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The teacher as co-creator of drama: a phenomenological study of the experiences and reflections of Irish primary school teachers

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Classroom drama in the Irish primary school context remains a relatively new endeavour and is largely under-researched. The knowledge base for all aspects of teacher education should be informed by rigorous reflection on teachers' experiences in the classroom. This paper reports on a phenomenological study conducted with seven Irish primary school teachers which focused on their experiences of co-creating drama with their students. Co-creating drama is held in this work to be the coming together of teacher and students in a collective creative enterprise during the drama lesson. The term proposes a partnership whereby they operate as co-participants and co-artists in the drama experience. The 'creating' aspect of co-creating can be considered the artistic enterprise of making drama in a way that is new and unique to the group. In considering the teacher as a potential co-creator of drama, the paper probes the emergent and changing ontological attitudes of the participants throughout the process: the values, attitudes and perspectives that informed their teaching. The paper illuminates the phenomenon of teachers co-creating drama in all its complexity, and seeks to reflect on the meaning of this for the teachers.

Keywords: drama education; co-creating; primary teachers; collaboration; phenomenology

Introduction

Drama, as a curriculum concern in the Republic of Ireland is, in educational terms, a very new project. First introduced in the revised primary curriculum of 1999, it remains without curricular standing at secondary level. As Neelands notes, for many countries, drama is still in somewhat of an 'advocacy phase', struggling to 'win a stable, constant, and secure place' (2000, 56) within the schooling system. This has changed little in the intervening years (Hoffmann-Davis 2008; Weltsek, Duffy, and Carney 2014), and it is also true of drama in Irish schools. As a subject, drama has been mostly absent in the history of formal Irish primary education up until the introduction of the 1999 curriculum. Although having this drama curriculum presents considerable opportunity, and the arts including drama have a visible presence in many schools, it seems that drama as a curricular concern has yet to prosper in Irish schools (Finneran 2016). Reading, writing and numeracy still have precedence, with drama receiving the least attention of all curricular areas (McCoy, Smyth, and Banks 2012, 9). There are a number of possible reasons for this, not

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specific to Ireland. A self-described lack of skill or experience of teaching drama leading to a lack of teacher confidence has been highlighted (Bamford 2006; Russell-Bowie 2013). The poor representation and elucidation of drama in the curriculum, and the uncertainty that exists in identifying drama's overall purpose in schools is another factor (O'Toole, Stinson, and Moore 2009). Both of these points relate directly to the Irish context, given the lack of tradition of drama in the curriculum, and the resultant lack of personal school drama experiences for teachers as pupils themselves, thus inducing an epistemological and experiential gap. The lack of clarity afforded by the existing 1999 curriculum does nothing to bridge this gap (Finneran 2016). This lack of clarity is reflected in Hallissey's (2015) teacher-witness account of the development of drama in Irish primary classrooms from 1971 to 2014. Hallissey discusses her experience of the diverse reactions from teachers as drama became a subject in the 1999 curriculum. She describes some teachers not understanding the 'abstract' language and terminology used and how some were disappointed about the absence of a list of 'drama skills', while others worried about classroom management and the difficulty of trying to navigate the different features of the new curriculum. From Hallissey's account it seems the curriculum was perceived as both mystifying for teachers in a practical sense and ambitious even for a drama enthusiast. There has been some positive movement in terms of recent policy, where a number of reports and directives have been launched to promote the arts in schools (Points of Alignment (Arts Council of Ireland 2008), and The Arts in Education Charter (Dept. of Education and Skills 2013), however these are very new initiatives, and what is clear is that drama remains a site of struggle in the Irish school system with the result that the place and future of drama in Irish schools remains quite uncertain. This highlights the need for more in-depth research of drama education in Ireland, and firmly locates the context of this study, as an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of teaching drama as it is perceived and thought of by those who are personally involved in it.

This study was originally undertaken to examine the phenomenon of teachers co-creating drama in an Irish context. This was achieved through a series of interventions, interviews and finally the examination of the participating teacher's narratives. The study began as two separate routes of enquiry. Teaching practices were interrogated and examined with a view to understanding ways in which students could be involved in moments of shared creativity and the authentic devising of drama work 'with' the teacher rather than them being passengers in the drama experience. In essence we looked to directly involve the students in both the artistic and creative development of the work. O'Neill and Lambert (2006) discuss the possibility of teacher and students being involved in a collective agreement to create drama as both parties working as co-artists in open possibility (55). This notion provided the initial impetus for the focus of this research, which was to question what teacher and students working as co-artists really meant, and what was needed to enable such work. The research was also concerned with the generalist classroom teacher's 'lived experience' of drama rather than examining the co-creating of drama solely from a peripatetic and 'specialist' visiting teacher perspective. In order to achieve this, a significant interrogation of the ontological idea of co-creating was necessary. Therefore, we sought to better understand the phenomenon of teachers and students becoming co-artists, and to understand the teachers' experiences of this and to reflect on the meaning of this for the teachers.

Co-creation of drama

Co-creation in drama can best be understood not as a specific set of pedagogical practices but as an ontological attitude. Ontology is the consideration of being; what is, what exists, and what it means for somebody or something to be (van Manen 1990). Therefore, attitudes are fundamentally ontological in nature, in that they are an individual's personal consideration of the world and how they exist within it. In this study, co-creation in drama can best be understood as a set of beliefs and behaviours that teachers enact in their practice. In looking at the concept of co-creating drama and how it may appear in the classroom, it can be characterised by visible features such as teacher and students sharing power and collaborating, with both participating in artistic action leading to the act of creating something new. The 'co' in co-creating is seen in the way in which the students are ostensibly empowered when the teacher moves beyond the role of mentor and facilitator to become a collaborator and a co-creator of the work. The teacher must be prepared to step outside their traditional teaching role and embrace this creative partnership. This attitude can affect the teachers' pedagogical approach, their relationship and interaction with their students, the physical and creative environment they create for students, and their level of social and creative participative behaviour. For the teacher this requires a readiness to play, experiment, take risks, and ultimately a willingness to become a co-participant and co-learner in the classroom (Craft 1997).

The 'creating' aspect of co-creating can be considered the artistic action, whereby both teachers and students enliven qualities of creativity. They are directly involved in drama and theatre activity, creating new work, while also developing an appreciation of the aesthetic component of their work. Fundamental to this is the teacher sharing the creative impulse with the students (Taylor and Warner 2006), whereby they become involved in the act of imagining, and are engaged in creative acts with their students in order to create something new and of value to the group. When we consider these features together, we can recognise that the teacher operating as a co-creator of drama seeks to bring about a culture in their classroom which encourages the students to think for themselves (Heathcote 1984), and where the students' experiences, their questions and their voices matter (Booth 2005). What we hold unique about the drama environment is that the students' work is grounded in imaginative activity and built on social interaction. Therefore, just as Wagner (1998) suggests, when students are negotiating and creating drama work, the teacher needs to provide opportunities for them to have an opinion and a voice, in order for them to realise their abilities as active members who can change and develop the fictional world around them. The culture that is created ostensibly honours what has been held to be the egalitarian, democratising and creative nature of drama. Neelands (2009) idea of a 'pro-social ensemble' sits alongside this idea. He describes it as a 'way of modelling how through collective artistry, negotiation, contracting of behaviour and skilful leading, the ensemble in the classroom might become a model of how to live in the world, a model of 'being with', (174). This quality of the social and democratic 'being with' that he describes can be considered the 'collective' being involved in an experiencing of each other. Fundamentally, he argues it is about modelling a democratic way of living. From this, it can be argued that co-creation depends greatly on the active involvement of teacher, their valuing of a creative learning environment, and their ability to enliven both egalitarian and creative behaviours in their teaching. Consequently, a number of factors facilitate and dictate the success of the co-creating experience; some are relationship based, where issues of power, autonomy and interaction are a

factor. Others are praxis related, whereby they determine how the participants engage with each other and the art form.

The methodological approach

The study consisted of five individual phases of field-work, beginning with a week-long Continuing Professional Development (CPD) summer course totalling 25 contact hours, from which 7 participants were enlisted for the full study. The course focussed on co-creation of drama and explored several models such as O'Neill's (1995) process drama approach which is the central concept that the Irish drama primary curriculum is based on and which embraces several co-creating principles. Following this, an initial interview was conducted. Given that each teacher has an individual relationship with drama, we wanted to gain some insight into their experience of drama before the study began, to give context to their experience of co-creating. The participants then agreed to activate what they understood to be co-creation in their classroom drama work on their return to their primary school classrooms in the west of Ireland. The participants ranged in teaching experience from 5 to 38 years, taught in both urban and rurally based schools and had classes ranging from junior infant class to fourth class. Three school visits took place between September and December 2012. Each visit involved between one and two hours of classroom work, with a further approximately one hour spent after school on interview, discussion and planning work. On the first visit, the Principal Investigator (PI) modelled co-creating drama with the teacher's class. On the second, the PI and class teacher collaborated in teaching a class to support their interpretation and adoption of co-creation. On the final visit the teachers were in charge of co-creating drama. Data were generated from phenomenological interviews with teachers, who were given pseudonyms from the start of the data collection process. Through these interviews, the teachers' experiences and reflections were explored in order to discern the essence of the phenomenon. The coding and analysis of the interviews led to a multi-faceted understanding of co-creating drama (Table 1).

Phenomenology is the study of 'lived experience', through stories, interviews and other accounts, to discover the meanings of those experiences (van Manen 1990). As this research is an examination of co-creating as seen and discussed from the teachers' viewpoint, a phenomenological perspective ensured that the focus remained on the teachers' 'lived' experience and an understanding of their drama practice as told through their own stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) explain that stories about teaching need to give voice to the teachers because the telling and re-telling of their stories can lead to realisations, and ultimately to transformations in the practice of teachers. The teachers in this study provided descriptions which contain a complex collection of elements including narratives on what they do in the co-creating experiences, meanings they give to their actions; and aims, ideals and beliefs about co-creating drama. We present the experiences of the teachers with the aim of finding resonance with the reader, to allow for a deeper look into the lives of these teachers using a co-creating attitude in their drama practice. Furthermore, by using a hermeneutic phenomenological structure otherwise known as 'interpretive' phenomenology, there is an opportunity to understand the 'meaning' of the phenomena through studying the teacher's thoughts and actions in their drama practice.

The analysis for this study was conducted through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens, whereby we were, 'working toward meaning through a structured process that is pre-determined yet influenced by data' (Laverty 2003, 20). The four series of interviews

Table 1. Field-work phases of the study.

Phase	Field-work element
Phase one	<p>Week-long CPD summer course (25 hours) led by the Principal Investigator (PI) focussing on co-creation of drama.</p> <p>Sixteen primary school teachers self-selected to join the course, from which 7 participants were enlisted for the study. The participants ranged in teaching experience from 5 to 38 years, taught in both urban and rurally based schools and had classes ranging from junior infant class to fourth class.</p>
Phase two	<p>Initial interview – PI collected stories from the teachers through interview in order to provide insight into the teachers' experience of drama before the study began. (Approx. 1 hour)</p>
Phase three	<p>School visit (Intervention 1)</p> <p>PI modelled co-creating drama with the teacher's class for 1–2 hours.</p> <p>PI collected stories of the teachers' experiences through interview (Approx. 1 hour)</p>
Phase four	<p>School visit (Intervention 2)</p> <p>PI and class teacher collaborated in teaching a class to support their interpretation and adoption of co-creation for 1–2 hours.</p> <p>PI collected stories of the teachers' experiences through interview (Approx. 1 hour)</p>
Phase five	<p>School visit (Intervention 3)</p> <p>Teachers taught a class which modelled their understanding of co-creating drama for 1–2 hours.</p> <p>PI collected stories of the teachers' experiences through interviews (Approx. 1 hour)</p>

were grouped in accordance with Seidman's (2006) three series phenomenological interview method structure. They were then examined group by group in order to build and layer firstly broad themes, and later more narrowly focussed themes in order to develop our understanding of the co-creating experience. The teachers' interviews provided the basis for a reflective structural analysis, and both a holistic approach and a highlighting approach were employed to analyse the transcriptions. The teachers' descriptions of their lived experience provided a textual journey from which we attempted to discover the underlying themes that defined the experience as a whole.

Making sense of experiences: an overview of the themes

The process of analysing the narratives resulted in the distillation of three essential themes about co-creating. The themes represent the commonalities in the teachers' experiences, and highlight the features of the experience that were communicated with the greatest significance and frequency. The first theme 'navigating to unknown destinations' illuminates how the teachers believe it is crucial to be sensitive to the creative and operational dimensions of co-creating. The second theme concerns issues of power and possibility in co-creation, and specifically the importance of teacher commitment to the process. The final theme discusses the educational outcomes of co-creating drama, in terms of the students, their learning and the teachers' practice. The teachers' narratives disclose five major outcomes. Their comments reveal the creative nature of the students' learning; the outcomes of the work being unique to the group; the students growing in unanticipated ways; becoming adept and practised in co-creating drama and how the co-creating experience has cultivated confidence in

their own drama practice for the teachers involved. In essence, when the teachers contemplate what co-creating offers them and their students, the underlying theme that emerged was the creative nature of the learning that occurs, the uniqueness of the experience and the beneficial effect on both the students and teachers.

Navigating to unknown destinations: artistry, confidence, relationships and structures in co-creating drama

The improvisational nature of co-creating means that it can be ‘a bit of an unknown journey’ (Anne-I3).¹ For this reason, the teachers provide important perspectives on what they consider is needed to guide a co-creating experience. They firstly discuss how working with a co-creating attitude means they have to notice more, be alert to opportunities, be receptive and reactive to events that emerge unexpectedly and be encouraging and responsive to their students. It can be argued that these actions can be considered activities in which an ‘artist’ teacher engages. According to Miller, Saxton, and Morgan (2001) an artist teacher is reflexive and responsive and is dedicated to ‘imagining possibilities and breathing life into the experience’ (103). Eisner (1985) considers ‘noticing’, in teaching terms, as having sensitivity and awareness, and believes these elements are part of the artistry of teaching (177). Anne echoes Eisner, describing how co-creating means ‘being in tune’ with the students and understanding ‘... the potential of a response or situation’ (Anne-I4). O’Neill explains the complexity of working this way, and how the noticing and developing that the teachers allude to involves:

... a subtle attention to detail, nuance and implication; the ability to exploit the unpredictable in the course of the work; the confidence to shift both educational and artistic goals where appropriate; and the security to deal with disappointment and possible failure. (O’Neill 2006, 121)

This highlights the responsibility of the teacher, who needs to have a ‘heightened awareness ... of noticing things’ (Anne-I4) and in this way is open to possibilities, and therefore amenable to change. It also highlights the need for the teacher to acquire the requisite skills for thinking creatively and for building on opportunities to ‘exploit the unpredictable’ (O’Neill 2006). Some teachers note being open and receptive to the students’ contributions is an important feature of co-creation and also suggest that possessing the ability to respond to these opportunities, that is, taking action in a dramatic and artistic sense is also essential. They also believe that having the requisite drama skills and techniques is a necessity. Some of the teachers highlight matching the appropriate conventions and strategies to the process as a key challenge.

Once you have recognised an opportunity, how do you bring the ‘doing’ into it? Like in a drama way ... that’s hard. (Faye-I3)

Confidence can also be an issue:

I did become unstuck a few times. Not knowing ... where to go with it or what to use drama wise. I think it’s just a kind of lack of confidence. (Barbara-I3)

This resonates with Aitken et al.’s study who found that in order to affect a sharing of power in co-creating drama, the teacher needs a ‘degree of skill and ease with the conventions and strategies of drama’ (2007, 11).

The use of skilful questioning, challenging the students' answers, and the importance of arousing curiosity is also a significant area of reflection for the teachers. Anne observes that there is a 'natural bond between teachers and questions'. She describes it as 'quizzing' the work and believes questioning is 'something we (teachers) do every day' (Anne-I3). Gallagher (2000) believes the teacher's role in drama is to create 'places of possibility', whereby they nurture questions and ask the learners to bring their own knowledge and thinking into their learning (114). George describes questions as 'arrows' that appear in the drama work:

Arrows appear ... in what I see ... but they also become arrows for the children. Sometimes I ask 'what would ye like to do?' and see how it works ... the questions move it along. I suppose the challenge is that you're able to cope with ... whatever direction it goes ... a child might come up with an idea and you need to think on your feet ... and I suppose questions are a great way to do that too. (George-I4)

Within the idea of navigating the drama experience, the teachers suggest that the willingness by both teacher and students to take a chance is an important part of the co-creating practice. Taylor (1995) believes artistry is powered by risk taking, as does Nicholson (2002) who connects risk taking with trust, while other studies show that environments which encourage risk taking have been found most conducive to creativity (Craft 2002; Jeffery and Craft 2003). George articulates risk-taking as taking a chance:

A lot of it I think this is trial and error ... we have to be comfortable and very confident in taking a chance on something, and if it works ... fantastic, if it doesn't then we move on ... You ... have to prepare yourself then for sessions that wouldn't be that successful. (George-I4)

Sahlberg (2009) in addressing the notion of 'trial and error', states that creativity is often blocked by the fear of being wrong. He argues that rewarding effort and ideas, not just correct answers, is essential for promoting creativity, and that being open to being wrong is an important part of being creative. Teachers' insights show that building an atmosphere free from right and wrong, in order to encourage risk taking is important, because, 'when you are being creative you are taking a chance' (George-I4).

In the analysis of their interviews, it emerged that the teachers comment to a significant degree upon the importance of building a flexible structure in their drama work to enable co-creation. They recognise that within co-creating they do not have ultimate control over the direction, content or outcome of the work; therefore, it is felt that a balance between student freedom and structure is important. As Anne suggests, '(y)ou need something to hang your hat on ... it's just having little crutches along the way' (Anne-I4). The teachers define structure in different ways. Some define it in terms of their use of drama techniques or conventions; for others it is a guiding material such as a storybook which can provide structure. Other teachers discuss structure as Neelands (1992) does, where there is a balance between discipline and constraint, and a more fluid expressive engagement with drama. The structure the teachers discuss is not a particularly ordered or rigid arrangement. Rather, it is a more carefully framed and mediated development of the work. McLauchlan (2001) observes that striking a balance between creative interaction and structure can be challenging, but it is also essential if the students are to 'create' work. Although the teachers

acknowledge the need for structure, they also emphasise the significance of being ‘free’ (Cathy-13) from predicted courses of action, and being ‘open’ (Ellen-13) to an undetermined outcome. When the teachers speak of structure, it is in terms of support for them in navigating the improvisational and unpredictable nature of co-creating. In essence they are creating a space where freedom and power are negotiated by both teacher and students (Aitken, Fraser, and Price 2007), which can lead to creative independence for the students. Ultimately, when the teachers discuss a structure for co-creating drama, they describe a flexible structure: one which enhances the quality of the experience rather than regulates or constrains it, and one which frames what is possible in a practical sense, with what is imaginable in a creative sense. Therefore, having a structure does not pre-suppose a lack of creativity in the co-creating experience but rather, gives creativity a framework in which to flourish.

The importance of teacher commitment to the co-creating experience: power and possibility

The teacher–participants in the study state clearly that the effectiveness of co-creation relies greatly on their level of the involvement in, and commitment to, the co-creating experience. Barbara describes co-creating as ‘a way of thinking and being with the students’ (Barbara-14). Her comment is a fitting way to describe the co-creating attitude. A commitment to a sharing relationship is based on the fundamental tenet of the teacher sharing power to some degree with their students. In doing this, they offer more opportunities for student autonomy, and also facilitate a dialogical atmosphere where the content and the direction of the work is negotiated by both parties. In considering the sharing behaviours and beliefs that the teachers describe, it is useful to consider how this indicates a fundamentally constructivist aspect to co-creating, whereby ‘[t]he constructivist artist or teacher believes that the self, meaning and knowledge is developed under the influence of all present and “interacting” language, materials, environment, bodily acts, cognitive and affective representations’ (Rasmussen 2010, 533). Anne describes the nature of her co-creating relationship with the students:

I think it is about building a sharing relationship, and me being prepared to just muck in and even make a mistake. And I think it’s me having confidence and trust in them, and for that relationship. That is key really. Today wasn’t the teacher being in total control ... I was kind of going with them and then leading sometimes, then sometimes they led ...
(Anne-12)

When Anne talks about a sharing relationship, we can understand she is permitting the students to have some choice in, and a degree of power over the experience. By offering them opportunities for decision-making, Anne is asking her students to think for themselves and to take ownership of the work, and thus facilitating their direct engagement with their own learning. Anne also explains how she leads the experience sometimes, and how the students lead at other times, thus ensuring a continuous renegotiation of power. Aitken, Fraser, and Price (2007) concur that, ‘where this kind of power sharing occurs, the teacher no longer ‘owns’ the drama, rather, it is ‘co-constructed’, (7). Finally, Anne describes ‘being prepared to just muck in and even make a mistake’, which suggests her willingness to take risks and to let go of some of her explicit signs of power, in order to encourage more student autonomy and to realise collaboration.

Teachers also discuss the idea of becoming a co-artist, where they actively partake in the creative enterprise with their students. This was most evident in their engagement in playful and artistic activity through the drama convention of Teacher in Role (TiR). The degree to which the teacher becomes practically and physically involved is significant. The teachers suggest that TiR enlivens a playful attitude in the teacher, and that some choices made in TiR can entail a type of dramatic artistry which leads to a deepening of engagement by both parties. George suggests the concept of becoming a co-participant is greatly connected to the teacher taking on a role within the drama:

... it was good for them to see me in role as well, you know being a part of it ... I just find that for that time you're their equal ... you're not the teacher ... you're another character in the drama I suppose. (George-I4)

We can consider that when the teacher acts as a co-artist, contributing ideas and becoming involved in the act of imagining and creating with their students, they are displaying a shared commitment to the artistic process, and the act of doing and creating.

While all the teachers discussed the difficulties of co-creating in terms of 'behaviour issues' (Ellen-I2) and the potential for 'chaotic-ness' (Barbara-I1), another common experience that emerged was that as the teachers became more comfortable with the co-creating process they began to trust the students. Trust in drama is multi-layered and is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated according to context and social circumstances (Nicholson 2002). The trust the teachers speak about appeared in many forms, for example, trusting students to direct the work and to contribute ideas of quality, trust in terms of risk taking and mutual trust. One particular type focuses on the way the students engaged with and developed the dramatic work, something which could be defined as a form of 'dramatic integrity' (Bundy 2003). Bundy argues that this particular concept of trust happens when a connection with the idea of the work is made, and that then leads to an aesthetic engagement. Some of the participants consider trust to be a two-way thing; that is, the students need to trust the teachers.

It begins with just the whole idea of listening to them ... giving them kind of a forum you know to share their ideas, and where I am acknowledging their ideas. (Faye-I2)

It follows that the teacher as a co-participant in a process which involves co-creating should be considered trustworthy too. However, this does not suggest that the teacher should be artistically or pedagogically agreeable to every suggestion. Rather, they are open and caring, because 'a caring environment may create a robust environment in which debate, dissent, generosity and artistic experimentation might be encouraged and valued' (Nicholson 2002, 90).

Embracing the learning: the intended and unintended outcomes of co-creating

In considering what co-creating drama means to their students, their learning and to their own practice, the teachers disclose five major and varied learning outcomes of co-creating drama: the creative nature of the learning; a unique 'end product'; the students growing in unanticipated ways; the teachers becoming adept and practised, and teacher confidence. Nearly all the teachers suggest that once the co-creating

process was embraced by both parties, there were many educational benefits. Although at times, scholars have not agreed on the educational value of drama (O'Hara 1996), the learning that occurs within drama is well documented (Anderson and Dunn 2013; O'Toole and Dunn 2002). Some of the kinds of learning the participant teachers speak of, that is, language development, social interaction and development of emotional and cognitive intelligences, are recognisable beyond a drama education context. Therefore, this outcome is not exclusive to co-creating drama. But, after detailed analysis, it is clear that at certain points the teachers speak about a type of learning that is new to both them and their students. Their comments reveal the creative nature of the students' learning, differentiating between creative learning and creativity. Creative learning sees the students actively involved in their own learning. They make choices and decisions, and develop imaginative and critical ways of thinking through exploring ideas and problem-solving. Creativity involves the students directly in thinking or behaving imaginatively in order to discover or create something new or something of value to the group and involves exploration and risk taking, and allows the students to express themselves physically and imaginatively through the art-form. Ellen describes engaging, imagining, doing and investigating; all actions that can be considered as indicative of creative practice:

(T)he way this engages them is different too. I felt they really had a much better understanding of it [the story] ... whereas, we'll say, if ... they just acted it out, I don't think they would have gotten the depth they did. They probably would have missed a lot ... of the thinking or ... the investigating even. (Ellen-I4)

Other teachers offer similar reflections of how imagination and creativity is embedded in the co-creating experience, and how it leads the students to think and act beyond what is, toward what might be (Fraser and Price 2011), and essentially to create. They also suggest that co-creating entails the use of creative thinking, and the application of knowledge and skills to make new ideas and new connections.

Participants also explain how outcomes of the work are unique to the group, and how they see the students growing in unanticipated ways. They describe the students not only uncovering new understandings about the drama work, but also new understandings about themselves, and speak about observing a new way of thinking and behaving that the students display, 'You see the benefit of it ... they grew, they really did' (Ellen-I4). Participant teachers refer to the students using approaches that go beyond their normal engagement or their 'mundane thinking' (Barbara-I4). They also highlight the social and collaborative dimensions of the co-creating work and some suggest that when provided with the opportunity to collaborate, the students experienced 'new interactions ... with each other' (George-I3). Anne highlights how the students can grow 'socially' through the co-creating experiences. She talks about a student being able to 'argue a point', and explains that when contributions are acknowledged by the teacher and the other students, it can cultivate confidence in the students. Furthermore, students are 'hit all round, all parts of them' (Anne-I3) in the sense of not just using their academic skills, but across a range of multiple intelligences (Gardner 2011). Teachers' also expressed surprise at the abilities, and imaginative capabilities that the children display when the teachers empower them. From this we may contemplate that co-creating drama creates a space which may permit

new individual qualities to be revealed, to the benefit of student and teacher. This also leads to a consideration of how the teachers may have changed as a result of the experience of co-creating drama in their classrooms. What is clear is that the experience has enabled them to begin to recognise the borders and possibilities of their teaching, and to critically reflect on their work something which has also enabled their own professional growth. Because of the co-constructed, contextual, emergent and somewhat unplanned nature of co-creating, the uniqueness of the work to the group is another significant outcome.

I think ... when you're teaching ... science or whatever it is, you've got your goals and an expected outcome. I suppose as teachers we always feel we have to have a product at the end of it, and ... that's not necessarily so now. You see, with this you're not sure what the end product is going to be ... and the product might be very different for each group you know ... because of the individual kids. (Barbara-I4)

When the teachers speak about co-creating, it is more in an experiential sense, and not just with an end product or outcome in mind. There is always a product of course because something is created, but this can be anything from the forming of new ideas or new perspectives, to a small performance, or perhaps a move by the students beyond the typical classroom thinking, or it can be something created that encourages personal or creative satisfaction for the students.

Another identifiable outcome is in how the students and teacher becoming adept and practised in co-creating drama, and how the co-creating experience has cultivated confidence in the teachers own drama practice. Nearly all of the teachers state that the co-creating experiences become easier as the group and teacher become more practised in this way of working. Some of the teachers also talk about familiarity of the practice helping the group to have an awareness of what is expected, and therefore, they acquire a more informed approach to the work. Through their routine of co-creating drama, the students acquire skills and knowledge of the practices involved, something that is also mirrored in the teachers' experiences, '[t]he more I do it, the more I learn ... the more I feel comfortable' (Cathy-I3). It is worth considering that this outcome suggests that the teachers are themselves forming professional craft knowledge in co-creating (Brown and McIntyre 1993), which then fosters knowledge about the kinds of decisions that will inform particular actions and situations. Reflection on perceptions, experiences and practices can be considered a core activity for all teachers (Walkington 2005). It can be argued that professional craft knowledge impacts upon the teacher in time, whereby the changing practice leads to a shift in teacher identity. This can be seen in the teachers' ongoing comments about changes in their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. They describe learning in the experience, which implies a change in practice and attitude, for example, learning to 'really listen' (Cathy-I3), 'learning to work from the kids' (Barbara-I4), learning 'to try' (Cathy-I3) and 'being open to things' (Barbara-I4). The teachers' identity is central to their beliefs and the practices that guide their actions (Cochran-Smith 2005). Therefore, their philosophy of teaching is constantly evolving and their identity as teachers is continually being created and recreated. From this work, we can understand that teachers' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs are likely to change because of co-creation work in drama, and this in turn may have an effect on their overall sense of teacher identity, something also reflected in a new-found sense of confidence in their drama practice, in their attitude, skills and personal confidence:

It's just about getting my confidence up more, so then we'll move on. Last year we would not have been able to do this, I wouldn't have signed up for it. I've hugely changed. I know more ... I want more now ... I want to enjoy it too now, like them. (Cathy-I3)

Some teachers enjoyed the imaginative freedom of the practice, while others feel the benefits of their newly acquired knowledge and skills were responsible for their confidence. Likewise, the spontaneous element of the practice really suited some of the teachers. Cathy describes an incident where the co-creating work didn't happen as she had hoped or how she had experienced before, and that made her realise how much she values co-creating drama, rather than utilising a more structured pedagogical approach. There are clear indications that the enjoyment and the success experienced often outweighed the worries that accompanied the teachers' teaching drama:

When I find myself standing in a class with those same feelings of 'God what will I do?' the thing is I feel ... I'd be open now. I just feel I would have more confidence now ... when we started reading the story today we literally, we had left it in such a way that we wouldn't know where we were going next. So I definitely feel now that there's even more scope and more directions. (George-I3)

We are reminded by Wales (2009), that 'teachers' feelings are an important aspect of their work, because much of the work of teachers is about how they express their identities and personalities in the classroom' (262). Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge how a lack of confidence may influence teachers' teaching practices. The teachers in this study expressed strong sentiments about how their confidence in their drama practice had increased because of their co-creating experiences. When we consider that one of the most substantial hindrances to drama and the arts in primary schools is a lack of confidence on the part of teachers (Bandura 1997; Russell-Bowie 2013), this insight is very significant.

Conclusion

The teachers' reflections in this study provide rich and authentic knowledge on how the co-creating experience unfolds in its essence. Although the nature of a phenomenological study is to simply share the common experiences of those willing to relate them, the themes of this study open opportunities for new dialogues about drama and co-creating drama in Irish primary schools. This study suggests that if a teacher becomes a co-creator of the drama, it may bring about positive change in their classroom interactions and practices. This change can be challenging at first, but it can lead to new ways of working and new insights for teachers. By moving away from a traditional role as an imparter of knowledge, the teacher is allowing their students to meaningfully impact upon the work: imaginatively; artistically; intellectually and practically. Consequently, the teacher may no longer have to carry the 'burden of having to have all the ideas' (Barbara-I2). In co-creating drama, the students are permitted to share their imagination, ideas and knowledge with the teachers. This sharing relationship gives the teacher the opportunity to help the students design their own learning experiences (Hyslop-Margison and Strobel 2007). In order for this to happen, a shift in the relationship of the teacher and the students, their interactions, and the teachers' pedagogical strategies is required. This takes risk and considerable effort on the teacher's part.

The gains made through instigating co-creating drama are substantial, not just in terms of its focus on the social, creative and intellectual impact on the students, but in

the positive attitudes towards drama that emerged in the teachers. Many of the teachers describe how before this study, they used drama mainly as a teaching method, or integrated drama with another subject rather than conducting independent drama lessons. The implications of this is that the full potency of the spectrum of drama may not be realised, the act of creating something new possibly neglected and the child operating as artist in the drama experience may also be lost. There is no suggestion here that all drama practice should involve co-creating. But, this research does highlight that some of the teachers felt that their students' creativity was enabled to a greater degree through their adoption of a co-creating attitude. This issue can perhaps be addressed through more emphasis in the curriculum on the appreciation and awareness of drama as a discipline in its own right, and the educational, creative and artistic opportunities within this.

Finally the centrality of teacher identity and the importance of the teachers' confidence in their creative abilities, and its impact on their drama practice was the subject of much discussion throughout the interviews. Many of the teachers' reflections in this study suggest that they often feel ill-equipped to develop and support creativity in their students. Craft (2000) states there is a need to nourish the creativity of the teacher, if they are to nourish this in their students. The teachers' narratives indicate that co-creating improved their self-esteem in terms of their pedagogical skills, and increased their confidence in their drama practice. Facilitating and supporting teachers in the expression of their imaginative and creative skills must be a cornerstone of the full spectrum of teacher education: it is critical to good pedagogy, within the arts and beyond.

Note

1. The 'I' and number for example Anne (I3) refers to the interview number in a series of three (three interventions). All participants were allocated a pseudonym in the study.

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