

DOIG: BREAKING THE DRAMA DEFICIT CYCLE: IMPROVING STUDENT TEACHER CONFIDENCE TO TEACH PRIMARY DRAMA THROUGH IN-PLACEMENT SCAFFOLDING

Breaking the Drama Deficit Cycle: Improving Student Teacher Confidence to Teach Primary Drama Through In-placement Scaffolding

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Abstract

Research shows that drama is often a marginalised subject in primary education, with many in-service and student teachers lacking confidence to teach drama effectively.

This mixed-methods constructivist study investigated the impact of in-placement scaffolding, through the provision of support materials during school practicum, on student teacher confidence to teach primary drama.

The 2020-21 intake of 191 pre-service primary teachers in a Scottish university were invited to participate. The study administered questionnaires at three stages and a total of 165 questionnaires were analysed. From the outset of their studies to just after their first teaching placement (mid-August to early December), three questionnaires gathered data on drama experience, confidence, curriculum knowledge and how respondents valued drama. Respondents were asked what they thought would support them in teaching drama and rated a range of scaffolding resources in order of perceived usefulness.

Findings were consistent with previous research into the factors that impact student teacher confidence to teach drama, such as subject knowledge and personal experience. An unexpected finding was that, while it was concluded that the scaffolding resources positively impacted student confidence, it was knowing the scaffold was there if required, rather than the application of the resources in practice, that appeared to improve confidence. Findings from this study may help inform how teacher education providers support student teachers with primary drama education.

Keywords

Teacher education; primary; drama; confidence; practicum.

Introduction

In the primary sector, class teachers tend to be broad general practitioners with a responsibility to deliver the whole curriculum however how they teach the arts, if at all, is dependent on their background and confidence (Russell-Bowie, 2013). While, across the globe, the marginalisation of the arts is nothing new, drama is a particularly marginalised subject (Neelands, 2010) and research suggests that many in-service (IST) and pre-service teachers (PST) lack confidence to teach primary drama effectively (McLaughlin, 2007; Killen and Cooney, 2017). Bowell and Heap (2010) argue that the primary purpose of drama research has been, and still is, to justify the place of drama rather than to achieve what ought to be the driving goal of educational drama research – to develop teacher ability and confidence in teaching drama and, ultimately, enhance the experiences of pupils.

This research project arose during the COVID-19 pandemic when practical drama workshops in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes were replaced with online learning. With many students already lacking drama confidence, the loss of in-person teaching for this fundamentally practical subject led

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to an exploration of additional scaffolds that might be put in place to support students. Findings have implications for student support, irrespective of whether learning takes place online or in person.

Primary teacher confidence in teaching drama – a global issue

Arts education is commonly understood to encompass the disciplines of the visual arts, music, dance, and drama (Clapp and Ho, 2023). It is therefore relevant, in addition to analysing drama-specific studies, to explore arts education research more broadly.

Teacher self-efficacy (belief in one's capacity to affect student performance) influences effectiveness to teach the arts (Garvis and Pendergast, 2010). Confidence is a central factor in achieving teacher self-efficacy, and lack of confidence is one of the key barriers to effective arts teaching (Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001; Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2010; Garvis and Pendergast, 2010). Research identifies key influences on primary teacher confidence to teach arts subjects. These influences tend to be globally universal and include:

- The value placed on the arts in schools: A perceived lack of value in the arts at school level has an impact on individual teacher confidence and likelihood to teach arts subjects (Davies, 2011; Lee and Cawthon, 2015).
- Teacher attitude: While the majority of teachers recognise both the importance of the arts and the potential benefits for their pupils, those with limited prior experience and low confidence still often bring a negative attitude towards the arts into the classroom (Oreck, 2004; Oreck, 2008, cited in Russell-Bowie, 2013).
- Professional Learning: Garvis and Pendergast (2010) discuss self-efficacy in terms of the inter-dependency between confidence and competence. Improving teacher competence through effective professional learning can help address a lack of teacher confidence (Oreck, 2004; Ewing, 2010) and therefore increase self-efficacy. Davis (2017) found that teachers placed particular value in professional learning which provided material resources that they could adapt to their individual contexts.
- Personal experience: Limited personal experience in the arts is consistently cited as a key factor in low teacher confidence (Wiggins and Wiggins, 2008; Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2010; Garvis and Pendergast, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2013), with many teachers having significantly less personal experience in drama and dance than in art and music (Green, et. al., 1998; Davis, 2017).

Like their fully qualified colleagues, PST also often lack confidence in both their own artistic ability and their capacity to teach the arts (Wright, 1999; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Wright (1999) states that this low confidence has a detrimental effect on the PST's ability to teach drama.

Many of the reasons cited for this low confidence amongst PST also mirror the literature on IST, such as a lack of subject knowledge (understandable in student teachers) and lack of personal experience (Wright, 1999; Prior, 2005; McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Building on this, Prior (2005) found that when students did have previous experience of drama, but these experiences were negative, this had a correlating negative impact on their confidence in teaching drama. In contrast to this however, Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy (2001) found that the attitudes and experiences their students brought did not, at least on the surface, appear to have a major influence on their confidence. They cite Calderhead's findings (1998, cited in Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001), suggesting that while a student's own school experience can influence their developing practice as teachers, the level of influence is not consistent across all students. This highlights the important point that the lens through which each student views their experiences is unique. While generalisations might be made, each lived experience is individual.

The implications for Initial Teacher Education

Given that teacher education experiences are among the most significant contributors to IST feelings of incompetence (Garvis and Prendergast, 2010), the challenge within ITE is how to design learning opportunities that encompass this broad spectrum of personal experience and attitude. Russell-Bowie (2013:61) calls for 'effective, practical, positive and long-term drama learning experiences' across ITE programmes. Such experiences must be delivered sensitively and supportively to mitigate against adding to PST feelings of low confidence and competence, but at the same time challenging negative attitudes because, unchecked, students will carry them into the profession (Oreck, 2004).

Power and Klopper (2011) describe a bleak 'self-perpetuating cycle' where teachers with a lack of confidence and competence in teaching the arts deliver a less than adequate arts education to their pupils. These pupils are the potential educators who then enter ITE with a lack of arts experience and knowledge. So, this leads to the question, what is teacher education not doing, that it could be doing, to address this deficit and break the cycle so that these students do not go on to enter the profession with the same lack of confidence their own teachers had? Indeed, Ewing (2012) urges governments and higher education to reflect on how effectively they are preparing students to embed the arts in their teaching. With careful planning and delivery, ITE arts-based learning can positively impact PST subject knowledge and confidence (Abbott, 2014). Some core considerations are identified across the literature when preparing PST to teach drama in the primary school.

A clear understanding of what 'drama' is

In a five-country study of PST and drama education, Russell-Bowie (2013) found that, while very few students felt they had a strong drama background, almost half of them felt confident to teach it. She postulates that this may be down to students' misperceptions of what drama in primary education involves because students bring a traditional view of script-based drama developed through their own school experiences. Thus, when exploring non-performance-focused drama, such as pedagogical drama where drama strategies are applied as a learning medium across the curriculum, Howell and Heap (2010:584) stress the importance of ensuring student teachers are 'aware that what they are being encouraged to do is, in fact, drama'.

Practical experience of drama as learners

While sufficient teaching time is a challenge in ITE drama (McLaughlin, 2007), Prior (2005:73) states that 'the experiential nature of drama is its real power and thus drama teaching too must be learnt by doing'. The active participation in drama, where the PST is learner, provides opportunity for students to develop their own skills, attitudes and creativity (Oreck, 2004; McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Abbott, 2014; Athanas and Sanchez, 2020). This is particularly vital for students who enter ITE programmes with what O'Toole (2011, pp.16) refers to as 'a drama deficit from their own education'. While reflection on practical learning experiences is likely to be 'more deeply felt through the bodily experience' (Anderson, 2015, pp.124), Wright (1999) warns that the anxiety many students bring to ITE drama workshops inhibits their capacity to fully participate in, and ultimately teach, drama. Sensitive to this, McLaughlin (2007:122) identifies the need for these practical drama experiences to be 'accessible and non-threatening'.

Practical experience of drama as teachers

The opportunity to apply and build on theory gained in university during teaching practicums is an important contributor to PST confidence, as is experiencing success in the classroom (Green, et al., 1998; Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001; Garvis and Pendergast, 2010; Abbott, 2014). However, teachers are very much bound by their environment and its cultural, structural and material resources and PST can face difficulty in transferring the enthusiasm and creativity generated during practical university workshops to a practicum setting, with the many pressures that the school environment brings (Oreck, 2004; Priestley and Minty, 2013). Literature suggests that students are not encountering

regular opportunities to practice arts teaching, generally, and drama teaching specifically (Green, et al., 1998; Garvis and Pendergast, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2012). To counter this, McLauchlan (2007, pp.122) identifies the need to provide students with 'relatively failsafe strategies to attempt in their initial teaching experiences'. She does this by demonstrating a series of lessons adaptable to various grade levels, during which her students act as reflective participants. McLaughlin (2007) acknowledges that this transmissive approach is a necessity of the limited time she has with her PST, despite transactive strategies being more compatible with the aims of drama pedagogy.

Role Models

Student confidence can also be developed by seeing drama teaching modelled on placement (Green, et al., 1998; Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Lee and Cawthon, 2015). However, the literature identifies a sparsity of effective drama teaching role models for PST on placement (Green, et al., 1998; McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012), unsurprising given previous discussion on IST low confidence to teach the arts. Further, students can quickly lose confidence if working with teachers who, lacking in enthusiasm or expertise themselves, might provide little guidance with planning (Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001). ITE programmes must consider ways in which students can learn from examples that do not rely on practicum experiences (Russell-Bowie, 2012).

Breaking the drama deficit cycle

This review of the literature has cited a number of studies exploring PST confidence to teach the arts, conducted within and across multiple countries. Many of them investigate approaches to supporting PST in preparing for practice through pre-placement university-based drama learning opportunities (Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001; McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Abbott, 2014). This was also the model of this study's PGDE programme. However, it is also important that teacher educators work with PST during placements to support students in making connections between academic learning and teaching practice (Hamilton and Vriend Van Duinen, 2018). Further, to build confidence, Oreck (2004) encourages the provision of ongoing support which facilitates regular engagement with the arts through, for example, sharing practice, professional dialogue and professional development.

Aligning with the theory of social constructivism and Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, such support in education is often termed 'scaffolding' – where help from a more knowledgeable other enables learner development beyond that which they might achieve unaided (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Such scaffolding is viewed as temporary, with learner independence the ultimate goal (Smit et al., 2018). Until the point of this study, while pre-placement support of drama teaching on the PGDE programme was provided by university teacher educators, any in-placement scaffolding was reliant on class teachers as the more knowledgeable other. However, as observed in the literature, many PST are not experiencing the in-placement teacher support required. The change in teaching practices necessitated by COVID-19 led to a review of student support and, ultimately, to consideration of the potential value of developing ITE support materials to scaffold PST during school teaching practicums. From this the research question emerged.

Research Question

The study sought to explore the impact of in-placement scaffolding, through the provision of support materials during school practicum, on PST confidence to teach primary drama.

This was guided by the following questions:

- How confident are PST to teach drama prior to and after their first teaching placement?
- What impacts PST confidence to teach drama?
- What barriers do PST face to teaching drama on teaching placement?
- What resources do PST value in building their confidence to teach drama?

Research Context

The focus of this study was a one-year full-time postgraduate pre-service Primary Education programme. The study spanned three and a half months, from the start of the programme to just after the first 6-week school practicum (PP1), during which period the students experience the first three of five 1.5 hour practical drama workshops.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all workshops in semester 1 of 2020-21 were delivered online via a virtual platform where students could not see each other, unless working in small breakout groups. The usual practical approach had to be reimagined. Online workshops were designed around videos of classroom practice and discussion-based tasks encouraged students to analyse the pedagogy observed.

To provide additional support in teaching drama on placement, a range of resources were designed to scaffold students in bridging from theory to practice. Students were given access to these prior to PP1, the timeline and justification of which is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Resource timeline and justification.

Schedule	Resource	Justification
Across online workshops 1-3	Videos of classroom practice	Literature identifies a lack of drama role models in schools and suggests that ITE programmes seek alternative ways for students to observe good practice.
Workshop 3, prior to PP1	A drama toolkit : including descriptions of drama conventions, drama games, and a skills-focused lesson plan exemplar	To counter the traditional view of drama as performative, this resource summarised drama strategies explored during workshops which could be applied to enhance learning across the curriculum. The lesson plan exemplar provided an example of pedagogical drama, modelling what students' own plans might look like.
Workshop 3, prior to PP1	An adaptable lesson outline : a scripted walk through, easily adaptable to individual class contexts	Literature suggests teachers value resources that they can adapt to their own contexts (Davis, 2017). This lesson outline provided this, offering students a 'relatively failsafe' (McLauchlan, 2007:122) guide to support their early drama teaching.
Every Monday of 5 week PP1 placement	A weekly email of simple, easily adaptable drama activities	For students not yet confident to deliver full drama-focused lessons, these activities provided suggestions for a simple weekly drama activity (eg 'Plan for the use of still image to give pupils an alternative way to respond to text'), along with supporting information. With literature suggesting students are not encountering regular opportunities to practice drama teaching, in sharing these ideas via a

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		weekly email, the hope was that it kept drama on their radar throughout PP1.
Mid-PP1	Voluntary online support session	While much of the research into building PST confidence to teach drama focuses on university-based learning, the provision of a mid-placement support session, along with the weekly email, recognises the importance of teacher educators continuing to support students during placement (Hamilton and Vriend Van Duinen, 2018).

Methodology

This mixed methods research was approached from a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as a subjective construct of those actively engaged in the research process (Mertens, 2019). Guided by Opie and Brown (2019), as the purpose of the study was to implement and evaluate the impact of an intervention (in-placement scaffolding) to address an issue (low PST drama confidence), action research was deemed the most appropriate research approach. This was a study into initial teacher education by an initial teacher educator, therefore the researcher’s analysis cannot be separated from their experience and perspective. When considering positionality in research, writing reflexively, rather than eliminating subjectivity, supports researchers in using their own interpretive framework as the foundations for new understandings (Mann and McLeod, 2015, cited in Opie and Brown, 2019). As such, the researcher’s beliefs and values inevitably, and necessarily, informed the research process.

Data were collected by questionnaire, a method used widely in educational research (Lauer, 2006). Rather than measuring learning gain, a focus of this study was student perceptions of their own confidence, and ordinal data gathered from closed questions is an effective approach to measure strength of attitudes or emotions (McLeod, 2018). However, causal relationships can be difficult to prove through descriptive statistics and, while they may support the identification of patterns emerging from the data, they do not allow generalisations to be drawn beyond the study population (Laerd Statistics, 2018; Opie and Brown, 2019). This limitation was addressed through the adoption of a mixed-methods approach to questionnaire design and the addition of open questions as, when trying to ascertain why a certain attitude or perception is held, open questions are useful as they enable respondents to provide more in-depth answers using their own words (McLeod, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

The 2020-21 intake of 191 students were invited to volunteer as research participants.

Data was collected through three different anonymous online questionnaires, each sent via a group email to the 191 students. Questionnaire timeline and content is described in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire timeline and content.

Questionnaire	When issued	Data collected	Responses
Q1	Start of PGDE (mid Aug)	Perceptions of drama subject knowledge, value of drama, and confidence to teach drama. Experience of drama (personal, educational, professional)	73
Q2	Pre-PP1 (mid Oct)	Perceptions of drama subject knowledge, value of drama, and confidence to teach drama. Perceived usefulness of videos of practice used during workshops. Degree to which participants hoped to teach drama on placement.	53
Q3	Post-PP1 (early Dec)	Perceptions of drama subject knowledge, value of drama, and confidence to teach drama. Participants who taught drama in PP1 and support resources they used. Perceived usefulness of all scaffolding resources provided.	39

For quantitative analysis of closed question responses, descriptive statistics were deemed sufficient and appropriate given the time-limited and practice-focused nature of the study (Opie and Brown, 2019). The majority of closed questions used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). Mean scores were calculated by dividing the total scores by the total number of respondents. Respondents were often grouped by level of confidence during this analysis to gain a deeper understanding of influencing factors.

Thematic analysis of qualitative data involved the identification of themes across the text responses and then the identification of any patterns between and across themes (Opie and Brown, 2019). This was done manually by exporting data from the survey platform (Online Surveys) to Microsoft Excel and undertaking Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage process of thematic analysis:

1. familiarisation with the text
2. initial coding
3. identification of broad themes
4. review of themes
5. refinement of themes
6. discussion

Ethical considerations

There were no known risks to taking part. The questionnaires were completed voluntarily and with informed consent. To minimise any potential issues due to the relationship of the researcher as teacher of the participants, questionnaire response was anonymous, and participants could not be identified. Research was guided by established ethical principles and standards (BERA, 2018) and ethical approval was awarded in advance by the host academic institution, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS). RCS was not the ITE where the study took place.

Findings

What affects PST confidence to teach drama

At the start of the programme only 21.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they felt confident to teach drama however this improved substantially and prior to PP1 68% of respondents identified as feeling confident. Following PP1, confidence dropped slightly to 61.6%. Respondents were grouped as confident (C+), neither confident nor unconfident (C/) and unconfident (C-).

In terms of what impacts PST confidence to teach drama and the barriers they face on placement, thematic analysis of open questions across the questionnaires identified five core inter-dependent themes:

1. Personal experience
2. Curriculum knowledge & understanding
3. Feelings towards drama
4. Self-efficacy
5. Support resources

1. Personal experience of drama

In Q1, 32.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a lot of personal experience of drama, while 52.1% felt they did not. Results suggest that the more drama experience respondents identified as having, the greater the level of confidence (Figure 1.).

Level of confidence	Experience of drama mean score
C+	3.87
C/	2.96
C-	2.09

Figure 1. Mean score for drama experience by degree of student confidence.

68.8% of Q1C+ respondents felt they had a lot of personal experience of drama, and this was identified in comments as the reason many gave for their confidence:

I have a number of years' experience in performing, directing and producing as well as teaching drama within a school setting.

(Q1R5C+).

I was never taught drama at primary or secondary school, however I went to a youth theatre group in my leisure time for a number of years and it built my confidence both on and off stage.

(Q1R10C+).

Only 29.2% of Q1C/ and 18% of Q1C- respondents identified as having a lot of personal experience of drama, with C- comments focusing on lack of previous experience as a reason for their low confidence:

No experience with teaching drama, where would I start?

(C1R62C-).

In Q2, the number of students feeling confident to teach was more than three times that of Q1. 58.3% of Q2C+ respondents commented on the positive impact participation in the online drama workshops had on their confidence:

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The videos [...] were really effective in showing how drama can be taught, especially since we're in the virtual world. There are so many useful ideas from the different conventions and resources we've been provided with that I feel a could lead a drama lesson tomorrow!

(Q2R32C+).

While 70% of Q2 respondents indicated they hoped to teach drama during PP1, in Q3 only 51.3% reported that they had done so. The main reason cited for not teaching drama were that it wasn't on the timetable:

I did not hear drama being mentioned as part of the curriculum.

(Q3R21C+).

I never got the opportunity to teach a drama lesson as they are currently not allowed to teach music or drama in their school because of COVID.

(Q3C/R27).

Respondents that did get the opportunity to teach drama during PP1 often cited this as a reason for increased confidence. Conversely, almost half of Q3C/ and Q3C- respondents (46.7%) cited no or limited experience of teaching drama during PP1 as a reason for their low confidence.

2. Curriculum knowledge & understanding (K&U)

At the start of their studies only 16.4% of respondents felt they knew and understood the primary drama curriculum. This rose sharply to 71.6% prior to PP1. The data suggests a possible correlation between levels of confidence and K&U of the drama curriculum (Figure 2.).

It is interesting to note that there is no substantial increase in perceptions of curriculum K&U post-PP1. This may be because many respondents did not observe or teach drama during PP1.

	Q1	Q2	Q3
C+	3.13	3.97	4.00
C/	2.58	3.50	3.55
C-	2.06	2.80	2.75

Figure 2. Mean score for perceptions of drama curriculum K&U by degree of student confidence.

Across Q1, many respondents discussed subject knowledge (SK) and pedagogical knowledge (PK) in relation to their level of confidence. In both Q2 and Q3, respondents made less direct reference to the curriculum however, a number of comments evidence increased SK and PK:

I knew nothing before about teaching drama whereas the fear has been taken away as I understand the concept behind it better so will probably use it far more than what I originally thought I would.

(Q2R25C+).

A few C/ and C- respondents focused generally on low SK and PK as a reason for their continued lack of confidence:

Lesson planning and curriculum knowledge in general is still daunting. I think once I am more practiced and comfortable with these I will feel more confident.

(Q2R48C/).

3. Feelings toward drama

Student comments relating to feelings towards drama were sorted into three themes:

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- Passion for drama
- Personal enjoyment of drama
- Valuing drama

In Q1, 62.5% of C+ respondents and 12.5% of C/ respondents explained their confidence in terms of their positive feelings towards drama, often connected to previous drama experience, whereas only 3% of C- respondents commented on feelings. In Q2 and Q3, while only a small number of respondents explicitly commented on their feelings toward drama, many of the comments about SK and PK could be interpreted as evidence of respondents recognising the value of drama. For example, Q2R37C+ observed: Drama is a very flexible medium to teach a range of topics to learners as well as the learners gaining a better understanding of themselves.

Consistently across the study, students demonstrated they valued drama, with over 90% of respondents in each questionnaire agreeing or strongly agreeing that they believed drama to be an important part of the curriculum.

The data suggest a possible correlation between level of confidence and strength of belief in the importance of drama (valuing drama) (figure 4). Worth noting, however, is a slight drop between Q1 and Q3 in the strength of agreement in each confidence group.

	Q1	Q2	Q3
C+	4.67	4.64	4.29
C/	4.42	4.17	4.36
C-	4.06	4.00	3.50

Figure 3. Mean score for student belief in the importance of drama by degree of student confidence.

4. Self-efficacy

Across the questionnaires, findings suggest a possible connection between a student’s positive self-efficacy and their confidence to teach drama. Comments suggestive of self-efficacy identified participant confidence in their future capacity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. This was more prevalent in C+ and C/ respondents than in C- responses:

I generally have a positive attitude about most things and I am confident I can gain the required skills to teach drama with enough practice.

(Q1R7C+).

I am confident that I will be able to teach drama in the primary school once I have studied ideas and concepts behind teaching it.

(Q1R39C/).

C- (and some C/) responses focused more on a general lack of confidence to teach anything due to lack of experience.

I find it hard to state how confident I am in teaching anything at the moment... because I haven't taught anything at this stage!

(Q2C/R40).

Not confident. Would like to see it being taught first.

(Q3R39C-).

5. Support resources

Prior to PP1, 78% of students identified that the scaffolding resources provided would support them, and this was also reflected in many comments:

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There are so many useful ideas from the different conventions and resources we've been provided with that I feel a could lead a drama lesson tomorrow!

(Q2R32C+).

The respondents who did teach drama during PP1 (n=20) used a range of resources to support their teaching (Figure 4). The resource most used was the students' own lesson plan(s) (95%).

Support resource	n = 20	
	Count	%
Student's own lesson plan(s)	19	95
Drama conventions toolkit	6	30
Adaptable lesson plan	4	20
Other (tutor feedback on planning, previous experience and school drama books)	4	20
Weekly drama activities	3	15
Class teacher's lesson plan(s)	2	10
Mid-placement drop-in	0	0

Figure 4. No. and % of respondents using each resource to support drama teaching in PP1.

Irrespective of whether they had used them in practice, all respondents were asked to rank the scaffolding resources in order of perceived usefulness (Figure 5.). The online workshops were included in the items to be ranked as they were recorded and therefore available to refer back to during PP1.

Support Resource	Mean	n=33
1 Pre-placement drama workshops	4.13	32
2 Videos of practice	3.61	28
3 Drama conventions toolkit	2.93	27
4 Weekly drama activities	2.59	27
5 Adaptable lesson plan	2.57	30
6 Mid-placement drop-in	1.43	14

Figure 5. Resources ranked by perceived usefulness based on mean score (5 = most useful, 1 = least useful).

What PST feel will support them teaching drama in the primary school

Across the questionnaires, five core themes emerged in student comments:

1. Subject and Pedagogical Knowledge
2. Professional Learning
3. Attitudes and Values
4. Resources
5. Practical Experience

Figure 6. plots the number of references (rounded to the nearest %) to each theme.

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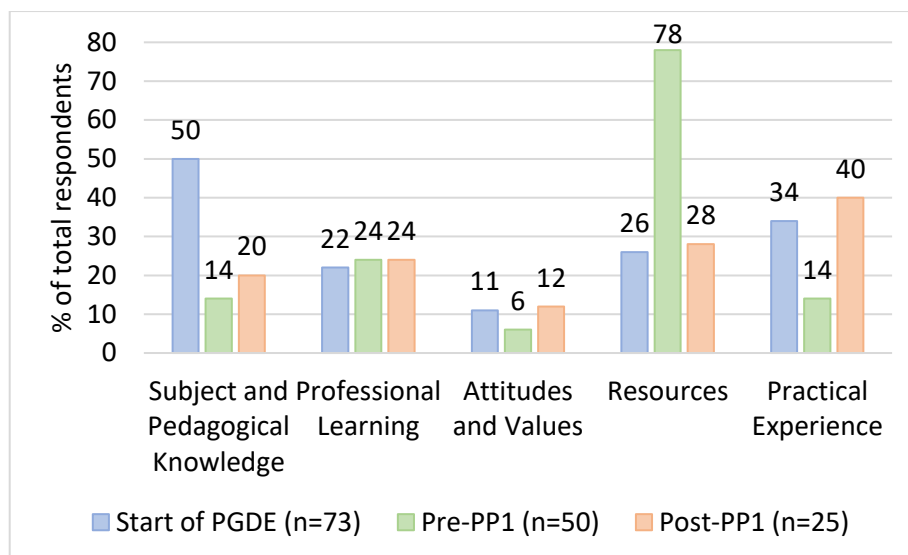


Figure 6. Respondent references by support theme.

At the outset of their studies, the need to develop subject and pedagogical knowledge was the main concern, with many respondents speaking in general terms about how this would support them (Being shown strategies and methods of how to teach drama - Q1R6C+). This became less of a focus in Q2 and Q3.

Collegiality was a common thread through Q1 and Q2 comments about professional learning activity, with the opportunity for professional dialogue and sharing of practice with peers and school colleagues identified by a number of respondents:

Bouncing ideas off other student teachers, colleagues and the pupils themselves.
(Q2R11C+).

...opportunities to share experiences with others who have experience of teaching drama in a primary setting
(Q1R52C-).

Q3 respondents identified a desire for professional learning in the form of further university inputs and personal research.

Respondents also discussed their own and others' attitudes and values. Some indicated that both their own 'willingness' to learn how to teach drama and the development of confidence would provide support. A small number of respondents identified the importance of drama being valued by the school community as a support to their future teaching. For example:

The main area of support for me would be from other teachers and parents valuing it as a means of learning; both about areas of the curriculum and about children learning more about themselves.
(Q1R4C+).

The most commonly identified support across all questionnaires was resources. In Q1, the majority of respondents just stated 'resources'. Prior to PP1, students focused on the scaffolding resources provided. Post-PP1 respondents continued to identify the university online workshops, drama tutor and support materials as supportive:

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I think the lectures, videos and resources that have been shared so far will really help me apply drama in the classroom.

(Q2R16C+).

With regards practical experience, across the questionnaires, responses focused mostly on practical engagement with drama as both a learner (during university workshops) and a teacher (delivering learning on placement), as well as the opportunity to observe drama being taught:

Gaining experience in teaching drama will be the biggest support in order to build my confidence and knowledge of how children respond to drama...

(Q3R26C/).

I think the teaching has been great in giving me an understanding of how to apply drama in lessons, however, my lack of confidence comes from a lack of experience in teaching/observing drama in placement or previous voluntary experience.

(Q3R33C/).

Discussion

According to the literature, across the globe a lack of teacher confidence is one of the key barriers to effective arts teaching (Hennessy, Rolfe and Chedzoy, 2001; Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Findings of this study demonstrate that, while PST experienced low levels of confidence at the start of their studies, there was a marked increase in confidence prior to their first placement. While confidence levels remained elevated post-PP1, there was a small, but notable decrease in the number of confident students following placement and possible reasons for these variances will be explored.

Factors affecting PST drama confidence

Supporting existing literature, findings indicate the confidence of PST is impacted by similar factors as affect IST.

At the start of their studies, while the majority of confident students expressed positive feelings towards drama, often developed as a result of personal experience, many unconfident students identified a lack of drama experience as reason for their low confidence, supporting Russell-Bowie's (2013) international findings. However, the sharp increase in confidence for many between the start of their studies and prior to PP1 suggests that the negative influence of lack of personal experience was strongest at the outset of their studies.

The development of subject knowledge and pedagogical understanding was the majority response in Q1 when students were asked what they thought would support them in teaching drama. This reflects previous findings about the positive influence on teacher confidence of effective professional learning (Oreck, 2004; Ewing, 2010; Abbott, 2014). As respondent Q2R15C+ observed:

The lectures have been fantastic and engaging. Making me actually feel excited about the possibility of teaching drama and all that it can be used for across the curriculum. This was not how I felt before starting the lectures.

(Q2R15C+).

As previously discussed, confidence and competence are core influences of teacher self-efficacy (Garvis and Pendergast, 2010). This is reflected in findings from this study, where positive self-efficacy was identified in many confident students who demonstrated the belief that, once they developed subject knowledge, they would be able to teach drama. Conversely, less confident students tended to

focus on their lack of knowledge and experience as a barrier without acknowledging that this barrier might be overcome.

In contrast to previous studies which indicate a connection between low confidence and a negative attitude towards teaching the arts (Oreck, 2004; Alter, Hays and O'Hara, 2010), consistently across this study, irrespective of prior experience or level of confidence, the majority of students indicated that they value drama by acknowledging its importance in the curriculum. However, post-PP1 there was a drop in the number of students indicating they valued drama. While this decrease was very small, it is worth reflecting on given a similar drop was also recorded in levels of confidence post-PP1. Considering previous literature, this drop in both confidence and value levels post-placement is perhaps attributable to the fact that many of the students' experiences echoed previous findings that show drama to be a marginalised subject. The literature identifies 'practical experience of drama as teachers' to be a key factor in developing student confidence, so it is concerning, but sadly unsurprising based on previous studies (Green, et al., 1998; McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012), that a number of students reported drama to be missing entirely from the timetable during PP1. Further research is required to better determine the cause of this slight drop in confidence and value post-placement.

Further, following placement, the opportunity to teach, or not, was often cited as a reason for a respondent's level of confidence. The lack of opportunity for students to observe drama being taught or to teach drama themselves again supports the literature previously discussed (McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Russell-Bowie, 2012) and was a key driver in focussing this study on in-placement scaffolding to build student confidence during practicums, rather than relying on the previous model where university support was provided pre-placement. Discussion will now turn to the impact of this scaffolding.

Impact of in-placement scaffolding

Across the questionnaires, when comparing what the students felt would support them teaching drama, 'resources' was the most common response, with a particular spike prior to PP1. This pre-PP1 result is likely influenced by the fact the scaffolding resources had just been issued, under the auspices of supporting them to deliver drama during placement. Following McLauchlan's (2007:122) advice to provide 'relatively failsafe strategies' for students to use in class, the in-placement scaffolding resources were designed to offer an easy entry point, particularly for the majority who were teaching drama for the first time. Had these resources not been issued, it is possible fewer students would have identified 'resources' as the main support. However, there was also a spike in feelings of confidence pre-PP1 and, while many students identified the online workshops as being contributory to their increased confidence, enough students also identified the scaffolding resources as a reason for confidence to posture that the provision of scaffolding resources had a positive impact on student confidence to teach.

In terms of the research question, this might be accepted as evidence that in-placement scaffolding can indeed build PST confidence to teach drama.

However, despite feeling increased levels of confidence due to the provision of in-placement scaffolding, only half the respondents actually went on to teach drama during PP1, with only a small number identifying they used the scaffolding resources to support their teaching. The drama toolkit was the most utilised of the scaffolding resources, providing a descriptor of drama strategies for students to use in learning across the curriculum. The mid-placement online drop-in was not attended by any student, reflecting Davis's (2017) findings that teachers particularly valued material resources.

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Post-PP1, respondents ranked the scaffolding resources in order of perceived usefulness, with the recorded online workshops and videos of practice deemed the two most useful sources of placement support. However, as noted, few students utilised any of the scaffolding resources in practice and perhaps the true value was, as previously suggested, the boost in confidence derived from simply knowing the scaffold was there if required:

Everything that has been provided to us in the lectures. (...) The resources, draft lesson plan, videos are all things that we haven't been given from other subjects, just making it so much easier for us to get started straight away.

(Q2R15C+).

Limitations

Causal relationships can be difficult to prove through questionnaires (Opie and Brown, 2019). While the inclusion of open questions invites more detailed responses and explanations, there can be a tendency for respondents to resist or limit their answers to such questions, for example due to the time required (Opie and Brown, 2019). The addition of focus groups might have facilitated a deeper exploration of the reasoning behind responses and common themes might then be more readily generalised to the broader population (McLeod, 2024). However, this procedure was rejected due to time pressures.

The short-term nature of the study only provides a picture of students at the start of their studies and longer-term research, spanning the duration of the PGDE, would enable deeper analysis. For example, tracking if the post-PP1 confidence dip is the start of a downward trend or if student drama confidence increases with greater classroom experience. A longitudinal study would also provide greater insight to PST application of scaffolding resources across all practicum experiences.

The subjectivity of the researcher must also be considered. When research is approached from a constructivist perspective some bias is inevitable, and any conclusions drawn in this study should be reflected on with this in mind (Opie and Brown, 2018).

Conclusion

Results from this study support existing research which finds that experience, knowledge, skills and attitudes are all important in building PST confidence in teaching drama in the primary education. In response to the research question, it can be concluded that in-placement scaffolding can positively impact PST confidence to teach drama. However, it seems that what built student confidence was knowing the scaffold was there if required, rather than engagement with the scaffolding resources themselves. To that end, it is recommended that scaffolding resources be provided to support student teachers during placement.

It has been acknowledged that many previous studies have focused on pre-placement preparation. Findings from this study suggest that the provision of in-placement scaffolding is an enhancement to the traditional model of pre-placement preparation. It was not the intent of this study to prove that in-placement intervention was more effective, rather to add to the collective global understanding of how best to support PST. Indeed, findings also reinforced the importance of effective ITE provision in terms of building student confidence prior to placement. This study supports previous findings that such provision will have greatest impact if it involves students gaining:

- practical experience (as learner and teacher)
- curriculum knowledge and skills
- conceptual understanding of the value of drama
- opportunities for observing and analysing practice

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There are lessons that can be drawn from the context of this study that might help develop this provision.

While the move online due to COVID-19 meant capacity to engage in practical drama on campus was lost, an important gain was the enhanced opportunity for critical discussion around drama in the primary school. This degree of in-depth analysis was never achievable at the same time as meeting all the outcomes of in-person workshops and might account for the sharp increase in students who felt they knew and understood the primary drama curriculum following the first three workshops. There are potential implications here regarding the balance of drama theory and practice explored in ITE. Further research will enable a comparison between students' subject knowledge perceptions in this study with student perceptions following engagement in the practical drama workshops prohibited during the COVID-19 pandemic. This would inform future ITE learning design.

Another positive pedagogical shift in response to COVID-19 was the introduction of video observations, which gave students the opportunity to learn from practice without a reliance on drama being modelled during placement. Consideration should be given, moving forward, to the inclusion of video observation and analysis during practical drama workshops.

While this study focused on the period leading up to and immediately after the first teaching placement, literature highlights the need for 'long-term drama learning experiences' (Russell-Bowie, 2013:61). A similar study conducted over the duration of a programme may give insight to any evolution in PST confidence, attitudes and perceptions; as well as help evaluate student experiences across placements. As discussed previously, scaffolding is temporary, with support gradually withdrawn as learner independence increases. A longitudinal study would develop understanding of PST reliance on support materials across all their teaching practicums and help determine the optimum point to withdraw scaffolding.

The issue of the non-teaching of drama during placement, or indeed any arts subject, requires further reflection. Would the following comment be acceptable if the student were discussing maths or literacy instead of drama?

I felt I would need to have known the class even better to pull off a successful drama lesson at this point in my teaching career.

(Q3R14C+)

Across many countries, primary teachers are broad general practitioners with a responsibility to deliver the entire curriculum, and yet the non-teaching of the arts continues. Despite this study finding that in-placement scaffolding can increase PST confidence, that was still not enough to encourage students to act on this confidence and actually teach drama. For the majority of students, it is not that they do not want to teach drama. Indeed, post-PP1, students expressed a desire for more opportunity to apply learning in practice:

Giving it a go! There has been lots of good inputs and help, just need to get a chance to try it now.

(Q3R23C+).

As discussed, research evidences that many PST are not seeing drama taught on placement (McLaughlin, 2007; Russell-Bowie, 2012). Findings from this study suggest that, for some students, their desire to 'try' drama is not being fulfilled because, despite being a recognised subject in Scotland's curriculum, drama is simply not being taught in all primary classrooms. That COVID-19

restrictions were often cited as a reason for not teaching drama indicates a worrying misunderstanding of drama at an institutional level.

It is quite possible for a PST to go through their studies without observing or teaching drama in any primary school placements. Perhaps university expectations regarding the development of experience of all curriculum subjects during placement needs to be more stringent, for example by making some of the scaffolding activities mandatory rather than voluntary. Although, this is not an easy ask when students must also fit in with existing school timetables and priorities. However, this study also indicated that, while many PST felt they were developing a sound curriculum understanding, others did not yet have clarity regarding what 'drama' is in a primary school context. If these students can be better supported in understanding that drama does not "have to be elaborate on a stage but can be short and meaningful moments in the classroom" (Q2R27C+), then they might feel more confident to teach it when they realise the timetable does not have to be a barrier at all.

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