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TEACHER BELIEF SYSTEMS, ATTITUDES TOWARDS DRAMA AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Volume 1

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

EDWARD PETER ERRINGTON, B.Ed. (Hons)

Department of Education

1985

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ABSTRACT

A notable feature of drama in schools is that its purpose, practice and subsequent pupil outcomes are governed by the belief systems of teachers. Using a conceptual framework derived from belief systems theory, the aims of the present research were threefold.

The first aim was to determine the nature of the Teacher Belief Climate in which drama in schools was deemed to operate. A sample of 235 primary teachers from 42 schools was invited to respond to belief statements about teaching, learning, drama and interpersonal relationships concerning immediate colleagues and pupils. The sample also indicated their actual and ideal drama choices. It was found that the teachers agreed on most in a series of given statements, but they failed to agree on the kinds of drama best suited to achieving their common educational intentions. Moreover, most teachers felt unable to pursue their ideal drama choices.

The second aim of the research was to examine the relationship between the drama choices of teachers and the achievement of intended pupil outcomes. A sub-sample of 16 teachers was selected on the basis of professing to use either theatre or dramatic play; these particular options were found to be the most popular ideal drama choices of the total sample (n=235). It was found that certain members of

the sub-sample of teachers were using drama exercise instead of dramatic play. As a consequence of this observation the number of drama options under scrutiny was increased from 2 to 3, that is, theatre, dramatic play and drama exercise. Interviews with the sub-sample revealed that, in spite of professing to use different kinds of drama, all members chose the same facets of personal and social development as their intended pupil outcomes. A pretest-posttest design was employed in order to determine gains and losses of pupils on indices of intended outcomes over a set period of time. Of the three kinds of drama employed only teachers of dramatic play managed to produce any significant pupil gains on outcomes. Teachers of drama exercise promoted significant pupil losses on creativity measures and teachers of theatre generated neither gains nor losses on pupil outcomes.

The third aim of the work was to investigate the respective influence of beliefs, behaviour and belief-behaviour consistency of teachers on the outcomes of pupils. Responses to the Teacher Opinionnaire and classroom observations, made via the use of the Drama Inventory, were employed to group the sub-sample of 16 teachers according to their beliefs, behaviour and belief-behaviour consistency. Inspection of outcomes according to these teacher groupings showed that very few single elements of belief or behaviour were associated with significant pupil change. However,

specific combinations of belief-behaviour were found to be related to significant gains and losses of pupils. Combinations of teacher belief-behaviour associated with pupil success were more evident among teachers of dramatic play than those who used either of the other two options. In respect of pupil outcomes, it was more important for teachers of dramatic play to be consistent than teachers using other methods.

The research also analysed profile characteristics of highest and lowest achieving teachers on each pupil outcome except self-esteem (where no significant changes had been evidenced). Besides reflecting the group findings outlined above, highest achieving teachers were found to possess relatively open belief systems, whereas lowest achieving teachers behaved as if they had closed belief systems.

Overall, teachers who achieved their intended pupil outcomes had certain characteristics; they used dramatic play; they were consistent and they possessed relatively open belief systems. In contrast, teachers unable to meet their desired goals tended to employ theatre or drama exercise; they were often inconsistent and acted in accord with closed belief systems.

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