

The Power of Authentic Theater Performance to Activate, Appropriate, and Acculturate Foreign Language (focus on English) Learning

Lynda (Llyn) Margaret Scott

(Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan)

Foreign language theater praxis in the College of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Fu Jen Catholic University from 1966-2006, provides a paradigm of the power of theater in language education. Authentic theater produces transformative language education through (1) thoughtful selections of challenging dramatic literature either in the original or translated English language, (2) access to standard-equipped stage facilities, (3) leadership by specialized teacher-directors, (4) six to eight weeks of rehearsals, (5) enrichment from theater courses, and (6) recognition by departmental budgets.

Since transformation is imbedded in theater arts, stage performance is an asset to departments of foreign language and literature aiming to prepare students to cross a growing number of linguistic and other borders. This paper will present an overview with sample videos of how the performance of a straight play or musical meets this goal by activating a student's desire for fluency and cultural insight through three means: (1) sense of ownership of the acquired language and behavior; (2) sense of belonging to a highly-functional and elite group, and (3) his/her sense of acceptance, appreciation, and authority from the director-teacher. The ultimate transformative power of theater depends on the comprehensive professional and personal coaching from a teacher-director within an educationally and aesthetically oriented rehearsal and performance environment. A satisfying performance signals that the student successfully appropriated the foreign language physically, intellectually, emotionally, and technically as well as expanded his/her appreciation of foreign culture(s) with his/her newly-gained revelations about the human condition and human relationships acculturated both onstage and backstage.