

Research Briefing No. 16

Using drama to increase the impact of the Home School Knowledge Exchange project

Key findings

- The project established that drama can be an appealing and effective way of communicating issues arising from educational research. The evaluations of the drama workshops and performances showed that live drama events can have a powerful impact on different audiences e.g. *'Wonderful! Really excellent way of getting respondents' voices heard'* and *'Memorable in a way that a conventional paper cannot hope to be'*.
- The project aroused considerable interest e.g. performances at conferences organised by Rhondda Cynon Taf LEA for 150 teachers and advisors; as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science before policy makers from the Welsh Assembly. Both the main collaborators, Theatr Iolo and Focus Productions have taken on a degree of ownership of the shared enterprise and planned to take it forward after the completion of the project. 500 copies of the DVD were distributed.
- Using drama to increase the impact of an educational research project is not however unproblematic and include issues of *autonomy and control* - educational researchers are not drama specialists and collaborations involve handing over a degree of control to the drama professionals *representativeness; authenticity or resonance*.
- A significant ethical issue arose out of our feelings of responsibility towards our audiences - how far were we entitled to engage with the audience's emotions through a dramatic production?



The research

The idea of using drama to increase the impact of the HSKE project grew out of discussions between the project team and various user communities when it was noted that several of the project's findings had a strong emotional content. The use of drama to communicate research is part of a wider interest in alternative methods of communicating research outcomes and exploring issues during research inquiry through a range of visual, dramatic and textual practices. Based on case studies from the HSKE transfer strand, two main products were produced from the project: a script for live drama performances and a DVD which raises issues about primary/secondary transfer, presents the voices of children, parents and teachers, and shows a number of drama activities which can be used to support children and their families through the transfer process.



Theatr lolo in opening scene of drama 'Ready or Not?'

Research design

The approach adopted on the project was collaborative and exploratory. Our two main collaborators were Theatr lolo (a Cardiff-based Theatre in Education company) and Focus Productions (a Bristol-based TV and video production company). At the start of the project, we shared the project's aims and objectives with these collaborators in a series of meetings (sometimes singly, sometimes joint) and together developed a programme of activities which drew on our collaborators' particular expertise and experience to meet the project's goals. The workshops and drama performances were evaluated after each event, and these evaluations were fed into further discussions with our collaborators and thence into the development of further activities, such as the script and DvD. The project thus shared many of the characteristics of action research, such as the cyclical structure of action/evaluation/reflection/further action.

Further information

Copies of the DvD 'Ready or Not? Using drama to support transfer from primary to secondary school' are available by emailing Wan.Yee@bristol.ac.uk.

Theatr lolo is an award-winning theatre company based in Cardiff and can be contacted at www.theatriolo.com or 029 2061 3782

Contact

Ms Wan Ching Yee.

Email: Wan.Yee@bristol.ac.uk **Phone:** 0117 331 4305.