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Child agency and therapy in primary school

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ABSTRACT



The article reports on, and analyses, qualitative research involving children's therapy in two primary school contexts in England. It aims to explore the potentials of how agency as a concept can contribute to a challenge to existing theory, research and ways of working concerning therapy in primary school contexts. The article addresses how this challenge can be theorised: drawing on a critical review of how the fields of health, therapy, education and child rights connect to concepts of agency. Themes within this review include different disciplinary paradigms of childhood; how concepts of agency relate to those of child rights and voice; how a field such as therapy, created around concepts of welfare, can shift to acknowledge the presence of a child rights framework; and the complexities of child agency in therapy within primary school contexts. Data are included from the authors' research projects that access children's views of their therapy and that engages with them through a questionnaire, a member checking group and as co-researchers into their experiences of therapy. The analysis of the data reveals the challenges, potentials and advantages of recognising and listening to children as 'active agents' and 'experts' in relation to their therapy.

KEYWORDS

Agency; voice; child rights; therapy; dramatherapy; arts therapy

Introduction

This article responds to the absence of knowledge of children's views on their therapy in primary school contexts. A review of the literature identifies this deficit, alongside a developing acknowledgement of a need to engage with children and young people about their experiences of their therapy in schools. Our analysis considers how this absence can be understood, using an interdisciplinary theoretical lens drawing on concepts of rights, agency and voice from the fields of children's rights and the new sociology of childhood to critique arts therapy literature and research. The critique illustrates how these concepts can be used both to understand the *absence* of child voice and agency in the literature but also to theorise a rationale for the *presence* of child views as a new dimension to arts therapy literature and to create a new agenda for research and for research-informed practice for arts therapy in schools. The literature review identifies the advantages and challenges of this area, and also of the need for further research concerning *how* to create and to *respond* to the knowledge gained by such *presence*. Our response is illustrated in the presentation and analysis of extracts from two dramatherapy research projects. These are chosen to illuminate different perspectives in relation to accessing children's views of their therapy.

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The projects focus upon the particular contexts of therapists accessing feedback from child dramatherapy clients in primary schools and analyses data from two research projects that use qualitative methodologies, involving different data collection methods. One uses a questionnaire for child clients, accompanied by member checking and the second involves child clients as co-researchers using participatory arts-based methods. The analysis of the data will illustrate the uses of an interdisciplinary lens drawing on concepts of agency, children's rights and drama therapy theory to understand the knowledge gained by using these methods. This includes an understanding of why access and response to children's views is *important* and also of *the nature and impact* of methods that access their views. Part of this concerns insight into how children are making meaning within these processes. Another aspect involves analysis of what the data shows about the nature of agency in the particular context of dramatherapy with children in schools.

Literature review

An interdisciplinary lens: agency, rights, voice, arts therapies

This review explores concepts of agency and voice and how these relate to child rights. It then considers the potentials of these concepts to critique how children are theoretically positioned and treated within children's services, particularly in relation to arts therapy, specifically dramatherapy, in schools. A gap in knowledge is identified, related to research into child views of dramatherapy.

Agency problematised

Agency has been defined by Bandura as 'intentionally to produce certain effects by one's actions' (2017, 130). Montreuil and Carnevale's (2015) literature review of agency in the contexts of child health argues that the meaning of agency has changed, and is changing, over time and in relation to different disciplinary contexts. They note a shift from the 1980s where it was framed as an 'ability' that children could develop, to recent uses where it tends to be understood as the capacity of children to influence their own and others' health-care needs. Recent debates challenge such concepts of agency as an individual 'attribute', arguing for the importance of conceiving it as relational and as interdependent (Archard and Uniacke 2020; Cockburn 2013; Esser et al. 2016; Hanson 2016; Polvere 2014). Hanson, for example, argues that 'agency is not a quality a person possesses or not, but materialises in decentralised practices in which children participate' (2016, 474). A tendency in the literature towards individualising agency is seen as problematic in relation to 'ideological positions on the absence of children's agency', as there is a need to contextualise it within 'relationship' (Esser et al. 2016, 274). Esser et al. see this emphasis on individual attribute as creating a danger in that children and their relationship to agency becomes decontextualised: 'a de-historicised, de-socialised, individual-centred idea ... a human capability' (2016, 6). Cockburn (2013) and Polvere (2014) parallel this, arguing that many concepts of agency are modelled on an 'autonomous acting subject' (Cockburn 2013, 14). They problematise this conceptualisation, as it excludes key issues related to *connection*: 'all people, including adults, are interlinked, interdependent and reliant on others' and they argue for a conception of agency that must 'therefore not denigrate dependency and the need for care, and thus the vulnerability of humans and children' (Polvere 2014, 8–9). This leads Polvere to 'locate agency in social relations and interdependency instead of independence and autonomy' (2014, 9). Esser et al.'s (2016) critique of the literature on agency also foregrounds agency and interdependence, but from a different perspective: arguing that in considering agency in relation to generational relationships the concept featured 'generally as a matter of resistance on the part of children, whose agency was restricted by adults and institutions' (12). They position agency as interactional and something that does not simply 'occur' by chance, but that can be enabled: arguing for a need in the literature and in research to engage 'not just whether institutions restrict agency, but also how institutions of childhood and children '(co-)produce agency' (2016, 12). Our understanding of the nature of our research draws on these

dimensions of conceptualising agency in the context of dramatherapy in primary schools: of situating it as relational and concerning connection, rather than as an individually possessed attribute, and that intergenerational relationships within institutions of childhood can be theorised and analysed in relation to how they restrict or support agency as a mutual production.

Child rights, voice, and agency: a need for new contextual knowledge

Kellett (2019) connects child rights, voice, and agency, describing their relationship as ‘an important theme in childhood studies’ that emerged as part of the momentum created by the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). She creates a particular connection between them, by arguing that children’s rights is an ‘imperative’ only and that ‘participation, voice, and agency are the tools that make it happen’ (2019, 1). She notes that the terms ‘voice’ and ‘agency’ are sometimes used ‘interchangeably’, but they are ‘nuanced in different realities’, arguing that ‘voice is the right to express ... views freely, including an entitlement to have these views heard. Children’s agency implies activity, a point at which their views translate into actions such as making decisions, influencing change, and providing evidence’ (2019, 1). Archard and Uniacke (2020) parallel this theorising of connection but draw out a need further to investigate the inter-relationships of rights, agency and voice. They problematise Brighouse to address the dynamic of this relationship between rights, agency and voice for children: ‘Brighouse regards what ... he calls “agency rights” in the case of adults as rights to be the ultimate judge of how to act’ (Brighouse 2003, 696) (2020, 11). They contrast this position for ‘agency rights’ for adults with the concept within the UNCRC, of children’s participation rights and the position of their views *being given* ‘due weight’ as what they call ‘a more complex picture of agency-related rights’ (2020, 11):

Article 12(1) provides a ready-to-hand and influential statement of ... a requirement to take proper account of the child’s views on all matters affecting them. Yet ... this right is complex. Its complexity can be seen in the problem of contrasting an adult’s normative power of choice with a child’s weighted views ... Article 12(1) adopts a scalar standard of influence that gives the child’s views ‘due weight’ in accordance with the child’s age and maturity. In seeking to explain the child’s right under Article 12(1), we must resolve questions of how to weight the child’s views and how this weighting makes a practical difference ... To identify the complexity of the child’s right to a voice is not to abandon the necessary attempt to elucidate the requirement to take ‘due’ account of the child’s views. (2020, 16)

In this way, Archard and Uniacke identify a need for new knowledge and research in relation to rights, agency and voice: ‘we should do more than simply hear their views without that making any difference’ (2020, 16). Their argument concerns a need to create *contextual understandings* of how to enact rights, agency and voice between adult and child: ‘if we are to hear children in this manner, we must clearly explain what it might mean to do so. Elucidating the right as stated by Article 12(1) shows how difficult it is to make clear sense of such a right’ (2020, 16). They argue that more knowledge is needed on how children’s rights, agency and voice can be understood in relation to *different contexts*. Our research is a response to such a theoretical need: creating contextual enquiry and understanding in relation to two specific contexts of children’s dramatherapy in primary schools.

Child rights, voice, and agency: a dynamic for research created by absence and presence

Recent literature is beginning to analyse how to understand the impacts of children’s rights, agency and voice on different areas of services and provision for children. This has included particular attention to the relationships between children’s participation rights and other areas such as their rights to health (Lowcock and Cross 2011). In a number of disciplines, children’s position has been analysed as being the objects of adult actions and decision making, who would act in their ‘best interests’ (Jones and Welch 2018), with children being seen to be most effectively served by such ways of working. Concepts such as the child rights and the role of children’s voice and agency have emerged to challenge such positioning of children and child adult relations. Lushey and Munro,

for example, use concepts of agency and voice to evaluate research methodologies which enhance children's right to participation within research in service contexts: how they 'may empower them, facilitate their active engagement in research and give them a voice' (2015, 523).

We have argued elsewhere that a critical lens to examine provision such as children's therapy can be constructed in relation to 'absence' and 'presence' (Jones et al. 2021), identifying the *absence*, and the impact of absence, of child rights, agency and voice within a particular service area; and helping to envision and understand the *presence* and values of child rights, agency and voice in that service. Stafford et al. (2021), for example, draw on the interconnection between child rights, agency and voice in ways that can be understood in relation to this framework of absence and presence in their review of family support work. They use the interconnection between rights and voice to critique the tradition of their *absence* in welfare contexts and to articulate the value of their *presence*:

The importance of voice in child welfare systems has been further reinforced by international and national reports (Department for Education (DfE), 2018; UNICEF 2019). Research also shows that not providing children with the opportunity to be heard, risks potential new harms emerging. (Carnevale et al. 2015; Kosher and Ben-Arieh 2020) (2021, 2)

Stafford et al. argue that

attitudes and actions of workers are symptoms of a deeper cultural issue ... We need to move from children being seen as incompetent, not mature enough, and passive consumers of services, to being seen as competent meaning makers and social beings in their own right. (2021, 13)

They connect well-being, agency and voice: to create change through research that 'promotes' the 'benefits that participation brings to children's wellbeing ... to enhance children's ... agency' (2021, 13). Their research notes the absence of 'children's experiences, adults are still not asking and listening to children as an everyday practice – due, in part, to an outdated paternalistic conception of children as vulnerable' and then use this as a momentum for creating an agenda for new knowledge and change in practices (2021, 13). They see this as a need for disciplines to find 'child-inclusive practice' that 'acknowledges and empowers children as knowledgeable, capable, evolving agents of their own lives' (2021, 13) and argue further that children are entitled to 'have workers who allow children to express themselves in ways that best work for them ... to facilitate full expression of children's voices and meanings' (2021, 13).

The process of applying this lens can be understood in terms of interdisciplinary impact: creating agendas for change. This has been described as a 'rights dynamic' and concerns the ways in which child rights connected to concepts such as child voice and agency have, as a concept, provided a language and framework to see children and childhood differently, and to draw attention to a need for change in ways that benefit children. This includes the 'dynamic energy' created as a critical position to lobby for positive change in children's lives: the 'impact of child rights in rethinking and changing the day-to-day lives of children in the spaces they inhabit and in relation to the people and institutions they connect with' (Jones and Welch 2018, 23–24). One illustration of this is the creation of 'rights informed practice' which reframes how adults and children see and relate to each other, emphasising children's participation rights in relation to their agency and voice (Jones and Welch 2018). This 'dynamic' has resulted in changes in how childhood is theorised within a discipline and in how adult child relations are enacted within professional practice. Literature has framed these developments in a number of ways concerning theory, professional training, changes in the law or national policy that have an impact on disciplinary thinking and professional practice (Banko-Bal and Guler-Yildiz 2021; Choleva, Lenakakis, and Pigkou-Repousi 2021; Stalford and Lundy 2020; Vandenhole 2015). This article is particularly interested in how such frameworks that theorise change by understanding a dynamic relationship between rights, agency and voice interrelate with specific disciplinary theories in relation to arts therapy, particularly dramatherapy in schools.

Dramatherapy, schools and the absence of child agency and voice

Karkou's (2010) research has identified a growth of arts therapy provision in schools over recent decades. Literature focusing on supporting the emotional well-being of children in schools documents the introduction of therapists into school systems (Andersen-Warren 2012). In the UK, dramatherapists work in both mainstream and specialist educational settings (Leigh et al. 2012). The body of evidence that has been developed in relation to dramatherapy includes accounts and studies of many areas of practice in schools that promote its inclusion as integral for the child to their 'educational, emotional and psychological development' (Klein 2012, 63). The increased accessibility of in-house services has also been noted as a positive factor in therapeutic literature, meaning that children can experience support for their emotional needs during the school day, in a place they are legally bound to attend (Meldrum 2012). Sessions are most commonly held during term-time on a weekly basis, with the term of intervention ranging from a small number of sessions to long-term work, depending on factors which include the client's needs but also those of the school setting (Ramsden 2011). Practice has been analysed within research into the effectiveness of intervention, methods, techniques and frameworks (Jones 2010; Karkou 2010; Leigh et al. 2012). Our recent analysis of arts therapy literature (Mercieca and Jones 2018; Jones et al. 2021) uses the critical frame of absence and presence, above, to argue that some disciplines connected to service provision for children, such as medical care, have responded by changing their ways of theorising childhood and their ways working to reflect children's rights by using concepts such as child voice and agency. However, there is little attention in theory and research in other disciplines such as child therapy, for example, in terms of participation rights. The fields of arts therapy with children has, to date, paid little attention to such areas (Jones and Mercieca 2018). Our recent review of literature looked at a five-year period, 2014–2019, of *The Arts in Psychotherapy* journal, Volumes 42–66, which included 42 articles on music, art, drama and dance movement therapy with children (Jones et al. 2021, 33–34). The review found there were no differences in the kinds of attention between the arts modalities nor in country of origin, in relation to the following areas: no articles mentioned children giving evaluative feedback on the therapy service as a whole, there was no mention of children being involved in the design of services, rooms or any part of the provision, nine articles included reflection or evaluation on the impact of therapy from children on their own progress or experience of the therapy, with 33 only including feedback and observations made by the arts therapist, teacher or parent and there was only one mention of children being active in assessment or aims setting as dialogic between child and therapist (Jones et al. 2021, 33). This is paralleled by Moula's recent systematic literature review of art therapy delivered in school-based settings to children aged 5–12 years, which also notes the absence of children being involved in giving feedback on their therapy and their perspectives on its impact: 'children's voice remained silent' (2020, 96).

This review of literature has shown how recent developments in the literature are exploring the meanings of the relationships between rights, agency and voice as interactional and relational rather than as an individual attribute or capability. We have discussed how this connects to a gap in knowledge described by Archard and Uniacke (2020) as a need further to develop theoretical understanding: how theories of child rights and agency are enacted in terms of policies and practice within different contexts. We have argued that the absence and presence of rights, agency and voice can form a critical lens to explore the inter-relation between such emergent dynamic identified needs and different disciplinary contexts. Our article and the analysis of data builds on and answers, Archard and Uniacke (2020) in that it looks at the concepts of rights, agency and voice and the contexts of therapy, particularly arts therapy in the form of dramatherapy provision in primary school.

Methodology

A group of researchers, trained as dramatherapists, connected to explore with children and young people what they had to say about their service provision. Ethical approval for the research was

sought from Leeds Metropolitan University, the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and UCL Institute of Education, in all cases parent/guardian and child consent was obtained. Both examples draw on the tradition of the ‘researcher-practitioner’ in therapy, described by Gabriel as involving a ‘researcher who is also a trained therapist’ (Gabriel 2005, 19). The role of ‘researcher-practitioner’ is defined as ‘that of a ... research focused facilitator’ who uses their therapeutic skills and judgement ... to deepen their understanding of the research process (Gabriel 2001, 97). McVey, Lees, and Nolan (2015) build on Gabriel in a way that reflects the approach in our research examples. They argue that practitioner research in therapy can:

fructify research cultures, which since the 1990s have been increasingly driven by evaluation research based on large-scale population studies. Practitioner-based research offers something different. Drawing from small-scale studies that take into account the microphenomena of the research process, it not only preserves the practitioner’s clinical approach but also uses it in the research process and thus contributes to its development. (2015, 152)

Both examples of research reflect this, in that the roles of therapist and researcher are combined in small-scale research that draws both on researcher-practitioner knowledge of research processes such as the use of qualitative questionnaires or children as co-researchers, alongside their knowledge of the processes at work in dramatherapy.

Example 1: Roundabout questionnaire and member checking

The first example presents enquiry carried out by Roundabout, the UK’s largest dramatherapy service provider and aimed to find out child clients’ views of their therapy provision. The research involved a questionnaire based on comments made by children about their experiences of dramatherapy (Jones et al. 2021) aimed at children between school years 4 and 7 who had, or were attending, weekly group dramatherapy sessions. The questionnaire was offered to children in a sample of primary schools who were accessing dramatherapy. In total 34 children were offered the questionnaire and all accepted. 14 girls and 20 boys, completed the questionnaires. Referral reasons to therapy were varied and included trauma, anxiety and social and communication difficulties. The average number of sessions attended was 25. All of the participants were able to read and write independently. Twenty-eight identified as white British, three as dual heritage, two as Black British and one as Asian British. The practitioner-researchers were therapists who were known to the children, which supported the aim to create a sense of safety and trust within the research process. Participants were informed that the results would be used by Roundabout to share with all child users of their service in order to inform them of how children viewed their therapy and would include a response from Roundabout on how this feedback would be used to develop their services.

The Roundabout organisation already used questionnaire formats such as Psychlops Kids and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), within its work and this seemed to work well with children in terms of their use of a self-reporting questionnaire format. The SDQ is ‘widely used as a screener for detecting mental health difficulties’ for ‘children and adolescents’ (2021, 1) and is ‘widely and freely available for use by teachers and parents’ (2021, 2). It is ‘a brief behavioural screening questionnaire about 3–16 year olds’ with a ‘self-report version suitable for young people depending on their level of understanding and literacy’ (SDQ 2020, <https://www.sdqinfo.org/a0.html>). However, the team of therapists wanted to create a questionnaire to elicit feedback from a very different perspective: to gain feedback from the children about their experiences of their dramatherapy. The design aimed to keep the format simple and open to the ways children wanted to enter material. The questionnaire consisted of open questions and aimed at encouraging participants to reflect on: what they found helpful and not helpful; what an ideal dramatherapy room might be like and how they might describe dramatherapy to others to help them know what dramatherapy was. The adults’ interest was also in finding ways of working that would create meaning for the

children involved in the project to offer feedback, whilst considering the possibilities of this way of working to be integrated into all practice by Roundabout in enabling children to evaluate and give feedback on their experiences of, and views about, the therapy provision.

The data was analysed by the practitioner-researchers using thematic analysis (Savin-Baden and Howell Major 2013, 439) which led to the identification of key themes. The themes used the language of children from their questionnaire responses. The researchers presented the themes to a member checking group of children. Richards defines member checking as a form of validation to 'seek views of members on accuracy of data gathered, descriptions, or even interpretations' (2003, 287). The Roundabout approach reflected Simpson and Quigley who draw on Richards (2003) and Phillips (2014) to define the process in relation to research with children as including the 'voices of students to inform' the analysis and meaning making of the data (2016, 380). They argue that it should be 'dialogical and flexible. In this way, members contribute to the data analysis, and ultimately knowledge construction' (Simpson and Quigley 2016, 380). The member checking group was offered to children who had participated in the questionnaires. The invitation included an explanation of the intention of the work, what member checking involved and the proposal for the group to be audio recorded. All were in Year 6 and the group who consented to take part comprised two females and five males, four of whom identified as white British and three as dual heritage. In addition to child consent, gatekeeper consent was gained from the school and from parents and carers. The children expressed particular perspectives about their own sense of motivation or the value in taking part. They were particularly interested in the intention that their responses and ideas would inform publications such as a chapter for a book, which would help people to understand what children think about their experiences of therapy. This led on to a spontaneous discussion about who might hold expert knowledge to help with such writing and they were keen to propose that they were experts because they knew about this first hand and that they really wanted to be listened to.

Member checking involved the practitioner researchers sharing the collated summaries of the responses, then the ways they had summarised these responses into themes. Following a presentation and discussion of the themes, all group members were offered the opportunity to agree or disagree with the four main themes through the use of 'Yes', 'No', 'Maybe' cards or to say nothing. This device was familiar to the group as it is used elsewhere within therapy and had been co-developed with children and young people attending Roundabout dramatherapy sessions to support children and young people having their say and feeling confident to speak up for themselves. The children's responses were noted, along with any additional questions that arose during the member checking process. The full results of the questionnaire are presented elsewhere (Jones et al. 2021). This article focuses upon the member checking process as a key arena in relation to children expressing their views.

Example 2: co-researching individual dramatherapy

This study engaged seven children as co-researchers of their individual dramatherapy experiences within a mainstream inner-city primary school, focusing on their reflections on their therapy. The doctoral study was undertaken as practitioner research and data was collected over 18 months (Ramsden 2014). Reflection as a concept is integral to any therapeutic process (Yalom 1995). In the practice of dramatherapy, reflection also forms an established stage within sessions – possibly made up of a number of sub-stages, depending on the practitioner's approach. Emunah (1994) considers the reflective stage as a time to provide and receive feedback about the emotional journey of the session. Jones refers to it as a time for closure and de-rolling which 'marks the ending of the main active work involving dramatic forms' (2007, 13). Reflection is seen as a space where the client integrates aspects of the session for themselves as well as offering and receiving feedback, by reflecting on elements of the process. This feedback does not have to be verbal – it might be expressed in metaphorical ideas through physical movement, image-making, story or by being in silence (Jones 2007).

The research questions addressed the ways in which children could engage as co-researchers about their experience of therapy in the reflective phase of dramatherapy sessions; whether choice-making in co-researching can promote children's agency and voice in communicating their experiences and views of their dramatherapy; what can be discovered about the nature and value of co-researching as a method of supporting children's voice and agency in dramatherapy and what the field can learn from children's reflections on their therapy. The study was conducted with children who were already engaged in individual dramatherapy. The invitation was that the children could work alongside their therapist as co-researchers into their perceptions of the therapy and that this combined the usual potential value of this space in reflecting on their experience of the therapy with communicating to others about what it is like to be involved in dramatherapy.

Data collection took place across three phases: Phase One (two sessions) was concerned with understanding the invitation to be involved and exploring and deciding upon consent. The co-researching took place in Phase Two (ten sessions), during 15 min of reflection time towards the end of individual dramatherapy sessions. Phase Three (three sessions) focused on each child and the practitioner-researcher therapist reviewing their co-researching experiences. The children led the pace of their engagement throughout the phases and reviewed their choice to co-research on a session-by-session basis. They also chose the nature of their engagement in the co-researching process from 12 arts-based creative research methods, designed by the practitioner researcher and based on arts processes familiar to the individuals and on resources available in the therapy room (Ramsden 2014). This aimed to provide opportunities for expression and exploration in the co-researching role in ways that were familiar to the children and which supported their making choices about how to express themselves and to find their own voice within the process.

Exploring and establishing the consenting process was of primary focus in Phase one. It was coupled with clarification for each child that their weekly dramatherapy sessions would continue, regardless of their decision about joining the study and in the reviewing of their consent as the research progressed. The idea that each child should decide on a pseudonym was introduced. This was described as a 'pretend name' that would be used to ensure their anonymity when writing up findings. Some children chose their names, others decided on them – and in two cases changed them – during future sessions. Exploring consent choosing with Reggie, a choice-affirming puppet, using badges and choosing pseudonyms, were processes designed to highlight how being a co-researcher was different from, but complimentary to, the familiar, confidential dramatherapy process. Reggie was worn by the therapist during the consent process and affirmed the choice of the child, whether they chose to take part or not in co-researching within the session (Jones et al. 2021; Ramsden 2011). Puppetry was a part of the expressive language and process within the therapy: Reggie was intended to connect with familiar processes, to create fun and to ensure that the puppet supported either choice as 'good' by nodding and supporting the child.

When choosing to co-research in the final 15 min of the therapy session, each child affixed their yellow badge (which stated 'I'm co-researching') onto their clothing and found a way to reveal their decision. On seeing this, the therapist would affix her own 'I'm co-researching' badge. As a co-researcher each child would make selections from the 12 research methods and accompanying resources in order to reflect on the content and responses of their dramatherapy experiences. These reflections could be based on insights and self-awareness gained during the session, or on any thought, feeling or experience that had been evoked throughout it. These methods included a range of activities such as 'transforming the imagination dough', where the co-researcher is invited to represent and reflect any feelings or experiences from the session using 'imagination dough'; 'Expressing and reflecting with puppets' where the co-researcher is invited to reflect on their session using puppets, including recreating moments from the session, or having a conversation with the puppets about their experiences; or 'Reflecting with images', where the co-researcher chooses wet and/or dry art materials to create an image or images that represent aspects and experiences from their session. The range of methods was available to each child so they could capture

aspects of their reflections, for example storing images or taking photographs. Towards the end of the 15 min each child would bring or be prompted to bring their reflections to a close and return their badge, along with any of the resources they had used, to their own tray and/or to a 'research basket'. Simultaneously the therapist would take off their badge to complete the session. When choosing not to co-research, the badges were not worn and each child would decide instead how to spend his or her reflective time. This could include choosing any of the 12 research methods, which they did in the understanding that their reflections would not be included as data. In this way, each child understood that opting to be in the co-researching role was giving consent for their reflections to be included as data, and choosing not to co-research kept their reflections confidential as part of the dramatherapy contract.

Individual resources designed for each child's sole ownership included A4 folders with copies of cartoon depictions of the 12 research methods; disposable 39-shot single-use cameras and co-researching badges. These resources were stored in each child's individual co-researcher tray, which was kept in a secure furniture storage unit in the dramatherapy room. Each child drew an identification label for their own tray, omitting their real names in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, each child had an individual A1 folder for storing any large art images they created. Data were captured throughout the 60-minute sessions that made up Phases One and Three, and during the 15 min of co-researching time during Phase Two. Data generated throughout all three phases consist of words, sounds and sentences made by each child in the role of co-researcher, along with any artefacts generated by them, such as photographs, video footage, drawings and paintings.

The data presented concerns one of the children, Rocksus. Rocksus was male, black British pupil, in year 6 within an inner-city primary school and had been referred to the in-house dramatherapy service as well as to the borough's child and adolescent mental health team (CAMHS). His attending therapy concerned experiences of feeling isolated and challenges in relation to forming relationships with his peers. Rocksus attended the 2 introductory sessions involved in thinking about and deciding whether, or not, to consent to becoming a co-researcher, then 9 of the 10 therapy sessions that formed the project within his ongoing therapy. He had previously been part of a dramatherapy group, which he said he remembered as being 'really fun'. Rocksus responded positively to the offer of being a co-researcher and regularly used this phrase when he reflected on his play choices during his time as a co-researcher. In the themes of his play within the therapy, hero characters always defeated their opponents no matter how many there were. He said that he interpreted the co-researching role as a place where he could feel like a hero, and that he made new choices which enabled him to express himself, to experience each moment as special, and to feel that each moment was being heard. Details of other children are presented elsewhere, the focus of Rocksus in relation to agency adds to the literature on this work (Jones et al. 2021; Ramsden 2011; Ramsden 2014)

Methods, design and agency

The research questions and methods of both examples reflect the earlier consideration of agency both as 'interactional' and as not simply occurring by chance within therapy, but as being *enabled*. They see child and therapist together within a framework, as described by Polvere, 'located' in 'social relations and interdependency' (2014, 9). In the methods used in both Examples, agency is situated, not as an essentialised or abstract principle, but within existing relations or role relationships – such as adult and child, or therapist and client. Our discussion of the data will show how agency *emerges* from, or is enhanced by, the methods by *building* on the existing relationships and therapy space. The methods aimed to respond to Esser et al.'s challenge to redress an overemphasis in the literature on how adults 'restrict' agency by innovating research that critically considers 'how institutions of childhood and children '(co-)produce agency' (2016, 12). Our analysis of the impact of the methods will illuminate the values of such co-production emerging from existing,

specific and contextual ways of working and relationships. Agency is not seen as something that is externally imposed, but is developed by the methods in a context-sensitive way and is mutually enacted by adult therapist and child client. The methods are initiated by adult *invitation*, but adult and child *develop the child's agency together* and this involves exploration and change for both parties, as they interact. For example, the questionnaire and member checking in Example 1 reflect agency in terms of inviting children to engage with expressing opinions about their dramatherapy experience. Opportunity to discuss and think about the project, including terms such as 'research', 'confidentiality', 'anonymity' and 'pseudonym', was created prior to decision making about taking part. This develops Hanson's critique of agency as not being a personal 'quality' that someone possesses but as 'materialising' in 'decentralized practices in which children participate' (2016, 474). These concepts can be seen within the practice of *orientation* within this example: sharing and ensuring knowledge of concepts that may be unfamiliar to the children and which help to create a framework for their understanding of agency and the practices that will help to realise their agency in research within the context of reviewing their therapy.

As the data from the case examples will show, the methods involve: the creation of a new space within the therapy; an additional element to the therapeutic relationship; creating a language of feedback/expressing views; and a menu of activities to enable children and therapists to work together. Our understanding of the nature of agency within the methods reflects a position that intergenerational relationships, within institutions of childhood such as 'therapy' or 'education', can be theorised and analysed in relation to how they support agency as co-production in order to create opportunities for each child to communicate their views of their dramatherapy (Polvere 2014; Esser et al. 2016).

Findings

Data Example 1: Roundabout questionnaire and member checking

An invitation was given to choose 'pretend names' so that discussion within the group would remain 'private'. The majority of the children did this straight away and then, one by one, they began to change their minds, thinking of new names and playing with the idea of who could think of the funniest or what might be acceptable in the group. The children discussed the member checking process in relation to their responses and ideas informing how Roundabout worked, creating publications about the service, which would help people to understand what children think about their experience of therapy. This led on to a discussion about who might hold expert knowledge to help communicate about the experience of therapy and group members were keen to propose that they were experts because they knew about this first hand and that they really wanted to be listened to.

Discussion of the rationale for work included attention to who would receive the results of the research and the impact of this. Children offered their own comments from the group: these were 'to get other people into dramatherapy', 'so we can improve', 'so that we know and can work on coping mechanisms' (Jones et al. 2021, 105). The concept of carrying out a thematic analysis was explored with the group, referring to the questionnaire that had been completed by the 34 children. The group took it in turns to read out the questions and then think about the word 'themes'. There were some explanations of this including 'a theme park', 'a theme song', 'Halloween is a theme' and 'clothing theme'.

During the presentation of the themes and the explanation of what they might mean, the group offered some changes to the language suggested by the researchers. This is highlighted below by the crossing out of the original text and the insertion of additional highlighted words.

1. **Feelings:** dramatherapy is somewhere you can talk about your feelings.
2. **Having fun and playing:** it is fun going to dramatherapy and you play and often feel happier from ~~attending~~coming to dramatherapy sessions

3. **How it helps:** going to dramatherapy helps you in your life outside of the sessions, at school and home, and you find out things about yourself.
4. **The therapeutic space:** the dramatherapy room needs to have plenty of space, a calm sensory area and lots of things to play with (Jones et al. 2021, 106)

The member checking group made it clear that the language should be changed, so that more children would understand the themes. These suggested changes in language were made, and the amended text became the substantive themes used in all sources and reporting.

During the 'Yes, No, Maybe' process, again the group members were observed to make changes to their original choices before settling on their final word. Sometimes a change of mind appeared to be the result of observing what others had chosen and at other times children offered an explanation about their choices. Children used the process to explore and consider issues related to their choices, sharing their thinking with each other and with the therapist researchers. For example, Raheem Sterling was very vocal in response to themes 1 and 2 naming how much they had enjoyed attending dramatherapy and how the sessions had supported them with difficult and complex feelings. However, they answered 'No' to the idea that *going to dramatherapy helps you in your life outside of the sessions, at school and home, and you find out things about yourself*. They were definite and clear in their choice (Figure 1).

Theme 3 generated the most comments. Group members commented 'it's focusing because you have everything off your chest and out of your brain', 'helps me not get into trouble' and 'it gets me closer to my friends'. Peppa Pig said that it felt alright to have been referred to dramatherapy by an adult, they wanted to make the point that children should be able to refer themselves to dramatherapy. Sly Bun Bun, for example, answered 'No' to theme 3, and had otherwise answered 'Maybe'. They had checked with one of the research team at the beginning of the research if it would be acceptable to respond to the themes only from their personal experience of being in a dramatherapy group. As they made their choices from 'Yes', 'No', 'Maybe', they added explanatory personal comments in a quiet voice to one of the researchers. They said that this had been an enjoyable experience but had been influenced negatively by their ambivalent feelings towards one of the group members.

A group chant began within the voting, 'It's a yes from me'. This was started by Sid the Sloth and was playfully expanded by the group, who started to individually chant their choice aloud accompanying the card sharing. The group was then invited to consider whether they could think of any additional questions that researcher therapists should, additionally, be asking children about their experiences of dramatherapy. One of the group responded by saying 'Yes, we are the experts!' Very swiftly further questions were suggested. Two examples are:

Pretend Name	Theme 3.How it helps
Raheem Sterling	No
Ali A	Yes
Sid the Sloth	Yes
Peppa Pig	Maybe
Mickey Mouse	Yes
Sly Bun Bun	No
Ronald McDonald	Maybe

Figure 1. A sample of responses each group member made to Theme 3.

- Do you think the therapists are supportive and helpful? (Peppa Pig)
- If you are in group Dramatherapy are you happy with the people in your group? (Sly Bun Bun)

After each question was proposed, the group was asked by the researchers to offer their ‘Yes’, ‘No’, ‘Maybe’ response. Everyone agreed these would be good questions. Sly Bun Bun appeared delighted to have named this question and again quietly privately expanded their thinking to one of the researchers, naming that they would have liked not to have been in a group with one of the people they had shared their dramatherapy sessions with.

As the group concluded, the entire group commented that they thought that it is right to ask children about what they think about dramatherapy. Sid the Sloth said that it had been a really enjoyable experience and they were pleased that they had been able to join in and be part of the group and have their say. Micky Mouse and Ali A didn’t appear to have the confidence or inclination to talk much in the group, however, they were fluent in their use of ‘Yes, No, Maybe’.

There was an immediate impact from carrying out the research, with Roundabout making a decision to continue to use the questionnaire format to offer children an additional avenue to have a voice about their dramatherapy provision. This offered the opportunity to not only find out from the children about the possible impact of engaging with dramatherapy but also for the data to help shape and form the future of dramatherapy provision, through questions such as ‘What were the not so great things about dramatherapy?’ and ‘If another child in your class was to be invited to come to dramatherapy and asked you about it how would you describe dramatherapy to them?’ (see Appendix). As a result of the data from the research, Roundabout amended its established aims and outcomes documents and online material to foreground the areas mentioned by children in their response to questions from the questionnaire such as, ‘Is there anything you have found out about yourself from being in dramatherapy?’ and ‘One thing you remember about dramatherapy that was great’. All children involved were given information about how Roundabout as an organisation responded to the research by representing the children’s themes in their website and in altering their organisational aims:

The established aims and outcomes, used in organisational information and fundraising, focus on increasing confidence, communication skills, well-being and relationships. In response to the children’s voices, these outcomes were amended to foreground the role of play and fun in connection with expressing and engaging with ‘issues’. Participants were informed that the aims were changed to include ‘Greater emotional expression through playing and having fun’ and ‘Increased understanding of feelings and how to talk about them’. (Jones et al. 2021, 57)

Data Example 2: co-researching individual dramatherapy

In each session, Rocksus chose to reveal his co-researching voice through collecting and wearing large resources from the room at the start of each co-researching time. For example, during the initial consent-choosing session, after removing his shoes and placing them by the rocking chair he picked up a large body ball and balanced it on his head. Holding the ball with his right arm, he slowly sat in the rocking chair. He particularly enjoyed the large gramophone speaker to hide in, to speak through, or to place next to him whilst he co-researched. He referred to this speaker as ‘the trumpet’. He also expressed his experiences, on occasion, using a self-selected scale of happiness. He said: ‘I am one in school. I am ten in dramatherapy, and I am TEN in dramatherapy co-researching’ (Upper case indicates Rocksus’ vocal emphasis). Rocksus seemed to welcome the opportunity to be a co-researcher and to make choices that were offered to him, such as choosing from the research methods, and choices of his own invention like the happiness measurement scale. Rocksus reflected that his co-researching role was an opportunity to talk, saying: ‘It’s a space where I can talk about my feelings that I did in the dramatherapy today.’ After his first time as a co-researcher he reflected: ‘It’s fun being here today. I enjoyed the session and being a co-researcher.’

Rocksus chose to record his co-researching experiences using the video camera in each session. This provided him with valuable opportunities to re-experience himself through the playback of the tapes, where he offered rich reflections about his actions. The recordings also formed a valuable dataset for recalling the events and reviewing the footage with him. He chose to be the cameraman, director and subject of the footage he captured, and also to reveal what he found to be significant about these processes. For example, he spoke of enjoying the contact and control he had when composing photographs that involved the therapist. He also reflected on the magical powers he could think of having in real life as a result of his story-making in dramatherapy, and videoed reflections of his stories as a co-researcher.

Throughout his time as a co-researcher, Rocksus made particular selections from the resources and objects and reflected on his choices. He chose from the 12 methods and recorded his reflections using the video camera. Rocksus selected two research methods during the sessions he chose to become a co-researcher, and chose research methods 3 (body sculpts), and 12 (reflecting with pictures and images). He chose to accompany his co-researching activities with an ongoing spontaneous commentary, in which he articulated his feelings about choice-making. For example, he said in one session: 'It's fun doing this', and in another: 'I like playing.' 'Play', 'perfect' and 'fun' were words Rocksus used frequently to articulate that his feelings and experiences during his research. He described feeling as though he was in the company of 'friends' amongst the toys and with the therapist, and that all were listening to him. Rocksus also chose to see and hear himself in the co-researching role. He did this most notably by videoing himself, taking Polaroid instant images and using his disposable camera. As well as capturing footage, he made specific choices about reviewing the footage in each session, and providing a further commentary about his experiences of filming and reviewing the footage. Rocksus laughed a lot when he reviewed footage, and made declarations including: 'Look at me!' with excitement and self-interest.

Also significant for Rocksus was the way in which he referred to himself as a co-researcher. Over the weeks of co-researching he chose to take on three pseudonyms from characters he had embodied or created during his confidential dramatherapy time. He decided on his first name during the consent-choosing session. He spoke of each character's positive qualities when changing his name, and said they would 'help me'. Rocksus chose to adopt the persona of his pseudonyms when co-researching, and used costumes and props to achieve this.

When reviewing the images, he had asked the therapist to take of him as the central hero characters of his stories, he offered comments and titles for them such as: 'This looks like I'm a Samurai person.' On another image where he is holding a pose with an imaginary sword facing towards the camera, he noted: 'This one looks like I'm fighting and I'm very angry and stuff.' When reviewing his pseudonym choices, he described them together as being 'perfect', and recounted the skills and powers he saw in each character. Rocksus described how the characters could help him to find solutions to problems he faced. This was most notable with the issue of time, and his desire to expand it to replay sessions and stay in the dramatherapy room longer. For example, one character had the power to freeze time, but was able to continue moving within a frozen environment. As in the story-making, Rocksus froze time in his co-researching reflections, commenting that it would allow him to 'stay in the room forever'.

Rocksus chose not to co-research in one session. On his way to the session that day he had raised concerns about his transition to secondary school, and referred to a welcome day he was due to attend that week. In accordance with the research design, he was not asked to justify his choice, but this was welcomed and affirmed by Reggie. The therapist's reflection here was that Rocksus may have been exercising his own agency in this choice not to offer consent to co-research, possibly as a means of self-protection and privacy.

Within his engagement in the review sessions during Phase Three, Rocksus revealed that reviewing the work was 'a good bit', as it allowed him to 'see what I did'. He also made it clear that it gave him an opportunity to come back to the room and remember his experiences. He said during the second review session that he could 'see all the stuff. I can remember stuff, like that stuff, and

other stuff I can't remember'. Retracing his steps and re-engaging with familiar objects and the memories they evoked was as significant to him as seeing things he did not remember. Rocksus recorded in writing that being a co-researcher had been meaningful 'because you were acherlee lesning' [actually listening]. Listening had made him feel good and his comments seem to indicate that the experience was of emotional benefit to him as a co-researcher and as a client in therapy. He reflected on his feelings about the role and said: 'Because it makes you feel like you're learning something – not just school work. Learning to be something that you are not, but that you can be.' He described researching as 'learning more about me', and 'having fun with the person and just being the person as well'.

The final review session also meant it was his last official time of returning to his primary school, now that he was in secondary school. There was a reluctance to end the session, and for the first time he did not put his shoes on until he had left the room. He commented that being a co-researcher had enabled him to be 'more confident', and would help him 'learn to have more fun'. He spoke of being sad that it was time to end the co-researching opportunity, and the therapist wondered aloud if he had any concerns about future opportunities to play hero characters? Rocksus listened but did not offer an answer. He went around the room saying goodbye to puppets, props and play resources and taking in the room as a whole. He had already taken home his photographs and his co-researching folder, which he said he had looked through a few times. He said he kept the folder 'somewhere safe'. As he prepared to leave the room the therapist asked him what experience he was taking away this final time, to which he replied: 'being the hero'.

Discussion

Therapy in primary schools: gap in knowledge

The data addresses the gap in knowledge in relation to an absence of child views on their therapy, by providing two examples. Analysing the data enables insight into what children attending services within a primary school context have to say about their therapy. The data can be understood within the theoretical frame identified above: connecting rights, agency and voice with the arts in therapy. The *data itself* and the acts of *creating the data* can be understood as reflecting Kellett's interpretation of children's agency as implying 'activity, a point at which their views translate into actions such as making decisions, influencing change, and providing evidence' (2019, 1) in that the children use the processes and relationships to express and explore their views about the worth of their therapy, the ways in which they see change for themselves and how to develop the provision. Children show that they are able to use the methods to form and voice opinions, that they are aware of the meanings of their views, the worth of their perspectives and their capacity to influence others. For example, in the Roundabout member checking process, the children spontaneously say that they are experts because they know about their therapy first hand and that they want to be listened to, along with the comment following the voting – 'Yes, we are the experts!' The children's understanding of this agency as 'experts' can be seen within the ways they enact this in their agreements and differences with each other and with their therapists. One example is in Raheem Sterling's sharing of why he answered 'No' in terms of the accuracy of the theme to reflect experiences of therapy of the discussions – where he feels able to share his own perspective and view, though it differs from others. Another example is in relation to Theme 3 'How it helps', where the group offers details, interpreting and validating the theme with details that they want to share in the member checking, to their 'audience' of the Roundabout organisation and to other children contemplating therapy: it is analysed as being 'focusing' as 'you have everything off your chest and out of your brain', and in terms of relationships 'it gets me closer to my friends'.

The data provides new knowledge and creates a new kind of activity and relationship between the therapists and the children, in terms of child clients articulating what they think their therapy offers within the member checking processes, understood as their further refining the concepts

and terms used, and as anticipating an audience and a context for action, arising from this new space and relationship. The data can be understood as showing that the enactment of agency in this context is also an emotional experience, for example in the children experiencing being validated. In the second example, Rocksus comments on this when asked to reflect on his feelings about the role and said: 'Because it makes you feel like you're learning something – not just school work. Learning to be something that you are not, but that you can be.' He described researching as 'learning more about me', and 'having fun with the person and just being the person as well'.

Archard and Uniacke identified a need for new knowledge and an agenda within research that develops our knowledge of children's agency by creating 'contextual understandings' based on experience: for example in terms of 'listening': 'what it might mean to do so' (2020, 16). The data from both examples provide such new knowledge and offers an innovative understanding of how agency relates to specific contexts: of the children's views on their experiences of therapy. Our analysis has shown how the methods developed create new kinds of space, activity and relationships between the therapists and the children: in terms of children articulating what they think their therapy offers in Example 1 by using a questionnaire connected to member checking or in Example 2 in terms of the use of drama and play based processes. The analysis in this context has shown, for example, how the member checking process can be understood as involving children's agency in their reflections on the adequacy of how questionnaire data was interpreted and articulated their voices. In addition, it has shown how the children experienced their agency within the member checking group as having opportunities for impact: they anticipated an audience and a context for action, arising from this new space and relationship. Our analysis of the data shows this as a motivational force and as something the participants stressed as important to them. The data can be understood as developing further aspects of a 'contextual understanding' by showing that the enactment of agency in this context is also an emotional experience, for example in the children experiencing being validated. Rocksus' comments indicate this, such as 'because you were acherlee lesning' [actually listening] or 'Learning to be something that you are not, but that you can be.'

Agency and connection: strengths and limitations

The therapists change their roles and relationships in ways that create dialogue with, and insight into, concepts of child agency in relation to arts therapy contexts. This can be understood in relation to Polvere's (2014) consideration of agency in relation to *connection*: 'all people, including adults, are interlinked, interdependent and reliant on others' (2014, 8–9) and to agency conceptualised in a way that reflects their challenge to arrive at new understandings that do 'not denigrate dependency and the need for care' (2014, 809) whilst theorising 'agency in social relations and interdependency instead of independence and autonomy' (2014, 9). The process of agency in both examples is conceived of within a therapeutic relationship and is enacted between child or children and therapist. The data can be interpreted as furthering Archard and Uniacke's (2020) concerns and offers a development of their critique of agency: that there is a need to avoid generalisation and to explore how children's rights, agency and voice can be understood in relation to *different contexts* to enable 'a more complex picture of agency-related rights' (2020, 11): Some of the strengths and limitations of the approach taken to agency can helpfully be critically addressed within this conceptualisation of agency as contextual rather than essentialised (Archard and Uniacke 2020), related to the specific connections of interdependency and of care within therapy. A limitation, for example, can be understood in relation to the specific contexts of the research being undertaken by research practitioner therapists in both examples: that the approach is clearly different from research that would be undertaken about the therapy by researchers outside of the context or therapeutic relationship. The potential negative impact of this is that the power dynamics between child and therapist might mean that children feel unable to share criticisms, or that their relationship with the therapist or with their peers limits their capacity for self-expression, due to past experiences or dynamics at work within the group.

However, both examples were designed to take the form of processes that could be undertaken by therapists to *augment the processes at work within their therapy* with their clients and by the therapists as part of their provision. This provides a particular kind of new knowledge, responding to Stafford et al.'s call for research connecting child agency and voice within 'standard' professional practice, accessing and responding to 'children's experiences, adults are still not asking and listening to children as an everyday practice' (2021, 13). Our understanding of, and critical reflection on, agency here is connected to the context of children in therapy and in a therapeutic relationship within a primary school setting. In terms of strengths, both examples can be understood as therapists facilitating child client agency. They change their usual 'everyday' professional practice to add new space, relationships and experiences for the children and for themselves as therapists. The space is one that invites feedback, the relationship is one whereby they add the identity of researcher-participant to the usual therapist-client relationship and the experience is that of using a questionnaire, accompanied by member checking. This is done within the therapeutic relationship and within established adult-child and child-child relationships. Children show themselves feeling able to share criticism and to voice views about change, in the Roundabout session, for example, Peppa Pig arguing that children should be able to refer themselves to dramatherapy. The strength of this is that the adults position their role as supporting children, there is the opportunity of trust and of facilitating expression: there is mutual knowledge and experience of a shared history. It illustrates how adults and children can 'co-produce agency' within a therapeutic relationship.

Difference

The two examples show different processes at work. The Roundabout example combining questionnaire and member checking is a group process and can be understood as illustrating the ways in which children who know each other within a therapy context can explore their agency together by forming and communicating perspectives and views together. The emphasis within the data from the member checking is upon commonality and group voice: children show themselves using the opportunity to reflect and individuate their own views and desires and to work as a group to articulate what they want communicated and responded to. This can be seen as acknowledging their power as a group to exercise their agency, with the chant interpreted as a collective express of voice and fun. The process shows group dynamics altering and debating views and voting together: their agency having an effect in wanting to alter words with purpose – about their views and having this collective agency acknowledged in the knowledge that these are to be used by Roundabout to communicate with other adults and children and to alter their organisational statements on their website in terms of what dramatherapy offers. The group members know and have a sense of the impact of their voice. Agency here is interactional and they are given a sense of the impact of their voice. The other example shows the creation of agency in the context of individual work and shows a process over time, with the interaction between therapist and Rocksus developing in parallel to the therapy process. The child client's agency is connected by him to the process of therapy and as interactional with his therapist. Examples include him communicating the characters' qualities that he takes on when co-researching can 'help me' and that the space, activity and relationship was done with the therapist witnessing his work: 'because you were acher-lee lesning' [actually listening].

Co-production and agency

Our literature review identified a need for research into different disciplinary understandings and applications of how co-production relates to agency (Esser et al. 2016; Lushey and Munro 2015). Our analysis of children's agency is understood as their acting within a space where voice, agency and the context of therapy interact. The processes at work can be understood as co-produced in that the therapists are facilitating agentic opportunities for children using languages and processes

that both parties were familiar with – though these are repurposed. In the Roundabout example the questionnaire process is already used in therapy, for the work with Rocksus creative methods in therapy are also familiar to the child as client. These are changed in purpose to enable child agency. This ‘agency’ reflects Bandura’s ‘produc(ing) certain effects by actions’ within a therapeutic relationship. The examples illustrate the value of not seeing agency in terms of an ‘autonomous acting subject’ (Cockburn 2013, 14), but as interactional and interdependent. The therapists in Roundabout initiate the spaces, concepts and language and the children are shown to understand this and to use the opportunity for agency. The children’s agency is understood as their acting within a space where voice, agency and the context of therapy interact. The agency of the children in both examples can be understood as communicating their views to their therapists in order to deepen the mutual understanding between child and therapists of the nature of the therapy and of what they value or want changed. This mutual meaning making enhances the work of the therapy by giving therapist and child alike insight into what is working. Roksus becomes aware of his own role as co-researcher and this, too, is seen by him in terms of identity and emotions. He explores this through improvisatory fictional lenses and uses other creative means to emphasise his view, his perspectives on his therapy: he exercises his agency by expressing his voice and this changes his journey, affirming experiences within the therapeutic relationship. He shows awareness and the desire to communicate awareness about this agency in terms of what he decides to say to his therapist.

Conclusion

The article has responded to Archard and Uniacke (2020) call for contextual understandings of the nature of agency in relation to child’s views. It has shown how a theoretical lens bringing rights, agency and voice in relation to dramatherapy in schools can help create agendas for change. The two examples have explored both the *methods used* to access child views in the context of therapy, *how* children are using these methods to make meaning and to understand what occurs. It has illustrated agency within the context of therapy in schools as rooted in connection between child and therapist and as a process of co-production. The creation of agency has been shown as an opportunity for children to see themselves differently and to have an impact on their therapy. The children make clear that they understand their agency in relation to their identity as experts and communicating that to the therapist in order to support what they see as working and, in the Roundabout example, to developing the service further and articulating what they see as the value to others to encourage them to choose to take part. The interdisciplinary lens in relation to rights, voice and agency enabled a critical understanding of the knowledge gained. This created an understanding of why access and response to children’s views are *important* and also to understand *the nature and impact* of methods that access their views.

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Appendix

Roundabout

Dramatherapy questionnaire

1. What were the great things about dramatherapy?
2. What were the not so great things about dramatherapy?
3. Is there anything you have found out about yourself from being in dramatherapy?
4. How has dramatherapy helped you in your life outside the sessions?
5. Has dramatherapy been fun? How would you rate it from 0 (not fun) to 5 (lots of fun)?
6. If another child in your class was to be invited to come to dramatherapy and asked you about it how would you describe dramatherapy to them?
7. One thing you remember about dramatherapy that was great.
8. One thing you remember about dramatherapy that was not so great.
9. What would your ideal Dramatherapy room look like?