

# Guest lecturer sessions as springboards for creativity

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Guest lecturer sessions are typically construed as passive and non-creative for learners. In this study, however, three guest lecturers from divergent immigrant backgrounds were invited to share their experiences with Japanese university students ( $n=22$ ). These sessions aimed to build the students' confidence during the question and answer (Q&A) section of the lectures by moving from prepared questions to more spontaneous ones. These guest lecturer sessions were part of a bigger process drama project which centered on issues of emigration and homelessness. It was hoped the guest lecturer sessions would provide a forum to lead students to better understand of the experts' specialized knowledge. This paper also incorporates the impressions of the guest lecturers themselves regarding student interest in their presentations.

ゲスト講師のセッションは、学習者にとっては受動的で非創造的である、と解釈されることが多い。しかし本研究では様々な移民の背景を持つ講師が3名招かれ、日本人大学生 ( $N=22$ ) とその経験を分かち合った。ゲスト講師のセッションは、あらかじめ用意した質問からより自発的な質問をしていくことにより、その内容についての質疑応答をする際、自信を持って臨めるようになることを目的としている。ゲスト講師によるセッションは、移民とホームレスの問題をめぐるプロセス・ドラマに関するプロジェクトの一部として行われた。ゲスト講師のセッションで学生が専門的な知識をより理解する討論の場を提供することを狙った。本論文はゲスト講師が自分自身のプレゼンテーションに対する学生の興味に関しての印象も扱っている。

**W**ITHIN A Japanese university EFL context, the concept of a lively and dynamic question and answer (Q&A) session can be difficult to imagine. There are factors, such as listener-responsibility in the Japanese communicative style, to be taken into account, as well as culture and generational gaps that exist between non-Japanese English teachers and Japanese university students. In light of these issues, this study investigates whether, with appropriate preparation and repetition, students developed sufficient confidence to ask rehearsed and spontaneous questions during guest lectures.

The main aim of these guest lecturer sessions was to move students away from rehearsed questions to more meaningful and spontaneous ones during the questions and answers (Q&A) part of the sessions. These guest lecturer sessions were an integral part of a larger process drama project, and the aim was for students to use the real-life experiences of the speakers to create imaginary worlds in order to engage with their thematic experiences both affectively and integratively.



This paper can be divided into five main parts, the first of which explains the origins of and rationale for developing a process drama project in this particular teaching situation and the reasons behind the inclusion of guest lecturer sessions into this larger framework. The second part describes the teaching context, while the third part outlines the procedure for the guest lecturer sessions. The final two sections describe the results from the perspectives of the guest lecturers themselves, the students and the teacher, and finally the last part presents the conclusions drawn from this project.

## Framework: Process drama and guest lecturer sessions

### *Process drama theory*

Process drama can be described as drama that occurs without a formal audience; instead the participants are also the audience. Process drama practitioners and theorists Howell and Heap (2001) describe it as “the genre in which performance to an external audience is absent but presentation to the internal audience is essential” (p. 7). Therefore teacher and the students produce and engage with the drama to develop meaning, relying on improvisation and reflection for a deepening understanding of the topic. The aims of process drama in the second language classroom are, Kao and O’Neill (1998) argue, “to increase the fluency and confidence of students’ speech, to create authentic communicative contexts, and to generate new classroom relationships” (p. 15). Activities can be individual (for reflection and writing-in-role), paired, in small groups, or in a class group for role-plays and research.

Thus, process drama can be seen as a way to make the unknown known. It evolved from the 1960s British drama-in-education (DIE) movement, predominantly through the pioneering work of Dorothy Heathcote, who described DIE to Wagner

(1976) as “a conscious employment of the elements of drama to educate—to literally bring out what children already know but don’t know they know...quality education as opposed to quantity education” (p. 8). However, initially the possibilities envisaged for DIE were quite limited in scope and focused mostly on primary school pupils for whom English was a first language. The evolution of process drama, by contrast, has remained flexible subsequently evolved within the inter-disciplinary fields of theater-arts, cultural studies, and language acquisition. Within the latter, Kao and O’Neill (1998) state that the key characteristic of process drama is to “include active identification with and the exploration of fictional roles and situations of the group” (p. 12).

### *From theory to praxis*

Although O’Neill initially followed Heathcote (1984) into the field of primary school education, she and Kao realized that although a process drama approach is increasingly familiar to educators in first language settings, it is still new to many second language teachers (Kao and O’Neill, 1998). While many SLA textbooks rely on a one-dimensional and/or mono-centric sense of language and its acquisition, classroom process drama stipulates:

1. Language is not only a cognitive activity, but also an intensely social and personal endeavor;
2. Both students and teachers must be prepared to take risks and take alternatives with a functioning speech community.
3. The teacher can no longer presume to dominate the learning and should be prepared to function in a variety of ways, including taking on a role within the drama. (Kao and O’Neill, 1998)

However, Kao and O’Neill (1998) found that “while language teachers accept in principle that drama activities can help them



achieve their goals, a disappointingly large number seem to restrict their efforts to the simplest and least motivating and enriching approaches, such as asking students to recite prepared scripts for role-play” (p. 6). They favored instead a more interactive three-step approach of preparation, dramatic scenes (role-plays), and reflection (writing-in-role) (Kao and O’Neill, 1998), which will be discussed further below. This act of reflection was in keeping with the thoughts of Heathcote (1984), who stated that, with respect to the creation of meaningful experiences, “without the power of reflection we have very little. It is reflection that permits the storing of knowledge, the recalling of power of feeling, and memory of past feelings” (p. 97). Concurrently, within the L1 drama classroom, Bowell and Heap (2001) continued to develop and expand on Heathcote’s (1984) theories, viewing classroom endeavors as part of a process rather than aiming for a final performance-driven product.

### ***Guest lecturer sessions***

In an informal context, inviting international exchange students to EFL class can provide opportunities for dynamic and meaningful exchange, as Kobayashi (2007) found at Seikei University. However, when it comes to the more formal notion of a guest lecturer session, the exchange tends to be more one-way, the quintessential teacher-led class. From 2004 to 2007, while employed at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the many advantages of using guest lecturers at the advanced level of a content-based course. However, despite having prepared for the lecture in advance, the pervading silence that accompanied the question and answer (Q&A) session was perplexing. There seemed to be anecdotal evidence that this was to be expected within the Japanese cultural context. The question that stayed with me as I began to further research Japanese cultural norms was whether it was possible for Japanese university-level students to tempo-

rarily step out of cultural norms in the pursuit of meaningful information.

### **Teaching context**

The students who participated in this project belonged to the School of Human Welfare Studies (HWS), Kwansei Gakuin University (KGU). There were two compulsory 90-minute courses of reading and expression respectively and the option of a double 90-minute elective classes of English Communication offered each week for two consecutive years. This English Communication course aimed to help students develop communicative competence through cross-cultural studies, emphasizing speaking and listening skills including presentation, debate, and negotiation. A feature of the course was encouragement of autonomous learning and facilitated opportunities for meaningful, authentic language exchanges. All three courses were streamed interdepartmentally, based on the results of the placement test for first year classes and then re-streamed based on first year final grades cross-referenced with an end of first year proficiency test.

### **Students**

All students (n=22) came from various regions of Japan and most had some overseas experience, although for only a few days or weeks. The average TOEIC score was 530 and they were classified as lower in general English ability. Within the entire group, however, there was a considerable range of English ability levels, from non-functional to proficient and so process drama, by the nature of its inclusiveness, seemed an ideal way to cater to the multiple needs of the students. As English was inter-departmental within HWS, students were able to meet and mix with other students within the faculty but from other departmental groups. Initially, the students tended to stay within



the departmental group, but through random grouping, were assigned to work with a more mixed group. This meant that students had to form cohesive bonds quickly within the group, despite not knowing the other students.

Within the average Japanese university EFL classroom, many students, after six years of English education, are unaware of their current knowledge, so one aim of the process drama project was for students to explore their pre-existing knowledge, gain confidence to apply it creatively, consciously seek out more information, and assimilate new and old information into a growing sense of ownership. Therefore, it was hoped that the insights of the guest lecturers allowed the students to gain first-hand information about emigration and homelessness, which they could incorporate into the larger process drama project.

### Topic choices

The establishment of HWS at KGU in 2008 was unique in its commitment to multi-cultural and multi-ethnic coexistence. Because the three departments within HWS were preparing students to be in positions of social responsibility and because it was prevalent in the media in 2008, I chose the social issue of bullying as the theme for the pilot process drama project, which was held during the second semester, and is described in Donnery (2010). With respect to this paper, the subsequent two themes of emigration and homelessness were chosen by the students in a secret ballot for the third and fourth semesters. It left to the teacher to find a suitable framework to highlight these social issues, yet have a definite point of identification for the students. Therefore the social issue of emigration became a research project into the passengers aboard the first passenger ship from Kobe to Sao Paulo in 1908, while the issue of homelessness examined the personal circumstances of Japanese-Americans interned during WWII. The contents of the guest lecturer sessions were in accordance with these two themes.

### Guest speakers

The first speaker (A) was a professor from Germany whose field of expertise included intercultural communication. A non-native speaker of English, he had taken the trouble to prepare his lecture on intercultural communication in a clear and methodical manner.

The second speaker (B) was an African-American minority and therefore was in a position to talk about minority identity and emigration issues both in America and Japan. Because the second speaker was a native English-speaking instructor of English from the Language Center located in the same building as HWS and thus more visible to students than the first guest speaker, most of the students knew his face, if not his name.

The third guest speaker (C) was an Afghanistan-born refugee to England and immigrant to Japan. His introductory video clip provoked much speculation among the students as to his personal journey.

### Procedure 1: Process drama project and the three-step approach

For the purpose of the pilot project of bullying and the two projects about emigration and homelessness, aspects from both Bowell and Heap's (2001) six-step model provided the macro-outline to form the basis for the project (see Table 1 below). In tandem, the micro-organization of Kao and O'Neill's (1998) three-step approach was also adapted for use in the HWS context.

After the students gave their preferred social issue for the upcoming semester, the teacher sought to find a historical link to Japan within the issues of emigration and homelessness. As the dramatic frame for the emigration project, the goal was to understand the feelings and emotions of emigrants aboard the



first passenger ship from Kobe to Sao Paulo in 1908. Then, as the dramatic frame for the issue of homelessness, the aim was to understand life through the eyes of Japanese Americans interned during WWII. The aim of the two projects was to understand the emotional and everyday events within the lives of Japanese people caught up in historical circumstances. The framework was further broken down into theme, context, role, frame, sign, and strategies, as outlined in Table 1.

The emigration process drama project ran from Week 6 to 14, meeting twice weekly for a total of twenty classes during the spring semester of 2009. The first guest lecturer session was held during the fourth class of this semester, with the preceding and following classes designated for preparation and debriefing. The second session was held in the twelfth class with the preceding

and following classes once again designated for preparation and debriefing.

In contrast to the first and second sessions, the final guest lecturer session was scheduled towards the end of the fall semester of 2009, the fourteenth class of a sixteen class process drama project.

### ***Dramatic scene: Role-play***

There are many different approaches to role-play, which Kao and O'Neill (1998, p. 16) identify as closed communication, from scripted role-play to more open communication in process drama. To move away from the idea of a scripted role-play and into more learner-centered process drama, it was necessary to

**Table 1. Design of process drama project**

The Six-Step Howell & Heap (2001) Approach	Semester 1*	Semester 2	Semester 3
1. Theme	<i>Bullying</i>	Emigration/ Immigration	Homelessness
2. Context	<i>Student Council</i>	Japanese passengers on the Kasato Maru	Japanese-American Internment Camps
3. Roles	<i>Bully, victim, relatives, friends and Members of Student Council</i>	Family Members, farmers	Family Members, doctors, lawyers, sisters, brothers, parents, grandparents
4. Frame	<i>Human Rights</i>	Human Rights	Human Rights
5. Sign	<i>Letter from victim to Japanese government Long coat</i>	Posters	Posters
6. Strategies	<i>Tableau, group role-plays, writing-in-role, class role-play</i>	Video-clips, guest lecturer sessions, Tableau, group role-plays, writing-in-role, class role-play	Video-clips, guest lecturer sessions, Tableau, group role-plays, writing-in-role, class role-play

\*See Donnery (2010) for more details of the Bullying Process Drama Project



scaffold student participation. Initially, students were assigned to random groups and asked to create a family and decide on each person's role within that family group. Students maintained these roles for duration of the project.

During the course of the semester students stepped in and out of these assigned roles; seeking greater knowledge through secondary internet research then having group discussion before performing their family-situations for the other members of the class. There were also class role-plays in which the teacher was in role as a recruitment agent for the Brazilian emigration authorities and a police officer during the evacuation of Japanese-Americans.

### **Reflection: Writing-in-role**

Many features of the Japanese educational system have startling similarities to process drama and one of them lies in the concept of *hansei*. Rohlen and LeTendre (1998) argue that the Japanese teacher, "by focusing on errors as useful data for reflection (*hansei*)...distances herself from the role of judge or arbitrator...Teachers and children are united in a search" (p. 155). In an analogous vein, in process drama the teacher refrains from giving overt directions in favor of asking questions to allow the students to reflect on the subject matter and their role within it. Therefore, writing-in-role provided a forum in which the students could reflect on their feelings, masked by the character-in-role about the situations they had faced in the role-play.

### **Procedure 2: Guest lecturer sessions**

The guest lecturer sessions occurred within the process drama project, with the function of the guest lecturer sessions to provide students with specialist knowledge to affectively engage the themes and to serve as a catalyst for creative expression. The main purpose of the guest lecturer sessions, however, was to allow the students to ask questions about the issues of immi-

gration and homelessness from experts. It was hoped students would move away from rehearsed questions and create more spontaneous and relevant ones and that their desire to learn would overcome feelings of shyness or language anxiety.

### **Class 1: Preparation**

Each of the guest lecturers was asked to make a brief introduction of their educational backgrounds and professional research which was digitally recorded. Students were invited to watch the video twice and then share information with their group. Then the recording was shown for the third and final time. Students were asked to make three questions they would like to ask the guest speaker and to post them, as a homework assignment, to a private class Google Group. To prevent overlap and to encourage students to work quickly, they had to check they were the first person to create each question.

### **Class 2: The guest lecturer session**

Each lecturer prepared a 10-15 minute presentation supported by a power point slide show. Afterwards there was a 10-minute Q&A session between the students and each speaker. All three sessions were digitally recorded.

### **Post-session**

Students were invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire about the sessions where they could write freely and directly about their reactions to the speakers and the content. In addition, the experiences of the speakers were taken into the realm of the process drama project as primary data for research into the lives of students' role characters. The guest lecturers were also asked to write up their analysis of the session, especially with respect the Q&A session.





## Results and discussion

### Google group questions versus Q&A

Both the teacher and the guest speaker knew when students asked prepared questions and when the asked spontaneous questions. In the first session 100% of the questions were from those posted in the Google group before the session, and thus the questions had little to do with the content of the lecture. That said, Speaker A commented:

The Q&A session went well. Usually, students at KGU have the tendency to refrain from asking questions, but this time, the situation was different. Many questions were asked (even though most of the students had to be called on to do so), some of them were good questions. Especially the questions the students had prepared beforehand went well. However, when they were asked to pose questions on the contents of my lecture, the contents of which they had not been told in advance, the atmosphere became quieter, and the students had to be urged to ask questions.

During the second session students seemed to be more relaxed when asking rehearsed questions and a few tried new questions. Speaker B commented:

In the Q&A segment, some of the students asked questions. It took some encouragement at the beginning from the instructor, but eventually students began to ask questions one after another. Though most of the questions appeared to have been prepared before the actual lecture, I was quite pleased to be presented with the initial and follow-up questions.

For the third session, student confidence seemed to soar and all but one question pertained to the content of the lecture,

rather than centering around prepared questions from the Google group. Also, the length of the Q&A session was the same as the lecture length, over 25 minutes. This successful session is reflected in Speaker C's comments.

Speaker C: The questions didn't seem to be the ones they had rehearsed prior to the lecture. They seemed spontaneous and naturally following the exchanges in the class, just like a conversation. Of course they were hesitant at the start as to who should ask the first questions, but once they got going, it turned out to be a meaningful exchange.

## Conclusions

The inclusion of guest lecturer sessions as part of the larger process drama project seems to have encouraged a growing sense of creativity on the part of the students as they moved from rehearsed questions to more spontaneous ones. This study reported a pilot study for linking theories into practice by providing students with role-plays and opportunities to write in-role as post-activities after guest speakers' presentations. The results indicate the students could use what they learned during the guest speaker sessions as catalysts for role-plays and writing-in-role. There is a wealth of further research studies necessary to draw any concrete conclusions but, within the context of process drama projects, the guest speaker sessions provided students with insight and knowledge into the subject areas and allowed students to gravitate from prepared questions to spontaneously created ones. The entire three-semester process drama is the subject of a doctoral dissertation scheduled for completion in late 2011.

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