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"It makes you feel a little bit freer": Committing to creativity: A hermeneutic phenomenological study of a primary teacher's use of drama with additional language learners

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“IT MAKES YOU FEEL A LITTLE BIT FREER”: COMMITTING TO CREATIVITY: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A PRIMARY TEACHER’S USE OF DRAMA WITH ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Abstract

Creative pedagogies contribute significantly to children’s cognitive, social and linguistic development. This article discusses the drama-based creative literacy practice of an early primary teacher in a high diversity school in Sydney, Australia. Literacy pedagogy blended with drama and role play was shown to aid oracy whilst also adding valuable semiotic support for language learners. Video recordings of this teacher’s lessons formed the basis of a hermeneutic phenomenological study into the affordances of drama in additional language contexts. Findings revealed positive contributions to learner comprehension and engagement. They also indicated that the pressure of an over-crowded curriculum necessitates personal commitment to creative arts pedagogy on the part of the teacher. Despite policy rhetoric promoting creativity as a key capability, creativity itself is seen to be stymied in an educational context heavily prioritising standardisation and assessment. Without systemic support, it is left to motivated, individual teachers to prioritise creative learning experiences in schools.

Keywords

Teachers; creativity; pedagogy; drama; literacy

Introduction

Education around the globe is facing an increasingly complex agenda. Several forces are coming to bear upon the notion of what constitutes the work of schools and how we can equip young people to thrive in an inestimable future (Griffin et al., 2012; Jefferson & Anderson, 2017). Digital technologies and artificial intelligence, increasing social and environmental instability, rising linguistic, neurological, and gender diversity—all these factors necessarily impact large-scale policy decisions being made around curriculums, teaching and learning (Loble et al., 2017). Within such an atmosphere, creative thinking skills and experiences are coming to the fore as having much to offer in terms of problem-solving and personal well-being in unsettled times (Clarke & Basilio, 2018; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019; Wyse & Ferrari, 2019).

Whilst teachers are being encouraged to embrace creative knowledge generation, they are also grappling with the mounting pressure of growing administrative demands, differentiating for increasing diversity and preparing students for high-stakes standardised testing (Berryhill et al., 2009). In this context, adoption of innovative and creative pedagogies can often languish at the bottom of the hierarchy of demands on teachers’ time and attention (Bloom & Van Slyke-Briggs, 2019). This article shares phenomenological findings from time spent with an early-primary teacher grappling with precisely these issues when incorporating creative drama into their literacy pedagogy for a language diverse class.

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Context

Creative knowledge, creative teaching

Creativity is a defining feature of human intelligence and warrants active attention in educational contexts (Ewing, 2020; Helfand et al., 2016; Runco, 2014). As Hennessey and Amabile (2010) argue, it is creativity that drives civilisations to evolve. Ewing (2020) articulates that arts-rich learning experiences demonstrate established links to improved educational outcomes by generating engagement, imagination, cognitive skills and social empathy.

Studies have found strong correlation between creativity, intellectual risk-taking and epistemic beliefs amongst students (Wan, Lee et al., 2021; Wan, So et al., 2021). Epistemic beliefs of teachers have also been identified as influencing their attitudes towards adopting creative pedagogies (Cropley & Patston, 2019). Supporting teachers to embrace such approaches involves more than policy rhetoric. A wide-reaching report published by researchers from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Centre for Educational Research & Innovation found that many teachers feel unsure of how to teach creativity and critical thinking skills (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). In recognition of this, their researchers developed rubrics to help articulate what types of classroom practices would allow students opportunities to develop skills in these domains. The report found that even for those teachers interested in adopting new pedagogic approaches, changing their teaching repertoire proved difficult without ongoing access to professional development.

The willingness and ability of teachers to embrace creative pedagogy is dependent on environmental as well as individual factors. Creativity is stifled in environments that rely on testing and conformity to validate teaching and learning success (Runco, 2014). As much as curricular directives may now acknowledge the importance of developing student creativity, without an accompanying emphasis on teacher creativity, these mandates will continue to fall short of their aims. Nemeržitski and Heinla (2020) found the most influential predictors of teachers' creative self-efficacy to be general self-esteem and perceived societal value—if they worked in an environment where the school and parents valued creativity, teachers were more likely to deem it a priority in their work. Rubenstein et. al. (2018) found that the school environment itself was commonly perceived by experienced teachers as a hindrance to creativity, specifically factors such as standardised testing, curriculum, and administrative expectations.

This theme of environmental valuing and support leading to teacher agency in enacting creative pedagogies is echoed in the findings of Chapman et al. (2020). Their research highlighted the eroding effects of continual curriculum reform and standardisation on the professional agency of even specialist arts teachers. Jeffrey and Craft (2004) discuss *teaching creatively* and *teaching for creativity*, arguing for the interrelatedness of the two practices. They cite a report from the UK's National Advisory Committee for Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE), asserting that students are most effectively taught creativity by teachers who are creatively engaged themselves (National Advisory Committee on Creative & Cultural Education, 2001). In observing drama pedagogy used for oracy and language development, this research similarly found that the creative confidence and personal investment of the participant teacher was key to the successful application of drama in the literacy setting.

Following a brief review of the literature on drama-based additional language pedagogy, this article will go on to discuss research vignettes constructed during a case study of one teacher's use of these approaches. Concluding comments will position findings within a broader consideration of educational policy and the expanding expectations placed on teachers without significant, accompanying expansions in support.

Literature review

Drama, embodiment, language

Drama fashions stories through the embodiment of thoughts, words and feelings. Its usefulness as part of art-based literacy pedagogy has been long understood (Bunyan et al., 2003; Ewing et al., 2011; Harden, 2015; Ntelioglou, 2011; Stinson, 2015). Drama is able to recruit learners in shared imaginary worlds, inviting them to perceive life experiences from multiple aspects. The expressive tools used to explore events, dilemmas and differing perspectives are words and gestures. This is language as students encounter it in real life—spoken, situated and embodied.

Language and the body are interdependent. At a young age, our impulses are borne out through proto-imperative gesture (Cameron-Faulkner, 2014). We read meaning and respond to the faces and voices in our environment. Even whilst held in our mother's womb, we are listening to, and learning the, patterns and vibrations of human speech (Jardri et al., 2012). Some evolutionary theories of language have speculated on the location of a mimetic action-recognition system—mirror neurons—in the Broca's region of the brain and argue this indicates neurological confluence of gestural mimicry and speech production (Arbib, 2011; Larsson, 2015). Arbib (2012) posits that the development of intricate manual dexterity during complex tool carving may have led to a flourishing of neural networks in this region, thus laying the groundwork for spoken language. Tramacere and Moore (2018), however, argue for the significance of vocal over gestural mimicry in early speech development. Whichever the case, considerations of language learning gain much from recognising its essentially embodied character.

For students who speak English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D), recruitment of the body as a site of meaning-making can have great significance (Beaumont, 2020; Hulse & Owens, 2019; Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Piazzoli (2018) cites the foundational importance of affect and identity for additional language learners and notes that drama-based learning creates space for emotions and identities to surface. Discussing the dynamic quality of "language in action" that drama provides, Piazzoli draws upon sociocultural theory and the primacy of interaction as both a mediating and motivating influence. Ntelioglou (2011) locates drama as a useful contributor to The New London Group's multiliteracies and their advocations of multimodal learning and knowledge representation (Cazden et al., 1999).

Multimodality is an acknowledged teaching tool in language diverse settings. Drama pedagogy can support additional language learner comprehension in mainstream classrooms through its explicit recruitment of body language and symbolic gesture to convey contextual meaning. Students' ability to both embody language and to "read" the vocal and physical embodiments of their peers in a drama-rich environment allows for clearer inferences and understandings (Beaumont, 2020). Despite recognition of the affordances of process drama for language learners, as Hulse and Owens (2019) assert, it is far from common classroom practice. It is largely interested teachers who elect to take part in professional development that are giving language learners, and their mainstream language peers, access to these creative teaching and learning experiences.

Methodology

This article draws upon a case study on the use of drama-based approaches to teach early-years literacy in a high-diversity primary school. Observations centred on the classroom interactions of a teacher and three participating students. The teacher was highly experienced, and the students were all additional language learners aged between six and seven years old. The research was concerned not to frame the children as "language-deficient", so priority was given to holistic, qualitative data where the participants' personal characteristics could shine through.

A key objective of the study was to better understand the embodied mechanics of drama-based literacy pedagogy and how it influenced participants' experiences of learning. The methodology chosen was hermeneutic phenomenology. This approach acknowledges human experience as dependent upon subjective sensory and perceptual phenomena (Heidegger, 2010/1927). It is most often found in high-

relational and person-centred sociological research such as education and nursing (Ho et al., 2017; Miles, et al., 2013). The perception-generating body is seen as continually entwined with the objects and world around it, and is thus legitimised as a primary site and mode of meaning-making (Low, 2017; Merleau-Ponty, 2013).

Field research was conducted over seven weekly literacy sessions in a language-diverse primary school in Western Sydney, Australia. This region is largely characterised by lower socio-economic households hailing from a range of cultural backgrounds. Forty nine point eight percent of the population of Western Sydney were born outside of Australia, with 53 percent of people speaking languages other than English in the home—significantly higher than the state average of 31.5 percent (NSW Government Census, 2016). The context of the case study was a small Catholic primary school comprised of 164 students and a staff of 16 teachers. The overwhelming majority of students were not Catholic but Hindu. Accordingly, the school promoted an openness towards other faiths and proudly celebrated its diverse community.

Data were gathered in the form of field notes, video footage, audio-recorded interviews and photographs of student work samples. Video recordings were made simultaneously with two cameras—one in the corner of the room capturing footage of the lesson as a whole and another roving camera used to capture close-ups of students working. Participant interviews were audio-recorded. Footage was analysed, transcribed and iteratively coded to discern moments of multimodal language support and positive socio-emotional engagement of participants. Video content was repeatedly viewed at various speeds and analysed in terms of body language and spoken interactions.

Phenomenological data representation is not concerned to seek out clear cut answers but instead to “let the reader encounter aspects of the phenomenon him or herself, thus coming closer to [its] authentic nature and significance ...” (Nielsen, 2000, p. 11). To this end, transcripts and video materials were synthesised into narrative form. Dialogue was lifted intact from the class transcripts and, along with detailed descriptions of body language from the videos, used to construct findings into a series of portraits and vignettes. The sum effect of these qualitative representations is what Geertz famously termed “thick description” of the phenomena and experiences under investigation (Geertz as cited by Merriam, 1985, p. 206).

Findings

Findings from the study centred largely on the students’ experiences of drama learning and ways in which embodiment provided multimodal semiotic support. This article, however, particularly focuses on the contributions of the participating teacher—pseudonymised “Abby”—as it became evident that she was a crucial element to the success of the pedagogy in action. Her commitment to engaging all learners and her openness to innovation and creative practice were a key component of the observed lessons. Following are some excerpts capturing these qualities. The portrait and question/answers are based on a semi-structured interview conducted mid-way through the study. The classroom vignette draws on a transcript of one of the hour-long video-recorded lessons that made up the field data.

Teacher portrait

Abby is a primary school teacher with a warm demeanour and long, auburn hair perpetually tied back in an unconcerned bun. Her expressive face frequently breaks out into broad smiles if a lesson is going well, or crinkles of deep thought if it is not. Abby began her career as a physical education teacher and has all the attendant energy one might expect. Her voice is capable of a loud boom and an even louder laugh, and she loves nothing more than delighting her class by performing characters from their books with boisterous vigour and flair. Abby is not an expert in drama, or additional language teaching, but over the years has taken part in professional development in both fields and drama strategies are now embedded in her own practice.

The school where Abby works is only small, and the staff know each other very well. Teachers tend to stay on, or return here, as the leadership and school culture are very positive. The staffroom is a clean, bright space filled with gentle, friendly chatter during breaks. Two of the walls surrounding the communal lunch table are covered with student literacy data. These provide visual representations of student achievement, showing where every child sits in relation to specific performance outcomes. Columns of tiny, smiling photographs of each student are pinned high or low within their appointed band. These walls form the basis of intense literacy team discussions, as staff work constantly to coax students from one band to the next.

Abby loves teaching but, in her own words, it takes "a lot of work to do it well", which is what she strives to do. Her talent and long experience have led to Abby's appointment in several leadership roles within the school. This means she must juggle maths and literacy team meetings and professional development days on top of her class teaching load. Although not uncommon for a good teacher in the world of primary schools, as a result Abby finds herself continually pulled between various commitments and responsibilities. She is pushed for time and prodded for attention from her students, her colleagues, her principal ... and pesky researchers. You can always tell Abby is having a particularly full-on day if she's gulping down a Coke Zero at recess or lunch and nodding continually as people talk to her. Also, her voice may start to quiver, just ever so slightly, with adrenaline. This happens when she's rushing to explain something before darting out the door to yet another responsibility somewhere else.

Teacher interview excerpts

At the end of the programme, Abby was interviewed to ascertain how she perceived drama-based learning and to glean how her personal and professional experiences contributed to using this approach. As the interview unfolded, Abby's understanding of her colleagues' attitudes to embodied and creative learning were also revealed. Teacher preference for quiet and orderly learning spaces is seen to be an obstacle to greater uptake of drama pedagogy.

What keeps you in the profession?

The fact that I'm helping kids all the time, and I keep in touch with some of the kids that I've taught when they leave school ... their success just makes me really happy.

Was teaching what you expected?

It's much harder than I thought it'd be, it's really tough and if you want to do a good job you have to do a lot of work.... So ... it is fulfilling but it's really tough.

What is the hardest part about teaching?

Differentiation ... that's definitely the one I find hard ... because some kids might like one thing, but ... other kids don't like it. So it's differentiating your lessons so all the children are motivated to learn.

What is your personal philosophy of teaching?

Giving kids enthusiasm to learn ... if they don't see it as important ... if they're not having fun ... [or are not intrinsically] motivated, they're not going to learn. They won't have that thought underneath ... this is ... something that I want to do, not just 'cos the teacher's teaching me. So they [have a] drive to want to do it themselves.

What is it like to teach using drama?

I think it's a free way of teaching. It makes you feel a little bit freer ... it makes me feel good, 'cos I know that the kids are benefitting from it ... and I know that it's working for them, so ... I'm happy to do that. And it makes me feel like the kids are learning. And that's the most important thing.

Why do you find it useful in the classroom?

Because when ... they're actually embodying something ... you can see the lightbulb go on. Like you can see it, it's an easy way to assess [comprehension]. The embodiment ... it's feedback to me straight away. They don't get this and I have to adapt my teaching because they didn't understand.

How is drama different to other types of literacy pedagogy?

It's 100% interaction ... all the children [are] involved, not just one with their hand up. And you know they've done the thinking because ... you've seen them embody it. But the other way, you don't know if they've done the thinking until you collect their books, and then you're like, ohhh!

How does drama work affect the students' learning?

It's richer ... a richer experience. I think the biggest thing is, they're taking it on board themselves. They're being an active learner, rather than a passive learner.

Why do you think there aren't more teachers using drama for learning?

Everyone could do it, but I think there's a big teacher reluctance. Because they don't always see the benefit. If you really know ... you can see that it is just so beneficial for the kids, but I think a lot of teachers are reluctant ... [because it is] disruptive. They like to have ... kids in their ... neat little "This is how we do things", and they want control over their class. They don't wanna step outside of the "control box". They don't like [the noise and energy of] how the kids react ... [but] they don't realise ... the kids are doing work.

Comments

Abby's driving qualities as they emerge from the data are energy, creativity and commitment. The pace at which she moves through her day, the cheer and volume of her voice, her keenness and ability to take up characters in drama work, and her willingness to allow children to be noisy and disruptive whilst working towards learning goals—all these make up a significant part of her success with drama-based pedagogies. Despite her heavy administrative workload as a lead teacher in more than one area, it is interesting to note that Abby identifies differentiation in a diverse setting to be the hardest part of her daily work. Abby also identifies the barriers to wider use of drama learning as resting with individual teachers, not the system surrounding them. Her impression is that most teachers do not understand the benefits of drama work and are not willing to manage the boisterous movement and commotion that it necessarily entails.

Regarding the pedagogy itself, Abby experiences it as allowing her a greater sense of freedom. She locates the oral, interactive nature of drama and its simultaneous engagement of all students as its pedagogic strength. She also sees drama as providing a rich experience for students as a precursor to written work. Students' adoption of character perspectives can be seen to stimulate extended oral responses. As literacy pedagogy, Abby values how dramatic embodiment transparently communicates student levels of inference and comprehension. This allows her to make teaching adjustments with more immediacy.

For Abby, the experience of creative drama pedagogy made her "feel good" because she perceived it to be good for her students while also allowing her to express her own creativity. Her instinctive grasp of the importance of engagement and physicality, fused with an understanding of the importance of oracy in early years and additional language pedagogy, led Abby to see significant benefits in using drama for literacy. Her experience of teaching as a whole, however, is burdened with expectation and the desire to serve all the different types of learners in her class. She also experiences her colleagues as

rigid, traditional and less open to creative drama approaches, chiefly because it is harder to control student behaviour in environments that encourage noise, interaction and movement.

Classroom narrative

Abby starts her lesson with a short singing and listening activity to help her students develop aural differentiation skills. When practised by very young children, these types of songs are shown to help stimulate language development systems in the brain. Next, she sings them a song from *Hey, Little Ant* (Hoose & Hoose, 2004), a picture book with an accompanying song about a boy and an ant. At the end of the story, the song asks readers to decide if they think the boy should squish the ant, or let the ant go free. Abby gets her students to divide themselves into two lines according to whose side they are on.

Move away. Go back!

Well, you guys move back!

Just move!

Now I can't see.

The dilemmas of six-year-olds arranging themselves.

Clara, pick a side. We're waiting.

Clara, with the spectacles, is spinning around in circles between the two lines.

Come on Clara!

Yeah, hurry up!

Claraaaaaa!!

The class grows impatient. Clara stays put.

I can't decide. I care about this 'cos I gotta ant farm.

We'll choose a side or I'll choose one for you. Can someone give Farouk a tissue please?

Okay! Here we go. First, we're all going to sing the song again, reading off the paper in front of you ... ready? Uhm, Farouk, can you blow your nose please mate?

Farouk is a short-haired boy with wide eyes, a somewhat distracted demeanour, and a perennially runny nose. He blows it.

The class sing the song together and create frozen statues of the characters at different points in the narrative; the boy with his shoe raised about to squish the ant; the ant begging for its life to be spared; the boy crouched down listening and deciding what to do, etc. Then Abby asks some of the children to stand and, speaking in character, give their reason why they want to step on the ant, or why they want the boy to let them go. This is a scaffolding activity using oracy to help develop her students' persuasive writing. She starts by encouraging the use of some target vocabulary.

So this is what you're going to start with, we're going to use the word **definitely**, because it's a good, strong word to convince people with. Def-in-ite-ly. Everyone, say def-in-ite-ly.

DEF-IN-ITE-LY!

So The Boy will start by saying, 'I should definitely squish you' ... and The Ant will start by saying, 'You should definitely NOT squish me because' ... Practise what you are going to say with your partner.

Abby gives her students time to plan and rehearse what they will say, once again practising their language skills through peer talk.

Alright! Michelle, stand up! Why should The Boy save you?

Michelle with the sticky-up fringe stands.

You should definitely save me because ... because I'm too little to be squished at all!

Ohh, you're too little? Okay. And how about one of The Boys? Suzanna? Stand up and tell us why you want to squish The Ant.

I wanna squish ...

I DEFINITELY want to squish you ...

I definitely wanna squish you because ... er, because ... because YOU take my food away!

Oh, very convincing! And ... Karpivi?

You should save me ...

You DEFINITELY should save me.

You definitely should save me because I don't wanna die!

Can anyone add on to Karpivi's reason? Because no one wants to die, right?

Because your family want you so much? says Xiao Hong.

Oh! Because she has a family that loves her so much. That sounds like a good reason. And now let's hear from another Boy. Arav?

I DEFINITELY WANT TO SQUISH YOU BECAUSE YOU TAKE MY FOOD AWAY AND I DON'T GET TO EAT ANYTHING AND YOU'RE LIKE THE BAD GUYS THAT STEALS MONEY!

The class dissolves into fits of giggles.

Ohhhh! They're crooks, are they? asks Abby.

No! We are not!

We're not crooks!

We need to eat too!

The children erupt into loud disagreement.

Hmmm, these are all good reasons everybody. Lots to think about. Okay, let's hear from Jessie. Come on, Jessie, you're fighting for your life here!

Jessie of the too-big-skirt stands, stomps one foot on the ground and implores:

I definitely want to be saved because I am part of nature and I'm made from God and we're all like the same, even if we're little!

The class start arguing once more, everyone vigorously defending their character's point of view.

Oh, well done everybody, some great convincing! Abby is pleased.

Er, Farouk, get a tissue mate.

Comments

After this session of drama, the students return to their desks and sit down to write. The function that Abby wants these young children to develop is persuasive writing, so they are asked to draw a picture of the boy or the ant, accompanied by a sentence of dialogue arguing for their chosen character's position. Their sentence must include the target vocabulary "definitely", but aside from this it is left to

the children to construct. The children's exploring of character perspectives using physical embodiment and emotional inference provides an oral rehearsal of words and ideas they will now put to paper.

The cognitive and emotional engagement of some of the children in this dramatic enactment is evident. Clara comments that she must think carefully which side to pick; she "cares about this" as she has an ant farm. In the focus group interviews with participating students, Deepika remarks how much she resents being picked on as the smallest in class. Normally reticent to speak in front of the whole group, her unusually long dialogue response reveals an identification with the ant being victimised because of its size. At a certain point, the whole class erupts in an enthusiastic "argument" with numerous students justifying their point of view simultaneously.

The data also reveals a pronounced element of social and collaborative learning in these sessions. In other vignettes, students are seen navigating confrontation amongst group members, encouraging one another to persevere in performing in front of the class, and supporting peers with ideas or language choices in collaborative work. Each session is punctuated with frequent laughter from students, especially when sharing and enjoying performances. Video data shows all students actively involved in drama work, smiling and energised for the majority of the learning time.

Discussion

As Abby's experience indicates, there are roadblocks to arts-based pedagogies in schools. Many teaching professionals do not feel equipped with the necessary training to encourage such approaches (Bloom & Van Slyke-Briggs, 2019; Hulse & Owens, 2019; Mullet et al., 2016; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). Further, if their work culture is not seen to value creativity, and a teacher's creative self-esteem is not high, there is little motivation to invest time in refining innovative teaching strategies (Nemeržitski & Heinla, 2020). Without professional development and school-wide support, it takes a personal commitment on the part of teachers to develop arts-based pedagogy.

Onarheim and Friis-Olivarius (2013) demonstrate that understanding the neurological processes of creativity can enhance training in this domain. They also cite the well-known work of Land and Jarman (1992), who administered divergent thinking tests to 1,600 children at ages 5, 10 and 15. At age five results showed 98 percent of participants measuring at creative genius level. By age 15, this had reduced to 2 percent. The researchers surmise that "non-creative behaviour is learned". This is interesting to consider in tandem with the findings of Westby and Dawson (1995), indicating that many teachers are biased against the non-conformist behavioural characteristics of creative students and posit that negative teacher attitudes can work to extinguish creative impulses in children. Echoes of this can be seen in Abby's comments that teachers prefer class control over a creative embodiment.

Aside from the cultural and systemic aspects of implementing creative pedagogies, there is the socio-emotional well-being of students to be considered. Creative experiences are clearly linked to emotional health and positive affect, both significant contributors to student learning outcomes (Caleon, 2019; Dan, 2021; Hernández-Jorge et al., 2020). This study found that Abby and her students generated significant positive associations with learning whilst using drama-based pedagogies. These approaches were marked by high engagement, playfulness, student collaboration and inclusivity.

Neubauer and Martskvishvili (2018) distinguish between creativity and intelligence, asserting that intelligence is used to refine and improve upon existing social agendas, whereas creative thought often settles upon completely re-visioned agendas. Societies and schools need a blend of stability and change, intelligence and creativity, in order to progress. Kaufman and Baer (2006) question, however, if education's intense focus on standardised assessment has unintentionally contributed to a decline in creative attributes. Generic creativity and divergent thinking do not easily align with state and national testing agendas. Wilkinson (2020) describes creative pedagogies themselves as speculative and exploratory, and thus resistant to institutional standardisation. For Abby, whose teaching days were marked by pressure, competing demands and short timeframes, the playful and expressive qualities of drama pedagogy allowed her and her students a greater sense of freedom in the classroom.

Conclusion

Creative imagining is an intrinsic way of exploring the world for young people (Vygotsky, 2004), the benefits of which are widely acknowledged (Eisner, 2003; Ewing, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013). This article is based on research that found the creative pedagogy implemented in a case-study school was dependent on the skill and motivation of a single teacher. Without an explicit cultural valuing of creativity within a school, nor adequate professional development, many teachers eschew exploratory arts-based pedagogies in favour of traditional teacher-centred written instruction (Cropley & Patston, 2019). Policy rhetoric highlights the importance of teaching creativity, a phenomenon that thrives in permissive, collaborative and playful environments. The pressure to produce test-ready students for evaluation of predominantly analytic and convergent thinking skills, however, means teachers must attempt to walk in two opposite directions. Many aspects of our existence are currently in flux, but disruption brings new opportunities. Framing the future as something to embrace rather than “survive” is an important part of the work of schools (Chung, 2017). Imagining better possibilities will come far more easily to students who are free to imagine in the first place.

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