

Persona Writing as Performing Language

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This is a preliminary investigation into: 1) how the student takes on the perspective of someone from another culture by employing the persona writing and 2) how they use foreign language to express themselves under the persona.

One of the interesting features of performing drama is allowing students to take on a persona and gain a different perspective. Additionally, the persona which they adopt demands a word choice beyond the language of their everyday life (Wagner, 2002). Performing drama, however, is not the only means available to engage them to do so. Persona writing (Pugh, 1997) is one activity which encourages students to have multiple perspectives. In this activity, students are encouraged to choose characters from stories that they find very different from themselves. Then students write a narrative, a dramatic monologue, a mock journal entry or a letter from the perspective of that character, exploring an alternative or conflicting viewpoint. Pugh explains the persona writing, stating “consciously projecting oneself into perspectives and experiences quite different from one’s own enhances both empathy and critical thinking.” Students step into the target culture through a character from the material that they have chosen, and create a new perspective, using a “persona.” In addition, the word “persona” would alleviate students’ anxiety about relinquishing their identity, while they integrate another’s views.

In this research, six US college students, who study Japanese language as a foreign language, engage in persona writing after they watch Japanese drama. The participants took Japanese language courses at a university setting for more than four semesters. After they read the scenario of the drama as their homework assignment, they watch the drama together in the classroom setting. They discuss the main points in order to clarify their understanding of the content. Then, they choose one character from the drama and, from the perspective of that character, write two of the following text styles: narrative, monologue, mock journal entry or letter, one style is in English and the other is in Japanese. Data examine both intercultural and linguistics aspects. The findings contribute to understanding how students adopt a culturally different perspective as well as how to manage the foreign language to express their feelings and emotions.