

TOWARDS A LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PEDAGOGY OF PERFORMANCE

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF  
EDUCATION

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATION  
YORK UNIVERSITY  
TORONTO, ONTARIO

March 2022

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a theoretical exploration of integrative drama and performance techniques that address the learning journeys of English language learners in mainstream classroom settings. It also explores the translatability of performance pedagogy for online learning platforms. Premised on principles embedded within two conceptual frameworks, Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum and Boal's (1973/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed, it aims to illuminate the benefits of an integrative performance approach. I bring these two disparate frameworks together in a way that is integrative, innovative, and inclusive for diverse student communities.

Two major contributions of this thesis are (a) to underscore the capacity of drama pedagogy techniques to enhance and reinforce other subject matter areas and (b) to illuminate the social justice and liberating potential of drama pedagogy in creating a venue for youth to imagine other scenarios than those that constrain their ability to be themselves and belong to a community of learners.

## Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank for supporting me along this journey. I am so grateful and appreciative for the support and guidance these individuals gave me as I worked to finish my master's thesis.

First, to Dr. Sandra Schecter: I am sincerely grateful for all your support, guidance, and mentorship throughout this project. For the countless hours of working through every one of my questions and for refocusing me in the moments I needed it most, thank you.

To John Ippolito and Gillian Parekh: thank you for all the feedback and insights you shared.

To Angela Di Chiazza: I am so grateful for all the moments of support and time you gave to my endeavour. Thank you.

To my mother: thank you for teaching me the value of hard work and determination.

To my sweet, loving little family: I dedicate this to you, Michael, my husband, and Lorenzo Di Chiazza, my son. Thank you for all the love and unwavering encouragement.

To all of you: my sincerest thanks.

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## Chapter 1

### Rationale

This study investigates areas of English language learning in Ontario classrooms during the era of online education in the midst of a global pandemic. I explore how instructional methods may be advanced through integrative drama pedagogy, particularly in the use of online learning platforms, to construct student narratives and support language development. I also engage in a theoretical analysis of the research that currently exists in both drama and performance-based education and virtual learning. This includes an intensive investigation of the works of Augusto Boal, notably his *Theatre of the Oppressed*, and how reflection on this work relates to the current state of drama education and pandemic education. I also look at applied online education platforms to draw conclusions on their translatability.

English language learners (ELLs) constitute a significant part of the diverse learning communities found in Canadian schools. With expectations of learning a curriculum in a language that is not their native language in classrooms and educational spaces with English-speaking peers, “English language learners must contend with the additional pressure of learning the curriculum at the same time as they are learning the language of instruction” (Coelho, 2004, p. 149). It therefore behooves us as educators and researchers to inquire what kind of pedagogical approaches would optimally reach those students in a classroom setting.

Through the creation and use of student narratives as a part of curriculum content, we are able to investigate how integrative strategies affect language learning during a pandemic. For the purposes of this study *student narratives* are defined as a telling of one’s own lived experience through the vehicle of performance education. As one colleague expressed, “Thinking narratively *with* each other’s stories shaped openings for relational shifts in understanding

ourselves and one another” (Seiki et al., 2018, p. 12). From this place we can start to understand student experience in a way in which both the teacher and the student go through a process of learning and transformation: “In and through all of this, each person becomes a co-teacher and co-learner in a process continuously shaped by thinking narratively with one another’s storied experiences” (Seiki et al., 2018, p. 15). I believe having one’s story be a part of one’s language development and expression may imbue the learning experience with a deeper sense of meaning. I explore this perspective in depth in the following chapters.

### **Researcher’s Positionality**

One may ask why this area of educational research interests me. I do not speak multiple languages and the only language other than English I grew up learning in the Canadian school system was French. I was not raised by newly immigrated parents or grandparents, nor did I grow up in a diverse city centre. This area of research interests me because, as an educator in the public sector, I believe in social justice education, and accessibility of education for newcomer students is a social justice issue that impacts the current educational climate. I am also interested in investigating the intricacies of online learning and the possible advantages or challenges it may pose to ELLs. Further, as a drama educator, the use of integrative drama pedagogy and its impacts in this area of education. As Schechter and Cummins (2003) affirm, honouring narratives within education is important to the experience of newcomers and their connection to schooling. Just as my own educational and personal narrative informs my life journey and how I connect to the world around me, the same emphasis should be put on sharing and cultivating our students’ stories and lived experiences. Through this approach, we are able to create more meaningful connections to learning, curriculum, and classroom community in a time when the definition of “classroom” is subject to interpretation and in constant shift. Thus, combining an area of



education that I know well, such as drama, with an area that I am continuing to learn much about offers a new dimension of vulnerability and growth for me as an educator and as a researcher.

As we find ourselves in an unimaginable global pandemic, the educational landscape has both changed and come to a standstill. Halfway through my master's degree program I, like many others, found myself in a time in history I never anticipated and as a result had to pivot from my original plan. Luckily, the vocation of teaching requires us to reassess our methods on a regular basis:

We who are teachers have to strive against limits, *consciously* strive. The alternatives are not to be found in a rediscovery of untrammelled subjectivity or in acceptance of total determinism. A dialectical relation marks every human situation: it may be the relation between individual and the environment, self and society, of living consciousness and object-world. Each such relation presupposes a meditation and a tension between the reflective and material dimensions of lived situations. (Greene, 1995, p. 52)

Amidst this absence of certitude, performance education as pedagogy can offer students an opportunity to express themselves in meaningful and connective ways:

When we study Shakespeare we must be conscious that we are not studying the history of the theatre, but learning about the history of humanity. We are discovering ourselves.

Above all: we are discovering that we can change ourselves, and change the world.

Nothing is going to remain the way it is. (Boal, 1973/2008, p. ix)

Augusto Boal (1973/2008) championed the notion of community, personal change, and growth in addressing delicate and often difficult subject areas. The context in which he practised was steeped in humanity and community experience. Both of these contextual characteristics arguably can be beneficially applied to the current time and challenges. In a time where our

sense of community and peer connection is tested and in flux, creating spaces where one can be expressive and have a sense of belonging has a heightened importance. The benefits and implications of applying Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed approach to address certain student and teacher experiences in a time of crisis are investigated further in later chapters.

When the pandemic struck, among the first questions that arose about public schooling in Toronto, Ontario, during this time were: How will the most vulnerable students be impacted? How will English language learners experience education at this time? In what ways can we enrich those student experiences? In what ways can we as educators find creative ways to engage with student learning during this time? Times such as these urge us to take stock in how we approach seemingly familiar situations in unfamiliar ways.

This is not a thesis highlighting the stories of teachers. They have enough on their plate without offering up their perspectives on this complex issue I put before them for the purposes of my own research. This is also not an account of student experience, because access to students as participants and school settings as research sites for those of us wanting to conduct empirical research is limited, if not nonexistent. Rather, this thesis is a comprehensive review of what we know in the field of integrative performance and drama pedagogy and how this area may serve the needs of English language learners. It is also a reflective piece that looks at the importance of integrative arts pedagogy and performance pedagogy in a context of significant institutional change, through the lens of online education models as we come together in the fight against Covid-19. I reflect on what I initially intended to do prepandemic, how a pandemic world changed that vision, and how that world amplified the potential of integrative drama and performance pedagogy to help vulnerable students such as English language learners.

## Research Questions

My interest was in investigating integrated pedagogical practices through a dramatic arts lens to see how this approach could assist newcomer students in connecting to the curriculum in a mainstream classroom setting. As a drama educator I believe that integrating this curriculum with varying dramatic approaches applied to language learning can enrich the student experience. Researching certain methodologies that address my questions about second language learning and equitable integrative teaching practices help to clarify and articulate how these methods either support or hinder language development in English language learners. My hope is to illuminate the following:

1. How can drama education, through integrating student narratives into the curriculum framework,<sup>1</sup> aid in ELL language learning and acquisition?
2. How can the use of such narratives create an inclusive classroom space for ELL students?

These questions may arguably be investigated on an online platform, but because of current restrictions on research projects and researchers working with students, I take a more reflective standpoint on existing research in the area of English language and integrative drama education. I also undertake a theoretical investigation of equitable educational approaches for ESL and ELL students in a time of online learning. As a result, I additionally explore questions such as:

- How are English language learners being affected by the current pandemic?

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, *curriculum framework* refers to the pedagogical approach that is developed to teach and address the expectations of the Ontario Curriculum document.

- How can we effectively use integrative drama and performance education practices during the era of online education?
- What does the literature tell us about the possibilities an online learning model can offer English language learners as compared with an in-person learning model?

### **Narratives as Curricular Content: Making Thoughtful Student Connections Through Performance Education**

Using online models of education may alleviate some of the obstacles we are faced with during the era of Covid-19, and such notions and research are explored further in subsequent chapters. However, I believe online learning and use of technology is not a cure-all for educational access. If there is any importance in constructing student narratives, it is the opportunity to see the value in student expression and their stories of self, as “drama education has always explored self-other relations; it has surfaced fundamental questions about the individual and the collective, both in its creative and mimetic practices and in its actual relationship to the broader social world” (Gallagher et al., 2020). However, the ability to cultivate meaningful connections with peers in an educational setting is called into question when the environment in which such relations were manifested has shifted drastically.

Perhaps, then, having narratives be part of a pedagogical approach is even more important now than ever before, as we move towards “seeking to make visible core narrative inquiry pedagogical processes to contribute to conversations of humanizing the academy by dismantling practices of inequity” (Seiki et al., 2018, p. 11). Online platforms can support students constructing narratives to share with a broader classroom community, and participation in an online classroom community can provide support for students sharing their stories. For English language learners, however, the concern is the disconnect from in-person peer-to-peer

communication which is integral to language development: “Working in heterogeneous groups helps students learn to work effectively in a mixed cultural setting. . . . The academic benefits are clear: opportunities for purposeful talk improve understanding, help develop communication skills, and promote higher achievement among all students” (Coelho, 2004, p. 197). Not all students may connect with an online learning platform and some may find independent learning a challenge. How, then, can the construction of narratives through a dramatic lens impact student learning and language development in an online educational platform, and how would such narratives contribute to social, community, and personal change during a pandemic period of learning and education?

A student’s story—their lived experience, their identity—has value not only because it is *their* story but because it instructively informs how an inclusive classroom space is devised. Specifically, “teacher-student interactions must affirm students’ cultural, linguistic, and personal identities in order to create classroom conditions for maximum identity investment in the learning process” (Cummins et al., 2006, pp. 305). To separate a student’s story from their learning is much like taking the individual out of the student, partitioning the school experience away from their constant personal realities and truths. I would argue that student narratives, when connected to the curriculum in an integrated way, bring meaning and a sense of purpose to a student’s engagement and development within an educational space. Seiki and colleagues (2018) reassert Dewey’s (1938) claims that “investigating personal experiences can hold possibilities for enhancing educational practices, since education is founded in experience. Thus, narratives of experience can teach us about education” (p. 13).

Societal conditions such as socioeconomic standing, sociocultural relations, ethical ideologies, and, yes, Covid-19 play a huge role in producing the multiple discourses that inform

students' learning and defining and redefining students' lives. Attaching importance to a narrative approach to the curriculum may then help to solidify a student's identity within a less-than-perfect learning environment and academic space. It will also help teachers and other educational stakeholders to understand how the aspects of cultural capital and the multiplicities of privilege come into play for newly immigrated students and English language learners. In the words of Cummins and colleagues (2006), "In contexts of cultural, linguistic, or economic diversity where social inequality inevitably exists, these interactions are never neutral. They either challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the wider society or they reinforce these power relations" (p. 304). According to these authors, understanding how these power relations are at play in a student's life not only is informative for how a teacher approaches a student's learning but can also inform how that student can be a partner in devising an educational experience. This philosophy connects to Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed because it strives to acknowledge and identify power structures present within society and everyday life. Ultimately, Boal (1973/2008) explored disprivilege in depth to produce his understanding that "the concepts of oppressed and oppressor are related not to individual characteristics, but rather to social positions of privilege and disprivilege and relations of power" (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 243).

Dramatic arts have often been reserved as a supplemental area of education rather than prioritized as an educational approach. This idea has served to undermine dramatic arts as a subject area that is as important as other areas of the curriculum, such as math and literacy. I am in no way suggesting that those subject areas are less important, nor am I arguing that they should not constitute separately focused areas of student learning. However, we should not diminish the importance of fine arts education as a connecting medium for community building

and student understanding, particularly in the area of language learning. This said, during a pandemic year certain aspects of drama education have been sacrificed. Changes in the once-typical drama space and elements of drama education have created challenges for this educational area. Indeed, this approach may benefit from reinvention through an online space that would allow students to reforge important peer connections (Gallagher et al., 2020).

For teachers of English language learners, integrated-drama pedagogy is an educational approach that may facilitate learning by allowing students agency and space for creativity, while from a curricular standpoint it can help connect language acquisition with a broader learning context. Coelho (2004) asserts that children learn language from a standpoint of purposeful application rather than from academic scaffolding, and reaffirms that a child's language development comes from their engagement with the world around them, driven by personal explorations (p. 149). Ascribing effective and meaningful context to language learning, then, cannot come from a singular approach, but rather from an approach that encompasses both our experiences within and outside the classroom. Gibbons (2015) affirms this notion, confirming that "prior experiences serve as the contexts within which the language being used is to be understood" (p. 93). If we see drama as beneficial to the work of integrating English language students into a classroom dynamic and facilitating potential language development through such narratives, then it behooves teachers to explore these opportunities within our teaching practices.

Integrated-drama pedagogy then can be seen as an approach in facilitating both an inclusive space and a learning space for students learning English in mainstream Canadian classrooms because it allows for a multimodal approach to teaching and learning. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) stated,

The arts nourish and stimulate the imagination, and provide students with an expanded range of tools, techniques, and skills to help them gain insights into the world around them and to represent their understandings in various ways. Study of the arts also provides opportunities for differentiation of both instruction and learning environments. (p. 3)

To silo the experience between creative expression and academic achievement perpetuates the notion that certain subjects are more important than others, rather than advancing the view that working together they most beneficially support student development. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) drama curriculum is promoted as an educational approach premised on the importance of personal expression within an educational framework that uses various sources, including that of personal narration, and intentional use of historical and current events as supportive context (p. 16). When we use an integrative approach to the curriculum in conjunction with lived experience, we create a space where students may build a foundation of mutual understanding while honouring the educational value of their narratives.

On a developmental level, there is something highly important in asking questions such as “Where do we come from and why we are here?” This is what our narratives strive to answer, and seeking, finding, and sharing these answers facilitates belonging for a student who is going through the emotional journey related to being in a country and an educational system where they do not speak the societal language. At this crucial time, “Writing narratives and analyses (in L1 and L2) that express their growing sense of self allows students to map out where they have come from and where they are going” (Cummins et al., 2006, p. 306). After all, the “self” is at the centre of the student’s educational journey and should not be relegated to belonging to a domain outside of formal schooling. Coelho’s (2004) research tracks newcomers as going



through four stages of adjustment, and describes how these four stages impact their experience within a new cultural space (See Table 1). Coelho describes the first of these stages as “Stage 1– Arrival and first impressions: during the first few days and weeks in a new country, immigrants may experience feelings of adventure, optimism and even euphoria” (pp. 17–18). These feelings, which may be categorized as positive responses to migration and excitement for what is to come, then shift and transfer into what is referred to as “Stage 2” which is accompanied by ambivalent feelings towards the new cultural space newcomers find themselves in:

Stage 2– anxiety and frustration, as well as communication difficulties, may make learning to live in a new culture seem like an unachievable goal. Some may feel that the majority culture threatens their sense of identity and completeness and seek support by bonding exclusively with members of their own ethnic group. (pp. 17–18).

Thus, because adjustment is emotionally charged and unavoidably connected to a space that is institutionally based, having student narratives at the centre of an expressive educational experience not only aids in solidifying one’s sense of identity outside of their country of origin but can also perhaps lessen the painful emotions that accompany such a migration. Stage 3 in this progression illustrates how a newcomer may then regain their sense of self and how they relate to the obstacles that colour their educational and migrational experiences:

Stage 3– Recovery and optimism: Immigrants and refugees are often extraordinarily resilient, and recovery from culture shock brings a renewed sense of optimism and autonomy. . . . Although they may still feel pressure, students begin to develop confidence in their ability to overcome difficulties, including those associated with learning the new language. (Coelho, 2004, p. 18)

What Coelho (2004) is arguing is that in Stage 3 of a newcomer's adjustment period there seems to be a shift that allows the newcomer to regain a sense of self that then informs them how to conquer further obstacles. Within an educational space, this newfound capacity could involve how a student relates within a new educational arena that is socioculturally unfamiliar. The final stage that Coelho describes in this progression is one that seemingly may take the longest to reach. Ultimately, it requires a negotiation of identity, inciting the question "Who am I now?" for the newcomer student who is no longer newly arrived:

Stage 4— Acculturation: After a period that may last a year or two, or even many years, most newcomers resolve internal conflicts by re-creating their identities. They may choose to integrate, adopting some of the values and practices of the new culture while maintaining aspects of their original culture. (p. 18)

Appreciating these four stages of adjustment can allow teachers and administrators to guide their habits of interaction and accommodation within a school setting. When school personnel understand the invisible burdens newcomer students carry, they can then strive to create a space that facilitates their growth within these parameters and advocate for students going through such a transition.

**Table 1***Coelho's Newcomer Period of Adjustment*

<b>Coelho's four periods of adjustment</b>	<b>Cited exemplar*</b>
Stage 1: <i>Arrival and first impressions</i>	"During the first few days and weeks in a new country, immigrants may experience feelings of adventure, optimism and even euphoria."
Stage 2: <i>Culture shock</i>	"Anxiety and frustration, as well as communication difficulties, may make learning to live in a new culture seem like an unachievable goal. Some may feel that the majority culture threatens their sense of identity and completeness and seek support by bonding exclusively with members of their own ethnic group."
Stage 3: <i>Recovery and optimism</i>	"Immigrants and refugees are often extraordinarily resilient, and recovery from culture shock brings a renewed sense of optimism and autonomy. . . . Although they may still feel pressure, students begin to develop confidence in their ability to overcome difficulties, including those associated with learning the new language."
Stage 4: <i>Acculturation</i>	"After a period that may last a year or two, or even many years, most newcomers resolve internal conflicts by re-creating their identities. They may choose to integrate, adopting some of the values and practices of the new culture while maintaining aspects of their original culture."

\* Quotes from Coelho (2004), pp. 17–18

Connecting narratives that correspond to each of the four stages of an English language learner's development in academic language proficiency through an integrative curricular approach may help students begin to conceptualize their stories into words and produce work that can be considered within the framework of evaluative pedagogy. Nor does the presence of drama education within these narrations have to be segregated in a drama classroom. Indeed, Coelho's (2004) research suggests that the use of an integrated curricular approach may open

possibilities for English language learners to connect their memories and experiences to storytelling, promoting L2 language development. Specifically, Coelho (2004) notes the significance of arts education as an area of “enrichment” that promotes secondary language learning and social development (p. 245).

Moreover, linking creative pedagogical approaches to areas of the curriculum that address the issues faced by groups of minority students such as English language learners represents a significant step towards creating an equitable learning environment. Within the realm of language acquisition and development, research shows that students who are non-native speakers have certain obstacles ahead of them when acquiring a language already mastered by many of their peers: “Most language learners immersed in an English-language environment take at least five years to achieve the same level of cognitive academic language proficiency as their native English-speaking age peers” (Coelho, 2004, p. 251). Cummins (1999) asserts, “In second language acquisition contexts, immigrant children often acquire peer appropriate conversational fluency in English within about 2 years but it requires considerably longer (5–10 years) to catch up academically in English” (p. 2). If this is the case, then it may be argued that children who are new to the country entering into Grade 8 in a Canadian school will never fully catch up to their peers in the area of academic language by the time they graduate from high school. However, it is equally important to note that Cummins has been criticized for his hypothesis regarding the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Specifically, his critics have argued,

A consequence of the BICS/CALP distinction is the ascription of special status to the language of the educated classes. . . . There is no reason to believe, and no evidence to

support, the presumption that academics are better at explaining their craft than the less schooled are at explaining theirs. (MacSwan & Rolstad, 2003, pp. 329–331)

MacSwan and Rolstad (2003) further assert that the BICS/CALP hypothesis propagates a “deficit” form of thinking with regard to English second language learners and their native language use (p. 337). Drama may then be beneficial for varying forms of communication among peers in certain situations. Equally importantly, it can welcome a student’s native language as part of the educational experience within integrated drama activities. Being mindful of the categorical distinctions of language use but focusing on the student’s individual experience of language learning and the inclusion of a student’s native language works towards addressing “language problems and eliminating discrimination on the basis of language” (Cummins & Schecter, 2003, p. 5). By doing so, the integrative drama approach to language could negate the deficiency associations by incorporating second language use within the initial stages of exploration. MacSwan and Rolstad (2003) assert that the classification of BICS and CALP is associated with “the ascription of special status to the language of the educated classes” (p. 329). Perhaps the notion of “success” and how we define it needs to be challenged within our educational spaces to include the perspectives of privilege with regard to language use, leading us to reevaluate our views of native language use within educational and sociocultural settings. Intentional inclusion of native languages within school spaces illustrates a mindful approach to inclusive education (Chow & Cummins, 2003, p. 33) and could address these various critiques.

Incorporating and supporting academic language and garnering more opportunities where academic language is the focal point of culminating activities shows that “academic language is more easily understood when it builds on the foundation of relevant prior learning and experience, such as hands-on concrete activities” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 94). MacSwan and

Rolstad's (2003) position emphasizes the importance of contextualized activities and peer interaction as stepping stones to success in achieved proficiency in academic language, at the same time creating a space where classifications of status with regard to language use are challenged. It does this by encouraging language use in the form of peer-to-peer interaction and vernacular, and working towards making connections between language and specific curriculum concepts (Gibbons, 2015, p. 91). All students are then able to engage the learning process at various points of strength and understanding. This perspective is revisited in Chapter 2 in the discussion of the conceptual frameworks that inform the methodology for this study.

Coelho (2004) also asserts ideologies that support the connection of narratives and sharing lived experiences with promoting educational initiatives of antiracist education: "Multicultural education, which consists of educational practices that recognize the experiences and contributions of diverse cultural groups, is often regarded as a developmental stage on the path toward anti-racist education" (p. 43). An approach to ELL education through an antiracist lens when writing and receiving student narratives legitimizes the need for students' stories as part of the curriculum, as mentioned previously, but also as part of implicit factors that inform classroom community practices: "Anti-racist education consists of institutional practices intended to reduce prejudice and discrimination, promote academic equity, and develop in all students the skills necessary to interact effectively in a racially and culturally diverse society" (Coelho, 2004, p. 43).

Many schools within an urban centre represent the diverse nature of the communities around them, as well as reflect the biases and prejudices directed at communities that exhibit diverse cultural landscapes. Schools are places where these views intersect, and also ideal places to unpack such thoughts and perceptions. Supporting a relationship with student identity and

voice works to create an antidiscriminatory and inclusive space where it is safe for students to explore such issues further and offer their own perspectives on their school and classroom community. In the words of Cummins and colleagues (2006), “Eliminating discrimination on the basis of language can be viewed as strategies that will result in better use of society’s human resources” (p. 299). In this regard, student narratives introduced as curricular content in language development can work to build foundations of community and understanding within schools. When we hear one another’s stories and acknowledge varying experiences, we can begin to deconstruct racist and discriminatory attitudes that may be present in an educational setting.

Research within the area of newcomer and ELL education is particularly important because newcomer students are learning to navigate new societal and urban spaces. Canada has welcomed immigrants and refugees into its borders and we have seen a surge of this in recent years: “In the aftermath of the Syrian refugee crisis, Canada had an outlier year by resettling nearly 47,000 refugees in 2016” (Hutchins, 2018, p. 1). However, recent budgetary constrictions to arts education have led to a lack of innovative integrative arts-based language study in mainstream classrooms, based on a recent report reviewed by Gibson (2018):

Arts education is being squeezed out, inequitably funded and delivered by underqualified teachers in schools across Ontario. . . . The report crunches numbers to paint a picture of inequity in public education, particularly taking opportunity away from students at smaller rural schools, schools with higher levels of poverty and schools with lower levels of parental education.

Gibson’s (2018) assertions illustrate a growing tension between arts education and the formal education dominant in present-day school systems. This situation jeopardizes teacher training in the arts subjects and the application of innovative approaches to integrative teaching

practices. To work connectively within subject areas in a way that facilitates learning for non-native speakers, teachers and other educational stakeholders must make use of integrative approaches to maximize students' opportunities to connect to learning in a multitude of ways. If we approach subjects such as science, language, or social studies through a dramatic lens, not only do we create a deeper connection to the work for the class as a whole but we also "help our students construct knowledge about the world together as they participate in challenging, open-ended, imaginative, intellectual, and artistic pursuits from various perspectives" (Gould Lundy, 2008, p. 7). We also facilitate bringing subject areas to life, engaging the curriculum in a visceral way by conceptualizing the knowledge we wish students to acquire through memory and shared experiences.

Linking research in the area of ELL language education and acquisition with arts education within inclusive spaces can open up new vistas for exploring the value that student narratives hold, and how they can be used to connect students with the curriculum we teach in Canadian schools. My thesis represents an effort to explore the possibilities offered by integrating arts education with ELL education to generate stronger connections to learning through students' realities, and in so doing to create inclusive classroom spaces. To this end, I offer a contribution in exploring how educators can create meaningful educational spaces for ELL students through integrated performance education practices during times of constraint.



## Chapter 2

### Conceptual Frameworks

For the purposes of this study two conceptual frameworks, Pauline Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum and Augusto Boal's (1973/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed, are used to illustrate the importance of an integrative approach to applied performance drama education in language learning. These conceptual frameworks at times stand alone in my discussions, and at other times intersect to illustrate complexities in the process of learning. Both frameworks focus on interpersonal and group learning practices involving peer-to-peer learning and group work. Gibbons's framework is more methodical in its systematic steps towards language development; Boal's approaches language enrichment through interpersonal exploration and emotional expression within a community context.

### English Language Acquisition and Learning Within the Mainstream Classroom

In 2017, it was reported that 63% of publicly funded elementary schools and 58% of secondary schools registered English language learners in English-language schools in Canada (People for Education, 2017, p. 1). These numbers, along with preexisting research reporting the increase of immigration and the impacts needed to be made in schooling, highlight the importance of substantial ELL education and standards of classroom practice: "This increase in diversity has been fueled by extraordinarily high levels of human mobility, notably in the form of economic migration to Europe, Australia, and North America and efforts to resettle refugees from countries devastated by war and famine" (Cummins & Schecter, 2003, p. 1). There are not only emotional issues surrounding the journey of a newcomer to Canada but, as Coelho's (2004) research demonstrates, also educational barriers that we need to pay attention to:

English language learners are dealing with the additional pressure of learning the curriculum at the same time as they are learning the language of instruction. . . . English language learners are attempting to catch up to peers who may be five, 10, 15, or more years ahead in developing their English language skills. A 15-year-old newcomer, for example, who is beginning to learn English must catch up to students who have been learning English for 15 years. (p. 149)

This understanding of obstacles faced by English language learners in mainstream classrooms informs our assessment of the research on second language acquisition within a formal educational setting. According to Cummins (1999), “In second language acquisition contexts, immigrant children often acquire peer appropriate conversational fluency in English within about 2 years but it requires considerably longer (5–10 years) to catch up academically in English” (p. 2). Additionally, “Immigrant children who are adjusting to a new cultural environment or who may have missed some schooling in their own country may need more time and more support than North American-born English language learners” (Coelho, 2004, p. 152). These obstacles have led me to want to do my own investigations of approaches that can connect most with English language learners and, in particular, with the newcomer experience.

My interest is in investigating integrated pedagogical practices through a dramatic arts lens to see how this approach could assist newcomer students in connecting to the curriculum in a mainstream classroom setting. As a drama educator I believe integrating this curriculum with varying dramatic approaches can be enriching to the student experience. Researching methodologies that strive to answer my questions about second language learning through equitable integrative teaching practices can clarify and articulate how these methods can either support or hinder language development in English language learners.

Students use informal conversation to communicate their experiences with peers and more mechanisms such as Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum to formalize the transformation of these experiences into narratives to attain higher levels of communication:

Most students acquire the basic interpersonal communication skills required to meet their day-to-day needs within the first year or two. . . . In order to acquire CALP, English language learners need the help of all their teachers to understand academic text, expand their vocabulary, and develop more complex sentence patterns. (Coelho, 2004, p. 153)

Through this approach students may then access more comprehensive opportunities for language learning.

Gibbons (2015) asserts that beginner-level English language learners need to be challenged, receiving "high levels of language scaffolding so that the task is not simply beyond what the student can achieve at the time" (p. 59). She goes on to emphasize the importance of contextualizing English language acquisition through experiential learning to foster a deeper connection to the classroom work, noting, "Academic language is more easily understood when it builds on the foundation of relevant prior learning and experience, such as hands-on concrete activities" (Gibbons, 2015, pp. 86–94). Such "hands-on-concrete activities," arguably, gesture to the drama activities I propose within this study as a way of encouraging newcomer student engagement in the language learning process.

### **Gibbons's Mode Continuum**

Cummins and Swain's (1986) research shows the relationship between communicative language and academic language use illustrates how English language learners take longer to achieve grade-level academic language proficiency and understanding, in contrast with oral proficiency in informal social contexts (p. 152). This said, Cummins and Swain (1986) also

assert that “dichotomizing ‘language proficiency’ into two categories oversimplifies the phenomenon and makes it difficult to discuss the developmental relationships between language proficiency and academic achievement” (p. 152). Their research shows the gap between acquisition of BICS and CALP and how these proficiencies are learned at different rates within an educational setting (p. 152). Although Cummins’s research is helpful in explaining why newcomer students showed success linguistically but seemingly struggled academically, it doesn’t offer constructive solutions to this dilemma. Gibbons’s (2015) *Mode Continuum* eases the transition between those two language proficiencies. It bridges the student’s language understanding from conversational to structured academic language use by contextualizing the learning experience for which different modes of language are used: “EL learners must from the outset use their new language for curriculum learning, and they need many contexts in which they can do this” (p. 93). With each stage of the continuum, Gibbons (2015) constructs accessible steps for the student to reach academic expression, which helps students develop their academic language proficiency through a logical evolution (p. 81).

Gibbons’s (2015) *Mode Continuum* has guided and helped structure this study, allowing me to create exemplars that implement stages of language use to help transition participant narratives from verbal forms of language expression into academic written forms: “While spoken and written language obviously have distinctive characteristics, this continuum of texts illustrates that there is no absolute boundary between them” (p. 81). Gibbons developed this framework by breaking down learning and language use into a four-step multimodal approach she refers to as the *Mode Continuum* (p. 80). This method takes the students from conversing with one another about the task at hand to introducing vocabulary that is applicable to the specific task (pp. 82–83). Gibbons (2015) cites Chang and Wells (1998), who consider “this more written-like spoken

language as ‘literate talk.’ This is a useful term because it draws an important distinction between different *kinds* of spoken language” (pp. 82–83), beginning with “teacher-guided” (p. 87) discourse between teacher and student to aid in language construction and create context for delivery of material, and continuing through documented verbal discourses to use later as supporting text when devising more academic forms of written work (p. 91). These stages help students who are learning English to engage with the language in a multitiered way and to develop usable skills to “reformulate *their* own talk” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 91), for purposes of communication and growth. The implementation of these stages, as Gibbons (2015, p. 83) details them, could then be connected to the area of integrative drama pedagogy, because the stages would be contextualized through drama exploration, storytelling, and creation rather than, say, an experiment.

Dramatic elements of study can effectively be applied to the writing process and to contextualizing language learning. These conceptual frameworks dovetail well with the provincial curricular expectations that I adapt in Chapter 4. The drama curriculum can then be made even more accessible to English language learners as we move towards an integrated delivery of education, putting words into action and language learning in alignment with deeply connected student experience and narrative. For example, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006) includes the following curricular expectations that specifically connect language comprehension and expression with techniques of communication, while drawing on certain characteristics that are also found in the drama curriculum as illustrated in Table 2:

2.4 use appropriate words, phrases, and terminology from the full range of their vocabulary, including inclusive and non-discriminatory language, and a range of stylistic

devices, to communicate their meaning effectively and engage the interest of their intended audience. . . .

2.6 identify a variety of non-verbal cues, including facial expression, gestures, and eye contact, and use them in oral communications, appropriately and with sensitivity towards cultural differences, to help convey their meaning (*e.g., rehearse and use hand gestures and increased volume to emphasize points during a formal presentation*). (pp. 139–140)

It is important to consider these expectations as part of a holistic analysis, thus supporting the idea that language learning is done in multiple capacities to engage learners in their development. Using the Mode Continuum as a basis for facilitating the development of a participant's language acquisition and then applying it in integrative ways both complements and adds to the existing provincial curriculum.

Using Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum, teachers would be able to assess how students develop their narratives in language use and performance by monitoring the development of language expression through the continuum. The connectivity of this framework with language learning through a performance education lens will allow teachers and researchers to evaluate the data in terms of growth, as well as how participants respond to integrative drama practices. This approach also helps me to make connections between how students acquire language and how they then use it in ways that are meaningful for them as individuals.

**Table 2***Gibbons's Mode Continuum in Connection to the Curriculum*

<b>Stages of Gibbons's Mode Continuum</b>	<b>Using the Mode Continuum to transition text from spoken to written language</b>	<b>Connection to the Ontario Ministry of Education Drama Curriculum*</b>
Stage 1: <i>Doing an experiment</i>	Students engage in spoken correspondence in the moment of the activity.	“B1.1 engage actively in drama exploration and role play, with a focus on examining multiple perspectives and possible outcomes related to complex issues, themes, and relationships from a wide variety of sources and diverse communities.”
Stage 2: <i>Introducing key vocabulary</i>	Students engage in spoken correspondence introducing key words to describe the process of the work in Stage 1.	“B1.2 demonstrate an understanding of the elements of drama by selecting and manipulating multiple elements and conventions to create and enhance a variety of drama works and shared drama experiences.”
Stage 3: <i>Teacher-guided reporting</i>	Teachers guide students in being able to consolidate their learning while further learning proper academic vocabulary and expression in connection to the activity explored in Stages 1 and 2. Gibbons uses the example of whole class group discussions where students report what happened in their experiment and the teacher helps them rephrase using proper academic language expression.	“B2.1 construct personal interpretations of drama works, connecting drama issues and themes to social concerns at both the local and global level.”
Stage 4: <i>Journal writing</i>	Students then take all three stages of linguistic development and contextualize their reporting in written form.	“B2.2 evaluate, using drama terminology, how effectively drama works and shared drama experiences use the elements of drama to engage the audience and communicate a theme or message.”

\*Quotes from Ontario Ministry of Education (2009), pp. 150–151

Using this framework also helps nurture best practices in education, because it not only brings students together in collaborative work but also allows for individual language practice and development in the fourth stage of writing (Gibbons, 2015, p. 82). Students are scaffolded to the point of challenging them to create written work that moves away from the reiteration of a situation and instead reflects their understanding of performance for a specific audience (p. 82). This stage would be easily adaptable to an online format, as writing is at times a more independent enterprise. Students can then access this stage of the continuum through forums and online submission practices for the teacher's assessment.

The multimodal approach that this framework facilitates will permit a diverse set of learners to engage with language, education, and their peers because it allows students to explore language development in varying degrees of peer-peer interaction and switching between the registers of spoken and written language (Gibbons, 2015, p. 80). Arguably, some of the stages Gibbons outlines could be difficult to recreate through an online medium. Stage 1, where students work together on a common task, poses a particular problem (Gibbons uses the example of a science experiment). Students converse about what they are doing in the activity and “language used was tied in with the situation the children were in. What they talked about referred directly to the actions in which they were taking part and to what was happening in front of them” (p. 83). Negotiating this task could pose a challenge: students would not be able to experience the nuanced correspondence that would take place with in-person learning, and technical issues experienced through online communication could disrupt or fracture the dialogic exchange. In this instance, it would be necessary to create a shared forum in which all the participants view the same activity simultaneously or work through a problem simultaneously from their various devices and locations.



I now turn my attentions to a framework developed by Augusto Boal (1973/2008), called Theatre of the Oppressed, with the goal of integrating this framework with Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum to construct an optimal enriched learning experience for students.

### **Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed**

As Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum aids in fostering language learning through integrative practices, so do Augusto Boal's (1973/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. Where Gibbons provides foundational components of language learning and support, Boal provides a performance drama educational focus needed to propel our theory forward. His work incites participants to become stakeholders in their discursive interactions and actors in their unique forms of being and understanding. Boal exhorts educators to create "spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it" (Boal, 2002, p. 5). Boal's pedagogy is affective because it asks participants to own their voice and their position and does so through creating opportunities for interactive, peer-to-peer engagement. For example, Boal (1973/2008) developed an activity called Simultaneous Dramaturgy (p. 109) that uses the technique of improv to explore a social dilemma. Actors develop a scene that surrounds a problem of some kind that needs resolution, and call upon the audience for possible solutions to be suggested and explored. At any point in the Simultaneous Dramaturgy process, the audience can also stop the proposed resolution of the scene to add direction to the actors in the moment as the scene unfolds. This relationship that is illustrated between the audience, the actors, and the problem being explored allows for various perspectives to be

discussed theatrically on stage with the help of the actors. All the solutions, suggestions, and opinions are revealed in theatrical form. The discussion itself need not simply take

the form of words, but rather should be effected through all the other elements of theatrical expression as well. (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 109)

The audience plays a key role here as they work with the performers to generate varying perspectives on the issue at hand. This technique allows community stakeholders to illuminate sensitive issues in a context where one can explore a variety of options and viewpoints.

Boal (1973/2008) outlined a process in which he would approach the application of *theatre as language* (p. 102) which allows the actor, or in this case the student, to work with the material in multiple ways. He presents an independent reflective opportunity in the “first degree” by asking participants to write while the actors are in performance, and then shifts into a collaborative peer-to-peer approach in the second and third degrees:

The theatre as language: one begins to practise theatre as a language that is living and present, not as a finished product displaying images from the past: First degree:

Simultaneous dramaturgy: the spectators “write” simultaneously with the acting of the actors; Second degree: Image theatre: the spectators intervene directly, “speaking”

through images made with the actors’ bodies; Third degree: Forum theatre: the spectators intervene directly in the dramatic action and act. (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 102)

We could draw comparisons between this process and that of Gibbons’s Mode Continuum in that they both illustrate the importance of having multiple modes of learning and varying opportunities for interaction, as well as how, through appropriate scaffolding, “you will see that the children gradually learn to use language in ways that are more appropriate to the context they are in” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 84). This type of activity will allow the actor’s ability to participate and interact thoughtfully with the subject matter and with the language being learned to grow. As a result of the enriched context and tiered methodology, “scaffolded interactions like this support

learners in completing what they want to say successfully, so they are positioned as successful interactants and learners” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 90). Both Gibbons (2015) and Boal (1973/2008) are striving for the same outcomes in different ways: they are both scaffolding a process that enhances the participants’ ability to move within their literacies to express themselves in a multitude of ways. Gibbons (2015) does this by creating a way for students to academically connect their spoken language to written language and then building on that increased capacity to deepen a student’s literacy repertoire, whereas Boal’s method involves kinesthetic movement and active interpretation of a shared intention and experience:

This was the image that person had of her village. A terrible, pessimistic, defeatist image, but also a true reflection of something that had actually taken place. Then the young woman was asked to show what she would want her village to be like. She modified completely the “statues” of the group and regrouped them as people who worked in peace and loved each other—in short, a happy and contented, ideal Otuzco. Then came the third, and most important part, of this form of theatre: how can one, starting with the actual image, arrive at the ideal image? How to bring about the change, the transformation, the revolution? (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 113)

Here Boal uses a series of tableaux to depict (a) the reality, (b) the ideal outcome or alteration of that reality, and (c) the transition between those two. This scheme illustrates how we as individuals and as communities can traverse the space between our present and our future, between what we see now and what we wish to strive towards. This process allows us to reflect on the reality that is before us, acknowledge it as the reality, and imagine and try to represent an ideal outcome of reality that *should* exist. It is also in this third step that Boal (1973/2008) proposes that multiple voices and ideas be shared to arrive at a solution, for “each participant had

the right to act as a ‘sculptor’ and to show how the grouping, or organisation, could be modified through a reorganisation of forces for the purpose of arriving at an ideal image” (p. 113).

The benefits of Theatre of the Oppressed in an educational setting are multiple. The literature in this area mostly supports the use of this method when working with diverse populations of students; but it is also important to acknowledge that critiques exist with regard to Boal’s work, how it fits within institutionalized school environments, and the malleability of these techniques to address other systemic issues.

Table 3 outlines Boal’s (1973/2008) Poetics of the Oppressed (p. 95), and the methods he uses to workshop Theatre of the Oppressed (1973/2008). These methods were originally used with the People’s Theatre in Peru in 1973 in conjunction with the Integral Literacy Operation program which Boal (1973/2008) developed from Paulo Freire’s work (pp. 95–96).

**Table 3**

*Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed Outlined Stages*

<b>First Stage:</b> <i>Knowing the Body</i>	<b>Second Stage:</b> <i>Making the Body Expressive</i>	<b>Third Stage:</b> <i>The Theatre as Language</i>	<b>Fourth Stage:</b> <i>The Theatre as Discourse</i>
-“There is a great number of exercises designed with the objective of making each person aware of his own body, of his bodily possibilities, and of deformations suffered because of the type of work he	-“In the second stage the intention is to develop the expressive ability of the body. In our culture we are used to expressing everything through words, leaving the enormous	<b>-First Degree: <i>Simultaneous Dramaturgy</i></b> “Having begun the scene, the actors develop it to the point at which the main problem reaches a crisis and needs a solution. Then the actors stop the performance and ask the audience to offer solutions” (p. 109)	<b>-Form One: <i>Newspaper Theatre</i></b> “It consists of several simple techniques for transforming daily news items, or any other non-dramatic material, into theatrical performances” (p. 121).

<p>performs. That is, it is necessary for each one to feel the ‘muscular alienation’ imposed on his body by work. A simple example will serve to clarify this point: compare the muscular structure of a typist with that of the night watchman of a factory” (p. 103).</p>	<p>expressive capabilities of the body in an underdeveloped state” (p. 106).</p> <p>- “For example: In one game pieces of paper containing names of animals, male and female, are distributed, one to each participant. For ten minutes, each person tries to give a physical, bodily impression of the animal named on his piece of paper” (p. 107).</p>	<p><b>-Second Degree:</b> <i>Image Theatre</i> “The participant is asked to express his opinion, but without speaking, using only the bodies of the other participants and ‘sculpting’ with them a group of statues, in such a way that his opinions and feelings become evident. The participant is to use the bodies of the others as if he were a sculptor and the others were made of clay: he must determine the position of each body down to the most minute details of their facial expressions” (p. 112).</p> <p><b>-Third Degree:</b> <i>Forum Theatre</i> “the participants are asked to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution. Then a 10 or 15-minute skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed, and subsequently presented. When the skit is over, the participants are asked if they agree with the solution presented. . . .Any participant in the audience has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him most appropriate” (p. 117).</p>	<p><b>-Form Two:</b> <i>Invisible Theatre</i> “It consists of the presentation of a scene in an environment other than the theatre, before people who are not spectators. The place can be a restaurant, a sidewalk, a market, a train, a line of people, etc. The people who witness the scene are those who are there by chance. During the spectacle, these people must not have the slightest idea that it is a ‘spectacle’, for this would make them ‘spectators’” (p. 122).</p> <p><b>-Form Three:</b> <i>Photo Romance</i> “The technique here consists in reading to the participants the general lines in the plot of a photo-romance without telling them the source of this plot. The participants are asked to act out the story. Finally, the acted-out story is compared to the story as it is told in the photo-romance, and the differences are discussed” (p. 126).</p> <p><b>-Form Four:</b> <i>Breaking Repression</i> “The technique of breaking repression consists in asking a participant to remember a particular moment when he felt especially repressed, accepted that repression, and began to</p>
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			<p>act in a manner contrary to his own desires. That moment must have a deep personal meaning” (p. 129)</p> <p><b>-Form Five:</b> <i>Myth Theatre</i> “It is simply a question of discovering the obvious behind the myth: to logically tell a story, revealing its evident truths” (p. 130).</p> <p><b>-Form Six:</b> <i>Analytical Theatre</i> “A story is told by one of the participants and immediately the actors improvise it. Afterward each character is broken down into all his social roles and the participants are asked to choose a physical object to symbolise each role” (p. 132).</p> <p><b>-Form Seven:</b> <i>Rituals and Masks</i> “This particular technique of a people’s theatre (‘Rituals and masks’) consists precisely in revealing the superstructures*, the rituals which reify all human relationships, and the masks of behaviour that those rituals impose on each person according to the roles he plays in society and the rituals he must perform” (p. 134).</p>
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\* The “superstructures” Boal refers to are society itself (p. 133).

## Summary

In this chapter I have provided a comprehensive overview of Boal's (1973/2008) techniques for performance instruction and learning. In the next, I outline how such approaches may be combined with Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum framework. I also show how these different techniques can be translated to an online format at a time when varying types of performances are being transposed to this medium.

One may ask: What is the teacher's role in reference to these conceptual frameworks? Boal (1973/2008) may have an answer. In his work, he refers to the role of the Joker: "On stage [he] functions as a master of ceremonies. . . . He makes all the explanations, verified in the structure of the performance" (p. 159). This role is one of guiding proportions, and illuminating moments when audience participation should be considered seriously. The Joker maintains the reflective relationship between actor and audience:

The Joker is the person who mediates the interaction with the audience and guides the direction, flow and tone of the dialogue. For Boal, the role of the Joker is to create a Socratic dialogue, a dialogue in which we begin to question our own understanding of a situation, but then guide us to develop and trust in our own ideas. The skill of the Joker is not to mediate a dialogue that will generate the right answers, but to ask the right questions, and these questions should expect, as answers, new questions. (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 245)

This perspective, in many ways, reflects good pedagogical practice in that the teacher's role is not to merely deliver subject matter but to create spaces where students can develop their own critical lens, actively connecting to meaningful modes of learning and to one another. Together, these two frameworks gesture, in Greene's (1995) words, to "teachers who provoke learners to

pose their own questions, to teach themselves, to go at their own pace, to name their worlds” (p. 11).



## Chapter 3

### Review of Relevant Literature

The literature presented in this chapter addresses research on language acquisition and English language learning in relation to integrative-drama education and online education, within the framework of institutionalized schooling. These studies illustrate and highlight some of the concerns already presented in the areas of inclusion and celebration of experience, and also offer a look at best practices within both classroom and online educational settings. The literature reviewed for this thesis has been categorized and analyzed thematically in relation to my research questions. While I focus on studies in the area of integrative performance education, I do so with a view to Boal's applications that privilege a Theatre of the Oppressed perspective within online formats.

#### Fostering Inclusive Classroom Spaces

Inclusive classroom communities are an integral component of fostering student well-being, and by extension, achievement. These classroom spaces can be defined as spaces that value diversity and inclusion, which is particularly important to this thesis in that such environments promote the incorporation of student narratives within the curricular framework (Cummins et al., 2006, p. 299). A student's own story has an important place in their learning, because "for students to invest their sense of self, their identity, in acquiring their new language and participating actively in their new culture, they must experience positive and affirming interactions with members of that culture, including their teachers" (Cummins et al., 2006, pp. 305–306). Identity is multifaceted in that it is constantly being informed by a multitude of discourses including the societal and sociocultural discourses being negotiated, so that "we can visualize the discourse of societal power relations that is broadcast into classroom and directly

affects how identities are negotiated between teachers and students” (Cummins et al., 2006, p. 305).

Arguably, educators would approach school environments and educational research with regard to the education of language minority students through the lens of antiracist education because such discourses are useful in informing the cultivation of inclusive classroom spaces. Coelho (2004) asserts the importance of an antiracist approach to education: “Multicultural education, which consists of educational practices that recognize the experiences and contributions of diverse cultural groups, is often regarded as a developmental stage on the path toward anti-racist education” (p. 43). Speaking directly to the education of English language learners, Coelho (2004) argues that sociocultural discourses that emphasize antiracist education (p. 43) directly connect with efforts to make education accessible and create a school environment that fosters students’ sense of belonging.

Ippolito and Schechter (2012) present research from a four-year study that was conducted to show the relationship between literacy and community and illustrates the benefits of multilingual learning opportunities. The purpose of the study was to close the gap between academic expectations and the situations immigrant students experience while navigating second language use (Ippolito and Schechter, 2012 p. 611). The researchers cited Cummins’s (2001) work, noting:

We understood, too, that to be effective, such instructional programs would need to involve a considerable investment in the formation and maintenance of identity for linguistically and culturally diverse learners. When students feel strong respect and affirmation from their teachers and peers, this generates a powerful sense of belonging to a learning community and motivation to participate fully in the society beyond. (p. 608)

The triangulated relationship between school, community, and identity fosters an ideal learning space that supports the learner and their individual success. A significant part of the learner's identity is rooted in their first language; and if we argue that identity is a key component of student learning and inclusion within schools, then the notion of incorporating a student's first language into the classroom experience is not far off the mark:

It was not uncommon to hear a high school tutor and younger student code switching when discussing an English-medium reading or writing exercise. The use of primary languages, in addition to enhancing their education through this complementary, community-referenced venue, was explicitly intended to signal the value that Ramona teachers placed on their students' home languages and cultures. (Ippolito and Schecter, 2012, pp. 617–618)

The importance of identity and including community and language is further substantiated in the documented dialogues with educators the authors included in this study, with one participant acknowledging that “it is so important to use diversity as a resource in a classroom. Not all learning comes from books . . . and sometimes, the most valuable lessons come from talking and listening to others from differing perspectives.” (Ippolito and Schecter, 2012, p. 619). This study then, supports a holistic approach to language learning and development: a student's learning journey is a balance between the internal and external forces that are exhibited within that student's world, community, family, and self at times, and educators' sensitivity to these different facets of the student's world is intrinsically linked to student success.

Cannon (2017) poses questions to her audience that encourage reflection upon how we use pedagogical practices to approach building classroom communities:

How can drama-based teaching techniques engage middle school ELs in their learning?  
What effects do drama activities have on students' participation and investment? How  
does being in a drama class affect students' relationships with each other and perceptions  
of themselves as language learners? (p. 1)

These questions resonate with the main research concerns guiding this study. They beg us to interrogate further how we can promote an even deeper connection to learning for newcomer students entering a Canadian school system for the first time. The pressures are higher for English language learners than for other students in mainstream classrooms, as Coelho (2004) has pointed out: "For a number of reasons, conditions are even more challenging for most English language learners. . . . The stakes are much higher. Their education and, indeed, their entire future may depend on learning English" (p. 149).

Exploring creative approaches to language learning is not only key to the education of newcomer students but also important for ELL/ESL students who have a high proficiency in English but speak a different language within the home, a cohort Schecter (2012) describes as "generation 1.5" English language learners. Schecter (2012) also makes the connection between our awareness of the educational boundaries present for these students and how such boundaries inform our pedagogical practices:

Referred to as generation 1.5 (G1.5) because they share characteristics of both first- and second-generation immigrants (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988), the students whose academic competencies this project sought to illuminate do not fit into the traditional categories of non-native speakers since they are both orally proficient in English and reasonably familiar with Canadian culture and schooling. (p. 309)

The educational approaches Schechter (2012) explores for this demographic of students overlap with those that are relevant to more than one category of learner, affirming several basic principles related to the creation of inclusive classroom spaces for minority students (e.g., experiential learning and bridging activities). Schechter (2012) emphasizes the importance of heritage language use and maintenance in tandem with English language learning, stressing the powerful relationship between narratives of home life and past experience in classroom learning. She advocates

developing an appreciation among educators of the educational value of transferable resources and skills and the importance of making connections with students' extra-school experiences; [and] generating pedagogic practices that built on this knowledge and were supportive of the academic literacy development of generation 1.5 students as well as the agency of teachers. (pp. 315–316)

The research presented by Cummins and colleagues (2006) suggests that we should view the discourse of identity and linguistic difference as an area of importance within an educational setting, rather than a divide. The researchers assert that linguistic and cultural diversity in language should be seen as an asset and as a societal resource that benefits the larger community in that “it highlights the interests of the entire society rather than those of particular minority groups, and, in doing so, transcends the ‘us versus them’ mentality” (p. 299). This approach to language diversity relates to McLean and Syed's (2015) research that offers the use of *narratives* as a pedagogical framework, allowing diverse narratives to form and contribute to societal inclusivity. McLean and Syed (2015) assert that our identity is primarily a sociocultural formation that can be shifted or re-“negotiated” once one's personal narrative starts to take shape. The personal narrative challenges the preconceived identity centred on cultural knowing,

perhaps resulting in a new identity as understanding of self (pp. 319–320). Adopting the “negotiation” that McLean and Syed (2015) discuss can allow teachers and students to make sense of societal tensions and relationships that are undoubtedly present within our classrooms and within our schools. According to Seiki and colleagues (2018),

Engaging in thinking narratively with our storied and restoried experiences of complicity, exclusion, invisibility, resistance, silence, voice, wakefulness, and so on, awakens us to seek to enact new possibilities in higher education, in schools, in other institutions, and in the communities where we are also composing our lives. (p. 16)

In sum, the use of personal narratives within educational spaces offers an opportunity for fostering community in a diverse population of students within an academic setting. This strategy aligns with principles of inclusive language learning in that to share such narratives we need meaningful opportunities for connecting with others. Seiki and colleagues (2018) echo Charbeneau (2009) and Lugones (1987) in asserting that “narrative inquiry as pedagogy served to individually and collectively shift exclusionary and oppressive classroom power dynamics” (p. 12) by honouring equitable classroom practices and fostering a space that promoted the appreciation of each students’ complex existence within society.

The literature reviewed in this section supports the use of narratives to encourage the development of inclusive classroom spaces that promote student engagement. These classroom spaces are based on giving priority to allowing students to explore their identities, and who they wish to become, by embracing their stories and individual experiences.

### ***A Cautionary Note on Inclusion and Ableism***

Educators have at times conflated the notion of inclusion with that of ableism, through association of second language learning with a learning disability or deficit ranging across

subject areas (Parekh, 2017, p. 339). This deficit belief inhibits an ELL student's growth as it limits their access to educational materials, resources, and experiential opportunities that challenge English language learners. Teachers are often tentative in providing such challenging opportunities for fear of a student's inability to perform the task or learn the concept being explored (de Araujo, 2017, pp. 363–364). Parekh (2017) draws upon de Araujo's (2017) study of English language learners' perceived deficit within educational contexts, specifically mathematics programming, and notes how such a demeaning attitude on the part of teachers directly connects with the assessment of a student's ability: "The label of being of a language learner was partly to blame for teachers' deficit perceptions of ELL students' overall ability" (p. 340). Thus, inclusion of a student within an educational space that maintains high expectations of English language learners is paramount to their learning and development, and ultimately, success (de Araujo, 2017, p. 380).

Parekh and Brown (2019) further the connections between perceived ableism and an analysis of demographic information that exposes the placement practices of some special education programming. She notes a longstanding and persistent pattern in which a disproportionate number of students from certain cultural backgrounds and living situations are more likely to be put into special education programs. These findings expose how stakeholders and practitioners may assess a student's ability based on factors that are not educationally related, bringing about outcomes that affect the student's placement within educational programs and opportunities for peer interaction.

### **Integrative Drama Pedagogy**

To start, it is important to define what an integrative approach is. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) defines integrative learning as

opportunities to link related content and/or skills in two or more subjects and to give students practice in meeting expectations from two or more subjects...As teachers work with curriculum and instruction in a connected, cohesive way, the opportunities for students to learn deeply, pursue areas of interest and communicate their thinking will become embedded in the school day. (pp. 1–8)

The Ministry of Education also advised that this approach to learning is supported by existing research and quoted researchers Drake and Reid (2010) in confirming that “research has consistently shown that students in integrated programs demonstrate academic performance equal to, or better than, students in discipline-based programs. In addition, students are more engaged in school, and less prone to attendance and behaviour problems” (p. 10). This thesis specifically investigates the connection between the drama curriculum and performance education with language learning for nonnative speakers. Thus, for the purposes of this study, “integrative” refers to the use of the drama curriculum and drama performance techniques alongside curricular expectations and commonly used techniques associated with English language learning to enrich the learning experiences and academic outcomes of English language learners.

Seiki and colleagues (2018) argue for the use of narratives as a tool of expression, as this approach gives students a sense of place and connection to their identity within their classroom communities. The authors claim that “stories help us to begin to understand and unravel the complexities of human experiences” (p. 12), facilitating the growth and application of academic language. Coelho (2004) argues that language should be used in application and in context, noting that language is learned through “purposeful” (p. 149) communication contexts. She asserts specifically that “children learning their first language do not study it. They use it for



purposes that are important to them... Language learning happens as a result of their engagement in a meaningful activity or interaction” (p. 149). The Ontario drama curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) supports these researchers’ ideas about language education by supporting integrative drama education, affirming, “Participating in drama provides opportunities for students to practice or rehearse language that they may use later in real-life situations” (p. 246). This focus on integrative approaches further endorses the ideology of contextual and applied language instruction that is integrated within drama education: “Drama provides many opportunities for students to practise communicating with different audiences for a variety of purposes, through moving, speaking and writing” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 15).

The Ministry of Education (2009) also states that drama education can address the societal discourses that inform student life and social structures. This objective is important to pursue within an educational space because it gives students the opportunity to grow in their understanding of the complex nature of diverse cultural environments, including the urban centres they inhabit: “This exploration of the ‘as if’ in roles and worlds will help students deepen their understanding of humanity and issues of equity and social justice” (p. 16). Further, pedagogy formed with an intent to address “humanity and issues of equity and social justice” (p. 16) is key in implementing social justice education within mainstream classrooms:

Teachers listen for the silent or absent voices in their classrooms and find ways to help these students re-engage with school and with the curriculum. As they encourage them to invest personal interest and increased effort in their own learning, they nurture student voices. (Gould Lundy, 2015, p. 11)

In her ethnographic research, Gallagher (2007) maintains that drama education can be a vehicle of positive learning by addressing crucial issues of social justice within schools. She asserts that “the times are dangerous because of a range of political and social crises: global economics, global politics, social unrest, and cultural experiments have forced a point of reckoning” (p. 4). Similar to Gallagher’s claims that education is framed within cultural and political discourses, Gould Lundy (2008) also champions drama-based pedagogy as a way of exploring and addressing more challenging subject areas, noting that “we need to affirm the life experiences of the students whom we meet in our classrooms and in the hallways of our schools and to acknowledge that schools are more than just places where teachers teach and students learn” (p. 11).

Integrative drama pedagogy may also be viewed as a strategy to promote student achievement and success, particularly on the part of English language learners. Coelho (2004) makes such a claim, concurring that “arts education enriches the lives of all students. Involvement in the arts also promotes second language acquisition and social integration” (p. 245). With growing expectations regarding student academic performances in institutionalized settings, and schools being assessed based on results of standardized tests rather than in-class work, it is important to register the challenges posed to English language learners and their teachers. Gallagher (2007) noted the observed divide between certain subject areas, specifically arts and science (pp. 76–83), and furthermore how the arts are considered of a lower priority within school systems. A perspective such as this would subsequently affect integrative pedagogical approaches. Gallagher (2007) argues that the prioritization of subject areas is directly linked to the pressure of teaching curriculum that supports standardized testing, rather than teaching that supports students’ individual needs (pp. 76–83).

Schechter and Cummins's publication *Multilingual Education in Practice* (2003) argues that both theoretical and experiential aspects of education can coexist in developing best practices within teaching approaches:

By *integrated* we mean not only a coherent relationship between university preparation and practical experience in subject matter teaching but also a vision of curriculum as a site of democratic negotiation of a core of shared values and social relations that are grounded in local context and lived experiences. (Schechter, Solomon, & Kittmer, 2003, p. 84)

An integrated teaching approach is further substantiated by Ippolito and Schechter's (2012) four-year research study that investigated the importance and subsequent effects of integrative approaches to bilingual learning. Ippolito and Schechter (2012) found that a varied approach of student interactions and engagement within group work and "cooperative learning" models, drama activities, peer-to-peer activities, and reading and writing work with both friends and teachers was helpful to student learning (p. 617). Ippolito and Schechter (2012) illustrate in their study that language learning takes place within various learning opportunities that are interpersonal and community-based as well as individual, and encompass both subject-specific learning and language development and understanding.

Dunn and colleagues (2012) conducted a study exploring the use of technology within drama-based pedagogy. The results of that study showed overall success in using an integrative approach when creating an accessible curriculum for English language learners:

Our analysis showed us that the technologies used within the drama work served seven key functions. These related to language development, information provision, narrative development, identification and the creation of mood. The use of technology also

generated opportunities for the children to have agency over their own learning and to create shared experiences with classmates and teachers. (p. 1)

Although this study looked at refugee students in particular, and although there are similarities between refugee students and newcomer students with regard to English language literacy development, it is important to acknowledge the differences in experience. Therefore, this research would need to be adapted to apply to newcomers' situations. Dunn and colleagues' (2012) findings offer insight into the potential of integrative curricula in facilitating learning for classroom communities as a whole. The study furthers understanding of student well-being through creating positive shared interactions among peers in integrated classrooms (p. 1).

Cannon (2017) expresses similar views as she researches drama through an integrative lens as well as student achievement and connectivity between peers: "These ideas speak to the power of drama to shift classroom dynamics by transforming classrooms of students into cooperative ensembles and to embolden students to learn and internalize new language" (p. 1). Cannon's (2017) research promotes an approach to learning through a dramatic approach that illuminates how "being part of a dramatic ensemble and engaging in performance-based literacy activities allowed students to 'try on [authoritative] discourses'" (p. 1). This integrative approach to learning enables students to examine sociocultural discourses and varying roles within an academic setting. Coelho's (2004) work goes on to argue that we must create tangible means of applied social and academic relations in language learning. She asserts that "arts education enriches the lives of all students. Involvement in the arts also promotes second language acquisition and social integration. . . . Participating in drama provides opportunities for students to practice or rehearse language that they may use later in real-life situations" (pp. 245–246). Conclusively, the literature suggests that when drama is used integratively with other curriculum

areas, professional educators can address varying obstacles related to English language learning and academic literacy development for ELL students.

### **Drama Education in an Era of Online Learning**

We now move from literature pertaining to creating spaces for minority students in general, to research that addresses the more specific domain of integrated drama education and language learning in an online context. Research in drama education and English language learning in an online space provides a comprehensive overview of both the benefits and the challenges associated with student language learning through an online model. This research reveals how online learning can be applied in an integrative fashion both globally and within a provincially specific context (Ontario). This area of research is important to review because pandemic education required an unanticipated but significant and immediate shift to online learning. As was noted by Wong (2020), the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) showed an increase in families choosing to learn virtually, as opposed to in-person, during the pandemic. The various delays caused by abrupt shifts in venue should not be underestimated. Indeed, if we are to properly reflect upon this development and its consequences for language acquisition, then we must take stock of what the research in this area tells us so that the future possibilities of online educational approaches can be assessed.

Another dynamic at play in online learning is the shift in human connection. We are used to being in a space that facilitates a connective and collaborative experience, one that is steeped in an ethos of building community through interpersonal interaction (Schechter & Bell, 2021). Do these connections impact our ability to collaborate with and learn from one another online? During the earlier stages of the pandemic, Gallagher and colleagues (2020) expressed concern about the shifting identity capital on digital platforms when students were propelled into online

learning. Particularly, at one of the high school sites based in Toronto, students seemed to wish to remain anonymous when moved to a uniquely online learning model (Gallagher et al., 2020). This expression of anonymity was opposite to what was observed in interactions a year earlier that showed students at a higher level of engagement and connectivity within their social media and online platforms (Gallagher et al., 2020). Gallagher and colleagues' (2020) findings call into question the viability of maintaining strong peer connections on an online platform and raise the issue of what steps need to be taken to fortify a sense of community and create opportunities for learning in online spaces. The researchers support the idea of using an integrated drama framework to address student identity during a period of crisis as they cite Hagood's (2004) assertions that "using drama to devise a narrative of place/time will afford youth the opportunity to speak to the ambiguities and contradictions that define their world as they make active and new constructions of themselves in the midst of crisis" (para. 9)

Of course, we do not need to be in a state of crisis to deem this approach beneficial, and we can attest that integrated drama strategies can manifest in different educational spaces where students can express themselves constructively. However, as educators we do need to address the technical issues that arise when working within an online format. We also need to pay attention to the systemic issues that may be at play in learning online: "The pandemic has also amplified inequities that were always there—some connected to students' varied access to technology, but many more connected to the impact of poverty, discrimination, and the wide range in families' capacity to support students" (People for Education, 2020, p. 2).

These inequities present a more nuanced challenge for teaching at this specific historical time. It is not a solution to simply ask students to use their personal devices for educational purposes. For one, technology may be limited or nonexistent, as "many schools rely on

fundraising to offset the costs of technology, and principals report that it is difficult to ensure that all students have equitable access” (People for Education, 2020, p. 6). Notwithstanding, “the TDSB lent 60,000 devices to its students during the spring transition to remote learning” (Samba, 2020). Data presented in an article published by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (Crawley, 2020) reported a correlation between demographics and virtual school enrolment, revealing specifically that students of East Asian and South Asian descent and students of lower socioeconomic standing or who have parents who never attended university were disproportionately represented among the 70,000 TDSB students who were enrolled in online education. The data seem to illuminate the greater threat of contracting Covid-19 felt by lower-income and racialized families in comparison with their wealthier, nonminority counterparts (Crawley, 2020).

Examining the research published in the area of online education has revealed additional challenges confronted by educators when working with students in this format. Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) found that in seeking to implement drama educational practices online, they “found it extremely challenging to go slowly to allow participants to follow the action, and *at the same time* to keep the participants engaged and curious” (para.21). Their research showed that there was a significant gap in how students negotiated the technicalities of online learning and how that process was then reflected in the level of engagement. These findings go beyond the technical and sociocultural challenges associated with online learning, addressing specifically how eliciting engagement and connection while teaching drama remotely can be challenging. Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) connect to Davis’s (2014) research, noting,

Our experience was that working in such a way was greatly constrained online. Since we could not use a shared space and what we mostly saw were faces (or, when in action, just

a segment of the speaker's body and room), we had to build on the participants' imagination (Davis, 2014) to an even greater extent than usual" (para. 13) .

The limitations revealed in this example would suggest that students need to become familiar not only with the material teachers are presenting but also with the capabilities of an online platform. If students are no longer sharing a physical space but rather a virtual one, then the limitations of that space need to be better understood.

Although the transition to a more online model of education has involved challenges, there have also been some significant successes in this area. Working with university students, Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) presented their findings on implemented drama techniques during the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of challenges, they reported,

When *facilitating*, one of the greatest challenges we faced was that, since we were not sitting in a circle, it was impossible to make and keep eye contact with the participants. . . . We felt that a far greater level of energy than usual was necessary (para.14).

However, they countered these challenges with outcomes that depicted ways to use drama education online successfully:

The online space also offered a few work forms that are not accessible offline. Responding to a question, writing messages and blog entries or conducting a quick poll were all possible in the chat feature of these platforms; this allowed everyone, even the more usually silent participants the opportunity to contribute simultaneously. We also found some online platforms that offered interesting possibilities for working collaboratively. Digital images proved to be highly useful to move the story forward (para. 16).



These findings illuminated ways in which educators could differentiate the learning experience in the particular subject area, allowing for students to respond and participate in creative but multimodal ways, beneficial for diverse needs.

Another study discussed in an article by Philip and Nicholls (2007) took an in-depth look at a fully online course called “The Genres of European Theatre,” offered at a university in Australia. The instructor’s objective was to create a course based in drama education that would foster the inquiry process in an online model and afford students opportunities “to pursue a creative endeavour according to their interests. Projects ranged from script writing, theatre design, and video production to innovative approaches to theatre criticism” (para. 29). Like the previous study, this one focused on postsecondary education, although these techniques could be transferrable to a younger demographic. Philip and Nicholls’s framework was innovative in applying the concept of “*mise-en-scène*” to an online space that students and teachers would actually be using during the course. The reappropriation of live theatre terms to an online venue created a rooted sense of the new environment and a commitment to focus on its specific characteristics:

In theatre, the *mise-en-scène* refers to those elements, sets, props, costumes, lighting, and actors that comprise the “scene,” the space in the dramatic action takes place. . . .

Similarly, the *mise-en-scène* for an online course comprises everything available to students each time they log in, including resources, tasks, assessments, and the presence of and interactions with other players. How well these elements are designed and integrated affects the learning space and context, which ultimately must engage the learners and impact on the course dynamic (para. 18).

Use of narratives through an inquiry approach to drama sparked success in this study as these exercises provided opportunities for student and peer engagement. Phillip and Nicholls (2007) assert:

As “story makers” and “story listeners” teachers and students to greater and lesser degrees build individual and group narratives. In our course, all students weave their own narrative drawing on the resources and input provided by other students, teachers and mentors. These individual and group stories are fluid and changing (para. 12).

Philip and Nicholls gathered evidence by noting their observations of student performance and interaction, assessing written forms of work and communication from the students, as well as issuing a questionnaire at the end of the course. Students’ responses and feedback showed that approaches to drama education and strong peer-to-peer connections could be accomplished online because “the ‘dynamic’ created in the online course encouraged the sense of a ‘community of learners’ or a “community of inquiry”” (Philip & Nicholls, 2007, para.1) This effect was most notably accomplished through an adaptive framework that conditioned the online space to one comparable to a theatrical space or stage and an inquiry-based approach to the drama process: “Students were encouraged to initiate and drive the direction of the ‘story making’ and ‘story listening’ space” (Philip & Nicholls, 2007, para. 7). This research promises significant findings of success for online drama education, regardless of the demographic, because the framework is built on the fundamentals of student engagement.

It is worth noting that Philip and Nicholls (2007) had one assignment in this online model that connects strongly with Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (1973/2008). Students from West Virginia University were asked to read the play *Lysistrata* and discuss the text, making connections to how the storyline was relevant to modern-day sociopolitical and cultural contexts.

Students were to share their views on how the play would possibly translate to a present-day staging, formatting their arguments in a written essay (Philip & Nicholls, 2007). This process is similar to the one outlined in Boal's (1973/2008) Forum Theatre, where participants are asked to use drama and performance theatre to analyze an issue for its sociopolitical relevance—specifically, “to tell a story containing a political or social problem of difficult solution” (p. 117). Philip and Nicholls's (2007) approach not only develops students' critical thinking, but offers an opportunity to English language learners to share their views within a framework that is designed to support student engagement.

Studies such as this can have an effect on drama education going forward. The use of integrative practices and online platforms to deliver remote educational opportunities can change how we perceive not only a classroom space but also a drama space. Gallagher and colleagues (2020) reflect upon their own experience as researchers shifting from a prepandemic research position into a time of a pandemic:

Our early perceptions revealed to us a complex portrait of youth, drama, and the online world at a time in which access to physical space—and interpersonal connection—has been necessarily curtailed. It is clear that any research project amid a global pandemic must live with new uncertainties about the possibilities of research itself, and in our case, the most obvious of these include the new configurations and protocols of school re-openings, as well as global air travel. This new state of uncertainty has more than practical effects, however; it invites us to ponder very human questions about art and interdependence, about identity, about teaching and learning, and about global, collaborative research (para.1).

Gallagher and colleagues' (2020) reflections on the alteration of teaching during a pandemic document a changing narrative of what it means to teach and to learn during this unusual time. This changed educational landscape will inform present and future pedagogical choices as well as research endeavours, whether from a pro-online educational platform or alternate venue. It is then of even more importance to truly understand how technology can connect the objectives of integrative drama and performance education to the needs of diverse populations of students. Davis (2017) looks at research on arts-based approaches in early childhood education, making connections between arts-based education and teacher confidence in instructing interdisciplinary arts that are relevant to higher grade levels (paras. 3-4). Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) assertions connect with Davis's (2017) thoughts by also reflecting upon the need of drama education at a time of both crisis and transition:

Drama is needed in such periods to reconnect with our communities and to understand the complexity of the crisis we are facing from multiple perspectives. For us, the lockdown was a serious learning process, a period when we had to learn to adapt our routines to demanding and challenging situations and, for us, to reconsider our function, operations, effectiveness and even our role as drama educators (para. 25).

### **Drama for Social Change: Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed**

Augusto Boal (1973/2008) first published his text *Theatre of the Oppressed* in 1973 to explore the everyday oppressions that he and others were facing against the backdrop of civil and moral unrest in Brazil, which, he wrote, "was at that time under a cruel and murderous civic and military dictatorship" (p. ix). Boal strove to create a transformative method with a democratic emphasis that would give participants the opportunity to gain perspectives, unlearn their current notions, and relearn a different understanding of their own oppressions. Kina and Fernandes

(2017) emphasize that “Boal viewed *Theatre of the oppressed* not as an arts practice, but as an interdisciplinary methodology of social change” (p. 248). He was heavily influenced not only by the world around him—the sociocultural and political structures that dictated everyday life—but also by the work of Paulo Freire (1996) and his assertions about the human experience in the face of opposing forces. Specifically, Freire (1996) asserted that “people are the experts in their own lives—that any work towards freedom from oppression must be based on ‘trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason’ (p. 48)” (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 244). These sentiments resonated with Boal and informed how he developed his method. He believed that change could only be achieved through a kind of transformation that incited action on the part of the participant. With regard to the role of drama in this transformative process, Boal (1973/2008) asserted, “Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution. The liberated spectator, as a whole person, launches into action. No matter that the action is fictional; what matters is that it is action!” (p. 98).

Kina and Fernandes (2017) echoed this assertion when they categorized Theatre of the Oppressed as a kind of political activism:

Activism is therefore central to *Theatre of the oppressed*. It is this explicit inclusion of concrete social action, network development and activism that distinguishes *Theatre of the oppressed* from other forms of applied theatre; it is a theatre of politics rather than political theatre. (p. 245)

In his seminal publication, Boal (1973/2008) devised three prominent modes of theatre education: (a) *Forum Theatre* (“The most well-known *Theatre of the oppressed* technique is *Forum theatre*, in which a social problem is presented through performance and audience members are invited to improvise—or test out—a potential solution” [Kina & Fernandes, 2017,

p. 244]), (b) *Image Theatre* (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 112), and (c) *Legislative Theatre*, which illustrated how theatre can be impactful. In their research, Kina and Fernandes (2017) provided an example of “*Legislative theatre*, in which theatrical techniques were used to both identify issues facing local people and facilitate dialogue about proposed legislation directly with local communities” (p. 243). Boal’s Legislative Theatre approach played an integral role in changing 15 different laws, including addressing laws around witness protection (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 243). Kina and Fernandes described how effective and transformative Boal’s method, involving theatre and performance, can be, and how it can transport one from a state of living to a state of being actively with others.

Inspired by Boal’s work, a Toronto-based theatre company founded in 1983, Mixed Company Theatre, has been exploring the oppressions caused by the pandemic with adult participants through online media platforms:

Our intention is to continue creating projects like these in response to major news events so communities can unpack, discuss, and respond to the dynamic and constantly changing news or “newsfeed” on our social media, in this uncertain yet significant time in human history. (Mixed Company Theatre, 2021)

These thespians explored pandemic-related and other historic moments such as Black Lives Matter protests. They delved into themes such as the dynamics of living with roommates during a pandemic and the shifting norms and expectations of working during a pandemic while maintaining social distance (Mixed Company Theatre, 2021). This exploratory project is significant for showing how Theatre of the Oppressed techniques can be used to examine the major issues of our time: “The aesthetic of the oppressed proposes to discover with the oppressed

the artist within, and through this process open the way to know oneself in relation to the world” (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 246).

When we look at Boal’s approach through the lens of literacy and language development, we can see how Theatre of the Oppressed can be an accessible mode of learning for those of varying language backgrounds: “When working in a literacy programme in Peru with people who spoke a variety of different languages and dialects, Boal developed *Image theatre*, which facilitated dialogue with people despite linguistic differences” (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 242). Boal believed that language could transcend the verbal vernacular and be expressed through a performative state:

There are many languages besides those that are written or spoken. By learning a new language, a person acquires a new way of knowing reality and of passing that knowledge on to others. Each language is absolutely irreplaceable. All languages complement each other in achieving the widest, most complete knowledge of what is real. (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 96)

Following Boal (1973/2008), performance theatre and the exchange between actors and audience is in and of itself a dialogue. The portrayal of truths, of personal stories, and of the oppressions within society in a performative state is a pathway to understanding language as an expression of humanistic values. Within this approach, an English language learner can connect understanding with emotion to deepen their level of understanding of their peers and their environment. Connecting language learning with an individual’s self, their culture and their lived experiences is an important goal of this approach, “to affirm the life experiences of the students whom we meet in our classrooms and in the hallways of our schools and to acknowledge that

schools are more than just places where teachers teach and students learn” (Gould Lundy, 2008, p. 11).

Chow and Cummins (2003) prefaced their investigations by stating their intention to create such an opportunity within an educational space for English language learners:

We set out to enhance the status of multilingual children by creating a context within the school where they would have ample opportunities to demonstrate their skills and to share aspects of their cultures, countries of origin, and personal experiences with their peers and teachers. (p. 35)

The researchers’ assertions affirm that our students’ identities inform how they approach learning and how we approach the complexities of creating a context for inclusive pedagogy. Similarly, Boal (1973/2008) champions the connective relationship between experience and change, affirming that “in order to understand this poetics of the oppressed one must keep in mind its main objective: to change the people—‘spectators’, passive beings in the theatrical phenomenon—into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action” (p. 97). In this view, we think of students as individuals transforming from “spectators” into active contributors to their learning and development in order to access change within their own lives. This notion anchors ELL students to their learning environment in a much needed way. Inclusivity is what connects Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed method to the research presented by Cummins and colleagues (2006), regarding creating classroom conditions for maximum identity investment in the learning process.

Kina and Fernandes (2017) present a critique that addresses concerns with the use of Theatre of the Oppressed to explore oppressions that pertain to a “victim” participating in the “protagonist” role in their own action. Specifically addressing gender-based violence, the



researchers conclude, in citing Mitchell and Freitag's (2011) assertions, that such a role would be invasive and place the actor in a vulnerable position:

In the case of gender violence, the burden of responsibility for preventing the violence laying with potential victim (Mitchell & Freitag, 2011). While the strategic nature of scene construction should place the problem or conflict in the sociohistorical context, practitioners using *Theatre of the oppressed* to explore gender-based violence have identified that the replacement of the protagonist (in this case, the potential victim of violence) exacerbated this burden. (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 248)

Mitchell and Freitag (2011, in Kina & Fernandes, 2017) present a solution to this sensitive issue. The authors suggest that the victim could occupy a "bystander" role so that they are only indirectly participating in the exploration of the oppression (p. 248). This said, arguably, oppression of this nature and magnitude is not one that I anticipate in a school setting, and I see much potential in Theatre of the Oppressed techniques for fostering English language learners' literacy development within a context that allows them to make use of their lived experiences. Still, it is important for educators to take stock of such a critique to assess the risk associated with degrees of vulnerability, in order to create safe spaces for student learning.

Another critique of Boal's (1973/2008) method raises concern about how certain exercises Boal proposes have the potential to further oppress female participants:

The focus on non-verbal exercises raises issues of trust. As women's experiences of oppression often involve the violation of physical boundaries, activities involving touching cannot be viewed as gender-neutral as this may invoke strong emotions among participants. (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 248)

This critique does not directly apply to my project as students would not be physically interacting when engaging in online drama activities. However, the researchers' point is well taken and represents a cautionary note on engaging with students from various backgrounds who have different boundaries to consider.

In this regard, it is important to note that Boal did not consider his method to be absolute. He himself exhorts readers to reflect on the relevance of the time and considerations of varying sociocultural and political dynamics when applying his techniques:

Boal recognised the need for continual “re-experimentation”, highlighting that his model responds to the Latin American context, and therefore when applied elsewhere, it “inevitably entails a reconsideration of all the forms, structures, techniques, methods and processes of this kind of theatre. Everything is once again open to question” (Boal, 2002, p. 253). (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 248)

I now move on to examine literature that contains specific examples of Theatre of the Oppressed techniques applied in an educational setting. Tolomelli (2016) highlighted the theatre group International Theatre of the Oppressed Company (p. 52), which does significant work on a global scale using the Theatre of the Oppressed methodology in various applications for the purposes of education and outreach:

Each group member of the “TOgether” network has developed projects at a local level, using TO applied to various contexts (schools, communities, women’s groups, informal groups of teenagers, and more). These experiences represented the opportunity among the participants to reflect on critical issues, strengths, theoretical elements emerging from the practice in a perspective of grounded theory. (p. 52)

Tolomelli (2016) writes about how Theatre of the Oppressed presents opportunities for a successful transformative process when used as a pedagogical approach to critically engage the student with the world around them: “The idea of ‘oppression’ leads us towards a vision of our commitment in education as a path for the reveal of what is hidden, to address the learning process to the development of a critical view of reality” (p. 50).

This process of critical development relates to Silva and Menezes’s (2016) assertions that forms of theatre can be conducive to cognitive and interpersonal growth, as the “literature shows evidence that the artistic and creative practices, especially those rooted in holistic (embodied) perspectives about human psychological functioning (such as theatre), seem to be particularly adequate for the objective of developing complexity of thought and active citizenship” (p. 40). Silva and Menezes further discuss how performance education, specifically Boal’s method, would aid in the construction of an educational approach that promotes what they refer to as “active citizenship” (p. 40). Supporting the assertion that community and social obligation are important elements within the construct of education, they continue, “This methodology reunites artistic qualities that largely contribute for the promotion of psycho-social development, engaging and empowering citizens in the construction of a better collective future” (p. 41). The researchers describe “citizenship” as being more than a societal construct of individual proportions, explaining how the role of the individual within society has the potential to better the world (p. 41), and champion the use of Theatre of the Oppressed as a way to create opportunities to explore global and community responsibility. Clearly, their research is intended as a validation of the applicability of Boal’s methodology to learning processes that bring about systemic change.

Silva and Menezes (2016) draw further connections between Boal's (1973/2008) ideology and social change. At the heart of their argument is the idea that creating the role of the "citizen" within the student is a strategy for realizing a future where there is social change and contestation of injustice. Silva and Menezes (2016) cite researchers Westheimer and Kahne (2004), noting,

The justice oriented citizen acts critically, striving to understand problems in their root and intervene for the construction of fairer and more equitable societies, engaging in activities that question the reasons behind the existence of the less fortunate and demanding social transformation. (p. 41)

These authors further connect their main ideas to Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) research expressing the idea that there are different types of citizens within a societal construct (p. 41), and that "the justice oriented citizen" (p. 41) is most in alignment with Boal's method of performative transformation. The "justice oriented citizen" unpacks the dilemmas faced by larger populations and oppressive systemic constructs to bring focus to their existence, and through such dialogue dismantles them. This citizenship perspective relates to the activism piece in Boal's work through the role of the "spectator" whose role is to intervene when compelled by the social dilemma being explored, illustrating the notion that "the passive citizen is also capable of acting in changing the course of events in the world s/he inhabits" (Silva & Menezes, 2016, p. 44). The act of citizenship also acknowledges a commitment to uphold community values. Within an educational setting, these actions would involve students connecting with one another and developing positive interactions through engagement with meaningful subject matter that promotes a greater understanding of the societal discourses that surround them.

Applications of Boal's (1973/2008) work within school settings give us insight into what using the Theatre of the Oppressed approach could mean for language learning and performance education. If we see theatre as a connective way to interpret reality, then we can look at drama and arts education as vehicles through which students can contextualize their process and experience. For example, a student experiencing the fear and anxiety of negotiating a pandemic may reflect these emotions through the guise of a character and the rules of performance outlined in Boal's (1973/2008) *Theatre of the Oppressed*.

The literature examined in this section has shown how Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques can be used in educational settings to enrich a learning environment for English language learners and enhance student engagement. Reviewing this literature has been helpful in assessing the merits of this approach as an integrative and transformative pedagogy. Critiques of specific techniques associated with this perspective have led me to propose adapting the method to further inclusivity and translatability in North American culture. In the following chapter, I suggest what some of these adaptations could look like within a formal educational setting in Ontario, paying special attention to the need to integrate online formats into this promising approach.

## Chapter 4

### Honing a Pedagogy of Performance

#### Connecting the Research to Pedagogical Practice

In this chapter I link my two primary conceptual frameworks with the Ontario curriculum, interpreted through a lens of performance pedagogy. As educators and researchers, we support the notion that there needs to be an intrinsic connection between research and action. The research reported thus far in my thesis is intended to inform our pedagogic practices. In addition to fostering educational environments that promote equitable opportunities for language learning and development for students, we should also be fostering a relationship between teachers and existing research to inform pedagogical approaches. Summarizing the research on the link between arts education and the cultivation of student understanding of community association and participation, Silva and Menezes (2016) assert,

Literature shows evidence that the artistic and creative practices, especially those rooted in holistic (embodied) perspectives about human psychological functioning (such as theatre), seem to be particularly adequate for the objective of developing complexity of thought and active citizenship. (p. 40)

One of the findings of research by People for Education (2020) on online learning during Covid times was that success in integrative drama performance education in an online format remains contingent on proper funding and teacher resources. Specifically, more teachers are needed to properly facilitate online education measures, and as People for Education (2020) report, “principals are already reporting challenges with e-learning, including a lack of adequate supervision and support for students to help them manage their workload and course

expectations” (p. 10). The same source reported the need for funding and creating infrastructure that allows school boards to provide adequate resources for students to access online education without hindrance. People for Education (2020) noted that “in Ontario, funding to support the hard costs of computers and software in schools has not increased for 10 years” (p. 6).

Accessibility, then, poses a challenge for English language learners and, truly, all students during this time of transition to online learning formats. It is evident that additional substantive change needs to take place to properly facilitate this medium of learning.

The literature I have reviewed teaches us that integrative pedagogy and integrative approaches to learning are optimal for student learning and academic achievement. We know as well that integrative pedagogy creates meaningful connections to learning and avenues in which the learning is differentiated and enriched. The Ontario Ministry of Education’s assertions on integrated learning being beneficial to student engagement and success connect to Boal’s approach: “Within the practice of *Theatre of the oppressed*, the subjective processes of being human are fundamentally integrated into the objective social systems that dominate everyday experience” (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 244).

The literature also reveals that integrative learning can be translated to an online classroom space; but this process comes with limitations. Physical space has posed a challenge during the pandemic because of the vacuum created by the continual flux between online and in-person learning. The researchers Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) note that “the participants were just watching a screen in their homes, and at any moment, they could decide to switch to their email or social media without anyone noticing.” At the same time, we are asking that the same rules and routines of the school classroom be honoured in the online classroom, even though the physical space the student is in does not replicate these formal learning conditions.

We also have to impress upon students that when they are working within a digital education platform, the spaces at their disposal are confined to those which we can see on screen. Cziboly and Bethlenfalvy (2020) assert, “When we showed a scene in role, we had to learn that since they could only view these scenes ‘through a window’, anything and everything that was visible gained meaning: the background, costumes and props, objects, even the smallest movements and gestures.” While the screen does pose limitations, it can also provide a learning opportunity for students striving to navigate and effectively use technology as a resource.

The research in the area of online drama education informs us that many aspects of the subject and accessibility are lost, while other aspects are gained. It is important to acknowledge these varied results, because as educators and stakeholders we find ourselves at this time in constant negotiation, assessing what we can bear to lose educationally and what we can potentially gain. People for Education (2020) connect their assertions to those of researchers Dede (2014) and Rizk (2018), stating that “the mere presence of technology cannot be an end unto itself. Technology is a tool that needs to be supported by teacher training and informed by pedagogy to yield its benefits” (p. 7).

Connecting with Boal’s (1973/2008) work, it is when we reflect on oppression, or oppressive times such as these, that a meaningful transformation and evaluation can occur: “It is argued that this methodology reunites artistic qualities that largely contribute for the promotion of psycho-social development, engaging and empowering citizens in the construction of a better collective future” (Silva & Menezes, 2016, p. 41). It is within that reflective process that we can make sense of what such evaluations reveal to us about our present educational situation. For instance, the integrative platform of online learning is significantly different from that of in-person integrative practices. Gallagher and colleagues (2020) refer to the research published by



People for Education (2020) to affirm that, within Ontario, technology was an essential tool for teachers and students shifting to a “crisis teaching” model. This People for Education (2020) article asserted that, though technology is essential, it does not “act as a replacement for the rich learning and human development that happens in the myriad face-to-face settings and relationships that exist in schools.”

We have learned from the literature that providing English language learners with opportunities to use their language in a contextualized way and in group settings supports language development. As seen in observations and transcripts collected from Gibbons (2015), “We can see again how small-group work supports learning. Together children explored and developed certain scientific understandings” (p. 86). Gibbons concludes from her findings that the steps in the Mode Continuum facilitated language development because they provided a logical transition from use of oral language communication to first communicate meaning to written modes of language use. Gibbons (2015) equates levels of linguistic understanding to Chang and Wells’s (1998) concept of “literate talk,” emphasizing the “important distinction between different *kinds* of spoken language. . . . Literate talk serves as a bridge between activity-related talk and more formal written registers of subject learning” (pp. 82–83). By examining these findings, we may be able to assess the viability of developing linguistic comprehension and contextualized language use in group settings, rather than attempting to cultivate competence uniquely through singular or individual exercises of oral communication.

It is equally important to analyze the research in terms of the newcomer’s voice within the structured learning environment. Coelho’s (2004) work, reviewed earlier in this thesis, teaches us that effective and inclusive classroom environments cannot exclude the emotional aspect of an English language learner’s life. We have also learned that incorporating multiple

aspects of the student's life, community, family, and culture within the educational space is an asset in successfully supporting language development and in fostering inclusive classrooms, as these efforts "create classroom conditions for maximum identity investment in the learning process" (Cummins et al., 2006, p. 305). Additionally, we see a benefit to English language learners maintaining their native or home languages while learning English. As Schechter and Bayley (2002) found, development of literacy in more than one language does not hinder, and generally helps, children's academic and personal achievement. Their extensive ethnographic research concluded,

Minority-language maintenance in no way impedes children's linguistic and academic development in the dominant language. We have seen that by our standards children who produced Spanish narratives did as well on their English essays as those who wrote only in English. (p. 191)

Schechter and Bayley's (2002) research further supports the ideology of linguistic inclusivity within mainstream classroom spaces, negating the need to silence a student's first language as a precondition for success in developing proficiency in English.

### **Experimenting with an Integrative Performance Approach in the Era of Online Teaching: From the Diary of a Teacher**

In my personal experience teaching during this pandemic, I attempted to use the online learning space to create opportunities for students to explore social justice issues and pandemic limitations through the use of split screen improv. Students were able to work through environmental concerns from other subject areas, pandemic restrictions, and obstacles from their individual screens (or, as we referred to them, "stages") to create this improvised piece. The renaming of the screen space was integral to having students rethink their environment, an

argument also put forward by Philip and Nicholls (2007) who pointed out that using theatrical metaphors and drama techniques is additionally helpful in guiding us to think through the processes of devising a learning space, rather than thinking about how the content and material are delivered (Philip & Nicholls, 2007). These activities provided an opportunity for students, both as performers and as audience members, to participate in their learning in a novel and contextualized way. It also provided a way for students to explore hard issues and ideas through the creative manifestation of performance.

While attempting to implement integrative pedagogy during a pandemic, I encountered some challenges, one being the technical complications when communicating solely with and through a technical device. Sometimes a student would lose their internet connection; sometimes the classroom platform would disconnect the student unexpectedly in the middle of a lesson. This would then make it challenging for the teacher, since a lesson plan would then generally need to be executed more than once for all students to gain clarification, or even to know what was going on. Also, sometimes in the middle of a performance one of the performers would freeze or have connection issues that would delay their communicative response to the other group members. One time a parent even came on screen out of concern, thinking that the scene and the emotional expression were real, rather than a drama activity being explored. The characteristics that distinguished learning from “real life” were being called into question in this “Brave New World” of online learning. Loud noises or expression could be interpreted as something going wrong or off task, rather than part of the creative process. In the case cited, the student had to explain to other household members that they were doing a scene and what it was about, a condition one would not encounter in an in-person classroom setting.

On the positive side, I did observe an increase in participation and feedback, most notably from students who had not been overly active in their classroom participation in other online venues. Some students who had remained silent or with their computer cameras turned off became active participants in the work being explored.

It is important to note that these are informal observations, and that this anecdotal contribution is based on an overview of my personal experience as a substitute teacher during an era of online teaching during a pandemic, where conditions did not allow for sufficient lead time to properly prepare the group of participants or collect data on the backgrounds of participants that could illuminate my findings.

### **The Exemplars: Contextualizing the Integrative Process**

The research in the area of language development and integrative drama pedagogy has been informative in guiding this educator towards meaningful approaches to teaching English language learners. I have created the following exemplars to inspire new ways of approaching language learning and development, as well as integrative educational practices. I have designed these exemplars within the frameworks proposed by Boal (1973/2008) and Gibbons (2015), using an integrative lens. In these exemplars, I focus on areas of learning (i.e., drama and language, or drama, language, and science) through a performance education lens, while integrating associated activities within the four stages of the Mode Continuum (Gibbons, 2015, pp. 80–92). I have honoured the steps of the Mode Continuum by having students work on their language and cognitive development in a progression from speaking to writing. The fundamentals of Boal's (2008) techniques are also being applied, using the activities he created (pp. 103–134). In the original example from Gibbons (2015), a science experiment looking at the functionality of magnets is used (pp. 80–92), whereas the examples included here are informed

by other curricular areas such as drama, language, and science. It is important to clarify that here the term *integrated* refers to both the cross-curricular approach to contextualizing the learning (i.e., using drama to contextualize certain aspects of the science curriculum in a different and, arguably, more meaningful way) and to integrating the two frameworks from which we are approaching and structuring the curricular learning. Simply put, instead of a traditional science experiment, we are using Boal's performance activities as a learning heuristic.

The exemplars below highlight the strengths of both the Gibbons (2015) and Boal (1973/2008) frameworks within a classroom setting. Using the scaffolding of Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum (pp. 80–95) to inform how the activities are structured, I am infusing the stages with Boal's (1973/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed approaches and techniques to determine the content of the activities and how they are to be accessed through performance education. The instructions for each activity, scaffolded within the four stages of the Mode Continuum, are each titled as cited from Gibbons (2015) to maintain consistency and accuracy within the framework. In this creative work, I strive to address currently topical areas of oppression and students' perspectives and understanding of their classroom communities. Throughout, Boal (2002) asserts that, "Theatre of the Oppressed creates spaces of liberty where people can free their memories, emotions, imaginations, thinking of their past, in the present, and where they can invent their future instead of waiting for it" (p. 5) provides the inspiration for my curricular choices. I use scenarios and scene creations set against the backdrop of issues such as a pandemic, climate change, and current political events to address societal and global aspects of adaption and assimilation, creating a narrative context for learning and creative exploration.

Gibbons (2015) titles the first stage of the continuum "The Experiment" (p. 83). The "experiments" here are performance-based using Boal's (1973/2008) activities, specified in the

title of each exemplar. The outline and progression of language use and development mirrors Gibbons's (2015) framework, as students work in small groups to explore an activity (p. 83), starting from oral communication, expanding that communication by integrating key terms, and moving towards a written form of reflection and account of the activity (pp. 80–95). The strategy that fuses the two frameworks is one of using the power of collaboration to devise a performance while at the same time initiating contextual language learning. Where Gibbons (2015) provides the structure, Boal (1973/2008) provides the context.

In the second stage of the continuum, “Introducing Key Vocabulary” (p. 86), students are introduced to vocabulary that relates to the context of the scene, as well as subject specific vocabulary. For example, if a group of students is working on the first scene in Exemplar 1, then they will be introduced to and encouraged to integrate scene-specific vocabulary such as *clerk*, *customer*, *store manager*, *mask*, *Covid protocols*, and *actors*, or even phrases such as *excuse me (sir/miss)*, as well as subject-specific terms such as *theme*, *perspectives*, *relationships*, *role*, *perform*, *audience* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, pp. 150–151). Teachers can help in facilitating integration of these key terms by, as Gibbons (2015) notes, introducing “a new vocabulary item, drawing on the experiences the children had just had and at the same time demonstrating the meaning physically” (p. 86), making connections of vocabulary with contextual and experiential language use within the scenes, and building optimal language use into parts of scenes students have already created

The third stage of the continuum, titled “Teacher-Guided Reporting” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 83), is a key element in the process of language development because it helps to expand students' language repertoires, and specifically “to produce longer stretches of discourse” based on the modelling provided by the teachers (Gibbons, 2015, p. 89). Developing language use in

this way helps students to access the capacities to communicate their understanding of the topics that they are exploring in more comprehensive ways. Such approaches are equally integral to Boal's (1973/2008) method as it puts the teacher in the "Joker" role: that is, having the teacher act as a guide between the audience and the actors in the scene to facilitate understanding and encourage participants to work through their thoughts about the issues being explored. Kina and Fernandes (2017) articulate the role of "The Joker" as a "person who mediates the interaction with the audience and guides the direction, flow and tone of the dialogue" (p. 245). This process leads students to the final stage of the continuum, titled "Journal Writing" (Gibbons, 2015, p. 84), where students engage with language in written form.

In the fourth, "Journal Writing" stage, students consolidate their learning in a reflective yet challenging way. Gibbons (2015) prompts this stage with a simple, yet effective question, "What have you learned?" (p. 91), and asserts that this stage is "linguistically the most demanding" (p. 84). It is the only truly individual stage of the continuum, giving students an opportunity to reflect on and consolidate their learning from a personal perspective. This stage allows educators insight into how individual students are learning and developing, a kind of in-classroom data collection process to assess where individual students are in meeting comprehensive language milestones. Gibbons (2015) noted from previous observations "that these journals indicated that the teacher-guided reporting sessions influenced the way the students *wrote*: their writings reflected wordings that they had used in interaction with the teacher" (p. 91) This confirmed the entire process of moving through the continuum as an intrinsic and holistic form of language learning. I too, chose to honour and follow those steps within these exemplars. The stages are explained further in the following section as we look more closely at the specific exemplars and how they are constructed.

### *Exemplar 1*

In the first exemplar, students engage with the ideas and feelings around oppression, as championed by Boal (1973/2008), as a way to acknowledge certain issues, grasp a deeper understanding of their own realities, and become empowered to act and broaden their perspectives. It serves to advance Boal's (1973/2008) objective of changing people from "spectators" into "transformers of the dramatic action" (p. 97). The flexibility this exemplar provides is unique, in that the scenes can be performed in person or online using a split-screen technique, as exemplified by Young People's Theatre's 2021 performance of *The Best Friend Blanket Fort Show* (Badian, 2021). Because there are four different improvised scenes in Exemplar 1, it is important to note that each group of students will have different vocabulary introduced for their group. The third scene in this exemplar was created to express a more specific approach to curricular learning, drawing upon and connecting to the Grade 8 Ontario Science Curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, pp. 143, 149).

Also in this exemplar, Boal's (1973/2008) Simultaneous Dramaturgy approaches (p. 109) are used, making the third stage of increased importance as students work through the dramaturge aspect of Boal's (1973/2008) exercise. Students create and present a scene that explores the issue their teacher assigned, rehearsing the scene to the point of "crisis." Essentially, students improvise a scene without a solid conclusion, opening up to the possible endings offered by their peers in the audience (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 109). This process helps students analyze what is at the heart of an issue and the emotion that may accompany it, as "the discussion itself need not simply take the form of words, but rather should be effected through all the other elements of theatrical expression as well" (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 109). Then, students in the audience position along with those presenting their scene work, with the guidance of the teacher, to explore



different outcomes for the performers to attempt (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 109). Students in the audience make suggestions as to how the scene could alternatively have been performed to address the issues explored in it, and the teacher helps to direct those changes. In this stage, I have also included guiding questions for teachers to ask to help students find clarity on the issues being explored and to help them with their journal writing in the fourth stage of the activity. I have chosen to diversify the way the journal is archived by having students write their journal entries as a blog. This gives students an opportunity to interact with modern forms of journal writing and differentiate the final stage of the Mode Continuum.

### **Exemplar 1: Scenes From the Pandemic**

#### Stage 1: Doing an Experiment

The teacher provides specific scenes for students to improvise in small groups. These scenes connect with current events and draw upon student experience:

1. A person walks into a grocery store not wearing a mask (actors needed: clerk, customer, store manager, other customer unrelated to the first).
2. You find out while in class at school that schooling will switch from in-person to online (actors needed: a teacher, 2 students, and a parent picking their child up).
3. You work with the Department of Environment and are calling a colleague to discuss forest fires, how to prevent them, and how to fight the ones that are currently raging. You relate your problem-solving strategies to water sustainability, droughts, and how climate change affects water sustainability and fighting these fires. You are on a Zoom call with the colleague when your internet drops. Similarly, the person on the other end of that Zoom call is about to deliver very important information when the person they are talking to on Zoom unexpectedly drops the call and then rejoins (actors needed: 2

people). This scene could be done either in person or with the use of technology to recreate a realistic depiction for the students. Either approach will help the student to come to an understanding of the emotions and realities surrounding such correspondence.

4. You have heard on the news that a press conference will be held in one hour announcing whether or not your region will be going into another lockdown (actors needed: 3 people in a household, plus an outside friend (this could be a parent and siblings, and then one of those people could call a fourth actor on FaceTime to talk about it).

Students work through the scenes in groups and prepare to present their scene to the class.

#### Stage 2: Introducing Key Vocabulary

Key vocabulary is introduced, both terms related to the drama activity (*problem, solution, audience, help, solve*) and subject-specific language (Covid terms and curricular terms depending on the scene). These terms are then used by the students as they play out their scenes and solutions. The vocabulary should be listed and anchored for students to refer to.

#### Stage 3: Teacher-Guided Reporting

As the audience starts to give suggestions on how the scene's problem could be resolved, or solutions to the problem, the teacher helps report these solutions to the presenters. The presenters then repeat the scene, making alterations to incorporate the suggested solutions.

After a few solutions have been tested, the teacher then uses these guiding questions to help clarify the experience: What did you observe during the scenes? What were your impressions of the scene? What did these scenes make you think of? How did it feel to do the scene twice? What did you notice the first time/second time? What did we learn by acting out these

different solutions? Was there a solution that worked best or felt right? What was one feeling that you had during this process? Was your mind changed? When we are presented with a “problem” to solve, how does looking at multiple solutions change our way of thinking about the problem? If you had an alternate solution that wasn’t shared, what was it?

#### Stage 4: Journal Writing

“What have you learned?” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 91)

Students then write or blog about their experience acting out the scenes or as audience participants. This is an informal entry and an opportunity for students to reflect on the work.

### *Exemplar 2*

Exemplar 2 is designed to address language learning from a written source to devise and express meaning in a physical way through a performance lens, merging Gibbons’s (2015) Mode Continuum with Boal’s (1973/2008) drama exercise titled Newspaper Theatre (p. 121). Starting with reading a specific text as the initial step of the experiment, Gibbons (2015) notes the relevance of “schema theory” (p. 139) which, “applied to reading, proposes that effective readers draw on particular kinds of culturally acquired knowledge and language to guide and influence the comprehension process” (p. 139). In this exemplar, students first engage with the newspaper article together as a class to discuss and derive meaning. From there, students work in small groups and are assigned a piece of the article to work towards creating a scene to perform. Reading through the article together supports the language learning experience. As Gibbons (2015) asserts, “Language is learned through reading; it is not simply a prerequisite for it” (p. 175). Groups of students then create their scenes and the groups perform their assigned pieces in proper sequence according to the article, essentially recreating the newspaper article in a

performance jigsaw (Gibbons, 2015, p.159). This exercise provides students with the opportunity to piece together their understanding of the article as a class, allowing students to learn from one another's pieces to form a congruent narrative based on helping students to contextualize the information they have read in the newspaper to promote a deeper sense of understanding.

Gibbons (2015) noted the importance of this level of engagement with text, as "meaning does not reside simply in the words on the page, but involves a thinking and interactive process between the reader and the text" (p. 180). The use of jigsaw also makes the assignment more achievable, as assigning an entire newspaper article to each group of students would be a significant undertaking, whereas performing the article in a jigsaw format would arguably have the same outcome and benefits. By approaching the newspaper article this way, students are given the opportunity to learn more about a different kind of written text through performance, while building upon their understanding of the entire newspaper article by seeing it come to life as a sequenced narrative.

Gibbons (2015) asserts that "jigsaw activities involve note-taking, listening, speaking, and reading, and they provide an authentic context for interaction" (p. 112). The teacher's role here is important as they stand in as the "director," orchestrating the scenes in proper sequence and guiding the flow to consolidate a greater understanding of the article being explored. In Stage 3 in this exemplar, I have included guiding questions to assist the teacher in directing the discussion to a place of broadening the students' perspectives in relation to the information in the article. Here we see the teacher taking on the role of "Joker" (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 159) once again. To give further context, Kina and Fernandes (2017) assert,

For Boal, the role of the Joker is to create a Socratic dialogue, a dialogue in which we begin to question our own understanding of a situation, but then guide us to develop and

trust in our own ideas. The skill of the Joker is not to mediate a dialogue that will generate the right answers, but to ask the right questions, and these questions should expect, as answers, new questions. (p. 245)

From an integrative standpoint, an informed pedagogical approach would be reflected in the teacher's choosing newspaper sources that are relevant to the grade level and subject area that is being taught in the curriculum. For example, if the area of learning is focused on sustainability and or the relationships between communities and the environment, a Grade 8 teacher would choose articles that would connect to the Grade 8 Geography Curriculum: Global Settlement: Patterns and Sustainability (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018, pp. 190–193).

### **Exemplar 2: Working From Newspaper Sources**

#### Stage 1: Doing an Experiment

The teacher provides students with a newspaper article to read through and discuss together as a class. Then students are given a specific piece of the article to perform. Upon completion, each group presents its scene in a jigsaw format. We then get to see these newspaper articles come to life through students' dramatic performances of them.

#### Stage 2: Introducing Key Vocabulary

The key vocabulary introduced here would be group-specific as the vocabulary comes from the articles that they are working with. Those key terms are highlighted and introduced to students as they work in groups. The vocabulary should be listed and anchored for students to refer to.

#### Stage 3: Teacher-Guided Reporting

After the groups have performed their newspaper articles in jigsaw, piecing the entirety of the article together, the teacher begins a class discussion to develop that learning and language use further.

Guiding questions: What did you observe during the scenes? What were your impressions of the scene? What did these scenes make you think of? What did the article make you think of?

What were the events that the newspaper article was written about? What do we now understand about these events? What do we think about the events or people in the article? Do we now have an opinion about them? Has that opinion changed from when you first read the article? How did performing the news help you to understand the article?

Stage 4: Journal Writing

“What have you learned?” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 91)

Students then write about their experience acting out the scenes or as audience participants.

This is an informal entry and an opportunity for students to reflect on the work.

### ***Exemplar 3***

Exemplar 3 highlights the inclusion of student narratives within the curriculum framework and puts student narratives at the centre of language learning. This exemplar demonstrates how Gibbons (2015) and Boal’s (1973/2008) methods can be used as tangible pedagogical techniques that address curricular areas by combining language learning with drama creation, while at the same time engaging with narratives from the classroom community. The “experiment” here is the *sharing* aspect of the lesson. The act of sharing and being heard is the initial step to having students begin to connect their voice with action, that is, the story becoming the physical creation of a scene. This exemplar starts with students connecting in small groups,

sharing stories that fulfill outlined criteria. The criteria provided for the shared experiences (e.g., a story that is about yourself that illustrates a time you overcame something) challenge students to bring themselves to the work and invite them to share more about themselves with the classroom community.

The key part of Boal's (1973/2008) Analytical Theatre approach is the examination of "roles" within the scene, how they are connected to greater societal structures, and how such "roles" inform the dynamics and outcomes of the characters: "Each character is broken down into all his social roles and the participants are asked to choose a physical object to symbolise each role" (p. 132). Investigating "roles" as Boal (1973/2008) defines them enables us to come closer to understanding societal constructs and interpersonal dynamics. This allows the students to explore the depth of a character more from a sociocultural standpoint, contextualizing their roles into physical manifestations and then, by extension, understanding the depth of the person more as well. The aspect of "roles" is analyzed in Stage 2, and most notably in Stage 3 during "Teacher-Guided Reporting" where teachers work to facilitate discussions and further understandings about "roles" and how we view them. The class discussion process is in two parts. First, the class clarifies and defines what "roles" and "symbols" (Boal, 1973/2008, pp. 132–133) are present within the scenes when devising and deconstructing the characters within the students' stories. Second, students have further opportunities to discuss reworking the scenes by altering the character's "roles" and corresponding "symbols," noting the effect on the outcomes of the scenes and the students' overall views of these characters. Guiding questions have been provided as suggested prompts to get students to engage with the heart of the issues being explored in this exercise. This helps to lead away from overly generalized questions and towards more thoughtful reflection in applied language use.

In Stage 4, students write and reflect upon the telling and reenactment of their stories and their peers' stories, further solidifying the details of the scenes and the vocabulary used to express them. This gives students the opportunity to have a final connection with the stories that they received, as well as how it felt to share their experiences with others in a classroom space. In this step, students are also able to process the idea of roles further and the perspective of their classmates' experience. Having a student tell a story or recount an experience they had, and having that experience heard and understood as deeply as having it performed by their peers, can promote community and inclusivity. Seiki and colleagues (2018) cite Epstein and Oyler's (2008) assertions on narrative construction for fostering equitable spaces:

Each person is engaged in active participation as each is called upon as a listener to respond from within his or her own experiences, his or her own life. This collective co-making as each person puzzles over his or her becoming, asking hard questions of who he or she is becoming *in relation*, offers hope for new personal, and sometimes even collective, possibilities, possibilities for reconstructing higher education to foster equity and solidarity. (p. 15)

### **Exemplar 3: Integrating Student Narratives**

#### Stage 1: Doing an Experiment

In small groups students have an opportunity to share a personal story that is significant to them. They will have been given this as a homework assignment to give them ample time to think of a personal story they feel safe sharing with their peers. The criteria for the personal stories are:

- It must be a story about you, not someone else.
- There must be at least one other person in the story.



- You must have overcome an obstacle or gone through a change that was significant to you.

After they have shared their stories in groups, their peers can have an opportunity to ask questions for clarification. Then, the students who were told the story recreate it in a scene to present.

Students are then introduced to Boal's (1973/2008) concept of "roles" and "symbols" (pp. 132–133). Students engage with the teacher to identify the "roles" of each character and a corresponding "symbol" that could be attributed to each character. After each role has been identified and symbol given, the students replay the scene to see how those "roles" and "symbols" affect the performance and their understanding of the scene. Finally, another pass of the scene is made, this time alternating the symbols of the characters to see how that affects their ideas of "role" and how the character is played.

#### Stage 2: Introducing Key Vocabulary

The vocabulary introduced here would be both subject-specific vocabulary, such as *roles*, *symbols*, *represent*, *individual*, *actor*, and story-specific vocabulary. For example, if a student told a story about an important FaceTime experience during the pandemic, then words from the students' retelling would be introduced to the class: e.g., *FaceTime*, *internet*, *distance*, *restrictions*, *locations*, *news*. The vocabulary should be listed and anchored for students to refer to.

#### Stage 3: Teacher-Guided Reporting

This stage takes the form of a "roles" discussion (Boal, 1973/2008, pp. 132–133). Using the vocabulary introduced, students come together to discuss the different roles that each character carries, as well as an object they would use to represent those various roles (for example, if

one character has the roles of mother, grocery store shopper, and teacher (employee), then perhaps the objects used to symbolize those roles would be; a baby, a mask/grocery bag, and an apple.

After students have performed their scenes and have experienced the part of the experiment where the scenes are reworked and “roles” and “symbols” (Boal, 1973/2008, pp. 132–133) reexamined, both performers and audience members engage in a discussion with the following guiding questions: What did you notice during the scenes? What part of the scene did you feel was important? What happened in the scene? How did this help us to understand the idea of “roles” and how we have more than one role at a time? Why is this important to understanding the people around us in this way? What do these roles tell us about the world and society around us? How was the story or the outcome of the story different when one of the “roles” or “symbols” (Boal, 1973/2008, pp. 132–133) for those roles changed? Were the characters’ symbol significant to how we view a person or character?

#### Stage 4: Journal Writing

“What have you learned?” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 91)

Students then write about their experience acting out the scenes, hearing their peers’ stories, or as an audience participant. This is also an opportunity for students to write about their experience of seeing their stories interpreted by their peers and retold through performance.

This is an informal entry and an opportunity for students to reflect on the work.

These three exemplars strive to address education from a social justice standpoint, honouring student voice and experience. Allowing for alternate forms of teaching and learning, such as the one I have presented here, helps to make the classroom more integrative in its

educational experience. It also increases the accessibility of education by contributing to a differentiated approach to language instruction.

The exemplars have been devised to draw upon the connectivity between subjects to understand their individual relevancies further and bring the “individual” experience into the learning, as “philosophy deals with abstractions, mathematics with numbers, but the theatre deals with individuals” (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 76). Students will have varying ideas related to the learning that is optimally community-based:

The teacher made an attempt to set up a genuine communicative situation by having each group of children work at different (though related) science experiments . . . In its communicative structure, the classroom organization was based on what we referred to in the previous chapter as an information “gap”, so there was an authentic exchange of information at the reporting stage. (Gibbons, 2015, p. 84)

By approaching this learning in this format, students may learn from one another’s different ideas and perspectives about the same curricular area.

In Stage 2 of these exemplars, the introduction of vocabulary can be both drama subject-specific (e.g., *tableau*, *gesture*, *scene*), and specific to the other subjects being explored (e.g., *environment*, *systems*, *structures*, *climate*). Gibbons (2015) notes,

From the point of view of second language development, it is important to note that in this classroom the children were given an opportunity to develop some understandings about magnets before they were expected to understand and use more scientific discourse and vocabulary. (p. 86)

Thus, it is important to have students first explore creating the theatrical scenes and *then* be introduced to subject specific vocabulary to expand their language learning further. This

distinction is important as we work towards “teacher-guided reporting” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 87) where students have an opportunity to further connect to the work:

During teacher-guided reporting, the teacher begins the exchange by inviting students to relate what they have learned, rather than with a known answer or display question. In this way the teacher sets up a context that allows students to initiate the specific topic of exchange. When learners initiate what they wish to talk about, language learning is facilitated because they enter the discourse on their own terms, rather than responding to a specific request for information from the teacher. (Gibbons, 2015, p. 89)

Gibbons (2015) argues that ownership and investment within the learning and discursive exchange are integral to the student’s further development. As they own their learning, they start to own the language, and “the student takes on the role of ‘expert’” (p. 89). Pairing acquisition of newly introduced vocabulary in a contextualized format through performance pedagogy drives the discourse forward, leading students to expand upon their language skills. Gibbons (2015) connected this process with Vygotsky’s (1978) idea of “zone of proximal development”: “This then brings the student to the point of ‘proximal development’ as they are expanding their language use just beyond their current language capabilities” (Gibbons, 2015, p. 89). In that expansion, further language acquisition and development occurs, solidifying the learning. The guiding questions then focus the students further in detailing their learning and experience.

This brings us to the final stage of these exemplars, and to the stage of Gibbons’s (2015) Mode Continuum called “Journal Writing” (p. 91). When I was in theatre school, journalling was an integral part of our process and syllabus. It is insightful to be able to revisit this priority years later within this context, because I carry a personal understanding of the importance of this step in a student’s learning and reflecting. The written consolidation is “intended as informal

responses that would later serve as a source of information in the writing of more formal reports” (p. 91). The informality of the entries allows students to reflect upon their learning, knowing that the text doesn’t have to be perfect; rather, it needs to be connected to their educational experience. It is important to note that the data collected by Gibbons (2015) showed a distinct progression of acquisition and development of language through the stages of the Mode Continuum:

What is particularly significant is that these journals indicated that the teacher-guided reporting sessions influenced the way the students *wrote*: their writing reflected wordings that they had used in interaction with the teacher or that had been part of the teacher’s recasting. This was particularly evident when the students themselves had had opportunity to reformulate their *own* talk. (p. 91)

Integrating these two conceptual frameworks presents a valuable opportunity to introduce a multitude of educational aspects within the classroom space. These include a progressive staged approach that scaffolds language use in written and oral forms, and also creative communicative opportunities that provide students with an opportunity to draw upon their lived experience as it directly connects with their learning. For example, Exemplar 1 draws upon shared experiences from a recent time in history. It shapes the learning around exploring such scenarios in a linguistic way—but also emotionally, experientially, and in connection to curriculum areas. Implementing a clear focus on language learning and development (Gibbons, 2015) alongside an intentional connective approach to fuse meaning through performance (Boal, 1973/2008) enriches a teacher’s pedagogical practice while providing opportunities to incorporate evidence-based research into one’s teaching technique.

## Chapter 5

### A Pedagogy of Performance for Future Educational Development

#### Discussion

As the research literature in the area of language development of newcomer students attests, English language learners in the public education sector face predictable challenges that are different from those of their native-speaking peers. As I have argued, this situation could be alleviated by implementing an educational framework built upon the foundation of focused integration and inclusive classroom practices. Formatively, Boal's (1973/2008) and Gibbons's (2015) frameworks, when used simultaneously, offer an opportunity for educators to teach in a way that embraces vulnerable aspects of student life, regarding these vulnerabilities as important resources of learning. Boal's (1973/2008) approach analyzes conflict from an internal point of reference, and retaining one's identity and voice are the cornerstone of the method's success.

Schechter and Bayley (1997) assert in their research that people belonging to linguistic minorities also carry the challenge of added identity negotiations. Specifically, "in their daily negotiations between dominant and minority cultures they confront questions of the discreteness and synthesis of linguistic code at many junctures and levels of self- and other-defining decision making" (p. 514). Their assertions support the notion that Boal (1973/2008) is trying to underscore: that the student's relationship with conflict on varying levels informs their educational experience, and by extension, would beneficially inform educators' approach to teaching. The action being suggested in this thesis concurs with these assertions: we cannot ignore challenges and conflict, nor can we ignore the emotions that arise when conflict is experienced and/or addressed.

In relation to the dialectic between an English language learner's lived experience and the mainstream educational setting, I have highlighted the state of arts education and what integrative performance education could contribute to improve learning opportunities for ELLs. Gibson (2018) discusses a report that revealed the diminishing amount of funding for arts-based education programs in Ontario, and the increased number of teachers who are not trained in the arts teaching arts subjects in schools. The report also illustrated inequitable practices within public education, specifically the lack of support for more rural schools and "schools with higher levels of poverty and schools with lower levels of parental education" (Gibson, 2018). Gibson's assertions are important to note when devising integrative arts practices within mainstream classrooms, as resources may not always be available to facilitate equitable access. By integrating drama approaches such as performance pedagogy, we may be able to overcome such budgetary obstacles and frame the language and literature curriculum in a different way.

I have passionately advocated for the inclusion of student experience, providing students with opportunities to express those experiences as narratives within a curricular framework. This approach would engage a student's experiences with society, with educational institutions, and with cultural discourses within diverse communities, and the integration of these experiences in classroom teachings. Kina and Fernandes (2017) noted similar connections in Boal's (1973/2008) approach, noting that "central to Boal's work is the connection of individual experience with social context" (p. 243). I would extend this assertion by noting that these social contexts can rapidly change, as 2020–2021 has so clearly shown us. The challenge is then to create relevant educational content that connects with the English language learner's journey from both a curricular and emotional standpoint, and with the conditions of the historical time. I

have provided examples of how this goal may be achieved through theoretically grounded applications of integrative drama pedagogy.

### **Disclaimers**

By way of disclaimer, I would recap several critiques and concerns with regard to the implementation of Boal's methods. First, concern has been expressed that improper use of the method would lead to potential adverse educational effects. As Stahl (2018) notes, "There is potential for harm if the techniques are not thoroughly understood and carried out with care and guidance, and educators should be transparent about this with students" (p. 370). Stahl (2018) asserts that Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed techniques must not be applied arbitrarily or without mindfulness and intention. Thus, my championing of the use of Boal's (1973/2008) method is based on the premise of appropriate teacher preparation and guidance when implementing new methodologies.

As a further disclaimer, I will volunteer that Kolovou and Kim (2020) express their concern with the inadequate amount of research on the effectiveness of integrating drama with other curricular areas. They point to researchers who "consistently and passionately attribute to drama a unique motivating power (Duin, 2019; Finlay-Johnson, 1912; O'Neill, 2018; O'Toole et al., 2009; Wagner, 1976), confirmed by reviews of the effect of drama-based pedagogies (Lee et al., 2015)." They continue, "there is a lack of studies that measure drama's impact on students' motivation at the middle, high school, and college level" (p. 192).

### **Applied Implications: Moving Forward in an Era of Online Education**

Through the research presented and the impact of a pandemic on educational space, it has become increasingly apparent that the techniques and lessons we create need to be flexible. As teachers we are not only striving to create an educational practice that is inclusive and enriching,



but also one that incorporates flexibility in its planning, allowing for possible shifts to (and away from) an online format. In this light, educational planning needs to be especially nuanced, as the list of considerations has now grown exponentially. People for Education (2020) argue that distance education inadequately supports the characteristics that make for an inclusive and integrated classroom, asserting that “in many provinces, distance learning during the pandemic has focused on reading, writing and math in ways that fail to recognize the progress we have made toward understanding education at a much richer, more integrated and complex level” (p. 2). In this analysis, online education is viewed as a pared-down version of the richer classroom environment found in physical, in-person learning spaces.

Philip and Nicholls (2007) look at online learning at the postsecondary level and note the challenges that arise when the educational environment changes and the student has difficulty connecting with the broader educational community:

Context is extremely important in distance learning because of students’ physical separation from other learners, academic staff, and the institution. In addition, this may create a cultural distance as well, where the world of the student, in our view, is seldom well integrated with the culture of the wider university.

Many sources in the literature (Cannon, 2017; Coehlo, 2004; Cummins et al., 2006; Gallagher, 2007; Gould Lundy, 2008; Ippolito & Schechter, 2012; McLean & Syed, 2015; Parekh & Brown, 2019; Schechter & Cummins, 2003; to name a few) proclaim the importance of integrating student identities within the fabric of the school environment. The importance of carrying that approach forward to an online setting could be the key to enriching the online classroom as a viable place for identity investment and learning. Reaching the student beyond technological delivery by

translating inclusive and equitable education across varying spaces is now the challenge for the teacher.

After reviewing research and reflecting upon my own teaching experience during this pandemic, I ask: What does all this mean for online education going forward? What are the implications for English language learners if we shift to a permanent online or blended educational model? We now know that using technology as a tool can be educationally enriching in many ways:

When implemented appropriately, technological advances can support a range of instructional strategies that align with developing future-ready skills. It is one of the tools that can support students to become more empowered learners, responsible digital citizens, innovators, communicators, and global collaborators (International Society for Technology in Education, 2020). (People for Education, 2020, p. 7)

We know that integrated learning is an optimal approach for growth and development for second language students:

The integration of language and content is consistent with the notion that language is learned through meaningful use in a variety of contexts. . . .nonintegrated approaches—that is, instruction in language alone—is usually insufficient to enable children to succeed in mainstream studies. (Gibbons, 2015, p. 208)

We also acknowledge the importance of including the student’s native language and culture into the folds of the classroom to make classroom communities more inclusive and academically enriching:

Overwhelmingly, the research shows that encouragement of the mother tongue development will in no way impede the development of English academic skills. . . .

Acquiring knowledge of interests, cultural identities, and linguistic resources of their students would help them to teach effectively. (Cummins et al., 2006, pp. 299–301)

However, we also know that with the move towards a dependency upon technology in the delivery of education, we lose many significant and integral aspects of classroom community that can accommodate the above positive factors. People for Education (2020) make a similar assertion as they remark that “during the pandemic, teachers across Canada have used a wide variety of online tools and techniques. However, many, if not most, have pointed out that online learning cannot replace the learning communities created in classrooms and schools” (p. 9). Taking into consideration the era that we are in, and that technology and online education are becoming immovable fixtures in our academic landscape, we need to further investigate ways to make the experience of online education more enriching for marginalized students, and for students in the ELL community. Over the last 2 years, online education has been used as a way to survive the chaotic flux of our educational situation amidst a health crisis: our understandings of the long-term effects of such a teaching and learning model are far from conclusive. This view is shared by contributing researchers at People for Education (2020), who draw upon the contributions of Dede (2014) and Rizk (2018) in asserting that “the mere presence of technology cannot be an end unto itself. Technology is a tool that needs to be supported by teacher training and informed by pedagogy to yield its benefits” (p. 7).

I see my offering to integrative performance education, realized through an online venue, as my contribution to these goals.

### **Implications for Instruction and Teacher Preparation**

The implementation of a pedagogy based on the frameworks proposed by Boal (1973/2008) and Gibbons (2015) has major implications for teacher education. Understanding of

the pedagogical practice needed to transform Boal (1973/2008) and Gibbons (2015) into a teaching/learning approach starts fundamentally with the teacher education process. I see this merge of pedagogies as an intentional practice, with teacher educators working to integrate both frameworks, while at the same time attending to creating an integrative educational experience for students.

In this thesis, I also argue the importance of preparing teachers to use Boal's (1973/2008) Theatre of the Oppressed methods as a way of reaching students who are educationally at risk. I see providing creative modes of expression where students have opportunities to visualize and express alternative realities in both interpersonal and academic ways as a mission of public education.

Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum allows educators to facilitate this creative expression by providing scaffolding through the kinds of exemplars I have proposed. The staged approach that the Mode Continuum outlines represents mindful and constructive scaffolding that anticipates the nuanced challenges for minority students and educators with regard to language learning in mainstream school environments. Examples of challenges are working with language learning expectations, curricular expectations, and varying student levels of language proficiency. Having a coherent yet flexible path towards language growth as I have proposed is beneficial from an instructional standpoint.

This said, educators should be alert to the possible risk that a student is not progressing through Gibbons's (2015) stages at the same pace as other students, delaying their development of academic literacy. Since Gibbons's (2015) Mode Continuum is applied to scenarios centred on group work (both in her publications and in my exemplars), this process may pose a challenge to groups with learners at different language proficiency levels and/or subject matter mastery. Also,

where a student is struggling with one of the stages and not keeping up with their peers, the implications for self-confidence are not insignificant, and may affect the student's social adaptation. However, I believe that these potential obstacles are surmountable by attentive teachers who are prepared to individualize their instruction when the situation warrants.

### **Implications for Educational Spaces**

Implementing the exemplars proposed in this thesis has major implications for the use of space. If we consider the restrictions posed upon schooling by the pandemic, then the obvious implication here would involve the use of online educational space. When working with students in this format, not only are teachers limited in expectations of a performance pedagogy approach, but students are also limited with regard to their available space. For example, does the student have a private or quiet area to truly delve into the work and express themselves creatively without interruption?

There is also the reality that online communication loses certain nuances of expression—kinesics in particular—that enhance opportunities for collaborative learning. This liability can also affect peer-to-peer interaction (Gallagher et al., 2020). Realistically, we need to acknowledge that while online education offers opportunities for creativity, it comes with certain communicative challenges for collaborative learning and community building.

Another challenge to this method when working in a conventional classroom is that many schools may not have designated spaces where work like that proposed by Boal (1973/2008) can adequately be explored. Generally, in the context of the formal curriculum, drama is confined to the same classroom in which all other subject matters are taught. However, creative educators are able to manipulate modern classroom spaces to create conditions that make this approach feasible.

### **Theoretical Implications: Reflective Pedagogy, Reflexive and Intuitive Teaching**

Arguably, being reflective is one of the most central elements in achieving a successful pedagogical practice and maintaining the integrity of social justice education. This thesis is based on reflection: reflection on the extant research, reflection on education in a time of historic crisis, and reflection on my personal experiences as a teacher, student, and first-time parent. If we as stakeholders in the education sector and as members of society do not reflect upon this time and what it has presented to us in the way of both challenges and possibilities for change, then we are missing an important opportunity to progress and thrive as professionals. Maxine Greene (1995) shines a light on education in an ever-changing world, remarking that “it is simply not enough for us to reproduce the way things are” (p. 1). Knowing what we now know, we cannot return to the educational model that preceded the pandemic. The pandemic has made clear that following the research and tuning in to our ever-changing communities and urban landscapes should inform our future planning and pedagogical choices. Innovation is born from need, and need is derived from listening closely and observing keenly. The question remains: Are we meeting current needs for English language learners in today’s educational climate?

Reflexive pedagogy is an awareness of oneself that transcends the immediate existence and circumstance of knowing, and categorically envelops the entirety of the person and their interactions with the world and with the classroom that constitutes their immediate environment. In connection to teaching and its use in addressing conflict, Rothman (2014) defined reflexivity as “learning to see yourself seeing and understand how you filter information through your own cognitive, experiential, and cultural lenses” (p. 112). This self-awareness and development of understanding that Rothman (2014) discusses connects fundamentally with the ethos Boal (1973/2008) writes about. Boal (1973/2008) allows for reflexive moments within the constructs

of his exercises, acknowledging the importance of the awakening of an inner awareness that is beneficial to students:

Artists are witnesses of their times: they should not impose on their public their own view of society, their own understanding of human beings, or their own way to make decisions, but, after speaking their speech, having their say, giving their testimony, delivering to us the product of their art and their craft, they should help others to stimulate inside themselves the artists that lie within” (Boal, 2002, p. 17).

Being reflexive, or reflective, within a pedagogical practice maintains the integrity of the teaching vocation, within Boal’s (1973/2008) vision. When using his methodology, we model and inspire such practices as we move pragmatically between the stages of Gibbons’s (2015) Mode Continuum to impact students’ learning process.

Halfway through this thesis odyssey, I became a parent for the first time. I went from being a teacher and a master’s student who viewed the world one way to having my view of the world altered quite considerably and quickly. While writing this thesis I have undergone one of the biggest transformations of my life. I have always believed in the power of education and the importance of innovation in education. I come from a standpoint of believing that social justice education is of the utmost importance to the success of current and future generations of students. Now, as a parent myself, I understand even more than previously and *feel* deeply the weight and importance of exploration and continuation of integrated and inclusive education. It has been a part of my own reflective process in writing this thesis that arts education can serve as a conduit between the *thinking* and the *feeling* parts of an educator’s reflective process. Albers (1999) remarks upon the possibilities arts education can bring to learning:

Art makes visible the beliefs that are often invisible in other content areas. It is this sense of awareness that helps students understand their role in a larger society; one in which they must be thoughtful participants. It is out of this thinking that students can become more critical discussants about pluralistic issues, which then, I believe, can initiate social change. (p. 10)

Both Albers (1999) and Boal (1973/2008) draw a connection between larger societal issues and institutions on one hand and student narratives on the other. As students move towards understanding “their role in a larger society” (Albers, 1999, p. 10), they also begin to understand their own identities and the identities of their peers. Expanding upon this idea, Greene (1995) claims that it is within our imaginations that we begin to connect with diverse lived experiences, noting that “we can look in some manner through strangers’ eyes and hear through their ears. That is because, of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions” (Greene, 1995, p. 3).

### **A Forward Glance at Performance Pedagogy and Language Acquisition and Development**

I have found implementing Boal’s (1973/2008) framework of performance pedagogy to be a way forward for an integrative educational practice that is effective in addressing sensitive areas of education in relation to vulnerable populations, creating a contextualized approach to language learning. Stahl (2018) acknowledges the need for education that invites us to explore connective educational avenues:

In today’s troubled times, we desperately need new approaches to educating for social justice. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed challenges us to act, to share our vulnerability, to



empathize with others who are different, and to practice confronting oppression in our daily lives. (pp. 372–373)

Stahl's (2018) suggestion of using Theatre of the Oppressed to further students' understanding of daily societal constructs and human experience intuitively connects to society's current state of upheaval and could help us delve into areas of oppression that have been uncovered during this pandemic. It also reiterates that Boal's (1973/2008) approach to learning through drama and performance shows promise for an integrative technique within a mainstream classroom setting, as it is an approach that fosters an environment where people can relate to one another and engage with difficult subject matter in a productive and meaningful way. Silva and Menezes (2016) make similar assertions, attributing creative and artistic approaches, specifically theatre, to a student's expression of "active citizenship" (p. 40).

Using theatre as an active mode of educational reform initiates a sense of ownership in the creative process of learning. When we connect to the personal expression of our peers in the context of a relatable situation and form understandings around complex ideas and experiences, then learning can take on the quality of *change* rather than passive acquisition: "*Theatre of the oppressed* is an art form that is committed to society; its explicit purpose is to act as an instrument of freedom" (Kina & Fernandes, 2017, p. 245). For such reasons, implementing Boal's (1973/2008) framework to complement that of Gibbons (2015) can be useful for academic language learning, as well as for uncovering of one's thoughts and expressing one's inner yearnings:

What I propose to do here is to relate my personal experience as a participant in the theatrical sector and to outline the various experiments we made in considering the theatre as language, capable of being utilised by any person, with or without artistic

talent. We tried to show in practice how the theatre can be placed at the service of the oppressed, so that they can express themselves and so that, by using this new language, they can also discover new concepts. (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 97)

These paired methodologies highlight the idea of contextualized education as meaningful education, and meaningful education as liberating education.

Where Boal (2008) provides experiential learning capabilities, illuminating the nuanced aspects of the curriculum against varying societal backdrops, Gibbons (2015), alternatively, creates scaffolded footholds for the English language learner to use to develop an academic vernacular, working towards spoken and written proficiency. Gibbons (2015) asserts “that scaffolded interactions like this support learners in completing what they want to say successfully, so they are positioned as successful interactants and learners” (p. 90). As she notes, the Mode Continuum provides guidance for English language learners to develop the ability to express themselves in a technically linguistic way. Boal (1973/2008) complementarily offers guidance in how the student may express themselves in an experiential way: “‘For Boal, theatre is defined as a human language that all people use in everyday’ (Santos, 2016). For this, human existence itself can be understood through theatre” (Tolomelli, 2016, p. 55). Both are modes for expression and communication, each enriching the other.

## **Conclusion**

The educational and cultural landscape has changed too much recently for educators to be able to rely on past designs and models. Accepting that education is both based on past examples of beneficial practices and in constant evolution, the foundation of our pedagogy and approach to English language learning must be both solid and fluid. It must be fluid to respond to change and

context, and solid in its ability to create stability in language learning that is thoroughly grounded in theory. Boal (1973/2008) asserts that the Brechtian approach to theatre shows that

the world is revealed as subject to change, and the change starts in the theatre itself. . . .

The experience is revealing on the level of consciousness, but not globally on the level of the action. Dramatic action throws light upon real action. (p. 135)

Boal's assertions reveal that the performance of theatre incites a greater sense of understanding of the world for the individual, and in so doing forges opportunities for revelation and change within an educational context. If change does "start in the theatre itself" (Boal, 1973/2008, p. 135), then implementing a performance pedagogy approach to language learning, similar to the examples presented in this thesis, allows for language learning to be presented through a change-oriented social justice lens for both educators and students.

As we move forward, inspired by these conceptual frameworks and by the possibilities that performance education can bring to language learning, we also note the potential these approaches hold for listening and developing a greater understanding of varied curricular areas. In the words of Gould Lundy (2015), "Listening is an act of social justice. Part of our task is to pay attention to the ways in which we talk to each other. . . . Words can be key mechanisms for both oppression and for transformation" (p. 35). As we listen to one another, to our students, to the broader education community and to the research that exists to inform us during this time, we open the door to creating approaches that are not only reflective of our educational ideals but also innovative in how they serve English language learners.

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