

Using drama activities to teach beginner's French to Chinese students at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong: An exploratory case study

Zarina Marie Krystle M. Abenoja

The Education University of Hong Kong

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9276-5697>

zabenoja@twc.edu.hk

Matthew DeCoursey

The Education University of Hong Kong

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5250-306X>

matthew@eduhk.hk

Abstract

The exam-oriented education system in Hong Kong has created a language learning environment that is largely confined to traditional classroom settings, which may not take best advantage of students' abilities to relate what they have learnt in class to real-life scenarios. Such learning environments may have implications for the way second language learners learn a new language. Numerous studies suggest that drama activities used in language classrooms can enhance second language learning. These studies put forward tasks that generate pleasant and rewarding experiences, enhance confidence and subsequently increase motivation to learn a language. By focusing on students studying in a beginning French course at a tertiary institution in Hong Kong, this article reports on how drama activities make a target language more enjoyable and easier to recall. Classroom observations and interviews with students ($N = 30$) revealed that learning French via drama had a number of positive effects on second language learners especially in terms of their confidence. The learning of French through drama may provide a language learning environment that enables students to apply their French language skills more effectively in real-life situations.

Keywords: language teaching; drama activities for L2 learning; teaching French

1. Introduction

Traditional foreign language classrooms typically use conventional teaching and learning methods with students sitting at their desks facing towards their teacher who stands at the front of the classroom drilling and repeating textbook exercises (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This paper uses the term *traditional language classroom* to refer to historical methods and approaches to foreign language teaching. One example of a historical method is the grammar-translation method that is discussed by Richards and Rodgers (2014) where the focus of language learning is on memorizing grammar rules, translation of sentences, vocabulary and accuracy. In today's language classrooms there is the presence of more dynamic and collaborative teaching approaches that use less traditional methods and more realistic scenarios (Carless, 2004; Littlewood, 2007). An offshoot to this type of instruction is the use of drama techniques and activities that help students learn the target language (Dalziel, Santucci, & Spedo 2011; Ryan-Scheutz, 2011; Winston, 2012). In the present study, the use of drama activities for learning the French language was investigated via classroom observations and interviews in Hong Kong, whose educational context tends to focus on summative assessment (Davison & Hamp-Lyons, 2009). The characteristics of an exam-driven education system have been researched by Carless (2011), who labeled exam oriented environments *Confucian-heritage cultures* (CHC). In addition, Biggs (1996) has also popularized the term CHC to refer to educational systems or countries within Asian societies that have been influenced by Confucianism such as China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. This suggests that the assessment practices in Hong Kong may be influenced by society and culture (Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008). The debate about whether students' learning behaviors are culture-based has been challenged by Shi (2006), who found that the Chinese culture of English language learning is shifting from a traditional, Confucian one to a modern, individualistic one. The findings from Shi's study also suggest that students' learning strategies and attitudes are subject to change under different educational and social circumstances.

Even though there are some studies on drama-oriented language classes in Hong Kong (Hui, Cheung, Wong & He, 2011; Hui & Lau, 2006; To, Chan, Lam, & Tsang, 2011) to date, there is little research that focuses on learning a third language using drama approaches in Hong Kong. Thus, this study investigates the use of drama activities for learning French as a third language and may provide valuable insights into alternative teaching methods for second or third language learners.

2. Brief background of Hong Kong's educational context

English and Chinese are considered the official written languages in Hong Kong. The official spoken languages are Cantonese, Putonghua and English. However, the mother tongue of the majority of the population is Cantonese, which is the Modern Standard dialect of Chinese. The medium of instruction (Moi) in primary schools is Chinese (excluding some schools such as international schools), and English is learnt as a separate subject. The situation in secondary schools is more complex. They are classified as either English medium of instruction (EMI) or Chinese medium of instruction (CMI). There are also schools that have developed curricula incorporating both modes of instruction. These classifications regarding the Moi were a result of the Hong Kong government guidelines to adopt CMI for secondary school students after the handover in 1997. When schools could decide whether to adopt EMI or CMI, the figures showed 91.7% of the schools in 1990 adopted EMI as the Moi (Lee, 1997, p. 166). According to Kan and Adamson (2010), the government was reluctant to take a strong commitment to force schools to be CMI in order to avoid conflict with various sectors of the community. In 2009, the Hong Kong Education Bureau allowed certain CMI schools to adopt different Moi for certain subjects, groups or according to the needs and abilities of the students and teachers. Furthermore, it was found that parents favored EMI primary and secondary schools because they believed that this would provide better employment opportunities and better education (Poon, 2010). The Moi in tertiary institutions in Hong Kong is English for all subjects except for language subjects such as Chinese, German and French and other subjects that require Chinese instruction such as Chinese medicine.

This study examined Chinese students enrolled in a beginner's French elective course called French I at a Hong Kong tertiary level institution. Thus, the Moi was English and the lessons were conducted predominantly in English and at times in French. The participants ($N = 30$) ranged from first to fourth year students who studied various subjects. Their first language was Chinese, English was their second, and French was their third. The type of pedagogy used by the teacher was of particular interest as drama activities were implemented in the lessons. The area of drama education is discussed in the next section.

3. Drama education

Drama education is not a new phenomenon. In the 1970s, drama educators Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton were known for their dominant methods of learning through doing. Heathcote believed in taking on an actual role in order to manipulate the learning process. Bolton also advocated the process of experiencing

through drama. He emphasized recognizing the magic that occurs when creating something that is not really happening. Together, Heathcote and Bolton inspired new practices of drama education such as acting out, acting in classroom drama, drama behaviors, drama for learning and mantle of the expert. The idea of process drama was pioneered by Heathcote and was originally coined as *drama in education* but is now referred to as *process drama*.

The use of drama has been found in various academic fields such as the social sciences, literature, history, and language arts (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Wagner (1988) is a key figure who conducted research promoting the positive impact that drama experiences have on first language acquisition. Wagner (1988) reported that experiences in drama can improve fluency, articulation, vocabulary and grammar as well as autonomy and motivation. Other renowned scholars that have recognized drama for its pedagogical contributions in learning were O'Toole (1992), O'Neill (1995), Ackroyd (2007), Neelands and Goode (2015), Nicholson (2010) and Anderson (2012). However, the focus of the present study is on one sub-sector of drama education, namely drama and learning a third language.

3.1. Drama and second language learning (L2)

Research regarding the use of drama for second language learning is rather limited but has increasingly become popular. This section provides an overview of the international literature in the area of drama and second language learning. Numerous scholars have examined the concept of drama education for second language learning and have shed light on its advantages in the language classroom. These studies and key findings are briefly summarized below.

What is particularly interesting about drama is that it manipulates the traditional classroom context and creates a new and innovative context for learning. For instance, the teacher may take on a role and act out an interesting character like an animal. Students may take on roles and act like monsters. This in turn changes the dynamics of a typical classroom as the teacher may no longer be seen as an authoritative person but someone who creates a new form of relationship between the teacher and student that is worth investigating. Students are also given the opportunity to communicate with other students (in a second and third language) and consequently learn from one another. According to Snyman and DeKock (1991), drama is the negotiation of meaning in which students are actively interacting with each other. The occurrence of communication between students is a vital process for effective learning in drama as it allows students to clarify new concepts with their peers. This active interaction could be beneficial for students who are learning a second or third language as they are able to check the meanings of particular vocabulary or phrases with their peers during interaction.

Di Pietro's (1987) work focused on facilitating students through role-play scenarios and getting them to resolve problems through interaction within the target language. This field of research was rejuvenated by Kao and O'Neill (1998) in the book *Words into Worlds: Learning a Second Language Through Process Drama*, which discussed the use of process drama in second language teaching. Kao and O'Neill (1998) claimed that drama and language share commonalities in terms of the influence of context on communication, the social nature of language and drama and the importance of active participation.

A case study conducted by Miccoli (2003) explored the use of drama in helping 37 English as a foreign language (EFL) students develop their oral skills. The students prepared a theatrical production and wrote reflective journals in order to document their learning. Findings reveal that students improved in their oral skills and had an increase in confidence to speak the target language. Miccoli (2003) states that drama created a context that was purposeful and meaningful for understanding the cultural and linguistic analysis of characters.

Drama in second language learning has been applied in various contexts and has not been restricted to EFL classrooms. Studies conducted in Canada showed students who dramatized picture book stories in French to French-speaking children generated positive outcomes (Early & Yeung, 2009). Another study collected observational data of university students learning German by rehearsing and performing a German novel. Participants stated they enjoyed drama-based learning and claimed that their language abilities improved (Lauer, 2008).

There is also research documenting the value of drama education and its effects on developing confidence in second language learners and also reducing learner anxiety. A study conducted by Piazzoli (2011) revealed that affective space generated by process drama could benefit language learners in terms of reducing language anxiety. As a result of this, drama had positive effects on the participants' confidence and ability to communicate orally. Overall, the studies suggest that the outcome of drama and second language learning incurs numerous benefits.

Drama has also been applied in task-based learning approaches. A study conducted by Carson (2012) investigated the role of drama in task-based learning and suggested that drama fosters both interactional and situational authenticity of language use. Interactional and situational authenticity refers to learning a language in a more natural way that is closer to how language is used in day-to-day life. She referred to Dougill (1987, pp. 6-8) to help illustrate her point of view: "Drama activities help to bridge the gap between the cozy and controlled world of the classroom and seemingly chaotic composition of language in the world outside." The quote suggests that drama is useful in helping students learn language in a more natural sense as opposed to a traditional rigid structure of learning a language. Her study examined postgraduate students taking an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program, which used

drama in the curriculum. The course followed a task-based learning approach that promoted the use of authentic academic resources during real-life academic tasks, both oral and written. Carson's study suggested that the authentic tasks enabled student interactions not only to improve in their second language learning but also to enhance their perceptions of learning and development of their L2 identities as natural language users. Carson (2012, p. 55) reflected: "Drama seems to be a powerful way of drawing learners into a task unlike other traditional language learning tasks."

A recent study by Galante and Thomson (2017) involved a pretest-posttest design including two groups. One group received a 4-month drama-based English program; the other group received four months of instruction in a traditional communicative EFL classroom. Results showed that the drama group had significantly higher gains in L2 oral fluency than the traditional EFL group. Comprehensibility scores were affected to a lesser extent and differences in accentedness did not change in either group.

It is evident that over the past three decades there has been considerable interest in how drama can be an effective contributor to language learning. However, it is not clear whether the situation is the same in Hong Kong. The next section reviews studies that were conducted in Hong Kong.

3.2. Drama education among L2 learners in Hong Kong

A number of scholars such as Hui have been particularly interested in researching creativity in young children. Hui has conducted several studies where she discusses the impact of drama education in kindergarten and primary schools in Hong Kong. One study (Hui & Lau, 2006) compared language learning in an experimental group, with students who participated in lessons with drama elements, and a control group, with students who participated in extra-curricular activities. The findings revealed that students who participated in drama-infused classes scored significantly higher in creativity than students who participated in unstructured extra-curricular activities. Another study by Hui and colleagues (2011) revealed that students who displayed more creativity and dramatic characteristics performed better in story telling compared to students in a control group, who were less verbal. Furthermore, Hui and Lau (2006) highlighted the psychosocial development of children's generic skills, which was enabled through arts education. These generic skills are recommended by the Curriculum Development Council (CDC), an advisory body responsible for developing teaching syllabuses for primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. Among the nine generic skills, verbal communication, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity are reinforced through arts education. However, it is worth noting that these studies did not mention or reveal in-depth information regarding the students' language skills.

To et al. (2011) documented reflections on a teacher professional development program where process drama approaches were introduced and carried out at 38 Hong Kong primary schools. There were two phases of the program: Phase one was an 18-hour teacher development course to provide teachers with fundamental skills and knowledge on using process drama; phase two was an 18-20-hour on-site support where teachers designed and applied a unit of English process drama. The teachers' reflections and students' experiences were documented. Interviews were conducted with the teachers in order to understand the potential of drama as a form of pedagogy in Hong Kong. To and colleagues stated:

We observed that some teachers who were reluctant to join the programme in the first place demonstrated remarkable changes upon seeing their students' learning in process drama. Their hearts were 'melted' as they noticed their positive responses - from passive to motivated, from silent to lively, from bored to interested, and from regarding learning as impossible to possible. (p. 522)

Teachers perceived process drama as a method of providing authentic learning experiences in which the four language skills were organically integrated. Other benefits reported were that students were motivated, confident in speaking, engaged, more active and that the relationship between teachers and students had improved. Although interviews with the participants yielded positive outcomes, teachers did say that they were concerned about how to continue using drama in their classrooms when they experience challenges in managing large class sizes, crammed curriculums, heavy workloads and diverse language proficiency amongst the students. The study also suggested that further research is needed in order to understand how teachers' perceive drama pedagogy and its implementation in Hong Kong in the long run (To et al., 2011).

Another study conducted in Hong Kong by DeCoursey (2012) recorded the experiences of teacher trainees and their perceptions of using a three-part model implementing aspects of aesthetics, emotion and imagination in their drama lesson plans. Results show that teacher trainees doubted the practicality of drama as an approach to learning as lesson planning was challenging and time-consuming. Despite this, the teacher trainees developed an improved understanding of teaching drama and were able to receive instant feedback from their students regarding the use of drama in the classroom. This implies that the success of implementing drama in the classroom does not solely depend on the effects that it has on the learners but also on how the language teacher facilitates and administers their lessons. Furthermore, cultural differences in learning styles and preferences concerning specific learning activities should also be taken into account.

These studies showed that there was an interest in the use of drama as a method of language learning in Hong Kong. However, there has been little exploration

of using drama for learning a third language. The present study could help to reveal the importance and benefits of using drama activities in the language classroom that have not yet been explored. In addition, there is yet to be extensive research reflecting a framework that incorporates drama and the learning of a third language at the beginner level in an Asian context.

4. Aims and research questions

The present study aims to explore students' learning of French as a third language via drama activities and the questions of whether such activities benefit students' language learning and how they perceive this approach. Based on the literature, there is also a need to establish whether the same or similar positive effects from previous studies occur with L3. The study addresses the following questions:

1. How do drama activities benefit students learning a third language in the language classroom?
2. How do students perceive drama activities as an approach to learning French as a third language?

5. Methodology

5.1. The context

The study examined Chinese students enrolled in a beginner's French elective course at a Hong Kong tertiary institution in 2014. The institution's medium of instruction is English and thus the class was conducted mainly in English and at times in French. The teacher used drama as an approach to teaching French and applied a variety of techniques to help these students learn French effectively. For this study, drama is defined by activities that include role-plays or short dialogues in addition to the more conventional meaning of the word. Activities such as script writing and performing these scripts were also incorporated into the lessons. The teacher's approach to teaching French with such activities was observed throughout the course.

5.2. Participants

The participants were tertiary level students ranging from first to fourth year who majored in various subject areas. The course called French I was an elective, which ran for a semester (13 academic weeks). A total of 30 students were observed in their natural learning environment. Their first language was Chinese (either Cantonese or Mandarin), English was their second, and French was their

third. Most of the students did not have any prior knowledge of French. The teacher conducting the French course, the second author, was also a participant in the study and was interviewed by the first author.

5.3. Data collection and sampling

The period of data collection lasted for a semester from September to December 2014. Data were collected through observations, interviews, student reflection journals and their written assignments. Normal ethical procedures were followed.

Combination or mixed purposeful sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling is also known as purposive sampling (Palys, 2008). This form of sampling allows the researcher to select the times, individuals and settings that can provide the information to answer the proposed research questions.

The first author conducted five student interviews in English after the course was completed. Table 1 shows that four students were from Hong Kong and one student from Mainland China. All the participants who were interviewed were of Chinese descent.

Table 1 Participant profiles

Student initial	Major	Year	Mother tongue	Region	CMI/EMI secondary school
I	Global & environmental studies	Year 3	Putonghua	Mainland China	N/A
J	Social science major in Greater China	Year 4	Cantonese	Hong Kong	CMI
R	Psychology	Year 3	Cantonese	Hong Kong	EMI
S	Music education & performance pedagogy	Year 3	Cantonese	Hong Kong	CMI
W	Greater China studies	Year 4	Cantonese	Hong Kong	EMI & CMI

Note. CMI = Chinese medium of instruction, EMI = English medium of instruction, N/A = the student's secondary school did not specify the medium of instruction.

5.4. Procedure of interviews, lesson observations and student reflective journals

The interviews were conducted one week after the end of the program and lasted approximately 30 minutes. All semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each student and were audio recorded and transcribed. A technique called stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2000) was used in order to gain insight into the teaching and learning occurring in the classroom. In this approach, the researcher transcribes sections of the lesson that include potentially interesting phenomena and then seeks clarification and confirmation with the interviewees. This allows the participant to comment on what is happening in the process of teaching and learning.

The observations of the participants took place in their natural setting, the language classroom. During the observations the first author took written field notes on the behavior and impromptu interactions of the students during each French lesson, which lasted for three hours. The observation notes also included possible follow up questions to be asked during interviews and information related to the development of a phenomenon and its relation to theory. In order to limit disruptiveness, the researcher did not interfere or interact with the students or teacher during the lessons. There were occasional interactions in which the researcher helped students clarify the meaning of French words and instructions given by the teacher, but these interactions were limited. For this study, 13 lesson observations were conducted throughout the whole length of the course (i.e., one semester). Sloan (2007) asserts that data from interviews and observations can complement each other. The benefit of observational data is that the researcher is able to directly see what participants do rather than relying on what they say. The observer's presence in the classroom was not disruptive as there was minimal interference and interaction with the students and teacher during the lessons.

In addition to the lesson observations, students were asked to write reflections after each lesson, and these extracts were kept in individual book journals. Student reflective journals, also known as diary studies, are a popular method of natural inquiry in second language learning research. According to Bailey (1991), diary studies are written by language learners and are records of their language learning experience over a period of time. The students were asked to write their names on the covers of their journals, which were collected at the end of the lesson. Students spent approximately ten minutes reflecting after each lesson and answering two to three different questions (see the appendix) relating to their experience during the lesson. All written reflections were then typed out and analyzed.

5.5. Data analysis

The first author separately coded the data that was collected from the three instruments (i.e., observations, student interviews and journals). The first author also categorized and coded the teacher's practices, pedagogical choices as well as student perceptions of the impact of using drama activities in the lessons. Student reflective journals were further examined to understand their concerns, needs and other perceptions of the course. For example, students' positive or negative reactions were coded. The codes for student interviews and student reflective journals were categorized according to positive and negative responses, as illustrated in Table 2. The codes for observations were categorized according to the type of activity such as role-play.

Table 2 Instruments and codes

Observations	Student interviews	Student reflective journals
Warm up	+Positive	+Positive
Pronunciation drills	Relax	Memorize easily
Drama games	Fun/funnier	Confidence
Role-play/dialogues	Enjoy/enjoyment	
Dictation	Interesting	
Student/student interaction		
Student/teacher interaction	-Negative	-Negative
	Not enough grammar	Boring
	Difficult	

6. Findings

Sections 6.1-6.3 give an overview of the observations, which includes the general format and description of the activities conducted during the lessons. In addition, the findings are further supplemented with concise descriptions from students' reflective journals and interviews relating to the observed incidents described below.

Each lesson included elements of drama in various forms. The most common elements were dialogues and role-plays that formed natural instances of interactions in French as opposed to mechanical drills in traditional language classrooms. The activities presented below are illustrated with short extracts and quotations from students in order to understand how the participants perceived the specific activity observed.

6.1. Warm up

Each lesson began with a physical warm up which was conducted purely in French. Students were instructed to stand up, breathe in and out and relax their neck and shoulder muscles. During the warm up, the teacher instructed the students to repeat out loud in French the body parts that were being stretched. It was observed that the response from students was generally quite positive as they actively responded to the instructions without hesitation. The following are the objectives of the first lesson as an example:

- To introduce a *dramatic warm-up* and associated pronunciation practice.
- To introduce elements of French: *être* – present tense, first, second, third person; pronouns, first, second, third person; negation with *être*; some vocabulary – official functions.
- To begin to *create a dramatic situation*, using nonverbal methods and perhaps some English.
- To use the elements of French learned today in a *dramatically* significant situation.

The majority of these objectives stress the importance of being “dramatic,” which illustrates that the lessons will involve the students being active. The warm up at the beginning of the lesson is described as a “dramatic warm-up.” Warming up before a lesson begins is a common activity before any drama rehearsal or lesson. Drama involves movement, which implies students are active rather than passive learners. In a traditional language classroom, warming up would not be common. A student wrote in her reflective journal: “Firstly, the warm-up activities relax me and make it easy to follow the professor. It is this reason that encourage me to carry on learning French.” The warm ups are also used in drama to help actors perform better. This briefly introduces how drama can benefit students and how it can help them not only in terms of dramatic performance but also in terms of implicitly learning the language. Another student wrote in her reflective journal:

I like the warm-up exercise in the beginning of the class. It cheers me up at 8:30 in the morning. I used to guess the meaning of the instruction in the beginning, but then I think I understood most of them in the last few lessons. It is a nice start of the class.

Here the student stated how she tried to guess the vocabulary as opposed to the teacher repeating and drilling vocabulary. Positive reflections regarding the warm-up exercises at the beginning of the class were evident. Another student further supported this claim in an individual interview and also mentioned the use of role-plays in the lessons:

I enjoyed the strategy that [teacher’s name] used for making the class enjoyable. Due to 8:30 early lesson, it was good to have some exercises for waking up the brain. Also, the role-play makes the class much funnier. “Learning by acting.”

Although there were a number of positive comments about drama, some students gave negative comments, and these are discussed in a later section.

6.2. Classroom layout for interaction

The results gathered from the classroom observations showed that moving the desks and chairs to the sides of the classroom created the opportunity for students to communicate and interact with each other easily. This is opposed to a traditional classroom set up which deploys non-communicative activities such as pronunciation drills.

The second objective in the first lesson was related to introducing elements of French and was implemented in several activities during the first lesson. Some of the activities are described briefly in Table 3.

Table 3 Procedure of Lesson 1

Activity	Teacher	Student
Introduction	Introduces French name and <i>bonjour</i> 'hello'	Attempts to pronounce their English name in French
Warm-up	Instructs via body movements and French <i>levez-vous</i> 'stand up' Stretching of neck and back muscles	Follows teacher
Pronunciation of the French alphabet	Voice repetition Instructs students to pronounce alphabet in French Instructs students to practice pronunciation of French alphabet for homework by listening to the sound file provided online	Repeats after teacher To practice French alphabet for homework
<i>Qui êtes-vous?</i> 'Who are you'	Stresses importance of pronunciation and form	Repeats after teacher
<i>Je suis un/une . . .</i> 'I am a . . .'	Provides masculine and feminine forms with examples	To understand the concept of male and female form by introducing themselves with <i>un/une</i>
<i>Menteur</i> 'liar'	Instructs students to call each other liar Emotion and body language	Walks around classroom and practices calling classmates liar

6.2.1. Traditional classroom layout

Figure 1 shows a common traditional classroom layout where the students are facing the teacher and the classroom projector. Since students are seated facing the teacher, this often dictates who the authoritative figure is and the direction of communication. Metaphorically, the teacher is seen as the performer and the students as the audience. This kind of classroom setting limits the frequency of interaction between students and their teacher as there seems to be an expectation that the teacher should be the speaker and that the students should be the listeners. The first three activities (i.e., introduction, warm-up and the pronunciation of the French alphabet) were conducted with the classroom layout shown in Figure 1.

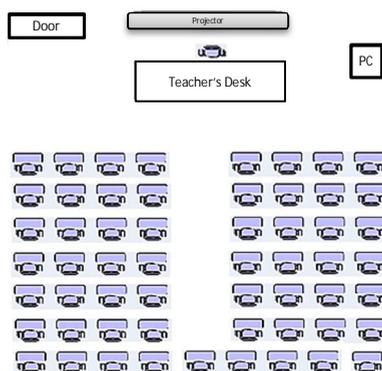


Figure 1 Classroom layout

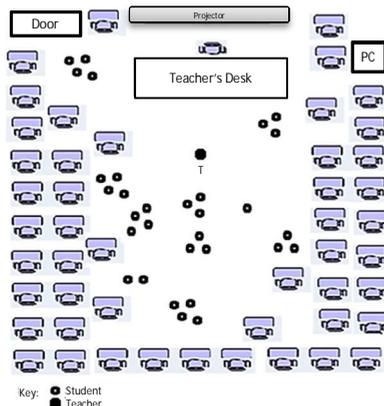


Figure 2 Proposed classroom layout for drama

6.2.2. Proposed classroom layout for drama

To form the layout shown in Figure 2, the students were asked to move and stack their chairs to the side of the classroom in order for an open space to be cleared in the middle. This way Activities 4 and 5 (see Table 3) could be conducted since they required interaction and movement around the classroom. This is a common strategy used by drama language teachers such as Almond (2005) in order to allow movement and interaction. Figure 2 shows how space enabled the teacher to interact with each student during group or pair activities. This allowed collaboration and interaction for effective language learning. One student wrote in their reflective journal:

In today's lesson, we have moved around the class to speak and practice what we have learnt. I think this is a more fun and effective way to learn a new language. It is because this provides me with opportunities to speak more. Also, this would be a chance for me to review whether I speak right or wrong, e.g. others could correct my pronunciation.

As shown in the reflection, the student commented on a pronounced difference between traditional and drama learning by stating the latter is "more fun and effective" because she is allowed to "speak more" and given the opportunity to check her pronunciation not only with the teacher but also with her peers. Being able to learn collaboratively with classmates is a core strategy in the language learning process and the classroom layout displayed in Figure 2 facilitated this process.

6.3. Role-plays and dialogues

Conducting role-plays is a common activity in the language classroom as researched by Kao and O'Neill (1998) and Miccoli (2003). This technique was observed

throughout the course and is also represented as short dialogues. Students reflected that drama helps them memorize French words easily. The code used during analysis was "memorize easily." The first dialogue given to the students was Activity 4 (see Table 3), which was named *Qui êtes-vous?* Students were to practice the following dialogue and take turns playing different characters, as illustrated in Table 4. The vocabulary for responding to the questions which was used in the activity is listed in Table 5.

Table 4 Dialogue example in Lesson 1

French phrase	English translation
Student A: Qui êtes-vous?	'Who are you?'
Student B: C'est le/la président.	'It's the president.'
Student C: menteur(euse)! Vous n'êtes pas le/la président.	'Liar!' "You are not the president.'
Student D: Je suis un étudiant/une étudiante.	'I am a student.'

Table 5 Vocabulary used in Activity 4

Masculine	Feminine	English translation	Emotion
C'est le président.	C'est la présidente	'It's the president.'	Shock
C'est un étudiant.	C'est une étudiante	'This is a student.'	Blasé
Menteur	Menteuse	'Liar'	Anger/confusion

The instructor planned this activity with the idea of enabling the students to be in a "dramatic situation," as stated in the lesson objectives. The instructor illustrated a dialogue as an example to the class and the expressions and emotions were indirectly portrayed through body gestures. For example, Student C points a finger at Student D for lying, which is naturally accompanied with an emotion of anger or confusion. This creates an opportunity for the student to act in accordance with their character and produces a sense of involvement whilst applying the vocabulary in interaction. The activity created a chance for students to interact and practice speaking French with classmates. It also allowed students to use the new vocabulary and clarify the meanings of the phrases with their peers. Students also checked the meanings of the phrases in English and confirmed their understanding of the French terms in Chinese. Students' notes also had Chinese characters written next to the French words in order to help them remember the meanings. It was apparent the students enjoyed the activity as they often laughed and smiled. In addition, it also encouraged the students to gain a conscious understanding of the French language as opposed to remembering individual vocabulary and the pronunciation. One student during an interview claimed the dialogue helped her remember the word *menteur*.

Writing a dialogue can help me to know more about the daily greetings and the conversation on French since the grammar is different from English also. And playing dramas can let me help me to speak the words correctly and with emotion. In my opinion, acting a drama can help to memorize the words easily like *menteur!* I need to act with anger and I will remember this word means liar as well.

The student made a clear statement that drama, and in this case the use of a dialogue helped her remember certain vocabulary. This may be because of the emotion of anger tied to the meaning of the word 'liar.' Another student during an interview also emphasized that the use of dialogues helped her to remember sentences:

The class has learned about the pronunciation of alphabets and some simple sentences. Standing up to practice was good for our voice projection. Also, having dialogues with others gave us chances to repeat the sentences in context and helped us to remember those sentences easily.

The usefulness of drama in language classrooms for increasing confidence has been found evident in other studies conducted by Kao and O'Neill (1998), Miccoli (2003) and To et al. (2011).

Another short dialogue that was presented in Lesson 4 is shown in Table 6. This particular dialogue created a lot of laughter and excitement as Student A was confessing his/her love for Student B. Students perceptions regarding learning French via drama are presented in the next section.

Table 6 Short dialogue presented in Lesson 4

French phrase	English translation
Student A: Viens ici! J'ai un secret.	'Come here! I have a secret.'
Student B: Un secret?	'A secret?'
Student A: Oui. Je t'aime	'Yes, I love you.'
Student B: Tu m'aimes?	'You love me?'
Student A: Oui. Je t'aime	'Yes, I love you.'
Student B: Je suis désolé(e). Je ne t'aime pas.	'I'm sorry. I don't love you.'

6.4. Perceptions of learning French via drama activities

A number of students perceived the lessons as relaxing, useful, interactive and fun. Students also said that they found homework easier than their usual traditional approach to studying. In a sense studying was no longer tedious but actually "fun and entertaining." Other perceptions that arose during the interviews were "interesting," and "motivated." Students generally had a positive perception of learning French through drama activities. In addition to the data collected from the interview, one participant also reiterated the same perceptions in her written reflection:

I like that the learning has incorporated with drama. in a drama context, everyone plays a role by speaking a dialogue in french with emotion. i have noticed that the heightened emotion has in fact reinforces our learning process by making it more vividly memorable. whenever more feelings are involved in a conversation, memory is easier to retrieve . . . it also makes the learning takes place in a fun way and more enjoyable.

The reflection strengthens the concept that drama activities are effective in helping the students remember what they have learnt because of emotions that are tied to the phrases they speak out during the lesson. Another student wrote in her written reflection: "Playing drama makes the learning process for grammar patterns and new words less boring compared with the traditional language lessons, which always focus students to remember all the vocabulary and grammar structure without enough practices." In addition to practicing dialogues students also had to create their own dialogues. A student commented on the usefulness of the activity: "He asks us to write a few dialogue and then perform it and we can be very creative about the dialogue and I think that's very interesting and it keep me motivated to learn it." However, what is largely scarce in the literature are negative perceptions of drama. They are presented in the next subsection.

6.5. Drawbacks of drama for L3 and students' negative perceptions

This section discusses the drawbacks of using drama for L3 learning and the students' negative perceptions of this method of learning. The analysis helps to answer Research question 2 in further detail.

One of the drawbacks of using drama activities in the language classroom was the increased opportunity for students to communicate in Chinese rather than French. A student commented: "In the French class, the students are native Chinese, they always speak Cantonese or English. They seldom speak French. The environment is not quite good to stimulate us to use more French." This poses as a potential drawback as some students may prefer to use their mother tongue when the teacher is preoccupied with other students during the lesson. A possible method to alleviate negative reactions is to encourage students to only use French or English during a drama activity. Complete elimination of using Chinese in the classroom would probably not be a realistic situation as students are habitually used to speaking in their mother tongue.

6.5.1. Individual student expectations and needs

There is evidence to suggest that the use of some drama activities may not fully facilitate the achievement of individual student's goals. One student commented:

Actually I think it's quite good to have a role-play because it give us a chance to use the French to communicate with other classmates but it little bit bored because every lesson we do the same thing. I would like to know more about the words or sentence related to daily life. For example, if I travel to French, I want to buy something, I would ask how much is it but we didn't learn in the courses and just... just know that... we learnt a lot of words or vocabulary but I may not use it when I travel to France.

Each individual student had specific individual goals. Student S remarked that the lessons were "a little bit boring." This may be because the students had to repeat the same dialogue several times but with different partners. This may have become a tedious activity for some students. Student S further explained that the teacher did not cover specific vocabulary that he could use if he ever travelled to France. Two other students who were interviewed both mentioned that the teacher did not spend enough time talking about the French grammatical system:

I think it's good and it's interesting but I just think that the grammar is not enough because the teacher was just using the dialogue but he didn't teach about the grammar so if people... if the other students they want to form a sentence by themselves, I am not sure if they could do that.

Student W reiterates:

Um... I think... if you want to know more about the dialogue and the grammatical system of French and the vocabulary of French, you need to find some reference books outside the class or in the library. That will help with improvement. But if you only hear or listen to the teacher's instructions, that may not lead to great improvement.

The student responses imply that drama at times may not be able to satisfy all the individual needs of each student. Since students may be used to learning grammar explicitly in traditional methods of language learning they may not be ready to learn grammar by reading the grammatical structures in the drama dialogues. In addition, the drama activities incorporated pair or group work and therefore the individual needs of each student may have not been entirely met. Furthermore, explicit grammatical instructions were limited to a minimum during the lesson, which also made it difficult for students to do activities that required improvisation in French. This suggests that if language teachers decide to incorporate drama activities into their language classrooms they may need to spend some time explaining the grammatical structures of the sentences presented in the dialogues. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that the students were learning a third language by using their knowledge of their second language (English). In order to resolve these drawbacks, the teacher could have dedicated some time to explaining the grammatical structures of the dialogues before practicing them.

7. Discussion

7.1. Benefits of drama for L3 learning

The findings will be discussed in this section in relation to the research questions. The first research question was: How do drama activities benefit students learning a third language in the language classroom? As shown by the data, the responses to the drama activities were mostly positive. Students viewed the dramatic warm-ups as an enjoyable beginning to their French lessons because they were active and able to move around. The classroom layout for interaction (as shown previously in Figure 2) illustrated how students could move around freely during the drama activities. This factor was also a benefit because students were able to communicate and practice the language with their peers more freely as opposed to being unable to move in a traditional classroom layout (as shown previously in Figure 1). This aligns with views by other researchers in the field such as Snyman and De Kock (1991), who stated that drama is the negotiation of meaning in which students are actively interacting with each other. The communication between students was an important element of effective learning because this allowed students to clarify new concepts or meanings with their peers. Furthermore, data gathered from individual interviews and reflective journals demonstrated that the role-plays and dialogues helped students remember French vocabulary, especially when the teacher required them to speak with emotions such as anger. In addition, results from interviews and reflective journals also indicated that correct pronunciation of French words was also easier to remember. Drama provided the context for students to use the language in a way that is close to the social nature of language. This is reiterated by Kao and O'Neil (1998), who suggested that drama and language do share commonalities in terms of the influence of context on communication. Research by Miccoli (2003) also supports the view that interaction between students is more meaningful and purposeful especially when students are given characters to play. This implies that drama activities were beneficial for students because they were provided with the context to use the language authentically.

The second research question was: How do students perceive drama activities as a method of learning French as a third language? The results suggest that students perceived drama activities as generally positive, as the drama activities were reported to be interesting and enjoyable. The students also liked interacting with their peers and thought that it was a good method of maintaining a level of motivation to learn French. Students also perceived the drama activities as an effective method to learn because they allowed them to check their pronunciation and meaning of French vocabulary more easily with their peers

as opposed to practicing alone. This suggests that students seem to be more willing to speak French during drama activities.

The findings show that the positive benefits of using drama for second language learning can also be found in learning a third language. The method of learning through drama activities generates a collaborative learning environment that sustains students' interest and motivation to learn a third language. Drama activities simulate the authentic use of the target language and enable students to use the language more proficiently and more confidently. These results concur with other studies that show that students who undergo drama-based programs have significantly higher gains in oral fluency than those who receive traditional EFL instructions (Galante & Thomson, 2017; Piazzoli, 2011).

While the majority of the research suggests the positive benefits of using drama for language learning, the negative perceptions should not be ignored. One of the main negative perceptions mentioned by students was the limited instruction given towards the French grammatical system used in the drama dialogues. This suggests the need to train teachers in balancing the instructions given for drama activities and explanation of grammatical structures used in drama dialogues.

7.2. Teacher expectations

It is also important to note other factors that the teacher (second author) had discovered. For instance, the teacher considered the different programs and subject majors of the students. Due to a range of subject majors it may be possible to develop a curriculum with a range of activities that suit the characteristics of the class. In previous semesters the teacher stated there were more students who majored in psychology and there were instances where students from certain majors did better than others. This suggests that certain drama activities may be more effective for certain types of students as it may depend on their subject major. This may be related to the English level requirements that different majors have before the student is admitted into the program. This implies that the level of English could reflect how students may perceive their experience in learning French via drama activities.

The proficiency level of the students' English and prior exposure to the French language affects their progress in learning the third language. Given that English is their second language, learning French would be considered a challenge for these students. For one of their assignments for this course students were asked to write their own dialogues. At the end of the course, they managed to write their own dialogues in French and perform them in front of their teacher, which was evidence that learning a language through drama activities is possible. Even with little to no experience in drama, the process of creating

their own scripts enabled them to remember their lines because of the meanings and feelings attached to their character. Although the dialogues created were short, the students learned French via the process of reading the vocabulary and writing their own dialogue. The speaking skills are also practiced when they deliver their dialogues and concurrently their listening skills. Thus, all four language skills are utilized in drama in a natural manner, which helps the students remember what they have learnt. It may therefore be concluded that drama activities do benefit students learning a third language.

7.3. Cultural implications for learning languages in Hong Kong

Students have an entrenched negative view of language learning due to the exam-oriented education system in Hong Kong. All the five participants who were interviewed stressed the need to achieve good grades in order to get into university. Although choosing to take French may have only been a way of fulfilling the elective requirements, the learning environment created by the drama activities may have provided them with a fresh approach to language learning and a new motivation to continue studying French. The approach to learning a language through drama is new to many students in Hong Kong and this may imply the need for more language teachers in Hong Kong to consider alternative teaching methods and approaches to language learning.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this exploratory case study has provided insights into a promising teaching approach in examination-driven education systems. The use of drama activities has been shown to benefit students learning a third language in the language classroom because there was more interaction amongst peers as well as with the language teacher. The layout of the classroom during the drama activities enabled students to communicate and practice the language more freely as opposed to a traditional classroom layout. Therefore, direct feedback and correction of pronunciation was instant. Students largely perceived drama activities as relaxing, fun and interesting, which makes learning the third language more memorable. As a result, this dynamic and collaborative teaching approach prepares students for using a third language more confidently in real life interactions. However, there are possible drawbacks to using drama activities in language learning. Some students stated a preference for explicitly learning French via its grammatical system. In addition, a lack of vocabulary and mastery in their second language (i.e., English) also caused hindrances in language learning as students frequently communicated in Chinese rather than the target language.

This suggests potential areas for future research into understanding the importance of balancing traditional approaches such as the grammar translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) with methods in drama education. Furthermore, specialized teacher training in drama and language is an area for further exploration. This may minimize negative perceptions from students that found learning a third language through drama challenging. The drawbacks of drama found in the study imply that future research is necessary into discovering a more customized teaching approach that adheres to cultural expectations in education systems that are exam-oriented. Further research in the area of drama education and learning a third language should be carried out.

References

- Ackroyd, J. (2007). *Research methodologies for drama education*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Almond, M. (2005). *Teaching English with drama*. London: Modern English.
- Anderson, A. (2012). The influence of process drama on elementary students' written language. *Urban Education, 47*, 959-982.
- Biggs, J. (1996). Western misperceptions of the Confucian-heritage learning culture. In D. Watkins & J. Biggs (Eds.), *The Chinese learner: Cultural, psychological and contextual influences* (pp. 45-68). Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre and Australian Council for Educational Research.
- Burke, A. F., & O'Sullivan, J. (2002). *Stage by stage: A handbook for using drama in the second language classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Carless, D. (2004). Issues in teachers' reinterpretation of a task-based innovation in primary schools. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*, 639-662.
- Carless, D. (2011). *From testing to productive student learning: Implementing formative assessment in Confucian-heritage settings*. New York: Routledge.
- Carson, L. (2012). The role of drama in task-based learning: Agency, identity and autonomy. *Scenario Journal for Drama and Theatre in Foreign and Second Language Education, 6*(2), 46-59.
- Curriculum Development Council. (2000). *Learning to learn*. Hong Kong: The Council.
- Davison, C., & Hamp-Lyons, L. (2009). The Hong Kong Certificate of Education: School-based assessment reform in Hong Kong English language education. In L. Cheng & A. Curtis (Eds.), *English language assessment and the Chinese learner* (pp. 248-266). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dalziel, F., Santucci, A., & Spedo, G. (2011). Rewriting the 'Duchess of Malfi': Adapting Webster's tragedy for an ESL Drama production. *Scenario, 2011*(1), 5-16.
- DeCoursey, M. (2012). Dramatic art for second language education: Appropriate process objectives for Hong Kong schools. *Asia-Pacific Journal for Arts Education, 11*, 250-270.
- Di Pietro, R. J. (1987). *Strategic interaction: Learning languages through scenarios*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dougill, J. (1987). *Drama activities for language learning*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Early, M., & Yeung, C. (2009). Producing multimodal picture books and dramatic performances in a core French classroom: An exploratory case study. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 66*, 299-322.
- Galante, A., & Thomson, R. I. (2017). The effectiveness of drama as an instructional approach for the development of second language oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. *TESOL Quarterly, 51*, 115-142.

- Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2000). *Stimulated recall methodology in second language research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Hui, A., Cheung, P., Wong, T., & He, M. (2011). How effective is a drama-enhanced curriculum doing to increase the creativity of preschool children and their teachers. *Journal of Drama and Theatre Education in Asia*, 2(1), 21-46.
- Hui, A., & Lau, S. (2006). Drama education: A touch of the creative mind and communicative-expressive ability of elementary school children in Hong Kong. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 1(1), 34-40.
- Kan, V., & Adamson, B. (2010). Language policies for Hong Kong schools since 1997. *London Review of Education*, 8(2), 167-176.
- Kao, S., & O'Neill, C. (1998). *Words into worlds: Learning a second language through process drama*. Stamford, CT: Ablex.
- Kennedy, K., Chan, J. K. S., Fok, P. K., & Yu, W. M. (2008). Forms of assessment and their potential for enhancing learning: Conceptual and cultural issues. *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 7(3), 197-207.
- Lauer, M. (2008). The performing arts in second language acquisition: A report on the experience of dramatizing a novel. *Scenario*, 1, 18-40.
- Lee, W. O. (1997). Social class, language and achievement. In G. A. Postiglione & W. O. Lee (Eds.), *Schooling in Hong Kong: Organization, teaching and social context* (pp. 155-174). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (2007). Communicative and task-based language teaching in East Asian classrooms. *Language Teaching: The International Research Resource for Language Professionals*, 40(3), 243-249.
- Miccoli, L. (2003). English through drama for oral skills development. *ELT Journal*, 57(2), 122-29.
- Neelands, J., & Goode, T. (2015). *Structuring drama work: A handbook of available forms in theatre and drama* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nicholson, H. (2010). The promises of history: Pedagogic principles and processes of change. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 15(2), 147-154.
- O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- O'Toole, J. (1992). *The process of drama: Negotiating art and meaning*. London: Taylor & Francis.
- Palys, T. (2008). Purposive sampling. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vol. 2; pp. 697-698). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Piazzoli, E. (2011). Process drama: The use of affective space to reduce language anxiety in the additional language learning classroom. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(4), 557-573.

- Poon, A. Y. K. (2010). Language use, and language policy and planning in Hong Kong. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 11(1), 1-66.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ryan-Scheutz, C. (2011). *Dramatic interactions: Teaching languages, literatures, and cultures through theater: Theoretical approaches and classroom practices*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Shi, L. (2006). The successors to Confucianism or a new generation? A questionnaire study on Chinese students' culture of learning English. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 19(1), 122-147.
- Sloan, K. (2007). High-stakes accountability, minority youth, and ethnography: Assessing the multiple effects. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 24-41.
- Snyman, R., & De Kock, D. M. (1991). Problem solving and creative thinking in structured second language teaching. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 25(3), 228-40.
- To, L. D., Chan, Y. P., Lam, Y. K., & Tsang, S. Y. (2011). Reflections on a primary school teacher professional development programme on learning English through process drama. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 16(4), 517-539.
- Wagner, B. J. (1988). Research currents: Does classroom drama affect the arts of language? *Language Arts*, 65(1), 46-55.
- Winston, J., (2012). *Second language learning through drama: Practical techniques and applications* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.

APPENDIX

Student reflective journals

1. Why did you decide to learn French?
2. How well do these lessons suit your purpose?
3. What motivated you to learn in today's lesson?
4. What do you want to achieve by the end of the course?
5. Describe your learning experience in today's class.
6. How is your learning experience in this course different from your experience in other language courses?