

A dramaturgy of intercultural teaching and learning

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A clear and compelling link can be made between the dramaturgical processes developed in contemporary performance-making and the development of a constructivist pedagogy for use in the IB Diploma Programme (DP). This paper explores how intercultural writings could be used to develop an intercultural dramaturgy and goes on to explore how this dramaturgy could be seen in light of current thinking about culturally responsive pedagogy. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a synthesis of practices and an opportunity to draw lessons from performance to pedagogy. Considering research in contemporary performance practice, dramaturgy and recent research released by the IB to contextualize the action research, this paper points towards some areas for further investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural exchange is a core component of International Baccalaureate teaching and learning across the continuum. This exchange can facilitate greater knowledge and understanding, a critical approach to learning, creativity and creative problem solving. It draws upon students' unique backgrounds to foster an additive approach to learning that builds vertically, investigating a subject from a range of perspectives, many offered by the students themselves. This is clearly seen in an IB Diploma Programme Theatre course that develops—through discourse with research, dialogue within the classroom and practical work in the performing arts—a rounded understanding of the processes and ideas involved in creating theatre. In theatre, dramaturgy is a field of practice that considers the logical underpinning of a piece, focusing on the processes that led to its creation. The work of the dramaturge is to follow the creative decisions of the theatre makers, drawing from the disparate creative impulses of how a work is devised or rehearsed, in order to form a scaffold of consistent logic—a dramaturgy—that emerges over time, through discussion, that allows the decisions of the theatre maker to be “tested” against a common standard.

Dramaturgy is an object of discourse that emerges from a process; it is the algorithm through which each dramatic idea gets tested in order to determine whether it will complement the overall goal of the performance. When we are considering the dramaturgy of text, it is helpful to consider Barba's (Barba & Savarese, 1991, p. 68) definition: “That which concerns the text (the weave) of the performance can be defined as ‘dramaturgy.’” Through this, we see dramaturgy as a sort of analysis of the actions and meaning of the text, something that *could* remain particularly inactive. Ruffini (1991, p. 241) compares dramaturgy to the idea of “work” in physics and goes on to say that “Dramaturgy understood in this way thus appears as the filter, the canal, by means of which energy takes form in movements.” Here we see dramaturgy as a conduit for the energy of the creative process to take the form of performance articulations—pushing the “idea energy” into a concrete form of expression, which can then find a performance articulation.

Understood in this way, dramaturgy can be usefully applied to an intercultural pedagogy of teaching and learning.

- *Dramaturgy* implies a structure in which flexibility and creativity are possible.

- *Pedagogy* provides a systematic approach for the application, exploration, exchange and development of knowledge, experience and learning.
- *Intercultural contexts* allow for the fruitful exchange of cultural and individual positions and perspectives, possibly moving toward a shared space of ‘neither-one-nor-another’ culture.

The intersection of these three concepts provides an opportunity to create a more significantly rounded educational experience for teachers and students.

INTERCULTURALISM IN THEATRE EDUCATION

Interculturalist approaches allow for an investigation of the space between cultures, the dialogue and interaction between cultural expressions. Rather than promoting the idea that different cultures form a single identity for the duration of an interaction, interculturalism views cultures as remaining distinct while they mutually engage in a common investigation of their contrasting and common elements. As Sauerberg (2001) comments: “With two different cultures as simultaneous points of reference, ideas and imagined fates can be played against each other in the *space created between* the two cultures” (emphasis added).

What is this “space between cultures”? The word “space” denotes the elements of contradiction and difference between interacting cultures—a “space” is opened up between them that enables an addi-

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tional element, distinct from the original cultures, to be formed. The “space between” opens possibilities for discovering a hybrid creation, something neither one culture nor the other, but taking constituent elements from both.

This kind of intercultural exchange is difficult to effect in principles and in practice, ironically, especially for IB World Schools. Former Director General of the IB George Walker is quite explicit when he observes that “with its strong emphasis on individual inquiry, personal responsibility and independent critical thinking, the [IB] learner pro-

file is embedded in a Western humanist tradition of learning” (2010, p. 8). This cornerstone document of internationalism as envisioned by the IB contains within it a “Western” ideological framework. In IB programmes, then, providing space for authentic intercultural exchange that resists the imposition of one culture’s assumptions and political values can be a challenge. It becomes important consciously to adapt a critical approach in order to make the intercultural exchanges mutually beneficial.

Interculturalism offers a framework from which to enter more equal interactions, providing practitioners with strategies for exploring and discovering the connections, differences and common expressions between different cultures—rather than attempting to force them together through a premature search for commonality. Rather than finding a mixed cultural representation—one in which two or more cultural formulations come together to create a new formulation—there is value in investigating the space between different cultures. This is not a matter of placing them in conflict, but rather allowing their differences and connections to be examined and considered, thereby encouraging meaningful dialogue.

CHARACTER AND LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

The research contained within this paper is primarily based on an “intercultural writing for performance” process undertaken with IB Diploma Programme students in 2011 at Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa. As a classroom teacher, I was

both an active participant in the research and, from another perspective, a disinterested observer working within the context of a formal academic investigation. With a relatively small and highly interactive group, we aimed to create an authentic community of practice where my roles as teacher and co-producer of art were purposefully blurred in a workshop setting.

This study has some important limitations. The research sample was small. This means that there is little or no statistical significance to the study—the sample does not and could not reflect a larger cross-

section of society. Indeed, the participants were drawn from a most uncommon environment—an international school where students are selected from many different countries on every continent to both live and study together while attempting to live by and promote a mission that focuses on sustainability and peace. While the students come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and have had many different life experiences, they are all highly educated relative to many groups in any society. The community they live in is constructed—in the sense that it would not “naturally” evolve in this way.

The research participants were self-selecting, which may call into question their motivations for being a part of the study. I am a teacher in the school and so had prior encounters with all research participants and this may have influenced the way that participants behaved. The nature of this kind of research is that the results cannot be tested nor the processes repeated in such a way that one could reasonably expect the same result. It is important to view this study as a limited, qualitative narrative analysis that explores what happened when an intercultural group came together to explore writing processes.

ACTION RESEARCH AND THE EXPLORATION OF INTERCULTURAL DRAMATURGY

Much of the research gathered for this paper emerged from workshops undertaken in May 2011. These workshops were designed to explore ideas around grief and interculturalism in writing-for-performance for a master of art dissertation submitted to Brunel University in September 2011. While the scope and focus of the workshops was not specifically on pedagogy and the workshops took place outside of regular classes, many of the understandings I gained in those workshops are relevant to pedagogical practice in the IB Diploma Programme. All the workshop participants were DP students. Several were IB Diploma Programme Theatre students.¹

Waterford Kamhlaba United World College of Southern Africa is an IB World School with about 600 students, the majority of whom live on campus, across seven years of high school education. Though there is a high proportion of Swazi students, the student body represents a number of nationalities, especially in the DP years. All participants said, through their questionnaire responses, that they experienced interculturalism on a regular basis, and in every case the reason given for this answer was that they lived in and attended an international school. This response was in line with my expectations and one reason why I saw this educational context as an ideal location for conducting these workshops.

Participants were asked to consider—before commencing the workshops—what interculturalism meant to them. Responses included:

- “inspiration from different cultures living together”
- “communication, knowledge, transmission and friendship across cultural boundaries”
- “the togetherness of more than one culture”
- “combining culture”
- “a blend of cultures”
- “a mingling of different cultures”
- “cultures living together”
- “when cultures meet and/or combine”
- “themes, ideas, practices that are universal throughout different cultures and that apply and are relevant in many cultures as well”
- “creating connection between [people from different cultures] without forgetting their original background”.

Consistently in the participants’ responses there is an emphasis on the *combination of cultures*, cultures coming together, existing in the same space, going across boundaries and finding the common ground.

Later, at the very end of the workshops, participants were asked to provide their own definition of interculturalism, in light of what they had explored through the workshops. Responses continue to demonstrate an emphasis on the “blending” and “merging” of cultures, but also began to include ideas about the *differences between cultures*:

- “interaction between people from different cultures”
- “recognition of the similarities and diversities across many cultures”
- “a new culture”
- “interacting, knowledge exchange and engagement between cultures”
- “where various cultures meet and their relativities are express[ed]”
- “an interactive relationship that learns and sacrifices and grows and changes into (hopefully) a new culture which encompassed all the positives of the other cultures”.

Participants' responses show an interesting shift in perspective—from a sense of combining, merging and mixing with no seemingly articulated result, to a greater sense of interacting, exchange. Where the ideas of merging and combining remain, they are discussed with an emphasis on creating something new: a hybrid culture, one that combines elements of both or all, holding parts of each in a novel intercultural space.

The range and volume of writings collected from the participants at the end of the workshop was immense. A selection of extracts² has been made that attempts to identify some key trends and striking aspects of the writings.³ In the workshop, we conducted a number of writing exercises, some of which opened windows into participants' ideas about intercultural understanding. One exercise invited participants to imagine someone from another culture and to attempt to write in his or her voice. Across the two-day workshop, this task proved to be the most difficult. The difficulty is apparent in the participants' writings—responses to this exercise often dealt in clichéd phrases that seemed forced and derived from other sources.

For example, writing about an experience of grief felt by the person from another culture, responses included:

- “When she turned sick and died right after something deep, something important died in me as well.”
- “Should I be laughing? I mean, Alex just died, and I did watch him die. Is it right to laugh at such things? Well, who says we shouldn't?”
- “He goes on a rampage. He loses it. He goes out of town to a sheep farm, he sneaks in the sheep barn, and he starts screwing the sheep.”

In these excerpts, there is a sense of forced empathy, of trying to present the genuine voice of another person, but finding little ground from which to develop that voice.

In informal discussions with the participants, it became clear that many people had chosen someone who was entirely different from their personality, someone who had entirely different opinions and outlooks regarding others. Many participants seemed to work from the perspective of someone with whom they could not imagine being comfortable. Their discomfort seemed to show through in their writings. The participants' polemic approach appears to have failed.

Many of the writings produced by the participants in other exercises focused on the past. This remembering of former times proved to be a more successful approach, offering participants a stronger sense of identity with their characters from which to work. Here, the past became a foundation for developing and understanding the present experience of people from other cultures.

For example:

- “Weird how I start of thinking culture and ended up thinking history.”
- “My legs ached, tired from running from the demons of my past.”
- “Is that my grandmother bellowing over some undone chore. Ha ha it is the sound of home.”
- “He knows nothing about my memories, I know nothing about his.”

This mix (abstract reflection about the nature of culture and history, the sound of home and the mystery and impenetrability of someone else's memories) opens just a small window into the many writings on past and memory developed in the workshop. Focusing on what has gone before, it seems, can help us not only to re-live past events, but also help us to craft concrete, contemporary narratives of our own lives, and then to shape those memories and narratives into an authentic personal identity from which we can enter into dialogue with “the other” across dramaturgical space.



Also contained within many writings and the reflections of workshop participants were ideas surrounding how language and identity have an impact on each other. In considering how languages shape cultures, it is worth considering that:

Language thus represents the hidden values in societies' cultures, as well as the way in which these values are transmitted and become apparent and significant in the narratives of groups or individuals as they make sense of the world. In other words, language is a representation of culture as well as a culturally specific form of communication.

(Allan, 2011, p. 5)

In bringing together different cultures, with different linguistic backgrounds, the intercultural teacher has to help his or her learners to negotiate the “hidden values” locked into language. This writing for performance process was able to uncover some of the intricacies inherent in culturally-inscribed language, revealing some of the values that language contains. In articulating complexities that often resist being put into words, writing-for-performance and the dramaturgy that it contains are able to express some of these complex ideas.

In all these workshop examples, a common theme and key feature is *identity*. Participants were often exploring questions such as these: Who are we and what does it mean to be who we are? How can we know that we are who we are? What happens when something comes to disrupt our self-understanding? Identity, in many ways, emerged as the pivot point connecting the other themes that characterized participants' writing-for-performance: memory, culture, interculturalism.

Here are some examples of students' writing that reflect their concern with identity:

- “I am curiosity.”
- “That's true culture, always coming back.”
- “What I am is beyond the mortal me, it's beyond the cause of life that was me! Me doesn't exist, me has lost itself in the wilderness, in this labyrinth and myriad confluxion of strangeness. A stranger to myself.”
- “However, here I have more colors, I still haven't lost those colors, our colors, I promise I never do. They are deep, painted so that it

is impossible to cover and even harder to destroy.”

- “It is a home. It is always a home, where I always go back even if I leave and I live somewhere else, this is the place I always come back.”
- “A person is not a person without his community. He does not have a sense of identity.”

In these examples, students seem to suggest that self-knowledge is the key to becoming an effective dramaturge. Can one really engage in an intercultural (or any other kind of) exchange without first having some sense of the full extent of one's own existence? To know one's own self first—considering the range and scope of possible iterations of self, exploring the potential for revising or re-viewing the self—emerges as a secure base on which to build bridges to other characters, other cultures. Here too we find a pathway from the *dramaturgy of interculturalism* to the *pedagogy of the intercultural*—an appreciation of starting with individual knowledge and working outwards from it.

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QUESTIONS THAT REMAIN FROM THE RESEARCH

This modest research raises further questions that deserve investigation.

- How can schools explore and extrapolate the practice of making theatre in pedagogical practice across disciplines?
- What opportunities for interdisciplinary approaches to pedagogy exist and what value can they bring to developing dramaturgical pedagogy?
- What support do teachers need in addressing changes to pedagogical practice that promote intercultural understanding?
- What further role can writing-for-performance, or other forms of creative writing, have as a reflective tool in all student learning?
- How can dramaturgy or writing-for-performance be used to explore ideas around international mindedness, as expressed in the attributes of the IB learner profile?

CONCLUSION

The dramaturgy that emerged from this writing process is one that concerns itself with the language of identity and the identity held within language, one that enacts metaphors for personalized expression, one that allows memory and history to intertwine with the immediate. These connections are all ephemeral and contingent on the performative moment. It is a dramaturgy that turns culture over in its hands to see what lies on the underside, one that seeks to understand what makes culture what it is, what makes people who they are. Thus, it is a composite dramaturgy, the dramaturgy of many overlapping voices, ideas, meanings, words, senses and experiences into one series or set of expressions. Performance is an impression of an event, a space in which multiple aspects of many different expressions come together, to form meaning. That meaning, however, is always ill-defined, complex, amorphous. Its blood pumps from many hearts, and it has many faces, never showing all of them at the same time.

This multi-faced dramaturgy connects in deep ways with contemporary educational thinking about student-centred learning. In these constructivist formulations, communities construct rather than transmit knowledge and understanding. Teacher as learner, and learner as teacher: this is the realm of ambiguity, of fluidity and of ever-changing ground. Teaching practice can learn from dramaturgy

in the process of constructing meaning through investigation, setting up a common language of interaction, developing a standard against which propositions can be tested, valuing an understanding that the collective, the disparate and the uncertain hold possibilities for new knowledge to be formed. Dramaturgy offers a communicative and organizing tool that can help students to understand the way in which they are learning.

These constructions demand a critical approach that develops students' abilities to investigate an ever-changing world, not giving them *facts*, but rather crafting for them an experience of *process*; they lay bare the way reality can be co-constructed. Exercises such as writing-for-performance can begin to explore and expose the potential of interculturalist approaches in the classroom, and they can demonstrate, for teachers and students alike, the value of creating dialogue for developing understanding in any academic discipline. While dramaturgy comes from the world of performance and theatre, its application to the taught curriculum (the process knowledge that underpins all classroom interactions) surely has relevance for the evolving contemporary pedagogy of all IB programmes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ENDNOTES

¹ As the proposed workshops presented some ethical concerns—such as the fact that some participants would be under the age of 18, and that I am a teacher and tutor at the school—safeguards such as informed consent, the right to withdraw for any or no reason, and assurances that the workshops would have no impact on the participants' assessments were put in place. Full research ethics documentation can be gained by contacting the author.

² The extracts have been quoted verbatim so that the effect of the

writing can be fully appreciated. Some writings had little or no punctuation, which gave a sense of rhythm that would be lost in a grammatically correct rendition. All misspellings have likewise been reproduced without the use of “[sic]”. There were occasions where unclear handwriting required an element of guess-work to be undertaken. Every reasonable attempt was taken to ensure the words are reproduced accurately. Insertions or changes are indicated through [].

³ All participants, where they opted to provide their writings, acknowledged that they would not be credited as the author of the words, to protect anonymity. The words are reproduced here without attribution of authorship.

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