Bringing literacy to life using drama strategies to develop multi-literate students

St Francis de Sales (TLIF 1-194)

For the Ministry of Education
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Project title:
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Research reports are available on the Ministry of Education’s website

Education Counts:

www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications.
Summary

The purpose of the inquiry was to raise achievement in writing through the medium of immersion in drama.

Inquiry Team

- Project leader: Chris Wratt, St Francis de Sales School.
- The other members of the project team were Tracy Gundesen, Sarah Fountain and Steve Douglas, all teachers at St Francis de Sales School.

External advisors

Tim Gordon- Drama facilitator

Tim was the drama expert. He introduced teachers to a range of drama techniques and provided coaching on setting up and leading drama activities in the classroom. He did this through running staff workshops, modelling planning and initiating a drama with small groups. Tim worked with syndicate groups during their inquiry planning process to help them identify opportunities for utilising drama to develop concepts within the inquiry.

Literacy facilitator- Sally Muir- Literacy Advisor

Sally guided the team in the development of teaching as inquiry into integrating drama to enhance literacy learning.

She assisted the team to identify trends and targets within writing data. She coached teachers in using a range of genre and writing opportunities that would be compatible with drama in the classroom. She introduced new techniques for teaching writing, and helped teachers to learn to find the places in their teaching of writing where drama would ‘fit’. Teachers learnt to be better teachers of writing by thinking more broadly and flexibly about genre and in particular narrative writing.

Sally both modelled and observed writing sessions connected to classroom drama and gave feedback on how teachers could modify their approach to improve the quality of writing produced.
Background

Teachers hypothesised that linking drama experiences with writing would maximise learning for all learners especially those who were currently less engaged and less successful. Drama was seen as a catalyst for intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic literacy learning. Teachers also identified a need for professional development in teaching drama. None of the teachers were aware of some excellent resources that had been made available to schools free the years previously.

The inquiry

The inquiry began by building teacher understandings of contemporary practices for teaching drama, and by assisting teachers to use drama to motivate student writing. Teachers were supported by the project leader to plan classroom programmes incorporating drama and writing. Each teacher had an in-depth focus on the writing of a small target group of underachieving writers in their classes.

Classroom inquiries explored themes together and became involved in textual analyses through role-playing. One syndicate worked together on a process drama and worked in role to explore the consequences of their community in a disaster. As the drama progressed over a number of day’s opportunities to write came out of the process, ideas which were then taken back into the drama.

Another drama technique, the “hot seat” technique, where a character takes on the perspective of another character was used to assist students to describe characters and narratives.

Assessment

- Throughout the project, teachers collected examples of student writing, especially of their target students and noted developments and next steps for their writing skills.
- Annotated photographs of students’ work in relation to class explorations were also used as data sources.
- Selected asTTle assessments were used to provide more quantitative measures of student progress in narrative writing.
- Pre-post surveys of students and teachers’ attitudes to drama were undertaken.
Key findings

- Seventy-nine percent of teachers reported that they were confident using drama techniques in their teaching compared with 42 percent at the start of the inquiry.
- A number of staff had adapted their planning in a range of curriculum areas to include drama activities.
- Target students made more than twice the average progress of children in similar schools over a year period in asTTle narrative assessments.

Key implications (in terms of the goals of TLIF)

- Teachers working collectively in their syndicate groups to learn, plan, teach, and evaluate their incorporation of drama into their classrooms were able to take risks with their approaches.
- New learning for teachers needs to be supported by capable experts who can model effective approaches and provide on-going feedback on teacher use of these strategies.
- Teachers would value more resources about using drama in the classroom being available to them on the Ministry website to support their on-going learning.

Plans for sharing the findings

The St Francis de Sales teachers have shared their experience in the drama and literacy project with their school community through newsletters. A cluster meeting presentation introduced local schools to the project and its results. An article/precis of the project was submitted to the NZ Education Gazette in August 2017.
Reference List

Ministry of Education. (2006). *Playing our stories: classroom drama in years 1-6.* Wellington, NZ: Learning Media [DVD & handbook] *was distributed free to schools*


O’Toole, J., & Dunn, J. (2002). *Pretending to learn: Helping children learn through drama.* Frenchs Forest, NSW: Pearson Education

For further information

If you would like to learn more about this project please contact the project leader
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