International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://www.ijea.org/ ISSN: 1529-8094

Volume 26 Review 1 April 30, 2025

Review: Campbell, V., & Hogan, Z. (2022). Connecting Through Drama: Drama and Literacy for Learning English as an Additional Language

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Citation: Sosland, A. D. (2025). Review: Campbell, V., & Hogan, Z. (2022). Connecting through drama: Drama and literacy for learning English as an additional language. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, *26*(r1). http://doi.org/10.26209/ijea26r1

Book Reviewed: Campbell, V., & Hogan, Z. (2022). *Connecting through drama: Drama and literacy for learning English as an additional language*. Currency Press. https://www.currency.com.au/books/education/connecting-through-drama/

As a theatre practitioner, K-12 drama educator, and arts education activist, I was thrilled to come across Campbell and Hogan's *Connecting Through Drama: Drama and Literacy for Learning English as an Additional Language* (Campbell & Hogan, 2022). This pedagogical guide offers navigable lessons exploring varied stories, themes, and perspectives for practical use. Through the use of literacy theory and scholarship, Campbell and Hogan (2022) ground the drama-rich practices in epistemological understandings. The innovative and familiar arts activities and processes will encourage drama practitioners and arts educators to continue to find significance and meaning in their work while also exploring cultural connections relevant to their participants.

Although similar to *Drama and Reading for Meaning Ages 4-11: A Practical Book for Ideas for Primary Teachers* (Harrison, 2022), Campbell and Hogan (2022) prioritize communication, collaboration, and social elements of literacy to support their adult communities' English language learning. Whereas other texts such as Garey's (2021) *Theater, Drama, and Reading: Transforming the Rehearsal Process,* York's (2022) *The Influence of Dramatic Arts on Literacies for Black Girls in Middle School,* and Baldwin and Galazka's (2021) *Process Drama for Second Language Teaching and Learning: A Toolkit for Developing Language and Life Skills* focus their drama-integrative literacy approaches on school age young people, Campbell and Hogan's (2022) guide stands out as one of the few resources supporting literacy of adults learning English as an additional language. A practical guide based on theoretical literacy and drama-rich frameworks, *Connecting Through Drama: Drama and Literacy for Learning English as an Additional Language* explores the ways *Connected*, a Sydney Theatre Company, supports adults (particularly from refugee and migrant communities) learning English as an additional language through drama-rich approaches and experiences. This guide will surely encourage arts practitioners, activists, and researchers to consider the comprehensive benefits of drama-rich experiences on literacy in varied communities.

To ensure clarity, I first review some necessary terminology ahead of a more expansive summary and critique. Campbell and Hogan (2022) reference several drama specific exercises or language used in their workshops that require defining in advance. For example, much of their work includes process drama, a type of dramatic activity similar to an extended or long improvisation. The facilitator and participants all play roles in creating a new story together. For instance, the participants could take on the role of factory workers at a town hall, questioning why the factory is being shut down while the facilitator is in the role as the mayor of the town. Process drama is collaborative and namely focused on the process rather than the product. Additionally, Campbell and Hogan (2022)'s text uses the phrase 'drama-rich' more often than language like drama integrated or dramatic activities, which describes experiences that are drama filled (Ch. 1, para. 4). These workshops and experiences may include dramatic

activities but using the phrase 'drama-rich' describes an abundance of dramatic experiences that may offer more flexibility than drama integrated approaches. They also use the phrase 'arts-rich' which similarly appears to describe workshops or activities that heavily involve arts activities (Ch. 1, para. 6). It seems that the focus here is on the abundance of arts or drama experiences rather than the level in which they are integrated within the workshops.

Additionally, Campbell and Hogan (2022) rely on relevant theory that helps ground their drama-rich work, including relying on the Heathcotian approach. This approach, based on the pioneering drama pedagogical work of Dorothy Heathcote, encourages teaching techniques such as "the ability to sense the general mood, the ability to look—to perceive the real situation" and "the ability to listen—to perceive the real statement" (Johnson & O'Neill, 1984, p. 30) all words and concepts on which Campbell and Hogan (2022) rely for the success of their drama-rich workshops and programming. This approach grounds Campbell and Hogan's (2022) work in formative drama pedagogical literature, allowing them to consider processes that have been used previously in creative ways and with varied participants. Additionally, Campbell and Hogan (2022) use Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogic as a basis for the criticality of conversation and dialogue between participants, as it allows for varied perspectives, while not silencing any particular voices.

Campbell and Hogan (2022) break down this book into parts. Part I includes three chapters that detail the *Connected* theatre program, literature and background on the concepts of literacy identity and agency, and warm-up activities and drama strategies used in their workshops. Part II highlights nine stories that are the basis of drama-rich literacy workshops, with step-by-step guides on each lesson. Below, I review each section in more detail, including subtleties that make this text unique and a worthwhile guide for arts practitioners and educators looking for more drama-rich processes.

Part 1

Chapter 1: The Connected Program

"The dramatic context of the process-based drama work became compelling enough that students would not so much shed their anxiety but temporarily transcend it, and communicate with more English than the classroom teacher knew they possessed" (Campbell & Hogan, 2022, Ch. 1, para. 2).

Here Hogan highlights a discovery she had as a teaching artist for *School Drama*, an arts education program for literacy development with school age children started by Sydney Theatre Company (STC) in 2009. In Hogan's early work in this program, she witnessed

dramatic shifts in the way children were impacted by the drama-rich programming, which influenced the development of *Connected*.

Campbell, also starting as a teaching artist for *School Drama*, had a similarly transformative experience, particularly with the use of folktales and myths, describing how "it was clear that connecting with deeper aspects of identity through storytelling, along with the range of heightened human experiences depicted in these stories provided a nourishing and positive educational encounter" (Campbell & Hogan, 2022, Ch. 1, para. 3). These experiences, expressly infusing folktales into the drama experience led to the development of *Adult Drama and Literacy,* later named *Connected.*

Connected participants range from 18 to 70+ years and are mostly of refugee or migrant backgrounds with a mix of genders and a range of languages and cultural identities. Levels of English proficiency range from beginners to fluency. *Connected* programs usually take six or seven sessions that are about 90 minutes each but can (and have been done in) shorter intensives that could last two to three days.

To ground their work in scholarship, Campbell and Hogan (2022) have used findings about the problems faced by Australian migrants with limited English speaking skills to prioritize social connection in addition to language learning as part of their programs (Blake, Bennetts Kneebone & Mcleod 2019). Additionally, Campbell and Hogan (2022) acknowledge a large body of research on the effectiveness of drama-rich educational experiences in learning an additional language with findings including greater motivation, questioning and turn-taking, foreign language anxiety, intercultural competences and agency (Liu, 2002; Stinson, 2008, Dunn & Stinson, 2011; Dutton et al., 2018; Kao and O'Neill, 1998; Piazzoli, 2011, 2018; Stinson & Piazzoli, 2013; Stinson & Winston, 2011; Winston, 2012).

In describing the goals of *Connected*, there is a clear emphasis on creating low-anxiety situations, enjoyable experiences, and meaningful interactions. Campbell and Hogan (2022) focus on building confidence and motivation, clarifying that the physicality of gestures and body language are as much a part of the language learning experience as are verbal communication or written expressions. *Connected* also differentiates itself from typical language learning classes as it employs the use of imagination and imaginative play; Campbell and Hogan (2022) suggest that it allows for a wider range of emotions, creativity and language. Additionally, through imaginative play and the use of fictional characters, *Connected* is able to create distancing, a type of scaffolding of emotion that creates a divide between reality and the imagined world as a type of safety net for participants (Bolton, 1979, 1984; Ewing et al., 2016). Lastly, *Connected* uses a pretext (an introduction into the drama

experience in the form of a piece of writing, photograph, poem, etc.) as the impetus for the workshop experience.

Chapter 2: Literacy, Identity and Agency

Campbell and Hogan (2022) define literacy as "the ability to communicate and share meaning with others through written, spoken, visual and embodied language" (Ch. 2, para. 1). As seen in their drama, Pandora's Box: A Whisper of Hope, Campbell and Hogan (2022) incorporate differing dramatic activities to promote varied literacy skills. For instance, the strategy 'Image Reflection,' where participants pass around a photo and use, "I see…" statements to share noticings and observations, promotes "talking and listening" and "vocabulary development" (Pandora's Box, para. 8). Within the same workshop, another activity, 'Sculpting' encourages participants to sculpt a partner's body as if they were made of clay to show positions of power, promoting literacy skills such as "talking and listening, embodiment" and "imaginative responses" (Pandora's Box, para. 10). Relying on their drama background and rooted in relevant research, Campbell and Hogan (2022) are clear about approaching literacy with a focus on social interaction, specifically speaking and listening skills over reading and writing skills. This focus encourages participation and representation, giving participants a voice and valuing their input. Campbell and Hogan (2022) share that an element of *Connected* workshops is the idea of translanguaging (García & Otheguy, 2020), where participants can teach their language to others and move from student to teacher roles while participating in the drama-rich programming.

Playfulness, imagination, improvisation, and joy are all at the heart of the *Connected* program. Through these attributes, participants can rid themselves of the anxiety that comes with getting words right or wrong when learning a language and participants have the agency to be creative, accepting the uncertainty of the improvisational nature of the stories. A teaching artist described the program as resulting in "laughter, curiosity, and delight, leaving participants feeling more connected" (Campbell & Hogan, 2022, Ch. 2, para. 14).

Chapter 2 ends with a note on ethical considerations, acknowledging the superiority of the English language. Campbell and Hogan (2022) aim to create an intercultural space inviting varied languages as to not presuppose the supremacy of English.

Chapter 3: Warm-Up Activities and Drama Strategies

In this section, Campbell and Hogan (2022) offer an array of warm-up activities and drama strategies from their *Connected* program that practitioners can use. For each warm-up activity they include its purpose, a detailed description of how to lead the activity, and extensions and modifications. Drama strategies are described in detail, offering subheadings for sections that

have varied types. For example, the drama strategy, collective drawing, can be facilitated in a variety of ways - students can participate in mapping, planning, or collectively creating. Some drama strategies include notes or extensions as needed.

Part II: The Dramas

Part II includes step-by-step workshops for nine stories rooted in myths or folktales. Campbell and Hogan (2022) clarify that these workshops are suitable for experienced drama educators and new facilitators who hope to use drama as a tool to learn a new language. As expressed above, the drama workshops are formatted and developed with the participants' experience in mind, maintaining low-stress, fun, and meaningful experiences that explicitly promote varied literacy skills.

The stories chosen derive from "oral storytelling tradition," and although Campbell and Hogan (2022) identify these nine stories as effective for their particular participant pool, they also encourage practitioners to adapt and modify them as needed (Part II: The Dramas, para. 3).

They include:

- Pandora's Box
- The Tiger's Whisker
- The Flight of Icarus
- One Grain of Rice
- Swan Maiden
- Atlanta's Race
- The Werewolf Knight
- The Golden Fleece
- The Selkie

Each workshop includes literacy outcomes and skills but for the most part, the focus is on developing speaking and listening skills. Each workshop begins with the following:

- Bare bones of the story: bulleted list of the key points of the story
- Resources: costumes, materials, props that are needed for the workshop
- Pre-text: one page 'script' of the story to initiate the dramatic activity

This introduction is followed up with individual workshops that include warm-up suggestions and drama activities scaffolded based on the development of the story.

Classroom and Community Applications

Campbell and Hogan (2022)'s text offers an array of resources to practitioners, educators and arts professionals. Not only does it include a wealth of resources on activities, warm-ups, stories, and pretexts, but it also conceptualizes its activities and workshops in relevant theory and research. As there are limited drama integrated programs for supporting English language learning for adult learners, this book offers drama-rich approaches similar to those in school age classrooms but that can widen the opportunities in language learning for adults.

Final Thoughts

Campbell and Hogan (2022) have written a thoughtful and practical guide to using drama practices to support learning English as an additional language with adult learners, particularly migrant and refugee adults. Although there has been interesting research about the use of drama practices to support English language learning (Brouillette, 2011; Brouillette et al., 2014; Greenfader & Brouilette, 2014), this research is typically focused on young children. Campbell and Hogan (2022) have offered insight into the usefulness of this work for adult learners as well.

I would have liked to hear a little more about how *Connected* supports trauma experiences that may come up particularly when working with refugee or migrant populations. Although the authors did acknowledge ways in which facilitators can attempt to steer participants away from difficult topics, it could be useful to include their recommendations for when difficult topics do inevitably arise. Campbell and Hogan (2022) did note that *Connected* workshops partner with mental health services and therapists, which shows great care and consideration for the refugee and migrant participants who may have left their home countries to escape conflict, persecution, or violence (Butler et al., 2011). Although *Connected* focuses more on literacy through dramatic activities, it could have benefitted readers to include suggestions or modeling on how to collaborate with mental health organizations when supporting particularly vulnerable populations.

For future research, I would like to see a model of the collaborative efforts between a program such as *Connected* and partner mental health organizations to pave the way for drama-rich programs to support literacy and mental health simultaneously. The testimonies of students and facilitators who have taken part in the *Connected* program clarify the transformative impact of Campbell and Hogan (2022)'s work and I implore practitioners and researchers to consider their innovative arts-based programs in future studies.

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International Journal of Education & the Arts

http://IJEA.org ISSN: 1529-8094