Title:

Masks in Pedagogical Practice

Author:

Roy, David, Other University of Newcastle

Author Bio:

Lecturer, School of Education

Abstract:

In Drama Education mask work is undertaken and presented as both a methodology and knowledge base. There are numerous workshops and journal articles available for teachers that offer knowledge or implementation of mask work. However, empirical examination of the context or potential implementation of masks as a pedagogical tool remains undeveloped.

On a theoretical level, throughout both ancient and modern drama education and performance, masks have been seen as synonymous to the field of drama. The mask is an iconic theatrical symbol from the times of Socrates to Modern western theatres. Simply put, masks symbolise the adoption of the role and hold a central place in drama across time and culture. Within Drama (as a field in itself), the use of mask have been used by influential drama theorists explicitly in specialist drama training. In schools, however, whilst referenced in official curricula internationally, there is no formal development of pedagogies for mask use in Drama, and little to no research in its potential impact upon the enacted curriculum.

This paper presents some methodologies of 'how' to apply masks offered through presenting theoretical, historical knowledge contexts. Two teacher workshops in mask application and pedagogical potentials is also further discussed.

Supporting material:

Image 1 (Trestle Basic 3)
Image 2 (Commedia Leather)
Image 3 (White Masks)
Image 4 (Mask Workshop)
Image 5 (mask tableaux)

Masks in Pedagogical Practice

> The mask is powerful, dynamic, and iconographic. It can represent a fixed moment, a psychological motif or an emblematic emotional state. (Wainscott, R., & Fletcher, K., 2010, p63).

Context

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On a theoretical level, throughout both ancient and modern drama education and performance, masks have been seen as synonymous to the field of drama. The mask is an iconic theatrical symbol from the time of Socrates to modern western theaters. Simply put, masks symbolize the adoption of the role and hold a central place in drama across time and culture. Within drama (as a field in itself), the mask has been used by influential drama theorists explicitly in specialist drama training. In schools, however, whilst referenced in official curricula internationally, there is no formal development of pedagogies for mask use in drama, and little to no research in its potential impact upon the enacted curriculum.

This article presents some methodologies of how to apply masks offered through presenting theoretical, historical knowledge contexts. Two teacher workshops in mask application and pedagogical potentials are also further discussed.

Definition

It is important to define what is meant by the mask and masking, and indeed what is not. The mask usage in which this study is focused is upon training and perfomance within schools. While makeup is used as a form of masking in both ritual and performance, as it is classed as part of a separate knowledge area of production skills in drama and theatrer studies curricula, it will not be included in the role or definition of masks as part of this study. For this research there is no division between the mask in usage and the humanizing of the mask, as some practitioners do, those who refer to certain performance techniques as the Hu-Mask (Simon, 2003). "Before you put on a mask it is not inhabited, not alive, and therefore not a Hu-Mask (a human in a mask)." (Simon, E., 2003, p. 5)

Masking, the art of using a mask, can be classified into six clear areas (Foreman, 2000)

a) Setting Apart: human, demonic/spiritual, animal
b) An object: cast, painted, sculpted, modelled, woven
c) An action and being: to put on a face, attached behind the nape of the neck, held with the mouth, worn on the hand
   - Uses (or practices): magic, ritual, religion, war, decoration (drama), training (acting), performance (actors)
d) Function: social, individual, psychological
e) Purpose: dissimulation, mimetic, transformation, transference, induce fear

Further to this, Susan Harris Smith (Smith, 1984) further clarifies four key mask types within Drama and Theatre.

- Satiric Masks: Masks that suggest that the masker is spiritually incomplete.
- Ritual, Myth and Spectacle: used to suggest the masker is superior to the audience/spectator
- Personification and Projection: masks to make dream images and mental conflicts visible
- Public Masks and Private Faces: The masks used to represent the artificial social role, and the performer is unmasked when showing their true self. (Smith, 1984)

There is a core difference to what masks do and how a mask is used. Research into what masks do in itself can be subdivided into the effect of mask usage upon the spectator and the effect of mask usage upon the masker. This is separate to the functionality of masks. Functionally, masks can be representational, emotive, indexical and as a disguise. This functionality of purpose is separate from the effect on the spectator. Anthropologically, the mask works as a metaphor or signifier for the spectator to separate the individual performer and distance that perception to allow an alienation effect that, in turn, allows a suspension of disbelief (Pollock, 1995). In simplistic terms, through forcing the spectator to accept the necessity for the suspension of disbelief, the spectator can willingly immerse him/herself in the message and meaning of the spectacle and performance, creating their own meaning. Elizabeth Tonkin sees the mask as a means to articulating power (Tonkin, 1979). This analysis appeals to the psychological and cognitive processes, but, as Pollock suggests, this analysis limits an understanding in that "one must interpret this as the work masks do rather than how they do it." *(Pollock, D. ,1995, p.583)* Pollock further develops the concept of what a mask does.

> The mask works by concealing or modifying those signs of identity which conventionally, represent the transformed person or an entirely new identity. Although every culture may recognize numerous media through which identity may be presented, masks achieve their special effect by modifying those limited number of conventionalized signs of identity (Pollock, D., 1995, p.584)

> The powerful role that masks have is in its force on the spectator to interpret communication, using methods other than the norm, through the limitations the mask places on the usual codifiers of the face. This concurrently also forces the "masker" to consider carefully just what each subtle movement, gesture and positioning of their whole body is undertaking, given that the dominant communication form of the face has now been removed.

For theatrical purposes, Brecht's use of masks was a deliberate act of alienation of the spectator, as derived in part from Meyerhold and Piscator (Hodge, 2010), to allow the audience to be conscious participants within a spectacle. This is different from the effect of the masks upon the spectator as has been theorized in relation to Greek Theatre, which in part is accounted for within the cultural basis for the society and the pragmatic requirements for performance.

> Importantly, when viewed in an open-air space, the (Greek) mask was an effective way of instantly establishing a sense o f theatricality. The wearer of the mask is immediately separated from the spectators, and as the vase paintings show, just the simple act of donning a mask indicates that a

performance is about to take place. Lastly, in an open-air space that allowed the external environment to inform the aesthetic experience of watching drama, the mask provides a visual focus for emotional communication, and is able to stimulate a deeply personal response from the spectators. The mask demands to be watched. Meineck, (P., 2010, p. 121)

David Wiles, who has written extensively on Greek theater and masks furthers the idea that, more than a pragmatic idea for performance, the concept of ritual and respect for the context of Greek tragedy ideas gave the mask a purpose which links the dramatic to the anthropological (Wiles, 2007). The mask meaning also shielded the performer and spectator from direct identification with any political ramifications from performances, as it did with Commedia dell'Arte, allowing the performer and spectator to feel safe and immune from the performance (Fava, 2004). Yet as Evy Johanne Håland explores (Haland, 2012), the mask empowers, as well as protects, the performer.

Masks are the most ancient means of surrendering one's own identity and assuming a new extraordinary identity, whose power sizes (possesses) the person carrying the mask'. (Haland, E. J., 2012, p. 125)

Chris Vervain has argued that, with the Aristotelian concept of character being subsidiary to action, there were six basic mask types, easily identifiable by the spectators (Vervain, 2012). Similarly, David Griffiths has recognized that Noh and Commedia dell'Arte used masks as identifiable in the audience's minds as character types.

As with Noh, the characters introduce themselves through their masks and their costumes. They are instantly recognizable. Who and what they represent are seen before they are heard (Griffiths, D., 2004, p.2)

In the course of the development of the Commedia dell'Arte, there grew up certain traditions that held fast for many years. The rascally servant, the old man, the lady's maid, and the like—stock characters who appeared in every play—always wore conventional dress, with masks. In general these masks may be classed under four or five groups: Pantalone and the Doctor, both old men; the Captain, a young man of adventure; the valet or jester, usually called Zanni; the hunchback Punchinello; and sometimes an additional old man, somewhat different from the first two (Camagnaro, 2010; Fava, 2004).

Other characters who appear are Il Dottore, Brighella, Pierrot, Pulcinella, Colombina and various other Zanni. Many of these characters were based closely on the key ones listed above and went on to become individual characters in their own right. You can still see these characters performed today in pantomimes and puppet shows (often using the same names), and in soap operas (Grantham, 2000; Griffiths, 2004; Roy, 2009).

Western contemporary practitioners have engaged with mask work as a performance medium and even more extensively as a training device in the professional theater (Wainscott & Fletcher, 2010). From Meyerhold at the start of the 20th century, to Mnouchkine and Fava using processes developed by Copeau and Lecoq, embedding the practices of theater history and ritual, the mask is an important element in actor training. It was in the 20th century that masks became a specific tool

for education and learning, initially starting with actor training. Masks usage with actors and training disassociated the performer from his own personal id, thus both releasing the performer into being the "other," similar to the shaman role. Through disassociation allowing objectivity, the performer was also able to gain a deeper understanding of his own sense of self.

For usage with masks in the classroom, it is through the theories of theater and the methods of drama that the methodologies for how to use a mask are drawn. Within this context, there are certain core practices that appear to be agreed on by the majority of mask practitioners in the theater. Jacques Lecoq has been hugely influential in this through his exploration of different mask types in actor training. Lecoq further simplified masks for usage into five types: neutral, expressive, larval, character and utilitarian(Lecoq, 2000). He did not include symbolic masks, as there are very specific encoded gestures used with rituals such as in Balinese mask or Japanese Noh masks.

With all these forms, basic mask usage principles are applied. These basic principles have broad agreement across a multitude of practitioner/researchers into mask training with theatre (Appel, 1982; Fo, 1987; Simon, 2003; Wilsher, 2007). Lecoq's training methods were themselves influenced by Copeau. In training, Copeau's actors focused on certain aspects of technique: breathing, rhythm and physicality, with many of these ideas adopted as part of Lecoq's training method.

> Copeau became aware of the potential of the mask, both in actor training and ultimately, in performance, during his visit to Craig (Edward Gordon). It made his appearance in his work by accident – whilst rehearsing a scene at the Vieux-Colombier he despaired of an actress who found herself repeatedly blocked during a scene and unable to move – a literal freezing of the blood. Copeau took his handkerchief and covered her face, noting that her body was immediately released as an expressive instrument. It was her face that had been making all the effort. This experiment was immediately put to work in the School, using stockings as well as pieces of cloth. (Hodge, A. (Ed.)., 2010,p.57)

Copeau used the mask as a means to release the actor to control the physical body in performance (Braun, 1982). He used games and play, foreshadowing the work of Keith Johnstone (Johnstone, 1987). The noble mask became the basis for the use of the neutral mask that Lecoq with which Lecoq became synonymous.

Arianne Mnouchkine has furthered the theories of Copeau and Lecoq in the usage of masks as a training/educational tool for actors. In workshops and improvisational scenes, Mnouchkine offers actors a choice of mask that, once they are connected, informs the movement and costume they will explore as a character. Mnouchkine studied with Lecoq and insists on the performers' respect of the mask in the manner they hold and use the mask. Individuals using the masks form groups to develop scenes involving their mask character on themes directed by Mnouchkine (Hodge, 2010).

Based upon the work of Jacques Lecoq and Arianne Mnouchkine in particular, the following principles in relation to mask usage can be considered. Initially, application of physical exercises should be undertaken prior to the wearing of a mask to prepare the performers to communicate emotions through their bodies physicality without access to the face (Wilsher, 2007). As with most physical activity, basic stretch and warm ups are required. Once basic movement exercises are introduced,

Vervain recommends that masks are incorporated sooner rather than later in the development process.

> Scenes are rehearsed in small sections first without, then with mask. In this way I avoid the sort of problems encountered in Hall's 'Oedipus' rehearsals in which the masks tended to be neglected so that when the actors playing the main roles finally wore them some of their movements, while appearing good for naturalistic acting appeared fussy and unnecessary in mask. (Vervain, C., 2012, p.173-174)

> General principles apply, such as the mask being placed on the face and adjusted with the back turned to the audience. This is so that when the mask is revealed to the audience, the sense of suspension of disbelief is not removed; the audience is not given awareness that this is in actor wearing a mask, but indeed the individual with the mask is "the other"(Wilsher, 2007).

Wilsher goes on to expound on the need for a simplicity in gestures, and economy and clarity in movements, recognizing that performers will come in and out of character as they become more accustomed to wearing and inhabiting the mask.

> Enclosed within the mask, the actor needs work hard to establish a secure sense of balance and spatial orientation. Strength in the feet also helps compensate for the enlarged scale of the masked head. (Vervain, C., & Wiles, D., 2001, p.262)

Michel Saint-Denis offers a clear summary of mask usage and training that has been collected as part of a series of his writings by Jane Baldwin (Saint-Denis, 2009).

- The smallest movement of the head, the slightest turn, a look up or down, counts.
- Sudden movements, or violent ones, prevent the audience from reading the movement clearly.
- It is important to be aware of the most favorable angle of the mask in relation to the position of the body. If one turns the head too far, the illusion of the mask being part of the body is destroyed – one sees the edge of the mask.
- The same applies, of course, to throwing the head back exposing one's own chin under the mask.
- The sound of breathing under a mask is greatly amplified: one should not hear it. If the student is relaxed, his breathing will be quieter.
- To achieve its fullest expression, the mask needs action. But until he gets the feeling that he has become one with the mask, the student should try out simple actions only: walking back and forth, sitting down, watching something or somebody, picking up an object.
- There are certain gestures one cannot do in a naturalistic way with a mask – picking one's nose, for example. But one can find a way to pick ones nose, which will involve certain transposition from everyday life.
- In general, one must find the right sort of technique to make the mask express what it wants; this bears analogy to the technique one uses with a text where one gets the meaning from the text and not from one's own subjectivity. (Saint-Denis, M., 2009, p.178-179)

Saint-Denis reinforces, through these practices, that the mask can create a focus of discipline in rehearsal and a precision to all movements. Using such techniques in the classroom, with masks, allows the students a to develop rehearsal techniques as well as increased self-awareness of control of their own physicality.

Types of Mask in Drama

In addition to the development of physicality through mask usage, students can be supported in their devleopment of self identity through mask usage. From a psychological perspective, masks have been used through ritual and also in modern day therapy to allow both the masker and the observer to dissassociate from the individual in performance, allowing a self awareness of identity understanding to be constructed (Roy, 2015; Roy & Ladwig, 2015). Using the mask as a methodology to allow development of identity, students can explore the relationships and situations with safety. Boal's work of Forum Theatre (Boal, 1998) gives a practical methodology for students of drama to role play different alternatives, thus giving potential resolution to crisis in identity that can have a lasting effect on self-image. With the further addition of a mask allowing one to be "the other," this creates a stronger alienation effect from the personal so that children can develop a sense of objectivity in exploration.

Within secondary drama classrooms, there is usually a choice of two types of mask, full face or half mask. Full face relates closely to the work of Lecoq and the neutral mask as well as being relevant within the study of Greek theater. The inherent problems with this are that unless there is a clear and enlarged mouth specifically designed for voice projecton, any dialog will sound muted and potentially remind the audience that this is a masked actor rather than a complete character. It is for this reason that, unless specifically designed for dialogue, full face masks are often best used silently, developing mime skills (Vervain, 2012).

For students, however, the real benefit is that the full face masks forces an awareness of the physicality of the performance and thus encourages the students to consider their skills and abilities in communicating emotions and reactions through the body rather than relying on an overdependence on facial movement and reaction.
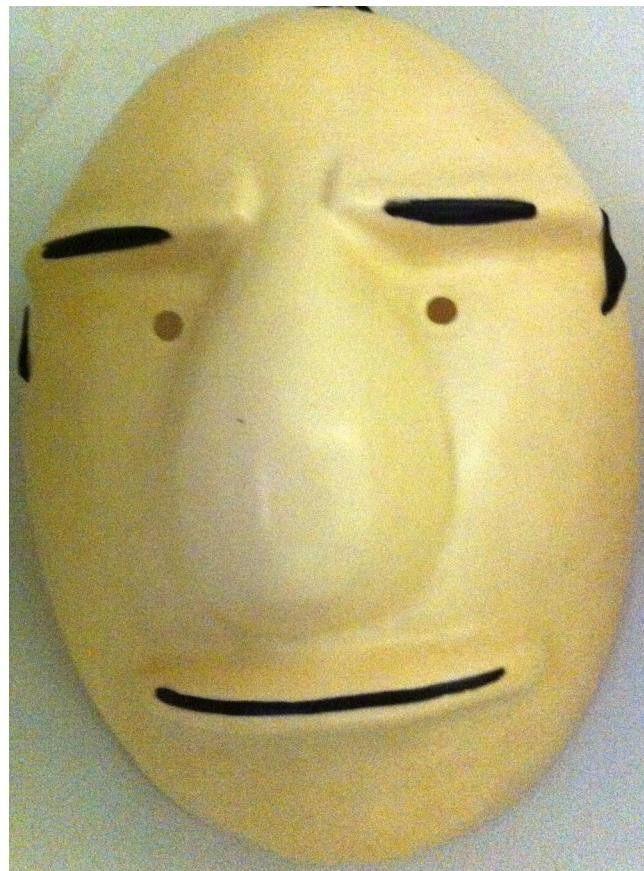
Figure 1 Full Face Trestle Theatre Mask

Equally as popular is the half mask best associated with the Commedia dell'Arte. While as a positive factor the mouth is freed to allow dialogue, the negative challenges are that half masks have a fixed characteroisation. Even with a half mask, when there is an attempt to keep as neutral expressions as possible in the construction, the fact that the actors' chin and mouth are revealed means that there is no neutrality, and a fixed character is created. This, of course can be a benefit to its use, as the character the masks suggest can make it easier for a performer to become a character as there is one already present on the face for them to build upon (Fava, 2004). While the mask does not necessarily impose a specific character onto the performer, the features do suggest stereotypic characteristics and will impose an interpretation of the character on the audience. The counter here is that such a perception may be contrary to the intention of the performance. "The fixity of the mask clarifies the character and constrains the actor to distribute onto other parts of his body the expressive variety of the character's intentions." (Fava, A., 2004, p.23)

Figure 2 Handmade Commdeia dell'Arte Mask (Leather)

Mask Practice Workshop Methods

As a research exercise into potential usage of masks as a pedagogical tool by teachers, two workshops were undertaken: the Drama Victoria State Conference 2013 (Using Mask as a Pedagogical Tool) and the Drama NSW State Conference 2014 (Masks: An Applied History). As part of the workshops, participants undertook basic activities to engage with masks whilst discussing how the activities re-enforce drama practitioner ideas and can be used as pedagogy rather than as a "mask" unit. The purpose was to observe teachers' responses to masks as a rehearsal tool (not performance) that would allow students to consider specific and controlled movements and blocking. Observations became field notes, recording activities and responses in situ and noting comments made by participants.

The activities were a summary of masks in history and society, followed by a warm-up on health and safety. The workshop, led by the researcher, explored how the audience imposed meaning on a performer. The processes involved confirming basic physical theater teaching practices as used in drama classrooms and applying methodologies suggested by mask practitioners such as Antonio Fava John Rudlin, and Trestle Theatre Company (Fava, 2004; Rudlin, 1994; Wilsher, 2007). Activities described in drama education texts as used by drama teachers from the Phase One survey data (Baines & O'Brien, 2005; Burton, 2004; Clausen, 2004) were all used.

The workshop structure was as follows:
1. Introduction – Context

- Ritual
- Theatre: Greek – Commedia dell'Arte – Meyerhold - Mnouchkine
- Society – Carnival – Halloween – Politics
2. Warm Up
   - Health and Safety
   - Knowing a mask
   - Best practice
3. Physical release: Copeau and Lecoq
   - Self-awareness
   - Isolated movements
4. Discipline: Asia and Decroux
   - Movements
   - Blocking
5. Communicating without words: Brecht and Brook
   - Tableau
   - Script subtext
6. Movement and meanings: Meyerhold
7. Rehearsing with masks: Mnouchkine
8. Tableau Part 2: Bogart
9. Next Steps: Barba

Each section connected theater practitioners to practice in order to contextualize the activities. There was an individual mask for each participant. Participants chose the mask they wished from two choices, a white comedy or white neutral mask. Masks were the same size and material.

Figure 3 White masks used in workshop

Introduction – context

There was an introductory brief PowerPoint offering a history of masks in anthropological and theatrical usage.

Warm up

At the start of the session, a very basic warm up prepared the participants for physical activities so as not to strain any muscles.
- Put feet together and slowly stretch the arms up toward the roof as far as possible, standing on tiptoe.
- Slowly lower arms.
- Place feet wide apart and let the arms and hands slowly pull the body to the floor, keeping legs straight.
- Slowly pull back into upright position.
- Now turn to the right, keeping the left leg straight and bending the right leg, stretch both arms out to the right and try to get as low to the ground without touching it. Slowly return to upright position.
- Repeat this in the other direction.
- Finally, start running in place and shake legs, arms and hands.

Neutral position

Participants were refreshed on the importance of developing a neutral stance as a method to show as little emotion as possible.
- Stand with feet in line with your shoulders.
- Keep arms relaxed at your sides.
- Stand straight.
- Keep legs straight but relaxed.
- Keep shoulders straight but relaxed and look straight ahead with no emotion.

Mask rules
- Never touch a mask when wearing it and facing any audience. Every mask should make the audience focus on the body position. By touching the mask, it reminds the audience that the face is covered and destroys their acceptance of being someone else. Masks have a "power" that touching it can destroy.
- Always put the mask on and off with back to the audience. Never try to turn the head away from the audience when wearing a mask, whether in performance or rehearsal, and never turn your back to the audience.
- When wearing a mask, children will become very aware of what each part of the body does. The wearing of a mask makes you consider how you place your feet. How do you bend your knees? How do you move your hips? How do you swing your arms? How do you move your shoulders?

Physical release activity

Group members chose a full-face mask. It could be neutral or have a character. They each looked at the mask for a moment, thinking about the potential character that mask had. The group members turned their backs away from the rest of the group. Standing in the neutral position, they each put the mask on. Each member moved their legs, body and arms into a way of standing that they thought suited the mask. The entire group turned around and faced the rest of the group to let others see them. They held this position for a few moments and then turned their backs again, to the whole group. While standing in the neutral position they removed their mask. Finally, we discussed what characters each thought others were.

Participants undertook the activity several times, each time changing body positions when wearing the mask. The teacher participants commented on finding many surprising and different reactions to the kind of person people thought each mask represented.

Discipline activity

The next activity was to have two volunteers in full-face masks. Initially, without wearing masks, they had a brief improvised discussion on how they came to the venue. Participants repeated the discussion wearing masks. Immediately, the non-performing workshop participants commented on the positioning of the heads creating a diminution of meaning in performance when the performers' physicality did not match the needs required by the masks.

The volunteer participants in this activity could speak only with their heads facing directly toward the audience and the listener looking at the speaker. When a speaker finished each individual piece of dialog, s/he had to look directly at the other performer. With eye contact made, the next speaker turned his head and spoke directly to the audience. This process continued for the entire scene/dialog. The audience engaged with each performance to higher level. The performers needed to rehearse several times to perfect this technique, but also commented on the power and impact they felt. Most importantly, the participants felt the activity embedded physical discipline and rehearsal without feeling onerous to the performers. The use of masks as a pedagogical tool to embed skill development in rehearsal for performers was clearly present.

Communicating without words activity
- This activity involves three participants wearing full-face masks. The three stand in a line, facing the audience, in neutral position: from left to right labeled M1, M2 and M3.
- M3 leans forward and turns her head to the left.
- M2 leans forward and turns her head to the left.
- M1 turns her head to the right.
- All three turn their heads to look to the front.
- M3 turns her head to the left
- M2 turns her head to the right
- Both M3 and M2 turn their heads to the right and fold their arms.
- M1 turns her head to the right, then turns their head to the front, lowers her head slightly and pulls shoulders forward.

Figure 4 Communicating Without Words Activity

The audience and the performers were clear in their understanding of isolation and bullying communicated through simple movements. Linking to Asia, Decroux, Copeau and Lecoq (Hodge, 2010), the groups explored how a scenario can be enacted, then re-rehearsed with masks, and finally, without masks. This was to explore how the middle section of rehearsal, with masks, changed and simplified the movements and gestures to become clearer and bolder and thus give purpose and impact.

Movement and meanings

The next activity was to create tableaux with the masks to reinforce the role of participants as very conscious of the positioning of each individual in all elements. One person in each group took on the role of director. This is important in that, while giving each group an objective positioning form an audience's perspective and interpretation, it also created a significantly inclusive role for any individuals who were psychologically uncomfortable with wearing a mask. The activity was to create four freeze frames that communicated a silent narrative.

Rehearsing with masks

During the rehearsal of these scenes, we collectively paused to consider the different types of rehearsal techniques applied to some groups' improvisations as they rehearsed, compared to other groups' clearly planning each scene before rehearsal. For some groups, there was a dominating leader and for others an equal decision-making processes. Some groups used ITC resources such as iPads and iPhones to photograph each freeze frame so they could use this as a reference to then adapt their positioning.

Tableau Part 2

The workshop participants finished their rehearsals and performed their tableaux to the other participants. After each performance, the group discussed the meanings intended by the group and the semiotics of performance that as interpreted by the audience. This included the images of the masks used and the heights and gender (when observable) of the participants.

Figure 5 Tableaux Workshop

The final process was to discuss the practicalities of implementation in the classroom. One of the most important issues for many was the sourcing of appropriate and cost effective masks.

Conclusion

The response of the participants supported the theories and thoughts of engagement from anthropology in relation to the semiotics and identity potential inherent in masks (Pollock, 1995). Participants noted increased awareness of identity, group cohesion and a shared collegiality. Participating in any shared group experience, particularly a creative one, can often be seen to develop similar responses from participants. Therefore, while a direct causality cannot be attributed to said reactions and mask usage, there is the potential of that causality. Participants were positive in their reaction to activities and felt there was a development in skills and a greater awareness of the potential for usage within the classroom. Participants stated that creativity is the core to higher order thinking and educational success. It is not something innate, but taught. Participants readily stated that, through masks, students will be engaged and focused and intellectually and emotionally stimulated. (It should

be noted, however, that participants came from the bias of previous engagement in drama education.)Practitioners would claim, if anecdotally, that this is a key role that masks play in performance pedagogy (Roy, 2016).

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