How does a School play impact on students and teachers personally and professionally, and in relation to the school community?

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A Research & Development Project

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Abstract

Throughout the early stages of my teaching career my school have been seeking to improve GCSE attainment and progress eight scores. This has been due to a decline in these in comparison with the national average over the past four years. Whilst the initiatives being implemented to try and support this are appropriate and necessary, they have at times been felt to be to the determent of school community and have also pulled focus away from the Arts subjects and extracurricular activities. In order to try and restore these feelings of school community I decided to organise a school play, an activity that students and teachers could work on alongside each other to achieve a common goal. I worked collaboratively on this with the head of Drama, in the hope that we could see an improvement in feelings of school community and connectedness for both teachers and students.

The rehearsal process began in the middle of September and the play was performed in the last week of term in December. Through this project I seek to investigate the impact that participating in a school play has on students and teachers' feelings of school connectedness and community, and whether participating in an extracurricular Drama group activity has a positive impact on this.

The research in this area generally covers the positive impact that extracurricular Drama has on students' self-esteem and confidence. It also discusses the rehearsal room being a safe space for students to explore emotions and practise interpersonal skills and communication, as well as the area that I am most interested in understanding, how participating in Drama activities can enhance or support feelings of school community and connectedness.

There was a small number of participants in this study which means that it is difficult to take a broad view. A significant proportion of participants in the play are those that struggle of find acceptance elsewhere in the school community for a number of reasons, so sought this through Drama. After conducting two rounds of qualitative questionnaires and two rounds of individual

interviews with a smaller range of students and staff involved some of the most significant findings were that the students confidence grew throughout the rehearsal process, and was sustained even after the play was completed. They also reported increased social interactions and feelings of school connectedness and desire to attend school while the play was being rehearsed, however this decreased after the play was completed. Teachers and students alike commented on viewing each other in a different light after the play and felt that this led to stronger feelings of community. A stronger sense of community was also enhanced by knowing a wider range of people from across year groups.

Overall, the aim of this study was to explore whether participating in a school play could enhance feelings of school connectedness and positively impact on the school community. Taking this research into consideration, it is my desire to endeavour to create and offer a more sustainable way that the feelings of community and connectedness created through the play could be sustained in the long term for both students and teachers.

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Introduction

Within the field of educational research, the importance of students' feelings of school connectedness and community are often highlighted as key in the narrative of flourishing. The need for 'group membership', particularly in adolescence is important for promoting interest and confidence in learning (Deci, Vallard, Relics & Ryan, 1991). The feelings of acceptance that this brings contribute to sentiments of school connectedness. School connectedness is defined as 'The extent to which students feel personally accepted and respected, included and supported by others in the school environment' (Goodenow, 1993, pg80). Feelings of school connectedness have far reaching consequences for student's futures, affecting self-esteem, confidence, and even their tendency towards risky behaviours and mental health (Frostick et al, 2018). A key way for these qualities to be developed in students is through their participation in extracurricular activities.

School based extracurricular activities benefit students positively by creating these powerful feelings of school connectedness, and also developing more positive relationships with peers and adults (Fredrick & Simpkins, 2013). Research by the Sutton Trust also states that participating in performing arts clubs, sports or musical activities has a two fold benefit of building these positive connections within school and in building resilience, motivation and confidence, as well as adding to a child's cultural capital which could have academic benefits (Montacute & Cullinane, 2018). For this project I will explore the advantages of Drama as an extracurricular activity, and the particular benefits it has on students' feelings of school community and connectedness. There is a great deal of literature claiming the academic benefits participating in Drama activities has, however, with a large amount of focus being placed on pursuing academic success in state schools I want to look into the personal benefits that participation in Drama activities has on both students and teachers.

School context

Since beginning my teaching career at my school four years ago I have noted the constant driving motivation has been to improve attainment and progress eight scores. This has been due to the drop in students gaining five GCSEs in grades A*-C or (4-9) over the past few years in terms of the national average. The school has been trialling many initiatives to raise attainment, which is completely understandable, however I feel that this at times has been to the detriment of the cultivation of a caring school community.

At the end of the summer term of 2019, Mrs. Smith who is the head of Drama, and I discussed with some other teachers from a range of subjects, the idea of putting on a school play in the hope of having a positive impact on the school community. Here we began to set out our collaborative plans for how we would begin conducting the project and how best to get senior leadership to consent. In the past number of years due to the stronger focus on raising attainment, the creative subjects have been largely pushed aside, so we had to negotiate with senior leadership to allow the involvement of all students, even those currently in years eleven and thirteen. Due to Mrs. Smith's seniority she took the lead on negotiations while I focussed more on engaging student interest in both the production and performing roles. When we were given permission by SLT to begin work on the production, Mrs. Smith and I continued to work collaboratively, but I had a particular focus on directing the performance and running rehearsals. Based on our intended outcomes and what I wanted to achieve through putting on a school production I developed these questions to frame my review of the literature:

- *What is the positive impact of a School production on the school community?*
- *What is the impact of a school production on feelings of school connectedness for teachers and students?*
- *What is the impact on teacher student perceptions after taking part in a school production?*
- *What do teachers and students perceive the general benefits of being involved in a school production are?*

Review of the literature

1. What is the positive impact of a School production on the school community?

When considering this question initially, I feel it is important to consider how school community benefits students' experiences of school. Frostik et al. (2018) note at the beginning of their investigation into how belonging in the school community affects student aspirations, that the need for children to feel a sense of belonging and group membership is vital in promoting confidence and a desire to learn . As the majority of a child's day is spent in school, their school community has a profound influence on not only their academic success, but their mental health (Forstik et al., 2018). With this in mind it is interesting to consider the impact that extracurricular drama activities can have developing this kind of positive culture within a school, and the power of imagination and creativity to strengthen feelings of community (Anderson & Donelan, 2009). The majority of research in the area of school Drama productions and their positive impact on the school community seem to run along two themes; The fundamental need to belong, and the creation and benefits of a safe sub-community within the whole school environment that Drama can offer for students, particularly focussing on ensemble work.

When considering this first idea Brendtro and Larson (2004) from their work into developing student resilience through group activities state that there is an innate need within all of us to belong, and when those feelings are met in the correct context, there is a substantial increase in healthy self-esteem (Brendtro & Larson, 2004). Within the context of involvement with Drama, this notion is backed up by Schulte et al. (2018) in their work with pre-service Drama teachers discussing the impact of their own school Drama experiences. A common theme within their responses was the idea that where they struggled to find a place to belong in the wider school community, involvement in Drama gave them the acceptance that they needed to flourish. The participants also highlighted in their observations that the teachers involved in working with them on producing school performances also were key to creating this positive community feeling, and how the focus of

working towards a shared goal or outcome cemented these feelings (Schulte et al., 2018). This idea is further backed up by Ewing (2010) who acknowledged that school-based activities like this create a sense of community, identity, and social capital for the students involved (Ewing, 2010), however I will focus on this in more detail in the second section of my literature review.

Impact of school community on student outcomes

From my own experience of running extracurricular Drama activities, whilst a lot of the students who take part feel sure of their place within the school community, there is a significant proportion of students attracted to these activities who seem to struggle to have their need to belong met elsewhere in school life. Within my own school context, a number of these students generally also struggle with additional needs such as anxiety or autism. For these most vulnerable students Drama can have a massive impact on their social interactions, self-esteem and mental health. A key example of this is in the work of Dr Wayne Williams, who investigated the link between participation in extracurricular activities and raising self-esteem in 'at risk' students. His findings concluded that participation in extracurricular Drama activities provided these students with a positive social group experience and a safe space to be themselves. He also stated that through earning positive judgements from both teachers and peers their self-esteem grew (Williams, 1990). Deasy (2002) takes this further, highlighting in their research that involvement in school based extracurricular arts activities has at times been the only reason why students at risk of dropping out have stayed in school. The students interviewed in this study stated that the freedom and acceptance that they felt in these environments helped them to manage the lack of these feelings they experienced in their general classroom settings (Deasy, 2002). Both Williams and Deasy's findings can then be seen to confirm Deci and Ryan's findings from their work on self-determination theory, that the positive quality of an environment is internalised by students, and so the more supportive and accepting an environment the more self-acceptance will grow, along with authentic self-expression and

confidence (Deci & Ryan, 1991). However, I do wonder of this is a slightly idealistic view when considered in light of the external factors facing these students. As much as it is appealing to believe that students can, as a result of membership of these types of communities, modify their mental states into those more conducive to education (Campbell, 2011) Bruner holds the opinion that this is much too simplistic an assumption. He asserts that the prior experiences of students need to be understood as 'embodied matter', which can have a fundamental impact on the brain, and this is something which needs to be taken into consideration by teachers (Bruner, 1960). This theory leads me to question the long-term benefits of these feelings of school community created through participating in Drama activities. It suggests they are not powerful enough to override the individual context that each student is entering the school community from, particularly if the community created by the play only lasts several weeks.

Benefits for the wider school community and beyond

It is clear that students' self-esteem and wellbeing increase individually from the sense of belonging they gain from participating in extracurricular drama activities. It is also important to consider the wider implications of this for the wider school community. Much consideration is given to the positive impact that working as part of an ensemble can have on students. Indeed, as school productions nearly always form their foundations in ensemble work it could be said that students taking part in Drama productions almost become part of a smaller subculture within the wider context of the whole school community (Neelands, 2009). Neelands (2009) highlights the two fold benefit of students performing together in Drama activities; The promotion of healthy social relationships, where conditions for future societal encounters are modelled and practised, and the realisation of our interdependence on one and other as human beings (Neelands, 2009). Neelands sees this pseudo community, as a microcosm of society, allowing these children not simply to rehearse a play, but metaphorically rehearse for future encounters in the wider world, 'Shaping their

social actions as a community beyond the classroom'(Neelands, 2009, pg10). This idea is further built on by McGrath, writing on building community through theatre. He describes theatre as 'Authentic democracy' and a space where a voice is given to those who are marginalised or in minority, allowing them the opportunity to speak without fear of judgement (McGrath, 2002). This links back to my earlier point about the significant number of students who are attracted to Drama being those who struggle to find accepted in the wider school community. However, it must be acknowledged that there is a danger that these students could seek community in extracurricular Drama as a safe unchallenging place simply to hide without contributing to the community itself. Neelands seeks to dispel this fear by highlighting that rather than providing a hiding place, these Drama activities can offer a bridge between the classroom and the real world, better equipping these students to deal with wider school life issues. So, at their heart, facilitators of these groups are creating a safe space for children to thrive, without it ever becoming a comfort zone for them to hide away in (Neelands, 2009). Indeed Neelands desire is seconded by Abbs (2013) who theorises that students who are involved in school Drama productions, through the powerful personal experiences of working together closely, create a more understanding community within the ensemble (Abbs, 2013). This generally comes, as Boyes (2003) states in her account of facilitating a school Musical, when their focus shifts from their own performance to understanding their place in the wider context of whole show (Boyes, 2003).

Therefore we can conclude that Drama can help support a healthy school community by providing another area where students may not only uncover talents and have freedom to express themselves, but also have the space to develop holistically their understanding of others in order to aid their development into well rounded human beings. However, one area I feel that the literature fails to address is the longer-term impact of a school play on the school community as a whole. Yes, it is extremely positive that students will have a place within this pseudo community, but what about when the play is over, and the support of this community is removed? Will they be able to internalise the positives they have gained from the involvement in the production in a strong enough

way to be able to benefit from them and forge a place for themselves within the wider school community?

2. *What is the impact of a school production on feelings of school connectedness for teachers and students?*

One of the key ways that involvement in extracurricular Drama impacts on feelings of school connectedness for both students and teachers is because it transcends culture and creates common ground (Williams, 1990). This notion was further explained by Van Meale and Van Houtte (2010) in their work on developing relationships between teachers and students. They concluded that positive teacher student relationships, cultivated through working together on something like a school play, can combat students' feelings of alienation, thus creating feelings of positive school connectedness for these children through the relationships formed. They go on to highlight that more emphasis needs to be placed on the impact of student trust in teachers effecting students' feelings of connectedness to school (Van Meale & Van Houtte, 2010). Hallinan further develops this idea stating that when students perceive that their teacher's support and trust them, their attachment to school increases (Hallinan, 2008). If we consider this theory in the context of putting on a school production, we can see that the level of social capital that students can gain within the educational context of school increases when their teachers demonstrate their trust in them. Therefore, the more responsibility given to a student in the context of a school production is indicatory of the trust the teacher is placing in them. The more social capital gained by students working alongside their teachers in this way the more their feelings of positive school connectedness grow (Van Meale &Van Houtte, 2010) So it is evident that the more teachers show that they trust their students, the more they are willing to engage with the process and feel connected to school.

Drama activities can also improve school connectedness through allowing students to develop stronger and healthier interpersonal relationships both with their teachers and their peers.

Mavroudis and Bournell in their investigation into how Drama can counteract bullying, highlight the benefit of Drama in reducing aggression in young people and creating a safe space for students to work on confirming their identity (Mavroudis & Bournell, 2016). This is furthered by Boyes when she talks about the holistic benefits of student's involvement with Drama activities. She highlights that the feelings of school connectedness are not only limited to the involvement within the drama activities but they lead to afore mentioned 'at risk' students building stronger relationships with their learning as a whole (Boyes,2003). This is furthered by Deasy (2002) who states that students who are involved with Drama in school develop a better self-concept and as a result are more likely to stay in school, on average achieve better grades and in the future become more involved in their communities (Deasy, 2002). So we see from this that the combination of students finding their place within the school community and cultivating positive relationships with their peers and teachers seem both to lead to these positive outcomes. However, I do feel that it is worth questioning again the longevity of these benefits once the students finish work on the school play.

Process over outcome

There has been debate over whether the process of creating a school production or the end product, feedback, and feelings that it creates in students is the most important in creating these positive feelings about school for students. Gallagher and Needlands, investigating the impact of Drama activities on teenagers in Urban Toronto, strongly believe that the value in a Drama production lies in the process, and that the performance, although enjoyed by participants is just a by-product of the true value of the experience (Gallagher & Neelands, 2011). However, McCaslin, sharing her experience of working with children on a Drama production, states that both are equally important in building up school connectedness for students and neither one should be considered the means or the end (Mcaslin, 1995). Booth and O'Neill, also writing on the relational nature of theatre productions, state that the joy of school is in participation in the activity itself- whether within the

classroom of extracurricular activities (Booth & O'Neill, 1988). Indeed, McCaslin concludes by saying one of the key ways that involvement with school productions can create feelings of school connectedness is through the sparking of interest in the arts that it creates. He states that very often as soon as one show ends, students are asking what the next one will be (McCaslin, 1995). This does then seem in line with my earlier questioning of the longevity of the impact that participating in school productions can have on students. Are they able to fully internalise the benefits of the process and feelings of connectedness long after the parameters of the rehearsal room are removed?

What is interesting to note however is that not a lot of space in the literature surrounding school connectedness through Drama is devoted to the teachers involved. Goldstein, Lerner and Paterson, after their systematic 'Hybrid qualitative quantitative' investigation into adult stakeholders' perceptions of the impact that theatre activities have on students, concluded that the facilitators of these type of theatre programmes were all in agreement about the most successful strategies to use throughout a production in order to get the best out of students and create the most valuable rehearsal process. Despite these insights, Goldstein et al do question why the voices of stakeholders in these types of activities are largely omitted from the body of literature (Goldstein, Lermner & Patterson, 2019). Özgür-İşyar and Akay share this sentiment, that teachers do have insightful opinions on the effect of Drama, particularly where it is linked to their sense of efficacy (Özgü-İşyar & Akay, 2017). It is interesting then, that teachers' voices are largely absent from the body of literature. It is clear that teachers involved in school productions have a distinctive impact on the students' feelings of school connectedness throughout the play process, so the absence of their voice from the literature is confusing.

3. *What is the impact on teacher student perceptions after taking part in a school production?*

Due to the specific nature of this research question, there is no literature that directly deals with it, however my reading has led me to consider the benefits that students perceptions of their teachers have in education generally, and how these can be positively impacted by involvement in Drama activities. Prewett et al. (2019) on their longitudinal quantitative study into the impact of positive teacher- student relationships determined that there is an intrinsic link between positive student teacher relationship and a student having a positive academic outcome. Indeed, the resounding ideas from the literature are that the more positive teacher student perceptions are the more positive the students' academic trajectory will be (Crossnoe et al. 2010). The benefits of positive student teacher relationships were also investigated by Opendaker in 2011. They concluded, subsequent to completing a yearlong study, that over time autonomous student motivation diminished, however, the alteration in progress and reawakened drive could be linked to certain teachers relationships with their students, therefore leading them to conclude that on some level a positive student teacher relationship can preserve student motivation (Opdenaker, 2011). However, these do come with one caveat: the initial building or altering of these perceptions can be difficult, particularly for students who are at risk of academic struggles or in difficult family situations (Crossnoe et al., 2010). Yet, when we consider this in terms of the impact of Drama, we may be able to help support the development of positive teacher perceptions in the students who participate in these activities. This idea concurs with the afore mentioned work of Van Maele and Van Houtte (2010) who state the importance of teachers placing trust in their students throughout the creation of a school play to develop positive perceptions. Thus, Van Maele and Van Houtte conclude that the more opportunities we have to give students clear responsibilities and show that we trust them, the more positively they will engage with us. This idea is furthered by Neelands in a drama specific context, stating the importance of our capacity to view student's ability to grow and change their perceptions through the process of participating in the activity (Neelands, 2007). He writes that by

ensuring that in the rehearsal process we leave space for personal development of students, and try and see their full potential rather than our preconceived idea of their potential, we can observe how transformative the creative process can be (Neelands, 2007). Indeed, Neelands also highlights the importance of not only developing and changing students' perceptions, but that it is equally critical for us as adults to be open minded when working with students in this way. Allowing ourselves to be open minded when viewing a student's potential to fulfil a role will in turn positively impact our perception of them as well as theirs of us, thus securing these strong trust relationships in a new and dynamic way, which will in turn positively impact our interactions with that student in a classroom setting. The importance of the development of these relationships was also highlighted by Gardner (1993) and Piaget (in Hanley 1998). They consistently advocated the development of the whole person, emphasising the positive impact this would have on the academic achievements of the student.

The literature in this area also highlights the profound impact that students and teachers' perceptions of one and other can have on feelings of school connectedness (Mitchell et al., 2016). Oliver and Archambault (2017) state the profoundly positive effect and protection against mental health disorders that positive teacher student perceptions can have in the students. Mitchell et al. (2016) foreground the idea of students identifying with school, referring to their sense of belonging and the value they place on school. They state that if students feel unaccepted, they will tend to withdraw from teachers and school-based activities. It could be argued then that taking part in a school drama production could go some way in building up these positive perceptions which will provide students with a more positive attitude towards school. Indeed, the afore mentioned study by Dr Wayne Williams (1999) stated that after working with their teachers towards a Dramatic performance, students demonstrated less at risk behaviours.

Mitchell et al also go on to mention the effect that herd mentality can have on students' perceptions of their teachers. They state that generally students develop a collective trust worthiness of their teachers, thus creating a group dynamic for behaviour towards that teacher.

Therefore, if we consider how this could be adapted through participation in a school production, it is helpful to view it through the lens of self-determination theory. Ryan and Deci (2000) state that taking part in extracurricular activities such as a school Drama production, encourages students to take on greater autonomy in terms of their own competence and relationships. If they perceive their teachers support in this it will lead to development of their more authentic self-determination leading to greater intrinsic growth and more trusting positive relationships with their teachers (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When considering students perceptions of their teachers Holler (1967) questions the direction of the relationship, in so far as he believes that studies are generally more focussed on teacher's perceptions of students. However, I would disagree as the main body of literature seems to have its focus predominantly in the other direction and on the mutual nature of these perceptions. Gash et al (2008) state that in a survey conducted with students, over half of the participants believed that teachers would treat students differently outside of the classroom. They also stated that they believed that their initial perception of the teacher would affect how they acted towards them outside of the classroom (Gash et al., 2008). This seeming lack of adaptability on the student's part again highlights the difficulty in changing perceptions, however again the literature highlights the positive role that participation in a drama activity can have on this. Hughes and Wilson highlight this as they state that Drama and activities provide space to exist outside the normal classroom routines. This more freeing atmosphere allows the necessary space for new perspectives to grow and new identities be explored (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). Indeed, the positive impact of Drama activities on student teacher perceptions are explored by Hanley (1998). She writes of how the opportunity for students to work alongside teachers closely as co-creators allows them a greater understanding of their teachers and leads to a holistic learning experience. As mentioned earlier, the more we show that we trust students the greater the positive impact on our perceptions of each other. This is further addressed by Taylor (1992) who writes of the special relationships developed between students and teachers during a Drama production. She states that when the

production is finished there remains a mutual respect and pride in each other's work towards achieving a common goal (Taylor, 1992).

4. What do teachers and students perceive the general benefits of being involved in a school production are?

When considering this question, I feel that the idea of perceived benefits is important to consider, as the literature has thrown up a distinct disparity between the perceived benefits and actual benefits. The first of these perceived benefits, and probably the most contended is the improved academic achievement of student's who participate in a school play.

When considering this perceived benefit on younger students Brenner found, after completing four cycles of research into the benefits of Drama Role-play games, that Drama can encourage more active engagement in learning, particularly in understanding and reading literature. (Brenner, 2019). Batdi and Batdi (2015) conducted a large-scale project to analyse data thematically on this topic across a number of schools. They aimed to look at the effects of creative Drama on academic outcomes using qualitative and quantitative data. They implemented a test group who took part in Drama activities in their lessons, and within ten weeks the test group had improved test scores across a range of subjects for those students who were involved in test group compared with those who weren't. They concluded that one of the key reasons for this occurrence is that creative arts participation has a role in developing cognitive behaviours (Badti & Badti, 2015). However, other than this there is very little in the field of literature with further evidence to highlight this as an intrinsic link, particularly when we consider that the Drama activities in this study took place within the lesson, not as an extracurricular activity. Indeed Burton, Horowitz and Abeles (2000) hold a similar view stating that the evidentiary grounds for making these claims are insufficient and it is simply the wishful thinking of those involved in extra-curricular Drama that have brought this theory to the fore. They go on to state that another potential reason that this theory has come to be widely

held is because of the threat to the arts in schools in recent years. Teachers of the arts therefore are fighting to demonstrate the importance and benefits of their subjects within an academic setting so as not to lose any more ground (Burton, Horrowitz & Abeles, 2000).

A similar conclusion was also drawn by Vaughn and Winner (2000). They conducted a longitudinal study into the impact that study of arts or extra- curricular arts subjects would have on SAT scores in children (2000). In the end they concluded that although the students who participated in arts activities did score better, the improvement couldn't be drawn directly from their involvement in arts activities (Vaughn & Winner,2000). This could be linked to Eisner's conclusion on higher academic success of student's involved in Arts activities. He states that these students potentially outdoing their peers cannot be wholly because of their interest in the arts, but because of the other indicators that this carries. He states that students who participate in artistic activities tend to be from more affluent backgrounds where these activities are encouraged and easily financed (Eisner, 1998). However, just as Eisner believes that positive correlation between arts and academic success is subjective, I would argue that his conclusion is equally anecdotal and assumptive.

There has been some evidence found that involvement in drama activities can enhance learning by encouraging speculative thinking, particularly in younger children (Burton et al, 2000). However, after researching the impact on higher order thinking and cognition, Burton et al asserted that their qualitative and quantitative research into the differences in those who had taken part in arts activities and those who hadn't were not great enough to settle that they had been caused by their arts activity participation. Both Burton et al. (2000), Eisner (1999) and many other academics do concede however is that when the arts are used in a targeted way, for example to explicitly improve reading, they do seem to improve students' academic achievement. However, Winner and Copper highlight the need for this to be made explicit to the learners. They state that unless students are made explicitly aware of the connection between what they are gaining through the Drama activity and how that relates to other areas of their learning, they cannot make that leap for

themselves (Winner & Cooper, 2000). I feel then that there is a case to argue that students should be encouraged to search for these connections themselves in order to gain the most from their participation in Drama activities and to cultivate a concrete triumph for them in this area. Seltzer and Bentley (2002) summarise the desired connection stating that when students enter the world of work they are required to have the qualifications for their desired job, along with the adaptability and knowledge of how to apply their skills in a new and creative ways (Seltzer & Bentley, 2002). Therefore, we can see that encouraging students to search for these connections for themselves could benefit them long into their futures.

Another perceived benefit that teachers and students alike can gain from the creative process is a stronger sense of identity and place within the school. Santomena (2010) stated that we should be considering the value of the play in and of itself instead of seeking the transactional benefits of extracurricular Drama on other academic subjects. She highlights that there are many unique and personal learning experiences that can only take place in this unique learning environment (Santomena, 2010). This is a sentiment shared be Neelands (2009) when he asserted that the value of shared experience and being with others is what makes the act of being part of a school production unique from academic learning. These personal qualities may also aid the students in the rest of school life, not necessarily directly having an academic impact on them, but in their attitude towards school as a whole. McNeal (1995) states that participation in extracurricular activities, such as a school production decreased students' chances of dropping out of school and increased their integration and sense of identity within the school (McNeal,1995). Indeed the same is seen in a more drama specific context when Teruel, Alfonso-Benerile and Lee (2018) stated that the multifaceted process of creating a play can tap into the child's inner potential through the different modes of expression being explored (Teruel, Alfonso-Benerile & Lee, 2018). Corby, writing about the experience of putting on a school production, stated that during the process there was a significant upward trend in school attendance (Corby, 2008). She writes that students had to sign contracts at the beginning of the rehearsals where the expectations on them were made clear,

particularly regarding absences; three absences meant that they would no longer be able to take part in the play. She states that this gave the students a certain amount of accountability and raised their status within this context, they knew that others were relying on them and so they felt valued and important (Corby, 2008). These sentiments were taken further by Ewing (2010) who stated that involvement in Drama can actively improve a student's sense of enjoyment in school and positively change the direction of their lives (Ewing, 2010). This idea of the improvement of self-actualisation and student's personal development, although as I mentioned earlier, is one that does have a more grounding in evidence, I feel that again it may be slightly over exaggerated. All these improvements in students' personal qualities and identity are extremely positive and obvious for them during the play process, but what must be questioned is the long-term impact that they have. When the students return to normal school life without the space and learning opportunities afforded by the play, do they slip back into their potentially anonymous detached state? Or have these newfound qualities been developed so strongly that a permanent change has been made in the life of the student? This is a question I will pursue in more detail through my interviews with students.

A final perceived benefit that was recurring throughout the literature on this topic was the health benefits, predominantly mental health, and personal character development that the environment cultivated in the rehearsal room would have on students. Nicholson (2002) states that when entering into the play making process much focus is required from the adult on building the right atmosphere to establish strong working relationships with students, and encouraging them to build these with each other (Nicholson, 2002). Luhmann furthers this in his analysis of the concept of trust stating that trust is a response to any moment of perceived risk (Luhmann, 1979). He states that without any element of risk taking there can be no valuable take away from the participation. I would then say in answer that a play is the perfect arena for this type of trust, as the sense of achievement when the play is performed will surely be that reward outweighing the risk. Indeed, the emotional involvement required in drama can only be achieved if this atmosphere of trust which Nicholson mentions many times is established from the beginning of the process. Baier furthers this

by saying that there is a needed shift in power relations between the truster and the trusted in the rehearsal room as drama can demand not only the explorations of one's own feelings and reactions, but the need to explore wider cultural feelings and ideas (Baier, 1975). This perception that students come out of a school play as more well-rounded characters, though potentially again a wishful and hopeful idea on the part of facilitators, has got some grounding in evidence. Yassa (1999) stated that after involvement in a Drama production students had higher levels of self-confidence, assertiveness, and were more open to receiving feedback, while Catterall, Chapleau and Iwanga (1999) reported students who participated in extracurricular drama to have higher levels of tolerance and empathy, primarily due to the fact that acting causes students to have to assume the perspective of another whilst playing a character (Catteral et al., 1999). Indeed, we could conclude from this that the idea of improved empathy and self-concept may be helpful for these students in their future lives. This idea links to the afore mentioned ideas of Neelands about drama transcending culture to create common ground (Neelands, 2009). When writing about the benefits of community Drama Ward, Mills and Anderson (2013) state similar outcomes. Through speaking with cast members Ward et al reported a feeling of higher consciousness within the group when the play was completed through the sense of pride and accomplishment at what they had achieved. One participant even went so far as to say that the play making process was more effective in aiding recovery from PTSD due to his military career than any therapy had been (Ward, Mills & Anderson 2013). Wright summarises these sentiments stating that as educators we have some responsibility to ensure that the young people we come into contact with are ready for their futures and by providing them with this space for the growth of these qualities in Drama we are helping them to flourish (Wright, 1994). I think of all the perceived benefits that teachers and students may hope to gain from the play making process, this is the most important and potentially the most likely to be attained. However, what I feel is lacking from the body of literature is the ideas and perceptions of the students themselves on entering the play process. There were no references made to why

students decided to be involved in school productions but only on why their teachers thought they should and what they thought they might gain from it.

Altered research questions

Subsequent to studying the literature I have decided to explore the following research questions:

1. *How does taking part in a school play impact on students personally?*
2. *How does a school production impact on school community?*
3. *What are the long-term benefits of a School play?*

Methodology

This study is an investigation into the impact that participating in a school play has on students and teachers, with specific consideration on the impact on students feelings of school community and school connectedness, along with any other areas of school life it may have influenced. After the general audition process was completed students attended rehearsals with the full cast every Thursday after school from the end of September until the end of December when the play was performed, with extra rehearsals on Wednesday and Friday lunch times. To ensure that students were committed to the project a consent form was sent home to parents outlining expectations of attendance at all rehearsals, and was to be returned signed by both student and parent as a way of clarifying expectations and ensuring commitment so that the project could go ahead smoothly.

There were thirty students involved in the production both on and off stage and each of these students filled out a qualitative survey at the beginning of rehearsals and after the play had been completed and normal school life had resumed in January. As well as this I conducted more in-depth interviews with six of the students involved from a range of year groups and backgrounds. I conducted these interviews both before and after the play to allow the students to reflect on the process and what they felt they had achieved both during and after.

As well as the student involvement, this project was also undertaken in collaboration with the head the school's Drama department. In aid of making the play more accessible to the whole staff body we asked for any volunteers who wished to be involved with any part of the creative process. This was keenly taken up by teachers of the art and textiles department who made costumes and props along with A Level students taking these subjects, and a new member of staff to the Science department who was heavily involved in the school productions at her previous school, and was an invaluable help with makeup and the musical elements of the play.

Practitioner research

Practitioner research is defined as “The intentional and systematic inquiry into one’s own practice.” Literature on the topic of practitioner research tends to focus on production of research and building research capacity but is fairly limited in research that leads to implementable knowledge or actions (Lighthowler, Stocks-Rankin & Wilkinson ,2018). The reason this gap emerges and struggles to be filled is due to the process of going from research to practise. A lot of the time this can be messy and incongruent. Lighthowler et al. state that the most effective practitioner research will combine the craft and wisdom of the teacher with the research evidence to produce an end result that will easily and meaningfully be implemented into the schools own context (Lighthowler et al., 2018). While this is a valid ideal to hold, I believe that the issues arising from practitioner research are not only in the implementation, but in the necessity of what is being researched. Broekkamp and Van Houte-Wolters (2008) hold the opinion that the gap between educational research and practise is not being filled because of the lack of utility in a lot of educational research (Broekkamp & Van Houte-Wolters, 2008). I think it is therefore fair to conclude that practitioner research needs to be conducted in a practical meaningful way with a key focus on outcomes in mind, otherwise we are right to question its purpose. It is assumed that teachers will be more focussed on researching areas of their practise or school they feel need improving, however it is clear that more consideration needs to be taken into what to do with the results of these investigations and how they will ultimately benefit the students.

Practitioner research seems to be the most logical and effective research style to use for this project, as it allows me to gain a further insight into the students and teachers perspectives on an area of education and student wellbeing I am particularly passionate about, and hopefully will lead to implementation of positive initiatives that will benefit the wider school community in the future.

Qualitative research

Another issue that arises when considering practitioner research is the type of research that is conducted. Qualitative research, being my preferred method of gathering data can at times be criticised as being inapplicable and lacking in meaning because it is conducted under a unique and unrepeatable set of circumstances. It is therefore seen to be unrelatable to other circumstances and thus its value can be underappreciated (Angen, 2000). However, I concur with Heikkinen on this matter, that when analysing and using qualitative research you are not trying to measure the reality but simply interpreting it (Heikkinen, 2016).

Although the literature claims there are many issues with qualitative research, for this type of project I believe that it would yield the most useful and informative data. As I wanted to gain insight into students perceptions of their place within the school community I felt that gathering this type of data would provide me with their true and personal ideas and experiences of the world around them (Kvale, 2009). I also felt that I wanted the data to come from a shared conversation as 'An inter change of views on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data' (Cohen, Maninion & Morrison, P.409, 2011). By ensuring I limited leading the direction of the conversation I hoped to gain the most honest and useful data and insights from the students. (Elton-Charlcraft, 2011)

Due to my research group consisting of less than thirty students, undertaking a quantitative approach would not have produced any meaningful results. The use of a qualitative approach is also beneficial, given the subject matter and ideas I wish to discuss with the students during the interview process. This style of research will encourage them to think more reflectively and evaluatively and encourage the depth of answer that more closed questions of quantitative survey may not have allowed for.

Participants

As mentioned in my introduction, my school does not have a culture of producing and performing plays. Mrs Smith, the head of drama and I had a lot of discussions about how best to get students excited and inspired to come along to the auditions. The whole process began with taking an assembly for each year group to try and create a sense of excitement in the students and encourage them to attend the auditions. To try and get as many students involved as possible, we decided that we would allow students who didn't want a speaking role to be involved without auditioning, as long as they came and expressed an interest they could be involved in a chorus type role.

Due to the newness of this type of project within my school we were concerned about how many students would attend auditions, also considering we had to hold them in the second week back to school. But after holding two days of auditions we were able to cast the play, and also ensure that all of those who wished to have non-speaking roles could also do so.

Shortly after beginning the rehearsal process I announced to the cast that I was going to be completing research on the impact that the school play would have on various areas of school life, and explained that both during and after the production I would be asking them to fill in a short questionnaire on their experiences. I stated at this point that they would be free to opt out if they did not wish to be involved, and also informed them that I would be selecting some of them to interview which they could also opt out of if they wanted to.

When choosing students for interview I tried to choose a range of students from across all year groups and backgrounds. I endeavoured to select students who may have had very different reasons for wishing to be involved in the play to gain insight into the how far reaching the impact of the play was on the school community and student's feelings of school connectedness. I also wanted to gain an individual and personalised insight into their perceptions of school (Kvale,2007). I sought to take into account the idea of Cohen et al when they stated that interviews should be just that, 'An inter change of views on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for

knowledge production, and emphasises the social situatedness of research data' (Cohen et al., P.409, 2011). Despite there being limitations to this method of gathering data as, "Pupils admitted to saying 'Only good things' when asked by teachers"(Arnot, McIntyre, Pedder & Reay, 2004 P.73) I endeavoured to limit this through taking on the least adult role and acting merely as a conversation facilitator (Elton-Charlcraft, 2011), following the lead of the students if they felt that they had no more to say on a specific point. I also decided to conduct the interviews on an individual basis rather than in a group to ensure that students felt able to share their honest thoughts, as they may have been reluctant to do so in the presence of their peers (Cohen et al., 2011).

Student context

Due to the nature of my investigation I felt it was appropriate to add a note on the context of the students interviewed. This is important as the students selected each have interesting experiences of the school community and having more information on their personal contexts will give a deeper meaning to the answers they provided in the interviews. When transcribing all student names were anonymised and substituted to protect their identity. To try and gather a range of data I decided to interview four students taking part in the play on stage, two who were helping backstage and my main collaborator Mrs Smith.

Bonnie

Bonnie is a year seven student who was one of the few who came along to the auditions. The auditions were held on the first week of school in September and so we were not expecting any year seven students to have the self-confidence to come along. Bonnie is a confident student who has made a very settled start to her secondary school career.

Holly

Holly is a year eight pupil premium student with autism. Holly had an unsettled start to secondary school, having to be moved to the other side of the year due to instances of bullying. Holly also struggles with dyslexia however is a very hard-working student with a real love of English and Drama. Holly spends much of her time in school in the inclusion centre and attends a lot of their after-school clubs. Holly does present as quite young for her age and often states that she doesn't have a lot of friends but is also aware that she is different to a lot of her peers.

Josh

Josh is quite a vulnerable year nine student. He is quiet and can struggle with large class sizes and other students being in his words 'silly'. This makes him angry and upset and has at times made him a target for bullies. Josh is very passionate about drama and attends the Drama company 'Stagecoach' outside of school.

Niamh

Niamh is a year ten student with autism. Niamh is very aware of her condition and has delivered a lecture to both staff and students about the difficulties of autism for females, and how the stereotypes surrounding it are harmful. She is a very able student being in top set classes for Maths, English and Science, as well as being involved in Drama activities outside of school. She also speaks Spanish fluently at home with her family and is very talented at Judo.

Daisy

Daisy is a year twelve student. She has always been very passionate about Drama and music and has aspirations to go to Drama school. For the last two years Daisy has struggled with anxiety and an eating disorder. During her GCSE's this became very serious and she was admitted to a fulltime treatment unit, however she discharged herself as she was afraid about missing school and failing her exams. She has been attending the treatment unit part time, ensuring she doesn't miss school

this year. Daisy is a very aspirational and hardworking student who achieved all grade seven and above in her GCSE's, including grade 9's in Music and English literature and language.

Natalie

Natalie is a year twelve student who transferred to our school on a planned move in year ten. She had an unsettled start to her time at the school however did settle and manged to achieve the grades to return to sixth form. Natalie is passionate about Drama and says that it is the reason that she enjoys school so much. Since joining the school Natalie has become a lot more aspirational and now wishes to study Drama at university.

Mrs Smith

Mrs Smith is the head of Drama and has taught at the school for eight years. Over this time the Drama department has been routinely understaffed and a lot of the time she has been the only Drama teacher. When I arrived at the school, having a significant background in Drama but being employed as an English teacher she was very keen that we could collaborate to put on a school play. She had tried to direct school performances several times, however due to lack of support from the senior leadership at the school and lack of commitment from the students they have always fallen through. She feels that the Arts are significantly underappreciated at the school and would love to see more collaboration in productions across the departments.

Methods

In order to gain as full a picture of the impact the play would have, I decided to use a combination of interviews and questionnaires. I felt that using both these methods of gathering data would give me both a broad view as well as an opportunity to gather more personal details of the participants feelings on the subjects being discussed. I also felt that the questionnaires may inform some

thematic ideas emerging from the data that could then support discussions with the participants in the interviews.

Questionnaires

The first round of questionnaires consisted of three open ended questions and the second of two. I asked the students to complete these alone and write their honest thoughts. I ensured they were anonymised and that students folded them before handing them in so I could not tell who they belonged to. Due to the topic of my research I decided to take a qualitative approach to my questionnaires as the focus of my research requires a more personal and individual response than a quantitative questionnaire could accommodate. As I mentioned earlier it would also be misleading due to my small number of participants. The questionnaire which was completed in the second cycle of research, after the play had been completed had the same two questions as the first with slightly different wording.

Interviews

Both the first and second round of interviews were conducted at lunch or breaktimes, as was convenient to the students. The purpose of the interviews was to understand in more detail the student's perceptions of their place within the school community and how they felt the play would impact on that. As I mentioned earlier the literature seems assumptive and is distinctly lacking in student voice on this topic, and so I felt that the best way to gain a better understanding of the range of issues facing students was to speak directly to them. Despite the argument of Cohen et al (2013) that interviews are 'Time expensive', I decided to do these individually with students due to the fact that they were from a range of year groups and so may have felt intimidated of uncomfortable speaking in front of each other. I also felt that speaking to students individually would support what Kvale (1996) refers to as the intimacy of communication, making the data

gathered from these interviews more human and personalised, allowing students to share more openly about their own context and reasons for their feeling about school and how the play could impact them (Kvale, 1996).

Analysis

When considering the best way to analyse the data collected I felt it was important to remember that qualitative data isn't intended to produce a concise set of facts, but rather its purpose is to shed light on an issue (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). At each stage of data collection I reflected on the information provided by students in an open minded way as one of the potential draw backs to implementing this type of research is that you are more likely to see something that we have intentionally set out to find rather than something new that we were not expecting (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). To this end I endeavoured to keep my interviews more discussion based so as to try not to lead the participants towards an intended response. After the first set of questionnaires were completed, I conducted some brief analysis to see if there were any similarities thematically in answers, which then may come up within the individual interviews.

As the breadth of data collected, due to its qualitative nature felt quite wide and initially slightly overwhelming to draw conclusions from, I decided to draw on some suggested analysis ideas from Atkins and Wallace (2012). They suggest considering the data under these four categories:

Is it illuminative?- Does it shed light on and help answer the research questions?

Is it Indicative?- Does it indicate something significant to the research?

Is it Representative?- Is it typical of the data as a whole?

Is it Illustrative?- Does it add accurately to the overall picture?

After considering the data in these terms I decided to look into the common themes emerging from the answers in the interview transcripts. Five main themes emerged; Friendship and like mindedness, community, personal growth, teacher perceptions, enjoyment of school.

Ethics

In line with the guidelines on undertaking any social science research as laid out buy BERA (BERA,2018) , and considering the ethical issues that could arise I completed a CUREC form, outlining all of the safeguards made to ensure that participants were fully informed of what the project would entail and thus make an informed decision about whether they felt they wanted to be involved or not.

I sent a letter to my head teacher (See appendix) to explain about the research being conducted within the school and to ensure that he was happy for it to take place. Students were all given a detailed verbal explanation of what research was taking place and how they would be involved. After this was read to students, they were given the opportunity to opt out of the process. None of the students chose to opt out of completing the questionnaires.

When selecting students for interview, I made it clear to them that their contributions would be totally anonymised and that if they decided they didn't wish to be interviewed this would not in any way affect their involvement with the play. I also assured them that they were speaking to me in a totally private context, to reassure them that they could be honest and not feel under pressure to give responses they thought I would want to hear, another potential limitation when gathering data through interviews as "Pupils admitted to saying 'Only good things' when asked by teachers" (Arnot et al, 2004 P.73).

I have ensured the confidentiality of all participants involved through replacing their names with pseudonyms. I have also avoided mentioning the name of the school. All data collected has been kept securely on the school system and has only been shared with Mrs Smith, my collaborator

on this project. Overall, the data that has been collected has been done so with as little time or emotional cost to the participants as possible and in accordance with CUREC guidelines.

Collaboration

My main collaborator on this project, as I have mentioned earlier, was Mrs Smith the head of Drama in my school. However, I do feel that it is important to mention that I feel that the collaboration is almost on two levels, between myself and Mrs Smith, but also between myself and the sixth form students who took on key backstage roles within the process.

Before beginning my research project Mrs Smith and I had many conversations about how to raise the profile of the arts in out school. We felt that it would be useful if we had some concrete evidence to demonstrate to the senior leadership team the valuable experiences on offer for both staff and students from involvement in a school production. After much discussion we decided that the best way to evidence our positive theories about involvement in the arts was to gather data before and after the play was completed in order to show the change in a clear and obvious way. I also decided to conduct an interview with Mrs Smith so that I would also be able to have her evaluation of the impact that she felt the project was having in terms of school community from a staff side of things. We continued our collaboration throughout the creative process constantly discussing creative decisions and how we could best cultivate the appropriate environment within rehearsals to get the best out of the students.

I feel that it is important to reference here my second level of collaboration which was with the two sixth form students who took on the roles of assistant director and stage manager. Both students are very keen to study Drama at university and so Mrs Smith and I decided it would be a good learning opportunity for them to take on a leading role in the production side of things. The two girls rose to the challenge remarkably and were always ready to offer creative advice when

asked. These students were also included in production meetings with other members of staff and were completely invaluable collaborators on this project.

Findings

All research was done with the main research question 'How does a school play impact on school community and feelings of school connectedness' in mind. The findings are presented in each subsection of research, questionnaires and interviews respectively. As mentioned in my ethics section, all student's names have been changed and replaced with pseudonyms, and any spelling and punctuation errors from quotations from student questionnaires have been amended for clarity.

First student questionnaire

The first student questionnaire asked students to consider and answer three questions in as much detail as possible. The questions were as follows:

1. Why did you decide to become involved in the school play?
2. What do you hope to gain from being involved in the school play?
3. What impact do you think the school play will have on your school life?

The findings from each of these questions will be stated below.

Why did you want to become involved in the school play?

The most common answer to this question was linked to enjoyment of the subject. Two thirds of students stated that their love for drama was a key reason for their involvement in the play, with many also stating that they wished to improve their skills in drama. A few students also stated an awareness of their perceived limited ability in acting but they still believed they would gain a lot of enjoyment from being involved:

> *'I decided to become involved with the play because I love to act. I might not be the best at it but I enjoy it very much.'*

Another common answer was that GCSE choices had limited students' access to drama and how they were missing this element of education:

'Because I couldn't do Drama for GCSE or A-Level, it is an outlet for me to act, which is something I really enjoy and would like to keep up.'

Other answers included a desire to meet new people, particularly those who had just moved up from primary school. A few of the students commented on being intrigued from the posters advertising the auditions. They stated that they were drawn in by these as they had never seen of done anything like it at school and it made them excited:

'Because I love to act and when I saw the posters I got excited and thought it sounded really interesting.'

What do you hope to gain from being involved in the school play?

The most common answer to this question was student's desire to gain confidence and raise self-esteem and enjoyment, improvement of skills and knowledge relating to drama such as projection and staging. Another key area that students wished to gain in was friendship:

'Some confidence in my acting and meeting new people'

Some students expressed very explicit objectives for being involved such as improving memory and obtaining an offer for Drama at university due to gaining experience for a personal statement. But one of the most interesting in this area was the desire to have some stress relief from a busy school day:

'Increased confidence in front of crowds, further creative expression. A stress relief from my busy work schedule'

What impact do you think the school play will have on your school life?

Like the previous question, the desire to have more confidence was raised by a majority of students, however more focus was given to the impact this would have in normal class time:

'Give me more confidence to say and do things in class'

A desire for gaining a wider social circle was also a very common response:

'It means that I will get to meet new people and I will be more happy'

Another common answer which I wasn't expecting was students' need for stress relief and a desire for something to take their mind off school:

> *'It will take my mind away from the stress of school. I have something to do after school other than homework and watching TV.'*

A few students even expressed excitement at having to spend a longer time in school on rehearsal days. Another interesting answer was a few students commenting on the potential it would have to change their perception of some teachers:

> *'It might give me a better impression of Drama teachers and again, better skills'*

One student acknowledged that they were unsure of the impact that the play would have on their school life, but they still felt their involvement was important:

> *'None. But that doesn't mean it's irrelevant to me'*

First round of student interviews

As mentioned in my methodology, I tried to take the least adult role in the interview process to allow the students to feel at ease to be honest about their feelings linking to school community and how they felt the school play would affect this. With this first round of interviews being conducted during the rehearsal process, the conversations were generally focussed on student's feelings towards school in the present moment and what they felt the impact of taking part in the school play would be on these. I decided the easiest way to present the findings from these student interviews was to do so thematically.

Friendship and like mindedness

The first theme that emerged from the interviews, and the most widely referenced by all students interviewed was that of making friends with likeminded people, conducting ensemble work, and how this at times felt like a discovery that there were other students like them in the school. Bonnie's remarks on this topic seemed to show surprise:

> *Bonnie: - and that there are actually a lot of people who like acting like me.*
> *Me: Yes, likeminded people.*
> *Bonnie: Yes, I've met a lot more people, like me who are interested in the same things.*

Holly also expressed a similar feeling, contrasting it with her normal experience of drama classes:

> *'like in actual drama. Sometimes people mess it up. So, it's a chance to work with people who also like drama and like be a little creative with what you do.'*

Another common idea that was shared was the connection and feeling of community across the school that was developing early in this stage of the rehearsal process. Holly commented on the positive feeling of unity and the impact it was having on her:

> *'Because people are quite often pretty divided between year groups and that and it's a chance to group altogether for people to do something with other people who also enjoy the same stuff.'*

Indeed, what was also interesting to see was the positive impact this had on the older students as well as those in younger year groups. Natalie spoke about the positive environment it was creating:

> *'I think. People in their friendship groups they don't like to step outside of their comfort zone but when they're put in an environment with other people that have similar interests whether they are older or younger they sort of find out that they do have the same interests and they can make new friends from it which I think is really good cause I think it's good that like the olders can protect the youngers and the youngers can learn from the olders.'*

With Daisy also echoing this sentiment:

> *'-and like students I would have never known in lower school I know now, and if they ever have anything they need I can help them with it now.'*

This observation of the older students as well as those lower down the school seems to suggest the formation of feelings of connection and friendship leading towards feelings of community within the cast and crew involved in the play. Two of the students interviewed were less positive on how feelings of friendship and like mindedness were adding a sense of community. Josh didn't mention ideas on this theme at all, while Niamh only conceded minor positives in this area.

> *Niamh: Um, I mean I've spoken to new people because of the school play and I've gotten to know people better and people that I already knew um, even more and I guess you could say I've made some new friends so. I guess if you look at it that way.*

Although reluctant at first to concede these positives, as the interview continued Niamh did seem more aware of the benefits of working with likeminded students and the positive impact it had:

> *'I think, I think yeah, it does…I guess there's a lot less people and they're all in a similar situation because like if you're in rehearsals you're there to rehearse a play. So that does make it easier and if it's… And if for example, in the play your two characters are friends in real life and then you have to practice that scene, it does help social skills even if all you're doing is rehearsing lines. Yeah, it does. It does help.'*

Here we were discussing Niamh's struggles at times to manage the social situations arising in school, and how the play may support her in managing these more positively in the future. Holly also expressed several struggles in this area and highlighted how being involved in the school play was already helping with them:

> *'I don't really have many things that… I don't really get along with many people. So, I thought if I go to Drama it'd be a chance to make new friends, get to work with a group of people and do something I really like.*

Holly also stated that one of the biggest things she thought she would take away from her involvement in the school play would be her ability to participate in group work more positively in the future.

School community

Another key area raised in these interviews was the community created through participating in a school play. Daisy felt particularly strongly about this and how the lack of opportunities to participate in a school production left a gap where this type of community would be:

> *Me: Did the lack of a school play impact on you or, did you not really think about it that much?*
> *Daisy: Oh no I was always thinking I really want to do a school play, I really want to do another musical, I was a bit young when we did 'Godspell' but I think they're so… maybe I'm a bit biased but I think they're so important and so… just fun… I was always thinking that I really wanted to do one. So yeah it really was a big gap for me… I didn't actually live in catchment for this school, my mum and dad had to appeal for me to get in here, but I really wanted to come here for the drama and performing arts, because before I came to this school I used to come and watch the musicals they used to put on, and that's what made me really want to come here.*

Daisy also highlighted the importance and need for all students to feel a sense of community within the school:

> *'it gives students an outlet and somewhere safe to go after school so they aren't causing trouble outside, and it's like a safety unit and… this is gonna sound a bit deep but… you become a bit of like a family I think,'*

The need for the acceptance that this type of community would provide was demonstrated acutely by Holly in our discussion:

> *'alright. Um, quite a few people tease me in the year group.'*

However, most of the students asked did perceive that the overall feeling of community was mostly positive:

> *Holly: It's pretty good…Again, there's always going to be people that are a bit mean.*
> *Me: I mean things like with our school kind of sense of togetherness.*
> *Holly: I think we're pretty good at that. There's, there's still bit of like division between other people who don't really want anything to do with it and the people are a bit more passionate about it.*
>
> *Me: What do you think of the school community at our school?*
> *Bonnie: I think that most people are nice and help each other.*

Josh highlighted the importance of the positive impact that a play could have on school community:

> *Josh: I feel my school plays are important because if you don't have things like musicals or plays in the school sort of a bit like dead cause most people like music and school plays and encourage it.*

One issue that was highlighted within the school community was that of year groups not mixing and the negative impact that might have:

> *Me: how would you describe the community at this school?*
> *Natalie: I think all years stick to like their years. Like groups stick with their groups like they don't really blend in with other people. And like they just kind of keep to themselves...*

However, Natalie did also share how she thought that the school play would positively begin to bridge gaps like this:

> *Natalie: I think it's good to let people like show their skills and to also like build community between different people in different years to like sort of bring them together.*

Confidence and personal growth

Another area that all students discussed was what they personally hoped they'd gain from the experience of being involved in the play. The two sixth form students who had been given more responsibility discussed how much they felt they would grow over the rehearsal period:

> *Daisy: the opportunity to showcase a different sort of skill, and students who are more like quiet and reserved in different lessons can show off in a different way… communication skills, being confident in my own ideas. Taking sort of a lead role because I've always been like in it rather than doing stuff for it, so it's been really fun seeing a different side.*

> *Natalie: Definitely like how to control like my temper. And I've learned how to use lights and sounds and. To like be aware… I feel like very proud of myself. Like. I feel like when it's done like seeing how it's come together and stuff like that I feel like I didn't think that I could do it. Honestly I felt it would look rubbish if I if I was co directing but the way it turned out. Like I'm really happy with it and I'm really proud of myself and stuff.*

The younger students all expressed similar ideas on what they felt they were gaining from the rehearsal process, sharing feelings of growing confidence and freedom of self-expression. Holly also

expressed a positive development in her social skills. The only student who did not feel they were gaining a lot in these terms was Niamh:

> *'I guess with other subjects, I'm not really sure, for me personally hasn't really impacted it that much… But if it's like lots of people, then, I dunno, I feel like I personally will be quite, alright, quite confident with performing in front of a lot of people, especially if it's people that I know and like, then it would definitely help me feel more at ease.'*

Changing teacher perceptions

Ideas surrounding this topic were raised by a lot of students considering how their teachers might learn something new about them from watching them perform:

> *Daisy: I'm fairly quiet in lessons and I don't really take sort of a leader role, so to put like energy and thought into something that has a positive outcome and is so creative, I think it could show like a different side to what I am in lesson, because I'm a lot more comfortable in drama and yeah I just think it will show a different side to what I'm like…I think with the play you get to showcase a different sort of talent than in class, so maybe the teachers can see a different side to them?*

Natalie's response is particularly interesting considering the negative experiences she has had throughout her lower school career:

> *Natalie: I think that they'll see that when I do put my mind to something I am capable of doing good things and that I do put effort into things I enjoy and that I can do more than what's expected of me.*

A lot of the younger students shared thoughts on the surprise their teachers might feel watching them perform:

> *Josh: Well, Mrs Smith already knows I do drama and I think from seeing me performing in it, it would sort of surprise her because in drama I haven't always been open and active.*
>
> *Bonnie: that I'm not always shy.*
>
> *Holly: They might think I'm decent. Maybe a little creative, maybe just… a little annoying Otter.*

Again Niamh expressed an unsure response to this question:

> *Niamh: I'm not, I don't know. Um, I literally have no idea.*

Enjoyment and desire to come to school

The last major area that was addressed by students was that of their increased enjoyment of school throughout the rehearsal process. Daisy, who has been struggling with a severe eating disorder said that she found the play rehearsals were helping her:

> *Daisy: Because it gives me like a purpose, if you know what I mean? Like something to look forward to with a clear outcome, that you can feel rewarded for…It gives me something to look forward to, and it makes me enjoy school a lot more.*

Holly and Josh shared a similar sentiment:

> *Holly: It makes me look forward to something.*
>
> *Josh: having an inside school is more like you've got something to do and it's like makes you happy in school and things.*

Freedom and space

A final area that I think is important to highlight is the feeling of freedom and expression that drama provides for students, and the joy they found at having the rehearsal room as a space for this within the school community:

> *Natalie: For me it's kind of a safe space like I'm quite conscious person. But like in drama I can just like shout about and no one's going to judge me and I can just like be myself.*
>
> *Holly: Um, its a way to like, express yourself.*
>
> *Daisy: I think it is really important because it gives kids the opportunity to showcase a different sort of skill, and students who are more like quiet and reserved in different lessons can show off in a different way.*

First teacher interview

When discussing the benefits of the school play with my main collaborator Mrs. Smith, her answers generally focussed on how involvement in the school production should be a wholly positive experience for the students:

‘They might have one or two lines on their own but that ability to feel like you're part of something without the pressure of standing up and delivering a monologue. I think it's just doing something positive in school as well. We spend so much time with academics or exam results or dealing with negatives you know. That [The play] should be. Wholly positive’

‘In previous experience it's always been positive. So I've never had anyone come up and be like well this could have been better or they could've done this. It's always really positive it's like they did this really well and that really worked. So yeah I think for them that is just purely positive.’

Mrs Smith observed, like myself that from our own personal involvement as students we were able to see the benefits for the students. She also observed the benefits of working together for students:

‘it's about working as a team about coming together as an ensemble about confidence. Generally I think at school I loved extracurricular so anything that was outside of lessons.’ …and I think that's what they take from it that even things go wrong you can still do it and people receive it really well, people are supportive they want you to do well you know no one walks into that audience waiting to for it to fail.’

She also commented on the formation of community that comes from the inclusivity of the play and the fact that there are many ways students can be involved:

‘And I think the other part of it is the inclusion so that you don’t have to perform to be in it. You know we've got kids doing costumes or lighting and the sixth formers have the set, even ticket sales the girls are doing a kiosk. It's about having as wide a reach as possible to allow everybody to participate because there are obviously other things in school aren’t there like PE. But. Again not everybody loves it or wants to be involved with as much, you may not necessarily love acting but you can get involved or even if you like it but are terrified..’

In terms of long-term outcomes Mrs. Smith talked about the benefits of working in ensemble on the students and seeing positives in each other:

‘I think it's. Allowing students to recognise positives in each other so that you know I didn't know they were capable of doing that maybe I could try it or maybe I could share with them what I'm good at.’

She also stated the benefits of staff seeing the students in a different light.

‘I would hope that they would again see the positive in kids. I think we find in drama as well, what we would consider a good child or a capable child is very different to in some subjects. So you know we always get these things through don't we like ‘they can't sit still in science’ or ‘they hate maths’ whereas because they're not sat at a desk with something that they can't get they absolutely have that chance to excel’

One of the most important benefits Mrs. Smith hoped would come from the play was enjoyment for staff and students involved:

> *'I don't know that there's a life changing goal at the end of it you know but spreading a bit of happiness and a bit of positivity and yeah something to enjoy. I think we do so much in school that's about results and competing…You're not being pitted against anybody, everybody can get involved. Yeah I think just something that is just about entertaining and being positive for them.'*

We also talked about the potential issues that might arise, and the issues that have arisen in the past when the school have tried to put on performances:

> *'I think unfortunately there was a couple of very key people that had the wrong attitude and pulled out very late and at that point there was just no going back and I didn't want to put something on it that wasn't right. I think we've been very strict from the beginning of this and sending out that letter and the expectations'*

Second student questionnaire

After the play was completed, I asked students to fill in a questionnaire answering the following questions:

1. What have you gained from being involved in the school play?
2. What impact has being involved in the school play had on your school life?

The findings from each of these questions are stated below.

What have you gained from being involved in the school play?

The most common answers to this question were thoughts linking confidence, friendship and general feelings of happiness. Many students stated that they felt they had made connections with people that they thought would last:

> *'I have gained a lot of confidence. I also met a lot of new people who I am now friends with who I never thought I would be. It also strengthened my bond with some of my now close friends'*

A lot of students also expressed feelings of greater acceptance and of finding a place within the school:

> *'I've become more confident and it has made me feel like I fit in more, like I've found my place. It was also a good experience as I've never been in a play before'*

Other answers also covered greater feelings of fitting in and feeling happier to be themselves and making positive memories of being at school. An interesting response from an older student stated joy at feeling like they had become a role model:

> *'I also gained new friendships within my own school year but was also able to act as an older figure for younger years'*

What impact has being in the school play had on your school life?

The majority of the student's responses linked to finding a similar group of people to them, and an increased enjoyment and desire to attend school:

> *'It gave me something to look forward to and made me enjoy coming to school'*

Linking to this idea, a lot of students wrote about how the play gave them a chance to put their energy into something positive and enjoyable:

> *'Being able to put all of my energy and focus into something positive also meant that being part of the play was a good outlet and allowed me to see the process of working on a project with a positive outcome'*

A lot of students also addressed how they felt they had gained skills that would be applicable to other situations within their school life and things they could take elsewhere:

> *'I am much more confident in class, and also have learned to have more patience. Also, it has helped my memory skills from remembering my lines'*

Other popular answers to this questions related to ideas of feeling more able to do things they thought they couldn't or found hard, forming more positive relationships with teachers and giving them an activity to do that they enjoyed and didn't get much opportunity to do.

Second round of student interviews

The second round of student interviews were carried out after the play had been completed and school life had returned to normal. They took the same structure as the first round with open discussions on how the students' school life had been effected by the play and linked along the same themes as the first round of results.

Friendship and like-mindedness

A lot of the students expressed their joy at being able to have a chance to participate in drama activities with likeminded people who would take it as seriously as them as opposed to the situations that can occur in drama classes normally:

> *Holly: Just like the experience of being able to like perform with other people who also liked drama instead of just like in class where most people are just like, they don't want to do anything.*

Niamh also shared these sentiments and stated that this was one of the key reasons she felt that school plays were important:

> *Niamh: Well, it's very fun activity and it brings people of like different year groups with similar interests together and it's, um, well it's a good experience as well. And I do think it is quite important.*

Niamh and others also expressed joy at the friendships that had been formed and how they had remained beyond the play:

> *Niamh: I have made quite a lot of friends, um, which I still talk to.*

The older students also expressed a connection between friendship and growth in confidence to perform:

> *Natalie: But when like there's more people around you acting as well as you, it kind of draws the attention off of you, which some people like. Um, so I think it was good to help people become more comfortable within their acting, within acting in front of other people as well.*

Community

Students all commented on enjoying the sense of school community that the play created:

> *Holly: Because it brings people closer together and I feel like it helps the school community become more well a community and it lets people release emotions that they would often be keeping it inside them during the school day.*

> *Josh: I feel like plays are important that because if they're something to go watch and something to do and something that you can get excited about and something to do with a community and a school and a group of people.*

They also stated the bonds created across the year groups that came through they play and how this continues to add to feelings of school community:

> *Daisy: It shows that like, it's gonna sound a bit cringe, but like older sibling role that sixth formers can have can have or like just, the higher up in the school you are to the younger years and how that can be really beneficial because if um like, I wouldn't have known many of the other people that were part of the play before we did it. So, I think it opens doors for things in the future. And also like, how you view students in lower school and how they can view you.*

> *Bonnie: Uh, I realise that um, just because they're older doesn't mean they're scary. They're really nice and helpful.*

However, they also stated that this is something that isn't necessarily as close as it was during the time when the play was being rehearsed.

> *Natalie: Not really. I still feel like as like everyone sort of sticks to their own years, um, in their own groups. But like the kids that were in the play, like they, they still talk to each other, which is nice seeing like how they've come together.*

Indeed, this loss of community was felt most keenly by Holly who stated that she is now struggling with the same issues that the play was helping her to manage before:

> *Holly: Well, while it was still on, I felt more of a reason to go to school, but now it's not as much because I come into school, get education, get bullied, go home.*

Confidence and personal growth

This seemed to be the topic that students were most keen to share on and discuss. The students all expressed a growth in their confidence after involvement in the show and that they felt this confidence was helping them in their other lessons as well. Daisy expressed her feeling of accomplishment more than growth of confidence; due to the higher level of responsibility she was given:

> *Daisy: Um, accomplished, if that's the word? and proud, I think. Yeah, it made me realise how when you go through school you can take different roles depending how old you are. So like, because obviously I was like one of the year 7's at one point, like in it and, to come out of it and do more work, like with like with the teachers and stuff, like it put a different light.*

Natalie also expressed similar feelings of accomplishment after being given more responsibility by the teachers involved in the play:

> *Natalie: Um, honestly I think I, I loved it because I felt like I was sort of treated as like an individual, not just a student. So like I felt a lot more mature doing that, than I would be if like I was treated as a student in that like situation.*

Niamh again was the most unsure of how her involvement with the play had affected her:

> *Niamh: Um, a little bit I guess, but I feel like I feel like it's not affected like, um, apart from the drama class like my other classes that much.*

Changing teacher perceptions

This was an area where students also noted a significant change. Natalie particularly had some interesting observations:

> *Natalie: yeah, definitely. Um, like teachers that I've never even had before coming up to me like, Oh you did like such great job. And I was like, Oh thank you. Knowing that like people that I don't even know thought that I did a good job that was really nice as well. It made me feel very connected with like more of the teachers at the school.*

Daisy furthered this idea commenting on the plays ability to broaden teacher's perceptions of students:

Daisy: it gives their peers and their teachers as well, like an opportunity to see that they can do different things outside of their subject.

Another interesting area that was brought up in these conversations was that students observed how their perspective had changed on some of their teachers, helping them consider them as more rounded people:

Holly: it made me realize that quite a few teachers that are actually good, uh, other things that aren't just their regular subject.

Bonnie: I think so because first of all, they would just teach us, but then they're actually more of a friend than the teacher.

Josh: Like I know they're more, I know like what they like and how, um, the like drama and everything. yeah.

Enjoyment and desire to come to school

The student's general response to this was that the play had made them feel more connected to school as they felt that they had more of a purpose in coming:

Bonnie: Because if I wasn't, I would just, it would just be just school. So it's actually made me want to come to school more and stuff.

Daisy: being part of the play, like made, um, school more enjoyable because it gave, um, I feel like it gives students like something to look forward to and um, something to put energy in that's like a positive thing rather than like going out and messing about or whatever.

However, as I mentioned earlier this potentially doesn't have a long-term impact as Holly observed:

Holly: Well, while it was still on, I felt more of a reason to go to school…It was like a release of me feelings and energy in the form of acting.
Me: And then now do you feel like it's something missing?
Holly: Yeah.

Second teacher interview

During my final conversation with Mrs. Smith we discussed a couple of observations that we had made throughout the process and felt were important. The first of these was what she felt was important for the school community:

> *In terms of the school community, I think people still talk about it, which is interesting. You know, they still mention it. Um, English wants to put up some of the set design stuff in the library. So that all becomes part of the bigger picture.*

We both mentioned our desire to ensure that this culture of having a school production continues and hopefully grows to involve more students. When discussing the impact that the play had, Mrs. Smith stated that she felt it was twofold; academically for those students involved who were about to take their GCSE drama practical exam but more importantly the social element for the students:

> *I think actually one of the biggest things that never really gets mentioned is friendships, and those kids talk to other people don't they.*

Mrs. Smith also mentioned the growth of community among staff at the school after the play.

> *Mrs. Smith: I think I have a different appreciation for some teachers. You know, like we were very well supported by staff and that's nice to see.*

The main focus of our conversation was the long-term benefits of the play and how we could make the positive impact of the play grow within the school:

> *'I think it just reminds you…that we have to look at the bigger picture and it's not just academics and these kids really succeed doing something like this. Even the ones that had small parts, they have the absolute sense of accomplishment and doing something together, something positive and non-academic. And also it's just good experiences. Like if you go into life and get a job and they've got to manage somebody or organise something or it's practical experience of doing that kind of stuff, which they don't get in the classroom. it's always really important to me that staff see kids in a better light. They're achieving something and potentially from kids that they would never see that from academically.*

Analysis

How does taking part in a school play impact on students personally?

One of the key ways that shone through in the student responses was that of greater enjoyment of school and a feeling of freedom and stress relief that was created for students. Holly Josh and Daisy all explicitly stated that being involved had increased their enjoyment of school, all remarking that it gave them a 'purpose' and 'Something to look forward to' at the end of the day.

> *Daisy: Because it gives me like a purpose…It gives me something to look forward to, and it makes me enjoy school a lot more.*
> *Holly: It makes me look forward to something.*
> *Josh: having an inside school is more like you've got something to do and it's like makes you happy in school and things.*

These ideas concur with Neelands thoughts, that the joy created from being involved in a school play transcends any academic outcome, as these qualities will lead students to develop a more positive attitude to school as whole (Neelands, 2009). The feelings of looking forward to coming to school expressed by students also link with Corby's finding that during the school production there would be an upward trend in school attendance (Corby, 2008). This also resonates with Ewing's idealistic view that not only does Drama increase student enjoyment of school, but that it can positively change the direction of their life, however I do think his view remains idealistic. Whilst both student questionnaires and interviews do show a real desire for enjoyment from taking part in a school play:

> *'I decided to become involved with the play because I love to act. I might not be the best at it but I enjoy it very much.'*
> *'Because I couldn't do Drama for GCSE or A-Level, it is an outlet for me to act, which is something I really enjoy and would like to keep up.'*

And that increasing student enjoyment of school was one of our key motivations for pursuing the project:

> *Mrs Smith: We spend so much time with academics or exam results or dealing with negatives you know. That [The play] should be. Wholly positive'*

> *'I don't know that there's a life changing goal at the end of it you know but spreading a bit of happiness and a bit of positivity and yeah something to enjoy.*

I feel I have to agree with my colleague here. While students have gained enjoyment and a more positive attitude to school during the production and perhaps into the near future, I believe it is too far to say that it will have a positive impact on the rest of their life, particularly as Winner and Cooper state that these positive gains are not generally recognised by students on their own, but must be explicitly pointed out by teachers (Winner & Cooper, 2000).

Another area where involvement in the play had a great personal impact on students was in their desire and recognition of growing in confidence. The desire for raised self-esteem was the most common answer given on the first round of questionnaires when students were asked 'what do you hope to gain from being involved in the school play?' It was also notable in the second questionnaire that students were able to confirm that their feelings of confidence had grown throughout the process:

> *'I have gained a lot of confidence. I also met a lot of new people who I am now friends with who I never thought I would be.'*

Students also expressed a sense of freedom they felt during the rehearsal process in order to explore these ideas:

> *Natalie: For me it's kind of a safe space like I'm quite conscious person. But like in drama I can just like shout about and no one's going to judge me and I can just like be myself.*

Both these sentiments concur with Neelands idea that the rehearsal process leaves space for students to explore their full potential without the limits of the preconceived idea of their potential which can be a hinderance in the classroom (Neelands, 2009). With some students observing that involvement in the play gave them more confidence to speak up during lessons, I think it may be worth considering if it is the confidence gained from involvement in Drama activities that lead to students' academic success rather than any skills they inadvertently acquire from it. This theory would provide somewhat of a middle ground between Burton et al.'s (2000) ideas that this is simply

wishful thinking, and Badti and Badti's (2015) ideas on drama improving cognitive behaviours. This being said however I do still have to side with Burton et al. (2000) as this theory is still somewhat anecdotal.

The last way that the play seems have had a personal impact on students is in their personal growth, and an acute awareness of the areas in which they have grown. The two sixth former were particularly aware of these:

> *Daisy:…Being confident in my own ideas. Taking sort of a lead role because I've always been like in it rather than doing stuff for it, so it's been really fun seeing a different side.*
>
> *Natalie: Definitely like how to. Control like my temper. And I've learned how to use lights and sounds and. To like be aware… I feel like very proud of myself.*

These responses seem to cement Yassa's ideas that students, after a school production, have higher levels of assertiveness and greater openness to feedback (Yassa, 1999). It also ties in with Catteral et al.'s ideas that students gain greater tolerance and empathy from participating in extracurricular Drama activities. However, what is interesting is the lack of impact that other students felt that it had on them:

> *Niamh: I guess with other subjects, I'm not really sure what for me personally hasn't really impacted it that much…*
>
> *'None. But that doesn't mean it's irrelevant to me.'*

So while involvement in a school play and the realisation of the growth gained from it does show a positive correlation with Taylor's (1992) ideas that participation in Drama leads to students having a greater sense of self actualisation, this highlights that this is not the case for all students and perhaps it is necessary at times, like Winner and Cooper argue, to help students make that leap between what is happening and how it has been beneficial to them. However as I mentioned earlier, one of the key motivations for producing a school play was the students enjoyment, and so again I would propose that if students do not have a full appreciation and in depth understanding of how they have grown as people, but have enjoyed the experience, then I feel that is still a positive personal outcome.

How does a school production impact on school community?

One of the ways the play seems to have impacted on feelings of school community is in providing a sub community for students within the wider school community where they expressed feelings of having a place to belong, and enjoyed being validated by those around them who are likeminded. This led to a growth in their social circles and greater feelings of belonging and connectedness to school:

> *Bonnie: - and that there are actually a lot of people who like acting like me.*
> *Holly: I don't really have many things that… I don't really get along many people. So I thought if I go to Drama it'd be a chance to make new friends, get to work with a group of people and do something I really like… Quite a few people in the year group tease me.*
> *Daisy: It gives students somewhere to go after school so they aren't causing trouble… It's like a safety unit… You become a bit like a family I think.*

This evidence concurs with Brendtro and Larson's conclusions that our innate need to belong being met in an appropriate context will lead to a rise in self-esteem (2006). It also agrees with Gray et al. (2018) particularly considering Holly and Daisy's comments on seeking out Drama activities as a safe space with Gray et al. stating that drama can provide students with the acceptance that they need to flourish. Whilst these statements from students do show a positive sense of community created by the play, also affirming Deasy's theory that these students greater levels of acceptance in the rehearsal room than in a normal classroom setting (Deasy,2002), I still wonder whether they are slightly idealistic considering the students comments after the play:

> *Holly: Well, while it was still on, I felt more of a reason to go to school, but now it's not as much because I come into school, get education, get bullied, go home.*

So, from this we can conclude that whilst the play is happening the conditions are suitable for flourishing, however when they are removed the impact on students' feelings of belonging within the school community are removed with it. It seems then that Bruner was correct when concluding that the external factors or 'Embodied matter' which could affect students' ability to find their place within the school community cannot simply be overcome by taking part in a school play. However,

this does not diminish the positive impact it has on students while they are taking part but calls into question its longevity.

The second area of community that seemed to be positively influenced due to the play was the creation of a greater connection across the year groups. The students observed that there were normally divisions between the year groups and that the play had helped to bridge this gap:

> *Holly: because people are quite often pretty divided between year groups and that and it's a chance to group altogether for people to do something with other people who also enjoy the same stuff.*
> *Natalie: I think. People in their friendship groups they don't like to step outside of their comfort zone but when they're put in an environment with other people that have similar interests whether they are like older or younger they like sort of find out that they do have the same interests and they can make new friends from it…*

These sentiments were also still felt after the play was over, however not as keenly:

> *Daisy: It shows that like, it's gonna sound a bit cringe, but like older sibling role that six formers can have can have or like just, the higher up in the school you are to the younger years and how that can be really beneficial*
> *Natalie: Not really. I still feel like as like everyone sort of sticks to their own years, um, in their own groups. But like the kids that were in the play, like they, they still talk to each other, which is nice seeing like how they've come together.*

These student observations concur with McGrath's ideas that theatre activities can provide a space for those who may be more marginalised or struggle to find there place elsewhere within the school to have a voice in a safe space with likeminded people without facing judgement (McGrath, 2002). It also links with Neelands ideas that the acceptance of the rehearsal room offers a bridge between the classroom and the real world, and the connections developed here can better equip the more vulnerable students with issues arising in wider school life (Neelands,2009). We can also conclude that Williams's findings that drama does have a lasting positive effect on the self-esteem and social interactions of vulnerable students have been demonstrated here (Williams, 1990), as well as Abbs theory, that a group of children working closely together on a play creates an understanding community that will have a long lasting impact on their social interactions even after the play is over

(Abbs, 2015). Deeper knowledge of each other and the building of patience and resilience throughout the play, whilst it may not change their whole school experience forever, the shared experience does create a bond. Whilst these students may not become best friends, they will look out for one and other in, as Daisy acknowledged an 'Older sibling' type way. So from this we can conclude that whilst the bigger feelings of belonging and finding their place long-term within the school community from taking part in a school play may be a step too far, there are still small wins to be noted in areas of social interaction and the positive impact that knowing a greater number of people within the school and across a range of year groups can have on all students.

What is the long-term impact of a school play?

One of the main themes that came through from the findings in this area was that of changing teacher student perceptions of each other. Before the play students expressed this as a desired outcome:

> *Daisy: I'm fairly quiet in lessons and I don't really take sort of a leader role, so to put like energy and thought into something that has a positive outcome and is so creative, I think it could show like a different side to what I am in lesson*
> *Natalie: I think that they'll see that when I do put my mind to something I am capable of doing good things and that I do put effort into things I enjoy and that I can do more than what's expected of me.*
> *Holly: They might think I'm decent. Maybe a little creative, maybe just… a little annoying Otter.*

Mrs Smith also expressed this as a desired outcome:

> *'I would hope that they would again see the positive in kids. I think we find in drama as well, what we would consider a good child or a capable child is very different to in some subjects. So you know we always get these things through don't we like 'they can't sit still in science' or 'they hate maths' whereas because they're not sat at a desk with something that they can't get they absolutely have that chance to excel'*

And in her second interview Natalie expressed that teachers had acknowledged her ability and success:

Natalie: like teachers that I've never even had before coming up to me like, Oh you did like such great job. And I was like, Oh thank you. knowing that people that I don't even know thought that I did a good job, that was really nice as well. It made me feel very connected with like more of the teachers at the school.

Natalie's comments are an active representation of Van Meale and Van Houte's theory that when students perceive that teachers have put their trust in them their attachment to school increases. It seems that Natalie's ability to step up into the more adult role in the play enabled her to sense that myself and Mrs Smith were placing a lot of trust in her and her capabilities, which as we can see has increased her positive view of her teachers. However, I do wonder if this is as prevalent with the younger students who were simply acting in the play and as such were not taking on a 'trusted' role. The main observations on changing teacher perceptions seemed to be more what they observed about their teachers rather than a change in how their teachers may perceive them:

Holly: it made me realise that quite a few teachers that are actually good, uh, other things that aren't just their regular subject.
Bonnie: I think so because first of all, they would just teach us, but then they're actually more of a friend than the teacher.
Josh: Like I know they're more, I know like what they like and how, um, the like drama and everything. yeah.

This is interesting considering Gash's statement that it is difficult to alter how students view their teachers, and Hughes and Wilson's notion that potentially the rehearsal room could provide a safe space to alter these. They stated that the more freeing atmosphere allows for new identities to be explored and perspectives on others to change (Hughes & Wilson, 2004). The comments of the students seem to concur with Hanley's theory that students having the opportunity to work alongside their teachers creatively leads to a greater understanding of them holistically (Hanley, 1998). This is particularly evident in the comments of the students stated above who seemed to gain a more holistic view of their teachers as human beings which have stayed with them beyond the play. We cannot however conclude whether or not this would lead to positive academic outcomes as Prewatt et al. proposes due to the length, size and aims of the study.

Another long-term benefit of participation in the school production was the friendships that were cultivated and the confidence that was gained. These were highlighted mostly in the second student questionnaire:

> *'I've become more confident and it has made me feel like I fit in more, like I've found my place. It was also a good experience as I've never been in a play before'*
> *'I also gained new friendships within my own school year but was also able to act as an older figure for younger years'*

As well as by Mrs Smith in her second interview:

> *'I think actually one of the biggest things that never really gets mentioned is friendships, and those kids talk to other people don't they.'*

These comments link to Boyes work when she discusses the holistic benefits of Drama activities, particularly in helping students build lasting friendships with likeminded people (Boyes, 2003). The benefits of these newfound relationships and are also in line with Deasy's statement that the confidence gained through Drama helps students to develop a clearer self-concept. Although this would also be something that requires further investigation and analysis, I do feel that there is evidence of this appearing already after the school play with students commenting on feelings of fitting in more and feeling more confident in themselves. I also feel that these outcomes demonstrate the establishing of a positive working atmosphere within the rehearsal room for these students, in line with Nicholson's assertions that when entering the play making process, much focus is required from the adult on building the right atmosphere to establish strong working relationships with students, and encouraging them to build these with each other (Nicholson, 2002). The longevity of this increased self- concept and friendship can also be positively quantified by Niamh's comments on this during her second interview:

> *Niamh: I have made quite a lot of friends, um, so which I still talk to.*

During the interview process Niamh consistently believed that participating in the school play had little or no impact on her. However, this was the one area that she spoke of making positive gains. I feel that this is worth noting as a long-term positive outcome as due to Niamh's autism she can struggle to build new friendships, however the confidence she gained coupled with the environment cultivated led to her building lasting friendships.

Despite sighting these positive long-term outcomes of the school production, I must conclude that potentially the long-term impacts were not as great as we had hoped:

> *Daisy: being part of the play, like made, um, school more enjoyable because it gave, um, I feel like it gives students like something to look forward to and um, something to put energy in that's like a positive thing rather than like going out and messing about or whatever.*
> *Holly: Well, while it was still on, I felt more of a reason to go to school… It was like a release of me feelings and energy in the form of acting.*
> *Me: And then now do you feel like it's something missing?*
> *Holly: Yeah.*

These comments from the students then can be seen to both support and find flaws in Neelands ideas that ensemble work provides students with their own sub-culture within the school. Whilst it does promote a safe space for students to build relationship and practise togetherness, it does not seem that the positive effects last in the long-term- particularly evident from Holly's remarks. It also seems here that Ewing's ideas that drama can change the course of a student's life are again idealistic but I don't think that means that the gains are unimportant. It seems to demonstrate that more consistency is required to maintain them. I also feel that, noting Niamh's responses throughout in particular, students could benefit from the positives they have gained being pointed out to them in a more explicit way as they cannot always reach these conclusions themselves.

Conclusion and implications

Taking part in the school play did increase student enjoyment of school and their desire to come to school. It also increased their confidence which, although I was unable to observe in lessons, they stated they had noticed themselves. This positive increase in confidence could lead to improvement in academic success, although this theory would need to be quantified through observation and further research, something I would have liked to have done in addition to student interviews and questionnaires, however was unable to due to the Covid-19 pandemic. I must also conclude however that while a lot of the students were able to recognise the personal impact involvement in the play had on them others definitely benefited from having it made explicit to them.

In terms of impact on the school community I was pleased to see the development of stronger feelings of community among the students. The rehearsal room became a safe space for students who may struggle to find their place within the school community to express their creativity. It was also positive to see that the students recognised this themselves and still remained acquaintances if not close friends with people in their own year group and further up the school who they had met through participation in the play. One thing that also came to light though was that when this sub community of the rehearsal room was removed, despite the new relationships that had developed, these students did feel its loss. It seems that spending time in this safe sub community wasn't enough to bridge the gap for them to feel fully included in the wider school community. I feel that it then needs to be considered how we help to sustain this type of atmosphere for these students, whether it is through establishing a Drama club or whether them simply knowing there will be a school play every year and having the next one to look forward to would be enough.

In terms of the impact on students and teachers professionally, participating in the play was shown to enhance a lot of student teacher relationships through changing perceptions. It was very encouraging to hear lots of reports of teachers congratulating students on their hard work, and a lot

of colleagues mentioned certain students by name stating how they had no idea of how talented they were and how it has changed their view them. What is also positive from this is that the change in perceptions is reciprocal. The students commented on enjoying finding out more about their teacher's hobbies and interest and this seemed to lead to them viewing their teachers more holistically. The twofold benefits of this seem to establish better working relationships between students and teachers, and I believe that the impact of this will be long lasting.

Overall, I would love to continue to work on creating a more sustainable approach to maintaining feelings of school connectedness and school community through a Drama. I feel that the research has shown the multifaceted benefits of participating in Drama activities for both teachers and students, particularly in the context of a state school where there is a heavy focus on academic success, I feel that a school play can provide a safe and beneficial outlet where students are affirmed and find their place within the wider school community.

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A: First student questionnaire

Write a short answer to each of these questions:

Why did you decide to become involved in the school play?

What do you hope to gain from being involved in the school play?

What impact do you think the school play will have on your school life?

B: Second student questionnaire

Write a short answer to these questions:

What have you gained from being involved in the school play?

What impact has being involved in the school play had on your school life?

C: First round student interview transcripts

Bonnie

Me: So what was it that made you want to be involved in the school play.

Bonnie: Well I did loads of plays in my primary school and I thought it would be fun to bring it into secondary school.

Me: And were you nervous about it at all being year seven?

Bonnie: No I did a lot of plays at primary school and have been in a few drama groups outside school so I wasn't that nervous at all.

Me: What do you think, so far from the rehearsal process and stuff?

Bonnie: That you can be animals when you're acting, and that there are actually a lot of people who like acting like me.

Me: Yes likeminded people. Do you think you've gained anything personally. Like being a new year seven, have you met more people?

Bonnie: Yes I've met a lot more people, like me who are interested in the same things.

Me: What's been the most challenging bit about this?

Bonnie: Learning the tricky lines.

Me: Why is it important to have school plays?

Bonnie: Because it helps people who are nervous get out of their shells and get more confident. And so that people can actually see what other people have, like the skills they have

Me: What do you think any of your teachers who come and see you will learn about you?

Bonnie: Yeah that I enjoy acting and that I'm not always shy.

Me: What do you think of the school community at Cooper?

Bonnie: I think that most people are nice and help each other.

Me: Do you think that doing the school play has helped?

Bonnie: Yes definitely.

Holly

Me: so talk to me then about why you wanted to be involved in the school play.

Holly: I love drama and basically I, I don't really have many things that… I don't really get along many people.

Me: Okay

Holly: So I thought if I go to Drama it'd be a chance to make new friends, get to work with a group of people and do something I really like. I love drama really.

Me: Yeah, I can really tell as well from whenever you're in rehearsals. So how do you find school generally?

Holly: Um, alright. Um, quite a few people tease me in the year group. But I'm happy with my group of friends.

Me: That's really good. And how does drama enhance or better your experiences of school?

Holly: It makes me look forward to something and also just a chance to, I with people who've got this similar interest and do something I really enjoy because I really enjoy Drama.

Me: Brilliant. That's really good. Um, why do you think school plays are a good thing. Why do you think it's good that we have one or we're having one?

Holly: Um, it a way to like, express yourself in a way also it's a chance to work in a group of people who also you had subject and like in actual drama. Sometimes people mess it up. So it's a chance to work with people who also like drama and like be a little creative with what you do.

Me: Had you'd done any drama before this school play?

Holly: Yeah, I did a few school plays in primary.

Me: Very good. And you really enjoyed those?

Holly: Yeah.

Me: And do you think, obviously we don't know this yet because we haven't done the play yet, but what do you think you will gain from performing in front of people?

Holly: a little more confidence in myself? Cause I, that's something I definitely need more. Also I've made a few friends in Drama so I know that they're probably going to stick.

Me: That's really good. If I talk to you about school community, do you know what I mean by that?

Holly: Yeah.

Me: So what do you think our current school community is like at Cooper? You can be honest.

Holly: It's pretty good. We have people we can go to about stuff. Again, there's always going to be people that are a bit mean.

Me: I mean things like with our school kind of sense of togetherness.

Holly: I think we're pretty good at that. There's, there's still bit of like division between other people who don't really want anything to do with it and the people are a bit more passionate about it.

Me: Yeah, definitely. And what kind of a positive impact is being in this school play do you think going to have on your wider school life? Or is it already happening on your wider school life?

Holly: Yeah. So the chance to work with people older than me, not just in the same year group. That's been very helpful. Being able to work with the people. Yeah.

Me: Do you think, has it changed any of your perceptions of some of your teachers, do you think?

Holly: No. Nope.

Me: You kind of had the same idea about them. Do you think maybe if some of your teachers come and see you, it might change their perception of you?

Holly: Maybe.

Me: What do you think they might think of you whenever they see you doing your acting?

Holly: They might think I'm decent. Maybe a little creative, maybe just… a little annoying Otter.

Me: What'd you think are, what are the kind of elements of this that are going to help you feel more confident within school? Cause you said like you don't get to do many things like this in school I guess. Um, so what particularly is it going to help with do you think ?

Holly: My work with other people. And my social skills. And confidence.

Me: Because we've got all kind of work together and be on the same page. Don't we? In order to do this. Um, if we didn't have a school play next year, would you be quite sad about that?

Holly: Very.

Me: And were you sad we didn't have one last year?

Holly: Yeah, because I heard about what Laura told me because she's been my best friend. And she told me what about it and I was thinking when I go to big school I want to do that. But then when I found out there is no school play, I got, it was sad.

Me: So what do you think as a school, as everybody, teachers, students, all of us, what can we gain as a whole group of people from doing a school play?

Holly: It's a chance to get the students to work more together because people are quite often pretty divided between year groups and that and it's a chance to group altogether for people to do something with other people who also enjoy the same stuff.

Me: Excellent

Josh

Me: Okay. So Josh, tell me about drama and the school play.

Josh: well I'm doing drama for GCSE so the school play is really helpful with that and it's just…I like drama and I want to become an actor when I'm older.

Me: Brilliant so this is a good stepping stone. What made you want to sign up for the school play? Apart from just loving drama?

Josh: Um, my friends were doing it and I liked, I liked doing drama but it's something else to do rather than just, yeah.

Me: It gives you another activity to do. Yeah. Um, what do you think you are gaining from the process of being in this school play and the rehearsals and different things like that?

Josh: I would feel like I'm gaining more like dramatic experience in drama and performing and I'm quite shy when I perform so its helping,

Me: I would not have known that. Would you say you're quite shy generally or just in like when you're performing?

Josh: Generally. Yeah. Generally.

Me: And so how do you find, does drama help with that?

Josh: Yeah. Cause it helps me build my confidence.

Me: That's really interesting cause I think a lot of actors can be quite shy actually. But then for some reason when they're acting it seems that they can really come out of themselves. Um, why do you think that school plays are important?

Josh: I feel my school plays are important because if you don't have things like musicals or plays in the school sort of a bit like dead cause most people like music in school plays and encourage it.

Me: And what do you think uh, has been like the highlight of being involved so far, obviously we haven't done it yet. What's been really the best bit so far?

Josh: I would say the highlight in the play is that it's got a musical part, like a song part to it because most plays don't have that but that's a good connection.

Me: And you like music as well don't you?

Josh: Yeah, I've done lots of musicals.

Me: And you do drama. You do drama outside of school as well?

Josh: Yeah, over the weekends. Yeah.

Me: What is different or better if you want, about having a school play rather than having a play that you're doing outside of school.

Josh: Having a school pays is better because it can help you with your drama in school. If you have it outside of school it's just a bit and you can have, having an inside school is more like you've got something to do and it's like makes you happy in school and things.

Me: That's good to we can we give you something to look forward to in school? Do you think any of your teachers that come and watch you in this, do you think they might be quite surprised at you or did you, what did you think?

Josh: Well, Mrs Smith already knows I do drama as she's my teacher and I think from seeing me performing in it, it would sort of surprise her because in drama I haven't always been open and active.

Me: So what about your other teachers who aren't involved in drama.

Josh: Well um, most teachers know I do music and drama but they don't know. I'm like fully involved. So they might be surprised I'm in it.

Me: What are you normally like in class?

Josh: Sensible. And I always listen and pay attention.

Me: Do you offer ideas a lot or do you tend to be a little bit more quiet?

Josh: I can sometimes be quiet if I'm having an off day.

Me: so they're not going to be like, Oh I didn't know James could speak like that. But they're going to be, do you think it be interesting for them to the see you in a different way?

Josh: Yeah.

Me: What do you think, cause it hasn't happened yet, but what do you think you're going to gain from this?

Josh: Um, like it will help with drama as I said and it will improve my like…cause I want them to come an actor, it will give me tips and things.

Me: What about your confidence?

Josh: Yeah, because the more I perform my confidence goes up.

Me: Outside of acting experience, what do you think you've gained from being involved in this?

Josh: It's like something to do something fun outside of school, well Inside of school, but yeah.

Me: Do you have anything else you want to say about like why you think drama is important or anything?

Josh: I feel like drama important because it's a good thing, like you go see a show like for weekend on school days and it gets you really involved and it should like stay alive cause most people don't like drama and music and it's just about so yeah.

Me: Where you sad in your first few years of secondary school that there wasn't a school play?

Josh: Yeah. So I was like, Oh I was looking forward to the school play and joining in that.

Niamh

Me: So let's just chat initially about your reasons for wanting to be involved in the school play.

Niamh: Well, I think first of all it was because I really enjoy acting and um, also because from previous years there haven't really been that many opportunities to do a school play, um, and when there has Um, I think in the end most of them have got cancelled because so many people are dropping out. And so I sort of saw this as an opportunity almost as a sort of fresh start and a way to really get an experience of what a school play is actually like, and also because I'm a GCSE drama student. So I thought it might help me maybe with my component one and two. Especially component two cause that's all acting.

Me: So you say you're someone who really likes acting. Um, have you done much acting kind of outside of school?

Niamh: Um, I've done a bit. I've um, I've auditioned for other plays outside of school. Um, and I used to do dance classes and performing art school. So I do have a bit of other experience outside of school.

Me: And why do you think, or what do you think maybe like are some of the benefits or why is it kind of a bit different doing it in school? Why is that kind of a nice opportunity to be able to have?

Niamh: Well I guess because the whole environment is familiar and the teachers are familiar, the students are acting with, they're familiar and I feel like that's better for some plays if you want that to be a bit more chemistry, if it's with people that you already recognize and already know, I think that a school environment can be very beneficial.

Me: Yeah, that's certainly true about that kind of, I didn't think about that, like knowing people and kind of being maybe more confident already in that environment. What do you think about that? Do you think it makes it a bit easier to do a play in school?

Niamh: I think. I think it can. Yeah. If you're comfortable. Yeah.

Me: How do you think being involved in this school play impacting on your school life or is it at all? At the minute,

Niamh: Um, I guess it depends. I guess, it doesn't really impact it that much apart from maybe drama because if I've already got a lot more experience with acting for example in a school play. Um, that could help me with my component two. But I guess with, I guess with other subjects, I'm not really sure what for me personally hasn't really impacted it that much.

Me: What about in terms of kind of socially, has it impacted any way in your, has it made any difference to that area of school life?

Niamh: Um, I mean I've spoken to new people because of the school play and I've gotten to know people better and people that I already knew. Um, I do even more and I guess you could say I've made some new friends so. I guess if you look at it that way.

Me: What do you think the aftermath of the school play, do you think it will have any, any other kind of an impact on your school life or school community?

Niamh: I'm not really sure. I mean, I think that just depends on the person I know for me, um, no I don't really think so. Just no, that's absolutely, it's a..

Me: There's no right or wrong answer. Like I said, it's just what you think. How are you feeling about the performances and being up there in front of your teachers and other friends and family that are going to come with?

Niamh: Um, well personally I really get that nervous if I'm doing anything in front of a lot of people. Um, if it's, if it's speaking or acting, um, I feel like it would, I'd be more nervous if it was in a small room with only few people because I feel like that's a lot more eyes on you. But if it's like lots of people, then, I dunno, I feel like I, I personally be quite, quite alright, quite confident with

performing in front of a lot of people, especially if it's people that I know and like, then I would definitely help me feel more at ease.

Me: And I guess just thinking back on what you said before, that will kind of be, I guess a natural thing because it's in within the school context and it's within the school environment. Then there'll be people, mostly people that are in the audience you'll knew or know of or kind of recognize. do you think it's a good thing that schools do? That we're doing a school play?

Niamh: I think, I think it is because I think it's a good opportunity and I think it can help with some people too. It can help them build their confidence. So I do think it's school plays are a good thing.

Me: Do you think it will help you become more confident?

Niamh: Possibly, yes it could. Um, yeah, I mean I'm not, I don't have like a huge part, but even then it might.

Me: How do you find school generally?

Niamh: Um…

Me: You can be honest and say, Oh it's terrible.

Niamh: Generally with the academic side, I've usually never really struggled. I do quite like the academic side of school. But with the social side I've always, and I've always quite struggled. I think that's probably got a lot to do with the fact that I'm autistic. But, um, but I guess school academically I do quite quite enjoy it.

Me: With regards to thinking about the social side of things, is there any benefit? Is the school play maybe gonna benefit that or help with that in any way do you think?

Niamh: I think, I think yeah, it does because there's, I guess there's a lot less people and they're all in a similar situation because like if you're in rehearsals you're there to rehearse a play. So that does make it easier and if it's… And if for example, in the play your two characters are friends in real life and then you have to practice that scene, it does help social skills even if we were doing all you're doing is rehearsing lines. Yeah, it does. It does help.

Me: Do you kind of have any idea of the impact this, that seeing you in this play may for example, have on like teachers who teach you? What do you think the impact might be on them of seeing you in this play? If anything?

Niamh: I'm not, I don't know. Um, I literally have no idea.

Me: That's absolutely you can say I have no clue and we can talk about that when we do a second interview later on.

Natalie

Me: So what are your thoughts. Kind of on drama generally.
Natalie: I think in a way it allows people to be themselves. Like because sometimes people are really shy or on their friends but in like drama. They can just sort of exaggerate and like be who they are.
Me: How do you view it personally for you. What's it like for you.
Natalie: For me it's kind of a safe space like I'm. I'm quite conscious person. But like in drama I can just like shout about and no one's going to judge me and I can just like be myself.
Me: Yeah definitely. And why or if you do. What do you think about this school play and why do you think. What's the purpose of why we're doing it. Why is it important that we are.
Natalie: I think it's good to let people like show their skills and to also like build community between different people in different years to like sort of bring them together. And so people can like show. How good they actually are.
Me: What do you think personally for you. What do you gain so far from being. Well we haven't done it yet but what have you through your involvement so far what you gained from being involved.
Natalie: I've gained. It is like directing something it can be stressful but it's for the outcome it's definitely worth it. Because the like there's always bumps along the road but it's really good. So…
Me: yeah definitely. Why did you want to be involved in this.
Natalie: I want to do drama at Uni so I thought it would look good on my university application.
Me: Is that it?!
Natalie: [Laughs] I just like drama you know non selfish way I like being in control of things. I just I enjoy like putting my ideas out there and seeing what happens. Yeah.
Me: What kind of skills do you think you have gained so far in her soul process and everything.
Natalie: Definitely like how to. Control like my temper. And I've learned how to use lights and sounds and. To like be aware.
Me: What do you think of school community. You've mentioned really between different groups. What do you think kind of. Would you how would you describe the community at The Cooper school.
Natalie: I think all years stick to like their years. Like groups stick with their groups like they don't really blend in with other people. And I like they just kind of keep to ourselves..
Me: And do you think how can this play kind of positively impact that?
Natalie: I think. People in their friendship groups they don't like to step outside of their comfort zone but when they're put in an environment with other people of other that have other interests and have they are like older or younger they they like sort of find out that they do have the same interests and they can make new friends from it and stuff which I think is really good cause I think it's good that they. Like the olders can protect the youngers and the youngers can learn from the olders.
Me: What do you think will be the impact of this on you. Like when it's done. What are you anticipating gaining from this role like when this is all finished. I'll talk to you again in January.
Natalie: It definitely… I feel like very proud of myself. Like. I feel like when it's done like seeing how it's come together and stuff like that I feel like I didn't think that I could do it. Honestly I felt it would look rubbish if I if I was co directing but the way it turned out. Like I'm really happy with it and I'm really proud of myself and stuff.
Me: What do you think then would be the impact on some of your teachers if they came and saw this Like your other subjects teachers come and see this. Do you think it might change their perception of you?

Natalie: I think that they'll see that when I do put my mind to something I am capable of doing good things and that I do put effort into things I enjoy and that I I can do more than what's expected of me.
Me: And has this changed your perception of any of your teachers or like how you viewed certain teachers?
Natalie: Um not really. I just I feel like. Working beside like you and Mrs Smith and like being treated as an individual it like makes me feel a lot more comfortable around all of you in the drama department. It's just good.
Me: That's nice. Lots of relationships. Anything else you want to generally about school plays or why its important or school community.
Natalie: I just. Yeah I feel like drama is it gives people a way to be themselves and they don't have to pretend to be someone they're not because when they're playing a character even though they are playing that character that character can link to them and they can be themselves for that character.
Me: Do you think because you haven't always gone to this school am I right in saying?
Natalie: No I went to Lindworth High before
Me: And how was the drama like there? How has it impacted your time here?
Natalie: I think at Lindowrth High because I was in a school play in year seven. We didn't really talk to the older years like they do here. Like in our production everyone's like because there's a small number of people. Everyone has to talk to each other and everyone gets along really well. But at my old school there's like so many people in it that we just didn't really talk like we we only did it if our friends were doing it and if we didn't get the same role as our friends like we didn't do it and we didn't talk to the older years. But honestly I would have preferred if when I did it I spoke to the older years because it's just good to like know other people and you can learn from them.

Daisy

Me: So how do you feel about the school play, about drama generally?

Daisy: Em.. I think drama helps different years like connect, with other subjects there isn't really the opportunity to connect with lower school.

Me: Why did you want to be involved in the school play?

Daisy: Because it gives me like a purpose, if you know what I mean? Like something to look forward to with a clear outcome, that you can feel rewarded for.

Me: Yeah because in other subjects I guess you don't get that extra curricular opportunity. Had being involved in the play changed how you feel about school?

Daisy: It gives me something to look forward to, and it makes me enjoy school a lot more.

Me: Do you think that having school plays is important?

Daisy: I think it is really important because it gives kids the opportunity to showcase a different sort of skill, and students who are more like quiet and reserved in different lessons can show off in a different way and it's also an opportunity for the teachers to see a different side of them.

Me: What are you hoping to get out of this experience, or have you already got out of it?

Daisy: Em… communication skills, being confident in my own ideas. Taking sort of a lead role because I've always been like in it rather than doing stuff for it, so it's been really fun seeing a different side.

Me: Has it changed your perception on any of your peers or any of your teachers, or how you think they view you?

Daisy: I think with the play you get to showcase a different sort of talent than in class, so maybe the teachers can see a different side to them?

Me: When this is all finished, what do you think you will take away from it?

Daisy: Sort of how to make something… like I don't really know how to describe it, how to like make something from the beginning? And build up lots of different things to make it all come together?

Me: Like the process?

Daisy: Yes definitely the process.

Me: So you're new to drama as a subject- what made you want to choose it? Or become involved in drama generally?

Daisy: Well I really enjoy it, but also its quite unique as a subject, you get to take lots of different experiences from loads of different people and you don't have to be yourself. So if you're like nervous in yourself, or confident in yourself for whatever you can empathise with other people and take on a different role, you don't have to be yourself. So it can help people step out of their own head and become someone else.

Me: Yeah definitely that can be really therapeutic, do you think that school plays are important?

Daisy: Yeah I think it is really important because it gives students an outlet and somewhere safe to go after school and so they aren't causing trouble outside, and its like a safety unit and… this is gonna sound a bit deep but… you become a bit of like a family I think, and like students I would have never known in lower school I know now, and like if they ever have anything they need I can help them with it now.

Me: You have been at this school since year seven, have you had any experience of school plays at this school before?

Daisy: Musicals yeah, and some music performances, but never a play.

Me: What musical did you do?

Daisy: we did Godspell.

Me: When you were in year seven?

Daisy: yes.

Me: and there hasn't been a play or a musical since then?

Daisy: No

Me: How do you feel… did the lack of a school play impact on you or did you think 'oh I wish we could do a school play' or, did you not really think about it that much?

Daisy: Oh no I was always thinking I really want to do a school play, I really want to do another musical, I was a bit young when we did Godspell but I think they're so… maybe I'm a bit biased but I think they're so important and so… just fun… I was always thinking that I really wanted to do one. So yeah it really was a big gap for me.

Me: do you think that after this the view that some of your teachers have of you will change? and if so how will it change?

Daisy: Yeah, I think like, I'm fairly quiet in lessons and I don't really take sort of a leader role, so to put like energy and thought into something that has a positive outcome and is so creative, I think it could show like a different side to what I am in lesson, because I'm a lot more comfortable in drama and yeah I just think it will show a different side to what I'm like.

Me: Yeah definitely, do you have anything else you want to say about drama, or school plays generally?

Daisy: Yeah, so I didn't actually live in catchment for this school, my mum and dad had to appeal for me to get in here, but I really wanted to come here for the drama and performing arts, because before I came to this school I used to come and watch the musicals they used to put on, and that's what made me really want to come here- the performing arts.

Me: Oh right, so obviously a bit frustrating when that didn't quite work out.

Daisy: Yes definitely

D: First round teacher interview transcript

Me: Talk to me about the what you think the value of doing this is.
Mrs Smith: I think having done them as a student you absolutely recognise that it's about working as a team about coming together as an ensemble about confidence about exploring different things. Generally I think at school I loved extracurricular so anything that was outside of lessons. But I think school productions was all about doing things within different year groups. I know some schools do like Lower and Upper School but ours were always everybody. And I found that really inspiring. And so I think that's part of what you want to do as a teacher is allow kids that same opportunity.
I think we only ever get to look at so many things in lessons. And that ability to look at a whole production which you would never do in a lesson from a script and characters and production and set and costume and everything else. And I think that's the other part of it is that the inclusion so that you have to perform to be in it. You know we've got kids doing costumes or lighting in the sixth formers have the set, even ticket sales the girls are doing a kiosk. It's about having us wider reach as possible to allow everybody to participate because there are obviously other things in school aren't there like PE.
But. Again not everybody loves it or wants to be involved with as much as you may not necessarily love acting that thought that you can get involved or even if you like it. But are terrified. Like there was a couple of girls in this one that didn't want to do it they wanted to be backstage and I know you're fine and they're just part of the ensemble. They might have one or two lines on their own but that ability to feel like you're part of something without the pressure of standing up and delivering a monologue.
I think it's just doing so positive in school as well. Like we spend so much time. With academics or exam results or dealing with negatives you know. That [The play] should be. Wholly positive. Yeah.
Me: And what do you think then. Like speaking more generally are the positive impacts to this wider school community of their being play.
Mrs Smith: I think it's. Allowing students to recognise positives in each other so that you know I didn't know they were capable of doing that maybe I could try it or maybe I could share with them what I'm good at. You know that sense that again you know celebrating the good rather than what's negative. I think productions are about bringing people together from across the school.
Me: What do you think for staff like do you think it will have any impact on other teachers coming to see.
Mrs Smith: I would hope that they would again see the positive in kids. I think we find a drama as well but what we would consider a good child or a capable child is very different to in some subjects. Yeah. So you know we always get these things through don't we like 'they can't sit still in science' or 'they hate maths' or 'they won't engage in this' whereas because they're not sat at a desk with something that they can't get they absolutely have that chance to excel. So I think they get the opportunity to see other students in a different light. And maybe other staff and you know see the fact because I think as a teacher you spend a lot of time considering how hard you work and maybe not but then you kind of assuming that nobody else works as hard. It's quite nice to see what other people do and are capable of. And we in previous productions I've had staff involved so I did fame and old school and we had this meant to be a head teacher at the beginning and our head teacher did that speech and then some other staff were the teachers for the audition phase. So it's quite nice to see staff in a different light as we get our kids to see them getting involved and do something different. I don't know that there's a a life changing goal at the end of it you know but spreading a bit of happiness and a bit of positivity and yeah something to enjoy I think we do so much in school that's about results saw you competing because even PE to an extent as much as they love it that compete against people or against other schools or, and there's none of that. You're not being pitted against anybody you know everybody can get involved. Yeah I think just something that is just about entertaining and being positive for them.

Me: What do you think. Because obviously in the last couple of times plays tried to be done. The kids are kind of been quite flaky and not committed. What do you think kind of. They will gain from this. Because this I'm like we've managed to keep them coming and committed.
Mrs Smith: I mean I've never experienced anything like it before... What happened with Alice. I've never known. To me it was just bizarre because they signed up for it. I think some of them had signed up to too many things you quite often get kids in production who do drama school or dance or whatever else that they'd kind of overstretch themselves. I think unfortunately there was a couple of very key people that had the wrong attitude and pulled out very late and at that point there was just no going back and I didn't want to put something on it that wasn't right. I didn't want those kids to the ones that were in it to ever feel like they were going to be embarrassed because they weren't prepared or any of that side of it. I think we've been very very strict from the beginning of this and sending out that letter and the expectations. We only lost one. Once they signed that letter with all the date you know we were really open from the beginning about what the expectation was. I know we've added more stuff in more rehearsals but of the basic expectations I think we were really clear from the beginning. I think as much as it would've been lovely in terms of selling more tickets and having a wider reach to have more kids it has helped having a reasonably small cast here. You know in terms of managing it and keeping them there and just because the other problem is when you do big shows is you have kids are not in it loads. So fame I did with 80 which was insane. But it meant that every chorus, you know there should have been next six or eight or 10 kids we put in everybody just so they were in it. Which is quite difficult to manage but they still had loads of time when they weren't involved on stage and I think that's the problem is because they're children they don't necessarily recognise that you can't be involved the whole way. So if they come to rehearsals and they're only rehearsing ten minutes of the hour they get bored or they're like oh well I'm not needed so. They don't necessarily see the bigger picture that we see. And I think also starting with some of those scenes that were group like we started with the opening didn't we. It was about everybody being on stage being involved so they can see from the outset that they're there. I think that helps.
Me: So I'm going to speak again after the play is done. But. Like I guess you kind of already covered it but what would you say kind of. Or are you anticipating the kind of either response or reaction to be. To the production.
Mrs Smith: In previous experience it's always been positive. So I've never had anyone come up and be like well this could have been better or they could've done this because it's family and friends. It's always really positive it's like they did this really well and that really worked. They don't nit pick in the way you know we would for an exam or something else. So I think it should be positive and it should leave the kids this term leaving on quite a nice note. And feeling really good about themselves and that's part of the thing and you know even if something does go wrong we just get on with it and you know there's enough around like the sixth formers that. Actually the year tens have been amazing it would just keep going. And they'd get on with it and I think that's what they take from it that even things go wrong you can still do it that people receive it really well you know people are supportive they want you to do well you know walks into that audience waiting to fall over or fail. and that's nice.
Me: That is nice like with regards to kind of how they are treated in class sometimes with kind of feedback lessons and you didn't get this quite right, rather than people wanting to kind of tell them what they've done wrong it's the audience I guess want to tell them how amazing they are.
Mrs Smith: Yeah. So yeah I think for them that is just purely positive.

E: Second round student interview transcripts

Bonnie

Me: So the play is done. How was that for you?
Bonnie: I really enjoyed it cause I got to meet new people and learn more stuff.
Me: And how did you enjoy the actual performances?
Bonnie: Oh, I liked being on stage and seeing everybody enjoying themselves.
Me: That's nice. Did you feel like you were all enjoying yourselves and you're doing it?
Bonnie: [Nodded]
Me: That's cool. What was the main thing you enjoyed about the process of doing this? What do you think was the main thing you gained from doing it.
Bonnie: I liked when we were, um, like getting into the characters and um, me, um, yeah, yeah...
Me: That's good. What about kind of, so obviously you gained skills in drama. What about kind of outside of that, have you gained anything like personally from being involved?
Bonnie: I gained a bit more confidence I think and a bit of friendship as well. Yeah.
Me: That's cool. So obviously you're in year seven. So how do you think that kind of, how did being in the play kind of help you, maybe, I don't know, feel a bit more settled in school?
Bonnie: Yeah definitely.
Me: in what way? What was kind of helpful about that?
Bonnie: Like, cause um, I got to know people and um, I feel bit more like… I don't know how to describe it…that a little bit. I already don't know…
Me: So like a bit more maybe like confident socially because you know a few more people.
Bonnie: Yeah.
Me: And what was it like kind of working with people like further up the school as well?
Bonnie: Uh, I realise that um, just because they're older doesn't mean they're scary. They're really nice and helpful.
Me: That's cool. So obviously I'm thinking about the idea of kind of school community, um, and feelings of being quite connected to school. How did being involved in the play help that? Or did it help it?
Bonnie: Em… I'm not really sure.
Me: So would you say being involved in the play helped you feel more connected to school?
Bonnie: Yes.
Me: Why do you think that is?
Bonnie: Because it got into activities and um, cause if I wasn't, I would just, it would just be just school. So it's actually made me want to come to school more and stuff.
Me: And why do you think, or do you think that the play has had an impact on the feeling of community within this go?
Bonnie: Um…
Me: that's a big question. So do have a think… do you know what I mean by school community?
Bonnie: I think like everyone. Like people and being together and kind of getting on long? Well, it's helped, um, people get together and do something. So not just being off with your friends, you're actually doing things with different people.
Me: Brilliant. Uh, what would you say was your kind of biggest takeaway from being involved in the play, what have you positively gained from this experience?
Bonnie: Um, that I really, really enjoy drama,
Me: and do you think it's important that we do school plays?
Bonnie: Yes.

Me: Why is it important?
Bonnie: Because, um, it gets people that aren't that confident to, um, like have a go at doing something that they're not used to and stuff like that.
Me: That's cool. Did any of your teachers come to watch you and the play?
Bonnie: Yeah my English teacher, She's Ms. Banks.
Me: did she say anything to you about it?
Bonnie: Um, the next lesson she, she was congratulating me. And that said she brought her daughter and her husband.
Me: Oh wow. And do you think that being in the play, has it kind of changed any of your relationships with your teachers?
Bonnie: She does talk to me a lot and, um, I asked for help if she needs help. So yes. Yes.
Me: Does it make you see any of their teachers in like a different way?
Bonnie: I think so because first of all, they would just teach us, but then they're actually more of a friend than the teacher.
Me: Brilliant. Excellent.

Holly

Me: So we've not done the play. How was the play for you?
Holly: Fun
Me: It was really fun! Did you enjoy yourself?
Holly: Yeah. It was really Good.
Me: Did you have anyone come and watch you?
Holly: Yeah, and my nanny, my granddad, my mum and my auntie Donna, my sister, and my dad.
Me: Oh wow. So you have a big audience in?
Holly: Well my nanny, granddad and dad came on one day and then auntie Donna and mum and my sister came on another.
Me: Brilliant. And so what was for you, what was like your favourite thing about the play?
Holly: Just like the experience of being able to like perform with other people who also liked drama instead of just like in class where most people are just like, they don't want to do anything.
Me: And what do you think were the biggest things you've learned from your experiences from the play. What would you say? Like the thing that stands out to you most about doing the play. What do you think you gained from it the most?
Holly: It probably came confidence and friends cause it's kind of… over the past few years I've lost confidence cause I've been bullied a lot. The drama helped me gain a bit of confidence back and help me get some new friends.
Me: Absolutely. And you still talking to those friends?
Holly: Yeah.
Me: That's really good. And so with regards to thinking about that, um, obviously I was thinking about drama and connection with feelings of school community. Has it changed anything about how connected you feel to school or not really?
Holly: Well, while it was still on, I felt more of a reason to go to school, but now it's not as much because I come into school, get education, get bullied, go home.
Me: Okay. So while it was on, it was really good.
Holly: It was like a release of me feelings and energy in the form of acting.
Me: And then now do you feel like it's something missing?
Holly: Yeah.
Me: That's really interesting. Um, what about then the school community? Do you think that's kind of impacted on the school community as a whole?
Holly: Yeah I do you feel like it brought people closer together and in a school. I think that's quite an important thing.
Me: Definitely. And did you have any of your teachers come in and see it?
Holly: Miss Way.
Me: And did she say anything to you about it after?
Holly: No.
Me: Did you have any other feedback from anyone?
Holly: My family said I was good.
Me: Do you think it's changed your relationship with any of your teachers?
Holly: It's really changed my relationship with you because I didn't really have one, and now I feel like I can really talk to you.
Me: Brilliant. And did it change at all how you see some of your teachers?
Holly: Yes.
Me: In what way? Can you explain why?
Holly: it made me realize that quite a few teachers that are actually good, uh, other things that aren't just their regular subject.
Me: Yeah cause we have Ms. Grey doing the makeup.
Holly: Yeah, that was really good!

Me: And so what would you say then, just as a summary, why do you think it's important that we do plays in school?
Holly: Because it brings people closer together and I feel like it helps the school community become more well a community and it lets people release emotions that they would often be keeping it inside them during the school day.

Josh

Me: Okay Josh, we've done the play. How was that for you? The actual performances?
Josh: it was exciting and it helped with my confidence cause I'm not that confident with shows and singing.
Me: How did you feel when you were performing?
Josh: I Felt excited and like I really wanted to do it and because I really like drama and everything.
Me: So, you said it helped your confidence, were you feeling nervous at all when you started?
Josh: A bit nervous but I knew I had everyone else there, all the other cast behind me so yeah, that was really nice too.
Me: How do you think or do you think that this the play has had, what has its impact been on the school community?
Josh: I think the impact of it is really good because it shows that drama is like a really important thing still in life and lots of people still want to do it.
Me: And what about thinking more specifically about school community, do you think it's had any impact on that?
Josh: It would bring like more people together and to watch. Yeah.
Me: Cause you said that yourself, that it was like you had everyone behind you. Who came to watch you in the play?
Josh: My Nan, my great auntie, my auntie, my uncle, my mum and my dad, my brother and my sister.
Me: Brilliant. And what did they think?
Josh: They, they really liked it. Yeah.
Me: And so what would you say has been your biggest kind of personal take away from being involved in this? In this play?
Josh: I've learned a lot more about drama and staging rehearsals and more. Yeah.
Me: Brilliant. What about kind of personally for yourself, what's the best thing you've learned or gained?
Josh: It's helped my confidence. Yeah.
Me: And has it changed at all or altered, obviously another thing I'm thinking about is school connectedness. Has it changed in any way? Like your, how connected you feel to school?
Josh: yeah, it's made me feel more connected to school. Coz I really like drama and it's good to know that I'm in a school where they promote drama and do loads of plays and shows.
Me: So it's kind of giving you an outlet for what you want to do as well, kind of on top of your school work. Do you think it’s changed how you view or your relationships any of your teachers?
Josh: Yeah, cause like some of the teachers were just like teachers, but now I've got to know them more and how they are with drama and music and everything and performing arts.
Me: How do you think that's changed your relationship with them or how you viewed them?
Josh: Like I know they're more, I know like what they like and how, um, the like drama and everything. yeah.
Me: so what's the best thing that you've learned from this play? As in for your personal feelings?
Josh: Um, my confidence. Yeah.
Me: Your confidence has been raised.
Josh: Absolutely.
Me: Do you anything else you want to say about my school plays are important or
Josh: I feel like plays are important that because if they’re something to go watch and something to do and something that you can get excited about and something to do with a community and a school and a group of people.

Niamh

Me: Okay. So we've now done the school play, how did you find it?
Niamh: Um, I actually really enjoyed it. It definitely have a lot of fun doing it and I felt really comfortable on stage and the first night and had an active audience second night the audience was a bit dead, but that's alright I still had fun doing it.
Me: That's good. That's most important thing. Um, what do you think has been your biggest kind of takeaway from the play?
Niamh: Um, I don't know. I have made quite a lot of friends, um, so which I still talk to, but also I suppose I never used to be really confident on stage, but the play has made me a lot more comfortable and just a lot more confident as well.
Me: That's really good. Um, are you still kind of in touch with those friends that you made? Do you still kind of chat to them?
Niamh: Definitely. Like if you see each other we always chat and we've got like loads of inside jokes that we still share all the time.
Me: What do you think, has it had any impact? Do you think on kind of what you think about school or how you feel about school?
Niamh: Um, no, not really. Not personally.
Me: So what kind of, how do you view school then? Generally?
Niamh: Um, I mean I enjoy, definitely enjoy the academic, uh, academic side of school. Um, but I guess for, I guess being a school play hasn't like affected that in any way.
Me: Has it affected the other side of school life like the social kind of side in any way?
Niamh: Apart from the fact that I just see more people I recognize and I guess I can talk to more people. But apart from that, no, not really.
Me: So it hasn't, has it affected the kind of like how connected you feel to school in any way?
Niamh: Um, I guess in a way it has made me feel more connected I guess. Cause now I'm connected to like more people, um, in a variety of year groups. In that sense, I do feel a bit more connected.
Me: What kind of feedback did you have? Did you have any feedback from any of your teachers?
Niamh: I did from um, from a couple of teachers, um, saying that they really enjoyed it. They thought I did it really well.
Me: And how did that, do you think that's kind of, have you seen a change in any of your relationships with any of your teachers since then?
Niamh: No, cause I think the only one of my teachers I know saw it was my form. I think apart from that, the others saw it, well apart from you, but you directed it.
Me: so you would say that it probably hasn't had a massive impact in your relationships with your teachers because maybe they didn't see you in it. Why do you think school plays important for school community?
Niamh: Well, it's very fun activity and it brings people of like different year groups with similar interests together and it's, um, well it's a good experience as well. And I do think it is quite important.
Me: Uh, so has this kind of, you say this is kind of made you more confident on stage. How do you think that will kind of affect or impact you in a wider sense, that confidence?
Niamh: Well I guess probably help with my GCSE, I've got a GCSE exam tomorrow with an examinar that I've never met before. Um, so I guess the practice of performing in front of people you don't know can definitely help with that. And I guess just the confidence just for day to day life. Maybe like just learning to speak to people and just general stuff.
Me: Have you been feeling more confident in your other kind of lessons to share ideas and things?
Niamh: Um, a little bit I guess, but I feel like I feel like it's affected like, um, apart from the drama class like my other classes that much. But I think maybe it has a little bit, it has maybe made me more willing to sort of put my hand up.
Me: So what is your kind of, what is your biggest takeaway from this experience?

Niamh: Um, I'm not sure. Probably just maybe just the amount of, um, like fun I had. Usually I think stuff that’s really fun to do or exciting to do can definitely have like the biggest impact. And I guess I’ll say the friendships as well that I made through doing it.

Natalie

Me: So how are you Natalie?
Natalie: I'm good, thank you.
Me: So obviously we've done the play now. How was the experience for you of the play?
Natalie: I loved it. Like it was absolutely incredible. Like you see like all the scenes and stuff like separately, but then you put it all together and it was absolutely incredible.
Me: And how did you feel about yourself in those times when you were like backstage and you were helping and you were like in the thick of it, how does that make you feel?
Natalie: Honestly, I was like worried cause I was like, Oh my God, if I miss a cue here it's all going wrong. But the way like it turned out I was really happy with myself that like I pulled through and I kept, I just focused on like making sure everyone like backstage is okay and like everything. Yeah. So I was happy with myself.
Me: Since it's been over, what do you think you kind of learned from the experience? what were your kind of takeaways?
Natalie: I'm probably better like picking out what's wrong with the piece and fixing it. Um, or like simply just like directing a piece. I'm like putting it all together and stuff. That's kind of what I've learned and picked up from you.
Me: What about in terms of then, so obviously I'm thinking about school community and school connectedness. Has your feelings of either of those things, school community or school connectedness, like how you, how much do you feel kind of connected to this school and involved in this school or a part of this school, has that changed at all?
Natalie: yeah, definitely. Um, like, like teachers that like I've never even had before like coming up to me like, Oh you did like such great job. And I was like, Oh thank you. Like knowing that like people that I don't even know thought that I did a good job, that was really nice as well. It made me feel like very connected with like more of the teachers at the school.
Me: How has that kind of then played out in how you, has it caused you to act in a different way or feel a different way or go about your lessons in a different way or?
Natalie: Um, I kind of feel more confident with myself and what I can do. Um, sort of like I put my ideas out there more. Um, and if I think like something could be improved then like I'll improve it and make it that so.
Me: And what about like the feelings of, of the school community? Like has that changed at all for you? the feeling of community within school?
Natalie: Not really. I still feel like as like everyone sort of sticks to their own years, um, in their own groups. But like the kids that were in the play, like they, they still talk to each other, which is nice seeing like how they've come together and stuff. Even though like some of them will be like year seven and some will be year 11. Like, it's nice that they can help each other and like the younger ones kind of look up to the older ones, which is nice as well.
Me: Have you kind of said hi or seen any of the little ones?
Natalie: Oh yeah, every time I see them they're like, Oh hi Natalie and I'm like hi! They're so nice. Especially like um, the girls like in year 10, they always like stop and have a chat with me and Annie as well. They're all so sweet.
Me: That's nice. And it's kind of nice cause they're, I guess a bit closer to you in age as well. Well, um, let's talk then about why it was important that we did this play?
Natalie: Um, I think it kind of gives like the shy children in the class a chance to like come out of their shells a bit. Um, cause sometimes if you were like in a class with people you might be a lot quieter cause you don't feel comfortable around them. But when like there's more people around you acting as well as you, it kind of draws the attention off of you, which some people like. Um, so I think it was good to help people become more comfortable within their acting, within acting in front of other people as well.

Me: Do you think that play has had an important impact on the school and the school community as a whole? Not just for yourself?
Natalie: Uh, I think, I think so. I want to say yes. Um, I think-
Me: you can say whatever's honest. I'm not gonna be offended.
Natalie: -Oh, I didn't know how to answer that question. Um…
Me: do you think I see like in general, uh, like any benefits from doing the school play, not just to your own feelings of school community, but to the school community as a whole? Like maybe your peers as well, how different people have reacted.
Natalie: Um, yeah, like all the teachers were very, um, involved in it. Um, like some teachers from like the art department helped out. Um, definitely like the drama teachers helped out. Um, D T teachers helped out. Like it definitely, um, bought like, uh, the whole school community together like within teachers and people. So they work together to put it all into one big great thing.
Me: what did you enjoy or did you enjoy anything about kind of that collaboration element of like working with the teachers? Like with you kind of being kind of part of that work, the backstage working team.
Natalie: Um, honestly I think I, I loved it because I felt like I was sort of treated as like an individual, not just a student. So like I felt a lot more mature doing that, than I would be if like I was treated as a student in that like situation. Yeah, and working alongside you all, it was really nice being able to like have like conversations with you and stuff and it was nice.
Me: Brilliant. So would you say that overall that like school plays generally and doing a whole school kind of collaborative projects like this, do you think they have a positive impact on feelings of school connectedness in school community?
Natalie: Definitely, yes. Definitely. Definitely bought everyone together. That did it, and it brought the whole school together as well, which was really nice to see.

Daisy

Me: So we have now completed the play. Uh, how was that for you? How were the performances?
Daisy: um, I felt like the performances went really well and, um, it was really good to see everything come together at the end.
Me: And how did you feel? Like, how did it make you feel like when everything came together and you were a part of it?
Daisy: Um, accomplished, if that's the word? Um, and proud, I think. Yeah,
Me: And, if any, what kind of impact has being involved in the play had on your feelings about school or about anything?
Daisy: being part of the play, like made, um, school more enjoyable because it gave, um, I feel like it gives students like something to look forward to and um, something to put energy in that's like a positive thing rather than like going out and messing about or whatever.
Me: And like on your personal kind of feelings about school, did it change how you kind of felt about school
Daisy: it made me happy. Um,
[Long pause]
Me: Sorry, that's a big question.
Daisy: Mmm. It may, I think like this is a bit random, but it made me like realize like how when you go through school you can take different roles depending how old you are. So like, because obviously I was like one of the year 7's at one point, like in it and, like to come out of it and do more work, like with like with the teachers and stuff, like it put a different light, it gave it a different perspective.
Me: How was that? How did that-
Daisy: Sorry did that make sense?
Me: no, it does that. It makes absolute sense. How did that, do you think that perspective was a positive experience for you to have?
Daisy: Yeah. Yeah.
Me: How did it make you feel being able to have that different kind of role where you were more kind of like on a similar level to your teachers if you want kind of in that way?
Daisy: Mmm.
Me: How did that make you feel?
Daisy: Mmm, like I think like, [Long pause] I don't really know…
Me: it's all right. Um, let's, let me rephrase that. Why did the kind of extra responsibility, how did that make you feel? Did you enjoy that?
Daisy: Uh, yeah, I enjoyed it. Um, um,… I forgot what I was gonna say
Me: it's all right.
Daisy: Mmm. Yeah. Like I enjoyed the responsibility and it, um, again, like put different perspective on the play as a whole and just working towards things like, um, as a group because you don't like, I think when you're in things you don't really appreciate that you don't always appreciate the effort that's going on that you wouldn't even really considered that has to be done. Do you know what I mean?
Me: Absolutely. And it gives you like a different insight into what everything that has happened to make a play happen.
Daisy: Yes.
Me: Um, has it in any way affected your feelings or your thoughts on the school community or your feelings about you're place within that school community?
Daisy: Um, I think it showed that like, even though like I didn't do that much.
Me: Yes, you did. You did loads Daisy!
Daisy: It shows that like sort of the, um, it's gonna sound a bit cringe, but like older sibling like role that six formers can have can have or like just old, like the higher up in the school like you are to the younger years and how that can be really beneficial because if um like, I wouldn't have known many

of the um, other people that were part of the play before we did it. So if, um, I think like it opens doors for things in the future. And also like how um, how like you view students in younger school and in lower school and how they can view you.
Me: Yeah. And is it like a case where you're kind of still wandering around in there still like high Daisy?
Daisy: Yeah. Yeah. That's really nice.
Me: Do you think it's important that we do a school play?
Daisy: Yeah.
Me: Why do you think it's important?
Daisy: Um, I think it gives students the opportunity that might either not have like be as lucky as I am in being able to do extracurricular stuff outside of school or like students who are more reserved or, I don't know, like shy is a bit of a bad word but like shy, um, to express themselves in a different way because like you get that opportunity in drama, but like I think it's different and it gives like their peers and their teachers as well, like an opportunity to see that they can do different things outside of their subject. Like, cause obviously if you're a drama teacher that you're going to see them act and stuff. But um, say like if you, like if a teacher from a different subject came to watch, like they'd have a different view on what that child was capable of.
Me: Yeah. Really good. What would be your biggest takeaway from this play for yourself? Like personally?
Daisy: Mmm. That if I work towards something then it can, like that can be a good outcome. That doesn't make sense. Yeah. Like, um, and that like, um, sorry
Me: yeah, I think that's perfect. And what do you think is, um, has been How has it positively impacted your like, school life?
Daisy: Um, it was, uh, um, I'm trying to think of the word, like, um, a good outlet. Yeah. And like um, something to like put all of my focus into something that was going to have like gonna be like a good outcome.
Me: Yeah. No, that makes sense. Um, yeah. That's cool. And if I offered you the opportunity to do another one like tomorrow, would you want to do it again?
Daisy: Yeah.

F: Second round teacher interview transcript

Me: Okay. So obviously we've done the play. What do you think was or has been kind of the biggest kind of impact on the school from doing it?
Ms. Smith: I think it's two fold. If you look at academically, there was definitely an improvement in the practical examination of the kids that were involved. So it because they had more confidence because they have more practice performing. So that's definitely helped I think in terms of the school community, I think people still talk about it, which is interesting. You know, they still mention it. Um, English wants to put up some of the set design stuff in the library. So that all becomes part of the bigger picture. There are kids talking about the fact that what are we doing next and we weren't involved, how could we be involved? And I think actually one of the biggest things that never really gets mentioned is friendships, And those kids talk to other people don't they. They never really spoke to you before and they formed those friendships and they just continue afterwards. I don't know. It's really hard to kind of quantify it. Yeah. Can you think of anything else?
Me: I think. Yeah, I think it's been quite, I think definitely the friendships has been nice. And I think what's the nicest thing is seeing the older ones like look out for the younger ones a little bit more. Like I've seen that happen a lot and even within drama lessons like for the older ones comes in and I go, hi Natalie, they kinda know, and they like that knowledge of the older ones.
Ms. Smith: Yeah and kind of that we've lost as a school cause we don't have vertical tutoring anymore. Whereas you used to get quite a lot of that isn't to do stuff across the school because otherwise it becomes quite insular doesn't it? In terms of who you talk to and socialize with,
Me: in terms of then like your feelings of school connectedness or community has it had any impact on that for you. Like have you felt more being involved? Has it made you feel more connected to school?
Ms. Smith: I think I have a different appreciation for some teachers. You know, like we were very well supported by staff and that's nice to see. And you know, people speaking to us in a positive manner about afterwards. Um, I sometimes worry with school that it's very departmental and everyone sticks to this themselves. But you know, doing things like that I think helps in that respect that people get involved, you know, loads of people helped, obviously lots of people going to watch it, um, and spoke to the kids about it and stuff. So I think that that has an impact.
Me: Has it changed anything about the reasons why you think it's got plays are important or has it reminded you of any reason why you think its important?
Ms. Smith: I think it just reminds you, doesn't it reminds you that we have to look at the bigger picture and it's not just academics and these kids really succeed doing something like this. Even the ones that had small parts, um, you know, they, they have the absolute sense of accomplishment and doing something together and something positive and nonacademic. Um, and I think even on a wider scale next time, I'd want more people involved. I know we attempted at this time and we did to an extent. Um, but there's only a few people from our, and there's only a couple of people from textiles, you know, so it's how you extend out further because I think that's where the real impact is. It's not just in drama and obviously if we did a musical that would help, but um, you're getting as many departments involved and therefore as many kids as possible.
Me: Yeah, it's really good. I think it's something as well that, like you said, the kids are already like asking what we do next year and stuff. Do you think, is it like going to be something that we'll continue to kind of do and grow in?
Ms Smith: This will definitely continue. I would love to have done a musical next, but I don't think that's feasible. Um, I don't know that you and I can run another big production on our own, but I have thought about some alternative smaller things next year and then a big one again. I think you'd have to alternate the big ones. But I would like to do something small next year. So there's something still going on.
But yeah, I don't know if we could feasibly for production.

Me: what do you think are the benefits for those who, obviously we've kind of talked about the benefits of the kids who were on the stage, even if they just had a small part, can you see kind of benefits for the students who were kind of, I guess I'm talking about the sixth formers who were kind of involved in the backseat.
Ms Smith: I think that's helped their confidence and helped them remember everything that they know. And also it's just good experiences. Like if you go into life and get a job and they've got to manage somebody or organize something or it's practical experience of doing that kind of stuff, which they don't get in the classroom. And so it's, yeah, there's mixed skills and then also the kids that did the, the technical side and learn a new skill or interacted with people they'd never interact with. I think a lot of people that do backstage stuff tend to do it cause they don't want to talk to lots of people or they don't want to be in the spotlight. But actually they're still part of that group and they're still part of what goes on. So they've also benefited, um, from mingling with different people.
Me: What do you think then I suppose just from kind of talking with other kids and stuff as well, like some of the little ones, what they felt was that while it was great at the time when they were in it, they now I feel a little bit kind of like loss of connection to each other and kind of being part of a bigger thing. do you have any thoughts on how like something like that could be sustained or is it sustainable?
Ms Smith: I think it's probably planning the next one in. So even if we're not doing it immediately, they know. I think we definitely need to restart drama club. It's just with everything else going on this year, it's beyond my capabilities and the kids that run it, we're now six formers and it's just too much for them. So it's finding the next generation of, of leaders of it. I suppose a drama club would be a good thing. It's quite casual. But allows them to come together and do something weekly or biweekly or something like that.
Me: Do you have anything else you want to say about trauma and school connectedness in school community?
Ms Smith: I think it's nice to remind people that we are here. I think it's nice to remind people that we serve a purpose or we're not just taking up space and time and that they, it's always really important to me that staff's kids in a better light. They kids doing something positive or putting themselves out there. I'm achieving something and I'm potentially from kids that they would never see that from academically. So yeah, that's always a big thing for me.

G: Letter of approval to Head Teacher

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Director Professor Jo-Anne Baird

Mr X,
XXXXXXXX School,
XXXXXXX,
XXXXXXX,
XXXX XXX

Dear Mr X,

I am writing to enquire about conducting research in school this academic year. As you know, I am studying for the Master's in Learning and Teaching at Oxford University, supervised by Gary Snapper. In my final research project "How does a School play impact on students and teachers personally and professionally, and in relation to the school community." I will explore How student's participation in the school play can alter feelings of school connectedness, and whether or not it effects students and teachers perceptions of each other, after viewing them in a different context.

The research will take place with the students and staff involved with the school production which is due to take place just before Christmas. My research focus is on students' perceptions of their place within the school and how taking part in an enriching activity such as the school play can positively alter their feelings of community within school.

By participating in the research, the school would be contributing to a project that will deepen our understanding of the importance of extracurricular activities in developing and enriching students time at school, and the benefits this has for both staff and students feelings of community within the school.

I hope to conduct this research between October and April. I would interview/audio-record students and staff before and after the play takes place, and also conduct questionnaires with the students before and after the performances.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. The University also recognises, however, that my study is a piece of practitioner research, and that schools already operate with the highest ethical standards. Therefore only your formal consent as headteacher is necessary, and not that of individual parents or staff. However, throughout the research, students and other teachers will be able to refuse to participate in any research activities at any time.

All participants, including students, teachers and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my

supervisor Dr YYYYYY YYYYYYYY and me, and only used for academic purposes. It will be kept for as long as it has academic value.

If you are happy for me to proceed with this study, please confirm. If you have any concerns or need more information about what is involved, please contact me or my supervisor. Further, if you have any questions about this ethics process at any time, please contact the chair of the department's research ethics committee, though: research.office@education.ox.ac.uk

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

H: Opt out speech delivered to students

As part of my master's degree at Oxford University I am investigating the impact and benefit that being involved in this school production will have on you and what you might gain from it in a wider context. Throughout the rehearsal process I will be asking you to fill in a short questionnaire about this matter and then will be asking to interview some of you informally to get some more detailed thoughts on this matter. I will then repeat these questionnaires and interviews after the show to see if the show has had an impact on how your feelings about school and the impact it may have had on you personally. If you are not comfortable with any of this along the way you can opt to not be involved, however all questionnaires will be filled in anonymously and if you are interviewed your name will be changed when I am writing up my research