

# Healing through Acting: The Therapeutic Effect through Online Monologue Performance

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**Abstract:** Drama therapy is a form of therapy through creative expression by including theatrical elements in mental therapy which aimed to facilitate personal growth and mental health of a person. During this pandemic, mental health become an immediate issue to deal with for many individuals, especially for youths. As such drama therapy may be proven to be more relevant than ever to maintain mental health during such a tumultuous time. This study aims to explore the application of dramatic therapy in class setting, particularly in an online environment, and what kind of therapeutic effects acquired (if any) by the students who participated in it. By using the concept of dramatic reality theory by Susana Pendzik, this research will mainly focus on the process of how dramatic therapy can be implemented in online drama class, particularly through online monologue performance. The method used in this research is qualitative and library research by conducting performance session, questionnaire, and extended interview. The findings of this research may provide new insights on how dramatic therapy can be used in a drama class and help students to cope personal issues, improving their performance skills and contributing to their personal growth.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Drama is one form of literature that brings reality into the world of stage. Many dramatists try to capture what happened around them, it can be problems, issues, or ideas that they found in the society, and bring them on the stage. They might have different purposes in presenting their stories on the stage, but the readers and the audience will get the whole idea from the drama that they watch. This concept makes drama as the most popular genre of literature, because it can serve as a form of entertainment and social commentary. Besides that, it is easy to be understood by any level of people in the society.

Looking back to history, drama is seen as an important tool used in traditional and religious rituals, such as in ancient Greece. In Indonesia, we can find that some tribes use drama as a media of traditional rituals. Drama was also used as a media of religious teaching; it can be seen in the performance of wayang which was used to teach Islamic values. Based on what being mentioned

above, we can see that drama has been used as an effective media to convey purposes since long time ago. Nowadays, drama is also used as media of therapy. It is used to help people to create another reality, which is called dramatic reality, that enables people to deal with their problems in the new reality. The goal of this practice is to help people with their problems by using drama as a media of creating another reality to face their personal issues.

Based on this idea, we are going to apply the concept of dramatic therapy to one of our classes that is Theatre Production class and find how acting in a drama could have therapeutic effects towards the performers, in this case our students during this pandemic and online teaching environment. The goal of this class is to learn about drama, acting and producing a drama performance, so it is quite difficult for not only for the lecturer but also the students, because you have to adjust from offline to online drama performance. We also find that these chaotic and uncertain condition effects our students' mental health. Because this condition, we try to use dramatic therapy in our class setting to help our

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students to be able to release their emotion and burden.

For the half of the semester they will learn about drama and acting, so in the midterm exam the students are going to create and perform a monologue performance. At the end of the semester, the students are going to produce a drama performance. We are going to apply dramatic therapy to help our students with their personal and interpersonal issues. This is done during the first half of the semester, when the students are writing and preparing their monologue performance. The goal of this dramatic therapy is not to cure any mental illness, but to help them to cope with their problems by facing and understanding the problems, and try to find the solution, so they will have personal growth.

## 2 METHODS AND MATERIALS

In order to carry out this study, a qualitative approach is going to be used in this research in order to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by research subjects holistically, by describing it in the form of words and language, in a special natural context by utilizing various scientific methods (Moleong, 2010). The use of this qualitative approach helped the researchers in gathering various information related to the implementation of drama therapy in students' monologue and what are the effect of monologue for the students. The instruments of qualitative research were the researchers themselves, who acted as data collectors. The methods that we are going to use are observation, questioner, and interview. Moleong (2010) explains that researchers are planners, executors of data collection, analyzers and interpreters of data, and reporters of research results. By using this method, this study aims to explore the application of dramatic therapy in class setting, particularly in an online environment, and what kind of therapeutic effects acquired (if any) by the students who participated in it.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This research will be based on Theory of Dramatic Reality which is posit by Susana Pendzik (2006) on the therapeutic functions of Drama Therapy. According to her argument, Dramatic Reality is "an island of imagination that becomes apparent in the midst of actual life" which means that dramatic reality is formed when a person's fantasy or

imagination, which is private in nature, made visible and experienced as alternative form of reality that are different from the participants ordinary reality. The process is shown from the Figure 1:

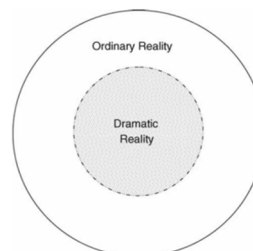


Figure 1: Diagram of dramatic reality and ordinary reality.

Pendzik further stated that drama therapy involves contents which were created from the participants' personal/inter-personal issues that they experienced in their ordinary reality that are projected into the dramatic reality. In dramatic reality, those issues are going through the process of expression, exploration, being looked at, and owning. The process of expression refers to the act of channeling one's experience which is done by choosing the highly-personalized contents that they created themselves. The exploration process is the process of creation and transformation of the contents in the form of script writing and rehearsing that supports the eventual performances. The process of being looked at is the process when the performances is being watched by the performers themselves, by the supervisors or by audiences. The owning process is the process when the participants manage to acknowledge their interpersonal/personal issues within the contents by expressing it through their performances in front of the audiences. In the context of this research those issues were expressed in the form of monologue performances by the students. As a result, when the person returns to the ordinary reality, the issues may undergo transformation, providing a possible new perspective on how the person view those issues which is therapeutic in nature.

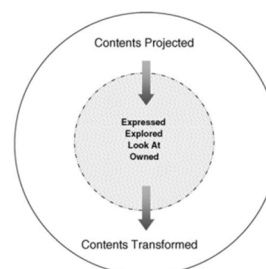


Figure 2: Diagram showing the process of dramatic reality within a therapeutic context.

Our study is the application of Pendzik dramatic reality theory which explains how dramatic performances give therapeutic effects for the students in the context of the creation of the contents in dramatic reality, the monologue performances that they did in ordinary reality and the impacts that it gave to the participants view on the issues afterward.

## 2.2 Literary Review

In terms of previous researches, there are quite an extensive amount of studies which revolved around the topic of Drama Therapy on the last few decades. The focus and purpose of those studies are quite diverse which reflect the numerous applications of which Drama Therapy could be used in many different ways. Thus, it also opens a great deal of opportunities for both researchers and practitioners to fulfill a wide variety of research gaps which covered many different contexts and frameworks. Some of the researches are focused on how drama therapy helps in affecting the participants life quality and recovery process. Emunah (2015), conducting a research by applying what she called 'self-revelatory act' in a theatrical act which is defined as a form of performance that is originated from the performer's current life issues that are in need of healing. Newman (2017) has done a research that focused on how drama therapy could help people to recreate their identities as well as helping them to cope up with their addiction problems. Meanwhile, Godfrey and Haythorne (2013) conducted a qualitative research to find the benefits of drama therapy for young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through the feedbacks from the parents and teachers after the treatments were finished. On the same vein, Lewis and Banerjee (2013) are using stories to the engage young people with ASD in a positive therapy, which benefits their emotional, psychological and social development. Gordon, et.al, (2017) research revolved around the application of Drama Therapy of using Clown Therapy model to help substance addicts in their rehabilitation and recovery process. From Wu (2020) it is revealed how drama therapy techniques could also be applied as an early intervention in to help developing cognitive abilities for children with disabilities. While Jaaniste, et.al. (2015) conducted a pilot research which aims to find out how the application of Drama Therapy affected the Quality of Life (QoL) on the elderly that suffers from moderate dementia by using the mixed qualitative and quantitative method in Australia.

Meanwhile, some studies focused more on the application of Drama Therapy in classroom settings for many different purposes. Butler (2017) tried to focuses her study on the intersection between of education and therapy in a drama therapy classroom in which the students often created personal affective materials based on their lived experiences during the learning process that sometimes blur the line between therapy and education. Chang, at, al. (2019) applied drama therapy activities to four counseling groups which consist of 12 high-risk college students from Taiwan. The study found that by using drama therapy, it enhances the participants' self-awareness and self-expression abilities as it allows them to express their hidden feelings into perceived actions by other group members. The literary reviews above shows that our research could fill the gap in the application of drama therapy as research which focused on drama therapy in Indonesia settings is quite rare. Moreover, none of the studies above were specifically focused on the application of drama therapy by using monologue in college classroom setting which further justified the necessity of our studies to further enriching the application of drama therapy for young people education.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of discussion is going to focus mainly on the effect of monologue performance based on the result of the survey which was conducted after all 42 students have recorded and performed their monologue performance on Theatre Production course. Before we discuss more about the survey, it is better for us to discuss about the process of preparing and performing the monologue. In order to apply the dramatic therapy in a class setting, we asked our students to write a monologue script about their life, especially about the saddest or happiest moment of their life. We asked them to tell us about the past experiences and problems that they encountered. After finished with the first draft, the students consulted their writings to the lecturer. The lecturer must be able to check not only about the structure of the story but also the emotion of the story and hidden feeling from it. It is important because a monologue require you to be honest to your audience, so you are able to use your story to engage with your audience, and even make them to feel your emotion. After your students finished with their monologue script, the next step is to ask them to have individual practice with their supervisor or

lecturer. This is an important part because you have to be able to trigger your students to be able to pour out their emotion about the story that they are going to perform. Here, they were asked to revisit their past and try to remember about their feeling and the situation at that time. After 2 or 3 sessions of individual practice, you can ask your students to read their monologue in a small group which consist of 2 or 3 students. It is better if your students could choose the members of the group, so they can feel relax and comfortable, knowing that they are going to share their story to people that they close to. The next step is to prepare the video of their monologue. For some students, it is very difficult to act in front of camera, but for some others, it is beneficial, because they are really afraid to act in front of many people. After they recorded their monologue performance, the next step is to share their video to their friends. Here the students were asked to comment about their friends' performance and find anyone who has the same problems or past experiences. During and after the process, the students were asked to answer a survey regarding the process of making and performing monologue.

All 42 students who took part in the course were participating in the survey and the discussion is going to revolved around the participants answers and will be analyzed via Pendzik's dramatic reality theory (2006). When the 42 students were being asked which process that they prefer between the scriptwriting, rehearsing, and performing, 27 students stated that they prefer the scriptwriting process, 10 students prefer the actual performance, while 5 people prefer the rehearsing process. These responses may reveal that in the process doing monologue, the actual performance may not be the one that matter the most for the students as they consider the process before the actual performance to be as important if not more for them. The discussion will start off with how the students perceived their experience during those three processes and what are the meanings of those processes form them.

### 3.1 The Meaning of Doing Monologue

The first question on the survey that was asked to the students is regarding their general impression/experience during the whole process of scriptwriting, individual rehearsing, and performing the monologue. There are three common threads that are acquired about what doing monologue means for the students based on their answers for the first question which could be categorized as new

experience, vehicle of expression and reflection, as well as personal improvement.

The first one to be discussed is monologue as new experience for the students. For all the students who were participating in the course, it was actually their first time in doing monologue performance that include the three parts process of scriptwriting, rehearsing, and performing. As such, doing monologue for the first time brings both positive and negative impression on them. Based on the students' answers, in general the majority of them actually gave a positive response to the whole process and described the whole experience as either interesting, happy, fun, or enjoyable. They felt that way mainly because the whole process provides them with different experience compared to the other courses that they took as it is focused mainly on practice and creating stories based on their own experience which is something that they generally like. However, at the same time some majority of the students also describe their first experience of doing monologue as confusing, challenging, and difficult. The difficult and confusing parts are mainly due to their inability to express themselves through performance as they are not used to perform in front of other students that resulted in anxiety and nervousness for some of the students especially in the performance and rehearsal parts. Furthermore, since the whole process was conducted online, some find the process to be difficult since they have to repeatedly record their performance in front of camera especially during the individual rehearsal. Meanwhile, others also feel confused in the scriptwriting process since it is difficult for them to choose the topic to be performed since the topic has to be based on their personal experience which some of them feel hesitant to share with others. However, in the end all students are able to choose topics/experiences that they feel comfortable to be performed to others. Such responses, both the positive and the negative, show how monologue as new experience has at least provided the students with experience that both intriguing and challenging for them in both cognitive and affective level that they never done before.

The second common threads about the meaning of monologue that will be discussed is monologue as vehicle of expression and reflection. Based on the students' answers, doing monologue actually provided them with a unique opportunity to explore and express the experience that they never thought could be expressed through dramatic performance. In the course, the students are

required to choose a topic based on a particular event or experienced that had happened in their lives be it a positive one or a negative one. By choosing personal experience as the required topic of the monologue, it makes the students able to channel the experience that they may not be able to tell others before or unable to express in a normal occasion. Some students stated that by doing monologue, they can be more honest to themselves. While other students claimed that doing monologue gave them the opportunity to recall significant a specific event or issue in their lives which enable them to re-explore the feeling and emotion from those experience. The process of how the students create contents based on their personal issues or experience into dramatic performance in the form of script and performance is in accordance with what Pendzik (2006) stated on how personal experience/issues are projected from the ordinary reality into the dramatic reality through the expression and exploration process. In the context of drama therapy, the process of doing monologue enables the students to “acknowledge and then integrate alternative versions of their experience into the narrative.” (2006) In other words, as the students created a highly-personalized contents, it is not limited only to the process of content creation to get a satisfactory grade in class but it also becomes a vehicle for the students to be able to personally express the unexpressed and enable them to reflect back on what had passed mainly through the scriptwriting and rehearsing process.

The third and final part of the meaning of monologue that will be discussed is monologue as personal improvement. Based on the students’ answer, the process making monologue has also improved some of their personal skills. For instance, a student stated that the whole process of making monologue performance also improve her English speaking and pronunciation skills since the process required her to repeatedly performed her entire dialogue in English. Moreover, a student also pointed out that the scriptwriting process make her to be able to think out-of-the box and able to use her imagination to create a content that she satisfied with. Some students also stated that the whole process makes him to be more confident to speak or express himself in public as well as giving them the opportunity to become more creative. Thus, the process of doing monologue not only help the students to express themselves but it also improves the students’ personal skills as it involved a lot of repetitive individual acting exercises that they do independently, in front of the instructors, and other

students as well as demanding a creative process from them.

### 3.2 The Scriptwriting Experience

This part of the discussion is going to focus specifically on what the students’ experience and feel during the scriptwriting process. As has been mentioned in the previous parts, in drama therapy scriptwriting is one of several transformative process which act as a bridge to integrate the subjective experience of a person in their ordinary reality into the narrative that they create in dramatic reality. As such, it is important to examine what the students are going through on this process in order to find out how their personal experience contributing in their creative process and whether or not the process of transforming the experience in the form of a monologue script has provided them with therapeutic effect.

On the survey, the students were asked to describe how do they feel during the process of writing their personal issue/experience into a script and their answers reveal several interesting points. Few of the students stated that the process of reliving the specific experience that they choose as topics and writing about it is an unpleasant because as they explore their feeling and emotion in written form, it is like reopening an old wound for them. Some of them also said that they feel uncomfortable and worried because they never share the experience to the public before. Some students also stated that they feel nothing or neutral when writing the script either because the event or experience that they choose has happened for a while and has been settled or because they have self-censored themselves in the writing process by leaving out some part that they do not want people to know. However, some students claim that writing their experience in the form of monologue script made them happy and proud of themselves because they feel happy if the story that they share could inspire or help others. Meanwhile, some other students also stated that they write the script as a form of self-introspection and they are able to reflect and learn from that experience by writing it. Among the students’ various answers, about 15 of the stated that they feel a sense of relief by writing their experience in the form of script because they are able to express the experience and make it into something that they and other people could enjoy. Thus, by projecting and transforming the subjective experience that they have into monologue script, the students may find the creative process in that

involve dramatic reality to be “actively invites, stimulates, welcomes, and shelters subjective reality” while at the same time “bringing them closer to a dimension of reality that can be seen and experienced by others...” (Pendzik 2006). In the context of drama therapy, it shows that the scriptwriting process works differently for each student but the fact that some the students feel a sense of relief during and after the process show how to some extent the creative process of transforming experience into monologue script “involves an act of creation – something which has long been acknowledged as possessing an intrinsic healing value.” (2006)

### 3.3 The Performing Experience

This part of the discussion is going to focus specifically on what the students’ experience and feel during the monologue performance. The monologue performance the final process that revolved around expressing, exploring, being looked at, and owning the contents that they have created on the scriptwriting and rehearsal process. In scriptwriting and individual rehearsal, the students are more focused on how they explore the contents that they created internally within themselves. Meanwhile, performing is different from the other two process because it requires, “a mutual agreement between parties – whether between performer and audience or among players: at least two different entities have to concur about the fact that the invisible world that is being manifested is truly material” (Pendzik 2016). In other words, the performing part is the part of doing monologue where the personal idea and imagination that has been transformed via creative process in scriptwriting and rehearsing become materialized in real world and performed not only for the students themselves but for others as well. Thus, it is important to examine what the students are going through on this particular process in order to find out about the impacts of the actual monologue performance for the students and whether or not the process of performing the monologue actually provide them with therapeutic effect in comparison with the scriptwriting process.

Based on the students’ answers, if the scriptwriting process becomes the opportunity for the students to explore the topics and experience that they choose internally, the performance part is the external moment of releasing of all the emotions, feelings, and thoughts that they expressed on the script into the real world for them. Some of

the students stated that the monologue performance makes them feel embarrassed, nervous, worried, or insecure since they recorded their performance with the mindset that people will actually watch them. However, since the monologue performance is conducted in the form of video and taken at their own home, it helps the students to reduce their nervousness and anxiety because they could actually do as much retake as they want which is different with the actual performance on stage. Also, some students are highlighting the fact that performing their monologue in front of camera instead of in front of real audience also help them to curb their anxiety as the real audience become imagined audience which feels more intimate for them. Despite of the perks of performing the monologue in the form of the video, it also has its downsides as some of the students stated expressing their frustration when they have to keep repeating the same lines over and over again and have to record the video over and over again when they make mistakes during the recording session. Moreover, some students still feel the pressure of doing the performance on camera since they want to deliver the kind of performance that can satisfy themselves and their imagined audience.

Akin to the scriptwriting process, some of the students are also pointing out the fact that performing the monologue actually made them feel a sense of relief since they are able to release some feelings or emotions that they are unable to express before in front of imagined audience. The monologue performance also becomes an opportunity to reflect about what they have gone through and compare it with their current state which made them realize how much they have changed since then. Thus, from the students’ answer, it is revealed that doing scriptwriting and performing of monologue gave similar effects to them. In both processes, some students do feel nervous, embarrassed and insecure with the idea that they have to share their personal experience to be watched by the other students. Although it has to be noted that for some students, recording and performing in front of camera do curb some of the uncomfortable feelings that they felt. However, at the same time, both processes also shown to bring both relief and joy for them. They feel joy from the idea that they could inspire others through what they convey in their performance and they feel relief because they are finally able to validate the personal experience and feeling that they never share to others before. The way performing monologue could affect the students in such way actually

supports Pendzik's theory on the therapeutic implication of drama reality via their monologue performance by "bringing them closer to a dimension of reality that can be seen and experienced by others..." which in turn allowed the "inner world to be expressed, in such a way that it validates subjective experiences and provides a bridge between them and the outer world." (2006).

### 3.4 The Post Performance Experience

This part of the discussion is going to focus specifically on what the students' experience and feel after their monologue performance and watching their friends' performance. We ask them whether after performing and watching their friends, they have different view about their problems and past experiences. 37 out of 42 students state that they have develop a new perspective about their problems and past experiences. Some say that by revisiting the problems and past experiences through their monologue, they have a second chance to analyses the issue and their past action. They realize that they could react better if they could see the problems from different perspectives. Some of them mention that they are grateful for their decision that they made in the past and they learn from their mistakes. Some students also say that they start to appreciate people who always support them when they were in their lowest point of life, and some of them learn that you have to love yourself and forgive others who hurt you.

The students also mention that they also learn from their friends' monologue. Some students find that they actually share similar problems, and this makes them feel that they are not the only one who experience it. Some students highlight that by watching their friends' monologue, they get better perspective about their problems and they even get solution or advice about their problems. Some of them also mention that they feel grateful about their life, because they have a chance to learn about their friends' life.

At the end of semester, the students were asked whether they have experience positive impacts after doing the monologue. 41 students state that they experience positive impacts after going through the whole process. Some students say that they know more about their strengths and weaknesses and how to deal with their weaknesses. Some of them state that they learn how to express their emotion verbally, and this help them to relieve the mental pressure and eliminate negative energy. They confess that now they are able to find a way to

reflect about their life whether it is personal or interpersonal issue and control their negative emotion and be able to see problems from different perspectives. They also add that they know that they have to face their problems not running away from it, but try to find solution.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

After the whole process, it can be perceived that dramatic therapy can be applied in the classroom setting. The goal is to help our students to overcome their problems or past experiences, in order for them to have personal growth and good mental health, especially during this pandemic. By applying Susana Pendzik's theory of dramatic reality, we can find that the students are able to use this dramatic reality to make peace with themselves by revisiting their problems and reconstructing their perspectives about their problems. The success of this monologue performance experiment can be seen from the result of the survey, that shows 98 % of students believe that they have undergo positive transformation during and after the process. Although it is time consuming, but the result is very satisfying because through the process of creation, our students are able to channel their experiences and undergo transformation which at the end help them to provide a new perspective on their problems or issues.

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