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A new way of learning: How can an understanding of self-efficacy and emotional resilience be used to develop successful teaching and learning strategies for students in Initial Teacher Education.

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Abstract

This article details a study in which student teachers were invited to attend Dramatherapy workshops to help support the development of their self-efficacy and emotional resilience. The aims of the intervention were to improve outcomes and student retention on teacher training programmes. Following the completion of the programme, students expressed positive responses to the intervention, indicating that it had enabled them to be more effective in self-evaluation and reflection, feeling less isolated and having more self-awareness. The research findings have evident implications for teacher educators wishing to support but also challenge the students in their care.

Key words

Self-efficacy; emotional resilience; therapeutic intervention; Dramatherapy; retention.

Background

The demographic of the ITE student population has significantly changed over several decades. Students now come from a variety of backgrounds and include those who follow a 'traditional' student pathway of leaving school, moving away from home and enrolling on the Bachelor of Education programme, as well as mature students and those who continue to live at home (THE, 2014). It is relevant, therefore, to consider the impact of self-efficacy and emotional resilience on successful placement experiences for this wide range of learners and in doing this, attempt to identify possible strategies to improve self-efficacy in students who have undergone challenges during teaching courses.

Student teachers are required to meet stringent demands before, during and after their teaching practice. Trainees can return to university, following placement experiences, demonstrating anxious and tense behaviours and expressing concerns as to whether they wish to progress in the teaching profession. In addressing these issues, some teacher training programmes have begun to consider interventions which aim to improve the emotional resilience and self-efficacy of trainee teachers. It is hoped that these interventions will ultimately have an impact on future teaching careers and improve teacher retention.

It has been suggested by course tutors that it may be useful to have additional support programmes available for trainee teachers at strategic points in their training to help establish their self-efficacy. Providing additional support to trainee teachers, with regard to matters of self-efficacy, resilience, confidence, can be achieved through a therapeutic intervention. Dramatherapy was identified as a suitable therapeutic learning environment in which students could develop personally and professionally and might potentially benefit from practical and experiential activities encountered through drama.

Citation

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Context of Dramatherapy as a Therapeutic Approach

Dramatherapy, a form of arts based psychotherapy, offers experiential learning through its approaches and techniques. This therapeutic approach allows individuals the opportunity to express a range of feelings which are brought into focus by placement experiences such as anxiety, feelings of inadequacy or a lack of self-belief. These can be addressed through supported problem solving activities which also enable individuals to develop interpersonal relationship skills. In turn, these activities can enable behavioural change which assists in building skills, allowing students to develop personal growth and coping mechanisms through emotional and physical integration (Thompson, 2016).

Individuals do not need any artistic skills to engage in the therapy (Langley, 2006; Jones, 1996) as Dramatherapy, drama, dance, music and art can be used to explore feelings and emotions in a safe, therapeutic environment which is comfortable to each individual person.

Addressing emotional resilience and self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been defined as 'the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute behaviours required to produce given attainments' (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013:244, Bandura, 1977, 1997). It is more precise in definition than self-esteem and self-concept, relating specifically to the specific estimate of ability to complete a given task. There are four main aspects to self-efficacy and these are: mastery experiences, vicarious or modelling experiences, verbal persuasions and physiological states (Bandura, 1977, 1997). It is important to recognise that it is the perception of the individual which determines self-efficacy beliefs and not reality. Perceptions can be influenced by the perceived difficulty of the task, the amount of support received and the task context. Self-efficacy and the belief in personal capability are not necessarily affected by increases in stress if the individual perceives that they are capable of succeeding at the task (Klassen, Durksen and Tze, 2014; Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013). Individuals are pro-active, self-reflecting and self-regulating and are not just products of their environment and there are significant links between the environment, social systems and behaviour (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Self-efficacy, on the part of the teacher, impacts on pupil achievement, pupil motivation, pupil self-efficacy and improvement in the pupils' attitudes and interests (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013). Therefore, teachers' self-efficacy affects pupil achievement and motivation and also impacts on the teachers' beliefs about the teaching and learning taking place, whereas low efficacy creates greater difficulties in teaching and leads to poor job satisfaction and job-related stress (Klassen et al, 2014). These factors which have been seen to impact on the effectiveness of qualified teachers, also impact on a trainee teacher during placement experiences. A lack of self-efficacy can therefore impact both on trainee outcomes but also on the outcomes of the pupils in their care.

The Impact of Dramatherapy as an Intervention

Through the application of therapeutic workshops students have the opportunity to 'play with' and 'rehearse' skills for real life situations they may encounter in their teaching career. Jennings (1992) identifies the 'Task Skills' approach to Dramatherapy. This approach enables individuals to explore, 'rehearse' and practise the skills needed in everyday life. For example, skills can be developed through using dramatic and psychotherapeutic material to anticipate situations an individual may encounter (Andersen Warren and Grainger, 2000). Therefore, it felt applicable to use this approach as a guideline to working with students on teacher training programmes, as it is used for situations in which issues are more or less clearly defined, for example building resilience, confidence and coping skills.

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

Additionally, an essential aspect of the intervention is for facilitators develop a secure learning environment (Powell, 2003) through students engaging in a therapeutic group intervention. Cohesive support is provided within therapeutic workshops via peer support and the support of the facilitator. A group dynamic can provide the opportunity for individuals to develop relationships, gain a sense of community, meet with peers, gain others perspectives, provide support and reduce feelings of isolation (Thompson, 2003; Bowden and Smith Greenberg, 2010). This approach potentially can be adapted to support students struggling with aspects of their teaching practice. Students have the chance to build a supportive network of peers in a therapeutic setting which could help them feel less alienated in their distress. Additionally, it can provide them with new ways of thinking and a safe place to develop in an empathic environment.

Context

This research project focused upon providing trainee teacher resilience workshops to B.Ed. students in their second year of study at the research university. The need to develop resilience in qualified teachers has been highlighted in recent studies (Hong, 2012). This need was also apparent in relation to university students when lecturers began to identify a number of students who were struggling to manage stress levels due to a lack of resilience and self-efficacy within this highly pressured programme. Consequently, two teacher training lecturers and a registered Dramatherapist initiated the resilience workshops as a pilot project. Full ethical approval was therefore obtained for the study and participants were aware that this was a research project having given permission for data to be published.

The second year group of students had been initially targeted in recognition of their stage on the Bachelor of Education course. It was understood that, as a cohort, they would be soon making decisions as to whether they would complete their degree in three or four years. It is appreciated that many teachers face 'adverse circumstances', (Mansfield, Beltman, Price and McConney, 2011, p.358) in their early years of practice. It was therefore considered that early support and intervention could be advantageous to students who recognised the need in their own development. Some of the contributing factors to such circumstances such as these can be the perceived heavy workload, behaviour management and lack of resources (Jenkins, Smith, and Maxwell, 2009; McCormack and Gore, 2008; Sumsion, 2003). Gu and Day (2007), cited in Castro, Kelly and Shih (2009, p.623) recognised there are potentially two types of resilience; that which we recognise as 'attributes which describe a resilient person' and those which involve interrelationships within a social system. Whilst the study aimed to explore the attributes of a person said to be resilient, it is clear that the focus would be how these attributes could be enhanced within the social process of engaging in collaborative workshops sessions.

Methodology

This paper discusses the pilot year of this study and uses a mixed methods approach to enable the experiences and viewpoints of the participants to be considered. This would allow the facilitators to ascertain whether or not there would be potential for this intervention to continue to benefit future cohorts. By obtaining the views of the participants, it would also enable future interventions to be adjusted to improve the quality of sessions.

The workshops were to be independently facilitated by the Dramatherapist who would implement creative therapeutic tools into the sessions. These tools would be used as a means of aiding students' explorations and expressions during the workshops. The workshops were spread across the academic year accordingly. Initially, second year B.Ed. students were introduced to the resilience workshops via a lecture and leaflets. Students who were interested in committing to the workshops referred themselves by contacting the two University lecturers. Once the individuals had expressed

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

an interest in the workshops, the facilitator was informed. In total, twelve female students of agreed to attend the workshops.

Dramatherapists have both an ethical and moral responsibility towards individuals they work with. Therefore, they adhere to both the British Association of Dramatherapists (BADth) Code of Conduct and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency and Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (Health and Care Professions Council, 2016; Health and Care Professions Council, 2013; The British Association of Dramatherapists, 2005). These frameworks incorporate ethical matters such as confidentiality, boundaries, contracts, consent and ensuring the therapeutic work is in the best interests of the client. Therefore, as well as meeting the ethical standards required as part of the University procedure, additionally, a therapeutic contract which provided the ethical boundaries for the group was agreed and signed by all who took part. Students had the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Prior to starting the workshops students completed a Connor Davidson Resilience Scale to measure their current resilience levels. The Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC) comprises of twenty-five items; each rated on a five-point scale (0–4), with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. The CD-RISC has been shaped from previous research that has focused upon adaptability, action orientation, confidence, hardiness, self-efficacy patience and endurance in the face of adversity. Additionally, it has also been built via the exploration of the characteristics of historical figures that have shown to embody the concept of resilience (Prince-Embury & Saklofske, 2012). The scale has been studied in a variety of populations including selected professionals.

Overall, seven workshops were facilitated during the academic year. Every workshop lasted for approximately one hour and a half. The workshops provided trainee teachers with a supportive, group dynamic to explore and express. The workshops were experiential and allowed students to focus upon various topics including; obstacles in education for children and teachers, the importance of resilience, mentally and emotionally, for children and teachers. Students were provided with the opportunity for self-exploration which included focusing on areas such as what we may need to be resilient against, our response to pressure, our strengths and our emotion. Furthermore, students were able to practise developing skills such as emotional resilience, coping skills and relationship skills. The facilitator offered a variety of ways to explore these areas which included imaging and art making, mask work, object work, drama and movement, discussion and reflection. In the final session, students were provided with the opportunity to reflect upon their experience. Students completed a further CD-RISC and an evaluation form.

Findings

The initial part of the findings presents the students' scores from the quantitative CD-RISC scale (Davidson and Connor, 2003). These measurements were taken prior to the start of the workshops and at the end of the final workshop. The CD-RISC scores demonstrate whether students' resilience improved, remained the same or decreased during the period of the short term intervention. The second part of the findings is focused upon the qualitative evaluation form which was completed at the end of the final workshop and reflected students' experience. Ten out of the original twelve students attended the final workshop and completed the evaluation form and psychological scale. The two students who were unable to attend the final session completed the overall evaluation only and this was sent via email to the facilitator.

Quantitative Findings

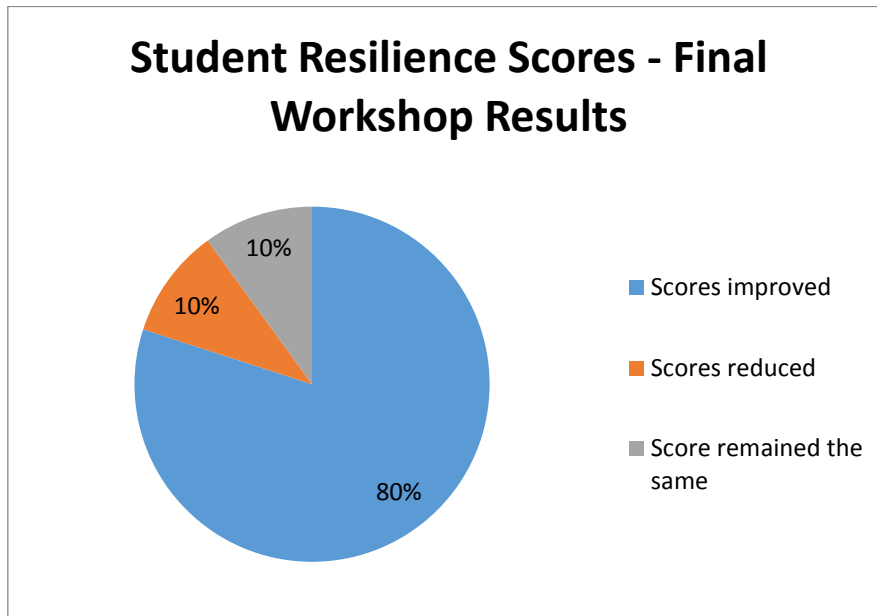


Fig. 1. Student resilience scores – final workshop results.

Fig. 1. demonstrates the overall results from the CD-RISC. The graph shows that there was 80% improvement in students' resilience scores after participating in the workshops. Resilience scores remained the same for 10% of students and reduced for a further 10% of the students who took part. Therefore, the data reveals that resilience scores improved for eight out of the ten students who remained engaged and attended the final workshop.

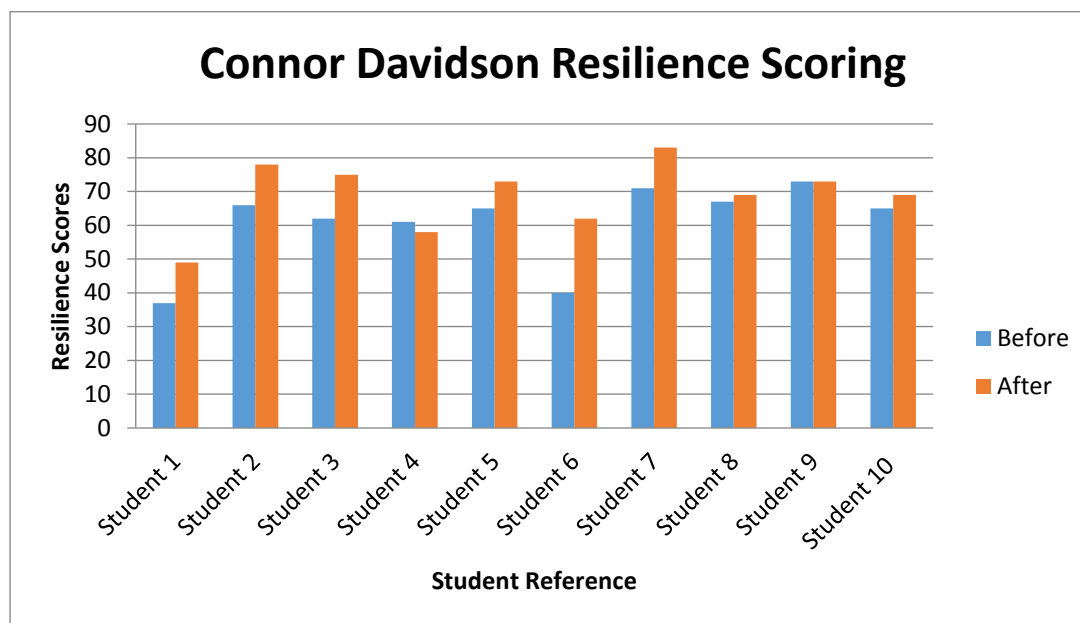


Fig. 2. Connor Davidson resilience scoring.

Fig. 2. shows the resilience scores completed prior to the start of workshops and at the end of the final workshop. Higher scores recorded in the CD-RISC reflect greater levels of resilience. Within the graph it is evident that 8 out of 10 students' resilience scores improved after the workshops intervention. This indicates that their personal resilience developed and increased during the course of this short term intervention. However, the graph also shows that one student had scores that remained the same and another student had scores that reduced over this period of time.

Qualitative Findings

Students also completed an overall evaluation form which provided qualitative data. All of the twelve students completed this form. The evaluation was adapted from the Dramatherapy evaluation tool of Steve Nash, Dramatherapist, (cited in Jennings, Cattnach, Mitchell, Chesner and Meldrum, 1994).

There were nine qualitative questions which explored different aspects of the process. The questions included:

- Describe a significant event during the sessions
- What would you have liked 'more of' during sessions?
- What would you have liked 'less of' during sessions?
- What would you choose to remain the same about the sessions?
- What advice would you give to someone else when considering the resilience workshops? Why?
- How satisfied were you with:
 - The venue
 - The time of sessions
 - The number of sessions
- Any other comments about your overall experience?

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

A thematic analysis took place using the qualitative data taken from the evaluation. This is a method for identifying reoccurring themes within a qualitative data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were collated and developed through immersing self into the data through reading and re reading. The themes found indicate a level of repeated response within the data. The analysis aims to explore the experiences of the students in the resilience workshops. Its purpose is not to interpret language or hidden meanings.

To note, when completing evaluations, some students were happy to use their initials whereas others took a pseudonym.

Table 1. Students highlighted discussion to be a useful part of the workshops.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract example
42%	<i>'Discussions/reflections as this was very useful to look back on what I had learned from the session'</i> (Student JF).

Students reflected on discussions that took place in the workshops. Some students identified this as something they would want to remain the same in sessions whereas; other students felt this was something they wanted "more of". Discussions appeared useful to inform student learning and a place in which "thoughts and feelings" (Student LK) could be explored.

Table 2. Students reported the concept of feelings that were expressed during the workshops.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
58%	<i>'It also gave me chance to think about my own feelings.'</i> <i>"It will really help you express your feelings and build your confidence up. It will help to evaluate how you feel'</i> (Student Anonymous A).

It appeared that the theme of feel/feelings reflected positive experiences that took place. These would incorporate awareness of self, expression of feelings and awareness of not being isolated:

'Recognising that people feel the same/similar'

(Student Anonymous E).

These comments were commonly found in the evaluation question that asked for the student to state a significant event. Furthermore, such comments were made within the question asking the

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

student to state what advice they would give to someone who may be considering engaging in the resilience workshops.

However, there were comments made in connection with this theme that demonstrated some difficult feelings were evoked in a student who participated in workshops.

'Sharing all the negative thoughts people had as sometimes I left the session feeling quite depressed'

(Student AT).

Table 3. Students used the term 'good' to describe various aspects of the workshops.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
66%	<p><i>'Was really good development'</i> (Student RC).</p> <p><i>'It was good to talk amongst a group and share experiences'</i> (Student Anonymous A).</p>

Within the evaluation students used the word 'good' to define different factors relating to the workshops. 'Good' was used to describe the content delivered to the more organisational factors such as the time of session. One student, in reference to the number of sessions, stated:

'Good - would be nice to have more but unsure what else would need to be covered'

(Student Anonymous E).

Table 4. Students used the term 'open' to describe various aspects of the workshops.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
66%	<p><i>'Body language workshops - really opened my awareness of how body language speaks even without you saying anything.'</i> (Student RC).</p> <p><i>'Be open minded you will learn more about yourself/acknowledgement that you would think'</i> (Student Anonymous E)</p>

These comments around being open and the opening of self-awareness were commonly found in the evaluation question that asked for the student to state a significant event. Furthermore, such

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

comments were made within the question asking the student to state what advice they would give to someone who may be considering engaging in the resilience workshops.

Table 5. Students recognised their ability to self-evaluate/reflect.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
42%	<i>'Evaluating myself against how resilient I think I am both at the beginning and the end, it was important as it shows how I've grown throughout the workshops'</i> (Student Anonymous H).

Some of the students commented on their ability to self-evaluate and reflect through the workshops. Students identified these qualities to be a significant part of their process and something they would wish to remain the same in sessions. When considering what advice they would give to someone else when considering the resilience workshops student anonymous A claimed:

'It will help to evaluate how you feel'

(Student anonymous A).

However, when identifying what they would like less of in sessions, one student commented:

'Less time on reflection in the earlier sessions - was difficult to do'

(Student RC).

Table 6. When evaluating the process, most students referred to the 'group' in a positive manner.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
42%	<i>'How we always had opportunities as a group to sit and vent and talk about why we were stressed'</i> (Student Anonymous C).

Students recognised group work as a significant event and something they would want to remain the same in sessions.

Interestingly, within this theme, a significant exercise that was identified within the sessions was one in which individuals were to create a group sculpt of resilience. A sculpt is a Dramatherapeutic technique in which an individual takes up a physical stance, such as a bodily gesture, to express what they want to say or represent (Andersen, Warren and Grainger, 2000).

'Making the sculptures as a group. We had to make sculptures as a group to represent what being resilient and not being resilient looks like'

HEWITT BUXTON THOMAS: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING: HOW CAN AN UNDERSTANDING OF SELF-EFFICACY AND EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE BE USED TO DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS IN INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION.

(Student Anonymous G).

Although, one student commented on feeling uncomfortable in a group at times and highlighted it to be something they would have liked less of in the sessions. This extract highlights that the individual may have only found certain activities, such as ‘performing’ in front of a group uncomfortable. Therefore, this implies that perhaps other group activities were comfortable to engage in.

‘Where I had to perform in front of the group as I sometimes feel uncomfortable’

(Student Anonymous C).

Table 7. Time.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
58%	<p><i>‘Was really good development having sessions spread out helped - able to have time out to work on what we’ve taken from sessions and put it into practice’</i></p> <p>(Student RC)</p>

The sessions were spread across the academic year in accordance to the B.Ed. programme commitments such as lectures and placement. The workshop sessions were held in the afternoon. Students commented on time of sessions and the time gap between each session.

‘I felt the time was an adequate amount’

(Student AT).

‘Great - a good time slot during the week’

(Student LK).

Table 8. Sharing and support.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
50%	<p><i>‘The sharing aspect was good as you felt supported and able to be empathic to other’</i></p> <p>(Student Anonymous B).</p> <p><i>‘There are many people surrounding each individual who can offer support’</i></p> <p>(Student AT).</p>

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Students identified that sharing with others in the group was a significant part of their workshop process. It was something students felt they would wish to remain the same. It was seen as useful to have an empathic and support network in place.

Despite this, there was one student who found sharing a difficult part of the sessions. “I would have liked less of sharing all the negative thoughts people had as sometimes I left the session feeling quite depressed, this mainly occurred though over the placement period where people did not have one to attend so this wasn’t always controllable.” (Student AT)

Table 9 – Students enjoyment of the workshops.

Percentage of comments based upon theme	Extract examples
33%	<p><i>‘I enjoyed the ability to take/leave something in the room. Release, calmer’</i></p> <p><i>‘I found the opposite I’ve enjoyed it’</i> (Student Anonymous E).</p>

A final theme identified that a selection of students stated they had enjoyed the sessions. This theme was found in the final evaluation question asking students if they had any other comments about the overall experience.

Discussion

Improving the self-efficacy of trainee teachers is essential in ensuring a resilient profession (Klassen et al 2014). The pilot project indicates that this can be supported by enabling significant reflection, self-evaluation and by encouraging self-awareness. Support, linked to social systems, is an aspect identified by some of the students when evaluating their progress during the workshops. This included the support of their peers within the workshops as well as the acknowledgment of support systems both inside and outside the University. This resulted in one student providing the following feedback in post session evaluations, “The sharing aspect was good as you felt supported and able to be empathic to others” (Extract taken from Student Anonymous B).

Hattie (2009) identifies in his meta-analysis that the impact of personality variables such as anxiety, locus of control and neuroticism on achievement is close to zero. However, self-efficacy, self-concept, aspects of motivation and persistence have greater links to achievement (Hattie 2009; Klassen et al, 2014). Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2013) suggest that anxiety can lower self-efficacy and therefore, the psychological state of an individual is important. Self-efficacy has been used to predict greater effort, persistence and optimism, with individuals being able to set challenging, yet attainable, goals and demonstrating a better ability to consider options in setting goals. A strong self-efficacy allows individuals to attribute success and failure to factors which can be controlled (Bandura 1977, 1997; Wang, Hall and Rahmi, 2015; Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013). Teachers’ self-efficacy is based on the capacity to manage instructional strategies, behaviour management and student engagement. Once teachers believe that they are able to control these factors their self-efficacy increases. Clearly, this is reflected in the responses from the students, as identified in the findings. This, in turn, leads to the use of more effective teaching strategies, innovative teaching methods, a focus on pupil collaboration and better academic performance by the pupils (Wang et al, 2015; Moè, Pazzaglia and Ronconi, 2010). Clearly, within the confines of this

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research, no conclusions can be drawn to substantiate these comments; that would be a longitudinal study, and not within the limitations of this exploration. However, a positive level of self-efficacy enables teachers to show a willingness to experiment with different pedagogies and resources; pursue a constant self-development as a practitioner; demonstrate effort and persistence in organisation and planning; show fairness in their attitude to others; demonstrate consistent enthusiasm and perseverance, as well as initiating fewer pupil referrals to other services. Student feedback had highlighted issues with some students leaving the sessions feeling stressed and depressed, as one participant commented, “sharing all the negative thoughts people had as sometimes I left the session feeling quite depressed” (Extract taken from Student AT). There is potential here to address such issues before the students leave the session, with the rapport between the student and the Dramatherapist being the key to the student acknowledging their own reactions and feeling able to disclose.

The findings of this study set out a variety of implications for teacher educators keen to support student self-efficacy. However, once self-efficacy beliefs have been formed, they are resistant to change (Bandura, 1997; Moè et al, 2010). Therefore, it would be imperative to address these issues early in their education, providing students with a more proactive and explicit response to their needs; such provision could be either in the format of compulsory sessions, or as in this research, that of voluntary intervention strategies.

However, it is important to recognise that it is not possible to create a learning environment where there are no challenges and in trying to achieve this, progression and development would be stifled. Challenges should be realistic, with short-term goals, thus reducing anxiety. Nevertheless, students should be aware that it is normal to have some anxiety, even when faced with challenges which are realistic. The individual needs to believe that success is the product of ability and hard work which is achievable if goals are realistic (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013). Verbal persuasion is seen as a fundamental aspect of self-efficacy and positive discussions allow development. However, criticism can also be effective in improving self-efficacy if it is used to motivate students to succeed with a little more effort (Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems, 2013). Indeed, students themselves recognised this need with one student commenting, “looking at how we could positively react to certain situations” (Extract taken from Student AT). With another student noting, “Learning and adapting to become a more positive person and why this helps” (Extract taken from Student Anonymous D)

Conclusions

Whilst we cannot draw conclusions in terms of the impact on teacher retention into their NQT year and beyond, the fact that the students who participated were willing volunteers and provided positive comments after the sessions regarding their experience of the workshops is indicative of them being able to recognise this need within themselves. Longer term studies into the impact of this work on professional development would be beneficial as well as further research into the impact for different target groups. It is intended, therefore, to repeat this therapeutic work and collate a wider database to demonstrate the effectiveness of this type of intervention in supporting a new way of learning for trainee teachers.

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