



Everyone's entitled to a proper turn...

A report into a yearlong 'Speech Bubbles' Project at Sandbrook School led and project managed by M6 Theatre.

This report is for the benefit of teachers, drama practitioners, partner organisations, schools and future funders.



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1 The aims of this report

The aim of the evaluation report is to give a detailed description on the delivery of the yearlong Speech Bubbles project delivered at Sandbrook Primary School, Rochdale. It aims to provide key learning points and discoveries made during the year. It aims to support the project's originator (London Bubble Theatre Company) and capture its evolution during this pilot year outside Greater London. It aims to provide both in-house and external drama practitioners information on the delivery of the project and also provide M6 Theatre with an evaluation of the project which is in line with its Evaluation Strategy.

This report has being written by Eleanor Samson, M6 Theatre's Projects Manager and Speech Bubbles Facilitator.

2 Overview:

Speech Bubbles is a yearlong project for children in KS1 who have a Speech, Language or Communication setback, which has been delivered throughout Greater London since 2009 by London Bubble Theatre Company. In 2013 funding was secured to pilot the scheme in the Greater Manchester region in partnership with 3 Northern based Arts Organisations: M6 Theatre Company, Oldham Theatre Workshop and Peoplescape Theatre Company.

This report will explore aspects of the project delivered by M6 Theatre at Sandbrook Primary School, Rochdale, from September 2013 to July 2014.

"Increasing numbers of children are starting school life with communication problems. The evidence gathered by the Communication Trust suggests that as many as 50% of children in areas of disadvantage have speech and language skills that are significantly less developed than those of other children of the same age.

Since 2009, London Bubble has designed and delivered the award winning Speech Bubbles programme of in-school drama interventions for children in KS1 with a Speech, Language and Communication Need. In Speech Bubbles sessions drama practitioners and school staff create a safe and playful space for children in KS1 to develop their communication skills. The story / drama approach places the child at the centre of the activity, and they become at different times, author, performer and audience. The Speech Bubbles programme supports referred children to develop Speaking, Listening and Attention skills in a fun and nurturing environment. A recent survey revealed that 89% of children participating in Speech Bubbles showed an improvement in Learning, Speaking and Listening and 90% showed behavioural improvements."¹

The programme has developed from the work of Vivian Gussain Paley who

¹ www.londonbubble.org.uk

developed 'The Story Square'. In the story square, the children act out each other's stories, playing lots of characters, landscapes, animals, buildings. The children work individually and in groups, being invited into the square to bring to life just a short section of the story while the rest of the children act as audience until their turn arrives to take centre stage.



3 What have M6 Theatre and Sandbrook School tried to achieve throughout the year?

- To work creatively with children who have been identified as having a speech, language or communication need.
- To improve children's speaking, listening and attention skills.
- To improve confidence.
- To encourage play and performance.
- To provide a safe and happy space.
- To assist children who possess behavioural issues².
- To support children who have English as a second language.
- Develop a strong relationship between Speech Bubbles and Sandbrook staff throughout the year.

² Behavioral issues- either owing to a disability (e.g. autistic spectrum disorder) or owing to stress brought on due to a child's chaotic home-life. Several members of the group were looked after children.

4 A typical session and notes on the exercises.

Having routine and structure to the sessions is essential. Constantly reiterating the key values of the project, correct modes of behaviour and expectations are vital to the children's progress:

"In speech bubbles we are gentle with each other..."

A typical Session Plan

1. **Chant.** *"In speech Bubbles we do good listening, in Speech Bubbles, we take turns, in Speech Bubbles we are gentle with each other and in Speech Bubbles, we do good acting!"* The values of the chant are reinforced throughout the sessions, instilling these ideals into the children's psyche both in their speech bubbles session and during their routine school timetable.
2. **Name and Bucket.** Going around the circle each person gets a turn to throw their name into an imaginary bucket. This popular ice breaker allows the children to play with gesture, sound and their own identity.
3. **Copying me!** Here LC (Drama Therapist) or ES (Drama Practitioner) would describe and give actions to their morning routine which would include several emotions & feelings. The speech and actions would be delivered slowly and the children would copy the facilitators. e.g. *"When I woke I still felt very tired so I did a big stretch and a big yawn. I ran downstairs, took out my cereal my bowl, poured my porridge and milk... I felt grumpy and sad because I was tired but then I remembered it was Speech Bubbles today so I jumped up and down with happiness..."* N.B over time the children would give their own morning routines with everyone copying them. Most children relished the opportunity to be a leader in some capacity, and had to wait for their chance to be in control. The children were constantly reminded that in Speech Bubbles (SB) we 'take turns'. All such activities worked to improve their patience, receptive listening and observation skills.

Reflections on Copying.

By copying they (the children) could relax cognitively and simply follow the leader. The leader (initially an adult but later other cohorts) might get the children to move in ways they have never thought to move, stretching their bodies and faces to create shapes and express emotion. In so doing, they expand their emotional vocabulary and comprehension. Each week we'd exercise this further, like working muscles in a gym, strengthening them and making them more effective through practice. Being witnessed and witnessing copying each other exactly is like a conversation, in order to meaningfully contribute we must focus on what is being expressed (albeit non verbally)... they must fully engage with each other to see how they can converse back correctly.

4. **Mirroring.** In the early stages of the project the children would line up facing a partner and one child would mirror the actions of the other, then swap over. More spirited children would always prefer to be the leader and would very quickly become side tracked and lose concentration. Over time we created a new mirroring game that kept everyone's attention and also encouraged the children to 'be a good audience member' and find enjoyment in watching others take centre stage. Two children would go to the side of the room and secretly decide on who was going to be the leader. They would then come back to the group and stand within the story-square with everyone else sat around. ES or LC would then time the children (30 seconds) and the children in the centre of the square would mirror each other's movements. The 'audience' would then have to decide who they thought was the leader/who the copier. This exercise encouraged the children to work together, moving slowly and thoughtfully whilst maintaining concentration and keeping good eye contact. The children showed a real sense of pride when they 'tricked' the audience into thinking the other child was the leader. This exercise really seemed to boost self-esteem. It gave staff a chance to praise the children for their efforts in playing the game. The more withdrawn and shy children quite literally seemed to grow when given direct praise from an adult.
5. **Climbing into Bubbles-** The group would blow up imaginary bubbles, climb into them and float high above the ground. ES or LC would ask the children what they could see, encouraging imaginative responses. Wherever the days story was set, LC or ES would paint a picture for the children - for example, they could be floating high over a 'play ground' or 'castle' or 'forest'. This way of gathering the full groups' responses gave the children ideas and resources, as well as providing security for them when they later entered the story square to act out their part in the days story.
6. **The Story.** From the beginning of each session, the author of the days story was made to feel special by the workers "It's a special day today. We're telling your story!" LC and ES took the opportunity to allow each child their own moment to be the centre of attention and feel special. The group would always thank and applaud the author of the story.
7. **Shower.** At the end of the session we would 'shower' off the story and prepare to go back to class. Interestingly, some of the children would refuse to participate in this activity. Staff came to the conclusion that this was because the children wanted to stay in Speech Bubbles.
8. **Hedgehog:** Hedgehog would be passed around and the children would tell the soft toy what they'd enjoyed most about the session. The children's comments to the hedgehog were often very generous, congratulating each other for effort, talent and story writing.
9. **Story Telling.** One or two children would remain with staff to tell their story. It would be copied down verbatim and would form the basis of the planning for the following week. This was a special time for the child as they would have the undivided attention of a SB staff member- listening closely to their story and writing it down word for word.

Pre and Post Session Prep.

ES (Drama Practitioner) and LC (Drama Therapist) would arrive at the school with time to plan and mark out the stories collected the previous week. SB staff would revisit the previous week's session and decide whether more time or focus needed to be spent on a certain exercise or on an individual within the group. As an example: behaviours in the previous week's session might mean a focus was needed on 'taking turns'. Sue Maguire (SM) the school staff member present in all SB sessions would meet us to discuss any difficulties the children had experienced that week, e.g. had any looked after children had contact with parents? Had this impacted their behaviour or emotional wellbeing at school?

ES and SM would then collect the children and escort them to the SB room to be greeted by LC and start the session. The two SB sessions run for approximately 40 minutes, with one child remaining with a practitioner at the end to give their story. Following both sessions, ES, SM and LC would debrief and discuss each child using the post session evaluation sheets as a prompt for analysing how well the children had attended during the session, with markers such as: making eye contact, or taking turns. the children would be awarded a score between 1-5 for each indicator. Over time this system allowed staff to see what aspects the children were struggling with, being challenged by or making progress with. This data also informed planning, and allowed staff to decide what exercises would be most useful to support children's needs. To begin with, SM allocated the score each child was granted up until roughly March 2014. This should have always been a shared process so that any decisions made came after as much discourse as possible. It will be a shared exercise in the new SB projects.



5 Referrals: Who is the project for?

Staff at Sandbrook School spoke of the many children who would have benefitted from this project and choosing just 20 referrals was a difficult process. The personalities within the 2 groups were complex. One child was a selective mute; another had English as an additional language, most had a lack of confidence and low self-esteem, some had behavioural and attachment issues and some pronounced speech impediments. The data gathered over the year shows that all of these children have made progress³. However, three children in particular found Speech Bubbles challenging⁴. These children found following the values in the chant - good listening, being gentle etc. difficult to follow.

One of the challenges within the sessions was balancing the personalities of the children in the groups. The more boisterous children demanded a lot of attention from staff, which impacted the amount of attention and time that could be offered to quieter and more withdrawn children.

Case Studies

Child One was disruptive at the start of the year, demanding of staffs' attention, would continually talk over others and found it difficult to concentrate on the different activities during the session. As the year progressed, this child improved enormously. They became able to listen, hold attention, wait for their turn, perform enthusiastically in the story square, give eye contact and speak when appropriate. This child had a significant speech impediment which improved significantly throughout the year. Staff have considered that perhaps this improvement links directly to the improvement in behaviour. This child was able to utilise the methods and learning framework offered by SB and the calm and controlled nature of the sessions helped this child to slow down, relax, become more composed and in turn their speech improved as a result.

Child Two regularly refused to take part, but did speak to school staff and ES en route to SB about their enjoyment of project. She would be an active audience member but always refused to participate in any activity. This child is diagnosed with an ASD. Staff noticed visible enjoyment on her face as she observed her peers acting or participating in activities - but any attention resulted in the child turning away and scowling. However Child Two really enjoyed telling their own story. The data shows this child made 'no significant progress' by the end of the year⁵. This was frustrating especially in light of the child chatting happily to and from the SB room and happily offering stories when with staff on a 1 to 1 level. Despite the data, staff felt this child had benefitted from the project.

³ Evidence of data –section 14.

⁴ By 'lack of boundaries' we refer to the more relaxed and gentle nature of Speech Bubbles- compared to classroom expectations and conduct.

⁵ Evidence of data –section 14

Child Three appeared disengaged and passive during sessions. This child would rarely join and if it was their turn to participate, they would often opt out. He would sit with the group and watch but would appear bored and a little unhappy. Towards the end of the year this child offered an extremely violent and age inappropriate story and the child became passionate and excited for the first time. SB staff were able to hand this over to the school staff member in charge of Child Protection and following a meeting with a parent made the discovery that the boy was playing rated 18 video games with an older sibling at home. It is regretful that staff didn't focus slightly more on this child the early months of the project; this learning will certainly be carried forward.

6 The difference between the two groups.

The Group One sessions always ran more smoothly. The children were calmer, more focussed and seemed to be able to grasp activities more quickly than the other group. There was a balance of personalities within Group One. It meant that individual children had their needs met more easily. Only one child was particularly boisterous but their behaviour was easily managed by SM, as the group in itself was very calm. Group Two were more complex. 5 or 6 of the most complex participants were in Group 2. Two of most boisterous children were in Group Two alongside 2 of the most withdrawn.

It is worth noting that children in Group Two were in the class room when children from Group One were collected for SB. Group Two knew that in 45 minutes, it'd be their turn to be collected. This is 45 minutes to feel excited, agitated, nervous or even anxious. This wait and anticipation might have been a contributory factor to some members of that group being livelier.

7 Relationships.

School Staff & Practitioners.

Staff at Sandbrook gave consistent support to the project and SB staff. SB staff felt valued within the school and supported throughout the year. Our support worker Sue Maguire (SM) is extremely special and the project would not have been as successful without her continued support, focus and commitment. Acting as the link between the project and the school, SM participated in every session. One of her roles within the school is to run an initiative called 'Tiny Turtles'. There are a great number of pupils at Sandbrook Primary who are 'looked after' children or who have very chaotic and disrupted home-lives. 'Tiny Turtles' is a nurture classroom that focuses on well-being and is a space for children to go to while at school away from the formal classroom. Sue was an ideal staff member to work on the SB project. Sue is a team player who's really willing to work as a team of equals, appropriately growing into the role as she learnt the ropes. Sue pushed herself throughout the

year- she was always willing to take the acting and story-telling seriously and showed the children how to commit to the programme, leading by example. SM was excellent at taking a positive approach to any discipline issues, reinforcing the SB values by constantly using the language of the chant. "*Good listening, good taking turns, good acting*" and our additional values: "*good copying, good watching, good eye contact*".

It was only after the project had finished that it was mentioned that certain teachers within the school felt frustrated at children leaving the formal classroom for their SB session. There are a number of interventions in the school to support the children's learning and classroom teachers are not always fully informed on these. SB sessions provide a calm and relaxed environment and SB staff work hard to create a gentle and nurturing atmosphere, so it's very important that teaching staff are aware of this should the children need time to adjust on arrival back in the classroom. For all future SB projects, specific meetings will be set up between SB staff and class teachers to fully explain the SB approach and project aims, to gain support from school staff and further support the needs of the children taking part.

As previously mentioned, SB sessions provide a relaxed, fun and less formal setting. Behaviours that might be acceptable in Bubbles may well be unacceptable in the classroom. The working atmosphere of SB took time to settle both for the children taking part, and SM, who felt early on that the behavioural boundaries were too relaxed. SM felt uncomfortable, for instance, with children not taking part, as this wouldn't be accepted in class.

However after working closely over the year, gaining confidence in each other and in the techniques used within the sessions, ES and SM are looking forward to managing the children's behaviours, and finding a good balance between school expectations and SB's nurturing atmosphere.

Relationships with the children.

LC (Drama Therapist) took on the role of lead facilitator and story narrator. ES (drama practitioner) and SM (Sandbrook staff) took part in the sessions alongside the children. ES would lead certain exercises. Many of the children, especially the girls would want to sit on ES's and SM's knee, hold their hands etc. Many of the children were in the care system and many experienced traumatic home lives and often they shared their upset with staff. A key learning point for next year is, while allowing the children the time and space to share, it is vital to move on with the session. Any vital information shared can be referred to appropriate school staff who can then give the individual time and attention that is needed.

8 The room and the story square.

A lot of time was spent ensuring that the room was always laid out in the same way to avoid unnecessary distraction as many of the children would fiddle and fidget. Routine and structure is essential to the smooth running of SB. The room must appear the same every week for the children to recognise that they are in 'Speech Bubbles' and therefore behave according to 'Speech Bubbles' structure. A major recognisable factor for the children is the story square. Having the square in place before the children arrived to the room helped the Sandbrook children, because the room was very small, and laying the square during the session proved difficult. As soon as they enter the room and see the story square in place- Speech Bubbles has begun. While in the sessions, a major emphasis was laid on being 'in' or 'out' of the story square. The story square is their performance space- a space to 'do good acting'. When the child steps into the square, they are in the realm of story and make believe. When they are out of the story square they are an audience member. It's important to separate the two so that the children know there is a special place to perform and a special place to watch and listen. Being on the outside of the story square is as important as being inside and this is a crucial part of SB. The children learn to be active observers; they learn to enjoy watching and learning from each other.

On one occasion, the SB sessions had to be held in a different room (owing to the school exams). The space we were allocated was far more spacious. All the children adapted very well to this change except the child with an ASD. This child was quite distressed during the session and this highlighted the importance of structure of and routine.



9 Visitors to the group

Throughout the year, we had two visitors to the sessions (both on two occasions). One was the Artistic Director of M6 Theatre and the other, the Associate Director of Creative Learning at London Bubble Theatre. The first time we had a visitor (AD of M6 Theatre) both SM and LC were absent from the session and therefore this visitor came to the session to support ES. For group 2 (the more complex group) this staffing change was difficult for them. One of the children who had very complex needs found this change almost too much to deal with and couldn't join in with the session and displayed hyperactive and attention seeking behaviour. Again, this highlighted the importance of routine and familiarity. On the other occasions we had visitors, the children enjoyed showing off their skills and seemed to like having another adult in the room to share and show off their achievements.

10 Open sessions and the reaction to an audience.

Some SB groups offer open sessions where family or carers can come to the school and watch the children act out one of the (group) stories. As so many children at Sandbrook are in the care system, and not in contact with their parents, SB staff felt

it would be better for each child to choose a friend from their class to come and watch them act out one of their stories. In preparation for this the children worked on acting out (rehearsing) the same group story three times so they felt very confident in what they were showing. The audience came to the whole SB session and watched all the activities - the chant, name and bucket etc - then the group performed their rehearsed story. This was a fantastic session. All the children rose to the occasion of having peers watching them. At the end of the open session one child, on an impulse, kissed his friend on the cheek while they were leaving the classroom. All the children laughed at what he'd done. SM and SB staff supported the child by reminding the others: 'it's a good thing ____ kissed his friend because in Speech Bubbles we are gentle with each other'. This brief moment felt significant as the SB children seemed to really grasp the concept of 'being gentle'. The children enjoyed the applause and praise given to them by their friends. This helped the children in later sessions appreciate what 'being a good audience member' means and gave staff an example to refer to. Open 'bring a friend' sessions will form part of SB moving forward.

11 Hedgehog

The children all had a very special friendship with 'Hedgehog', the toy passed around at the end of the session. The children talk to 'Hedgehog' about what they liked/disliked about the session or they could simply give the toy a hug and pass it on. It became a very important part of the sessions, giving each child their own moment to speak, with no rights or wrongs, always with encouragement. The children who hardly spoke to 'hedgehog' at the beginning of the year spoke in sentences to it by the end of the year.



12 The Impact of Speech Bubbles.

How has 'Speech Bubbles' impacted/supported the children's school life?

Teaching staff commented on the SB children having made key improvements in their ability to tell stories within class. Teaching staff also commented on the SB children being apparently more imaginative during their playtime and were seemingly having more fun with their friends.

13 The sentiments of the school staff

1. Teacher Questionnaire.

What is your understanding of the 'Speech Bubbles' Project?

It helps to develop children's confidence and speaking and listening skills.

Have you noticed any changes in communication/confidence/behaviour in any of the children participating in 'Speech Bubbles'? Please give specific examples.

I haven't noticed any significant change that I could put down to speech bubbles as most attend Tiny Turtles as well.

From your understanding, how do you think the project is supporting some of the needs of the children taking part in 'Speech Bubbles'?

I know they enjoy going but as I haven't noticed any significant change in their speaking and listening skills. However these children will always benefit from any small group work so I think that is beneficial.

2. Teacher Questionnaire.

What is your understanding of the 'Speech Bubbles' Project?

I think it is something to do with telling and acting out stories to improve speech and self-esteem.

Have you noticed any changes in communication/confidence/behaviour in any of the children participating in 'Speech Bubbles'? Please give specific examples.

All the children come back to class eager to talk about what they have done in SB.

From your understanding, how do you think the project is supporting some of the needs of the children taking part in 'Speech Bubbles'?

It seems to be nurturing the children in order to give them confidence to speak and perform in small group.

3. Teacher Questionnaire.

What is your understanding of the 'Speech Bubbles' Project?

From what I understand children with learning/emotional issues go there for positive learning experiences- specifically to do with speaking and listening, I understand it to be a way to communicate with other children and adults without the formal constraints of the classroom.

Have you noticed any changes in communication/confidence/behaviour in any of the children participating in 'Speech Bubbles'? Please give specific examples.

_____ is more able to tell us why he communicates as he does, and is far better at listening than previously. He will say if his behaviour is good or not. He starts conversations more often, and has shown the ability to have much more of a formal chat.

_____ always appears confident. However, I feel she puts on a very brave face front when in reality she is fragile. Her communication about her dad and not being able to see him anymore is now quite a common conversation. She seems to be yearning for dad/a father figure in her life. Maybe SB has helped her to tap into those emotions and frustrations.

From your understanding, how do you think the project is supporting some of the needs of the children taking part in 'Speech Bubbles'?

It is enabling children to speak and to listen. It is building confidence and the children feel more valued in class.

_____ is having her emotional needs met more, but she is still very confused who has been let down badly by adults. She often says very negative things and it seems that's SB has helped boost her and allowed her to have fun. She needs constant reassurance that she is loved and needs positive role models in her life. She has positive role models in Speech Bubbles.

Interview with Sam Rafter
(Learning Support and Inclusion Manager at Sandbrook Primary)

What is your understanding of the 'Speech Bubbles' Project?

Speech Bubbles develops children's Speaking, Listening and Communication skills through drama experiences.

Have you noticed any changes in communication/confidence/behaviour in any of the children participating in 'Speech Bubbles'? Please give specific examples.

The children who participate in Bubbles are showing more confidence around school. I have noticed that they are speaking to other adults more. Almost all of the children are showing improvements in behaviour apart from 2 or 3 who have very complex lives.

What are your thoughts towards the effectiveness of this project?

I do believe that the project is very effective at enhancing the children's communication skills and is worthwhile doing. Hence informing the Head Teacher that we need to fund for another year.

The school member of staff is also gaining some strategies that can be used in other nurture provision run in school.

From your understanding, how do you think the project is supporting some of the needs of the children taking part in 'Speech Bubbles'?

The children feel part of a special group and feel that their own wishes and stories are valued.

What improvements could M6 Theatre make to the organisation/delivery of the project?

We just need to make sure that the children have some kind of boundary that they and staff can stick to in regards to behaviour. I know that this is being developed all the time between M6 practitioners and school staff. Children have to be able to be successful in Bubbles and back in the classroom.

Interview with Sue Maguire.

How effective do you feel this project is?

I feel this project has a very positive affect on children who never have the opportunity to explore themselves through expressive arts.

Can you give examples of exercise and techniques you feel worked best for the groups?

The mantra of the chant has helped these children enormously... good listening, taking turns. The routine of the sessions really helped some. Expressing themselves through acting has also really helped them.

Can you give examples of when you felt exercises didn't work well?

Climbing into the bubbles was sometimes a little confusing for individuals and a bit chaotic.

Have you noticed any changes in communication/confidence/behaviours in any of the SB children?

I think all the children have become more aware of the others children's feelings and their strengths and weaknesses. ___ has definitely learnt to slow down and take a breath. They've all learnt to slow down, listen, think and then speak.

How has working on the Bubbles project impacted on your own practice?

I use the SB mantra all the time in Tiny Turtles. It has given me confidence to use drama techniques in my work

What improvements could be made to the project in terms of organisation and delivery?

I think there should be more sessions and maybe the project could have fewer breaks or less long breaks. Maybe Bubbles children could be invited to watch M6 Productions in school.

14 Data Analysis.

Speaking & Listening

3 Children have made a striking improvement
 14 Children have made a clear improvement
 3 Children have made a slight improvement

Emotional and Conduct Behaviour

(Including subjective class teacher comments)

4 Children made a striking improvement
 9 Children made clear improvement
 6 children made a slight improvement

The overall results:

4 children have made a striking improvement
 13 children have made a clear improvement
 3 children have made a slight improvement

15 Report Conclusion.

The data shows that all the children's Speaking, Listening and Learning has improved this year, as has their conduct and behaviour. Importantly though, all the children throughout the week leading up to the project repeatedly spoke to Sue Maguire about their excitement for the next Speech Bubbles session. Even the most reserved and withdrawn children spoke of their enjoyment of the project (those who on paper only showed a 'slight improvement'. The sessions were always fun, happy and creative and as the project progressed and the children became used to the nature and structure of the work, as did the children's enjoyment and creativity. This project allows and encourages children to have fun, be creative, explore, express themselves and trust in their own ideas and imagination. As the project developed, children who were very shy and withdrawn at the start visibly relaxed and grew in confidence, they were able to express themselves in new ways and were given a voice. Recorded data has proved for a number of years that the framework and structure of Speech Bubbles has a positive impact on its referrals, yet the project's

other impacts, those mentioned above and which are hard to quantify have an invaluable affect on a child's social, personal and educational development.

