

‘Drama is like reversing everything’: intervention research as teacher professional development.

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Abstract:

This paper reports on a one-year project in a Singapore 'neighbourhood' school where the researcher was invited to assist the teachers of two secondary English classes to incorporate drama strategies to enliven their pedagogy. Few teachers involved had any prior experience of drama in schools and none had studied drama during pre-service teacher education. The project was faced with a number of challenges, most significantly the extent of teacher 'buy-in' for the research; this was influenced by the hierarchical nature of school administration, teacher resistance, teacher and community pre-conceptions about drama, and the degree of willingness to engage with change practices within the school. This paper discusses the challenges facing long-term intervention research in schools. It addresses issues of teacher commitment to the research, teacher-researcher relationships, and the challenges that impeded significant change taking place in this particular school context. It considers methodological issues for researchers who wish to engage in schooling contexts which are by nature complex, chaotic and diverse.

Introduction

How can we help 'non-drama' teachers use drama effectively in their classrooms? What strategies might they feel comfortable with, as beginning drama teachers but experienced teachers of English? How much support is needed for planning? And how much time will it take until they plan and implement drama independently? These are some of the questions that came to mind as I embarked on a year-long research partnership with some of the English teachers in a local school in Singapore.

There are particular challenges for researchers who wish to partner with schools and work in the real-life messiness that is inherent in long-term school-based intervention projects. Consideration must be given to personal and professional positioning and vulnerabilities, participant motivation, continuity of the research and support for systemic change. This paper reports on teacher responses to, and participation in, a one-year school-based research project in Singapore. It highlights the challenges faced by the teachers and the research team in this particular context and offers insights which are worthy of consideration by others seeking to undertake ongoing research in schools.

The Speaking Out research project¹

The *Speaking Out* research ensued from the *Drama and Oral Language (DOL)* research project (Stinson & Freebody 2006, 2006) which investigated the impact of ten hours of process drama workshops on students' oral communication results in the nation-wide English examinations at Secondary 4 level. The principal of one of the participating schools had been impressed with the positive impact the DOL project had on teachers and students in her school and was convinced that developing a similar programme in collaboration with her teachers would be of benefit. Consequently she approached me to undertake a longer-term research study in her school. Her vision for the school included the goal that, 'In time to come we will see ourselves as an academic institution which is open to conducting research' (Chen Lili², Interview, 15 April, 2005). She was keen to provide opportunities for the teachers in her school to work collaboratively with researchers in a long-term study, with the goal of capacity-building for her teachers being most significant. While she believed in the intrinsic value of drama and hoped eventually to introduce it into the curriculum it was, in particular, the potential to improve teacher reflection and capacity through research that held the greatest appeal. Of particular concern was the need for what she termed 'urgent' professional development amongst the staff, some of whom were open to newer ways of teaching whilst others were 'cautious to guard their old way of teaching'.

My motivation was slightly different. The DOL project had chosen to use local teachers who had graduated from our Drama Education Diploma (APGD) at the National Institute of Education (NIE), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. They had exhibited and maintained a commitment and passion for teaching drama that had lasted

¹ This paper makes use of data from the research project "Speaking Out: An exploration of process drama and its contribution to oracy" (CRP27/05MS), funded by the Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore (<http://www.crpp.nie.edu.sg>). The views expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily represent the views of the Centre or the Institute.

² In line with ethical research protocols the names of the school and individuals involved in this project have been changed to protect anonymity. Informed consent was gained from all participants (teachers, students, parents, and school administrators) and documents verifying this have been kept in the research project archives.

through the required satisfactory completion of seven modules, which were offered on a part-time (after school) basis. I was interested to see what sort and how much in-service would provide 'non-drama' teachers³ with sufficient knowledge and confidence to use drama independently within their regular English language classroom practice.

In consultation with the Principal, Chen Lili, and her Head of Department – English (HOD EL), Cheah Hui Ling, the Speaking Out research project⁴ was conceived. We began with two questions: how does drama impact on oral communication in Sec 1 and Sec 2 classes in this Singapore school? And what are the professional development requirements for the implementation and ongoing development of such an approach by general EL classroom teachers?

The participating school was a secondary neighbourhood school with a cohort of around 1400 students, mostly from lower-middle income families. The majority of students were Singaporean, with small numbers from the Philippines, Vietnam, China and Myanmar.

Our research team was to work closely with the teachers in the school throughout the school year and record the teachers' journeys as collaborators in the project. In seeking answers to our research questions we chose to use Design Research methodology (Brown 1992; Collins 1992; Collins, Joseph, and Bielaczyc 2004; Kelly 2004) and used emerging data analysis to inform and modify the ongoing intervention.

From the earliest stages of the project it was understood that teacher preparation and preparedness would be crucial to the success of the intervention. We were collaborating with experienced English teachers, working already in an established school context, and providing professional development in drama. The research team worked with eight English teachers (12 classes of up to 40 students in each class) to provide initial professional development and ongoing support. Four 1½ hour workshops were conducted at the beginning of the project and all English teachers were invited to participate in these, though only the teachers of Secondary 1 and 2 English classes had ongoing support for planning and implementation. We wanted to know how much time would be effective in preparing them for the introduction of drama strategies in their classes. In addition we wanted to know what strategies they found easier and were more comfortable with in the early stages of the project, and we sought to discover at what point they began to plan independently, without the support of the team. The DOL project had been structured around a series of process dramas (Haseman 1991; O'Neill 1995; Howell and Heap 2001) planned by very experienced practitioners and implemented by facilitators who had completed a diploma qualification in drama education, so the core of the enquiry related to the professional development of teachers who had no prior experience in drama pedagogy.

The Professional Development model

In an attempt to avoid the 'one-day 'let's get pumped' experience led by 'experts' in the field' (Conway et al. 2005, 8) we drew on a range of professional development models. Guskey (1995) and Kennedy (2005) point out the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of expert-led short workshops but caution that they offer few opportunities for individualization relating to teachers' diverse backgrounds and needs. Joyce and Showers (1980, 132) note that, although this model can 'boost conceptual control, skill development, and transfer [it] is not powerful enough alone to achieve much impact

³ At the time of this study there was no official curriculum support for drama in Singapore and drama was not offered as a course of study in the undergraduate teacher-education program at NIE.

⁴ The technical report from this project is available at Centre for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, National Institute of Education, Singapore (<http://www.crpp.nie.edu.sg>).

beyond the awareness level but, when combined with others, it is an important component'. Corcoran (1995) suggests 'joint work' including team teaching and 'other jobs that create interdependence among teachers and require cooperation' (p.5). Others (e.g. Fullan 1995; Imants and Tillema 1995) support the value of cooperation but warn of the dangers of 'contrived' collaboration. When planning our professional development model we drew on models of co-planning and co-teaching (Roth et al. 2005; Roth and Tobin 2004) and the coaching-mentoring model (Joyce and Showers 1982) of theory-observation/demonstration-practice-feedback and follow-up, with significant emphasis on mentoring (Ike 1996; Weasmer and Woods 2003) to provide ongoing professional support.

The after-school workshops were conducted with the aim of equipping the teachers with some basic knowledge about drama conventions (Neelands and Goode 2000) and strategies, and the structuring of process drama, to prepare them for infusing English lessons with drama, and for the co-teaching of a process drama during the drama camp. I led the first four workshops, during which the teachers were participants and were asked to think about the purpose and applications of the conventions to students' learning and English acquisition. At times I would step aside from the drama to discuss and share some theoretical principles, strategies for classroom management, and the purposes and importance of signing, enrolling, building belief and establishing the drama contract. No reading or assessment was undertaken.

Simple drama strategies and conventions were introduced. These included still images, teacher-in-role, pair and small-group role-play, circle drama, gossip mill and conscience alley; they were chosen because they were within the comfort zone of most of the teachers and were manageable within the context of the large classes and limited access to suitable spaces for drama work within the school. As individual teachers began to use these conventions in class they became more comfortable with their application and contingent behaviour management strategies. Further drama conventions were introduced on a one-by-one basis as teachers requested them.

In addition the research team (myself and three local teachers who were employed as research assistants) participated in the school drama camp in March. For the two days of the camp we taught workshops to all classes in Secondary 1 to model drama pedagogical practice. The teachers worked alongside the researchers as co-teachers (if they felt comfortable in doing so), or observers while the researchers taught the students.

Following the initial professional development sessions one member of the research team was partnered with individual teachers to act as a mentor and provide professional support with the planning and implementation of drama/English lessons to suit the context of each specific class and the 'comfort' level of individual teachers. Teachers were encouraged but not forced to apply drama strategies in their regular English classes. It was hoped that they would use the strategies, experienced in the workshops, when the strategy suited the learning context. For the remainder of the year the research assistants collaborated with each teacher as a co-planner and/or co-teacher when desired, providing professional support in planning and implementation.

Data sets

Each professional development session was audio-recorded, as were the co-planning sessions. Video records were made of two classes led by the intervention school teachers (Term 1 and Term 3). These were coded and formed the basis of analysis by the research team. The teachers were given the opportunity to contribute a 'talk aloud' reflection on the second video-recording, providing data on their responses to

the 'planned' (Pinar and Irwin 2005; Pinar et al. 2002; Posner 2004) and 'enacted' (Eisner 1994) curriculum experience.

Teachers and researchers kept personal reflective journals throughout the project. Teachers were provided with a thumb-drive so that their reflections could be collected regularly and uploaded by the team.

Changing practice

All teacher-researchers placed a high degree of importance on students' engagement in learning during lessons, although what it means to be 'engaged' ranged from being 'attentive', to being 'interested and involved' and 'participating actively' in class. Each teacher felt that in order to maintain this engagement, a variety of teaching methods needed to be used. Engagement proved to be the aspect where teachers were most positive about drama. As Chan explained, drama is 'activity-based' and not 'textbook-bound' giving him 'more avenues to try out different ways of teaching the lesson or teaching the students'. Mr Lim echoed this: 'Sometimes it is good to have something that is not related to the textbook'. Adam proposed that drama 'takes away the monotony of the lesson'.

The 'monotony' identified by the teachers seemed to stem from the more 'usual' ways in which English lessons were conducted. As Tan Pei Shan explained:

Usually it's just direct teaching, you know, there's not so much of the play element. [My classroom is] more of a worksheet kind of classroom. Only once in a while we will have some games and some activities. Yeah, so after we have come into contact with process drama I find myself trying to use more of these strategies and it's a livelier classroom.

By incorporating drama in the lessons, teachers were able to vary the way the lessons were delivered instead of being wholly dependent on the more 'conventional' teaching strategies such as direct teaching and using worksheets. Chan pointed out:

Drama is like play (and play is enjoyment) and most of the time children learn because they're happy learning, and they are participating, and they are ... interested. They want to do it. As long as they want to do something, they're learning.

Devi suggested that because drama is more student-centred, students become more involved in the lessons:

A usual English lesson will be more teacher-focused, and less on the student interaction. So, I think [in a] drama lesson there's more student interaction, more student communication. Yeah, and there's a lot of movement, so it's not only just sit and do work but rather they're always moving around [to] explore issues and everything. [This is] something that might not be done well if it's just a normal English lesson ... you know where they sit down and have a discussion.

Challenges to changing practice

A particular complication in this school context was that there was very little understanding of drama education, process drama, or drama pedagogy, though the terms were commonly heard. To most of the teachers, drama was about 'putting on skits', either humorous or with a strong social message, and any teaching emphasis concentrated on voice production or movement for characterisation. A significant challenge was to de-emphasise the perception that *talent* was a *pre-requisite* for any drama work so the workshops in which the teachers participated highlighted processes of exploration, meaning-making and collaboration as integral to learning in drama.

After the first series of workshops it became apparent that the teachers needed more workshop experience before gaining confidence in the planning and implementation of drama strategies within their class:

For someone who is familiar with the conventions it becomes easier. For someone who is not, then you become less ... you are a little hesitant about trying it out immediately because you know you are afraid that the lesson will be wasted or you are making a mess out of it. I mean I am the sort of person who has to ... maybe someone else would be more versatile, be able to do it. I am a little bit inflexible I guess (Suhailah, Interview).

At issue here is one of the quandaries for school-based intervention researchers who seek to support teachers in altering their familiar models of practice. All the teachers in this study were experienced and in their own location. They were familiar with the models of teaching behaviour expected of them within the school context. However this research asked them to step out from the comfortable and familiar, and the variation in practice was seen by some as being too much of a personal and professional risk. The teachers saw drama as a 'trick' to enliven lessons and a departure from the direct teaching and worksheets that was their normal practice, and struggled to recognise the learning that was taking place when there were fewer written artefacts to verify student progress:

So the emphasis is different. Drama is like reversing everything. Speak, speak, speak and no writing (Tang, Interview).

The principal was conscious that changing teaching practice was a challenge for many of the teachers and suggested more time was required:

You said that they would pull together several of the strategies and put it together in a lesson. I think that was rather big a task for them to do because they have not even mastered the individual strategies. Like you said, some of them did not have sufficient lessons to practice this. So it made the consolidation of all the different strategies through lessons rather difficult. It's an entirely different pedagogical approach ... maybe we need to give more time to teachers than just the time that we had in the one year. I feel if we had gone a little bit slower [the] results would be better (Chen Lili, Interview).

While the shift to the student-focused approach of process drama from the strongly teacher-directed methods that were common within this school challenged the teachers' understanding of the learning purpose and potential of individual drama activities, it is not process drama that was at issue here; any change in practice which involved more student activity and less teacher-talk was cause for resistance.

Positive teacher responses

Despite the challenges described above, as time passed, many of the teachers became positive about the benefits of including drama in their pedagogical repertoire because they noticed changes in student outcomes in their classrooms. They looked to drama to help the students write with more maturity and depth:

I feel that students are able to explore many perspectives of a person's story. They are able to analyze the characters better, with the use of drama conventions. Thus, when it comes to writing tasks, they have better content and definitely a lot of imagination. Some students are able to use better language and vocabulary words in their writing (Devi, Interview).

We had encouraged the regular changing of groups to encourage cooperation as a useful strategy. This led to an increase in the use of spoken English during classes:

I can see a significant increase in the number of students who speak English during that one or two lessons rather than only a handful speaking. So I think it has created an awareness or created a need to speak English to one another (Chan, Interview).

and

I think they were speaking more in English than their Mother Tongue because this time round they had to work with people of different races. Previously I allowed them to get into their own groups and obviously they went to their friends so the ratio mix was not there. So the Malays might be in one group, the Chinese may be in one group and when that happens, they will slip into their own Mother Tongue (Tan Pei Shan, Interview).

These teachers highlighted that, with drama incorporated in lessons, students were more motivated to participate. In addition, those who were normally quiet or constrained by their lower ability in language were emboldened to express themselves. Suhailah noted that students 'just took it as something they enjoyed and were very responsive, more responsive than they usually are' and that she 'didn't call out any names, they volunteered their response. She was surprised and encouraged that a student, who was weak in English, spoke up and gave an 'intelligent response' during a hot-seating session, and how pupils from Vietnam, Myanmar and China were able to participate actively, instead of feeling hampered by their weakness in the language as she felt they would be in her regular English class.

The teachers recognized that this was the result of drama being a communal activity and that, because students were working in small groups, more opportunities were created for them to respond to the lesson and to one other. Some acknowledged that working in role removed some of the fear or embarrassment that came with presenting and allowed even the more reserved students to participate actively. Suhailah explained in her journal:

With the use of process drama, I noticed that they had overcome their initial hesitation and shyness. I guess in a sense it had to do with them being in role.

However they still preferred to use 'conventional methods' of drill-and-practice. They were uncomfortable with the 'informal' nature of drama lessons where the 'teachers were having fun with them' instead of doing a 'proper' lesson.

If we do too much drama then they get to be conditioned to playing (Tang, Journal).

It was apparent that many of the teachers needed more opportunities and time to develop understanding that learning can take place in playful ways.

Behaviour management

Connected to the concern about drama being playful was the worry that teachers were perceived to be lacking control of the class when noise levels rose:

The management cannot tolerate noise so if we use drama, it's going to be noisy (Tang, Journal).

They were afraid of being seen as incompetent in managing their classrooms and therefore were not keen on employing drama strategies that might generate noise and movement (such as gossip mill and conscience alley) preferring to adhere to 'safer' conventions like 'still images' and 'tapping in'. This affected planning in that most planned, not according to which conventions were best suited for the learning focus but

according to those that would create the least noise. And then there were the classes that did not go as planned:

I was frustrated with the class because they did not cooperate with me during the activities/filming. I felt they only wanted to sabotage me. After so much preparation in the lesson plan, I have failed to conduct a good lesson (Aminah, Journal).

On these occasions, perceived lack of success as being a 'competent' drama teacher diminished the desire and motivation to persist. At the request of the teachers an additional 3-hour workshop with a focus on classroom management was offered at the end of August.

Exams

Teachers in Singapore are highly accountable for their students' performance in examinations. As a result, they tend to stick to methods that are tried and tested instead of 'experimenting' with a new and open pedagogical approach like drama, especially when it comes to preparation for examination.

Ok, huh honestly I think if given a choice, I will not adopt process drama because ultimately I have exams to meet (Suhailah, Interview).

Aminah stopped doing drama in class after one examination set of marks were released because she felt that it was time to 'focus more on written work' as her students had done badly for the test. Since the examinations focused on recall and written grammar, the teachers preferred to rely on their familiar drill-and-practice approaches as examinations drew nigh.

Most teachers tended to view drama as a 'fun' alternative to normal lessons. With examinations looming, they felt students should be focusing on 'serious work' instead of just 'playing around' or 'experimenting' with drama strategies. At the high pressure times close to examinations the research team responded to the teachers' requests to 'leave them alone' so they could focus on examination preparation. At the end of the project we calculated that, of the 40 weeks in the school year, only 23 were employed for teaching time, with the remaining 17 used for examinations, examination preparation or feedback, or other school events.

Planning requirements

The teachers felt that lessons with drama took a long time to plan. Suhailah explained that planning took a long time to 'think through the conventions and think about how' they could be applied. As part of their workload relief, the teacher-researchers had been promised two spare periods per week to spend in planning, discussion and reflection, but this time was frequently eroded by 'important' meetings or school events. Planning required the teachers to work carefully through each step and see that each step combined into a coherent whole. Tan Pei Shan pointed out that, for regular classes, teachers were not required to submit detailed lesson plans and would just have a 'general' idea of what they wanted to teach and usually work through pages of the set text book. She suggested that more experienced teachers had grown accustomed to a particular teaching style and did not see the need to undertake detailed planning. However, she felt that it was a good wake-up call for her as it was easy to become 'complacent', rehashing previously used worksheets and previously taught lessons without thinking about the specific learning needs of students.

Administrative support

Another frustration faced by teachers stemmed from conflicting signals they received from the school management. On one hand, the school placed a high emphasis

on examinations and getting good grades, while on the other hand, it wanted the teachers to 'experiment' with new ways of teaching. Teachers were caught in this 'tug-of-war' because, although they saw that drama could be an enriching experience for their students allowing for learning through discovery, the process was slow and teachers were pressed for time to prepare their students for examinations.

In the early planning stages the HOD EL was to be included as one of the research teachers. Internal timetabling made this impossible and this placed additional distance between the research-involved teachers and the head of department. The teacher-researchers noted her lack of direct involvement in the project and their own level of commitment diminished. In an attempt to connect the external research team with the teacher-researchers the HOD EL appointed one of the teachers as an internal liaison. While the liaison teacher was very dedicated and organised, she was the youngest and most inexperienced of the teachers. Consequently she had little influence within the group and the HOD EL was forced to remain involved and play an administrative role. As the year progressed she came to resent the additional administration that the research project entailed and avoided contact with the research team.

(In)-Voluntary research collaboration

Changing teacher practices is not as simple as providing new strategies. As Richardson and Placier (2001) point out, many modifications of practice require changes in the beliefs of teachers, as well as a cultural change in the way teaching is seen in the school and wider community. Added to this is the imperative for teachers to see a need for change and to desire to be part of the change process. The Civil Service in Singapore is highly bureaucratised, hierarchical and centralised (Salleh 2004). Here, teachers have been recipients of top-down changes where leadership is crucial in the management of all stages of the change process (Goh 2005). For our project it became apparent that the strongest inhibitor was teacher resistance that resulted from the top-down imposition of the research by the school administration. Despite the (mainly) positive comments noted above and the evident improvement in student achievement the most significant challenge to the project was managing the ongoing teacher resistance that emerged in response to the lack of consultation from the school administration, and this was never happily resolved.

At the first Research Briefing in January, the teacher-researchers seemed positive, engaged and, as far as we could tell, keen to participate in the research. In fact this was far from the truth. Because the initiative for this work had come from the Principal and Head of Department, it was important that the teachers *appear* enthusiastic and proactive. Colin Marsh (2004) identifies two attitudes of teachers who engage in curriculum innovation. The *consonant* teacher is philosophically attuned to the innovation or research and brings a personal commitment to their role in the innovation. The *dissonant* teacher is either one who appears to be committed but contributes little or deliberately (and behind the scenes) undermines the project or overtly shows their lack of interest and commitment. In Singapore the personal stakes in terms of Performance Reviews and top-down management make it very difficult for teachers to openly disagree or criticise a decision made by the school senior management. We were to discover during this research that the teacher-researchers were, in fact, quite antagonistic towards the whole project (though thankfully not towards the research team personally) because they had not been consulted by the Principal or HOD EL before the project began; while the research team made it clear that we were asking them to participate voluntarily, opting out was not possible within this school context. They did

not feel empowered to withdraw from the project. Instead it was important that they appeared to go along with it.

We were not given [an option to participate] although it says in the contract that we can choose to do it. We were told by the people here that we have to do it. ... No way out of, getting out of this thing that we had to do. So we were quite irritated you know. ... that kind of upset most of us anyway in the beginning and we were quite hostile (Anna, Interview).

When asked about this in an interview, the HOD EL stated:

I don't believe in saying that [it is optional] ...if you ask your team, your team says, 'No, I don't want to do this'. I mean given a choice nobody would want to do additional work. I mean, to teachers it is additional work, let's put it that way. Nobody would want to do that. But we have to sell it in such a way that ... they get to see that it is really of benefit to them (Cheah Hui Ling).

The Principal acknowledged the need for more consultation prior to the commencement of the project:

I expected teachers to feel uncomfortable; to feel that they are being watched. And I expected them to object to having to do this and I think it did happen in the earlier stage where the teachers felt that I did not consult them enough before accepting such a big project. And I had a long conversation with one such teacher and she told me how they felt: not that they minded doing this, but they minded [that I] did not consult them first and they were not given the opportunity to choose to be involved. Well, for me that is actually a very good learning point. I think if I were to do it all over again I could do it better and do it differently. At least to involve [the teachers] in the decision making stage (Chen Lili, Interview).

It was difficult for the teacher-researchers to see any personal benefit from participating in the project. The Principal had planned for **all** the teachers in the school to be involved in research in some way. Teachers not involved in this project were to participate in a concurrent large-scale action research task. In return the teacher-researchers were not expected to participate in any additional professional development (a 100 hrs per year requirement).

For this whole year, we have been telling them, this is your professional development project (Cheah Hui Ling, Interview).

However it was difficult for teachers to equate this school-based research project with in-service or professional development. Instead they saw the research as additional and imposed work. Within the school there was no accountability or reward for participation in the research project built into the teachers' workload. The other research projects planned to run concurrently with this one did not go ahead, leaving the teachers working on the *Speaking Out* project as the only research participants within the school. Other school commitments were, understandably, seen as more important and the teachers frequently were unable to meet or came unprepared, as they were extremely busy meeting deadlines or other internal school obligations. The research project was perceived to belong to the external researchers and the demands of the teachers' day-to-day jobs meant that they would fit in the research project if, and when, they could.

Teacher-researcher relationships

In spite of the frustrations described above the research team maintained positive relationships with the teacher-researchers, who acknowledged that the school circumstances had made things difficult for us:

We were not left on our own and a lot of times you guys were actually willing to come down at our convenience for you to have co-planning, co-teaching with us. So that was really very nice of you guys to do that ... I mean you were very flexible and all that ...sometimes we stood you up ... so you've been very, very understanding and accommodating. (Suhailah, Interview).

The research team worked hard at developing and maintaining positive relationships with their teacher-researcher colleagues but the everyday stresses and challenges of working in the ordinary messiness of schooling sometimes meant that the research project became the target for complaint.

Some challenges facing school-based intervention research

In response to this project the following thoughts for researchers wishing to participate in long-term interventions are worthy of consideration.

It is almost a truism in contemporary social science research to state the value of informed and voluntary consent. The voluntary nature of the consent given by participants in this project is open to question. In strongly hierarchical top-down bureaucracies a particular challenge is posed when participation in research is a directive from immediate supervisors rather than valued and motivated by the participants themselves.

The benefit of participating in research needs to be perceived *and felt* by the site-based researchers. For this project the teacher-researchers could see that the students were more engaged and motivated when learning through drama, and they felt their own repertoire of practice was being broadened, but this was far outweighed by the pressures of exam preparation, which was the dominant topic the teacher-researchers brought up in relation to pedagogy. For them these benefits were not enough.

It was easier for the teacher-researchers not to teach drama than it was for them to teach drama so, for the most part, they avoided it when they could. The change to practices encouraged by the research was seen as an add-on to their workload; it had no credibility or accountability within the school and hence there was no real motivation for the teacher-researchers to participate, or produce the artefacts we were hoping to share at the end of the research.

A major complaint that became a regular refrain was the lack of time. The Principal had allocated two lessons a week to the project and relieved the staff of some additional duties, but the time was eroded as priorities shifted and, with the non-continuance of the action research project in the school, the teacher-researchers felt imposed upon.

We found that it is particularly important that the school liaison/contact person is someone with substantial authority within the school. This individual should be valued, listened to and respected by both the school administration and participants in the research. Their role manifests the individual and collective commitment to the research if they are also a participant in the study.

If this project was to be replicated some of the challenges highlighted above may be addressed by ensuring that the informed and voluntary consent, fundamental to all research, is negotiated clearly with all participating parties including the school administration. We were disadvantaged by the time-scale of the project. One year was not enough time but research funding was not available for an extension, despite the desire of the principal and some of the teachers to continue. Additional time would have allowed for continuity of the supportive and trusting relationship which had developed between the researchers and many of the participants, and this would have raised the teachers' familiarity and confidence in planning and implementing drama lessons.

Another aspect worthy of consideration is the location of the research team within the school. We had hoped to have a room or some space allocated to us throughout the year so that the research team could be easily accessed by teachers for informal chats. Space requirements within the school did not allow this and, consequently, all contact had to be arranged formally, via mobile phone or email. Thus opportunities for valuable 'passing-by' conversations and access to support as needed were unavailable to us and the teachers.

In addition, it would assist teachers in such circumstances if their research participation was recognised and accredited as part of their professional development. Initially, we had hoped that we would be able to offer more workshops over time, and that these could follow the structure of the initial module of the diploma in drama offered at NIE, but the Principal felt the time and workload commitment that this would require was too great a load. More time in prior planning may have given us an opportunity to reach an effective compromise on this.

Of greatest significance was our discovery that teachers would have responded more positively had a senior member of the teaching staff and/or school administration been deeply involved in the research process and seen to be taking the same professional risks as the teachers themselves. The fact that the HOD (EL) had committed the teachers to the project but was not involved herself left her colleagues feeling uncomfortable and abandoned within the school context.

These considerations, while not new for researchers, emerged directly from this localised research context. Intervention research, in particular, must be sensitive to the developing relationships between researchers and participants. The iterative nature of data collection and analysis makes it vital that researchers find perceptive, sensitive and ethical ways of dealing with emergent issues and questions in response to the always changing circumstances in real-life, complex and busy school environments. As researchers we know that the collection of data must be methodical, meticulous and authentic in the context. So must our care and concern for all the research participants within the study. As colleagues of our research partners we must value each others' expertise and concerns and strive to structure the circumstances in such a way that they continue to be mutually beneficial. With these concerns in mind, researcher-participant partnerships offer opportunities for positive and fruitful research outcomes.

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