

Process Drama : A Social Project through Research, Performance and Empathy

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This paper attempts to explore the benefits and drawbacks of using a process drama-based project to develop communicative competencies of Japanese in the case of one particular Japanese university classroom. Usually, the average Japanese first year learner of English in the university class has had much exposure to accuracy-based, teacher-led and examination-focused English learning at junior and senior high school levels. Therefore, most learners are heavily dependant on using a textbook being recipients of language study and the very thought of producing meaningful communication without a set structure is daunting to most. In contrast to this top-down system of education, experts in the process drama field such as O'Neill & Kao(1998) and Howell & Heap (2001) define process-drama as a dramatic world that is created by the teacher and the students in which social issues can be explored on the affective level, but can also incorporate objective understanding through active research. The process drama project of this paper takes place over a period of ten classes, spanning from November 2008 until January 2009. Students are in the second semester of the elective English Communication course in the newly created Faculty of Human Welfare Studies at Kwansei Gakuin University. One aim of the project firstly is to allow the students explore social issues relevant to their core studies in a responsible and objective way. Because these students are all first year students in a new faculty, the theme of the first project is based on the difficulties of asking for help and the consequences of internalizing emotion. The other aim of the project is to use the process drama as an exploratory tool, in which issues such as empowerment, complicity and conformity can be explored in a psychologically safe environment. The context of the project is the announcement of a suicide of a school intercom in the classroom of the victim and the bully. For the opening and closing frames, the family of the suicide victim take a bully to court whose defense will include that even the most incapacitated can and should ask for help. The findings and conclusions of the project will be discussed at a later date.