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Building students into the Roman narrative: using drama to immerse students in Roman life as presented within the textbook. An action research project with a Year 9 Latin class in a mixed independent school

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Abstract

This action research project explores the use of drama in the classroom and its effect on immersing students into the narrative of a textbook. The project aimed at creating a context in which students could connect with a Roman world that they, by means of drama activities and the textbook, could imagine distinctly. It focuses on the use of role-play, props and acting and their effect on student engagement with the narrative within the textbook. The findings showed that all the drama activities facilitated their imagination, benefitting their engagement and empathy with the narrative and the characters within it.

Building students into the Roman narrative: using drama to immerse students in Roman life as presented within the textbook. An action research project with a Year 9 Latin class in a mixed independent school

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Introduction

Latin textbooks, such as the *Oxford Latin Course* or the *Cambridge Latin Course*, provide different sociocultural contexts in each of their stages or chapters. The different settings of each stage are used as a background for Latin language learning as well as for the opportunity to learn more about Roman culture and history. In my action research project, I wished to emphasise the features of the *Cambridge Latin Course* that immerse its readers into the context of each chapter.

On his website, Steve Hunt details how the *Cambridge Latin Course* immerses, as I would describe it, its students into a context for learning:

“[each stage] starts with an Initial Stimulus picture (the ‘hook’), . . .the new grammar feature is introduced with visual support, some short stories in Latin to learn the new language features in the context of a meaningful and attractive narrative,... some well-illustrated background material on the cultural and historical topic”

(Hunt, 2018)

Hunt’s use of the word “hook” implies that the Initial Stimulus picture aims to intrigue and engage its reader so that they continue with a greater interest as they are keen to find out more about the topic introduced. The “visual support” and “well-illustrated background material” build on the Initial Stimulus picture to bring the topic of Roman culture or history to life facilitating the reader’s imagination so that they can have a visual sense of what they are learning about. In my action research project, I wished to push my students’ imagination further than the visual plane. I intended on taking advantage of the ‘meaningful and attractive narrative’ of the stage so that students would be keen to engage with the setting. I planned for them to interact with as well as examine objects associated with the context and to role-play characters within and entering the narrative in order to provide more ‘hooks’. I hoped that their overall experience of the stage might be deeper and that

they might gain a range of skills beyond that of just becoming better at translating Latin. For example, I aspired for the students to develop investigation skills, empathy and a greater sense of cultural appreciation.

In this paper I use the term ‘sociocultural’ to refer to the learning of a language within its original context as opposed to in isolation, which is the meaning Lantolf and Thorne (2007) attach to it. I wished to heighten the extent to which the students’ Latin learning was meaningful as opposed to abstract. The word ‘context’ refers to an environment (physical or imagined), either in the textbook or in the classroom. I use the term ‘sociocultural context’, then, to refer to a learning environment that is situated within a meaningful and relevant setting for the language, which was, in our case, Latin.

Research Context

I conducted my research while on placement in a co-educational fee-paying school. The school is selective by an entrance exam and takes approximately the top 60% of students in the area in terms of attainment. The entrance exam contains a French language element and an optional Latin section for those who studied the language at primary school. There are no other significantly more selective schools in the area. There are two classes of students in Year 9 who study Latin, which are set by attainment. Students are introduced to Latin in Year 7 where they are taught a mixture of Latin and *War with Troy*, an audio resource, and by the end of Year 8 they finish Book 1 of the *Cambridge Latin Course*. In particular, the students enjoy the stories in the *Cambridge Latin Course* and the rich narrative that the *War with Troy* episodes provide through dramatic story telling.

The group I worked with was a Year 9 Latin class of 15 students, the lower attainment set of two. Despite this, the students were still an academically high achieving set, with an attainment range of 6-8 (B-A star). The target grades are consistent with the fact that out of the 488 students who took Latin GCSE, 306 achieved a 6-9 grade in the Latin language paper (OCR, 2019). There are five very vocal students who leap at any opportunity to offer their opinion or present their work, but they also quickly lose focus if they are not kept busy by a variety of tasks. By contrast there are three students who are comparatively quieter and in the observations that I undertook of these students in several of their other subjects often make no classroom contributions unless prompted. The majority of students have decided to study Latin at GCSE. The minority who have decided not

to continue with Latin enjoy the narrative in the *Cambridge Latin Course*, but are not motivated to learn new vocabulary or Latin grammar. As a result, I was inspired to heighten students' immersion into the narrative, encourage all students to be vocal and at the same time to continue all students' progress with the Latin language.

The geographical context of the *Cambridge Latin Course* stage (Stage 19) that we were studying was the city of Alexandria, Egypt, during its Roman occupation 1st century CE. The social context was the conflicting ancient theories about medical treatments.

Literature Review

I have identified four main areas of interest in my analysis of pre-existing literature. First, I explore the theory behind learning within 'child's play', since it is one of the earliest ways in which children learn and expand their native language. Second, I consider Vygotsky's theory of ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) and the scholarship that builds upon his work, in order to investigate the uses of learning through social interaction and a meaningful context. Third, I look to scholarship that discusses how to use drama effectively in the classroom, since I wished to find out how best to include and support all students, irrespective of their confidence or previous experience with drama. Lastly, I turn to the benefits of drama in education, so that I could anticipate a few of the results of my research project and focus on maximising the advantages that drama can bring.

Child's Play

Vygotsky (1967/2004) sees creativity as "one of the most important areas of child and educational psychology" (p.11) and decides that the first and clearest signs of creativity is in child's play. Vygotsky argues that imagination is the key to creativity (p.12) and that imagination itself has a "very important function in human behaviour and human development" (p.17) since it has the ability to expand the human experience beyond what someone may have directly come into contact with. In the Classics classroom, imagination is a helpful, if not necessary, skill in enabling students to access a culture, society and language that often may appear radically different to their own. McCaslin (2006) argues that "imagination is the spark that sets off the creative impulse" (p.37), which I sought to encourage so that students might develop in a range of skills while in their own creative play. In my research, I wished to maximise the degree to which students were relying on

their imagination as a starting point from which they could access the wider context of each lesson. In this way I hoped that their imagination would enable their investigation skills, as they considered the relevance of their play, and develop a wider cultural appreciation as they engaged with and were immersed into new contexts.

Albert builds on Vygotsky's theory about the importance of imagination through play. Albert, using the example of "four-year-olds...playing doctor", writes that, in their first stages of play, children "create a context in which they must expand their skills in oral language, vocabulary, storytelling, and social interaction" (Albert, 1994, p.20). The idea that the children themselves put together a context for their play was a situation I wished to emulate, in the hope that in this way they might be more invested in setting.

Eun and Lim (2009) develop Albert (1994)'s idea by suggesting that children in their play create their own context in which they expand their language and social skills. Eun and Lim write that learning through acting or oral speech "the context of language use becomes less abstract, fuller, and more saturated with meaning" (Eun and Lim, 2009, p.20). While Latin is not predominantly taught as an oral language, translating Latin passages into dramatic scenes involving oral work could provide students with a more creative way of presenting meaning than writing a written translation might.

As well as facilitating the language, the use of play can also support students with the context of literature. Dulaney, who undertook an action research project with a high school class learning *Othello*, came across difficulties in teaching Shakespeare because of "the lack of connection between students and the language and culture of the plays" (Dulaney, 2012, p.37). Building on Vygotsky's educational theory about imagination and creativity, Dulaney planned to use child's play in the initial process of connecting with the characters and themes of *Othello*. The principal of building a bridge between students and the language and culture of a text applies just as much to Latin as it does to Shakespeare's *Othello*. In Latin textbooks, such as the *Oxford* and *Cambridge Latin Courses*, there are multiple opportunities for using the stories for the analysis of characters and themes, a skill which is required at Latin or indeed English GCSE and A-level. It seemed appropriate, then, to follow Dulaney and seek to create connection between students and text to ensure their engagement and interest as well as develop key skills for GCSE and beyond.

Before I discuss the importance of contextual learning below, it is worth mentioning that, as well as being beneficial to learning, child's play is enjoyable. Albert (1994) found that while children are learning new skills through play, they "have fun doing all this" (p.20). While Vygotsky does not define child's play as an activity for the purpose of pleasure, he does acknowledge that children shape their play to gratify their needs. Vygotsky writes that children turn their play into something which interests them and, in this way, enjoy themselves (Vygotsky, 1978, p.92f.). In my practice, I have found that when students are given the opportunity to direct their learning or decide how they approach a topic, they show more enthusiasm and engagement with it.

ZPD and the importance of contextual and sociocultural learning

Vygotsky (1978) argues that cognitive processes, including language, develop through social interactions, in particular through mediation of teachers and other students (p.90). The mediation of teachers and "more capable" students on another student's learning is what Vygotsky names the 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) (p.86). In what follows, I explore first what role the students should play and second what role the teacher should play in order to facilitate learning.

Eun and Lim (2009) build on Vygotsky's theory of ZPD in their research into the importance of meaning-based instruction in the language classroom. Eun and Lim agree with Vygotsky that "meaningful interaction among individuals [is] the greatest motivating force in human development and learning" (Eun & Lim, 2009, p.13). By 'meaningful', Eun and Lim refer to instructions and tasks that are "relevant, purposeful, and [have] personal significance in the lives of the children" (ibid., pp.21-22). Eun and Lim argue that when we address the interests of students, by "changing the social environment of the classroom by...creating challenging problem-solving situations" (ibid., p.23), we provide a context within which students might have a meaningful experience. Along a similar train of thought, Flynn and Carr argue that, in establishing the context of a piece of literature, "students need to be put in roles| that will require them to defend or argue for something, make decisions, or come up with a plan" (Flynn & Carr, 1994, pp.39-40). Inspired by these ideas, I integrated problem solving activities that required students to work together into my research lessons in order to provide 'purpose' for my students and 'meaningful interaction' with their peers.

In order to make their experience more 'meaningful', I decided that students should be as involved within the context of our learning as possible. When putting students into roles, we ask of their imagination to suppose themselves as other people. Heathcote and Bolton theorise about 'double

framing’, whereby “the meaningfulness of the action is dependent on *who* you are, what social role you are in” (Heathcote & Bolton, 1997, p.34). Heathcote and Bolton use the example of tying your laces while playing the part of a scout, which might require you to take a particular pride or care in this action that you might not otherwise, to explore how we treat our actions based on our social role. The potential benefits of using role-play as a drama activity I discuss below, but in terms of creating a context, I saw an opportunity to not only build a setting around the students, but to put the students themselves within it.

Central to Dulaney’s action research was a prop box which she put together in order to “develop a multisensory experience that generated interest and excitement prior even to introducing students to Shakespeare and the complex cast of characters who live within the pages of *Othello*” (Dulaney, 2012, p.38). In her prop box, Dulaney included “a collection of tangible items that represent significant symbols, conflicts and characters of a given text” (ibid., p.38-39). Just as Shakespeare and the context of *Othello* might appear contextually out of reach for students, I wanted to make sure that my students were involved and enthusiastic about the new part of the Roman world we were going to learn by experience. Moreover, Dulaney explains that the props brought all students onto the same level “intellectual and emotive playing field” (ibid., p.42) before they started reading their text. In this way, in my own research I was particularly interested in the use of props providing scaffolding that would encourage all students in their ability to access the learning.

I chose modern objects for my prop box as opposed to ancient objects. Eun and Lim write that instructions should “connect...to their real lives in the real world” (Eun & Lim, 2009, p.22) and as such I wished to build students into a contextual theme of medicine that they were familiar with, before stretching their imaginations to support the context of Roman medicine. Moreover, from a curriculum perspective, I hoped to fulfil the suggestion that “drama can enrich the existing curriculum” (Flynn & Carr, 1994, p.43). In this way, I was inspired to borrow equipment that my students were currently using in science lessons in order to create a bridge between modern scientific technique and Roman equipment. By ensuring the students had already used the objects, I chose props that were not only academically relevant to the students but also recognisable objects that would not alienate them, but rather connect them to the context of science and medicine.

Chen, Hao-Jen and Dai (2018), although they conduct an action research project on the use of digital games, provide useful conclusions for contextual language learning. They found that “when

students are situated in a context, the contextual and non-linguistic cues in the context allow students to comprehend and retain their learning” (Chen, Hao-Jen & Dai, 2018, p.186). While the context that Chen, Hao-Jen and Dai created was a virtual world within which students could operate, I decided that props and costumes would provide a comparably interactive context to try to facilitate comprehension and retention.

Using drama in the classroom effectively

McCaslin argues that when first using drama with a class, the teacher’s “goal is to create an atmosphere in which the players feel comfortable” (McCaslin, 2006, p.26) and to ensure that students are “at ease with one another while working together” (McCaslin, 2006, p.259). Bakogianni, in her own research, built on similar principals: “to set [students] at ease”, demonstrated “a dramatic reading” of a text first before asking the students to perform themselves (Bakogianni, 2017, p.3). Reflecting on McCaslin and Bakogianni’s examples, I decided, as referenced above, not only to ensure that students were working in pairs or small groups in their dramatic activities and that where possible I would demonstrate the dramatic task before asking the students to complete it.

Morgan and Saxton argue that “in drama, one of the most effective teaching techniques is that of teacher in role, where the teacher is taking part in the drama” (Morgan & Saxton, 1998, p.36). Flynn and Carr write that the teacher-in-role can support the drama by deepening questions, ensuring that all students are included and keeping students focused (Flynn & Carr, 1994, p.39). In my research, I wanted all students, irrespective of their experience or opinion of drama, to be focused and involved in all parts of the lessons. In this way, I decided that I would be involved in all dramatic elements of the lesson.

Morgan and Saxton describe nine roles that the teacher can play (Morgan & Saxton, 1998, pp.37-39), and I chose to play the part of “second in command” who acts as “the ‘go-between’ who does not always know but offers to find out [information]” (Morgan & Saxton, 1998, p.37). I chose to be ‘second in command’ as opposed to the ‘authority’ to build into Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD wherein the teacher is a colleague rather than an instructor. When the teacher is positioned not as the authority but as the one who reports and speaks for the authority, McCaslin, Morgan, Saxton and Towler-Evans suggest that students will develop as experts and responsible for their own learning (Morgan & Saxton, 1988, p.40; Towler-Evans, 1997, p.106, 113; McCaslin, 2006, p.383). I wished

to facilitate students' ability to learn for themselves, rather than impose a structure on them that might not match their interests or learning style.

The benefits of drama in education

Gay, who taught Latin with Classics PGCE students at KCL, argues that drama “can be a very powerful learning tool in almost any subject”, and that, because of the integral role that drama played in ancient society, “it is particularly fitting to integrate drama into classics teaching” (Gay, 2004, p.24). I agree with Gay that we need to reflect the importance of drama in ancient society by ensuring that students understand the performative nature of many of the texts that we read. The way in which Latin and ancient Greek speeches, poems or plays were performed is a dimension that is lost to us and so we should make an extra effort to reimagine the performance context in our teaching to emulate the ancient experience.

While, as Albert and Vygotsky suggest, the use of creative play and by extension ‘drama’ may engage the students’ interest and be ‘fun’, I wanted to ensure that every aspect of our activity facilitated or deepened their learning. McCaslin warns that we must use drama “not to sugarcoat...but to illuminate and interpret” what we are learning (McCaslin, 2006, p.277). I wished to implement drama activities purposefully for students’ interpretation and appreciation of the narrative as well as to increase motivation and enjoyment.

McCaslin argues that “to help young people live in harmony in a society of many ethnic, racial, and religious groups is the most urgent need of the times” and that drama, through which students might consider different perspectives is the best space for sociocultural awareness (McCaslin, 2006, p.16). I support the emphasis on the importance of exposing students to a wide diversity of culture and people early on in their education in order to reflect the variety of peoples and cultures in the world we live in.

A range of scholars see drama’s ability to address this need that McCaslin highlights, including McCaslin herself (McCaslin, 2006, p.4). Gay writes that creating drama from an ancient text provides “a greater understanding of their different perspectives” as well as social and confidence skills (Gay, 2004, p.24). Daniels and Downes reflect about the “development of alternative ways of thinking and feeling about the world and one’s position within it” (Daniels & Downes, 2015, p.110). In the interviews that Walker, Anderson, Gibson and Martin held with high school teachers

in Australia, one teacher commented that “‘drama is about understanding people and life and delving into lives and delving into some of the truths that underpin life’” (Walker, Anderson, Gibson & Martin, 2015, p.128). In this way, I wished to see a result in terms of cultural awareness and empathy in practice, whether the activities that the students took part in made them reflect thoughtfully on the differences between the world of the ancients and their own.

Moving from the benefits of expanding our external awareness to internal, Daniel and Downes (2015) explore the effects drama can have on self-reflection. Their research focuses on a case study which explored the impact that label identities such as FSM (free school meals) have on the students’ own self-perceptions. They argue that while drama explores “‘fictitious’” identities, it may enable students to reflect upon “‘the ‘actual’” (Daniels & Downes, 2015, p.98). It is helpful for students to realise that they decide how they to define themselves rather than having labels thrust upon them. Moreover, using drama in the classroom, Daniel and Downes argue, creates “‘a space for an experimental refiguring of the landscape of the social world of the young person” (Daniels & Downes, 2015, p.103). The word ‘experimental’ is key here, as the classroom is a space in which students may make mistakes in a safe environment and play with identities as literary constructions (Walker, Anderson, Gibson & Martin, 2015, p. 116). I considered it important to make students feel comfortable in the research, so that they might confront rather than shy away from the exploration of identity through the characters of the textbook narrative.

The benefits of props are that they act as “‘a catalyst to unearth students’ inherent and emotive knowledge of symbols and their meanings” (Dulaney, 2012, p.39). I wanted students to personally engage with the props with their own understanding of what they represented and suggested about the context of our learning. The props provide a helpful backdrop for further drama activities, since they have served as a bridge for students’ personal emotional connection to the material as well as for understanding of the immediate context of the learning. For props that are more symbolic, Dulaney found that students were able to analyse the text with “‘insightful connections between the symbols and their role in facilitating a deeper understanding of character, plot, and conflict” (Dulaney, 2012, p.42). Rocklin (2009), who reflects on his teaching of *Hamlet*, offers similar insights to Dulaney. Rocklin writes that performance activities involving props or creating a character “‘prompt discussion...[about] larger issues about the play *and* about learning to read the play as a performance text” (Rocklin, 2009, p.79). Gay sees drama activities as providing similar results to Rocklin: to look at a text in greater depth (Gay, 2004). After asking her PGCE students to

create and perform scenes based on an ancient text, Gay cites a range of benefits, such as “enriched understanding of the text” (ibid., p. 24). The stories in the Latin textbooks contain characters and themes that are worth exploring to exercise students’ literary analysis skills and as well as performing in order to gain these deeper insights.

Research Questions

I focused my research to answer the following overarching question, with two areas of focus:

Overarching question:

What impact do immersive drama activities have on Year 9 students when learning about a topic of Roman culture?

Focus Area 1: What are Year 9 students’ perceptions of how immersive drama activities made them feel in terms of involvement in the Latin stories we read?

Focus Area 2: What impact do immersive drama activities have on Year 9 students’ personal understanding of the characters in the Latin stories we read?

I was inspired to find out students’ perception of involvement after using immersive drama activities by Heathcote and Bolton (1997), Eun and Lim (2009), who suggest that it makes learning more meaningful and enriched. I was keen to explore whether students would engage with the narratives and what their engagement would look like.

I wished to explore students’ personal understanding of the characters because of the research of Gay (2004), McCaslin (2006), Daniel and Downes (2015), who argue that drama activities can expose students to a variety of types of characters and make them reflect upon their own identities. I wished to investigate to what extent students would make connections between themselves and the characters in the Latin textbook and how their engagement would affect them.

Teaching sequence

I split my use of different drama activities over the course of four lessons, which I taught over the course of a week. Before each role-play activity, we spent a minute or two working on the

characteristics of each role as a class: drawing a rough sketch and writing adjectives on the board that describe what they are like.

Lesson 1

Inspired by Dulaney (2012) and Rocklin (2009), I started the sequence by covering the front table with a series of props: stethoscopes, bandages, a sterilised syringe, pestle and mortar, an oxygen flow mask, a thermometer. I encouraged students to interact and ‘play’ with the props and each other for the first five minutes. The students then had to tell their partner about their predictions about what our new topic might be and what they thought might happen in the textbook story based on the themes that the props suggested. The other key part to this lesson was a role-play translation task, whereby as one of two characters in a Latin story, students had to put together a resume to recommend themselves as worthy of the role of family doctor.

Lesson 2

I laid out the scientific and medical props on the front table again and, if students arrived early, they were able to ‘play’ with these until everyone arrived. The students conducted another role-play activity as the doctor in the Latin story and they were to feedback to the teacher, playing a friend of the patient, with a doctor’s note and prescription, which I was to judge as to whether or not it would be an effective treatment. The key to success was an accurate translation of what was exactly said in the Latin. I encouraged the students to work in pairs and confer with other tables of ‘doctors’ to make sure that they were on the right track.

Lesson 3

I kept only one of the props on the front desk for this lesson: an oxygen flow mask, in order to imply that a death was approaching). Instead of role-playing one of the characters within the Latin story, students were to act as private investigators considering the evidence presented within. Students were to build a case for which of three characters they thought might have malicious intent for the ill patient. The teacher played the part of the go-between the patient and the investigators he was paying to find out who his enemy was.

Lesson 4

In the final lesson, I laid a resuscitation doll dressed in a Roman toga and bandages covering the wound on his shoulder. There were two final activities: one was interpreting meaning from the teacher acting out part of the Latin story and interacting with the resuscitation doll. The second was for the students in groups of three to emulate the style of the teacher acting and to perform the final part of the Latin story. The groups were asked to opt-in to performing in front of their peers if they wished.

Methodology

Taber defines action research as a purposeful exercise “to bring out change in a personally experienced situation (Taber, 2013, p.107). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) echo this definition, adding that it “tries to solve real, practitioner-identified problems of everyday practice” (p.307). I chose to conduct an action research project because I intended to ‘bring about change’ in my practice by trying out a new way of involving and engaging students in the hope that they would enjoy Latin lessons with more vested interest. The need for change was self-identified.

Elliot argues that “the fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge” (Elliot, 1991, p.49). My main intention was to ‘improve practice’ and my research was limited due to fixed context, in terms of students and school. Yet I hope that, as Taber suggests, my research may be useful in terms of inspiring other teachers to try out immersion activities for themselves in order to improve their own practice (Taber, 2013, p.111, 206). In this way, I wished to implement action research that would benefit my own practice as well as provide an example of what benefits using immersive drama activities in Latin lessons might have for teachers of similar classes.

Wilson states that it is “transformative *action* that characterizes action research” (Wilson, 2009, p.192). In order to achieve ‘transformative action’, Wilson writes that we must ‘reflect’ upon and ‘reframe’ the issue before following up with further research (Wilson, 2009, p.190, 192). I hoped to achieve ‘transformative action’ in my practice and in this way reflected upon the effects of the drama activities by giving students questionnaires at the end of each lesson. I planned to change and adapt the next lesson if there were dramatic elements that the students particularly responded well or poorly to. Cohen et al. describe an 8-stage procedure to reflection (Cohen et al., 2011, p.307),

and while it would have been best to have seen through several cycles of reflection and reframing, limited by a short time frame, I was only able to research 4 lessons. However, Cohen et al. also recommend that action research should “stay small” and “focused” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.308). It was necessary, then, to keep the research to only 4 lessons.

Nolen & Putten highlight the ethical importance of ensuring that students are happy to be part of a research project. I asked for and was granted the oral consent of each student to research my practice with them and offered an alternate way of approaching each of the dramatic activities if students did not wish to participate (Nolen & Putten, 2007, p.402). I am aware that as their teacher there may have been for the students an “implicit pressure to participate” (ibid., p.403). However, I hope that the findings of my action research are found to suggest that students were happy to be involved.

Key to my research was finding out students’ perceptions about their own learning through drama activities, which Nolen and Putten argue, lends itself well to an action research project (Nolen & Putten, 2007, p.401). As a result, it seemed clear that qualitative research was a more effective way of gathering data than quantitative. Moreover, Cohen et al. write that “qualitative data often focus on smaller numbers of people than quantitative data” (Cohen et al., 2011, p.461), which made sense for my class of 15.

Research methods

The main focus of my research was on student perceptions of immersion through drama activities. As a result, the two main ways in which I collected data were through questionnaires at the end of each lesson and interviews at the end of the process. I wanted to conduct both questionnaires and interviews in this way, so that I could find trends and common responses to discuss and dissect further with students in interviews.

Questionnaires

When putting together my questionnaires, I first considered the ethical issue of asking students to share what could be private opinions. Cohen et al. state that “respondents cannot be coerced into completing a questionnaire” (Cohen et al., 2001, p.317). I extended Cohen et al.’s principle to apply

also to interviews and as such ran an opt-in policy for both. All students agreed to complete all 4 questionnaires, and 8 students agreed to be interviewed. I have anonymised all responses.

Munn and Drever write that questionnaires ought to be: “brief, easy to understand, [and] reasonably quick to complete” (Munn & Drever, 2004, p.20). Accordingly, I made the questionnaire 7 questions long, with 3 of those questions simply being a space for students to explain their answers and 1 as a space for any other comments. I decided that I would use the same questionnaire after each lesson so that students would know what to expect and better understand what was being asked of them.

For 4 of the questions, I wrote statements which students responded to on a Likert scale ranging from ‘Strong agree / Agree / Disagree / Strongly disagree’. I chose not to include a neutral option so that students would have to come down on one side or the other about how they felt. I realise, that as Taber writes, my choice may have elicited “an artificial choice if they genuinely have no feelings or mixed feelings about a topic” (Taber, 2013, p.267). However, I decided that the comment space attached to each question would allow for students to express themselves further in this regard. In this way, I gathered a small amount of quantitative data with more of a focus on qualitative data because I wished to gain an overall insight into students’ perceptions of the drama activities. After I conducted the research, I realised that students can better describe their opinions in their own words rather than on a Likert scale.

I tried to avoid composing leading questions by writing statements for students to respond to, however at the end of the process I reflected that the statements were not neutral enough. The words, ‘positive’, ‘more involved’ and ‘helped’, might have implied to the students that this is how they should have felt about the drama activities. In response to this, I decided that the interview questions would be more open.

Interviews

Taber highlights the effectiveness of combining questionnaires with follow-up interviews. Taber writes that interviewing in this way gives “the opportunity to test out interpretation of the thinking behind questionnaire responses” (Taber, 2013, p.274). In this way, I wished to confirm firstly whether the very positive response that I received to the questionnaires was true and secondly to

explore in more detail what it was about the dramatic activities that students had found particularly helpful, involved or beneficial to their learning.

I decided that I would interview students in small groups, organised by friendship, following the argument of Taber that “students are much more comfortable talking to a researcher in pairs or groups, especially where they are interviewed with friends” (Taber, 2013, pp.276-277). I realise that individual interviews may have avoided students being influenced by one another’s opinions. However, since I had already asked students to fill out individual questionnaires, I thought that a group setting could encourage discussion and a multiplicity of perspectives.

Data and Findings

I shall frame my discussion by addressing the three research questions I set myself above. I shall review the questionnaires first, including the further comments section on the questionnaire, and then secondly the interviews in order to make some preliminary but tentative conclusions. I wish to present my findings in this way to reflect the chronological order in which the students presented their opinions. I incorporate examples of students’ work into my discussion of the questionnaires in order to provide further insight into the learning experiences that they describe.

In my review of the questionnaire responses, I will address each of my research aims individually as they almost directly correlate with the questions that I asked. I will then consider all three aims on a broader level in light of the other data I collated.

The Questionnaires, Classwork and Observation Notes

I realised after I reviewed the questionnaire responses that the small amount of quantitative data that I collected is not very telling of students’ perceptions. I reflect that the limited time frame and small class of students did not provide a helpful insight into how students found the drama activities. In this way, I will focus instead on the qualitative data I collected through the comment spaces that allowed for personal responses.

There were two major themes that came through in students’ written comments to the questionnaires: that, as a result of the drama activities:

Theme 1: they were able to relate to and understand the characters on a deep level

Theme 2: they were immersed or engaged with the lesson

These two themes correlated almost exactly with the two parts of my overarching research question: whether students felt more involved in the Latin stories and what impact the drama activities had on students' personal understanding of the characters. After discussing these two themes, I will close my review of the questionnaires by considering the responses of a few comments that imply that the drama activities were not as effective as the other answers might suggest.

Within the theme of 'relating to' and 'understanding the characters on a deep level', there were several similar responses, which I will now consider. Firstly, students commented that they 'were' the characters or empathised to them. Phrases such as 'a close connection to the character', 'it helped me understand the mindset of the doctor', and 'made me feel like Barbillus', reveal that by role-playing as someone within the narrative, the students found out more about the character. The adjective 'close' implies that the student developed a deep relation to the character and implies that the student could empathise with them. The word 'mindset' suggests that the student started to think as their character and to consider why they behave as they do. The classroom work of the students complements their responses about feeling as though they were the characters. The use of the first person singular in the words 'I am accustomed to heal slaves' demonstrates the student's immersion into the character they role-play. The student seems to assume the personality of their character and is able to make a justification as a result of their comprehension of what they are like.

Moreover, the response of one student that 'I understood the characters more as you can learn more from this instead of just Latin words' is particularly interesting. It could suggest that while a student may understand the meaning of a Latin word, drama activities might be able to make that meaning more real and relatable for them. In this way, they might be able to better understand the effect the Latin words have as descriptions of a character. These students' comments tie into the findings of Daniels & Downes (2015) that drama activities develop students' ability to empathise. In terms of implications for my research question, the students' responses suggest that role-playing does increase some students' sense of involvement in the story.

Secondly, there were students who 'understood' the characters by means of visualising the narrative better. The students who commented, 'I felt like I was Phormio . . . I could visualise it better' and 'I could imag[ine] the story better', imply that the students were immersed within the narrative to the

extent that their imaginations enabled them to see the characters and the action. It is difficult to know what the adjective ‘better’ means, but it suggests that these two students find that immersive drama activities to facilitate more of a visual dimension to Latin stories than the other ways of reading Latin stories that they have experienced. The drawings that one student associated with the one of the characters further reveal a deep level of understanding what they were like (Appendix 3). The student’s ability to translate their opinions about the character into images suggests that they have created a detailed and imagined version of them. Moreover, the comment of one student that the drama “showed the pain Barbillus was in” suggests that the student not only imagined the scene visually but even how the character felt.

Thirdly, the students wrote that the role-play and props helped them to remember the characters in a rich level of detail. The comments, ‘it gives you something to relate to, and remember’, ‘it helps me relate and will help me remember the lesson’ and ‘made me remember . . . relate to them’, reveal that these students considered the drama activities to have created hooks in their memory that will enable them to recall the lessons. These students seem to imply that there is a connection between relating to the characters and the ability to remember the lesson. It seems that the connection that the students made with the characters are the emotional hooks that will help them to remember the lessons.

Within the second theme, the students wrote that the drama activities made them feel immersed or engaged with the lessons. The responses, ‘I paid more attention’, ‘more interesting and makes more of an impact’ and ‘because it’s fun I want to be involved more so I learn more’, all suggest a strong level of engagement with the lessons. As above with the word ‘better’, it is hard to know what the comparative ‘more’ refers to here. These students may be comparing their experience of previous Latin lessons or even of their other subjects. Nonetheless, the comparative ‘more’ in the questionnaires seems to imply that either that students’ involvement in their Latin lessons increased or that their involvement in a classroom increased. Moreover, the comment of my observer at the beginning of one of lessons which involved props, ‘the students are all very keen to play’, suggests that the props acted as a hook for the lesson and engaged students from the beginning. My observer writes ‘I had wondered if they would quickly lose their enthusiasm, but they actually would have liked to have had longer’ implies that the students enjoyed the props. My observer was the students’ previous teacher and knows them well, and so the fact that the students’ engagement exceeded their expectations implies a great extent of engagement.

The experience of one student reveals a clearer example of their engagement with the story; their level of engagement with the characters resulted in an accurate prediction of what happens next in the story. The student writes, ‘I think that Phormio is helping and Astrol[o]ger is not a trained doctor’. The response, which was written only after the first lesson on the new topic and new characters, shows a deep level of engagement with the characters that goes so far as to accurately predict what happens much later in the narrative. It seems likely that the engagement with the characters, through role-play, enabled the student to carefully consider the motives behind their actions so that they could subsequently work out what is in store for them later in the narrative.

To close my discussion of the questionnaires, I shall consider the responses of students for whom the drama activities were not quite so effective. There were two students who implied that they prefer to do Latin to English translation tasks in Latin lessons. One writes ‘I think translations are more important’ and the other writes ‘I mean its [sic it’s] fun but I think that I personally find doing translations easier’. What is interesting about these comments is that elsewhere on their questionnaires, they had written that they found the lesson ‘fun’ and ‘engaging’. Moreover, we should note that in the lesson which they are responding to, they were required to do some translating in order to complete the role-play task. I think it is possible that the students are commenting on struggling with a change in style of lesson, rather than implying that they did not learn effectively within the immersive drama activities.

Another student commented on their experience by means of comparing their learning in another lesson. The student, following lesson 2, writes: ‘last lesson’s drama activities were more interactive.’ While their comment suggests that across both lessons, they found the drama activities positive, it is interesting that they considered lesson 1’s activities to be more ‘interactive’ when there were essentially the same two activities: creative play with props and role-play. The major difference was that in lesson 2, students could only play with the props if they arrived early. The word ‘interactive’ implies that it is the creative play with props that they missed. The implications from their comment are that for some students, the visual aspect of the props might not be sufficient, but that they must be given time to interact with them in order for a positive impact. Following the comment and my observer’s earlier note that the students ‘would have liked longer’, on reflection I would consider a way to involve the props into the whole lesson. However, overall, it appears that the students found the drama activities helped them understand the characters in greater detail than they were used to and that they felt engaged.

The Interviews

Following the questionnaires, I wished to find out which drama activities students found particularly helpful or unhelpful to their learning. I am anonymising the students' names by referring to them with different letters from the alphabet. I interviewed eight students in two groups of four.

Three students (A, B and F) spoke along similar lines in their comments:

Student A: 'The Barbillus dummy helped as a point of reference, [which] helped me visualise the scene'

Student B: 'The lesson where we had the dummy at the front helped me see the scene'.

Student F: 'I really enjoyed giving Barbillus CPR and wearing the gas mask. It helped me to see the scene more!'

While it is possible that Student B was influenced by the answer of Student A, Student F was in a separate set interviews and still made similar comments. It is interesting that some students found that the drama activities benefitted their imaginations, allowing them to 'see' the action of the narrative.

It seems that it was the props in particular that the students found helpful in terms of helping them to be involved in the narrative. Student E said that the props 'brought [the lesson] more to life', and Student F commented 'the props helped me to become the characters and think about how they might use these props to save Barbillus'. These comments complement what was written on the questionnaires about picturing the scene and feeling as though we were the characters in the stories. The word 'more to life' and 'to save Barbillus' suggest that the students were immersed into the stories to the extent that they were engaging with their imaginations. In this way, the props and Barbillus' dummy seem to have had a positive impact on increasing students' involvement in the Latin narrative.

The conflicting views on freeze frames were brought out more in the interviews than they were in the questionnaires. Student C comments that 'the freeze frames activity helped me to build the scene'. The word 'build' suggests that for Student C the freeze frames acted as a scaffolding for their ability to understand what was happening in the narrative. On a different note, Student A commented that the freeze frames 'would have been better if we could have used our own words. . .

rather than Latin'. It seems that Student A was engaged with the freeze frame activity and may have wanted to be further immersed by using English to describe the action rather than Latin.

One aspect of student perception that was not so present in the questionnaires was the students' positive response to working together. Student G comments that they 'really enjoyed' the teamwork and that 'it helped [them] to engage more and feel as though we were all investigating'. Student G not only picks up on the idea of the lessons being 'fun' but also suggests that the group work increased involvement in the lesson and in the story. The words '[I] feel as though we were all' imply that Student G found it helpful that everyone was immersed in the same experience. Student F implies that the group work was helpful through the words 'It was exciting. There was a lot of energy in the room'. It seems important that there is group-work involved in order to create an atmosphere that does encourage enthusiasm. In this way, the interviews confirmed that students found the lessons fun and engaging, as they had indicated in the questionnaires.

Conclusions

My research project used a range of drama activities in an attempt to immerse students into the narrative of the textbook. The responses to the questionnaires and the interviews suggested positive implications for my research questions. Overall it appears that students felt very involved in the Latin stories and connected closely with the characters within them. While it is difficult to comment on their learning and memory, some students felt as though they were able to remember details about the characters within the stories as a result of role-playing as them or using props associated with them.

However, as to Latin learning itself, the students who implied that they would have preferred translations tasks as well as the student who in the interview commented that they would have preferred English in the freeze frames brought up a significant point. It was difficult to blend the drama activities with Latin learning. One of my main aims in the process was not to sacrifice Latin learning for the sake of doing drama activities, however I now reflect that that there can be compromise. It seems to me that a mixture between using drama activities to immerse students into a story so that they develop connections with the characters and are engaged is a helpful starting point. If I were to teach the sequence again, I would not conduct 4 lessons in a row that focused on using drama activities, but I would also involve more elements of language teaching. While the

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students did not seem to mind the lack of variation in these drama-orientated lessons, engaging with the narrative and developing empathy cannot be the sole focus.

My research project has taught me that using drama activities can facilitate students' imagination and immerse them into the narratives of Latin stories, benefitting their engagement, empathy and to some extent their cultural awareness. As a result, I will continue increasingly to incorporate drama activities into my lessons and strive to think of ways I might involve more grammar learning into these.

If I were to teach the sequence of lessons again, I would emphasise the role that the props play since the students highlighted these as useful to their learning and engaging. In an ideal world, the props I would use would be a mixture of familiar tools for the student and of ancient objects that they would need to investigate. I would add more variation within the sequence of lessons so that we do not neglect the learning of new Latin grammar in the textbook: the involvement of drama would take a slightly less significant role in every lesson but would instead take a more consistent role over a longer period of time. I would also increase the amount of group activities so that there might be more engagement and so that students might learn more from each other's imaginations.

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