Using Practiced Improvisation and Role-Play
to Improve Oral Communication Skills
for English Second Language Learners

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A Thesis

in

The Department of Education

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

May 2008

Canada

ABSTRACT

Using Improvisation and Drama to Improve Oral Communication Skills for ESL Learners

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Many secondary school students from French schools across the province are graduating with a limited ability to communicate orally in English.

Based on the work done by educator Dorothy Heathcote in England, I developed a new method of practicing oral communication. This method incorporates elements of improvisation and drama. Participants were required to portray the role of a particular character to resolve a conflict that was presented in the form of a scenario. They had the opportunity to discuss the conflict and practice their arguments while using idiomatic expressions and key vocabulary in the conflict resolution. Once participants completed the practice, they presented it to an audience, demonstrating how the conflict was discussed and finally resolved. Throughout the study, two experienced ESL teachers and one language arts teacher observed the participants in action to provide me with further insight and feedback on the effectiveness of this new method of practicing oral communication.

Participants discussed their reactions and thoughts on the activity during the focus group interview. The teachers who observed the group discussed their responses to the activity and the effect it had on the participants during a separate focus group interview. The results show that participants were able to use the English language with more effectiveness, fluency and accuracy. They were also able to use the target vocabulary and English expressions appropriately. Participants

were also more engaged and felt less stressed about using the English language to communicate.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Learning a second or foreign language is not only a difficult feat, but takes years of dedication and hard work on the part of the learners to evolve into effective and efficient communicators. What makes speaking a foreign language such a challenge is the number of skills that are required and which must be engaged simultaneously. To speak in a foreign language, learners must master the sound system of the language, have almost instant access to appropriate vocabulary and be able to put words together intelligibly with little hesitation. Language learners must also focus on understanding what is being said to them and be able to respond to the other person appropriately. Speaking has the added challenge of being done in real-time. Therefore, learners' abilities and skills in oral production also include being able to plan, process, and produce the target language within a reasonable amount of time. For that reason, the structure of speech is considerably different from that of the written language, where users have time to plan, edit, and correct what they produce (Luoma, 2004). Additionally, Del Hymes emphasizes that communicative competence encompasses knowledge of grammar and syntax, knowledge of rules of speaking, knowledge of how to use and respond to different types of speech acts and social conventions, and knowledge of how to use language appropriately (Brown, 1987:200, 201; Ellis, 1986:259). It is no wonder then that most graduates from French schools in Quebec have difficulty communicating effectively in English. Students are graduating with a limited ability to interact orally with English speakers outside the classroom environment. The purpose of this action research study was to explore the effect of using conflict scenarios, in which

participants practiced improvisation and role-play, on oral communication skills. The results of this study and the participants' positive responses to the activity have educational implications for teaching oral communication skills in ESL classrooms.

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What will be the effects of using practiced improvisation and role-play on learner's fluency?

- Will learners' ability to use key vocabulary words and English expressions improve by using practiced improvisation and role-play?

- How will learners respond to using practiced improvisation and role-play?

- What will their responses be when they compare it to the types of oral activities they presently use in English class?

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

Language teachers worldwide have struggled with the same burning question, "how can I teach my students to be efficient learners who will ultimately gain a functional mastery of the target language?" For most language learners, it usually entails being able to communicate orally with others who have mastered the target language or are native speakers. Therefore, how can language teachers enable their students to achieve this level of acquisition? Jacqueline Boulouffe (2006) believes that the learner needs to produce the language in order to learn it. She feels that activities which require listening and reading skills alone will only give the learner a superficial understanding of the language. The student will therefore not be able to either understand or to produce language which involves the speaker's own judgments, feelings, and beliefs. In order to reach this level of understanding, the learner needs to struggle with the demands required for self-expression. The teacher must therefore encourage the learner to produce as well as to understand.

Although there are several oral activities that students can engage in, the difficulty lies in finding classroom activities that will prepare students and help them become efficient communicators in the target language in real situations, outside of the classroom. There are a multitude of criteria that must be met in order to enable such learning to take place. According to Krashen, there are affective variables that play a positive role in second language acquisition. He believes that learners who are motivated, self-confident and have little anxiety will learn or acquire the language more easily than a learner who has low motivation, suffers from low self-confidence and high levels of anxiety. Such situations create a mental block for students which

will act as barriers to the acquisition process since comprehensible input cannot be fully experienced (Krashen, 1978).

Years ago, English Second Language (ESL) teachers relied heavily on repetition and structured scenarios in textbooks. This drill and practice method left much to be desired. Students often could not relate to the characters portrayed and such exercises would do little to prepare the students for authentic communication outside the classroom. In the 1970s, TPR (Total Physical Response) started gaining widespread popularity. It differed drastically from previous teaching methods in that students were required to interact and get physically involved in the communication process. However, this method was quick to be criticized because the activities could only truly be used with beginners, and occasionally, intermediate learners (Asher, 1982).

Today many ESL teachers continue to include oral exercises such as pattern practice, pair practice and other forms of group work, but these activities typically have a set, predictable pattern. During such exercises, the students who are not speaking do not have a need to pay close attention due to the fact that their response and the continuation of the exercise do not rely on it. Usually, the language the learners are required to produce is, if not totally predictable, then at least limited to a narrow range of options, and can be produced quickly and correctly without a great deal of thought. These types of oral exchanges inevitably lead to boredom and lack of effort on the learners' part. They also do not allow students to experience features which are present in real conversations outside the classroom (Linvingstone, 1983). The challenge for language teachers then lies in finding oral

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activities that are engaging, can provide ample opportunity to practice oral skills, and require interdependence between the speaker and the listener.

2.1. MELS Objectives and Classroom Suggestions for ESL

The Ministry of Education in Quebec has outlined basic, but essential goals for students learning English as second language. At the end of the secondary program, students should be able to "communicate with people who speak English in Quebec, Canada and throughout the world." Learning English will also give students "access to the wealth of information and communication technologies" (p.173). In the first cycle, the main focus in the ESL program is developing three main competencies in each student; interacts orally in English, reinvests understanding of texts, and writes and produces texts. Based on the educational reform that has taken place in Quebec, oral interaction is essential in an ESL classroom. "Oral interaction is at the heart of all activities in the classroom: students use English to communicate with each other and the teacher to share their ideas while speaking, listening, reading, viewing, responding, writing, and producing (p. 175). The challenge lies in having students engage in oral interaction while ensuring that the communication between students is actually done in the target language and not in their first language, which in Quebec is typically French. Over the years of schooling, students are expected to redirect their focus from refining their comprehension skills and acquiring vocabulary and English expressions to developing their fluency in English. According to MELS guidelines, students should develop their fluency by "experimenting with a language repertoire." This is done by having the students engage in spontaneous conversations, role-playing, problem-solving and classroom

discussions. Therefore, "oral interaction is the backdrop for the Secondary ESL program" (p. 180). By incorporating drama into the language classroom, the teacher can provide learners with a wealth of opportunities to improve their proficiency in English, as well as other cross-curricular competencies outlined in the Quebec Education Program (QEP).

2.2. Defining Drama

The obvious question then becomes, "what exactly is drama in a language classroom?" Drama can be defined in a multitude of ways. However, with respect to learning a language, drama is defined as an activity in which the student is asked to portray either himself in an imaginary situation or another person in an imaginary situation. In other words, the student is being asked to pretend; to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person. He may do this alone, or more usually, he may do so in conjunction with one or more of his fellow learners. He may act in a controlled way, following linguistic and organizational guidelines laid down by the teacher, or he may be left relatively free to work out his own parameters (Holden, 1983). In either case, he will be interacting with other people, and reacting in some way to what they say and do, drawing on his own personal knowledge of language to communicate meaningfully. Drama is applied to classroom activities where the focus is on the doing rather than on the presentation. In other words, the students work on dramatic themes, and it is this exploration of the ideas and characters in their target language which is important, for it entails interacting in English and making full use of the various features of oral communication. The students have the opportunity to

experiment with the language they have learned and the teacher has a chance to see how each person operates in their interaction with others (Ladousse, 1996). For the purpose of this study, the type of drama activity that will be referred to is role-play.

2.3. Benefits of Using Drama in an ESL Classroom

There is immense potential in using drama as a technique to teach a language. The potential "is so immense that every English language teaching professional must know how to harness it" (Ladousse, 1996).

Although there are several ways to meet the MELS guidelines, the use of drama in particular can play a vital role in language acquisition and the development of fluency. Dorothy Heathcote, a well-known educator in England, believes that drama should not be taught solely by trained drama specialists, but by ordinary classroom teachers who want their students to "achieve something that cannot be attained as effectively in any other way" (Wagner, 1976). Heathcote believes drama is an effective technique for learning because it isn't something that is unfamiliar to learners. Most ordinary people use drama to cope with new or unsettling experiences. For example, if a person has a job interview coming up, they will rehearse it in their minds beforehand to mentally prepare themselves for success. Also, if something traumatic happens, we may replay the scenario in our minds to help us explore the experience, gain better insight, and decrease our anxiety and consequently increase our control over it (Wagner, 1976).

One of the most significant advantages of using drama in an ESL classroom is its potential to limit boredom and lack of effort on the learners' part. Traditional oral

activities do not allow students to experience features which are present in real conversations outside the classroom. By using drama, and role-play in particular, the teacher provides the students with oral activities that require them to be active participants for the entire activity. This is accomplished because the learners' responses will depend on what the other participants say and do, which unlike traditional oral activities, are not predictable (Whiteson, 1996). Therefore, even if the learners are not speaking, they have to be listening attentively to their peers in order to respond accordingly. This also has inevitable implications for classroom management. Students who are asked to engage in activities which seem irrelevant or are not deemed interesting by the learners will certainly lead to issues of classroom discipline, often leading to students getting off-task and not participating in the activity, which will then affect the entire group. These types of problems lead many teachers to rely on activities that require little movement and interaction between students themselves. Oral communication is then replaced by oral presentations and teacher-student interactions. These do not allow the learners to get sufficient practice in oral communication. By using role-play that has been chosen to suit the students' interests, experience, and needs, the relevance and importance of the activity is obvious to the learners and will encourage greater and more authentic participation (Heathcote and Bolton, 1999). No student who is interested in what he is doing will misbehave. Activity and discipline are also closely linked. It is not natural for children to sit quietly and still for long periods of time. An exercise which is not only seen to be relevant, but also requires mental and

bodily activity, will enrich concentration and interest, thus increasing the possibility of effective learning (Livingstone, 1983).

Another critical benefit, according to Mordecai (1985) is that drama enables the language learner to contextualize the language in real or imagined situations, both in and out of the classroom setting. Drama allows the learners to explore, try out and practice language in meaningful situations while reinforcing the language structures they have already learned. It also helps to extend, retain and reinforce the vocabulary and grammatical structures that have already been taught. Although Maley and Duff (1978) believe that appropriate use of the language and meaning are more important than form or structure, typical language classrooms still emphasize the learning of correct grammatical forms before meaning. Drama can reinforce the most critical aspects of language learning and allow students to focus on meaning and language forms simultaneously.

According to Fernandez and Coil (1986) drama also encourages students to exercise their imagination and sensitivity which, in turn, makes learning more realistic and meaningful. Students have to perceive an experience through the roles they portray which are often different from their own. In role-play, a student is given a chance to understand and relate to the feelings of others. This develops a sense of empathy in the student as he learns to look beyond himself.

Another advantage of using drama is that it fosters a sense of responsibility and co-operation among students (Early and Tarlingtion, 1983). Drama typically involves group work and students cannot afford to remain passive. There is a need to belong to a group and to complete the task. The students develop a sense of self-

worth as they work together. Based on research done by Dougili, the use of drama also fosters the social, intellectual and linguistic development of the child (1987).

Another major benefit of using drama is that students are personally involved in the process of producing the language. This will inadvertently enhance retention of the language used. Drama in a second language classroom also teaches the students about pragmatics which are hardly acknowledged in conventional language teaching classrooms. Students get exposure to intonation, gestures, and body language which are culturally appropriate in the target language. By engaging in drama activities students can observe, notice and practice these features (Holden, 1981).

Understandably so, many students feel anxiety during oral presentations. Language students in particular often feel very nervous about interacting orally, especially if they aren't confident about their abilities to communicate in the target language. Drama can help lower these students' self–consciousness, fear of making mistakes, sensitivity to rejection and inhibitions while at the same time increasing confidence, integrative motivation, spontaneity, empathy and interpersonal skills in the target language (Ladousse, 1996). Because students are acting based on a character, they are not putting their own ideas, opinions and rational out to be judged by others. Various case study articles suggest that students participating in drama activities experiment more with the target language as they are in "masks" hiding themselves behind characters (Asher, 2003). For advanced language learners drama can help them understand and internalize literature, which is commonly used

in language classes. Drama can help students get into the shoes of the characters and develop their ability to analyze plot, style and character.

Another appealing aspect of using drama is the fact that it allows the teacher to prepare exercises that will suit the various abilities in class; not only based on language skills, but also the strengths and weaknesses of the learners as students. For example, major roles that require a lot of speaking and strong decision making abilities can be assigned to students who not only have a better grasp of the target language, but also like to talk and lead the group. Students who are shy and/or do not have a good grasp of the language can be assigned the smaller, but equally important roles. Carol Livingstone states, "I do not believe that a student who is by nature a quiet person should be required to do as much talking as the others. If he does not say much in his mother tongue, then there is little point in trying to make him a chatterbox in the foreign language. The task of the teacher is to improve performance in the foreign language, not alter personality (28)." Role-play can be created to fit not only linguistic ability, but also the personality of the individual student.

Finally, drama brings the issues and reality of the outside world into the classroom. Current events and social issues can easily be integrated in role-play activities. This could have positive effects in terms of social interaction and cultural awareness and sensitivity. Also, because role-play is unpredictable, students are better prepared to deal with the unpredictability of real conversations. A student may learn all the correct forms of communication but may not know when to use

them appropriately. Role-play provides opportunities to react to these situations and to give the students a taste of real life (Bolton, 1984).

2.4. Heathcote's Method

Traditionally, drama involved having students reading a play, memorizing lines, perfecting actions and facial expressions, and finally presenting the play to a group of people. Although such use of drama has its merits, Heathcote has developed a method than can be much more beneficial in a language classroom. This method begins by presenting the learners with detailed conflicts. These conflicts must be appropriate in content based on students' age and language ability. The students are then grouped together in teams so that each student plays one character. As a group, the students must decide on the characterization of each character, the plot and the resolution to the conflict. Once that has been discussed and decided upon, students practice how the scenario is going to play out, but they do not have lines to write or memorize and have no script to adhere to. They are simply practicing to familiarize themselves with the characters they are portraying and to decide if the resolution they have decided upon is appropriate based on the conflict. "Heathcote lets children decide what the play is to be about, when it is to take place, where the scene is to be, and in most cases, roughly what happens." (Wagner, 1976) Finally, the students act out the scene in front of their classmates. A self-evaluation or classroom discussion may follow.

Based on her method, language learners can benefit in many ways and each step requires a multitude of skills and therefore ample opportunity for learning and development. First, students have to work together and interact orally to understand

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all aspects of the conflict. Second, they must discuss with their group members the persona of each character and decide on how the problem will be resolved. This will require them to engage their problem-solving and debating skills. It will also lead to learning new vocabulary words (based on conflict topic), English expressions, and potentially even grammar. Third, students will be engaged in content-based learning because many of the conflicts will stem from current issues so they may have to do research in order to properly prepare themselves. Fourth, throughout the entire process students are interacting orally, listening, and cooperating with each other adhering to Q.E.P (Québec Education Program) guidelines and recommendations.

The use of drama, and more specifically role play, in a language classroom is an essential method of teaching oral communication for several reasons. First, it involves activities which are purposeful and interactive. Second, the scenarios used can be based on authentic material and issues being dealt with currently in society. Third, they are based on the information gap principle, which emphasizes the importance of learners' interdependence to complete tasks (Chauhan, 2007). To ensure the success of learners, Luamo (2004) also stresses that including higher-order thinking and critical thinking skills is essential and can be reinforced through the use of real-life problem solving situations. According to Mordecai, drama also allows language to be used in meaningful situations. Drama enables the language learner to contextualize the language in real or imagined situations, both in and out of the classroom setting. It allows the learners to explore, try out and practice language in meaningful situations while reinforcing the language structures they have already learned.

2.5. Hypotheses

I hypothesized that the participants would be able to communicate during this activity with more fluency and effectiveness. They would also be able to use the English language with more accuracy and conviction because they had had an opportunity to practice what they would like to say and how they would like to communicate it in a team setting. The target vocabulary words and the English expressions included in the activity would also allow the students to engage in a discussion that would be effective and appropriate for the context of the conflict scenario.

Based on the research I have done and the feedback I have received from my students in the past about their dissatisfaction with oral activities, I also hypothesized that this activity would be well received by students. I believed it would provide them with an interesting platform to use English and express their thoughts and opinions in the target language.

CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design for this study is practical action research. The aim of such a design is to research a specific situation within a school setting in order to improve practice. Although this problem affects many learners under many different educational settings, the aim of this study was to improve the methods currently being used at my school to develop students' oral skills in their second language. The purpose of the study was to investigate how students would respond to this new method of integrating oral communication in their second language classroom. Based on their feedback, I, as well as the other ESL teachers at the school, could make the necessary changes to the current program.

3.1. Participants

The participants that took part in the study are all native speakers of French and are learning English as a second language. They are secondary IV students who attend a French private school on the island of Montreal, where English is commonly used both in the school corridors as well as in the community. They have all been learning English since kindergarten. Although they have a good grasp of the English language due to their exposure to it, they still make errors in vocabulary use, grammar and pronunciation.

3.2. Observers

The two ESL teachers who observed the participants are colleagues of mine. One has been teaching ESL for nine years. She has worked at two private French schools, one in the South Shore and her currently place of employment is in Montreal. She has taught secondary one to secondary five students, both regular

and advanced groups. The other has also been teaching for nine years. She has taught at two private French schools. Her first place of employment was a primary school where she taught English from grades one to six. The second and her current place of employment is a French private school in the South Shore. She teaches advanced secondary two groups. She is also currently doing a Master's in Applied Linguistics at Concordia University. These observers had non-participant roles. The third colleague is a Language Arts teacher. She has been teaching for two years at an English public secondary school in Laval. She has taught secondary one to secondary three students. Because of the location of her school and the demographics of the area, many of the students she teaches are actually ESL students, even though they attend an English school. Prior to this, she taught ESL students at a French private school for two years. She is also the one who first introduced me to Dorothy Heathcote's method of bringing drama into the classroom. She took a course in university which was based on Dorothy's Heathcote's methods. Since then she has used it several times with her own classes. Based on this, I felt she would be best suited to guide the participants during the activity. Although she observed the students, she also had a participant role. She was the facilitator during the activity and played a role in the conflict scenario activity with the participants. Her primary objective was to help the participants get accustomed to the format of the activity and to provide guidance as was needed during the activity.

3.3. Procedures

Initially, introductions were made between the participants and the observers. The participants then filled out a short questionnaire about who they are and how much exposure they have to English outside the classroom setting (Appendix A).

Participants were first given a trial conflict scenario so that they could become familiar with the process before the conflict scenario to be studied was presented to them (Appendix B). Participants had this opportunity to ask questions about the procedure. They were encouraged to ask questions at any time since a complete understanding of the process and their role in the activity was essential for it to succeed.

Once the trial scenario was completed and questions and concerns were addressed to the participants' satisfaction, we proceeded with the actual study scenario. To begin the language arts teacher, who played the role of the facilitator, distributed a handout to each participant describing the conflict scenario (Appendix C). The participants were given a few minutes to read it over on their own. Once they were done, she began the session by pretending to be the Dean of Dawson College. She explained to them that the school was seriously considering putting in metal detectors in light of the devastating events of 2006. However, many members of the faculty, students, and parents were expressing concern about how these metal detectors would affect Dawson students, staff and faculty.

At this point participants were asked to randomly draw a name 'from a hat' to determine which role they would be portraying. The five roles included two students, one for and the other against placing metal detectors, a parent, a teacher and a

representative from the company that would provide the metal detectors if the school decided to implement them. These roles were chosen because they all had a vested interest in the safety of the school and each character would have a unique point of view as to how the school should improve security.

Once the participants knew their roles, the facilitator explained the "Help" boxes on the handout. For the vocabulary box, words were selected that would facilitate the flow of the discussion. The participants were also encouraged to add words that they found useful as they went along. The second box had English expressions that could have potentially helped them improve the quality of the language they used. Again, they were encouraged to add to this list as they progressed. They reviewed the vocabulary words and expressions as a group. Before the actual discussion began, participants were reminded that the first time would be a practice run. They were informed that they could ask any questions pertaining either to the topic, their character or to elements of the English language. They were permitted to use dictionaries or other resources they found useful. They could also write down any notes of their own on the back of their handout.

The scenario began with the facilitator reiterating the problem at hand and summarizing the key points. To get the participants warmed up, she went around asking each person involved what they thought Dawson should do. Once each person had had an opportunity to express their initial thoughts as their character, they continued the discussion by adding to each others' comments and ideas. Once the practice was done the participants were given time to discuss their roles, the content of the discussion and the resolution.

After a short break the participants were asked to re-enact their discussion for our group of observers. During the performance participants were not permitted to ask any questions pertaining to the target language. They had to participate in the discussion based on the practice they had just completed. They were also not permitted to use a dictionary, but they were permitted to refer to the handout with the "Help" boxes and their own personal notes. Once the reenactment was completed, the participants were again given a five minute break.

Participants then took part in a focus group interview and were asked to give their feedback on the activity they had just participated in (Appendix D). The three observers also participated in a focus group interview in which they shared their professional opinions based on what they had observed during the practice and the performance of the conflict scenario based on the shooting at Dawson College (Appendix E).

3.4. Data Collection

Once the focus group interview with the observers was completed I collected their fieldnotes based on the practice and performance.

I proceeded to view the videotaped segment of the practice as well as the conflict scenario activity and took initial notes based on the participants' actions, expressions, and oral communication skills. I viewed the taped segment multiple times, each time taking detailed notes on the participants' vocabulary use, use of grammar forms, use of English expressions and fluency. I also took notes on the participants' level of participation and their interaction with one another.

I then view the videotaped segments of the focus group interviews with the participants and the observers and took notes on their comments and responses to the questions. Excerpts from the interviews were transcribed.

3.5. Data Analysis

After the initial viewing of the practice and performance I compared my observations to those made by the observers. Several reoccurring themes emerged from this comparison. After each viewing, I observed other details that were initially highlighted by the observers. I also documented the kinds of errors that were made by the participants during the practice and compared them to their performance during the actual test.

For the focus group interview, the comments and observations made by the participants were carefully noted. Several of the participants, and at times all of them, shared many of the same views and opinions about the effectiveness and appeal of the conflict scenario activity.

3.6. Method of Validation

To validate my findings I used triangulation by comparing the different sources of data. These comparisons were based on my initial observations, the viewing of the videotapes and the other observers' fieldnotes. It is through the investigation of each of these sources that I determined the themes that emerged in the study. It is also through this process that some of my initial interpretation of the data changed. For example, initially I felt that the participants had more convincing arguments during the practice. However, Observers 1 and 2 felt that although the participants spoke less during the performance, their arguments were actually more concise and

to the point. They thought that during the practice, the participants were repetitive. After viewing the tape again, I realized that they were correct. The participants' arguments were much more refined during the performance. Another example is when we discussed the participants' level of participation. I first thought Participant B did quite well during the practice, but Observers 1 and 2 felt that although he spoke clearly, his did not speak very much. Similarly, I initially felt that Participant E spoke very well, but Observers 1 and 3 observed that even though she spoke clearly, her arguments were weak and not nearly as interesting and engaging as what the other participants had said.

Once the analysis of the findings was completed, I used member checking by asking the observers to read it and provide me with further feedback as to the accuracy of my conclusions. In order to do this in a constructive manner I organized a discussion session with the observers to bring to light any issues or inconsistencies in my analysis. In light of this discussion I made some adjustments to my report. This final member checking process provided validation of the results from the study and the conclusions that were drawn.

CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS

4.1. Results Based on Language Improvement

There were four areas of language proficiency that were observed during the study to assess the improvement in language skills from the practice to the performance; fluency, grammar use, vocabulary use and the use of English expressions.

4.1.1 Fluency

All the observers noticed a 'significant' difference in the participants' fluency between the practice and the performed conflict scenario. During the practice there were four, ten-to-fifteen second pauses between the end of one participant's statement and the beginning of another's. This did not occur during the performed scenario. "Students spoke with more confidence" (Observer 2). The participants also used fewer pause words. For example, Participant D spoke very clearly, but often used "like" at the end of her statements. During the performed scenario, she only used "like" twice before continuing with her arguments. Participant A also hesitated often during the practice run. He was much more fluent when expressing himself during the performance. He had fewer pauses and seemed less nervous. The participants also made arguments that were more concise and to the point, unlike the practice run when many of the same arguments were repeated. "The arguments they raised were less redundant the second time around" (Observer 3). Two of the participants also added new arguments during the performed scenario. "I thought it

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was interesting that some of the participants had new arguments. I guess the conflict kept them thinking (Observer 1)."

4.1.2 Vocabulary

The participants also showed improvement in their ability to use key vocabulary words more accurately. A few of the key words on their handout, such as *tuition, metal detectors* and *dean*, were used more often during the performed scenario than the practice even though the meaning of these words were explained and discussed before the practice run.

Participants A and D also demonstrated the ability to use more complex words by reiterating them once these same words were used by the dean when she asked them questions. For example, when the dean stated that Participant D *represented* a large part of the community, Participant A replied, "I too *represent* a large part of the community and we want to install metal detectors in our school." Another example is when the dean used the word *speculate*. When some of the participants began expressing concern that the staff may act as accomplices if they were to have special access to the school, participant D replied, "That is too much speculation." Another example is the participants were discussing the possibility of having metal detectors for the main entrance and only having security guards for the others. The dean then asked the group "Is anyone concerned about that method?" Participant B replied with. "I'm concerned that a gunman would use one of the other entrances to come into the school."

During the practice some words were used inaccurately (Table 1). Although the participants were not corrected during the practice run by the facilitator or the other

participants, they did not use those words again during the performed session. However, some words were not used in the practice run and were incorrectly used during the performance. Participant A at one point in the discussion stated that, "guards need to make sure that nothing *suspect* is going around in school," when his intention was to say *suspicious*. Participant D also state that, "They (students) are *evolving* to become parents. In essence, she meant that students are maturing and becoming adults.

Table 1. *Vocabulary Errors Made During Practice*

Participant	Vocabulary Error	Correction
A	I'm sure to be *secure* all day.	safe
B	Ø	
C	They put *stuff* in the guns and start shooting.	bullets
	There is *less* level of risk with metal detectors.	a lower
D	I will always go by the safest *enter*.	entrance
	We'll have security guards too so if teachers are in *difficulty*, there is someone there that can do something about it.	trouble
E	I don't think *less* people would come if you had metal detectors.	fewer

4.1.3 English Expressions

The participants used many English expressions accurately during the practice run and the performance, particularly when it came to expressing their opinions (Table 2).

One example of an improvement in this area from the practice run to the performance was demonstrated by Participant C. During the practice, he claimed that some students from Dawson suffered "traumas in the head," when trying to describe the impact of the event on the Dawson students. Although he was not corrected by his peers, during the performance he reiterated his point by stating that, "many Dawson students were traumatized."

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In some cases participants attempted to use certain expressions during the practice run, but were unsuccessful and did not repeat those attempts during the performance. For example, during the practice Participant D stated that, "it is important that students are allowed to *do their lives*," when she meant *live their lives*. She did not attempt to use this expression again during the performance.

Table 2. *Examples of Proper Use of English Expressions During Practice and Performance*

Participant	Examples
A	"We need to *shut down* entries."
	"*I think* it is important to have metal detectors installed."
B	"I *strongly agree* that we should install metal detectors."
C	"*Take them off*."
D	"*I'm against* what he just said." "*I still disagree*." "This kind of thing only happens *once in a lifetime*."
E	"*I think* that you should close some of the entrances and put metal detectors in the other ones."

Some participants made new attempts to use English expressions during the performance that they may have been somewhat familiar with, even though they were not used during the practice run. For example, Participant A stated that, "you never know who has a *black side*," when he really intended to say *dark side*. The same participant, when referring to the possibility that another person might attack Dawson students and staff, stated that, "I don't want someone to shoot a bullet *up my arm* or in my head."

4.1.4 Grammar

In general, the participants made few grammatical errors during the practice and even fewer during the performance. When the participants did make grammatical errors, they were minor, in that the message they intended to convey

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still came across clearly (Table 3). The grammatical errors included problems with subject/verb agreement, count and non-count nouns, plural forms and occasionally subject-verb agreement.

Table 3. *Grammatical Errors Made During Practice*

Participant	Grammatical Errors	Correction
A	The shooting gave students *psychologic* problems.	psychological problems
	If I be a bad guy.	If I were a bad guy.
	There was people that died.	There were people that died.
	There is crazy people out there.	There are crazy people out there.
B	Ø	
C	how much guards	how many guards
	approximated price	approximate price
	other small entrance	other small entrances
	It'll get people frustrating.	It'll get people frustrated.
	That have already been done.	That has already been done.
D	mans or womans	men or women
	peoples	people
E	less people	fewer people

The participants generally used verb tenses accurately throughout the practice and the performance. For example, several of the participants used the future tense since the issue dealt with the future security of Dawson College (Table 4).

Table 4. *Participants' Use of the Future Tense*

Participant	Examples
A	"She'll come to school to shoot me." "We'll have security guards too."
B	"Yes, they (metal detectors) will slow down the flow of the school."
C	"They will become what I am today." "Students won't be comfortable doing their tests if they are all wet." "There will be some traffic jams." "I will always try to go in by the safest enter."
D	"I'm not sure all of them will like it, but I'm sure some of them will." "Our school will feel like a prison."
E	"They will prevent it from happening again."

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The participants also used several modal auxiliaries properly throughout the practice and performance (Table 5).

Table 5. *Participants' Use of Modal Auxiliaries*

Participant	Examples
A	"She might come and shoot me another day." "Students can come a bit earlier and talk to others while they are waiting to get scanned."
B	"I strongly agree we should install metal detectors."
C	"In snowy or rainy days the students would get frustrating because they would have to wait outside while others are getting scanned." "I can agree for the metal detectors." "In the main entrance we should have massive security."
D	"The students should be treated like adults."
E	"I think that you should close some of the entrances and put metal detectors in the other ones." "We should put metal detectors in the main entrance." "The metal detectors are very sophisticated, so the school would not feel like a prison."

Participant A also used the conditional several times, especially during the practice:

"If she has a gun she can use it on the students."

"If I be a bad guy and see metal detectors, I won't go there.

4.1.5 Participants' Reactions to the Activity

To determine how well the participants responded to the activity I looked at their level of participation, the interaction between them and their responses to the activity.

4.1.6 Participation

Three of the five participants spoke a significant amount of time for the practice and the performance. Two of the participants did not speak very much during the practice run, but they did speak more during the performance after they

had been told by their peers to do so. When I asked the participants how difficult it was to participate in this kind of activity, the consensus was that it was very easy to participate.

4.1.7 Participant Interaction

Two of the observers found that the participants were speaking more to the dean (played by the facilitator) than to each other. "It was as if they were trying to convince her rather than each other" (Observer 2). However, during the practice run of the vacationing family, which the participants did before the Dawson practice, they spoke more to one another than to the travel agent whose role was played by the facilitator.

The participants used key expressions, such as *I agree, I disagree,* and *in my opinion* to communicate their views with one another. They respected their peers and allowed each participant to voice their opinion without being critical. "This group seemed to blend smoothly together. No one was trying to dominate the discussion" (Observer 3).

4.1.8 Participants' Responses

Based on the feedback from both the observers and the participants, the activity was very well received. The participants enjoyed the activity and had ample positive feedback. They felt this type of activity was much more interesting than the kinds of activities they currently do in their English class for oral production. Two of the participants also commented that they felt they had learned more during the conflict scenario activity than they had preparing for other oral presentations they had done in the past for English class. "I like this kind of challenge. I learned more

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doing this than other kinds of orals I've done before" (Participant D). Another participant claimed she found it more interesting, "It's fun because you have to think about it" (Participant E).

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1. Discussion

The use of conflict scenarios to engage students in practiced improvisation and role-playing has several benefits for second language learners. It allows them to learn a second language that is content-based and within a specified context of interest to them which makes the activity more meaningful and purposeful for the learners. It provides a forum that is conducive to learning new vocabulary words, English expressions and proper grammar structures which can be practiced in a safe and supportive environment. Learners can also practice their oral skills under minimal stress because they work in small peer groups and have access to several resources to improve on their performance. Because there are no lines to memorize, students have little preparation to do ahead of time. This type of activity also enables learners to engage in conversation that allows them to see other points of view and can make them more sensitive and empathetic to others. Above all though, one of the most essential benefits of this type of oral activity is that it provides ESL learners with an ideal opportunity to improve their fluency.

This study looked at four areas in language development to assess the success of the conflict scenario activity. Based on the results, the activity was found to be an effective and beneficial learning tool for English second language learners.

5.1.1 Fluency

Unlike typical improvisation activities, this approach enables learners to practice how and what they are going to say in their group discussion. This allows students to think through not only the arguments they would like to make, but also how they plan to convey their message in the most effective and convincing manner. As the results show, the participants were able to synthesize their ideas and perform more convincingly during the performance. Their arguments were better organized and their speech much more fluent and natural. "This kind of activity is much more natural" (Participant E). The flow of conversation was also much smoother during the performance. "It really seemed as though the participants were involved in an actual conversation and discussing the pros and cons of using metal detectors in their school" (Observer 2). During the performance, the participants' discussion flowed naturally from one speaker to the next; there were no awkward pauses.

5.1.2 Vocabulary

The participants were able to incorporate the key vocabulary words they learned with the facilitator during both the practice and the performance. Studies have shown that the average language learner needs to be exposed to a word in context between five and sixteen times before they actually learn its meaning (Nation, 1990). Considering that several of the key words were unknown to the participants, their ability to actually use the key words when expressing their points of view as their characters is quite significant. It implies that this type of activity creates a forum in which new vocabulary words can be learned, practiced and properly used within a short period of time. Because the discussion is based on a

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conflict scenario, using the key words was essential for the participants to be able to convey their message accurately.

The participants were also able to use words that were spoken by the dean. Although these words may have been familiar to the participants before the activity, they used them immediately after when responding to the dean's questions, in which the words were initially used. This demonstrates that language learners can reinforce the meaning of words they are already familiar with simply by listening to how others use them.

During the practice run, some of the participants used a few words incorrectly. Although they were not corrected or given any kind of feedback from their peers or the dean, these words were not repeated during the performance. This may have occurred because after attempting to use those words correctly, the participants themselves realized that they were not appropriate word choices for the message they wished to communicate. This is why the practice run is so vital to the success of the performance; it encourages the participants to take chances when using their second language. By having a practice run, the participants themselves can often times judge whether their word choices are appropriate.

Some of the participants attempted to use new words during the performance. Although the pronunciation of these words was accurate and their meanings were close to what should have been the correct word choices, these types of subtle errors are what differentiate these advanced learners from those who are more fluent. However, their attempts to use these words may be an indication that their own confidence during the activity was high enough to take those kinds of language

risks with words they were familiar with, but may not have known how to use properly.

5.1.3 English Expressions

These participants were able to use many English expressions accurately; particularly those that were included in the handout which was intended to help participants communicate their opinions with ease. Although English expressions can often be a difficult aspect of learning English, these participants demonstrated an impressive degree of ability in this area during both the practice and performance. One explanation is that these students live in a relatively English area of the Montreal region, have had years of exposure to the English language and often use English with friends and sometimes even extended family members. They possibly hear English expressions being used properly and were able to learn how to use them effectively when communicating in English.

When some expressions were not used properly during the practice, as in the case of Participant C, corrections were made for the performance. This again illustrates how the use of the practice run is essential for participants to feel comfortable enough to take risks when speaking and to have the opportunity during the practice to make the necessary changes so that they are able to improve and sound more like native speakers.

Some of the participants also made new attempts at using English expressions during the performance. This again may demonstrate that the participants felt confident enough within a group setting to take new language risks. Although these expressions were not accurate, they were very similar to the intended expressions.

For example, Participant C's use of *black side* instead of *dark side* shows that he does have some level of understanding with respect this the expression, but is still in the process of learning how to use it properly.

5.1.4 Grammar

The participants were able to speak in English without making any major errors in grammar. The mistakes that were made were subtle and did not impede the message they intended to convey. It is also important to note that many of the errors the participants made are the types of errors that even native-like speakers of English make. For example, errors with much and many, as well as less and fewer are very common. These types of errors are common with native speakers of English as well; therefore it is not surprising that these errors would also be made by ESL learners.

The participants' ability to use the different verb tenses accurately was also impressive. The observers noticed that the future tense, modal auxiliaries and the conditional were properly applied. This made them sound much more proficient and enabled the observers to actually listen to the content of their arguments rather than the quality of their speech. "Each and every one of them spoke clearly. Their ideas were very easy to follow" (Observer 1). Because of this, no improvement in particular was noted by the observers based on the participants' proper use of grammar from the practice to the performance. Realistically, to improve the quality and accuracy of the grammar used by second language students takes years of exposure to the target language and extensive practice. It is therefore understandable that notable improvements were not made during this 45 minute

activity. However, this does not imply that grammar use cannot be improved with the use of this activity over several classes. In fact, this activity could easily be modified to have learners use specific verb tenses. For example, if the teacher wants her students to practice using the simple past tense, the conflict scenario can be based on a crime scene that took place the previous night and the students can all be witnesses to the crime. When the students discuss what they witnessed, they will have to use the past tense.

5.1.5 Participation

Throughout the practice, three of the five participants spoke for a significant amount of time, continuously adding new comments and arguments to the discussion. Two of the participants, whose ability to speak in English is arguably stronger, spoke much less. Although these two participants made the necessary adjustments for the performance and actually contributed significantly to the discussion, they were asked during the focus group interview why they didn't speak more during the practice. Both participants, one played the role of a parent and the other of the salesman for the metal detectors, said they were unsure of their roles. Participant E, playing the salesman, wasn't sure if she was suppose to convince the group to purchase the metal detectors or she was simply suppose to answer their questions. Participant B wasn't sure if he should be for or against the use of metal detectors, therefore he kept quiet most of the time. After the practice, these participants were told by their peers that they had not contributed enough to the conversation. During the performance, their participation increased considerably.

The practice allowed them to see how the others played their roles and gave them the opportunity to make the necessary adjustments.

All five participants claimed they felt it was easy to participate in the discussion. "It's more natural for someone to listen and respond; it's more spontaneous. And the orals you learn by heart, you're just thinking about saying your oral and when you're too concentrated you might forget. You're looser (during a conflict scenario activity) and you're able to react to someone else's response and listening and responding back. It's more natural" (Participant B). Several of the participants also felt that this activity enables learners to perform better than the kinds of activities they currently use in English class for oral production because the group setting and the nature of the activity alleviates their level of stress. For these participants, a typical classroom oral activity entails doing research at home based on a teacher-specified topic and preparing a speech to be presented to the entire class. Even though their English may be strong, the stress of delivering a speech to the entire class is often overwhelming. "This is better than memorizing lines. I get so stressed out when I have an oral to do in front of the class" (Participant A).

They are also often required to do oral book reports in which they are expected to summarize the book and give their opinion on it. Again, these participants do not like these kinds of orals, which require only lower level thinking, because they feel it is boring for their peers to listen to, particularly if their oral book report is based on a novel that has already been read by others. "This kind of activity would actually be very interesting to watch because the problems (conflicts) are always different and after the group is finished, the class can also give their opinion on the topic"

(Participant D). This activity allows not only the participants to engage in meaningful discussions, but also provides a meaningful opportunity for the other classmates to observe and listen to the discussion. Once a resolution has been obtained and the oral is completed, those who observed the discussion can also weigh in and give their opinions and points of view.

5.1.6 Participant Interaction

A couple of the observers found that the participants spoke less to each other and more to the dean. This was probably because of the nature of the conflict scenario. Because the facilitator played the role of the dean, the participants may have felt that their role was to convince the dean to either install metal detectors or to leave the security as is at Dawson College. During the practice run the participants did before the Dawson scenario the participants interacted with one another much more because in that scenario, they were expected to convince the other family members to go to the vacation spot of their preference. Although the facilitator was also part of this discussion (she played the role of the travel agent), the participants rarely spoke directly to her; their comments and arguments were directed to the other participants. Had a participant played the role of the dean, this may not have occurred. However, the dean needed to be played by someone who could lead the participants to some kind of resolution and since these participants were unfamiliar with the format of this activity they probably would not have been able to play the role of the dean effectively.

All three observers also noted that the group dynamic was also very positive. "They work quite well together" (Observer 2). The participants were respectful to

one another, allowing each one to contribute to the discussion. Although the participants were told that they needed to be respectful to one another and allow each person to speak freely, the level of respect in this group was probably due more to the maturity and level of motivation of these participants. Having had them as students before, I can attest that they are generally well behaved students who are very respectful towards others.

5.1.7 Participants' Responses

Perhaps the most rewarding part of doing this study was to see how well received this activity was by the participants. They seemed to enjoy it immensely. They appreciated the fact that little work had to be done beforehand in preparation for the discussion. They also liked the fact that the conflict was based on an issue that was pertinent to them and had actually taken place in Montreal. They found it challenging to come up with different arguments, but interesting at the same time. "I liked it. I think I learned more in this than actually doing an actual oral. Like sometimes they ask you to learn a poem off by heart or do it on your book. Some others may have already read the book so it's boring for them. What happens when your book is boring and you have to make it interesting? This is always a new conflict so it's more interesting and challenging" (Participant D). They felt it was easy to become and stay engaged in this activity. They also felt that if they had to perform their conflict scenario discussion in front of the entire class, their peers would also find this kind of oral activity more intriguing to watch. "You can ask them to give their opinions (those watching) afterwards" (Participant E).

Several of the participants also commented about the stress they experience when delivering an oral. They feel this type of activity, because it is based on group discussion, allows them to focus more on the quality of their arguments, rather than the worrying about presenting their oral as they had prepared it.

- "It's a lot better when you're in a group because you're not as stressed out. We were talking about when you stuck during an oral. When you actually get stuck, at least when you're in a group someone can help you or someone can just continue the conversation so you don't look as bad in front of the people. We all know you sort of look bad" (Participant A).

- "It's better than memorizing lines cause when you're memorizing you forgot something, you're thinking in your head for half an hour and you get so stressed. Even if you knew the rest, you get so stressed, and your heart is beating. You're dead" (Participant B).

- "In an oral, if you forget what you have to say, you don't have a chance to like stop, try to think about it and then restart. In this activity you have the option to stop and let someone else talk and while he's talking you think about it" (Participant B).

- "You just get so hot. It gets so hot in your body" (Participants C).

Another participant also expressed her frustration about plagiarism, while others felt that other forms of evaluation did not accurately depict students' abilities to communicate in their second language.

- "Some people don't even write their text, they just take it off the internet and memorize it" (Participant E).

- "Some people get a 100 % on a test because they learn things by heart, but they don't know how to speak in English" (Participant A).

- "It's easy to learn in your head, but it's harder to actually communicate while you say it. They get a 100% on their grammar test, but they can't speak well. They're not able to use it" (Participant D).

5.2. Comparing My Findings to Heathcote's

Although Dorothy Heathcote has used drama to teach several different subjects, she has not applied it to learning languages. For this reason, only the participants' responses to this activity can be compared to what Heathcote has observed about its effectiveness over the years as a teacher. One important similarity between my findings and those of Heathcote's is that learners become completely engaged in the activity. They fully immerse themselves in the conflict at hand and become so invested in their characters that they often forget that they are performing at all. In this study the participants played their characters so well that it was initially difficult for them to reach a consensus; no one seemed to be swayed by the others' arguments. Consensus was finally reached at the end of their thirty minute discussion.

Another noted similarity is that conflict scenarios also provide an interesting and unique platform for learning content. Even though my focus is to help students improve their oral skills, it is through the use of authentic material and current events that the students become interested in learning the content and subsequently language as well. By basing the conflict on the shooting at Dawson College, the participants became very intrigued and wanted to find out more details

surrounding this event, from how the gunman entered the school to how the students from Dawson College who were there the day of the shooting are coping with the aftermath.

Learners are also highly motivated and are eager to contribute to the discussion. Because the activity is student-centered, learners have a better opportunity to participate significantly during the discussion and to actively listen to their peers.

5.3. Pedagogical Implications

When learners are able to practice a group discussion before actually presenting it to the teacher and their peers, they are able to improve on their use of the English language because they have the opportunity to take language risks they may not otherwise be willing to take. This practice also provides an atmosphere where students can learn new vocabulary words and English expressions. Because conflict scenarios can be designed based on the vocabulary words, English expressions, and grammar the teacher wants the learners to acquire, this type of oral activity is a natural and intriguing way to learn how to effectively use these different aspects of the target language.

In order for oral activities to be effective and beneficial to the learner, teachers also need to ensure that several conditions are met. First, students find it motivating and worthwhile when activities are interesting and mentally challenging at the same time. Second, students also want oral activities to be structured in a way that limits stress and simultaneously activates students' interest. It is also vital for teachers to include variation in the types of activities they have their students engage in for oral

practice in order to satisfy the needs and interests of everyone in the classroom. It is important to those engaging in oral activities that are to be performed or presented to their peers that the topic and format is also interesting to the audience. If the format is engaging for the audience as well, the learners who are performing feel less stressed because they don't have to worry about making their performance unique in order to appeal to their peers. Finally, educators must make communication activities meaningful to the learners. This will give learners a clear sense of purpose and will indefinitely lead to a deeper, more satisfying and more successful learning experience.

5.4. Limitations of the Study

Although this study gave me much insight on how using practiced improvisation and role-playing in my ESL classes can improve on my current teaching methods, there are several limitations to this study. First, I only tested the conflict scenario activity once, with one group of students. This one time observation cannot provide a complete understanding of the effectiveness and complexities of using conflict scenario activities in ESL classrooms. However, this was the choice I made because I wanted to determine the types of challenges teachers would face when they initially presented this activity to their classes.

Second, the group of participants may not have been representative of typical ESL students across Quebec for several reasons. To start with, the participants were not randomly chosen; they volunteered to be part of the study. They are generally motivated students who work hard and want to do well in school, including English class. They are also students I have taught before, some for more than one school

year. They live in an English milieu and they are exposed to a significant amount of English in and out of the school environment. Because of this they already have a good grasp of the English language. Although they are not advanced students, they can communicate clearly in English. Their objective as learners is to refine their communication skills and become more fluent. Observers 1 and 2 also mentioned that the participants seemed to be very comfortable with me. They felt that this may have played a role in how well they participated in the study. Although this may very well be a possibility, it is important to note that several of the participants suggested ways I could improve on the activity. I think this indicates that even though these participants may like me as a teacher, they are still willing to risk disappointing me if it entails giving constructive criticism in order to improve the activity.

Third, the performance was done within fifteen minutes after the completion of the practice. All three observers felt that the activity may have been even more effective had the practice and performance been done on different days. However, by spreading the study over two different days I would have risked having one of the five participants or one of the three observers absent on the second day. This was already an issue that had to be dealt with since one of the participants that had had their consent form signed, was not able to be present for the study.

5.5. Challenges in Implementing the Activity

I believe that the benefits of using conflict scenarios in ESL classrooms make the difficulty in implementing this activity well worthwhile. However, these challenges can be overwhelming for teachers who are already overworked and have limited resources. One problem is the amount of time it takes to prepare a conflict

scenario properly. Because using current issues is more motivating to students, teachers need to be up to date with current events and need to have the time necessary to research certain topics so that the students have the right information and so that she could provide accurate feedback. The most demanding part is in creating an initial bank of conflict scenarios. If several teachers within one school or school board want to implement this activity into their own curriculum, they can share the conflict scenarios they create. This would alleviate some of workload. Students can also create their own conflict scenarios once they become familiar with this format. This kind of activity would also promote the development of students' metacognitive abilities, which is a critical component of the QEP. The teacher can then tweak the conflict scenarios prepared by the students and add them to her bank of conflict scenarios for the following school year.

Another challenge is that students may need to practice using this type of activity several times before they become comfortable and feel confident that they are able to participate effectively. However, this is a common dilemma for many group activities, including activities that require cooperative learning. Like cooperative learning, the use of conflict scenarios also takes time for students to become accustomed to, but the commitment is worth the benefits that are gained by using it.

The teacher may also have issues with classroom management. I did not experience any problems because I was dealing with only one group of students. However, when I plan to use this activity next year with my students, I will have to figure out how I will be able to manage the entire class. I suggest that teachers

allow students to practice in class when they are first assigned a conflict scenario. As the students practice and become familiar with their roles, the teacher should circulate and provide help as needed. The groups should then be assigned a date in which they must perform in front of the class. If the teacher wants to extend the activity, she can have the rest of the class comment on the discussion that was performed. This again would be a meaningful extension to the activity. Fortunately, teachers can also take this opportunity to assess students on their oral communication skills. The design of this activity enables teachers to assess students based on the competencies outlined in the QEP and the criteria outlined by the IBO (International Baccalaureate Organization).

Teachers must also learn how to act as a guide in this process. The teacher must be able to make helpful suggestions, while ensuring that she is not influencing students based on her views. This takes time and experience to perfect, but teacher training could be very useful for those who are unsure of how to integrate this activity in their own ESL classrooms.

5.6. Future Research

There are several aspects of this study that can be investigated further in order to get a clearer picture of the effectiveness of using conflict scenario activities for oral production development. My first recommendation would be to have more time lapse between the practice run and the performance. This will give learners more time to reflect upon their performance during the practice and may enable them to make more improvements in their use of English. It can also give them the time needed to rehearse what they would like to contribute to the discussion during the

performance in their minds, which can again give them the opportunity to improve on their language performance and the quality of their arguments.

This study should also be done with a random sample. Because the participants volunteered to be part of the study, they may not be representative of other ESL students across Quebec. By testing this activity with a random sample, the researcher can look more closely at the effects of participant motivation. In theory, this activity can also be very effective for differential learning. The researcher can create groups of participants with different levels of proficiency and observe how this would affect the group dynamic, level of participation and student interaction which would ultimately also affect the discussion.

In order to determine how this activity would be integrated into a classroom setting, I also recommend testing this activity with an entire class. The researcher would then be able to provide educators with a more comprehensive plan of action for incorporating conflict scenarios into everyday classroom practice. The researcher can also make recommendations on how to micromanage the class while students are practicing their conflict scenarios in their groups. As I suggested earlier, those observing the group discussion being performed can share their own opinions and points of view once the group has reached a consensus. The teacher can also extend the activity by having the students write a personal response based on the group discussion. This would encourage the students observing to be attentive and it would also give the performers an opportunity to share their real views on the issue; this can enhance the activity and make it more meaningful for everyone. By

incorporating these types of post activities, the class will theoretically be easier to manage for the teacher.

An interesting alternative to this activity that can be studied is having the participants switch roles between the practice and the performance. The participants would arguably be even more attentive while listening to the other group members and more motivated to question their peers' input because they would have to play the role of another character for the performance. This type of setup would also require more interdependence between the group members and would perhaps encourage the students to help their peers be successful in their depiction of the character and the quality of their language use.

5.7. Conclusion

Heathcote's methods have successfully been used for decades. By using her techniques, language teachers can begin to prepare their students to be active communicators in English settings, but more importantly than that, students can be excited about improving their proficiency by actively participating in role-plays. It will allow them to not only improve their language skills and proficiency, but also learn about the outside world. It has the potential of teaching them how to communicate effectively and accurately outside the classroom setting and will make them more sensitive and empathetic to others, both at home and around the world. It is for these reasons that the appropriate use of role-play imbedded in conflict scenarios for an English second language classroom can be an invaluable experience for both students and teachers alike. Although there is still research that needs to be done, conflict scenarios is a valuable activity that can be used at all levels and modified for

varying abilities. Most importantly, conflict scenarios can promote cross curricular competencies and can easily be implemented into multidisciplinary lessons to encompass broad areas of learning.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

1. Name: _____

2. Age: _____

3. How many years have you been learning English? _____ years

4. Apart from English class, how often do you use English with others per week (answers are in minutes)? Circle the answer that applies to you.

• At school	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• With friends (outside of school)	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• At home	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• With relatives	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• Extra-Curricular Activities	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• At work	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+
• On the internet (MSN)	0	1-15	16-30	31-60	60+

5. Using the following 1-5 scale, please indicate by circling the most correct response, the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5   I can communicate very well in English.
1 2 3 4 5   I am very motivated to improve my English.
1 2 3 4 5   I enjoy the oral activities we do in English class this year.

APPENDIX B

Trial Scenario: Family Vacation

The Lopez family is planning their family vacation for the summer. They have to decide on a location because plane tickets and hotels are less expensive the earlier you book. Mr. Lopez really wants to spend quality time with his family, especially his four sons. He would love to go camping and teach his boys how to rough it in the wilderness. Mrs. Lopez hasn't seen her brothers and sisters for years and wants to go to Mexico. She wants her boys to get to know their extended family and experience their heritage. Jon, the eldest boy, wants to go to Florida because his girlfriend will be vacationing there with her family. He would love to spend time with her during his vacation. He thinks it's a great idea since his family and his girlfriend's family get along so well. Emilio absolutely wants to go to Las Vegas. He just won concert tickets to a concert for his favourite rock band. He has front row seats and knows that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. He also figures his family can then drive down to the Grand Canyon and spend time there as a family. Fernando has had a rough year at school and really just wants to find a location where he can relax and take his mind off of school. Jorge is the youngest boy, he's only 15, but he would actually rather stay home and spend the summer with his friends. He also started a new job and likes making extra money. He's hoping to make enough money over the summer to buy himself a car when he turns 16. If he leaves for vacation he'll miss out on the money he could have made working and may even lose his job. This family needs to discuss the pros and cons of going to the different locations and come to a decision as to where the family will spend their summer vacation.

Travel Agent: Facilitator (Language Arts teacher)
Father: _____
Mother: _____
Jon: _____
Emilio: _____
Fernando: _____
Jorge: _____

APPENDIX C

Conflict Scenario: Metal Detectors at Dawson College

"The Dawson College shooting occurred on September 13, 2006 at Dawson College, a CEGEP in Westmount near downtown Montreal. The perpetrator, Kimveer Gill, began shooting outside the de Maisonneuve Boulevard entrance to the school, and moved towards the atrium by the cafeteria on the main floor. One victim died at the scene, while another 19 were injured, eight of whom were listed in critical condition with six requiring surgery. The shooter later committed suicide by shooting himself in the head, after being shot in the arm by police.

Victims were treated at the Montreal General Hospital and other Montreal-area hospitals. It is the fourth fatal school shooting in Montreal, after the École Polytechnique massacre in 1989, the Valery Fabrikant shooting spree at Concordia University in 1992, and a murder at an immigration school in 1997."

In light of these events, Dawson College administrators are proposing installing metal detectors in all entrances to the college in order to increase security and ensure the safety of the students, staff and faculty. However, there are many issues that need to be discussed by those concerned in order to reach a decision about whether or not these metal detectors should be installed. First, the cost of the metal detectors ranges from $60, 000 to $100, 000 per entrance detector. Second, there would need to be at least one security guard per entrance at all times, which would again increase the cost to the school and unlike the metal detectors, this would be an ongoing cost. Third, the metal detectors may also slow down the flow of traffic at the entrances, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day. Fourth, having metal detectors may discourage future students from attending Dawson College since it sends the message that such equipment is needed, which would put in question the safety of our school.

Many of us at Dawson College feel that something needs to be done to improve security measures. Apart for the immediate devastating outcome of the shooting, many of our students and faculty members are still dealing with the aftermath. Several students have quit college altogether and others have had to take time off to deal with the stress and fear the shooting has instilled in them. We need to find a way to ensure the safety of our students, staff and faculty so that each one of us can come to work or school with ease of mind. As the Dean of Dawson College I have called this meeting to discuss the pros and cons of installing metal detectors in our school. Should we choose to purchase the metal detectors, there is much planning that needs to take place. Therefore, a decision must obsolutely be reached by the end of our meeting.

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Roles

Dean: Facilitator

Student (for):   _____

Student (against): _____

Student (unsure): _____

Teacher: _____

Parent: _____

Salesman: _____

Vocabulary   **Expressions**

Tuition   I believe, think, feel

Metal detectors   I (strongly) agree

Faculty   I (strongly) disagree

Staff   In my opinion....

Dean   _____

For/against   _____

Pros/cons   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

APPENDIX D

Questions for Focus Group Interview with Participants

1. What do you think about the activity you just did?

2. How does it compare to the kind of oral activities you do in class now or have done in the past?

3. What did you like most about the activity?

4. What did you like least about the activity?

5. How easy or hard was it for you to participate? Why?

6. Is this the kind of activity you would like to do more of in English class? Why?

APPENDIX E

Questions for Focus Group Interview with Observers

1. How do you think the participants responded to the activity in general?

2. How does this activity compare to the kinds of oral activities you prepare for your classes?

3. What are some of the advantages of using this type of activity in a language class?

4. What are some of the disadvantages of using this type of activity in a language class?

5. Could you see yourself including this type of activity in your classes? Why or why not?

APPENDIX F

Tuesday, March 11, 2007

Dear Parents,

      As an English second language teacher, I am constantly looking for innovative and interesting ways to help students improve their oral communication skills. I have been a language teacher at College Charlemagne for seven years and have taught students from grade 3 to secondary V, both regular and advanced groups. I am currently working on my thesis for my Master's degree and have developed a new activity which promotes oral communication through the use of improvisation and drama. Volunteers who participate in the study will enable me to research the effectiveness of this new activity as well as provide me with feedback that will be used to make important adjustments.

      To respect the privacy of students, the names of the participants will remain confidential throughout the study and in the final report. The name of the school will also remain confidential and simply be identified as a private French school on the island of Montreal. In order to study the effectiveness of this activity in great detail, it will be videotaped. However, I will be the only person who will view the tape.

      I thank you for your time and consideration. Should you have any questions or concerns you can contact me at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

Pelagia Kyriakopoulos
pkyriakopoulos@collegecharlemagne.com

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Pelagia Kyriakopoulos from the Education Department of Concordia University.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to explore second language students' responses to using improvisation and drama to improve oral communication in English.

B. PROCEDURES

The research study will take place at College Charlemagne on April 9th,2008. It will take place in one two-hour session after school. The participants will be required to work in a group of six to resolve a conflict that is presented to them by the researcher. Each student will have a different role to play in resolving the conflict. For example, if the conflict is about a fifteen year old girl who would like to date but her parents won't allow her to, the three roles would include the father, the mother, and the fifteen year old girl. The participants will be given time to practice English expressions and vocabulary in their teams to prepare for their roles. After they have practiced the participants will be asked to show the researcher how they chose to resolve the conflict scenario that was presented to them.

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

PARENT'S SIGNATURE: _____

DATE: _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Office, Concordia University, at 514.848.2424 x. 7481 or by email at Adela.Reid@Concordia.ca