subjects … I particularly like using dramatic play, Teacher in Role and process drama … she was genuinely surprised”.

Across the three monologues I (Richard) perform in this program, the PSTs are particularly interested and intrigued observing the exchanges between peers (i.e., previous PSTs in their course) and their Mentor teachers. They report that the ethnodramatic monologues provide a rare insight into the thoughts, values, and opinions as expressed by the mentor teachers, which they would not otherwise experience. In particular they are most interested in aspects of the monologues where the Mentor teacher addresses issues of communication between them and the PST. They are also captivated and provoked by the frank views expressed, as if expressed to a professional colleague: for example, at one point a Mentor teacher, “Sarah”, talking to a colleague at her school reveals that:

I think [the PST’s] main problem on his Drama placement was that he tried to hide what he thought were his deficiencies, especially around classroom management, rather than to come and talk to me about it … Overall, I had a real problem communicating with him. We sort of never quite got off on the right foot and I don’t think either of us ever recovered from that, which is regrettable. It was nothing in particular that caused this – it was more of a sort of a mismatch in our ideologies that we could never quite resolve. Because I adopt a more theoretical approach to drama teaching than he does, he probably thought that I was really stuck up and standoffish. I’m sure he thought I had a low opinion of him, which was not the case, and ultimately was not reflected in my assessment of him.

(Sallis, 2018)
The following response from one of the PST audience members encapsulates the responses of others in the ICAS program:

The communication breakdown between Sarah and the Drama teacher [PST] was something I could relate [sic] because it had a close connection to my own teaching experiences. I liked how we got to hear Sarah’s realisation that they both were responsible for their failure to connect.

The emergent findings of this research suggest that a significant contributor to the success of the use of drama-in-education techniques and conventions in the ICAS program is that in accord with the tenets of enabling programs per se, the participants are presented with scenarios to examine that are similar to those they are currently experiencing or will experience on their teaching placements. Significantly, the drama workshops in the program provide a supportive space, and this enables the students to test, try out, and postulate how they may respond in future real-life professional pedagogical situations.

**Carol’s response to case study 1**

Carol: In this case study the immense capacity for drama processes to review, replay, reinterpret, reimagine, and manipulate real-life contexts and experiences to gain insight within a safe “no-penalty zone” is highlighted. I see the juxtaposition of the “as-if” and the “as-is” world through “having conversations in and out of role” as crucial to the provision of an authentic drama learning space and the consequent gaining of important insights that the ICAS program provides. In the case of the pre-service teachers in the ICAS program, I believe the multi-perspectival nature of these insights is threefold – from the original “as-is” nature of others’ experiences in the performed research monologue through to the “as-if” presentation as an audience member, and the “as-is” of the PST’s own potential experiences.

There is also the ability to view and interrogate the monologues through the lens of closeness and similarity of experiences from within the safe distance of talking about the experiences of others. Providing an in-depth focus on pre-service teachers’ school classroom experience through drama including different perspectives and lenses contributes considerably to the rich research that constitutes this valuable ICAS program.

I was most interested in some of the content in the monologues that mirrors aspects of my previous research and wondered what the participants in the ICAS program made of this, particularly in relation to Cecilia’s monologue and the common misperceptions reflected in her Mentor teacher’s statement that “I didn’t think you’d be a drama kind of person” and Cecilia’s link to introversion. In my master’s research (2006), which examined personal and contextual constraints in the use of classroom drama, the lecturers, teachers, and pre-service teachers involved all believed strongly that a shy, introvert nature or a loud, extrovert nature was not a factor in whether people were drawn to drama but rather “intrinsic attitudes and values” such as being a risk-taker, open to change, exploring ideas, thinking on your feet, and valuing imagination. Drama was believed to be a space where shy people can “find their voice”. Cecilia appears to confirm that there is still a misconception in relation to introversion and drama. In a 2016 study (Carter and Hughes) conducted with pre-service teachers it was stated, however, that teachers’ confidence levels are directly linked to levels of engagement and use of arts techniques and strategies in teaching and learning.

The responses of the ICAS participants in relation to communication breakdowns taking place in the “Sarah” monologue emphasise the power of these monologues to hold a mirror up to classroom realities faced by pre-service teachers for the purposes of reflecting on and
finding solutions to the challenges. It also conveys the stark reality of some Mentor teachers failing to put into practice a partnership type of mentoring required as well as the lack of trust, mutual respect, and open communication that is key to any learning experience. Again, I would be interested in the (further) responses by the ICAS participants.

Richard: (in response to Carol’s feedback on case study 1)

Over the past few years the inclusion of the research-informed theatre (performed-research) element in the ICAS program has increased due to demand. The PSTs have variously described the content of the monologues as being “relatable” [sic], “insightful”, “informative”, a “cautionary tale”, and so on, and that the performances have informed the way they have related to their Mentor teacher and students on their subsequent teaching placements.

I intentionally present the monologues in a “neutral” voice and stance given that those I am portraying are often of a different gender identity and/or cultural background to myself. Significantly, this performative decision does not appear to lessen the impact of the performances; the students attest that it is the stories of the characters and what they say that is paramount.

Case study 2: Drama for enabling foundation in education students

Carol: In lectures and tutorials it is often a challenge to get enabling students interacting with me and asking questions. Even more challenging is to get them to share with each other, particularly in respectful ways which honour diversity. A contributing factor in this context is that “speaking out in pedagogical spaces [has been] identified as a significant source of anxiety for many students associated with equity” (Burke, 2018, p. 102).

It is the beginning of Semester 1 2020 and I am standing outside the door waiting to be interviewed for the job by the “interview panel” consisting of “parents, university lecturer, students, etc.”. I listen at the door and hear the loud buzz of busy, productive discussion. I knock on the door. “Excuse me… is this where the job interview is taking place?”, I ask hesitantly. “Yes, come in”, various voices chorus. “Where do I need to sit?” I am settled in and made to feel comfortable. Then different, appropriate, complex, challenging questions requiring a great deal of careful consideration fly through the air. There is laughter and enjoyment alongside serious, critical thinking and responses. “Thank you for this opportunity… I hope to hear your decision soon”. “You already have the job”, says a kind student, while the rest of the class agree.

At the end of this session we learn more about each other, our interests, differences, and similarities, and consolidate what we have learned through the “I see you” chant and drama activity. Class interaction and participation is at an extremely high level as they talk to the various partners, they “see” about what they learned, their expectations for the course, what they understand about the theories and philosophies focused on today, and so on. Positive feedback responses range from finding the activities interesting, enjoyable, and worthwhile through to “X thinks you are a cool teacher”. A student in the class ventures, “I hate these kinds of activities”, while some other students nod in agreement.

This is a key research moment, given that the interview and observation data from 2018 and 2019 only recorded, or identified, positive responses, given that my observation of these students in 2020 showed deep engagement and high levels of participation, and given that the student making this statement was heavily involved in the interview and was the one who said I had the job. I try to probe further but the students respond that they don’t really know why they dislike activities of this nature. While the 2020 student reflection on the activity is different, the expressed sentiments of the 2019 students mirror
what I observe to be happening in these classrooms in 2020. In the research conducted in 2019, all the students who participated in the interviews stated that drama techniques and activities enhanced their participation and engagement. For example, “Well, with the dramatic aspects it’s more involving, more inviting and it gets you. You feel less judged if everyone is sort of on the same slate; you feel comfortable expressing yourself. If you have a teacher who’s out there and fun, it makes the whole learning experience more inviting” (Carter & Sallis, 2019, p. 87). Are the responses linked to self, peer, and/or teacher expectations? Does the place, space, time, and research method have an impact? For example, in 2019, a colleague, who did not teach these groups of students, conducted group interviews on my behalf at the end of the semester, while in 2020 I relied on observation notes and informal reflective conversations near the beginning of the semester.

An assignment that the students need to do is to write an essay on the main ideas of one educational “seminal thinker”. To support and enhance their diverse language needs, communication, and academic literacy skills, and to assist them with the thinking required in the “culture” of higher education language and teaching, I make use of oral drama strategies as a stepping-stone to their writing. One of these activities is a plane crash parachute debate, where each group of students is a seminal thinker (e.g., Vygotsky) who argues for being most deserving of the only parachute available. It is April 2020 and I have to work much harder than previously to get the seminal thinkers to begin work on their debate. Previously, once an initial group inertia was quickly overcome, this was followed by serious commitment, engagement, and thoughtful debate.

In this case it takes an enormously long time with group 1 to get the debate focused on the seminal thinkers with the participants questioning the qualifications of the pilot, suggesting a change in job career to education since I appeared to be “an excellent teacher but a useless pilot”, trying to problem-solve the rescue of all and what could be done, how more parachutes could be made, etc. One participant suggested, “Since all our ideas are written down and we have lived our lives, maybe we should donate the parachute to one of the other passengers”. Eventually, one or two points are made based on the ideas and work of the seminal thinkers. In the end, “the more expert co-pilot managed to find a way to land the plane safely”. Perhaps this transpired because of a more communal, caring group, or perhaps because the “flight” took place online in Zoom.

It is a few days later and I have changed the mode of transport for group 2 to a ship given that breaking into different Zoom rooms (cabins) may be more authentic. I have a background on my Zoom of a ship.

“Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. This is your captain speaking. Sorry that you have all been confined to your cabins, but we had to keep you inside while we were trying to rescue our ship. Please stay calm, ladies and gentlemen, but our ship is going to sink and we only have one lifeboat available. As you know we have [names of seminal thinkers] on board as well as their family and staff. The only fair way of deciding on who gets the lifeboat is by allowing everyone to speak and then deciding who gets the lifeboat”. When the participants return, many ideas specifically linked to seminal thinkers are generated – shared more via chat than talking.

Richard’s response to case study 2

As Ziebell et al. attest (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has offered never-before-encountered pedagogical challenges and opportunities for teachers in all sectors, including those in pre-service teacher education. As they assert, it is almost impossible to write about teaching and learning in 2020 without acknowledging the impact that COVID has had on places of learning. For those teaching the arts and more specifically those of us teaching drama and theatre classes in the university sector, it has been especially challenging when teaching in
real life (IRL) has been replaced with classes being delivered online. Carol’s experience teaching drama using Zoom and the strategies she employed are ones that many drama teachers and lecturers have had to engage when the only option available to them (during the pandemic) has been remote, online delivery.

As detailed in her account, Carol grappled with a decreased level of engagement from her students when she delivered her classes online. As I found in my own teaching during the COVID “lockdown”, the visceral responses from those engaging in a Teacher in Role activity in real life are greatly diminished when the activity is held online. It is also harder for an educator to read the responses from their students (especially when students turn their computer camera off). I am also reminded of the distinction between drama students being physically present in a space and being fully present in the moment. I would argue that the extent to which Carol’s enabling foundation students were fully present when participating in her classes would have been harder for her to determine online. Additionally, it is notable that the students in Carol’s class mostly responded within the “lifeboat” activity via the Zoom chat function, which I contend drama educators would find to be a more distant and passive form of communication. Carol asks if place, space, and time have an impact on student learning in drama. Certainly from her experiences teaching online in the first semester of 2020 it would appear to be so.

As a university lecturer who regularly utilises drama-in-education techniques and conventions across my teaching, periodically I reacquaint myself with Peter Wright’s article, *The Thought of Doing Drama Scares Me to Death* (1999). It reminds me that the reason some tertiary students don’t enjoy drama is because the way it is being taught makes them feel insecure, and lecturers should do what they can to ease the students’ apprehension. In his article, Wright reports on the anxieties that pre-service teachers without a background in drama may experience when engaging with DiE activities and processes including roleplays. He reports that his research into using drama in a teacher education course revealed that many pre-service teachers feel secure working in groups compared to working alone in drama. Significantly, when planning and teaching the Drama curriculum, Wright asserts that if pre-service teachers feel uncomfortable when taking part in the classes, there is less likelihood they will be willing to try out what they have learnt with their own students. As Carol did in her case study, I have found the need to adapt the ways in which I use DiE to non-drama folk so as not to alienate them; I am mindful to employ strategies which I hope will calm the students’ self-consciousness and enhance their participation.

**Carol: (in response to Richard’s feedback on case study 2)**

I absolutely agree, Richard, despite there being some ‘group inertia’ in both the face-to-face and online experiences, it was much less of a challenge to overcome and get students ‘fully present in the moment’ when working face to face. While I learned that it was more possible to engage students in a process drama online than I had previously imagined, the obstacles in place in online teaching do detract from the full engagement in, and authenticity of, the experience. In all classes (whatever the mode of delivery) I do pay special attention to the needs of the non-drama students and employ strategies that I have found will invite them into the drama space. I believe that the disjuncture that existed in the first face-to-face class between negative feelings about drama expressed and positive, participatory experiences observed is strongly linked to calming, non-threatening strategies employed. In informal conversations with students later on in Semester 1, it was confirmed that one of the reasons for their initial responses to the drama activities and ‘hating them’ was because of some prior negative experiences. It seems to me that, certainly at a subconscious or unconscious level,
the current continued deference to a teacher-centred approach (particularly in tertiary context), the marginalisation of the arts, and the notion of, particularly, adult learning requiring a separation of the mind and body, cognition and emotion, the academic and the practical, and the serious and the enjoyable had an impact on students’ expectations and responses.

**Case study 3: Drama with EAL primary school students**

**Richard:** I first met Susie [pseudonym] in the ICAS program. At that time Susie had been in Australia for less than 12 months, having completed her compulsory schooling and undergraduate tertiary education in mainland China. Susie had a high IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score but was most unfamiliar with the Australian schooling system. When I interviewed her during the ICAS course Susie expressed a particular interest in teaching EAL (English as an Additional Language). According to the Victorian Curriculum:

> The English as an Additional Language (EAL) curriculum is central to the learning and development of all young Australians for whom English is not their home language. Through learning EAL, students build their capacity to communicate confidently and effectively. This learning also strengthens their understanding of the nature of language and culture, and the way that language changes according to purpose, form and audience. (2020, paragraph 1)

Susie told me of her prime reason for wanting to teach EAL to her primary school students.

**SUSIE:** On one of my teaching placements [in first year], I experienced racial prejudice directed towards me from the students and from my Mentor teacher. It was direct, unsubtle, and racist! The Grade 5s asked me to repeat or re-state instructions, when I knew this wasn’t often needed, and one boy told me my last name was too hard to pronounce. When I asked my Mentor teacher why she thought they were doing this, I was shocked when Julie told me, ‘It’s the way you speak, and your body language is not what they’re used to — it comes across as weak’. At the time I kept calm, gritted my teeth, swallowed hard, and sucked it up. I didn’t tell anyone, not even my Clinical Teaching Specialist [the visiting lecturer from the University]. I needed to pass this placement and I didn’t want to get Julie offside because I was sure she’d give me a bad report. I was really shaken by this experience and it affected my confidence. That’s partly why I enrolled in the ICAS program — I wanted to know more about why as an Asian student I was treated in a culturally insensitive way at that school. This is Melbourne; it’s not like there aren’t lots of teachers from Asia teaching in Melbourne already! I needed to understand more what makes someone like Julie think it’s okay to treat me like that. I knew I may not get the answer in the actual classes but I’d be with other international students who I could talk to and maybe if they’d experienced something similar, they might have some advice.

(Sallis, 2020, pp. 18–19, based on an interview conducted in 2018)

The following year I met Susie again because she had enrolled in the drama-based elective subject I co-teach, called Active Pedagogies. The aim of this subject is to explore active, participatory, and critical approaches to the teaching and learning of texts for varying purposes and across a variety of educational environments through applying embodied pedagogy techniques using conventions of drama-in-education. It is taught by drama staff members from the Artistic and Creative Education (ACE) team at the university and attracts students...
from a wide range of discipline areas and pre-service courses, primarily interested in incorporating drama techniques and processes into other curriculum areas that they teach.

Susie informed me that she had chosen this subject because she had responded positively to the use of drama techniques in the ICAS program and hoped she might learn the principles of an embodied pedagogy approach that could assist in her teaching of EAL students.

SUSIE: I found the roleplaying to be the most effective technique. It was like trying out how I might react and what I might say but without the consequences of real life. I also liked the activity where we imagined what it would be like when I became a graduate teacher and how we’d talk to people in different situations, like parent-teacher night, to colleagues, students and so on. Having to consciously change the way I spoke to the different groups was a little challenging as a non-native speaker but I could see how changing how you speak to people in different contexts is part of being a teacher. I think roleplays like this would work really well with my EAL students.

(Sallis, 2020, p. 22)

In a subsequent lesson, after she had applied some of the techniques she had experienced in Active Pedagogies with her EAL students, Susie informed me that she had witnessed how effectively drama can foster interaction between students and build confidence with the language they use in different contexts, something which EAL teachers often attribute as being one of their hardest challenges.

SUSIE: My EAL students are more engaged when they do the drama activities and less passive in class than they were before. I think one of the reasons for this is because the activities are student-centred and encourage interaction. But it was only after I had made my EAL class a comfortable and trusting and non-judgemental place could I actually do drama with them. I remember being told at Uni that it’s best to introduce drama activities slowly to students who haven’t experienced drama much before. I took that advice and it worked. I’ve been doing some Teacher in Role and if I had introduced that too early, they may have found that a bit too much and not something they wanted to engage with.

(Sallis, 2020, p. 34)

Additionally, Susie asserted that through their engagement in the drama activities her students were voluntarily tapping into their social and cultural experiences and were willing to share these with others in their class.

Carol’s response to case study 3

Susie’s description of perceived racial prejudices on teaching rounds saddens my soul and echoes the experiences of many teacher education students from Asian and African cultural backgrounds that I have taught. The cultural biases and prejudices frequently have little to do with the language proficiency of the student on teaching rounds but rather on the outsider (Gee, 2002) status of the student, the funds of knowledge or different capitals at the student’s disposal (Bourdieu; Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez 2001), and the cultural imagery and practices expected by mentoring teachers in Australian school contexts. Even where students are comfortably able to demonstrate proficiency in the AITSL graduate standards, “accents” and “body language” negatively and erroneously cloud and impact on Mentor teachers’ judgements. This is why such programs as the ICAS are so vital and why drama, as we know, is an important tool for helping students, as Susie says, for “trying out … without the consequences of real life”. Through the drama we can negotiate and reflect on the nuances and subtleties of cultural imagery and prejudices to provide support and coping mechanisms for our students. Just like in forum theatre (Boal, 1993), we are largely not in a position to alter the mentor teachers’ (protagonists’) attitudes, but we
can find ways to challenge these attitudes and solve the problem of focusing on cosmetic aspects of language teaching.

I found it encouraging that Susie chose the Active Pedagogies subject because she had responded positively to the use of drama techniques in the ICAS program, particularly in the light of the marginalisation of the arts and the few opportunities that pre-service teacher education has to engage with drama and drama processes. There are still in-service teachers and prospective teachers who will see the benefits of drama processes if they are given the opportunity to experience them firsthand. In a climate where time for learning and teaching of the arts has been reduced in tertiary environments globally, it is even more important that such opportunities and programs exist.

As with any other subject or skill, the opportunity to practice regularly is crucial and a key to the intuition and thinking on one’s feet that teaching using drama requires. I currently have two vivid images in my mind. One is of my first disastrous foray into process drama where the students were skating along the floor and climbing the walls and where, when I did get rich responses from the students in role, I had absolutely no clue what to do with these responses. The second is at an international conference where I had just delivered a paper on my research concerning the benefits of process drama. A delegate stood up and asked what about if the students are not good at or can’t engage in a drama process? My response to her at the time, and I still believe this to be relevant, was what if, for instance, students have difficulty with group work? Would you give up on group work as an important part of learning, or would you give the students opportunities to practice and refine their group work skills as an important aspect of learning?

The advice given that it is “best to introduce drama activities slowly” and build up trust is sound, and not only for the participants but also the facilitators that are new to drama conventions. Consistently in all of my research related to drama, which have had many different contexts and findings, this has appeared in many different forms. For example, responses from research participants:

Carol waited until we were familiar with her before she started. I think if you just came, like straight out first up and you were more like, here’s all my drama, it would put people off (Carter & Sallis 2019). Meta-journal: “… the learner- teachers were thrown into the deep end of performance which some “loved”. Others wanted to take small steps and get used to the water, hide in the shallow end, or get out of the swimming pool completely… (Carter 2010), Student Response” “…essential to build up [participants’] trust and then people will be okay to open up. Then they will grow”.

(Carter 2006, 2016)

**Richard: (in response to Carol’s feedback on case study 3)**

In my research, almost all of the international student participants singled out classroom management / student behaviour as being their greatest challenge when teaching in Australian schools. In the ICAS program I tell students to “fake it until you make it”, in reference to how they “perform” their in-class teaching persona. Drawing on my own teaching background and work as a professional theatre director and actor, I use drama-in-education activities and theatre rehearsal processes and character development language, terminology and exercises to explore ways to advantageously use body language and voice production in the classroom. The techniques are combined with advice provided in teacher education texts (Dyson et al., 2018; Ewing et al., 2020; Ledbury et al., 2004) about effective ways to
use gesture, eye contact, and classroom space to assist with management of the class. Subsequently, students employ these techniques in their micro-teaching within the program and when they are on their teaching placements.

**Conclusion**

As the findings of our ongoing research reveal, drama and theatre techniques and processes can effectively be applied to assist students from CALD backgrounds in regard to language acquisition and cultural engagement. In our first case study (University of Melbourne, Graduate School of Education) we discussed the use of research-informed theatre to support international PSTs to navigate the Australian school terrain including communication with their mentor teachers. The second case study (University of Newcastle) was concerned with drama experiences in an enabling Foundations in Education course and focused on such aspects as levels of engagement and participation in face-to-face or online classes. “Susie”, a Chinese-born student who faced cultural bias in her primary school placement, was the key player in our third case study (University of Melbourne, Graduate School of Education) whose positive experiences of drama techniques at the university encouraged her to apply some of them with her own EAL primary students.

As the three case studies and our accompanying critical reflective conversations reveal, there is an immense opportunity for using drama with non-drama students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This includes the pedagogical opportunities that continue to be identified through applying drama in online contexts, something that COVID has necessitated in 2020 for drama educators. The case studies are informed by our joint research projects, our experiences of and reflections on working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. However, we maintain that there is still much to learn in the application of drama to cross the cultural “boundaries and borders” and for the provision of equitable, supportive, culturally rich, and diverse learning and teaching spaces.

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