

**Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama: Welsh as a second
language in the primary school setting**

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ABSTRACT

This paper tests a new method of teaching vocabulary to young second language learners through the medium of drama, specifically the effect of drama teaching techniques on vocabulary acquisition among primary school learners of Welsh. Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama (VAD) is based on principles derived from both process drama and communicative and task-based approaches to language teaching, and involves three phases: pre-drama, drama and post-drama activities. The research design involves two experimental and one control group, and a pre-post-retention test format on three measures of vocabulary acquisition: picture naming, sentence formulation and improvisation tasks. Results show a beneficial effect for VAD. The discussion section of the paper addresses the potential contribution of this approach to teaching second/foreign language vocabulary

KEYWORDS Vocabulary; drama; young learners; modern foreign languages; second language teaching; Welsh; primary education

Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a key challenge in the teaching and learning of second or foreign languages (L2). Language educators agree on its importance (Harmer 1991; Wilkins 1972) and research underlines the role of sufficient vocabulary input in early L2 success (Knight 1994; Konstantakis and Alexiou 2012; O'Dell 1997; Uberman 1998). Nevertheless, Schmitt (2008) reminds us that vocabulary is still neglected in mainstream language teaching, while grammatical structures and syntactic patterns seem to be overemphasised. Even modern teaching approaches like communicative language teaching (CLT; Richards 2006) continue to downplay vocabulary acquisition, meaning that vocabulary may be taught and evaluated unsystematically (Brumfit 1984; Milton 2013; Scholfield and Gitsaki 1996). Milton (2013: 75) notes that:

curriculum descriptions for B1 level foreign language exams in UK (e.g. Edexcel 2003, for French) routinely contain only minimal core vocabularies of around 1,000 words, levels of vocabulary which are incompatible with performance attainment at B1 level observed elsewhere in Europe.

In Greek schools too, vocabulary is dispreferred by teachers: 'grammar is more amenable to description by rules than vocabulary, and rules are seen as making teaching easier' (Konstantakis and Alexiou 2012: 36).

However, a comprehensive body of vocabulary acquisition research (Nation 2001, 2006, 2007, 2008) exists to inform vocabulary teaching. For example, learners of English L2 need to acquire some 2000 *high-frequency words* (West 1953), be aware of additional *low-frequency words* and perhaps also focus on *specialised vocabulary* (Nation 2001: 12–14). Nation and Chung (2009) suggest that attention to input, output and linguistic features, plus practice, are necessary for effective vocabulary acquisition. Common teaching and learning techniques for adults include teacher explanation, translation, studying word lists, using dictionaries, guessing from context during communicative activities and graded reading accompanied with vocabulary exercises (Nation 2001). These approaches do not always offer enough space for actual practice of the target vocabulary (Inal and Cakir 2014) and may be unsuitable for younger learners. For young L2 learners, common vocabulary teaching activities often involve course books, with picture/story cards and flashcards for presentation and practice, using mime and gesture, rhymes, songs, movement, and storytelling (Alexiou 1999; Milton and Vassiliu 2000). Another technique which fits with both research recommendations and common young learner practices is drama.

Drama, and particularly process drama (PD), has been shown to cultivate the desire to communicate in the target language and boost fluency, engagement and active participation with young beginners and intermediate learners (Kao and O'Neill 1998; Stinson 2008; Stinson and Freebody 2006). Drama, deriving from the classical Greek (*δρῶ/dro* = act), is a process in which the participants experience a situation by acting and participating both emotionally and physically. It fits with the principles of active learning and permits the integration of new subject matter into already existing knowledge (Even 2011), placing value

on play and collaborative learning, and facilitating student-centred learning (Nicholson 2009). Proponents claim drama 'can be used to teach virtually anything and teach across curricula' (Brennan 2008: 1), and is perhaps especially suited to second language teaching and learning as it involves the 'head, heart, hands and feet' (Schewe 1993: 7), thus serving cognitive, emotional, practical and kinesthetic needs (Even 2011). If vocabulary teaching is a neglected area of L2 teaching, and a challenging one to tackle with young learners, PD seems to offer practice opportunities which may provide a solution.

This paper starts with a review of the literature on the role of drama in language teaching, before setting out the research questions to be addressed, presenting the method used in the present study, followed by the results and discussion, then conclusions regarding the use of Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama (VAD) with young Welsh learners in the classroom context.

Background

The following review of research begins with vocabulary acquisition, before turning to drama in second language teaching and learning, followed by a more specific review of VAD, the approach used in the present study.

Vocabulary acquisition strategies

Before examining the specific question of drama for language teaching and learning, it is worth briefly outlining the strategies that have traditionally been used in teaching and learning vocabulary. Two types of vocabulary learning are often distinguished - incidental and intentional - although Hulstijn suggests that the *type* of learning is less relevant than other factors, arguing that it 'is the *quality* and *frequency* of the information processing activities (i.e. elaboration on aspects of a word's form and meaning, plus rehearsal) that determine retention of new information' (2001: 275; emphasis added). Intentional vocabulary learning activities include dictionary look-up, guessing from context (Huckin, Haynes and Coady 1993) and mnemonic devices such as the keyword method (Pressley, Levin, and Miller 1982; Pressley, Levin and Delaney 1982; Pressley et al. 1982). Gu (2003) notes that such strategies require metacognitive judgement, choice and deployment of cognitive strategies for vocabulary learning. Intentional vocabulary learning requires direct and systematic study (Read 2004) such as memorising lists of vocabulary items, a method that seems at odds with much of current communicative and task-based approaches. While the debate surrounding the importance of explicit attention to form has centred almost entirely on the acquisition of grammar, the general move away from grammar-based syllabuses has also pushed aside the systematic study of vocabulary in the language curriculum, relying instead on incidental learning processes (Doughty

and Williams 1998). Hulstijn (2001) argues that in the classroom context, incidental and intentional learning should be seen as complementary activities,

since both play a role in successful vocabulary acquisition (O'Dell 1997).

The classroom implications of this research emphasise: (a) opportunities for both incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, (b) active teaching approaches requiring learners to respond and participate in vocabulary activities and (c) the importance of recycling new vocabulary to fix lexical items in long-term memory and facilitate later retrieval. Nation (1990) claims 5–16 exposures to a new word are necessary for acquisition; Laufer (1997) shows a strong learning effect for vocabulary repetition, while Ellis (1997) and Schmitt (2000) make the case for variety of learning contexts and activity types. There is some evidence regarding learning outcomes associated with particular teaching methods. Lightbown, Meara, and Halter (1998) investigated teacher-centred activities and found that participants acquired few new words, since exposure was limited to high-frequency vocabulary. Tang and Nesi (2003) found a more flexible approach, using a range of activities, resulted in more incidental learning of lower-frequency words. Similarly, Nation found in direct teaching 'less than half of the taught words were learned' (2011: 536) but reported successful use of extensive reading with graded readers.

At the intersection of classroom research and teacher education, recent academic blogs also focus on the teaching implications of vocabulary research. From a review of vocabulary learning strategy research proposed by Gu (2003), for example, Jordan (2015) recommends the following activities:

(a) intentional vocabulary learning as a supplement to incidental learning while reading, (b) dictionary look-up and role rehearsal to boost vocabulary learning, (c) mnemonics for vocabulary retention and (d) organised learning of single items and lexical chunks. Whyte (2015) also examines learner and teacher roles in vocabulary acquisition, emphasising learner autonomy and strategy training.

At this point, having examined L2 vocabulary acquisition strategies in general, we turn to examine the potential of drama as a strategy for L2 vocabulary acquisition.

Drama as a strategy for second language acquisition

Proponents of drama in second language learning claim it develops motivation, enthusiasm and confidence, encourages a safe atmosphere in the classroom, and can lead to a more balanced distribution of power among classroom participants (Brown 1994; Stinson 2008). Drama may also have the potential to improve both the clarity and creativity of communication of verbal and nonverbal ideas, encourage learners' active involvement and collaborative talk, and thus help develop and consolidate learning, improving fluency as well as meeting broader educational goals (Eccles 1989).

Among various drama techniques used in teaching, PD (O'Neill 1995) stands out as closest to the kinds of spontaneous or unplanned interactions thought to drive language acquisition and thus emphasised since the 1970s in CLT and, since the 1990s, in related task-based language teaching (TBLT; Nunan 2004) approaches. Unlike short-term, exercise-based drama games such as role-plays, scripted scenes and performances to an audience (O'Neill and Lambert 1982), PD emphasises the creation of a distinct 'dramatic world' shaped both by teachers and students to explore a particular situation, solve an issue or deal with

particular theme (O'Neill 1995). In PD learners can write their own play in a process whereby 'the narrative and tensions of their drama unfold in time and space and through action, reaction and interaction' (Bowell and Heap 2013: 6). PD is intended not for a separate audience but for the benefit of the participants themselves (Bowell and Heap 2001). It involves 'all the students all the time ... [with] collaboratively co-created texts, which draw on the lived experiences of the participants to add veracity to the dramatic text' (Stinson and Freebody 2006: 29). PD promotes experiential learning (Pugh and Girod 2007; Spolin 1999) and can improve cognitive and affective development through the inclusion of a fictional dimension (Courtney 1993).

In the L2 classroom, drama can support teaching of the culture of the target language to engage learners holistically with the environment of the language beyond the narrow borders of grammar, spelling and punctuation (Desiatova 2009). It can be used for L2 practice via physical movement (Alber and Foil 2003), since, for some, words are better understood when children physically act them out (Stewing and Buege 1994 cited in: Demircioglu 2010: 440). Dramatic story-telling enhances intrinsic motivation by allowing learners to tell their own stories (Cox 1988; Moffett and Wagner 1976; Ross and Roe 1977; Wood and Algozzine 1994), provides an important source of vocabulary (Wray and Medwell 1991), allows activities involving all four language skills and improves young learners' concentration (Kirsch 2008). Chang and Winston (2012) used drama to address the variety of pupils' English learning backgrounds in a Taiwanese primary school and found advantages in terms of emotional and physical engagement, as well as spontaneous, interactive target language use through play. Against this background of research in vocabulary teaching and learning, and the specific role of PD, a new approach to drama for vocabulary acquisition among young L2 learners is proposed: VAD.

Vocabulary Acquisition via Drama

VAD aims to bring together the use of drama both to engage young learners and to provide targeted vocabulary learning opportunities. It uses elements of drama teaching including:

- imaginary settings and/or contrived circumstances, as a safe yet stimulating environment for experimentation;
- collaboration and team-work in play as a context for communicative language use, and
- frequent practice opportunities to allow repeated use of targeted lexical items.

VAD is designed to be applied in a targeted manner in conjunction with CLT and TBLT approaches for the specific purpose of vocabulary teaching in a given content for a specific duration and with clearly circumscribed objectives. VAD therefore combines (a) the emphasis on interaction associated with CLT approaches, with (b) a focus on non-linguistic outcomes which is characteristic of TBLT, and (c) the imaginative play and rehearsal associated with PD.

Play is the core activity of VAD, which follows the principles of PD to involve all learners in using the target vocabulary while focusing on the dramatic goals. Younger learners play drama games, while older pupils can benefit from image theatre or forum theatre techniques (Boal 2000). VAD teaching involves three stages: pre-drama, drama and post-drama, mirroring the three phases of a drama lesson. In *pre-drama*, the teacher begins with a warm-up activity including the first presentation of the target. The new words are presented in context, focusing on pronunciation (phonemes and rhythm) and relying on props and musical sounds to support comprehension. In *drama*, the teacher presents the target vocabulary and the learners are invited to play, dance, draw, make guesses, and use target items for both intentional and incidental learning. The learners respond to the dramatic situation through improvisation or acting out a story narrated by the teacher, focusing on the target vocabulary. In *post-drama*, the closing activities may involve interactive whiteboards and online applications, thus integrating technology with drama to provide a context for recycling and repetition of the target language items to facilitate retention and subsequent retrieval (Spolin 1999; Stanislavski and Benedetti 2010).

For example, in the pre-drama activity 'run your own business', groups of learners designed a poster menu for a local café using new vocabulary. The drama activity involved acting out short scenes with the help of props. These activities promoted the development of research skills (looking up words and expressions in dictionaries and online for the poster), writing skills (practising punctuation and spelling) but placed the main emphasis on speaking skills (improvised and spontaneous use of the target language) through PD. The structure, objectives and props for all three activities were included in a handbook that was used by teachers as a manual when implementing VAD in the present study.

A series of VAD lessons were developed along these lines for teaching Welsh vocabulary to L2 primary school learners and a small-scale research study was undertaken to answer the following research question: what is the impact of VAD activities on vocabulary learning in young classroom L2 learners of Welsh? In the next section we outline the method used in our study to implement VAD.

Method

The research design reflects the specificities of the Welsh education system where (a) primary teachers are responsible for teaching the full range of curricular subjects and (b) Welsh is a required subject, given its status as a national language in Wales. The vast majority of primary schools in Wales are English-medium where all teachers are required to teach Welsh as a second language. The majority of the population do not speak Welsh and the primary teaching profession reflects this (Beauchamp and Hillier 2014); in the area where this study took place Welsh is a heritage language for a minority of pupils, but a second language for the majority.

In the study two teachers (T1 and T2) worked with their own Y5 classes (E1 and E2, aged 9–10), using the VAD approach to teach vocabulary in line with the school scheme. The following year T1 taught the same vocabulary content to her new Y5 class, control group (C), without using the VAD approach.

Instead, T1 implemented mainstream teaching methods to teach the target vocabulary to the control group, generally using slide presentations on the interactive whiteboard to improve students' oracy, reading and writing. Each class was taught a target vocabulary set of 21 words and 3 expressions of like/dislike from the school curriculum on the topic of food, in five lessons over a period of approximately one month. The learners in experimental groups E1 and E2 used the target words in various drama contexts, such as drama games (e.g. dance with props), dramatised settings (e.g. supermarket scene), film-making (e.g. online video clip creation using iPads), while the control group C learned the same words through course book activities and class interactions alone.

This research design allows the comparison of the experimental groups using learning procedures based on the principles of VAD (interaction, discussion, creation, imagination, personalisation and recycling) with a control group using traditional methods. Following established protocols in educational research 'variables defining one or more "causes" [were] manipulated in a systematic fashion in order to discern "effects" on other variables' (Ross 2005: 3), with all pupils tested in the same manner (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2011). The participants over the two-year period were 63 Welsh L2 learners, 21 in each of three intact Year 5 classes in the same primary school in Wales. Participation in the study was voluntary and informed consent was gained from all participants. All pupils attended every VAD lesson and took all pre-, post- and retention tests designed by a member of the research team. These evaluation results were not used for any other assessment purposes. Both class teachers were native speakers of English in their mid-40s, with similar teaching qualifications and experience in mainstream primary education. Neither had experience in teaching with VAD prior to the project.

To assess the impact of VAD, a pre-test was administered to all pupils to check prior knowledge of the target vocabulary and a post-test was given by the same member of the research team immediately after the final lesson, with a retention test three weeks later. Pre-, post- and retention test formats were identical for all classes. The test had three parts: (a) a production task where participants named as many flashcard pictures as possible from a total of 21 vocabulary items; (b) a second production task where participants used the flashcard vocabulary to produce statements expressing like/ dislike and (c) a drama-based evaluation where participants improvised short scenes around a lunch invitation scenario using a combination of words and phrases from (a) and (b). All tests were recorded for analysis. After the tests each child in the experimental classes completed a very short written evaluation and discussed this with a researcher to provide additional qualitative data.

Analysis and results

In this section we consider the three parts of the test in turn.

Table 1. Flashcard vocabulary picture naming scores for three classes on three tests.

Groups	Pre-test (21)	Post-test (21)	Retention test (21)
Class E1 $N = 21$	4.15	17.7	18.8
Class E2 $N = 21$	4.10	17.3	18.0
Class C $N = 21$	4.10	14.1	13.9

Production task: picture naming

Table 1 shows average vocabulary recognition scores in naming picture flashcards without accompanying text in pre-, post- and retention tests. A mean score is given for each class of 21 learners. The figures in Table 1 demonstrate first that the three groups had equivalent knowledge of the target vocabulary items prior to the start of the intervention, and that this knowledge was limited: on average, learners recognised just four target words. After the intervention, the post-test classes E1 and E2 outperformed control class C in both the post-test and the retention test, with a slightly larger gap in retention test scores. To check for statistical significance we conducted one-way ANOVAs for each group separately. All three groups demonstrated a significant effect of phase (C: $F(2,60) = 145.37, p < .001$; E1: $F(2,60) = 323.92, p < .001$; E2: $F(2,60) = 88.17, p < .001$). Subsequent Bonferroni tests revealed that the post-test and the retention test scores were higher in comparison to the pre-test for both the control and the experimental groups (pre-test vs. post-test, $p < .001$; pre-test vs. retention, $p < .001$ for all groups). There were non-significant differences between the post-test and retention test phase for each group. To find out whether the three groups differed within each phase, we performed paired-samples t -tests between the groups. In the pre-test phase, there were no statistically significant differences between the three groups. For the post-test phase, however, both experimental groups scored significantly higher than the control (E1 vs. C: $t(20) = 8.93, p < .001$; E2 vs. C: $t(20) = 2.34, p = .03$). The two experimental groups performed comparably (E1 vs. E2, $t(20) = .358, p = .724$). The same pattern applied for the retention phase. The two experimental groups performed slightly better than the control group (E1 vs. C: $t(20) = 7.58, p < .001$; E2 vs. C: $t(20) = 4.09, p = .001$ but the differences did not reach statistical significance (E1 vs. E2, $t(20) = .947, p = .355$).

The statistical tests thus confirm comparable (low) levels of vocabulary knowledge in all three classes prior to the intervention. After teaching, all classes improved, but both experimental groups outperformed the control group both on the post-test and retention test, suggesting that VAD helps learners retain more target vocabulary longer, at least by this measure.

Production task: expressing preferences using target words

Scores for the second test, a production task, are presented in Tables 2–4. Participants attempted to use the target words in three sentences: *Dw in hoffi x*

(*I like x*); *Mae'n well* “*da fi ... (I prefer ... to ...)* and *Hoffwn i ... (I would like x)*. Learner utterances were scored holistically on a three-point scale: ‘very good’ indicated a complete sentence with target-like use of grammar and vocabulary, ‘good’ was used for incomplete sentences and/or grammatical or lexical errors, and ‘poor’ meant very incomplete utterances and/or use of English instead of Welsh. Given that the criteria were clearly defined (with consequently limited margin for error) and the sample was small, the results reported below were scored by a single researcher, an experienced teacher. In Table 2 percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number, and scores show that prior to the intervention, less than half the learners in all three classes were able to use the first sentence frame productively, while almost none could use the other two.

Table 3 show scores on the same task administered after the intervention. As in the pre-test, all classes scored highest on the first sentence, ‘*I like x.*’ Scores on the second sentence were similar for all classes; it was beyond the reach of most learners. On the third sentence, however, 84–85% of the learners in each experimental condition were able to produce a good or very good model, compared with only 69% of the control group.

Table 2. Sentence formulation scores for three classes on pre-test.

	I like x			I prefer x to y			I would like to have x		
	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control
Very good	30%	28%	29%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%
Good	15%	14%	17%	5%	4%	3%	10%	8%	12%
Poor	55%	58%	54%	95%	96%	97%	90%	90%	87%

Table 3. Sentence formulation scores for three classes on post-test.

	I like x			I prefer x to y			I would like to have x		
	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control
Very good	93%	90%	80%	23%	20%	19%	62%	60%	50%
Good	0%	2%	2%	15%	13%	10%	23%	24%	19%
Poor	7%	8%	18%	62%	67%	71%	15%	16%	31%

Table 4. Sentence formulation scores for three classes on retention test.

	Phrase 1			Phrase 2			Phrase 3		
	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control
Very good –	85%	84%	72%	5%	6%	10%	80%	78%	68%
Good –	0%	1%	4%	75%	80%	66%	5%	9%	7%
poor	15%	15%	24%	20%	14%	24%	15%	13%	25%

The figures in Table 4 demonstrate scores for all three classes on the same task on the retention test. This test was conducted two weeks after the post-test, learners having been asked not to revise or study the target vocabulary. This table shows a slight, but consistent, advantage for experimental classes over the control class for each phrase assessed as very good or good (80–87% vs. 75–76%).

Production task: improvisation task

The third measure of vocabulary acquisition was a drama-based evaluation where participants improvised short scenes around a lunch invitation scenario using a combination of words and phrases from the earlier tests. Learners were asked to improvise a short scene inviting their friend for lunch, explaining their food preferences and deciding what to eat together. They were asked to use as many as possible of the 21 words and the three expressions they had been taught, as naturally as they could. The goal of this activity was not to assess pupils' drama skills but to evaluate vocabulary acquisition. As in previous tests, this task was video-recorded and then scored holistically on a three-point scale, plus two types of task avoidance. 'Very good' indicated confident communication with fluency, spontaneity and some initiative

Table 5. Improvisation formulation scores for three classes on pre, post and retention test.

	Pre-test			Post-test			Retention test		
	E1	E2	Control	E 1	E2	Control	E1	E2	Control
Very good	0%	0%	0%	40%	0%	0%	62%	0%	0%
Good	0%	0%	0%	22 %	57%	0%	33%	48%	0%
Poor	42%	10%	19%	33%	38%	53%	5%	38%	57%
<i>English</i>	48%	90%	71%	5%	0%	33%	0%	0%	29%
<i>No production</i>	10%	0%	10%	0%	5%	14%	0%	14%	14%

taken by learners. 'Good' indicated more hesitant communication, with limited use of the target vocabulary and the taught expressions. 'Poor' indicated very

incomplete and inaccurate communication, and the remaining categories were used to classify two types of task avoidance: using English or not performing the task. The results for all three groups in the three tests are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that none of the learners were able to perform this task to good or very good standard prior to intervention: all three groups avoided the task or did poorly. After the intervention, however, the experimental groups outperformed the control group: E1 and E2 learners performed good or very good role-plays in 66% and 57% of cases, respectively, at post-test, while none of the control group could do so. For the retention test, the combined figures are 95% and 48% good or very good for E1 and E2, and 0% for C.

Pupil feedback and qualitative evaluation

Individual learner feedback for the experimental groups was obtained by a short questionnaire where learners were asked to identify the VAD activities they enjoyed most and least. The vast majority of the 42 pupils who participated in the experimental groups claimed that they enjoyed most of the activities, with the role-play activities ('shopping' and 'lunch with my friends and the teacher') appearing the most popular. Also 41 of 42 participants claimed to appreciate the five lessons with statements such as 'extremely enjoyable', 'cool' and 'helpful' for their learning. Many claimed that acting out short scenes in Welsh was a fun experience that they had never had before.

Summary of results

The results presented in this section support a number of conclusions. We found significant differences between the scores of the experimental groups and the control group on three measures of vocabulary acquisition in both post- and retention tests, suggesting that VAD as a method helps learners retain vocabulary and retrieve it for productive use more effectively than traditional techniques. The learners in the experimental groups using VAD teaching techniques outperformed the control group in terms of vocabulary retrieval (naming pictures), controlled production (using vocabulary in different sentence frames) and free production (improvisation or role-play activity). On the vocabulary retrieval task (Table 1) learners in the experimental group could name 17/21 pictures, compared with only 14 for the control group. In controlled production (Tables 2–4) the experimental learners also outperformed the control group, with some four out of five VAD learners able to produce good or very good utterances using target vocabulary in target structures, compared with only two out of three learners in the control group on the post-test and three out of four on the retention test. Finally, in the open-ended role-play task, only the VAD groups were able to perform successfully. None of the control group was able to offer good or very good performances, while between half and almost all learners in the VAD groups could do so. Implications are discussed in the final section of the paper.

Discussion

This small-scale research project was premised on the notion that vocabulary acquisition is a key, but neglected challenge in L2 teaching and learning, especially with younger learners (Milton 2013). It explored the potential of applying drama techniques to L2 vocabulary teaching, although given the small scale of the project, we need to carefully consider the validity and reliability of the empirical results presented above before discussing some tentative conclusions. The results did show an advantage to the experimental groups, suggesting that VAD techniques are effective for L2 vocabulary acquisition with young beginners. If follow-up studies confirm our findings (and in particular rule out a novelty effect), what explanations might be offered for the efficacy of this approach?

As noted in the background section, vocabulary acquisition is an area where research findings are both relatively well established and yet poorly applied. As Nation (2011: 532) notes, 'teachers do not think that vocabulary learning needs to be planned, and if it does the course book will take care of that. Usually, the course book does not'. L2 vocabulary acquisition research suggests that learning new words in a second language requires a variety of types of exposure to L2 forms and opportunities for production and practice, including input, output, attention to form and practice, both in contexts where learning is intentional and in others where incidental learning may take place (Nation and Chung 2009). As implemented in the current study, VAD allows teachers to address a number of these requirements: learners receive contextualised input in pre-drama activities, are encouraged to produce output and reflect on their production in a safe context in drama and post-drama tasks, and have built-in opportunities for practice as they rehearse dramatic performances. VAD shares these advantages with more established communicative and task-oriented language teaching approaches, increasing our confidence in this explanation for its apparent effectiveness.

The responses from learners in this study seem to suggest the drama activities created an emotional and physical engagement, as noted by Chang and Wilson (2012). The fact that this was common to two different teachers suggests that the approach is not reliant on the teacher, making the results more valid and reliable. The teachers of the two experimental groups, both non-specialist teachers of Welsh, were provided with exactly the same resources, guidance and support. T1, however, reported that she enjoyed teaching though VAD and appreciated the playful dimensions of these lessons, while T2 favoured more structured lessons and expressed some reservations about VAD teaching. As a result of these preferences and teaching styles, the teachers delivered VAD differently to their classes, although both followed the same structure and sequence of activities. T1 took part in drama activities herself, focusing on learner enjoyment and encouraging experimentation, while T2 read instructions from the handbook, corrected language mistakes during activities, and maintained a much quieter, more controlled classroom atmosphere. Nevertheless, even the teacher who expressed reservations was able to implement the strategy resulting in learning gains, suggesting that the structure provided by the handbook and the pre-drama, drama and post-drama activities could produce similar results with

other teachers.

This finding supports previous work in other areas of the primary school curriculum, such as music, where primary school teachers are also non-specialists and the use of structured activities which support, but do not replace the teacher have also been shown to be effective (Beauchamp 1997a, 1997b). While we must exercise caution in the interpretation of the findings, given that this initial study only used two teachers, further research in a larger-scale study in different schools appears worthwhile. This study also suggests that there are potential benefits for pupils in using VAD in addition to vocabulary gains. In every VAD session pupils were encouraged to listen to each other's ideas and views and to take turns, building their self-esteem and confidence, and engaging with the values of drama (sharing, playing, imagining in a sheltered environment) as a propitious context for L2 acquisition and broader educational objectives.

This paper suggests that VAD has potential as a flexible teaching tool which can contribute positively to young learners' second or foreign language vocabulary acquisition. Our findings suggest it is suited to non-specialist teachers, allowing them to engage young learners in activities they find fun and motivating, but also support vocabulary acquisition. While the study is small-scale, with resultant limitations, this research suggests that VAD has potential to support L2 learning and therefore merits further investigation.

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