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School Drama: Using drama for oracy in an EAL/D classroom

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the pedagogical potential of drama-rich processes to develop and improve oracy skills for students learning English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). Research was conducted through a multi-level, qualitative case study of Sydney Theatre Company and University of Sydney's *School Drama* ™ program. *School Drama* is a co-mentoring teacher professional learning program that promotes a dual focus of developing teachers' capacity to use drama pedagogy with literature, and improving literacy outcomes and engagement for students. The research context was an intermediate Intensive English class at a western Sydney secondary school, involving students from refugee backgrounds. Data gathering included observations, focus groups, teacher interviews, and artefact analysis. While this instance of the program presented behavioural and structural limitations, benchmarking assessment depicted a marked to moderate improvement in oracy skills. *Vocabulary, imagination and creativity* and *confidence* emerged as the most salient ways oracy was developed and improved.

KEYWORDS

Drama pedagogy; EAL/D; oracy skills; drama-rich processes

'Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn'. – Benjamin Franklin

Introduction

According to NSW Department of Education and Training (NSWDET, 2020), approximately 25 per cent of students in NSW government schools are learning English as an additional language, while more than 35 per cent are from a language background other than English. In our increasingly globalised world, it is vital teachers are adept in addressing the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of students, in order to sustain supportive and inclusive learning environments (NSWDET , 2020). Moreover, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated challenges for students from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families, thus heightening the need to support the engagement and success of EAL/D students (Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN, 2020). That drama can support learning needs and outcomes for EAL/D students, and language learning more generally, has been a growing field of interest and inquiry (Podlozny, 2000; Dunn and Stinson, 2012; Stinson and Piazzoli, 2013; Hertzberg, 2016; Beaumont,

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2021). Drama places demands on its participants within a 'safe physical, cognitive and emotional space' (Stinson, 2008, p. 194) and supports risk-taking through the power of role or dual-affect (O'Toole and Stinson, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, the process of enactment in drama provides EAL/D learners the opportunity to communicate understanding non-verbally, even if they have not yet established the necessary English vocabulary (Hertzberg, 2015). This research investigates using drama as a cross-curricular strategy in developing oracy skills in another language and is particularly focused on the secondary context.

Theoretical framing

The use of drama as a pedagogical tool aligns with sociocultural constructivist perspectives on education. Vygotsky's (1978) seminal work on sociocultural constructivist theory envisages learning as a fundamentally social experience; a notion consistent with drama education as an 'essentially collaborative enterprise' (Ewing and Simons, 2016, p. 4). The core features intrinsic to drama – creativity, collaboration, and embodiment – are underpinned by Vygotsky's (1998) emphasis on creativity as profoundly social, existing 'not only where it creates historical works, but also everywhere human imagination combines, changes and creates anything new' (p. 90). The experiential, embodied nature of drama parallels Vygotsky's socioconstructivist notion of perezhivanie or lived emotional experience considered fundamental to meaningful learning. Finally, Vygotsky's (1978) Zones of Proximal Development can be realised through collaboration in a dramatic setting.

Drama, EAL/D and oracy

Oracy, while a fundamental skill and gateway to learning, is often a 'forgotten basic' (O'Toole and Stinson, 2013, p. 157). Due to the burgeoning immersion of technology in family lives, children are often much less practised in communication and expression (O'Toole and Stinson, 2013). Hertzberg (2016) argues oracy is crucial for reading and writing progress, and that listening to and speaking a language is foundational for its mastery; a notion supported by Vygotsky (1986), who suggests that speaking aloud allows students to think in different ways. Through proficiency in oracy, children can explore and problem-solve, clarify ideas and 'become fully participative citizens in a highly mobile global context' (Evan & Jones, 2007, p. 559). Providing support for English language learners in oracy is therefore paramount to ensuring their access to, and inclusion in, learning.

Oracy can be activated through drama-rich pedagogies (Ewing, 2019), as drama is 'the art form of the spoken word and of the gesture and the body' (O'Toole and Stinson, 2013, p. 158). According to NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) (2020), learning conversational language takes approximately two years for EAL/D students, while academic language takes five to ten years with specialist help. Research concludes that drama can dually develop these language functions, as improvisation in drama can facilitate the use of conversational language, whilst drama processes can explicitly plan for using specialist, higher-order language (Ewing and Simons, 2016; Hertzberg, 2016). Further, dramatic strategies can improve oracy in terms of 'spontaneity, fluency,

articulation [and] vocabulary', but also 'more abstract thinking and expressive language', as well as 'increased use of rarely accessed vocabulary, improved grammar and understanding of narrative structures' (O'Toole and Stinson, 2013, p. 157).

School Drama program and oracy for EAL/D students

Despite abundant evidence supporting a drama-rich approach to language and literacy development, its benefits for improving oracy need to be better understood. Stinson and Piazzoli (2013) state that combining language and drama is 'not a simple, mechanical action; it is not guaranteed that by implementing drama, a language is acquired' (p. 200). The teacher must be dually proficient in both drama and language pedagogy, or at the very least, partner with experts to devise meaningful and effective strategies (Stinson and Piazzoli, 2013). This approach is inherent in Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and University of Sydney's *School Drama* program (Ewing and Saunders, 2016), which situates quality English literature texts within drama-rich processes, in order to improve learning outcomes in English language and literacy.

This research contributes to a growing portfolio of case studies that explore the efficacy of the *School Drama* program (Collis, 2021; Beaumont, 2020; Karaolis, 2020; Saunders, 2015; 2019; Hankus, 2015; Smith, 2014; Sze, 2013; Robertson, 2010). To date, no case study in this collection has explored oracy, nor an adaptation of the program for a secondary Intensive English Centre (IEC) context. Therefore, this research aimed to explore **how** *School Drama* can facilitate the development and improvement of oracy skills for secondary EAL/D students.

Materials and Methods

This research comprised a multi-level, qualitative case study of the *School Drama* program. The qualitative paradigm has potential for more interpretive and illuminative insights (Hamilton and Corbett-Wittier, 2013) and aligns with drama-rich processes, which primarily involve enactment, embodiment and exploration. Moreover, the case study methodology aligns with the existing portfolio of case studies on *School Drama*. Sociocultural constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) provides the theoretical framework for this research, as it not only aligns with the collaborative and socially situated nature of the drama classroom, but also the dialogic and social process of language learning (Morita, 2000). In light of the case study's sociocultural constructivist framework, I acknowledged my own subjectivities and monitored them carefully (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Ethics approval from Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) and NSW State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) were obtained for this case study, along with appropriate permissions from parents, carers and class teachers.

Case study – School Drama program

This case study uses the 'classic' version of *School Drama*, a co-mentoring teacher professional learning program developed in 2009 by Robyn Ewing (USYD) and Helen Hristofski (then Education Manager, STC). Over the last thirteen years it has been developed and

refined by Ewing and John Nicholas Saunders, former Director of Community Engagement and Partnerships and Education Manager at STC, based on ongoing evaluation (Gibson, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015; Gibson and Smith, 2013; Gibson and Beachum, 2019).

School Drama promotes a dual focus of developing individual teacher's professional learning, and improving literacy and engagement for students. Following six hours of teacher professional learning workshops, the *School Drama* program typically takes place in classrooms over seven weeks, with one two-hour workshop per week. Here, classroom teachers collaborate with Teaching Artists (usually actors, applied theatre practitioners, or drama educators) to integrate drama strategies into literacy learning. Teachers select one of four areas of focus: *inferential comprehension, confidence in oracy, vocabulary development* or *imaginative writing*. These areas are adapted from NSW Board of Studies (2012) English syllabus outcomes and include pre-program and post-program benchmarking tasks for the nominated literacy area. The focal literacy area within this case study was *confidence in oracy*.

This case study was conducted within a Level Three IEC class at Sunnyvale High School (pseudonym) in western Sydney. Typically, IEC enrolment entails three school terms of targeted English language tuition, with the student participants undertaking their third and final term in an IEC setting. The class teacher, Kara, who requested her real name be used, had 18 months experience teaching EAL/D, prior to which she taught Physical Education. The class comprised 13 students of intermediate language proficiency – seven girls and six boys – who ranged in age from 13 to 14 years old. All student participants were from Iraqi and Syrian refugee backgrounds, and spoke Arabic as a first language. According to NSW Department of Education and Training (NDW DET 2020), refugee students may have greater and more complex needs than other newly arrived EAL/D students, such as little to no prior experience of formal schooling; limited literacy skills in their first language; and/or complex health and welfare issues. Therefore, these students may take longer to achieve language and content syllabus outcomes (NSW Department of Education and Training (DET), 2020); a notion that was carefully considered in the case study.

Data collection

Qualitative data collection methods, including observations, interviews, focus groups, and artefacts, were adopted in the case study. Research was flexible and exploratory to cater to the open-ended nature of drama, and to align with sociocultural constructivist methods. As qualitative researcher, I was the primary tool for data collection and analysis. I aimed to be 'sensitive to underlying meaning' (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 17); an approach which resonates with the collaborative, creative and experiential setting of the drama workshop. Focus groups occurred twice in the program following the third and final workshops, and consisted of six to eight students of varying language competencies that were selected by the teacher. Key artefacts included the pre-program and post-program benchmarking which adapted Stage 3 English outcomes to address a series of criterions related to oracy. As oracy was the literacy focus of the program, these benchmarking tasks provided invaluable qualitative data. Additionally, artefacts such as student work samples, lesson plans, and the chosen literary text, *The Coat* (Hunt, 2012), were collected and studied.

Data analysis

With the purpose of this study being to discover the ways *School Drama* develops and improves oracy skills, data analysis was treated as a thorough, iterative and ongoing process informing data collection, in order to draw substantive conclusions. Interviews, observations, and artefacts were subject to Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework for qualitative data analysis, which involves four criteria: data collection, data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing and verification. Data collection occurred through both generating and collating data; reduction through the process of coding and categorising; display through an attempt to identify patterns, themes and anomalies (Hamilton and Corbett-Wittier, 2013); and finally tentative conclusions were drawn to be verified through further analysis.

In coding, data was analysed into preliminary categories representing the 'ways' *School Drama* improves and develops oracy skills. According to *School Drama*'s benchmarking rubric for *confidence in oracy*, oral skills include vocabulary, engagement, creativity, eye contact, vocal variation, facial expression, body language, characterisation, pronunciation, and coherency. These categories were preliminary and open to variation depending on information that emerged throughout the study.

Findings and discussion

The Teaching Artist, who I refer to as Jane, described this particular instance of the *School Drama* program as an atypical one: throughout workshops, more time than usual was spent managing student behaviour and focus. The class teacher, Kara, attributed this to the cohort's difficulty with longer timeframes:

> Some weeks in certain tasks they were quite engaged, then in others they weren't . . . I think it was because it was a two period class. With these students, staying on set tasks and times . . . they can tune out.

Challenges with behaviour and focus meant Jane needed to adapt lessons. For instance, in the second workshop, Kara and Jane discerned students were more focused when responding to writing tasks. Consequently, Jane implemented drama-based writing tasks in remaining workshops, which not only ensured focus but also scaffolded subsequent oracy exercises. In addition, these allowed students to cross-check language, spelling and pronunciation with teachers and peers. Kara commended this strategy:

> When we incorporated the writing it actually made a big difference . . .. I think writing, then expressing it, then acting helped keep it on track . . .. some of them might find it easier to . . . not be focused all the time on their speaking.

Time constraints appeared an additional challenge in the case study. Where *School Drama* usually comprises seven consecutive weekly workshops, Sunnyvale IEC's program involved six somewhat disjointed lessons – both due to an unforeseen two week cancellation, and an additional session added in the final week. Despite behavioural and structural limitations, Kara concluded the program was ultimately successful:

> They have been tougher . . . probably not what you guys have had within mainstream [schools] . . .. it still has worked, even if you get a class that can be a . . . little disruptive . . . Students have been engaged, it's just taken a few times to get there.

Benchmarking: pre-program and post-program comparison

As in all *School Drama* workshops, the pre-program and post-program benchmarking tasks (Figure 1) were a key instrument in measuring student progress. Prior to and following the program, students undertook two similar tasks with identical rubrics (Figure 2) that derived from Stage 3 English syllabus outcomes to assess *confidence in oracy*.

Both tasks used contemporary children's literature as the basis for a hot-seating activity, where students assumed the role of a character from the text and were questioned in-role by the class. Where pre-program benchmarking used *The Lost Thing* (Tan, 2000) in a traditional reading group setting, the post-program task explored *The Coat* (Hunt, 2012), which had been studied over the six-week *School Drama* program. The class teacher assessed both tasks, while I helped facilitate hot-seating questions. I had no part in marking to avoid any potential bias.

Figure 3 illustrates the nine complete sets of pre and post-program tasks within the class. Of the 13 student participants, four were absent in pre or post-program benchmarking, therefore nine results were collected and analysed. All students made some improvement in terms of oracy skills between tasks. In this report, pseudonyms are used for all student participants.

Confidence in Oracy
Pre-program Student Benchmarking Task 2018
STAGE 3

1. You are a character in the story, *The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan. (Characters are listed below).
2. Choose one interesting object of those that your teacher has laid out in front of you. Choose carefully as you have to be able to create a story for this object!
3. You have **10 MINUTES** to brainstorm ideas about the character and then you will be **HOT SEATED.**
4. Your hot seat will last for 3 to 4 minutes.

Character List: The Boy The Lost Thing Mum Dad

Confidence in Oracy
Post-program Student Benchmarking Task 2018
STAGE 3

Student:

1. You are a character in the story, *The Coat* by Julie Hunt. (Characters are listed below).
2. Choose one interesting object of those that your teacher has laid out in front of you. Choose carefully as you have to be able to create a story for this object!
3. You have **10 MINUTES** to brainstorm ideas about the character and then you will be **HOT SEATED.**
4. Your hot seat will last for 3 to 4 minutes.

Character List: The Coat The Man A character in the café

Figure 1. Pre-program and post-program benchmarking tasks.

School Drama™ Benchmarking Rubric 2018

STAGE THREE

Confidence in Oracy

STUDENT NAME: _____

Pre-program/Post-program (Please circle)

Syllabus Outcomes	Criteria	A	B	C	D	E
EN3-1A communicates effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes using increasingly challenging topics, ideas, issues and language forms and featured. **EN3-7C** thinks imaginatively, creativity, interpretively and critically about information and ideas and identified connections between texts when responding to and composing texts. **EN3-1A** communicates effectively for a variety of audiences and purposes using increasingly challenging topics, ideas, issues and language forms and features **EN3-6B** uses knowledge of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation and vocabulary to respond to and compose clear and cohesive texts in different media and technologies	Uses appropriate vocabulary					
	Coherently recounts events in narrative					
	Builds on existing story in an imaginative, creative and engaging way					
	Characterisation is consistent and relevant					
	Makes eye contact with listeners where appropriate					
	Uses variation/contrast in volume, pace, intonation, pause for effect/to create contrast					
	Uses facial expression and body language for effect					
	Clear pronunciation					

Continuum of Achievement:

A+ A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D D- E+ E E-

Comments:

Figure 2. Pre-program and post-program benchmarking rubric.

The class teacher Kara suggested she may have been lenient in pre-program benchmarking due to its difficulty for EAL/D students with minimal drama experience. In the post-program benchmarking, however, Kara expressed surprise towards the cohort's collective improvement.

As this was a qualitative case study with a small number of participants, only simple descriptive statistical analyses were used to compare benchmarking tasks. Comparing tasks illustrates a moderate to marked improvement in students' oracy skills over the six weeks. Six of the nine participant students made marked progress, their increase ranging 21% to 41% between tasks. The remaining three students made moderate improvements, with scores increasing between 9% and 12%. While improvement in oracy is clear, further analysis is required to explore the primary *ways* oracy was developed and improved for students.

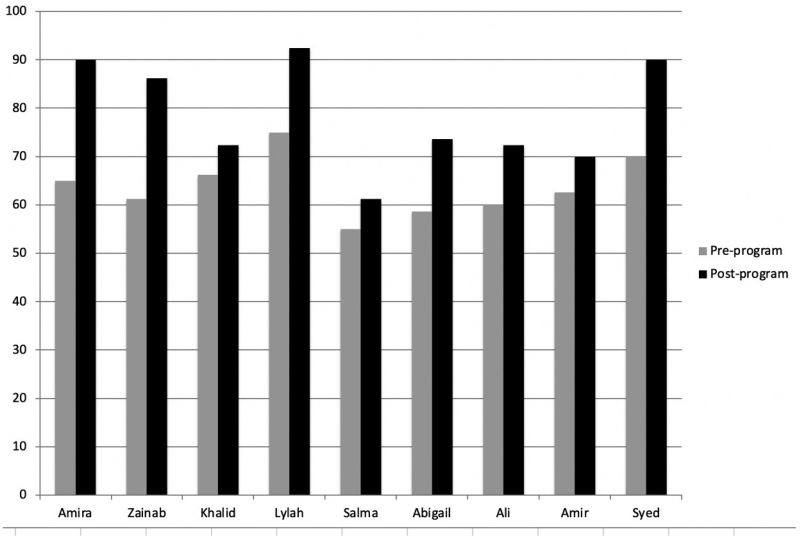

Figure 3. Student pre-program and post-program benchmarking task results comparing oracy skills.

Coding categories

Data was coded into preliminary categories representing the 'ways' *School Drama* improved and developed oracy skills, which derived from *School Drama*'s benchmarking rubric for *confidence in oracy*. The following coding categories were most salient, and are thus subheadings for subsequent discussion

- Vocabulary
- Imagination and creativity
- Confidence

Vocabulary

The first criterion in the *confidence in oracy* rubric entails the use of 'appropriate vocabulary'. Vocabulary was initially a significant challenge for students, however it substantially improved throughout the program. In benchmarking, vocabulary saw an average moderate increase of 11% between tasks. Coding of teacher and student interview commentary led to the suggestion vocabulary manifested in two ways – both in *using* and *understanding* vocabulary.

At the start of the program, class teacher Kara expressed her wish to see students adopt wider vocabularies, and provide 'not just a "yes" or "no" answer'. Several weeks later, she alluded to *using* and *understanding* vocabulary as a specific challenge in EAL/D contexts:

> Sometimes just expressing their opinion . . . they know what they want to say in their head, but . . . to explain it is the hardest. And sometimes I think there's lots of words [in the text] that they don't understand.

Understanding vocabulary in *The Coat* (Hunt, 2012) became a critical teaching outcome in lessons. In the first workshop, students were noticeably disengaged in class reading, likely due to confusion with vocabulary. Chloe, a quiet and reserved student, confirmed this challenge:

> Interviewer: Chloe, what have you not liked about the lessons?
>
> Chloe: When we read book, because we don't understand the meaning.

Chloe's frustration perhaps spoke to a common sentiment felt by students initially. Therefore, Jane and Kara adjusted learning strategies to provide more clarification of vocabulary and narrative: each page of the text would be read twice with attention to language. In discussion following the program, a student cited this focus on vocabulary as an aspect he enjoyed most about lessons:

> Syed: I like when the teacher read it, then the vocabulary.

Another student, Lylah, corroborated this approach:

> Sometimes you don't understand the words when we read the book, and the teacher help you.

Further, vocabulary was modelled and consolidated through dramatic strategies such as *Freeze Frames*, where students created tableaux to physically represent newly acquired words like *confidence*. The efficacy of using dramatic strategies for vocabulary acquisition was affirmed in Syed's statement:

> Syed: I like when we explaining word, explaining more, and we act or make a picture about each paper of the book.
>
> Interviewer: And does that help you understand the words in the book, Syed?
>
> Syed: Yeah.

Similarly, Kara commended strategies that allowed students to learn new words, represent them, and consolidate them. By the fourth workshop, she identified vocabulary as an area of oracy that was 'definitely improving'. This was reflected in student discussion following the program – when asked if students believed their English had improved, Amira gave an enthusiastic answer:

> Amira: Yes!
>
> Interviewer: Yes?
>
> Amira: So much better.
>
> Interviewer: So much better – what makes you say that, Amira?
>
> Amira: Miss, because I learn new word, and help me in English.

By the end of the program, Kara articulated the connection between *understanding* and *using* appropriate vocabulary, and improving oracy:

> Lots of vocabulary in the book they didn't know. So I definitely think vocabulary has been helped . . . as they've all improved from giving one-word answers.

Imagination and creativity

The *School Drama* benchmarking rubric aligns 'build[ing] on story in an imaginative, creative and engaging way' with oral proficiency. Imagination and creativity saw a marked average improvement of 26% between pre-program and post-program benchmarking tasks. At the start of the program, Kara identified creativity and imagination as areas requiring improvement, and linked potential barriers as a lack of understanding, engagement, and/or confidence. Interestingly, observational and interview data substantiated the view that improved confidence in oracy and engagement with the text enabled students' creative and imaginative thought processes.

This was particularly evident in the case of Syed, an introverted student who made marked improvements in creativity and imagination throughout the study. Halfway through the program, Kara reflected on Syed's development:

> The last two weeks I've noticed a massive improvement . . . He's still quite reserved, but his imagination and insight has improved massively . . .. He's really thinking now, whereas before it was more him trying to take in what was going on.

Through confidence in oracy, it is possible that students like Syed were more equipped to articulate, and build upon, their existing imagination and creativity. In the fifth workshop, students created a character to appear in a cafe scene within *The Coat* (Hunt, 2012); completed a character worksheet; shared responses in small groups; then participated in a hot-seating exercise in-role. Syed developed the character of Alfarazdek, a poet sitting in the cafe alongside his friend, Shakespeare. In hot-seating, Syed surprised teachers and peers when confidently reciting a poem by heart, which was well beyond the requirements of the task (Figure 4) .

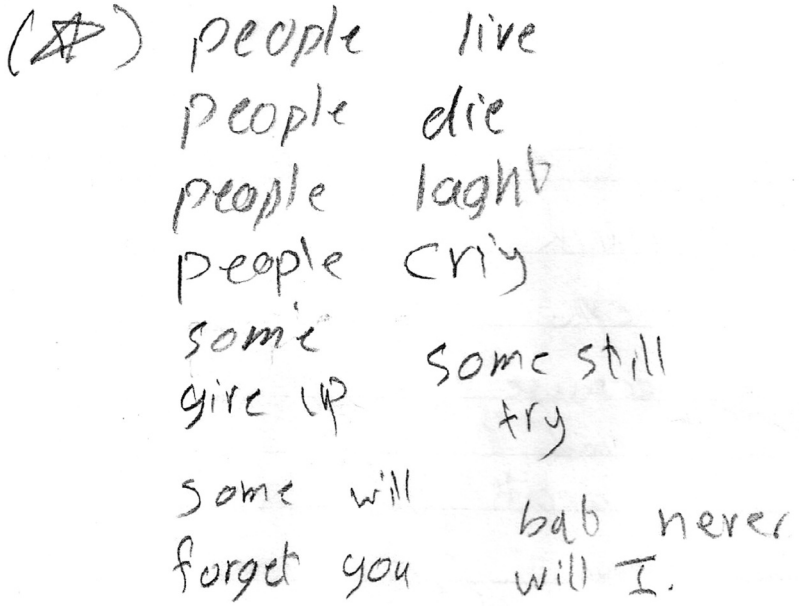

Figure 4. Syed's poem scribed on the back of his characterisation worksheet.

This was a critical moment in the case study as it captured genuine engagement with the program. Through dramatic enactment in hot-seating, Syed, a usually quiet student, was provided with a means for creative risk-taking in the safe guise of character (Hertzberg, 2016). Kara reasserted his progress in the closing interview, confirming Syed's responses in post-program hot-seating were 'deep' and 'in character'; a student who has 'got better as the weeks have gone by'.

On a classroom level, Kara reflected that drama strategies such as *10 Second Objects* and *Artefacts* triggered student creativity and imagination, to 'get the kids thinking' and 'think outside the box' before commencing tasks specific to oracy. In the concluding interview, Kara remarked that students' 'creativity and imagination has improved, especially from day one'.

In the final workshop, the class considered the book's ending and its lack of closure. Kara explained the fate of the protagonist is 'left to our imagination', and students speculated on possible reasons:

> Kara: Where is he going?
>
> Zainab: To new life?
>
> Amira: From sad to happy.
>
> Khalid: The coat changed . . . his life.

The answers generated in this final discussion were insightful, reflecting a profoundly deeper and more creative engagement with the text than in earlier lessons.

Confidence

While confidence was not an assessable criterion in benchmarking, *confidence in oracy* was the overarching goal of the program. The data collected about confidence was not statistical, but rather emergent in interviews and observations.

In the first workshop, there was an evident distinction between extroverted students, and those who tended to 'take a backseat'. Kara reflected on this dynamic:

> Sometimes because [shy students] are quieter, or there's other people in the class that . . . kind of takeover, they don't really get to voice their opinion.

However, strategies such as hot-seating in pre-program benchmarking provided all students the platform to contribute, including those less confident:

> It was good to hear from some of the girls, like Amira and Zara . . . They can be quite quiet and reserved . . . so it was nice to see they had some great ideas.

Kara asserted improvement in oracy is 'all about building confidence', and reiterated this halfway through the program:

> I think some of them it's just, putting themselves out there. Just to be confident and trust in your ability . . . Not to think what you're doing is wrong.

Here, Kara alluded to an issue specific to the student demographic, which was later discussed with her head teacher, who I refer to as Irene. Irene emphasised the unique context at Sunnyvale IEC which consists primarily of students from refugee backgrounds,

who not only face typical EAL/D challenges, but also have a broad range of additional emotional and social needs. She highlighted that in most cases, students are wary of giving answers due to fear of being wrong. These considerations indicated that confidence would be a challenging yet critical area to develop for proficiency in oracy.

By the fourth workshop, however, Kara had perceived a shift in student confidence and insight:

> There are some students I initially thought were more quiet … .. But then today I found that even though they don't always volunteer, they give insightful answers … they're more confident … especially students that would generally give a one-word answer in the beginning of the course.

Confidence as a core aspect of oracy culminated in the sixth and final workshop, its focus being to 'explore the concept of confidence'. This occurred not only through examining confidence as a theme within the text, but also in students fostering confidence within themselves and their speaking skills, specifically through drama exercises such as *Words of Encouragement*.

By the end of the program, students affirmed they were more confident about speaking English, with Lylah commenting workshops had helped her speaking before different audiences:

> I feel more comfortable when we speak … in group of people like this, or like with adults.

When asking *why* students felt more confident with English, Ali offered 'because we are speaking', while Sabah added 'we are learning'. Amira contributed an enlightening response: 'because we are acting, so we are more comfortable'.

There was thus a notable turnaround within the unique EAL/D demographic at Sunnyvale IEC. Students were not only more confident in their English and oracy, but also possessed the confidence to share their opinions and contribute to class discussion, which Kara elucidated in the closing interview:

> Their confidence in getting up and giving their opinion has improved; knowing that there's no right or wrong answer.

Conclusion

In this research, I have documented how the drama strategies in *School Drama* improved and developed EAL/D students' oracy skills at Sunnyvale IEC. The most pronounced gains were in: *vocabulary, imagination and creativity* and *confidence*. Drama supported *using* and *understanding* new vocabulary, encouraging more articulate and extended ways for student expression. Simultaneously, drama helped students tap into their creative and imaginative capacities, thus affecting their ability to speak in more insightful and thoughtful ways. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, drama fostered confidence in students – which not only enabled them to speak more confidently in tasks, but also empowered students to contribute to discussion, providing access and inclusion in the learning experience.

Given that the scope of this case study is limited, no generalisable findings are claimed. The study does not speak for all EAL/D experiences. Student participants were from Syrian and Iraqi refugee backgrounds; an EAL/D demographic that bears distinct learning needs and challenges. Rather, this project depicts a qualitative snapshot of EAL/D experiences in one IEC context and may provide a platform for further investigation.

Moreover, *School Drama* workshops took place for two hours per week; six workshops in total. Students were immersed in an IEC curriculum during this time, their day-to-day education saturated by language learning, which very likely contributed to an improvement in English language and oracy. It is not possible to attribute student progress and competency in oracy solely to the results of the *School Drama* workshops. Interviews and observations with students and teachers, however, built a qualitative understanding of the *School Drama* program as an enabler in the development of oracy skills.

This case study provides a strong basis for further investigation into using drama-rich processes to develop oracy skills in EAL/D classrooms. The *School Drama* program is still being trialled in IEC contexts, therefore the generic rubric applied in mainstream schools was used in case study. Aligning benchmarking assessment with ESL scales (NSW DET, 2006) for future iterations of the program in IEC contexts may create new insights and valuable data. It is hoped ongoing and intensive research with broader parameters will provide further insights into how drama strategies can develop oracy skills for EAL/D students.

In a final comment, I turn to the words of Stinson (2015), who quotes:

> If we want our young people to become agentic and participative citizens in today's and tomorrow's world, then it is time we turned our gaze to oracy and the enabling pedagogy of drama, within a dialogic space. (p. 312)

Oracy is both a challenging and critical skill to develop in the highly mobile context of 21st century learning; one essential for inclusion both within and beyond the classroom. Carefully structured drama-rich processes have the capacity to develop and foster oracy skills in an imaginative and collaborative dialogic space. The value of drama as critical, quality pedagogy cannot be underestimated: now, more than ever, drama must be lifted from the peripheries of the curriculum and centralised as an enabling pedagogical and social tool.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, OM, upon reasonable request.

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Notes on contributor

Olivia McAtamney is an early-career Drama, English and EAL/D teacher at Cheltenham Girls' High School in Cheltenham, NSW. She received a Bachelor's Degree in Education and Arts (Humanities and Social Sciences) at the University of Sydney. Her research interests include drama education, creative pedagogy, literature, and English literacy. This paper is based on research completed in fulfilment of her Honours candidature at the University of Sydney.

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