Becoming the Pioneers: A process drama to encourage writing

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Abstract

In search of a means to enable children to write more freely with motivation and engagement, I spent two weeks with a class using process drama based around the New Zealand Pioneers. O’Neill explains that “process drama is a method of teaching and learning that involves students in imaginary, unscripted, and spontaneous scenes…it exists through the interactions of students and teachers, and it is framed by curricular topics, teacher objectives, and students’ personal experiences” (O’Neill 1995).

This article reports an initial stage of a research project that examines the creation of process drama and writing experiences in one primary classroom in Canterbury. Process drama was used as a context for learning, and writing activities were incorporated both in and out of role throughout the experience. Initial findings suggest that there was a large increase in the engagement and motivation of students as well as moderate increases in the word count and features of writing that the students produced.

Introduction

Internationally there has been much interest in the impact of using drama as a motivator for writing (Bolton 1995, Heathcote 1995, McMaster 1998, Tarlington 1985, Wagner 1994). For example McNaughton (1997) examined whether or not drama gave a context and purpose for writing, and found that a positive student-teacher relationship could encourage children to make more of an effort in their work as students feel safer and more confident to contribute. She also suggested that when the students and teacher are involved in the same learning experience, understanding is clearer and therefore more meaningful to the students. Similarly, O’Neill (1995) found that the experience of drama is what engages students to learn. She reported that process drama in particular with its range of role taking and lack of pressured acting techniques allows students to feel more at ease. However, in New Zealand less attention has been focused on researching this area and its benefits are not widely advertised to schools and teachers.

Two recent studies that have focused on linking drama and writing in the New Zealand context are those of Marino and Greenwood. Marino (2012) found that drama clarified the confusion students sometimes felt in writing classes and gave them an authentic purpose for their writing. Greenwood (2011) examined an action-based intervention that incorporated a science fiction novel with a process drama to research inclusive education. Although the findings from both of these studies showed improvement on the performance of classroom literacy, further research is required to show the value of using drama to promote an improvement in motivation.
Study background

I am a primary teacher who has recently discovered the literature that advocates the use of process drama to teach literacy. I come to the research as generalist teacher who seeks to adapt the strategies of drama to my own classroom context. The class I worked with included 9 – 11 year olds of varying writing ability. Preliminary classroom assessment, using the schools’ writing progressions, showed 54% of the class were achieving below the expected level when it came to writing. My initial discussion with the class showed that many children enjoyed writing but found inspiration an issue. A large group also told me they did not enjoy writing at all. Yet it has been repeatedly argued that writing instruction is most effective when children are engaged and motivated in the writing process (for example Clay 1987; cited in Smith and Elley 1997). I worked on the basis that the incorporation of drama into a writing program would increase students’ enjoyment and motivation and therefore improve children’s skills. During two weeks in term one, I facilitated nine process drama and writing lessons with the class. We based it on the early New Zealand colonials in Christchurch and entitled the unit ’The New Zealand Pioneers’ which was a topic they were focusing on over that term. I used the following data sources to track the progress of students during the teaching:

- Daily observation of students
- Daily field notes detailing lessons and any changes that had occurred
- Daily writing samples from the students
- A questionnaire on the students’ views of writing taken in session two
- An interview with the classroom teacher prior to the research
- Interviews with selected students after the research
- Daily motivation charts, filled out by the students
- Daily journal entries written by the students

My initial interview with the classroom teacher provided me with background information on the students and after examining the children’s writing samples to track usage of punctuation, word and sentence count and the input of emotive and subject-specific vocabulary, I was able to identify their strengths and weaknesses. I could monitor motivation and engagement daily through my observation and the children’s feedback. The interview with children provided me with their further interpretation of the process drama session and how they felt it impacted upon their writing and enthusiasm for learning overall.

The New Zealand Pioneers

The following section gives a detailed account of the New Zealand Pioneers process drama that was utilised. Before teaching began, the children had the opportunity of questioning me about the teaching block, and there was excited anticipation at the thought of “doing drama”. The children all knew they were helping me with a study and so when I informed them that they would become junior researchers, providing data for my own research, there was an air of self importance. Literature suggests that informing children in any topic leads to a transparency that facilitates cooperation with the teacher and gives them ownership of the topic, resulting in a much stronger commitment to learning (Smith and Elley 1997).

Day One: A strong pre-text
The first session began with the introduction of a main character into our process drama. The class had not participated in many drama sessions prior to ‘The Pioneers’ and so some explanation was needed. I reminded them that anything we did was enabled through the magic of drama. We could go back in time, we could meet anyone we chose to and we could become passengers on one of the first four ships that brought colonists and emigrants to New Zealand. To enable students to participate fully in a drama they need to believe in the characters and the story enough to be able to work with them and their experiences while at the same time realising it is not real life. (Greenwood 2005). The students were engaged throughout our discussion and I found that the answer ‘through the magic of drama’ answered all of their questions easily.

Some dramas start with a strong pre-text that hooks the children into the drama. “In general terms, a pre-text is any text that contains the seeds of the text that will emerge through the drama” (Greenwood 2005). This is a moment that will grasp their curiosity encouraging them to ‘want’ to learn more about the proposed topic. My pre-text was in the form of artefacts. I had collected and made various items that looked to have come from the 1850s; which was when the Charlotte Jane, one of the first four ships carrying the pioneers, made her journey from Plymouth Sound, England to Lyttelton, New Zealand. These items included a lace handkerchief and ‘diamond’ brooch, a newspaper advertisement inviting emigrants to apply for passage, some diary entries, a Jamaican-looking doll and a range of different embroidered cloths. I informed the class that the items had all belonged to a passenger named Elsie. The children had an opportunity to look at each item in groups and discuss why Elsie might have thought these particular items to be so special. During the activity there was increasingly rich discussion about who Elsie might have been and why she might have travelled to New Zealand. The doll caused a lot of confusion as the other artefacts had looked like they belonged to a wealthy, English girl. However, a dirty, coloured doll did not match. When we re-grouped I said we were so lucky because through the ‘magic of drama’ we could meet Elsie! The class were given time to write questions they could ask Elsie to discover more about her. I found that this caused much excitement about the possibility of an actual visitor from the Charlotte Jane! In fact only one student questioned her age and suspected we might be meeting a great grandchild.

The next stage of the drama required me to assume the character of Elsie. This is a dramatic strategy called teacher-in-role which is a “powerful device for influencing the direction of the drama” (Greenwood 2005). This task enabled the students to question Elsie and find out more about her. Because they were doing the questioning, I was able to give them as much or as little information as I liked, therefore peaking their curiosity even further.

I had already told the students we would be meeting Elsie, so once regrouped I reminded them of the need to be respectful to visitors and that I would go and get her. I said “you will know who she is because she wears a colourful scarf”. At this I stood up, wrapped a scarf around my neck and sat back down again. A number of children looked confused, and one or two looked disappointed that their visitor was actually me! However a few realised quickly what we were doing and put their hands up with questions. As more questions were asked and answered the class became more enthusiastic. When Elsie said she “really must go”, they called goodbye and were disappointed they could not ask more questions. I wondered afterwards if I should have continued until the children ran out of questions to ask. However, I was so aware of a lack of time I felt the need to move on. After coming out of role I asked...
the children to reiterate what they had learnt and the results were fantastic. All were able to give me information on Elsie, the ship and where many of the artefacts had come from.

I asked the children to create a written character description of Elsie. For this they needed to write down all they had discovered about her through their questioning. My belief is that this is an important step in aiding their memories. The enthusiasm they gave this task was thrilling, and all children, even those that require writing support, were engaged in the task. I believe this shows the impact teacher-in-role can have to a lesson. It also shows the importance of a strong pretext. The children were motivated and engaged for the entire 90 minutes that I was with them, using inquiry, thinking, discussion and recording skills. As the session came to an end I introduced the task of writing in their personal journal.

**Day Two: Making directional decisions**

We began with the questionnaire which aimed to gather the children’s opinions of writing, many of whom found it an unexciting subject that was required at school. Then, after reviewing and reflecting on the previous day’s session, we split into two groups: the working class emigrants and the upper class colonists. Within those groups, they made their own families and assumed characters that lived in England in 1850. This took some discussion and teacher input, as I found the first time the children were reluctant to work in mixed groups. Eventually after talking about realism and being in role, most were able to do this. I did find as the week continued this changed dramatically and children were working together unreservedly.

Once in groups, a new character, Edward Wakefield, was introduced. We talked about who he was and the company he started with the aim of encouraging the English to take up residence in New Zealand. Some prior information like this was vital as the children had shown me at the beginning of the topic that they had extremely limited knowledge of anything to do with the pioneers. Edward Wakefield, being an actual historical figure, gave children a chance to learn true history as they had fun. I informed the children they would be meeting Edward in the roles they had chosen. They would need to think about their questions carefully because this was their chance to decide if they actually wanted to go to New Zealand. Again I employed a teacher-in-role strategy, this time wearing a hat to assume the character of Edward. At no point in my teacher-in-role did I change my voice, my actions or even the way I sat. I answered their questions as Edward would have, brushing off some with excuses and using strong exaggeration to promote New Zealand as an exciting opportunity. When I had finished it was interesting to hear the children’s thoughts on Edward; that he was sneaky but very convincing, and all of them chose to make the voyage to New Zealand.

Throughout the research I kept a reflective journal. Here I had noted that “I wish that here I had used the “decision alley” technique so that children could identify and debate reasons for and against colonising to New Zealand” (13.03.12).

A decision alley is a useful technique for exploring any kind of dilemma faced by a character. It provides an opportunity to analyse a decisive moment in greater detail (Drama Resource 2012). I noted that my own learning of how to facilitate a process drama was developing at the same time as the students’ knowledge of how to participate.
The writing task for this session was to create an advertisement using acquired information to encourage English residents to move to New Zealand. Figure one illustrates the process used to create this advertisement. Children were completely silent and focused as they wrote. Julian, who had shown dislike of writing in his questionnaire and previous lessons, was totally engaged during the task and began his advertisement with “Want to live a better life? Then come to New Zealand on a free pass” (13.03.12). This showed impact and incorporated some of the information that Edward had relayed, that those who would emigrate to work would get subsidised, if not free, passes on the ship.

Figure 1: Advertising for passage on 'The Charlotte Jane'

**Day Three: Using prompts**

This session began with the introduction of a new character, Henry, of whom the class were given no prior knowledge. Henry was a different class to Elsie and Edward which allowed the children a different point of view. Their questions were creative, for example: “why have you decided to travel so far from your family?” and the class soon learned a large amount about Henry and his reasons for being on the ship. Upon questioning after coming out of role, the majority of the students could relay this information easily, it was interesting to hear that they thought Henry had an Irish accent and that he was a much friendlier person than the other two characters, particularly because I had not changed anything about my manner or voice when I spoke to them as Henry; this was because once the children were engrossed in the drama I wanted to let their imaginations create his character. The class completed a character description of Henry and then spent some time in their family groups, out of role, discussing and confirming their names, ages, jobs and relationships. Here I began incorporating freeze frames into the drama, a technique that enables a moment from the drama to be frozen, thus allowing it to be examined more closely (O’Toole and Dunn 2002). I used freeze framing throughout the remainder of my time with the class and the children really enjoyed this strategy and showed huge improvement as time passed.
The children then ‘walked onto the ship’ in role, some trying hard to use expressions that would identify their character clearly. They then froze and the ‘audience’ had the opportunity to tap a character on the shoulder and question them about who they were or why they had decided to make the journey. As this was the first time some students had been in role, some found this task difficult, their minds going blank at the thought of giving an answer. Others were engaged straight away and able to tell us that their job had ended as a result of the industrial revolution and that they hoped for better opportunities farming in New Zealand. Upon reflection it seemed most children were pleased with their character; however in their journals others felt they needed to put more thought in next time.

I then began to use cue cards I had created prior to the drama. I had chosen actual events from the Charlotte Jane because I felt it vital to keep the children learning as much as possible. Interest in the topic had not wavered at all and the feedback I was reading in the class’s journals was positive and encouraging.

I gave two cue cards, one based in steerage and one in the cabin area. After discussion on the difference in lifestyle, the children created a freeze frame of what their particular family would have been doing at that time on the ship. The class was very enthusiastic and it was incredibly noisy with a lot of laughter was taking place. A number were in role as misbehaving children, some of the colonists were at a wedding where husbands were refusing to hold their wife’s hand for the dance. We stopped the drama here as I feel it vital that if something needs explanation all must come out of role to aid understanding.

I questioned what people would have been like in 1850. One student was able to tell me that children would have been ‘seen and not heard‘. This began a short discussion on how their characters would have actually been acting. When they had a second opportunity to create their freeze frames it was much more realistic and it was clear the children had a better understanding of life on board the ship through their role portrayal.

Their writing task for that day was a diary from the point of view of their own character, recapping their day on the ship. In figure two we can see the student has adopted the role of Claire Brown who was travelling in cabin class on the Charlotte Jane. This student shows excellent comprehension of the style of writing used during that time; through her use of voice. The whole class took less than a minute to begin writing and were all engaged in their task. When I stopped them after ten minutes, some moaned and asked for more time which was thrilling to hear. I informed them that we would be incorporating editing tomorrow so they would get some extra time then.
Day Four: Tweaking our work

After starting the following day with an editing lesson and giving the children time to review their diaries, we then spent some time working through how to improve our freeze frames. The class split into two halves, one as the ‘audience’ and then swapped over. They were to portray a scene where they had been on the Charlotte Jane for three days now and some of them were very sea sick. As they froze the audience analysed the scene before them; who was or was not realistic and why. After both groups had presented their scene we discussed the importance of freeze framing and what helps us portray appropriate emotion. Students recognised that character identification leads to a better understanding of their character’s experience and therefore a stronger belief in the drama.
I gave out another cue card which used the character of Elsie, and gave the children only a few minutes to form the scene portrayed. The students worked out of their family groups in this session, allowing them to work with a different set of people. The freeze frames were good, with convincing body language and facial expressions. I was pleased we had spent some time discussing the methods to get to this point as it showed a huge improvement on their original attempts.

The groups created two more freeze frames and I again used thought tapping to 'hear' what they were thinking in role. Some struggled with this to begin with, instead giving a description of what they were doing. However, as we spent more time on this technique the students showed strong improvement. After the second freeze frame, I asked them to imagine what might have happened exactly five minutes prior to the event they had just portrayed and to create this scene. We then repeated the activity showing what happened five minutes afterwards. This is an excellent way to tease out the story instead of just creating frozen moments. Here would have been a fantastic opportunity to use a vignette which is an improvised strategy which captures a moment moving from one scene to the next (Arts online 2012). This tool would have given a flow to the freeze frames showing them as a story rather than separate scenes.

Because we had created many scenes with the character Elsie I asked the children to write a diary entry detailing some of her experiences. The writing in figure 4 illustrates the student’s understanding of the situation and makes descriptive use of the senses. The writing was fluid and all students were engaged as they wrote independently. I noticed that towards the end some were also editing using the strategies we had discussed earlier. Julian had written six lines (a big achievement for him) and was looking extremely pleased with himself. After 15 minutes of writing I announced that Cook had nearly finished preparing the evening meal and they were all invited to the dining room. There were many groans as the majority of children wanted to keep writing. Upon reflection, if this opportunity was repeated I would certainly aim to allow more time for writing so the children could edit and improve their work with more detail.
Day Five: Practice makes perfect

The next day was focused on more improvisation activities. The class were back in their family groups and were able to spend some time role playing in their respective areas on board the Charlotte Jane. I wanted to give the children a chance to do this as I felt there had been a lot of structured work and, as Greenwood asserts, playing is a “very powerful accelerator of learning. Pleasure, or having fun, makes the task seem easier. It gives motivation. And it also seems related to a sense of ownership of the task” (Greenwood 2005). After some time I asked the groups to freeze and we took turns watching one group at a time. The students reflected on their improvisation, and some felt that their commitment to their characters had been a little weak and they needed to remember who they were. The act of observation and reflection is important and I frequently returned to this technique to allow the children to identify changes, instead of me telling them. In reflection students make discoveries about their learning and grow in understanding about the consequences and implications of their attitudes (Lambert and O’Neill 1990). This day’s written assignment was an addition to Elsie’s diary and the children informed me this was very easy to do since they had learnt so much information from the freeze frames.

Day Six: A larger focus on writing

I began the second week with a lesson on punctuation. I have found through my own teaching experience that even the most imaginative child writers can be lacking in this necessary skill. In this class there were only five children who were using punctuation at a satisfactory level, although they too could have extended themselves. The remainder of the class often forgot to use full stops and capital letters which, in New Zealand, we would expect proficiency of this by the second or third year of school. In fact the Ministry of Education’s Literacy Learning Progressions state that by the end of year three, students should be “proofreading their writing to check the spelling, grammar, and punctuation, drawing on their own developing knowledge about words and sentence construction and using classroom resources such as junior dictionaries” (Ministry of Education 2010). My original aim with this study was to include more work on punctuation and I was worried I had not attacked it sooner, with only two weeks left I was feeling the pressure of time. However this did give me a focus to take into the second data collection I completed with the class later in the year.

I began with quotation marks, as I wanted the children to incorporate these into a later session. They all knew how to use full stops and capital letters so I felt a lesson on this would be rather monotonous for them and result in loss of interest, also throughout the two weeks I was modelling correct use and checking this in their books. With any type of lesson “it is of prime importance that the teacher should write with the children. Teacher writing has multiple effects on children, primarily, they begin to see writing as an activity which everyone does” (Smith and Elley 1997). I noticed during this lesson that children were quite fidgety and so I have resolved to make punctuation a more interesting teaching area in the next study.

We spent more time on freeze frames, portraying life onboard to get the children back into their characters and focused on the drama. It was at this point I introduced a final character to
the class. I wanted them to get more of an idea of Elsie through her relationship with this character, and show that it was not just British people (although they were the majority) onboard. Wearing a coat this time I became Mr Abernathy, an American who owned a tea plantation in Jamaica. He had paid passage on the Charlotte Jane to look for gold in New Zealand. After this teacher-in-role I handed out a cue card for the children to create a series of freeze frames:

*Mr Abernathy has invited Elsie to tea with his daughter Florence.*

*Elsie has just arrived and the girls are greeting each other.*

The purpose of these freeze frames was to view events on the ship across all areas. The children had completed a lot of work in steerage and this gave them an opportunity to understand life as it was for the upper class. The children were incorporating not only mannerisms into their roles, but also voice which was interesting to see, as I had never done that as teacher-in-role, showing that “drama skills such as the successful adoption of a role will grow from being in the situation” (Lambert and O’Neill 1990). Many groups did this well, however I did notice one that had Mr Abernathy calling Elsie on a cell phone and serving fries–prompting a discussion on what had been invented in 1850. This of course is a natural learning opportunity in the classroom. I had assumed the children knew this, and most did, however we were able to thoroughly dissect as a group what had existed, therefore ensuring learning for the entire class. Unfortunately, because of this I completely ran out of time for a writing task.

**Day Seven: The Cockroach**

On the second day of week two we started with a hot-seating exercise to give the students an opportunity to review their characters and share them with the rest of the class. This is an exercise where players have a need to question or interrogate a character to find out more about them or why they might have behaved a certain way in their role (O’Toole and Dunn 2002). During a group discussion we spoke about what hot-seating is and how they could make it more realistic. Most were able to tell me that if they knew their character well enough they would be able to answer questions. We debated the use of accents. I asked them if I had used an accent with Elsie, Henry or Mr Abernathy with some children thinking ‘yes’, Henry had sounded Irish and Mr Abernathy was definitely American. However, after discussion they realised the use of accent was unnecessary, and that I had not changed my voice but instead, their imaginations had added an accent to the characters for them. It was here the children began to realise how caught up in the drama they had become.

After giving the children time in their family groups to review their assumed roles I called them back to a circle and set up a hot seat. A hot-seating activity means that only the person in the hot-seat is in character, the rest of the audience is not in role, they are simply asking questions. I was interested to see how many children were brave enough to take the hot seat, but was completely surprised that they were all incredibly enthusiastic and showed a strong knowledge of their characters. As the hot-seating progressed, questioning became stronger too. The class had enjoyed questioning me in role, but from watching their enthusiasm, the opportunity to inquire about their peers was a much more enthralling topic for them!
It was now that I introduced the Charlotte Jane newspaper, 'The Cockroach'. The newspaper assumedly was a way for the passengers onboard the ship to keep themselves amused during the passage to New Zealand. After discussion surrounding the purpose of 'The Cockroach' and why it was named as such the class began to brainstorm ideas for interesting articles. They decided some would be informative and some light-hearted because although a newspaper is a way of spreading current events, on the ship it was also the entertainment. The children brainstormed three events they thought would make interesting reading:

Mr Abernathy’s tea party

The wedding

The bad storm

Following this discussion there was a lesson on writing a transactional text in the form of an article. The beauty of running drama with writing, meant that now the children had an extensive knowledge of events that had happened on board, and the type of people travelling to New Zealand. It also meant that stopping at any point to give a lesson, like the above, is easy and runs naturally with the programme.

Using Edward de Bono’s (de Bono Thinking Systems 2012) white hat for noting only factual information we discussed the use of powerful headlines to grab attention, and the importance of the first paragraph containing as many of those facts as possible. We completed an example as a class and the children did some short activities to aid their understanding. I kept this lesson fairly succinct, time being a large factor, but also because the children were itching to write and I didn’t want them to lose their eagerness. Given the option of writing with a partner or by themselves, most children opted to work independently; I thought this to be a huge breakthrough in their attitudes and later discussion with the class teacher confirmed this.

The teacher walked in near the end so we shared a few articles with her. She was very impressed with what they had achieved and mentioned later “I was surprised that some of them had written so much after knowing nothing on the subject a few days ago” (21.03.12).

After time I stopped them and asked those that were keen to share their idea in a sentence. These were powerful and gave those that were still thinking some suggestions. Figure 5 illustrates a clear use of paragraphs and the understanding of how to set out a news article.
I briefly talked of the importance of paragraphs and many were able to tell me that a new idea begins a new paragraph. I was pleased to note that most children worked their article into paragraphs at this point. During my teaching I had only facilitated the ideas, never saying something ‘had’ to be done, instead giving hints about what could make it better. I found this to be an interesting tool with the students who enjoyed giving feedback and took on helpful hints enthusiastically. A part of this is teaching the children to use self-regulation strategies, enabling them to decide when an instruction is important. “Students’ beliefs that they can complete tasks on their own makes them feel they have more freedom of choice as writers” (Parr and Glasswell 2010). At this time in their personal journals students were writing that they felt their writing was improving because of the drama and they loved the fact that the ideas were flowing.

“I loved writing the newspaper.” (Julian – 21.03.12).

“Today I learnt heaps and I really loved the hot seats.” (Claudia – 21.03.12)

“Today we wrote a newspaper article, it was AWESOME! I wrote about a wedding that went wrong.” (Skye – 21.03.120

“For the last two weeks I think I have improved on my writing because my punctuation started getting better.” (Dianne – 21.03.12)

“For the last two weeks I think I have improved on my writing because my punctuation started getting better.” (Dianne – 21.03.12)

“Today was the best drama session I have ever had. I think I’ve improved in my writing because I have done more.” (Thomas – 21.03.12)

My aim was to make writing an enjoyable activity and change the children’s attitudes and so far this seemed to be working.
Day Eight: In the hot-seat again

I began the next session with hot-seating again as it had been so popular. The children were just as motivated to take the seat and were strong in their roles. There was a relieving teacher in the classroom that day and he mentioned later how surprised he was that the children knew so much about the topic and that they were able to confidently take the seat and answer questions. He even questioned me as to whether I had provided them with all the answers, which of course I had not. This was the eighth session I had spent with the class and in that time they had covered a vast range of material, yet I had spent only short periods of time ‘teaching’ them. Drama was an effective way for the children to inquire, discuss, and improvise a story based on actual events that I had fed to them through different characters and short discussion. The added benefit was that eight days into the unit the children were still thoroughly engaged and keen to learn more.

The class spent the remainder of the session on their articles, drafting, reworking and editing them. They then formed small groups and developed their own newspaper. For this task we had already discussed the roles involved in producing a newspaper, such as journalists, the editor, photographers. As the students had all written articles they were all in the position of journalists but also took on smaller roles to create their paper.

Day Nine: A series of frames

For the final session I wanted to end on a fun note. We began by forming three ‘photographs’. This was an informal way of reviewing what the children had learnt about the Charlotte Jane and her passengers. The children formed a group and created freeze frames as if posing for a photograph at the following three times:

Just before boarding the Charlotte Jane

Over a month into passage

Upon arrival at Lyttelton

The students improved as we progressed through each frame. Thought tapping was used as they posed for the photos and children spoke of fear, homesickness, boredom, and enjoyment. They were extremely realistic and showed strong knowledge of what they had learnt. We broke just before the third photo because as yet we had completed no work on the emigrant’s arrival in New Zealand. A discussion developed of the colonists feelings, not only seeing new land for the first time in ninety days, but also their fear of the unknown, accommodation, food, and the native people of which they knew little. Then we formed the last photograph, after which the children moved into their family groups to enact the arrival. There was much excitement at the prospect of new land and a small amount of fear at meeting the native Maori people. They then formed a scene to show what they would have been doing two hours after getting off the ship which became a series of frames showing time progress. At every opportunity I would stop them for discussion and refocus on historical events so the children stayed on task. The final task was to complete a diary entry for the 16th December 1850, detailing their character’s thoughts and the events that had occurred upon arrival.
This ended the data collection. I returned a week later and asked the children to complete one more written task; they were to write a narrative from Elsie’s point of view imagining that Elsie’s great, great grandchildren had found all her diary entries detailing her time on the Charlotte Jane.

Final thoughts

Overall the work produced in the project was very positive and gave me excellent insight into the abilities of the students. I found that process drama led the children into a different, imagined world, yet one where they were able to learn about their country’s history at the same time.

It provided a context in which the children could write freely in role and allowed me at the same time to teach the functions and forms of various writing genres. The sources of data I collected throughout the drama gave a number of outcomes:

- The observation of students and children’s personal journal entries showed a large increase in motivation and engagement throughout each lesson (see journal entries on day seven).
- Writing samples from the students gave an increase in the number of words written in a comparison between the beginning and end of the research. Through a tabulation analysis I found they also showed a moderate increase in the use of surface and deeper features.

At the end of the research I also received feedback from both the teacher and parents indicating that the students’ motivation for learning had improved.

*One of the best days I really enjoyed every minute of it. If only you could do drama and writing all day every day (Henrietta – 23.03.12).*

I approached this study as an emergent researcher following practitioner-based methods. Through focusing on the impact of a creative teaching approach I wished to extend my own learning as well as contribute to existing literature and provide teachers with more knowledge to develop better education for students through the integration of drama and writing. As a teacher I received training to enter the classroom in all curriculum areas as well as in-school experiences. However, I was not an expert in any one area and any subsequent training I wanted in the area of drama was up to me to pursue. In order to complete this research I have had to research and experience drama myself and learn with the students in order to extend my own knowledge. I discovered that using drama does increase understanding and therefore learning, and while motivating students it has also made teaching a far more enjoyable experience as the students are engaged in the task and interested in exploring more about a given topic.

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Biography
Adele Staples

**Adele Staples** is a primary trained teacher with ten years experience both in New Zealand and overseas. She is interested in the field of drama studies and has pursued further education in this area through a recent Masters of Education undertaken with the University of Canterbury. She lives with her husband and son in Christchurch. Email: mrs.staples@hotmail.co.nz