

# Why bother with arts-based methods in intercultural education research? A reflection on drama pedagogy to explore intercultural experiences

Katja Frimberger

**Why bother using arts-based methods?**

**Why bother using them in intercultural education research?**

**Why bother at all?**

I don't mean to be dismissive of my own approach but I think these are relevant questions. Why bother? Seriously. Any research project is stressful enough without it being complicated by some fancy methodology.

(Picture drama pedagogy which looks complicated and 'fancy')

If you are not an artist or 'expert', using arts-based methods - drama pedagogy for example - can be daunting. Maybe the risk seems to big. What if I mess up the data collection because I am not using the method 'properly'. What if something goes wrong? And the ethical questions. My research participants (and let alone 'me' the researcher) might be out of our comfort zone (emotionally, psychologically, physically) when engaging with these new, more embodied methods. Is this 'discomfort' ethically justifiable? Why am I using drama methods in the first place given that it seems to involve risks (ethically, methodologically) which might be otherwise avoided. Why bother?

In the following presentation I would like to give an account of why bother. I will explain how and why drama pedagogy has been used in intercultural (language) education for purposes of teaching and research. By clarifying the methodological and philosophical arguments which underpin *A drama pedagogy for intercultural education research*, I aim to show that 'risk-taking' and 'ethical dilemmas' should not be seen as a deficit to be tolerated.

***1.) Reason 1: Teachers and researcher (e.g. in the area of foreign language education) have bothered before***

The use of drama pedagogy in intercultural education is nothing new. Take the so called communicative and cultural turns in foreign language education. A focus away from literary-based approaches in foreign language teaching gave rise to communicative models of pedagogy which later also integrated the intercultural dimension. This meant language teaching wasn't solely seen as the act of imparting a closed grammatical language system anymore. The focus shifted onto the individual learner or what Claire Kramsch termed the 'intercultural speaker' (1997). Emerging pedagogies and concepts acknowledged that 'culture' couldn't be simply taught in neat packages as part of a mainly linguistically focussed language education. The cultural dimension was now regarded an integral part of and not just an add-on to language learning that shed light upon a country's food preferences, behavioural quirks and high literary outputs. Students were to become not only linguistically but also interculturally competent (e.g Michael Byram 1997). The aim was to educate students as 'intercultural actors' who could not only speak well but move skilfully and critically aware in an ever-changing intercultural world in which linguistic and cultural practices flow through complex social networks (e.g. Karen Risager 2006).

### **Drama pedagogy in intercultural (language) education**

And this is where drama pedagogy found a way in. As a consequence of the cultural turn followed the performative turn (e.g. Schewe 2013). There was now room for pedagogies which were more 'explorative' rather than 'didactic' and paid attention to the embodied dimensions of intercultural learning situations as they happened in the 'real world' (i.e. not only within the walls of the classroom) and between real flesh and blood human being. In other words, there was an academic and pedagogical interest in asking questions that couldn't be simply ascertained by methods that only paid attention to cognitive dimensions of learning.

*What does it feel like to live intercultural? How do we deal with conflicting, negative emotions and our prejudices, when living abroad is expected to widen our horizons and make us 'better' and 'more open' human beings? How is it that 'living intercultural' can be a volunteer journey of self-discovery for some bodies and a matter of survival or no choice for other bodies?*