

Introduction

My action research considered the influence that trust has in improving learning outcomes for teenage boys when they participate in collaborative learning groups.

Using the Whoosh technique (Teaching Shakespeare the RSC Way, 2008), I introduced the learning group to the study of Shakespeare, with an emphasis on physicalizing the text and exploring the play.

John K. Butler Jr. (1991) outlines ten conditions of trust and describes the building of trust as a circular, mutually reinforcing process. Harvey and Daniels (2015) make the case for the building of collaborative skills being a question of ethics.

The Research Question

How can building trust during a collaborative dramatic study of Shakespeare enhance engagement for Year 9 English students?

I wished to examine what assists the boys with their sense of engagement; their being united into a community; and their appreciation of the content and implications of the play.

Research Context and Participants

This action research project saw twenty-one, mixed ability Year Nine boys at The Hutchins School being introduced to *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Hutchins School is an Anglican, K-12 boys school in Hobart, Tasmania. While the school draws students from a range of socio-economic, religious and cultural circumstances, the majority of students are from advantaged backgrounds. Hutchins aims to build good men who act with kindness, integrity, compassion, humility and courage.

The Research Action

To investigate the impact of trust-building exercises on the student engagement with the Whoosh I focused on creating a climate of class citizenship. I introduced preparatory exercises from *Active Approaches to Shakespeare: A Toolkit* (Grainger 2008) including: 'What's in a Name', 'Sonar', 'Moving in Space', 'Ensemble Statutes', 'Moving with Lines', 'Tribes' and 'Punctuation Shift'.

The students were given reflective journal questions on *Romeo and Juliet* as well as questions pertaining to trust, relationships and collaboration.

I spent three 100-minute lessons delivering the Whoosh. This involved using a large clear flat teaching space with a data projector and screen. It provided plenty of room for the class to undergo vigorous warm-ups and preparation; to improvise many key scenes of the play; to read selected quotes from the play on the screen; and to reproduce sword fights and melees between the Capulets and the Montagues

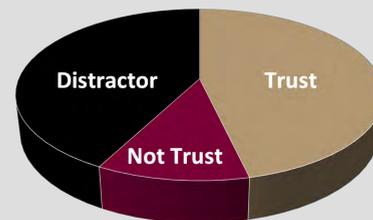
Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data, I used:

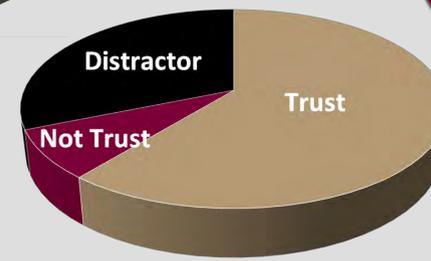
- pre-interviews and post-interviews
- reflective writing using open-ended questioning
- trust indicator table
- pre and post surveys

My questioning in a variety of forms and the use of reflective journals enabled the boys to share their "turning point experiences." While watching the videos I looked for themes I had noticed in other data analysis, and I also pulled out key statements and made some critical physical observations. I relied heavily on comments from the interviews and compared the responses to the trust indicator table at different times during the action.

Trust Indicator Selection (Before)



Trust Indicator Selection (After)



Key Findings

- Collaboration fosters appreciation of Shakespeare
- Positive environment promotes productive collaboration
- Fairness and participation leads to trust
- Trust builds confidence
- Boys have different perceptions of their own development

Conclusions

As trust grew, doubts lessened and enjoyment and engagement greatly increased. Not only was the collaboration within the learning group more sustained, but the complexity of the work of interpreting, comprehending, and performing a Shakespearean play seemed to lessen, and the previously intimidating task became commonplace, as if this study was as normal as turning up to class.

"It suits everyone, the normal way won't suit everyone, this does!"

The boys matured and benefited from the positive effects of good collaboration.

"Everyone was involved. You learnt how things were happening through physically doing it, not just standing there and having someone read out to you. Seeing other people doing the stuff as well, you think if other people can do it, I can do it as well."

"I enjoyed it ... We each learnt a little bit of the play and we all recited that to make the scene happen. I felt accepted and confident to act out the play."

"(Trust) can't be asked for and received, it has to be built. If it's strong there's a bit of leeway, yeah. They can let you down and that's still fine 'cause that's human I guess. You have to be able to forgive people."

Key Readings

- Butler, J. K., Jr. (1991). Toward Understanding and Measuring Conditions of Trust. *Clemson University Journal of Management*, 17(3), 643-663
- Harvey, S., & Daniels, H. (2015). *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles for Curiosity, Engagement and Understanding* (Revised Edition). USA: Heineman.
- McBee, Orzulak, M., Lillge, D., Engel, S., & Haviland, S. (2014). Contemplating Trust in Times of Uncertainty: Uniting Practice and Interactional Awareness to Address Ethical Dilemmas in English Teacher Education. *English Education*, 47(N 1).

The Whoosh in action

"The walking helped me learn it faster. That was pretty cool."

"I liked how there wasn't tons of lines."

"More people stepping up to do things it was a bit contagious in a way."

Do you bite your thumb at us sir?

"It was good to change up the roles a lot. You could be part of a bed or Romeo!"

"...no one felt threatened. It made it more enjoyable and easier because they weren't feeling judged."