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## **Internalizing the ephemeral – Impact of process dramas on teachers’ beliefs about drama education**

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### **Abstract**

This article draws on the findings of a case study that looked at the impact of an in-service professional development course conducted at the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Singapore on the beliefs of three teachers. Specifically, the case study investigated the change, if any, of teachers’ beliefs about teaching and about drama education. The study also analyzed aspects of the course that has the greatest impact on changing teachers’ beliefs. For this article, the discussion will focus on literature and findings surrounding the investigation of the course’s impact on teachers’ beliefs about drama education. Interview data from the three teachers were transcribed, coded and triangulated for emerging themes for each teacher and between the three teachers.

The course aims to introduce teachers to and equip them with the conceptual and practical understanding of how to use drama effectively for delivery of curriculum. Findings included teachers reported that their beliefs about drama education had changed. They indicated that they began the course with a belief that drama is merely performance, a ‘product’. At the end, they believe in the potential of learning through the drama ‘process’. More notably, the teachers cited that the process dramas they experienced were significant aspects of the course.

The analysis of the interview data suggested that their experiences of the process dramas had a comparatively greater impact on their change in beliefs about drama education compared to other aspects of the course. These experiences were critical incidences (Dhamotharan, 1992;

Webster & Mertova, 2007) which contributed to the change. Their experiences - ephemeral as they were and deeply personal - were internalized as the teachers experienced what it is like to be engaged as learners. This suggests that perhaps process dramas ought to be part of a professional development that aims to introduce teachers to the use of drama for learning purposes.

**Key words**

Teacher change, teacher beliefs, teacher professional development, process drama, drama education

### **Educational change and teacher beliefs**

An inherent supposition of any professional development programme is that it is designed to change teachers' practice which would ultimately improve students' learning and outcomes. The curricular reforms in education systems around the world give rise to a need to look at ways of helping teachers to keep pace with the changes. Richardson and Placier's review of the literature in teacher change theories and models (2001) found that many educational reforms call for a change towards constructivist teaching and teaching for understanding which, they concluded, require deep belief changes on the part of the teachers. This is similarly echoed by Deng and Gopinathan (1999, 2001) who also highlighted the need for belief change in Singapore teachers in response to reforms in Singapore education.

In drama education, Heathcote's practice in teacher education is similarly founded on the premise that "we are all rooted in the rich soil of our beliefs" (cited in Wagner, 1999, p. 226) and she believed that it is essential to help teachers come to know "why they are doing what they are doing." (p. 226). In Singapore, there are few studies on teachers and change (except for WettaSinghe, 2002; Salleh, 2003 and Goh, 2005). This area is still relatively untapped in the field of drama education. In the context of growing interest of drama education in the region in recent years, it seems pertinent to investigate the relationship between drama education, teacher change and teacher professional development in South East Asian education systems.

For this article, I will first be sharing the background, the research methodology, and the data collection and analysis of the case study from which this article drew on. Secondly, I will briefly outline the literature on the nature of beliefs and teachers' beliefs, features of an effective professional development and the impact of professional development on teacher beliefs. Then I will compare this with existing literature within

drama education on teacher beliefs and professional development. Next, the more dominant paradigms of drama education in Singapore is discussed and compared with the paradigm that the teachers were exposed to in the in-service professional development. Finally, I will discuss the specific findings with regards to teachers' beliefs about drama education and propose the implications for teacher professional development, especially in the context of burgeoning interest in drama education in South-East Asian education systems.

### **Growing interest in drama education in Singapore**

In recent years, there seems to be a growing interest from the primary and secondary schools in the use of drama to enhance students' learning in other curricular subjects and for their holistic development. This is an interesting phenomenon as drama is offered as a subject in a few secondary schools and pre-university institutions in Singapore. Since formal drama education has not been extensive within Singapore's formal time-tabled curriculum, most teachers would not have had experiences of studying it as a discipline and experiencing it as a way of learning both as a student and perhaps during their preservice programmes.

This phenomenon raises a consideration for pre-service and in-service teacher educators. The prevalent form of drama education in Singapore exists mostly in the co-curricular programmes<sup>1</sup> where the teachers in charge of them are unlikely to have been schooled in the theories and practices of drama education. Their beliefs about and practices of drama education might be different from the pedagogical beliefs and

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<sup>1</sup> Co-curricular programmes in Singapore are encouraged for Primary school pupils (from 7 to 12 year olds) and compulsory for Secondary school students (from 13 to 16 year olds). They are outside of the timetabled time and students can choose one from the many that schools offer. A large number of schools have Drama clubs where students are usually exposed to the art form through watching performances and being involved in school productions. Schools are free to plan their co-curricular programmes and the teachers in charge of them need not be teachers with experiences in drama or drama education.

practices from countries with more established drama curriculum where there are more clearly articulated progression of learning, learning outcomes, and connections to other learnings in other areas which are based on robust practice-informed research and scholarship (For e.g. Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and some Nordic countries.)

With such growing interest from schools, it is not surprising that there is a strong demand for in-service professional development. This will invariably bring Singapore teachers in contact with established practices from other parts of the world. How would this impact their beliefs? What are the implications for teacher professional development?

### **About the case study**

The case study investigated whether teachers' beliefs about drama education changed as a result of them learning about drama education during the Advanced Post-Graduate Diploma in Drama and Drama Education (APGD), in in-service course offered by the National Institute of Education in Singapore. The teachers voluntarily signed up for the part-time course, completing seven modules of study from January 2003 to October 2004 (over a span of 21 months) before obtaining the diploma. The data collection for the case study was completed in 2005, after the teachers have completed the course. While teaching full-time I transcribed, coded, analysed and reported the findings for a Masters Dissertation that was examined and, thankfully, passed in 2009. Admittedly, there is time lapse between the data collection, analysis and reporting of the findings for the original study and for this article. Perhaps the readers might still find some ideas relevant.

The three teachers interviewed for the case study - Haida, Megan and Molly<sup>2</sup> - are experienced English Language and Literature in English teachers who have been teaching between 6 to 18 years at the time of the study. They were also the teachers in charge of their schools' Drama club and have varied experiences in managing drama programmes and competitions in their schools, at times training their students for performances as well. The teachers took some different modules for the diploma but all three of them took the modules *Learning through Drama* and *Process Drama in the Curriculum* which were taught by the same lecturer, hence sharing some common learning experiences.

The data for the entire case study consisted of (i) a survey on teachers' schooling, teaching, experiences of drama and drama education, and reasons for signing up for the course; (ii) transcribed semi-structured interviews before a lesson observation; (iii) their lesson plans where they used drama for learning in their own classrooms; (iv) field notes on the lessons observed and; (v) transcription of teachers' response to the video of their lessons. For the interviews, the teachers were asked aspects of the APGD that the teachers felt had impacted on their beliefs about drama education and their changes in beliefs about drama education. They were also asked for their experiences of significant moments of the programme, their own schooling experiences and their experiences as teachers.

For this article, I am drawing primarily from the interview data and teachers' responses to their own lessons which were coded, analyzed and triangulated for patterns within each teacher, and between the teachers. The analysis focused on what teachers said about the course and their beliefs about drama education.

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<sup>2</sup> Pseudonyms are used.

The teachers' beliefs were analysed from teachers' recount of critical incidents (Dhamotharan, 1992; Webster & Mertova, 2007) so that inference can be made about their beliefs (Dhamotharan, 1992). Those incidences that reflected 'good or bad practice' (Dhamotharan, 1992, p. 306) that the participants had experienced in their past as students and teachers, during and after the in-service course are especially significant. As Webster and Mertova (2007) explained, critical events are usually 'change experiences' (p. 75) where the people recounting the events have difficulty integrating their beliefs with the reality of their experiences, and memories of these events help them to adapt strategies to apply to new situations (p. 71). Hence, critical incidents, or what the teachers report as significant anecdotes, can reflect both teachers' beliefs (past and present) and their changes in beliefs. These were triangulated from the data. In addition, such reported incidences can reveal aspects of the programme that have significantly impacted the teachers' beliefs.

### **Nature of beliefs and teachers' beliefs**

Van Fleet (1979, cited in Pajares, 1992, p. 316), proposed that beliefs are shaped by three overlapping components: *enculturation*, *education* and *schooling*. Essentially, he claims that a person's beliefs are shaped by social and cultural norms he/she is in, how he/she learns to behave according to what is expected of him/her and what he/she is taught in schools.

Some key findings from Pajares' (1992, pp. 324-325) synthesis of the nature of beliefs that are of relevance are:

1. Beliefs are formed early in life, resisting changes and contradictions by reason, time, schooling or experience.

2. Beliefs shape how we look at tasks and decide how to interpret, plan, and make decisions for such tasks; hence beliefs affect our behaviour and how we process information.
3. Beliefs shaped earlier in life are more difficult to change.
4. Beliefs about teaching are well established by the time a student gets to college.

This suggests that teachers' beliefs, especially those about the nature of teaching and learning, and related beliefs like the nature of knowledge, subject matter and students are shaped early in their personal lives before their actual professional experiences of teaching. This may be extended to include teachers' beliefs about drama education based on their personal experiences during their schooling and adult life. The types of drama experiences they have would shape their beliefs about drama education and, by extension, their practice.

If these beliefs are resistant to change, what would be required of a professional development programme to impact teachers' beliefs about drama education?

### **Features of effective professional development programs**

Professional development programmes, school-based or otherwise, often adopt a multi-pronged approach in engaging and equipping teachers with innovative practices. Some of the features that have been suggested by the literature that would have a positive impact on teachers' beliefs and practices are (i) analogue experiences that provide teachers with similar learning experiences that they need to facilitate for their students (Borko & Putam, 1995; Morocco & Solomon, 1999); (ii) strong content focus (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Kwang, 2001; and Desimone, Porter, Garet, Kwang & Birman, 2002); (iii) active learning where teachers are engaged in the

analysis of teaching and learning (Franke, Carpenter, Fennema, Ansell & Behrend, 1998; Nelson, 1999; Morocco & Solomon, 1999; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Kwang, 2001; and Desimone, Porter, Garet, Kwang & Birman, 2002); (iv) dialogue amongst teachers (Richardson 1990, 1994; Guskey 1995, 2003; Morocco & Solomon, 1999; Wilson & Berne, 1999; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Kwang, 2001; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Kwang & Birman, 2002) and (v) long term support and feedback (Borko & Putam, 1995; Guskey, 1986, 1995, 2002) by instructors.

Hence, during the interview teachers were asked to report on aspects of the APGD that they felt were significant. This will suggest aspects of the course that had a greater impact on their beliefs.

### **Impact of professional development on beliefs**

In the literature on professional development, an underlying aspiration is for consistency between teachers' new beliefs and practices as it indicates a successful uptake of the innovation introduced and that the change will be sustainable. However, studies found inconsistencies between teachers' beliefs, and between their beliefs and practices (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991; Richardson & Anders, 1994; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Levin & Wadmany, 2006) which might indicate a change process (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991; Richardson & Anders, 1994; Levin & Wadmany, 2006).

Borko et. al., (1992) and Richardson (1992) noted that some teachers prefer picking up strategies that can be immediately applied rather than reflect on their beliefs and develop a different practice. A possible explanation comes from Joram's (2007) study which found that practicing teachers believe that knowledge of effective practices,

especially their own, are localized and not easily generalized to other contexts. They are also likely to dismiss new practices suggested by research, especially those foreign to their beliefs about teaching and learning. Therefore, if teachers do not understand the rationale of the new approach they could view these strategies as additions to their ‘bag of tricks’ (p.134) rather than integrate the conceptual beliefs of these strategies into their beliefs about teaching and learning.

Furthermore, if the professional development programme requires teachers to look at teaching and learning quite differently (Borko & Putam, 1995) with theoretical assumptions of the new material and strategies too discrepant from the teachers existing beliefs (Samuels & Price, 1992), then teachers may not be able to change their practice to engage students differently and meaningfully because the teachers could not agree with the ‘basic assumptions about learning and the learner’ (Samuels & Price, 1992, p. 213).

These studies suggest that in evaluating professional development, one of the criteria is to ascertain the change of teachers’ beliefs as this will likely suggest a change process, and perhaps indicate how they may change their practices – either relate to students differently using the new approach, or using strategies without relating to students differently.

### **Professional development and beliefs in Drama Education**

In his discussion of the efficacy of a professional development programme, Prior (2005) reflected that perhaps the teachers’ practice of drama as pedagogy was influenced by their beliefs about teaching, and their beliefs about drama education which were based on their childhood experiences. He found that the teachers had incomplete understanding of drama education. He also noted that teachers tended to

copy techniques and ideas (p. 79). However, this might be in part due to the initial stage of the change process where teachers are attempting to change their practices as they may believe it is worthwhile to do so. Prior (2005) found that the professional development programme was still successful as it encouraged the beginnings of a shift in teachers' pedagogical beliefs (p. 80).

Chou's (2004) study finds that the theoretical aspect of drama pedagogy is challenging for those learning to apply drama. Her analysis of published literature in drama education (Chou, 2006) indicated that the practical aspects of teaching drama are more emphasized by drama educators than the theoretical underpinnings. She demonstrated the commonalities between the wider field of education and drama education as (i) child/student/learner-centred, (ii) action-prioritized (learning through active participation) and (iii) knowledge-constructed (constructivism and social-constructivism) because '[u]nderstanding the similar nature of educational claims made by these (two) fields can assist in strengthening teacher beliefs' (p. 120).

However, such an analysis made the assumption that beliefs about knowledge as subjectively constructed by learners, is shared by all teachers who are learning to use drama as pedagogy for learning. Wouldn't the teachers who do not share such beliefs find the theoretical aspects of drama pedagogy even more challenging?

Till this point, I have discussed the nature of beliefs and teacher beliefs, features of an effective professional development and the possible impact of professional development on beliefs. Comparing these to the literature within drama education, it is not clear which features of a professional development programme for using drama as pedagogy has an impact or more significant impact on teachers' beliefs and practice. Also, it is found that the published literature on drama education assumed that the readers have similar conceptual understanding and beliefs about how students learn.

### **Distinguishing the threads of drama education in Singapore**

To have a general sense of teachers' beliefs about drama education in Singapore, it is useful to look at the more dominant forms of drama education more commonly found in schools. In *Drama and the Curriculum*, O'Toole, Stinson and Moore (2009) unravelled the diverse though inter-connected purposes of Drama in the school's curriculum into four paradigms. For the purpose of this article they are summarized as:

1. linguistic/communicative (developing language through drama) – drama is used as a medium through which students are developed for language competencies (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and appreciation of literature. This includes the related movement of Speech and Drama where students are trained to speak better. Furthermore, Drama is also used in English for Second- and Other- language learning.
2. expressive/developmental (growing through drama) – drama is used as an instrument to develop students personally and socially. This includes emotional development, self-expression and self-esteem, creative imagination, social understanding and cooperation and self-confidence in public.
3. social/pedagogical (learning through drama) – drama is used as a medium for students to learn the content and skills of other subjects in the formal curriculum.
4. aesthetic/cognitive (learning the art form of drama) – where drama is studied as an art form in its own right and this is realised through the dimensions of appreciating, performing and making drama.

The most dominant forms of drama education that exist across almost all Singapore schools in one way or another are (i) study of drama as literary text, (ii) training students for a variety of speech / debate / story-telling competitions and (iii) training students in co-curricular activities for the purposes of performances and competitions. As a former British colony, English Literature is studied as a subject for all lower secondary students and for some upper secondary students. Subsumed as a component of English Literature, Drama is studied or appreciated (Hunter, 2001) primarily as texts. For some schools, part of their study of the selected texts may involve dramatizing them so that it would 'enrich' their experience of literature.

In recent decades, the government's focus on speaking good English for economic purposes has stimulated the development of more speech competitions which is commonly associated with drama because a common criterion of excellence in (English) drama is about speaking well. In 2000, the National Speak Good English Movement was launched by then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong (SGEM, 2007a) to encourage Singaporeans to speak grammatically correct English so that we can be understood internationally. This national movement has cascaded into the school system as most schools' English language department began to focus on the explicit teaching of oracy and regularly held school-based story-telling, speech and debate competitions or sent students for national competitions such as Plain English Speaking Awards (PESA) that has been partially organized by the Ministry of Education since 1987 (SGEM, 2007b). The focus is on training students to speak well in the competitions.

For most schools, drama is also one of the co-curricular activities where the students are usually trained by external facilitators, mostly theatre practitioners, for assembly performances, internal or external arts festivals, or annual/bi-annual drama

competitions (Hunter, 2001; Tan, 2003) both intra- and inter-school. Some performance platforms, such as the **biennial** Singapore Youth Festival (SYF) organized by Ministry of Education, are events that most secondary schools actively participate in.

From the description above, the dominant paradigm seems to be linguistic/communicative. These forms of drama programmes may involve students performing dramatic material and students may be more involved as actors and stage crew. As part of the Literature and/or English programmes students may also write scripts and perform them. Hence, these forms of drama may sit, very uneasily I might add, in the aesthetic/cognitive paradigm as the students are, at the very least, “performing” drama. However, there are misgivings about the extent to which the students are systematically taught to appreciate and make their own drama.

These forms have a strong impact on teachers’ and students’ beliefs about drama education. The high profile inter-school national drama and speech competitions and performances may shape beliefs that emphasize a focus on students’ mastery of speech and performance. This treats knowledge of texts and stagecraft as fixed, and positions the teacher/instructor as the one with all the knowledge and skills while the students receive and practice them. Students may also be assessed for their mastery of knowledge of texts and skills in speech and “acting”.

The growing interest of using drama for learning (the social/pedagogical paradigm) other subjects requires teachers to relate to students quite differently. This paradigm has a different set of conceptual beliefs of the learners and how they learn. This suggests a need to consider how professional development can be designed to effect the desired change in teachers.

**APGD: Exposing teachers to a different way of learning through Drama**

The APGD exposed the participants the social/pedagogical paradigm of drama education which is representative of contemporary practice in Western educational development with its praxis underpinned by social-constructivist theories such as those by Bruner and Vygotsky (O'Toole, 1992; Nicholson, 2000; Edmiston & Wilhelm, 1998; Wagner, 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Chou, 2006; O'Toole & O'Mara, 2007; O'Toole, Stinson & Moore, 2009) whose theories of spontaneous play, and the relationship between thought, language and learning has informed educators of how students learn during drama. This treats knowledge as subjective, constructed by the learner through their experiences and positions the teacher as a facilitator who structures the learning experience for the students for them to make meaningful connections with the curriculum inherent in the drama. This positioning of knowledge, teacher, students and how they relate to each other is in contrast with the dominant form of drama education in Singapore. The emphasis is to improve students' learning and thinking (qualities in) rather than only their mastery (qualities of) of the dramatic art.

This contrast between the dominant paradigm of drama education in Singapore and the paradigm espoused by the course thus form the background for this study. Assuming that the teachers' beliefs about drama education have been shaped by the dominant paradigms, what would be the impact of the course on their beliefs?

In 2002, the APGD was introduced at Singapore's NIE. The course was made up of seven modules. The content of each module was a combination of practical experiences of drama education facilitated by the lecturers and discussion of assigned course readings. The teachers had to demonstrate their learning through critical essays, lesson plans, practical tasks of teaching a segment of a lesson they designed or through

devising and presenting a performance. Of the seven, four were core and essential modules. Of these four, three (*Learning through Drama: Theory and Practice*, *Process Drama in the Curriculum* and *Theatre in Education: Theory and Practice*) have conceptual beliefs of the social/pedagogical paradigm inherent in the course readings, while process dramas were an essential practical experience offered in the first two modules. The process dramas were facilitated by an experienced practitioner and were mostly published<sup>3</sup> process dramas.

### **What is Process Drama?**

Process drama is distinctive genre of drama education that sits within the social/pedagogical paradigm. It is described as (i) non teacher-dominated, (ii) involving *all* the students *all* the time, for the purpose of (iii) solving problems, employing higher-order thinking processes (Stinson & Freebody, 2006, p. 29) and students' personal growth. The dramas, transient and 'ephemeral' (Stinson & Freebody, 2006, p. 29), are for the internal audience made up of the participant group and are not intended to be performed for an external audience. The teacher (/facilitator) structures the experience by drawing on the participants' input and knowledge and the entire group collectively manipulates dramatic elements for the drama to unfold for them meaningfully in a processual manner (O'Toole, 1992). As a relatively new term in drama education, Stinson and Freebody (2006) warned that process drama may be misconstrued as merely a series of improvisational role-play, participative strategies or 'activities'. However, process drama is a powerful way to transform learning as the participants

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<sup>3</sup> Published process dramas are not scripts, but are lesson exemplars written and refined by practitioners/researchers of the form. An experienced teacher/facilitator who believes in and practice co-creating learning experiences with and for learners would be able to draw out the most from them.

takes ownership of the learning and uncovers the curriculum facilitated by an experienced practitioner.

Teachers were exposed to examples of good practices by participating as learners in various process dramas (analogue experiences) in two modules – *Learning Through Drama* and *Process Drama in the Curriculum*. Furthermore, these two modules were supplemented by required theoretical and practical readings that support such practices. The teachers also had a dialogue about the readings and their embodied experiences in class, relating them to how they can similarly create such learning experiences for their students.

In Singapore, this form of drama education is the most undeveloped as there is yet long term developmental programmes for students to learn about other content subjects through drama. The inclusion of ‘practical drama’ is intermittent, and more often than not, depends on motivated English and/or Literature teachers with some exposure to drama (Hunter, 2001). Many teachers who use such practical drama in the classroom tended to tap into their existing beliefs about drama education, and hence practices in the classroom may be dramatization of texts as part of their learning of literature and the staging of performances for intra- and inter-school competitions. These practices reflect their beliefs about the knowledge, role of the teacher and students in the learning of drama. Essentially, the knowledge of text and stagecraft is fixed, the teacher or the instructor/director has the knowledge to disseminate to the students who have to remember and practice the content of literature and the skills of ‘acting’ and speaking’; and students are assessed for the mastery of knowledge and quality of their speech and acting rather than the quality of learning and thinking. However, the teachers who are using such forms of practical drama in the classroom

believe that they are using drama as a pedagogical tool to enhance students' learning in English and Literature in English.

Against the predominance of the linguistic/communicative paradigm, the teachers who signed up for the in-service course were introduced to the socio/pedagogical paradigm of drama education for the first time. Hence, the case study took the opportunity to investigate the impact of such an exposure on three teachers' beliefs about drama education.

### **Finding 1: Teachers reported a change in their beliefs about Drama Education**

The teachers interviewed – Haida, Megan and Molly- were experienced teachers who were also in-charge of their schools' Drama clubs. All three of them indicated that the APGD had changed their beliefs about drama education and hence agreed to be part of the research.

#### ***From product to process – a shift in their beliefs about Drama Education***

All three teachers' interviews suggested a shift in their beliefs about drama education to encompass the social/pedagogical paradigm where students learn about the curriculum content and skills through drama.

Megan responded that she has more faith in students benefiting from drama though she was “very, very skeptical” about it before the course. She also revealed that she used to view drama as “end **products**. What you get out of the plays you put up, performances and stuff”. When asked whether her beliefs about drama education have changed, she replied that there was “a great fundamental shift, to greatly appreciate that the **process** is of such great benefit (to the students)”.

Haida said that before APGD, she saw drama and theatre only as **products** in the form of performances. After, she “realize(d) that there is a long **process** (and) that there’s such a thing as drama in education.”

Molly similarly said her initial understanding of drama and theatre was of “stage work, stage directions and scripting” and that those who studied drama were “just preparing for a career in acting”. The course made her realized that there were drama conventions like “tableau” and she can “infuse drama into some many other subjects and make the other subjects so much more meaningful.”

### **Finding 2: Process Drama had a significant impact**

The interviews across the three teachers were triangulated for the frequency and details of their recall which indicated four main factors that the teachers reported to be significant in impacting their beliefs about drama education. They are (i) the teachers’ experiences of process dramas, (ii) their personal engagement with the experience, (iii) learning strategies that they could apply, and (iv) areas of the course that they were interested in.

Two of teachers’ responses to their experiences of process dramas were the most richly described, carefully clarified and elaborated upon amongst the other factors and mostly with strong positive emotions as demonstrated in the tone of voice. This may suggest that process drama has a comparatively greater impact than the other factors in changing their beliefs about drama education.

#### ***What did the teachers say about the process dramas?***

Haida exclaimed “I love Process Drama” and Megan could remember “every single experiential process drama”. They recalled, with relish, significant details of their

experiences particularly *First Fleet* (O'Toole & Dunn, 2002), *The Seal Wife* (O'Neill, 1994), *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Taylor, 2000).

Haida enjoyed *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Taylor, 2000) as she could “see things from a different perspective” and “thoroughly enjoyed” *The Seal Wife* as

it's very dramatic. I remember (for an episode) working with <sup>4</sup>Wee Kit and one other person and we used sound and everything was in slow motion and theatrical. The image was very strong to me especially (the part) where we said goodbye to the seal wife, who had to say goodbye to the family and I think that the whole sequence was so wonderful.

During the process drama, she felt that she “was actually the character” and experienced a “sense of community” during the folk dance. While in role and “voicing” her opinion to the Seal Wife, she could see the relevance of the drama as she “can be your father, your mother, your friend who has done something”. The experience of which, to Haida, was “very empowering”. The deep sense of connection with character and community had a great impact on Haida and led her to formulate the connection between being in role in the dramatic fiction and a deep learning experience in drama.

Similarly, in recalling her experiences in the process dramas, Megan felt “being touched in the soul” as:

I think part of the whole drama course is that it's very much to do with Art, and Art is about being touched in the soul. I think that did happen in this course a number of times.

Based on these experiences, Megan also believed that process drama had an impact on her teaching as she believed that the process drama “brings about many outcomes”. While recalling them, she would often make the connection between her experiences as a participant, to possibilities in her practice, for example, “how does this

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<sup>4</sup> A fellow course-mate. Her name had been changed.

benefit my students” and indeed, in her interviews she would extrapolate possible learning and writing tasks for her students based on her experiences of the process dramas.

For instance, her experience of *First Fleet* (O’Toole & Dunn, 2002) made a significant impact on Megan. She recalled a specific moment in the drama, where the class had finished writing a letter to their loved ones back home.

I think she (the lecturer) would walk around and we talked louder and we read from the letter and when she walked away, our voices will go softer. That whole experience was so magical and so like “Wow! You know I could do this with my kids. They get to write, which is always a good skill and they have to read aloud and it’s just so meaningful. I mean the moment we started doing that drama I was thinking – this is so Singapore! You know this is about the migrants and I thought it would be so easy to translate that here.

Her experience made such an impact on her that she modified the lesson and facilitated the drama with the students from her Drama Club at the beach and the English teachers in her school in an enclosed room.

For both of them, it was evident that they have retained their meaningful understanding of process drama. For Haida, *The Seal Wife* impacted her on a personal level as it led her to think about the voicing of suppressed feelings. Megan reflected on Singapore’s historical status as a migrant nation through *First Fleet* and how students, like her, could be very “introspective” during drama. Amongst the teachers, she was more articulate about how she extrapolated her own learning experiences in the process dramas to her professional development as she connected her deep learning to the possible benefits for her students’ learning. She thought of possible writing and reading tasks that can arise out of the drama and modified an existing process drama for her students. However, she also reflected that students’ deep learning during process dramas needs to be properly guided by the teacher.

During their recollection of their experiences of process dramas, Megan and Haida were visibly more enthusiastic compared to the rest of the interview. The tone of their voice, body language and zeal in offering these as critical incidents suggested a strong physical and emotional reaction as they remembered their experiences. Furthermore, Haida's and Megan's recall suggest that they made cognitive/emotional connections to the curriculum inherent within the process dramas intended for them as participants (e.g., seeing things from different perspectives); and intended for them as teachers (e.g., experiencing how students can learn differently, and relating to the reading/speaking/writing tasks suitable for their students).

In comparison Molly did not immediately talk about process drama with the same enthusiasm and with as much details. Her emphasis, when she was asked about her significant experiences in the course, was that she found that the drama conventions in the two modules were very useful 'strategies' that she can use in her classroom. It was found that perhaps her prior beliefs about professional development as picking up strategies for immediate application may have impacted how she viewed her experiences.

### **Discussion of findings**

The findings echoed Prior's (2005) where a professional development programme that introduces drama education to teachers was successful in encouraging the beginning of a shift in teachers' beliefs. What was found in this research is that the teachers' beliefs about drama education have indeed changed. This finding is even more significant in the context of the literature which tells us that adults' beliefs are difficult and even resistant to change, and in Singapore's context where the dominant paradigm of drama education is different to what was introduced to the teachers. Indeed, the

animated recount of emotive and descriptive details of the process dramas attest to the impact that their experiences had on their beliefs about drama education. Process drama may have provided the ‘critical incidences’ (Dhamotharan, 1992; Webster & Mertova, 2007) that have changed the teachers’ beliefs about drama from merely ‘product’ and ‘performance’ to include the learning ‘process’ possible via their experiences. In designing professional development, perhaps process drama ought to be an important feature especially when introducing teachers to the pedagogical potential of drama education.

In professional development, experiences of process drama is also the analogue experiences (experiencing new ways of learning as learners/participants) which Borko and Putam (1995) and Morocco and Solomon (1999) suggested is an essential component of a professional development programme that can impact teachers’ beliefs and practices. From the interviews, it was clear that Megan and Haida were so inspired that they wanted to re-create such experiences for their own students. Their experiences of process dramas were facilitated by an experienced practitioner using published process dramas that are exemplars of reflective and theoretically-grounded practice by practitioner/researchers. This suggest that quality experiences of process drama - skilful facilitation of well-planned lessons – is essential so that the participants can work collectively to uncover and unfold the drama (and curriculum) meaningfully for themselves, just like how their students would. In fact, Megan’s interview transcript strongly suggested that she may have experienced professional metaxis (Simons, 2002) as she often related her own experiences to what her students could learn through drama – the curriculum intended for the teachers in the APGD.

On the other hand, Molly’s relatively subdued response to process drama and her emphasis on the dramatic conventions used as part of the dramas as useful discrete

strategies provided an interesting counterpoint. She reported on how she has incorporated drama conventions in her English and English Literature lessons, using them as discrete and separate strategies instead of viewing process dramas as an encompassing experience. Perhaps it was due to her belief about professional development as picking up strategies for immediate application. Nonetheless, her response is also indicative of a change process which is present in all three teachers.

Interestingly, there is a lack of reference to the theoretical terms and concepts in the interview data and when teachers reflect on their classroom practice of drama. The APGD did provide teachers with reading material of theoretical and practical nature, and there were frequent dialogue sessions where teachers discussed the readings, and related their practical experiences of process dramas to the readings and what they can do for their students in practice. Though these features of an effective professional development were present, the interview data showed that the teachers did not use much of the new terms or theoretical constructs introduced during the course, and did not highlight the readings as significant. Furthermore, when asked for what they understood by how students learn through the drama 'process', all three teachers could not articulate the theoretical stance nor extrapolate their own interpretation.

There are a few possible reasons. Perhaps the underlying beliefs of how students construct their own learning and how teachers should facilitate their learning, which is assumed in the reading material and in their practical experiences, may indeed be too different from their own beliefs (Samuels & Price, 1992) for the teachers to make meaningful connections with. This echoed Chou's (2004) findings that the theoretical aspects might indeed be too challenging for teachers to understand as it assumed different beliefs about how students learn. Also, the readings themselves may have

emphasized more on the practical aspects of teaching drama (Chou, 2006) rather than the theoretical concepts behind drama as pedagogy.

Though the teachers' have reported a change in their beliefs about drama education, it falls outside the scope of the original case study and this article to examine whether the belief change did impact teachers' practices, and if so, the extent of change. Even so, the findings are encouraging as it indicates that quality experiences of process dramas had a significant impact on teachers' beliefs such that they were undergoing a change process and were motivated to apply their learning after the course. Perhaps future research can examine the impact of belief change on teachers' practices.

In the context of educational change, tightening budgets and a growing interest in drama education across most education systems in this part of the world, Guskey's (1995) words remind us that 'policy makers, funding agencies, and the general public all want to know if professional development programs really make a difference.' (p. 2). In addition, these stakeholders are also interested in not just effective but also time- and cost-efficient professional development that can effect significant and sustainable change in teachers' classroom practices. A tall order indeed.

Perhaps it is appropriate; even necessary, to consider the following questions and sub-questions that future research can look into:

1. How do we design effective professional development for drama education?
  - a. What are the guiding principles?
  - b. What are the features?
  - c. What is the "optimal mix" (Guskey, 1995)?
  - d. Would the program design be the same for all teachers with different experiences of drama education?

- e. Would the programmes be time- and cost-effective?
2. How do we evaluate the effectiveness of professional development for drama education?
  - a. What are the factors to consider?
  - b. Who would want to know?

### **Implications of the findings**

Fundamental to the praxis of any good teacher is the ability to surface and know where the students came from, what they believe their world to be, and lead them to uncover, question, negotiate, add to and apply what they have learned as they work with their peers. Perhaps the same should apply to professional development programmes.

It seems, from the growing field of research in drama education, there is still room for attention on the theoretical and practical approaches of effective pre-service and in-service teacher preparation and professional development. Perhaps most of such programmes exist in or are adopted from education systems (such as Australia, Canada and United Kingdom) where drama may be part of the formal curriculum. By extension, there may be the assumption that teachers who were schooled in such contexts will have had the practical experiences of, share similar beliefs about, and understood the conceptual underpinnings of the paradigms of drama education that they were being apprenticed into (Lortie, 1975).

This notion may need to be reviewed as the interest in drama education grows in as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China and other countries where the socially- and culturally-specific beliefs of what is education, drama education, 'good' drama and 'good' practices of drama for learning may be quite different.

As Nicholson (2005) noted, recurring pedagogic practices of drama are globally exchanged and locally re-interpreted as embodied experiences. Hence, in designing effective in-service professional development in these countries, there may be a need to consider the beliefs of the teachers who were encultured and socialized differently, as this would impact how they interpret their experiences of drama education and translate their learning into their classroom practices.

The findings from the study certainly suggest that the embodied, internalized and ephemeral experiences of process drama, a genre that exemplifies the social-constructivist approach to learning that is characteristic of drama education, had a significant impact on teachers' beliefs about drama education. It is hoped that future research can look at the design of professional development that can effectively and efficiently transfer the conceptual and practical aspects of drama education to more teachers in our region.

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