ACTIVATING (ORACY) EMBODIED-DIALOGIC AND CULTURAL LITERACIES THROUGH DRAMA WORLDBUILDING PEDAGOGY ACROSS THE PRIMARY CURRICULUM

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Abstract

Across Europe, the need for teaching practices that foster collaborative pedagogy involving creativity, active student engagement and culturally responsive learning is seen as critical. Effective social-emotional communication and language skills enhance positive life outcomes and educational attainment. However, language ideologies in English education policy often advocate deficit thinking in monolingual and monocultural classrooms. This case study shares the practice and research findings of a two-year 'Story Exchange 'project by employing co-participatory research with teachers, artists, and young people. Seven primary schools worked with five artist-educators in the North of England to bring the Humanities curriculum to life through an oral storytelling and inquiry approach called Drama Worldbuilding. Dismantling deficit models of oracy, the project aimed to promote imaginative, culturally relevant learning by building on the linguistic strengths of all children, especially Black and Global Majority children—seeing these assets as rich affordances of learning. Teachers were paired with one of five artist-educators and given time and space to co-plan, co-deliver, and co-reflect on curriculum learning, engaging them in systematic action research. Employing a translanguaging approach, the research evidences the impacts of the pedagogical approach on children's social-emotional literacy, presenting a new co-designed Framework of Dispositional Learning through Embodied-Dialogic Oracy.

Keywords: Pedagogy, creativity, primary school, oracy, culture, drama

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1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT

What constitutes a 'language rich' classroom environment? We live in a multicultural society where teaching and learning should be relevant and responsive to the literacies, languages, and cultural practices of our communities. This case study shares the findings of a two-year project, led by Story Makers Company at Leeds Beckett University alongside seven primary schools and five drama specialists in the North of England. Drama-based pedagogy, defined as 'a specific approach which uses drama techniques to teach across the curriculum' (Dawson & Lee, 2018, p. 17) was utilised to bring the humanities curriculum to life alongside oral storytelling and narrative inquiry. The project's ambition was to place an explicit focus on children's language and communication skills, creating new, imaginative, culturally relevant curricula for children in Years 3 and 4 (aged 7 to 9) across schools.

The seven schools were situated in Bradford, a city in the North of England, and were part of a partnership network of schools which developed a wide range of shared opportunities for enriching the curriculum through staff development and school improvement. Publicly available school data across the seven partnership schools (see Appendix 1) demonstrated that on average, 35% of children were eligible for free school meals at the time of the project, indicating the high levels of poverty and deprivation within their student population (Jerrim, 2021). The 3,800 children across the schools also come from a uniquely diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including Pakistan, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Gypsy Roma Traveler (GRT) backgrounds, with a rich tradition of oral storytelling. The schools had strong ties with the local community and were keen to bring this experience to the project, ensuring that it remained culturally relevant to the children's lived experiences. Senior leaders stated that many of their children start school with social, communication, and language skills that do not meet national curricular expectations (Public Health England, 2020). Many children in the lead school were experiencing systemic inequality and disadvantages, particularly through poverty and racial discrimination, with 46.5% (higher than the average across the seven schools) of the children eligible for free school meals—prompting senior leaders to instigate the project. The lead school had 557 children who were 'New to English' at the time of the project. Furthermore, all the schools noted a significant impact on learners' oracy and communication skills following COVID-19, which drove the collective project focus.

Systematic reviews highlight that data is lacking on effective practice in developing children's expressive language (Dobinson & Dockrell, 2021). Drawing from the work of anti-deficit thinkers, our project aimed to develop teachers' and artists' confidence in using drama-based pedagogy with children through participatory action research; to co-develop and embed localised, emergent, and responsive curriculum planning; and to provide empirical evidence of the impact of this holistic, creative learning approach on children's expressive language and social-emotional communication.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Oracy and cultural learning—a deficit framework?

> "It is essential for the schools within the community to embed their curriculum around oracy and language development. Without this, our children are often unable to make the meaningful connections required to progress academically and develop critical interpersonal and communication skills made much more complex by COVID-19." (Senior Leader A, lead project school)

Literacy is a social and cultural practice. Effective social, communication, and language skills have been shown to enhance positive life outcomes, wellbeing and educational attainment (Dobinson & Dockrell, 2021). The school's collective project rationale focused on improving children's communication and language skills through drama-based pedagogy, as summarized in the opening quotation from a Senior Leader. In the wake of COVID-19, two-thirds of primary teachers (69%) reported that during COVID, school closures had a negative effect on the development of spoken language students (Dobinson & Dockrell, 2021), raising concerns about 'learning gaps' in economically disadvantaged families (OECD, 2021). Oracy has been defined as "what the school does to support the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others, in education and in life" (Alexander, 2012, p. 10). Oracy is used increasingly as an umbrella term for spoken language in the United Kingdom and is particularly prominent in high profile, school-facing organisations such as Voice 21 (Voice 21, 2022). Used as a unified term for classroom talk in education, oracy includes both talk as a pedagogical process and learning strategy (i.e., learning to talk, learning through talk, and learning about talk). With a focus on disadvantaged children who have language gaps significantly lower than their more advantaged peers, oracy is currently positioned as a powerful lever for social mobility within England (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Oracy, 2020; Voice 21, 2022).

Anti-deficit thinkers have challenged traditional discourses on language gaps, asserting it is as deficit construct, which is based on colonial knowledge hierarchies, which has mis-shaped understandings of language in schools. Cushing (2022, 2024) highlights the ideological foundations on which oracy was theorized asserts that working class, disabled and racialised children produce less legitimate language than their wealthier, able bodied and white peers. Furthermore, this creates a language deficit because it focuses on marginalised children making tweaks to their own language to close this language or word gap. García and Otheguy (2016) argue that these deficit narratives are based on conceptual misunderstandings of language and how to assess its use. Furthermore, they assert that this failure in understanding has turned many children into limited language users in schools.

Within English Primary Education Policy (Department for Education, 2014), language and communication are focused on less than reading and writing and there is little attention paid to the intersection between language, race, and class in a

school inspection system that privileges monocultural Standard English (Hyatt et al., 2022). The Oracy Education Commission in England (2024) has called for changes to Educational Policy in England to re-position Oracy as one of the 'four Rs' recognised, valued, and resourced alongside reading, writing, and arithmetic as a cornerstone of education (p. 26). For teachers, this can create conflicting agendas in satisfying high-stakes school inspections and standardised examinations as well as valuing community dialects (Knight, 2024). Additionally, Millard and Menzie's (2016) research into teachers' perceptions of oracy found that 32% felt that there was not enough time to focus on oracy, 22% worried about unruly behaviour and 50% stated that they were not trained in oracy. This indicates both the complexity and a lack of confidence in teachers employing new curricular approaches.

In dismantling deficit thinking, Valencia (2010) argues that we must focus on an asset-based approach in education—recognising and leveraging the strengths, cultural backgrounds, and resilience of students, especially those from historically marginalised communities—rather than viewing them through a deficit lens. This perspective promotes inclusive teaching practices, equitable learning environments, and policies that empower students by valuing their unique experiences and abilities as assets for success. In response to the rich cultural diversity in our project schools, we drew theoretically from García and Otheguy's (2016, p. 58) conceptualisation of a 'translanguaging perspective'—positioning languages as social constructions that do not reflect social linguistic boundaries. Whilst our project focuses on improving children's oracy could be in danger of falling into a deficit narrative of oracy, the project explicitly aimed to take an 'asset-based approach' (Valencia, 2010) to counter this deficit position by building on the linguistic strengths of all children but especially Global Majority children, often marginalised. The term Global Majority is collectively used to represents the identity of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people (Cambell-Stephens, 2021). Roma children in the schools, for example, have a 'language rich' tradition of storytelling culture which is ripe for teaching and learning opportunities within classrooms.

2.2 Drama-based pedagogy and semiotic expression: Translanguaging meaning making

Currently, within educational policy in England, creative arts are also undervalued as part of children's holistic learning (James et al., 2019). Teachers lack confidence in embedding these approaches across curriculum, partly because they are hard to evidence in neo-liberalist terms. Research reports have highlighted a lack of equitable opportunities in creative arts for many children both inside and outside school as a social justice issue (Cultural Alliance, 2019) here too, there lies an opportunity gap for children. Whilst creativity, pupil agency and critical thinking are positioned as crucial transformative competencies for learners in global policy roadmaps such as the OECD Future of Education (2019) there is a gap in pedagogical understanding of how these competencies could be activated within the curriculum.

Creative arts have been shown as a powerful and dynamic method for capturing and amplifying young people's voices and stories (James et al., 2019). This is because creative arts, such as drama, visual art and music invite young people to express emotions and experiences that cannot always be put into words. Storytelling (spoken, danced, sung, or performed) is a global language from which to make meaning of the world, described by Indigenous scholars as educating the heart, mind, body and spirit (Archibald, 2008). However, stories are privileged and often told from a dominant perspective.

Drama-based pedagogy values the meaning-making process of learning over performance outputs. Children co-create imaginative worlds from which to explore characters' motives and backstories. Drama strategies such as Teacher-in-role and Mantle of the Expert (Heathcote & Bolton, 1987) provide opportunities for teachers to change their stance, placing children at the centre of learning as inquiring experts. This approach offers an imaginative 'entry point' to the curriculum and has been theorized and developed by many drama scholars and practitioners (Aitken 2013; Edmiston 2024; Roberts & Kidd, 2018). Curriculum can be positioned differently, for example, content on volcanoes can become an exploration of a community living in fear of eruption or an exploration of what it means to be displaced through natural events. Children are (re)positioned in fictional worlds as capable actants who are challenged to practice possible solutions to fictional scenarios together through narrative inquiry, rehearsing collective agency.

In line with García and Otheguy (2016, p. 58) language is expanded through drama-based pedagogy as a semiotic system and dynamic process by which learners communicate. It is much more than written and oral language—it includes gestures, sound, and image, as well as speech and script, all contextualized and recontextualized to fit the communicative needs of learners. Drama pedagogy involves meaning-making through a combination of linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial communication modes (multimodal)—an effective approach for EAL learners. It has been shown to improve spontaneity, fluency, articulation, and vocabulary because it provides a meaningful context for learning. (O'Toole & Stinson, 2013). Oracy is expanded within this pedagogy to encompass complex components of cultural, cognitive, linguistic, aural, verbal, and emotional ways of knowing, collectively defined as embodied learning (Branscombe, 2013).

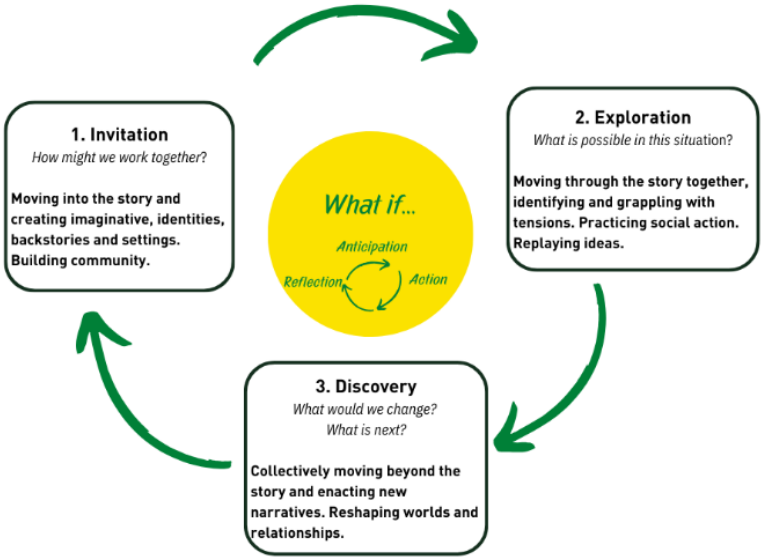
Our project aimed to critically explore new visions of expressive language (oracy) education by creating pedagogical spaces for the valued languages, practices and knowledge of the dynamic communities (Paris & Alim, 2017) in the school's localities. In other words, children were encouraged to draw from their full linguistic repertoire during the drama sessions. Through drama pedagogy literacies are pluralized as they are experienced holistically—emotionally, physically, visually, aurally and cognitively across the senses. Drama pedagogy is emotion in action. Embodied action is a state generated through relational encounters experienced and felt together—this can be called affect (Ahmed, 2013) and is applied conceptually to drama pedagogy. Working imaginatively activates children's cultural references and cultivates a sense of agency

and belonging (Stephenson, 2023, p. 11). Creating curriculum space and to hear and value cultural stories and expressions can connect home and school worlds—drawing on children's cultural assets and affordances.

2.3 Drama worldbuilding and dialogic oracy

One of the great potentials of drama-based pedagogy as an 'affirmative pedagogy' (Cushing, 2024) for language and communication learning is that rather than language correctness, the learning approach activates diverse ideas and multiple expressions. However, there is a need for further empirical evidence to develop an understanding of creative pedagogies from learners' perspectives (Cremin & Chappell, 2021). Addressing these gaps, Drama Worldbuilding (Stephenson, 2023) is a creative pedagogical approach *to collective problem-solving* through drama-based learning (embodied action), story making and narrative co-inquiry. The fictional narrative is conceptualised through three phases of dialogic inquiry: an invitation phase, exploration and discovery phase as shown in Figure 1 below. Children are challenged to work collectively to solve fictional social problems—they are in it together. This sense of community places children as agentic problem solvers. The pedagogical approach follows an Anticipation-Action-Reflection cycle (OCED, 2019). Each phase has been shown to evidence a range of critical inquiry skills that are activated throughout the narrative phases as children collectively navigate backstories and find collective solutions within story worlds (Stephenson, 2025).

Figure 1. Drama worldbuilding



Drama techniques, such as teacher-in-role, create spaces for further narrative exploration by children. Children have a choice in how to respond within this approach to learning through story, both individually and collectively drawing from diverse language registers and semantic modes of communication. In line with a translanguaging approach, language is fluid within these learning experiences. There are high expectations to listen, feel, think, and act ethically together within the story worlds (Stephenson, 2023).

The approach draws from many theories of drama-based pedagogy *but differs* by placing explicit focus on socio-emotional and cultural learning rather than curriculum content. The approach addresses gaps in empirical data by evidencing longitudinal impact on pupil learning by drawing from children's perceptions or self-assessments of learning. The *8 Collective Creativity and Wellbeing Dispositions* (attitudes, values, mindsets) (Stephenson, 2023) are malleable and transferable learning outcomes which evidence children's experiences of learning through Drama Worldbuilding pedagogy.

1) Imaginative freedom
2) Agency, autonomy and openness to thinking-feeling and acting with others
3) Emotional inquiry
4) Possibility thinking
5) Collectively embracing conflict, struggle and negotiation
6) Self-efficacy and confidence
7) Teamwork and belonging
8) Embodied learning and critical thinking

The disposition of *'openness'* to expressing, listening and responding collectively to each other's ideas, termed as exploratory talk or inter-thinking (Cremin & Burnett, 2018) is highlighted as central to engagement in inquiry-based learning by children (Stephenson, 2025). Openness is 'rehearsed' playfully as learners make collective decisions and negotiate possible solutions within story worlds by asking *What is possible in this situation?* For teachers and children this approach requires a specific dialogic stance and language register, where discourse spaces are opened for exploration and multiple voices and perspectives are negotiated verbally and non-verbally (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). These teaching skills are very different to those of instructional teaching. Boyd (2023, p. 1) defines the three markers of Dialogic Oracy Practices as:

1) Language of possibility (signaling new ways to view and evidence something)
2) Response-able practices (signifying actively listening and responding)
3) Dialogic local Space (invites and values student realities in a shared space of possibilities which enable us to feel heard and open to hearing others so that there can be a deepening and widening of understanding

However, within language and communication learning in England, there is an over-emphasis on formal presentational mode of talk as policy prescriptions on 'standard English' run counter to the principles of dialogic teaching by privileging 'correct'

forms of expression over emerging ideas (Snell & Crushing, 2022) and closing down many responses. Purposeful and cumulative talk are most difficult to enact, highlighting the importance of pupil autonomy, ownership and identity within classroom culture.

> "Children's capacities to use talk to reason, argue, explain, explore, justify, challenge, question, negotiate, speculate, imagine, evaluate, and in these and other ways to take ownership of their talking and thinking rather than merely answer someone else's usually closed questions. Such talk, unusual in the teaching of mainstream subjects, is not unlike that habitually deployed and encouraged in performance arts." (Alexander, 2017)

Through the Story Exchange project, artists, teachers, senior leaders, researchers and children were learners who were all engaged in collaborative dialogic oracy practices. We argue that these literacies are embodied cultural expressions for all children. We viewed communication and language as Dialogic Oracy Practices which were defined as linguistic practices associated with jointly taken inquiries, and open, respectful exchanges of ideas.

2.4 Curriculum co-design with teachers and artist-educators

In the opening Story Exchange project design meeting, the senior leaders from the participating schools articulated a need for '*collaborative brave spaces and new ways of working'* to make informed, and responsive pedagogical choices for their children through curriculum. In facilitating a theory of change, we drew from research evidence across 14 PhD studies into curriculum design teams (Voogt et al., 2016) showing that collaborative design positively affects both professional development and the implementation of curriculum change, because teachers develop competencies and practice and develop ownership of the change. Voogt et al. (2016) note that central to the successful impact of teacher collaboration in design teams on both curriculum development and teacher professional development can be attributed to three effective theoretical principles: the situatedness of activity (authentic and site based curricular), agency (individual and collective responsibility of the curricular change), and the cyclical nature of learning and change (time for reflexive practice). These theoretical principles are also supported by empirical evidence from longitudinal curriculum showing that enactment and participation as a member of a professional team supports understanding in how to facilitate drama-based pedagogies within curriculum (Dawson & Lee, 2018). The role of a coach and senior school leaders are also seen to be factors in successful co-design curriculum teams.

Within our collaborative co-design approach, project teachers were paired with one of five artist-educators (specialists in drama-based pedagogy) and given time and space to *co-plan*, *co-deliver* and *co-reflect* on 15 classroom sessions across each year (30 classroom sessions in total) in teams. Central to the co-design of our professional development and learning (CPDL) model was a coaching approach

(Stephenson & Lofthouse, 2023), which blended with expert pedagogical modeling and learning exchange across the project. We viewed these co-design teams as a community of co-inquiry, which were central to embedding new practices.

2.5 Research questions

To understand and Sustain Cultural Literacies (Paris & Alim, 2017) in classrooms, empirical evidence of how these literacies are activated and experienced through pedagogy is needed. The Oracy framework of Cambridge University and Voice 21 (Mercer et al., 2017; Millard & Menzies, 2016) has raised the profile of oracy in schools by developing resources for teachers to deliver and assess the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical components of oracy. However, some contradictions in language ideology are extended to the framework, particularly its linguistic component through assessment statements that reinforce ideologies of language correctness (Cushing, 2024).

Within our project we critically explored the Voice 21 Oracy framework. In doing so examined our story exchange project as a Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, described by Ladson-Billings (2021) as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes" (p. 4). Central to this approach is subverting the deficit narrative by giving agency and choice in how they interpret and respond to learning from their cultural practices. Rather than using set worksheets and uniform, static planning approaches to teaching, evident in many English classrooms through use of prescriptive teaching schemes, our project employed creative approaches to teaching. Co-design teams were essential as an exploratory space to build confidence and competence in co-developing and sustaining new understanding and practices through the following research questions:

1) How does Drama Worldbuilding activate learner's dialogic oracy, effective communication, and cultural literacies?
2) How can Drama Worldbuilding create a transdisciplinary curriculum (blending humanities, arts, social-emotional and cultural literacies) which is localised? How does this impact learning?

3. METHODOLOGY

The project used a (co)participatory action research approach (PAR) described as a dynamic and generative process that develops from the unique needs, challenges, and learning experiences specific to a given group (Kidd & Kral, 2016). Teachers were paired with one of five artist-educators (Stephenson using expressive arts) in co-design teams, to *co-plan*, *co-deliver* and *co-reflect* for 30 sessions across two years. Central to this process of professional development and learning was a coaching approach blended with expert pedagogical modelling and learning exchange. Embedding action research approaches with teachers has been shown to be an

important factor when embedding new creative learning environments within school contexts because it engages them actively in the process of change within their own localised contexts (Davies et al., 2013). Teachers and artists were systematically asked to co-reflect on *significant moments* following each taught session as a form of professional noticing and critical reflection on learning–capturing 'in the moment' reflections of teachers and children. Professional learning days brought all stakeholders together at the beginning and end of each term to share practice, critical reflections (12 days across two years) and impact data such as pupil case studies. Crucially, time and space were spent on the project to allow for this. Rooney and Boud (2019) note that professional noticing is essential for developing professional practice. The structure and consistency of this approach to professional learning created spaces for systematic reflection on and in learning and time to embed and evidence responsive curriculum design (Stephenson & Lofthouse, 2024).

3.1 Participants

Across the seven schools, the project design included Year 3 (aged 6 to 7) teachers in the first year of the project and Year 4 (aged 7 to 8) teachers in the second year of the project. The collective school population across the project was 3,659 children, with 1,080 children aged 7 to 9 directly participating. Children participating in the project had two years of implementation. The project directly involved 34 teachers and 7 Senior Leaders. Of the five artist-educators who were working across schools, two were Global Majority artists and each worked across one to two schools depending on the size of the school (see Table 1). Additionally, the project commissioned a Roma home school liaison participant from the local community, who focused on interviewing Roma parents and children about the impact of the project using a documentary format. This approach was chosen because the school already used YouTube as a successful communication tool with these parents. The lead researcher was also a drama practitioner and teacher. The five artist-educators were all practicing drama, theatre and creative writing experts who were part of a research and practice collective with varying school and community experiences.

Table 1. Participants from each school

Participating Primary School	*Participating teachers/SLT in the project*	*Participating children in the project*
1	6	(3 classes per year group) 180
2	6	(4 classes per year group) 240
3	6	(4 classes per year group) 210
4	3	(2 classes per year group) 90
5	2	(1 class per year group) 60
6	4	(3 classes per year group) 150
7	7	(3 classes per year group) 150
Totals	*34*	*1,080*

The structure of the drama-based pedagogy drew from the practice of Drama Worldbuilding and this three-phase approach to lesson co-planning was used across all schools (See Figure 1) It is important to state that within our Story Exchange Project, whilst Drama Worldbuilding was used as an overarching structure for the pedagogy, providing shared language and pedagogical understanding, the five artists and teachers applied this approach in their own imaginative ways which was responsive to their practices, children, and localities. The Worldbuilding structure was used collectively to frame creative learning opportunities.

3.2 Data generation

Table 2. Data summary

Pupil case studies: 36 pupil case studies (Ethnicities: 14 British Pakistani, 3 Polish, 1 Slovakian, 12 GRT, 1 Eastern European, 4 White British, 1 Iranian)
Teachers and artist critical reflections on sessions: 170 voice recordings, summarized across 6 thematic coaching sessions (uploaded on shared Google Drive)
30 teacher *pre/post project questionnaires* (baselines)
Teachers and artist significant moment interviews: 16 significant moment interviews: Year 1: 7 x interviews with artists and teachers (1 interview per school) Year 2: 7 x interviews with artists and teachers (1 interview per school) Interview with Senior Leaders on impact (2 interviews)
Documentary: 2 documentaries Documentary post project (interviews with teachers and artists) Documentary from Gypsy Roma Traveller with parents at the end of Year 1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6bdKmks7Sk
Teacher and artist pictures/planning of sessions: 145 images and 11 videos of sessions, 16 planning documents (uploaded on shared Google Drive)
Pupil focused conversations: 14 group interviews across 7 schools, 74 children

Coaching conversations between the artist, teacher, and coach followed each teaching session. These coaching conversations aimed to capture significant moments in real time, online or offline, and were recorded on phones and then uploaded to a shared drive and transcribed. Each school had shared folders to collect and share their reflections, which were not accessible to other schools at the teachers' request. 170 reflections were recorded for analysis across the project. These coaching spaces provided sustained reflective dialogue and iterative data collection across the two years. Additionally, coaches from across schools met together termly online with the research team to share insights, challenges, and positives from their termly coaching sessions. These insights were shared with all schools during professional development days, ensuring that the professional development days were responsive to teachers and artists. Coaching questions for co-planning, co-teaching and co-reflection were co-designed, example questions include:

1) How do you feel about the session today?
2) What role did you play both (artist/teacher) in the session?
3) What did you notice about how the drama worked in pursuit of the learning?
4) Are there any moments that stood out for you? Why?
5) What did you notice about pupil engagement in the session?
6) How was Oracy activated by the drama?
7) How did you capture pupil learning today?
8) Is there anything new that you noticed about your practice within the session?

These questions were not used as a 'script' but refined across the project in response to artists' and teachers' feedback, embedding a systematic action-reflection cycle (McNiff, 2013) within the project. Data generation also included children's free writing journals, artefacts generated within the workshops, and teachers' and artists' planning. Teachers also chose four to six children to observe as case studies across the project. Data sets are further summarized by school in Appendix 2. Ethical procedures and consent were adhered to in line with the British Education Research Association (2018).

3.3 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used across all data sets systematically (termly) to enable responsive professional learning sessions at the beginning and end of each term. Themes were generated through descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and coded inferentially following initial analysis and cross-referenced, ensuring transparency and rigour. Teacher questionnaires, significant moment interviews, and pupil/teacher journals were also used as 'baseline' assessments of learning and repeated systematically across the project. Pupil focused conversations took place across all schools at the end of the project. Cambridge Skills and Voice 21's Oracy

framework was used initially during pupil observations as a benchmark alongside the National Curriculum oracy (England Department for Education, 2014) statements, but this was co-developed later in the project to reflect observed impacts and emerging themes across all schools. Analysis across data sets and schools was shared with participants systematically during professional development days, providing a reliable feedback loop about perceived accuracy of emerging themes in line with participatory action research. Data was represented in a variety of visual formats to support teacher implementation in classrooms, in response to teacher feedback.

3.4 Crystallisation

Due to the volume of data collected across the two-year project the research methodology uses crystallisation (Ellingson, 2009) rather than triangulation for methodological rigour and validity in this paper. Crystallisation involves many forms of analysis and the incorporation of images, anecdotes and reflections and is a useful tool for examining the ways in which the children made meaning within the drama.

4. RESULTS

4.1 RQ1: How does drama worldbuilding activating dialogic oracy, social-emotional and cultural literacies?

During co-planning sessions, teachers and artists mapped narrative inquiry questions throughout each phase of Drama Worldbuilding alongside embedding learning opportunities for imaginative inquiry through a range of visual, aural, gestural and physical expressions using their chosen drama strategies (which were termed as pedagogical tools). These are briefly summarized in Table 3 below, which highlights the key role of exploratory social questions in framing curriculum experience throughout the Worldbuilding process.

Table 3. Drama worldbuilding and dialogic inquiry

Curriculum area	*Worldbuilding Inquiry Question*	*Pedagogical tools*
Adventure title: "Sky Island" Taking the best of Bradford to Sky Island Curriculum coverage: Ecological crisis of destruction to microhabitats Cloud types … geological features on the ground	How has my high street changed since the 1950's? Why is Morrison's important to Bradford? I wonder what specific knowledge, oracy, critical thinking and soft skills you are hoping to develop in this work?	Teacher in Role, The Scientist Village meeting, Free Play Freeze frame, Mime, Image theatre
Refugee Week	The refugee has journeyed. Can we find out more about the journey? How to do this? Can we relive parts of the journey to find out if we are right? Prepare images to show the refugee?	Teacher in role as refugee Teacher-in-role being asked to help but not really knowing how to proceed so need support.
Adventure title: "Granny Bloom" Curriculum coverage: Biology - plants Summer festivals/fairs	How can we use our knowledge of plants and biology to solve a mystery and make ethical decisions? What do plants need to grow, and how can we tell when something is wrong with them? How can we use scientific observation and evidence to solve a problem? What influences people to make ethical or unethical choices, and how do we respond when trust is broken? How do human actions, both intentional and unintentional, impact plant health and ecosystems?	Teacher-as-Storyteller, group meeting, mime, improvisation, questioning, mapping, freeze frames, co-constructing story, role-on-the-wall, body sculpting, teacher-in-role, message delivery, interview, newspaper article.
Adventure title: Roman Ghosts Curriculum coverage: The Romans and The Celts – conflict resolution.	How can we uncover and honour stories of the past to ensure all voices are remembered? How can we give a voice to the people and events of the past and help their stories be heard today?	Teacher-as-Storyteller, ten second objects, freeze frames, soundscapes, co-construction of story, mapping the space, role-on-the-wall, phone call, shared writing, mime, letter/email, group

	What do ancient discoveries reveal about how different communities lived, clashed, and shaped the world we know? How can we use history to understand both sides of a story and create a fair way to remember them?	meeting, objects as story prompts, corporate drawing, thought tracking, individual drawing, creating an exhibition, speeches.
<u>Adventure title:</u> The Plastic Monster <u>Curriculum coverage:</u> Plastic Pollution, The Coast	How can we transform our understanding of plastic pollution into creative solutions for a more sustainable future? What impact does plastic pollution have on our environment, wildlife, and communities? How can story making help us explore real-world environmental challenges and solutions? What actions can individuals, businesses, and communities take to reduce plastic waste and create positive change? How do emotions like outrage, empathy, and hope influence the way we respond to environmental issues?	Teacher-as-Storyteller, group meeting, mime, improvisation, questioning, mapping, slow motion, freeze frames, co-constructing story, role-on-the-wall, body sculpting, soundscape.

It is noted from the case study participant groups that 89% (32 out of 36 case studies) children were Global Majority, with teachers noting rationales for case study choices recorded by teachers across six out of seven schools being a *"lack of confidence"* and "*poor spoken English"* as well as *"struggling to speak out and retain information"* (See Appendix 2). Questionnaire feedback from teachers showed that 100% felt that pupils' confidence and competence had increased in communication following the project, this was reflected across case study reports.

Figure 2 below captured across the project by teachers and evidenced examples of the range of multi-modal and semiotic expressions embedded in sessions as modes for making meaning and communication. All the visual images are taken from a selection of three sessions delivered on the Romans and Celts in two schools. Children were positioned through Drama Worldbuilding pedagogy as archeologists mapping the site of a Roman settlement. Meaning-making is seen as collective using visual, material, aural, physical—drawing from multi-modality and semantic linguistic modes as they create characters and backstories. The image of a stone surrounded by swirling words of a story demonstrates how interpretation of fictional events was open for children, moving from the language of correctness to the language of possibility. Children are seen working collectively across the project, suggesting that child-to-child talk, communication and active listening were positioned centrally. This is a representative sample of visual data (145 images and 4 videos) across the project.

Figure 2. Semantic meaning-making within lessons

4.2 Dialogic oracy and dispositional learning

Throughout the two years, teachers noticed increased cumulative talk and participation in sessions noting through reflections that children were asking more sophisticated questions and voluntarily applying technical curriculum language in Drama Worldbuilding sessions. These questions captured across teachers and artists coaching reflections and journals were significant because they were rich examples of exploratory talk (Cremin & Burnett, 2018). Examples of these critical inquiries by children were often in response to fictional dilemmas, asking ethical questions about characters' motives for actions. These are evidenced throughout the data sections below. Teachers and artists used The Cambridge Skills and Voice 21's Oracy framework (Millard & Menzies, 2016) within pupil observations across the project to identify dimensions of Oracy as it was already being used in three schools. Whilst this was initially useful in Year 1, the coaching sessions and interview data highlighted a pattern where pupil observation and significant-moment reflections *did not align* with the Voice 21 framework. Across the professional learning days, we drew from our emerging empirical data to evidence *how* children were engaging through the pedagogy, collectively adapting the four dimensions of school 21's oracy framework (i.e., physical, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic) in response. The codes are presented as circles, based on teachers' and senior leaders' suggestions on the data framework format. Segments were added across our termly meetings as teachers and artist-educators noticed pupil learning develop. This approach to iterative data collection aimed to create a holistic visual of the impact on pupil learning, which would be useful in classrooms as an observational tool. Each

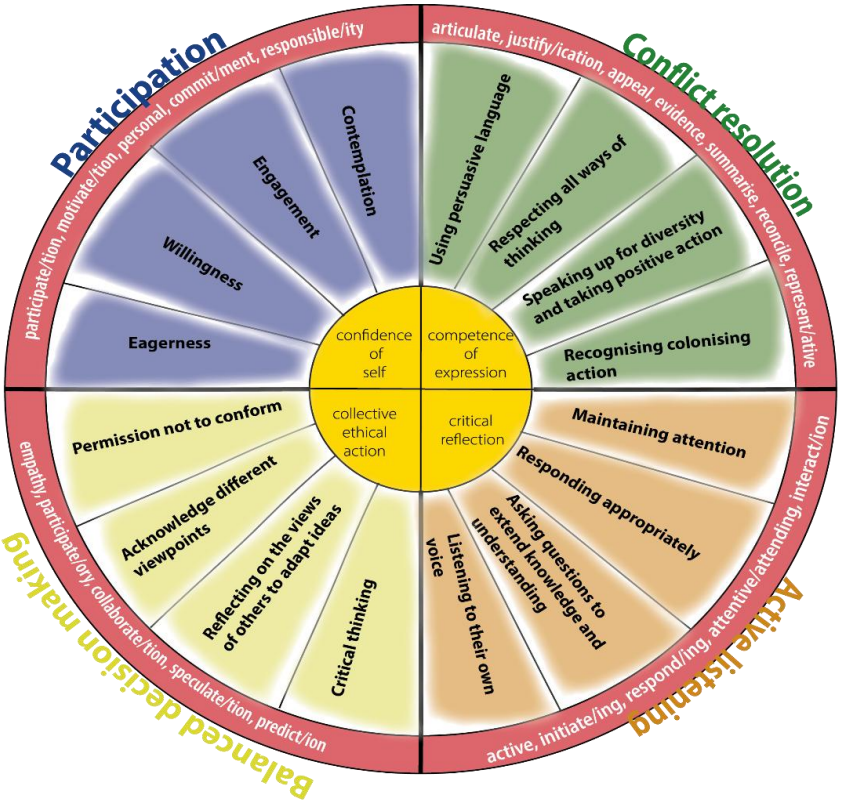
segment of our emerging data, named the Cultural Literacies and Embodied-Dialogic Learning (Oracy) Framework (Figures 3, 4, 6, and 7) was therefore co-designed with teachers and artists from their iterative observations of pupil learning in sessions and case study data. Additionally, these codes, represented as a set of dispositions (attitudes, skills, values), were cross-referenced with pupil perceptions of learning through focused conversations using crystallization as data analysis. Each of the four dimensions of language and communication (physical, cognitive, social-emotional, and linguistic) is presented as a circle within this paper to give an authentic representation of the emerging data.

Whilst the Voice 21 framework places spoken language centrally with cognitive, social/emotional, and physical components as expressions of correct language. Our emerging framework showed the opposite: *The social-emotional and physical (embodied) or felt/affective a*spects of Dialogic Oracy were seen as the most sophisticated, driving dialogic inquiry and increased language and communication acquisition. The cognitive component was activated in new ways which foregrounded exploratory talk, creativity, and critical thinking. Linguistic choices were activated through these components, shaped by the children, teachers, artists, and their cultural practices. Over time, teachers and artists became more confident in iterative planning–learning from children's cultural practices. These codes are outlined in more detail below.

4.3 Social and emotional component of literacies

Within Voice 21's Social and Emotional component of Oracy, the learning dimensions focus on confidence to speak, awareness of others and listening and responding. The core elements of the social and emotional strand of the Story Exchange project were evidenced through the following dispositions (skills, attitudes, and mind sets) placed centrally in the framework (illustrated in Figure 4): *Confidence of self* (p*ositive self-esteem, independent thinking), Competence of expression (embracing risk, self-expression and honesty), Collective ethical action (confidence in negotiation action, compassion, conflict resolution) and Critical Reflection* because these were the observed learning outcomes by teachers. These core elements were further segmented into four parts which represented a progression of observed learning across all school They are coded as *Participation, Active Listening, Balanced Decision making and Conflict resolution.* These parts are listed below and unlike other codes were seen to be developmental across two years.

Figure 3. Social and emotional literacies



Social and Emotional Components of Oracy

Children's perceptions of the Drama Worldbuilding experience highlighted that engagement and participation were a *felt* experience which was driven by a sense of agency, possibility and imaginative freedom (Stephenson, 2023). This experience was perceived as being a non-judgmental space where things could be freely changed.

> "In drama like you make up your own story. No one is looking at you while you're making it. You can just be alone for once." (Child A)
>
> "I think we're learning is that if you don't want to go you can still change it." (Child B)
>
> "No one's going to mark everything you do. You can just do it. Like yes, it doesn't matter." (Child D)

> "I used to be a little scared because if I made one mistake, everybody would laugh at me, but now I know that it doesn't matter what you do, it just matters to let out your imagination." (Child V)

Overtime, children expressed more openness and confidence in expressing and sharing emotions within the sessions and made the associations between sharing emotions and feeling better—suggesting a sense of emotional regulation and increased emotional literacy which was different to other teaching.

> "I think it's good that we're doing drama because you know when you feel sad and you want to share your emotions, like in Year 2 we didn't have drama we didn't get to share our feelings and then it makes us even more upset …you don't feel good." (Child U)

This was linked to a range of emotions and new confidence.

> "It makes me feel pretty energetic and when we stop, it makes me feel calm and relaxed. Whenever I feel angry, it just gets me relaxed and I really like it." (Child N)

> "At first, I used to be really scared with my stuttering and my appearance and how I talk and now I am not." (Child B)

This was also noted by teachers.

> "There was this one little boy who put his hand up and he won't put his hand up unless he knows the answer. So, he put his hand up yesterday and he didn't know the answer, but he didn't care." (Teacher V)

Children also showed greater understanding, empathy, confidence in relationships with friends and greater competence at listening and responding to each other. Children were also able to articulate the initial challenges of working together through *struggle*.

> "And you're getting closer to your friends by knowing what they like and what they want to do." (Child H)

This closeness was linked to communication and listening as the following extracts with pupils.

> "How does it bring you closer to people?"

> "When we're working together, we talk and we have to communicate to each other, and we all put our ideas in and make a big project." (Child F)

> "When we do projects, everyone wants to draw and we start arguing, so we have to work together and compromise." (Child K)

> "When we do it, it brings us closer and we do argue, but then at the end, we all get our own terms." (Child B)

Children linked the social and emotional component and the linguistic component of learning with a sense of agency and teamwork. Teachers and artists noted that children also spoke up for diversity and challenged viewpoints ethically in sessions as they became more confident. This engagement centred around asking deeper questions.

> "Drama helps us learn about democracy because everyone has to share what they think to know what is best." (Child B)

These extracts evidence the development of children's social and emotional skills and values through the process of learning. These skills and values align with the transformative competencies in supporting children to address uncertainties and thrive in the future in policies such as the Futures of Education (OECD, 2019).

All stakeholders also commented on the impact of the approach on increased opportunities for culturally relevant learning and greater intercultural understanding, evidenced through increased active listening, active compassion and conflict resolution, which was practiced through the story worlds.

> "It's important to share stories, and then they can know your lifestyle, your culture." (Child P)

This was noticed by parents and other teachers in other applied contexts beyond the classroom. Teachers noticed pupil investment in new ways including increased confidence in self-expression, active engagement in sessions and stronger friendships.

> "It was as if he needed the authority to be able to speak, because usually it was overshadowed by other children who were constantly talking and wanting to talk and wanting to act out." (Teacher U)

> "The activity actually gave him a bigger voice to be able to share his knowledge." (Teacher B)

During the second year, teachers and pupils were able to notice significant impact of the pedagogy on pupil's ability to resolve conflict through balanced decision making.

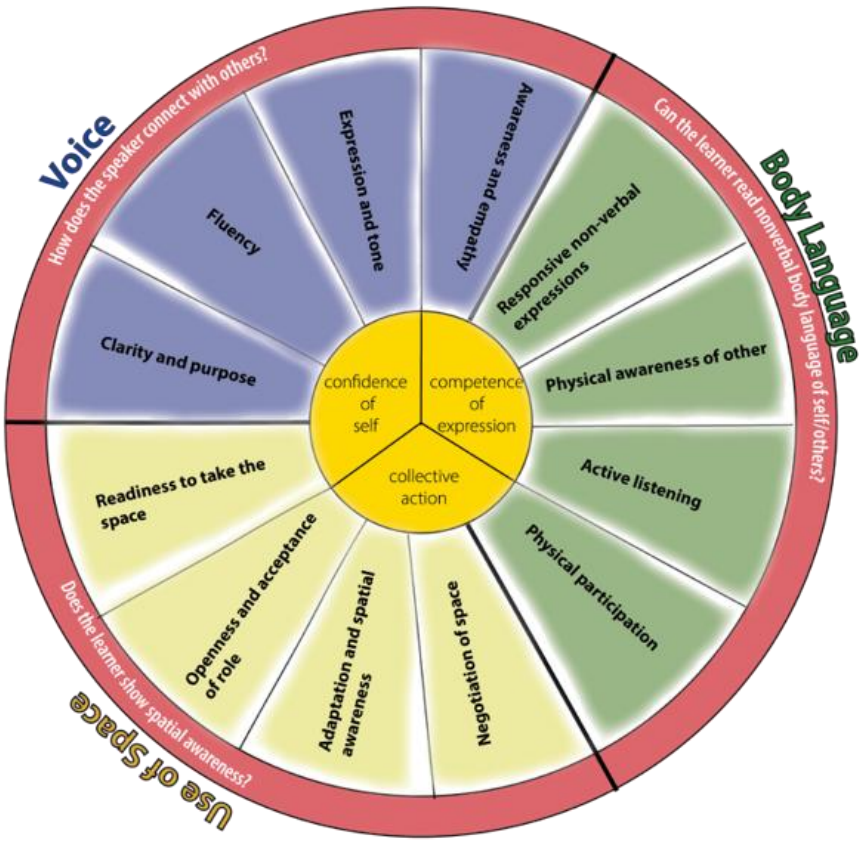
> "I think the way that they actually pictured the conflict itself and talked about it was something I hadn't anticipated. They weren't just coming at it from their point of view, they were asking for other people's opinions and things." (Teacher R)

The complex and sophisticated components of social and emotional learning *aligned* with the 8 Collective Creativity and Wellbeing Dispositions (Stephenson, 2023).

4.4 Physical component of literacies

Within Voice 21's framework, the physical component of Oracy focuses on linguistic components such as gesture, posture and facial expressions when speaking correctly. Within the co-created Story Project Core elements of the physical strand were evidenced through the following dispositions (skills, attitudes and mind sets) which are illustrated in Figure 4: *Awareness of self; Confidence of self; Competence of Expression; Readiness to learn; Active participation, Awareness of others; Responsiveness to others, Non-verbal communication* because these were the observed learning outcomes by teachers Embodiment was evidenced as a critical way to make meaning and foregrounded literacies and spoken language.

Figure 4. Physical literacies



The physical/embodied dimension of learning was strongly expressed as an important aspect of learning by children which is closely associated with a sense of agency, imaginative freedom and increased meta-cognition.

> "We make our stories, like we could choose groups together and we can make it with our body." (Child B)

For children this dimension was clearly related to increased memory and understanding of information.

> "When you do drama and history after drama or a day after, it gets into your brain and there's this sort of glue which sticks it on, so it helps you remember how you're supposed to do it and what it's supposed to be." (Child N)

> "Drama helps me remember stuff because I really enjoy doing actions and the actions can stay in your head." (Child C)

Children articulated the embodied dimension as a heightened and intense sense of engagement, participation which fueled their inquiry and curiosity. This affective learning created a sense of intensity and purpose for learning (Ahmed, 2013; Stephenson, 2023) which was more real suggesting it made abstract learning more understandable. Children were ready to take space and to take action together.

> "It feels like I'm out of school and actually in the place. And it's like I'm seeing the actual thing, like it's happening. And it's just so intense like what's going to happen next, is he going to do that, is he going to do that? Or like what's going to happen to it, or something." (Child H)

Additionally, nonverbal communication, symbolism and space were important aspects of processing and exploring key complex issues for children as highlighted in the extract below where a child was able to express embodied trauma through a range of physical, gestural, non-verbal, verbal and visual modes (semiotic expressions)—these learning assets (Valencia, 2010) supported much more sophisticated communication, interpretation and meaning-making (semantics).

This is demonstrated in Figure 5, taken from a series of workshops taken from 3 Worldbuilding inquiries on Romans and Celts (see Table 3). Children were learning factual historical knowledge from their teachers (placed before or during sessions) and layered this learning by exploring deeper inquiry questions through worldbuilding and evidenced co-planning documentation (see Appendix 3). These were:

1) How can we give a voice to the people and events of the past and help their stories be heard today?"
2) "What do ancient discoveries reveal about how different communities lived, clashed, and shaped the world we know?"
3) "How can we use history to understand both sides of a story and create a fair way to remember them?"

Figure 5. Significant moment reflection and session image

"There was one where we were doing the Romans, but I'd set it up that there was a Celtic settlement and then the Romans had built their road through this Celtic settlement and there'd been a conflict because of that and so there were ghosts left from this conflict. We were dealing with something not really complex, I was saying there was conflict in the ground. We did a freeze frame about the conflict. No, we were digging down. I don't think I'd framed it like that. We were digging down on what they'd found and one little girl and sort of scrunched her body up really tightly and another person was pulling her up, but she looked heavy. "I said, 'What is this?' and she said, 'I am the conflict in the ground' and she talked about it being heavy and we talked about the conflict bringing tension and being something, you have to carry. I think that was a moment that stood out. And a similar one in terms of conflict resolution we then later in that same series of sessions we had." (Artist Educator F)

Although children in this significant moment extract may not have had the words to linguistically explore /articulate the notion of displacement and conflict, Figure 5 highlights the meaning-making that manifested through shared physical, gestural, and emotional expressions. Embodiment was also an important aspect of the professional days for teachers, artists and senior leaders who shared and participated in each other's practices in professional development days across the project. Teachers reflected that this supported their own understanding of children's experiences of meaning making.

4.5 Cognitive components of literacies

The cognitive aspect of the Story Exchange project was also adapted significantly from Voice 21's framework. Within Voice 21's framework, these features focus on the features of verbal presentation, often associated with public speaking or being an orator. Within our project, core elements of the cognitive strand were evidenced through the following dispositions: inquiry, adaptation and application of ideas. These cognitive dimensions of learning were seen to be activated by the anticipation-action-reflection cycle (OECD, 2019) or the critical thinking approach embedded centrally within the Worldbuilding pedagogical framework as they navigated both individual and collective experiences. This focus on anticipation-action-reflection or critical thinking was also placed centrally within our cognitive component of literacy by teachers' framework (illustrated in Figure 6) as they observed "*increased use of*

sophisticated and probing questioning by children" (Teacher K). This evidences how the pedagogy activated deep exploratory inquiry and talk, which goes beyond the notion of learning through talk.

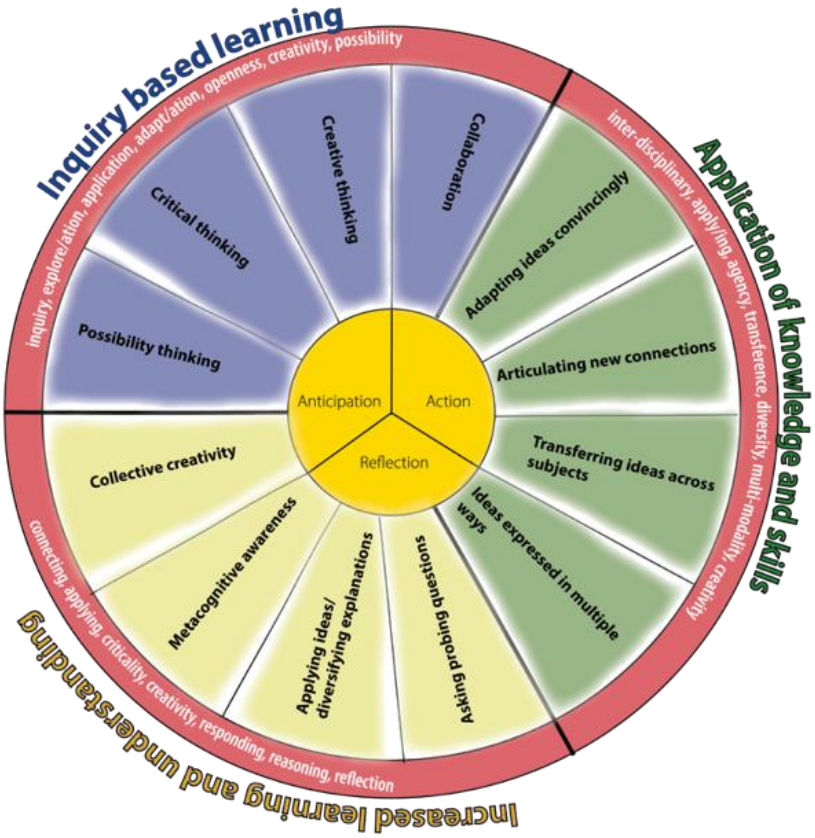
Dispositions of creativity, critical thinking, divergent and possibility thinking underpinned cognitive literacy across the project because these were the observed learning outcomes by teachers. Children demonstrated a growing sense of autonomy and agency to think and act through the Worldbuilding process of learning (Illustrated in Figure 6). This was reflected in children's critical reflections.

> "Everybody can be creative—they won't be shy in front of all the people." (Child N)

The imagination is linked with active, autonomous learning by children.

> "I like him because he's (the artist) imaginative, and he gives us real stories that happened. But he makes them more fun, you know like in the past like the Romans and Celts. He doesn't always tell us, he actually shows us how to do it, and we use our imagination, and we think. And he takes us to a new world that is full of imaginative thing." (Child K)

Figure 6. Cognitive literacies



Children reflected on making more meaningful connections between past and present learning and demonstrated increased metacognition as they articulated this process. Learning and language were experienced and applied freely in a transdisciplinary way within the story worlds, which demonstrated that children were developing interdisciplinary thinking through the pedagogy, as well as consolidating disciplinary knowledge (OECD, 2019).

> "I really like him because he (the artist) makes us go from the present like plastic pollution—we talk about that happening now. And then he talks about the past. He basically teaches us history and then he connects to the things that we're learning now and then make a whole story about it." (Child N)

The extracts also demonstrate the development of children's meta-cognitive skills through the process of learning (OECD, 2019).

4.6 Linguistic component of literacies

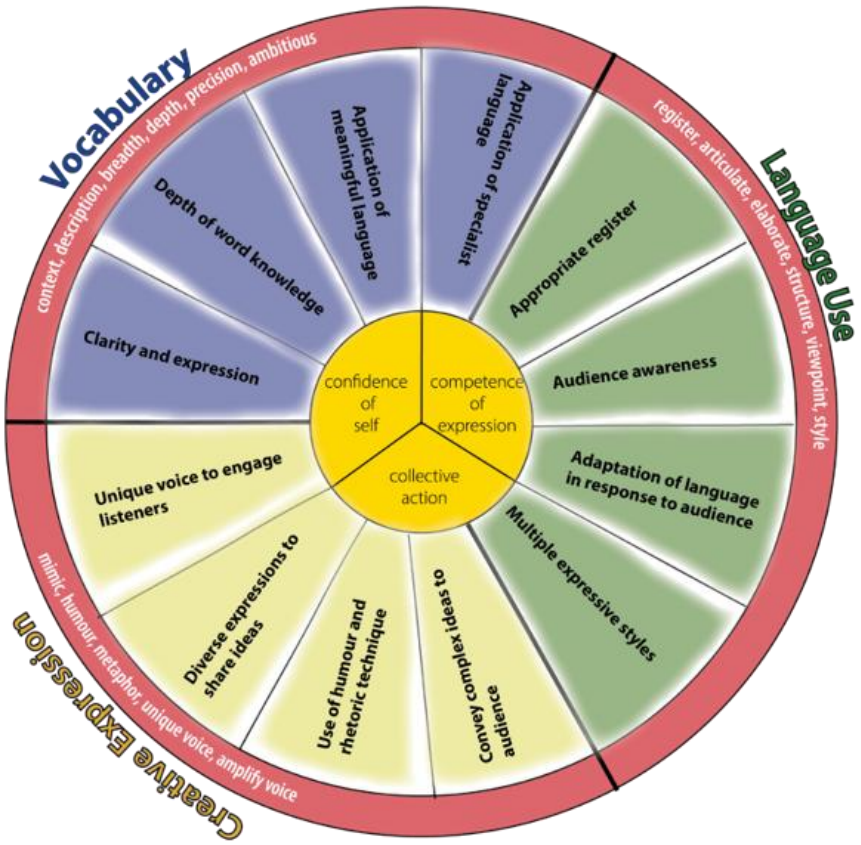
The linguistic component of School 21's framework focuses on oral correctness and was the strand least engaged with by teachers during observation, despite the school focus on oracy and their initial rationale for case study selection. Within the co-created Story Project Core elements of the linguistic strand were evidenced through the following dispositions: ***active engagement, curiosity, creative and cultural expressions*** because these were the observed learning outcomes by teachers (illustrated in Figure 7)**.**

> "It's like my imagination coming to life, and it's like nice and relaxing. It's like, I sometimes think it's curious, what can happen next. And he (the artist) gives us exciting stops, like if we go into the story he stops there and he gives us the opportunity to finish that story." (Child V)

There is a sense of collective expression.

> "I think we're learning like with lots of different people instead of the exact same people. And I think we're learning about different scenarios each week, because it's good to learn about different scenarios for when you're older—if you don't learn different scenarios, you won't know how to react if the scenario happens." (Child N)

Figure 7. Linguistic literacies



Teachers recounted aspects of learning which surprised them and challenged their perceptions of what they felt some children were capable of. This related to the impact on learning such as use of higher order vocabulary within story worlds, deeper social and emotional engagement, use of a greater range of language registers and nonverbal communication. Information was engaged with through higher order thinking and applied across different transdisciplinary contexts. Children demonstrated deeper understanding of humanities subjects.

> "I would like to say most of the progress that a lot of children made, especially those that were quite timid and quite shy, and they have so much more confidence in what they're saying, and what they're writing." (Teacher V)

> "Their ability to articulate themselves we've noticed a difference in that. I think that is a direct result of them taking part in the project." (Teacher C)

This data also supports evidence that the children were developing a sense of individual and collective agency, or co-agency (OECD, 2019) through the pedagogy.

Table 3 summarizes all codes. Problematising the notion of Oracy as a reductive one because it encompasses both 'learning to talk' and 'learning through talk', and acknowledging the colonial roots of the word, it is placed in brackets within our framework. The collective dispositions evidence the sophisticated level of relational communication and learning activated within classrooms through the worldbuilding approach. The term 'cultural' as a title incorporates social-emotional-cognitive-linguistic meaning making, and the term 'literacies' acknowledges the plurality of this communication. The term 'dialogic learning' is a crucial pedagogical feature that is necessary to cultivate dispositions (ethics, mindsets, values) for expressive language and communication through collaborative inquiry-based pedagogy, leading to ethical action.

Table 3. Cultural literacies and embodied-dialogic learning framework (oracy)

Oracy Component	*Learning Component*	*Disposition*	*Transferable Competency*
Social and emotional	1. Participation	Eagerness, willingness, engagement, contemplation	Confidence of self
	2. Active listening	Maintaining attention, asking questions, responding appropriately, listening to their own voice	Competence of expression
	3. Balanced decision making	Critical thinking, listening to the voice of others, adapting ideas in response to others, permission not to conform	
	4. Conflict resolution	Respecting all ways of thinking, use of persuasive language, speaking up for diversity and taking action, recognising colonising action	Collective action
Physical (embodied)	1. Voice	Clarity, expression, tone	Confidence of self
	2. Body language	Gesture, participation, awareness, responsiveness	Competence of expression
	3. Use of space	Readiness, awareness, adaptation	Diverse expression
Linguistic	1. Vocabulary	Breadth, depth application of language	Confidence of self
	2. Language use	Audience awareness, adaptation, style	Competence of expression
	3. Creative expression	Unique voice	Diverse expression

Cognitive (inquiry-based learning)	1. Inquiry, possibility and critical thinking	Inquiry, explore(ation), application, adapt(ation), openness, creativity, possibility	Anticipation
	2. Application of knowledge and skills in a range of learning contexts	Inter-disciplinary, apply(ing), agency, transference, diversity, multi-modality, creativity	Action
	3. Increased learning and understanding	Connecting, applying, criticality, creativity, responding, reasoning, reflection	Reflection

4.7 RQ2: How can drama pedagogy create a transdisciplinary, localised curriculum?

The impact themes across the project are further coded into three broad impact categories, which were used by four senior leaders in schools within their School Development plans to evidence and sustain further engagement with the pedagogy following the project.

4.7.1 Impact 1: Equitable learning opportunity, pupil voice and raising aspirations

Cultural representation of Global Majority artist-educators, children, teachers, and Senior Leaders was paramount in developing richer research insights and understanding about the impacts of the project for all involved, provided meaningful insights to challenge, consolidate, reframe the learning.

The theme of aspiration and voice was reflected strongly in the documentary interviews with parental interviews led by a Gypsy Roma Traveler home school liaison, who also observed and documented the sessions in school. Parents noted that children had more confidence to speak at home. He noted that, "*Roma kids normally sit in the last row in the classroom."* He also observed in sessions that*: "Child X and V could talk about their own life and what matters them and contributes to class with their own Gypsy stories and with their own Gypsy perception." And that the project had "Taught them to dare to dream."* This aspirational theme was also reiterated by parents who were interviewed by the Gypsy Roma documentary makers in their community stating that children were more verbal at home. For example, in sessions where children created back stories and characters, some children drew from cultural practices such as food traditions and traditional oral stories—these cultural references supported deeper meaning-making as learning assets (Valencia, 2010). Whilst this was an important feature of the data, this paper focuses on the semantic making-meaning and dialogic inquiry aspects of the data.

Aspiration was also a key theme for teachers who were reticent in the project initially—across the project teachers were seen to shift identities from teacher to teacher-artist**.**

> "Everything is so narrow, and I can really see this thinking process. I think the key take away will just be the fact that I can do it. I think at the beginning I was always quite hesitant." (Teacher C)

These data extracts evidence of the richness of Drama Worldbuilding pedagogy to activate a localised curriculum approach which empowered the voices of both teachers and learners through increased agency and autonomy. These are crucial skills and dispositions for learning (OECD, 2019).

4.7.2 Impact 2: Transdisciplinary, localised curriculum—linking home and school

Greater links were made between home and school through the development of a localised, transdisciplinary curriculum approach.

> "Anyway, we were thinking about how Bradford and Cliff Wood were at the time, which is really familiar to them as well so it's like thinking about their culture on the doorstep sort of thing. Because Bradford is their place, it's where they grew up. We thought about how it was the boars' home before anyone in the village. So, when we, as the villagers went to chop down the trees and the habitat, the boar was scared. We re-imagined the ending and thought how we could live with the things that we fear the most." (Teacher J and Artist E)

This included linking fictional learning to real life experiences.

> "We do look at really difficult problems or you know, like hunger—the scenarios were putting in these children's minds, are really helping them inside and helping them outside." (Teacher H)

The pedagogy was seen to impact on pupil engagement and conflict resolution both inside and outside of lessons (Stephenson, 2023). This was highlighted through extracts such as:

> "Their debating skills have improved considerably. Outside of class there was an altercation between a few of my boys which escalated-they didn't need an adult to give any input or any sort of ideas as to how to resolve that conflict. They were able to do it completely independently using language rehearsed in the drama." (Senior Leader D)

These reflections evidence the learning process of applying language into real-life contexts as a result of the semantic, affective and collective meaning making during the sessions. Language of possibility becomes linguistic and applied (Learning through language) to resolve conflicts and express opinions because there has been an opportunity to practice the language within a context, which is fictional and collective with diverse linguistic representations and interpretations.

Senior Leaders embedded the approach within localised school development plans more rigorously as the research impact on pupils' wellbeing was systematically evidenced in Year 2, particularly concerning increased skills, dispositions and knowledge about actioning conflict resolution, wellbeing, and aspiration.

> "Have a go at dealing with these kinds of difficult situations in this kind of safe environment and then be able to transfer those skills into real life- we believe that really links into their well-being by having these opportunities to practice confrontation and conflict and how they negotiate their way through life. So, it fits into our school development plan, we're redesigning our curriculum units as a result." (Senior Leader B)

Conflict resolution is positioned as transformative competence by OECD Futures of Education policy (OECD, 2019), alongside taking responsibility and creating new value. These competencies are clearly activated and embedded through a dialogic, creative curriculum approach across the schools.

4.7.3 Impact 3: Reimagining professional practice through action research

Teachers noted challenges across the project through coaching sessions, and these were associated with time and senior leaders buy in from schools as well as Ofsted visits for three schools which were seen to clash with the project. Senior leaders from both schools noted that Ofsted were "*just not interested*" (senior leader E and F). Co-planning with artist-educators was one of the challenges of knowledge exchange across schools. Initial coaching conversations reflected this across all schools, where teacher D noted that "*planning was hard and there's a lot to it"*.

> "I think one of the challenges has been just shifting a way of seeing the curriculum." (Artist B)

Over the first term teachers' reflections focused on recognising, implementing, and sharing *'pedagogical tools'*, a term which they gave to many of the drama strategies. As the project developed the coaching reflections indicated a shift in teacher confidence as they began to recognise drama strategies for Dialogic Oracy and apply them independently across other subjects. A bank of these strategies was collected and shared across schools. This category was initially the most important to some teachers to have a sense of agency.

> "I've hosted some staff meetings which have been a highlight and it's been really exciting to get the feedback from the members of staff who have tried the pedagogical tools that have passed on to them." (Senior Leader N)

The involvement of a range of stakeholders and the systematic engagement in longitudinal participatory action research was instrumental in making the learning visible across time and this was crucial to support confidence in the effectiveness of the pedagogy. This was evidenced by teachers' reflections on value led practice in the final interviews. Increased confidence in teachers (teacher-artist) and artists (artist-teachers) professional identities are also evidenced across data sets. In the post-questionnaire, 100% of teachers reported that the project had changed their practice, 100% of teachers felt more confident in using creative pedagogy, and 100% of teachers felt that the project had positively impacted on their professional development. Whilst there is not the space to explore this data more in this paper, it evidences the project's positive impact on teacher wellbeing and professional agency.

> "I got so much out of it if you'd have asked me two years ago at the beginning of the of the project if I could see myself leading a workshop for students and leading staff meetings-now I feel that myself esteem has increased, I feel confident that I can plan

> my own unit of story curriculum and that will coincide with another subject. That's for me, that's huge progress." (Teacher L)

The research makes an original research contribution by expanding Boyd's (2023) concept of Dialogic Oracy Practice to include *embodied (thinking-feeling) cultural expressions which supported deeper meaning-making and communication.* These multi-modal diverse literacies are summarised in Table 3, as Features of Pedagogy. Shared dialogic values were embedded and sustained across professional learning contexts through co-design teams—this was also critical for teachers who felt vulnerable and less supported by senior leaders on the project. Expressive language and dialogic inquiry were explicitly linked to the development of social and emotional literacy, demonstrating the link between affect and expressive language acquisition. This is outlined in Table 4 below, summarized as Dialogic-Embodied (Oracy) Literacy Practices (the word Oracy is/can intentionally be replaced by literacies due to the deficit nature of the word 'oracy').

Table 4. Dialogic-embodied literacy (oracy) practice

Language of possibility	Features of Pedagogy
Language of possibility (signaling new ways to view and evidence something)	• Diverse literacies are activated and valued (social, emotional, physical, gestural, and aural modes of communication) • Collective participation • Affective, Relational and Embodied modes of meaning making, cultural expressions and communication • Dispositional learning (openness, active listening, collective participation, creative agency, possibility thinking, ethical action)
Response-able practices (signifying actively listening and responding)	• Localised, transdisciplinary curriculum shaped by teachers and their practices • Child-to-child exploration and dialogic inquiry • Co-design teams or co-agency (teachers, artists, children, researchers, and communities)
Dialogic local Space (invites and values student realities in a shared space of possibilities which enable us to feel heard and open to hearing others so that there can be a deepening and widening of understanding	• New affirmative, creative pedagogies • Diverse literacies • Dialogic co-inquiry • Collective creativity

5. DISCUSSIONS: WHO DECIDES WHAT IS 'LANGUAGE RICH?' RECLAIMING CULTURAL LITERACIES

In line with anti-deficit thinkers (Garcia & Otheguy, 2016; Valencia, 2010) our project aimed to consider how a diverse society can educate its children in ways that extend their meaning-making potential, rather than in ways that restrict it to one autonomous language. We therefore focused on developing new fluid curriculum

spaces for learning *through* cultural literacies. In doing so, the project placed a critical centering on the physical or embodied, gestural, emotional, and cognitive components of oracy rather than solely the linguistic oracy components (spoken language components such as 'correct grammar') which are often represented in static and uncritical ways through current educational policy in England. By challenging language barriers across our project, children were seen to engage more deeply, developing a stronger sense of self-identity and investment in learning.

In reviewing approaches to dialogue, Alexander (2017) notes that purposeful and cumulative talk are most difficult to enact. Drama Worldbuilding pedagogy was seen to create a 'dialogic space' (Mercer & Mannion, 2018), where communication in the classroom was collective (teachers and children in partnership). It was 'reciprocal' (talking, listening, and sharing viewpoints), supportive (no fear of failure), cumulative (builds on each other's ideas) and purposeful (with educational goals in view). The research makes an original contribution to understanding the relationship between drama pedagogy (worldbuilding) and effective language, communication, and social-emotional learning through longitudinal co-design, particularly by amplifying learners' perspectives. We problematise the notion of the term oracy as encompassing both 'learning through talk' and 'learning to talk—within our project, children were learning to express and communicate collectively, through embodied social-emotional communication and action. Language and communication were cultivated through their emotional investment to take action within the story worlds. This covered multiple curricular areas effectively, such as climate change, historical bias, and place-based learning through the integration of social-emotional learning. Embedding a Translanguaging approach (Garcia & Otheguy, 2016) to the Humanities Curriculum through Drama Worldbuilding highlighted how School 21's Oracy Framework appeared to reproduce ideologies of language deficit. The pedagogical approach resulted in the children's increased cognitive and linguistic understanding and application of Humanities knowledge (particularly Global Majority and SEND children), increased social and emotional dispositions, confidence and competence, and ability to resolve conflicts. Arguably, this was precisely because children were drawing from their linguistic strengths and embodied cultural expressions—this benefited all learners.

Additionally, through our intensive co-design and action research approach, *dialogic values* were seen to change by teachers in response to relationships between teacher and learner and the understanding of 'oracy'. This is reflected in the quotation below, where preconceived and simplistic reflections on oracy are now problematised by the teacher at the lead school, evidencing increased critical consciousness to make pedagogical choices (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

> "For me as well oracy... It's difficult, isn't it? Because although it's not just language and vocabulary it's the way that you feel, it's about relationships, and it's... I don't know. It's so broad I think the oracy thing. To be honest I really did come into the project at the beginning thinking that oracy was literally just language and that's changed, yes. So, the way that I think about oracy as well is it's not just language it's an umbrella of different things that we're looking at here. Oracy has been activated." (Teacher W)

For oracy learning to reflect the diversity in our classrooms, further work needs to be done to dismantle deficit approaches to language and critically evaluate the practices high profile, school facing organisations. Through the application of Drama Worldbuilding as an 'affirmative pedagogy' (Cushing, 2024) many EAL, global-majority children exceeded expectations of teachers—this suggests children were learning *through* multimodal language, communication and collective reasoning—discovering the power of their individual and collective voices. This learning asset manifested as sophisticated socio-emotional and cognitive dispositional learning which manifested as conflict resolution—highlighting the rich potential of drama pedagogy for activating dialogic learning and ethical action. Classroom pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum must move beyond static, monolingual practices so engrained in current English Education Policy to provide equitable learning opportunities to children. Global policy roadmaps such as OECD Futures of Education (2019) are leading the way in this thinking and creative pedagogies offer ways to bring this policy to life in classrooms. The limitations of the research were that baseline case studies were not consistent across all schools due to recurring COVID-19 cases and impeding Ofsted inspections which drew teachers' focus away from consistent data collection.

In considering how the pedagogy might be sustained, there is a desperate need to fund more longitudinal practice-research projects to support teachers to co-develop and embed new practices and assessment modes that are responsive and relevant to their learners. Co-participatory action research is essential to support professional development and evidence-based curriculum change. Emphasis should be placed on pedagogies which activate socio-cultural literacies in teacher training in curriculum reform. Storytelling and story making is a powerful, pedagogical tool to activate cultural literacies within diverse communities of practice, ripe for further exploration, whilst not downplaying the structural inequalities many children face.

> "If there is any gap, it is in social and educational opportunity—opportunity for all children to be valued in their meaning making, to be heard, to have a significant and powerful voice" (García, & Otheguy, 2016 p. 63).

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APPENDIX 1: SCHOOL DATA AT THE TIME OF THE PROJECT

Participating Primary School	*Participating teachers/SLT in the project*	*Participating children in the project*	*School enrolment numbers*	*Staff numbers*	*Free school meals number*	*% of children eligible for free meal*
1. Bowling Park	6	180	652	26	267	
2. Holycroft	6	240	369	21	120	46.50%
3. St Matthews	6	210	423	21	117	
4. St Stephens	3	90	455	43	169	
5. St Josephs	2	60	183	55	15	
6. Bradford Academy	4	150	869	20	735	
7. Margaret McMillan	7	150	618	62	152	
Totals	*34*	*1080*	*3569*	*248*	*1575*	*35% of children eligible for school meals*

APPENDIX 2: ITERACTIVE DATA COLLECTION

School	*Terms*	*Video or photo images of each session (Total 145 images and 11 videos)*	*Reflective voice recordings artists/teacher (Total 171 voice recordings)*	*Planning documentation*	*Pupil case studies (Total 36 case studies)*
1	Term 1-6	51 22	16 (across both years)	Romans (children as archaeologist) Light and sound	6 students (3 Pakistani, 1 White British, 1 Eastern European, 1 Iranian) (Improving vocabulary and spoken English) No impact data
2	Term 1-6	22 15	26 (across both years)	Romans (children as archaeologists)	None submitted but 3 discussed over interview

3	Term 1-6	10	23 (across both years)	Explorers (children as archaeologists)	3 students (2 British Pakistani, 1 Christian) (Lacks confidence) Oracy observations of children in lessons: Using initially Oracy 21 in year 1 100% impact data—increased confidence and participation
4	Term 1-6	10	20 (across both years)	Explorers (children as archaeologists)	Exit interview: Oracy observations of children in lessons: Using initially Oracy 21 in year 1
5	Term 1-6	5	38 (across two years)	Rocks Extreme Weather (5-week planning sessions broken down with teacher visual resources) Ancient Greeks (5-week planning sessions broken down with teacher visual resources) Bradford Boar (5-week planning sessions broken own with teacher visual resources)	6 children, ethnicity GRT (Lack confidence, make poor choices, shy, bright but lacks participation) 6 children (5 Pakistani, 1 Christian) (Lacks confidence, anxiety, participation) 6 Children (ethnicity GRT?) (Lacks confidence, anxiety, participation confidence, anxiety, participation—no impact data) Oracy observations of children in lessons: Using initially NC – Year 1

6	Term 1-6	2	28 (across both years)	Athenians Greeks Volcanoes	6 students (2 Polish, 2 Pakistani, 1 Slovakian, 1 British) (Lacks confidence, struggles to speak out and retain information)
7	Term 1-6	11 videos 3 images	20 (across both years)	Athenians Greeks Volcanoes	2 students (both British Pakistani) Details progression over sessions as impact date

Additional data: Teacher pre/post project questionnaires (baselines) Analysis data Microsoft Forms, 6x Termly Coach meetings summary of insights, challenges and positives of project, running analysis

Significant moment interviews with teachers, artist and senior leaders: Year 1: 7x interviews with artist and teachers (1 interview per school), Year 2: 7x interviews with artists and teachers (1 interview per school Final TDF report, Interview with Senior Leaders on impact (2 interviews), Impact Documentary post project (interviews with teachers and artists), Documentary from Gypsy Roma Traveller https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6bdKmks7Sk, Pupil Interviews (14 group interviews across 7 schools, 74 children.) These are presented creatively as a summary cartoon Why Story.mov

APPENDIX 3: PLANNING PROFORMA DRAMA WORLDBUILDING

Session Length: 60 min practical session

Age rage: Year 4

Writer/Facilitator: Daniel Ingram-Brown

Main theme: The Romans and the Celts – conflict resolution

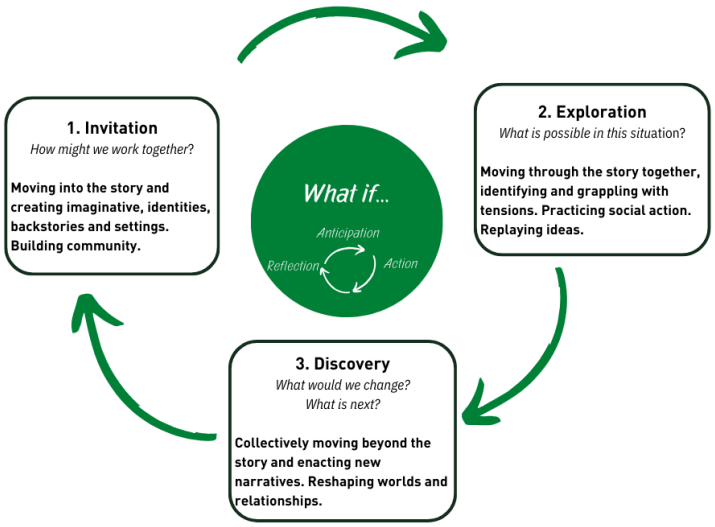
INQUIRY QUESTIONS (RELATED TO THE DELIMMA) and challenge: How can we uncover and honour stories of the past to ensure all voices are remembered?

Curriculum Links: Ancient Rome and its Impact on Britain, including Roman roads, settlements, artifacts, the invasion and its consequences for the native Celtic population; English – speaking and listening, writing; PSHE – conflict solution, teamwork and collaboration, cultural awareness and respect; Arts and Design – drawing places for the exhibition; Geography – understanding landscapes and human impact (roads, settlements).

Disposition: Conflict Resolution

Inquiry Question *What is the big question we will address?* *(Prompts and sentence starters)* Link to PHSE/relationships/oracy	Let's say we are…. Invitation *Who are we?* *Where are we?* *When was it?*	Exploration *What's happened?* *How has it happened?*	Discovery *What are we going to do about it?* *What is possible…?*	National Curriculum Links *What is the purpose/ aim of the learning?*	Next Steps

Worldbuilding Pedagogy (Stephenson, 2024)



INVITATION- (Let's say… What if…)

Who are we? Where are we? When was it?

Inquiry Questions:

"How can we give a voice to the people and events of the past and help their stories be heard today?"

"What do ancient discoveries reveal about how different communities lived, clashed, and shaped the world we know?"

"How can we use history to understand both sides of a story and create a fair way to remember them?"

Pedagogical tools:

Teacher-as-Storyteller, ten second objects, freeze frames, soundscapes, co-construction of story, mapping the space, role-on-the-wall, phone call, shared writing, mime, letter/email, group meeting, objects as story prompts, corporate drawing, thought tracking, individual drawing, creating an exhibition, speeches.

We're people who work in a local supermarket – current time. We've been invited to the opening of an exhibition in the supermarket. An historical artifact will be unveiled. The artefact has been discovered during an archaeological dig on the supermarket's grounds.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: Welcome to the supermarket and introduce the artefact. Position the participants as people who work in the supermarket.

Ten second objects: Become things you might find in the supermarket.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: Introduce the 'strange happenings' that have started since the artefact was discovered.

Mapping the space and co-constructing the story: Ask what 'strange happenings' others have seen.

Phone call: The professor who's coming to open the exhibition is delayed due to a storm.

Soundscape: Create the sound of the storm.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: The artefact is revealed. The ghost appears. They say: "The storm will not pass, and you will not be able to leave the supermarket, until you tell my story, until you honour me as a great warrior. You will find the answers you need buried beneath the ground..."

EXPLORATION

What's happened (dilemma)? How has it happened? How might we work together?

Phone call: We try to contact the professor but can't.

Shared write: We write an email to the professor to ask for help.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: We need to undertake our own investigation – our own archaeological dig.

Mime: We gather the things needed for the dig.

Ten second objects: Becoming one of the objects found in the dig.

Teacher-as-Storyteller/Letter/Email: We've had a reply from the professor. She gives some context about the Roman road built through the Celtic settlement. She tells the story makers to find the plans from the dig.

Group meeting: We find the plans and discuss them.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: A second ghost appears – from the Celtic settlement – they tell their story.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: Moving to a different part of the dig and introducing the Roman road.

Objects as story prompts/corporate drawing: The story makers use stones to create stories seen on the Roman road.

Group meetings: The group is split into Romans and Celts. Each group meets to talk about what's important to them and what they want to achieve.

Freeze frame: The two groups create a freeze frame of the Romans and Celts. A spokesperson is chosen from each group to make their case – this can lead to a discussion in role.

Thought Tracking: Find out what different characters are thinking and feeling.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: "There is conflict in the ground here. We can never rest while that conflict is here, hidden in the ground. It's up to you, people from the year 2024 to help us find rest…"

DISCOVERY

What are we going to do about it? What is possible in this situation? What would we change?

Group meeting:

What do the ghosts want? What do we have to do?

How might we help to heal the conflict in the ground? What sort of things might we do to remember conflicts that have happened in the past?

How many communities were involved in the conflict? How many sides are there to this story of conflict?

How many sides to the story are we showing in the exhibition? Is that fair?

Is there something we could add to the exhibition to show both sides of the story?

Individual drawing and exhibition: The story makers add to the exhibition to tell both sides of the story.

Speeches: The story makers are invited to say something to declare the exhibition open.

Teacher-as-Storyteller: The ghosts are released, and the storm passes. The ghosts leave a message. The story makers decide what their parting message is.

<u>WAYS TO EXTEND THE WORKSHOP</u>

Teachers could encourage real world engagement. The children could ….

- Story makers could design ways to deal with conflict in their classes or school. They could design a policy for the school.
- Community history project with a focus on conflict and conflict resolution.
- Writing or art project inspired by the perspectives introduced through the workshop.
- Visit a historical site or museum.
- Hands-on archaeology activity.

RESOURCES

- Plinth
- Roman helmet and stand
- Cloth
- Masking tape
- big map
- Laptop
- High-vis vests
- Pens/pencils
- Blank paper
- Tape Long roll of paper
- Stones
- Red and green stickers
- Laptop (with email on it)
- Phone