

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

THE POWER OF USING DRAMA IN THE TEACHING OF SECOND LANGUAGES: SOME RECOLLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT. In this paper, the author discusses the use of drama to engage students to become more interested and involved in French-as-a-Second-Language (FSL) courses. He has drawn from over 30 years of experience with the use of drama in the classroom to formulate both the theoretical and practical uses of this approach to increase motivation and achievement in FSL classes. Throughout the article, the author uses examples of his students' drama experiences to support his ideas.

RÉSUMÉ. Dans cet article, l'auteur analyse l'emploi de l'art dramatique pour inciter les élèves à s'intéresser et à participer davantage à des cours de français langue seconde. L'auteur tire les leçons de plus de 30 années d'expérience dans l'utilisation de l'art dramatique en classe pour formuler à la fois les avantages théoriques et pratiques de cette démarche en vue d'accroître la motivation et les résultats dans les cours de FLS. Dans tout l'article, l'auteur cite des exemples des expériences d'art dramatique de ses élèves à l'appui de ses idées.

The purpose of this article is to attest to the motivational power of using drama in teaching for arousing and maintaining interest, for stimulating learning, and for evoking feelings of worth, both for the students and for the teacher, in second-language programs. I am not a dramatist, nor a student of drama in education; but, in order to testify to my belief in the value of incorporating drama in education, I present specific examples from my own career, and I refer to the research literature that confirms this practise.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE

If one views drama as being a distinct mode of understanding that communicates and is communicated by the representation or imitation of human behavior (Cranston, 1990; Nixon, 1982); and if one further accepts that, since ancient times, it has been based on play and games

(Colborne, 1988; Courtney, 1991), then it is logical to assume that it can have a vital part to play in all education (Courtney, 1991; King, 1993).

The dramatic process, as it is applied in schools – whether conducted in a spontaneous, creative form of improvisation (Heinig, 1993), or structured in a formal, rehearsed theatrical play – has been consistently shown to produce several benefits in both first- and second-language (L2) programs. Drama activity 1) engages the imagination, 2) enriches creativity and cognition, 3) enhances communication skills, 4) improves cooperative skills and social development, 5) develops interpretation skills, 6) promotes affective development, 7) increases self-discipline and concentration, 8) improves conceptualization, problem-solving, and group cohesion, 9) promotes self-reliance and independence, and 10) is appealing and entertaining both to participants and audiences (Heathcote & Bolton, 1995; Jackson, 1993; Poisson, 1994; Swartz, 1995).

Based on her research and experience, McCaslin (1987) believes that: “Of all the arts, drama is the most inclusive, for it involves the participant mentally, emotionally, physically, verbally, and socially. . . .” (p. 1). Moreover, my own teaching experiences, especially those pertaining to L2 acquisition, endorse her belief that to deny drama activities to students is to rob them of some of life’s most enriching and humanizing and aesthetic experiences (McCaslin, 1987). I found that participants engaged their entire personalities in a holistic process of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor components as they achieved two basic goals: the personal aspect (their own interpretation) and the universal aspect (sharing common human experiences with others) (Colborne, 1988).

In this report I restrict “drama” to mean a theatrical art form (i.e., a play or skit) in which student performers seek to communicate and interact with an audience for an educational purpose. This dramatic activity involves the participants’ physical, emotional, and intellectual identification with a simulated situation (Colborne & Ramsden, 1997).

SOME PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

A major reason for my incorporation of a variety of drama activities in my teaching was to motivate my students to learn, particularly early in my career as a teacher of Core French-as-a-second language (FSL) (Ralph, 1987, 1989). At that time I was teaching French as a compulsory subject at the middle years, and the junior high and senior high school levels. Because I found several of the students in my classes did

not want to learn conversational French, but were forced to be there, I desperately looked for ways to increase student motivation and reduce negative student attitudes toward the course. After serious searching (via my work in a graduate program in education, professional meetings and workshops, and conversations and exchanges with fellow teachers), I planned, created, implemented, assessed (and modified) several strategies and projects over the years, in which students engaged in a variety of dramatic activities to practice and perform their language skills.

I have selected a few of these experiences (ones that my former students and their parents, and my former staff colleagues have confirmed) were highly motivating for all involved. I describe them briefly, not necessarily with the intention of providing models or suggestions for second-language teachers to adopt, but rather to provide a historical reflection upon specific activities that stimulated the teaching-learning process in my own career (see Ralph, 1994).

Short activities

One effective approach was to capitalize on learners' basic psychosocial needs for recognition, approval, and acceptance, by having them in pairs or small groups prepare and present to the class some short skits, as early in the term as possible, using the L2 structures presented in class. Over the years I have witnessed L2 students in small groups from my junior high compulsory French classes present a variety of simple dramas, such as: "The family picnic," "Drama at home-plate," "Jacques and Jacqueline at the movies," and "A foiled bank-robbery."

In one instance in the late 60s, a seventh-grade group of four beginning FSL male students used their elementary French, but complete with props and genuine emotion, to act out a rather touching episode of the break-up of a Vietnamese family due to the invasion of enemy forces during the then-escalating Vietnamese war. Their level of French was passable, but the communication of their feelings and "drama sense" was extraordinary! Because of the positive reinforcement and emotional support that they received from their peers during this experience, I noted a substantial reduction in previous negative attitudes toward the L2 course among the four members. This was an example of how negative predispositions may be modified, not by concentrating on "attitude-change" per se, but by having students engage in cognitive tasks in which they indirectly or unknowingly begin to adopt the thinking and behavior that characterizes the desired attitude. Through this public role-modeling and vocalizing of the very elements that were

contrary to students' initial negative attitudes, subtle improvements occur in their own outlook.

Another valuable learning activity that I have used after students have learned to ask and answer basic conversational questions in the target language (of the Who? What? When? Where? and How? variety) was to provide pairs of students with visual materials (e.g., an overhead transparency, a photograph, a slide, a poster, a painting, a chart, a scene from a book, a cartoon, or a scene from a periodical or calendar), with instructions to prepare within five minutes a question-answer dialogue about the events or scenes depicted in the materials and to present the dialogue orally to the class. One class was asked to present these "visual-dialogues" at the school's annual "open-house" evening for the parents. The students were motivated to demonstrate their L2 skills, the parents were impressed, the school administrators were pleased, and the teacher experienced a warm glow of satisfaction as a result of it all!

A third short activity that incorporated some elements of drama in one FSL class at the eighth-grade level was an invitation for students to create and present their own sound-track for a short 16-mm film. An appropriate film I used for this project was *La Course* (The Ride), a ten-minute humorous episode of an aristocratic business-executive, his chauffeur, and the chauffeur's dream of taking his boss on a wild drive through a Canadian winterscape. The film, available through the National Film Board of Canada or from certain public and educational resource-centers, contains a fast-paced musical score and a host of comical encounters and events as the pair take their journey. It has no dialogue or sound effects.

For this project, two male students volunteered to create a simple French dialogue for the characters, and to spice-up the sound-track with added sound effects, such as the sound of a toboggan swishing downhill, the noises of the car, slamming doors, and a snorting bear. For their class presentation, the boys used a "microphone-over" technique to produce the entire sound-track, live, during the actual screening of the film. Their classmates and teacher were genuinely impressed with their technical skills, and the boys experienced an enhancement of their self-esteem because of their contribution and its recognition. They also continued to display a positive attitude toward the French course throughout the remainder of the school year.

A fourth illustration of how some of my colleagues and I added an element of drama to our teaching repertoire at the university level was

our attempt to incorporate "the motivation of performance" in a senior-level course for both preservice and practicing teachers, entitled "Instructional Technology in Teaching." (I have found this activity effective in a variety of subject-matter contexts.) In order to help eliminate the rather negative reputation that had arisen about the course being "only a workshop to show you how to thread a projector, and to make transparencies," the course instructors re-designed the program to include more student presentations and performances to be given in the class in order to enliven the learning experiences. One of the revised assignments was to assign groups of three or four students to create and videotape a one-minute TV commercial (Ralph, 1994). It was to be designed for the purpose of attracting other university students to enroll in a course (real or imagined). Armed with these instructions, a camcorder, and a time-frame of 90 minutes, each group created and filmed their unique "ad." Students who were surveyed after this activity were unanimous in their positive appraisal of its motivational value, and several of them expressed a desire to use a similar activity, later, during their extended-practicum teaching experiences or in their own teaching positions.

An example of one of these commercials, which consisted of a simple narration but a high-impact visual message, sought to persuade viewers to enroll in a "new" literature course at the university. Filmed outside on a cold and snowy Canadian winter day, the commercial began with the narrator, bundled in coat, scarf, and mitts, inviting viewers to enroll in the literature course because: "This class explores . . . romance." (The camera then panned away from the speaker to show a young man and woman in winter garb running towards each other along a snowy sidewalk arms outstretched. They met and embraced.) Then the narrator reappeared saying: "This course also has . . . drama!" (The camera panned to a similar running scene, but this time as the two students met, the woman administered two quick karate chops to the male, sending him sprawling into a nearby snowbank.) Then, the narrator appeared for the third time, advising: "And this course offers . . . humor." (A third running scene appeared, but this time the couple kept running past each other, with arms outstretched). Finally, in the last scene the narrator asserted: "We know you will want to sign up, immediately, for Literature 101!"

I have discovered that when L2 (and other) students of any age experience the impact of designing, producing, viewing, and appraising their

own drama projects, as in this example, both interest in and appeal of the course invariably increase.

In arranging for students to engage in these various drama experiences that incorporate the motivational process of preparing and performing a theatrical piece for an audience, I consistently found that, regardless of the stage of development of the participants, my observations were congruent with those of McCaslin (1987), who concluded: "Students work best when challenged, and tire or become bored when too quickly satisfied."

Longer dramatic activities

In addition to the shorter drama experiences just described, I was also able to supplement some of my courses with opportunities for students to engage in motivating activities of a more comprehensive nature.

One example of a longer motivating project incorporating dramatic elements that I employed with two different English classes (one in grade four and the other in grade eight) was a take-off on The Lawrence Welk Show that was popular on television during the 1960s and 1970s. Using several prerecorded musical and comical selections by other artists that the actors lip-synched (including Stan Freeberg's recorded rendition of "Wunnerful, Wunnerful", and a variety of popular songs from the 50s), each of the classes created a stage presentation of a humorous interpretation of the Lawrence Welk Show, complete with bubbles and the bubble machine, special guest stars, and the accordion-master, himself. Because the entire sound-track for the presentation was prerecorded by each class on audio-tape, the student-actors not only had to memorize their lines, their songs, and their actions and movements, but they had to execute them all, including appropriate gestures, expressions, and "presence", with split-second timing. Once the audio-tape began, the show went on!

Although the students expended considerable time and effort in producing the scenes; rehearsing them; preparing their own costumes, props, lighting, and scenery; and changing scenes during the short intermissions, I found that, in both cases, the group cohesion, the motivation to succeed, and the "esprit de corps" never waned. I also witnessed what McCaslin (1987) reported from her rich background in educational drama: that ". . . group discipline occurs, like an athletic team, willing to suspend their individual desires for the sake of the group's goal . . ." (p.1).

As a the teacher, I was present initially to "light the fuse"; but after that, the necessary momentum, enthusiasm, ingenuity, and drive emerged from the students themselves. I then acted as facilitator and occasionally as guide to promote **their** enterprise.

A second example of a longer dramatic activity was the creation by one junior high French class of a slide-tape presentation entitled "Un jour typique dans la vie d'un étudiant" ("A typical day in the life of a student"). The story followed Jacques, a grade nine FSL student, from the time he awoke in the morning, having breakfast, going to school, attending classes, visiting with friends, attending football practice, and walking home. (All through these activities, Jacques was preoccupied with his girl-friend, Jacqueline!) The presentation concluded with his telephone invitation to Jacqueline to accompany him to the local burger emporium for an evening snack, after homework. The surprise occurred when Jacques found that he forgot his wallet, and Jacqueline had to pay for the meal.

Although I assisted the group in preparing the 35-mm slides that were all shot "on location", the students created much of the story-line, the French dialogue, the sound effects, and the music background for the story. Key results of this project were that: (1) student motivation increased toward learning French, (2) the whole-class morale was enhanced, and (3) group creativity and cooperation developed.

A third project that injected the appeal and stimulating aspects of the performing arts into my teaching at the post-secondary level was one class's creation and presentation of a festive skit that they entitled, "The Insight Before Christmas". The group, consisting of eight adult students from a private college, developed the idea of having a TV "news-interviewer" on a snowy, city corner the week prior to Christmas asking passers-by and shoppers what they believed to be the meaning of Christmas. Each interviewee's response emerged musically, in the form of the actor lip-synching one or two lines of a prerecorded Christmas song or carol amplified through the auditorium's sound-system.

The adult students took the initiative and created the story-line details, dialogues, songs, and sound effects; and they designed all costumes, props, scenery, lighting, and staging. For instance, one of the scenes opened with reduced lighting, the sound of whining wind, and the interviewer bundled up in winter clothing, with microphone in hand, stopping a child on the street, with: "Pardon me, little girl. We are from

T.4-2-TV, and are asking a few shoppers, tonight, what they think of Christmas. What do you want Santa to bring you?"

One of the college students dressed as a small girl responded to this question by lip-synching and moving energetically to the words from the Christmas song, "All I want for Christmas are my two front teeth," while pointing to the black gap in her teeth. Other scenes were similarly presented. After the performance, the president of the college publicly congratulated these students for their entertaining production, advising them: "You should get this thing published for the benefit of others who are always searching for good ideas for Christmas programs!"

Again, my role was one of technical assistance, support, and encouragement. The students exemplified more than enough creativity and zest to carry out the production. One or two of them have personally shared with me since then, that their experience "with the Christmas skit" that year is one of their most vivid and pleasant memories of their time at the college.

A fourth example of the incorporation of longer dramatic productions developed and presented by several FSL classes during my teaching career with middle years and junior high-school aged students was a series of humorous longer plays that appealed especially to adolescents and children. These plays formed the annual class "assemblies" that were produced and performed by each teacher's home room for the other classes in the school and the parents. Because, in my case, I was the "French teacher" on staff, these assemblies had to reflect that subject. Rather than demonstrating how we conjugated verbs or learned oral structures in L2, we decided to inject interest, relevance, and humor into these productions. The students eagerly participated.

The plots and scripts for each play were generated and modified collaboratively by the students and me; moreover, all of these plays shared five commonalities. The first was that the plots were simple, humorous, and traditional, in that there was rising action, comedy, a climax, and a resolution of conflict. It was felt that these features would appeal not only to the younger classes in the audience, but also to the staff and to the parent visitors from the community. The second characteristic was that, once the plot had been established, the complete sound-track for the entire production was again to be pre-recorded by the students. On this audio-tape were recorded all students' lines (bilingual speech and song), sound effects, musical background, narration, pauses, and musical interludes (for scene changes). This tape was produced just as the

final, formal performance would sound, and it included the precise sequencing and pacing of all the audio parts of the play. This sound-track then served as the "guide" or "director" of all subsequent rehearsals and performances.

In response to the argument that this idea would reduce the student-actors to "mindless mannequins and marionettes mechanically mouth-ing mandatory, mediated melodramas and melodies," I found, on the contrary, that the audio-track technique proved invaluable in several ways. First, through its use, I was able to convince many students to "play a part," who would not normally have participated in any type of public performance because of fear (e.g., stagefright, fear of forgetting or flubbing lines, or particular anxiety about mispronouncing the French parts). Knowing that their vocal part was already "there, on the tape" diminished the apprehension among these students.

Second, the sound-track compensated for any potential fluctuation or deterioration in voice quality, projection, and volume, which is often typical of inexperienced, self-conscious actors presenting a single live, public performance in a large auditorium full of students, staff, and relatives. In other words, the audio-tape helped me as the teacher to maximize student participation in the drama, while also providing stability and quality of students' vocal performances. Third, the pre-recorded audio component permitted us to include a mix of realistic and emotion-stirring sounds and music to enhance the impact of the plays, both for the audience and the performers.

Fourth, the use of the sound-track especially allowed first-time performers, some of whom started with "zero confidence" in their dramatic and their L2 abilities, to develop their acting skills because of having the security of the "safety-net" of the tape. These individuals were thus able to concentrate less on their voice quality and more on their stage movements, timing, gestures and expressions, while simultaneously using exaggerated "lip synchronization" for their lines (both for their own prerecorded voices or for their "mouthing" of lyrics from pretaped songs). The key advantage in all of this audio preparation was that both the rehearsals and the live performances were "directed" by the influence and certainty of the flow of the sound-track – consistent, repeat-able, and unflustered.

A third general characteristic of all of these "bilingual plays" was that several of the actors' "lip-sync" sequences included selected lyrics of certain popular songs or television or radio commercials of the day,

which were inserted surreptitiously into actors' lines to create extra humor. However, current copyright laws, today, are more complex, and users of copyrighted audio materials for school activities (e.g., playback of prerecorded music or recorded segments of television and radio programs or commercials placed in school performances) are obligated to check with, and gain permission from, appropriate agencies with respect to the laws governing copyrighted material in their jurisdictions.

A fourth commonality of these school assemblies was the incorporation of student ingenuity to help create and modify the plots. Ideas emerged from the imaginations of class members with respect to story-line, characters, acting, staging, scenery, props, make-up, costuming, sound, and lighting. **Every** member of each group was involved in some aspect of the production, and this involvement served to intensify group loyalty, class pride, and overall motivation. I as the teacher discovered that the entire process and product of the experience not only helped reduce negative attitudes among certain students towards Core French, but that the use of this drama-process seemed somehow gradually to enhance my own educational credibility and reputation among my students, as well as with the rest of the school. I realized that the work involved to initiate and maintain the assembly-project each year paid dividends, both short- and long-term. Benefits were accrued for my (and other) students (past, present, and future), for their parents, and for myself, in that my interaction with students in producing and presenting these bilingual dramas became some of the most rewarding work in my teaching career.

A fifth common feature of the plays, closely allied to the above attribute, was that I attempted to incorporate the specific talents, strengths, and interests of each student, and to publicly and genuinely recognize, formally or informally, all of their contributions. Although some students had definite performance capabilities, whose talents were utilized accordingly, others relished fulfilling other production duties.

One eighth grade student, for instance, who was at first negatively disposed toward Core French, specifically, and learning, generally, but who had a keen interest in electronics, was asked to take charge of the audio-visual work for his class's "French Assembly". He not only expertly carried out more than his share of the technical responsibilities of directing the production's sound and lighting, but he also later consented to play the part of "Mother Hubbard" in the play (a significant character, but with a minor speaking role). His acting ability,

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although unknown previously, emerged to the surprise of everyone, including himself! A few weeks after the formal performance, he was overheard in the school hallway telling another student, "You know, French isn't really that bad . . . my average has gone up on this report card. . . ." This was one example of how the use of drama in my teaching field positively affected student attitude and behavior.

A brief description of five of these bilingual plays is presented below.

1. **AN AIR PROBLEM: HIJACKING.** This production was originally created in the early 70s (during a time of international concern about air hijacking) by a seventh grade class under my guidance. The "show" consisted of the audience being told that "the TV crew" who was stationed with fake cameras and microphones on tables at the front of the school auditorium was filming the "made for TV drama" that was about to be performed "live" on stage. The audience was to witness "the filming" of a play about an air hijacking. Furthermore, they were instructed that, near the end of the play, the stage curtains would be closed in order to give the audience an opportunity to guess the ending of the play. At that time, they would also be helped with their decision, when the host of the show would briefly interview several famous personalities (e.g., Colonel Harlan Sanders, founder of Kentucky's famous fried chicken restaurants; a renown scientist and inventor; and two French fashion designers) in order to hear their ideas on how the play would end.

To start, the curtains opened to reveal the inside of an airliner full of passengers and crew. The suspense slowly built from the first scene as the flight attendant served beverages and food to a variety of passengers, while a "mysterious little old man" made his way slowly to the cockpit, where he would attempt to divert the flight to Montreal. Then, after the curtains were closed, and the interviews with the famous people had been completed, the action on the plane resumed; and we found that the passengers, themselves, on Flight 13 prevented the hijacking by subduing the terrorist.

Again the students created all scenery, costumes, props, lighting, and staging effects; and they put concerted effort into coordinating the theatrics to make the drama realistic. They used both French and English dialogue, in order for younger students in the audience (who at that time had not yet taken French) to comprehend the plot.

2. **THE DUPLICATING MACHINE.** In this play, Louis Quatorze, a French-speaking Chicago-style gangster and his group of mobsters, stole the professor's famous duplicating machine that reproduces whatever is placed into it.

Louis also kidnapped the professor's children, one of whom secretly tipped off the police inspector, who managed to find Louis' hideout in an inner-city, abandoned warehouse. However, Louis captured the inspector, but accidentally pushed him into the duplicating machine that quickly reproduced several other police inspectors, who emerged and captured Louis and his henchmen.

An outstanding feature of this production was how the grade eight class meticulously coordinated lights, sound effects, music, scenery, twenties-style costumes (men's Fedoras, white ties and dark suits, violin cases and machine guns, and Charleston music and dancing) and French and English dialogue to create an authentic atmosphere for the play. A highlight for them was their invitation to present it later for several other French classes from other schools in the city.

3. THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UNCOORDINATED. An eighth grade class created this play with a classic Western theme, in which a gang of thieves terrorized the town, and where the incompetent sheriff could never quite manage to capture them. Tension increased as we learned that the "big boss," the mastermind of the outlaws, was actually one of the town's citizens; but no one knew who it was. It was not until the last scene, that the audience discovers that the ringleader was "grand'mere", the "sweet little old lady" whom no one suspected. However, she escaped at the last minute (and many think she is still at large, today, still directing organized crime!).

As the guide in this effort, again I provided the students with initial suggestions and served as the technical resource-person. Local radio station personalities in our city dubbed for us the musical selections that we requested for our lip-synch sequences; and the local libraries supplied us with several sound-effects recordings that provided the necessary realism for the background ambiance.

Again, my experience in working with the students in these dramatized events coincides with that identified by McCaslin (1987) in her research:

There is probably nothing that binds a group together more closely than the production of a play, and no joy more lasting than the memory of a play in which all the contributions of all the participants have developed so well that each has had a share in its success. (p. 250)

4. THE LAD WHO WANTED TO BE A MOUNTIE. Another eighth grade French class's play in the mid-seventies, was one which followed Charles (a boy who always desired to become a member of the R.C.M.P.), from his early homelife, through his school-days, to his entrance and graduation from

the RCMP Academy in Regina, to his first posting as a constable in Canada's North. A subtheme that emerged, particularly in the final scene, was his affinity for Michelle, his childhood sweetheart. This play, although having zany twists and turns, like the other bilingual dramas, was one which also evoked a more serious feeling.

A key element in this piece was the fact that the father of one of the students was at that time a member of the RCMP and lent his son his official red-serge uniform for our production (although it is officially illegal to do so). As was the case for the other major productions, these classmates demonstrated keen cooperation, cohesion, and intense group loyalty in fine-tuning the minute details to perform this play. The song "Seasons in the Sun" (which, incidentally, holds the world record for the highest number of single recordings of a musical performance ever sold), was popular during the production of this particular drama, and was thus incorporated in the final scene of the play to render a memorable ending.

5. **FRANKENSTEIN AND THE FRACTURED FAIRIE-TALES.** This bilingual drama was also initially created and performed by another eighth grade French class during the mid-70s for their annual assembly. Like the previously described plays, it incorporated several then-contemporary songs, and TV commercials; plus, it used the theme songs of several current TV drama and detective shows. There were "cameo appearances" by TV and film heroes famous at the time such as: Low Plains Shifter, The Lone Stranger, Gaine, and Kookie Monster. The plot of this play was: Red, the Riding Hood, steals the robot-monster, Franky, from the scientist's lab, and proceeds to destroy Mother Goose's Fairie-Tale Land. Miss Hood takes Franky to the locale of each nursery rhyme and programs him to interfere in each one of the tales. Meanwhile, hot on their trail, the professor and his assistant, Igor, enlist the help of several highly esteemed law enforcers of the era to recapture the monster and Red. Then, at Cindermellow's all-night hop, she and her godfather and his gangsters, together with the TV heroes, have a showdown to gain back Franky. To the strains of the 50s song, "The Monster Mash", the conflict is finally resolved, and justice triumphs . . . or does it?

This play was the longest and most detailed of the FSL dramas performed; but, as was the case for the earlier pieces, the students showed exceptional patience, collaboration, and sensitivity in combining all of the elements of developing bilingual dialogue, music, sounds-lighting-staging; creating scenery-props-costumes; and in memorizing and lip-synching their appropriate French and English lines and musical lyrics.

They, too, were later invited to present their production for other schools in the city.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Attempting to describe in print what Poisson (1994, p. 3) portrays as the magic and marvel of theatre, in which “. . . being part of a production company can have a positive and lasting effect on a young person’s life. . . .”, does not do justice to the powerful impact such dramatization experiences have on all who are involved with them.

I assert that these drama activities that I was able to incorporate into my teaching repertoire, primarily in FSL programs, proved to be among the most effective instructional approaches I have had the opportunity to use. Three key reasons supporting this assertion are derived from the theoretical and research literature related to drama in education, and which I have repeatedly validated in over 30 years of my own teaching practice. The first reason was that these theatrical experiences definitely increased the students’ motivation to learn. By empowering them to become meaningfully involved in both creating and publicly presenting plays and skits that were relevant and humorous to them, learners’ interest in the entire second-language program was stimulated.

A second reason for the effectiveness of these drama activities was that each individual’s self-esteem and the group’s sense of camaraderie and coherence were mutually enhanced. Invariably, I found that participants’ feeling of personal belonging and worth increased because of each one’s essential and unique contribution to the welfare of the class’s drama production. Hence, I witnessed that the well-documented strengths of the cooperative learning process (see, for example, Freiberg & Driscoll, 1996; Good & Brophy, 1994) became evident (even before current writers articulated them), namely: (1) improvement in student achievement in subsequent second-language acquisition, (2) development of group loyalty and social and communication skills, and (3) reduction of student negative attitude toward the L2 program (see, for example, Ralph, 1987).

A third source of support that I identified for the use of drama in my teaching practice, and which has been consistently substantiated in the theoretical and research literature, was the motivational aspect for me as a teacher. Because of the students’ success and the consequent satisfaction and acknowledgment expressed both by the students’ par-

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ents and by school administrators and fellow-teachers, I too experienced the pleasure of having participated in the accomplishment of significant educational goals. I was positively stimulated to continue to pursue the incorporation of drama in my teaching practice. This increase in motivation (for the students and ultimately for me as a FSL teacher) was not only related to the theatrical performances, directly, but it indirectly influenced our view of the subject, itself.

Thus, these experiences press me to concur with Crosscup (1966), who stated over 30 years ago:

The performance, itself, is unimportant. . . It is the process which is important because it shapes the players' sensitivities, their human understanding, their creative potential, and hence, the course of their lives. (p. xi)

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