

Ms Wan Ching Yee: November 2013

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Home-School Knowledge Exchange Programme was a multi-strand research programme based at the University of Bristol's Graduate School of Education.¹ It is based on the assumption that both parents and teachers have knowledge which is relevant to pupil attainment and learning disposition, but this knowledge is often poorly communicated and under-utilised. The overall aim of this research was therefore to understand, develop and evaluate ways in which pupil attainment and learning disposition can be enhanced by a process of knowledge exchange between parents and teachers which also involves the children. The idea of using drama to increase the impact of the project arose from discussions between the project team and various user communities when it was noted that several of the project's findings had an emotional content. Based on case studies from the HSKE transition strand, two main products were produced; a script for live drama performances and a DVD which raises issues about primary-secondary transition and introduces a number of drama activities which can be used to support children and their families through the process.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A collaborative exploratory approach was adopted. The main collaborators were Theatr Iolo (a Cardiff-based Theatre in Education company) and Focus Productions (a Bristol-based TV and video production company). The project's aims were shared with the collaborators in a series of meetings and an appropriate programme of activities was developed. The workshops and drama performances were evaluated after each event; evaluations were subsequently shared with the collaborators and further activities were then developed. These included the script and DVD mentioned above. The project therefore shared many of the characteristics of action research, such as the cyclical structure of action, evaluation, reflection and further action.

KEY FINDINGS

- Drama can be an effective and appealing way of communicating issues arising from educational research. Evaluations showed evidence of impact on different audiences.
- The project aroused considerable interest – e.g. performances at conferences for 150 teachers and advisors were held and an invitation to contribute to the ESRC Festival of Social Science before policymakers from the Welsh Assembly was received. Both the main collaborators have taken on a degree of ownership of the shared enterprise and planned to take it forward after completion of the project. 500 copies of the DVD were distributed.
- Using drama in this way has its challenges and brings up issues related to autonomy and control. Educational researchers are not drama specialists and collaborations involve handing over a degree of control to the drama professionals.
- A significant ethical issue arose out of the researchers' feelings of responsibility towards the audiences; to what extent are researchers entitled to engage with the audience's emotions through a dramatic production?

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¹ See summary no 10 (September 2013) *The Home-School Knowledge Exchange Project Literacy Strand*
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