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Hamilton, Claire Elizabeth (2023) *Learner participation to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: A framework to enhance learner participation through the Drama Curriculum.* [MEd]

https://dissertations.gla.ac.uk/573/

Deposited: 05 March 2024

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Learner participation to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: A framework to enhance learner participation through the Drama Curriculum.

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Dissertation submitted by Claire Elizabeth Hamilton in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Education (Educational Leadership)

University of Glasgow

August 2023

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people who have supported me to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Leadership) at the University of Glasgow.

- My dissertation supervisor Kathleen Kerrigan for her positivity, encouragement, and wisdom.
- My close family and friends for believing in me and encouraging me to embark upon this adventure.
- My husband Mark for his patience, never-ending support and encouragement.
- My daughter Mila who inspires me every day.

Learner participation to improve educational outcomes in Scottish schools: A framework to enhance learner participation through the Drama Curriculum.

Abstract:

The recent move to incorporate the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) into Scots Law means that fulfilling children's rights, and therefore embedding them in Scotland's Education system, is a top priority. Despite a positive education policy context which promotes learner participation in schools and a wealth of research highlighting the benefits of learner participation and positive outcomes for learners, there continues to be challenges fulfilling policy intentions in practice. This systematic review of contemporary empirical evidence analyses and synthesises existing literature in the field of learner participation in order to provide new insight, rooted in classroom practice. It also examines how curriculum Drama can equip young people with the skills and abilities to participate effectively. The study concludes with a proposed framework for enhancing participatory practice within a Scottish secondary school Drama department in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

There is an extensive body of literature evidencing the benefits of pupil participation in schools. Benefits for pupils include; improved learner engagement, empowerment, and the development of transferable life skills (Mitra, 2018). Organisational benefits include; enhanced intergenerational relationships, better ethos and shared sense of community (Cross, et al., 2014, Graham et al., 2018). A recent study in Scottish schools also highlighted a clear link between effective participation practice and improved attainment and achievement in areas of deprivation (Mannion, et al., 2015). Reducing the poverty-related attainment gap is a top priority in Scottish Education, therefore there is clear rationale for developing practice within this field. Whilst the Scottish education policy context advocates the importance of learner participation through a range of key policies, fulfilling these intentions in practice continues to be a challenge in Scottish schools (Hulme, et al, 2011, Cross, et al., 2014, Mannion, et al., 2022)

This was reflected in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development report on Scottish Education, which highlighted that 'learners' input, in particular, does not appear to be taken into account enough in decision making, although Scotland is committed to consulting its youth (2021, p.18). This places a responsibility on educators to ensure that learner input results in action. However, many argue that the structured, pupil voice frameworks, utilised in Scottish schools, are in fact replacing the benefits of consequential dialogue and shared decision-making with practices that are tokenistic at best (Hart, 1992, Fielding, 2001, Hall, 2017, Jones and Hall 2022). There are also concerns in relation to the ethics of pupil voice, when young people are not 'authentic participants but instead symbols that the school, district and/or state is doing "something"' (Mitra, 2018, p. 479). A recommendation in The Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18) guideline is that participation must be 'intrinsic to everyday ways of working' and that educators now need to reflect on ways to better support learner participation in their schools. This should begin with helping young people understand their rights and enabling them to contribute in all kinds of decision-making processes affecting their educational experiences (Education Scotland, 2018, p.7).

1.2 Context

This study initiated when the researcher took up the position of Principal Teacher of Drama in a new school, and local authority. The school has previously been highlighted by Education Scotland as an example of good practice in the field of learner participation. Embedding participation within the everyday practices of the school (Bovill, et al., 2011, Hulme, 2011) is a top priority, with the term 'leadership at all levels' featuring in the School Improvement Plan and sub-sequentially the researcher's Departmental Improvement Plan. Therefore, this research stems from a desire to develop knowledge and skills that will contribute to a whole school participatory ethos and improved outcomes for learners. In the context in which this study will take place, it is evident that attempts have been made to engage in authentic collaboration with learners. This, in the main, has involved learners taking lead roles in whole school evaluation procedures using How Good is Our School? 4th Ed. quality indicators (Education Scotland, 2015). In an attempt to embed more equitable practice, the school has also replaced elitist forms of participation, where individuals are selected to represent the views of all (Thomson, 2009), with a more inclusive 'Leadership Academy', involving learners leading on an area of interest or expertise. The work undertaken by these ambassador roles is very positive and the school now wishes to expand this practice beyond the senior phase. In order to fulfil the ideals articulated in Scottish education policy, this will include all departments, and work towards developing a whole school approach.

This study is specific to a secondary school Drama Department. Drama has long been associated with the development of confidence, collaboration and self-expression (Hajisoteriou et al., 2022). Through the medium of Drama, learners have the opportunity to explore real life issues, put themselves in other people's shoes, formulate opinions and communicate ideas in creative ways (Hammond, 2013). A study which explored the potential to elicit pupil voice through creative arts practice, identified a significant change to the power balance in the room which placed learners at the centre of the experience. Therefore, coming from an arts perspective, this research will contribute to the 'broadening of possibilities for individual expression' and aim to harness the 'transformative power of inclusive participation' (Jones and Hall, 2009, p.186).

1.3 Definitions

There are varying definitions of learner participation and the range of practices it encompasses, which is discussed further in the next chapter. For the purpose of this study, learner participation will be defined as all 'educational activity (including research and pedagogy) that operates to include students centrally in educational debate, design and decision-making' (Nelson and Charteris, 2020, p.2). This definition has been selected as it is informed by seminal literature in the field of pupil voice (Hart, 2002, Fielding, 2001, Mitra, 2006) and aligns with terms referred to in Scottish education policy such as 'co-constructed partnerships' and 'shared decision-making processes' (Education Scotland, 2018, p.5).

1.4 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this research is to provide clarity around the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation and the contextual factors which support and undermine its success in Scottish schools. Through the emergence of a new framework, it will develop clear and accessible guidance, rooted in research, to support planning, implementation and evaluation of learner participation at departmental level. This will endeavour to enhance learner participation within the Drama department, which the researcher leads, in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos.

The specific objectives of this research are to:

- Identify the principles underpinning effective learner participation in schools.
- Critically examine the contextual factors which support and undermine the effectiveness of learner participation.
- Identify how educational professionals can support and enable learners to participate.
- Investigate the extent to which the Drama curriculum can equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively.

1.5 Research Questions

This study is framed by the following overarching research question:

   i)   What are the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation in Scottish schools?

The research question will be addressed through the following sub questions:

   ii)   How do contextual factors support or undermine effective learner participation?
   iii)   How can educational professionals support and enable learners to participate?
   iv)   To what extent can curriculum Drama equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively?

1.6 Value of Research

This is an exciting time of reform, where all stakeholders are being consulted on the future of Scottish Education. Teachers and learners now have the opportunity to work in partnership to enhance curriculum design, improve pedagogical approaches and engage in the culture-work needed to embed participation practice in the everyday life of schools (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007). The wealth of research allocated to pupil voice, learner participation and pupil leadership demonstrates a desire to engage learners in authentic, consequential dialogue and decision-making processes that lead to positive change. This study will contribute to the academic field in relation to embedding learner participation in classroom experiences and enabling learners to develop skills and attributes that will help them contribute confidently and responsibly. Although the findings from this study cannot be generalised, the framework will be used to inform curriculum planning and implementation of participation practice within this specific context. The findings may also inform other departments across the school and local authority as they develop their own participation practice, as well as providing fresh insight from a Drama curriculum perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one placed this research in context, provided a clear rationale for the study and identified four research objectives for this dissertation:

- Identify the principles underpinning effective learner participation in schools.
- Critically examine the contextual factors which support and undermine the effectiveness of learner participation.
- Identify how educational professionals can support and enable learners to participate.
- Investigate the extent to which the Drama curriculum can equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively.

This review of policy and literature will define all key terms and provide an overview of the knowledge surrounding learner participation. It will incorporate multiple perspectives, identify disjuncture between policy and practice and highlight potential gaps in the field.

This chapter will begin by examining the key policies underpinning learner participation in Scottish schools, in order to elicit the key messages and therefore expectations of educational professionals in practice. It will then discuss several models used to guide participation practice in schools as well as issues experienced in practice. As this research aims to investigate how curriculum Drama can support participation in schools, the chapter will conclude by discussing the key theories, curriculum frameworks and National Qualifications that shape the way Drama is delivered in Scottish schools.

2.2 Scottish Education Policy Context

The recent move to incorporate the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) into Scots Law means that fulfilling children's rights, and therefore embedding them in Scotland's Education system, is non-negotiable. The right for children to be involved in all decisions that affect them is reflected in several key policy drivers that shape the way participation is understood and enacted in Scottish schools. Learner participation is a key thread running through How Good Is Our School, 4th Ed.; a framework used nationally to help educational professionals implement self-evaluation at all levels. It promotes learners taking lead roles in school improvement procedures and a school culture committed to children's rights and developing positive relationships (Education Scotland, 2018). This sentiment is further reflected in the National Improvement Framework which promotes 'leaders at all levels who are empowered, and who empower others' (Education Scotland, 2016a, p .4). Learner participation is a vital aspect of 'An empowered system' which identifies eight key partners who work together to improve outcomes for children and young people. The policy guideline encourages a rights-based approach, collaboration and mutual respect between all partners. It identifies improved attainment, wellbeing and better school ethos as benefits of learner participation (Education Scotland, 2019). The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), is underpinned by principles of participation. The four capacities promote opportunities to develop knowledge, skills and attributes that encourage learners to become 'democratic citizens and active shapers of that world' (2005, p.2). The refreshed narrative advocates 'opportunities to participate responsibly in decision-making, to contribute as leaders and role models' (Education Scotland, 2022 p.3). Through authentic participation in school, Scotland's young people acquire skills for learning, life and work as well as the desire to make a difference in the broader world. In addition, the Getting it right for every child policy framework, seeks to support and enhance children and young people's wellbeing through an emphasis on individual needs, strengths, and ensuring every child's voice is heard and valued. The principles underpinning this policy, utilised in all Scottish schools, reflect a commitment to equity, children's rights and participation in all decision-making processes affecting their lives (Scottish Government, 2022). The Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18) framework highlights that participation should not be limited to formal pupil councils and should be experienced by all learners across four arenas of school life. It identifies equal opportunities to participate, a rights based approach, consequential dialogue and shared decision-making as the fundamental principles of learner participation. The document

reiterates the importance of communications between adults and young people which are 'two-way, voluntary, sustained, deal with real concerns and be based on mutual respect and children's rights' (2018, p.5).

Therefore, it could be said, that the promotion of participation within current policy discourse is underpinned by four main educational priorities:

- The fulfilment of children's rights
- Ensuring equity and excellence in education
- School Improvement
- Citizenship Education

Prioritising participation in Scottish schools aims to improve outcomes for learners and institutions, whilst nurturing a generation of informed, engaged citizens who are equipped to positively contribute to society and uphold principles of equality and respect. Despite a very positive policy context with complimentary ideals, several studies highlight inconsistency in practice (Hulme, et al., 2011, Cross, et al., 2014, Mannion, et al., 2022). Learners involved in the National Discussion expressed the need to be listened to, respected, valued and more involved in decision- making processes (Scottish Government, 2023). This was further reflected in the Putting Learners at the Centre report which highlighted that learners question whether the culture of the education system supports increased pupil involvement (Scottish Government, 2022). Learners also voiced concerns about the over assessment of literacy and numeracy in replace of a broader focus on skills development and rights-based approach that nurtures their talents and abilities. This is in line with the It's Our Future: Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment report which highlighted that Scotland examines their young people more than other jurisdictions. Despite the desire to develop skills such as critical thinking and creativity, fulfilling these curriculum intentions through historic assessment procedures such as summative, external examinations is proving difficult (Stobbart, 2021). As such, recommendations for improvement suggest a move towards project based learning whereby pupils are given opportunities to learn through real life scenarios and develop skills that prepare them for the real world (Scottish Government, 2023).

The Scottish education policy framework places great emphasis on involving pupils in decisions affecting their lives, in the hope of developing a more inclusive, learner-centred education system. However, as with many policy intentions, there appears to be challenges

translating them to practice. Issues around consultation, accountability, leadership and culture are further reflected in literature and research, shaping the evolving definitions and enactment of learner participation in Scottish schools.

2.3 Issues in Practice

The publication of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which articulated the right for children to express their views on all decisions affecting their lives catalysed a growing body of research into *pupil voice.* This term is complex, largely due to the conflicting agendas which shape the way it is enacted in schools (Arnot & Reay, 2007, Thomson and Gunter, 2006). Initially, pupil voice was concerned with consulting young people on aspects of school life, quality assurance procedures and evaluating learning and teaching through structured, school improvement processes such as pupil councils, surveys and focus groups (Mannion et al., 2022, Whitty and Wisby, 2007). However, this quickly led to concerns about whether leaners' views were actually being listened to and acted upon by those involved in decision-making processes (Arnot & Reay, 2007, Lundy, 2007). Rudduck et al., also highlighted the dangers of speaking on behalf of learners when meanings are refracted 'through the lens of our own interests and concerns' (1995, p.177). Therefore, the agendas on which learners are invited to contribute, often diminish the potential for consequential dialogue with young people (Nelson, 2018). Some argue that pupil voice has become a tick box exercise, used to 'fulfil externally mandated policy and framework requirements' (Jones and Hall, 2022, p.574) and that pupils currently lack agency within traditional school structures and processes (Bovill, et al., 2011, Flemming, 2015). There is consensus in the literature that when delivered in this way, pupil voice becomes another accountability measure and tokenistic form of democratic processes (Arnot & Reay, 2007, Hart, 2005, Fielding, 2011, Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Cook-Sather argues that voice and agency are closely linked. When learners feel valued and can see their perspectives being acted upon, it develops their sense of agency and encourages further engagement (2022).

Fielding proposed a more transformative approach, whereby learners and teachers work together in partnership. He argued that for participation to be meaningful it must be built on authentic engagement, dialogue and shared inquiry that is influential and leads to new improved practices (2004). When underpinned by democratic values and shared responsibility, learner participation can have positive outcomes for learners, organisations, curriculum

planning, and staff development (Fielding, 2011, Mayes, et al., 2021). Similarly, Mitra advocates for youth-adult partnerships that involve shared decision-making processes, learning from one another and actions that work towards positive change.

In light of this, the term *learner participation* emerged to reduce the emphasis on 'voice' and capture the true essence of learner involvement in schools (Lundy, 2007, Spyrou, 2016). Learner participation is recognised in literature as intergenerational dialogue and shared decision-making processes that lead to improved outcomes for learners and schools (Black and Mayes, 2020, Chilvers et al., 2021, Cook-Sather 2022, Fielding 2011, Leat and Reid, 2012, Mayes et al 2021).

2.4 Models and Frameworks

Recognising the challenges of delivering authentic learner participation in practice, Hart produced a 'ladder of participation' model to inform and support educational professionals. At the bottom of the ladder, 'manipulation' is listed as the least desirable practice and 'child initiated, shared decisions with adults' features at the top (1992, p.8). This model was widely adopted in Scottish schools and used as a scale to evaluate pupil participation practice. However, a common criticism of the ladder metaphor is that participation does not unfold in sequential stages and that one form of participation is not necessarily better than another. Participation involves a wide range of practices, each with their own place and purpose (Treseder, 1997). Hart later acknowledged that it was not surprising that his model was misinterpreted and clarified that his intention was never to create an evaluative tool but rather to demonstrate the different degrees to which institutions afford and enable pupil agency (2008).

Fielding's 'Patterns of Partnership' model aimed to demonstrate what authentic participation might look like in schools (2011). Similarly to Hart, Fielding proposed different levels of participation with pupils assuming more leadership as they progress up the scale. Despite attempts to root the model in classroom practice, critics suggest his aspiration of 'intergenerational learning as lived democracy' (2011, p.67) to be unattainable in current school structures.

Mitra acknowledges that pupil participation encompasses a number of different practices, ranging from consultation to learners initiating change in their schools. She proposes a pyramid of three levels; 'listening, collaboration and leadership'. Leadership is placed at the top of the pyramid as she argues that the more agency young people assume in school initiatives the more they develop and grow (2018, p.473).

However, some argue that these type of models cultivate a one-size-fits-all approach to learner participation and fail to take account of the contextual factors that support and undermine its success. Jones and Hall propose critical pragmatism; reflexive approach that examines the structural, political, cultural and many other forces that shape an organisation. They argue that 'without critical awareness of the existence of power structures within a school community, student voice can contribute to their reinforcement' (2022, p.577).

2.5 Leadership and Culture

Flutter and Rudduck argue that a more holistic approach to learner participation is required. To be authentic and impactful, schools must first of all create a community of learning which enables it to flourish (2004). Shared decision-making between adults and young people goes against the traditional, hierarchical relationships in Scottish secondary schools (Maitles and Gilchrist, 2006) and both teachers and learners struggle to enact this mutually beneficial way of working (Graham et al, 2018). Hulme, et al, argue that nurturing these relationships requires strong pedagogical leadership and more opportunities to engage in this type of collaboration (2011). Another key message coming from the literature is that for participation to be inclusive, it must be 'interwoven into the everyday teaching and learning processes in schools' (Jones and Hall, 2022, p.580) through a move towards, active, inquiry-based learning in the classroom (Biddulph, 2011, Chilvers et al., 2021, Susinos and Haya, 2014) Therefore, further research on how to support learners and create the conditions for success, is pivotal in order for learner participation to fulfil the ideals propelled in policy and achieve its transformative potential.

2.6 Curriculum Drama

Drama education in Scotland has been heavily influenced by two seminal theorists; Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal. Freire advocated for education to be a transformative and liberating experience, empowering pupils to become active agents in their own learning and in society

(2000). He developed the concept 'critical pedagogy' in which learners are encouraged to engage critically with the world around them and to challenge dominant power structures. This is reflected in the CfE experiences and outcomes for Drama which provide opportunities for pupils to 'express and communicate my ideas, thoughts and feelings through drama' and 'use drama to explore real and imaginary situations, helping me to understand my world' (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 7). Freire believed that Drama provides a platform for pupils to explore complex issues in a safe and supportive environment. One of his key ideas was the concept of dialogue, which he believed to be the mutual exchange of ideas, where both teachers and learners are active participants in the learning process 'the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students' (Freire, 2000, p. 72). Freire recognised Drama work as a way to break down the traditional power dynamics between teachers and pupils.

Similarly, Boal believed that 'theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society' (Boal, 1995, p. 78). He developed 'Theatre of the Oppressed', a pedagogy which uses theatre as a tool for social and political change. Forum theatre is used to explore issues of injustice and pupils can suggest alternative actions for the characters. This process is 'not intended to provide answers but to encourage debate' amongst learners (Boal, 1995, p. 109). By presenting real-life scenarios and exploring different solutions, pupils are encouraged to consider the perspectives of others and develop empathy. These skills are also embedded in the Senior Phase National Qualification courses which aim to provide opportunities for candidates to 'generate and communicate thoughts and ideas when creating drama' and 'develop knowledge and understanding of a range of social and cultural influences on drama' (Scottish Qualifications Authority, 2019, p. 2). Pupils develop critical thinking skills as they work with others to investigate, analyse, create and evaluate drama performance. It is through this process of inquiry, that learners become active participants in their own learning, developing their critical thinking skills and sense of agency (Cook-Sather, 2006).

2.7 Summary and Emerging Issues

Learner participation features strongly in policy and pedagogic discourse in Scotland. However, the wide range of definitions, practices and agendas associated with it often lead to experiences that are tokenistic and superficial. There is convergence in the literature that learner participation cannot be solely associated with quality assurance procedures and that it is highly dependent on positive, intergenerational relationships and school culture. In order to capture the voice of all pupils, participation must also be rooted in everyday classroom practice. The Drama curriculum in Scotland, aligns with the underlying principles of learner participation reflected in policy and literature. Therefore, a unique aspect of this research will be to further investigate how Drama can equip young people with the skills and abilities to participate effectively in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This systematic review of literature is based on the analysis of 24 published journals relating to pupil participation from 2011 – 2022. The purpose of this literature review was to analyse and synthesise contemporary empirical evidence on the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation, the contextual factors which support and undermine its success and the ways in which Drama can be used to enhance pupil participation in Scottish schools.

This Literature Review Protocol outlines the methodology, inclusion criteria, search strategy, data extraction techniques, and data synthesis methods selected for this research. The design of this study was informed by methodological literature and data collection techniques used in similar studies. The researcher selected a methodology and methods appropriate to the research questions and overall aims of the study (Hart, 2005), nevertheless it is important to acknowledge the ontological and epistemological assumptions influencing each stage of this research (Cohen, et al, 2018).

3.2 Theoretical Perspective

3.2.1 Ontology

This study is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, which recognises the socially constructed nature of reality and values the subjective interpretations of individuals in shaping our understanding of the world (Baumfield, et al., 2012). The researcher's world view is that truth is constructed through social interaction and that knowledge is highly context-driven and shaped by cultural and social factors (Cohen, et al, 2018). Therefore, this research explores and interprets multiple perspectives and experiences of individuals in relation to pupil participation in order to gain fresh insight that will inform future practice. It recognises the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts in which phenomena occur and acknowledges the role of human interpretation in constructing and shaping reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994 cited in Cohen et al, 2018).

3.2.2 Epistemology

An interpretivist epistemology aligns with qualitative research; 'a form of social enquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasise the essential role of subjectivity' (Hammersley, 2013, p. 12). Therefore the research methods selected for this research focused on exploring meanings, experiences, and interpretations of individuals to generate knowledge, whilst recognising the influence of bias, values, and assumptions in the research process. It is important at this point, to acknowledge the limitations of such methods. The emphasis on individual interpretation and subjective meanings limits the ability to draw broader conclusions or make generalisable claims. To counteract this, it adopted a reflexive and interpretive approach to research, acknowledging the complexity and subjectivity inherent in the pursuit of knowledge (Cohen, et al, 2018). It is recognised that the researcher's core beliefs may shape the way data is collected, interpreted and presented. Nevertheless, this research has value in that it provides deep insights into subjective experiences, allowing for richer understanding of learner participation that will inform future practice. Attempts will also be made at each stage of the process to ensure rigour, quality and reliability in the research, which will be discussed further throughout the chapter.

3.3 Research Questions

This study is framed by the following overarching research question:

i)   What are the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation in Scottish schools?

The research question will be addressed through the following sub questions:

ii)   How do contextual factors support or undermine effective learner participation?
iii)   How can educational professionals support and enable learners to participate?
iv)   To what extent can curriculum Drama equip young people with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively?

This research, situated within an interpretivist paradigm, aimed to examine the underlying principles of effective learner participation in Scottish secondary schools. The overarching research question focused on identifying the fundamental elements that contribute to successful pupil participation practice. To address this question, several sub-questions were investigated. The first sub-question examined how contextual factors facilitate and or hinder effective pupil participation. This exploration acknowledged the importance of the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which pupils operate, recognising that these factors can significantly influence their educational experiences and participation in school life.

The second sub-question focused on how educational professionals enable and support effective pupil participation. This recognised the role of teachers, and school leaders, in facilitating opportunities for effective participation and aimed to develop an understanding of the strategies and practices employed by educational professionals to promote pupil participation.

The final sub-question explored the ways in which Drama can be utilised to enhance pupil participation in Scottish schools. This question aimed to uncover the potential benefits and challenges associated with this approach and its impact on learner participation practice.
By addressing these research questions, the study sought to gain insight into effective learner participation practice, the influence of political and contextual factors, the role of educational

professionals and the potential of Drama as a pedagogical tool, contributing to a deeper understanding of this vital aspect of the Scottish education system.

3.4 Research Design

This non-empirical study takes the form of qualitative research synthesis a 'set of methods for combining the data or the results of multiple studies on a topic to generate new knowledge, theory and applications' (Drisko, 2020, p.736 cited in Booth, et al 2020). Synthesising the literature in this way can have 'as much intellectual and practical value as collecting first-hand data. A thorough critical evaluation of existing research often leads to new insights' (Hart, 2001, p.3). This approach was selected in order to synthesise and analyse existing literature on pupil participation to provide a reliable summery of evidence and valuable insight that will inform future practice. Limitations of this methodology include the potential for subjectivity and bias in the selection and interpretation of studies, as well as the lack of standardised methods for combining and analysing qualitative data. Nonetheless, qualitative research synthesis is a valuable research methodology which expands knowledge and influences policy and practice. To enhance the reliability and quality of this research, systematic approaches were adopted. A systematic review 'seeks to search systematically for, appraise and synthesise research evidence, using strategies to limit bias' (Booth, et al 2020, p.77). This rigorous and comprehensive approach included four key elements; a step by step methodology, pre-established review protocol, quality assurance checklist and reporting guidelines (Booth, et al 2020). These will now be discussed in more detail.

The review protocol was developed in line with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (Shamseer, et al, 2015) in order to strengthen the quality and rigour of the research (Cohen et al, 2018).

3.5. Literature Review Protocol

3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion Criteria
1. Language	English
2. Type of Publication	Journal articles
3. Type of Article	Empirical Studies using qualitative data
4. Content	Studies which address aspects of pupil voice, pupil participation, and pupil leadership as well as articles which include drama.
5. Research Settings	All
6. Timeframe	2011-2022
7. Geographical Location	Any
8. Peer Reviewed	Yes

3.5.2 Search Strategy

The following search strategy was designed to identify relevant studies for inclusion in this systematic review. It involved constructing a comprehensive search query, selecting appropriate databases, and applying specific search filters to retrieve relevant literature. The search strategy aimed to ensure that all relevant studies were captured, minimising the risk of missing important information (Ridley, 2012). There are however, limitations to this search strategy in relation to the time and scope of literature reviewed and the inclusion criteria which may exclude relevant studies, leading to potential gaps in the findings.

- The English language was selected to eliminate errors in translation, meaning the exclusion of key works with valuable contribution to this research published in any other national languages.

- Relevant key words related to the study such as *'pupil voice', 'learner participation'* and *'pupil leadership'* were entered into ProQuest Academic, SCOPUS and all EBSCOhost research databases, These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage and to locate current research.

- Empirical evidence with details of methods of data collection and analysis were included. This was key to the design and quality assurance of this research.

- The time frame of the past ten years was set to locate studies which capture current perspectives and developments in the field of pupil participation whilst also including seminal studies with findings that relate to the research questions.

- The secondary school setting was selected to locate studies directly linked to the research question, however studies undertaken in a range of countries were included to widen the sample and incorporate different perspectives and experiences of pupil participation at this stage.

- The 'any part' default function was selected to ensure any mention of the key words or search queries in the title, abstract or main body were included.

- Secondly, search queries using a combination of key words such as *'drama and pupil voice', 'drama and learner participation'* and *'transformative drama education'* were entered to the same databases, using the same filters as above.

- To ensure literature saturation, the process of citation mining was then undertaken (Booth, et al 2020). This involved scanning the references of selected articles to identify other sources not found in the initial search. Citation tracking tools such as google scholar were also utilised to identify articles that have cited key papers in the field.

- Although systematic reviews can utilise a vast range of literature sources including grey literature and policy documents (Ridley, 2012), due to the time restraints of this research project the decision was made at the outset to maintain a focus upon the most relevant sources to ensure a realistic and manageable scope for this small-scale study. With this in mind, an approach similar to that used by Nguyen, et al, was adopted, in which only sources from academic journals were selected as these have been thoroughly peer reviewed and thought to be credible sources (2019).

- An exclusion criteria was then applied to eliminate studies that may obscure the emergence of meaningful patterns. This included studies conducted in Higher Education settings (unless they provided valuable insight. i.e. collaborative curriculum design) and studies not based on empirical data. All titles and abstracts that were

irrelevant to this study (i.e. did not address the conditions, enactment or impact of pupil participation) were also excluded.

- The next stage of this process was to scan the full documents to ensure the shortlisted articles directly linked to the research questions. The 24 shortlisted articles were then exported to Endnote.

3.5.3 Data Extraction and Appraisal

24 Articles met the predetermined criteria and became the main body of data for this research project. The next stage of the process was data extraction and appraisal. This involved systematically extracting relevant data from the shortlisted articles and appraising the methodological quality of the studies. This was to ensure the reliability and validity of the review findings and to make evidence-based recommendations for future practice (Booth, et al 2020).

In order to extract key information from the selected studies a customised data extraction form was developed, in line with standardised examples from the (Cochrane Institute, 2018 cited in Booth 2020) It included the headings; author, date, location, study characteristics, participants, intervention details, and key findings. This framework enabled all relevant information to be captured and ensured consistently when extracting data from each study. In larger studies, data extraction may be conducted by two or more independent reviewers so that any discrepancies are resolved through discussion (Ridley, 2012). However this was not possible due to the time scale of this research, and the researcher therefore acknowledges that this process may be subject to error and/or bias.

In order to determine the validity and trustworthiness of the evidence presented in the studies, a risk of bias assessment was undertaken. This involved evaluating the quality and rigour of the methods employed in the included studies. A customised checklist was created to do this, informed by the A Risk of Bias Assessment Tool for Systematic Reviews (University of Bristol, 2016 cited in Booth, 2020). This enabled the researcher to assess factors such as the design of the study, sample size, data collection techniques, methods of analysis, the potential for bias and conflicts of interest. A total of 24 articles are cited in this review which provide evidence to support the themes discussed in the next chapter.

3.5.4 Data Synthesis

The findings from the selected qualitative studies were then synthesised and analysed using Qualitative Data Analysis. Taylor and Gibbs describe this process as 'how we move from the data to understanding, explaining and interpreting the phenomena in question' (2010, p.1 cited in Cohen et al, 2018). Qualitative data synthesis approaches enable researchers to go beyond the individual studies, providing a richer understanding of complex phenomena. In the case of this study, it provided deeper insights into pupil participation practice in relation to the research questions. The approach used to synthesise the data was Thematic Analysis which involves identifying, organising, and interpreting themes or patterns within qualitative data. Thematic Analysis was chosen as it aligns well with the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this study which values validity over reliability. Limitations of this approach are that it is open to subjectivity due to the different ways people engage with information. Data and interpretation are unavoidably combined which may also lead to the researcher being over-selective or unrepresentative. This can however 'be attenuated by the researchers reflexivity' (Cohen, et al, 2018, p. 648). Analysing the data using a systematic and rigorous approach, sought to increase the objectivity and credibility of the research in order to produce evidence-based recommendations for future practice.

3.5.5 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data. This is a qualitative approach which constructs patterns and develops emergent themes across a data set in order to produce a 'coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in data'. (Braun, et al., 2019, p.848). This approach values and acknowledges lived experience as 'not just valid but a resource' (Braun, et al, 2019, p.848). Therefore this approach compliments the methodological assumption that knowledge is contextual, underpinning both the purpose and design of this research.

Braun and Clarke six stage process was used to analyse the data. This involved, familiarisation with the data, generating codes, constructing themes, revising and defining and reporting the analysis (2013). This is a flexible process and involved iterative movement between the different stages allowing for rigorous exploration of the data and leading to insightful analysis. A detailed description of each stage is provided below to ensure transparency and validity in the research.

Familiarisation with the Data: The researcher immersed them self in the literature developing a comprehensive understanding of the content. Notes were recorded in a reflexive journal, informed by the aims of the study. Themes that emerged, relating to the research questions, were recorded along with ideas that resonated with the researcher's core beliefs and lived experiences.

Generating Codes: The journal articles were systematically coded using comment boxes and then exported to Microsoft Excel for further analysis. Inductive and deductive coding was utilised to identify content theoretical perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Salient and latent notes were recorded to ensure a true interpretation of the data and to extend the analysis. This aimed to develop an understanding of what happened, and more importantly, why (Baumfield, 2013). The researcher acknowledges that the interpretation of the data and generation of codes is open to subjectivity.

Constructing Themes: This involved systematically sorting and organising codes into potential themes that emerged through the researcher's perspective and reflected recurrent patterns (Braun and Clark, 2006). The coded excerpts were organised into categories of similar ideas and then formulated into key themes and sub-themes using continuous engagement with the literature, reflexivity and concept mapping,

Revising and Defining Themes: The coded excerpts were organised in to themes and sub-themes using the OneNote tab facility. The data was repeatedly revisited to highlight repetition, and contradiction. Concept maps were used as a visual tool to establish how the themes interconnected and to define meaningful titles.

Reporting the Analysis: Revisiting the data and utilising supervisor feedback enabled construction of a coherent narrative, highlight overarching themes, supported by illustrative excerpts from the data. These overarching themes form the final, thematic structure of the research findings. They are presented and discussed in relation to the research questions and overall aims of the project in the next chapter. The findings have been written in line with the Updated Guideline for Reporting Systematic Reviews (PRISMA, 2020, cited in Booth, 2020). This is to ensure a transparent, complete, and accurate account of how the review was conducted and what it has found (Ridley, 2012).

3.6 Ethics

The design, conduct and reporting of this research was informed by the approved ethical guidelines created by the British Educational Research Association (2018) and Scottish Educational Research Association (2005). Ethical implications underpinning this research relate to the role of the researcher, validity and reliability and potential professional bias. Measures taken to address these ethical issues and strengthen the integrity of the conclusions are discussed in the following sections.

3.6.1 Role of the researcher

The purpose of this study was not to prove a hypothesis but to generate fresh insight from the literature that will inform future learner participation practice. Although the interpretivist nature of this research embraces the researchers lived experience (Baumfiled, et al, 2012) attempts were made to maintain objectivity and avoid contamination of the data through the use of a reflexive journal (Cohen, 2018). The journal was used to document the researcher's thoughts and evolving insights as they engaged with the data. By documenting interpretations and decision-making processes, the researcher was able to mitigate preconceptions and bias, providing validity to the emergent themes. Acknowledgment of where pedagogical beliefs have influenced the findings provides transparency and ensures the study is conducted in line with the ethical guidelines of qualitative research (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007).

3.6.2 Reliability and Validity

Although the findings of this research do not intend to be transferable, attempts have been made to increase the validity and reliability of the results. (Cohen, et al, 2018). The systematic approach to data collection and reflexive thematic analysis were selected to ensure precision and consistency in the data sampling and analysis. Validity was considered in relation to whether the research 'represents what it intends to describe, explain or theorise' (Winter, 2000 p.1, cited in Cohen, et al., 2018, p.245). The reflexive journal and discussions with a supervisor also ensured the findings accurately reflected the data. This was continually revisited to ensure the analysis addressed the research questions and overall aims of the study.

3.6.3. Acknowledgement of potential professional bias

As an interpretivist, the researcher is drawn to social constructivist learning theories, where by learners construct knowledge through social interaction, interpretation and collaboration (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010, cited in Cohen, et al., 2018). Therefore, the researcher's ontological position and pedagogical beliefs may have influenced the way data was interpreted and presented. However, constantly revisiting the data and using the reflexive journal to illuminate potential bias endeavoured to balance pedagogy and research (Baumfield et al, 2012).

This was a desk-based study and did not involve human subjects therefore, ethical approval was not required. The use of secondary data, already in the public domain, also limited ethical implications.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main findings from the systematic review. It will synthesise and analyse contemporary empirical evidence on the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation, the contextual factors which support and undermine its success and examine ways in which the Drama curriculum can enhance learner participation practice in schools.

The data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis; a qualitative research methodology used to analyse and interpret patterns of meaning within textual data (Braun and Clark, 2005). The themes and sub-themes identified in the analysis have been combined to produce three overarching themes; learner participation for positive change, relationships and inclusive learner participation. The findings under each theme will be presented, followed by further discussion and implications for practice. This chapter will conclude by drawing from key findings to propose a framework to support middle leaders with planning, implementing and evaluating pupil participation within their department in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos.

4.2 Learner participation for positive change

4.2.1 School Improvement

There is consensus in the research reviewed for this study that learner participation can enhance school improvement processes (Black and Mayes, 2020, Charteris and Smardon, 2019, Cross et al., 2014, Gibson et al., 2021, Graham et al., 2018, Hall, 2020, Jones and Bubb, 2021, Mayes, et al., 2021). It helps educational professionals identify areas of school life that need to be improved as well as successful practices to be shared and expanded (Chilvers et al., 2021, Gibson, et al., 2021, Graham et al., 2018). Listening to the opinions of learners can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of learning and teaching strategies (Graham et al., 2018, Hulme, et al., 2011), support curriculum reform (Biddulph, 2011, Leat and Reid, 2012), enhance the ethos of the school (Cross et al., 2014, Hulme et al., 2011) and inform teacher professional learning (Mayes, et al., 2021).

The contemporary evidence confirms that by listening to and incorporating learner input into decision-making processes, schools can make more informed, learner-centred choices (Gibson, et al., 2021). However, despite the drive for pupils to report on school effectiveness, there is still uncertainty as to whether these practices always lead to improved educational experiences (Cross et al., 2014, Jones and Bubb 2020).

4.2.2 Consultation and Action

A key finding across the selected literature is high levels of consultation, but mixed evidence of influence. A recent study, carried out in Norway, known for its longstanding engagement with children's rights and wellbeing, identified that pupils are regularly consulted on various aspects of school life but question whether their input is considered or acted upon (Jones and Bubb 2020). Pupil perception across several studies is that their voices are not valued and therefore their contributions are meaningless (Graham et al, 2018, Hulme at al., 2011, Jones and Bubb, 2021, McLuskey et al., 2013). Learners also report feeling the need to comply with what the school wants them to say (Hulme et al, 2011) or feel restricted by the predetermined processes, in which they are asked to contribute (Graham et al, 2018). When pupil voice is harnessed to fulfil school improvement policy expectations we fail to experience the true transformative potential of listening to young people (Biddulph, 2011, Charteris and Smardon, 2019).

Issues of power continue to influence which pupil voices are heard and how they are actioned (Graham, et al., 2018). Several studies have highlighted that the same select group of pupils are often asked to contribute their opinions and ideas, resulting in the underrepresentation of many voices (Biddulph, 2011, Hulme et al, 2011). Teachers in one study openly admitted to selecting pupils to participate as a reward for hard work or on the basis they were academically capable of contributing responsibly. Only one school in this project enabled learners to volunteer to participate. After one day, the pupils who were not selected on academic ability, decided not to continue and therefore, their voices were not heard (Biddulph, 2011).

Charteris and Smardon raise concerns about the way in which pupil voice is interpreted by adults and identified examples of pupil perspective being objectified by 'teachers' gaze'. They argue that authentic participation requires learners to be involved in the subsequent actions that result from their ideas. When only adults have responsibility to implement change then learner

agency is tokenistic at best (2019). Contrived leadership opportunities which have little impact on school decision-making have negatively impacted learner's enthusiasm to participate further (Hulme at al 2011, Jones and Bubb, 2020).

On the contrary, research conducted in a rural Scottish Primary School, which adopts a distributed model of participation, identified enhanced engagement and motivation when pupils were taught about coordinating decision-making and plan implementation in their school. Pupils openly discussed the need for trust, compromise and delegating responsibility as well as valuing discussion and explanation when decisions don't go their way. This study highlights a different attitude towards pupil involvement in decision-making processes, attributed to a coordinated whole school approach (Cross et al., 2014). Similarly, Charteris and Smardon identify positive examples of pupil participation in schools where they have been taught about the structures, processes, knowledge and skills needed initiating ideas and take responsibility (2019).

4.2.3 Performativity

Many of the selected studies, particularly in Secondary school settings, continue to highlight lack of time and issues of performativity as barriers to successful pupil participation. (Cross et al 2014, Hulme et al., 2011, Mayes at al., 2021). Educational professionals comment on the immense pressure of academic achievement, resulting in meaningful collaboration with pupils being overlooked and replaced with course content and preparing for summative examinations. Limited time and conflicting priorities bind and constrain teachers desire to support pupil participation in schools (Graham et al, 2018).

On the contrary, some research highlights the connection between effective pupil participation and improved attainment (Mannion et al., 2022). It suggests learners can improve academically when given the power to improve instruction and curriculum. Pupil participation fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills which can be applied in and beyond the classroom. (Hulme et al, 2011). The research also states that when students feel their opinions and contributions are valued, they develop a sense of ownership over their education, leading to increased confidence, enthusiasm and a willingness to strive for excellence (Hall, 2020). Some research alludes to how learner's experiences of democratic processes in school enable them to develop skills, such as; expression, negotiation and cooperation, preparing them to become active and

informed citizens in society (Cross et al, 2014). However these findings are perceptions based on indirect evidence.

4.2.4 Culture and Ethos

The success of pupil participation comes down to the value placed on it by the institution (Cross et al, 2014, Hulme et al, 2011). The most effective examples of pupil participation are situated in a school culture, where both pupils and teachers feel empowered to engage fully in decision-making processes and where time and resources are provided for it to flourish (Graham et al, 2018). However, top down improvement initiatives and performance targets can influence school leaders decisions about whether to persevere with the challenging culture work needed to embed authentic participation (Mayes, et al, 2021, p.204). Therefore, the importance placed on whole school approaches comes down to the value base of senior leaders. Charteris and Smardon call for further investment in practices of radical collegiality where by educational policy and institutional processes position pupils as 'action-orientated individuals' who engage in joint construction of knowledge (2019, p. 102).

4.2.5 Further Discussion

The research examined has found that involving pupils in self-evaluation processes can provide valuable insight on their preferences and classroom experiences, enabling learner-centred curriculum reform within a department. However, the findings suggest that when pupils recognise their contributions have made little impact they are left feeling disempowered and lose respect for the process. Therefore, it is vital that pupil recommendations are genuinely considered and motioned in order for pupils to recognise that they have the power to affect change (Fleming, 2015).

The findings highlight that the emphasis on performative measures results in pupil participation practices being overshadowed and many teachers continue to prioritise academic results. A key message coming from the literature is that addressing this challenge requires a culture shift. Recognising and valuing the place of pupil participation in the development of skills and attributes should support and compliment academic achievement.

The findings highlight that the type of collaboration between teachers and pupils propelled in policy goes against the traditional power dynamics within an educational setting and that most

decision-making processes still remain in the hands of senior leaders (Graham et al, 2018, Lundy and Cook-Sather 2016, Manion 2010). Pupil participation needs to be underpinned by discourse of transformative education and educational professionals need to understand how to embed authentic pupil participation practices in the day to day life of the school (Charteris and Smardon 2019).

Listening to pupils is a transformative process which will lead to reconfiguring the structure, processes and hierarchies of schools. (Fielding 2006). The evidence suggests that adults are reluctant to change established practices and ways of working, mostly due to time, resources and focus on academic achievement. Therefore, to facilitate feasible changes to practice, it is the role of the teacher to be transparent with pupils and develop a shared understanding of how decisions are made within the institution as well as time and financial implications (Cross et al, 2014). Understanding the complexities, constraints and tensions, is what enables pupils and teachers, to find the possibilities that exist and generate creative ideas (Mitra, 2018). Previous literature has suggested that for pupil participation to be authentic and impactful it requires strong pedagogical leadership and a school culture that values and supports it (Flutter and Rudduck, 2004). However, this review of literature has identified that modelling strong collaborative processes and acting upon pupil voice, in itself, contributes to the development of a whole school participatory ethos (Cook-Sather 2022).

4.3 Relationships

4.3.1 Power Dynamics

The research examined has found that pupils want to be more involved in decision-making processes (Biddulph, 2011, Jones and Bubb, 2021, Martens et al, 2019) and that despite some concerns, the majority of teachers want to engage in meaningful dialogue with pupils that will improve teaching and learning (Black and Mayes, 2020, Graham et al, 2018, Silva and Menzes, 2013). However the findings indicate several challenges in practice.

Several studies have identified that teachers are sceptical about the capabilities of young people, with many questioning whether children actually know how to make schools better. This, in the main, is due to concerns over the maturity level of pupils (Hulme et al, 2011), confidence to engage in critical dialogue with teachers (Jones and Bubb, 2021) and the knowhow and commitment required to see actions through (Graham, et al., 2018). Teachers

also report feeling frustrated about the added workload participation initiatives create. They refer to occasions when pupils have initiated great ideas but then fail to see it through, resulting in staff taking on the work (Graham et al, 2018).

In contrast, Silva and Menzes identified very positive teacher reflections on pupil participation where they acknowledged pupils' initiative, reflexive capacity and ability to make critical judgement. Nevertheless, teacher perceptions of participation in this study were more complimentary than pupils' which could be attributed to discourse of accountability (2013). Across multiple studies, teachers discuss avoiding participation practices due to feeling threatened by the potential impact of pupil feedback (Black and Mayes, 2020, Mayes et al 2021). When positioned within a discourse of governmentality and accountability, pupil voice can be viewed as a mechanism for surveillance (Charteris and Smardon, 2019). Teachers raise concerns over anonymous surveys and question whether pupils would provide the same feedback face to face. They highlight the need for learners to understand the concept of constructive feedback in order for it to be productive (Hall, 2020).

On the contrary, pupils identify issues of respect as the main barrier to open and honest dialogue with their teachers. They report feeling uncomfortable critiquing their teachers as they do not know how they will respond (Graham et al., 2018, Hulme at al 2011, Jones and Bubb, 2020). They argue that teachers need to be open to pupil feedback and ready to make changes in light of it. A senior leader suggests that the willingness to accept such critique from pupils requires a certain level of security and confidence from the teacher (Graham et al., 2018). This type of relationship goes against the tradition power dynamic experienced in schools and pupils argue that in order for them to contribute effectively, there needs to be greater equality between pupils and teachers (Graham et al., 2018). There is agreeance that a repositioning of pupils in schools is required to enable them to engage in active pupil-teacher partnerships (Biddulph, 2011, Charteris and Smardon, 2019).

4.3.2 Intergenerational Dialogue

A key theme reoccurring in the literature reviewed for this study, is the importance of intergenerational dialogue which is two-way, and built on mutual respect (Black and Mayes, 2020, Chilvers et al., 2021, Leat and Reid, 2012, Mayes et al 2021). Through the exchange of ideas and experiences pupils and teachers can learn together. Pupils benefit from the knowledge and experience of their teachers and teachers gain new insight and perspectives from their students (Leat and Reid 2012). A positive example of this type of exchange was identified in a 'Teach the teacher' programme conducted in an Australian primary school. Pupils led professional learning sessions for their teachers, incorporating starter activities and collaborative group work they found engaging. As a result, many teachers altered their pedagogical approaches, pupils recognised how their input had enabled positive changes in the classroom and pupil-teacher relationships were enhanced (Mayes et al., 2021).These types of participatory approaches, which allow teachers and pupils to get to know each other and feel more comfortable, can be a catalyst for ongoing dialogue and become the groundwork for open and honest conversations about learning and teaching (Susinos and Haya, 2014). For participation to be transformative, this dialogue must be influential and lead to new improved practices. This intergenerational partnership relies on pupils sharing in the responsibility for the vision of the initiative, the activities planned, and monitoring the processes and outcomes of such actions. Collaborating in this way ensures that school decision-making captures the needs of all parties (Charteris and Smardon, 2019).

4.3.3 Shared Decision-making

Despite a desire to engage in shared decision-making, teachers report uncertainty and lack of competence in how to include pupils in such discussions (Hulme at al 2011, Jones and Bubb, 2020). Educational professionals currently lack the necessary training and resources to effectively implement intergenerational learning initiatives. Several studies also identify the need to develop pupil's skills in relation to effective dialogue, collaboration and deliberation. Hulme et al propose this is done through a mentoring relationship (2011). A fundamental idea emerging from the literature is the need for educational professionals to 'scaffold the development of student's participatory skills (such as negotiation, compromise coordinating a plan, etc.)' (Graham et al., 2018 p. 1041). Teaching decision-making, through practice, and

providing leadership opportunities that enable pupils to apply these skills develops confidence, democratic values and shared responsibility. Positioning teachers in a facilitator role also provides scope for the shift in power relations identified by pupils (Graham, et al, 2018, Jones and Bubb, 2020).

4.3.4 Pupil Led Research

Some pupil-led research, whereby pupils have worked collaboratively to plan, develop and implement their own improvement projects, have shed light on the true capabilities of young people, and evolving teacher perceptions of pupil involvement (Gibson et al, 2021). A case study conducted in a Spanish Primary school, which aimed to develop pupil voice and participatory pedagogy using a Students as Researchers, accredited positive relational outcomes to the mentoring approach (Susinos and Haya, 2014). The process involved; developing trusting relationships, teacher-pupil mentoring, co-designed decision-making and final recommendations for improvement based on changes young people would like to see. The mentoring approach helped to develop pupil understanding of how the school worked as well as a range of new skills and sense of agency over their educational experience. When pupils are actively engaged in sharing their opinions, ideas, and concerns, it empowers them to take ownership of their learning journey and fosters a shared sense of responsibility and commitment to school improvement (Gibson et al., 2021). Biddulph proposes that participatory research approaches dilute the traditional hierarchies and power dynamics of schools, empowering learners to act (2011). However, there is concern over the sustainability of this approach when heavily reliant on a particular group of pupils and teachers. To sustain the positive outcomes of participatory research, it needs to be embedded in the everyday processes of the school (Cross et al., 2014). Although the scope of this project was limited in terms of changing school culture, the creation of new pedagogical relationships and practices, underpinned by intergenerational learning, is arguably the first step in a greater presence of pupils in decision-making processes (Susinos and Haya, 2014).

4.3.5 Further Discussion

The findings suggest a desire from both learners and teachers to work together to improve educational experiences. However pupils are sceptical that their contributions won't be valued and teachers are wary of giving pupils too much power. Therefore, positive relationships built on trust and respect are pivotal to this process (Biddulph, 2011). The findings indicate that when pupils feel safe and connected to their teachers, they are more likely to express their thoughts, ask questions and share ideas without fear of judgement. What is clear from the findings, is an evolving perception of pupils' capacity to contribute effectively, with teachers recognising their ability to provide fresh insight and innovative ideas to all sorts of decision-making processes. A key barrier to effective participation is adults not knowing how to partner with young people effectively. Review of the selected literature has identified six key characteristics underpinning effective dialogue between teachers and learners including; trust, respect, exchange of ideas, debate, shared decision-making and distributed action. When conducted in this way, there is move form intergenerational dialogue to intergenerational learning, creating positive outcomes for pupils, organisations, curriculum planning and staff development (Fielding, 2001, Chappell and Craft, 2011, Fielding, 2006). Evident from the findings is the importance of teaching pupils to value deliberation, modelling appropriate behaviours and approaches and providing scaffolding that supports and enables learners to contribute (Mitra, 2018). Educational professionals must now go beyond providing opportunities to participate, and be proactive in supporting pupils to do so effectively. The research has highlighted a need for professional learning that enables educational professionals to learn and explore ways in which to develop a greater sense of partnership with their pupils (Jones and Hall, 2022). Without proper guidance and support, teachers may struggle to design appropriate activities that facilitate meaningful interactions and mutual learning which take participation beyond the tokenistic opportunities currently experienced n schools. Therefore, a key implication for policy and practice is the importance of helping educational professionals foster a culture of participation, develop collaborative skills and strengthen pupil-teacher relationships so that participatory experiences can expand across the school.

4.4 Inclusive learner participation

4.4.1 Classroom practice

In their study of 'pupil participation' in Scottish schools, Hulme, et al, highlighted that teachers often associate the concept with activities external to the classroom, such as involvement in pupil councils, government funded projects and teacher orchestrated events. However, learners were more likely to comment on discussion and decision-making opportunities embedded in their classroom experiences (2011). Similarly, Cross et al., identified that pupils were most articulate about learning participation, naming embedded classroom practices such as; target setting, self-assessment, learner conversations and personal learner plans (2014). Embedding participatory practices in day to day classroom experiences helps move away from the opinion that participation is an opt in exercise only available to an elite group of pupils (Susinos and Haya, 2014). Pupil experience of informal participation within the classroom, where there is less risk, can eventually lead to greater involvement in deliberate forums and whole school decision-making processes. Opportunities to develop confidence and learn collaborative skills through group work can then be applied to the more formal structures in and beyond school (Cross et al., 2014). Encouraging pupils to engage in dialogue and discussion about learning and teaching creates a pedagogical partnership which improves curriculum experiences as well as nurturing a democratic, rights based approach to education (Hall, 2020, Souza et al., 2013).

4.4.2 Curriculum Reform

Hall highlights the limitations of generic curriculum feedback surveys and calls for a more flexible, creative, and collaborative curriculum planning procedure whereby pupils are guided through the process and enable to offer relevant and innovative ideas (2020). A recent study used creative pedagogies to facilitate a student-staff partnership approach to course enhancement. This involved using creative activities, materials and metaphors relevant to the discipline to elicit deeper evaluation of course content and facilitate intergenerational dialogue. Despite some logistical challenges of this approach the findings included enhanced student autonomy and reflection, a culture of partnership and enriched curriculum design (Chilvers et al., 2021). However, this study was conducted in a Higher Education setting therefore the findings may not transfer to a secondary school context. A study which explored student research in a curriculum development process identified three key benefits including; enhanced creative and reflective skills, more accessible assessment frameworks and changes to teachers' thinking and practice. However this emphasised that the most positive change was in the relationships, enabling a shift in the organisational power structures of the school (Leat and Reid, 2012). Despite the positive outcomes of involving learners in pedagogical planning,

requirements from professional bodies may limit the possibilities of co-creation. Some studies identified a reluctance to relinquish curriculum design to pupils due to time constraints and fear of impact on academic progress (Biddulph 2011, Bovill et al., 2011).

4.4.3 Creative Pedagogy

A key message emerging from the literature reviewed for this study is the need to utilise more creative and inclusive forms of participatory practice (Chappell and Craft, 2011, Cook-Sather, 2022, Hajisoteriou, et al., 2022, Hammond, 2013). A study which utilised forum theatre to elicit pupil voice, empowered pupils to express themselves through performance. Using drama techniques such as improvisation, problem solving, emotional awareness and imagination, pupils developed advocacy through means other than the spoken word (Hammond, 2013). Similarly, the use of collaborative storytelling to explore issues of social justice highlighted how creative pedagogical interventions can foster children's critical thinking, create trusting relationships and develop expression and collaboration (Hajisoteriou, et al., 2022). Both the forum theatre and collaborative storytelling interventions engaged pupils in critical inquiry and action. Through forum theatre, children were able to communicate their views in a safe space that promoted equality. Participants as young as four were able to challenge the oppression in a bullying scene and explore alternative actions using both verbal and non-verbal communication. Pupils who participated in the collaborative storytelling, discussed how the programme had encouraged them to be more actively engaged and committed to promoting social justice (Hajisoteriou et al., 2022). A study which looked at dialogic spaces for co-research also found that creative learning conversations flatten the usual hierarchical power relations found in schools and promote a sense of equality (Chappell and Craft, 2011). The collaborative and participant focused nature of Drama is the most emancipatory aspect which promotes a pedagogy of participation. Hammond argues the performing arts are significantly underutilised within educational settings and despite a developing evidence base, there still appears to be a world of opportunity (2013).

4.4.4 Further Discussion

A move towards collaborative learning in the classroom and embedded democratic processes ensures all voices are heard and empowers learners to use them. Engaging in personally

relevant critical enquiry, has shown to enable pupils to question the fundamental habits and patterns of school, challenge injustices and impact their surroundings (Mitra, 2018). Providing opportunities to involve pupils in curriculum reform and design has also demonstrated very positive results such as enhanced intergenerational relationships, the development of creative and critical skills as well as innovative pedagogical approaches to improve leaning and teaching. It is important to note that involving pupils in pedagogical design does not replace the expertise of the teacher and that they are fundamental to facilitating this process (Bovill, et al., 2011). An implication for practice is for institutions to place value on pupil contribution to curriculum design and afford time and resources to support this collaborative process. Issues identified in relation to external body requirements apply particularly to senior phase exams in Scotland. The current format of national qualifications may inhibit this type of collaboration. Creative pedagogies have proven to be effective means of engaging pupils, enabling them to explore complex issues and themes and build confidence in their ability to communicate and collaborate. By stepping into the shoes of different characters and exploring their thoughts and feelings, pupils develop empathy as well as critical thinking skills (Jones and Hall, 2020). Role-play, improvisation, and other creative activities, enable pupils to explore issues of social justice, inequality, and discrimination, developing their understanding of different perspectives.

Therefore, it could be argued that classroom based activities such collaborative group work, pupil led research, joint curriculum planning and creative pedagogy are key to laying the groundwork for more substantial forms of participation across the school, developing a participatory ethos from the inside out (Cross, et al, 2014). Optimising opportunities for children to share their views is a fundamental right therefore, further exploration of how these approaches can be utilised is essential (Hammond, 2013).

4.5 Enhancing participation through Drama

A main objective of this research was to identify the key concepts underpinning effective participation in Scottish schools. The concepts identified in both Scottish education policy and the literature reviewed for this study are listed in Table 1.

Effective Pupil Participation
School Improvement
Quality Assurance
Children's rights
Citizenship
Transformative Leadership
Flat Power Dynamic
Positive relationships
Intergenerational Dialogue and Learning
Collaboration
Communication
Expression
Creativity
Problem-solving
Critical Inquiry
Inclusivity
Empathy
Leadership
Reflection
Social justice
Shared decision-making
Evaluation

Table 1. *Key Concepts underpinning Effective Learner Participation* synthesised by the researcher.

Another objective of this research was to examine how curriculum Drama can support and enhance participation in Scottish schools by equipping learners with the knowledge and skills required to participate effectively. The key concepts underpinning the Drama curriculum in Scotland, are listed below in Table 2.

Drama Curriculum
Performance skills
Production skills
Performance Analysis
Collaboration
Communication
Expression
Creativity
Problem-solving
Reflection
Critical Inquiry
Children's rights
Inclusivity
Empathy
Leadership
Constructive Feedback
Issue based Drama
Alternative course of action
Shared decision-making
Evaluation
Flat Power Dynamic
Positive relationships
Intergenerational Dialogue and Learning

Table 2. *Key concepts underpinning the Scottish Drama Curriculum* synthesised by the researcher.

A key finding from this review of literature is that the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation in schools align closely with the skills developed through curriculum drama and the emancipatory potential of drama pedagogy. The diagram below attempts to synthesise both sets of concepts, illuminating many shared principles.

Figure 1. *Synthesis of underlying concepts as found in policy and research*

The diagram above highlights that many of the key concepts underpinning effective learner participation in schools are in fact embedded in the Scottish Drama Curriculum. Therefore it could be argued that Drama is a powerful tool for enhancing learner participation in Scottish secondary schools as it;

- dilutes hierarchical power dynamics
- is built on collaboration and the exchange of ideas

- enables all learners to express themselves through verbal and non-verbal communication
- develops creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- enables intergenerational learning through critical inquiry
- empowers learners and teachers to challenge injustice
- encourages shared decision-making and responsibility

Drama provides a safe place to engage learners in authentic participation practices that lead to positive change.

4.6. Developing a framework for practice

The findings from this study and key aspects of literature and policy have been synthesised to develop a framework that endeavours to move beyond identifying concepts to providing a clear and accessible guide that will inform and enhance learner participation within a secondary school Drama department. It aims to:

- raise awareness of learner participation

- highlight potential barriers and opportunities

- develop a shared rational and strategy for implementation

- promote the relational work that will determine its success

- suggest classroom based approaches that foster authentic learner participation

- identify evaluation processes that will enable sustainability

The Learner Participation in Educational Settings (3-18) guidance was developed to provide a clear definition and rationale for participation in Scottish education as well as principles and practice across four arenas of school life (Education Scotland, 2016). This framework intends to build on this guidance by incorporating new insight developed from this systematic review of current empirical evidence.

This framework is based on in-depth research relating to principles underpinning effective participation, contextual factors that support and undermine its success and the role educational professionals in supporting authentic participation. Where this framework differs from the Education Scotland guidance, is that it is rooted in everyday classroom practice and aims to utilise the transformative potential of Drama education. It provides a clear and accessible framework to support planning, implementation and evaluation of learner participation at departmental level that can be extended across the school in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos. Although it has been specifically designed to support educational professionals working within a secondary school Drama department, generic aspects of the framework could be applied and modified to suit a range of subject specialisms.

4.6.1 How to develop a participatory ethos in your department: A framework for enhancing learner participation practice
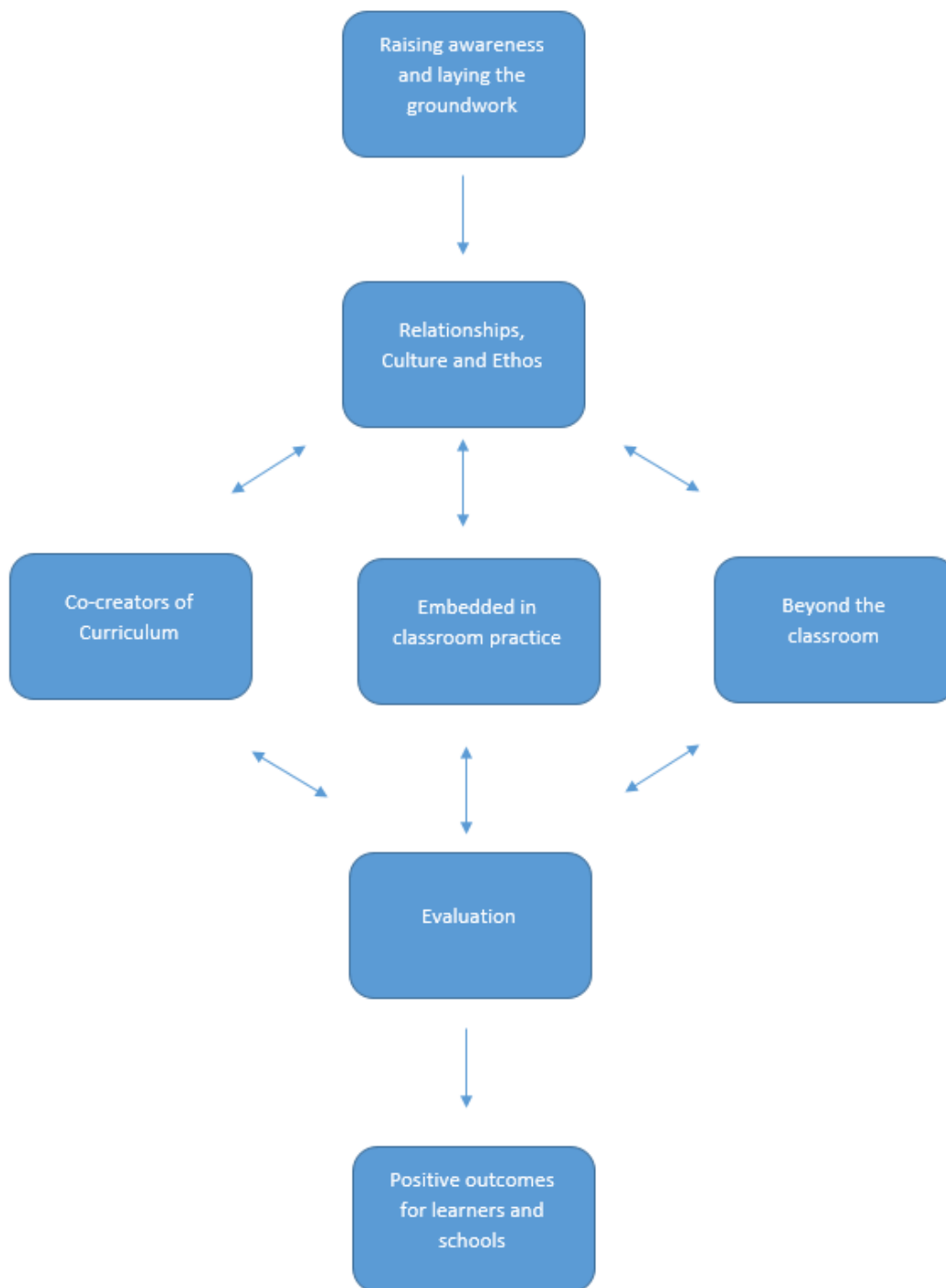

Figure 2. *How to develop a participatory ethos in your department* Synthesis of Findings

4.6.2 Framework Guidance

The first two components of the framework; *raising awareness and laying the groundwork* and *relationships, culture and ethos* relate to the findings in 5.2 Eliciting pupil voice for positive change and 5.3 Relationships. The recommendations are informed by key concepts underpinning effective learner participation including; transformative leadership, collaboration, intergenerational learning, and shared-decision making as well as contextual factors such as school culture, values, conflicting agendas, time and resources. They emphasise the important role teachers' play in developing a flat power dynamic, building positive relationships built on trust a respect, modelling democratic principles and ensuring transparency in decision-making processes.

Developing awareness and laying the groundwork (Staff and pupils)

- Provide a clear rational and definition of learner participation based on policy and research
- Reflect on current practice to identify contextual barriers, supports and opportunities
- Establish a shared vision and responsibility for learner participation across the department
- Develop a clear and accessible strategy for implementation
- Promote and enable opportunities for professional learning

Relationships, Culture and Ethos

Identify the importance of positive relationships that are built on principles of:
- Transformative leadership
- Democratic values
- Equality
- Trust and mutual respect
- Intergenerational dialogue and learning
- Collaborative inquiry
- Shared decision-making and collective responsibility

The next section is informed by the findings in 5.4.2 Curriculum Reform which highlight the potential for critical inquiry, creative approaches and collaborative planning to enrich curriculum design, enhance assessment frameworks and improve pedagogical approaches. Collaborative curriculum reform can conducted with a small group of teachers and learners or as a whole class activity at the beginning or end of a unit of work. The role of the teacher is to coach pupils through this process in incremental stages, encouraging shared decision making and collective responsibility. What is important, is that it is voluntary, inclusive and acted upon.

Co-Creators of Curriculum

- Share curriculum frameworks
- Be transparent about policy/school expectations, limitations and timelines
- Use creative approaches to elicit pupil perspective and ideas
- Engage in critical inquiry
- Scaffold activities for pupils
- Coach and mentor learners through this process
- Allocate appropriate time and resources
- Implement learner suggestions
- Involve learners in evaluating impact and establishing next steps
- Recognise their involvement in enhancing learning and teaching

The recommendations in the following two sections *Embedded in classroom practice* and *beyond the classroom* relate to the findings in 4.4.1 Classroom Practice which highlight how participatory practice within the classroom can develop the skills and attributes needed to participate in formal participation processes across the school. As this framework is specifically designed for a Drama department, it also incorporates the findings from 4.4.3 Creative Pedagogy, which demonstrate how creative activities such as role-play, story-telling and forum theatre promote leadership, develop empathy and empower learners to act on issues of social justice.

Embedded in classroom practice

These approaches are merely suggestions based on research evidence. The list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

- Actively engage pupils in all aspects of learning using formative assessment strategies.
- Provide opportunities for collaborative group work.
- Promote democratic values and practice negotiation and shared decision-making in the classroom.
- Utilise drama activities such as games, improvisation, roleplay and creative storytelling, enabling learners to develop communication, creativity, empathy and critical thinking skills.
- Embed opportunities for personalisation choice and harness learners' interests and talents. This can be in relation to content, stimulus, form of theatrical expression and production role.
- Facilitate whole class productions where each learner has a vital role and feels valued.
- Offer a wide range of curricular pathways and vocational courses such as Technical Theatre
- Engage in inquiry based learning and mentor pupils through this process.
- Use Forum Theatre to explore issues of social justice and to establish alternative course of action.

Beyond the classroom

- Provide opportunities for pupil led research to be conducted and shared across the department and wider school.
- Use theatre performance to communicate important ideas to the wider school and local community.
- Provide opportunities for learners to participate and apply their leadership skills out with the classroom such as extra-curricular drama clubs, transition workshops, end of term performing arts events, school show and excursions.

The recommendations in the final two sections *Evaluation* and *Positive outcomes for learners and schools* relate to key messages found in Scottish education policy and the literature reviewed for this study. They emphasise the importance of valuing learner input, and involving them in subsequent actions, including evaluating impact. When learners recognise that their contribution has resulted in positive change, it develops their sense of agency and commitment to all aspects of school life.

Evaluation

- Involve learners in evaluating impact and change.
- Identify progress, challenges and next steps.
- Involve learners in sharing good practice with other departments
- Put systems in place to extend and improve practice across the school

Positive outcomes for learners and schools

The recommendations above should work collectively towards the following outcomes:

- Improved relationships
- Enhanced Learning and Teaching
- Innovative curriculum design
- Better ethos and sense of community
- Development of skills for learning, life and work
- Improved engagement, empowerment and agency
- Improved attainment and achievement

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The overarching purpose and aim of this research was to provide clarity around the key concepts underpinning effective pupil participation practice and the contextual factors which support and undermine its success in Scottish schools. This endeavoured to enhance participation practice within a secondary school Drama department in order to contribute to a whole school participatory ethos.

The specific objectives were to:

- Identify the principles underpinning effective pupil participation in schools.
- Critically examine the contextual factors which support and undermine the effectiveness of pupil participation.
- Identify how educational professionals can support and enable pupils to participate.
- Investigate the extent to which the drama curriculum can equip young people with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively.

This concluding chapter will revisit the research objectives above, summarise the findings, and offer specific conclusions in relation to each research objective. It will discuss the limitations of this research, contribution it has made to the pupil participation field as well as suggestions for future research. In doing so, the researcher aims to achieve cyclical closure (Biggam, 2021).

5.2 Limitations

It is important at this point to highlight the limitations of this research. Firstly, the articles that were shortlisted for this review mentioned one of the predetermined search phrases i.e. 'pupil participation' in any parts of the publication and were listed in the EBSCOhost Education Database. Therefore, articles which did not mention these terms, or were overlooked during the citation mining process were excluded from this study and may have offered relevant insight on pupil participation.

Secondly, this review included only peer reviewed, empirical studies written in English, excluding grey literature. Therefore a key limitation of this research is the 'missing literature'. A broader focus may have produced different findings and conclusions.

Another limitation of this research is that the studies included reflect small scale, qualitative methodologies across a range of settings and contexts. Therefore, these findings are influenced by the methodological approaches, rigour and analysis of a range of researchers with contrasting theoretical perspectives and values.

The findings of this research are based on a systematic review of literature specific to the predetermined research questions. The conclusions are drawn from these sources only and cannot be generalised to all educational contexts. Instead, they offer relatability in that the findings may be of interest to other educational professionals and researchers in the field looking to enhance participation practice within their context.

5.3 Summary of findings and conclusions

This research concludes that a main barrier to authentic pupil participation is the traditional hierarchies and power dynamics found in Scottish secondary schools. Participation continues to be influenced by policies, processes, structures and pedagogy, all determined by adult beliefs and values regarding pupil status and the purpose of education. Issues of performativity continue to impact the time and value placed on participation practice with teachers and leaders prioritising the attainment agenda. In order to meet the ideals propelled in Scottish education policy, a culture shift and move towards transformative approaches is vital.

Another factor undermining the success of authentic participation is staff not knowing how to partner effectively with young people and pupils' lacking opportunities to develop participatory skills, guided by their teachers. Pupils are sceptical of tokenistic leadership opportunities, where their opinions have no impact on school decision-making and call for greater equality in such processes. The literature reviewed for this study has identified that a fundamental principal underpinning pupil participation is intergenerational learning. This positive relationship built on trust and mutual respect ensures teachers and pupils feel their contributions are valued and encourages them to engage in conversations about school improvement that are influential. Through the exchange of ideas, deliberation, transparency and distributed responsibility, pupils and teachers can engage in shared decision-making processes that lead to positive change. Pupil participation is most effective when situated in a school culture which values its contributions to school improvement, relationships, curriculum reform, learning

climate, pupil development and staff professional learning. Factors which enhance its success include; a coordinated whole school approach with clear rationale, staff training, time and resources that support authentic intergenerational collaboration and opportunities for shared-decision-making, plan implementation and evaluation. When pupil participation is underpinned by transformative leadership, pupils and teachers believe they can work together to make positive changes within their school and feel empowered to do so.

In order for pupil participation to be inclusive, it must be embedded in the everyday practices of schools and experienced through pedagogical approaches used in the classroom. Involving pupils in curriculum reform and providing opportunities for them to co-create content and assessment procedures also enhances the participatory ethos. What is vital is that pupils are supported through this process using appropriately scaffolded activities. The empirical evidence from this review has identified strategies to support pupil participation within the classroom such as; collaborative group work, critical enquiry, pupil led research, modelling democratic processes, forum theatre and performance. Providing opportunities for pupils to develop participatory skills in a low risk environment prepares them for more formal shared decision-making out with the classroom.

5.4 Value

Up until now, work produced by other researchers in the field of learner participation has primarily focused on definitions, perceptions, challenges and enactment at whole school level. This research differs in that it aimed to consolidate key principles from previous research in order to identify a coherent, operational framework specific to a secondary school Drama department. The learner participation framework proposed at the end of chapter 4, aims to support discussions around the planning, implementation and evaluation of pupil participation practice at departmental level, in order to contribute to a whole school approach.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

The final part of this conclusion discusses key implications and suggestions for future research. The majority of reviews used in this study, refer to practices within a primary school setting. Moving forward it is a vital challenge of those researching in the field of pupil participation to extend the empirical evidence base in Scottish secondary schools in order to provide more detailed accounts of successful enactment and strengthen this specific knowledge base.

This review in alignment with others (Jones and Hall, 2020, Mitra 2006, Mitra 2018) has shown that effective pupil participation continues to be undermined by discourse of performativity. The empirical evidence from this review suggests that the skills, attributes and mind-set developed through participatory practice not only compliments but enhances academic achievement. Although these studies do not present firm conclusions, the findings point towards indirect links between pupil participation and pupil attainment. Therefore it is suggested that future studies aim to provide more rigorous and methodologically sophisticated, empirical research on the impact of effective pupil participation practice on pupil attainment. This review of literature identified how collaborative storytelling, forum theatre and other creative pedagogies were used to elicit authentic pupil voice, create the conditions for critical engagement and explore issues of social justice. Consequently, future empirical studies would benefit from focusing on the use of drama and other expressive art forms and their contribution to whole school pupil participation.

The pupil participation framework, is based on in-depth research and has been specifically designed to support educational professionals working within a secondary school Drama department. As mentioned earlier in the study, previous models of participation have been critiqued for their theoretical underpinnings and idealistic notions unachievable in practice (Jones and hall, 2020). Therefore, a final recommendation is empirical research on the implementation of the framework; including perception, application and evaluation. The framework is by no means prescriptive or complete and would benefit from ongoing development in light of continued research.

This research, has highlighted the true potential of Drama, not just as a subject but as a pedagogy that fosters the conditions, relationships and capacities that enable effective pupil participation. A final recommendation is for other specialisms to undertake similar research, identifying what their unique subject has to offer. This would raise awareness of learner

participation, encourage widespread engagement with current policy and research, enable collaboration across the school and encourage senior leaders to put systems in place that maximise opportunities for learners to participate and influence positive change. It is important to recognise that this work is complex and ongoing, however the potential outcomes for learners and schools reinforce that investments up front are worth the long term gains.

Word count: 14462

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