

DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

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|----------------|--|--------------------------|--------|
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This form is designed to help you give us the information we need to find a suitable supervisor for your dissertation work. The more information you give us, the better we will be able to match you to a supervisor. If you change your mind about any of these plans later on, you can discuss the changes with your supervisor – you will not be forced to stick to what you have said here.

Working Title/Topic area:

Area: Second Language Acquisition/ Corpus Linguistics/ ESL Student Motivation
Corpus Linguistics Verification of the Efficacy of Theatre Techniques in English Second Language Training

You MUST fill in this section!

Research in using drama for ESL makes claims for its efficacy as a tool and appears more provocative than testable. To provide evidence of its value as a teaching tool, student corpus may be developed and examined to provide evidence of student improvement through drama-based ESL training.

Possible research questions/hypotheses:

Can an approach to ESL which utilizes theatre techniques for language exploration improve ESL students' learning and retention of language features which are typically difficult for students? Some features which may have proven difficult for students to develop fluency successfully (ie: to the point of expressing ideas without causing confusion in writing/ speaking) are:

- Vocabulary/ idiom
- pronunciation—especially intonation and stress patterns
- figurative elements such as metaphor and personification
- verb tenses/ phrasal verbs
- prepositions

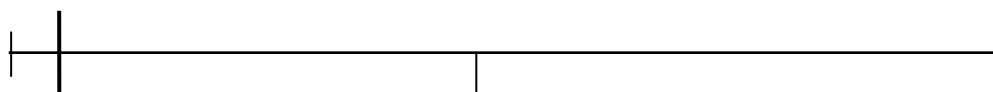
My view is that theatre techniques can be used for language exploration to enable students to successfully focus on the language point(s) to the exclusion of limiting affective filters. Furthermore, theatre techniques require one to focus on the language not merely for reproductive value (i.e.: the correct form or the correct sound) but to intensify meaning created by language use between a speaker (or writer) and a listener (or reader). A theatre-based approach to language learning may allow students of language greater control over their language use. This may be quantified through corpus examination of spoken and written samples taken before and following the training period.

Possible data collection methods and data sources (if relevant):

I intend to take samples of student speech and writing via a pre- and post- interview and test; these will be entered into two separately created corpora for comparison. I postulate that students usages of the taught language elements will show improvement of these language elements over a "standard" ESL class which does not utilize theatre techniques. The results will be both qualitative (i.e.: based on observations of student interactions in class) and quantitative (i.e.: results based on corpus study of pre- and post-tests).

What books/articles/authors have you read or heard about that you think are relevant?

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- Wichmann, A. et al. (eds.) (1997). *Teaching and Language Corpora*. Longman.
- Wright, P.R. (2006). *Drama Education and Development of Self: Myth or Reality?*. Social Psychology of Education 9:43-65.



Very sure (definitely won't change it)

Reasonably sure (may make some changes)

Very unsure (will probably
make changes/need much more advice)

Any other information you want to add at this stage:

The use of drama in ESL classes will require somewhat of a specialist training as to the purposes and aims of dramatic activities and how to use them to mitigate the effects of students' affective filters in addition to closer critical study of language aspects and meaning creation. Many teachers would avoid drama's use for lack of training or experience, and many others, well-meaning, might inadvertently harm their students for lack of knowledge of the purposes and aims of drama activities. The latter group, whose experience may not include formal training in drama, may broadly apply activities such as putting on plays or "theatresports"—elements of drama in most people's experience—simply because they are fun and amusing. The value of such activities may not be apparent to the student, who may experience harm with the realization that the activities are really for the amusement of the teacher. Plays and improvisation activities have their place in English language teaching; the aims, however, must remain clear to the students at all times. Transparency, in this regard, is incumbent upon the teacher.

The typical classroom organization—of which ESL partakes—seeks to reduce the sensorimuscular involvement of the student to maximize cognitive growth. This reflects the ideology that language is purely cognitive, although language may be as rooted in the physical experience of its production as in the cognitive. A purely cognitive approach to learning results in movement-restricted postures created while sitting in desks and control of one's emotions at all times. There is much research indicating that learning which activates the sensorimuscular systems actually involves more of the brain in the learning and improves involvement in and retention of learning materials. If it is the case that sensorimuscular involvement of an individual shapes his or her ability to reason about the world, then the same mechanism may be involved in language identity formation since it is through language that reason is typically expressed. There has been a movement away from purely cognitive styles of learning—particularly language learning—and into tasks and activities which require more active involvement (i.e.: Task Based Learning, etc.). Removing the students to a locale which enables them to explore the physical and emotional implications of language use—such as in an open theatre-like space—may allow the students the ability to increase their comprehension and retention of language functions and tasks which, hitherto, have been difficult to develop.

The question remains of how to test for the successful development of students in this learning environment: developing a corpus of student interviews and written texts both pre- and post- learning may provide the quantitative data to support the hypothesis, above. Comparing against a second class taught in a "typical" ESL setting may provide the necessary baseline comparison.

Date you would like your supervision to start:

April 2010.

Current submission date:

Revised submission date – please check with CELS first: