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## **‘The Sun Shines on...’ Speech Bubbles 2019-2020**

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## 1. Introduction

This report is titled 'The Sun Shines On...' which is a very popular drama game where one person has to say something that is true about them, and if it also true about the other players they have to stand up and move to a new place. Well this year 'The sun shines on... everybody who has experienced a pandemic!' So in the game we all have to stand up and move to a new place, and let's hope and work together to make sure that is a better place!

We started the year with the disappointing news that the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) was delaying the reporting of findings of the national Learning About Culture (LAC) research trial. The initial delay in findings was from April 2020 to September 2020 and this was due to a lack of a clear data sharing agreement between the research partners and the Department for Education. The results have now been further delayed and are expected to be published in March 2021. The trial remains an ambitious and unique study into the potential academic and creative benefits of arts education interventions in primary education. Speech Bubbles is one of five interventions that have been studied. More details about the research programme can be found [here](#)

Despite the delay in reporting we still managed to launch the programme in a total of 46 schools nationally for its eleventh year.

As has become custom we decided on an area of study for the year and this year we set out to focus on positive ways to support the children's behaviour within the Speech Bubbles sessions. This was connected to the PRIDE model of positive behavioural support that we came across through the work of Melanie Cross (Speech and Language Therapist). In addition we engaged with the Oracy agenda and provided evidence to the Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group on the long term benefits of working through creative practice to support children's communication.

The year started well and we managed to deliver 16 sessions in most schools before the government began the process of closing down activity in mid-March. We had stopped delivering in 90% of schools the week before they closed down to all but the children of Key Workers. The schools themselves in some cases had stopped having any but permanent staff in their buildings. As the lockdown extended and schools continued only to be open to small numbers of pupils it was clear that it wasn't appropriate to restart the programme. Also out of respect for the time and additional responsibilities placed on school leaders we didn't request post-project assessments from the participating schools. For that reason we have no reliable information on the impact of the programme on the participating children in this year.



## 2. Monitoring

### Children and schools

- **920 children** in Key Stage 1 for whom we have monitoring data for 798.
- **46 schools**  
14 in South London. 10 in North and East London. 13 in Kent. 9 in Greater Manchester
- Most children took part in **16 sessions**

### Pupil profile

- **56%** of children were reported as being eligible for Pupil Premium
- **37%** were reported as EAL (English as an additional language)
- **7%** were identified as having a statement or EHCP (education and health care plan)
- **57%** were male
- **43%** were female

### Reasons for referrals

The following comments are from teachers in pre-project assessments and have been selected to give an idea of the reasons that teachers and SENDCOs give for referral:

*Often lacks focus and is unable to listen or concentrate for long periods of time. Sometimes, X lacks confidence and can struggle to create relationships with peers in his year group.*

*X finds it hard to sequence his own sentences, in speaking and in his writing. X also finds it tricky to listen to instructions and pay attention on the carpet, resulting in him perhaps doing something different when he gets to his table or not knowing what to do.*

*Unable to concentrate on activities for a sustained period of time. Easily loses focus on tasks often gets distracted.*

*Reluctant to speak in class. Will only speak if spoken to.*



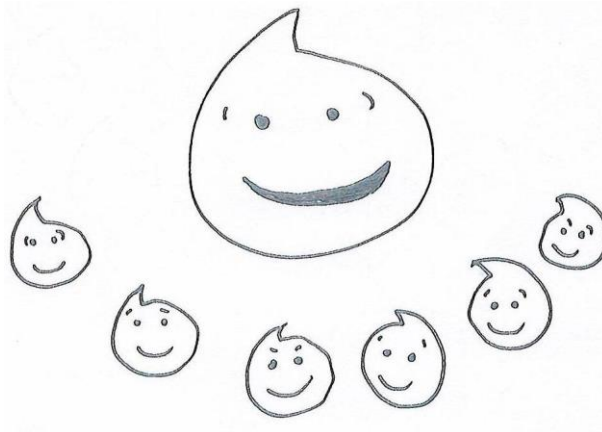


## Training

- **221 attendances** by drama practitioners, storytellers, teachers, learning mentors, speech and language therapists, drama therapists and students at training events
- **6** whole day events
- **9** half day events
- **6** online training sessions
- All drama practitioners have completed the Communication Trust CPD Online Short Course: An introduction to speech, language and communication.

### 3. The PRIDE model

A regular topic of discussion at Speech Bubbles training days and collaborative learning events has been the different tolerances or standards that we each have to assess children's behaviour, and beyond that what effective tools we have to support positive interaction in the drama session that school staff and drama practitioners could both feel happy with. Not only do we each have individual expectations for what is okay in a session but we have different ideas based on our profession, job title and training. We have regularly discussed the idea that all 'behaviour is communication' and the implication that as the adults in the room we have a responsibility to try to understand why a child is behaving in the way that they are, and consider what we can do to support them in a way which is both positive for them and for the group. What we were seeking was a framework that would build on our instinct that positive, playful interactions were more useful in a creative activity than negative and punitive interactions.



We came across the PRIDE model in 'Children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and communication problems- There is always a reason' by Melanie Cross (Pub: JKP 2011) and adapted it for Speech Bubbles.

Speech Bubbles PRIDE model (adapted from Gerhenson, Lyonn and Budd 2010)		
Skill	Why?	Examples
Specific PRAISE for appropriate behaviour	<p>Helps develop a positive interaction and is likely to encourage the behaviour being praised.</p> <p>Helps child to understand what is expected in Speech Bubbles.</p>	<p>Referring to the Speech Bubbles chant – I loved the way you waited for him to finish – great turn taking!</p> <p>Great acting your dinosaur was loud and scary.</p> <p>I loved the way you were gentle when doing the play fighting.</p> <p>I liked the way you were kind</p>
REFLECT appropriate speech	<p>Shows that you have listened and heard and provides opportunities for creative extension of creative ideas.</p> <p>To show you value their choice of language and creative input</p>	<p>When working in the 'I wonder' mode!</p> <p>Child: We could have a picnic! Adult: Great idea, I wonder what could we eat at our picnic?</p> <p>When in question mode</p> <p>Child: Dragon, fire, shoot, burn.</p> <p>Adult: the dragon shot its fire and burnt things! Wow!</p> <p>Scribing the child story as it is told.</p>
IMITATE appropriate behaviour/play	<p>The child gets attention for positive behaviour and this can increase co-operation.</p> <p>Models importance of non-verbal communication</p>	<p>Child makes a shape/statue adult mirrors it.</p> <p>Vocalising of imitating...</p> <p>'I like your cat acting! I am going to copy it.'</p> <p>Let's all 'Jump' banana like Elmira</p>
DESCRIBE appropriate behaviour	<p>The child knows that they are doing well and this behaviour gets positive adult attention.</p>	<p>You are listening and taking turns.</p> <p>You were gentle in that game.</p>
Be ENTHUSIASTIC (and sensitive) in tone and body language	<p>This adds to the positivity of the interaction and increases the participation.</p> <p>Sensitive not to dominate the space.</p>	<p>Adult uses a gentle playful tone and inflection with frequent smiles.</p>

The model received a positive reception from school staff and drama practitioners alike and is now a core module in new practitioner training.

#### 4. Evidence for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Oracy

Speech Bubbles is a creative programme to support young children's communication development and it has a connection to the notion of Oracy 'the ability to express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech'. Speech Bubbles practice is concerned with children's ability to express themselves through their words and actions. It is also concerned with the development of their attending and receptive skills.

Working with Dr Jonathan Barnes we prepared an evidence submission to the Oracy APPG. The submission consisted of a video and a supporting paper. Dr Barnes interviewed 6 children who had participated in Speech Bubbles in 2014/15. The children were interviewed in pairs and asked about memories and feelings they had towards Speech Bubbles. In his report Dr Barnes concludes that:

*'...this small sample of children unequivocally believe that SB made all the difference to them. Founded upon experience they constructed enduring personal stories that underpin their present identities. These unique narratives open with shaky beginnings, introduce a varied cast of activity, fun, friendship, values and develop via the arts of story-making, story-sharing and the collective honouring of contributions. Each child's story culminates in the discovery and development of a confident, contributing, socially and psychologically healthy self.'*

Four years after finishing the programme the children were able to say:

*Speech Bubbles made me listen to others in class and share my ideas more, put my hand up more, share your ideas more!*

*Now I want to listen to more things and learn, I have more imagination now than before and use it in any type of writing, it's improved my writing.*

*I liked the square - no I didn't actually like it- I loved it, because we could explain our ideas and make up our own stories and express ourselves.*

We received a letter back from the APPG Chair, Emma Hardy MP:

*I am writing to thank you for the fantastic videos you sent to me in which you spoke so brilliantly about how much developing your speaking skills with the Speech Bubbles programme has helped you.*

Whilst Speech Bubbles is a programme that supports children's communication development broadly there is a benefit to connecting with the oracy agenda and demonstrating the power of the arts and creative practice.





## 5. What we did in lockdown...

Speech Bubbles is delivered in schools by a team of trained, experienced and playful freelance theatre makers. Despite the closing down of the programme two thirds of the way through the year we committed to continue to pay those freelancers through to the end of their contracts. During this time the freelance artists maintained contact with their school staff, contributed to the resource packs and attended training. One freelancer made a video of the last story that the children had created, one made a booklet of the children's group stories and yet another made a lesson video for use by the school staff in the alternative education setting that she was working in. Our patron Mark Rylance read two group stories from the children at Torridon school and responded with this [video](#)

### Resources

We created **3 resource packs** during lockdown.

The content of each pack was offered by our team of freelance drama practitioners and curated by the Speech Bubbles team. The first two packs were specifically selected activities for children to do at home with siblings, carers and their cuddly toys. The third pack was developed for school staff to work with small groups of children in their 'bubbles'. This pack includes guidance on 'social distancing' during the activities.

Each resource pack was distributed through our school and partner networks and reached **65 schools** and **920 families**. They were also distributed via our Social media channels and are available to download for [free](#)

### Training 1

The Drama at School pack was supported with a programme of online support sessions for school staff using the activities. A total of **20 school staff** attended those sessions. Feedback was positive about participants' confidence to use the activities as well as the benefit of being in a low pressure, playful training session.

Teacher feedback:

*I was with a mixed age Key Worker bubble for the last two weeks of term in which I was able to try out a couple of the activities in the booklet; "The Sun Shines on..." and "I wonder what's in your box". The children absolutely loved both games and I think it gave them a really valuable opportunity to share their likes and dislikes with others in a safe, non-judgmental way. As the group was made up of children from different classes and different friendship groups, there had been a fair amount of low-level bickering and disagreements in other activities but they all listened to each other in these activities and hopefully realised that they had many things in common! After playing "The Sun shines on..." on a Monday, the children requested to play it every day that week. They even added their own "rules" - for example, you had to do some star jumps if everyone stood up. The children enjoyed the physical aspect of the games, such as miming what was in their boxes, which was much*



*needed in the bubble after sitting at desks all day. I've looked through the other activities in the booklet and will definitely be using these and other ideas in September. I like the structure that the activities give you and I think the children will also respond well to this more game-like way to discuss their thoughts and opinions, rather than just free-flow discussions during circle time, especially after such long period of absence from school and each other.*

## **Training 2**

All Speech Bubbles drama practitioners and project leads were invited to attend 3 sessions of online training with Kazzum Arts. The training was adapted for the needs of Speech Bubbles practitioners and introduces a trauma-aware approach to working with young children. **28 practitioners** have completed two out of three sessions with the third session scheduled for September.

*The recent Kazzum trauma training has been absolutely brilliant, thank you so much for extending that opportunity to us all.*

*This training was so timely, really helping me to think about how I prepare for returning to work with children in school.*

## **6. Planning ahead**

### **Covid recovery curriculum**

At the time of writing (mid-August '20) it seems as if all schools will be open to all pupils in September. There is guidance on working in 'bubbles' and it seems that pages and pages of changing guidance will leave each school to come up with its own risk assessment on what is safe and beyond that a plan on how they will welcome pupils back. There are more and less informed speculations about the impact of lockdown on different children. The only certainty seems to be that we have all been uniquely affected.

Professor Barry Carpenter at Oxford Brookes University has been thinking about the mental health impact of the sudden shutdown of schools and their reopening. He has conceptualised a [Recovery Curriculum](#) built around five levers. Through a survey with people connected to Speech Bubbles we have begun to consider what role we might play in a sensitive approach to the wide re-opening of schools. The full survey results will be available alongside a blog post about the arts and the recovery curriculum.

Please find below each 'Lever' and a description in italics. Below that in red is a summary of the Speech Bubbles response.

*Lever 1: Relationships - we can't expect our students to return joyfully, and many of the relationships that were thriving may need to be invested in and restored. We need to plan for this to happen, not assume that it will. Reach out to greet them, use the relationships we build to cushion the discomfort of returning.*



This is Speech Bubbles gold! Rebuilding social connections and relationships isn't just about talking to each other (about feelings or anything) it is learning how 'to be' together and to be relaxed and playful in that shared space and time. We shouldn't assume that everybody had a difficult time in lockdown. Each experience will have been unique.

*Lever 2: Community - we must recognise that curriculum will have been based in the community for a long period of time. We need to listen to what has happened in this time, understand the needs of our community and engage them in the transitioning of learning back into school.*

The open 'I wonder' mode of Speech Bubbles practice and the welcoming of whatever story each child wants to tell can provide an opportunity for the adults to listen deeply to the children. We can feedback to class teachers if children express the things that were beneficial or detrimental to their learning in lockdown.

*Lever 3: Transparent Curriculum - all of our students will feel like they have lost time in learning and we must show them how we are addressing these gaps, consulting and co-constructing with our students to heal this sense of loss.*

We will not assume what the children will feel about gaps in their learning, but we will be transparent about what we are working on in Speech Bubbles. The weekly chant is part of that and so will be sharing with the children our love of their stories, play and engagement. We will not put a time pressure on catching up, rather we will relish the time that we do have to engage in creative and imaginative play.

*Lever 4: Metacognition - in different environments, students will have been learning in different ways. It is vital that we make the skills for learning in a school environment explicit to our students to reskill and rebuild their confidence as learners.*

So much of Speech Bubbles is about being prepared to learn. Prepared to listen, prepared to be expressive, prepared and confident to try, prepared and confident to be imaginative. It's a low pressure space to practice these skills in a smaller group to then support classroom learning.

*Lever 5: Space - to be, to rediscover self, and to find their voice on learning in this issue. It is only natural that we all work at an incredible pace to make sure this group of learners are not disadvantaged against their peers, providing opportunity and exploration alongside the intensity of our expectations.*

As we don't have a body of knowledge to teach we can provide a space where development and growth happens at the child's pace. The pressure to 'catch up' elsewhere in school may cause anxiety for some of the children referred to Speech Bubbles. We provide a space for children to discover self, through play, through story and through connection.



## Black lives matter

*Whilst we are both hurt and outraged by recent events in the US, we are fully aware that race is not America's problem alone. Right here in the UK, we have countless stories of brutality, microaggression, discrimination, disparity and all the many ways in which racial injustice inhibits and shortens black lives. We want our black colleagues, facilitators, staff, participants, audience members and supporters to know that we will always stand with you – as individuals, as a collective, and as part of the Bubble community. London Bubble*

In response to the renewed energy and drive to address racism that has come from the Black lives matter movement we have been reviewing all the projects that London Bubble delivers, and asked ourselves how each of those projects could better serve the cause of anti-racism.

Speech Bubbles has at the centre of its practice a child's own imagined story, whatever story they want to tell on the day. And that story is acted out by a company of their peers, unabridged. What we haven't scrutinized to date is what barriers children might feel about which stories are suitable to tell in school. Darren Chetty (UCL teaching fellow, contributor to *The Good Immigrant*, teacher and artist) talks about his work in a primary school in Hackney in this lecture ['Beyond The Secret Garden'](#). What he noticed in his work in an ethnically diverse primary school was that the overwhelming majority of characters that the children wrote about in their stories were white with European heritage names. He tried many things to encourage a broader diversity of central characters but it wasn't until he specifically asked the children to use a name from somebody in their family in their stories that he saw anything different.

Over the next year of Speech Bubbles delivery we will be alert to the stories that the children tell and will engage in a critical analysis of whether there are cultural and structural barriers that are limiting the range of stories that the children feel safe to tell and what we might do to dismantle those barriers.

This mirrors a previous enquiry that we undertook when we identified the issue that in some schools boys will be reluctant to play female characters, the girl, the mum, the princess etc. and yet we had no equivalent for girls who appeared at ease playing boys in stories. That enquiry led to a note in our training and our resource packs about being explicit that 'in Speech Bubbles boys can play girls and girls can play boys.'

We will report back!



## 7. The Sun Shines on...

The sun shines on anybody who is working to adapt to new circumstances!

I hope that reading this report has given you a taste of the work that we have done this year, and please don't forget that in those initial 16 sessions the children had the opportunity to tell and act out some wonderful stories!

A multitude of stories: flying dragons, princesses who save princes from the tower, winning racing cars, shopping in the market, flying to the moon, shark attacks and the Black Panther saving everyone from danger.

Every practitioner on the programme will be thinking about the children that they left behind back in March and wondering how they got on in lockdown. For me there was one child who had newly arrived in the UK and was thoroughly excited to be in school. This was their story...

*We were in the shop and we bought some things from the shop and then we are going to go to a house and in the house people are going to watch TV and talk about what they going to do tomorrow. Then tomorrow they went to a big shop and they bought loads of stuff and after that day they were very happy. And they were very happy. And then maybe they can go to school? And then they signed up for the school and I started learning.*

I wonder how they have been adapting?

The sun shines on us as we adapt to the new circumstances...

We are continuing to adapt and plan for the 20-21 school year. We are in discussion with schools and other creative practitioners about how we can safely and creatively move from Social Distance to Social Connection.

We will be delivering all Speech Bubbles school staff and practitioner training online and working with individual schools to respond to their Covid Safe Risk Assessments.

We will have a staggered start to the year with schools starting when they feel it is appropriate to bring in visiting practitioners. We will have an individual risk assessment for all drama practitioners working on the programme and are currently sourcing clear face masks for practitioners to wear when working in schools.

We are currently working on Social Connection practice-sharing document that will help all practitioners to adapt the way they work to make the connections that we know makes a difference to children's communication and confidence and keep everybody safe!



## 8. Thank you

The whole team at London Bubble would like to express our sincerest thanks to the drama practitioners, school support staff, school leadership teams, theatre partners, Speech Bubbles children and their parents/carers who took part in our eleventh year. Thank you for the stories, the acting and the communication.

Looking ahead to our twelfth year we would also like to thank Paul Hamlyn Foundation, EEF, Walcott Foundation and the Communication Trust for new funding that will help us to adapt and thrive.

