FROM THEATRE TO COMMUNICATION:

THE APPLICATION OF THEATRE TECHNIQUES TO AN ORIENTATION PROGRAM FOR OVERSEAS STUDENTS

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education by major thesis.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this thesis is original and that I have not knowingly plagiarised another's material or ideas. This work has not been presented in another degree or at another institution for examination or credit.

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Rosemary J. Dunsick
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Karel Reus and Carmelle Le Vin for their artistic vision and inspiration in 1990, June Gassin for her recognition of Drama and personal encouragement, Jane Orton for her on-going interest in my work since 1991, Evan Burge, warden of Trinity College, for his continual support of Drama and the Management Committee and Academic Committee of the Trinity Education Centre for their recognition of the importance of the Foundation Studies Program, Denis White, Diana Smith and my colleagues and friends for their patience and understanding, especially Shura and Gilly. Thank you to Bob Thorneycroft for his support during this time.

Especially, I want to thank all the students I have had the pleasure to teach since 1990 and to express my gratitude to all the staff on the 10th Floor of the Science Education building for their support during my candidature, especially Sue Wright and Valda Kirkwood. Finally, thank you to Murray Seiffert for his intuition, inspiration and confidence throughout the writing of this work.

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my wonderful son, Luke, who has been more than understanding about the demands it has made on my time and energy.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a reflective account of my teaching in a program for non-native speakers of English from the Asia and Pacific region, preparing to enter a tertiary system that was vastly different from their previous educational experience. My contribution was to design a compulsory Drama course to train the students in acting techniques to improve their overall communication in a Western English-speaking context and to assist them with integrating the new ideas. A distinctive feature of my course is an extensive study of non-verbal communication through mime and movement activities.

In 1993 the period of reflection led me to an important discovery. With the assistance of the Action Research model of plan, action, observation and reflection, devised by Kemmis and McTaggart, I was able to articulate and understand my methodology for the first time. What I had supposed was instinctive, was in fact a thoughtful and systematic process emanating from my background knowledge of drama and experience in professional theatre.

This approach, influenced by the philosophies of Grotowski and Stanislavski, enabled me to respond to the students in such a way that I could adapt the curriculum to suit both their academic and personal needs. The students showed the interpersonal skills required to begin development as professionals in Australia, as well as managing the challenge and choices required of them to live in contemporary Australian culture whilst they were students. Without these skills, many aspects of their personal identity were threatened.

Further, I recognised that my process as a teacher, solving the pedagogical problems in the development of a responsive curriculum, paralleled the preparation of actors for performance. This thesis documents the exciting journey of my reflection and analysis.

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CHAPTER ONE

REWRITING THE SCRIPT

Introduction
Increasing numbers of overseas students from the Asia and Pacific region are coming to Australia to undertake tertiary studies. How to maintain our high standard of education while helping these students access our system has become an important question in recent years. Their "English" - spoken and written, is usually seen as central to the solution. Institutions require varying standards of English for entry into their courses. However, no-one really knows how much English is enough, as a lot depends on the educational background, skill and motivation of each individual student.

The situation is further compounded by the lack of research in this area and the fact that Australia accepts students from countries with widely varying educational and social systems, which has considerable impact on the physical, emotional and intellectual development of these students, as they are often unprepared for the vast differences in education and culture that they face on arrival. More importantly without assistance in understanding and adapting to these differences the students are unlikely to achieve their educational goals. Recognising this, institutions on and off campuses throughout Australia began to offer intensive courses, specifically in the area of English.

At the University of Melbourne, the Vice Chancellor and various academics wanted to establish a program that addressed these issues, as it was felt to be important for the students as well as for the University. It was identified that apart from linguistic and cultural differences the students often misunderstood academic expectations of participation and work requirements. Often, therefore, the impact on
educational achievement was great. The students needed more than assistance with their English. Trinity College, at the University of Melbourne, established its "Foundation Studies Program" in 1990, a year after the University of NSW, in order to address these issues.

An advertisement for teachers was placed in "The Age" newspaper in January, 1990:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Foundation Year at Trinity College is a tertiary level program preparing overseas students for degree studies at The University of Melbourne. The program is administered by Trinity College in facilities provided on campus by the University. Casual and part-time teaching positions are available in the following subjects:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of Ideas (Philosophy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics (Pure and Applied)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All subjects have a set syllabus approved by the University. All teachers will be required to reinforce English language skills in their own subject. The ideal teacher for one of these positions will be highly experienced in secondary and/or tertiary teaching, with a sound academic background preferably at post-graduate level. Teaching qualifications are desirable but not necessary. Most appointments would commence in mid-April.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further details contact:
Mr Karel Reus
Executive Director

The staff were answerable to a Director, an Academic Committee and a Management Committee. 'Shepherds' were appointed to establish and maintain curriculum guide-lines and assessment procedures that were of a standard acceptable to the University. The Director, Mr Karel Reus and the Assistant Director, Ms Carmelle Le Vin, did not adopt the NSW curriculum. They believed that learning about Australia and its cultural heritage would help overseas students access the dominant culture, thereby removing some of the hardships faced by studying here. They also wanted to offer an academic challenge. To achieve this aim the Director introduced a compulsory study of
English Literature and History and Philosophy of Ideas for all students. He thought that a study of Western ways of writing, thinking and analysing would greatly assist the students in their preparation for tertiary studies. He disliked the traditional English As A Second Language (ESL) approach for non-native speakers, describing it as:

belittling to have English without content...the culture of filling out forms, reading newspapers and completing grammar exercises [He wanted the program to appeal to] cultured Asian parents looking for a quality education.

(Taken from notes of interview with Director, 19th April, 1993.)

An important feature of the Director’s approach was his encouragement to staff to contribute their own ideas and expertise to the curriculum. They were challenged by the pioneering aspect of the work. I was hired as an English lecturer and it was my task in collaboration with others to devise and teach the English Literature course. The staff were from different academic backgrounds, including Literature and ESL, and all had considerable experience in curriculum development. My own background, though a graduate from the University of Melbourne with an English Literature/French major and Diploma in Education, was in Drama and Theatre. I had worked as a performer/directorstage manager for several years, as well as a Drama co-ordinator in a private boys’ secondary school. It was this background that influenced my interpretation of the issues facing overseas students.

During the curriculum planning meetings I began to perceive different priorities from other people. The cultural and academic approach, Australian Literature, Western philosophy, ESL, were all important to the students academic achievement, but what about their daily lives? How was knowing about Australia’s literary culture, through reading, writing and discussion, going to enable the individual student to actually participate in the contemporary culture? The University wanted Asian students to participate in lectures and tutorials in preference to remaining silent. There seemed to be a missing link. How were the linguistic and academic approaches going to encourage them to be personally more confident
and expressive? It seemed to me the students needed opportunities to 'practise' this new awareness to incorporate it into their own approach to study and life in Melbourne. How would their participation improve otherwise? How to integrate knowledge into behaviour rather than an adding yet another layer of abstract ideas?

I saw the students' problems as stemming from external and internal factors:

External
* Educational differences - Western ways of thinking and behaviour expectations in the new context.
* Ignorance of Australia's social and cultural differences - we make many incorrect assumptions about what overseas students know, without realising it. A simple example is the use of a knife and fork.
* Language difficulties - a lack of confidence with speech, a need to bridge the gap between text book English and personal usage, enabling the student to use a more youthful, colloquial phrasing and adapt it to different contexts. Many students have never spoken English before, and the vocabulary they know is suited to their own cultural context, not Australia.

Internal
* Inhibition, shyness, lack of confidence to project themselves and to participate.
* Isolation. The fact that they were alone without immediate emotional support and encouragement from family, friends and society.

I saw their needs as complex and emphasised the need for personal development linked to communication skills, appropriate for the Australian context. My interpretation of the issues reflected my response as an actor in an alien environment. I was not phased by the cultural variety nor the cultural difference. I had been part of a mime-magic show that successfully performed to audiences of Aborigines in Mornington Island, recently-arrived Vietnamese boat people in Melbourne and students at Geelong Grammar School, and had come
to believe that there was a universal form of communication and understanding that we all shared.

Touring for four and a half years for Arts Councils in different States throughout Australia, provided me with a vast amount of experience - we had to make the show appeal no matter who was in the audience or what our performing conditions were like. For example, we could be asked to perform for the residents of a mental institution in the morning, for underprivileged children in an inner city school in the afternoon and for the Society of the National Gallery in the evening. Each performance involved adapting our show for the different performing venues, as well as fulfilling the expectations of the different audiences.

Such expectations forced us to develop a consciousness of the universality of the meanings and messages conveyed by our show. As the show was mime, I also learnt that words were unnecessary for communication. In fact, we were given a challenging itinerary as the enjoyment of the performance was not reliant on verbal communication. It taught me that theatre evokes a commonality among people despite age, status, culture, language or circumstances. Our show was enjoyed as much by Aboriginal people in remote parts of Cape York performed in a large open cattle shed, as by the Governor and his wife in a performance at the Melbourne Concert Hall. This is because people have an apparent openness to new ideas, visual beauty, comedy and generally make themselves available to the experience of being engaged and transported by a theatrical performance.

I concluded that the different backgrounds of overseas students would make it difficult but not impossible for them to understand the Australian culture. It was a matter of improving communication rather than accepting a permanent cultural wall. They needed skills to help access a different culture, without loss of their own identity. This involved skills of adaptation and change. Like Stanislavski who wrote that “All peoples possess the same human nature” (1958: 137), I also believed in the universality of theatre.
Although often the words “theatre” and “drama” are interchangeable, within this thesis I prefer to use the terms “theatre techniques”, to describe the skills that I taught within the subject called “Drama”. Having made my living professionally in theatre for five years, it gives an edge to my work and thinking, as well as a set of specific skills which could not be learnt in the classroom. These came from professional directors, performers, classes in mime and movement and performance experiences, as well as from teaching Drama.

Intuitively I wanted to empower the students by using theatre and acting techniques which would:

* train them in all aspects of communication e.g. listening, speaking, observing, projecting, use of the voice, eye contact and gestures.
* develop their self-confidence and self-knowledge.
* help them find their identity in a foreign culture and to find appropriate ways of expressing it within the culture.
* assist them with assertiveness techniques and skills for interpreting and negotiating situations.
* train them in improvisation techniques that would be useful for interpreting context and adapting language and behaviour accordingly.
* teach them relaxation techniques to deal with stress and to help them ‘unwind’.

This was my way of assisting them with their challenge - giving them “structures of knowledge” to help with the problems of living, useful for the students (Elliott 1991: 90). I had a lot of experience where participants had been empowered through theatre techniques. It is not a question of this week teaching confidence and next week relaxation, as the workshop format effectively achieves several goals at once. This was one of the most obvious reasons to introduce Drama as a subject, as it is structured to respond immediately to students’ needs. Schon writes about ‘knowing-in-action’, where the knowledge is in the action. (Schon 1987: 25) He quotes Raymond M Hainer “knowing more than we can say” and Michael Polanyi “tacit knowledge” in his explanation of how there are types of knowledge that are difficult to make verbally explicit and that our descriptions of
them are “constructions”, or an attempt to explain tacit or
spontaneous knowledge (p22).

Even without having tried drama in this context I knew it could
work. The more training and expertise you have in communication,
the more communicative you become. However, such training did
not necessarily begin with the voice or mouth, but with an
understanding of yourself and the way you communicate to others.

Having been influenced by the work of Stanislavski and Grotowski,
communication for me had to do with the whole person. “Theatre
provides an opportunity for what could be called integration, the
discarding of masks, the revealing of the real substance: a totality of
physical and mental reactions” (Grotowski 1968: 255). It also didn’t
start from the outside but from within. Grotowski talks about “the
dialectics of human behaviour” and teaches about the use of the body
to demonstrate “what is behind the mask of common vision” (p17).

In teaching his actors, he trains them to incorporate the full use of
their means of communication to represent the human condition.
They must train every part of their bodies, so they will not be limited
in scope in the expression of their imagination. In developing the
physical potential of the body, an actor is freed from all sorts of
restrictions of stress and tension as well as experiencing health and
wellbeing.

Grotowski links physical training with the psychological, which he
sees as essential for the actor to be true to life and to ‘affect’ the
audience. Every gesture and movement in playing a role, must be
truly felt by the actor. Grotowski sees every individual as unique and
in finding their own essence, only then will they be able to fulfil the
task. For him the developing process of self-knowledge for the actor is
undertaken like scientific research, placing oneself ‘on the borders of
scientific disciplines such as phonology, psychology, cultural
anthropology, semiology’ (1968: 129). This sophisticated training of
the body and its possibilities for expression is basically for each
individual actor “the study of one’s own means of expression” (p142).
Stanislavski stresses the importance of the relationship between the body and the inner psyche, in his acting method. He emphasises the dual role of action and feeling. “In each physical act there is an inner psychological motive which impel physical action, just as in every psychological inner action there is also physical action, which expresses its psychic nature” (Stanislavski 1958: 21). Stanislavski believed that each person’s physical state reflects their inner state, as well as their reactions to situations and environment. Therefore by being conscious of our body and enjoying its potential for expression we can better respond to life. With physical freedom comes confidence and relaxation, which helps us to unleash our potential. He claimed universality for his ideas:

My system is for all nations. All peoples possess the same human nature: it manifests itself in varying ways, but my system still remains applicable.

(p 137)

Stanislavski and Grotowski have had a major influence in the training of actors this century and their ideas extend beyond the theatre. Before teaching Drama at Trinity, I had explored and adopted their ideas for improving the communication and confidence of secondary school students. I had developed a theatre-based Drama program that relied on movement skills and improvisation techniques. The results of this work confirmed the effectiveness of theatre techniques when applied to non-performers. Not only did the improved physical awareness extend ability for dramatic performance, but it seemed to significantly increase the confidence and communication of all participants, as well as establishing a tolerant and understanding group. This work was with native speakers of English.

Improvisation is also important as it offers “opportunities for experimenting with different social roles and role-relationships, and for analysing them in terms of the physical and linguistic behaviour they produce” (Seely 1976: 13). In the case of non-native speakers of English, I could not see an improvement in communication stemming from academic and linguistic solutions, as I interpreted the students would need similar physical “communicative training”. I saw confidence and communication as the same problem with the
same solution. It was a matter of transferring self-confidence in one language to self-confidence in English. Confidence had to be experienced physically, before incorporating speech. "Bodily activity comes first, and then vocal expression", it is of the utmost importance that "we learn to speak with the body first and then with the voice" (Grotowski 1968: 183).

It was well accepted that overseas students needed to be empowered in English. Their actions had to be in English too. "Everybody must find an expression, a wording of his own, a strictly personal way to condition his own feelings." (Grotowski 1968: 204) "We hardly ever believe what we say. Man is far more complicated. You must be conscious of the action behind the words." (p235) I did not see the solution to my students' problems as word-based, as they needed to be confident non-verbally first; in fact some already knew the words. This was my instinct. Just as I had developed the potential of native speakers of English through the teaching of Drama, it was to be expected that this must be effective with non-native speakers.

Grotowski, when asked about his philosophy of art, characteristically replied: "A philosophy always comes after a technique! Tell me do you walk home with your legs or your ideas?" (1968: 201) For Grotowski the process came first, then the theory. By giving actors skills for expression and communication first, they are then in a position to know, create and to be. To me this quote was symbolic of the problems of overseas students: academic knowledge is meaningless if it's not connected to the real issues. How were the academic ideas going to help with the out-of-class challenge? How were they to live and negotiate their way through about six years of academic and social life in Australia without some practical help? Elliott refers to Erich Fromm's definition when describing education for "having" rather than "being". In his extension of Stenhouse's theory of educational process - "not simply a matter of developing human powers of understanding by inducting students into 'structures of knowledge'- it is about developing these powers in relation to the things that matter in life. Powers of human understanding must be developed to deal with problems of living" (Elliott 1991: 147; Stenhouse 1975). Drama provided the essential link,
so that the "structures of knowledge" in Australia made sense to the students and enriched them in terms of their particular challenge.

With the skills I taught and the academic tuition provided by my colleagues, I felt the students would be well prepared for the tertiary environment. Without the acting techniques they were at risk and vulnerable to a system they did not understand, and would be unlikely to understand as they would have no chance of entering it.

**Drama not English**

Renegotiating my role was not easy as none of the planners of the program had considered training the students in theatre techniques. I therefore developed an approach that incorporated the proposed Literature curriculum: Discussion/Drama was born. I would train the students in acting techniques to develop their self-expression and self-confidence, while also creating opportunities to explore the themes and ideas from the prescribed texts, via discussion, roleplay and improvisation techniques. I proposed that every student attend a compulsory workshop for two hours a week, in optimum-size groups of ten. This meant I would be teaching roughly five two-hour sessions a week as well as attending the Literature lectures.

I submitted full details of a year’s curriculum proposal to the Director, including aims, activities and desired outcomes for each session, how they linked to the Literature lectures, building on a series of communication skills and experiences. I gave details about the structure of each workshop to demonstrate how acting skills and oral English could 'work' in this tertiary cross-cultural context.

For example, each workshop related directly to the texts and ideas of each Literature lecture thereby providing an opportunity of deepening their understanding, while simultaneously expecting them to participate in a vast range of theatrical activities that would promote their confidence and command of English. I was overcompensating for Drama's usually low status (Lawton 1980; Graham and Tytler 1993). I couched the advantages in academic terms with a creative twist that aimed to personally empower the students in the expression and
articulation of their ideas. For example, I linked voice projection and pronunciation with the recitation and presentation of Australian poetry; including physical awareness through eye contact, posture and movement. I underplayed the acting techniques by making them integral to the particular study. I was required to prepare a detailed statement of my proposed program in advance. This was a major undertaking for me as I had never before had to submit such extensive information about workshops. Yet, I had never felt so passionately about what I saw as an obvious role for Drama.

The Director and I were encouraged by the "shepherd" for ESL, Ms June Gassin, Director of the Horwood Language Centre, University of Melbourne. She had researched the impact of Drama in developing the self-confidence in advanced second language learners. As it involved the students "physically, emotionally and creatively" it gave them an experience of a language that is "lived" not "borrowed" (Gassin 1985: 60). She found that "drama offers a uniquely integrated approach to the development of both oral communication skills and personal growth" (p57). Consequently she supported Drama's place in the curriculum. The Management Committee was sceptical, as Drama was not a pre-requisite for university entrance, and successful at law, business and medicine, the members did not see the relevance: "What's all this about Drama? I've done very well without it!" My course was on trial, and so was I. The proposal had staffing, financial and political repercussions, however the Director liked the ideas and forced the Committees to accept them on the grounds that he had "absolute and final say on curriculum" and that this was a "non-negotiable decision". [Notes from interview 19th April, 1993].

A characteristic of teacher-based action research according to Elliott is that the management facilitates a "bottom-up" rather than a "top-down" approach to development of curriculum policies and strategies (Elliott 1991: 9). This was certainly the Director's approach, which he demonstrated with his encouragement. I renegotiated my job and became responsible for a year's Drama program that would enable the overseas students to better participate in the Australian education system and culture. This thesis examines the developing process and
the knowledge I gained about the communication needs of these students. The research question I am investigating is:

How did I adapt my expertise in drama and theatre techniques to develop and teach a communication program for overseas students?

Elliott writes about "a felt need for practitioners to initiate change, to innovate is a necessary precondition of Action Research." (Elliott 1991: 53) My approach to a compulsory course in Drama was unusual. During the reflection about my practice I realised that my process of curriculum development could be demonstrated and clarified by reference to Elliott and to the model described by Kemmis and McTaggart in the Action Research Planner (1984).

In the years of reflection I refined my questions as follows:
* How did my teaching skills develop and what guided them in my adaptation to the students needs?
* How did I solve the problems that arose during this process?

At the time there were no models of Drama specialists doing the same thing as me. In order to fill this gap I had to articulate the effects of my philosophy of theatre and communicative acting techniques on my ability to develop and teach a program that answered the communication needs of non-native speakers of English from the Asia/Pacific. This was problematic as my workshop style was multi-dimensional and seemed to be derived from an instinctive response to an audience. "Language, as we experience it in life, is not "linear". Neither is the play, as the audience experiences it" (Smith 1984: 27). It was difficult communicating in a linear form the non-verbal interactive process, which seemed to occur instantaneously between me the teacher/actor and the students. This was problematic for documentation and analysis, so I had to get some assistance.

In pursuing greater understanding about my teaching processes I looked at the approaches of a range of educators including Connell (1985), Gore and Zeichner (1991) and Russell and Munby (1992). I read Dicker (1990), Burns (1991) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1984 and
1992) to see if Action Research applied to my experience of curriculum development. In particular, I responded to Kemmis and McTaggart's model for Action Research. By first trialling the terminology I began to discover and analyse the levels of my own technique. The predictive nature of the plan, action, observation, reflection cycle encouraged me to look for and to find a definite structure in my own approach, which I had previously thought was "instinctive". This investigation was further enhanced by finally adopting the structure and terminology of Action Research, even though I had never heard of it before.

I used the Action Research model to help explain my reflection, not as my methodology. In doing so I was able to systematically unravel the process of my teaching and to recognise the important influence of my own philosophy of theatre on the developing curriculum. The structure of Action Research allowed me to retrace my steps to develop my own understanding of my practice. By following the model like a map it led to some hidden treasure - a deeper and richer understanding of my work as an artist and teacher. In 1994, I undertook a CD Rom Library search to link Drama, ESL and Action Research in the tertiary context, with little outcome. It remains an area that is vastly under-researched.

The concept of Action Research originated in the work of Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist, but has been developed for use in education projects. In Australia it has been used as a means to extend a teacher's understanding of their practice while also assisting with the development of curriculum (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 6). The methodology is flexible enough to allow teachers freedom to explore in their own way, while also providing them with a structure that gives strength and support to the risks involved in change. I use my interpretation of the Action Research model throughout the thesis to assist with analysis. During the course of one thesis it is not possible to document every moment, so I have chosen to discuss aspects of the curriculum that both highlight and emphasise this approach and allow me to articulate and analyse my process.
In 1992 and 1993 when I started reviewing my project, I found the model described in the 1984 Action Research Planner very useful as it helped me to understand and articulate something of my own process of working. The revised model by Kemmis and McTaggart (1992), that I read in early 1994 was less useful to me, as it increases its emphasis on group thinking, discussion and collaboration, and systems of working is more pronounced. “Action Research is participatory, collaborative research which typically arises from the clarification of some concerns generally shared by a group”. It is a group project and the group identify the ‘thematic concern’. “Group members plan action together, act and observe individually or collectively, and reflect together.” (1992: 9) Kemmis and McTaggart state that their model has been revised “in the light of developments in the perspectives of Deakin University researchers on action research” (p7).

Both the earlier and the later model discuss the importance of collaboration, but the later version to the point of saying. “The importance of the group in Action Research cannot be overemphasised. Activities where an individual goes through cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection, cannot be regarded as action research. Action research is not individualistic” (1992: 15). Even so, they go on to say that “while the group is the focus of action research as an activity, individuals are committed to changes in their own personal practice as a means of advancing the collective interest of the group - the improvement of educational practice in general” (p16). It is possible that the increased emphasis comes from the political need to involve a range of people in order to effectively implement new practices; certainly their revised model does not give a justification of the increased emphasis on “group” involvement. Even though the Action Research cycle remains basically the same in the later version, I shall use the earlier 1984 model, as its acceptance of individual reflection is better suited to the description of my process, as solitary as it has had to be.

Kemmis and McTaggart describe teaching as an evolving process of learning for teacher and students, characterized by the teacher’s search for improvement or change (1984: 5). By adopting the Action
Research model, a teacher is certain to grow from the experience. The guide-lines access the resource of previous experience, while providing a new approach, so that a teacher isn't trapped into a teaching method that they or the context has outgrown, nor forced to take too many risks. Expressed simply, the model works in the following way: a teacher thinks some sort of change or improvement is desirable. This might be to solve a problem that has arisen or to explore a new direction for themselves. S/he decides what it is roughly that s/he wants to tackle. Kemmis and McTaggart describe this in terms of a "battle", as opposed to the "whole war" (p6). In other words the starting point can be small, just an idea. Through a cycle of plan, action, observation, reflection and further planning, the teacher introduces change into the curriculum, while simultaneously researching its effects through rigorous enquiry and analysis.

Plan
The early planning begins and the teacher takes into account past knowledge and experience as well as considering the objective for change. While designing simple steps toward the improvement/change, there is recognition of long-term potential. So there is an immediate and a future focus. The action planned is "strategic" - it takes account of risks, yet does not constrain the teacher from going beyond the current situation. The teacher aims for opening up potential and for flexibility with unexpected outcomes. (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 7)

Action
The action, though controlled and deliberate based on the "plan", also has its own energy, is no longer just an idea. The dynamism, produced by the action, which is interactive, forces the teacher to focus on change rather than being restricted by a plan that may develop shortcomings. Thus the teacher can deviate, keeping in mind the three aims at this stage:
   i) the improvement of the practice
   ii) the improvement of their understanding
   iii) the improvement of the situation where the action takes place.
(Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 8)
Observation
This is closely linked to the action. Though the teacher has planned the sorts of aspects that s/he will notice, s/he remains open to unpredictable effects, which contributes to a more detached frame of mind. This distance emphasises the research component, and establishes a less subjective involvement with the process. It enables criticism of the action, through a thoughtful observation of the participants. The detachment also increases the possibility of responding to unforeseen directions. (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 9)

Reflection
The teacher now has something concrete to work on: what happened when the new plan was introduced, what were the students’ responses, what changes were made to the original plan and what does all this mean? The teacher makes sense of the action and reflects on all the consequences of it. It is reflection on more than one level and as such enables the teacher to devise the next step, revise the objectives and generally grasp the significance of the action. (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 9) Discussion among the participants usually helps this stage.

Further planning
After the teacher has evaluated and analysed their data, another plan is drawn up that takes into account the new experiences. Now that the process is underway the teacher should be more confident. Kemmis and McTaggart describe this cyclical process of plan-action-observation-reflection-plan... like the spirals in a long spring, connected but with a new extension. These steps, and the way they are linked, provide the basis for improvement and understanding. What is exciting is that the teacher is also the researcher. This approach gives teachers credit for a capacity for knowledge, and for being able to use their multiple skills to re-shape and redefine their practice and their understanding of it. Kemmis and McTaggart recommend that the four activities be carried out collaboratively, “involving others affected by the action in the Action Research process” (1984: 7).
Where my approach differed from Kemmis and McTaggart's model was especially with regard to collaboration. "For teachers engaged in action research, communication with others affected (other teachers, parents and students) is essential" (1984: 13). In my situation it was not possible to get this level of support from my colleagues, as we were a small group with demanding work-loads. Even though in a general way we worked as a team, and did support each other in the recognition of our respective challenges, we did not have the opportunity to consult each other's thoughts on all curriculum developments, nor to take on shared projects. I was fully committed to developing the best program possible, but I had no time to spend with the Chemistry lecturer, for example, to talk about her problems with Chemistry, and she had no time to spend with me, though she was always encouraging. (I mention her as she is Chinese and was once an overseas student herself.) I did seek the written reflections of my students, but only once things were underway. Having given drama workshops in different contexts, I was used to being sensitive to individual differences. Workshops thrive on differences. People from the same ethnic or nationality group can still experience cultural difference (Pederson). Students can display similar behaviours, but have different expectations, so the workshop structure provides a crucible for all the different attitudes and behaviours. It is the starting point for something new, so participants in the process subconsciously agree to put biases aside so that there is this opportunity.

Kemmis and McTaggart (1984: 9) argue that "reflection is usually aided by discussion among participants" because "through discourse, reflection leads to the reconstruction of the meaning of the social situation and provides the basis for the revised plan". When appropriate I sought verbal responses from the participants; however, I was working with students who were non-native speakers of English and who had problems with verbal communication, so I had to solve these first. There is no way the students would have been able to participate in the type of discussion suggested by Kemmis and McTaggart's model. Perhaps it was also culturally inappropriate to expect them to criticize a teacher. The students knew, however, that Drama was an experimental approach to improve their English. I maintained my own analysis by keeping notes of every session, my
observations, issues that arose, the students' responses and my impulses about where to go next. In time, my process of planning, observation and reflection became more detailed. When an opportunity was there to discuss the work with a colleague or the students I would certainly do so, but I did not rely on it to proceed.

Kemmis and McTaggart's argument that the steps of Action Research should be taken "collaboratively" implies that the input will be beneficial, that other people will be as committed to finding the answers and wanting to discuss the issue and that this is the only way it can be done. Day writes that "reflection is a necessary but not a sufficient condition" for a teacher learning about their practice in the 1990's. He sees problems with collaboration describing it as "comfortable", "Balkanised" or "contrived collegiality" (Day 1993: 88). He argues that "confrontation either by self or others must occur", as we "do not know how reflection leads to change" (p90).

I was in a situation where my approach (action-idea) was breaking new ground and I did not know if it would work. We were establishing ourselves as a viable program, individually we had our own responsibilities, and time was limited. Why should it interest other teachers to give the input and support Kemmis and McTaggart suggest? When we had meetings there were so many other issues to discuss, the Drama curriculum was seen as my problem to solve. From my experience in theatre I was used to being hired for projects that often started as an idea, and I had to work my way through it (taking risks) to succeed. This didn't feel any different.

In Drama there may be times when it is inappropriate for the participants to be involved in detailed analysis of what took place. Sometimes the intellectual level cannot verbalise the experience, as it occurred on an emotional or physical level. Kemmis and McTaggart place much emphasis on verbal communication. But words don't describe everything and in a second-language context may convey unintended meanings. Discussion could have pre-empted reactions rather than just letting them happen. Spontaneously the students gave feedback to the Director, other lecturers and myself - they
“enjoyed Drama class”, “it was fun”. What else could they have said? It did not occur to me to ask them what I already knew.

To communicate with parents as Kemmis and McTaggart suggest, was not possible. They lived overseas and most did not speak English. To concern them in matters of curriculum would have offended their ideas about teachers and education. It was not in their culture to discuss everything with the teachers, whom they respected enormously. They were buying a ‘quality’ education and that is what they expected. Drama was a very new concept for them. It is difficult to invite someone to ‘observe’ a Drama workshop without them participating in it. If the activity is non-verbal for example, it is hard to understand from ‘outside’ as the learning relies on ‘doing’. It is intrusive for the group dynamic to have an outsider observing. To participate is ‘risky’ for colleagues, plus their involvement then becomes their focus. I did invite people to participate but no-one accepted my offer in 1990, except for brief visits by the Director and the Assistant Director.

Elliott recognises that sharing data with peers carries the risk of bringing latent conflicts and tensions out into the open (Elliott 1991: 61). This has been my experience - especially when students praised their experience of drama. I found it offends some teachers when students enjoy themselves! Another difficulty raised by Elliott, is when students commenting on one subject area, take it upon themselves to comment on others (p59). This may be unethical. I was accustomed to being defensive about Drama, having to ‘fight’ for its status as a subject and resources and facilities. Elliott describes issues of privacy, territoriality and authority when teachers avoid sharing knowledge, so “the secret garden is preserved” (p65). I was guilty of this but from a defensive position. I had to prove Drama would work first. Perhaps that is why there was greater ‘outside’ interest in 1991 and 1992, when my course was underway and officially approved.

In essence, the Director established a mood of ‘research’ for the Trinity program of wanting something more than English lessons for non-native speakers and in focusing on a comprehensive preparation for
the tertiary context. There seemed to be an endless number of issues to consider that were extraneous to Education and English, but nonetheless impacted so greatly on the students that they were impossible to ignore. These details were more to do with 'life' - for example, accommodation, cultural differences, youth, health, entertainment. There were language complications as the students came from different countries, with varying approaches to Education and teaching English. My interpretation that the students needed to feel confident within themselves and with their overall ability to communicate seemed to link everything.

The students needed to find their identity in English in the Australian context. Improving their speech without acknowledging the wider experience would not necessarily improve their academic performance. For the students to achieve in the Australian systems they had to undergo a considerable amount of change in attitude to lifestyle, as well as understanding of education. I had to help "bring about significant changes in the students' patterns of behaviour" (Tyler 1949: 44) so they could better access Australian academic and cultural life. It was exciting to bring all of my performing and teaching expertise to fruition in this practical way. As part of the planning process, Kemmis and McTaggart recommend that "participants may collaborate in discourse (both theoretical and practical) to build a language by which they may analyse and improve their understandings and action in the situation" (1984: 8). When I did the planning of my initial curriculum, the students had not arrived in Australia: they had problems with language and communication and it would have been alien for them to comment on curriculum without increasing the cultural gap between us and my curriculum was designed to be interactive.

In order to gain acceptance for Drama I had explored the current methods of preparing overseas students for university. In 1990, there was not much apart from the Foundation program at the University of NSW and various colleges that offered ESL courses. My exploring was like a "reconnaissance" as articulated by Kemmis and McTaggart (1984: 22). I based the structure of the workshop on my experience and knowledge and my plan was "flexible" (p7) so I could adapt to the
students' responses. I planned more activities than necessary, in case some ideas didn’t work. It was “strategic” (p8) as I chose a wide range of activities, which would teach me as much as possible about the students.

Drama workshops are inherently ways to gather information. When starting a new project the early workshops are designed to learn as much as possible about the participants, to ascertain their potential, to establish ground rules for my methodology and the experiential process. I set my goals, without being absolutely certain where the process will go, allowing the participants to be who they are and to remain open to their responses. I prefer to allow unforseen or unexpected possibilities to emerge which will automatically affect the sorts of activities I do and the direction I take. Drama works with these 'messages' and it enables you to establish a ‘dynamic’ or ‘code’ that suits the needs and aspirations of the group. However, sometimes the real learning that takes place in the workshop occurs incidentally to the perceived focus as “an important by-product of the dramatic experience” (Bolton 1986: 262).

Walker and Adelman (1975) make recommendations for classroom observation. Kemmis and McTaggart and Elliott advise ways to observe and monitor the participants' responses to the 'action' of Action Research. (Elliott 1991: 81; Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 39-42) These recommendations imply the teaching is in a traditional classroom. A Drama class is different, because of the inter-dependence of participants and teacher. That's all there is! Interestingly, Elliott suggests observing details like tone, gesture etc. (Elliott 1991: 77), and Kemmis and McTaggart recommend observing pupil and teacher verbal and non-verbal behaviour (Kemmis and McTaggart 1992: 105). These are the sorts of 'cues' that a Drama teacher instinctively observes to decide the success of an activity - without a positive response you can’t continue! You can’t disguise a failure by suddenly opening a book, setting some work or writing on the blackboard. Powers of observation and monitoring are the key to survival and success. It’s what you have to rely on. This is different from the experience of a science teacher for example, who can fall back on content, text book, notes and subject status. As working with overseas
students was new to me, I undertook various monitoring techniques: analytic memo, video, tapes, interviews, photos, diary. I invited the Directors to observe classes, had occasional visitors from the University, ran a conference for Drama and ESL professionals. In 1990, even though I worked alone, I was accountable, so my preparation and reflection had to be effective.

Elliott describes teaching as "an enabling activity" (1991: 10). What I tried to do was to explore the needs of overseas students, to solve some of the issues and to be of use to the students. Gavin Bolton in his article "Drama and Meaning" talks about the different levels of awareness and meaning within the dramatic activity for both teacher/observer and participants. He emphasises that the experience of the participants is a "unique event not translatable into terms other than itself" and that for observer and participants the meanings can be different. Drama is different in terms of observation. It is interesting that Bolton describes the teacher as teacher/observer of the action and as such the awareness and experience is different. The teacher's focus is to "enable" the participants to find their own meanings within a given context (Bolton 1986: 252). I saw my role as teacher/observer so that I could initiate action in response to the students' needs. A teacher/observer relies on the feedback of participants.

I responded to the issues from my own point of expertise and knowledge, which seemed different from the academic approach of other staff. My challenge was two-fold: firstly, I wanted to apply my knowledge of theatre to solve a problem that required a practical use; and secondly, I felt that the current academic approach, influenced by the philosophy of ESL teaching, would not solve all the issues of overseas students facing tertiary study in Australia.

Elliott does not see the process of curriculum development and Action Research as straightforward (Elliott 1991: 70). In particular he suggests the general idea should be allowed to shift (as a much deeper problem may come to light and the general idea may have to be changed); the reconnaissance stage can keep re-occurring as it involves analysis as well as fact finding. The implementation of the
action is not always easy, therefore it can't always be evaluated until you can monitor the extent of it. "There is a danger of forcing the process through when the situation requires one to sustain an activity for perhaps a longer period than originally anticipated... could well mean a commitment of at least a year." (p85) I needed to work in this way for a full year to be able to confidently evaluate the effects of drama on the students.

I will now continue my story and through it I will refer to Elliott's ideas for the 'reflective practitioner', as I liked the flexibility in their application and draw parallels with my approach. However, I will use the terms plan, action, observation, reflection as provided by Kemmis and McTaggart as I prefer the simplicity of the language.

Even though my main focus is 1990, the thesis in fact covers three years of work from 1990-1992 inclusive. I faced the greatest number of problems in 1990, as most of the time I was pioneering the curriculum and teaching possibilities without any precedents to guide me. In 1991 and 1992 with experience and approval behind me, I was able to concentrate on different aspects, to try to articulate my methodology, to research further and to consolidate the process I had undertaken.

I have been selective in the details of my story in order to best demonstrate the process of my methodology to the reader. I have chosen to write about the most significant features of my curriculum which includes: my workshop structure, body language, speech and the use of words. I believe that the essence of my curriculum was formed as a result of my experience as an actor, and my consequent responsiveness to the messages of my audience. The Action Research model helped me discover and articulate this process.
CHAPTER TWO

MEETING THE STUDENTS.

Introduction

As a teacher/observer to use Bolton’s term (1986: 252) I used the first Drama workshop to establish our context. Behind the seeming free, spontaneous and easy-going activities, there is in fact a very careful structure. Each moment counts towards the next and each activity gives the participants experiences and skills that will be utilized later. I designed each activity as a learning experience where the students might acquire a skill, an awareness or insight into others and themselves. The next activity builds onto, tests and extends this “knowledge”. However, designed into the plan is a flexibility to alter course. Though my goals are clear, there is more than one way of reaching them. This flexibility frees my creativity and gives the participants their own space, to be who they are. Their response is more important to me than the activity. Their responses are the workshop.

Teaching Asian students for the first time, I had designed activities that gave me an opportunity to observe them, so I could provide experiences appropriate to their level. For example, it was important for me to see how they expressed themselves verbally, with confidence or without, how they spoke, whether they were relaxed, and generally what I call each person’s “communication repertoire”. I also used the first session to get a general feel of each class. In this way I was very much an actor experimenting with an audience. I had written the script, but I did not how the audience would respond.

I reasoned that if an individual is unaccustomed to expressing themselves in a certain way, e.g. a Korean in English, then either they
don’t know how to, don’t have the ‘skills’ to do so, or may not want to. “Education is a process in which pupils develop their intellectual powers by utilizing public structures of knowledge in constructing personal understandings of life situations” (Elliott 1991: 150). I intended to teach the students about self-expression and communication in an Australian context and to help them find their own meaning in it. Even though I was interpreting communication from my own Western-Anglo-Saxon-Australian perspective, it made sense to do it this way as speaking English was the obvious common bond in the room, the language spoken at universities in Australia and it was the focus of their challenge. It was a way into the Australian culture. “Induction into systems of thought constitutes structures or systems of thinking about ourselves and the world, which are encapsulated in our culture” (p142). I did not feel that anyone would be disadvantaged as I wanted to promote the strengths of the individual and to develop each student’s potential.

In one workshop there was likely to be as many nationalities as there were participants. Students came from countries such as: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia (Brunei, Sabah, Penang), Singapore, Sri Lanka, India, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Samoa, Thailand, Macau and Western Samoa. I had been forewarned about a number of taboos e.g. Muslims don’t like touch, neither do Chinese, gender issues were to be avoided, not to do anything of a personal nature as this could be offensive, nor to approach political topics as this could cause friction between students of different nationalities. Whereas I knew the workshops could not succeed without crossing these ‘taboo’ boundaries!

The dramatic process separates the person from the ‘taboos’. Grotowski’s ‘discarding of masks’ means finding the person behind the layers of self-defense and culture. This was unavoidable. To access the culture in Australia, it meant a necessary confrontation with beliefs established in another culture. Life is different in Australia. This was a fact that they had to come to terms with, in order to succeed. “What constitutes useful knowledge in one context may prove useless in another.” (Elliott 1991: 151) It wasn’t a question of right or wrong, but is. My feeling was that if the cultural challenge
was too much then better not study in Australia. Our different lifestyle was out of my or their control. I wanted them to be open to difference and not afraid of it, to be open to the unknown. In this way my focus was "on process rather than product, directed to activating, engaging, challenging and stretching the natural powers of the human mind." (p10)

I did not assume that the students needed special treatment, because they were different. Instead I thought of them as a gathering of participants in an acting workshop. This was an important decision as it opened my thinking to the theatrical possibilities rather than focussing on the fact that they were from countries that were alien to me. I couldn't be culturally sensitive to ten nationalities at once, but I could look after ten people in a workshop. Afterall, I was there to challenge them culturally, for how else were they to understand our lifestyle? My curriculum would be shaped in response to the students' own search for meaning within the new context. (Elliott 1991: 11)

My approach paralleled Kemmis and McTaggart's Action Research model on account of the risks of social and political repercussions. In doing so, it seems to me that I allowed myself to trust my skill and expertise to get on with the planning. It was liberating and scary because it was both controlled (the known) and experimental (the unknown). I was committed to my idea of training the students in acting techniques and to seeing the consequences of it. I was also interested in observing the results of the experimentation with Literature and whether it helped the students academically. It was a planned course of action that would bring about breakthroughs in my own practice. Kemmis and McTaggart (1984: 9) write: "Action is also retrospectively bound by prior practice, but also prior practice has only a tentative grasp on the realities of the present". Risk is unavoidable.

Initially, for the workshop process to be effective it was essential for me:
* to get to know the students
* to earn their trust
* to establish a means of working and communicating whereby everyone was comfortable.
* to trial different forms of expression - movement, speech, dance, games, to see how the students responded.
* to encourage self-expression via this means.
* to have fun with the work so that we relaxed and enjoyed the processes.
* to establish an environment that was equally supportive and challenging, safe and risky.

I "strategically" (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 24) chose activities that were verbal and non-verbal so as to enable me to find out how they did communicate and how well they understood English. As I wanted to encourage their expressiveness, this challenge had to be present from the start. This is what leads to 'breakthroughs', this is what theatre is about. From my experience it is only when you challenge individuals to go beyond their usual patterns, that they progress and develop. Workshops are about new knowledge. My confidence in the participants in their ability to change was an important ingredient. I gave the students energy and starting points, but the 'essence' was their response, which was unpredictable. Kemmis and McTaggart describe this as the "dynamic" aspect of the action plan: it is the ingredient that will promote change. Their response and what I did with it, was what would make or break a workshop. It also would provide me with ideas for the future. "The 'action' moment of the Action Research process shows the practitioner at work: thoughtfully and constructively" (p9).

Thus in my planning of the first session, not only had I devised activities that would be most likely to 'work' dramatically in this new context; but I chose ones that would enable me to gather as much information as possible about i) the students, ii) their response to Theatre iii) the curriculum, and iv) my teaching - observations that would assist me later with reflection about the session and for further planning. This balance of the 'concrete' and the 'unknown' or the 'expected' and 'unexpected' helped establish my own research base by giving me optimum chance to observe and reflect. Stenhouse wrote that: "Education as induction in knowledge is successful to the extent that it makes the behavioural outcomes of the students unpredictable ... and not merely reproducing the understandings of their teachers."
The first workshop

I tried not to be obvious in my own adaptation to a room of Asian faces. It was a shock initially to have them all staring silently at me. They had never done anything like this before, so did not know what to expect or what was expected. I remember animatedly explaining why Drama was in the program pretending I was seeing their response. I wasn't. They watched me in a thick silence. Inscrutable. It was like we were separated by an invisible and impenetrable wall. I had never experienced such an unresponsive silence like this before, I didn't even know if they understood my English. I knew they'd be examining everything about me, so it was important to appear confident, calm and professional. In order to cope with the silence I went into 'automatic pilot' not to be distracted by what I thought were huge barriers between us. It was like I resorted to a well-rehearsed script from a past workshop. It's like a comedian who isn't getting laughs, but continues regardless. This helped my detachment so I could better observe, think and analyse my way through the two hour session.

When I had been on stage doing something the audience loves, I have found that they respond, and their message establishes an energy between you. If they don't like what you're doing, you try to change your approach to see if that makes a difference. The actor is conscious of this interactive energy. A workshop has the same give and take of energy. In my first session in 1990 it felt like this interaction was missing. I observed that the students were very uncomfortable in this context: solemn strained faces, sad and serious eyes, stiff bodies that revealed nothing. I can't get the participants to do much while they're like this. If they're feeling so uncomfortable then I have to get rid of the tension. Even standing up in a circle of people was threatening to them.

The warm-up was the first level of getting acquainted. This meant relaxing with the body. I recommended that participants remove their
shoes to be freer in their movements, which symbolically established that Drama was different from other ways of learning. I took them through a series of actors' separation exercises (used to prepare muscle groups to do mime or other controlled movement) and free-flow dance that loosened and relaxed the body. Some students giggled and smiled, so it seemed they enjoyed it; others were so stiff that it was obvious that they hadn't done anything like this before. Yet, they all responded to encouragement. I could see that they liked popular music. Genders were separated, but it did appear to be a pleasant experience. The atmosphere improved during this noisy activity as there was a sense of sharing and fun and it released some of the tension in the room. This was encouraging.

Next we played a physically active game which relied on quick responses, team co-operation and concentration. It was a good way to break down barriers between people, as no-one had any time to worry about anything else. It showed me how competitive some of the students were and their general level of fitness. I observed the females were noticeably less physically free than the males. The game made everyone quite puffed out and generally excited, which meant there were cries and laughter in the room. Now they didn't seem any different from a group of Australians! This helped me feel more confident about the activities I had planned. I started to expect them to be more receptive to my speaking. Having got acquainted non-verbally, it was time to be acquainted verbally.

The next activity (Teller/Listener) was more challenging as it was exposing on verbal and personal levels: it involved working in pairs, where for a couple of minutes the 'teller' recounted what they chose of their life to the 'listener'. Afterwards everyone sat in a large circle and the 'listener' from each pair had to stand up, introduce themselves and their partner and recount as much as possible of the life story they had just heard.

This was my way to:
* introduce the students to each other and to learn their names and nationalities.
* listen to their voices and to observe their voice projection
* to observe their English proficiency
* to get to know their individual personalities, to see what energy they had for the group.

* to observe the level of shyness/confidence when talking on their feet to an audience.

* to observe each individual very closely without being too obvious about it. For example, I watched the way they stood, whether they fumbled, whether they used their face and gestures while addressing the group, how the other students responded and what they did to show this response. I was gathering a communication ‘vocab’ about them that would later help me to interpret their needs. It enabled us all to learn quite a lot of ‘cultural’ information about their different backgrounds.

According to Kemmis and McTaggart, observation can ‘contribute to the improvement of practice through greater understanding and better informed strategic action’ (1984: 9). This activity also achieved a number of important drama goals: everyone now knew each other, so there was a more relaxed feeling which was the beginning of establishing a group dynamic. Everyone’s voice had been heard and English ‘exposed’. A free flowing discussion had followed some stories, which showed an interest in each other and a preparedness to be open. I observed their lack of presentation skills, which meant it was a challenge to address the group. In a second language context fear of speaking is a major barrier to most students.

The exchange of personal biographies established a balance of individual and group knowledge. The students appeared to want to get to know each other, as exemplified by a frenzied rush to tell as much as they could within the time limit. As the focus was on recalling their partner’s story, getting them to stand up and face the ‘audience’ was less confronting. The audience was keen to hear the details, which also helped. I was pleased when each student had been able to say something and be understood - they had had their first performance experience! This fact united the room. The students liked the opportunity to get acquainted:

I was very shy to speak, especially in english but now I feel more confident. Moreover it’s the way we get to know each other in class.
We were now about half-way into the workshop. I returned to non-verbal work having recognized that there was a wide range of spoken English. I wanted to develop every student’s self-confidence without being restricted by speech difficulties. The next task gave me a chance to observe their ability to imagine and to express something without relying on speech. It introduced the students to improvisational mime, which gave scope to be creative. Each individual had to present an idea to the audience whilst sitting in a circle. Their ideas could be simple or grand. Completion of the task was all I wanted. Just to stand up at this stage, is a huge non-verbal statement when being observed by a silent audience. *This time I had focused the silence as something to use to communicate.* The activity forced them to give clearer signals so we could all understand. I noted that “a couple of students blocked at first” (in my teaching notes 26th February, 1990). This meant that they found it confronting and so said they couldn’t do it. That this is a common strategy of avoidance, with Asian students it meant they were afraid of being wrong.

They were overcoming barriers to do with confidence, strangeness, expectations, space. I reassured the students that each individual’s input mattered to me and that it wasn’t a competition to get it *right.* Without realising it, this exercise touched on what would be a major issue for Asian students - fear of being wrong. It reflected their experience of education. It was crucial for me to not make a mistake with the participants, as this could have meant a rejection of me and my techniques and personal withdrawal. If you ask for a volunteer, for example, you don’t want to choose the ‘wrong’ one. With a group of Australians, you understand their visual cues and can see who is confident and who can handle the exposure. With my first group of Asians I did not know what the visual cues were, so I had to trust my ‘gut instinct’. This artistic knowledge has been described as “knowing-in-action” - “a kind of intelligence that begins by being tacit and spontaneous” (Schon 1987: 25).

I extended their understanding from the solo experience to a group improvisation where everyone contributed to creating a scene, but in
mime. The students were accustomed to exerting great control over their face and bodies. They were still being asked to do so, but this time with the intention of expressing ideas, rather than hiding ideas. Each successive scene improved, students started taking more risks in their choice of character and action. The body language developed at a rapid rate for some students, as they felt the instant recognition of their classmates - surprise and admiration. Interest in the activity took over from fear. They started to volunteer and were eager to participate. Again it made them laugh often. Here the use of body in relation to the message was a controlled focus, later it would become instinctive/automatic.

I have noticed that by emphasising the body in tableau style the students already are more physically expressive. They are enjoying the opportunity to communicate in this way. It seems to have liberated them.

(my notes, 25th March, 1991)

In this early stage I was satisfied to get everyone on stage joining in no matter how small their role. As the students gained trust in the workshop, they would also gain trust outside the workshop. They began to enjoy this way of working, as was obvious by their smiling faces and keenness to do more.

I had confidence in my ability to assess the individuals even though Asian faces were unfamiliar. This stemmed from the fact that my observation skills were already highly developed. I had previously taught theatre workshops to male teenage offenders at Turana correction centre, and to ‘emotionally disturbed’ teenagers at a psychiatric institution. These tasks involved working with participants skilled in anti-social behaviour; this gave extraordinarily unstable emotional dynamics and meant their response was unpredictable. I had to become extremely sensitive and observant of each individual, as much for the success of the projects as for my own personal safety. The participants in the workshops did not exist in socially accepted/recognised behaviour norms - every moment we were constantly on the edge at first, particularly as they were unused to choosing to co-operate. During these projects I believe I refined my observational skills considerably, and it is these skills that I resorted to when facing my early workshops with overseas students. My
observations were crucial to the success of the work, so it was essential to get it ‘right’ and to trust my ability.

By the end of the first two-hour workshop in 1990, my two most important observations were: (i) the students had accepted Drama. They demonstrated their interest by an increasing involvement in the activities and through the general feeling in the room. They appeared relaxed, happier and more communicative. This was important, as it showed their trust and acceptance of my approach. In acting terminology they had “opened themselves” to the challenges ahead. (ii) I understood their ‘silence’. I observed that the silence had different levels and by the end of the workshop it was less threatening to me. This was because I noticed that the silence changed - the acting work had already had an effect on their reservation as they began to fill the room with their presence, instead of just clinging to a spot along the wall, and, at the finish, they started chattering together.

During the Teller/Listener activity I realised that most of the students hadn’t even known each other’s names or their country of origin. Getting acquainted helped them simultaneously relax with each other and with the experience.

My notes February, 1991 emphasise the importance of getting acquainted:

Every student spoke well and showed a lot of interest in each other’s stories. A lot of discussion evolved from people asking questions relevant to the stories.

Asians don’t automatically like other Asians - they were no more at ease together than an assorted group of Australians who had never met! We are all naturally defensive when in a group of complete strangers. To the untrained inexperienced Australian, Asians may ‘look the same’, but Asians see obvious differences between Indonesians, Koreans and Taiwanese, or even between Malaysians from Brunei, Sabah or Penang for example; however, they don’t necessarily understand these differences.

Some notes I scribbled on my workshop plan in March, 1990 that I would analyse later when planning the next session, show my actor’s assessment of what was required. It is a precis form to indicate the
direction for the next few weeks. It is my shorthand for urgent skills they need for anything to happen:

Initially - trust, getting-to-know each other, early concepts of improvisation, early concepts of mime/dance, tableau. Need to encourage, make confident and teach skills and gestures relating to body language first so that later it is not humiliating or 'unnatural' to be expressive when communicating.

I now recognise my notes as an example of an actor's assessment of the audience's needs. It helped me plan the next workshop. Speech was too confronting at this stage and they needed more skills to do with the body. I set these goals, because I realised how difficult the session had been and yet it was what was needed. They had all seemed so alone. In observing the silence I felt the students were trapped by it in a way that made me think that they couldn't get out of it by themselves. I didn't know if they wanted to escape or not, but interpreted that it related to their educational background, where no participation was asked of them, and that they didn't know how to project themselves or speak up. This meant I had some theatrical problems to solve. This lack of individual input, was also an educational issue for them, if they were to succeed in the tertiary system in Australia. I needed to give them the skills to do so.

By 1993 I understood the silence further. I realised that the students were doing what they do best. At school in all Asian countries, students are not expected to participate as they do in Australia, it is frowned upon. They did not know that it was frustrating for a Drama teacher, because they didn't know how to do otherwise. Their reaction was best summed up by one of my students in November, 1992:

When Australians speak they claim the space and expect to be heard, whereas Asians are more modest, don't expect much. First impression for Asians is quite difficult, because they are more reserved, they don't have the skills to put themselves forward.

Male, 18 years, Malaysia, in an interview where he recalled his early impressions of Drama.

Within the workshop they experienced the paradox - the restriction of structure and rules alongside the openness of freedom and choice. This paralleled their life, e.g. away from home and 'free' to do what
they wanted, yet there was a high expectation of academic achievement; they could spend money as they wished, yet for many of them the families were making great sacrifices to provide this opportunity. They were ‘free’ in Australia, but had brought the restrictions imposed by another lifestyle with them.

The process I was involving them in was about trying to get rid of barriers. This was an actor’s approach - stripping away the layers to find the truth. For Asian students to progress in their communicative skills, they had to lose the protective layers (symbolised by controlled faces and gestures and an attitude of silence) that belonged to a different type of communication and culture. Their silence and stillness was their protective layer that hid the truth. I also needed to learn what lay behind these Asian ‘masks’ so I could better interpret their messages and needs. This confirmed my understanding of their need to learn to use the face and body when communicating.

Implications of the silence

The silence was the major factor of the first meeting. It was also the greatest obstacle to the success of the drama workshop - it didn’t give me any energy; there was no oral communication, it hid a lot of meanings, the students stayed more comfortable in it while it was less comfortable for me unless I removed words altogether! My main goal at this stage was to make the workshop successful, so I had no qualms about trying anything in pursuit of this. This meant the discussion part of the curriculum had to be dropped for the time being. Having no expectations for speech freed me too. By being purposefully silent the students were forced to use their bodies. In deciding to do non-verbal work only, what I had done was take the focus off speech completely.

The thing that overseas students appeared to be the most scared about is their lack of confidence and fear of rejection. So, by giving them another means of ‘speech’, it would provide relief, and it would teach them that their means of communication was not so restricted. In trusting my ability to observe, I also trusted my ability to reflect. In
acting terms the reflection stage was the most agonising, as it involved sifting through the vast amount of sight and sense observations, as well as the intellectual or analytical. Reflection was the stage where I assessed the significance of the moments, the responses and the effects of the action. In doing so, I realised the next step in my action. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1984: 9) reflection is when the teacher "seeks to make sense of processes, problems, issues and constraints made manifest in strategic action. It takes account of the variety of perspectives possible in the social situation and comprehends the issues and circumstances in which they arise".

My decision to further action involved solving acting issues as well as giving the students the skills they needed for their challenge. Being expressive doesn’t mean you’re less private, it means your communication is clearer and you’re more conscious of your message. I realised that most Australians wouldn’t understand these Asian students unless they were a lot clearer in their body language. I couldn’t see the point of adding words to tense, expressionless bodies. Get the body right first, then worry about the ‘words’. These students didn’t seem to know how to communicate with each other, let alone me, and it wasn’t a question of language. I had to give them opportunities for self-realisation and communication with each other, not just so they could talk to Australians!

In 1990 I wrote:

I am struck by the level of difficulty of some of my expectations. I am asking the students to develop skills that they need to complete the task successfully, without really having a solid base of skills behind them.

This showed my insecurity as to whether my expectations were inappropriate, it showed that I was not entirely confident with the students nor with my ‘reading’ of their signals. I was taking short cuts. I was also rejecting the curriculum in advance; it had been written in isolation and what I had realised since meeting the students was the enormity of the challenge. There was no way that they could participate in an academic discussion without being taught the confidence and language (verbal and non-verbal) to do so. My reflection showed that I was exploring the techniques that best solved
their problems. I did not think like this in 1992, as by this time I believed the sky was the limit and nationality wasn't a problem. By then I didn't ask anything of the students of which they weren't capable.

In 1990 I knew how to improve English-speaking people's confidence and ability to communicate. However I didn't know what would happen with a multi-cultural audience for whom English was a second language. My experience as an actor gave me confidence that I was sufficiently professional to make something work. All the same I did experience many doubts about my work. Kemmis and McTaggart would say that it is because it is "risky" (1984: 8). I experimented quite a lot too, oscillating between the prepared curriculum and an emerging curriculum that I was designing week by week, in response to what took place in class. I gave increasing focus to drama activities, as this seemed to be what the students wanted and needed. I didn't think it was culturally offending as it felt 'right'. The workshop structure was my security as it provided me with a familiar environment to learn about the students and to teach them something at the same time. "Action is thus fluid and dynamic, requiring instant decisions about what is to be done, and the exercise of practical judgment" (p9). I often changed my plans while in a workshop. This was because of the mood of the group or I had a sudden idea that seemed better suited to the situation. I often worked instinctively.

For example, one day with a group, I noticed a spark between us that was different, an energy that hadn't been there before. It made me want to 'play'. I dropped my lesson plan immediately and explored this feeling. My notes, 14th June, 1990 describe what happened:

We had a vigorous dance work-out that led to simple acrobatics. The group so enjoyed the movement work that we ended up spending two hours devising a group dance...we worked continuously devising the piece 'The Gang War' with structure, tension and a conclusion...The students were all beaming throughout and there was a fantastic atmosphere.

I was completely struck by this particular workshop. I had been worrying about this group of students, as they were less responsive
than others. The students came from Malaysia - Brunei and Penang, Singapore, Indonesia, India, Taiwan and Hong Kong. A few of them were having problems in all their subjects and were close to being sent home. It was a confidence breakthrough for these students. Students who I had thought were not up to the challenge of tertiary life, surprised me by their innovative and thoughtful ideas. One girl in particular who had barely spoken a word to anyone apart from the Director, gave her all to the solo, despite never having danced in her life. We were all amazed. It gave me an opportunity to 'see' another side of their personalities, a side that they had not expressed. In doing this dance with them I observed that overseas students can be greatly underestimated in their ability to adapt. I had been putting up unnecessary barriers to communication. It was as if they wanted me to push them out of themselves and didn't want to stay in their shyness prison. I had been overly culturally sensitive, which was denying them their challenge.

In the context of improving their speech, dance seemed illogical. But it worked; the students appear to have needed a way to access some part of themselves that opened them to the challenge. Each student found their expression non-verbally in dance; this meant projecting themselves into the space (most of them had never danced before); this was a symbolic step in their development towards confident communication. This experience had injected them with a confidence that I had never imagined. Kemmis and McTaggart describe action that takes risks, by following the students' interest, in preference to the plan, as "fluid and dynamic" (1984: 9). In workshop-speak this is called 'going with the flow'. The actor/teacher is trying to engage the participants' spontenity, which will open them to new ways of seeing, understanding, responding. The flow cycle works like this: the actor will provide an impulse, a starting point; the participants respond. Maybe something clicks. The actor notices and the next activity develops this further.

By 1992, I anticipated the students' needs in my planning for the first workshop. I did not waste any energy - I was completely focused. I was confident and relaxed about the different nationalities, their needs and the extent of the challenge. It was like setting up a neutral
culture, knowing that there was indeed a common denominator in our potential to communicate as Grotowski maintained (Grotowski 1968: 17). Nevertheless each year the first workshop remained extremely important in establishing the link between teacher, students and method. The first session was a microcosm of my methodology as it showed how I combined the essentials of the acting process with the requisite experimentation, thus satisfying my needs and the needs of the students. All the ingredients were there in this first session. Every element mattered.

In the first week of March, 1992, I tested this understanding and knowledge by giving the students a few written questions to answer before, and after the first workshop to see if their responses matched my aims. My aims included:

1 to get to know the group, learn names  
Important for establishing trust, familiarity and control

2 to assess their shyness and to develop their confidence  
Experience had taught me that 'silence' was not the best way to judge English ability. Shyness could inhibit a student's capacity to understand instructions. 'Outgoing' students often expressed their nervousness differently.

3 start the formation of a solid group dynamic  
By building a group, individuals are strengthened, important for risk-taking behaviour, students who were alone, getting acquainted meant familiarity, sharing and friendship.

4 to establish a clear orientation of drama  
They needed an uncluttered focus for motivation, and to relax

5 to introduce some basic drama skills  
I introduced concepts of on-stage, actor, audience, the basic structure of the 'language' of theatre. All this helped students to focus on their own uniqueness and how this enriched the whole group, each individual's contribution counted.
The questions I gave the students *before* were simply to make them more conscious of the process and their reaction to it. I left the questions open-ended, as I wanted the students to say for themselves what was important about the session *for them*, rather than talking about what was important for me. I did not know any students by name and suggested they answer without signing their names, as I felt this would encourage honesty. Several students chose to write their names, which explains why for some responses I can detail age, gender and nationality, for the others they remain anonymous. Their written responses clearly showed that the first session tapped into their needs at this stage. Forty-seven students responded to the questions: *How do you feel now (after the workshop)?* and *Did you learn anything?*

Of the 47, 40 wrote of their wellbeing, feeling more relaxed:

*It feels most comfortable than before started.*  
(Female, 20 years, Hong Kong)

*I didn’t feel out of place. Other subjects undermined my confidence.*  
(Female, 19 years, Japan)

*express more bravely more relax and sense of belonging*  
(unnamed student)

39/47 students made direct mention of the group feeling, communication and participation with others:

*I feel as though I am getting out of the situation of being ashamed to speak openly in front of others.*  
(Female, 19 years, Solomon Islands)

*I actually learnt to have the self-confidence to join the crowd and participate with the others*  
(Unnamed student)

*I’ve learned something from other people about how to express my feeling.*  
(Female, 20 yrs, Taiwan)

*I learnt to know and work in group and much more activities gives me the confidence to participate.*  
(Unnamed student)
From this session, I find the people how they are looked like and what are their thinking as well. Some people are closing themselves and some of them are very open. Different people have different ideas and it will be a good lesson and exercise. (Unnamed student)

Initially difficult to volunteer - being aware of other people's reactions, be accepted by others. (Muslim male, 18 years, Malaysia)

I found out that some can do the act without feeling shy. I do hope I can do that too. We also can do anything we like and think. (Unnamed student)

In their replies they also acknowledge the risks, the influence of the group, the importance of approval and acceptance.

38/47 students felt more confident, less shy:

I feel great and it gave me a lot of confidence and fun as well. I'm waiting for the next lesson soon. (Male, 19 years, Malaysia)

I learnt that I can get to express myself as well as imagine anything that comes to mind, and also to be an individual as one has their own imaginations and ideas. (Muslim female, 19 years, Malaysia)

I've learned that just in a few hours all of us are beginning to lose our shyness bit by bit (Unnamed student)

I feel a bit more opened. I used to be very shy back in my country. (Unnamed student)

I really enjoyed this class today, because now, I feel a bit confident about myself now. (Unnamed student)

37/47 students wrote they'd learnt something about acting, enjoyed learning the new techniques:

I learnt a lot, I think my spirit is building up. (Muslim male, 19 years, Malaysia)
I enjoy it and I find the way how to enjoy in it. Everyone share their own idea and very amazing stories and funny idea. We can success our dream by drama. (Unnamed student)

express more bravely more relax and sense of belonging (Unnamed student)

It is nice and useful. I've got something on acting from it. It give me a chance to act and communicate with others. (Unnamed student)

I feel great. It's like I'm not ashamed to do anything anymore. I know I have the guts to do what I want but I have to know how to start off. (Unnamed student)

They observe and comment on behaviour, other people less threatening, wanting to and liking expressing feelings, breaks down barriers.

24/47 students wrote of the importance of learning names and getting acquainted:

I know the other classmates better. (Unnamed student)

I know the names of my classmates. (Unnamed student)

brings nationalities together ... out of class stick to own group ... helped me to overcome shyness, wanted to speak up more (Female, 19 years, Malaysia)

I learned that my classmates are very innovative and have a great sense of humour, even those who I originally thought were timid. (Unnamed student)

Students sometimes mentioned more than one category. Their responses highlighted their needs as self-confidence, sense of relaxation and wellbeing, trust and understanding of others, and their interest in the opportunity to learn theatre techniques, which they believed would help them in their social relationships and communication. These responses matched my aims for the first session. What I found particularly significant was that students were more concerned with their own self-development, confidence with
others, and the communication skills that Drama would give them, than an emphasis on their spoken English. This was even more remarkable as several students did not speak English very well. This confirmed what I had felt in 1990.

Certain key features of my 1992 workshops stand out: I achieved more in the first six sessions than ever before. I could anticipate what they needed, so was economical in my use of activities to achieve the goals. I was also more ambitious and set higher standards for the students. I recognised what was essential, what was ‘extra’, ways of extending the students’ learning and talents. My aims were clear, focused and more objective. This didn’t stop me from trying new ideas, I just knew how to organise the ideas to exert maximum impact. *In fact I took a lot of risks in style and ideas.* What I did include in the plan were the points to emphasise. These didn’t change, but I was able to teach them in different ways. Trust was well established from the start and I did not need to emphasise this in planning. The other most significant difference was that I opened up the cultural challenge from the start and created opportunities for the students to explore each others’ ideas and reactions. They had to quickly come to terms with their own cultural differences.

As a result, the students were better trained and this expressed itself in their wanting more challenges: *e.g.* they all performed at two public occasions - at a performance evening called “Stories By The Fire-side”, which was an opportunity for them to display their talent and skill and at the end of year performance exam, which was an appropriate culmination to an enjoyable year.

This period of reflection has enabled me to understand more about 1990. At the time, I was *observing* the students and trying to understand them. This meant that I responded to the students at each moment, *allowing the workshop to proceed from them* rather than from my set plan. In this way it wasn’t fixed, but was adaptable to the students’ energy and interests. I had unconsciously integrated levels of culture, self-knowledge, language (verbal and non-verbal), tolerance and understanding into the activities.
Whereas in 1992, I set specific goals for the students, and I knew how to achieve them. I was no longer hesitant about the effectiveness of theatre techniques. I anticipated their responses, and I knew the activities would develop their communication skills. I had trialled and errored my way for two years, using a model of plan, action, observation, reflection, further planning. I did not use the time to learn about Asian students, I used it to get on with the challenge. The cyclic approach had trained me in the essential elements of the workshop.

Reflection based on the Action Research model enabled me to identify and articulate my process. Thus, in allowing myself great flexibility in the early 1990 workshops, I could rely on my previous skill and expertise to overcome my problems. Over the years 1990-1992, as my knowledge about Asian students increased, so the workshops became more attuned to the students' needs.
CHAPTER THREE

THE LIMITATIONS OF "THE ESL APPROACH"

Having identified my theatrical approach to communication, it is important to understand why I followed my own path and not that of the usual teacher of ESL (English as a second language). When I devised my course in 1990, the information I had about ESL did not seem to answer my problems. There were some helpful ideas to use in classes, but there was not an approach that I could adopt for my particular situation.

In 1990, despite the Director's approach, the University obliged us to include ESL as one of the subjects. The ESL teacher said that the students required language assistance and set about to provide this. Whereas I saw that the students needed increased self-confidence and personal development to negotiate the new culture. The distinctive approaches we took to assisting overseas students will be clarified by examining some of the major issues that impact on the students on arrival in Australia.

The students' background

Before coming to Australia, almost all the students had learnt some English. It was usually taught by an Asian teacher, within an Asian cultural context, from a textbook emphasising vocabulary and grammar, without any oral work. The students were not personally empowered to deal with life in an English-speaking context. This would not matter if they stayed in their own countries, but by coming to Australia it caused problems. Not having ever had an experience of speaking English at school meant they had difficulty with pronunciation and basic conversation. Despite our testing and their school results, there was a broad range of skills from little English to
near-native fluency. Many students had never spoken English, others had spoken it at home as their parents were keen to give their children an 'educational edge'. Problems of misinterpretation, lack of spoken practice in an Australian context, isolation, loneliness, lack of understanding and assertiveness were endemic.

The students often knew words/phrases that referred to things they hadn't seen or experienced. For example i) lamb chop. (They are usually grateful for a tour of the supermarket, as they have no idea what Australians do with many of the products.) ii) the sense of being an individual with a choice, such as career choice. They did not question the family's right to choose their career for them. A student struggled to become a doctor or an accountant, despite having no propensity for such a career, nor the academic ability. The connection between family and identity was so intrinsic that students rarely considered their own needs. For scholarship holders it was similar, as governments insisted that they study for degrees where there were shortages of qualified people. This caused a lot of heartache as sometimes students simply did not gain the results - not for lack of effort. The different concepts of personal rights and identity, choice and loyalty they accepted back home. Yet the reality they encountered in Australia opened unexpected choices that tested this acceptance. Learning words by heart and pronouncing them correctly didn't automatically help with the sort of situations that demanded communication requiring skills of a personal nature, such as rejecting the charming, though unwanted, advances of a friendly Australian.

My view of the way many overseas students speak English is as if words and structures are superimposed onto a person. It is perfect imitation. They haven't integrated the language into their own identity to use as an expression of themselves. Their words are correct, but empty. There is an absence of cultural understanding. It isn't the individual speaking, it is the words, structures that they have learnt to imitate, not integrate. Communication is not impersonal and often requires a subtle use of language (verbal and non-verbal). It is unnatural to stand back and assess objectively what is required before participating.
It isn’t just a question of selecting the right behaviour for a particular situation in one’s life, of saying to oneself ‘Ah yes, interview with housing officer, so I should adopt role A and use vocab B, syntax C, and so on.’ People make these choices at an intuitive level, based on intuitive interpretation of a situation. ... When neither we nor the cultural group to which we belong have specific experience of a particular type of situation, then we tend to equate it to a situation that we do know. Thus we may lump together a range of situations that others find it necessary or useful to differentiate. (Seely 1976: 12)

It is obvious that the students’ lack of understanding or insight into the range of situations they face in Australia impacts on their experiences of life and education. It becomes not simply

a matter of developing human powers of understanding by inducting students into ‘structures of knowledge’ - it is about developing these powers in relation to the things which matter in life. Powers of human understanding must be developed to deal with problems of living.

(Elliott 1991: 147)

Let me expand on how the ‘problems of English’ affect the students’ problems of living. For some the complete lack of experience of spoken English before arrival in Australia means they are ill-equipped to participate in a culture that they don’t know or understand. While those skilled in spoken English, are usually trained for another culture, so are unable to assert themselves easily in Australia.

In term three 1990, I was asked to give five boys from Hong Kong extra speaking practice. They were unpopular as they seemed to prefer speaking Cantonese and made no effort to mix in. With regular meetings I realised their English was quite good. They seemed to gain enormous confidence just by meeting and telling me about their life in Melbourne. They had basically alienated themselves from Australian society and established their own unit as protection against homesickness and fear. Their behaviour, which had been interpreted as arrogance, was actually fear. One of these boys expressed it like this:

sometimes when they (Australians) are friendly, we don’t have much to talk about. I think it is because we, Asians, are afraid to talk a lot because we can’t catch what they are trying to say and we
are afraid we will make mistakes when we speak. I suppose we have to be braver.
Taken from an interview in the student magazine.

This is a common problem! Most students do not have the opportunity to mix with Australians, they share accommodation with students from their own nationality group or live alone, and they spend a lot of time studying rather than 'doing'. Their other subjects, though taught in English, do not always require active participation. Some students told me that apart from class, they don't talk to anyone and have spent entire week-ends and holiday breaks on their own. Others spend hours on the phone. They do not have the skills/money/confidence to organise to meet people. This very effectively denies them the opportunity to access the social and academic life in and around the university.

Problems of a different kind emerged for students already fluent. One of our top students suffered in her 'homestay' from a lack of understanding about her 'rights'. For almost a year she not only paid full board, but was expected to do the housework and garden maintenance! She had arranged a homestay for protection, yet was unable to deal with a situation that contravened this. I took another equally fluent student to hospital when he told me he had been coughing blood for a few weeks. He had lacked the self-confidence to ask for help and stayed home waiting to get better, ordering delivery pizza for food. Fluency in English doesn't help students cope with the culture shock of Western lifestyle (Pederson, 1991). A scholarship student from the Solomon Islands found it difficult to understand budgeting, what were enormous amounts of money to her. A student from Thailand couldn't contact her parents as there were no phones in the village where they lived and the postal service was unreliable. These are all examples of when cultural issues rather than English fluency directly affect the students' experience.

Rules established by a strong network of family, friends and society had been very clear back home. Leong describes his initial experience of the Australian way of life as "culturally shocking" (1992: 9). Australia offered so much personal freedom in their eyes, not only because they were on their own away from all the traditional
structures, but also by the very nature of the culture itself. Caplan writes: "what is sexual in one context may not be so in another: an experience becomes sexual by application of socially learned meanings" (1987: 2). A fact that underlined their difficulty with the apparent lack of 'rules' and 'restraints' on personal and social behaviour, individual rights, and adult choices and decision-making.

the younger generation of Australia may very well have come from another planet as far as freedom is concerned (A Muslim student's comment in a group discussion I held in 1992 on the needs of overseas students.)

Extreme differences in educational expectations caused further problems. The students were used to an authoritarian system based on a rote learning structure, imposed discipline, lack of participation, non-existent individual choice, awesome respect for teachers, silence in class. In Australia they had to deal with an open system that encourages individuality, choice and participation, where students develop and interpret ideas for themselves and are encouraged to question ideas expressed by their teachers.

In Malaysia there are so many regulations in schools. For example, you can't mention the word 'you' when speaking to a teacher, you have to look away when being scolded, you can't use first names. In Malaysia we seldom participate. Smiling is ok but laughing out loud is considered rude. in Australia we have 'rights'.
(Male, 19 years, Malaysia) From an interview with students at the end of 1991.

I think the most impressive thing for me in Australia is the teaching. We are free to express our opinions, whereas in Hong Kong we have to follow whatever the teachers say.
(Female, 18 years, Hong Kong) Taken from an entry in the student magazine.

The different expectations cause problems for the students. To want to participate is an issue of confidence and culture not second language. Many students wouldn't participate even if the class were held in their native language, as they have not been trained for independent thinking. This is a distinct disadvantage when you're in the position of (what seems like) complete independence and
freedom, and responsible for decisions that directly affect you academically and personally. They experience a lack of self-confidence in their ability to 'know' something for themselves (Antaki, 1988). The rigid and disciplined educational structures back home paralleled the lack of personal/individual freedom of their lifestyle. However, in Australia it is different:

You're not under parents' influence you're on your own, you have to make your own decisions ... back home your parents are there to guide you, here you're on your own so it's more tempting ... you're more open ... you know it's wrong, but when your friends do it you're more likely to join in. Back home your parents are there to stop you and to say 'don't do that, that's wrong'.

(Female, 19 years, Solomon Islands) From a discussion I held in 1992 on the needs of overseas students.

Students suffer from the lack of support from family and friends within an 'unstructured' society. They were used to depending on very clear limits to behaviour. Most did not receive any preparation for the new situation.

"The greater the distance between the home culture and the school expectations, the more severe these problems of 'acculturation'. Such problems block learning because they represent an extra burden on energy and a discontinuing in experience. They are also a source in personality conflict and disturbance."

(Taba 1962: 72)

Even though Hilda Taba was referring to students in USA, it is equally relevant for students here. In August, 1990 I wrote:

Many Asian students must learn a whole new way of life, of education, of culture, at the same time as speaking English in an Australian context. The 'new' freedom of not being immediately answerable to anyone, together with the risks associated with choice, can be very daunting.

I felt they needed to develop a means of adaptation and survival in a culture that expressed itself in ways that were 'alien' to their experience. They need to understand that in Australia individuals have rights within the culture, but not everyone had to act on them. Options that existed which Australians chose and chose to make
available for others include: homosexuality, freely available R-rated
videos, kissing and holding hands in public places, being topless on
the beach. This culture of 'freedom' and 'choice' was intrinsically
expressed in the language and education system too. Knowing the
correct vocabulary didn't prepare the students for using it to deal with
these sorts of concepts. Elliott argues that "learning involves active
Fluency in English in fact did not help the students negotiate these
situations. This explains why a linguistic solution to their problems is
insufficient. In 1991 the students and I became involved in an
informative discussion, which showed the value they attached to
mastering English and the fact that they recognised inherent
cultural differences expressed through the language, and that they hoped to
experience this 'difference'. I recorded it in my diary, dated 24th June,
1991:

We discussed the significance of Asians learning English and
the importance of English being spoken world-wide for
international relations. One student from Hong Kong said that
now he found that for some things [he] preferred to say them in
English as it was quicker and easier than Chinese

What he was saying was that in terms of the sort of life experiences he
had in Australia, English expressed more accurately what he needed to
say. Most students said the Asians thought of "white English-
speaking people as more open-minded than Asians". They felt "white
people allowed more individual freedom which is what appeals to
Asians." They said that most Asians wanted to speak English so they
would "know what was going on in the world". This was further
reinforced by a female student from Hong Kong in an interview in
1992:

I liked being made to notice the world around you. Drama forced
me to watch tv and read newspapers to bring ideas to class - very
important to open up the outside world.

This is not an unusual remark as many students do not seem to know
what is going on in the Western world. Students need to explore
issues for themselves.
This will contribute to their understanding of their own identity in an English-speaking context. Without opportunities such as this their English 'persona' will be stunted. Increasingly I am aware that learning another language is so much more than remembering words and grammar.
(My notes 17th June, 1991)

Their well-being was repeatedly undermined by their inexperience and vulnerability. Stephan Smith emphasises this point when he writes: "The method actor, like the language learner, is not as concerned with the words that come out of the mouth as with what these words mean to the speaker, why these words were chosen, and what the words mean to all who hear them" (1984: 13).

The students fear rejection from each other and are ruled by a pressure to 'conform' to a life suited to their home country, not Australia. If you have never experienced freedom in the way they see it exists in Australia, without obvious limits, it requires a great deal of self-confidence and maturity to survive. Perhaps the greatest cause of conflict for the students is their new-found experience of 'individuality' and its accompanying 'freedom of thought and action' which is expressed through their developing use of English versus the profound respect and loyalty for family and culture which they are used to expressing in another language and another place. The temptations of what is new are doubly felt as it represents something that was desired by youth back home, it is a conflict between generations, the older society and the young which is already affected by Western music and Western fashion, McDonalds' and the desire for change. The loneliness and the isolation increase the alienation or the temptation. The students who come here to study are not just dealing with linguistic issues.

The approach taken by ESL staff in 1990 was so different from mine that this caused conflict - another reason why it did not occur to me to invite collaboration, as I felt our worlds were diametrically opposed. It appeared to me that the students were treated like problems, not people. Some of the ESL staff appeared to find my techniques threatening and unnecessary, as the students weren't in Australia to become actors. Several ESL teachers have been employed at Trinity, each with her own ideas, but the focus has been dominantly linguistic.
The changes in ESL staff have created problems, particularly with regard to establishing their role in an innovative program such as Trinity. Perhaps for this reason and the fact that Drama quickly became an established part of the program, not one of them has expressed an interest in teaching theatre techniques. Their concern has mainly involved giving support and assistance to the students in use of the library, teaching grammatically correct written forms, assistance with the specialist ‘language’ needs of the students’ different subjects and generally English for academic purposes.

I wanted to see what ESL had to offer in the way of ‘communication’ techniques - verbal, non-verbal, gestural and so on. The skills I felt would develop their ability to speak up and participate. Central to these was self-confidence. So I was not looking for ways to improve their written English, but their spoken communication.

**ESL and ‘language’**

When writers of ESL publications mention communication, almost invariably they mean speech, and the uses of speech (Brown (1977) and Bygate (1987)). There are many books that have innovative suggestions to “provoke spoken communication” (Harmer 1991: 122). Top of the list is the text by Harmer, which is familiar to most ESL teachers. His approach is comprehensive. Examples of “communicative activities” are: oral communicative activities, reaching a consensus, discussion, relaying instructions, games, problem-solving, talking about yourself, writing reports and advertisements. All activities that involve a range of speech situations.

What struck me was that out of Harmer’s twenty-one suggested activities, only five relied solely on direct and immediate interaction between the students. All the others involved preparation via some form of writing, reading and studying prior to the interaction. This demonstrated that the focus was not on the interaction. The emphasis was aimed to teach the appropriate form of communication e.g. a report or giving directions, and on the words that would be used. This style of approach is typical of ESL methodology. It achieves the
purpose of teaching the appropriate linguistic form to suit the context. With the need for books, pens and paper, something to write on and someone to sit next to, the activities also indirectly impose certain physical constraints. The writing-speaking approach is best suited to a traditional classroom. In Harmer's book of 296 pages, the communication chapter takes up only 30. The focus does not seem to be on oral communication as such, but on an academic mastery of written and spoken forms of the English language. It's as if the teacher doesn't need as much help with conversation but rather with other aspects of language.

Eckard and Keany make 'speaking' their entire focus. They describe the "primary ESL goal" as to teach students to "speak English well enough to converse spontaneously and naturally with native speakers" (1981: 1). They have developed some thoughtful techniques to combine what they describe as "linguistic" (knowing the phonology and structures) and "communicative' skills" (knowing how, when and when not to use learned structures in real life situations) (p3).

They claim that "conversation in a second language is a skill" (Eckard and Keany: 18). From my experience, conversation in a first language is also a skill, which not all students possess! The 'skill of conversation' that they identify is taught with similar techniques to Harmer. The actual conversation is stylized to teach appropriate linguistic forms to suit the given context. The teaching is accompanied by 'aids' such as dialogue outlines, pictures, stories, situations, all to be 'prepared' by the teacher in advance and which will involve the students in reading, discussion and/or writing prior to the exercise.

The significance of cultural influence is well documented and recognised as having a marked effect on the context and the conversation taking place. Many ESL texts mention 'paralanguage' and its influence on 'speech'.

What people say in a conversation, how they say it, when they say it, and what gestures they use to reinforce their verbal utterances are all governed by cultural constants or formulas that determine such matters as how to disagree, how to apologise, how to take turns in a conversation, how close to stand or sit,
when to make or avoid contact, how to interrupt a speaker, how to make a request, how much volume to use, which gestures to avoid, which words to avoid, when to remain silent, or how to terminate a conversation. (Eckard & Keany 1981: 3)

However, most if not all of the speaking situations that they identify will be influenced by other factors as well for example, gender, status, education. There is not a formula way of doing a gesture in a given time and place. Such a list implies that there is a right way that can be learned, but in reality context can change the rules. Apart from this, it assumes that Australians also ‘live’ by the ‘rules’!

Smith goes into greater detail about non-verbal aspects which influence conversation. He emphasises the importance of “body language” and “how it communicates, how it is misinterpreted, and how in and/or out of control it can be” and recommends many activities to help students with awareness of their body’s messages, just in the way an actor would - “A person learning about a foreign culture needs to become a better actor” (1984: 13). As this is rather confronting, he is sensitive to the need for ‘training’ and relaxation. Apart from listing various activities he doesn’t actually say how the use of the body language eventually becomes part of the student’s communication repertoire. There is an understanding of the importance of helping students to relax, to enable better expression. “Unnecessary tension inhibits spontaneity. Actors use exercises to help them relax. The more an actor can free himself or herself of tension, the more freedom will be left for expression” (p11). Smith in fact recommends many of the skills used by actors as appropriate training for second language learners. In feeling ‘free’ it is assumed that the student will be more ready for ‘communication’ as s/he will be more self-confident too.

Smith writes that “warming up can help language learners gain an awareness of and control over themselves, which can make them confident” (1982: 18). Maley and Duff also signify the importance of the ‘warm-up’ to help develop “a strong sense of mutual confidence and co-operation” (1982: 38) which means the class is supportive of the individuals in it. Trust, relaxation and self-confidence are also recognised as important for establishing the ‘right’ atmosphere to
promote speaking in the second language. The importance of student confidence in being able to speak easily and naturally is recognised throughout the literature. A lot of the recommended techniques incorporate drama activities and games.

Maley and Duff ‘humanise’ the techniques of second language learning by emphasising the influence of emotion: “language is not purely an intellectual matter” (1990: 7). They describe the effect of emotion and mood on a conversation and how this will affect the tone, choice of words, response and so on. “What we say will be coloured not only by our feelings but by the mood and disposition of others” (1982: 11). They demonstrate that a person’s relationship with the speaker will necessarily change their intention and hence their speech. The contribution by Maley and Duff emphasises a more ‘real’ or ‘natural’ approach to communication and they offer a wide range of interesting and innovative drama ideas to direct the teacher’s focus to the fact that students are people and as such have a lot going on that is extraneous to words, phrases, grammar and memory. “Drama techniques directly engage students’ feelings, and, as a result, often make them aware of the need to be able to express them appropriately” (p11).

“It is important to encourage students from the start to become sensitive to the way in which our built-in views of our own roles and those of others are defined and clarified through language. Our roles are constantly shifting” (1982: 10). Yet they provide activities to practise one role at a time. In focusing on the ‘people’ side of their students Maley and Duff recognise the importance of a good classroom dynamic “good group feeling” as a device to improve a student’s confidence to take a risk in front of the other members of the class. They reinforce the use of the body to help establish this. Body language is recognised as important, as a means to develop ‘trust’: “physical trust is an important prerequisite for the psychological trust involved in free, creative interactions” (p49). They also recommend its use to dispel student restlessness (from sitting at desks) and for body awareness so that the students are conscious of gestures and non-verbal messages. Harmer recommends some amusing activities
involving mime for the purpose of giving and receiving instructions and to encourage physical expression (1991: 126).

Many of the aspects I consider important to ‘communication’ exist in the ESL literature: e.g. interaction to suit context, cultural influence, body language, confidence, trust, emotion, group dynamic, relationships and an actor’s approach. The writers I have highlighted seem to me to offer a range of effective techniques to achieve these goals. For example, the emphasis on trust so that risks can be taken in the classroom, essential for confidence in speaking. The ideas are sophisticated in their concepts of paralanguage, kinesics, prosodies and so on, however these make up just a tiny part of the ESL machine - it is mainly about linguistics in the end. It is a giant puzzle of fragments, which must be slowly and systematically put together by the teacher: culture on Monday, writing on Wednesday, conversation on Friday. The aim is overall mastery of the ‘language’ written and spoken forms, as they exist in books, as opposed to communication between people.

For the purposes of this thesis where my interest is in communication, I feel that ESL separates each aspect and teaches it in isolation. It does not grasp communication as a ‘whole’; inadequate attention is given to synthesizing all of the aspects into a complete performance. For example, speaking is approached as a formula like this:

(fun) activity + one use of language + one type of talking = better grasp of ‘language’.

benefits may include: confidence, relaxation, cultural understanding.

When faced with so many aspects of ‘language’ to work on, the teacher must have an overall vision that connects all the ‘parts’. This is not an easy task. This was why ESL seemed inadequate at Trinity. The students were supposed to be reasonably fluent speakers already, destined for tertiary studies, so it is clear why an ESL teacher would take an academic approach. Their goals were to work on the mechanics of language to assist students with their essay and report writing, understanding of specialist vocabulary, for example for
accounting, chemistry or psychology, discussions to encourage analytical thinking and argument based on newspaper/magazine articles. No ESL teacher at Trinity to my knowledge has used theatre techniques. All of them have taught in rooms with tables and chairs accessible for writing. The written English of most students requires this form of assistance to reach university level, and to be able to understand the literature and texts that await the students in their studies. The purpose of English Literature and History of Ideas is to further develop these skills in the students.

It is hard then to see how this fragmented approach to communication could solve the problems I have identified. The ideas do not go far enough. They have borrowed from Drama, but for linguistic ends, not people ends. In this way they are limited in their perspective of student issues in the tertiary context. The principal limitations of the ESL approach are as follows:

1. The approach is too oriented to words.

If an ESL activity aims for the students to practise certain question and answer structures, the emphasis is on the words, not the students. Getting students to ‘talk’ in this way, you will expect them to use the appropriate vocabulary, but they may not be ‘communicating’. It assumes the students identify themselves in the speech/language already and that they are confident doing so. It is a ‘strange’ and ‘strained’ way to motivate people to talk. The falseness of the ‘fun’ puts a huge emphasis on the teacher to make it work. The books don’t point this out. The activities devised for speaking, as thorough and imaginative as they are, don’t appear to have an overall reasoning behind them. I find myself asking, where does this lead? Each activity serves a purpose, but it is still up to the individual teacher to slot it into their own personal teaching style as well as a context. Without a background in theatre or drama it would be quite difficult to devise an on-going sequence of work that uses these techniques constructively.

ESL texts often refer to activities labelled as being suitable for beginners, intermediate and advanced - ability is equated with knowledge of words and grammar. The expertise is memory-based.
Yet communication and people's understanding is much more than this. The students are defined by their particular 'language difficulty' or level. Tertiary institutions contribute to this by their reliance on IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or TOEFL (Testing of English as a Foreign Language) scores, which are based on tests designed to trick the foreigner's grasp of English. (I have often wondered how native speakers would fare!) Solutions to overcome shyness, cultural difference and lack of participation are always connected to words and their (students') lack of knowledge about them in some way rather than 'human' solutions.

2. ESL is restrictive in its interpretation of 'language' and 'communication'.

Communication isn't activities. The lack of methodology behind activities that may produce body language or eye contact, make the approach seem fragmented and superficial. Without connecting the experience to a sense of a person's whole communication, the activities risk being embarrassing, if not ineffectual. Body language is communication, not an optional extra. Most recently arrived students from Asia are unable to recognise and incorporate body language signals into their overall communication, without training. Their apparent blank faces, indirect eyes, minimal gestures and withdrawn body postures have a detrimental effect on their communication. It keeps them outside of the 'action'.

A look at the background training of ESL and LOTE (Languages Other Than English) teachers will to a certain extent explain why we approach the problems differently and confirm my interpretation of the Literature. The following observations are based on an interview with two senior lecturers in ESL and LOTE at the Institute of Education, University of Melbourne in June, 1993. Dr Jane Orton and Ms Chris Davison said that currently there is no research to confirm their observations, but that I may quote their comments in my thesis. Their comments are based on their extensive experience in teacher-training and on observations of ESL and LOTE teaching in schools throughout Victoria.
Dr Orton said that: "The value of drama techniques exists in the theory of ESL, but not in the practice" and Ms Davison agreed. One of the reasons for this discrepancy, according to the lecturers, is the lack of role models in schools for trainee teachers. They claim that trainee-teachers go to schools with innovative ideas, but the established structures support traditional teaching methods only. According to Ms Davison: "It is widely known and of great concern to Methods teachers" who believe that "paralinguistics" is important (the word ESL teachers often employ to describe anything non-verbal that affects the meaning of the speech: from stress, rhythm, and pause to voice inflection and gestures), and Drama a good method of incorporating these non-verbal aspects into the teaching.

Ms Davison explained that ESL and LOTE teachers fall into three main categories: the vast majority teach traditionally, a very small minority take a 'wholistic' approach, and the rest teach somewhere in-between. The majority object to using drama techniques or even to teach 'paralinguistics' for the following reasons: it doesn't suit their teaching style, they are afraid of the students' reaction to change and the facilities are designed for traditional methods. Of the small minority who practice drama techniques, most have theatre or drama training, so they are confident with these techniques. These teachers seem to be in the thirty to forty age-group. The in-between group are an older generation with a strong background in linguistics. Ms Davison includes herself in this category and says that they're influenced by audio/visual techniques, and are concerned with accuracy and situational English. Stress, intonation and paralinguistics are important in terms of global linguistic features. She praises Ms Gassin's research for her recognition of the importance of 'paralinguistics', yet admits that teachers in this category still see the issues as separate 'bits' to a 'linguistic whole'. Today it's paralinguistics; tomorrow it's culture.

Pre-requisites for entry into the University of Melbourne's Graduate Diploma in Education course of Teaching English as a Second Language, according to the 1993 information booklet: "Sub-majors in at least two distinct school subject areas including a Language other than English or Linguistics or one part of each". Notice that there is
no mention of Drama. This indicates the emphasis that the courses will take when training the teachers. It also reinforces the linguistically-focused teaching style. It should be noted that ESL professionals are also quite frustrated by the levels of expectation teaching English to non-native speakers, often in difficult circumstances and with limited time. There are varied opinions about the validity of the IELTS and TOEFL testing methods. The students sometimes expect teachers to perform miracles with their English in as short a time as possible. “How long does it take to learn enough English for successful study in Australia?” is a good question and there is no research to provide answers.

The theory exists in ESL literature to solve many of the problems to do with ‘communication’, but there does not appear to be an integrated approach to bringing it to fruition, nor does it appear to be a goal of ESL practitioners. It is often unclear in the texts how teachers should access the range of (Drama) techniques and apply them, thereby assuming a certain degree of expertise and confidence to succeed. It is not surprising then that most teachers lean towards a linguistic approach which suits their background and training.

3. Its approach to cultural difference is superficial and lacks integration with other skills.

The ESL approach to teaching ‘culture’ seems to be about ‘customs’, whereby students compare and contrast their customs with the teacher. This is informative but unlikely to develop an integrated understanding of cultural differences when separated from other aspects of language and communication. Talking about something is far removed from the experience of being or doing, especially if you’re alone, in an unfamiliar setting and expressing yourself in a language which shows your lack of confidence. Learning English in Malaysia or Taiwan and staying in those countries means the demand to face the Australian culture isn’t there, so talking about customs is adequate. When assisting students who have embarked on a path of major development from being at home with parents and friends, to being alone to face the challenge of independence, adulthood and
career in a society that has completely different rules and expectations, cultural preparation is necessary.

Included is the demand made by their chosen career that may expect them to have successfully made the transition from one culture to the other. For example, in Medicine, students have to be ‘comfortable’ with naked bodies of both sexes, be able to talk intimately to patients in hospitals, examine them and so on - activities that transgress taboos, yet overseas students need to do this to gain their qualifications. In fact, in many careers where there is interpersonal contact and interaction, the students need assistance to negotiate the interaction, the right amount of formality, the right amount of friendliness. How do students ‘learn’ such information if they’re not accessing the wider community and practising their interpersonal skills all the time? Cultural understanding is unavoidable when their educational success will depend on it.

If they do in fact access Australian life, they are likely to confront ideas that they may never have been allowed to explore before, and it’s important that they find ways to negotiate through them. For example, pre-marital sex is widely practised in Australia, and they may be under pressure for sex, so why shouldn’t they know about it? This is a fact of our culture and a direct consequence of the personal freedoms that we allow. If you only talk on the level of customs, then you’re unlikely to offend, yet how will students learn to negotiate their way in a culture with completely different codes of behaviour and expectations when they have never been introduced to these ideas, or only as something ‘forbidden’? If overseas students justify and explain Australian behaviour through ignorance, this leads to unnecessary misinterpretations and misunderstandings. Students need to be informed, so they can respect the difference, rather than be threatened by it. It doesn’t follow that this is what they must do - it means knowing their rights to say no or yes, as they choose. Their education will require that they are professional within the system, which may mean being conversant with a range of ideas and behaviours - offensive or otherwise. It is inappropriate to teach speech to foreign students as separate from cultural issues, especially in the post-secondary, pre-tertiary context.
These three main concerns with ESL methodology emphasise our different interpretations of the data (the needs of the students), and therefore seek to solve different objectives. "the same items of data permit several possible interpretations... the philosophy of life and of education enter into the interpretation of data of this sort" (Tyler 1949: 14). ESL won't achieve the sorts of goals I have for the students in the Trinity program. An overseas student's ability to communicate effectively in Australia is hampered by a lack of confidence (fear of failure and rejection), an inexperience of cultural difference and a lack of expressive skills (verbal and non-verbal).

"Language, as we experience it in life, is not "linear". Neither is the play as the audience experiences it. We remember the message, but not necessarily the order in which the words were delivered" (Smith 1984: 27). Actors attempt to make conscious their every movement and utterance, so they can clearly and convincingly express emotions, thoughts and relationships to the audience. When an actor thinks about 'communicating' to an audience, s/he thinks about effectively using the whole communication repertoire - face, eyes, gestures, body, posture, voice, tone, mood, silence, stillness, movement, emotion, costume, pose, hair) in whatever way is necessary to get the message across. For non-actors, training in these skills develops clarity in communication through increased confidence and physical and verbal control, as well as an understanding of the dynamics of communication, which helps with adaptation to any context anytime. For overseas students, training in acting skills was not only about improving their communication, but to assist their understanding of the non-verbal and verbal messages of a culture that was completely alien to their experience. To understand difference is to not be afraid.

Essentially I adapted these ideas for my Drama course: acting for communication, not artifice. By training the students in the basics of acting, I believed they couldn't fail to be more confident in their communication. I didn't see a person as only a 'speaker', as words are often used to conceal what is going on. Native speakers are often not very competent with words either, especially when they are unsure about the 'message' they want to convey. Once you're clear and
expressive in your communication, confidence seems to follow automatically. Confidence is important to help with the transition from the familiar to the unknown. My approach was about integrating the new skills to the communicativeness of the whole person. This included developing the students' understanding of interpersonal dynamics like intent, focus, motivation. I wanted the students to want to communicate, as well as having the skills.

Self-knowledge is a key to communication, confidence and understanding. Success in the second language is a search for your identity in it. Drama workshops are about solving problems of communication of one sort or another. They encourage people to express who they are, with the vast range of means available. I train them every inch of the way, and give them opportunities to express and explore the different parts of themselves in different contexts. Learning to adapt and participate in this way, they are ready to face the challenge of their stay in Australia. "... the essential means of education are the experiences provided" (Tyler 1949: 64). My focus was to develop the confidence of each student by providing experiences, which also meant teaching them to observe and to understand what they were seeing in others.

The course I had developed initially was inappropriate for these students as it assumed active participation, give and take of ideas, roleplay, putting forward an argument and defending it, skills which were too confronting for them. They had to learn skills for confident communication before they could participate. I had designed it from a Western perspective of education, which was important, but they needed help with the transition first. I interpreted the students' responses as an actor would: this meant that I rejected what didn't work and kept what did, in order to develop a curriculum that would answer their needs. It is significant that the original curriculum was linked to other goals apart from improving speech ie accessing the Australian culture, embracing themes from the literature, building 'acting' skills. There was always a clear focus in the background that was bigger than mere language acquisition. This was an advantage in designing what became the 'real' course, as it encouraged a greater richness.
In this chapter I have identified the differences and similarities in our approaches to overseas students. Though many ideas fundamental to my approach exist in ESL literature, in practice most teachers prefer a linguistic emphasis to solve the problems. My preference for a theatrical style in 1990 meant that I was on my own. No-one else shared my vision. Through my own cycle of plan, action, observation, reflection and further planning, which occurred before and within each workshop, I interpreted the students' needs from a theatre perspective, rejecting what didn't work, exploring what did. I was on a path of research into the needs of overseas students. I knew it had the possibility to 'change' the approach to teaching overseas students in the pre-tertiary context. This systematic approach enabled me to solve some of the communication issues facing overseas students.
The students showed in the first session in 1990 that for some reason they appeared to be unable to participate fully in verbal activities or to find them enjoyable. So I had to change my approach. I interpreted that they were lacking in confidence and skills to do so. I decided to emphasise non-verbal activities, hoping that they would be freer to express their ideas, rather than being restricted in a word-based framework. I wanted to establish a public communication - a language we could all understand as a starting point for their participation. It was also not in my own background to rely on words to communicate.

I sensed their need to feel 'at one' within a group of vast cultural diversity. This was manifested with what seemed like 'guarded' behaviour, and a conscientious attitude of doing what was 'right' or 'acceptable'. They did not know how to express themselves in public without feeling shy, at risk of making mistakes, or simply, they did not realise what was expected: participation in discussions, asking questions, individual learning, voicing opinions, expressing ideas of their own, disagreement when appropriate. The students also needed to get to know each other to trust the workshop form. "An atmosphere must be created, a working system in which the actor feels that he can do absolutely anything, will be understood and accepted. ... He must be accepted as a human being, as he is" (Grotowski 1968: 211). By this comment Grotowski believed it was important to have a working atmosphere that accommodated and celebrated people’s difference. I tried to establish this in my workshops. For most of the students it was difficult to project their ideas as it was not expected of them back home, so they needed permission and a motivation to speak.
I wanted to teach mime to train them in the following skills, as I believed these would increase the students’ self-confidence and cultural understanding:

* awareness and use of the face and body in self-expression and communication
* eye contact
* observation, understanding and interpretation of Australian body language
* ability to adapt and improvise to expected and unexpected situations

It was a two-way process in that I had a range of acting skills to teach the students, but it was also important to discover from them the best way to help. In their challenge of being a foreign student in Australia, personal development was in fact part of the communication issue, as they were alone for the first time and were expected to make decisions that would affect their personal and academic lives. Self-knowledge was important as only they can know what is appropriate for them in this new context, they cannot learn that from others, nor find the answers in a book. “Everybody must find an expression, a wording of his own, a strictly personal way to condition his own feeling” (Grotowski 1968: 204). If you’re shy in one language you’ll probably be shy in the next one too. This fact might matter if you’re in a foreign culture. The practical approach that emphasised the expression of the whole person in communication, led to personal development, in fact the two are inextricably entwined.

Resorting to mime when I was there to improve speech was a surprise in 1990. For a while I kept alternating mime and speech activities to get a balance of what they needed, but the mime was usually more successful and the verbal discomfort continued well into the year. Lyn Geusen observed, in an unpublished essay on the use drama with ESL students, that “Many (students) have a great understanding and knowledge that cannot be totally communicated through their limited word power, but it can burst forth with gusto through action”. This was certainly my experience too. The students’ confidence developed as a result, everyone was equal non-verbally, speech and nationality
differences could be shelved for the time being, and there was less pressure to be right.

Mime was my way of teaching 'body consciousness or body language'. By teaching definite mime skills, the focus went from 'learning to do a gesture' to learning to feel expressive in your own individual way, discovering your own style of expression. Grotowski says, "that it is of the utmost importance that we learn to speak with the body first and then with the voice" (1968: 183). Having worked for four and a half years in a mime show I knew both the frustration and the effort required to make one's actions and meaning clear to an audience. It was a disciplined way of being conscious of every message communicated through movement, so it disciplined other aspects - thoughts had to be communicated sequentially to show the logical progression. The structure also permitted a wonderful freedom, a chance to explore imaginative possibilities. My notes 29th July, 1991:

The mirror exercise was an excellent medium for students to develop trust, concentration and movement control. As time went on they became more confident and tried to explore their use of the body in movement. When in the larger groups the work maintained the high standard.

Most groups responded well to the movement warm-up and diamond concentration exercise. Some groups were quite outstanding and gave their all to the opportunity of being creative and loose and free in the movement. I particularly remember some students stretching and moving with such ease and beauty that they were in another place. They were almost acting out a fantasy.

These comments show that I was quite astonished by the level of excellence in their mime - in particular, they did not hold themselves back in any way, but gave themselves fully to the execution of the movement. The boys were not afraid of being 'poetic'. They seemed to thrive in front of me at the creative opportunities.

Having performed magic as well as mime, I incorporated the art of 'misdirection' into my teaching. Even though the actual mime work was 'silent', the planning and preparation involved speech. I would set them a mime task to prepare in small groups and to get 'physical' control of their idea, a group had to participate in considerable verbal
negotiation and discussion (in English) to reach agreement. This gave the students an opportunity to get acquainted as well as to be assertive in explaining their ideas. Such explanations involved using gestures for clarity. Speech was thus being linked to gesture as an automatic response to the problem. It was a sub-conscious process, emanating from a ‘felt’ need. This meant the gestures came naturally from an internal motivation rather than from external pressure. In terms of organising an idea it was important to be clear, otherwise the actions wouldn’t be convincing. This involved adapting the use of the face and body, as well as timing, cues and conscious use of space. In doing so, the students were developing a sophisticated use of their whole expression in English while focussing on something else. The top student in 1990 wrote of her personal response to the mime activities for the student magazine:

Through Drama, one pays more attention to body coordination and body language. The former is important because it helps us to be more alert and agile. The latter is important because it makes us aware of the usage of our body in communicating.

It is not unusual for students to say that they had never realised before that the body can be used in communication. Fast (1971: 120) writes that

As we begin to receive and interpret the signals others are sending, we begin to monitor our own signals and achieve a greater control over ourselves, and in turn, function more effectively.

Gradually they became more adept at thinking ‘physically’, they were more focused and their negotiated speech became clearer. Though mime seemed to make life easier for the students, in fact it is more work to prepare a minute of mime than a minute of speech. The execution of ideas was a two-way process involving recognition of different cues and learning to read and accept them. Giving and reading non-verbal cues while communicating was an important skill in the cross-cultural context. The resultant tolerance broke down some of the barriers between the different nationalities. Instead of being threatening, difference became interesting.
With the focus on the body as the channel for the messages, the physical acting itself helped diffuse overly sexual attitudes. This dealt with the underlying sexuality issues as the students ceased to be embarrassed about touch and their body parts, because the body remained just that, parts. These parts were neutral and capable of giving clear messages. They intellectualised their body at the same time as getting familiar with it. Coming from cultures with many taboos related to touch and 'sex', it was important that the students didn't misinterpret some Australian gestures as necessarily sexual e.g. a pat on the arm or other sort of casual touch shown in friendship, or their own use of the body as sexual. Accepting 'bodies' as parts of the whole person was a relief for the students, it meant they could get to know each other without this concern.

To exemplify this I refer to my notes 12th August 1991 where I comment on an activity that I devised where I give the students a title and they physically construct their interpretation of it. Here the topic was “Lunch”. Four boys devised an hilarious sculpture which was inventive and showed the complete lack of concern about physical contact:

It also shows that ‘touch’ has lost any connotation of embarrassment, expressing an idea as creatively as possible is their uppermost focus. Boys being chicken wings on a plate. It’s with a sense of pride that they present their ingenuity to the group.

The performance itself removed cultural barriers as the students made their ideas ‘universally readable’: it didn’t matter whether they were Korean or Taiwanese. This fact meant that even inarticulate students were able to contribute. Being verbally ‘weak’ did not translate non-verbally. In the above group, there was a Japanese student who almost had no spoken English. In this context he was able to have a say and be part of a group. It was important that the performance was in silence, because each student was learning to confidently project him/herself into the space, to eye contact the audience, to think on their feet (about the message that they were conveying non-verbally), and to experience the ‘success’ of being understood and enjoyed.
These techniques were designed to improve the students' expressiveness in English and provided a confident foundation when speech was added later for the performance, not just the planning. There was a considerable challenge for them in this whole process, but it was not harder than sitting down and having a serious discussion in a formal situation. The challenge effectively required a multi-layered participation. This was a new experience in English. The negotiation being in English, it was hoped that the performance, though non-verbal, was also thought in English. This was providing the means to integrate their ideas with the use of the body. "We're all from different countries - this is how we communicate, our images might be from our culture, but our language is in English" was the comment of a male student from Malaysia, in a recorded discussion with ESL professionals, after doing an improvised performance.

Mime, dance, body language and movement activities achieved:
- increased confidence
- relaxation
- better physical consciousness and confidence - feeling more at ease in the body which helped with gestures and posture.
- better individual focus - thinking for yourself
- improved concentration
- improved sharing links in small group work - tolerance
  - changed perspective of the world, created new possibilities - thinking 'opened', allowed greater scope in ideas which called on different 'senses' and different ways of responding/reacting/thinking.

(The students' responses to a questionnaire on page 74 confirm the above conclusions.)

As a performer I was well aware of the importance of eye contacting your audience. Teaching eye contact elsewhere had taught me that this was an important skill for everyday life, as it improved an individual's overall effectiveness in communication, promoted self-confidence and was integral to overall body confidence and well-being. For overseas students, lack of eye contact weakened their overall use of the English language. It led to misunderstanding, as the words they
spoke were not reinforced by the look in their eyes. I knew from
watching the students talking to Australians, (teachers, shop
assistants, people on the tram) that even if a student's English was
excellent, the response was not as it should be. "The reactions of the
face correspond closely with the reactions of the entire body"
(Grotowski 1968: 145). By teaching eye contact I believed it would
assist the students in their communication with Australians, as it was
an important cue for confidence and cultural understanding. It would
enable them to communicate more clearly and assertively in English
and be better equipped for participation in lectures and tutorials.

My notes 8th April, 1991 demonstrate and confirm that eye contact
had a significant impact on the students:

The eye contact warm up was very effective in that the half doing
the eye contact were clearly more confident, open and happier;
the avoiding eye contact group became hunched, hesitant and
insecure/uncomfortable. It was astonishing to see such dramatic
differences in the individual student's manner and demeanor
from this simple exercise. The discussion raised the appropriate
observations that it felt stronger, more powerful, happier,
friendlier, sociable to eye contact and weak, powerless, awkward,
lonely and different not to. Students also observed marked
physical differences in their posture, facial expressions and
general carriage and sense of well-being. They obviously
understood the importance of these exercises and exerted a lot of
concentration and effort to succeed with the self-discipline
necessary for this work. The work established an excellent
feeling of rapport within each group. We followed this with
some basic work on gesture and mime. The concentration and
control exhibited for the mime activities showed already a greater
body awareness and a freer approach to movement.

The students gave their observations later. I quote from my notes (6th
May 1991):

A student from Japan told me today that for the first time in her
life she was able to look into a person's eyes while speaking to
them, after we did the work on eye contact. She said she now
feels like a different person, much more confident and also much
more aware of other people's shyness. She said she really liked to
eye contact people and to be more aware of herself in this way.

Another student told me that in Drama he saw for the first time
how to communicate in the Western way. Back in Korea they
did not have any opportunity to communicate in this way. He
was specifically talking about using face, gestures, eyes in communication. The more he did the more he liked it. His friend said that he went home and practised for hours in front of the mirror, trying to use his face like me! He said he was fascinated by the way I used my face.

Eye contact was a most important lesson - I learnt how to eye contact teachers.

There was a unanimous response: eye contact increased their confidence, which confirmed my ideas. It is a skill involving control and it isn't something you unlearn once it has been acquired. The students were on their way to being able to confidently relate and respond to any audience. I chose to teach eye contact later rather than earlier, because I wanted it to be achievable for every student. By focusing on the body first, they were automatically using their eyes and being more conscious of their faces. They also had already become more confident in the 'foreign' setting, and so were less likely to find it too confronting. I wanted eye contact to be achievable for every single student when we did it.

The point about the use of mime (including eye contact) was to give the students some confidence in using their body while communicating. The idea that was expressed and understood was important, not their ability to be 'mime artists'. They knew this and found it enjoyable to be released from the problems of grammar and vocabulary. They had the ideas, not the English.

In 1991, the students were even more responsive to mime, and this fact with my own increased confidence and developed sense of the potential of the work, led me to spend more time on non-verbal activities and to take more risks with it. One workshop in particular, I took an enormous risk as I wanted to give the students a challenge and to improve the dynamic within the group by mixing students into different nationality groups. It involved me asking students to improvise a simple scene in mime to the audience, without preparation. Again the focus was on their effort to communicate their ideas. I selected three students at random and said, "You're in a restaurant, show us this by only using mime". My notes 20th May, 1991 describe what happened:
In the group a female (Indonesia) and a male (Korea) were a couple eating in an expensive restaurant and another student (Korea) played a snobbish waiter. The task was to be interpretive of character and to communicate everything that shows the context. One male played a man who wanted to impress a woman by going to an expensive restaurant, but who then proceeded to worry about the cost of everything. He tried all sorts of subtle means to bribe the waiter, to influence the woman's choice and to entertain the audience with his 'mean' endeavour.

This scene was significant in a number of ways - both the Koreans were extremely 'weak' verbally (in public) which affected their friendship with other students as they were very shy; however in this format there was no stopping them. (The Korean students were so uncomfortable at speaking English that they were also isolated outside the class and forced to stay with each other. I thought this was because of their weak English, so I spent lunch with them as I wanted to encourage them to not worry about other students and to try to practise speaking English as much as possible, not worrying about mistakes. I noticed how much better their English was while talking to me in a small group which meant I resolved to encourage their confidence further in class.) This exercise did wonders for their confidence and self-esteem in the group. They proved to be very skilled at interpreting a situation through character and enjoyed playing with the scene as much as possible, to the enormous delight of the class. The girl also had previously been very reluctant to participate, but in this scene she showed a wonderful wit and intelligence and was an excellent foil to the two males. The rest of the group who made up the audience were thrilled by the 'talents' of their classmates. Students had 'turns' and maintained the very high standard. They were relaxing at being on stage and having something to say. They were gaining in confidence at their sense of control and were feeling valued for their contributions.

Confirmation of the impact of body language and eye contact

In 1992 after six workshops, I sought written evidence from the students about their response to mime, eye contact and body language. I wanted to confirm my own observations. The workshops had been focused on non-verbal and mime activities with a good
understanding of improvisation. I felt the work had been my best yet with overseas students, as the students made faster progress compared to earlier years. The questions were:

1. Do you feel different to the way you felt at the beginning of the term? If so, in what way?

By this question I was looking to see if the students realised how much they'd changed, particularly with regard to their confidence.

2. You have learnt about a range of acting skills incorporating the face, body, gestures and eyes. What have you enjoyed the most and has this been useful or not?

I wanted to know whether they were conscious of the usefulness of the body language.

3. Has there been anything that you haven't liked doing?

I wanted to know whether some activities were unnecessary or inappropriate.

The replies varied in length from several sentences to a short phrase. The students were not asked to sign their names, though some did, which explains the gender, age and nationality details.

38/40 students talked about increased self-confidence as the major change.

At the beginning, I feel quite uncomfortable when I was acting in front of people. But now I found it's challenging, exciting and for every drama lesson, it really impressed me and I enjoyed myself very much.
(Female, 23 years, Hong Kong)

I feel more open. I find I don't stammer much and I also find that when people talk to me, I don't feel like running off. (I used to feel like this)
(Unnamed student)

I feel more confident in approaching to talking to people.
(Male, 19 years, Malaysia)
I feel more confident and I was made to know that not much effort were needed to be what I really am.
(Unnamed student)

Eye contact and gestures as well as body movements, because it helps to improve my way of being more confident
(Female, 19 years, Malaysia)

It's given me much confidence and the feeling of freeness.
(Unnamed student)

I feel VERY different. I feel as if I've changed a lot, especially in being able to express myself more confidently.
(Unnamed student)

37/40 students found that learning about using the face, eyes and body in communication the most useful skill.

Face and body - because I think they are important for daily life such as communicating with people.
(Male, 18 years, Macau)

I enjoyed learning about body movement. My movement had been rigid and forced. So now my movement has a more natural feel to it.
(Male, 19 years, Malaysia)

I think the session in which we learnt how to use our faces to convey a message was very helpful. Before that I never realised that aspect of communication.
(Unnamed student)

I like body and eyes because the persuade way is much better and other people are easy to understand.
(Female, 20 years, Hong Kong)

The eye contact as I think this is one of the most joyous thing to do.
(Unnamed student)

Eyes because it is an act of telling someone what one wants, it is useful in our real life.
(Unnamed student)

6/40 students wrote that there were activities that they didn’t like.
(Three of these replies were concerned with doing the activity in front of others. One of the replies was concerned with gender - “boys are regarded as more important than girls”.) Despite this, all six said they
felt more confident and liked learning to communicate with the face etc.

If I continue, it will be useful. Because I will be able to have real (unchangeable) confident. But not yet. (Unnamed student)

Since I got more used to this group and have more confidence in doing things in front of the audience. (Unnamed student)

The face expression it is really practical to learn and enjoy it as well. I didn’t like doing something that you have to do (create) and others have to follow you because when we did something unusual enthusiastically and others didn’t participate very much, you too wouldn’t enjoy it. (Unnamed student)

Only 17/40 students talked about the interaction with other students as still being an important focus. This showed a significant shift from being concerned with ‘what other people might think’ to a greater interest in personal self-development and their own individual expression.

It appears that the students were not culturally threatened by these changes in themselves. They liked the changes even though it was not something they’d experienced before. No-one ever went back to not using eye contact and gestures. They were integrated naturally when they spoke English and the students were comfortable in their ‘new expressiveness’.

The essential thing is that everything must come from and through the body. First and foremost, there must be a physical reaction to everything that affects us. Before reacting with the voice, you must first react with the body. You must think with the whole body, by means of actions. Everybody must find an expression, a wording of his own, a strictly personal way to condition his own feeling. (Grotowski 1968: 204)

I fully concur. There is no doubt in my mind of the importance of incorporating and understanding the body’s role in communication. For many students it helped them experience their own individuality. This opportunity was important as it meant students felt personally
empowered by their own means. “The process of self-knowledge is different for each individual” (Grotowski 1968: 131). In reflection, what the mime-body language process achieved was a further stripping away of the barriers to communication. The non-verbal focus meant individuals had to project outwardly. It wasn’t about learning the artifice of acting, but about participation in their education and about how and why gestures are understood in communication. Being forced to express ideas helped with the self-realisation about the processes of their life.

It has been recognised by Kendon (1980: 209) that “the individual, in speaking, acts as a whole, that speech is not a disjunct action system but that it continuously mobilizes the muscular systems of the whole body ... gesticulation is an integral part of speaking”, which reinforces my own (and Grotowski’s) work. It is impossible to improve a person’s overall communication, including speech, without taking account of the gestural messages. Kendon further points out that using gestures doesn’t just mean an embellishment of what is spoken, but it is a message system in its own right. As such it has been discovered that “gesticulation may also be used to encode more abstract features of the utterer’s discourse” and what is significant for overseas students, is that it has been established that “the gestural channel is easier and more readily called upon, that there are fewer steps to the process than there are when a formulation of the ‘idea’ into speech language is to occur” (Kendon 1980: 222). This helps explain the students’ responsiveness to non-verbal activities.

Kendon (1980: 225) describes some Japanese people talking together in English, using a lot of gestures, and then talking in Japanese and ceasing to gesticulate. Culture affects the way gestures are used. What matters is that the Japanese were not less Japanese even when expressing themselves with gestures in English. For overseas students wishing to communicate in Australia, an English-speaking context, it is appropriate for them to develop the natural skill of gesture, not only to enhance their speaking but to extend the range of their communication (and understanding) to and of native speakers. Native speakers of English will be reading the body language as well as listening to the speech.
Body language and gestures being taught via mime/movement, will ‘tap’ into an innate instinct to use the body for communication. It was easier for the students to express themselves in this more direct way. If an individual is interrupted while speaking, the speaking can cease immediately; however, the body always continues its message, it is unable to stop midway. If you can’t access the body language then you will be very limited in your speech and communication overall. In 1990, I wasn’t aware of this so much, as I knew the students were very limited in the way they approached communication in a Western context.

If gesticulation is universal, then it is not surprising that so too is mime. Recently I noticed an article in the “Age” newspaper (8th July, 1993) proclaiming the success of ‘Mr Bean’, a mime character performed by Rowan Atkinson, an English comedian. The television show has been sold to seventy-five countries throughout the world, including many non Western and non English-speaking countries. Raymond Gill the journalist writes:

What Rowan Atkinson’s Mr Bean shares with other great 20th century comics such as Chaplin, Keaton, Tati is a universally understood visual humour that expresses subtle observations of human nature.

Mr Bean is loved by cultures who don’t usually use face and gestures in communication. When I performed and toured with our mime show we found that even though audiences changed, the response didn’t. It was universally well received. What we did find was that different jokes or moments appealed to one group more than another, but people, whatever their background, responded to mime.

The following section analyses my Drama workshop process and how I used it and theatre techniques to research the communication issues of overseas students. The process is similar to the Action Research model. Teaching the non-verbal communication skills extended over the year, which took me through several cycles of plan, action, observation and reflection. I learnt that the students’ wall of silence ebbed and flowed through the different stages. It was a place to retreat
to when the pressure got too much. Even so, the students’ participation and enthusiasm grew as the year progressed.

The workshop in 1990 always had more than one focus (the main one to observe the effects of the curriculum on the students so it could be adapted to their needs). It was the usual approach for Drama workshops where you are always outside of the action, observing and thinking about what is occurring and making decisions to change, extend or develop it.

I will explain the different levels I considered during a workshop:
1. The technical level of the task
   The mimed action or movement used for the activity. The physical mastery and resultant energy being of greatest importance - the emphasis on ‘doing’, which was inherently satisfying, got the blood flowing, and made them feel alive - all contributed to confidence and well-being, as well as giving the students an on-going experience of participation.

2. The purpose behind the task
   Increasing the students’ confidence and relaxation was always a goal. The activities were designed to help them: learn about themselves and their reactions, to be conscious of their movements, to make the context less threatening, to encourage assertiveness. Purely physical activities provided a chance for the students to focus on ‘self’ and paralleled other challenges in their lives - culture shock, new language, independence, aloneness.
   Using their bodies to communicate a message was initially hard. They literally had to think about how to use their face muscles, for example. Also, moving parts of the body, whether it be arms or hands, was ‘embarrassing’ in front of other people. It was very much a process of physical mastery. Gaining control delighted them. The success experienced in the workshop carried over into their lives. Independence was becoming easier. Without speech barriers it was easier for these students to look inward, reflect and project ideas outward.

3. Keeping control for productive outcome
This meant I watched for opportunities to extend the experience. It meant I had to be attuned to their response and commitment to an activity, so I would know where to take it. An example of this was when I was teaching them about their powers of observation and that this skill could be used in their daily life. The focus was on capturing in mime a moment from their daily life in Melbourne. I ended up spending a whole workshop extending this activity, as the students enjoyed observing each other’s ideas. They were depicting scenes like: catching a tram, at the bank, in a lift, in the supermarket.

This sharing of the trivial, achieved a number of important goals:
- it reinforced the body language, eyes in communication, which they demonstrated with increasing skill.
- it allowed them to realise that we all deal with similar issues - important cross-culturally.
- it produced a feeling of solidarity
- the laughter was a good release.
- the groups took time to establish the scene, the characters, the atmosphere, the mood, the status, the relationships = a fusion of their skills, and a great step in their understanding of communication.

The structure was equivalent to them doing a non-verbal essay - a cohesive presentation of an argument/idea, clearly presented, organised etc. I noticed that even very shy students did well and every person was very clear in their role in the scene. They all wanted to communicate and this fact was more powerful than anything else. This workshop did wonders for observation, understanding and cultural awareness. The students were showing amusement at people and life rather than fear, which also meant they took risks.

4. Planning ahead, seeing where I can take the group next
I applied a more intellectual use of body language with ‘creative structures’. I used this technique to expand their thinking to be more analytic, concrete and interpretive. It took ‘communication’ onto a level that was more representative of the intellectual skills
they would have been required to demonstrate in other subjects. I refer to my notes 12th August, 1991 to demonstrate the evolving sophistication of their creativity and ideas:

The students not only explored ideas of balance and aesthetics, but used the 'art form' to comment, entertain and to most importantly, open up their own perspective of 'the world', by changing the reality, to animate inanimate things, to alter focus from the person to the object, to open up the realm of possibilities by 'breaking rules' of normal perception of reality ie some story sculptures had the vision of surrealism or more simply, took on the anarchy of animation and were cartoon in style. Some of the work was so impressive, that the students were obviously moved themselves. They had made quantum leaps in their thinking and this was a very exciting experience. I realised that I had inadvertently found a way of teaching lateral thinking and other elements of creative thinking that these students had never used before.

Without even knowing about Action Research cycles I commented further:

It was interesting for me that with this rather special work in each group, there were students who preempted the next stage instinctively. There appears to be a natural process that goes through rather distinct phases, which shows the level of truth in the work.

The students needed this major opening up stage, their confidence had to go beyond for 'real' change to take place. This shows how verbal work limits the potential of their thinking. Once experienced the next stage is to keep on experiencing it, even with words.

5. Watching for strengths and weaknesses in the group dynamic
The interaction both within the small groups and between the performing group and the audience helped deepen the group dynamic. Students were getting to know each other and were learning to be more tolerant and understanding. Working in the small groups had several advantages in the abstract use of mime and movement as the comments made by two students at the end of 1991 show:

Opinions of others helped solve the problem
(Female, 19 years, Japan)

the best activity because even though you're in a group, you have to know each other
(Female, 20 years, Hong Kong)

6. Relating it to the big goals

English, greater confidence, understanding. It was doing this non-verbal work that I recognised how it provided a parallel with their other aspects of learning. Many of them had trouble writing an essay, because they were unused to structuring an argument into paragraphs with a beginning, middle and end. Having become accustomed to expressing themselves in mime, the students enjoyed using the art form to grapple with any problem I could think of. It had become a means of presenting their ideas. There was no limit to their extraordinary imaginative ideas. They used the space, took up as much room as the idea required. They knew how to perform to the audience and to get a response. There were no barriers. Their thinking was integrated with the form. Using their bodies to communicate had become second nature.

The stages I have mentioned have to be passed through. Different people may do different activities, just as I did over the three years. Even with increasing confidence and imagination as I devised new ‘experiences’, I have found that there are some essentials, no matter how talented the group of students. The gesture and eye contact work, teaching about space, developing the group dynamic, to name a few. So too, the process of speech. There are unavoidable stages and barriers to overcome. More often than not, it remained a question of developing confidence. Teaching communication via theatre techniques is like solving a series of problems one by one. The process so far has established a workshop culture, wherein individuals have learnt what they’ve needed to become confident, expressive people. For the most part, however, speech has occurred off-stage. The reintroduction of speech as a focus, now became the challenge.

As the communication and cultural understanding developed considerably during this stage, I concluded that ‘language is more than words’. This confirmed what I had observed elsewhere. Physical expression helped clarify thought, promote self-confidence and
relaxation and gave a sense of well-being. The work I had done with directors in the past, emphasised this approach to performance. I had always believed that the theatre arts offered accessible skills for people to use in everyday life, not just for those wishing to become professional actors. In the training of one's body in communication, it is impossible to avoid the fringe benefits of personal wellbeing and development. Through eye contact and body language the students learnt to 'see'. It's as if the blinds are up and the curtains are open and there's a whole new world to notice.

The non-verbal work gave the students the self-confidence and skills necessary for a more effective communication in the Australian context. More importantly, the understanding they had gained enabled each individual to feel personally empowered to participate in a lifestyle and education system that no longer threatened them.
CHAPTER FIVE

SPEECH AND THE USE OF WORDS

By now the students had developed a natural use of their body in communication in a Western way. This meant they incorporated facial expressions, eye contact and gestures automatically. It also meant they had a sense of timing, an understanding of distance and space and their effect on meaning, intent and character which came from acting out scenes and stories. Though specifically theatrical skills, all served to assist with their understanding of people and more effective communication. They were all more confident at negotiation, planning and organising ideas in English in small groups, in their participation in class, trusted the workshop structure and each other and generally demonstrated a willingness to join in and contribute wholeheartedly. One effect of mime was a focus on self, which led to an interest in exploring their own ideas on life. There was a greater sophistication in their thinking about issues, as a result of the growing independence from home and family. It was time for the students to express themselves verbally, so that the 'communicative process' was complete.

For the last part of 1990 then, my aims were to prepare the students to be fully confident and competent orally and to be adaptable to any language context - academic, social, spontaneous or prepared. I had high goals partly because the non-verbal work had been so successful and because I would have had the same expectations for native speakers.

The workshops were video-taped on 31st July and 14th August, 1990, to record this period and demonstrate the speech and confidence problems I still had to resolve. The interpersonal dynamic in the small groups was changing as students seemed to both seek support from their classmates and to challenge them. The group were their audience - a sounding board for their ideas. They wanted to express ideas about aspects of life, that were not permitted in their own
culture and education systems. This meant they were taking advantage of a system that allowed choices, personal self-expression and the exploration of ideas. Individuals could challenge their shared cultural background by projecting new ideas - the audience could respond with encouragement or conflict. There was a risk. This experience would give them better survival and assertiveness skills. The workshop gave them a framework within which they could construct their own meanings. The video sessions show the struggle between individual challenges and the group support, freedom and control. Each person was accounted for in the success/failure of the work as they had to confront the core of their communication problem - their identity versus shyness out loud, and fear of what other people might think. They were ready, but they had to know it themselves.

Both Stanislavski with his acting method and Grotowski with his visionary understanding of 'body language' in fact designed systems that led to insight and self-knowledge. Developing as an actor for them could not be separated from development as a human being. The potential for one developed the potential for the other. On-stage and off, their actors were trained to be more aware. With self-knowledge comes confidence which is empowering and was my goal for the students. Essentially their new approach to communication had to be articulated by them to each other - in front of everyone. They had to believe in their own ability to communicate. It was claiming your individuality in front of the group.

My role changed from developing their confidence to say *anything*, to giving them the opportunity to explore *everything*, and to be able to deal with the freedom that came with confidence. To empower the students I had to step back so they would be self-reliant. I wanted to teach them that they could go on *alone*. I didn’t want to influence them at all, as I was promoting their self-development, so I allowed their ideas to dominate the workshop. My responsibility was to provide the starting points, to guide their learning, to promote their communication skills, and to develop their understanding. “We take away from the actor that which shuts him off, but we do not teach him how to create” (Grotowski 1968: 129). I removed the barriers but
did not tell the students what to say. I used activities I had experienced as a performer for on stage confidence and speech empowerment. My aim was to encourage students to feel good about themselves, who they were, claiming the space as their own. By this I mean standing in a room as if you have a right to be there. If you come from a culture that's reserved and withdrawn, it is very hard to stand up, literally take up space and express your ideas. It is very alien for them. It isn't shyness, it is more that no-one is allowed to back home.

Grotowski would say for each individual actor it must be clearly established “what prevents him from experiencing the feeling of his own freedom, that his organism is completely free and powerful, and that nothing is beyond his capabilities” (1968: 129). The students needed to experience their identity in Australia and to express it, to realise that they now had many skills to utilize, that these ‘means’ had become part of their ‘communication repertoire’. Their skills in observation and interpretation meant they could ‘understand’ what the context required, they didn’t need to be afraid of it. The response could be: see, observe, reflect, understand, respond - all which were almost instantaneous, as for native speakers. They didn’t need to retreat anymore. What had been conscious through mime, had to become unconscious with speaking. To give the students practice at expressing their ideas I used improvisation techniques (Spolin, 1977). I also used this to observe them, to see what help was still needed. Improvisation can be described as creative conversation, you just allow dialogue and action to flow, without controlling it to see what happens.

For improvisation (creative scene-making) to take place the participants must follow certain rules. For example, a willingness to accept ideas from others, a willingness to accept the responsibility for developing ideas, an understanding of when one is co-operating and when one is dictating ideas, an understanding of exploration so that you don’t force a scene to end but allow it to develop and reach a natural conclusion, a willingness and ability to sustain a role e.g. you play the mother in a scene, because that is what is needed to help it along. Very simply, it's about creating situations and characters and
exploring them as you might a story. The students were aware that improvisation gave them the freedom to explore characters and ideas:

Drama trains us to have a more keen sense of observation. When we improvise, we take on all kinds of characters and our ability to portray them will come from how much we observe others. Drama develops our imagination. We have to come up with ideas quickly.
(Wrote one female student in the student magazine in 1990.)

One approach to improvisation was called "Freeze Tag". Two actors start on stage and are given a situation to develop e.g. In a florist shop - one spontaneously might play the shopkeeper and the other the customer. The shopkeeper may be helpful, bossy, proud; the customer might be buying for a girlfriend, mother... I provide the topic for the scene and the students develop it. The scene continues until someone shouts 'freeze' which causes the actors to stop mid-action. The audience member takes the place of one of the actors, and starts a new scene. In this way, use of the body and speech are interconnected and focussed. The improvisation continues with scenes and actors changing often - giving scope for different characters and situations. This helped them become versatile and to think quickly under pressure. You couldn't predict what another actor would say or how they would respond (like life). The rules oblige you to accept whatever is said to you and to help establish a scene as best you can. Each actor is responsible for contributing to the development of the scene and cannot 'block' the action. The advantage of this improvisation is that there is no time to worry about anything apart from concentrating on the situation.

Improvisation developed ability to think on my feet ... cope with unexpected questions or challenges, relate to other people's thoughts, everyone has their own ideas, not to block them and see what can happen.
(comments from an 18 year old Malaysian student at the end of 1992 in a personal interview.)

Improvisation gave the students an opportunity to 'act out' safely the processes they were questioning. Some students were uncomfortable and vulnerable but no-one refused to participate. The open-ended style allowed them to experiment with use of the space, move around
and take up as much as they needed - these were important non-verbal skills that further strengthened their speaking. Words were connected to their physical communication and were seen as a major commitment, the 'final say'. They wanted to try out thoughts and words, to see how it felt.

Relationships that were emotionally/sexually charged, became a familiar theme. For example, in one brief exchange a Malaysian girl called 'Freeze' - the situation she set up had her facing a boy from Hong Kong - his hands were thrust forward towards her. She said: "Stop touching me like that!" to which the boy jumped back and said "Like what, I wasn't touching you". Both of them realised that he was blocking by not accepting the role imposed by her opening line. The girl also realised she'd embarrassed him, but continued: "At least not here where everyone can see. Let's go somewhere private!" This caused an uproar from the audience - it was a daring thing to do as it showed she was inviting sexual intimacy for the boy to touch her breasts which was 'taboo'. In doing so she made herself more vulnerable in front of the group, she made them laugh and protected the boy's shyness. Yet it was a topic she wanted to explore. The humour it caused stemmed from the challenge, as well as an acknowledgement that it was only a playing out of behaviour that they had all been confronted with in Australia. The audience response was complicit with the girl's action, and as such, was supportive not critical. It was like being 'naughty', so was fun.

Sometimes a student didn't 'cope' with the challenge, so I would intervene and rescue the scene with humour, rather than sexual innuendo.

Significantly difficulties in English were no longer a barrier. There was status attached to taking a risk. One student from Taiwan's desire to communicate was stronger than her fear of mistakes. Despite her language difficulties she spoke elaborately. Up till now she had been timid and quite withdrawn as she was self-conscious of her mature-age and had felt inadequate. Her participation altered from this time, which was not uncommon at this stage of the year. Even though the work was harder, the students seemed to blossom.
Another student, from Hong Kong, demonstrated how his comprehension and confidence had grown during the course of two workshops. The first session showed his reluctance to participate: this was clear by looking at his body posture in relation to the other students. I felt his English was quite weak. While the group was clearly engaged in the activities, he stood apart uncomfortable, hands in pockets, hunched-over and isolated. His speech was hesitant and he tried to say as little as possible. A fortnight later he was participating, speaking and not worrying that he made pronunciation and grammatical errors. What was important was joining in. He looked happier and more confident. The gap between what students understood and what they 'said' was diminishing for most, and where vocabulary was lacking they 'accommodated' with non-verbal messages.

I felt a new responsibility that accompanied the teaching of confidence to overseas students - there was no way to predict the outcome. Body language though real had been asexual, abstract and intellectual. Speaking brought things 'down to earth'. Ideas they were barely conscious of back home e.g. pre-marital sex, relationships in general, took on mammoth consequences here. In a different society there was a different emphasis. They wanted an opportunity to 'make sense of things' for themselves as individuals in this foreign context. The individuality-concept was also important as the students were potentially going to spread throughout the tertiary campuses of Australia, depending on their results and career choices, so they needed to be able to cope alone. They could not assume their friends would even be in the same state.

From observing the improvised scenes I was able to identify the next and final stage. The students needed help with articulation, voice projection and pronunciation to satisfy the language testing that was compulsory for overseas students to enter the University of Melbourne and other tertiary institutions. Many students' voices were too soft while a few were quite difficult to understand. Some students were still shy and others were ready to take on the world, and needed to express all sorts of ideas related to their own personal development. I wanted them to be comfortable in any context. In
order to experience this they had to have a free rein on their speech and had to be challenged to go further. I realised not many students had an opportunity to practise with Australians, so they had to help themselves.

I devised two courses of action: controlled speech experience (pronunciation, voice, control, individual preparation) and improvised speech experience (spontaneous, adaptable, coping with the unexpected, group participation).

**Controlled speech**

About this time I was doing some work on the themes of *Macbeth*, a prescribed text. Most of the students admitted to not reading it, despite attending Literature tutorials and lectures. They didn’t understand the language. There was no way I could run a discussion - again I resorted to theatrical solutions. I decided to set speeches for their oral examination, as it would provide a solid thing to work on and would assist their work in Literature. To focus on one speech I felt would give them a 'feel' for the whole thing. I selected key speeches, to be performed with an interpretation of character e.g. Macbeth’s soliloquy when he is planning to murder Duncan or Lady Macbeth addressing the evil spirits.

Even though my decision was instantaneous, it was a response that showed I was well attuned to the students' needs. The approach was practical and forced the students to come to terms with the mechanics of speech. Many of them needed to face their own difficulties with articulation; this was an individual task.

Doing the speech solved a few problems:

* It provided an oral examination.
* It helped them understand the play.
* The rote-learning approach was tangible, accessible and they were good at it.
* It enabled me to give individual help. I listened and coached out of class - as they practised and struggled with pronunciation hurdles.
* It forced each student to acknowledge and overcome his/her own speech difficulties. It separated the issues.
Performing emphasised voice projection, articulation, tone and overall verbal and non-verbal communication.

I advised the students to practise daily, to listen to the tone of their voices aloud, to project out, to play with the words, to enjoy the experience. Some students hired Macbeth on video to listen and pause the film and repeat the phrases. They were very motivated and grew to love the play - the supernatural element, the witches' scenes and speeches, Banquo's ghost scene, Macbeth's vivid imagination and ambition, the influence of Lady Macbeth. They practised in the grounds and corridors of Trinity College. This reciting out aloud was very important. One student from Hong Kong was so 'taken' by the poetic language, that he would go to a local park at midnight, with a candle and practise his speech "Is this a dagger I see before me..." It was a turning point in his year. The 'romance' of this student was not exceptional as others used this opportunity to express this side of themselves. Many students commented at the end of the year that the speech was a significant part of their Drama experience:

- It opens up your viewpoint, acting the character, images, by being Macbeth it helps you to know what he's thinking.

- Acting helps you to understand the characters in the books.

- I enjoyed learning the speech and the challenge of pronunciation.

Obviously I was not concerned with every detail of accent, but the students took on this challenge themselves. It was impossible for them to recite the speeches without taking on the 'grand' theatrical style, including the majesty of the variety and tone of the voice, clearly articulated poetic phrases that were rhythmically projected across the room, exaggerated and expansive gestures and use of the space as a way to fully express the moment. It was an individual challenge, a solo performance that involved risk, but which was also safe. No students thought of standing still and presenting a rote-learned item - it was impossible for them to avoid using gestures and facial expressions.
I realised that this learning experience was a **culmination** of their confidence and skills. The students had learnt how to express themselves using acting techniques, rote learning was a familiar technique from their own education, the combination of the English, plus the acting, plus the memory work was complete integration of two education systems and two cultures. It was the point of major breakthrough for many students. What was exciting was that the experience was full of passion, romance, thrill, a sense of majesty and grandeur, gestures were highly theatrical, they had the skills to have as much fun as they wanted to in the expression of the speech. The motivation for correct tone, articulation, flow, rhythm, intent, pause, couldn’t be greater. The excitement and grandeur was linked to their own power of speech. They spoke beyond themselves as a result, projecting themselves grandly into the room.

Speaking English was never the same. Doing the speech achieved these goals:

* improved listening skills
* regular practise of their own voice in english - a practical means of enjoyment
* performing - claiming the space - assertiveness
* outwardly projecting yourself- greater clarity
* integration of skills - verbal, non-verbal, academic and dramatic knowledge
* individual challenge and success, personally empowering
* improved pronunciation and articulation - modern English became easier than ever to pronounce!
* self-confidence raced ahead!

**Improvised speech**

Following on from their other improvisation work I wanted to give them more opportunities to experience control in unexpected situations. The ultimate test for a confident speaker was to be able to spontaneously and competently improvise on any topic in front of an audience without preparation. As recognized by Viola Spolin (1977), the spontaneity was an important component in overall confidence and personal development, as I saw it as providing the opportunity
for the students to 'be' themselves, and it encouraged this. In 1990 I had decided to invest completely in a form of improvisation known as 'Theatresports' (devised by Keith Johnstone with the Loose Moose Theatre Company in Calgary, Canada), as an innovative and fun way to perform improvisation even though I was scared they may not all succeed at it. Theatresports is a series of games that have strict rules and guidelines that provide a structure to the improvisation. The structure is designed to encourage creative and interesting input by the players. The basis of the participation was 'clever' use of speech and movement while communicating to an audience. The spontaneity is important as it provides that raw edge of theatre in the making. It is full of risk for the performers, but also exhilarating. I believed that I had trained the students to be quite good actors and I wanted them to enjoy this fact. I wrote in my notes, October, 1990:

I want to hear as much talking, discussion, conversing from every individual as possible. Participate, participate, participate. Get involved.

The style of my notes indicated my action: I wanted to motivate the students to be as verbally participatory as possible! It was the final challenge. The Theatresports games achieved this goal.

Even though the games were completely spontaneous, there was a given framework and rules within which the actors explored the topics. Groups of four chose the style of the improvisation, where they had to present a scene, story, explore a situation, with a beginning, middle and ending within four minutes. The students were accustomed to performing and had lost their self-consciousness; their concern was with the excellence of their ideas - they wanted the scenes to be good.

Theatresports was as successful as the Macbeth speeches - it was the culmination of their acting skills, confidence, individuality and inventive use of English. Again it worked with 'misdirection'. By giving them another focus the structure/rules of the activity they were less conscious of performing. In effect, to succeed at Theatresports it required a great deal of skill. They excelled at it - partly as they found the games so novel, and it was the perfect vehicle
to explore their ideas, when speech was difficult the students more than compensated with use of facial expressions and gestures. Though they worked in groups of four, each individual was responsible for his/her contribution - the ability of the group to work together was vital. This was a contrast to the earlier Macbeth challenge, which was solo and planned.

Their favourite game was 'Subtitles', as it revolved around a play on 'cross-culturalism', foreign language and interpretation. The actors are given a film title that involves two actors performing in a foreign language (gibberish) and two interpreters improvise subtitles to the audience. This demonstrated their adaptability to suit language/behaviour with ease to the context and in many ways parodied their own situation. The topics had to be international and universal. It often meant we laughed till tears rolled down our faces. There was a keen interest in exploration and acting out 'relationships' of every kind. Even though the situations involved taboo topics, this time they used their skills to be clever or humorous rather than 'naughty', which again emphasised their confidence.

The following students' responses capture the significance of this work. I recorded some personal interviews at the end of 1990, 1991 and 1992 to gather some feedback about Theatresports.

Different topics - have to think, create something and to notice and pay attention to environment around you. I liked being made to notice the world around you. As an overseas student, it's difficult to know what's going on - in Drama I have to work it out to be able to do something ... Drama is the 'channel' to help me understand English - forced me to watch TV and read newspapers to bring ideas to drama class. Drama can use lots of topics - very important to open up the outside world - lots of choice.
(Female, 20 years, Hong Kong)

everyone has opened up in the past month ... really quiet people have become noisy
(Female, 18 years, Malaysia)

Improvisation directly related to skills for daily life, communication, situations, increased confidence

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your personality comes through via your characters
I noticed how shy students really came out at the end

Improvisation games tested their communication skills, voice projection, clarity, observation, understanding, broadmindedness and success was satisfying to the individual and group

Performance was important as a practical opportunity of communicating clearly to an audience and being heard. Drama helped me to know myself - happened naturally you need to claim your space as the stage to succeed with the performance.
(Male, 18 years, Malaysia)

Improvisation gives a balanced perspective - inclined to be less parochial, more tolerant, acting in character makes you understand other people

Improvisation is quite a challenge for us since we have to keep on thinking of what we should do for the next step while we are performing in front of the audience. When I perform funny scenes which make people laugh, I experience lots of satisfaction. There is no doubt that drama is an effective way to develop our creativity and confidence.
(Female, 18 years, Hong Kong)

comments from girl who disliked and showed no confidence in drama for 6-9 months in 1990.

Improvisation enabled me to look at life ... opened up eyes to other ways of being, living, attitudes.
(Male, 19 years, Malaysia)

Mum favoured Drama - opens up the person. A great opportunity in my life.
(Female, 19 years, Malaysia)

Theatresports further extended the students and they reaped the benefits of their year. Often described by students as the highlight, because everything came together for them at this stage. I have kept Theatresports in the curriculum, as it has provided the students with such enjoyment and personal fulfilment each year.

One parent, on a trip to Australia, commented to me that:
Asians need the opportunity to learn to be confident and to speak out and express themselves ... the body language component was equally important.

(father of female student from Singapore. 24th June, 1991)

The successful IELTS scores resembling native and near-native efficiency in English confirmed the effectiveness of Drama in improving the communication of overseas students. Even though they spoke better English the students were not less Asian, so they were better able to express their cultural difference.

In 1990 I saw sexual innuendos as a normal stage in the improvisation cycle. It was a sorting out of rules and boundaries, good comedy and bad, which differentiates between wit and crudity. It was also a form of initiation from adolescent to adult thinking. The students were tempted and wanted to explore choices and decisions that are permitted in Australia which included a questioning of the values of their parents and society. It is the early stage of a more sophisticated process. In 1992 I felt it was more significant as I realised it was exploring the sexual freedom of a different culture without facing the repercussions of it. This meant a tiresome number of scenes that dealt with boyfriend/girlfriend relationships, homosexuality, talking about sex, touch or anything that was sexually charged - such scenes offended some students and altered the ‘tone’ of the scene. This acting-out behaviour highlighted their vulnerability.

At the end of 1992, as part of a post-graduate study in Human Sexuality and Health Education, I undertook a project with a small group of my students to explore these issues further. They completed a questionnaire, participated in a two and a half hour discussion and a one hour Drama workshop. Though I was inundated with volunteers, I chose seven students from seven different cultures. They wanted to discuss and compare beliefs about pre-marital sex and virginity. They voiced their challenge in Australia - the temptation to experience ‘sex’ was very strong and they wished their parents had prepared them for it. It was unexpected - they had no idea such freedom existed and didn’t know how to cope with it. Their challenge involved the temptation and the denial they needed to know there was nothing wrong with them if they felt different. It was the
realisation of being an individual with rights and respect for others, not through fear but understanding. I realised how lacking in assertiveness skills they were and felt they were disadvantaged. After discussion, they did some Drama where they improvised topics exploring the 'temptation' they had been discussing. The most popular topic was pre-marital sex.

The main difference with Drama and discussion/questionnaire was that sitting down having an intelligent discussion was very cerebral-based and what was said, was what they'd like to be thought of as thinking. They could control what they wanted others to know. I found the discussion restricted by an atmosphere of 'voicing what would be expected from their culture' and initially they presented conservative viewpoints. Though, individually, it was a risk merely participating in a discussion about sex! The reality was very confronting for them.

Whereas with the Drama, their approach was more natural and spontaneous. They had been trained to find the motivation of characters in a scene, to react from instinct and intellect, and to be open to the possibilities of a scene, ie play the moment to its fullest truth. Thus, in a scene of a pregnant daughter breaking the news to her father, the students consciously acted out the overt social behaviours and attitudes because that's what is expected of them. This was significant. They took a Western idea (pre-marital sex) and acted it out in Australia, but felt its consequences as if they were back home. Drama offered an opportunity to experiment cross-culturally, try out the new ideas but within their social context. Drama encapsulated the dichotomy of their thinking - adherence to the beliefs expected of them and the fascination of breaking with these and exploring the consequences. *The workshop in fact demonstrated the value of 'doing' rather than 'discussing'.*

It gave the students a way to think about what was right for them, yet enabled them to respect people's differences. For the girls, it was about being assertive with what they wanted. In Asia, they don't think about it, as it's not allowed, it's taboo; in Australia they confront it head on and no-one is there to stop them. Before arriving they are
not being encouraged to find out who they are for themselves, which leads to problems in Australia. A report entitled "The Issue We Cannot Abort" by Sharon Lim, in the publication of the Association Of Overseas Students from Murdoch University, WA, (1993), begins to address these issues. WA Health Department statistics showed that there was a "disproportionately high number of Asian students who seek termination" compared to the ratio of Asians to Australian students. The article claims this has occurred for the following reasons:

* Problem of adaptability and loneliness (most pregnancies occur among newly-arrived students)
* The sense of freedom that comes from living away from home and family relieves some inhibitions, in addition to living under the pressures of a foreign social environment.
* Most Asian students are ill-equipped with the necessary information on sexual topics before they arrive in Australia. "taboo among Asians to speak about it"
* Unwanted pregnancy - termination as there is no real choice - guilt, fear of ostracism from family and society (usually remains a secret and students do not receive counselling), distress, depression resulting.

The written and recorded student responses to sexuality discussion and workshop reinforce the issues raised in the article:

I learn and explore myself more. Drama brings me in a situation that I can think truly for myself what my attitudes towards sex are. I understand that I have the right and to feel more confident in saying "no" when I don't want to have sex.
(Female, 23 years, Hong Kong)

Drama opens my mind ... this involve more on our body action and speeches. It makes me think more ... brings out the issues a lot clearer and how we actually feel as we could not express that in words.
(Male, 18 years, Malaysia)

Drama is better (than discussion) because people are faced with reality. It is not only words .. it's what they see that will stick.
(Female, 19 years, Solomon Islands)
Sometimes we cannot understand the situation well enough if we don’t really put it out into play. Although it’s not real, we have the chance to think and imagine.
(Female, 23 years, Hong Kong)

I like Drama. Because a person only has a life. You only can have one life, be one man, but drama can bring you in different situation with different man.
(Male, 18 years, Macau)

We must get our principles right, be tough and not be tempted.
(Male, Muslim, 19 years, Malaysia)

Once the students recognized themselves as individuals it was natural to explore everything that life offered, but it was easier to make mistakes, especially if you’re homesick and alone. The seven students who participated were there because of the importance of the opportunity to discuss what they felt were ‘serious’ matters. It was an affirming experience for most of them, as they realised they had a lot in common in terms of facing life in Australia. The very fact that they were there demonstrated to me that Drama in fact had prepared them to be sufficiently confident to be able to speak on issues that were forbidden back home. They had not lost their identity. They had developed the skills to express their identity in a context that was different and required different responses. It is not taboo in Australia to discuss and explore ideas relevant to your personal safety and wellbeing. In fact it is inappropriate to ignore them. These students’ beliefs and values had been openly examined in a such a way that each individual was clear about them. They did not need to give up their beliefs to survive in Australia, nor did they need to be afraid, they just needed to know it was alright to be who they were and that they were equipped to express this.

The process that enabled me to reach these conclusions was similar to the Action Research model. In responding as an actor I was observing the responses of the students in such a way that it prompted the direction of my work. By observing the speech problems of the students and the possible consequences of these e.g. poor articulation and lack of voice projection could mean lack of understanding (and respect) in many contexts, I had to devise an effective solution that would once and for all empower them. What I had reacted to
instinctively was actually much more than that - I had gone to the crux of the problem, and my intuition solved it. This theatrical-instinctive approach was in fact born out of years of training at observing and interpreting situations, years of using theatre techniques to solve problems of communication of one sort or another.

For example, in the case of Macbeth and the students' articulation problem, I *observed* that students had not read the play, their accent was adequate but not good enough for the general public and still had problems with identity. I *planned* that the speech would be a good way to incorporate gestures with speech and voice projection, help them to understand the play, it was a concrete task, they could control it and it was individually demanding. I *observed* that the students embraced the task wholeheartedly. It was a personal breakthrough for many students. It was a task of great motivation and love. In *reflection*, it achieved many goals and as such was a culminating point in their year. A fusion of their educational past with the present, the challenge of *personal development linked directly to academic mastery*.

As for Improvisation - Theatresports, I *observed* that the students needed to be confident in their adaptability. They were bursting to express themselves. I *planned* improvisation so their speech wouldn’t be stilted and restricted. I *observed* that this opened up topics to do with sexuality which frightened and excited them and speech became more confident, and they loved it. I *reflected* that personal development was indeed linked to speaking confidently. Improvisation was their only opportunity to explore the 'unspeakable' from their culture. Using the freedom of the Australian system to sort out what they needed to from their own system so they could live with themselves in the Australian system.

I believe that as a teacher I had come a long way to better understanding what it was I was doing in my teaching and how useful it was for overseas students. Elliott writes:

> What counts as useful curriculum knowledge cannot be determined in advance of the pedagogical process. It is
determined on the basis of teachers' own reflective deliberations as they select and organise theories, concepts and ideas in response to pupils' search for personal meaning. "Structures of knowledge", information and skills can only be pre-selected as resources for learning. The appropriateness of these resources for developing pupils' powers in relation to life situations can be tested only in a pedagogical process of teacher-based action research (1991: 151).

In my first curriculum I did not plan to explore the students' sexuality issues, even though I had devised a course to empower them. It was only when I dropped the first curriculum and allowed myself the freedom to develop curriculum in response to the students, that I was able to rely on and extend my own expertise. In so doing, I was able to devise a course that truly reflected the needs of the students.

The students were ready for the opportunities that speaking gave them. Speech was not an intimidating experience of learning, but was the highlight of the students' year, as they experienced the motivation and the freedom to explore their ideas meaningfully in the foreign language. Their communication was effective as it integrated their new skills with their newly discovered independent personal development.

Now when they spoke in Australia, they were able to cope with any context and to assert their rights as an individual. Their expression reflected a completely integrated understanding of communication in an Australian context. Drama had fostered the wellbeing and development of culturally different persons by giving them an opportunity to be who they are and by giving them the means with which to express it.

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CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTING UPON THE PROCESS

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T. S. Eliot. Four Quartets.

When I started teaching overseas students in 1990, it was like an adventure into the unknown, where I had no maps or signposts to guide me. Relying on my professional experience, my instincts and courage, I gradually found ways to make the journey easier and more fruitful, till eventually I needed to stop and take stock of where I'd been and where I was going. The process of reflection and review has achieved this goal. It has been a journey of enlightenment, as I needed to develop strategies to help me recognise the path I had taken, to help me know what I was looking for and to analyse its significance in the light of my teaching and curriculum development.

Let me recount something of this journey. In 1990 I established my role in Drama to help overseas students access the Australian education system and culture by teaching communication skills appropriate for this context. I felt instinctively it was important to link skills in English with individuality, self-confidence and a desire to communicate and express oneself. Coming from a theatre background I interpreted the skills as a need for training the students - physically to develop confidence and well-being and emotionally to empower the individual in an alien context. This meant learning about use of the face and body to reveal and strengthen the whole person - ideas inspired by the teaching of Stanislavski and Grotowski. Elliott describes this as “education for being” (Elliott 1991: 145) and that
"powers of understanding must be developed to deal with problems of living" (p147). This was more important to me than vocabulary, pronunciation and English. When Australians have problems with their communication we generally assume it's through shyness, lack of experience and so on, rather than from a lack of grammar and vocabulary.

In developing confidence in actors, Grotowski and Stanislavski taught that it was impossible to separate personal development from teaching effective communication. I instinctively applied this philosophy to the situation facing overseas students. It wasn't just what they said, but what they thought and felt. Life in Australia required different skills in understanding language and in communication.

It was not until my period of reflection that I became aware of and articulated the effect of my philosophy of theatre in response to these issues. Having trained Australians to be better communicators I knew the importance of eyes, face, gestures and posture to develop overall confidence and effective presentation. Self-confidence was an internal energy and had to be experienced by the individual, it is not something learned from listening. I also knew learning through theatre techniques was a powerful way to acquire these skills. My original response to the needs of overseas students in 1990 was correct: they needed to develop self-confidence to find their identity in a foreign culture, before they could communicate within it.

In Australia, the students are alone with different rules and unfamiliar behaviour codes; it is a dreamt-about opportunity for some, a nightmare for others. The freedom that they face causes difficulties in more than one area of their lives:

You don't have that back home, it's new to us and because we want it back home, so when we have it here, we grab it. [In Australia] it's not immoral to think about it. Back home that's our culture. It is overwhelming and confusing.

explained an 18 year old student from Malaysia, who attended the sexuality workshop in 1992. Some interpret the way of life as libertine
and undisciplined. For them self-discipline stems from fear of reprisal, not from self-imposed choice. Unaccustomed to freedom of speech, public affection, little censorship of media, they see ‘sex’ everywhere. This sort of freedom is very difficult as it thrusts unheard of choices onto these students. It doesn’t really matter if they don’t understand the etiquette for borrowing a library book, this they can learn easily, but it does matter that they learn to negotiate the choices, especially with regard to their sexuality and personal life. The same student, quoted above, wanted skills to deal with the personal challenge he was recognising:

How to cope with the liberal system here but still keep your culture and tradition with you and not forgetting where you’re from, your origins.

He explained further, so that it felt more like a plea. In February 1991 describing the process of Drama I wrote:

As Education in Australia and Western ways of behaving are vastly different to their own experiences, the workshop provides an opportunity to experiment and explore ideas in a relaxed and non-threatening way.

This meant learning assertiveness techniques, skills for interpreting, understanding, and negotiating situations that they may not have experienced before. I felt that theatre skills would achieve these goals. “Theatre provides an opportunity for what could be called integration ... a totality of physical and mental reactions” (Grotowski 1968: 255).

In 1990 it wasn’t standard practice to offer compulsory Drama courses to overseas students and there was nothing much written about it, which is still the case. I knew what worked, but hadn’t articulated why it worked - it was more than ‘good teaching’ - the link of the activities to the students' needs was too significant to be a ‘lucky guess’. At the time people said to me that I was responding “as an artist”. I agreed, but did not know what this meant. This was when I started my own search for meaning - a period taking me up to the present. In my year and a half of reflection, discovering the Action Research model helped me begin to see my process. Its systematic approach to the exploration of teaching, students' responses and
curriculum design to promote learning and understanding, as well as accommodating the risks, *as you go*, paralleled my own approach and gave me a language and a structure so I could explore, articulate and analyse my methods. It was like discovering my methodology for the first time.

Action Research taught me that my acting experience was vital preparation to be able to solve the communication problems of overseas students. It is thought that Theatre is free and loose and acting superficial; yet its discipline demands relentless dedication and commitment. Apart from four years of performing twelve to fifteen shows a week touring for Arts Councils, I taught Drama in prisons, hospitals and psychiatric institutions, as well as schools and community centres. I was used to taking on a challenge that had to be solved with Theatre solutions. It was the totality of my background training and experience in theatre and drama that provided me with a working structure or methodology to solve the communication problems of overseas students. It was a system that I could rely on. In a workshop, my key decisions were based on a careful plan, that I often agonised over, acted on, observed the effects of and reflected about before setting up the next step. I was surprised to discover that much of my minute to minute method as an actor could be explained by that process.

The students themselves talk about needing *confidence* to speak to Australians, not simply skills in the English language:

Drama helped me become more confident, open and not so reserved like I was before I arrived in Australia

The major areas of interest for them are *self-confidence* and *identity*. These are needed to negotiate ideas (sexuality, individual identity, freedom of expression) they were barely conscious of back home, and which take on mammoth consequences here. In a different society there's a different emphasis - in Australia they have to learn about their rights as an individual. They have to learn to think for themselves to make the 'right' choices in their education and in their personal lives. One of my students explained that for her, the experience of Drama opened up her life:
Drama helps to have a broader view of the world, realising that there are other things than Malaysia... forced me to analyse what’s going on.

To acquire a broader perspective they need to observe, interpret and understand the context. They are unaccustomed to this and fall victim to their own prejudices and lack of experience. The creativity in theatrical activities develops flexibility in their thinking and broadens their awareness of people and life. They are thus better able to ‘cope’ with the challenge and the change. The students themselves identify their own journey of self-realisation:

Drama gives me a sense of identity, helps assimilate the messages.

We are free to express our joy and this is the type of class that I have never thought of before. It is a precious experience for me, studying here in Australia. My mind has been opened and I have become aware of the things which happen around me. (Female, 18 years, Hong Kong. "Voices" Student magazine, 1990.)

From the experience of this study it would appear that the link between the speech and personal development as the basis of communication has been established. Personal development cannot be separated from communication, just as it cannot be separated from meaningful educational experience. Elliott says personal development “constitutes the primary end of the educational process as a whole” (1991: 148). My research confirmed that communication problems for overseas students are not just words.

I can now appreciate that there is a significant difference between teaching English for use in Australia and teaching English for use at home in Asia. It would appear that this difference was not appreciated by those writing ESL text books. Even in Australia the communication skills required vary between courses. The demands of teaching language and culture can be quite different depending on how you’re going to use it e.g. the requirement for an Arts degree is quite different to Medicine. Conventional approaches appear reluctant to change culture; I make no apologies for it. I am
convinced the students need these skills to survive in our culture, skills that will enable them to achieve *their potential* in our education system, and to protect beliefs appropriate for another society. Isn’t it equally interventive to deny overseas students the right to access our culture? The students themselves reinforced the need for personal development in the sexuality workshop. An 18 year old girl from Singapore, who was particularly outspoken, said:

> Back home your parents are there to stop you and to say “don’t do that that’s wrong”, but here you’re more open. ... We need help with exploring ourselves - we have never had the chance to explore ourselves. I have to think this is an aspect of myself that I’ve never seen myself in and I’m frightened. I don’t know who to turn to. I’m alone.

Indeed this study has shown that foreign students need to develop skills in effectively communicating with Australians, if they wish to preserve some aspects of their own culture whilst living here.

For clarity in the thesis I have tried to separate the stages, however, the plan, action, observation, reflection cycle would sometimes occur in seconds. In the theatre arts this was not unusual. The process is affected by the response of the audience or the group, which may require an immediate action on the part of the actor. Such give and take of responses is instantaneous and it feels like you are working from impulse and instinct, seeking the truth of a ‘moment’ or a character. Much as I had done while touring and adapting to the different needs of audiences. This flexibility of approach and the immediacy of the energy between actor and audience is similar to the response described by Kemmis and McTaggart as “risky”, “fluid and dynamic”, “requiring instant decisions”. It’s as if an actor in a workshop is practising a form of *innate* action research: having a plan, that is “open to change in the light of circumstances” (Kemmis and McTaggart 1984: 9), always observing the participants’ responses, instinctive and experienced, reflecting and deciding new strategies, always open to different ideas. This came as a relief, to discover and understand my own very careful and analytical approach.

This should not come as a surprise, given that actors (and Drama teachers) are concerned with clarifying and interpreting human
behaviour and overcoming barriers to the communication of thoughts, ideas and feelings. An actor’s role is that of an expert commentator of the human situation. This requires a heightened sense of observation, understanding and interpretation of people. Actors are trained to give and receive messages to and from an audience, which means they have an understanding of verbal and non-verbal messages and cues.

Actors make conscious the usually unconscious interaction of communication. In a workshop I was an actor responding to an audience. I was not an ordinary person, just in the way a Doctor in a surgery is seen an expert at curing illnesses, I was an expert at communication. It was like a performance. Actors, in their efforts to explore the energy between themselves and the audience, the exchange of ideas, interpretation of experience, are researchers in communication - searching for the truth of human messages and the ways to convey them to others to create understanding and to evoke realisation. In a performance, an actor asks for a commitment from the audience, a willingness to be engaged in and by the action. Every individual’s response affects the whole. “We are concerned with the spectator who undergoes an endless process of self-development, whose unrest is not general, but directed towards a search for the truth about himself and his mission in life” (Grotowski 1968: 40). The goals of a workshop are similar, in the development of the communicative and expressive awareness of the participants, as they explore a range of experiences.

In applying the Action Research model to the development of my curriculum, working in mime was an appropriate response to my observation and reflection of the students’ silence. What had seemed instinctive at the time was in fact directly linked to my expertise in responding to an audience and making use of the response. In a lecture, the lecturer learns to ‘read’ the audience. However, the context is already established where the audience will sit and listen and make notes. In Drama you do not expect students to sit and listen for very long, the purpose of the workshop is interactive and ‘works’ when the teacher/actor is attuned to the participants’ needs and responses. The pressure to ‘read’ the audience is therefore greater.
In 1990, I responded to the situation in which I found that the students were comfortable, in silence. This did not bother me as I knew instinctively that mime would assist with confidence and relaxation - without pressure 'to speak'. It developed physical awareness, established trust, it was fun and created interest; it was a technique for control, encouraged individuality and got rid of the awkward 'silence'. By 1993 with the assistance of my new vision, I realised that mime achieved more than this. The inward focus led to an extraordinary journey of personal development for the students, as it forced them to think and universalise their ideas before expressing them. With words, people have the opportunity to “waffle” mid-conversation, in the indulgent exploration of their ideas; with mime, if you’re unsure of your thoughts, you won’t be able to express anything, because you won’t know what to physically communicate so everyone will understand.

They had to show me and their classmates their ideas, which they couldn't have explained in words, because they didn't have the skills to do so. Their world had a completely different emphasis and even if they’d had the words, we may not have understood each other. Mime was an innate form of communication that freed them as much as it freed me, it went beyond cultural limitations, it opened doors to our shared humanity. Mime represented freedom of speech and of understanding, it was disciplined and controlled and established a secure framework for discovery. Apart from improved observation and understanding, mime forced outward projection, it established equality within cultural diversity and promoted rules of logic and order - all important features for the students. It was also a form of communication that I was skilled in and was able to access this in my response to the students. I resorted to my expertise in interpreting their messages.

It was not 'good luck' as a teaching strategy, but based on knowledge and expertise that I had internalised, and that I used as a resource when necessary. Kemmis and McTaggart explain that, in its flexibility, action "is retrospectively bound by prior practice" (1984: 9). When I observed the students' inability to cope with speech, I had to
find another way to create opportunities for communication that
would work. Coming from my background, mime was an obvious
choice, however it also was right for the students. Their response
validated my judgement. The success of the work validated the
methodological approach that I used. Kemmis and McTaggart say that
the plan is there to follow but if the response is something else, it is
better to drop the plan and to go in the direction of the unknown or
unexpected. My discovery of Action Research was similar in that it
helped me find my way through the reflection, it was a secure
framework that forced greater clarity and articulation of my ideas. Of
equal importance was the fact that it identified questions to ask of my
practice.

Another example of when I responded to their language difficulties
was setting the Macbeth speech. Though I had planned to have a
discussion of the themes, I observed that this bored them. They in fact
had not read the play and had no feel for it. As an actor I reflected and
gave them a chance to perform it, and, in so doing to make the
characters personally meaningful. This also gave them an outlet for
their acting skills and an opportunity to focus on pronunciation that
was meaningful. The exercise represented a culmination of their self­
confidence and acting skills, plus the highly motivated and disciplined
challenge of pronunciation and memory. As such, it resembled an
equation that balanced their needs against the needs of their academic
work while reinforcing previous strengths e.g. the totality of their
acting skills and confident individuality (which were new) + their
skill at rote learning derived from their culture = complete integration
of two education systems and two cultures. It confirmed the link
between personal development and speech.

I observed the students avoided eye contact, or applied it differently to
the way we use it in Australia. As an actor it was an obvious skill to
develop in your students. In reflection I realised the full significance:
it was an important skill as it prepared them for the type of
interaction they would experience in their later student and
professional lives and it was important for their personal
assertiveness with regard to sexuality issues. Therefore what
appeared to be an obvious acting technique to improve
communication, had another level of importance that was vital in
their overall preparation for life in Australia. For the first time in
their lives, eye contact empowered many of the students with the
confidence to look at people while speaking and to not shy away from
eye contact generally.

Probably most of all the Action Research model has enabled me to
integrate my past theatrical experience with the new knowledge of
working with overseas students, so that I am convinced that non-
verbal language is universal and the basis of understanding between
people. When Stanislavski talks about his method for training actors
he is not restricting himself to Russian actors:

My system is for all nations. All peoples possess the same
human nature: it manifests itself in varying ways, but my
system still remains applicable.
(Stanislavski 1958: 137)

Human nature is human nature, at one level there are things which
are common to all people. It is the pursuit of theatrical performance
that for centuries actors, directors and writers have tried to define and
present the truth about the human condition, or as Grotowski
describes it: behind the mask of common vision: "the dialectics of
human behaviour" (Grotowski 1968: 17). An attempt to remove
society's mask to find the person. It is a search (or research) that
continues. Grotowski, talking about his methodology in exploring
human behaviour, is confident of the validity of his systematic
approach to train actors, which he developed and researched over
many years:

Taking into account the fact that the domain on which our
attention is focussed is not a scientific one and not everything in
it can be defined (indeed many things must not be), we
nevertheless try to determine our aims with all the precision and
consequence proper to scientific research.
(Grotowski 1968: 129)

Ultimately, all people have similar needs, self-belief and self-
knowledge being primary. When talking about people from cultures
with different rules and codes of behaviour wishing to live and study
somewhere else, cultural change is inevitable. This change does not
mean a dismissal or denial of their beliefs, but a need to re-organise their frames of reference and thinking, to accommodate the difference. Humans are capable of this without loss of identity. A reconstruction of meaning for the new context. "Little is known how drama releases the imagination, providing teacher and their students with a voice they perhaps are not ordinarily invited to have" (Taylor 1993: 17).

In a workshop or on stage you are guided by the audience feedback, it’s interactive, and what you do is dependent on this energy. No-one thought of giving overseas students compulsory Drama. I did, because of the needs which I identified. Drama should be more accessible as it has the potential to work well in many different contexts. It has its own unique approach to solving problems - particularly with regard to communication. Working within the discipline of sustained and systematic research helped me realise the significance of theatre techniques in solving problems of communication. By 1992, after three years of trialling my techniques, the curriculum’s purpose was clearly integrated with the creativity of the art form, so that its impact was fully realised.

Stanislavski said that:

The creative work of the director must proceed in unison with that of the actors, and not run beyond their creativeness nor hold it back. He must facilitate the creativeness of the actors, supervise and integrate it, taking care that it evolves naturally and only from the true artistic kernel of the play. This applies also to the external shaping of a performance. (1958: 155)

Seen in this light, the process of theatre is similar to the process of Action Research. Grotowski writes that: "It is after the production is completed and not before that I am wiser" (1968: 30). These quotations demonstrate the clear parallel in methodology between the directors when they are working in the rehearsal process, training the actors for a production and teachers or educators, in developing curriculum for their students. Note the similarities between Elliott and Stanislavski when Elliott writes:

What counts as useful curriculum knowledge cannot be determined in advance of the pedagogical process. It is
determined on the basis of teacher's own reflective deliberations as they select and organise theories, concepts and ideas in response to pupils' search for personal meaning. 'Structures of knowledge', information and skills can only be preselected as resources for learning. The appropriateness of these resources for developing pupils' powers in relation to life situations can be tested only in a pedagogical process of teacher-based Action Research. Curriculum development and teaching are not two distinct processes. The former is a dimension of the latter. (Elliott 1991: 151)

Here Elliott reflects a central thesis of Stenhouse (1980).

My thesis has shown me why Drama/Theatre techniques are essential components for the teaching of communication skills. In teaching these skills it is impossible to separate the skills from development of the whole person. I now see that in developing the curriculum for communication skills I used my expertise in theatre to respond to the needs of the students and I devised a curriculum that reflected this.

I believe it is important for Australia that overseas students studying in our universities be properly prepared for our education system and culture. It is important that they understand our contemporary life, not only for a more rewarding time personally and educationally, but so they have every opportunity to understand and respect our culture. I recommend these techniques be explored for non-English speaking migrants coming to Austraia, particularly those from non-European countries. There is a need to assist the students at universities who have come straight from overseas, including post-graduate students.

Action Research helped me discover what my methodology was. It enabled me to see the methodology that I adapted to develop and teach a communication program for overseas students. The rich influence of my philosophy of and experience in theatre plays a major role in my work. I did not recognise this before. This understanding which I now bring to my teaching of communication skills allows me to take a more confident stance in all aspects of my work. I recognise that I am still an artist, I am a teacher.

Post script
In 1994 I returned to the Trinity program, having spent a year in reflection and writing. It has been a fascinating return as it shows me
the benefits of the journey I have taken since 1990 and the knowledge
that I now bring daily to my teaching. I am a different colleague than I
was two years ago - more empowered and less fragile. I make more
astute observations and can better articulate my ideas. And I am still
learning.

A mature age student from Japan approached me recently to discuss a
forthcoming oral examination, where students have to prepare and
perform a monologue. He said he wanted to show anger in the
performance but didn't know how to move his face to show emotion.
The concern in his voice meant it was a problem for him. We
discussed the issue further and he expressed extreme alarm at
displaying emotion. He explained that the Japanese way is to disguise
all emotion, the less an actor reveals, the greater the applause. He
wanted to be sincere in his acting, yet did not want to apply Western
techniques. I suggested he show his anger in some other way (e.g.
twisting a handkerchief in his hand) that was subtle, but was still
indicative of his inner state. I explained that Western art did not
require exaggerated gestures. I felt that the experience of the thesis
taught me to listen more carefully to his issue. I knew he had a
problem with accessing Western forms of communication. It was
good that he could approach me to discuss it. I also resolved to teach
the students that non-verbal communication could be very subtle.
His astute enquiry did not make me feel defensive, as it may have
done in the past. I felt my reaction was intellectual rather than
emotional and as such helped objectify and isolate the issue. I
resolved to help him further with incorporating the use of his face
when communicating in English.

I am no longer teaching apprehensively from my instinct, but
interpret analytically. I now feel more confident to remove myself
from the immediate problems; to analyse the problem to propose the
solution in the light of my understanding of theatre and of Asian
students and to implement that solution. Moreover, I feel more
confident in reflecting upon that action.

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Title:
From theatre to communication: the application of theatre techniques to an orientation program for overseas students

Date:
1994

Citation:

Publication Status:
Unpublished

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/37772

File Description:
From theatre to communication: the application of theatre techniques to an orientation program for overseas students

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