

WORKSHOP

Interactive Drama Workshop to Share Ideas for DIESL (drama in the ESL, or any foreign language pedagogy)

Cam Culham

This interactive workshop presents the research findings of actor/teacher Cameron Culham; it is a sharing of tried and tested activities that he has successfully used over the span of his twenty year career in EAL (English as an Additional Language) instruction in Canada and France. Cam developed the workshop over a six year Graduate Studies period with his mentor, Professor Juliana Saxton, at the University of Victoria, Canada. He holds a Masters in Arts in the field of Drama in Education (currently renamed Applied Theatre).

DIESL (Drama in ESL) suggests that ESL teachers can, through drama activities, access their students in significant ways, enabling them to learn about each other as well as promote language proficiency and enhance intercultural awareness in the classroom. The workshop will examine how theatrical conventions such as gesture, physicality, displays of emotion, spatial shifts, breath control, design and overall improvisation can be introduced to an L2 classroom to achieve significant sharing and learning.

Though drama and story have most certainly been at the core of language acquisition since the dawn of time, their import within EAL literature has only recently begun to receive the focus they are due. These past ten years have seen increasing research and publications on the topic.

A discussion that might follow this workshop could examine how EAL pedagogical institutions might better offer theatre training to EAL teachers, thereby allowing them to implement DIESL in their teaching. Along these lines, Cam has taught these techniques to visiting international language teachers within the Department of Continuing Studies. He has had opportunities to share his findings at the international level, such as in Hong Kong at IDEA 2007, Pinar, Cuba (2009), IDEA 2010 Brazil and most recently at IDIERI in Limerick, Ireland. He published his work in *Body and Language*, a book investigating new methodologies in second language production as well as Drama Contact journal, and with a previous IAPL online publication.

“Language acquisition,” O’Neill and Kao (in their pivotal 1998 book *Words into Worlds*) explain, “arises from the urge to do things with words, and this need becomes paramount in process drama, when participants are required to manipulate the dramatic circumstances to achieve their own goals” (p. 4).

This use of drama in an intercultural second language setting acts as a helpful vehicle to encourage student involvement, creativity and the exploration of new avenues for self-expression, through movement and imagination, but a word of caution: language production is one of the workshop’s outcomes and yet, paradoxically, language is not an explicit part of many of the activities! As such, it is particularly relevant and accessible to a conference with participants from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds. When it was conducted at IDEA 2010 in Brazil, participants with developmental disabilities interacted with those who are able, and participants from one country connected clearly and profoundly with ones from another country where an entirely different language might be spoken. Barriers were overcome and connections made. In fact, Cam has over recent years adapted these techniques to foster communication in Victoria School Board classes for special needs children, allowing their diversity to be expressed with fun and humour.