A Framework to Enhance Learner Participation through the Drama Curriculum

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Abstract

The incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law in 2024, means that fulfilling children's rights and embedding them in Scotland's education system is a top priority. Article 12 mandates the right of the child to fully participate in decision-making around all matters affecting them. Despite a positive education policy context and a wealth of research highlighting the positive outcomes of learner participation, there continue to be challenges fulfilling policy intentions in practice. This paper aims to clarify the key concepts underpinning effective pupil participation and the contextual factors that support and undermine its success, specifically through Drama education. This paper highlights the importance of the prominence of Drama in the curriculum if we are to fulfil the aspirations of the UNCRC. The collaborative nature of Drama is the most emancipatory aspect, promoting a pedagogy of participation. Providing opportunities for learners to develop confidence and leadership skills in a low-risk environment prepares them for more formal shared decision-making out with the classroom. It concludes with a framework to support leadership and evaluation of learner participation at departmental level, developing a participatory ethos from the inside out.

Keywords: learner participation, drama curriculum, shared decision-making, pupil voice, pedagogy

Introduction

There is an extensive body of literature which evidences the benefits of learner participation in schools. Learner focused benefits include; improved engagement, empowerment, and the development of transferable life skills (Mitra, 2018) and organisational benefits include; enhanced intergenerational relationships, better ethos and shared sense of community (Cross et al., 2014, Graham et al., 2018). While the education policy context in the country advocates the importance of learner participation, through a range of key policies, fulfilling these aspirations continues to be a challenge in Scottish schools (Cross et al., 2014; Hulme et al., 2011; Mannion et al., 2020). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report supports this, noting that learners' input does not appear to be taken into account enough in decision-making (2021, p.18). While there have been attempts to provide meaningful structures to ensure pupil voice is captured, many argue that the frameworks utilised in schools are outdated and in fact replacing the benefits of

consequential dialogue and shared decision-making with practices that are tokenistic at best (Fielding, 2001a; Hall, 2016, Hart, 1992; Jones & Hall 2021). There are also ethical concerns, noted by Mitra, when young people are not "authentic participants but instead symbols that the school, district and/or state is doing 'something'" (2018, p. 479). A recommendation in *The Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18)* guideline is that participation must be "intrinsic to everyday ways of working" and that educators must reflect on ways to better support learner participation in their schools. (Education Scotland, 2018, p. 7). This should begin with helping young people understand their rights and enabling them to contribute to all kinds of decision-making processes affecting their educational experiences.

This paper aims to provide clarity around the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation and contextual factors that support and undermine its success in Scottish schools. It does so by drawing on the discipline of Drama and examines how the Drama curriculum can equip young people with the skills and abilities to participate and lead effectively. Through the emergence of a new framework, it will develop clear guidance, rooted in research, to support planning, implementation and evaluation of learner participation at departmental level.

The study is framed by the following overarching research question:

What are the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation in Scottish schools?

The research question will be addressed through the following sub questions:

i) How do contextual factors support or undermine effective learner participation?
ii) How can educational professionals support and enable learners to participate?
iii) To what extent can curriculum Drama equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively?

Scottish Education Policy underpinning Learner Participation

The recent incorporation of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) into Scots Law means that fulfilling children's rights, and embedding them in Scotland's education system, is non-negotiable. The right for children to be involved in all decisions that affect them is reflected in several key policy drivers that shape the way participation is enacted in Scottish schools. Learner participation is a key thread running through *How Good Is Our School* (4th ed.) (Education Scotland, 2015), which is a framework used nationally to help educational professionals implement self-evaluation at all levels. It promotes learners taking lead roles in school improvement procedures, a school culture committed to children's rights and developing positive relationships. Learner participation is a vital aspect of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). It advocates "opportunities to participate responsibly in decision-making, to contribute as leaders and role models" (Education Scotland, 2019, p. 3). The four capacities promote opportunities to acquire skills for learning, life and work and encourage learners to become "democratic citizens and active shapers of that world" (2019, p. 2). The *Getting it Right for Every Child* policy framework, seeks to support and enhance children and young people's wellbeing through an emphasis on individual needs, strengths, and ensuring every child's voice is heard and valued. This policy reflects a commitment to equity, children's rights, and participation in all decision-making processes affecting their lives (Scottish Government, 2015). An *Empowered System* identifies improved attainment, wellbeing and better school ethos as benefits of learner participation (Education Scotland, n.d.). The policy guideline encourages a rights-based approach, collaboration and mutual respect between all partners. The *Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18)* framework highlights that participation should not be limited to formal pupil councils and should be experienced by all learners. It identifies equal opportunities to participate, a rights-based approach, consequential dialogue and shared decision-

making as the fundamental principles of learner participation. The document reiterates the importance of communications between adults and young people which are "two-way, voluntary, sustained, deal with real concerns, and based on mutual respect and children's rights" (Education Scotland, 2018, p. 5).

Therefore, it could be said that the promotion of participation within current policy discourse is underpinned by four main educational priorities:

- The fulfilment of children's rights
- School Improvement
- Ensuring equity and excellence in education
- Citizenship education

Prioritising participation in Scottish schools aims to improve outcomes for learners and institutions, whilst nurturing a generation of informed, engaged citizens who are equipped to positively contribute to society and uphold principles of equality and respect.

Issues in Practice

Initially pupil voice was concerned with consulting young people on aspects of school life, and evaluating learning and teaching through structured, school improvement processes such as pupil councils, surveys and focus groups (Mannion et al., 2020; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). However, this led to concerns about whether learners' views were being listened to and acted upon by those involved in decision-making processes (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Lundy, 2007). Rudduck et al. (1995) highlighted the dangers of speaking on behalf of learners when meanings are refracted "through the lens of our own interests and concerns". Therefore, the agendas on which learners are invited to contribute, often diminish the potential for consequential dialogue with young people (Nelson, 2018). Some argue that pupil voice has become a tick box exercise, used to "fulfil externally mandated policy and framework requirements" (Jones & Hall, 2022, p. 574) and that pupils currently lack agency within traditional school structures and processes (Bovill et al., 2011; Fleming, 2015). There is consensus in the literature that when delivered in this way, pupil voice becomes another accountability measure and tokenistic form of democratic processes (Arnot & Reay, 2007; Fielding, 2011; Hart, 1992; Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Fielding proposed a more transformative approach, whereby learners and teachers work together in partnership. He argued that for participation to be meaningful it must be built on authentic engagement, dialogue and shared inquiry that is influential and leads to new improved practices (2004). When learners feel valued and can see their perspectives being acted upon, it develops their sense of agency and encourages further engagement (Cook-Sather et al., 2023).

Curriculum Drama

Drama education in Scotland is heavily influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Freire advocated for education to be a transformative and liberating experience, empowering pupils to become active agents in their own learning and in society (1970). He developed the concept *critical pedagogy* in which learners are encouraged to engage critically with the world around them and to challenge dominant power structures. This is reflected in the CfE experiences and outcomes for Drama which stipulate opportunities for pupils to "express and communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings through drama" and "use drama to explore real and imaginary situations, helping me to understand my world" (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 7). One of his key ideas was the concept of dialogue, where both teachers and learners are active participants in the learning process "the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students" (Freire, 2000, p. 72).

Similarly, Boal believed that "theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society" (2008, p. 78). He developed *Theatre of the Oppressed*, a pedagogy which uses theatre as a tool for social and political change. Forum theatre explores issues of injustice and learners suggest alternative actions for the characters. This process is "not intended to provide answers but to encourage debate" amongst learners (Boal, 2008, p. 109). By presenting real-life scenarios and exploring different solutions, learners are encouraged to consider the perspectives of others and develop empathy. This process of enquiry enables learners to become active participants in their own learning, developing their critical thinking skills and sense of agency (Cook-Sather, 2006; Hammond, 2013; Jones & Hall, 2021).

Methodology

This study utilised a systematic literature review. Taking such an approach can have "as much intellectual and practical value as collecting first-hand data. A thorough critical evaluation of existing research often leads to new insights" (Hart, 2001, p. 3). This approach was selected to synthesise and analyse the existing literature on learner participation, to provide a reliable summary of evidence and valuable insight to inform future practice. Although systematic reviews can utilise a vast range of literature sources, including grey literature and policy documents (Ridley, 2012), the decision was made to focus on the most relevant sources to ensure a realistic and manageable scope for this study. A similar approach to that used by Nguyen et al. was adopted, in which only sources from academic journals were selected as these have been thoroughly peer reviewed and thought to be credible sources (2019). This search strategy aimed to ensure that all relevant studies were captured, minimising the risk of missing important information (Ridley, 2012). The search strategy was designed to identify relevant studies for inclusion in this systematic review. Relevant key words related to the study such as "pupil voice", "learner participation" and "pupil leadership" were entered into ProQuest Academic, SCOPUS and all EBSCOhost research databases. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage and to locate current research. Secondly, search queries using a combination of key words such as "drama and pupil voice", "drama and learner participation" and "transformative drama education" were entered to the same databases, using the same filters as above.

Twenty-four articles met the predetermined criteria and became the main body of data for this research. The next stage of the process was data extraction and appraisal. This involved systematically extracting relevant data from the shortlisted articles and appraising the methodological quality of the studies. To ensure the reliability and validity of the review findings and to make evidence-based recommendations for future practice (Booth et al., 2021) a customised data extraction form was developed, in line with standardised examples from the Cochrane Institute (2017) which helped to extract key information from the selected studies. It included the headings; "author", "date", "location", "study characteristics", "participants", "intervention details", and "key findings". This framework enabled all relevant information to be captured and ensured consistently when extracting data from each study. The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, a qualitative approach which constructs patterns and develops emergent themes across a data set in order to produce a coherent interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke's six-stage process was used, which involved; familiarisation with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, revising and defining and reporting the analysis (2013). This flexible process involved iterative movement between the different stages allowing for rigorous exploration of the data, leading to insightful analysis.

Findings

School Culture

Studies conducted in secondary school settings, highlight lack of time and issues of performativity as the main barriers to successful learner participation (Cross et al., 2014, Hulme et al., 2011, Mayes et al., 2020). The immense pressure of academic achievement results in meaningful collaboration with learners being overlooked and replaced with preparation for summative examinations (Graham et al., 2018). However, some research highlights the connection between effective learner participation and improved attainment (Mannion et al., 2020). Pupil participation fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills which can be applied in and beyond the classroom (Hulme et al., 2011). When learners feel their contributions are valued, they develop a sense of ownership over their education, leading to increased confidence, enthusiasm and willingness to strive for excellence (Hall, 2016). Some research also alludes to how learner's experiences of democratic processes in school enable them to develop skills, such as expression, negotiation and cooperation, preparing them to become active and informed citizens in society (Cross et al., 2014), a key aspiration of Curriculum for Excellence (Education Scotland, 2019). The most effective examples of learner participation are situated in a school culture, where pupils and teachers feel empowered to engage fully in decision-making processes (Graham et al., 2018). Schools which adopt a distributed model of participation identify enhanced engagement and motivation when pupils are taught about coordinating decision-making and plan implementation in their school. Learners openly discuss the need for trust, compromise and delegating responsibility as well as valuing discussion and explanation when decisions don't go their way. Similarly, Charteris and Smardon (2018) identify positive examples of pupil participation in schools where they have been taught about the structures, processes, knowledge and skills needed to initiate ideas and take responsibility. However, top down improvement initiatives and performance targets can influence school leaders' decisions about whether to persevere with the challenging culture work needed to embed authentic participation (Mayes et al., 2020). Therefore, its success often comes down to the value base of senior leaders (Cross et al., 2014; Hulme et al., 2011) and their commitment to ensuring that participation is high on the agenda, and systems are in place to support it.

Intergenerational Dialogue through Creative Classroom Practice and Enquiry

A key theme reoccurring in the research literature, is the importance of intergenerational dialogue between pupils and teachers, which is two-way, and built on mutual respect (Black & Mayes, 2020; Chilvers et al., 2019; Leat & Reid, 2012; Mayes et al., 2020). While seen as a valuable approach, both learners and teachers can find this a testy process, pointing to teachers feeling threatened by the potential impact of pupil feedback (Black & Mayes, 2020; Mayes et al., 2020) or the belief that pupil voice can be viewed as a mechanism for surveillance (Charteris & Smardon, 2018). On the other hand, learners report feeling uncomfortable critiquing their teachers and identify that teachers need to be open to pupil feedback and ready to make changes in light of it. (Graham et al., 2018; Hulme at al., 2011; Jones & Bubb, 2020). This type of relationship goes against the traditional power dynamic experienced in schools and learners call for greater equality with their teachers (Graham et al., 2018).

Participatory approaches, which allow teachers and learners to get to know each other and feel comfortable, can catalyse ongoing dialogue and become the groundwork for open and honest conversations about learning and teaching (Susinos & Haya, 2014). An important message emerging from the literature is the need to utilise more creative and inclusive forms of participatory practice (Chappell & Craft, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2019; Hajisoteriou et al., 2021; Hammond, 2013). Creative learning conversations flatten the usual hierarchical power relations found in schools and promote a sense of equality (Chappell & Craft, 2011). Creative activities which encourage intergenerational

collaboration also develop learners' skills in relation to effective dialogue, cooperation and deliberation. A study which utilised forum theatre to elicit pupil voice, empowered pupils to express themselves through performance. Using drama techniques such as improvisation, problem solving, emotional awareness and imagination, pupils developed advocacy through means other than the spoken word (Hammond, 2013). Similarly, the use of collaborative storytelling to explore issues of social justice, highlighted how creative pedagogical interventions can foster children's critical thinking, create trusting relationships and develop expression and collaboration. Learners who participated, discussed how the programme had encouraged them to be more actively engaged and committed to promoting social justice in and beyond their school (Hajisoteriou et al., 2021). The collaborative and participant focused nature of Drama is the most emancipatory aspect which promotes a pedagogy of participation. Hammond (2013) argues the performing arts are significantly underutilised within educational settings and despite a developing evidence base, there still appears to be a world of opportunity.

Shared Decision-making through Curriculum Reform and Research

To be transformative, this intergenerational dialogue must be influential and lead to new, improved practices. This relies on learners sharing in the responsibility for the vision, processes and outcomes of improvement initiatives, ensuring school decision-making captures the needs of all parties (Charteris & Smardon, 2018). Despite a desire to engage in shared decision-making, teachers report uncertainty and lack of competence in how to include learners in such discussions (Hulme et al., 2011; Jones & Bubb, 2020). One method with positive results across several studies was a teacher-learner partnership approach to curriculum development. When pupils are actively engaged in sharing their opinions, ideas, and concerns, it empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey (Gibson et al., 2021). Using creative activities and materials relevant to the discipline to elicit deeper evaluation of course content and facilitate intergenerational dialogue results in enhanced critical skills, more accessible assessment frameworks, changes to teachers' thinking and enriched curriculum design (Chilvers et al., 2019). To facilitate feasible changes to practice, it is the role of the teacher to be transparent with learners about how decisions are made within an institution as well as time and financial implications (Cross et al., 2014). Understanding the complexities, constraints and tensions, is what enables learners and teachers, to find the possibilities that exist and generate innovative ideas (Mitra, 2018).

Pupil-led research, whereby pupils have worked collaboratively to plan, develop and implement their own improvement projects, has shed light on the true capabilities of young people (Gibson et al., 2021). Vital to this process was developing trusting relationships, teacher-pupil mentoring, co-designed decision-making and final recommendations based on changes the young people would like to see. A fundamental idea emerging from the literature is the need for educational professionals to "scaffold the development of students' participatory skills (such as negotiation, compromise, coordinating a plan, etc.)" (Graham et al., 2018, p. 1041). Teaching decision-making, through practice, and providing leadership opportunities that enable pupils to apply these skills, develops confidence, democratic values and shared responsibility. This mentoring approach helps to develop learners' understanding of how a school works as well as a range of new skills and sense of agency over their educational experience (Susinos & Haya, 2014).

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Culture Shift

The type of intergenerational collaboration propelled in policy goes against the traditional power hierarchies within educational settings, and most decision-making processes remain in the hands of senior leaders (Graham et al., 2018; Hulme et al., 2011). Listening to pupils is a transformative

process which will lead to reconfiguring the structure, processes and hierarchies of schools (Fielding, 2007). However, the evidence suggests that adults are still reluctant to change established practices and ways of working, mostly due to time, resources and focus on academic achievement. Addressing this challenge requires a culture shift. Educational leaders need to value participation as a key aspect of academic achievement and communicate this across their schools by disseminating research, coordinating a whole school approach and putting systems in place that enable it to flourish. Creative participatory approaches, such as drama, dilute the traditional hierarchies and power dynamics of schools, empowering learners to act (Biddulph, 2011). The creation of new pedagogical relationships and practices, underpinned by intergenerational learning, is arguably the first step in a greater presence of pupils in decision-making processes (Susinos & Haya, 2014). Previous literature has suggested that authentic learner participation requires strong pedagogical leadership and a school culture that values and supports it (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). However, this review of literature has identified that modelling strong collaborative processes and acting upon pupil voice, in itself, contributes to the development of a whole school participatory ethos from the inside out (Cook-Sather 2019).

Experiences in the Classroom Can Lead to More Formal Participation Across the School and Beyond

Embedding participatory practices in day-to-day classroom experiences helps move away from the opinion that participation is an opt-in exercise only available to an elite group of pupils (Susinos & Haya, 2014). A move towards collaborative learning in the classroom and embedded democratic processes ensures all voices are heard and empowers learners to use them. Engaging in personally relevant critical enquiry, has shown to enable pupils to question the fundamental habits and patterns of school, challenge injustices and impact their surroundings (Mitra, 2018). Providing opportunities to involve pupils in curriculum reform and design has also demonstrated very positive results such as enhanced intergenerational relationships, the development of creative and critical skills, as well as innovative pedagogical approaches to improve learning and teaching. Evident from the findings is the importance of teaching pupils to value deliberation, modelling appropriate behaviours and approaches and providing scaffolding that supports and enables learners to contribute (Mitra, 2018). Pupil experience of informal participation within the classroom, where there is less risk, can eventually lead to greater involvement in deliberate forums and whole school decision-making processes. Opportunities to develop confidence and learn collaborative skills through group work can then be applied to the more formal structures in and beyond school (Cross et al., 2014). Encouraging pupils to engage in dialogue and discussion about learning and teaching creates a pedagogical partnership which improves curriculum experiences as well as nurturing a democratic, rights-based approach to education (Hall, 2016; Souza et al., 2012).

Classroom Drama Creates the Conditions for Effective Participation

The findings indicate that when pupils feel safe and connected to their teachers, they are more likely to express their thoughts, ask questions and share ideas without fear of judgement. This study has identified six key characteristics underpinning effective dialogue between teachers and learners including: trust, respect, exchange of ideas, debate, shared decision-making, and distributed action. When conducted in this way, there is a move from intergenerational dialogue to intergenerational learning, creating positive outcomes for learners, organisations, curriculum planning and staff development (Chappell & Craft, 2011; Fielding, 2001b; Fielding, 2007). Creative pedagogies have proven to be effective means of engaging pupils, enabling them to explore complex issues and themes and build confidence in their ability to communicate and collaborate. Role-play, improvisation, and other creative activities, enable pupils to explore issues of social justice, inequality, and discrimination, developing their understanding of different perspectives. By stepping into the shoes of different characters and exploring their thoughts and feelings, pupils develop empathy as well as critical thinking skills (Jones & Hall, 2021). Therefore, it could be argued that

classroom-based activities such as collaborative group work and creative pedagogy are key to laying the groundwork for more substantial forms of participation across the school (Cross et al., 2014). Optimising opportunities for all children to share their views is a fundamental right therefore, further exploration of how creative approaches can be utilised is essential (Hammond, 2013). This is in line with the new Scottish government guidance which aims to develop more creative means of embedding children's rights, such as music, art and drama. (Scottish Government, 2024).

Enhancing Participation Through Drama

A main objective of this research was to identify the key concepts underpinning effective participation in Scottish schools. The concepts identified in both Scottish education policy and the literature reviewed for this study are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Key Concepts Underpinning Effective Learner Participation (synthesised by the researcher)

Effective Pupil Participation

School Improvement

Quality Assurance

Children's Rights

Citizenship

Transformative Leadership

Flat Power Dynamic

Positive Relationships

Intergenerational Dialogue and Learning

Collaboration

Communication

Expression

Creativity

Problem-solving

Critical Inquiry

Inclusivity

Empathy

Leadership

Reflection

Social Justice

Shared Decision-making

Evaluation

Another objective of this research was to examine how curriculum Drama can support and enhance participation in Scottish schools by equipping learners with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively. The key concepts underpinning the Drama curriculum in Scotland, are listed below in Table 2.
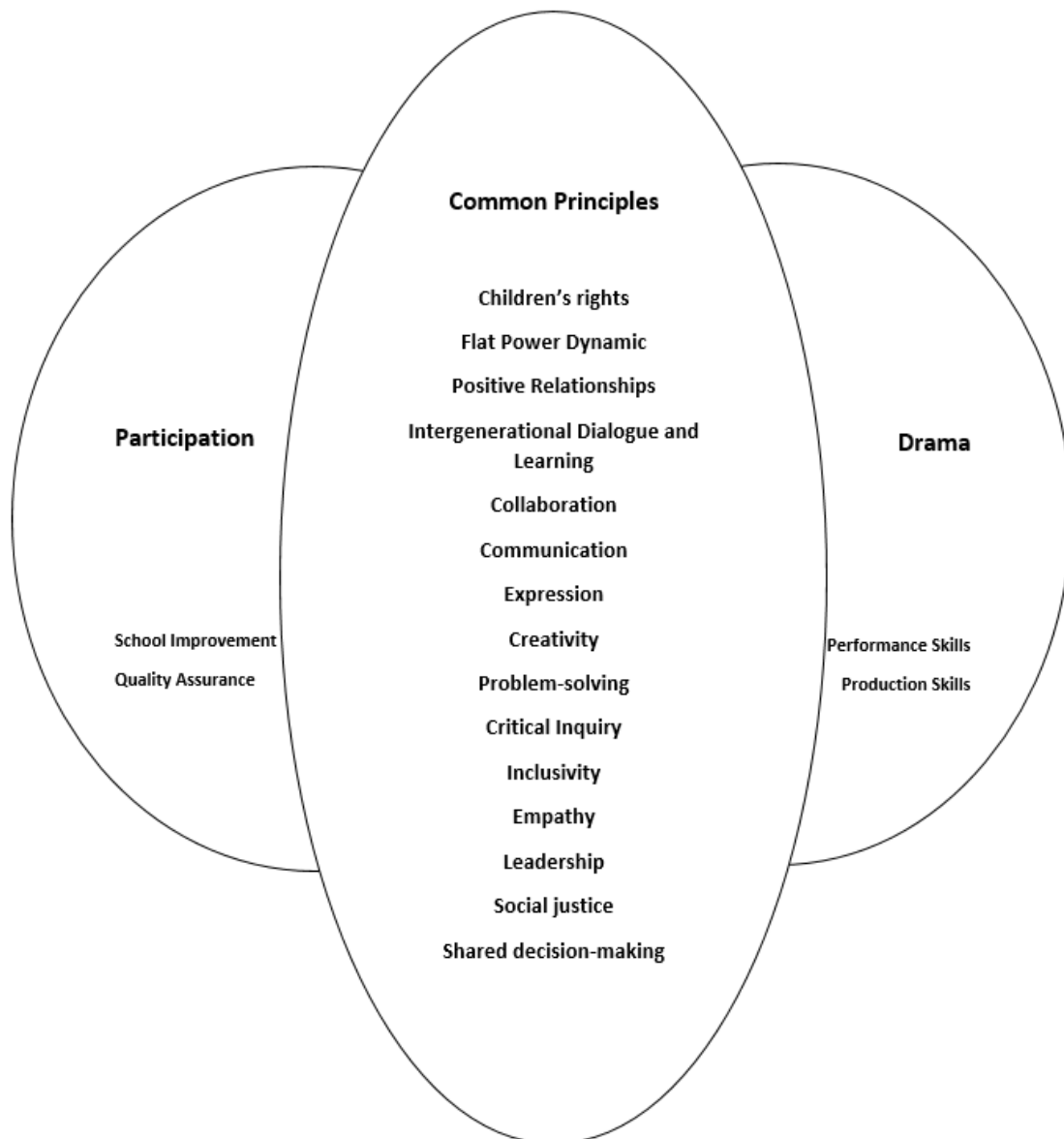
Table 2.
*Key Concepts Underpinning the Scottish Drama Curriculum (*synthesised by the researcher)

Drama Curriculum

Performance Skills

Production Skills

Performance Analysis

Collaboration

Communication

Expression

Creativity

Problem-solving

Reflection

Critical Inquiry

Children's Rights

Inclusivity

Empathy

Leadership

Constructive Feedback

Issue Based Drama

Alternative Course of Action

Shared Decision-making

Evaluation

Flat Power Dynamic

Positive Relationships

Intergenerational Dialogue and Learning

A key finding from this study is that the concepts underpinning effective learner participation in schools align closely with the skills developed through curriculum Drama. Figure 1 below attempts to synthesise both sets of concepts, illuminating many shared principles.

Figure 1.
Synthesis of Underlying Concepts as Found in Policy and Research

Common Principles

Participation

Drama

Children's rights
Flat Power Dynamic
Positive Relationships
Intergenerational Dialogue and Learning
Collaboration
Communication
Expression
Creativity
Problem-solving
Critical Inquiry
Inclusivity
Empathy
Leadership
Social justice
Shared decision-making

School Improvement
Quality Assurance

Performance Skills
Production Skills

The diagram highlights that the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation are in fact embedded in the Scottish Drama Curriculum. Therefore, it could be argued that Drama is a powerful tool for enhancing learner participation in Scottish secondary schools as it:

- dilutes hierarchical power dynamics
- is built on collaboration and the exchange of ideas
- enables all learners to express themselves through verbal and non-verbal communication
- develops creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- enables intergenerational learning through critical inquiry
- empowers learners and teachers to challenge injustice
- encourages shared decision-making and responsibility

Drama provides a safe place to engage learners in authentic participation practices that lead to positive change.

Developing a Framework of Practice

The findings from this study and key aspects of literature and policy have been synthesised to develop a framework that endeavours to move beyond identifying concepts to providing a clear and accessible guide that will inform and enhance learner participation within a secondary school Drama department. Figure 2 shows the framework, which is expanded on the following pages. The guide aims to:

- raise awareness of learner participation
- highlight potential barriers and opportunities
- develop a shared rational and strategy for implementation
- promote the relational work that will determine its success
- suggest classroom based approaches that foster authentic learner participation
- identify evaluation processes that will enable sustainability

How to Develop a Participatory Ethos in your Department: A Framework for Enhancing Learner Participation Practice

Figure 2
How to Develop a Participatory Ethos in your Department (synthesis of findings)
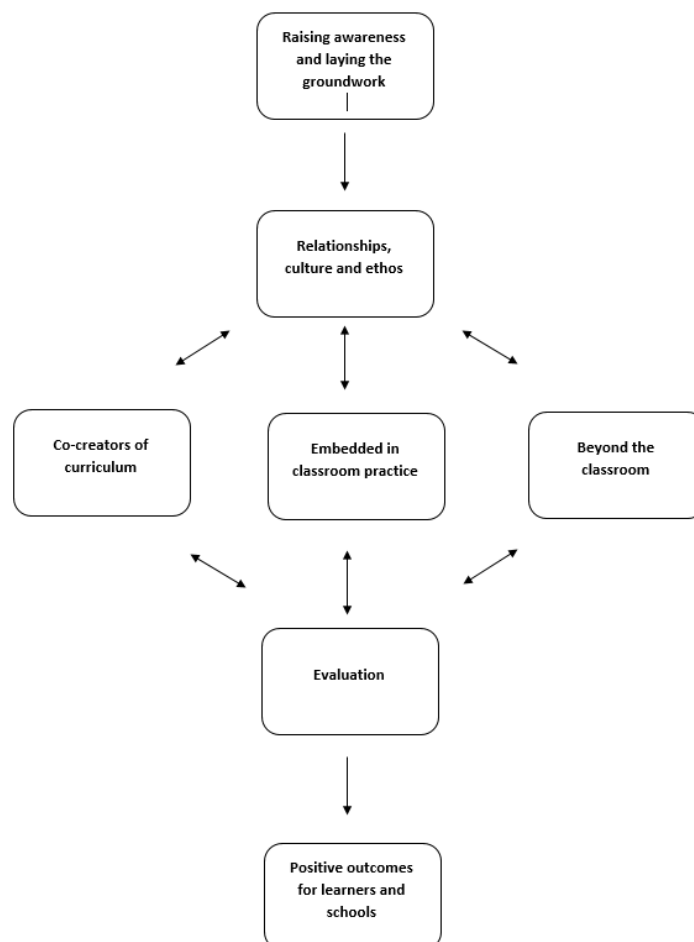
Developing awareness and laying the groundwork (staff and pupils)

- Provide a clear rationale and definition of learner participation based on policy and research.
- Reflect on current practice to identify contextual barriers, supports and opportunities.
- Establish a shared vision and responsibility for learner participation across the department.
- Develop a clear and accessible strategy for implementation.
- Promote and enable opportunities for professional learning.

Relationships, culture and ethos

Identify the importance of positive relationships that are built on principles of:

- Democratic values.
- Equality.
- Trust and mutual respect.
- Intergenerational dialogue and learning.
- Collaborative inquiry.
- Shared decision-making and collective responsibility.

Co-creators of curriculum

- Share curriculum frameworks.
- Be transparent about policy/school expectations, limitations and timelines.
- Use creative approaches to elicit pupil perspective and ideas.
- Engage in critical inquiry.
- Scaffold activities for pupils.
- Coach and mentor learners through this process.
- Implement learner suggestions.
- Involve learners in evaluating impact and establishing next steps.
- Recognise involvement in enhancing learning and teaching.

Embedded in classroom practice

Suggestions based on research evidence. The list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

- Provide opportunities for collaborative group work.
- Promote democratic values and practice negotiation and shared decision-making in the classroom.
- Utilise drama activities such as games, improvisation, roleplay, and creative storytelling, enabling learners to develop communication, creativity, empathy, and critical thinking skills.
- Embed opportunities for personalisation choice and harness learners' interests and talents. This can be in relation to content, stimulus, form of theatrical expression and production role.
- Facilitate whole class productions where each learner has a vital role and feels valued.
- Offer a wide range of curricular pathways and vocational courses.
- Engage in inquiry based learning and mentor pupils through this process.
- Use Forum Theatre to explore issues of social justice and to establish alternative course of action.

Beyond the classroom

- Provide opportunities for pupil led research to be conducted and shared across the wider school.
- Use theatre performance to communicate important ideas.
- Provide opportunities for learners to participate and apply their leadership skills outwith the classroom such as extra-curricular drama clubs and performing arts events.

Evaluation

- Involve learners in evaluating impact and change.
- Identify progress, challenges and next steps.
- Involve learners in sharing good practice with other departments.
- Put systems in place to extend and improve practice across the school.

Positive outcomes for learners and schools

The recommendations above should work collectively towards the following outcomes:

- Improved relationships.
- Enhanced learning and teaching.
- Innovative curriculum design.
- Better ethos and sense of community.
- Improved engagement, empowerment and agency.
- Improved attainment and achievement.

Conclusion

This research concludes that a main barrier to authentic learner participation is the traditional hierarchies and power dynamics found in Scottish secondary schools. Issues of performativity continue to impact authentic collaboration with pupils, despite empirical evidence suggesting that the skills, attributes and mind-set developed through participatory practice enhance academic achievement. It is suggested that future studies provide more rigorous and methodologically sophisticated, empirical research on the impact of learner participation on attainment. Learner participation is most effective when situated in a school culture which values its contributions to school improvement, relationships, curriculum reform and learner agency. Factors which enhance its success include: a coordinated whole school approach with clear rationale, staff training, time and resources that support authentic intergenerational collaboration, and opportunities for shared-decision-making. A fundamental principle underpinning learner participation is intergenerational learning. This positive relationship built on trust and mutual respect ensures teachers and learners feel their contributions are valued, and encourages them to engage in conversations about school improvement that are influential. Creative activities such as Drama have proven to dilute these traditional relations and lay the groundwork for open and honest dialogue. Through the exchange of ideas, deliberation, transparency and distributed responsibility, learners and teachers can engage in shared decision-making processes that lead to positive change.

A key implication for policy and practice is helping educational professionals utilise creative pedagogy to foster a culture of participation. Learner participation must be embedded in the everyday practices of schools and experienced through pedagogical approaches used in the classroom. Providing opportunities for pupils to develop participatory skills in a low-risk environment prepares them for more formal shared decision-making out with the classroom. What is vital is that pupils are supported through this process using appropriately scaffolded activities. Strategies such as modelling democratic processes, collaborative group work, critical enquiry, forum theatre and performance elicit authentic pupil voice and create the conditions for critical engagement and exploration of issues of social justice.

This research advocates the true potential of Drama, not just as a subject but as a pedagogy that fosters the conditions, relationships and capacities that enable effective learner participation. Consequently, future empirical studies would benefit from focusing on the use of drama and other expressive art forms to enhance the general principal of participation, which plays a fundamental role in realising all the rights of the child.

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