

Conclusion

It may be argued that using drama as a means of improving children's writing worked because the children were:

- engaged with the subject material;
- able to comment on and improve their work in a safe environment;
- introduced to stimulating literature and go on to read more widely; and
- given opportunities to express themselves, in the first instance, outside the confines of the literacy hour, thus ensuring a degree of commitment to the subject matter.

Having a second teacher in the classroom benefited both the children and the teacher leading the work as it was possible to track specific pupils and observe how they engage with the subject matter. The observer was able to report on aspects such as children's language and their ability to work well with others.

Scope for further activity

The school needs to:

- develop a writing frame so that the children can transfer their newly acquired language on to paper without losing spontaneity;
- explore ways of using drama techniques to enhance other areas of the curriculum; and
- educate the parents about how to read with their children and discuss plot and subtext.

Suggestions for further reading

Starting Drama Teaching – Michael Fleming

Structuring Drama Work – Jonathan Neelands

Shakespeare in the Classroom – Susan Leach

Drama in Schools – Arts Council England

Teaching Literacy through Drama – Patrice Baldwin and Kate Fleming.

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Research Porforma - Pupil engagement with lesson Session..... Date:..... RESIDENCY DRAMA AND DANCE 2001

	Pupil engagement with lesson	Moments where creativity happened	Evidence of Engagement
Ritual contract/ownership	e.g. creating the condition and the preparation of pupils for entering into the activity, mental or physical in context of the rest of the lesson.	Eg.pupils awaiting/anticipation of activity in enthusiastic/positive attitude.	Eg.Pupils silent in a circle – as a ritual.
Imagination	e.g. stimulus/trigger to spark pupil responses – question, visual ref, artefact, teach aspect	Eg.willingness to respond and suspend disbelief – ability to invent and experiment.	Eg.image of group activity/dance verbal response Teacher note on observation of pupil response.
Discovery invention/experimentation	e.g. setting opportunities for pupils to explore activity. Pupil steps towards creating and learning.	Eg.pupil input and ownership, response in moving beyond the given context to make meanings.	Eg.How creatively have pupils responded to the material?
Evaluation progress & reflection	e.g. creating appraisal, inviting pupils to reflect. Questions inviting response in a passive role. “Can you help me out with?”	Eg.Willingness and ability for pupils to reflect on their own experience.	Eg. Each pupil makes a postcard statement - Discussion in question and answer session - Tape record pupil comments. Further creative work – writing, drawing, independent practice/talking outside lesson – playground analysis. - Pupils sharing in groups and feedback.

National Teacher Research Panel

engaging teacher expertise

This summary was commissioned by the National Teacher Research Panel for the Teacher Research Conference 2004, which explored and celebrated teacher engagement in and with research. All conference materials are available at www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ntrp

Using drama to improve creative writing

Aim of the project

To improve our drama teaching and raise the standards of the children's writing through drama.

Context

The project involved three Year 5 classes and their class teachers, all from the same school. A teacher from the school led the drama lessons.

Summary of main findings

- This study showed that the quality of writing improved significantly when drama lessons ran in parallel with literacy work.
- Children were more likely to read a book when they had explored it through drama.
- Children were more likely to write imaginatively about a text when they had taken part in a physical activity centred on it.
- Children's ability to sequence the events in a plot accurately improved when they had used the drama form.
- Drama developed pupils' critical analysis and creativity, and deepened their response to a text.
- More children got Level 5s in sats at the end of the study period than in the previous year.
- Evidence suggests that the latest cohort of Year 5 pupils have improved their writing significantly from their levels in Year 4.

Background

Priestmead Middle School is middle deemed primary school (8-12yrs) with approximately 370 children on roll. The majority of pupils are of Asian origin but there are 20 ethnic groups represented in the school. In 2000 the London Borough of Harrow decided to focus on improving drama at KS2 and there was a series of workshops designed to develop teacher skills. A teacher from Priestmead Middle attended the courses and took part in a three-year LEAP project to improve drama standards across the borough. The teacher was awarded a Best Practice Research Scholarship to fund the work she was doing in school. The research was carried out in three Year 5 classes during September 00 – July 02.

Teaching processes and strategies

The research had three main objectives:

- how could the quality of teaching in drama be improved?
- how could the imaginative element of children's writing be developed? and
- how could boys be persuaded to read more?

As a school we have noticed that the children's work is generally unimaginative. The catchment area is predominantly urban and few of the children seem to play outdoor imaginary games. However, our children love drama lessons and arrive for lessons enthusiastic and willing to participate. So we decided to tap this enthusiasm and attempt to channel it into their writing.

Getting started

At the beginning of the year the children had very little understanding of what a drama lesson was so time was spent laying the ground rules, such as standing still and being quiet when the teacher said "freeze" and not even whispering when others were performing.

The teacher used a formal approach at the start of each lesson generally using teacher-in-role so that children were able to see situations and characters modelled to introduce the theme or story.

There was also a short warm up activity. When necessary the teacher presented background information on the topic. For example the children had little or no understanding of life in Victorian England (Drama Topic 1) so the teacher had to feed them information of the period as well as teach drama techniques. The pace of the lessons was therefore divided into short periods of hot seating, still image or improvisation (see glossary) so that the teacher could pass on background material without the lesson becoming didactic and teacher-focussed.

Drama activities

- Each activity was kept short to keep the interest and pace of the lessons high.
- The children were expected to discuss each other's work in a positive way. They were taught to praise and offer suggestions for improvement. This would often involve discussing positions and correcting poses.
- They were led to make connections between physical positions and actions, and emotional inferences. This encouraged their empathy with sub-text and imagery. It also developed their understanding of the power and shape of the story. At the end of a year's work the class was able to make constructive suggestions for improvement of spacing the performers and how heights of positions can reflect power.
- A variety of texts was selected that enhanced several curriculum areas and highlighted some interesting literary texts. This selection was also chosen to excite boys and interest a variety of cultural groups.

Glossary

STILL IMAGE: groups devise an image using their own bodies to crystallize a moment, idea or theme.

HOT-SEATING: A group, working as themselves, have the opportunity to question or interview roleplayer(s) who remain "in character".

FREEZE FRAMING: Holding a position to begin or end a piece of drama to heighten dramatic tension.

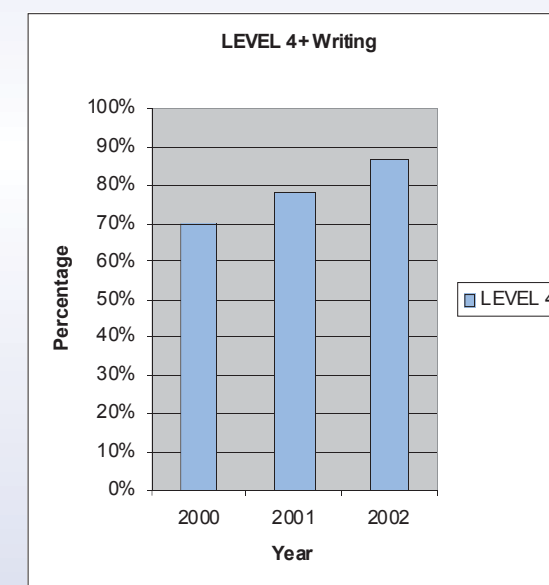
IMPROVISATION: unscripted speaking in role.

The Findings



- When the teacher used a flip chart to capture the children's suggestions for vocabulary, the children were able to recall some of the words in their written work.
- The children learned how to assess work, make and receive constructive criticism, and use that criticism to improve the final product.
- Knowing they were being assessed by a second teacher, who played a role in evaluating the strategy, sharpened the children's responses.
- The children's written work indicates that after a lesson using hot seating and soliloquy they were able to empathise with a character. Their writing revealed a greater depth of understanding of issues facing that character and how these issues might affect them.
- It was our perception that when a book was studied through drama techniques boys were more likely to read it –or at least the sections that had been amplified

The percentage of Level 4s in writing has steadily increased. However it should be noted that the research project was part of a whole school focus on literacy. The school literacy co-ordinator had also concentrated on improving written style, vocabulary and punctuation.



Research methods

The research method used was case study. There was no control group because there was enough support for the belief that drama improves creative writing to make it unethical not to offer all the children this benefit.

Two members of the teaching staff were present for every lesson: one to teach the class and one to evaluate. In general, it was the class teacher who evaluated the lesson by monitoring specific children.

The class teacher used a Research Proforma devised by Daria Wignell and the Arts for Schools team in Harrow LEA. The proforma focussed on pupil engagement with the lesson and creative moments. (For a copy of the proforma, see below).

We focussed our observations on several children per lesson. We were particularly looking for engagement with the subject material and wrote down anything they contributed. We also looked for times when they lost concentration. The teacher and observer discussed their findings after the lesson to reflect on strengths and weaknesses of the material and how the child's learning could be enhanced.