

Integrating Drama Performance and Debate-Style Speech Performance in English Language Teaching : Paralleled Collaborative Teaching

Masako SASAKI, *Akita University*

Minoru KONO, *Akita University (Emeritus)*

1. Introduction

Sharing the integration of drama performance and debate-style speech performance as part of the EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher education program, the authors shifted their previous collaborative teaching project in 2001 (Kono & Sasaki, 2006) to a more theme-based and independent approach in 2002. In terms of their theme-based approach, both Kono's English Pronunciation Teaching Course and Sasaki's Oral Communication Course were designed to perform culture, focusing on messages from Australian indigenous peoples and multiculturalism. Though more independent, the students' co-curricular activities in each course were finally integrated into one communication performance on the stage, conducted not only as part of the 7th Oral Communication (OC) Festival, but also as part of one of the panels of Dokkyo International Forum entitled "Performing Culture: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Multiculturalism." It was cosponsored by The Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) OC Special Interest Group (SIG) and Dokkyo University, Japan, and held on Sunday, 15 December, 2002. The authors report on their revised collaborative teaching project, which paralleled their activities in their two different courses, jointed by the common theme of multiculturalism. Feedback from the performers and audience is also analyzed in this paper.

2. Theme-Based Approach

In contrast with a drill-based approach with linguistic forms at its centre, a theme-based approach lets students focus on meaning. The students who participated in this 2002 OC project thought about messages from indigenous peoples and multiculturalism and used language to express the messages and convey their opinions relevant to the concept of multiculturalism. According to Wachs (1996), the theme-based method is able to integrate not only all four skills, i.e., listening, speaking, writing, and reading, but also thinking. When students are involved in a theme by developing their thought about it, language learning is likely

to occur with meaning and be student-centred.

3. Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is not so familiar a concept as Japanese people are always concerned with in their daily life, but an essential concept in this modern world. Multiculturalism in Australia is the ideology to manage the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity which was brought by the large-scale immigration (Foster & Stockley, 1988, p.22). Since the concept of multiculturalism functions in the world as well, it is important and necessary to think about it as a global citizen. The students in Sasaki's course had thought about multiculturalism through experiencing a debate-style speech performance on the proposition "Japan should become a multicultural society."

Foster and Stockley (1988) also refer to the Aborigines as the population that makes the issue of race relations much more complex because the Aborigines are not part of the post-war immigrants but indigenous peoples who have populated in Australia for around 50,000 years. In Kono's course, the messages from the Aborigines were orally interpreted and led the students to thinking about Australia's multiculturalism with historical viewpoints.

Into a collaborative group performance entitled "Dream for Multiculturalism" were these seemingly independent two courses integrated by the concept of multiculturalism.

4. Aims of the Courses

4.1 Kono's course: Drama part

Kono's 2002 English Pronunciation Teaching Course commenced in October with the aims below.

- 1) Developing students' skills to interpret orally the messages conveyed by written texts and to express them prosodically.
- 2) Developing students' nonverbal expressions in the form of dramatic performance, entailing extra-curricular activities.
- 3) Developing students' pedagogical skills to teach English pronunciation effectively.

4.2 Sasaki's course: Debate-style speech part

Sasaki's 2002 Oral Communication Course also started at the beginning of October and presented the aims below to the students.

- 1) Developing students' speaking skills to express their opinion logically and critically with

reasoning.

- 2) Developing students' skills to deliver their opinions as a form of performance with emotion.
- 3) Developing a cross-sectional teaching of debate with emphasis on logical and critical reasoning and performance with emphasis on emotion.

5. Process of the Courses

5.1 Kono's course: Drama part

Below are the steps taken in Kono's course.

- 1) Read a drama whose topics cover indigenous peoples and multiculturalism. The drama is entitled *Dreamtime*, originally written by Roger Pulvers, an Australian playwright.
- 2) Select the most relevant part as text for performance, and revise it. The revisions were made jointly by the teacher and the students.
- 3) Discuss the text, interpreting it orally. The students' interpretations were compared with the audiotape accompanying the text. Then the students were encouraged to think about the intentions and emotions of the characters, and express them in natural and effective oral interactions by incorporating the information gained from English phonetics, especially the discourse and attitudinal functions of intonation.
- 4) Mark the text prosodically, that is, by using tonetic-stress marks.

*Steps 1 to 4 were conducted as in-curricular activities for all the students enrolled in Kono's course.

- 5) Practice performance prosodically, that is, by using appropriate stresses and intonations.
- 6) Mark the text, paralinguistically, that is, in terms of nonverbal expressions.
- 7) Practice performance prosodically and paralinguistically, that is, by coordinating verbal expressions with nonverbal ones, such as facial expressions, gestures and body movements.
- 8) Evaluate each other's performance.
- 9) Refine dramatic performance based on the evaluation.
- 10) Present the drama as performance in front of audience.

*Steps 5 to 9 were conducted as co-curricular activities, or the combination of the in-curricular activities with the extra-curricular ones for volunteer students.

5.2 Sasaki's course: Debate-style speech part

The following 10 steps were taken in Sasaki's course.

- 1) Read some books and articles about indigenous peoples and multiculturalism and individually investigate problems around them.
- 2) Discuss problems in a group.
- 3) Select several controversial subjects and make propositions for debate.
- 4) Construct their own opinions on the propositions.
- 5) Prepare themselves for counter-argument.
- 6) Practice delivery of their opinions.
- 7) Debate about the propositions.
- 8) Evaluate each other's debating.
- 9) Refine debate as performance based on the evaluation.
- 10) Present the debate as performance in front of audience

Of these 10 steps in the two courses, the 8th and 9th steps, especially, involved the students attending both Kono's and Sasaki's courses in combination with the latter students' speech presentation on multiculturalism, our common interest and topic. The 10th step was their final performance: *Dream for Multiculturalism*.

6. Performance: *Dream for Multiculturalism*

6.1 Participants

Seven students (4 males and 3 females) participated in the first drama performance and five students (all females) in the second debate-style speech performance. Ten out of the total twelve were second-year students.

6.2 Organisation and content

The performance consisted of two parts: drama performance of *Dreamtime* for 25 minutes and debate-style speech performance for 15 minutes; it was about 40-minute performance in total.

A. Drama

The drama performance opened with the video pictures symbolizing messages from Australian indigenous peoples and multiculturalism, projected on the screen behind the performers. Actually, the pictures had been dubbed from several scenes of the opening

attraction of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Sound effects featuring Australia, such as Waltzing Matilda and Botany Bay, were also inserted in the performance.



Drama performers with video pictures symbolizing messages from Australian indigenous peoples on the screen

B. Transition from drama to debate-style speech

In the climax scene of the drama, reference was made to a TV debate programme about the possibility of Japan becoming a multicultural society, which facilitated the transition from the drama performance to the debate style speech performance.

Jun: I heard that from 3 o'clock a TV programme from Japan will be on air and it is a debate about the possibility of Japan becoming a multicultural society. Shall we watch it together?

After Jun suggested that they should watch it, the seven performers in the drama part became audience of the TV debate programme, while five debate-style speech presenters appeared on stage.

C. Debate-style speech

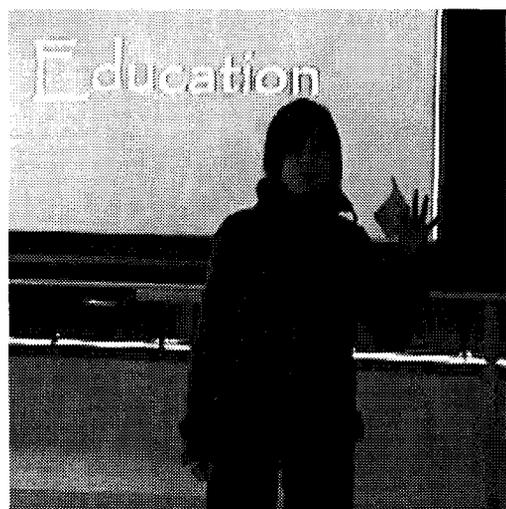
One of the five debate-style speech presenters took a role of chair and explained about three policies in Australia as introduction: cultural identity, social justice, and economic efficiency. Then, she presented the proposition to the audience and four viewpoints from which both the affirmative and negative sides stated their opinions. The proposition was "Japan should become a multicultural society." The viewpoints from which the four presenters (two for each side) argued were education, employment, language, and adaptability.



Opening with chair at the centre and two students for the pro and con side respectively



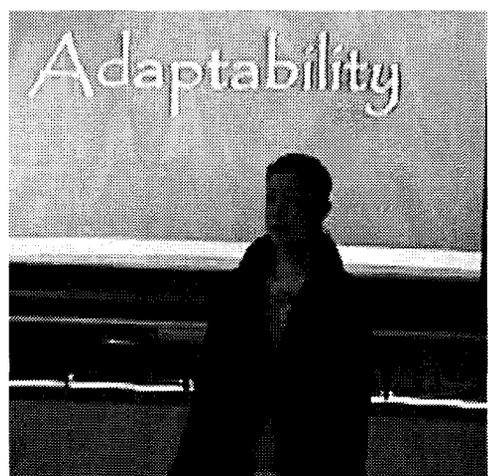
2nd affirmative from the viewpoint of employment



1st negative from the viewpoint of education



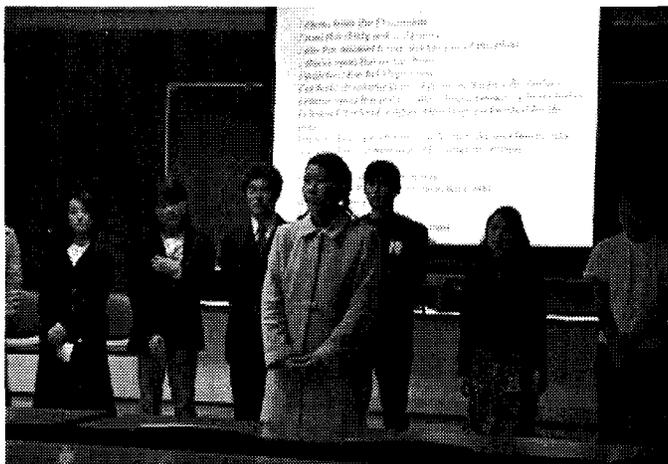
3rd affirmative from the viewpoint of language



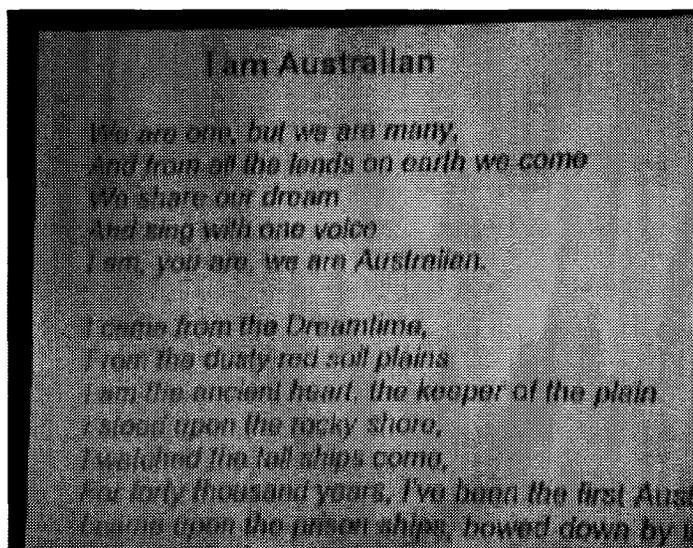
4th negative from the viewpoint of adaptability

D. Joint ending

As the TV debate programme ended, all the performers lined up on stage and Yoshiko took a step forward and wrapped up the whole performance by saying that we should accept differences whether or not Japan will be a multicultural society. “Australia will lead the world as a model country which advocates multiculturalism...” was her final remark.



Last scene of the performance “*Dream for Multiculturalism*”



“I am Australian” is played as background music with its words on the screen.

7. OC Festival Drama Performers’ Self-Evaluation

The seven Akita University drama performers answered the essay questions in late July, 2003, about seven months after their stage performance. Below are the questions and the summary of their answers. The number in each parenthesis shows the number of comments.

1) What did you gain from the practice and performance of the drama in terms of verbal and nonverbal expressions?

- How to convey messages with prominence. (3)
- Difficulty of English pronunciation and nonverbal expressions. (2)
- Joy of verbal and nonverbal expressions. (1)
- History of Australia and its indigenous peoples. (1)

2) What did you gain from the participation in the 2002 Oral Communication Festival?

- Techniques of performing in front of audience, and courage and confidence in doing so. (4)
- Joy of performing in English. (1)
- Inspiration from the wonders of the performances by the students of other universities. (2)

3-1) Has the experience of the practice and performance of the drama influenced you in terms of verbal and/or nonverbal expressions?

Yes: 6

No: 1

3-2) How did it influence you, if you answered Yes in 3-1?

- I learned the importance of clear voice and expressive body movements. (2)
- I found it fun to perform in English. (2)
- I recognized the importance of solidarity through collaborative work. (1)
- I've been trying to acquire native-like English pronunciation. (1)

3-3) Does the influence still keep alive, if you answered Yes in 3-1?

Yes: 6

No: 0

3-4) How, if you answered Yes in 3-3?

- Reliance in peers who worked together. (1)
- Interest in learning spoken English. (2)
- Effective for English interview test in Teacher Employment Exam. (1)
- Likely to work in future teaching profession. (1)
- Likely to work when the need arises. (1)

4-1) Has the experience of the participation in the 2002 Oral Communication Festival

influenced you?

Yes: 7

No: 0

4-2) How did it influence you, if you answered Yes in 4-1?

- I realized the importance of grasping things in broader perspectives, e.g. culture behind language. (2)
- I gained confidence in performing in front of audience. (2)
- I was inspired with the wonders of the performances by the students of other universities. (2)
- I learned to speak clear. (1)

4-3) Does the influence still keep alive, if you answered Yes in 3-1?

Yes: 6

No: 1

4-4) How, if you answered Yes in 4-3?

- Encouraged by those who think and study like us by watching other performances. (1)
- Got interested in literature. (1)
- Effective for English interview test in Teacher Employment Exam. (1)
- Likely to work in future teaching profession. (1)
- I still remember the joy of performing in English. (1)
- Since then, I have received visitors with my clearer voice. (1)

5-1) Did you develop any awareness of and insight into the issues on indigenous peoples and multiculturalism through the experience of the drama performance ?

Yes: 4

No: 3

5-2) What kind of awareness and insight did you develop, if you answered Yes in 5-1?

- My interest in minority and indigenous cultures has been strengthened. I think we should pay more respect to them. (1)
- Now I want to understand multiculturalism more deeply. (1)
- I have come to view others from their standpoints. (1)
- I recognize various ethnicities should respect each other. (1)

6) Write anything you like about the experience of the drama performance.

- I have learned how to perform in front of audience and express myself orally. (1)
- I now understand the significance of body language by learning to use gestures naturally as a communication strategy. (1)
- I believe my immature experience as a performer will work in some way. (1)

8. OC Festival Audience Evaluation

We showed the Akita University performance video to the staff at GU CALL (Griffith University Centre for Applied Linguistics and Languages), Australia, on the occasion of our visit there in early July, 2003. After that, 16 staff there wrote their comments on it freely. Below is the summary of their comments. Again, the number in each parenthesis shows the number of comments.

1) Negative Evaluation

- Poor quality of sound and images (1)

2) Suggestions

- Make sound and images more effective. (4)
- Don't be rigid in stance. (2)

3) Positive Evaluation

- Good use of paralinguistics (5)
- Good oral expressions, esp. prosody (4)
- Broad humanitarian outcome beyond language (4)
- Good effects of sound and images (2)
- Interesting way to make the indigenous culture of another country seem accessible to the students (1)

9. Discussion

- 1) Our shift to a more theme-based approach worked well in the students' motivation and awareness. Besides having them more motivated to acquire English oral skills and nonverbal skills, they got aware of cultural studies as well.
- 2) Some of the students were inspired by the wonders of the performances by the students of other universities. The participation in the OC Festival widened their horizons.
- 3) The students got also aware of the importance of solidarity through collaborative work. They learned the spirit of multiculturalism, not just as knowledge, but through the experience of reliance in peers who worked together.

- 4) Some of the prospective EFL teachers had an idea that their experience as performers will be likely to work in their future teaching profession. Our project could be effective as part of the EFL teacher training curriculum.
- 5) We admit there was much room for improvement in our stage performance, such as the quality of sound and images, and the stance of performers.

10. Conclusion

Our collaborative projects of communication performance integrating drama performance and debate-style speech performance were initially designed to be more skill-based. Our shift to a more theme-based approach in 2002, however, proved to work well in the students' awareness in cultural studies as well. We are now aware that in foreign language education we should adopt more holistic approaches to the linking between skill development and humanistic education. For prospective EFL teachers, especially, their experience as performers will work well in their future profession.

Notes and Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this paper was co-presented at INTERACT 2006, IATEFL/YLsig International Conference in Vienna, Austria, on 25 March 2006. This study was supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A) for 2003 to 2006 from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (research number: 15202013).

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