Background

- Marginalised or socially excluded young people disproportionately experience multiple deprivations: poverty, exclusion from school, and a lack of social supports.
- Their future trajectories are frequently associated with negative outcomes: academic underachievement, homelessness, substance misuse, and mental health problems.
- UK government’s Youth Matters (2000) Green paper led to increased interest in alternative ways of supporting socially excluded young people, including sport, the creative arts, and drama and theatre.
- Existing research suggests that drama and theatre might be associated with unique benefits that emphasise personal development.
- Studies carried out with typically developing and at-risk youths provide insights into psychological mechanisms underpinning the impact of drama and theatre activities.
- Outcomes include: more pro-social behaviours, positive identity changes, increases in self-belief, self-efficacy, personal agency, and motivation, as well as greater confidence in social skills.
- Additionally drama and theatre has been found to offer young people a space for self-expression, a place where young people can be themselves; and where playing roles offers an opportunity to experiment with other ways of being.
- But what psychological processes may underpin changes brought about by drama and theatre projects?

Aims and research questions

- To examine the impact of drama and theatre involvement on marginalised young people.
- To use in-depth, longitudinal, idiographic methods (studying the experiences of individuals) to capture change and continuity of experience to go beyond limited ‘snapshot’ of a cross-sectional study.
- To examine whether the narratives of young people support the psychological mechanisms identified by our model.
- To address the question of ‘how and why’ drama and theatre activities ‘work’.

Method

- Participants: Four young people involved in a drama and theatre project (3 female, 1 male; aged 15-21 years; British with mixed ethnicity: 2 mixed race, 2 black).
- 3 out of 4 participants had received permanent exclusions from school, and 2 out of 4 had histories of offending behaviour.
- Design: Qualitative longitudinal design to capture change and continuity of experience.
- Semi-structured interviews – 3 time points over 2.5 years.
- Interview questions tapped into: motivation for attending workshops; experience of involvement; relationships with theatre practitioners; character played in production.

Analysis

- Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of anonymised transcripts.
- IPA: Concerned with exploring and understanding the lived experience of each participant
- Themes and superordinate themes arrived at for each of the four cases separately within and across time points.
- Patterns identified across cases – first by compressing time points, then by tracking common and distinct themes across individuals and time points.

Results: Themes from analysis using IPA

Something for Myself

- Seeing myself as actively achieving
- Planning to achieve
- A sense of control
- A positive experience

A Nurturing Space

- Supportive environments
- Autonomy, competence, relatedness
- Motivation, as well as greater
determination
- Intrinsic enjoyment
- Enjoyment
- A sense of identity
- A sense of belonging
- A sense of others

The drama and theatre workshops – provided a nurturing space in which young people felt valued accepted, and a sense of belonging

Discussion: Relationships as foundation of self-development

The young people experienced self-belief and competence from positive feedback – appeared to result in a re-connection with intrinsic values and motivation

Playing characters based on past selves created an opportunity for young people to reflect on ways they had changed, and responded for past beliefs and experiences

Changing the Story

- Self-development possible because of theatre environment which supported a sense of agency and choice, belonging, and competence

Opportunity to experience something that was inherently enjoyable and rewarding resulted in new achievement experiences which are often not experienced by youth at risk

References

5. gluebucket, D. (2009). To provide a snapshot of the psychological mechanisms underpinning the impact of drama and theatre activities.
7. The drama and theatre workshops – provided a nurturing space in which young people felt valued accepted, and a sense of belonging

Discussion: Relationships as foundation of self-development

The young people experienced self-belief and competence from positive feedback – appeared to result in a re-connection with intrinsic values and motivation

Playing characters based on past selves created an opportunity for young people to reflect on ways they had changed, and responded for past beliefs and experiences

Changing the Story

- Self-development possible because of theatre environment which supported a sense of agency and choice, belonging, and competence

Opportunity to experience something that was inherently enjoyable and rewarding resulted in new achievement experiences which are often not experienced by youth at risk

References