



Precarious repurposing: learning languages through the Seal Wife

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ABSTRACT

'Je voudrais un café au lait' you nervously utter to your classmate, who listens carefully while wearing his best haughty French expression. Role play has long been popular in Additional Language (AL) classes for practising and rehearsing daily conversations. Subsequently other forms of drama education have garnered interest from the Language learning community for their ability to provide purposeful and engaging contexts for learning. This paper critiques the work of two language educators, who have adapted Cecily O'Neill's *The Seal Wife* for an AL learning context. It critically examines the two dramas focusing upon several key features of process drama and discusses potential issues which may arise from borrowing and altering existing drama works.

KEYWORDS

Process drama; additional language learning; Seal Wife; Cecily O'Neill, pretext, role, reflection

Introduction

Drama education is once more facing banishment from the classroom as international trends of high stakes testing and STEM march on (Lambert et al. 2015). Throughout its history, drama has fought for its status as a subject of intrinsic value (Luton 2015). Beneath Hornbrook's (1998) critique of the process drama work of Heathcote, Bolton and their colleagues was an implication that drama practises not easily quantified and assessed were without value.

Unsurprisingly drama educators continue somewhat to validate the merit of their subject, by how it enhances the teaching of something else or corresponds with a valued competency. Creativity (Lehtonen et al. 2016), Interpersonal skills (Dickinson, Mawdsley, and Hanlon-Smith 2016), Literacy (Baldwin and Fleming 2003) and Inquiry learning (Wilhelm and Edmiston 1998) are just a few of the aspects taught through or enhanced by drama. Undoubtedly excellent drama work is occurring and there is a growing body of research, which supports the value of drama as a pedagogical tool (Anderson and Dunn 2013; Cziboly 2015; Kao and O'Neill 1998; O'Toole 2009). A tension however remains.

Floating beneath this article lurk the following questions: How do we negotiate between the instrumental use of drama and the legitimacy of its pedagogy? Are we so busy defending or advocating for drama that we neglect to critically interrogate our own drama practise? What are the precise conditions required for meaningful drama praxis and how do we ensure them? This discussion of the repurposing of *The Seal Wife* in two language-learning contexts,

offers a provocation to practitioners to consider our own drama praxis when adapting an existing drama work.

The Seal Wife

The Seal Wife began with my doctoral work, which explores the potential relationship between the philosophies of critical pedagogy and process drama. Created by influential process drama pioneer Cecily O'Neill (Neelands 2008) and illustrative of a number of the techniques of process drama (Taylor 1995), *The Seal Wife* was an obvious choice for the document analysis phase of my study. Having immersed myself in anything related to O'Neill's *The Seal Wife*, I was immediately struck by its durability, its popularity and its application in a wide range of contexts.

Puzzled by the selection of *The Seal Wife* drama to teach in an Additional Language (AL) context, this article arose from my questions about successful drama praxis and is buoyed by a critical approach. It features the work of two practitioners who relied heavily upon O'Neill's *The Seal Wife* for AL learning. Gary Carkin (2010a, 2010b) who employed *The Seal Wife* to teach English as a second language in the US and Renee Marschke (2004) who researched its potential for teaching high school French in Australia.

Rationale

My focus for this discussion is how these two AL drama examples altered or adhered to some key elements of *The Seal Wife* and the subsequent implications of those decisions. Taking a critical approach (Kincheloe 2003) this discussion focuses upon the use of key components of process drama; pretext, teacher in role (TIR), curriculum, aesthetics and reflection (Taylor 1995; Taylor and Warner 2006). As a document analysis this discussion relies entirely upon the accounts of these two dramas as produced by the facilitators. Readily available online these dramas have the potential to significantly influence future practice from novice practitioners. In an effort to enhance my understanding excerpts of both AL dramas were explored in practical workshops.

The Seal Wife drama

Created by internationally renowned drama specialist Cecily O'Neill in the mid 1990s, *The Seal Wife* is widely considered an exemplar of process drama (Dunn 2016; O'Connor 2013; O'Neill 1995; Taylor 1995; Wong 2015). Based upon a well-known workshop given by O'Neill in Australia during the mid 1990s it created some controversy regarding its capacity to reinforce patriarchal views, marginalise and oppress women (Dunn 1996; Fletcher 1995; Neelands 1996; O'Mara 1996; Taylor 1995, 2000). *The Seal Wife* planning explicitly describes the sequencing and selection of drama conventions and theories beneath them (Dunn 2016; Fletcher 1995; Muir 1993; O'Neill 1994, 1995; Taylor 1995, 2000).

An Irish folk tale concerning a mythical half-human, half-seal sea creature known as a Selkie, offers the initial pretext. Captured some years earlier, a young female Selkie recovers her sealskin and returns to sea, leaving her husband and children behind. Although O'Neill suggests the story is centrally concerned with the repression of a true identity, it has clear resonances with themes of motherhood, abandonment, loss, love and family (Dunn 1996; Fletcher 1995; O'Neill 1995).

Published over twenty years ago, *The Seal Wife* has since been employed and modified to teach a variety of subjects including teenage pregnancy (Ngum 2012), conflict management (Chinyowa 2012) language (Carkin 2010b; Kao, Carkin, and Hsu 2011; Marschke 2004) and naturally process drama (Wong 2015). This article will focus upon its use in an AL learning context.

Drama and language learning

Drama can provide a vital, engaging and novel approach through which to teach and has been enthusiastically seized upon by the ESL (English Second Language) and TESSOL (Teaching English in Schools for Speakers of Other Languages) communities (Kao and O'Neill 1998; Pheasant 2015; Rothwell 2012). Drama offers a physical, engaging and co-operative pedagogy where students work in role, learning holistically through action. Rather than reject the interference of the body, drama recognises its centrality to learning and channels that physical energy. Through the body, a language learner may communicate, well before mastering the words to speak a sentence, feeling or idea aloud.

Drama fosters a virtual environment, which gives meaning to language practice and provides a holistic instruction and learning methodology (Hsu, Shin-Mei, and Carkin 2009; Winston 2013a). Drama engages participants by providing authentic reasons to employ new language and create meaningful learning environments (Rothwell 2012). As Rike (1993, 29 cited in Wilkinson 2000) suggests 'communication and creative thinking are rooted together in the action of make-believe' making drama the perfect vehicle for language learning.

In a drama, participants need to talk, listen, interact and improvise together creating a social relationship of co-operation. Through role they can gain safety in the fiction, take risks and explore other identities. Working in role, students may imagine themselves differently and escape the 'tyranny of identity' (Winston, 2004, 12 cited in Winston 2013b).

Research indicates the benefits of fusing AL with drama pedagogy to motivate learners, increase speaking confidence, improve writing, use language with purpose, enrich means of expression, engage a variety of students, activate learning and foster better relationships (Lai-wa et al. 2011; Stinson and Piazzoli 2013). No wonder Carkin and Marschke were keen! The following section will describe these two AL examples and how they relate to O'Neill's original.

Carkin's Seal Wife

At the time of this work Carkin (2010b), Hsu, Shin-Mei, and Carkin (2009) was Professor of TESOL at Southern New Hampshire University and specialised in teaching English through drama. He launched *EVO Drama!* in 2005, an online community to discuss, share and teach the use of drama techniques in second/foreign language teaching (Carkin et al. 2011; Dilatush 2015). He employed *The Seal Wife* repeatedly in this context and referenced it in several lesson plans, articles and youtube videos (Carkin 2010a).

Planning overview

I will briefly review Carkin's 2010 version of the drama, which until the second day of the workshop, mirrors O'Neill's almost exactly (Taylor 1995). This outline is based upon a series of lesson plans Carkin made available on the EVO blog (Carkin 2010b; O'Neill 1995).

*Day 1**Step One: Launching the Pre-text*

The students read the story after which the teacher asked the group several questions including:

What is Patrick doing? Where is he?

What is seashore?

Where's the woman? Does she have long hair or short?

What did Patrick do?

Step two: Transforming the Pre-Text

In small groups the participants are asked to create a frozen image depicting a moment from the seven years that Patrick and his wife were together. Participants were then asked to consider the feelings of the characters and provide a line of dialogue for each. Finally images were placed into sequence and discussed.

Step three: Becoming a community

During the community gossip activity participants were reminded that, gossip is not necessarily true. They were then asked to think of one line they wanted to share with others and write down all the lines of gossips they heard.

Step four: The Family

The participants were asked to go into role as parents and children and together write a report about what they know of the sea.

Step five: The Private Dream World

The students got into groups and worked on dream scenes for either Patrick, the Seal Wife or the children. Each group performed their dream scene for the others and participants were asked to interpret what they saw.

Step six: Ten years on

Students were asked to flash forward the story 10 years. In this future scene the children ask Patrick what happened to their mother and a short conversation of 6 lines was created. As homework participants were asked to write a letter in character to another member of the family. (Taylor 1995, 17–26, Carlin 2010b; O'Neill 1995, 86–88)

*Day 2**Step seven: Reading the letters*

The teacher collected homework letters, students were then asked to select someone else's letter to read and correct for spelling and sentence structure. These letters were then sent to the Seal Wife as messages in a bottle. Students read these letters aloud and discussed how Patrick now felt.

Step Eight: Patrick's Song

The students talked about Patrick's dreams and his longing for his wife. A student suggested a connection to the song *My Heart Will Go On* by Celine Dion. It was played repeatedly so that students could write down the lyrics and finally sung together by the students along with the music. Students created, performed and then interpreted each others dream sequence about the Seal Wife's disappearance.

Step Nine: Scenes between Connie and his father

Students were split into groups and created a scene between the son and his father using another group's script. This was followed by a discussion. The teacher read the end of the story as written in the book: *The Seal Mother* by Mordecai Gerstein. (Gerstein 1986)

Step Ten: Folk Dance

Students were told it was a 1000 years later and the story had been forgotten except as the stimulus for folk dance. Students were given a piece of music and asked to create and perform a dance. Finally students were given ten minutes for reflection upon the day's experience. (Carkin 2010b)

Discussion

Carkin recognised and valued the ability of drama to 'play and act out natural, creative interactions supported by imagination and intuition' (Way, 1967 cited in Carkin 2007). Suggesting that drama provides an authentic context in which to develop social and linguistic skills. While clearly enthused about process drama Carkin's primary focus was the language objectives as evidence by his assessment tasks (Carkin 2007). His planning indicates a progression towards a pre-determined endpoint and little space is made available for students to reflect inside or outside the drama.

In contrast to the collaborative teacher-student relationship commonly associated with process drama (Aitken 2007; Howell and Heap 2013) the role of teacher throughout is didactic. Carkin appeared to engage with the group in the same register throughout the work and didn't noticeably employ TIR. He explained and directed the action, initiated the drama and provided its conclusion.

Despite the didactic teaching participants were given an opportunity to think creatively, create images and work through character and role within a fictional realm. Imagining and creating images in step 2 based upon the unknown seven years allowed the participants to contribute to the narrative. Writing lines of gossip offered a task, which combined the dual aims of the language practise and belief building. Through these snippets of conversation students actively created and sustained the drama world.

Potentially using a written pretext limited the students' opportunity as ESL to interpret and question, Carkin translated and supplemented the initial pretext so that students could access the drama. Without his intervention, the drama may have stalled, however a balance needs to be negotiated between providing access and dictating meaning (Carkin 2010b). Additionally the co-construction of the initial drama work was perhaps restricted by the participants' inability to interpret and their reliance upon the facilitator.

Later in the workshop, students were asked to correct letters written while working in character for spelling and grammar. Although accurate spelling is essential to language learning its overt inclusion here may have pulled focus and energy away from the drama. This task lacks authenticity within the world of the drama and returned the focus towards curriculum and assessment. Correcting work for language accuracy raises the stakes and counters the potential of drama as a penalty free zone (Heathcote, Johnson, and O'Neill 1984). In this instance the focus upon correctness potentially undermined the artistic and creative space offered by working within a drama frame.

Sending these newly corrected letters in a bottle out to sea for the Seal Wife, shifted the action once more to the fictional realm. This lack of demarcation between the real and

imagined worlds potentially conflated them so that neither felt secure. Students operating in this uncertain realm may have written only what they knew how say correctly, fearful of getting it wrong. This instrumental use of drama failed to maintain the commitment to drama as its own pedagogy. Carkin seemed to lose the sense of the art form and did not as Dunn and Stinson (2011) suggest hold the artistry in one hand and the intended learning in another.

Incorporating the song “My heart will go on” by Celine Dion added multiple affective elements to the drama. It carries not only its emotive lyrics but also the legacy of hyper-romantic film *Titanic* (Cameron 1997). The decision to copy out the lyrics and perform the song reinforced an interpretation of *The Seal Wife* as a romance. Patrick becomes a cause for sympathy and his loss a central concern. Providing an actual storybook ending, *The Seal Mother* by Mordecai Gerstein (Gerstein 1986), communicated a clear delineation of what is considered an appropriate ending to the story, denying potential new endings as imagined by the participants.

Finally, the selection of *The Seal Wife* seems like an unusual choice for a class of tertiary ESL students at an American university who may be separated from their families. *The Seal Wife* drama evokes complex themes around loss, family and identity and the potential for these students to identify with these seems evident. Drawing upon personal experiences and identifying with aspects of characters is often a result of working in role (Gallagher 2000; Kao and O’Neill 1998; Neelands and Goode 1990). Reflecting out of role enables participants to unpack any issues the drama has raised and process feelings. Without this opportunity students in this class were potentially left unsettled by the drama.

Marschke’s Seal Wife

Marschke (2004) an Australian teacher, used her Masters thesis to investigate how process drama could be used to create authentic, communicative situations that are intellectually and affectively engaging in foreign language classrooms. Although Marschke had previous experience with *The Seal Wife* as both a participant and teacher she had no experience of using it to teach languages. Being an early pioneer of process drama for additional language learning she had few examples of practise or research to rely on. In light of this Marschke modified *The Seal Wife* for her Year 9 French class aligning it with the syllabus topic areas of ‘personal and community life’ and engaging in all drama activities in French.

Planning

Describing its themes as universal, Marschke (2004) relocated *The Seal Wife* to Brittany, France and provided a number of resources to build belief and establish the fictional setting of a small French village (Heathcote, Johnson, and O’Neill 1984). She created a sense of community by leading the village in a group yoga class and gave purpose to language tasks through a village poetry competition (Marschke 2004). Students assumed the roles of community members, school students, the family, Patrick, the Seal Wife and seal community. Marschke worked in role as the Mayor, a yoga instructor, class teacher and head of the seal community. Marschke primarily followed O’Neill’s (1995) structure but made a few alterations due to the language requirements and/or limitations of the students (Marschke 2004). The following discussion details only the modifications that Marschke made to O’Neill’s original planning.

Planning steps not listed below match O'Neill's as described in *Pre-text & Storydrama: The Artistry of Cecily O'Neill & David Booth* (Taylor 1995).

Step 3: Building community

Initially Marschke developed a sense of community by holding a yoga class on the beach. Later a community poetry contest asked students/community members to devise a response to the atmospheric poem *Les Sables Mouvant* (The Quicksand) and create a family portrait.

Step 6 Private Dream World

Similar to O'Neill, Marschke invites students to enact the departure of the Seal Wife. Motivation for this enactment is provided by two emotional songs by Lara Fabian; *Tout!* (Everything) and *Je suis malade* (I'm insane/sick). Following this performance, the students are asked to create a poem, song, letter or prayer from the perspective of one of the characters. Operating as a language assessment the objectives were provided by an accompanying task sheet which detailed the assessment of the students' ability to: use a range of language, use appropriate language and demonstrate correct features of oral production (Marschke 2004, Appendix 3). While this activity marks the mid point of O'Neill's drama, Marshke moves to the final activity believing that the language demands of the remaining activities were beyond the probable abilities of the class. Marshke finishes the workshop with the participants in role as the seal community deciding whether to take the Seal Wife back.

Discussion

Marschke states that if the goal of language teaching is to have students 'communicating and interacting with one another on an authentic level' (Marschke 2004, 117) then process drama helps achieve this. Marshke's thesis found that process drama has potential as an effective approach for teaching languages (Marschke 2004, 113). She found her drama approach to language instruction offered more interactive opportunities for students, gained great support from her school and increased the numbers of students taking French (Marschke 2004).

Marschke chose to follow O'Neill's drama in order to privilege the drama components of building belief and creating tension over those of language learning. Despite not following the traditional language development structure of 'easiest to hardest' students completed tasks successfully (Marschke 2004, 51).

Marschke values the use of reflection in general educational practises and for its specific use in process drama. Recognising that a central goal of educational drama is to enable participants to make meaning about human interactions (Wagner 1979). She noted that reflecting upon the experiences within the drama provides a safe distance from which to review and unpack the experience and its emergent meanings (Bolton 1979). She attempted to incorporate both of these types of reflection into her design conceding that this may need to be done in English rather than French.

Although her findings were overwhelmingly positive she recognised the importance of quality drama resources, school support and the skill and artistry of the teacher when employing this approach. Marschke recommended rearranging the physical space of the classroom to better suit the needs of the drama and asserted that teacher praxis was the most significant component to its success. Focusing upon several core elements of a process drama the remainder of this article will address how these elements were addressed by these language-learning examples.

Key elements of process drama within the Seal Wife

Pre-text (sense of using this story)

An effective pretext is simple and efficient, it offers clear implications and accessible intentions for the roles it suggests (O'Neill 1995; Piazzoli 2010). It activates 'the weaving of the text of the drama' and binds participants together through dramatic tension, roles and the anticipation of potential action (O'Neill cited in Taylor 1995, 14).

The pretext offered to these second language learners in *The Seal Wife* is a written story, provided to participants' and/or narrated by the teacher. Unfortunately, as Piazzoli (2010) identifies when the pretext is textual, it can be too technical for emergent second language speakers. A good pretext should stimulate, and captivate participants in a way that extends beyond a language barrier (Piazzoli 2013), but this seems problematic when the pretext is purely text based. Where language obscures meaning from all participants how effective can the pretext be?

The initial Seal Wife story fails to satisfy the requirements of a pretext in both Marschke's (2004) and Carkin's (2010b) teaching examples. It does not immediately launch participants into a task but requires a thorough unpacking of the text. Unpacking, that due to unfamiliar vocabulary relies upon the facilitators and not participants. The deficiency of this pretext in a language-learning context is further evidenced by the decision by both Marschke (2004) and Carkin (2010b) to supplement it. Adding music and images, immediately alters the potential of this drama and contrasts with O'Neill's sparse beginning. It is the teacher and not the students who pose the initial questions (Carkin 2010b). The community yoga session at the start of each lesson would also alter the impact of the pretext considerably. Marschke explains that the yoga and music were used to settle students as they entered the fictional world (2004). As a yoga teacher she maintained her authority and created an atmosphere of ease and compliance. Pretexts are designed to stimulate and build tension, returning each session to equilibrium through some calming yoga could dilute the energy of the drama and negate any tension created.

Teacher in role

TIR whereby the teacher joins in as part of the improvisation is a hallmark of process drama and distinguishes it from other approaches (Kao and O'Neill 1998; Neelands 1984; O'Neill 1995 cited in Lin 2010). The willingness of the teacher to enter and build the fictional world alters the atmosphere, relationships and balance of power in the classroom (Aitken 2007; Balais 2002; Bolton 1984; Kao and O'Neill 1998; O'Neill 1989). Working in role minimises the authoritarian position of the teacher and challenges the barrier created by the dominant status of the teacher (Bowell and Heap 2013). Repositioning the teacher into role alongside the participants can create a more collaborative, playful pedagogical relationship conducive to language acquisition (Piazzoli 2014). As TIR the teacher can invite spontaneous language practice through changes in their register, vocabulary and expression and model desired practise (Kao and O'Neill 1998; O'Toole and Stinson 2013).

TIR is only used briefly in the two examples described and neither teacher strays very far from their existing position of authority. While Marschke entered the drama at several points; as yoga teacher, Mayor and class teacher she remained in a position of authority throughout. Carkin employed TIR only briefly taking on the role of teacher within the drama and there

was little evidence his tone or performance changed. He moved imperceptibly between the world of the fiction and the classroom, diminishing participants' opportunity to co-create by working in a collegial position with him and weakening the legitimacy of the fictional space (O'Neill 1995). Returning students abruptly to the real world negates the potential of drama to offer a penalty free space in which they may take greater risks with their language attempts (Heathcote, Johnson, and O'Neill 1984).

The lack of teacher-in-role, confusion between the fictional and real spaces and reassertion of the facilitator's authority, contradicts many of the underpinning aspects of process drama (Neelands 2008; Taylor and Warner 2006). This breaks the silent agreement between students and teacher, namely that they agree to act together within the fictional realm (Heathcote and Bolton 1995), potentially inhibiting students, restricting them from exploring role, taking risks or authentically making meaning.

Curriculum focus

Language acquisition is the primary focus of these two dramas and consequently both plans contain number of integrated language tasks and assessments. While these fit easily into the procedural flow of *The Seal Wife* their aesthetic or dramatic purpose does not appear to have been thoroughly considered. How do these changes impact upon the original design of the drama in terms of both form and content? While teachers should tailor the drama to their own context (Bowell and Heap 2013), Eisner critiques the instrumental approach to the use of arts in education. While it is a significant challenge to teachers as managers of both curriculum and aesthetics (O'Toole and Stinson 2013) I suggest that the curriculum focus has overwhelmed and obscured other possibilities within the drama.

Marschke attempted to create an authentic need for the language through the drama and incorporated the assessment, as a poetry competition. Although stipulating the composing criteria for the "poem" through the worksheet no doubt directed the students' offerings (Marschke 2004). Reasserting its dominance over the fictional frame, this criterion potentially compromised the poem as a creative and reflective task.

Carkin similarly incorporated his assessment, repurposing the letters written in role as a peer assessment for spelling and sentence construction. Surprising students with this covert piece of assessment breaches the mutual trust and collaborative atmosphere usually associated with process drama (Edmiston 2003).

This tension between curriculum and drama pedagogy raises numerous questions: How does a curriculum-focused process drama ensure students still engage in an aesthetically meaningful creative experience? How can the improvisational philosophies of process drama be negotiated alongside established learning objectives? How can ephemeral ways of knowing be valued when assessment remains paramount?

Reflection

Reflection is deemed essential to successful process drama practice (Bolton 1979, 1984; Edmiston 1993; Heathcote, Johnson, and O'Neill 1984). Reflection provides the cognitive response to the experience of drama through which participants can interpret and make meaning (Bolton 1979; Neelands 1984). If participants are unable to reflect due to time or language constraints, how will they make sense of the experience, gain richer understandings or step back from potentially unsettling emotions?

Reflection was approached quite differently in these two examples; Carkin does not mention any verbal opportunities for students to reflect in role but did ask them to discuss aspects of the drama and write a reflection at the conclusion of each day (Carkin 2010b). There is little indication about the purpose of this reflection and it seems to be more of generic reflection about the learning rather than the themes of the drama.

Marschke (2004) however, gave significant consideration to reflection for both language acquisition and thematic exploration. Marschke stresses the need for reflection as a de-roling strategy and opportunity to manage sensitive issues raised by the drama. Students were given opportunities to reflect on the drama in their own language if necessary.

Yet again, a number of questions arise: how important is reflection to any drama work? if the focus of the lessons is not developing understandings or making meaning does it really matter? and how effective can reflection through discussion be if it is not in the speaker's native language?

Artistic licence or aesthetic manipulation

Finally in both of these examples teachers employed other artistic devices to enhance the process drama work, adding another layer of aesthetic fabric to the pretext. Carkin's decision to extensively rely upon *My Heart Will Go On* added significant associations of romantic love, loss and heartache into the drama. Whilst Marschke notably used the haunting poem *Les Sables Mouvant* and several of Lara Fabian's emotionally charged songs to enhance her version of the drama. Carkin provided the class with an image of thatched English cottage and later a picture book to supplement the pretext. Marschke offered maps, pictures sound effects and shells, buckets and other materials to signify the seaside location.

The meanings explored by the two dramas are therefore a culmination of aesthetic elements. Supplementing the original pretext with these powerful secondary sources emphasised certain themes whilst obscuring others. How does this reconcile with process drama's stated aim to 'give birth to any number of themes' (Taylor 1995)? The teacher holds the balance of power and manipulates the drama through these choices. This is not necessarily a problem however incorporating high levels of aesthetic material into the drama requires a significant level of skill and proficiency (Stinson and Piazzoli 2013).

Final thoughts

Through this article, I have proposed more questions than answers. *The Seal Wife* drama carries with it a great deal of evocative and problematic themes. Problematic themes are deliberately embedded within a pretext and lie under the surface of the drama whether they are excavated or not. There is a real danger that adopting a drama without addressing the potential themes it may provoke runs the risk of dis-satisfying participants through engaging them in an incomplete process drama experience.

Facilitating a process drama is an example of artistic praxis and at the core of that praxis are elements of reflectiveness, self-discovery and wonder (Piazzoli and Kennedy 2014; Taylor and Warner 2006). While both facilitators drew upon arts elements in their dramas' the balance between artistry and curriculum is often lost (Dunn and Stinson 2011; Marschke 2004). The very nature of process drama, its pretexts, drama structures, inventiveness and experiential form allow it to provoke the unknown. The arts allow for 'flexible purposing' in which the learning emerges from the work rather than following objectives (O'Connor 2009).

This article questions the repurposing of process drama and raises awareness for practitioners, of the complexities that lie beneath process drama praxis. It is not an attempt to dissuade practitioners from engaging with existing process dramas but rather to critically question the potential of each drama to work effectively in action. We must question the assumptions rooted within each work and remain clear about the intentions, or potential unintentionations of our practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Claire Coleman is a lecturer in Arts Education at the Faculty of Education, University of Waikato. She began her career in education as a puppeteer in a disability awareness education program and since has taught in a variety of educational settings. Discovering process drama through her studies she went on to gain a Masters in Education at the University of Sydney and is currently completing her doctorate. Which posits that the ambiguities and uncertainties available within the dramatic world provide a playful space within which social constructions of identity and power may be challenged. She is an active member of Drama New Zealand, the IDIERI conference committee and non-profit disability support organization, StarJam. She is deeply passionate about education and the potential for drama as both an aesthetic artform and an effective pedagogy.

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