The Role of Theatre in Education in Health Education: did something important happen?

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Abstract

In acknowledgement that lifestyle behaviours that affect our well-being develop in childhood, British schools have been charged by Government with ensuring that the nation's children acquire the knowledge to allow them to make informed decisions about matters relating to their health. Theatre in Education (TIE) is one method of raising issues that affect health. This article describes two such programmes, examining one in detail and presenting data acquired from the teachers, students and TIE team involved. The outcomes show that TIE is a valuable means of approaching such work, rooting the enquiry in the lives of fictive 'others' whilst allowing the students to relate to the characters in ways that later may help inform their own choices.

Introduction

The English National Curriculum decrees that schools deliver a planned programme of health education. The need is manifest, with the UK possessing the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe , mental depression forming the biggest killer in the UK, and obesity, eating disorders and heart disease constituting major health concerns.

Many behaviours that affect health are acquired in childhood and adolescence. Attitudes to fitness and diet, sexual health and drug use are entwined with the normal, social living conditions of young people who are particularly influenced by peer and media pressure. It is a moot point how much the work of teachers can counter or modify opinion. Certainly straight-forward rule-transmission seems to be relatively ineffective. One difficulty that can be experienced by even a trusted teacher is the understandable unwillingness of students to talk about their own more sensitive experiences of alcohol use, sexual behaviour, bullying and child abuse, for example. The social constructs of the average British secondary school class do not lend themselves to personal revelation, or to open, frank discussion of such topics. It is for this reason that health educators have used case studies as a means of rooting the work in a more detached context .

A technique that seems to have impact is peer tutoring in that students listen to others who are not too distant from them in age, in ways they do not extend to teachers and parents . One reason why this is so is that students recognise the coincidence of their life-experiences with those of the peer tutors, giving an authentic, credible context for discussion. In research conducted by the Portman Group , peer tutoring, followed by theatre were found to be the most effective methods of raising issues to do with alcohol education .

TIE provides a means by which circumstances affecting 'others' can be created. In experiencing a TIE programme, students know they are not

watching real lives or events, yet the power of the drama to draw an audience in to the issues that affect the people being portrayed is obvious to anyone who has experienced a programme in which participants willingly suspend their disbelief to enter into the fictional world that is created. A TIE approach combines the following qualities:

- authentic contexts
- recognisable dilemmas
- characters with whom the students can identify
- issues located in the detail of human circumstance
- an absence of simple, explicit moral rules
- an absence of easy solutions
- a sense of occasion/not normal school

TIE occurs at the interface between theatre and education, combining a knowledge of and the strengths of both processes. Unlike most children's theatre, it does not simply present a performance but adapts the dramatic medium to the educational setting. One prime example of the latter is the way in which most TIE programmes are interactive. There will almost always be a performance element that has been prepared by the TIE personnel, but, depending on the educational purpose and structure of the programme, such performance will be set in varied contexts that require student involvement. Examples are:

- a performance at the start of a programme introduces a group of characters and a problem. Through role-play and discussion, the students explore the problem with which the performance element ended and advise the characters how to continue their lives. The students watch the characters put this advice into practice, and sustain their involvement through forum theatre;

- students read a newspaper report of a party that got out of hand through the arrival of older gatecrashers. They hotseat the characters to find out more information. They advise one of the characters, who intends to hold a similar party, how to set it up to minimise potential problems, watch her issue invitations and observe her friends' responses;

- groups of students are attached to characters to play roles in the world of that character. Once the students are involved, the characters interact to build a dramatic story of which the role-playing students become part.

Because performance is only one of TIE's elements, the complete activity conducted with students is called a 'programme'. Often the TIE team are present in a school for the whole programme, but sometimes the TIE team visits only to deliver the performance element, the rest of the programme being covered by school staff. The work additional to the performance element, always integral to the structure of the programme, may be undertaken before and/or after the team's visit. Preparation may involve:

- engaging in non-drama work that will orientate students in relation to future aspects of the TIE programme (as in example one below);

- examination of material that requires students to identify with characters and their dilemmas (as in the second example described in this article);

- absorption of contextual material that will illuminate the students' understanding of the drama (knowing about the slave trade in preparation for a TIE input on slavery, for example);

- reading a particular story that will introduce students to characters and context (reading Macbeth before a TIE input on the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth);

- exploration, though drama situations, that will allow them to open-up the problem in relation to the TIE team's work (eleven year-olds work on drama situations to do with friendship and loyalty prior to a TIE input of a story that has these themes at its core).

Work that may follow a visit by a TIE company might include:

- the production of letters/other documents that flow from the TIE visit (used in the second example below);

- exploration in their own drama work of analogous dilemmas;

- the creation by older students of a TIE programme, based on the team's model, that will tour to younger students;

- continuation of their involvement with the TIE project characters, but moving to new considerations (as in example one below).

In each case the aim is to sustain the students' involvement with the social and ethical issues embedded in the TIE programme through personal, creative contributions.

The Programmes

At the request of several schools, Exeter University Drama students under the direction of John Somers, have for some years developed interactive TIE programmes to cover a range of issues to do with Health Education. Great care is taken to devise material that is relevant to the school participants' lives. We will mention two programmes on alcohol education and develop one in detail. Intentionally, both programmes mentioned adhere to similar processes in an effort to understand this particular form of TIE. We will then attempt to draw out the theory that informs the programmes' structure and use.

Programme one

A secondary school requested a customised programme on alcohol education. In Exeter as in many towns and cities, there is a growing problem with young people, some as young as eleven, collecting in groups in parks and outside youth centres and getting drunk. An action programme was in place in attempts to understand and to discourage such behaviour: youth workers talked to students during their visits to the area's youth club; police talked to such groups and took action on underage drinking; shopkeepers were reminded of their legal responsibilities in selling alcohol; and advice was given in school. It was felt, however, that the students needed an input that would challenge their thinking about alcohol use, set in a social context with which they could identify.

The university group devised the following programme in consultation with: personnel from the school (the head of year 8 [11/12 years], the head of media studies, the year 8 class teachers); the Police (Schools' Liaison Officer); Trading Standards (Education Advisor); the Youth Service (local youth club leader, and the chair of the Exeter Youth Council).

The nine class groups in year 8 were invited to take part in a new advertising campaign for a fruit/alcohol drink aimed at the younger age-range (nicknamed 'alcopops' or 'designer drinks' in the UK). Class members were asked by the Head of Media Studies to produce:

- a product name, logo, bottle label, and product slogan;
- advertising copy for magazine display;
- an advertising card that could be displayed on off-licence counters;
- a design for a large poster that could be displayed on billboards, and a strategy for using Exeter billboard sites that would maximise target-group awareness.

Working in their once-a-week tutor period, students took three weeks to complete these tasks, at which point the TIE team visited the school. An actor role-played the managing director of the drinks company who announced the winning promotional team whose work was displayed under lights and with accompanying fanfare. As he is about to present the winners' certificate, proceedings are interrupted by an ambulance siren. He is pushed to one side by paramedics who are tending a girl who has collapsed behind him. The TIE team play out a flash-back scenario in which, due to peer pressure, parental oversight and sister rivalry, an under-age girl has become drunk on the clearly identifiable alcopop designed by the winners. She is hospitalised in intensive care after choking on her own vomit.

The students considered who had responsibility for this occurrence. In groups, they were invited to hotseat any character. They were particularly hard on the managing director of the drinks firm, accusing him of complicity in the girl's condition. He countered by implicating them through their promotional work for the company. The session ended with a plea from the

parents of the girl for youngsters not to exert peer pressure on those who were too young to appreciate the power of alcohol, and with a statement from the managing director of the drinks firm thanking the students for the insights they had given him. A week later, a letter from the parents arrived in each class thanking the students for their work in trying to sort out why their daughter had collapsed under the influence of alcohol, and telling them that she was now making a good recovery. The letter formed the focus of a class discussion in which the students reflected on what had happened, and facilitated closure of the programme.

Programme two

The second programme was developed for a slightly older age group (year 9, 13-14 years) in another Exeter secondary school. Ostensibly, this school served a much more affluent catchment area with a larger proportion of middle-class families. The school was aware, however, that alcohol abuse was a growing and apparently intractable problem. The TIE group members, comprising postgraduate and undergraduate students, were all new to this kind of work, but they quickly absorbed the principles that would inform our programme. One team member commented:

When we first came together to discuss devising a piece of Theatre in Education for the high school's year nine students on alcohol awareness, we agreed that we did not want to preach to our audience. As we ourselves have not been out of school for long, we cringed at memories of outsiders coming in to our schools to tell us what and what not to do. Therefore, we aimed at placing the issue of alcohol secondary to an issue with which year nine students could easily identify, in this case, friendship. We wanted to show what could happen to a friendship as a consequence of alcohol.

Working to the principle that TIE educates by asking students to reflect upon situations and people they recognise in the fictional world, and only indirectly upon the reality of their own lives, it was vital that the students became involved with the lives of our characters. We wondered how we could accomplish this in a twenty-minute performance. It was clear that our work required more than the performance itself. As described above, the educational success of our project depended not only on what we did during the performance but what was done before and after.

Before the performance

Four days before the performance, we met with the deputy head teacher, year 9 co-ordinator and the year 9 tutors to brief them on our plans. We also delivered special packs for each tutor group which would acquaint students with the characters and provide clues to the story in which they are involved. In an effort to maintain authenticity, we hand-made each packet containing the following items:

- a receipt for alcohol purchase;
- a booth photo of two friends, Lucy and Rachel (two central characters);
- a transcript of a 999 emergency telephone call to the police;
- an ambulance and hospital report;

- a scribbled note passed between friends in a French class;
- a postcard from Lucy to Rachel;
- a school report card for Lucy, from St. Mark's School;
- a behaviour report on another character, Sarah;
- an invitation to Lucy's sleep-over party;
- a photo of a school trip marked 'private: keep-out' portraying all of the school student characters with nasty comments written about some of them.

All items were enclosed in an off-licence carrier bag from the same company shown on the receipt. The packet constituted a 'compound stimulus' that invited the students to create the characters and events to which the items related. The class teachers introduced the compound stimulus to their classes two days prior to the TIE team's visit. The thrust of the students' investigation was 'Who are these people and what is happening to them?'

The Performance Element

We had to create and polish the performance input before we could decide on the specific items to include in the compound stimulus. The performance was devised collaboratively by the eight actors and director.

First we established the structure. The performance would focus on the friendship of two girls, Lucy and Rachel and the apparent betrayal of that friendship as Rachel becomes severely intoxicated at a sleep-over party. The story was carried by a series of flashbacks and narration from the point of view of the friend who betrays (Lucy). Since we wanted to avoid transmitting direct social rules, we decided against a focus on the victim (Rachel), as this might suggest the obvious message 'this is what could happen to you if you drink.' The framework was established through the classic devising processes of improvisation and discussion. There was always at least one person sitting out to comment on the dramatic potential of the work and its suitability for a year 9 audience. The content arrived at was:

Scene 1: Police-officer interrogating Lucy about the night in question.
Narration: Lucy comes forward and explains to the audience that she is in trouble and suggests that it might be her fault that her best friend Rachel is now in hospital. She asks for the students' help in understanding how the problems occurred.

Scene 2: Flashback: friendship between Lucy and Rachel. Two girls take photo of themselves in a booth.
Narration: Lucy introduces a very different friend, Sarah.

Scene 3: Flashback: school playground, Sarah with gang. Lucy invites them to a sleep-over party and is pressured by Sarah to have a 'proper party' with alcoholic drink. Alcohol will be provided (and legally acquired) by the older brother of Becky, one of Sarah's gang.
Narration: Lucy explains how excited she was and how she can't wait to tell Rachel.

Scene 4: Flashback: French class. Lucy and Rachel whisper and pass notes about the party. Rachel is not pleased about Sarah and the presence of alcohol.
Narration: Lucy explains that Rachel agrees to lie to her mother about what type of party it will be.

Scene 5: Flashback: Rachel and mother's bond and relationship are shown. With difficulty, Rachel eventually lies to her mother about the nature of the party.
Narration: ' the night of the party finally arrived.'

Scene 6: Flashback: Rachel and Lucy getting ready for the party as they wait for Lucy's Mother to leave. Rachel's naiveté is shown as Lucy helps her to correct her make-up. Rachel confides that she does not want to drink but Lucy consoles her and tells her not to worry.
Narration: Lucy explains that she was determined that Rachel would have a good time.

Scene 7: Flashback: Party. Fun and silly dancing to 'girlie music'. Sarah arrives and changes tone. Becky's older brother arrives with drinks. Sarah offers alcohol to Rachel who refuses. Sarah changes CD to 'heavy music'. Sarah spikes Rachel's drink and convinces Lucy to give it to her while the others watch and laugh.
Lucy's narration indicates time passing. Later that night, Sarah suggests doing 'shots' - bolting spirit drinks in unison. Although the rest fein drinking Rachel doesn't, now drinking of her own volition. She finally collapses and Becky rings for an ambulance. Sound of siren finishes scene.

Scene 8: Tableau of all characters. Police officer with Lucy, asks who is responsible? Sarah - she spiked drink? Becky - she asked brother to get drink? Brother because he was over eighteen and supplied drink to minors? Mother - she did not check party properly? Rachel - she should have been able to stop drinking? Or Lucy - it was her party and she betrayed her friend? Each character holds a card bearing his/her name as an identity check for the audience.

Before we took it into school, time was spent on improving the performance element and editing it to about 20 minutes. During an extended morning's work, it was performed to 270 year 9 students, in three groups of 90, before further breaking into tutor groups of 30 for the discussion and hotseating.

After the performance element
Whist the rest of the characters remained frozen in the final tableau, the police officer takes Lucy around them asking her what degree of responsibility each may have for Rachel being in hospital. Lucy is still confused, so the police officer gives the audience the following tasks to do in tutor groups:

- to determine which character is most responsible (and not just 'to blame') for the events that occurred and;

- to determine the key moments in the performance when characters made important decisions that affected the outcomes.

A TIE team member comments:

> The point of determining responsibility was to provoke active discussion and demonstrate that there was not necessarily one person to blame; and that, in some way all participants might be responsible for the outcome.

To focus the discussions, each tutor group had a set of cards that showed each character's name, the order of which they changed as discussion progressed. Tutors organised group discussion in different ways. One tutor (an English specialist) controlled most of the whole discussion/hotseating, whilst another (a scientist) simply observed and let the students organise everything, for example.

After thirty minutes (which, in retrospect was too short) everyone re-grouped in the hall. At this point, the character of the police officer led a large-group discussion as we posted each group's cards (in their chosen order, from most responsible to least) to show the differences in opinion across the groups. The police officer asked students from the various groups to explain the reasoning behind their choices regarding responsibility, and to identify key moments in the plot when significant decisions were made. Our intention was not to reach consensus amongst the students, but to draw out the ethical stances represented in the group, whilst allowing individual dissent. Finally, we assigned a follow-up task for the next tutor-groups session.

Follow-up task

The final task was for students to write in role a letter from one character to another in the story. a range of possibilities were discussed, for example, an official letter from the police to Lucy's parents or a get well card from Lucy to Rachel. Students were required to make the letters look as authentic as possible, as we had attempted to do with the material in the compound stimulus. We hoped this task would enable students to focus their ethical/social stance through a particular relationship and statement. It also had elements of 'student as story writer', as they were being asked to extend the fiction through their own vision, giving them a stake and therefore status in the story making.

Closure

One week after the letter writing activity, a letter from Rachel's parents arrived at each class thanking the students for their help and concern and telling them that Rachel was now out of hospital and progressing well.

Reflection

The data that form the basis of this reflective section come from:

- letters written in the follow-up task;
- questionnaires filled in by six of the nine class tutors involved;
- more lengthy written responses from all eight members of the TIE team;

- interviews with nine girls and nine boys, one from each class, randomly selected six months after the event. Discussion with two gender-balanced groups of nine different students, each drawn from one of the nine classes involved;
- the observations of John Somers who was, except for playing one small role, able to watch the whole experience.

We will deal with each element of the programme in turn.

Compound stimulus

The tutors were enthusiastic about the use of the compound stimulus. One tutor found the material 'very good and useful' and thought her class responded to it with 'enthusiasm - they could see the realism in it'. One reported '100% involvement', whilst another said 'all were involved - I was most impressed'. A tutor wrote of the effect of the story-making response: 'my students sorted out a possible scenario – which helped them to engage.' Another noted:

> Working in groups they responded to the challenge of working out 'who did what' from the clues given. There was a lot of animated discussion and not a little heated argument, with waving of evidence to prove a point.

In some cases a class reached a story consensus, in others groups and even individuals held differing scenarios.

The tutors all agreed on the importance of the use of the compound stimulus in securing the students' willingness to engage with both the performance element and with the issues embedded in the whole project, although there was some evidence that the task was too complicated for some of the students, one of the tutors commenting: 'Some of the less able perhaps found the volume of clues a little off-putting'.

The performance element

Because the students had some foreknowledge of the characters when they entered the hall on the day of the TIE performance, they were intrigued before the performance element started. As all three performances began, we could hear students pointing at us and whispering such things as, 'that's Rachel' or 'there's Lucy'. As the action progressed, there were audible and visible signs of their interest in the characters to which they had been introduced through the compound stimulus. The students were also motivated to watch for the 'real' relevance of the compound stimulus items throughout the performance and to check this against their story predictions of two days' earlier. For example, they now knew that Becky's older brother had obtained the alcohol receipt in buying drink for the party; the behaviour report for Sarah could now be seen in the light of her dominant, aggressive manner; and one scene showed Lucy and Rachel taking the booth photographs.

Generally the tutors thought the performance to be relevant and of high quality. One commented: 'Convincing, especially as some of the main characters did not look that much older than the youngsters in this school'.

The ability of the students to relate to the storyline and the characters was thought to be central to the performance's success - 'An excellent performance with characters the students could relate to', although one thought the performance 'rather short, with a rather unoriginal storyline on which they [the students] had almost overdosed due to it being in all their magazines and TV programmes'.

Our judgement of the audiences' reactions, confirmed by looking at the video record of the three performances, supported most tutors' views, and those of the Head of Year 9 and the Deputy Headteacher, that the students were very involved in the storyline.

Hot seating and discussion

To aid discussion on the two issues (who was responsible, and what were the key moments in the performance when characters made important decisions that affected the outcomes?) in the tutor groups, each group was allowed to hotseat three characters from the story. There was a feeling amongst tutors and the TIE team that the hot seating was the crucial interface between the students' interest, learning and the performance. One tutor noted 'the hotseat session was where it all happened', and it was here that they made the connection between the scenario, its issues, and self. One member of the TIE team also felt the hotseating to be an important and successful element:

> The hot seating was perhaps the most effective aspect of the project due to the students' participation and willingness to uphold the suspension of disbelief. The effectiveness also depended on the tutor's role in leading the discussion. Each group sent a runner to the main hall where we awaited them, in character at all times. When, for example, the character of Sarah entered a tutor group's room, the group often greeted her with boos. Each group throughout the three sessions asked extremely perceptive questions, such as 'whose friendship do you value more?' to 'what relationship do you have with your parents?' It was a chance for the students to become actively involved in the play and to control the conditions.

Tutors commented that student decisions about who to choose for hotseating were not always made democratically due to pressure of time and the relative social status of students, 'Some were more involved than others partly because of some dominant females in my class, which is also linked with the relative immaturity of most of the boys at this age'.

One tutor felt it may have been better to have split the class into smaller groups to discuss who they would hotseat, with final, democratic decisions being made by the whole class. There was, however, a high level of engagement with the issues and characters during both the hotseating and the discussion. There was no incident of indiscipline and the work seemed to have built into it its own rationale and dynamic. A tutor commented 'I didn't hear anyone ask "what are we supposed to be doing?", which is unusual'.

Although the lead could not be taken by all of the class members, there was evidence that those who did not speak much were involved. A tutor noticed 'The few that were not involved in the discussion all seemed to be listening, but their body language was different - not so much leaning forward, for example'.

The set of character cards formed a useful device to focus discussion on relative character responsibility. Generally the cards were laid on the floor in the middle of the discussion circle where all could see them. The groups used and related to them differently. In the group where the tutor organised things, for example, this tutor established the convention that he would move cards to student direction, whilst in the group where the tutor withdrew, the tutor later noted that the real social structure of the group impinged on the clarity of decision making:

> My group put the cards into order, but then there developed a 'game' where one person would step in and change a card or two, then another would, etc. – so it came down to social 'pecking order'.

Follow-up task - the letter

The letter writing required the students to write in role. We received a wide range of letters - parent to parent, parent to various teenage characters, police to various individuals, solicitors' demands, get well, birthday and Christmas cards and letters from characters alluded to but not shown in the storyline, including Rachel's teachers. Some students wrote on standard A4 sheets of paper with little attempt at authenticity, whilst others created get-well cards sealed in envelopes, or word-processed official documents bearing very credible police letter headings, for instance. It was clear that the authentic letters required more thought and effort. As the quality remained the same within tutor groups but varied between tutor groups, it seemed that some tutors stressed the importance and perameters of the assignment while others did not. As McGregor, et al (1977) comment:

> How the experience is used educationally depends on the original purpose of the programme and the way that the teacher develops the ideas in the classroom. […] Theatre-in-Education teams can provide a provocative starting-point for the resourceful teacher to build on. Although the teams are responsible for the quality of the work they provide, it is for the school itself to exploit its potential. 1

The letters showed that the students had absorbed the storyline in some detail and had gained insight into the ethical issues involved. Predictably, the majority were between Rachel and Lucy. Some dealt with Lucy's contrition and her wish to make amends. One get-well card said:

To Rachel,
[…] I wish that I never invited them and that I never was a part of what took place. When you collapsed I suddenly knew what I had done. […] I feel more and more guilty every time I think about what happened. […] You'll be pleased to know that I haven't spoken to Sarah - and she has been crossed off all my party lists. I should have listened to you and stuck to the sleep-over like you said. […]I hope that you will find it in your heart to forgive me. I would still like to be your best friend, but I would understand if you don't want to.
Get well soon
From,
Lucy

whilst a note stated:

Dear Rachel,
I know that you probably want nothing to do with me right now but if you continue to read this letter it would give me a chance to explain what really went on that night […]. Mum found out and I'm grounded for two months but to be honest I think I deserve more punishment for what I did, I mean letting you get hurt. Maybe when you're feeling a bit better we could talk again but I would understand if you didn't.
Love,
Lucy

Several wished to show that Rachel had acted under the influence of Sarah

Dear Rachel,
I'm not really sure of what to say, but first I would like to say sorry for what I've done. I didn't really mean to give you that spiked drink. Sarah said it would be a laugh and that I had to give you the drink because you wouldn't take it from her. I think we were all having fun at the time and didn't realise what we were doing until you fell down and had to go to hospital. I knew you didn't really like Sarah, but I thought she was nice and that you two would get along and maybe even make friends. To be honest, you were right, I was just doing what Sarah and all her so-called mates wanted me to do. I should never have invited her to that party and made you lie to your mum. […] I hope you get well soon, and when you do, can we meet up and talk?
Lucy

This one from Lucy to Sarah demonstrated the sharp feelings some students felt about Sarah's part in the events:

Sarah
It's all your fault that Rachel is in hospital, so don't deny it. She is my best friend, and look what you have done to her.

Okay, I may have agreed to let you bring the drink along, but spiking her drink went too far. You saw her and you could have stopped, but you just couldn't help yourself so you carried on and on until she ends up in hospital. Don't you feel guilty? - well what was the point in asking you that, you never think about anyone but yourself, because you're a selfish no-lifed bitch who couldn't care less.

I hope you are happy - Rachel will never forgive me, she thinks it is all my fault. If you ask me, you are a jealous cow. Just because you don't have a best friend, you spoil other people's friendship.

Get a life Sarah - no-one actually likes you. They only hang around you because you threaten them. You are a patronising cow.

Hope you're satisfied now. You can jump off a cliff for all I care.
Lucy

Others claimed Lucy to be fully responsible and another even absolved Sarah. Some dealt with Sarah's continuing influence on the social structure of the friendship group:

French Class
Dear Lucy,
Great party! Shame it got out of hand, but we all know whose fault that was, don't we. You'd better not dob [tell] on us or your life won't be worth living. Can't you see what an idiot Rachel is, look how much trouble she's caused. […] You're better off without her. So forget her and learn to enjoy life more.
Sarah PS Don't forget what I said, I meant every word of it!

Several chose to write from Rachel's viewpoint, this one reflecting the hurt she feels although with a chance of reconciliation:

To Lucy,
I wrote this to say why did you do it? What's the point? I thought we were best friends. I don't care if you go off with Sarah, but I would like to know why. I mean we were so close friends, and you knew I didn't want to drink. But you just got carried away with Sarah. You thought I would like Sarah. Well that was a big mistake. You've only made things worse. This might be the last time I speak, or write to you, but that's up to you. Well it's either me or Sarah. Sorry to give you such a tough decision, but we can't be friends if you choose Sarah over me. Bye for now.
PS Please write back with your answer and then we can talk. Rachel

Some took on the task of apologising to the parents:

Dear Mr. And Mrs. Hurst,
I am writing a letter of apology and of condolence.

I feel very guilty and ashamed about what happened at my party, it was a terrible accident and it was never meant to happen.

I understand that you will be very upset and angry at me but I really am sorry for what has happened. I know that you trusted me to look after Rachel, and I have lost that trust, not only with you, with Rachel and my parents too.
With all my apologies,
Lucy

There was a variety of letters. One student created an angry letter from Rachel's mother to Lucy's parents, whilst another took the line that Lucy was sorry for her actions, but felt the real problem was to do with Rachel's naive attitude.

There were some visually very convincing letters that had been desk-top-published to a high standard. Most involved the police or ambulance service:

DEVON and CORNWALL CONSTABULARY ***Form No: 51***
Tel no: 0990777444
Ref: CC/21432/CT
Date: 02 December 1998
From: The Chief Constable, Police Headquarters, Exeter
To: Mr C Thomas, 12 High Street, Exeter

Subject: DRINKING INCIDENT - 26TH NOVEMBER 1998

Dear Mr Thomas
I am writing on behalf of the Chief Constable regarding an incident that took place on the evening of 26th November 1998, where under age drinking occurred. It is alleged that you purchased alcohol, namely an assortment of spirits, and gave them to people under the age of 18.

I am writing to inform you that, on this occasion, you will receive a caution in respect of the above offence. I must advise you that, if it happens again the court will prosecute you.

I also recommend that you should write a sorry letter to Rachel's parents apologising about what has happened.

Should you have any queries regarding this matter please contact me.
Inspector R. Matthews

Process Officer

Most of the tutors who responded found the letter-writing task useful. One tutor wrote, 'the follow-up work was a good idea and kept the issue alive until our next tutor session.'

The TIE team
None of the participants had taken part in any TIE work before. Undergraduates chose to do so as part of an Applied Drama module in year three of their degree. Two participants (both from the USA, and practising secondary teachers) were members of a taught MA in Theatre Practice and their programme required them to audit undergraduate course. Their reasons for choosing the option related to their wish to experience the interface between theatre and schools. Several of the undergraduates reported how, when school students, they had been intrigued by visiting TIE companies, and how they now wished to experience things from the actors' point of view. Two of them were contemplating doing a postgraduate teaching qualification, so they had particular reasons for taking part.

The devising process was seen by the team as well structured and rewarding:

> Devising the piece not only allowed each of us to give input and address the issues we felt important, but enabled the production to change and stay 'fresh' each time it was rehearsed and performed. Therefore, the project had the benefit of being extremely rewarding for the actors.

They were aware that the performance element should be uncomplicated, allowing the students to respond immediately to the issues embedded in the drama. Each commented on the role of the director in giving an initial framework for the project which defined the intention for the performance element. They also remarked on the value of the director's experience in keeping them 'on track' during the devising process.

Asked about their feelings of anticipation about going in to a secondary school to do the programme, the two US teachers accepted the situation calmly. The undergraduates showed a certain anxiety, especially after the meeting with the Deputy Headteacher, Year Head and class tutors. One commented that she felt the teachers 'appeared less that enthusiastic'. In fact the teachers were under great pressure in other areas and it seemed that some of them, quite legitimately, saw the programme and their part in it as an extra load. The teachers' responses after the programme had finished would seem to suggest they had valued taking part. One commented 'I didn't expect to, but I thoroughly enjoyed the session', and enthusiasm and thanks were evident on the day of the school visit. The approval of the majority of the teachers involved was an important part of the TIE team's validation of the worth of their work. When the team realised that what they had prepared was working, they began to enjoy the experience. One commented 'on the day I felt quite privileged to have the opportunity to perform the piece', whilst others said 'the majority of them [the school students] seemed really willing to participate as an audience and afterwards in the hotseating and discussion' and 'all aspects of the programme resulted in fairly animated and active participation'. One member commented after watching the video recording 'their reactions [...] show clear concentration and interest'.

The team's reflections on the effectiveness of the programme show that they believe it 'worked' but their responses raise the important issue of whether the programme really dealt with alcohol education or whether it dealt more with the issues surrounding peer pressure, relationships and loyalty/betrayal. We believe that we were right in this instance in not making alcohol the main focus as this allowed it to be carried within another issue that assumes great importance in this age group, friendship. One team member summed this up by saying:

> The overriding message [of the project] for me was rooted in taking personal power in choosing appropriate friendships and knowing that we have choices. The crux of the play seemed less that Rachel had collapsed from alcohol, and more that she had been violated by her friendship group.

It is also clear that much alcohol use takes place within young people's social frameworks, and at this age peer pressure is an important characteristic of such behaviour.

All team members liked the compound stimulus compound stimulus that formed the energised the pre-visit work. One commented 'I liked its problem-solving nature that asked the students to piece together a story from a series of clues', whilst another mentioned that it provided the 'hook' to get the students immediately involved in the action even before the 'drama arrives'.

The team recognised in retrospect how the performance element was incomplete without the supporting activities. Not having the performance as a stand-alone element was unusual for team members whose main experience of drama had been in more theatre-based performance work.

All team members found the hotseating the most challenging and unpredictable aspect of the project. One said:

> The hotseating was a triumph. It was this aspect of the programme that really captivated me. The questioning from the students validated my hopes that, for the most part, they had received, considered and analysed what we had offered them - that the drama had been effective. The hotseating was also exciting for the performer, as the questioning was often detailed, requiring serious quick thinking and improvisation.

One member commented on the dynamics of teacher participation in this part of the programme, commenting:

> This part of the programme varied in its effectiveness depending on how the teacher led the discussion. Those who didn't lead and let the students initiate the discussion, tended to be the most effective; they weren't the most organised groups, but the students were working out their questions in their order of importance.

All parties thought the plenary session at the end was too rushed to be of major use, its inclusion questionable in that few students spoke, and that the tutor groups had reached their own conclusions about responsibility and that the plenary was therefore superfluous. It seemed to fulfil a need to 'pull things together' at the end, a kind of 'signing off' rather than having any intrinsic value. Several commented that it needed to be longer to give each group the chance to contribute in ways that did not simply replicate what they had already done in the tutor groups and for inter-group differences to be discussed. One felt that the police officer was the wrong person to front this section, and that 'a more controversial or challenging character' should have conducted the session. The policewoman was chosen because at the end of the performance she set the original task of apportioning responsibility for what had happened to Rachel, but this could have been changed - Rachel had originally asked for the students' help, for example, and could have run the plenary, or perhaps a more peripheral character such as a nurse, or ambulance driver.

Augusto Boal writes about his audiences who suffer various forms of oppression:

> Let them create it [solutions to oppression] first in the theatre, in fiction, to be better prepared to create it outside afterwards, for real. 2

The same can be applied to TIE audiences. In allowing them to confront the characters through hot-seating and to enter the characters' lives by writing a letter of apology or accusation, we have, in essence, given students insights into areas they may encounter in the future. Had we merely offered them the play, with no before and after activity, the students could not have become as involved with the lives of the characters, minimising the possibility of transferring any reflection to their own lives.

We believe that the nub of TIE learning lies in the intertextuality of the TIE story and the students' life stories. Thus, the tutor's willingness to take the project further in the classroom is of great importance in enhancing the educational impact of the programme. The effectiveness of this follow-up activity within the overall learning is crucially related to the tutor's ability and willingness to evoke the characters and the events in the minds of the students at several days' distance from the event. This is a skilled task because, as one tutor pointed out, 'pupils were not so enthusiastic [to write the letters] as the moment had gone.' Nevertheless, as many of the letters demonstrated, it was possible for the students to write in role with a sharp sense of the characters' psychological characteristics.

The school students

Interviews were conducted with the students six months after the programme was completed. Pairs, comprising a boy and a girl from each of the nine classes, plus two gender balanced groups of nine drawn from all classes, formed the basis of the interviews. This involved 36 students in all.

It was our belief that there was a correlation between the ability of the students to recall the programme and the significance it had for them as a learning experience. Alan Baddeley, author of Essentials of Human Memory says 'Quite simply, we remember best what we're most interested in' . Most of those interviewed remembered something of the programme and were able to provide a basic outline of the happenings, the characters and the storyline.

Interestingly, although their recall of the events was rarely complete, they never mixed up the story elements, or the names. Their memory of the bag and its contents varied, but nearly all could name some of the bag's content and had a 'feel' for why they had been asked to examine it.

> We had all the letters and pictures and photos and bits of diaries when they were at school. We had to look at them and work out the story before we saw the play, work out who was who, and what they did.

Some had fragmentary recall, but what they remembered was significant to the story:

> It had her diary in it, what she thought of people and her feelings.

> There was a party invitation. She went to the party. I think in her diary she said she didn't like Sarah. She had stuff in there about her best friend as well, and the pressure she was feeling.

> It had diary entries of Sarah, [...] and party invitations, a receipt and just things like that. It was interesting because it had different pieces of the story.

Another girl mentioned the process of working on the documents, saying it was 'like being a detective'. Ability to recall the storyline varied, with nearly all being able to remember certain main threads:

> One of her friends was hanging out with these more popular people, and she was leaving these other girls behind - I can't remember their names now. They invited her friend to a party and the more popular kids, they were ganging up to spike her friend's drink, and she did and she actually let her drink it.

Nine people from the thirty six, seven of them girls, had almost total recall:

> It was about a girl, two girls really, Lucy and Rachel who were quite hip really, and Lucy got along with this girl Sarah and they wanted to be friends with her, because apparently she was cool. They had a party, there was to be no drinks or anything and they were to cause no trouble, but Rachel ended up being hurt. They spiked her drinks and she ended up being unconscious, no she didn't die, she was in a coma.

In the group discussions, students triggered each other's recall. One said:

> I remember the girl's mum saying there's not going to be any drink or anything, and her lying to her mum [...] and Sarah saying there's got to be drink, I mean originally it was just going to be a sleep over and watching a video.

triggering a chain of responses through which the group filled in the missing bits. When asked their opinion on the purpose of the programme, students readily identified the issue behind it 'We had to choose who we thought was responsible for the girl being in hospital.'

'Responsibility' was mentioned twelve times during the interviews and discussions, whilst the more simple concept of 'blame' was mentioned only once. This was rewarding as, on the day of the performance element, the groups were asked who had some responsibility for the happenings and it was pointed out that it was not a matter of simply apportioning blame. In discussing the purpose of the programme, some students were able to project beyond its immediate structure, 'Older people go to clubs and things, but our age might have parties and I think you were trying to warn us before we do start going to clubs and drinking a lot more'. Some were very perceptive about our methodology:

> You were giving us a choice I reckon, like to make up our own mind in a way, showing us what the effects are, and what can happen if you do get in to drinking heavily.

> It wasn't like 'don't do this, don't do that'. I think it was just like, if you do this then this might happen. It wasn't too overwhelming. It showed the emotions as well and the fact that not just one person is affected.

There was also an awareness that the alcohol issues overlapped with other matters: 'It wasn't just about alcohol, it was about friendship as well'. The part of the programme that seemed to dwell most strongly in the students' memory

was the hotseating. Many were able to remember which characters they had spoken to:

> We all went to our tutor groups and chose who we wanted to talk to, the important person, and we brought them up to us. We talked to the actual one who got drunk and to Sarah, the girl's friend who brought all her mates in. And we talked to the friend's mum.

Some commented on the hotseating experience itself. Through their questions, they were able to get behind the persona that they had seen in the performance element 'In the play you saw her [Sarah] being horrible, but when we talked, she was telling us why she did it'. The students were directly affected by the dynamics of the hotseating, 'I also liked the questioning, where they seemed to have an answer for everything - you couldn't catch them out'.

We asked about their experience of alcohol use and abuse. There was a general feeling that 'drink is getting more and more common with young people and more are drinking'. Only one of the thirty six admitted to having been drunk, whilst others had seen friends in a bad state, 'There are people in our year who drink. Sometimes they get it from home. One of my friends got bad on really strong drink'.

Drinking alcohol seemed not to be widespread amongst this sample, although most admitted it was fairly easy to acquire and that they knew those who did, 'I don't know anyone who drinks really heavily and gets really bad with it, but there are people who go to the park or whatever'. The most frequent response was 'not yet', said with a certain amount of foreboding. The programme scored highly on 'believability' and authenticity: 'We knew they were actors, but the way they answered to questions and stuff was very convincing'. The fact that the experience was 'live' appealed to many whose experience of drama is usually from the TV :

> It was having the actors there. It was really cleverly done and you have hatred towards some of the characters, like the girl that was horrible. People paid much more attention because it was happening in front of them.

This was contradicted by two students who compared the programme to a video they had seen on drugs awareness. They felt that the reality of the video programme gave it the edge over the TIE:

> I think the drugs one was a bit more effective because it actually happened and real people were talking about it, and the alcohol one was drama and plays and we actually enjoyed ourselves, but it couldn't be so shocking.

Some compared it directly to their TV drama experiences, 'Because you are seeing it - it is happening in front of you. It's like Eastenders (a British TV soap opera). You know that it's not real, but you get involved in it'. The involvement of the students in sorting out the issues carried in the programme was valued 'I liked the hotseating and discussion - getting asked for my advice'. The particular nature of the experience stood out from the normal school routine, 'I liked it - you can join in more than ordinary lessons. You can

interview them and get involved. You don't just say what happened, we have to think for ourselves'.

When asked if theirs was the right age to experience the alcohol programme, there was a general affirmation that it was:

> Year 8 (12-13 years old), it's not suitable. I think Year 9 (13-14) is the most valuable time to do it. When you are in year 10 and 11 (15 years-17 years) they will come and listen, but they have done more, and are more independent.
>
> It was the right age because if it had been any later it would have been too late.

although a few students felt Year 8 to be the right age

> It could have been better with younger people because a lot of our age group are already drinking. If you get a younger age group, you could teach them all the effects and all the dangers, so they can think, 'Oh, I'll stay clear of that'.

The interviews confirmed our impression that the tutors had handled the letter-writing in different ways. Students in some classes worked individually or in pairs whilst in other classes the letter writing was deputed to just two people 'Charlie and Claire did our ones. We did have two, but we only sent one', or it was made an optional activity. Some tutors re-established contact with the storyline before releasing the students into the letter-writing task, whilst others appeared not to. Those who did write letters had clear memories of the context:

> We could either do an apology letter to Rachel, or to Sarah saying what had happened. We could write to the brother from the court warning him, telling him that he was in danger of trouble if he encouraged underage people to drink again. I did one between the two friends. I wrote it on the computer.

In one case, the letter writing was done long after the event:

> We did ours in a tutor period, but it was weeks after and we had forgotten about it. I think me and my best friend were the only two who did it, and we did it in our own time, nobody else bothered.

There was considerable evidence that the pre-visit compound stimulus had whetted the appetite of the students who were keen to experience the next stage of the project, 'Like me and Matt. We wanted to know what happened next and so when we went in to the hall and saw what happened it was very interesting'.

Discussion in the two groups of nine students turned to the issue of why some more than others had greater recall of the programme's events. When the interviewer asked why Denise and Mark should have a greater recall than anyone else, and why Linda seemingly remembered everything in great detail, it turned out that Linda voluntarily attends a local stage school. Two more people with good recall also attended this stage school, but two others who had near total recall did not, and one of them did not do Drama at school. Perhaps students who have above average levels of dramatic literacy are

best placed to recall events within the dramatic medium as they have the potential to understand and absorb more during the programme.

Some students seemed to have a particular facility for remembering fictional events. One said 'I usually remember stuff if it's like, fantasy'. One boy felt the active participation within the programme heightened his recall, 'If you'd just been told a story, I think it would be harder to remember. Being shown the people and talking to them made it easier for me to remember'.

There was a feeling that making meaning of the project depended on the characteristics of each individual who experiences it. One girl said 'Everyone takes in different bits of knowledge in different ways', and another 'Someone sits in front of a video and takes it in more than others, someone sits in French and takes in more than others. It all depends on the way you work as to what you take in'.

The students seemed to understand that, if that which is being experienced coincides with the interests of the participants, they will find it relevant, and become more involved, 'I think it all depends if you are interested, they were more interested than the others, it was more relevant'. This reinforces our belief in the correlation between intertextuality and effectiveness.

Conclusion

There is little doubt in our minds that the programme achieved many of its aims. The responses from teachers, students and TIE team members confirm this. The teachers were impressed by the involvement of their students and the general impact of the programme. Through the way they treated the story and its characters, the letters that were produced and the sincere reflections during interviewing, they showed that they had been involved with the lives of the characters and the dilemmas they faced. The TIE team members were very pleased with the effect of the programme and the positive dynamic it created, believing that the conditions of 'significant experience' demanded by effective educational processes had been achieved. The judgement of John Somers, based on his involvement in twenty-three TIE programmes, was that the programme achieved a high level of success in raising issues that endured in the consciousness of the students . These conclusions would seem to accord with other research in this field. It is clear, however, that evaluation of such a programme is problematic. It is not possible to 'prove' in a scientifically objective manner that this programme achieved its objectives, but in the words of a TIE member from another company 'obviously, something important happened' . We cannot ignore the fact that the authors are not neutral in the process of evaluation. One directed the programme and the other took part in it. By making our involvement transparent and our personal judgement explicit, we hope that readers, in the context of their own professional experience, will make their own judgements about the authenticity of this research.

There remain a number of issues that could form the focus of further research. Among them are:

- What is the best age to raise issues such as alcohol awareness in relation to experience students may have of the material and issues that form the focus of the programme?

- How does such a programme affect long-term attitudes and behaviour?

- How effective would the TIE experience be if it were delivered by peers of the target group? Would this lead to a 'double benefit'?

- Do students with enhanced dramatic literacy gain more from such a programme?

- How reliable is participant memory of events as an indicator of positive affect?

- How best can research of the learning outcomes of such programmes be conducted?

PAGE

PAGE 17

The Guardian, Guardian Women, 17.5.99, p.7

For an example of case study, see Finding out about Drinking Alcohol,, Derek Garwood & Christine Rickards (1998), Cambridge: Hobsons Academic Relations, pp. 8-9.

The peer-group was found to be the most significant influence on under-age drinking - see Taskforce on Underage Alcohol Misuse, Kate Fox (1997), London: The Portman Group, p.27.

The Portman Group is a drinks industry initiative against alcohol misuse.

Hotseating is a process by which actors, in character, are quizzed by others. Characters are usually hotseated one at a time and there is an assumption that even if other characters are in earshot, the discussion is confidential between character and audience.

The legal age for buying and consuming alcohol outside the home is 18 in the UK.

See Kevin Brain and Howard Parker (1997) Drinking with Design, (Manchester: University of Manchester and the Portman Group) pp. 73-77.

an 'off-licence' is a shop that is allowed to sell alcohol 'off licensed' premises. Strict rules govern these sales in relation to young people.

TIE logbook

For more on this see Christine Warner's article 'The Edging in of Engagement' in Research in Drama Education, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1997), (Abingdon UK: Carfax) pp. 21-42.

One camera captured the performance whilst another dwelt mainly on audience responses and also toured the groups during hotseating and discussion.

The most important factor in Year 8 that influences students' alcohol use is 'because friends do'. See section 3.1 of 'Why Youngsters Drink', in Young People and Alcohol - Its use and abuse. Schools Health Education Unit Report, John Balding (1997), Exeter: University of Exeter.

Baddeley Alan D (1999) Essentials of Human Memory Hove: Psychology Press, quoted in 'Health Report: lest we forget', The Observer Magazine, 7.12.99, London: The Observer Newspaper.

Kate Fox claims that theatre has more impact because 'All young people are familiar with film and video. to which they have built up a considerable degree of emotional 'immunity', but may have little or no experience of live theatre' - see Kate Fox, (Ibid).

Ken Robinson in an article 'Evaluating TIE' states that 'Acts of evaluation should blend systematic observations with personal judgements based on professional experience' in Learning Through Theatre, Tony Jackson (Ed), (1993 second edition) London: Routledge, pp. 259.

Quoted by Ken Robinson in Jackson (1993) (ibid).

Useful UK addresses include:
Alcohol Concern: http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
Health Education Authority: http://www.hes.org.uk
The Schools Health Education Unit has the largest UK datbank of young people's health-related behaviour. Annual detailed summaries date to 1986: http://www.ex.ac.uk/sheu/

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