

Part 6.

THE DISPLACED TEACHER AND THE DISPLACED CHILD

UK Research - Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

This research forms part of an international project that uses drama and theatre to promote the well-being of teachers and young people.

The UK-based strand of the research takes an interpretative and ethnographic approach to qualitative data from teachers participating in the project at an inner-city primary school. This is subsequently analysed by an expert interpretation panel.

The research explores how the Theatre in Education Company Big Brum sought to meet the needs of the 'displaced child' by engaging these teachers in a felt and creative manner.

The research asks to what extent Big Brum was successful in its stated ambition that:

“by working with teachers in affective, creative and collaborative ways, the Company believes that they will be able to synthesise new forms of authentic educational practice that benefit all children, including those most at risk of school exclusion”?

It further considers what Big Brum, as well as other schools and practitioners, can learn from this experience.

CONTEXTS - Well-being crisis, global pandemic

The project that the research investigates took place in the context of an endemic crisis of well-being for teachers and young people, further aggravated and made visible by the 2020-21 global coronavirus pandemic.

“The focus of this one is completely different ... I think it will really contribute to the welfare of the children. It [the pandemic] can't really be ignored. For us to give children the time and space for the children to digest it is the way forward. It would be worse if you just put it to one side, went back to a 'normal' focus, what you would have taught a previous Year 6 group. It wouldn't give them a chance to work through it. There will be lots of children that it's really presented a lot of difficulties for.”

- Teacher AA, Benson School

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Children's well-being

- The project had clear and positive benefits for the well-being of participating children.
- The project created a 'safe space' where children could freely and openly share their feelings, experiences and ideas.
- There were no exclusions by the school during the project period.
- Good attendance in the participating classes was maintained during those times when the school was open and during which the main project activities took place. This was not always the case with other classes at the school.
- Children experiencing disadvantage and/or requiring Early Help appear to have experienced similar benefits from the project to those for other children.

Teachers' well-being

- The project was demonstrably beneficial to the well-being of the participating teachers.
- The project created a 'safe space' where adults could freely and openly share their feelings, experiences and ideas.
- The teachers were able to assert themselves through the project as active agents in their own authentic professional practice.

Collaborative and creative practice

- Project benefits appear to have been circular: "healthy wellbeing for pupils equals healthy wellbeing for staff equals healthy wellbeing for pupils."
- Collaboration itself seems to have been a key element in promoting teachers' (and thus children's) well-being.
- Collaborating within 'the crucible paradigm' allowed Big Brum and the teachers to work with considerable freedom.
- The project strongly emphasised the affective dimension for both adult and child participants, including providing a space where participants could talk about, rather than repress, their feelings.
- Experiencing and processing their own felt/emotional responses to the project appears to have empowered the teachers when it came to their work with the children.
- Pedagogies employed by this project could be widely and beneficially applicable beyond it.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate clearly that this project benefited all children, including those identified by the school as being most at risk of school exclusion.

They also demonstrate how creative collaboration helped enable teachers' felt understanding' of the work, thereby giving rise to forms of authentic practice that resulted in these benefits.

This project has taken a significant step forward in terms of using drama to enable significant collaborative work that connects Big Brum's creative practice to the authentic emotional and educational needs of teachers and children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This project raises the potential for the company to go both deeper and wider in terms of further development. This might include more in-depth work with existing partner schools; exploring the transferability of 'the Benson model' to other contexts and settings; the development of a CPD programme that draws on its pedagogies.

This in turn raises questions about whether Big Brum should work predominantly with schools which appear to be 'compatible' or seek to engage a wider spectrum of schools.

Data collection methods could be developed further, so as to be more sensitive and inclusive to partner needs and so as to restore aspects of research design that it had not been possible to pursue during the conditions in which this research took place.

The further development of Expert Interpretation Panels should be considered and could be beneficial for those involved.