

Drama as an Additional Language : Creating community, confidence, and comfort

George Belliveau, Amanda Wager, Graham Lea

The three distinct, yet interrelated, sessions in this panel respectively explore ways in which an after-school drama program fostered community building and learning for a group of English language learners. Fifty students from kindergarten through seventh grade participated in a three-month after-school drama program led by student-teachers from the University of British Columbia (UBC). Approximately 40% of the elementary students and 33% of the UBC student-teachers as well as one of the original members of the research team were identified as English language learners. In the one-hour drama program, held weekly from January to March 2008, elementary students participated in a wide variety of drama activities. Gathered data for this research project includes student-teacher journals, elementary student journals, parent feedback, photos, videos, and researcher field notes. The presenters of this panel have developed a research-based theatre piece that sought recurring themes and significant findings. Current literature in research-based theatre (Mienczakowski & Moore (2008); Rossiter et al, 2008; Saldaña, 2005) and drama & second language learning (Dodson, 2002; Dougill, 1987; Bournot-Trites et al, 2007; Wagner, 1998) will be shared to contextualize and analyze the performance-based presentation. The three sessions briefly described below aim to shed light on the learning and felt experience of the English language learners during the three-month after-school drama program.

Setting the scene: Contextualizing the study (Amanda Wager)

The first paper begins by contextualizing and describing the after-school drama program. The presenter explores key topics that emerged during the data analysis: community dynamics, process and product, negotiation and conflict, and multi-age groups. She then critically looks at ways in which the drama program fostered, and at times hampered, the building of community, confidence, and comfort with the English language learner participants. The final portion of this paper investigates the origins and developments of research-based theatre in education, particularly through the work of leading scholar-practitioners such as Goldstein (2001), Mienczakowski & Moore (2008), Norris (2000), and Saldaña (2005).

Playing the data: Performed research (George Belliveau, Graham Lea, Amanda Wager)

The second piece, a performance, dramatizes key moments gleaned from the research data. The research-based play, performed by the presenters, focuses on moments of learning and community building which occurred during the after-school drama program. In particular, this performed research play illuminates the complexities, benefits, and challenges of using drama to communicate in another language and culture for the English language learners.

The curtain call: But what does this all mean? (Graham Lea)

The third paper begins by analyzing artistic, methodological, and ethical considerations encountered by the researchers as they dramatized and presented their research-based performance in the second session (Gallagher, 2007; Sinding et al., 2008). Further reflections are considered about key issues such as space, time, and leadership that took place during the after-school drama program. Returning to some of the questions addressed during the first paper, the presenter concludes by sharing perspectives, implications, and suggestions for research-based theatre as a methodology for exploring additional language acquisition.