

Experiences of the impact of drama in enhancing student engagement



What are teacher's and children's experiences of the impact of using drama in enhancing engagement and learning within wider curriculum subjects?

Introduction - 619

This research was chosen due to how often it has been mentioned in the press recently; with stories about phasing out the arts subjects and others stating there is a lack of drama being taught in schools (BBC News, 2015; The Secret Teacher, 2018; Jeffreys, 2018). The concern is that the arts are being side-lined in the curriculum as they are seen as less important, but in fact they can offer vital learning experiences. Literature shows that often drama is limited to part of an English lesson or saved for a school play (Roy, Baker and Hamilton, 2015). Fleming (2019), however, states that throughout the last few years, using drama to teach other curriculum subjects has grown hugely – especially in subjects like history, geography, science, mathematics and languages. He states that “ drama education has always drawn on a progressive theories associated with child-centred, experiential approaches” (Fleming, 2019) and Baldwin (2012) explains that drama is a useful tool to change with the times and new problems that arise within society and the classroom, and therefore can be applied to most subjects through a child-centred approach. However, Fleming (2012) warns that when drama is used to teach other subjects it can become constrained to the learning outcomes and therefore be flat and predictable which defeats the point of using such an expressive teaching method for the children to explore the topic. Davis (2014) agrees, stating that conventions such as hot-seating and questioning in role are overused in a very limited way which further limits the learning for the children (Davis, 2014; Fleming, 2012).

My previous research during my undergraduate degree in Primary Education in 2018 looking at using drama to teach history in upper key stage 2 found that the children's learning and engagement was greatly improved when using drama (Miles, 2018).

This was completed as a case study comparing engagement and learning resources in lessons where drama was a learning tool to other lessons where other tools were used, such as artefacts and storyboard biographies, in a sequence of lessons. This aimed to give a clearer picture than stand-alone lessons as they are based around the same topic. The research was gathered through providing questionnaires with both qualitative and quantitative questions for all children after each lesson and through observations. When reflecting on lessons taught on placements in schools during my undergraduate degree, the combination of drama in many subjects such as English, history and religious education showed a clear difference in children's engagement levels as they found it more fun than an average lesson. It is also important to acknowledge the context of the school used in this previous research, as it was clear that the school was lacking in physical resources for lessons in many wider curriculum subjects. This led to planning lessons where the children were engaged in learning aids other than physical resources including drama activities. This collectively led to the question being specified towards the engagement in and learning of history when drama was used. The conclusion of this research project found that there was a great improvement in both engagement and learning in history due to drama sessions being more immersive and 'fun' as the children phrased it (Miles, 2018). Therefore, it is important to expand this research into other

areas of the curriculum and different contexts to see whether the same conclusion can be drawn. However, it is important to consider personal worldview in relation to this topic, as researcher's need to be aware of how this can affect my interpretation of the data. Denscombe (2003) states that the researcher's self plays a significant role in the production and interpretation of qualitative data as their beliefs and worldview can influence how the topic and questions are perceived.

Research Objectives - 181

The research question is as follows :

“ What are teacher's and children's experiences of the impact of using drama in enhancing engagement and learning within wider curriculum subjects?”

This research as well as the following literature review aim to develop the previous research in a wider sense across many wider curriculum subjects, such as History, PSHE and language, as well as looking at how drama engages children in order to help them learn and how this applies to the different subjects. This aims to show a positive conclusion on why drama is so important and should be kept in the curriculum. The three objectives of this research therefore are:

1. To examine teacher's experiences of using drama to teach wider curriculum subjects and consider whether it enhanced engagement and learning.

2. To examine children's experiences of learning and engaging with drama in wider curriculum subjects and consider whether it helped them learn and was engaging.

3. To evaluate the importance of using drama in teaching these subjects and whether it is more useful than other teaching devices to enhance engagement and learning.

Literature review – 2000-2500

Introduction

The question “ *What are teacher's and children's experiences of the impact of using drama in enhancing engagement and learning within wider curriculum subjects?*”, can be researched by considering how children learn overall, then looking at how drama, history, PSHE and languages are taught as stand-alone lessons before how drama can aid these subjects to improve learning and engagement. These different aspects are vital when looking at this question to gain a full understanding of the research and theories behind it before comparing it to the findings once the research is complete.

How children engage in their learning

There are many ways in which children learn, but it is paramount that children are motivated to engage with the learning in order to improve their knowledge. Children's motivation can be achieved if they are actively engaged with the learning. Practitioners who believe that all children are powerful active learners, build on children's interest and curiosity in the classroom (Vickery, 2014).

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Vygotsky (1978) stresses the importance of children actively engaging in activities in lessons. Solving practical tasks using speech as well as their eyes and hands results in children understanding the task and learning because they have developed the “unity of perception, speech and action” (Pound, 2005, p. 40). He also states that children interacting with each other is important as there are obvious benefits for both children when a child is helped by a more knowledgeable peer. Often higher achieving children are placed with lower achieving children so they can both gain something from the experience - whether it is teamwork, sharing knowledge or independence away from the teacher’s guidance (Vygotsky, 1978; Vickery, 2014). The idea of Bruner’s (1967) ‘scaffolding’ term supplements putting the zone of proximal development into practice as it relies on teacher observation and planning for the child’s needs (Pound, 2005).

When teachers are planning, it is important to understand that they are the main knowledgeable other within the classroom. Unlike Piaget (1952), who believed that children’s learning was dependent upon their readiness to learn, Vygotsky (1978) expresses that the key factors were not just existing knowledge or understanding, but were assisted by their ability to learn with guidance. Consequently, it is important to have a positive teacher-pupil relationship and classroom environment where children are able to develop this relationship (Brady, 2013).

McGuinn (2014) found that when a positive classroom environment was achieved, it created a more productive atmosphere from which the children were able to learn more. This was because they felt more comfortable asking questions, being the centre of attention and working in groups (Ecclestone <https://assignbuster.com/experiences-of-the-impact-of-drama-in-enhancing-student-engagement/>)

and Hayes, 2009). This positive environment affects all lessons and children's learning. Brady (2013) explores the importance of these relationships further and states that they are fuelled by a supportive learning environment that enables children to access positive learning experiences. Jacques and Hyland (2007) support this concept by researching the classroom 'climate' and how having this positive climate improves motivation, effort, behaviour and self-esteem within the classroom. Brady (2013) however, does still note that children will learn regardless of a positive climate or teacher-pupil relationship, but recognises that the motivation this brings is a powerful catalyst for learning.

Literary overview of drama teaching

From a very young age, children engage in play in all kinds of contexts and can explore the boundary between play and everyday life and how they link together (Winston and Tandy, 2001). Drama is often seen as a vehicle for exploring social issues that can occur in a child's life both in and out of a school context. However, as Winston (2004) states, over-emphasis on this factor can limit a child's drama experience. He explains that drama should not always be for exploring social issues but should be integrated throughout children's lessons (Winston, 2004, Tandy and Howell, 2010).

Drama is a powerful learning tool in the classroom, not just to be used as an isolated lesson, as it allows children to manipulate information for themselves, and thus provides a deeper understanding of the concept (Woolland, 2010). Both Winston and Tandy (2001) and Woolland (2010) agree that it is from the knowledge children learn from play, that drama

within the classroom can then be constructed. This creates concepts which children are able to utilise to further develop their learning (Winston and Tandy, 2001).

Drama provides a necessary space within such a structured schooling system to reflect on learning both inside and outside school in order to understand new concepts and develop prior knowledge (Winston, 2004). When engaging in this type of learning, children are not only gaining vital academic knowledge but also social and emotional skills (Eccles, 1999). By having this time where children see their learning as fun, it allows them to be more involved in their learning and become more independent learners, as they realise that learning can be an enjoyable experience and therefore become more confident (Baldwin, 2009; Martin and Dowson, 2009). Martin and Dowson (2009) researched confidence in learning through the use of drama in Australia and found a positive correlation due to increased engagement in lessons. Although this was a study from Australian schools, it still has relevant aspects when looking into schools in the United Kingdom, as Quin (2016) found similar correlations between drama, confidence levels and engagement in learning. However, different conclusions were drawn by stating that that pupil-teacher relationships encouraged this confidence as children felt more comfortable in using drama within the classroom due to the positive classroom environment they created. McGuinn (2014) had developed this argument previously stating that a positive classroom environment created a more productive classroom as children feel more able to ask questions to develop their learning.

Therefore, by using drama discretely and integrating it into other lessons like Winston (2004) and Tandy and Howell (2010) suggest, children are able to gain much more in terms of academic ability as well as social and emotional needs within the classroom which can then be applied to other lessons.

Literary overview of history teaching

Cremin (2015) states that creativity is aimed to involve teachers in making children's learning more interesting and effective, suggesting that teachers should use imaginative approaches within the classroom. Subsequently, history should be taught creatively in order to engage children in the learning (Cooper, 2017). She also states that "creativity and history are essentially interdependent" (Cooper, 2017, p. 9) as creativity is integral to historical enquiry for children to make connections, ask questions and evaluate information to reach a conclusion. Additionally, Pickford, Garner and Jackson (2013) state that through enquiry based learning where children are constantly creating ideas and applying their understanding, their knowledge acquisition is greater. Although this study was in New Zealand so is not directly transferrable to our school system, Churchill (2017) explores the idea that when children are fully engaged in the learning of history through some of these creative teaching methods, they look forward to learning which in turn increases their engagement and knowledge. Cooper (2015) expands by stating that a creative approach in history allows children to develop their social and emotional capacity as well as their cognitive development. These methods of teaching enable children's self-esteem to grow because they are more likely to generate individual ideas and feel valued for their input in lessons, which will improve their work as they are <https://assignbuster.com/experiences-of-the-impact-of-drama-in-enhancing-student-engagement/>

more likely to be engaged (Pickford, Garner and Jackson, 2013; Cooper, 2015).

Cooper (2007) further explains that children understand history through “constant practical application” (Cooper, 2007, p. 6) which could come from many different teaching approaches, including the use of evidence, artefacts, audio and drama (O’hara and O’hara, 2001). Nevertheless, it enables all children to engage with an idea themselves allowing them to expand their imagination and knowledge rather than only experiencing a verbal explanation (Frederickson and Cline, 2002; Conklin and Stix, 2014).

Literary overview of PSHE teaching – 400

Children learn values from an early age, initially from their families but also from peers, media, and then gain a deeper understanding at school (Halstead and Taylor, 2010). Evidence shows that children develop their moral sense within the first two year of their life (Halstead and Taylor, 2010; Kagen and Lamb, 1987) which is linked with their emotional and social development (Kuebli, 1994). The PSHE Association defines learning these values as the process through which “children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future” (PSHE Association, 2013, p. 45).

Boddington, King and McWhirter (2014) states that children’s active participation in lessons to aid their learning is more important in PSHE than any other subject. This is because it allows them to apply a sound understanding of themselves and their lives and welfare as they are more “

closely engaged with the subject matter than when they are solely listeners” (Boddington, King and McWhirter, 2014).

Literary overview of language teaching – 400

Drama lends itself to all of these subjects

Farmer (2011) states that drama is ideal for cross-curricular learning and is a valuable teaching tool in many subject areas. The National Curriculum (2014) states that drama techniques help children to identify with and explore characters, which therefore extends their understanding further. Baldwin (2008) suggests that drama enables children to operate multi-sensorily, rather than relying on predominantly learning through reading, writing and listening to teachers. When children are in the early stages of school, engaging in play and visual stimulation is central to development as children gain more knowledge through experiential learning (Bruce, 1997; O’Hara and O’Hara, 2001). However, O’Hara and O’Hara (2001) state this should not stop post Early Years as any child can gain more through visual aids or hands on resources. This is because it provides more opportunities to ask questions and discover information, especially in subjects where children have no first hand experiences (Dickinson and Neelands, 2006). Using drama therefore enables children to face the same experiences, hopes, fears and problems as the character which deepens their thinking and learning (Dickinson and Neelands, 2006). In addition, children learn vastly more when immersed in a visual experience, like drama, where they can interact with the past and develop their imagination (Klahr, 2012). Kerry (2015) agrees, stating that visual experiences are also important for reluctant learners because they

can see the purpose of learning opportunities and fully immerse themselves in the experience (Kerry, 2015).

Although there are many teaching aids that help children learn, using drama in any subject allows all children to be involved in deepening their learning. When children are immersed in play or drama, they are motivated to make choices, explore and ask questions whilst being flexible and actively engaged in the task (Cooper, 2015). Moreover, play allows children to act beyond their age and daily behaviour meaning they are able to engage further in their learning to gain a deeper understanding (Vygotsky, 1978; Cooper, 2015). Turner-Bisset (2005) explores drama activities that prioritise a deeper understanding of information, such as role play, hot seating, teacher in role and history based drama enactment. These facilitate the deeper engagement that children need in order to access more complex ideas and facts in history. Woolland (2010) states that these activities will be successful as long as there are no passive links in the learning, which allows children to gain the most out of the lesson. He also warns teachers about making use of precise facts and their authenticity to provide children with accurate information that they can engage with, and not letting this slip in lessons where drama is being used.

Fleming, Baldwin and Farmer

Research approach - 750

In order to research this fully, it is important to consider all aspects of research methodology. While there are benefits to both qualitative and

quantitative research methodologies separately, there are clear strengths to combining both into a mixed methods approach to researching this question.

The focus of the research will be to collect data to assess teacher's and children's experiences of the impact of using drama within the certain subjects. The data will be collected through observations, questionnaires and interviews. These research methods will assess their views on whether using drama within that lesson was helpful for engagement and learning, and why they think that was. The teacher's will also be asked their perceptions on cutting drama from the curriculum and how that affects a child's learning, and whether using drama in wider curriculum subjects is a way in which this valuable subject can be kept within the curriculum.

-Triangulation with children in focus group

- Ethnography

Data will be collected by ...

The quantitative and qualitative responses can be examined, and the children's responses can then be coded using content analysis, meaning that their written and tallied answers could be evaluated to identify common themes (Weber, 1990). Therefore, using a mixed method approach to research allows for meaning and understanding to be applied to the numerical data, and furthermore, the use of triangulation provides more valid and reliable evidence for answering the research question (Wilson, 2009). Finally, the validity of research can be assured as the qualitative data provides meaning, whilst qualitative methods provide objectivity. As a result,

the research set out what it aimed to do, meaning it provides an accurate, relevant explanation to the question being studied (Wellington, 2015).

Ipa

Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explain IPA as a qualitative research approach committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences. Creswell (2013) expands on this explaining that IPA seeks to get close to the purity of lived experience whilst attempting to interpret that experience within the context of particular social constructs which frame (and regulate) the lifeworld. IPA draws on phenomenology (the study of lived experience) and hermeneutics (the study of interpretation) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Again, like Laverly explained previously, this allows the researcher to gain a broader context for why people are acting the way they do or why they have given certain answers.

This can help greatly when interpreting data as it gives the researcher a deeper understanding of how they link to the question or the overall view from the data.

- Laverly (2003) hastens to remind us that this can only be explored when considering the link between this and hermeneutics (methodology of interpretation which is concerned with human actions), so the context of why this is their worldview is just as important and can therefore affect their unique ways they reflect on the world and certain situations.

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Creswell (2013) explains that IPA seeks to get close to the purity of lived experience whilst attempting to interpret that experience within the context of particular social constructs which frame (and regulate) the lifeworld.

During this research, the lived experience of the children taking part in these lessons will be considered both inside and outside the lessons in order to gain a full view of all the data and what it means. The context of enquiry-based learning through drama also needs to be considered in terms of how that relates the children and the data. Pickford, Garner and Jackson (2013) also state that through enquiry-based learning where children are constantly creating ideas and applying their knowledge, that their knowledge acquisition is greater.

It is also important to engage with the context the research is taking place in, and take into account that my personal worldview may influence the research by my teaching of the lessons. Jacques and Hyland (2007) support this concept by researching the classroom 'climate' and how having this positive climate improves motivation, effort, behaviour and self-esteem within the classroom. The classroom climate is more likely to be positive if the children are engaging with my enthusiasm - which therefore may alter the data, and this must be taken into account when analysing the data post-research.

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