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## **‘We ur al aff tae th’ big schuil’ - Pupils' and teachers' views and experiences on using Drama Conventions to support primary-secondary transition.**

This case study explores pupils' and teachers' views on using Drama Conventions during primary-secondary transition. The intervention took place during the final month of the Scottish academic year (June), in three associated state primary seven classes (the last year of primary school in Scotland) with seventy-eight pupils and three teachers. Forty-nine pupils completed a retrospective questionnaire on the intervention at the end of secondary term one. This paper suggests that a Drama Convention approach to primary-secondary transition creates a learner-centred transition curriculum developing: solidarity, empathy, meta-awareness, multiple perspectives and understanding of transition bullying. Qualitative data methods included: pupil questionnaires and focus groups, teacher semi-structured interviews, teacher observations and a researcher diary. The conclusion outlines recommendations for future transition research, policy and practice.

*Keywords: primary-secondary transition, drama education, drama conventions.*

### **Primary-secondary transition conceptualisation**

Transition is a dynamic and ongoing process of psychological, social and educational adaption, over time due to alterations in context, interpersonal relationships and identity which require ongoing support (Jindal Snape 2018). For some pupils transition is an exciting opportunity to develop friendships and academic outcomes (Jindal-Snape and Foggie 2008). However, others indicate that transition is an anxious period (Galton and Morrison 2000), with some experiencing concerns about bullying, increased academic pressures and worries about getting lost in secondary school (Lucey and Reay 2000). There can be an initial attainment dip in secondary with some pupils suffering longer term consequences (Alexander 2010). Galton and McLellan's (2018, 274) international review of pupils' transition experiences, from the 1970s to the present day, indicates that secondary schools focus on 'short-term concerns, mainly to do with pupils' familiarisations and acceptance of the [school] system'. Consequently, schools often negate pupils' transition socio-emotional concerns (Topping 2011). Pupils with poor self-esteem may question their worth, confidence and ability to manage their transition (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008). However, peer assisted learning activities can enhance self-esteem and motivation to learn at transition (Topping 2011) while reducing the effects of transition stress (Arowosafe and Irwin 1992).

### **Drama's potential to support primary-secondary transition**

As the school curriculum advances it often becomes removed from human experience and focusses on abstract skills and concepts. This might result in difficulties for pupils navigating and understanding the significance of their learning (Neelands 1992). Roeser et al. (1998) indicates that this curricular shift is highlighted during transition as pupil motivation and engagement often declines. However, an alternative pedagogical approach which adopts the symbolic language of story and drama (Neelands 1992) might address the curricular shift between primary and secondary school.

Drama is an ensemble approach to learning requiring pupils to problem solve through role-playing activities. Role-playing requires pupils to adopt specific attitudes and beliefs and act 'as if' they were another person in a different time and place. This enables pupils to experiment with multiple perspectives and actions without accruing the effects in the real world (Goode 2014). Role-playing enables pupils to act out issues which are relevant to them (Jindal-Snape et al. 2011) via the security

of a fictional safety net (Neelands 2009), while promoting citizenship (Nicholson 2014) and the understanding of multiple perspectives (Saxon and Miller 2015). Jindal-Snape (2016) proposes that using drama at transition: empowers pupil ownership of transition learning; provides a creative space to develop emotional understanding by creating realistic scenarios and anonymity of role adoption. Therefore, using drama creates a 'felt' knowledge which would be 'genuinely serving the needs and interests of students in the transition years' (Clark et al. 1997, 19).

### **Primary-secondary transition - a drama approach**

*...drama is essentially about people and their relationships, dilemmas, concerns, hopes, fears, aspirations, celebrations and rites of passage, all of which create ties which bind them together (Bowell and Heap 2013, 17).*

Bowell and Heap's (2013) proposal links with primary-secondary transition literature as *rites of passage* is used by Pratt and George (2005), peer *relationships* by Mizelle and Irvin (2000), *fears* of bullying by Zeedyk et al. (2003) and transition horror stories (Lucey and Reay 2000), to describe the impacts of transition. However, using drama to support primary-secondary transition is not well documented (Jindal-Snape et al. 2011). Those studies that have, concluded that drama develops pupils': emotional wellbeing, social skills, agency and motivation during primary-secondary transition (Walsh-Bowers 1992; Jindal-Snape 2012; Hammond, 2015) - regardless of their academic ability (Jindal-Snape et al. 2011). Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) indicate that the drama function of metaxis (holding the fictional and real world together in the mind) supports pupils' reflections and behavioural choices during primary-secondary transition. Consequently, pupils can experiment with possible futures, that they have a hand in shaping, to create a better world for themselves (Neelands 1992).

Hammond (2015) indicates that using Forum-Theatre (see explanation in table 1) empowers primary pupils to explore transition concerns by finding potential solutions. Unlike Hammond's (2015) study, which devised a play to forum, this research did not create a performance to be shared. Instead, the participants and the researcher worked together, without an external audience, using Drama Conventions as a medium for learning about transition via the symbolic form. Additionally, this study, unlike Hammond's (2015) research, gathered data in secondary and primary settings.

A previous Scottish study (Jindal-Snape et al. 2011), investigating the potential role for using creative drama at transition, involving three hundred and fifty-seven pupils, twelve teachers from six primary schools and four drama professionals, purported that it was effective at empowering pupils' understanding of emotional issues through a fictional safety-net. However, unlike the current study, which was undertaken by the researcher with expertise in primary/secondary drama teaching, Jindal-Snape et al. (2011) research was implemented by professional drama practitioners outside of the school context with no data gathered in the secondary setting.

Walsh-Bowers' (1992) rural study involved one hundred and three Canadian Grade six junior high pupils who recently transitioned from elementary school. A drama curriculum was designed to develop pupil interpersonal relationships and social/group skills while minimising transition fears in Junior High School (with an almost exclusive Caucasian middle-class population) while incorporating teacher training in drama. The current study's focus did not use drama to develop pupils' social/group skills at transition in a language arts curriculum – although the data shows this was a benefit of the intervention - nor did it aim to incorporate teacher education in the research design. Instead, this study was a stand-alone intervention undertaken in an urban area of multiple deprivation with an ethnically diverse population.

To the best of the author's knowledge, to date, no transition study has adopted a solely Drama Conventions approach, led by a classroom practitioner/researcher, in the urban primary setting, with data gathered in primary and secondary schools.

### **What are Drama Conventions?**

Neelands and Goode's (2015) Structuring Drama Work offers 100 Drama Conventions and are categorised into the following actions: context-building; narrative; poetic; reflective. Drama Conventions empower pupils to 'make, explore and communicate meaning through theatre form as if they were somebody else in a new time and place' (ibid 2015, 1). They fuse the roles of spectator and actor while emphasising 'theatre's traditional role as an educative form of entertainment that responds to a basic human need to interpret and express the world through symbolic form' (ibid 2015, 4). Language is used symbolically (representing speech), or to describe the visual use of gesture, space and objects in the representation of places, relationships and actions including discussing and implementing ideas. Space is used both symbolically and spontaneously to convey meaning of movements or visually to emphasise meanings associated with use-of-levels between character status, surroundings and psychological distance. Irrespective of whether the drama is set in the past, present or future, the action is always in the here-and-now. Pupils interact and plan their drama in the real world while temporarily distancing this by entering the fiction 'managing the real dimension from within the symbolic dimension is central to the learning experience' (ibid 2015, 147-148). Moreover, pupils connect their drama to the real events which it purports and, through story development, forge a relationship between the drama and the real world (ibid 2015).

### How the Drama Conventions were used

Three weekly sessions, lasting approximately two and a half hours, were individually facilitated in each primary school based on a fictional primary seven pupil's (Samantha) transition. The research asked -

- What are pupils' and teachers' views and experiences on using Drama Convention approaches to support primary-secondary transition and how does this relate to the literature?

The research objectives were shared with the participants as was their right to anonymity, confidentiality and withdrawal.

### Sessions

(Table 1: Sessions and Drama Conventions overview)

<b>Drama Conventions Definition</b>	<b>Description of use in this study</b>
<i>(Italicised definitions are based on Neelands and Goode 2015).</i>	
<b>Session One</b>	
<b>Spectrum-of-Difference (SoD)</b> <i>Pupils place themselves on an imaginary or physical line, linking two alternatives, indicating their preference by their position on said line.</i>	Pupils stood on an imaginary line representing how they felt about their transition. Next, pupils noted their position, discussed choices with neighbours and full class.
<b>Teacher-in-Role (TiR)</b> <i>The organiser manages the theatrical context from within the drama world to stimulate group involvement through role.</i>	In role as a Samantha, the researcher shared her transition thoughts and feelings.

<p><b>Role-on-the-Wall (RoW)</b></p> <p><i>A role is represented as a human figure ‘on the wall’ where information is added or read as the drama develops. The role can be adopted by anyone during improvisations enabling collective representations.</i></p>	<p>Pupils drew a human outline representing Samantha. Inside the outline they recorded facts about her transition. Pupils noted questions on the outside.</p> <p>(Pupils re-visited their RoW throughout the three sessions.)</p>
<p><b>Hot-Seating (with TiR)</b></p> <p><i>The group question a role-player ‘in character’ either as themselves or in role.</i></p>	<p>In role as Samantha, the researcher sat in a hot-seat enabling pupils to ask questions from their RoW. Thereafter, pupils updated their RoW based on Samantha’s answers.</p>
<p><b>Still-Image (SI)</b></p> <p><i>Groups create an image using their bodies highlighting a key moment, idea or theme.</i></p>	<p>Pupils created a SI representing Samantha’s feelings.</p>
<p><b>Thought-Tracking (TT)</b></p> <p><i>Action is frozen and participants, in role, are selected to reveal their role’s private thoughts.</i></p>	<p>Using the previous SI, pupils used TT to provide an insight into their character’s thoughts.</p>
<p><b>Session Two</b></p>	
<p><b>The Ripple (R)</b></p> <p><i>Characters involved in an unresolved moment are sculpted into a SI. The image is brought to life with each character making one movement and sound in turn.</i></p>	<p>Building upon the SI and TT, pupils slowly brought their images to life using one movement and sound.</p>
<p><b>Small-Group Play-Making</b></p> <p><i>Small groups devise and present an improvisation telling a story representing a hypothesis or demonstrating alternative views/actions.</i></p>	<p>Building upon their previous SI, TT and R, pupils devised a short-improvised scene.</p>
<p><b>A-Day-in-the-Life (AL)</b></p> <p><i>Working backwards from an important event in the drama, the group fill in the story’s historical gaps to chart how characters arrived at an event.</i></p>	<p>Working back from Samantha’s first day in secondary, small groups created scenes, charting her experiences, thoughts and feelings.</p>
<p><b>Narration</b></p> <p><i>Used either inside or outside the dramatic context, the organiser provides a narrative link, or the participants report back in story form while providing a narrative to support the action.</i></p>	<p>Groups were labelled A to D. A provide a narration for B, B for C, C for D and D for A. Narrations:</p> <p>A – Samantha’s primary seven peers’ hopes and fears for her</p>

	<p>transition.</p> <p>B – Samantha’s hopes and fears for secondary school and her future</p> <p>C – Samantha’s memories of past transitions</p> <p>D – Samantha’s parent’s hopes and fears for her.</p>
<b>Session Three</b>	
<p><b>Teacher-in-Role</b></p> <p><i>(See above entry.)</i></p>	<p>In role as the primary Head Teacher, the pupils and the researcher discussed what should be included in Samantha’s primary-secondary transition report.</p>
<p><b>Diaries-Letters-Journals-Messages</b></p> <p><i>Texts written in or out of role as a means of reflecting on past moments, or introduced by the organiser to add tension, or as evidence, or to review the work, or building a cumulative account of a drama sequence.</i></p>	<p>Pupils wrote a collective letter outlining potential supports for Samantha.</p>
<p><b>Mantle-of-the Expert (MoE)</b></p> <p><i>The group become expert characters, relevant to a task-orientated situation, which they have the skills to resolve.</i></p>	<p>Pupils adopted an expert role as a secondary teacher and discussed transition supports available to Samantha. Individual groups created a scene demonstrating these supports.</p>
<p><b>Forum-Theatre</b></p> <p><i>A small group of actors enacts a scenario relevant to the drama’s issues to the larger group (observers). The actors and observers can stop the action when they feel it is losing direction, or if they require help, or if it loses authenticity. Observers can assume roles or add to them. The convention is often mediated through a joker who has the power to freeze the action and ask observers for suggestions.</i></p>	<p>Pupils selected one scene from (MoE) to forum.</p>
<p><b>Spectrum-of-Difference</b></p> <p><i>(See above entry.)</i></p>	<p>Pupils repeated the SOD standing at the same place from the first iteration. Then, they were asked how they now felt about their transition and moved (or stood still) to a new position on the SOD.</p>

## **Methodology**

A case study approach suits drama research as it: provides flexibility in documenting the social nature of the work; supports participants' exploration of drama and empowers participants in the process (Carroll 1996). The researcher, as the drama organiser, gathered data by participating alongside the pupils inside and outside of the fiction. Winston (2006: 43) proposes that case study methodology enables drama researchers and pupils to work together as it strikes a chord '...with the forms of knowledge created by the art form of drama itself'. Therefore, a collective case study methodology was adopted as all three lessons were repeated with different primary seven classes in their own schools (Stake 2000).

### Data collection

#### *Pupil questionnaires*

Questionnaires were constructed using appropriate language to create clear and unambiguous questions (Munn and Drever, 1990) and were issued at the end of the sessions (seventy-eight responses) with an additional one completed at the end of secondary term one (forty-nine responses due to absence and pupils transitioning to alternative secondary schools).

#### *Teacher semi-structured interviews*

One semi-structured interview was undertaken and recorded with each teacher after the final drama session. Generic questions were asked about overall thoughts and opinions of the intervention followed by specific ones on Drama Conventions and transition.

#### *Pupil focus groups*

A thirty-minute recorded focus group, for each school, was conducted after the third session and consisted of six pupils (3 males and 3 females) who were randomly selected by their teacher. The focus group commenced with general questions, then focused on specifics relating to Samantha's transition, and finally on how their experience with Drama Conventions might have supported their transition or not.

#### *Teacher observations of sessions*

Teachers were issued with an observation protocol sheet with headings corresponding to the individual session plan episodes; teachers noted reflections and descriptions across all three sessions (Creswell 2014).

#### *Researcher diary*

The researcher diary was used throughout the sessions to record and explore participants' voices and were written up after each session (Taylor 1998).

### Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña's (2014) framework for qualitative analysis was used to explore, describe, order, explain and make sense of the data. Initially, data was transcribed before assigning first level codes, in the form of a descriptive labels, to enable the process of ordering data chunks. Thereafter, second level pattern coding was used to group the first level codes together into emergent patterns. Next, a map of pattern codes was used to establish points of commonality. This led to emergent themes that unified the codes which enabled the researcher to draw and verify conclusions (ibid, 2014). Data was stored on a password protected computer with participant hard copies secured in a locked safe.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Theme One: Drama as a pedagogical approach creating real world transition learning experiences

Pupils and teachers indicated that Drama Conventions enabled learners to assume roles and transfer their learning between the drama and real world,

Yea. Because acting it out helped us think about going to \*\*\* (Primary School L, Pupil 4)

Drama is acting as a preparation for secondary. It was really up to them where they took it, and I suppose through that maybe they guided it towards what they were concerned about (Teacher G).

Teachers noted that pupils acting 'as if' created a learning-centred curriculum based on their transition concerns. This established a sense of detachment which supported pupil criticality of the fiction while returning to the real world having changed some internal variables (Somers 1994),

When you are acting it out you are experiencing it, and then when the teacher tells you it just sounds like a bunch of words, but when you are experiencing it, you feel it (Primary School P, Pupil 1).

To counter a formal transition lesson, where a teacher's summary 'just sounds like a bunch of words (School P, Pupil 1)', the pupils, their teacher and the researcher collaborated together to create a drama structure (Anderson 2012). The Drama Convention of Teacher-in-Role maintained pupils' interest in transition learning,

Listening to the story with Sir [the researcher] being Samantha. It was really interesting and fun (Primary School L, Pupil 1).

It appears that Teacher-in-Role motivates pupils by engaging them in the drama world (Neelands 1984, O'Toole & Stinson 2015) on the theme of transition. Teachers indicated that Teacher-in-Role eased pupils into the drama while modelling behaviours and commitment,

I haven't done teacher-in-role and a few boys were giggling, but very quickly they just accepted that's what happens. When they saw that you [the researcher] were serious about it, and it wasn't a giggle, it made them stop in their shoes and think OK this is what we have to do now (Teacher P).

Indeed, Teacher G commented that when Teacher-in-Role was implemented the,

...children, were on board and 'believing' character. Believed teacher and teacher-in-role (Teacher G)

The pupils' and teacher's comments indicate that Teacher-in-Role motivates young people's investigation of complex life situations (Balaisis 2002) such as transition. For example, Teacher-in-Role supported pupils' understanding of Samantha's 'complex life situations' by relating her transition experiences to that of their own,

...when you [researcher] were acting Samantha, it helped me think about going to secondary (Primary School L, Pupil 4).

They seemed to understand the situation and enjoyed this - interesting to see how they interpreted the story and linked back to their own lives (Teacher P).

Learning through the fictional narrative enabled pupils to question primary-secondary transition processes. For example, during Teacher-in-Role with Hot-Seating, the pupils stated,

I liked asking Samantha questions in the hot-seat because I found out more about her, like going to secondary, and made me want to find out more about it (School P, Pupil 10).

Therefore, Teacher-in-Role and Hot-Seating supported pupils' emotional engagement with the drama and sustained their [transition] interests (Winston and Tandy 2009). Working in role empowered pupils to speak, with authority, regarding a school's transition practice,

Primary School P, Pupil 1	It helps us understand how it is going to be and how we are going to act. Not everyone is confident about going, if I am not confident, I can go to a teacher or a buddy.
Primary School P, Pupil 4 Researcher	You can meet all different people at clubs. Did you know about all the supports before we started the drama?
Primary School P, Pupil 4 Researcher	Just a wee (small) bit. Did the drama help you understand transition supports?
Primary School P, Pupil 4 Primary School P, Pupil 2	Aye (Yes). It helps you understand what teachers do in secondary, they find out things about you, who you work well with, what classes they should put you in. All the children don't know about Samantha and lacking confidence. If you do this class you will know how it feels and you will know how to solve the problem.

Pupil role adoption extended into collective writing, via Diaries-Letters-Journals-Messages, which required them to write Samantha's transition report,

It taught us how we would feel if we were a teacher, how teachers prepare for it [transition], how the teachers react and how the teachers communicate with other teachers...to help Samantha and the support they give us (Primary School P, Pupil 3).

The pupils' experiences with 'Writing-in-Role' (alternative name for Diaries-Letters-Journals-Messages) motivated them to write and reinforced their expert roles and knowledge (McNaughton 1997). In addition, pupils acknowledged that their involvement in the drama developed their social-emotional learning,

Creating scenarios about Samantha about how she goes (sic) on in school and changing them. I liked this because it's taught us how to deal with things like that happening in \*\*\* and how to relate and sort it (Primary School L, Pupil 15).

This highlights the potential benefit of drama's fictional safety-net, to rehearse transition issues. Neelands (2009, 183) argues that when pupils adopt fictitious roles it empowers them to observe their and others' behaviour from unfamiliar perspectives; the resulting emotional experience is real even though the action is fictional – 'a secure environment without ever being a comfort zone'. Neelands' (2009) comment is supported when considering pupils' opinions on how the drama prepared them for transition,

Primary School P, Pupil 4	It helped us understand the building and how it was going to be bigger than this, and to meet the teachers and there are more teachers and children than in primary school.
Primary School P, Pupil 6	The drama helped you understand that if you have any troubles you can go to a teacher. And like if when we went to the school we got to find out where to go and stuff.
Primary School P, Pupil 1	Going to *** [school's name] transition day helped you with the building, but the drama helped you get the friends and mental stuff.

Pupils' thoughts on using drama to support their emotional and social transition, might address Jindal-Snape and Miller's (2008) and Galton and McLellan's (2018) critique that schools should focus on pupils' social-emotional transition experiences. This data highlights that if schools use a Drama Conventions transition approach, pupils can devise scenarios that are recognisable to their own, enabling them to form a relationship between the fiction and reality and change or bolster their transition outlook.

### Theme Two: Drama Conventions ability to develop empathy and meta-awareness during transition

Bowell and Heap (2013) note that drama provides a framework to explore ideas, feelings and meaning making, enabling pupils to understand themselves and others. During Spectrum-of-Difference pupils and teachers were aware of others' transition emotions,

I have learnt that some people are not that confident, but some are confident in the line. They have mixed feelings (Primary School G, Pupil 21).

I think it was \*\*\* that said it made them think about other people's feelings in the line. I remember when he said that I thought 'ohh' cos it made me think they are thinking about what we have been talking about, like feelings - some things have actually sunk in (Teacher L).

Pupils' and teachers' experiences of Spectrum-of-Difference supports primary-secondary transition literature that argues learners might exhibit a mixture of feelings during transition (Symonds 2015). Understanding others' transition feelings enables pupils to develop an appreciation of self. Finch (1995, 201) comments that humans make sense of their lives, emotions and attitudes by positioning themselves 'in the grammar of the public language that I have learned'. For example, hearing characters' transition feelings, through Thought-Tracking, developed pupils' empathetic skills,

I know that people are scared and happy about going to high school. I know more about feelings and emotions. I know more about it because of thought tracking (Primary School P, Pupil 23).

I think when you touched them on their shoulders, they were able to speak in role you could see the thought tracking. You could see they were very in tune with the character and you could see the empathy (Teacher P).

Role playing develops pupils' empathic skills and an understanding of another's perspective (Baldwin 2008),

Primary School P, Pupil 3	You can put yourself in their shoes.
Researcher	Is that a good thing to do?
Primary School P, Pupil 3	Yeah, it lets you feel how they feel like and they can feel what you feel like.
Researcher	For primary-secondary transition?
Primary School P, Pupil 4	Yeah.
Researcher	Why?
Primary School P, Pupil 4	You put yourself in their shoes and they feel really sad about going, if someone is going to a different school, from where you are going, you should put yourself in their shoes and feel how they feel.

...empathising with different people and trying to put yourself in someone else's position and that people all see things from different transition perspectives - they really understood that (Teacher L).

Clark et al. (1997, 24) indicate role-playing develops pupils' imagination to re-play or pre-live experiences, which, in turn supports reflection and anticipate future events; this improves self-knowledge and offers new 'dynamic perceptions of self'. Pupils and teachers indicated that relating the fictional and drama world together, helped learners' confidence and outlook about their transition,

Primary School L, Pupil 15	My favourite part was being a teacher and doing an act about Samantha's first day in secondary. Because it was really exciting and fun and I got to learn more about how I feel.
Researcher	How does that make you feel?
Primary School L, Pupil 2	Confident and happy that if you were having problems you could go to them [teachers] for help.

I think certainly some of them have expressed being more confident and feel less worried about what they are going on to experience when they get to secondary school (Teacher G).

Pupils' and teachers' experiences and views of using Drama Conventions and story at transition indicates that pupils can explore their inner experiences, while developing an understanding of what makes them human (Barton and Booth 1990) within a secure learning environment (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2008, 230). This is because theatre acts as a metaphorical mirror enabling pupils to consider themselves and their relationship to others (Neelands and Goode 2015). Therefore, adopting Drama Conventions, at primary-secondary transition, provides pupils with an empathetic learning environment to articulate and understand their own and others' transition responses.

### Theme Three: Drama Conventions ability to develop citizenship, solidarity and multiple perspectives during transition

A fictional context enables pupils to behave in different ways while being supportive of others on issues of common concern (Baldwin 2012). Pupils demonstrated this by recognising Samantha's concerns in others and by offering support and advice,

We are OK about going to secondary school, so we should try to help people who aren't as confident as us (Primary School G, Pupil 9).

...offered advice rather than ask questions (Teacher L).

When pupils offer one another advice they draw upon their experience of school and friendships (Winston and Tandy 2009). Pupils' actions suggest that they were demonstrating practices of 'care, trust and community support' (Nicholson 2014, 29) to those in transition need. Teachers indicated that the safety-net of the fiction developed pupils' transition citizenship as they offered advice to one another (which they might not have been able to do in real life),

There is always something at the back of their minds that because they are not real they are more likely to say things or do things that they might hold back if they knew the person (Teacher L).

Therefore, role distance empowered pupils to express their transition thoughts and feelings (Baldwin 2012). Moreover, working in role supported pupils' understanding of transition citizenship,

...doing the role, as the teachers, we were talking about what we could do to help Samantha. We came up with a few thoughts and like we could take her to clubs and show her around the school. If she would have one or two friends then that would be OK she can get into a group with a couple of people (Primary School L, Pupil 4).

Primary pupil L4's comment denotes that learners linked their fictional transition understanding with personal feelings. Therefore, drama developed pupils' self-awareness while promoting their 'intelligent caring and a commitment to the well-being of self and others' (Anderson 2012, 73). Developing a commitment to the well-being of others supported pupils' self-worth as they shared similar transition feelings with peers. For example, during group discussion, before and after roleplay activities, pupils created opportunities for solidarity due to establishing common ground, and 'preserving a compact of affirmation, solidarity and critique' (Garcia 1998, 155). The pupils' participation with Drama Conventions therefore developed a sense of solidarity and established a collective purpose to solve Samantha's (and their) transition concerns. Neelands (2007, 315) proposes that the democratic process of an ensemble bestows participants with 'a second order identity as citizens struggling together.' Acting as citizens struggling together required pupils to dialogue with multiple (transition) perspectives and challenge any preconceived thoughts which they have about peers (Gallagher and Ntelioglou 2015). For example, Spectrum-of-Difference, supported pupils' understanding of peers' transition perspectives by discussing others' views with their own (Fleming 2011),

I think it made them more aware that other people didn't think the move up was a good one (Teacher L).

Teacher L's comments were confirmed by pupils who indicated that they developed their understanding of multiple transition perspectives due to their drama involvement,

Primary School P, Pupil 3	You could hear about what they were thinking inside.
Primary School P, Pupil 1	Yeah, I knew that Samantha wasn't confident, but then we found out she had no supporters and no one to help her. We needed to help her.

Therefore, drama enables direct access to the character's inner thoughts by penetrating their private world (Fleming 2011). However, having access to a character's transition thoughts enables pupils to relate these to their lives (Edminson 2016). Asking oneself 'Who am I?', in the dramatic inquiry, can be a complex task, as pupils must act and react to events with more or less authority than they might have in reality. For example, teachers indicated that pupils, during Mantle-of-the-Expert, shared their transition thoughts and opinions from a higher status than they normally have in class,

I think that seemed to cause more of a dilemma for them because, while they always want to be the teacher, and be in charge, I think when they had to come up with solutions, they found this difficult. I think that is good because it is making them have to think and see something from a different perspective and try and empathise as well (Teacher L).

Teacher L's comments indicate that Mantle-of-the-Expert enabled pupils to enter the fiction with information to share and make a difference (McGuinn, 2014). Getting 'inside the skin of the expert' (Bolton 1998, 244) enabled pupils to succeed in the drama and problem solve (Heathcote 1984) their character's possible transition experiences. Therefore, Mantle-of-the-Expert changes pupils' status and provides an objective viewpoint on events that are often tense with emotions and contrasting attitudes (Prendiville and Toye 2007). Relating to their transition, pupils highlighted that they were able to 'act out' and alter their character's perspectives, through Forum Theatre,

Selecting a part about Samantha and then doing it in front of everyone and they could say stop or do a character themselves –it was interesting to hear what people were saying so it can change the play (Primary School G, Pupil 4).

Pupils remarked that 'acting out', and observing different characters, developed their understanding of others' perspectives and supported their transition citizenship and solidarity. Moreover, using Drama Conventions, at transition, helps pupils to look beyond the fictional narrative and hold the essence of the experience with them in the real world.

#### Theme Four: Drama Conventions and transition bullying

Drama is suitable for addressing complex cultural differences such as conflict and bullying amongst learners (Burton 2015). Pupils indicated that they enjoyed learning about potential transition bullying through drama,

Because it really helped me and now, I know what to do if I am being bullied because we all put ourselves in her shoes (Primary School G, Pupil 13).

Using drama to discuss bullying at transition enables pupils to create scenes including the first day in school, bullying, friendships etc. which they create themselves (Jindal-Snape 2012). In doing so, pupils' fictional engagement provides strategies to effectively deal with potential bullying incidents (Burton 2012). Teachers commented that pupils understood available anti-bullying supports,

He said that the drama has helped him to prepare. Yes, I think that is far better than us just saying if you see bullying go and tell an adult (Teacher G).

Teacher G's comments indicate that the drama helped pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of conflict and prepared them for acrimonious situations which may, or may not, occur (Burton 2015) throughout the transition and wider life journey. Pupils indicated,

I learned about how Samantha was feeling during a 24-hour time. There were people bullying. So, if I get or see bullying, I should tell a teacher (Primary School L, Pupil 8).

Pupils, while demonstrating their understanding of bullying, also expressed their wish to counter this injustice in school,

She really needs help Sir [researcher], we should try and help her...I would give her a hug and tell her that everything is going to be OK (Primary School G, Pupil 3).

It appears that due to pupil involvement and exploration with drama and transition it developed their empathy towards the character of Samantha and peers on the issue of transition bullying. Indeed, the pupils' comments indicate, that because of their involvement in the drama, they are less likely to bully, offer support to those who are in need and inform teachers (Baldwin, 2009). Expressions of support are not unusual as pupils adopt a strong stance regarding their feelings on justice and fairness in the drama that they create (Neelands 1992). Teachers observed that Forum-Theatre enabled pupils to reflect on the consequences of bullying,

Yes, all that kind of restorative justice in Forum-Theatre, and what you do to somebody and how it can affect them and how bad it can make them feel (Teacher G).

Using enhanced Forum-Theatre (interactive theatre enabling the audience to stop the action and adopt roles to investigate the play's issues via peer teaching and Drama Conventions) helps pupils deal with conflict and bullying (Burton 2012). However, teachers indicated that some bullying scenes were,

...kind of exaggerated...to the nth degree of bullying whether it is what they perceived might happen or what they have seen on television...Maybe that is them just acting out what their fears are (Teacher P).

This might have been due to pupils being inexperienced with drama and thus adopting stereotypical characters which have their genesis in television or popular media (Walker et al. 2016). Nevertheless,

pupils indicated that Drama Conventions, supported their understanding for the potential reasons of bullying at transition,

Drama lessons have helped me understand more about bullies and why they bully people (Primary School G, Pupil 6).

Developing an awareness of the reasons for bullying helped pupils understand the bully's thoughts; in the created scenarios bullies often bullied because they were fearful of being bullied themselves. Additionally, pupils discovered that problem solving transition bullying provided opportunities for reconciliation between the bully and victim,

When Samantha walked out of the classroom the bully confronted her and said, "...I heard what Miss said and I'm sorry for upsetting you...if you want, we could maybe be friends (pause) I'm sorry." (Research diary).

In summary, pupils' and teachers' indicate that enacting scenarios which dealt with themes of bullying at transition empowers learners to discuss the reasons why it occurs and prevent it from happening (Burton 2012).

### **Pupils' secondary reflections on their primary drama experience**

In the follow-up secondary questionnaire, the following themes emerged on pupils' views of the drama intervention in primary school.

#### *Preparation for secondary*

All pupils indicated that the drama prepared them for secondary,

...gave me an idea what it was like in high school because of Samantha (Secondary Pupil 4)

Pupils highlighted that the drama helped them understand and manage the process of transition change in the fiction and relate this to the real world.

#### *Bullying*

Acting out bullying scenarios alleviated pupils' transition fears while highlighting impacts and preventative strategies,

...it helped us learn to never bully anyone and what it can cause (Secondary Pupil 9)

Yes, because my P7 classmates gave ideas about how to help Samantha and that would help me if I was in that problem (Secondary Pupil 41)

Therefore, drama contributed to pupils' transition resilience, on the issue of bullying, by managing potential risks (Newman and Blackburn 2002) empowering them to explore concerns and find solutions in the fictional before actioning in the real world (Neelands 1984).

#### *Meta-awareness*

Pupils mentioned that the drama developed their understanding of transition feelings,

Good, as I am more confident in all of this and being able to identify expressions and feelings and know that not all feelings (something you feel) can cause problems in future (Secondary Pupil 5)

Developing confidence helped pupils' understanding of their transition emotions,

It made me happy and not so worried about going to secondary (Secondary Pupil 32)

Lowered confidence and self-esteem are issues during transitions (Jindal-Snape and Miller 2010). However, it appears that using drama might counter any immediate threats to pupil confidence and self-esteem.

#### *Multiple perspectives*

Pupils indicated that the drama developed their understanding of others' transition feelings,

I learnt that not everyone feels happy coming here to [secondary school name] (Secondary Pupil 48)

Understanding that others' share similar or different transition perspectives empowers pupils to divulge their own hopes/fears. Therefore, when pupils' share their transition perspectives, instead of solely internalising their thoughts, it positively impacts their behaviour including other aspects of life (Jindal-Snape et al. 2011).

#### *Empathy and friendship*

All pupils indicated that the drama developed their empathetic skills and stated that they would support peers struggling with transition,

I saw a boy called \*\*\* getting bullied and I told him to go to the head teacher's office. The drama helped me empathise because we told Samantha to tell the teacher (Secondary Pupil 41)

Pupils indicated that their involvement in the drama taught them how to make new friendships in secondary,

...the [drama] stuff taught me about how to make friends (Secondary Pupil 14)

Pupils' social-emotional development increased as the drama helped them to be 'kind to others' and 'help everyone to make friends' (Secondary Pupils 23 and 22 respectively) (Jindal-Snape and Vettrano 2007). Adeyemo (2005) indicates pupils with secure social emotional skills have a relatively successful transition.

#### *Pupil's recommendations*

All pupils recommended using a transition drama with primary pupils,

...it gives P7s an idea what it is like in high school (Secondary Pupil 4)

However, there was a consensus that the work should commence earlier in primary seven,

I would start at the start of the year, so they have more time (Secondary Pupil 34)

#### **Limitations**

Though this urban study was limited to three associated primary schools in Scotland, making the results non generalisable, its findings are comparable with similar transition research (Hammond 2015; Jindal-Snape et al. 2011; Walsh-Bowers 1997).

There are some inevitable issues which weaken the data such as: pupil absenteeism, however, this was mitigated by using a Drama Conventions approach, and not assigning individual roles, so that continuity of the three lessons were not negatively impacted; low return of the secondary pupil questionnaire due to some pupils transitioning to a 'different' secondary school than the 'area' comprehensive; no focus group of pupils once in secondary school; and, no ongoing drama activity in secondary school which sought to determine the benefit of the primary support while supporting ongoing transitions.

The researcher's participation in the study could have biased the pupils' responses due to adopting a participant observer stance (Miles, Huberman and Saldana 2014). Therefore, data interpretation might be questioned due to researcher bias. However, to minimise researcher bias, the researcher adopted Creswell's (2014) and Miles, Huberman and Saldana's (2014) respective strategies for trustworthiness and ethical considerations, while also being bound by BERA's ethical guidelines (BERA 2011). In addition, the study was scrutinised and approved by the University of Strathclyde's Ethic Committee.

## **Recommendations**

### *Practice*

Primary schools could use Drama Conventions to support pupils' transition thoughts, feelings and understanding. Basing the drama structure on a fictional character's transition provides a relevant context for pupils and encourages them to problem-solve the protagonists (and their) transition. Pupils, using the anonymity provided by the drama, can rehearse their transition concerns and find alternative positive outcomes while also bolstering their hopes. To support teachers with this endeavour, primary and secondary schools need time to develop an understanding of each sector's transition approaches. Additionally, primary and secondary colleagues might be offered drama education training to support the development of a drama transition pedagogy. Creating and facilitating a drama transition curriculum with staff from both sectors, might provide continuity of transition learning. The drama could centre on pupil transition needs by dealing with local concerns (as well as universal transition issues) through personalisation and choice. As the pupils indicated, the intervention should be initiated as early as possible in primary school to support pupils ongoing educational and life transitions. In doing so, this might minimise the concept that transition is a singular event while recognising that many young people are aware of the multiple and multidimensional transitions which they encounter throughout their schooling and wider life (Jindal-Snape 2016).

### *Implications for transition policy*

Creative approaches can be intimidating for some who question its legitimacy (Jindal-Snape 2012) when devising transition policy documentation. However, as this data shows, a Drama Convention pedagogical approach supports pupils' transition understanding. Therefore, policy makers might consider what opportunities and supports they can provide schools to implement drama throughout educational and life transitions. Additionally, they might consider to what extent transition is discussed during Initial Teacher Education and how creative and collaborative transition learning opportunities, between primary and secondary teaching students, support their and pupil transition.

### *Future research*

Future studies might consider using Drama Conventions with a larger participant group, across multiple sites and local authorities (urban and rural settings). Additionally, future research might consider implementing a Drama Conventions approach to transition throughout primary and secondary school. In doing so, future studies might gather additional longitudinal data relating to pupils' and teachers' views and experiences on the intervention. Transition bullying concerned pupils and future research could investigate how Drama Conventions might support this theme. Additionally, as this research data showed, when pupils are given the opportunity to discuss potential bullying at transition they were resourced to manage with these types of incidents and support those in need. In addition, drama research could be implemented with pupils, parents and teachers to support ongoing transitions.

## **Conclusions**

Drama Conventions enabled pupils to explore primary-secondary transition, through 'as if' scenarios, establishing a motivational 'here and now' curriculum. Working in both the real and fictional worlds enabled pupils to develop their understanding of multiple perspectives as they discussed, role-played and reflected on their and others' learning. This in turn, developed learners' sense of empathy, meta-awareness, solidarity and citizenship as they discovered that others felt the same as they did about transition, with many offering and pledging support to those in need. Like other international

transition studies, the pupils in this study mentioned their bullying concerns (Lucey and Reay 2000). However, if pupils are provided with opportunities to create a fictional context and experiment with bullying narratives, they can collectively problem solve and reflect on preventing or stopping these incidents. This suggests the importance pupils place on transition friendships and positive teacher-pupil relationships. Additionally, pupils indicated that their respect for teachers and knowledge of transition supports, increased due to adopting a teacher role and solving transition issues. Therefore, pupils utilised abstract transition constructs and enacted them through a fictional character's story - aiming to address her (and their) transition concerns and promoting their hopes. Pupil and teachers concluded that using Drama Conventions at transition supports learners' social and emotional development and their understanding of transition processes.

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