Pre-Service Teachers' Views on The Performing Arts, Based on Their Theatre-In-Education Production

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ABSTRACT. Many lecturers involved in teacher education modules in South Africa tend to follow lecturer-centred approaches when teaching the subject content knowledge, which inhibits learning. Hence this study aimed to explore how second year Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers (grades 4-6), attending an English language methodology module (PIME 303), experienced the application of the performing arts to engage with the text 'Whitney's Kiss' by Ohne Vegter, which is a prescribed text for the intermediate phase in South African schools. The class consisted of 40 Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers, none of whom had any prior exposure to the performing arts. The research methodology was qualitative, and the design was phenomenological. Data comprised written reflections after the production, which were coded and analysed thematically. Some of the themes emerging from the study indicate that the application of performing arts-based approaches within higher education classes have the potential to develop pre-service teachers' creativity, confidence, ability to work as a team and to reflect on how such approaches could be applied within the context of their own school- based learning contexts.

INTRODUCTION

The preparation of teachers for the 21st century, with its rapid technological advancements, requires teacher training programmes that will focus on new ways of thinking about teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Shockley & Krakaur, 2021) for the development of critical and creative thinking skills. The latter is of special significance given that a focus on superficial knowledge and skills has become obsolete in the current era (Urbani et al., 2017). It is within this context that performing arts-based approaches have a significant contribution to make in the field of teacher education to meet the changing demands of our times (Bedir, 2019; Urbani et al., 2017). However, despite the potential of the performing arts such as dance, drama, and music to prepare teachers for the future, it tends to be undervalued. This could be attributed to the fact that many teacher educators either view arts-based approaches as time consuming, or do not have the requisite skills to engage with such approaches within their own teaching (Mustafa, 2022).

Current trends in teacher education, however, both nationally and internationally, are inclined towards completing a set range of material in the various modules within extremely constrained time frames, thereby dictating that pre-service teachers work under immense pressure to cover extensive content in limited time (Watson, 2018). Such a focus on the completion of the content and the use of standardised testing at the expense of developing pre-service teachers' critical and creative skills, straight- jackets them into using teacher-centred approaches in their future roles as teachers (Watson, 2018). According to Calitz (2015), the idea that traditional pedagogical approaches place the lecturer at the centre of teaching and learning while the students are passive recipients, leads to unequal power relations (Freire, 2005, McMahon and Portelli, 2014). Such lecturer centred approaches fail to take cognisance of the rich knowledge that students bring to the lecture room nor the diversity of teaching strategies that could be applied constructively to prepare pre-service teachers more adequately for their future roles as creative teachers (Beagle, 2021).

Furthermore, the application of traditional approaches to teaching leads to what Beagle (2021, p.7) refers to as "mechanical memorisation". Hence within the context of this system students perceive their lecturers as powerful individuals who cannot easily be questioned or critiqued as they are the sources of knowledge (Mann, 2008). Consequently, since students' personal strengths and talents are marginalised, they do not take ownership of their learning as they feel disempowered (Mann, 2008).

The application of a pedagogical approach that focuses on the content at the expense of the development of pre-service teachers' critical and creative thinking skills, leads to a banking system which stifles teaching and learning (Freire, 2005) and inhibits students from critically reflecting on what they are learning. In sharp contrast to this model, Freire (2003), advocates for 'problem-posing education', which promotes dialogical engagement between lecturers and students, thereby leading to an emancipatory system of education, synonymous with critical pedagogy. The latter, according to Freire (2003), contributes significantly to the development of critical and creative thinking skills, which ought to be the guiding principles of education.

Hence, within the context of this small-scale study, notions of embodied learning, curiosity, and the co-creation of knowledge synonymous with critical pedagogy represent important hallmarks that constitute the crux of performing arts-based approaches to teaching and learning (Freire, 2000). The latter approach can be construed as counter-hegemonic since, besides disrupting traditional approaches to teaching and learning, it affords students opportunities to develop their voice, volition, and empathy so that their sense of agency can be enhanced (Calitz, 2015; Walker, 2010).

The application of performing arts-based approaches to teaching pre-service teachers, according to Beagle (2021), could lead to more engaged participation thereby stimulating volitional learning. Hendricks and Leibowitz (2016) also assert that universities need to explore the implementation of more creative approaches such as arts-based approaches to teaching and learning rather than traditional ones, so that students are afforded opportunities of engaging with the content critically and reflecting on their learning experiences. The study builds on the work of Shockley and Kraukar (2021) and Bhukanwala et al (2017) who, in their respective studies, indicated how the implementation of performing arts-based approaches among pre-service teachers, enabled them to become more aware of its potential to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classes, thereby leading to the development of more inclusive learning environments.

Theoretically, I approach arts-based teaching and learning through Elliot Eisner's (2002, p. 3) understanding of the arts as a common term for many art forms which include dance, drama, music, and choral recital that can serve as a "model for teaching." According to Eisner (2002), the significance of arts-based approaches is that they involve aspects such as the abilities to re-create oneself, expand consciousness, shape dispositions, satisfy the quest for meaning, establish contact with others and share culture, all of which are essential for education and learners in general.

It is with this background in mind that this article provides an overview of how second year English methodology pre-service Intermediate Phase teachers used the text Whitney's Kiss by Ohne Vegter (2004) as the content for an exploration of how the performing arts could be used to engage with the text more critically and creatively, within the context of their teaching in primary schools. The aim of the study was thus to establish how pre-service teachers experienced performing arts-based strategies in the construction of the workshopped theatre-in-education production, entitled 'Whitney's Kiss', based on the text that was presented to an audience.

PERFORMING ARTS- BASED APPROACHES

Various studies conducted both nationally and internationally highlight the significance of the performing arts such as dance, drama, and music in improving learners' academic performance. Most of the research, however, tends to focus on the use of the performing arts to enhance language teaching and learning at primary and secondary school levels, with limited research in higher education contexts. While some studies, within higher education contexts, tend to focus on the significant impact of drama techniques for the development of pre-service teachers' social skills (Shockley & Krakaur, 2021), others emphasise the motivational aspects (Poston-Anderson, 2008; Yilmaz & Dollar, 2017) and the opportunities for students' personal and professional development (Doğan & Cephe, 2018). Further studies in higher education contexts also focus on the value of arts-based approaches in promoting learning in creative (Dönük, 2018), effective and fun-filled ways (Güryay, 2015).

According to Walker et al. (2011), the performing arts and theatre techniques enhance student engagement and provide them with a sense of ownership of their learning. Furthermore, as pointed out by Greenfader et al. (2015), students are afforded opportunities to learn from each other and their lecturers. The incorporation of movement and gesture also enables students to learn academic content in multiple modes which enhance the retention of such content (Hardiman et al., 2019).

Beagle (2021, p.6) posits that arts-based approaches have shown the potential to facilitate learning in that they have the capacity to "develop more flexible, inclusive and participatory classrooms that are more responsive to the reality of the multi-diverse learning environment." The application of arts-based approaches such as theatre-in-education has the potential to deepen learning, since it provides opportunities for "visceral, emotive and embodied experiences that enhance cognition" (Beagle, 2021, p.6). This, furthermore, as highlighted by Liamputtong and Rumbold (2008, p.1), also leads to the promotion of inclusive and rich ways to "access experiential knowing."

According to Stein and Newfield (2007, p. 919), pedagogies such as performing arts-based approaches to teaching and learning, in view of their multiple configurations, have the capacity to "unleash creativity, intelligence, and agency through the creation of symbolic identity objects and practices that lead to creative rapprochements." This assertion is further expanded on by Landsman (2011) who, in his evaluation of theatre arts, asserts that it has proven to increase imagination, critical thinking, problem solving skills, real-world and cross-curricular connections, stimulation, collaboration, motivation, and excellence.

In the language arts classroom, theatre arts represent a successful way of experiencing characters from their points of view (Karuiki & Black, 2016), as it takes the students beyond the text and answers the question "What happens next?" (Cordi, 2011). It furthermore also allows students to interact with a text and to explore the world found within its pages. Emert (2010), for example, in his research conducted in a middle school noted the interaction that occurs between students and a text when engaged in theatre-arts integrated language arts classrooms. In his research he observed how students experienced the drama of poetry through reader's theatre as they created their own scripts, which enabled them to take ownership of their learning (Emert, 2010). Hence theatre-arts integration enables students to move beyond the most basic levels of Bloom's taxonomy into levels of application, analysis, evaluation, and creation.

However, despite the advantages of using the performing arts to enhance teaching and learning, various studies highlight challenges associated with its implementation. Some of the areas of concern relate to the environment, time and material required for drama activities. While some studies such as that of Akyol, Kahriman-Pamuk and Elmas' (2018) identified preparation and time as inhibiting factors, others by Demircioğlu (2010) identified learning environments and limited material as factors that could stymy the process. Başçı and Gündoğdu's study (2011), furthermore, also indicated that students were sceptical about the extent to which the performing arts could achieve its goals due to time limits, not being suitable for all courses and limited knowledge about drama activities and its use.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The research methodology used for the purposes of this study was qualitative in nature as the focus was on eliciting pre-service teachers' views on their experiences of using the performing arts to create a piece of theatre based on the text *Whitney's Kiss* by Ohne Vegter (2004). In its broadest sense,

qualitative research refers to "research that elicits participant accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions" (De Vos et al., 2011, p. 65).

The population of the study comprised pre-service Intermediate Phase teachers (grades 4-6) attending the PIME 303 module, which is a second-year module, offered at a South African higher education institution, aimed at preparing students to teach English at home language level. The sample included all 40 students who attended the classes for the module. The study was conducted within the context of the PIME 303 module which focused on assisting pre-service teachers to reflect on and apply strategies that they could implement in the teaching of English at home language level in the Intermediate Phase (grades 4-6).

Given that students had limited experiences in the use of arts-based approaches I decided to use performing arts-based approaches in the presentation of the module to enhance pre-service teachers' repertoire of strategies that they could use during their school-based learning experiences. These strategies included drama, dance, music, and choral verse.

The design was a phenomenological case study, since the focus was on the "lived experiences of a phenomenon for several individuals" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) who, in this case, were second year pre-service teachers that attended the same module namely Methodology for English in the Intermediate Phase (PIME 303).

Data collected for the purposes of this study were based on the students' written narrative accounts on their engagement with various aspects of the performing arts in the construction of their own theatre-in-education production based on the text *Whitney's Kiss*. The prompt that served to guide their written reflections was: *Write a reflection of at least one page on how you experienced your engagement with the performing arts in the construction of your class play based on Whitney's Kiss?* To safeguard the participants' anonymity and for ethical reasons they were requested not to indicate their names on the written reflections and the submissions were voluntary. All 40 participants agreed to submit their written reflections, which contributed to the richness of the data discussed under the findings. Before the commencement of the project, permission was also sought from the university's Ethics committee for ethical clearance.

The data analysis process involved coding each of the 40 written reflections (from S#1 to S#40) and engaging with the rich data to identify common themes and patterns across the narratives (De Vos et al., 2011). This entailed thoroughly engaging with each of the written reflections and examining the rich data for common, themes, patterns, and trends. The findings, emerging from the data, are discussed in detail under the appropriate themes and sub-

themes. One of the limitations of this study is that since this is a small-scale study, which only focuses on one group of students registered for the PIME 303 module, the findings cannot be generalised to all second-year English methodology modules in South Africa.

STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED TO ENGAGE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

The initial workshops focused on how the pre-service teachers could use drama pedagogy to teach the text *Whitney's Kiss* which, as mentioned above, is a prescribed text for grade 6 learners in certain schools in South Africa. The text explores issues of sexuality and HIV and AIDS among teenagers, and how the death of Whitney's father, due to HIV and AIDS, affects her relationship with her friends who stigmatise her, and how she is almost infected with HIV and AIDS by an older learner at the school she attended.

During our interrogation of the text and the strategies that pre-service teachers could use to involve their learners optimally for developing their critical and creative thinking skills, I exposed them to strategies such as tableau, improvisation, and role play, which are synonymous with drama pedagogy. Some of the exercises during the sessions involved creating frozen scenes (tableaus) on various chapters and enacting scenes from chapters by taking on the roles of characters as depicted in the text. I also aimed to develop students' creativity by showing them how they could use improvisation to expand on scenes in the story and by motivating them to write and present choral verse, raps and songs based on various events in the story. These initial training sessions also aimed at providing them with skills for the development of the text into a theatre-in-education production and to explore how they experienced the process. Within the context of this study, theatre-in-education focuses on the creation of a play that uses interactive drama, performing arts-based approaches and theatre to educate the audience on issues of concern, in this case HIV and AIDS (Lu, 2002). According to Lu (2002), its main goal is to offer creative learning opportunities through theatrical experiences.

In her assessment of the application of theatre-in-education for the promotion of HIV and AIDS awareness in South Africa, Dalrympie (1997, p. 84) argues that the theatre-in-education process "provides a broad framework in which to explore ideas from a range of different perspectives", thereby enabling the participants and the audience to engage with issues of concern more critically and creatively. The theatre-in-education process, within the context of this study, involved dividing the class into 8 groups of 5 members per group with the brief that they could use any arts-based approaches or combinations of these to depict an event or scene from the text.

The participants were initially required to work on their respective scenes in separate groups but later shared their contributions with the rest of the class which, facilitated by the lecturer, were collated into a piece of theatre. The theatre-in-education production, which was loosely based on the text, '*Whitney's Kiss*' and which included dance, drama and music was presented to an audience of faculty members, students, and staff at the university.

The limitation of this study is that since this is a small-scale study only involving 40 participants in the PIME 303 (Intermediate Phase English methodology) module, offered at one higher education institution in South Africa, the findings emerging from this study cannot be generalised to pre-service teachers registered for similar English Intermediate Phase modules offered at other higher education institutions in South Africa.

FINDINGS

An analysis of the 40 second year Intermediate Phase pre-service teachers' written reflections indicated that the findings could be grouped under the following broad themes namely: Students' views on their *participation in the workshopped play,* what they *learnt about themselves* and what they learnt about applying aspects of the *performing arts in their future roles as English teachers*. These broad themes will be discussed below with accompanying subthemes and at times verbatim quotations will be used to substantiate individual viewpoints as per the codes (S#1-S#40 – *Student 1-40*)

STUDENTS' VIEWS ON PERFORMING ARTS-BASED APPROACHES

Participants identified both negative and positive experiences in the application of performing arts to teaching within higher education contexts. Some of the negative experiences included the fact that the process was time consuming, finding common times to meet for rehearsals and that the lecturer needed to monitor the activities regularly to link the scenes into a coherent piece of theatre. Some of the positive features highlighted included opportunities for collaborative learning and teamwork, and the promotion of visceral learning for enhanced understanding.

TIME CONSUMING

Some of the students expressed the view that since the creation of the piece of theatre was time consuming, the participants had to work expeditiously to deliberate on how they would present the various sections. This was summed up by S#5 as follows:

The process takes time, so the group needs to think creatively and work together on how they are able to achieve their goal.

This was further articulated by S#14 as follows:

The talent we have in the class is awesome, but time was an issue.

S#19 elaborated further on this by stating:

The process takes time, so the group needs to think creatively and work together on how they will achieve their goal.

In view of the time-consuming nature of the process, the lecturer needs to plan the series of activities carefully leading to the presentation of the final piece of theatre to the audience.

CHALLENGES IN ARRANGING MEETING TIMES FOR REHEARSALS

There was a view among the students that since some students did not meet their groups on a regular basis, they could not make progress in completing their scenes as they would have liked to.

S#20 presented this view as follows:

Since some students did not pitch up to work on our scenes during our rehearsal times this made it difficult for us.

S #25 articulated this view further as follows:

We weren't always able to meet during practice times due to our other work.

Furthermore, there was also the challenge of trying to arrange additional time with the lecturer for assisting with the linking of the scenes into a coherent piece of theatre, since there was not enough time during lectures to do so.

This viewpoint was expressed by S#32 as follows:

The lecturer needed to check on them all the time – see if they don't need assistance for the production to be successful, which also took time.

Connecting the various scenes into a coherent piece of theatre tended to pose challenges since rehearsals, additional time to meet and monitoring of the various scenes required additional time which tended to draw the process of theatre-making out considerably.

PROMOTES TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

The students' satisfaction with the opportunity to work in groups was aptly summed up by one of the participants (S#10) as follows:

This experience has been wonderful. The practice session usually led us to have a nice social session where we got to know each other. I love dancing, it is a passion and through this play I found me a dance partner.

Through their construction of the play S#10 was furthermore also able to find a dance partner and learnt about other students' talents. They describe their viewpoint as follows:

We walk together, we sit together, we talk, we laugh together, but there is so much we do not know about each other for instance I did not know that Marshall can dance as powerfully and beautifully as he did, nor did I know that Leonie had such a beautiful voice and through this experience we found out more about each other.

There was a strong sense among the participants that the implementation of performance arts-based strategies enables participants to work collaboratively in groups thereby galvanising the group which subsequently leads to more enhanced learning and better outcomes.

S#15, for example, expressed this view as follows:

> If one works together one can produce good results.

S#18 focused on how the rehearsals galvanised the group as follows:

The rehearsals were the best part of the play because it is during them that we knew that we could be silly and enjoy each other's company.

The opportunity to work in groups enabled the participants to get to know each other on a more personal level as articulated by S#11 and S#18 which they articulated as follows:

The production was excellent, and I felt proud of my fellow students to pull off such an amazing performance and to get to know them in another context (S#11).

Working in groups for the production helped us to interact with each other on a different level than we would usually do in a classroom situation (S#18).

The advantages of working together and sharing insights and experiences in the creation of the production created a bond amongst the participants which enabled them to overcome obstacles during the development of the play. S#33 focused on how bonds were developed which was articulated as follows:

I also experienced a sense of bonding amongst the students as we now had to work as a team to make the presentation work.

Participant S#15 explained how through collaboration they were able to overcome obstacles:

We used the obstacles that were in our way as stepping-stones, and we learned from one another. We worked well together as a group.

It is clear from the students' accounts that the implementation of arts-based approaches provides ample opportunities for teamwork and collaborative engagement.

PROMOTES VISCERAL LEARNING FOR ENHANCED UNDERSTANDING OF ISSUES

There was a realisation among the students of how the application of arts-based strategies within teaching could contribute to visceral learning as they became part of the experience and the characters and empathised with them.

S#6 was quite vocal in this initial scepticism of the play, which later led to identifying with the character portrayed, thereby ensuring a better understanding of the issues raised in the book.

I thought Whitney's Kiss was another AIDS story. But to my surprise it wasn't just another AIDS story. It was a story that many people could relate to. I was cast as one of the characters and it was amazing when we acted out this book and I could really see myself and my fellow actors living ourselves into this book and the reality of it.

The focus on visceral learning and living into roles was further articulated by S#9, S#15 and S#30 as follows:

While S#9 emphasised the feelings that were accentuated through participating in the production as follows:

This production was such an amazing experience because I could feel the anger, love the humour in Whitney.

S#15 alluded to how the production enabled them to express their feelings generally as follows:

Acting is a good way of expressing one's feeling and in Whitney's Kiss we could do so.

The view of how one's participation in the play could heighten one's feelings of taking on a role that one would normally not portray led S#19 to sharing the following insights:

Doing the part of the play where we had to force Whitney to drink was completely out of line and awkward for me because I wouldn't like it if someone did it to me.

It is clear from these accounts that the participants felt that their learning was enhanced through the process.

DEVELOPS CREATIVITY

The students expressed the view that the value of performance arts-based approaches to enhance teaching lies in its potential to develop creativity amongst the participants.

This view was articulated by S#10 as follows:

To experience a story transformed into a script was a great learning experience and allowing all the students to include their own ideas and creativity into the production was fun-filled experience.

S#8 focused on the deeper thinking associated with such approaches as follows:

Working on a specific scene in the production made us think deeper into the script or novel so we had to think out of the box which became very interesting in the rehearsals.

And S#12 focused on the processes involved in deliberating on how to fit the various pieces together collaboratively so that the message could be conveyed effectively:

The main play was fantastic – the music they chose, the characters, everything fit together like a puzzle.

The students' accounts indicate that arts-based approaches enhance understanding of the content at deeper levels in view of the processes involved in engaging with the content collaboratively.

STUDENTS' VIEWS ON WHAT THEY LEARNT ABOUT THEMSELVES

An analysis of the written narratives indicate that the pre-service teachers learnt to value their own voice as they were afforded opportunities to share their insights in the construction of the play, realised that they had hidden talents in the performing arts and discovered how their self-confidence improved during the process of creating the play.

THE VALUE OF USING ONE'S OWN VOICE

There was a strong sense among pre-service teachers that their participation in the development of the production enabled them to realise how they could use their own voice in the construction of their lessons. There was the realisation that teaching involved much more than giving instructions, but also leading, guiding, and giving their learners a voice through a range of strategies.

This was articulated as follows by S#20

Doing the drama last year and continuing this year made me realise that I do have a voice within. Being a teacher is so much more than just giving instructions, you must be able to lead, to listen and sometimes to follow.

The realisation of the kind of 'voice' that teachers need to develop for effective teaching and learning in their classes is articulated further by S#28 as follows:

This experience helped me to come in touch with that 'voice" and this I will take into my teaching one day.

DISCOVERING HIDDEN TALENTS AND SKILLS

There was a strong sense among the pre-service teachers that they discovered skills and talents in music and singing that they did not realise they had. S#25 articulated this view as follows:

I learnt that I have the ability to do things that I did not think I could do, it enhanced my self-confidence so much that I am no longer quiet and reserved.

The discovery of hidden talents that they had were further expressed by S#18 and S#15.

It's very seldom that I will find myself singing aloud in front of my classmates. To my surprise I found myself singing and acting to them and I've got to say that I have enjoyed and loved every single moment of it (S#18)

This was further articulated by S#15 as follows:

Learners make use of their talents to express themselves freely like in my case I always felt that I could not sing yet I got the opportunity just to do so and it was not bad.

S#12 elaborated on this further by indicating that they would use their newly discovered talent in their future role as a drama teacher which they articulated as follows:

I have found out that I can sing solo and decided to train my voice when teaching drama or music to students.

DEVELOPING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Students' self-confidence was also enhanced during the process which were articulated as follows by S#11 and S#15 as follows:

Back at school I used to be very quiet with low self- esteem. The approach here is very learner centred. I became more confident.

The unleashing of hidden talents led participant S#39 to articulate their views as follows:

If someone were to tell me back at school that in few years' time, I would be participating in a roleplay called Whitney's Kiss, I would have laughed, but look at what happened.

Since schooling tends to focus on learners' academic skills, their skills in the performance arts tends to be ignored. However, if teachers afford learners

opportunities to showcase other skills and talents that they have, their self-esteem will be enhanced.

WHAT STUDENTS LEARNT ABOUT USING PERFORMANCE ARTS-APPROACHES FOR TEACHING

There was a strong realisation among the pre-service teachers that the onus is on them to ensure that their classes are stimulating, lively, engaging, and interactive. They felt that their participation in the class play and their exposure to performing arts-based strategies enabled them to have a better understanding of how they would engage their students in their classes in their future roles as teachers.

THE INCLUSION OF A VARIETY OF TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCED LEARNING

This was succinctly summed up by S#13 who compared their experiences as a learner to their experiences as a student in the PIME 303 play as follows:

What I have learnt about those experiences about teaching is that you learn more when the teacher makes things exciting. I have realised that you must incorporate many different strategies in your teaching.

This was further articulated by S#9 as follows:

The teacher can make learning fun and can use the learners to experience and learn a lot of skills and knowledge for themselves.

This was further elaborated on by S#19 who said:

In my future English class, I would encourage the learners to walk in the shoes of the characters and own the scripts and create their own scripts.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING LEARNERS' SELF-CONFIDENCE

There was a strong sense among the participants that the inclusion of performance arts-based strategies in their classes could enable students to become more confident. The development of learners' confidence will lead to the enhancement of other skills as articulated by S#5 as follows:

Teaching will have a greater effect on learners when they are exposed to drama in education. It will help them overcome fear, inhibitions and unlocks creativity.

The focus on the development of learners' self-confidence was further elaborated on as follows by S #11 and S#6:

Not only do we get to discover talents in our children, but those children become more confident in what they do, whether it be speaking, reading, dancing, singing, etc.

S#6 expressed this view as follows:

It enhances learners' self-confidence, improves their communication skills. It helps learners work with other learners to confront problems.

DEVELOPING LEARNERS' IMAGINATION

One of the major advantages of the application of drama in the class is the development of learners' imagination as highlighted by S#18 as follows:

Theatre in education gives the learners an idea how things would be done, seen, felt, or experienced in real life. It helps learners' imagination.

In reflecting on what they would do in their future roles as English language teachers students expressed their views as follows:

Teachers could help learners unlock their emotions through DIE (S#36).

Allow learners to be creative and share ideas (S#32).

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

There was a sense among the participants that in their roles as teachers they should cater for 'all learning styles; auditory, visual and kinaesthetic' which performance arts has the potential to do and that teachers should 'make the learning process fun and exciting'. One of the participants (S#19) stressed the importance of developing learners' creativity through the writing of scripts and producing plays which she articulated as follows:

Dramatising the novel, give learners scenes to make frozen images, let learners write or develop their own scripts on scenes and present or act in groups and allow learners to always work in groups.

The success of the process, however, is dependent on including all the learners in the process of the creation of the play if their talents and skills are to be valued. S#13 articulated this view as follows:

You have to make everyone feel that they are part of the process otherwise you lose control and attention.

The importance of an inclusive process during the creation of the play was stressed by S#19 as follows:

All learners no matter what their culture, religion or beliefs are, must be included. It will help them appreciate and respect one another more.

DISCUSSION

The findings, emerging from this small-scale study, based on the text *'Whitney's Kiss'* by Ohne Vegter (2004), highlight the significance of arts-based approaches in developing pre-service teachers' personalities, promoting

teamwork and collaborative learning, in-depth self-reflection, critical thinking, the development of creativity and visceral learning and reflecting on how such approaches could be applied in their future multi-ethnic classes.

Participants were vocal in terms of how they galvanised as a group and the rich experiences they had during the process. The development of a sense of community among the group members during the creation of the play also enhanced students' self-efficacy and self-esteem (S#11 and S#6). Dalrymple (1997) in her study in the use of performative arts-based approaches to examine issues of HIV and AIDS in a South African higher education context also found the sense of support, belonging and group appreciation as significant outcomes. The findings of this study indicate that when there is a sense of belonging to a group and when students feel that what they have to say matters, they become more committed to the process of learning and are motivated to tap into their creativity (S#10 and S#12). This is supported by Kisida et al. (2020) who found in their study that when using performative arts-based approaches to teach, participants formed personal bonds with their peers and empathised with the characters they portrayed. This led to active engagement in the learning process which resulted in a better understanding of the content being presented (Kisida et al., 2020). Furthermore, as pointed out by Beagle (2021, p. 14), when students are motivated and actively engage in the lessons, they are "open to giving and receiving and are therefore able to engage more fully." Within the context of this small-scale study the active involvement of students enabled them to be more open to sharing ideas and supporting each other in a collaborative learning space. The accounts of S#10, S#11, S#18 and S#33 illustrate how the drama experiences served to enable the group to work collaboratively for enhanced meaning-making and to support each other during the process. This collaborative approach to learning aligns to Vygotsky's (1978) focus on the significance and value of social constructivist approaches for enhancing teaching and learning.

Another significant finding of the implementation of performing arts-based approaches, within the context of this study, is that it led to the development of reflective practice skills which contributed to enhanced learning (Dewey, 1974; Freire, 2000). Participants indicated, for example, that they became more aware of how they were able to use their own voice (S#20 and S#28) in the construction of the theatre-in-education production, discovered their hidden talents in dance, drama and music (S#39) and how various aspects of their personality such as their confidence and self-esteem were enhanced (S#6 and S#11). There was a sense among the participants that one need not necessarily be talented to participate in a theatre-in-education production as one discovers one's hidden talents during the process (S#15, S#18 and S#25).

Similarly, Kenny et al. (2015, pp. 163-164) reported that through the "practical hands-on experiences" created for student teachers in their own research project, students realised that they did not need to have special talents. Furthermore, in the respective studies conducted by Barnes and Shirley (2007) and Hunter-Doniger and Herring (2017), students increased their confidence in their own artistic abilities. Within the context of this study, the viewpoints of S#15, S#18 and S#25 are of particular significance, as the students discovered aesthetic abilities that they did not know they had (Morin, 2000) and developed sensitivity towards arts that provided both confidence and skills (Selkrig & Bottrell, 2009). These are significant findings since they demonstrate that when students are afforded a sense of ownership for their learning and the freedom to be creative, they experience teaching and learning in a positive light (Mattson, 2008).

The opportunities for reflective practice, after the workshop sessions, and the development of reflective practice skills throughout the theatre-in-education process created opportunities for connected learning in that the pre-service teachers were able to explore the connections between their own experiences as participants in the process of theatre making, and how they would apply the arts-based strategies in their future roles as teachers. This was supported by some students who indicated that the experience enabled them to reflect on the importance of incorporating arts-based strategies in their classes (S#5, S#9 and S#13) and how they would incorporate them in their classes to facilitate learning (S#14, S#15, S#16, S#19 and S#25). Hence through the experiential learning process, the participants started to view knowledge as something actively created rather than passively received (Jove & Farrero, 2018) which led to their transformation through their active participation and engagement in the process (Bhukhanwala et al., 2017; Patterson, 2017).

Furthermore, others were able to reflect on its value, based on their experiences, in terms of enhancing learners' confidence (S#6 and S#11) developing their imagination (S#18, S#32 & S#36) and creating an inclusive learning environment (S#13, S#14, S#16, S#19, S#25) in their future roles as teachers. This link between personal and professional spheres is what Giorza (2016, pp. 167) refers to as an "openness to our changing selves" which through visual and embodied forms of knowledge, explored through arts-based approaches, creates a link between the "self" and the "learning self". This process enabled the pre-service teachers to reflect on the value of arts-based approaches in their future roles as teachers.

The views expressed by the pre-service teachers indicate that they have started to reflect on their future practice as teachers, which provide possibilities for action, and which further implies that they have started to

think differently about the approaches that they intend using in their future practice. In this way, as highlighted by Bozalek, Garraway and McKenna, (2011, p. 3) arts-based approaches provide the space for the development of deep cognitive approaches that enable "connections and relations to become apparent."

The incorporation of performance arts-based approaches in teaching, however, also poses challenges highlighted by some students such as its time-consuming nature (S#5 and S#14), co-ordinating additional meeting times with group members (S#20 and S#25) and the lecturer's availability for additional rehearsal sessions (S#32). These limitations were also identified in Akyol, Kahriman-Pamuk and Elmas' (2018) study in which pre-service teachers using performative arts-based approaches indicated that they experienced challenges in the preparation of the performance piece due to the additional time required. This entails that teacher educators intending to use arts-based approaches in their classes will need to plan the series of activities carefully and be available for additional rehearsal sessions to guide their students.

The implications of this study for pre-service teacher training indicate that performance arts-based approaches have a significant contribution to make in terms of unleashing students' creativity and collaborative learning, which are important skills in their future roles as teachers. Furthermore, given the opportunities for reflective practice, which are integral to the development of performance pieces, pre-service teachers are afforded opportunities to reflect on the strategies that they believe could be implemented in their classes for more meaningful learning. The application of the experiential learning approach aligned to drama practices and approaches also creates opportunities for enhanced reflection and experimentation.

CONCLUSION

This small-scale study that focused on pre-service teachers' experiences in the use of performance arts-based approaches in the creation of their piece of theatre on the text *'Whitney's Kiss'* by Ohne Vegter (2004), highlights the value of incorporating such strategies in the teaching of modules at university level. The students' reflections, based on their experiences, provides insights on multiple levels, which include how they experienced the creation of the play, what they learnt about themselves during the process and how their learning will serve to inform their future teaching practice as Intermediate Phase teachers. Based on the findings of this study it emerged that they found performing arts-based approaches beneficial to their development in terms of its contribution to enhancing collaborative engagement, visceral learning, and creativity. Furthermore, on a more personal level, they realised that the theatre-in-education process gave them a voice to express their views freely,

to discover their hidden talents in the performing arts and to develop their confidence. This study confirms that despite time constraints, the incorporation of performance arts-based approaches within the context of pre-service teacher education has the potential to develop pre-service teachers' critical, reflective, and creative skills, which are imperative for teacher development.

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