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"I would like my students to feel like that too." Reflections on engagement in drama-rich pedagogies with community/heritage languages teachers

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This article explores engagement and group flow in drama-rich pedagogies with community languages (also known as heritage languages) teachers. Flow is usually examined in terms of an individual experience of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2008, 2014), where autotelic or intrinsically rewarding experiences are associated with a state of flow. Group flow refers to a collective state where attention is equally put on the task and others, because the task requires continuous social interaction (Hackert et al., 2022; Sawyer, 2004, 2007). Teaching Artists working with drama-rich pedagogies must balance individual creative contributions, group dynamics and the demands of the narrative to sustain engagement and bring about the conditions for group flow. This research found that engagement for the purposes of teacher professional development broadened to encompass autotelic engagement. Data also indicated that a deepening sense of autotelic engagement served to extend and reinforce participants' teacher professional learning goals.

1 Introduction

The value of drama-rich pedagogies in additional language learning are well established and suggest that performative approaches to teaching and learning can increase confidence, fluency and motivation (Kao & O'Neill, 1998); facilitate questioning and turn-taking (Kao et al., 2011); reduce foreign language anxiety (Piazzoli, 2011); and foster intercultural competence (Rothwell, 2011) and student agency (Dalziel & Piazzoli, 2019). However, there is a complex interplay between the aesthetics and artistry of drama, and the instrumental goal of language learning. Without an understanding of dramatic forms and elements, drama strategies become functional and do little to add value or deepen the quality of the learning experience (Dunn & Stinson, 2011). At such times, drama can become didactic, focusing on spelling and grammar, lacking deep reflection, with the teacher holding the balance of power (Coleman, 2017).

My own practice as a Teaching Artist working with drama in language learning contexts has ranged from government-funded programs where language learning was an overt goal, to working with therapy groups where interest in the storytelling aspects of drama took

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precedence. In 2022, I was fortunate to embark on a creative process with a group of women from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, brought together by their shared experience as teachers and principals of community languages (CL) schools (also known as heritage languages). In this context, the goal was to provide professional learning that would enable participants to use drama in their teaching of community languages. Participants volunteered for a process drama program “to give you the skills to teach language through drama with your students“ (K. Cruickshank, personal communication, March 16, 2022). What follows is a reflection on how the initial motivation for attending – teacher professional development – evolved into autotelic engagement and the experience of group flow, as evidenced through participant interviews, informal discussions, and contributions to the creative process.

2 The research context

In 2022, a professional learning program based on drama-rich pedagogies was initiated with Sydney Institute for Community Languages Education (SICLE), a university-based institute which supports the professional development of teachers working in CL schools. Aspects of this program draw from *School Drama*, a program developed from 2009 by Sydney Theatre Company and The University of Sydney, in particular Professor Emerita Robyn Ewing. *School Drama* is a teacher professional learning program where a Teaching Artist works alongside a classroom teacher using a co-mentoring model. The program combines quality children’s literature and process-based drama and has been demonstrated to nurture student literacy, imagination, confidence and engagement (Ewing et al., 2015; Ewing & Saunders, 2016; Gibson & Smith, 2013; Saunders, 2015, 2019) alongside teacher confidence and expertise. While *School Drama* uses an episodic pretext model (Saunders, 2015, 2019), this program departed from *School Drama* in using myths and folk tales as pretexts rather than quality children’s literature.

CL schools form a unique and important role in the landscape of language education in Australia. They are not-for-profit schools run on weekends and weekdays outside school hours. In 2019, 62 languages were being taught in CL schools in the state of New South Wales, Australia, to more than 37,500 students (Cruickshank et al., 2022). A recent meta analysis highlighted that internationally, CL schools are a major sector of language education provision, and in some cases are the main or sole provider for certain languages (Cruickshank et al., 2023). CL teachers are volunteers, often migrant women with qualifications from overseas, who enter the schools as a pathway to further study and career development, although these pathways are often blocked (Cruickshank, 2021).

This research involved a group of 11 CL teachers who volunteered to participate in an 8-week program designed to introduce drama-rich pedagogies to their own teaching practices. As such, workshops were conducted in English and teachers adapted drama strategies for use in their own classrooms and language contexts. The teachers represented Arabic, Laos, Persian/Dari and Uyghur CL schools, all involved with SICLE. Two participants were also school principals.

In this project, I was both a Teaching Artist and a researcher, supported by a co-Teaching Artist. Applied theatre practitioners can inhabit the hyphen between the Arts and social sciences (Hatton, 2004; Thompson et al., 2009) and I perceive my own role as existing within this hyphen. I also considered myself as a researcher-participant (Gans, 1982), a role requiring hybridity and reflexivity, and a consideration of how my choices as a Teaching Artist influenced and interacted with the co-creation of the process drama.

3 Literature overview

In this section, I provide an overview of flow theory, process drama, and teaching artistry, as it pertains to this research project.

3.1 Flow

In this article, I examine participant engagement within the framework of flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, 2008, 2014). Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow has long been influential in studies of creativity, and many scholars have found that high levels of autotelic or intrinsic motivation engendered by the flow state are correlated with high levels of creativity (Duncan & West, 2018). The conditions of the flow experience include clear goals, immediate feedback, challenges that match skills, deep concentration, exclusion of irrelevant stimuli, possibility of success, reduced self-consciousness, an altered sense of time, and ultimately, that the experience becomes autotelic, or worth having for its own sake (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

In defining flow, Csikszentmihalyi makes an important distinction between ‘autotelic’ and ‘exotelic’ experiences. Deriving from two Greek words, *auto* meaning self, and *telos* meaning goal, autotelic refers to a self-contained activity – that is, not with the expectation of some future benefit, but simply because the doing itself is the reward (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Exotelic experiences are directed towards external goals or outcomes. Whereas exotelic experiences are undertaken in service of a future outcome, autotelic experiences are associated with a state of flow: “When experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain” (Csikszentmihalyi

2008, p. 69). Autotelic experiences can make life more rich, intense and meaningful. While Csikszentmihalyi (2008) concedes that most activities are not purely autotelic or exotelic, he does describe how an activity undertaken for exotelic or instrumental purposes can, in time, become autotelic in nature. Csikszentmihalyi uses the example of a person learning to play the piano for exotelic purpose of becoming a good pianist: “With time, however, the goal of becoming a good pianist may recede as the primary motivational factor because the experience of playing is so rewarding that it can sustain the process by itself” (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 154).

In education contexts, the exotelic aspects of learning are often foregrounded. In language learning, the impetus to become fluent and confident in the target language is particularly overt. However, Csikszentmihalyi (2014) suggests that the more that learning is talked about in terms of its instrumental outcomes, the less easy it will be for students to realise its intrinsic rewards. This perspective differs from a cognitive approach to learning, which emphasises the way that information is processed and understood by the learner, and instead places the affective, emotional and motivational at its centre (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). This is particularly relevant for Teaching Artists and those interested in facilitating aesthetic experiences within educational contexts. Bundy (2003) posits that engagement affords the possibility of an aesthetic response, a particular way of perceiving and knowing the world and our relationship to it. In the context of a drama experience, Bundy defines playful engagement as participants engaging in the spirit or idea of the work. The affective experience is placed at the centre of the educational experience when “the percipient ‘meets’ the drama at a metaphoric level. Aesthetic response relies on the relationship between the drama, the percipient and the context in which they both exist” (Bundy, 2003, p.180).

In this article, I draw on Martin et al.’s (2017) definitions of motivation and engagement: motivation is the inclination, energy, emotion, and drive relevant to learning, while engagement refers to the behaviours that reflect this inclination, energy, emotion, and drive. This article is predominantly concerned with engagement, as it focuses on observations of participant behaviours that reflected their inclination, energy, emotion, and drive during the drama workshops.

Resonant for Teaching Artists is an emerging body of research investigating group flow, which occurs during a real-time interaction with others where attention is equally put on the task and others, because the task requires continuous social interaction (Hackert et al., 2022; Sawyer, 2007). Group flow does not occur when a group of individuals are all in a state of individual flow, such as has been studied in an interdependent music ensemble (Bloom & Skutnick-Henley, 2005) or a sports team (Elbe et al., 2010). Rather, group flow refers to all members reaching a level of complete self-other overlap with the group, which leads to a

collective experience of flow on the group-level (Hackert et.al, 2022). Building on Csikszentmihalyi’s description of the individual flow experience, group flow encompasses a common goal, close listening, complete concentration, participation, familiarity, blending of egos, equal communication, and the potential for failure (Sawyer, 2007). Sawyer (2007) describes how group flow is analogous to a continual, coherent conversation, where each person is “managing the paradoxes of improvisation by balancing deep listening with creative contribution” (p. 50).

Of particular interest to researcher-participants (Gans, 1982) facilitating drama-rich pedagogies are the indicators of group flow, as outlined by Walker (2010):

- Shared intense absorption and engagement with the task
- High attention to group members
- Loss of sense of time
- Less awareness of self
- Surrender of self to the group
- Emotional communication during group work
- Emotional contagion within the group and external observers
- Joy, elation and enthusiasm felt and shared throughout group performance
- The experience builds meaning and a collective sense of purpose
- The group desires to repeat the experience
- Rituals may be established to institutionalise social flow (p. 9).

For drama practitioners, the parallels between group flow and the drama workshop space are resonant, akin to Peter Brook’s ‘sacred spaces’ where a certain ‘magic’ happens (1996), and Ewing’s description (2010) of how drama bends “time and space to create a place for exploratory interactions, dialogues and representations out of which new thoughts, ideas and ways of looking/seeing can emerge” (p. 40). For Teaching Artists working in language learning contexts, an understanding of group flow may assist in facilitating process drama.

3.2 Process drama

Process drama is usually defined as an exploration of a theme, topic, idea or problem through a series of dramatic devices, resulting in an improvisational or unscripted drama experience (Haseman, 1991; O’Neill, 1995). The emphasis is on drama strategies and processes, rather than a performance. For O’Neill (1995), a pioneer of the form, the main characteristics of process drama are episodic structure, the absence of a script, and an integral audience. While participants experience the story from inside, they are simultaneously creating the story from the outside, evaluating what is happening and making connections to the real world and their own lives (Kao & O’Neill, 1998). In this article, I use ‘drama-rich pedagogies’ to refer to the

learning and teaching approaches broadly underpinning the program, and ‘process drama’ to refer to specific workshop plans and experiences.

The dramatic momentum of process drama is instigated by what is referred to as a pretext, shared in the early part of a process drama. Piazzoli (2018) makes a useful distinction between a stimulus and a pretext: a stimulus introduces the topic and is forgotten, whereas a pretext ushers in the theme and is remembered, affording inspiration for what is to come. Building on the *School Drama* model of a text broken into episodes that are explored sequentially (Ewing & Saunders, 2016; Saunders, 2019), this program used an episodic pretext based on the myth of Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus in Homer’s epic *The Odyssey*. Although the ultimate goal of Odysseus, the protagonist of the hero’s journey, is to return home and reunite with his wife Penelope after being at war for ten years, Penelope exists largely at the margins of the story. Her name has become synonymous with patience and fidelity. As Margaret Atwood’s Penelope laments in the reimagining of her story, “And what did I amount to, once the official version gained ground? An edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with” (Atwood, 2005, p. 2). However, Penelope can also be considered a transgressor and a trickster who, while in charge for twenty years, manages the estates better than any man could and keeps her suitors at bay (Massoura, 2017).

This myth was chosen because of its potential to explore the experiences and qualities of female leadership, an experience that was shared by all participants as teachers, principals and community leaders. The story was intentionally dislocated from a specific time and place, so it could operate as a kind of blank slate on which the group could co-author a new story and experience a greater sense of creative freedom (Campbell & Hogan, 2022).

While a pretext sets a process drama in motion, what emerges from the drama is more difficult to define. As O’Neill (1995) states, the text generated from the process drama “remains an outline, a trace, in the memories of participants after the event” (p. 20). In this program, this ‘outline’ finds form in the development of the post-text, a written version of the myth or folk tale that has been co-created and made anew by participants, including their imaginative contributions from each drama workshop (Campbell & Hogan, 2019, 2022). The post-text must be crafted carefully, drawing on the group’s experience of flow, by the Teaching Artist.

3.3 Teaching Artistry

A Teaching Artist is an artist, with the complementary skills and sensibilities of an educator, who engages people in learning experiences in, through, and/or about the Arts (Booth, 2003). Coined at the Lincoln Center Institute in New York in the 1970s, the term ‘Teaching Artist’ is an imperfect umbrella term encompassing those who may also describe themselves as applied

theatre practitioners, community artists, or facilitators (Booth, 2015; Hepplewhite, 2013). The innate hybridity of the role, spanning both the Arts and education, suggests that the individual engages participants as fellow artists and co-creators, rather than simply as learners.

The Teaching Artist appears to exist largely in the ‘in-between’, a liminal zone requiring a sense of playfulness, a habit of noticing what is present, and a readiness to pose questions (Booth, 2009). The term ‘Teaching Artist’ resonates with McLaren’s (1988) concept of the teacher-as-liminal-servant. McLaren (1988) invokes a teacher in a counter-hegemonic role who actively contests existing relations of power and privilege, recognising “the foundation for all human agency as well as teaching is steeped in a commitment to engage and critically reconstruct the possibilities for human life and freedom” (p. 171). O’Neill (1995) extends McLaren’s vision of the teacher-as-liminal-servant for leaders of drama-rich pedagogies, who are also:

> … guides to new worlds… the liminal servants to the work, trying to lead the way while walking backward, so that they do not become intent on reaching a predetermined destination as quickly as possible. (p. 67)

For O’Neill (1995), leaders of drama-rich pedagogies must be able to make decisions about aesthetics and dramatic tension in the moment, akin to a playwright. She described the playwright function as largely the responsibility of the leader of a process drama, at least in the initial stages, as although a process drama is essentially improvised, “it is not a matter of casting off all forms and limitations in order to be free and spontaneous. We use these forms and constraints in order to transcend them” (O’Neill, 1995, p. 151). Ideally, a Teaching Artist will guide a group through these forms and limitations in a way that creates and maintains the conditions for the experience of group flow.

4 Research approach

The research project described here uses Arts-based inquiry (Barone & Eisner, 1997, 2012; Knowles & Cole, 2008) to illuminate participants’ personal, social and creative experiences. The participants are not mere objects of the project, but in terms of this research are viewed as co-creators of culture (Freire, 1996). The research was designed as an iterative process, with data collection at several points, including pre- and post-interviews, eight weekly process drama workshops, and an ethnodrama presentation. This article focuses on the activities leading up to the conclusion of the workshop series, and does not include the ethnodrama presentation. Informal focus group discussions, in addition to one-on-one ethnographic interviews, provided qualitative, cross-sectional data to elucidate participant experiences. This data was complemented by the artefacts created by participants during workshops, which

included visual arts (maps, roles-on-the-wall), creative writing (writing in role, reflective writing) and a co-created post-text.

5 Discussion

The following section explores how engagement and group flow evolved during the 8-week program, as demonstrated through participant interviews, focus group discussions and participation. Of particular interest are the creative contributions from participants that served to shape the story and deepen autotelic engagement.

5.1 “Can we take off our teacher hats?”: Exotelic engagement

In the initial meeting to introduce the research project, and several pre-program one-on-one interviews, it was clear that a major motivation for attendance was teacher professional development. There was particular interest in how drama could engage disengaged CL students, and several participants enquired about the certification of the course through SICLE. The motivation to access relevant and effective professional development is in keeping with the context of CL schools, where many teachers have not had the opportunity to attain formal teaching qualifications (Cruickshank et al., 2022). This was particularly evident for Qadira[1], the principal of a CL school who was planning to attend with two teachers from her school. Her motivation was clearly linked to supporting her teachers to access effective professional development:

> Qadira: So we can have this ongoing professional development, which will help them [CL teachers] to not to be an empty vessel because an empty vessel can't give to the kids. So you have to always put things in, in their ideas and in their brain. So when they prepare, they have plenty of things to give back, you know? Because again, in our language, we say, if you don't have, you can't give.
>
> (Pre-program interview, 4 May 2022)

With the reasons for the participants’ attendance in mind, for the first two weeks myself and the co-Teaching Artist integrated moments throughout each workshop where we would ‘pause’ the process drama and reflect (as teachers) on the drama strategies used and how they could be adapted and used in participants’ classrooms. A digital resource was emailed to participants on a weekly basis, containing an overview of all warm-up exercises and drama strategies used in that workshop. The resource served to reinforce their professional learning and free them up from taking notes during each workshop, but also to enable all participants

[1] All participants have been assigned pseudonyms.

to feel that those concerns were being addressed, allowing us to use the majority of the workshop time to explore the story.

While engagement in the first two weekly workshops was positive, my co-Teaching Artist and I discussed how we sensed that autotelic engagement was missing; a feeling of deep absorption in and connection to the story. Based on our shared experience developing and co-facilitating process dramas for six years, we felt that a deeper level of engagement could only come about if we created space for aesthetic engagement, where “the percipient ‘meets’ the drama at a metaphoric level” (Bundy, 2003, p. 180). To do this, we needed to establish conditions conducive to group flow, without regular interruptions to discuss professional learning. We discussed this shift with the group at the outset of the third workshop:

> Teaching Artist-researcher: Can we take off our teacher hats for the next 90 minutes? And just imagine we are students, individuals, doing this process together. And at the end we will put our teacher hats back on and discuss how you could use these drama strategies in your classroom.”
>
> (Workshop 3)

Participants agreed with this approach, so from the third workshop onward we reserved time at the conclusion of each workshop for professional learning discussions, rather than pausing after each drama strategy. This set the tone for deeper connection to the story for the remaining workshops, leading to autotelic engagement and group flow.

5.2 “We haven’t killed the serpents yet”: Building group flow through co-creation

Co-creating a post-text from week to week adds a layer of ownership and engagement to the ongoing story-making (Campbell & Hogan, 2022). As such, it is a key strategy in engendering and maintaining the experience of group flow. When a creative contribution emerges in a workshop through a drama strategy, if it resonates with the group and has dramatic potential, it will likely be interwoven in the developing post-text. Ultimately, these decisions fall to the Teaching Artists, who are attempting the fine balance of leading the way whilst walking backward (O’Neill, 1995). For a Teaching Artist, these aesthetic decisions or ‘playwright functions’ (Dunn, 2002, 2008) are constant and varied and must balance individual contributions, group dynamics and the demands of the narrative to sustain engagement and flow throughout the process drama.

To unpack these decisions, and examine how the dramaturgical decisions of the Teaching Artists and the creative contributions of participants are interwoven in this program, I focus now on an aspect of the story that emerged and became central throughout the process drama: the sea serpent. The pivotal role of the sea serpent in this reimagined story of

Penelope reflected a creative process that built from week to week, with ideas from within the group supported and reinforced by Teaching Artist-led offerings. The serpent has long been a potent symbol in myth and storytelling. In Jung’s analysis (1968), the evil animal often takes the shape of a snakelike monster that kills and devours all other animals. The motif of the sea serpent initially emerged in Workshop 2, and over time became central to the climax and conclusion of the process drama. A detailed table outlining how the story of the serpent evolved, through a series of Teaching Artist-led and participant-led contributions, is included as an Appendix.

The motif of the serpent first appeared and was discussed in a Mapping activity[2] (see Image 1). It was included in the following week’s post-text by the Teaching Artists, and subsequently became a recurring feature in various drama strategies and discussions. Participants decided that the threat posed by the sea serpents was the impetus for Penelope’s husband’s departure and was also a feature of the challenges Penelope dealt with during her leadership. In Workshop 4, Penelope’s ingenuity as a leader saw her instructing soldiers to shoot the serpents with an ice cannon (depicted in a Freeze Frame). In Workshop 5, a participant in role as Penelope foreshadowed the return of the serpents: “We haven’t killed the serpents yet. We have frozen them but they maybe come again so what we should think now is how we remove them forever.”

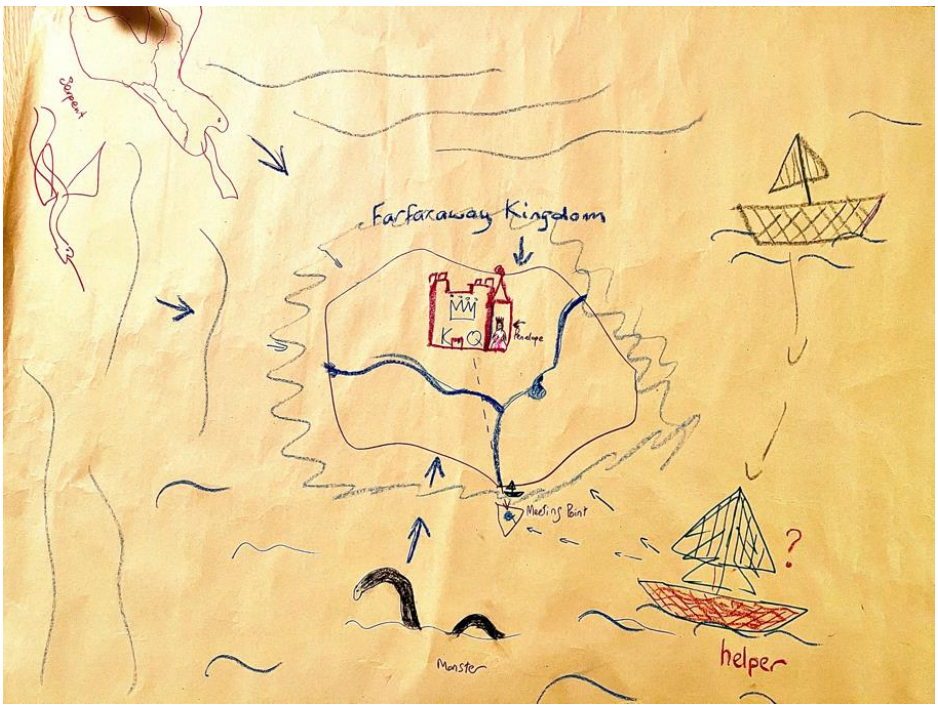

Image 1: A map created by participants in Workshop 2 depicts a ‘far far away’ island kingdom terrorised by ‘monsters’ and ‘serpents’.

[2] Detailed descriptions of this and the following drama strategies can be found in *Connecting through Drama* (Campbell & Hogan, 2022) and *The School Drama Book* (Ewing and Saunders, 2016).

As co-Teaching Artists responsible for the overall narrative arc of the drama, we knew that the apotheosis of Penelope’s challenges as a leader needed to be explored in Workshop 6. However, the particular nature of this final challenge only took shape in our minds after Workshop 5, where participants initiated a discussion about how facing challenges makes you a stronger person. One participant had just shared a story about overcoming her fear of spiders when she was home alone with her children (including a dramatic re-enactment of the climactic moment, imaginary broom raised above her head). This discussion followed:

> Alice: Especially as a mum when your kids are in danger, it doesn’t matter, you know, if you’re scared or whatever, you’re just going to protect it.
>
> Co-Teaching Artist: That’s it, you know, if your child is being threatened, you know you could actually really hurt someone who is threatening your child, maybe even kill them.
>
> Leyla: So true.
>
> Co-Teaching Artist: That’s the mother’s instinct.
>
> Leyla: I have a phobia from animals. But I imagine if any animal that come towards my kids [Leyla gestures cutting the throat of the animal; sounds of laughter and agreement from the rest of the group] immediately.
>
> (Discussion, Workshop 5)

This conversation prompted myself and my co-Teaching Artist to determine that Penelope’s ultimate challenge would come in the form of a sea serpent kidnapping her son. Knowing that the dramatic stakes would engage participants, we planned the workshop to incorporate an acknowledgement of the emotional gravity of the situation (Reaction Circle), followed by an action-oriented sequence of drama strategies to focus on the steps Penelope would take to secure the safe return of her son by the end of Workshop 6 (Ritual, Advice Circle, Planning). The dramatic context featured a situation – a child in danger – that had been identified by participants in Workshop 5 as one that would tap into their deepest reserves of courage, thus raising the dramatic stakes to connect with participants’ autotelic engagement. The sequence of drama strategies was designed to enable the safe return of Penelope’s son by the end of the workshop, to ensure a sense of closure. This delicate balance of emotional engagement is key to building the experience of group flow as, drama is “not necessarily concerned with protecting participants from emotion… but rather to protect them into emotion. This requires a careful grading of structures towards an effective equilibrium” (Bolton, 1984, p. 128).

In the workshop, the Planning activity (a group writing/drawing exercise where participants develop a plan to resolve a dilemma in the story) led to a spontaneous group improvisation, where participants embodied Penelope’s actions, tricking then killing the sea serpent to safely

retrieve her son. It was a triumphant victory for Penelope, and also featured several indicators of a sustained sense of group flow, including shared intense absorption, less awareness of self, and a sense of emotional contagion (Walker, 2010).

The collective sense of meaning, given form in the developing post-text, was further enhanced by the contributions of Ellen, a participant who regularly brought in objects to the workshop space (see Image 2) which provided either a tangible representation of a story element (for example, a serpent figurine) or offered a new story aspect (for example, a ‘pink precious gem’ which glowed to indicate Penelope’s husband was still alive). In the final workshop, Ellen created a gallery of all the objects she had offered to the group throughout the process drama, complete with printed labels. Other participants photographed the gallery, an indication of the group’s collective sense of meaning and purpose.

Image 2: Ellen’s gallery, Workshop 8.

The sea serpent became a key motif in this process drama, serving as both the impetus for the drama and its climax. The serpent also served as a metaphor for the challenges – personal, professional and political – that Penelope faced and overcame as a leader. The serpent became so integral to the post-text that during a post-program focus group discussion, participants asked how the serpent featured in the original myth of Penelope. The sea serpent does not feature in the original myth, nor did it feature in the original plans developed by myself and the co-Teaching Artist. Our previous experiences as Teaching Artists indicated that Penelope would inevitably play a more agentic role than in the original myth, in which she weaves and unweaves a shroud until Odysseus’ return. However, slaying a serpent and saving her son emerged from the creative co-contributions of the group, creating a sense of ownership which supported the deepening autotelic engagement.

5.3 “I’m just thinking about what I act”: Autotelic engagement

Autotelic experiences are associated with a state of flow: “When experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present, instead of being held hostage to a hypothetical future gain” (Csikszentmihalyi 2008, p. 69). In the post-program focus group discussion and interviews, I asked exploratory questions about participants’ experiences of the process drama. In one-on-one interviews, I also used Video-Stimulated Recall, replaying key moments in the workshops. This approach has been shown to enable interview subjects to relive an original situation with vividness and accuracy, and tap into spontaneous impressions of engagement in specific moments of a drama workshop (Bloom, 1953; Piazzoli, 2013). In response to watching a short video of herself and two other participants sharing the role of Penelope in a Hot Seat activity, one participant commented:

> Shanifa: We were taking it seriously. Yeah, very serious interview. Yeah, and the questions and the answers [came] quickly, because we know what we were doing and what we're on about. So we could actually propose or give the right answer there.
>
> (Post-program interview, 15 June 2022)

This prompted Shanifa to reflect on how she experienced the workshops as a self-described ‘shy’ person:

> Shanifa: What surprised me is that, I don't know about the other people, but as a group I'm discovering in myself things that I wouldn't do normally, especially when it comes to acting and activities and freezing and all that. If I was to do that in a normal classroom, I'll be laughing my head off, or I'll be like ‘I don’t know, I'm not doing that’. You know what I mean. But because all the group is participating and they're doing it and I find myself doing it, but I'm learning from it at the same time.
>
> (Post-program interview, 15 June 2022)

Shanifa describes the experience of an individual in a group flow state, as the awareness of the self recedes and there is a surrender of self to the group (Walker, 2010): ‘but because all the group is participating and they’re doing it,’ Shanifa finds herself ‘doing it’ too. This suggests that for some individuals, a state of group flow may be more accessible than the state of individual flow. Shanifa describes her absorption in the drama activity, indicating that what she deemed as her usual responses of laughter or refusal to participate did not occur. It is interesting to note her final comment ‘but I’m learning from it at the same time’. While Shanifa’s absorption in the experience had surprised her, she continued to value the exotelic aspects of professional development. This was similarly reflected in Qadira’s post-program

interview, where she suggested that the sense of ownership of the story was instrumental in the group’s professional learning:

> Qadira: There is an ownership of the participant in the story and in the drama to get all together… people feeling ownership, people feeling that their voice is heard. So they are not really wasting time and learning and not able to give back to the subject, of course, they are learning.
>
> (Post-program interview, 23 June 2022)

As new creative contributions were included in the post-text every week, indications of participants’ autotelic engagement continued to strengthen. Spontaneous discussions before and after workshops were just as likely to feature the particulars of Penelope and her story as reflections on teacher professional learning. A theme that emerged strongly in the data was a feeling of joy, elation and enthusiasm felt and shared throughout group, also mentioned in Walker’s (2010) indicators of group flow. One participant commented, “I was thinking that this is not only a workshop, it’s also a time for me. So that’s why I feel fun and happy when I was there, because I feel this is a time for me.” After watching a short clip of the spontaneous group improvisation in Workshop 6, where Penelope killed the serpent and rescued her son, Aynur reflected on Ellen’s engagement:

> Aynur: …in the story, she’s [Ellen] forgot herself. Always. She’s in this story in that two hours. I’m a bit impressed about her. In that video, I am doing that acting, but I’m a bit, I am laughing like that, but she’s not. She’s seriously in that story. I never forgot that.
>
> (Post-program interview, 23 June 2022)

Aynur’s sense of respect and admiration for Ellen’s absorption reflects the importance of the interpersonal aspects of group flow in bringing about autotelic engagement. In this light, the experience of group flow may be strengthened by observations between and among individuals. In Ellen’s post-program interview, instead of describing drama in terms of teaching approaches or specific strategies, Ellen simply described drama as “engagement and connection”, and spoke of how she often thought about the story throughout the week:

> Ellen: I was engaged, everything I see ‘Oh, it could be part of Penelope’ and all that. And I would like my students to feel like that too.
>
> (Post-program interview, 23 June 2022)

Out of Ellen’s deep absorption in the process drama, and her acknowledgement of her autotelic engagement with it, came another layer of exotelic engagement. As a CL teacher attending the workshops ostensibly for teacher professional learning, Ellen had become

deeply engaged in the story, and she wanted her students to “feel like that too”. While Csikszentmihalyi (2008, 2014) outlined that exotelic activities can, over time, become autotelic, it is also worthy of reflection that a deepening sense of autotelic engagement served to extend and reinforce Ellen’s initial motivation to access teacher professional development.

6 Limitations

While this research has explored engagement and group flow in a process drama program for CL teachers, the following limitations are noted. The small sample size, while appropriate given this Arts-based inquiry sought to provide rich insights into the experiences of participants, limits the generalisability of the results. Longitudinal research could examine how the autotelic engagement of CL teachers in the drama program influences their use of drama-rich pedagogies in ongoing teaching practice.

7 Conclusion

Teaching Artists in language learning contexts are well aware of the instrumental requirements of participants who want to gain fluency and confidence in the target language, or, as in this program, learn new approaches to teaching language. However, the value of drama-rich pedagogies is only truly realised when participants can encounter drama at a metaphoric level (Bundy, 2003) and experience the aesthetics of the art form in a state of group flow.

This research found that ongoing discussions regarding the instrumental purposes of drama-rich pedagogies compromised participants’ autotelic engagement. When participants agreed to instead share professional learning reflections at the end of each workshop, rather than throughout, several indicators of group flow were observed. Fostering autotelic, or intrinsically rewarding, engagement is a journey enabled by the flexibility of process drama to respond to and incorporate the creative contributions of participants. In our approach, the post-text is a conduit for this, and creates an artefact similar to the concept of an *oeuvre*, defined by Knill, Levine and Levine (2005) as something tangible that emerges from a creative experience, a “gift of a work that carries meaning and value” (p. 11).

The demands on the Teaching Artist working with drama-rich pedagogies include, but are not limited to, balancing individual contributions, group dynamics and the demands of the narrative to sustain engagement and flow throughout the process drama. The Teaching Artist must also be cognisant of the instrumental, or exotelic, objectives of participants in attending drama workshops, as these form an important foundation from which to build autotelic

engagement. As Shanifa said as she was reflecting on her experience of group flow, “but I’m learning from it at the same time”.

While Csikszentmihalyi (2008, 2014) outlined that exotelic activities can, over time, become autotelic, it is also evident that a deepening sense of autotelic engagement can serve to extend and reinforce a participant’s original exotelic objectives for attending. This was reflected in Ellen’s comment that she “would like my students to feel that [autotelic engagement] too”. Further research on group flow as it pertains to process drama may explore the role of autotelic engagement in group flow and how the particular aesthetics of the art form of drama provide unique and rich possibilities for group flow experiences.

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8 Appendix

This table outlines key moments in the process drama related to the motif of the sea serpent. It excludes other key story moments in order to highlight how creative contributions from both participants and Teaching Artists shaped the drama in relation to this motif. The drama strategies mentioned throughout this article are outlined in detail in the texts *Connecting through Drama* (Campbell & Hogan, 2022) and *The School Drama Book* (Ewing and Saunders, 2016).

Key story moment	**Teaching Artist-led**	**Participant-led**	**Post-text**
Penelope was a talented weaver. Her husband was a king. But there were many problems in their kingdom.	Workshop 2 – Mapping activity – in groups, participants draw a map of the story world. They are asked to include a body of water and at least one problem.	A map featured an island kingdom surrounded by serpents (see *Image 1*).	“Serpents appeared in the surrounding oceans; they swam into rivers and breathed fire.”
Penelope’s husband had to go away.	Workshop 3 – the threat of the serpents is included in the developing post-text.	Unprompted, a participant (Ellen) brings in a series of objects related to the story – including two serpents (see *Image 2*).	The group decides that Penelope’s husband has left because he is meeting with other leaders to discuss the problem of the serpents.
Penelope makes many improvements to the kingdom.	Workshop 4 – participants create a series of Freeze Frames depicting Penelope making improvements to the kingdom.	A Freeze Frame depicts Penelope directing a soldier to shoot an ice cannon at a sea serpent.	Among many improvements: “She ordered soldiers to shoot ice cannons at the serpents”.
After seven years, the people grew impatient and began to gossip.	Workshop 5 – in a Conscience Alley activity, participants advise Penelope	The participant in role as Penelope mentions that the problem of the sea	“We haven’t killed the serpents yet. We froze them, but they might come again. What we should do

	whether or not she should marry again.	serpents is still unresolved. In a participant-led discussion, participants reflect on how they would protect their children from threats, such as a dangerous animal.	now is think about how to remove them forever.”
One morning, a servant came in with terrible news: Penelope’s 10 year old son had been kidnapped by a sea serpent.	Workshop 6 – a series of strategies (Reaction Circle, Ritual, Advice Circle, Planning) guide the group through the crisis of Penelope’s kidnapped son.	In groups, participants devise a plan to rescue Penelope’s son. In presenting their plans, one group spontaneously role plays the son’s rescue.	“At midday, she laid out the string of pearls where it would catch the light and attract the serpent...” Penelope rescues her son from the serpent.