

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Demystifying process drama: exploring the why, what, and how*

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ABSTRACT

Process drama is a highly engaging participatory form that is capable of generating rich opportunities for learning. This is especially the case when the drama experiences are built upon pretexts that are aesthetically charged and when the work itself is structured and facilitated by educators with a deep understanding of its true nature. However, in spite of a strong research base that supports its value both in the drama classroom and beyond, a number of myths relating to its use and value appear to be limiting its application. In addition, while many drama teachers make use of the strategies associated with process drama, far fewer offer their learners opportunities to engage in the cohesive and sequenced experiences that this form requires. These myths and misunderstandings are explored within this keynote, while examples drawn from three different learning contexts are used to demystify this important form and provide greater clarity around its nature, purpose, application and value.

KEYWORDS

Process drama; pretexts; planning and facilitation; teacher artistry

Introduction

Ever since I was a young 17 year old embarking on my journey as a teacher, I have been excited, challenged and constantly surprised by a dramatic form that is known variously across the globe... but which I choose to call process drama. I'm passionate about all participatory forms of drama, but this highly engaging form is the one that continues to challenge, provoke and intrigue me. I was therefore delighted when the Drama Victoria Conference organisers asked me to focus this keynote on process drama. In particular, they asked me to demystify process drama by exploring: why it might be a useful form to include in our classrooms; to outline what it looks like when effectively practiced; and to offer some key points for supporting strong practice in its facilitation. From my perspective, my goals go further than this. I want to advocate for process drama to have a stronger presence in drama classrooms – with learners from children in the early years to young people in their final years of schooling or even universities. Its current under-utilisation in Australian schools is surprising given that its application has been the subject of considerable research, both here and internationally – research that overwhelmingly outlines the positive outcomes it is capable of generating.

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Many of you present here today may already be strong advocates for process drama, highly confident in its application, ensuring that your students have the opportunity to experience its rich aesthetic possibilities. To you I say, thank you and hope that in spite of this, you might enjoy hearing about this form from the perspective of a fellow advocate. For others, those of you who are new to process drama, have some misconceptions about it, have forgotten what you once learned, or are simply a little rusty... I hope that this keynote can support you toward greater application of this exciting form.

Across the next hour, I also hope to dispel some of the myths that surround process drama – myths that I think are holding teachers back from embracing this form in their classrooms. These include:

Myth 1: That process drama is just for young children and not really appropriate as a form for secondary or senior drama students.

Myth 2: That process drama is great as a learning medium for a range of curriculum areas, but it doesn't support students understanding of drama.

Myth 3: That process drama can't be taught because it can't effectively be assessed.

Myth 4: That process drama is not sufficiently theatrical or artistic.

I'll return to these myths later, but for now, I want to begin within a short definition of process drama for those of you unfamiliar with this form.

Bowell and Heap (2005, 59) have suggested that the term process drama should be used to describe work where, 'the participants, together with the teacher (facilitator) constitute the theatrical ensemble and engage in drama to make meaning for themselves... "writing" their own play as the narrative and tensions of their drama unfold in time and space'. They also highlight the fact that this form is dependent on the action, reaction and interaction of the participants, adding that the participants are both the theatrical ensemble that creates the play and the audience that receives it.

They also argue for its value suggesting that:

Process drama is a potent means by which perception and expression may be heightened. It provides a framework for the exploration of ideas and feelings. Through the unique, quintessentially dramatic process of enactment, learners develop as artists and, through this, refine a means by which they come to know more about themselves and learn more about the world around them. As such, process drama demonstrates itself as a genre of theatre in which the human need and desire to make symbolic representations of life experiences, explore them, and comment upon them are central. (2005, 60)

This definition highlights many of the key characteristics of process drama including:

- (1) Collaboration between all participants including the teacher/facilitator
- (2) Absence of an external audience – meaning is made for and by the participants
- (3) Direct involvement in the action by the teacher or facilitator
- (4) The centrality of tension and the importance of symbolic transformation.
- (5) Its spontaneous and improvised nature.
- (6) The fact that participants have agency in the work with their improvised offers informing the direction of the dramatic action.
- (7) And perhaps significantly, that it is an important member of the wider genre of theatre.

How did it emerge?

For me, it all began in a darkened room of the building I currently teach in at Griffith University! My drama lecturer shared with us a reel-to-reel version of Dorothy Heathcote's now very famous *Three Looms Waiting* work (yes I am that old!). Her pedagogy was revolutionary – and if you haven't seen it, check it out on YouTube. I was hooked... and for the last 25 years or more, process drama (along with play) has been the focus of my research, much of my teaching and many of my publications.

Years later, I was lucky enough to be at a Drama Australia conference here in Melbourne, when Cecily O'Neill facilitated, within a two-day master class, her now famous 'Seal Wife' drama. By this time, she and others, including Haseman (1991), had started calling the form process drama, with Cecily also introducing new terminology including the notion of pretext (1995), and transforming Bolton and Heathcote's earlier work by emphasizing reflection, non-linearity, and conventions manipulated specifically to offer multiple perspectives on the dramatic focus.

Also important for the growth of process drama as a form, and my ability to apply it, was John O'Toole and Brad Haseman's work outlining the 'elements of drama' model. It provided us with a framework for better understanding why some drama experiences worked and others failed. In addition, John O'Toole's text – *The Process of Drama – Negotiating Art and Meaning* (1992), was critical in deepening our understanding of these elements, particularly the various forms of dramatic tension.

Around about the same time, Jonathan Neelands and Joe Winston, both from the UK, were sharing their particular approaches. Like O'Neill they were raising the artistry of this participatory form, with Neelands in particular identifying new ways to layer participatory work with poetic and aesthetic dimensions (Neelands and Goode 1992).

This emphasis on the aesthetic dimension has been critical for my work in process drama because for me, this is where the power of the form lies. According to Haseman and Winston (2010), the term aesthetic refers to a specific form of knowing and along with it, a particular type of experience – one quite different from the normal business of everyday perception. They claim that aesthetic experiences go beyond a mere recognition of conceptual content; instead cognition, imagination, memory and the body work in complex interrelation to produce insight and fresh understanding.

However, in order to generate these rich experiences, process drama, like almost all forms of drama, requires teacher skill, artistry and importantly, a willingness to be spontaneous and take risks. Cecily O'Neill (in Taylor and Warner, 2006, 121) has written with great clarity about this need for artistry, noting that its importance is not just relevant to process drama, but all drama teaching. She notes:

The teaching of any arts subject, and in particular, the group processes that lead to theatre, is a cognitively sophisticated and demanding activity. It involves a subtle attention to detail, nuance and implication; the ability to exploit the unpredictable in the course of the work; the confidence to shift both educational and artistic goals where appropriate; and the security to deal with disappointment and possible failure.

Neelands (2009, 14) has also commented on this aspect, suggesting that 'every drama "lesson" should be an artistic as well as an educational journey' and notes that it is the process of working within the art form that deepens and strengthens the potential of drama work.

He also suggests (2009, 11) that drama 'by itself does nothing. It is only what teachers do with drama that makes the difference'.

So, no pressure folks, but when you combine the need for artistry with the other everyday challenges of teaching, there are times, particularly in process drama work, when we don't quite get it right... where our planning, at either the macro or micro level, let's us down – with the macro level being the planning we do prior to entering the classroom, while the micro is the planning we do 'in the moment'. Madonna Stinson and I have written about this recently (Dunn and Stinson 2011), suggesting that due to its spontaneous nature, it is quite easy to make small mistakes in process drama at the micro level.

For some excellent examples of these mistakes, I encourage you to read Peter Duffy's excellent edited volume entitled: *What Was I Thinking? Adventures (and Misadventures) in Drama Education* (2015). In this book, drama educators from across the globe share their mistakes with the world. I have a chapter in this book... and mine relates to a terrible decision I took in relation to a process drama I facilitated once with young children. Fortunately, according to Joyce (1922) mistakes are portals to discovery, so I'm very pleased to report that across my career I have entered many portals and made many new discoveries! So take heart and don't let this put you off... be comforted by the fact that it is actually the spontaneous and unpredictable nature of process drama that makes it such an exciting form – for participant and facilitator.

What does it look like? Three vignettes

This morning I want to share with you a series of short vignettes relating to my work with a range of participants including university students, newly arrived refugee children in the upper primary years and children in their first year of schooling. Later today, across three workshops, I will provide those of you who are interested, with the chance to participate in drama work designed for Year 12 students, middle years students and children in the early years. For now though, I hope these descriptions serve to provide sufficient insight to support the key points I wish to make later, while also highlighting the fact that this flexible, intriguing and varied drama form, when carefully planned and managed, is suitable for participants of all ages and levels of dramatic experience.

The first vignette today relates to a process drama I run each year with first year university students (and one, by the way, that would be appropriate for your Senior students). The course is focused specifically on process drama and in particular on how play scripts can be used as pretexts. In this case, the pretext is Tennessee William's play: *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

In choosing to use this play as a pretext, my goals for the students are multiple: I want them to have a dramatic experience that engages them cognitively and affectively – I want them to feel and to think; I want them to dig deep into the key characters of the play and to explore these characters in new ways and across new situations; I want them to participate in a drama experience that will extend their understanding of key elements of drama, especially tension of relationships, mood and role; I want them to develop their dramatic skills including their capacity to sustain role, use appropriate language and maintain focus; AND I want to challenge them to think more deeply about domestic violence, and in particular, the role of the bystander.

This process drama is structured somewhat differently from most others you may have participated in or facilitated, for within it, the participants *take role as characters* from the

play – specifically, the four key characters – Stella, Stanley, Mitch and Eunice. This structure is therefore very complex, for each character is simultaneously being played by multiple participants – and in line with the importance of participant agency in process drama work, the group sizes may be vastly different. For example, there may be just two Stellas, three Stanleys and ten Eunices!

Here is a vignette from one offering of this drama:

The room is dimly lit. 20 first year university students stand in a square (yes, not a circle). Each of the four sides of this square is made up of multiple individuals playing Stella, Stanley, Eunice or Mitch – characters from Tennessee William's play 'A Streetcar Named Desire'. They have selected these roles for themselves and as such, the group sizes are uneven, with many students opting for the 'protection' that the roles of Eunice (the lady upstairs) and Mitch (Stanley's card playing mate) can offer them within a process drama that they already know will be focused on the topic of domestic violence. At this particular moment of the drama, the participants have just experienced a narration that has time jumped them into the future. Stella and Stanley now have a second child... a daughter who is a young adult. She lies in a hospital bed, the victim of abuse at the hands of her new husband – a young man very similar to her father.

Earlier in the drama, the participants have had the chance, out of role, to hot seat the facilitator in role as Blanche Dubois who is currently ensconced in a home for the mentally ill. She is Stella's sister, and she shares with them confused, bitter and sometimes contradictory responses to their questions. They already know, from careful reading of the play itself, that in the very last scene of Tennessee Williams' play, Stanley a tough young man of Polish background recently returned from the second world war, has had her committed... leaving her sister Stella bereft while Eunice the neighbor comforts her and Mitch, Stanley's card playing mate, hangs his head in shame for his lack of action in support of Blanche.

In previous steps, the participants have explored, in character, the aftermath of Stanley's decision. They have: engaged in paired role plays that have been shared through the use of a strategy which John O'Toole and I have described as Eavesdropping; they have been involved in a gossip mill where they have shared their character's views about Blanche's fate – accompanied by Ella Fitzgerald singing 'Summertime'; they have created a short improvised sequence depicting events further in the future, at the first birthday party of Stella and Stanley's child, and depicted the fallout when one of the four characters suddenly mentions Blanche's name; and they have been questioned collectively as one person, about the cause of Stella's injuries... acquired that night. Significantly, they have all avoided the truth... and for many, in a moment of strong metaxis, they have begun to squirm about their complicity in domestic violence.

Now, as facilitator, I ask the group how this new tragedy may have been avoided and invite the participants to step into the square and speak their thoughts aloud to any group of characters/roles about this, including the members of their own collective role. What follows is powerful – with the participants using language in emotionally charged, sometimes aggressive, sometimes reflective, sometimes poetic ways as they step forward to accuse, condemn, blame or encourage. I stand in the corner of the square... feeling the tension, experiencing the emotion. Beside me, one of the girls begins to cry, sobbing gently. She does not leave the square or attempt to move away (in spite of her understanding that participation is always voluntary and that she can of course step back from the work at any time). Instead, another participant simply drapes her arm around her shoulder and the drama moves on – with the same convention but this time out of role with the group invited to reflect more generally on the 'roles' of victim, abuser and bystander. Later again, we come together to reflect on the drama experience and the meanings made or

not made within that two hour event. Emotion is a common theme – but not just sadness, anger too, as well as hopelessness and even some joy at being part of what some students described as a strong aesthetic experience.

The next process drama moment I'd like to share, involves a group of children in their first year of schooling. This drama addresses a far different, but no less important focus. Here the children are exploring notions of fairness and greed... with the pretext in this case being a short narrated story. Entitled 'The Wish', this drama is more traditionally structured than the *Streetcar* process drama, for the children are in a blanket role – as Members of a Council of Little People. Their task is to try to rescue one of their citizens from the clutches of a troubled young child called Sally.

In the story (which I think I invented just so I could play the role of Sally), two children (Sally and David) are staying with their Grandma due to the illness of their mother. Sally is a collector – with a bedroom lined with jars filled with her collectables. When she spots a procession of little people in her Grandma's garden, complete with carriages drawn by tiny horses, Sally immediately decides that she must capture one of them to keep in a jar beside her bed. In spite of David's concerns for the well-being of this little person, and the pleading from members of the council of little people, Sally is digging in... finally setting a ransom – a wish!

The children are seated on the floor in a circle. Each one is draped in fabric of various colours, with this fabric being designed to support the children to develop their roles as members of the Council of Little People. Sitting amongst them is their teacher who is also in role – as the President of the Council. Her job is to organise a vote relating to Sally who is demanding a wish in exchange for the latest addition to her collections. The council members must decide... should they grant her the wish she is requesting in exchange for the safe return of one of the smallest members of the Community of Little People, or should they deny it and look for another way to rescue their citizen.

Previously in the drama, they have re-created the procession of the Little People, with some children being prancing horses and others waving Kings and Queens. Accompanied by Pachelbel's Cannon, they have been encouraged to think about their movements, and invited to slow them down in order to be more precise and to better capture the movements in the moment. To further deepen their roles and along with them their empathy with the community, they have drawn a whole class map showing the path from Grandma's garden to the little people's homes, built miniature worlds where the Little People live, and created freeze frames of key moments from the story including the capture.

Now, at this solemn council meeting, one by one, the council members are asked to share their decision about the wish, providing along with it a justification. With great solemnity and great thoughtfulness, each member of the council sets out their decision – standing to reinforce the importance of the moment. Their responses are detailed, thoughtful and carefully considered, with each council member offering a different rationale for their decision. The votes are slowly tallied and the tension rises. The decision is made – Sally does not deserve a wish. The children, in role as the Council Members, cheer loudly. Urgent plans begin for a rescue!

The third process drama moment involves participants in the middle primary years. All are newly arrived refugees, with very limited English. However, due to their diverse countries of origin, the only language we all share, is English... limited as it is, so we have to place our trust in process drama and its ability to make meaning in spite of the language challenges. Penny Bundy and I are teacher/artists/researchers in this classroom, engaged in an Australian Research Council funded project designed to support language development and the settlement process for new arrivals through drama (for more details see Balfouret al. 2015).

In designing a process drama for this group, to be conducted six one-hour sessions, we had to choose our pretext carefully... and eventually, in the absence of a suitable one, created our own – a situation and characters that we hoped would support the children to think about and talk about settlement, whilst providing the distance needed to ensure that their personal stories of trauma do not become the focus. Rollo the Robot is born – a character whose space ship has landed in the park across the road from the school and just down the road from Kmart. She has lost her pet robot dog, Sparky... is all alone and needs help. Rollo speaks no English. The children have two problems to solve – they need to teach Rollo enough English to communicate with her, and they urgently need to locate her runaway pet.

The process drama structure has positioned them as experts in English, turning the normal situation upside down. No longer the learners in this situation, the drama has given them the chance to be the teachers supporting Rollo through her arrival process.

The following vignette describes one of the key moments in this drama:

I am in role as Rollo's Mother... recently arrived from Planet Buttonridge to locate my daughter. Like Rollo, I am eager to locate the family pet that has been missing for so long now. The children share with me the images of Sparky that have been arriving by email – images that show that Sparky has been hiding out in Kmart, consuming batteries, looking at space books for inspiration and meeting human dogs. They also share with me information about my daughter and her attempts to learn English. I am not happy with my daughter and suggest to the children that my daughter Rollo is irresponsible and very naughty. They resist my ideas... and in very broken but passionate communication, they tell me she is a good girl and I should be kind to her. Suddenly, a strange sound is heard outside the room, sounding something like a small dog's bark. The children rush to the door... and there is Sparky. With great respect and more than a little surprise, the children stand back and make a space for Sparky to enter. No-one grabs him or tries to impede his progress as the small robot dog makes his way towards us and a joyful reunion.

Later in the drama the children will help to arrange a wedding for Rollo, completing research into Earth Weddings and determining, in spite of their rich and varied cultures, that a Bollywood wedding would be the perfect way to celebrate Rollo's big day.

In reflecting on these three key process drama moments, others immediately spring to mind... like the moment when a group of Taiwanese students, within a drama built on Shaun Tan's wonderful book *The Arrival*, respond to an image of departure and the notion of something dangerous happening yesterday. They create achingly beautiful but devastating depictions of a Chinese invasion – with the drama providing a vehicle for them to discuss a fear rarely expressed but deeply held, revealing an intensity not normally seen in Australian classrooms where war seems comfortably distant. I recall too, the moment when a class of twelve year olds, within a drama about who was the first climber to conquer Everest, stand tall and announce to a cashed up NZ software executive, 'You can't buy history!'; and, perhaps my favourite moment of all, when a seven year old elective mute child, who hadn't spoken in a year of school, suddenly speaks in response to an invitation from an 'alien' who has passed him the speaking stone that enables communication between different life forms.

The key features of process drama

So... what do these drama experiences all have in common? What are the features of these and other quality process drama experiences?

(1) All of these process drama experiences are driven by a specific focus or focus question... with this question helping to shape the action of the drama and the reflections that occur within and following it.

With this characteristic in mind, we should be careful not to label work that is fragmented, or consisting of a series of strategies loosely connected or linked by a common theme, e.g., war, or grief, or friendship, as process drama. Certainly, within the drama classroom students are regularly given opportunities to improvise around themes such as these and to explore ideas using strategies such as freeze frames or paired role plays or even hot-seating, but these linked or ad hoc experiences do not constitute process drama, for process drama is a form that must offer learners a cohesive and holistic experience, where over time, they have the chance to co-construct a shared dramatic world, build and sustain a role or set of roles, explore a specific focus and importantly experience one or more tensions. Simply using the strategies of process drama does not constitute doing process drama!

For example, in the *Streetcar Drama*, the focus question explored in the drama relates specifically to the role of the bystander in domestic violence, with all of the strategies being carefully selected and sequenced to ensure that the participants have enough direct and embodied experience of this within the drama to be able to reflect upon it both within the work and again once the drama is completed. Importantly, this focus on the bystander is not the only focus question that might be examined in relation to this important play by Williams. Many others are possible, including for example, a focus on how the racism suffered by Stanley based on his Polish background has influenced his aggressive tendencies... or why a woman might continually return to a man who inflicts violence upon her, and more. But no matter which one is chosen, a focus is essential to the creation of a cohesive, deep and meaningful process drama experience.

Similarly, the drama described earlier, based on Tan's book *The Arrival*, focuses on the forces that might drive someone to leave their home for far off lands. An alternative would be to focus on the arrival itself... on the settlement, and indeed I have created a drama that does just that, but clearly such different process dramas offer quite different experiences, prompt different reflections and generate quite different meanings for the participants.

Later today I will be working through three process dramas and each one has a focus question. For example, the Senior Drama workshop, which is based on Sophocles' play *Antigone*, seeks to explore what happens when what is required of us by law clashes with our personal values, while the middle years drama examines what happens to community cohesion when outsiders are considered threatening because of their difference (does that sound familiar in the current Australian border protection context??).

Framing is a key aspect of planning that is related to the focus, with educators needing to determine if they want the students to experience the action from the inside, on the edge of the event, or outside it. In the *Streetcar* and *Rollo the Robot Dramas*, the work is framed on the inside... with the situations happening to the characters the participants are playing.

By contrast, in the *Wish Drama*, the events examined are not happening directly to the children themselves (e.g., their characters are not being put in glass jars)... but instead, the children are in role as characters whose involvement is on the edge. Alternatively, the work could have been framed on the outside, with the children being in role as Grandma's friends, discussing the children and their situation.

The skill then is to determine which level of framing will provide the most appropriate balance between connection and distance, whilst generating the understanding needed to engage in a meaningful way with the focus question (more about distancing in a moment).

(2) The second feature that is a key component of process drama is that a rich and stimulating pretext is needed. This pretext may be a play as we have seen in the *Streetcar* example, or in the case of the *Wish* and *Rollo Dramas*, a told story. It may be a whole picture book or a single page from one (as in the *Arrival Drama*); it may be a novel or even just the title of the novel. Alternatively, the drama work may be stimulated by a film, a diary entry, a fictitious Facebook page, a backpack full of materials, an artwork, or even a song. Irrespective of the source, what's important are the qualities of the pretext materials.

My colleague Penny Bundy and I have previously written an article about these qualities (2006), suggesting that an effective pretext has some or all of the following qualities. A good pretext:

- raises questions for the 'reader' of the text
- provokes our emotions and our intellect
- creates strong visual images beyond the text itself
- has an element of ambiguity about it
- offers open-ended possibilities
- allows the teacher to 'see' what the students will be doing and learning in response
- involves/infers a group of people
- indicates a future or a past
- has its own inherent tension or beauty
- may include a juxtaposition of two or more unusual images/ideas
- offers a hook for the students – something that appeals to their interests.

In addition, when selecting a pretext, I believe that careful consideration must be given to the issue of distancing, with sufficient distancing being necessary in order to offer emotional protection for participants. For example, a process drama for refugee children about being a refugee would never be appropriate, hence the *Rollo* story which provides distance through the fiction of the robot... but sufficient connection for them to engage and make meaning. Similarly, a drama about middle years students enacting racist behaviours might serve simply to reinforce these behaviours, so one that is built upon a traditional tale that introduces the notion that two Green Children have mysteriously appeared in a small community (as per my workshop later today) creates a safe analogous space for the children to engage in action and subsequently the deep reflection needed to discuss racism in general and distanced rather than specific terms.

Within the *Streetcar Drama* I described previously, I aimed to achieve distance by inviting the participants to take role as characters – with multiple individuals all playing the same character, providing an additional layer. However, in spite of this, and as heard in the vignette, some of the participants still became highly emotional in response to the work itself OR the ideas being explored. Indeed, across much of my work, including with young children, a range of emotions are evoked... and for some participants very strongly. Occasionally I feel troubled by the depth of engagement that can be generated by this powerful medium... but I take heart from the words of that great genius of our field, Gavin Bolton (1986), when he says:

Drama does not require that people actually faint, that they scream themselves into an hysterical ecstasy, that they hit each other in rage. It does require a no less real but a different order of emotions: children should experience a deep concern, a genuine elation, a feeling of anger. Providing the response is to the symbolic situation, then all the emotions that belong to living, that playwrights have handled as their stock-in-trade, are the proper stuff of a creative drama experience, whatever the age of the child. (1986, 90)

The trick is knowing how to get the right balance between connection and distance, because too much distancing can be just as problematic, leading participants to disengage because they are unable to connect in any way to the material being addressed.

Madonna Stinson, Penny Bundy and I are currently exploring the role and nature of emotion in process drama as one of our areas of research and have generated some very exciting findings (2015). For example, I have facilitated the *Creon's Decree Drama* (that I will be offering later today), in six different international locations and have tracked the emotional responses of the participants by inviting them to record their emotional responses to specific moments within this drama and to also indicate their level of commitment and connection at these moments using this grid.

We have found through analysis of this data that within this drama there are emotional hot spots (no time for this now), and that in all, more than 50 different emotions were identified by the various participants. The hottest of these hot spots (where commitment and connection are at their peak), appear to be those moments that involve direct engagement with the facilitator in role OR where poetic devices such are employed with careful attention to mood and atmosphere.

Teacher artistry is therefore required at this very first step of macro planning to ensure that the pretext you select offers the participants the chance to connect with ideas either within or beyond the drama AND that it aligns with the focus question, your purposes in running the drama and the participants' needs and interests.

(3) Process drama has some important structural components.

In *Pretending to Learn*, a book written by John O'Toole and me (which has recently been reborn, vamped, revised and revitalised into an e-book (2015) in response to the Australian Curriculum) we outline in some detail key aspects of this structuring. This topic is too complex to explore in detail here, but what is most critical is that process dramas must be driven by one or more of the forms of dramatic tension and that in addition, within each drama the participants should adopt one or more carefully designed cohesive roles.

In most cases these roles require the participants to shift status or perspective – with the shifts serving to empower the participants as learners. For example, within the *Wish Drama*, the children's status is lifted to make them Council members and decision makers; in the *Rollo Drama* to make them experts in language and problem solving... whilst in the *Streetcar Drama*, by taking role as Stanley and improvising his responses to situations, the participants are required, temporarily, to adopt a different perspective that might generate new insights.

Structurally, process dramas are organised into three phases – an orientation or initiation phase, an experiential phase and a reflective phase. Perhaps the most important of these, for a successful drama, is this initiation phase, for it is here where the roles, situations, time, mood, and place are established. In each of these dramas too, the facilitator takes role as well... although to various levels and durations.

(4) Quality process drama work requires a willingness to be flexible and responsive at the micro level... with the facilitator looking continually for opportunities to build on the offers

made by the participants, to follow their leads, to let them determine the outcome of the work and to manage the tension within the work – tension of the task, relationships, mystery, surprise, or metaxis – that unique tension that I constantly strive to generate – the tension that puts beliefs in the real world into tension with actions and belief in the dramatic one (no time for this here, either... sorry!)

The management of tension is critical. Too much tension will eventually kill a drama, as it cannot be sustained... and too little will result in boredom or disengagement.

The myths

Time, now, to return to those myths I introduced earlier in this presentation and take them one at a time:

Myth 1: That process drama is just for young children and not really appropriate as a form for secondary or senior students.

Myth 2: That process drama is great as a learning medium for a range of curriculum areas, but it doesn't support students understanding of drama.

Myth 3: That process drama can't be taught because it can't be assessed... or worse, that we assess by asking students to plan a process drama.

Myth 4: That process drama is not sufficiently theatrical or artistic.

Let's start with Myth 1. Hopefully, the *Streetcar* vignette and some of the other examples I have provided in this presentation have helped a little to dispel this myth. However in addressing it, I also want to look a little more closely at the various ways process drama can be used in the secondary drama classroom.

First, this very flexible form can be an excellent way to kick-start a unit of drama work, without it necessarily being the focus form for the whole unit. For example, *The Arrival Process Drama* I briefly mentioned earlier, which explores why people might leave their homes to travel to far off places, can be an important first step in a performance focused unit based on the play *Boy Overboard* (based on the novel by Morris Gleitzman). In such a unit, the experience of the process drama helps the students develop the understanding that is required to perform a play about the experiences of two children fleeing Afghanistan as boat people.

Alternatively, as might be the case for the *Streetcar Drama* or *Creon's Decree Drama*, the process drama might be conducted midway through a study of the play, in order to deepen or challenge older students' understanding of the characters and their motivations. In addition, a process drama can be a wonderful vehicle for supporting scriptwriting with older students, encouraging them to consider what might happen next to the characters in a follow up scene (for example in the *Streetcar Drama*) or even to consider action happening well before the play. Here, a process drama that explores the original cause of the rift between the Capulets and the Montagues might be a really strong scaffold for a scriptwriting process.

It may also stimulate a deeper understanding of a topic to be addressed within collage or for primary students in particular, can be a great way to work with a whole class to collaboratively build a play based on the children's experiences within the drama. Two examples of this approach are included in *Pretending to Learn*, with one group created play being based on a process drama about the journey of the First Fleet convicts, while another examines the community responses to the sudden arrival of the Green Children.

Finally, process drama can also support students in the creation of monologues – delivered by the characters they played in the drama or from those distanced from it by time or place. For example, in a process drama based on the book *The Burnt Stick* (also included in *Pretending to Learn*), which describes a story of the stolen generation, a monologue might be written by a descendent of the station owner who notified the police to take the child away.

It is therefore, for me at least, the most flexible form open to us as drama educators because it offers learners an experience that while self contained, can also be a springboard to work in almost any other drama form and for participants of all ages.

Myth 2 suggests that process drama is great as a learning medium for a range of curriculum areas, but it doesn't support students' understanding of drama. This is perhaps the most surprising of the myths, for it suggests that teachers cannot provide learners with an experience of the elements of drama whilst also explicitly teaching about them and encouraging their students to reflect upon their use. This is clearly not the case. For example, in *The Arrival* drama, students were asked in advance to take particular care with the mood of the drama, having first explicitly discussed this element and its impact on drama work. Even in the early childhood drama, the students were focusing on role and place, co-creating miniature worlds to represent the homes of the Little People and maps to represent Grandma's garden. They also used their bodies to create this garden, with this activity being used to help the children gain a shared understanding of the dramatic world they were co-constructing within the drama. Of course, not just elements, but skills can also be developed, for example the ability to devise short improvisations as part of the drama – as occur within the *Streetcar* work.

Of course, the bonus is that the students do in fact learn through drama at the same time, with a range of curricular skills and general capabilities being developed at the same time. In particular, process drama experiences provide children and young people of all ages with real support for their writing – and indeed this link to writing has been carefully researched and documented in the literature. For example, in a recent chapter, Annette Harden, Sarah Marino and I (Dunn, Harden, and Marino 2013) draw upon our various research projects and the wider literature to outline the benefits of writing linked to process drama including: enhanced motivation; greater cohesiveness; greater quantity of writing; more diverse and complex registers applied; and a keener sense of empathy displayed.

Currently too, our Griffith team, together with Adrienne Jones, are working on an exciting, large scale funded project entitled *Y Connect*. This work, being conducted at Yeronga SHS, has a particular focus on developing the writing skills of students in the middle years through drama. These students, many of whom once again are from refugee and immigrant backgrounds, are being introduced to novels and plays using process drama, with the writing emerging, at this early stage at least, showing signs of being more cohesive and more creative as a result of those experiences.

Myth 3 suggests that process drama can't be taught because it can't be assessed... or worse, that we can only assess it by asking students to plan a process drama. In response to these ideas, I want to make the important point that as teachers we should never be assessing process drama. Rather, we should be assessing our students' dramatic responses within and reflections following it. To do this, we need to be prepared with checklists based on criteria that are linked to our curriculum intent for the work. With these in hand, we can easily assess many of the knowledge and understandings required within the *Australian Curriculum*. For example, with younger children we can identify those who can sustain role, or with older children, those able to use relevant language, employ symbol or build tensions. We can find

out if they can sustain mood. We can also assess their understanding of these elements as they respond to the drama work, reflecting on the elements that drove the drama or where their absence hindered it.

Of course, we can also assess the work that emerges in response to process drama experiences, as discussed earlier, including the scripts written, the work devised, or the plays enacted. But what we can and I believe should never do is ask our students in the secondary school to create their own process dramas – both because this task is too difficult and because there is no point to this. Students don't need to know how to plan a process drama – this is the teacher's role. To ask them to do this would be akin to asking them to write your lesson plans for you!

Debunking the fourth myth, which suggests that process drama is not a very theatrical or artistic form, is a little more difficult for the theatricality of process drama, like any other drama form, is dependent upon the educator and their own skill and artistry. It is also dependent upon their understanding of the possibilities.

For me, there are two ways to elevate the artistry of this form... one is through a keen awareness of the dramatic elements and how they work individually and in combination across the work. The second, and perhaps most important, is the willingness of the teacher or facilitator to carefully prepare for their in-role work. In too many process drama experiences, the in role work of the teacher is difficult to differentiate from the normal work of the teacher themselves. However, if the educator carefully considers and then prepares their roles, with a close attention to status, purpose and attitude... then the seriousness of the teacher has a spillover effect to the students who also adopt their roles with care and focus. The careful selection of symbols, music and lighting, where possible, to support the mood are also important.

Conclusion

To conclude then, my journey as a drama educator has been keenly enriched by the wonderful experiences I have had as a facilitator of process drama. Indeed, some of my fondest classroom memories are ones where I could almost see the children and students in my class learning. I'm sure that many of you have had similar experiences. I have also valued the fact that even many years later, students have been able to recall in some detail, aspects of the drama.

Emotion and memory are closely connected and this is certainly true within process drama. I hope that like me, many of you have already experienced the joy of engaging with this most exciting of dramatic forms. If not, why not give it a go... your students will thank you... I'm sure of it.

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Notes on contributor

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