

***An exploration into Dramatic Play and Story Drama as a tool for
supporting children from a socio-disadvantaged background with
Speech, Language and Communication Needs.***

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Abstract

This dissertation will aim to examine through theoretical analysis how drama might be an effective tool for supporting children from a socio-disadvantaged background with a speech, language or communication need and how this may also impact on their personal and social well-being.

An explanation to the meaning SLCN is presented, providing underpinning knowledge of the difficulty alongside how this difficulty can effect healthy communication development.

The primary focus of the dissertation looks at the positive effects of dramatic play and storytelling as a tool for developing communication skills and how through dramatic play and conventions, personal and social skills are also developed. Finally, the conclusion presents the reader with an argument for the need of supporting speech and language development and a final thought on which to contemplate.

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To the memory of Joyce M Lloyd

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Introduction

‘Almost everything we do involves Speech, Language and Communication’

(Communication Trust. 2012) In today’s modern world, we are surrounded by many tools which enable us to communicate with other people. Technology is widely available to both young and old, and when this new technology goes missing or becomes broken we are often left feeling lost or separated from the world.

Communication helps us as humans express our needs and desires. We use communication to tell others how we feel and it is a tool used in helping to build positive relationships. Being able to use basic communication such as talking, listening and understanding, are all life skills that can easily be taken for granted. For children who have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), expressing their needs or ideas can be a daily challenge. They will often have various difficulties with both speech and language, communicating effectively, being able to interact with others and to manage their emotions.

There is increasing evidence to suggest that there is a link between SLCN and social disadvantage. ‘Early findings from the Language and Literacy across the Life course project show that there is a relationship between a child’s social background and their ability to understand words.’ (I CAN. 2007. Pp.8) ‘Communication is equally key to the child’s broader well-being and mental health. Being able to convey personal and social needs to friends and family is an integral part of the process of growing up.’ (DfEE. 2000. Pp.1)

Drama is an effective tool for developing communication skills as communication is at the heart of all dramatic activity. Drama helps to encourage creativity in problem

solving and language learning, challenge perceptions of the world around us and can provide us with the skills needed to be expert communicators whilst enhancing confidence and a sense of self. For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, using Drama to help develop their communication and social skills will enable them to avoid social exclusion and receive better education.

The London Bubble Theatre Company are leading the way on using drama with children from socio-disadvantaged, especially those with SLCN. Their “Speech Bubbles” programme, is a drama intervention aimed at children in key stage one that uses a “story drama” approach to aid children’s receptive and expressive language. In his report *Promoting social and personal well-being in 5 – 7 year olds through the “Speech Bubbles” drama project*, Dr Jonathan Barnes of Canterbury Christ Church University states the Speech Bubbles programme as being an educational success. Dr Barnes spent time analysing the programme over two terms in two different primary schools and presents his findings in this report. An outline of Speech Bubbles can also be found in *Drama to Inspire* which is a London Drama guide to excellent practice in drama for young people. In this guide, Adam Annand, the Associate Director of London Bubble, gives an account of the Speech Bubble programme that was set up with Pupil Development Centres in the London borough of Southwark. Mr Anannd explains to the reader that the need for the programme arose after concerns were raised about ‘children’s poor communication skills and the impact this had on speaking, listening and attention’ (CONVENTION. 2011. Pp.141), in key stage one. At the time of going to press, the programme was midway through its first year and noticeable improvements in children’s communication were being witnessed amongst the children taking part. The story drama approach to ‘creating,

exploring and re-enacting stories is deeply influenced by the work of Vivian Gussin Paley, (CONVENTION. 2011. Pp.141)

Paley, an American kindergarten teacher and early childhood education researcher, has written many noticeable books on the connection of play and storytelling and how this can notably impact on a child's intellectual and social growth. In her book *The Boy who would be a Helicopter*, Paley stresses the importance of play and recounts her experiences of being a teacher and using stories within the classroom to help children learn and also to socialise with each other. Upon widening the literature search to include the idea of story making as a means of supporting the communication process, the author of this dissertation came across *Drama Therapy and Storymaking in Special Education*. This text covers the broad spectrum of learning difficulties including those with attention deficit disorder and autism, all of which fall under the SLCN umbrella. Although viewed from a drama therapy point of view, the techniques put across by Paula Crimmens in the book could also be transferred to assisting children with a speech, language and communication need. Crimmens states that story making and other creative therapies are majorly beneficial to 'improving communication skills and providing alternative means to communication'. (CRIMMENS. 2006. Pp.15) Similar to the work of the Speech Bubbles programme, creative therapists when working with learning difficulties, tend to focus on social skills development and acquisition of language. They will also address the emotional issues in being a child with a learning difficulty. Children with SLCN will have difficulties in forming relationships due to their lack of communication skills which in turn will impede on their social behaviour. Crimmens believes that 'Drama therapy is ideal for the teaching and practising of social skills with children with cognitive and communication impairments.' (CRIMMENS. 2006. Pp.12) This

suggests that drama techniques could be an effective tool for supporting a child with SLCN to develop their language and communication skills but to also overcome social barriers enabling them to participate in social situations. This may ultimately lead to the child gaining greater personal confidence, educational inclusion and an improved sense of self.

Historically, children with speech, language or communication difficulties have had their needs provided for by specialist schools or units. However recent changes in education legislation over the past twenty years has seen children with learning difficulties such as having a SLCN, moving from segregated provision to inclusive education. In 1999, the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), along with the Department of Health (DH) and the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW), commissioned a research report into the provision for children with speech and language needs in England and Wales in the education and health settings. The report identified that the speech and language needs of children 'directly impacted on children's educational achievement and in many cases resulted in mental health difficulties and in social exclusion.' (DfEE. 2000. Pp.1) As-well as the need for speech and language therapists, it was also identified that teachers needed to have a better understanding of child development and that more training was needed. In light of this, resource texts such as *Inclusion for Children with Speech and Language Impairments* became available for both teachers and professionals to help promote learning and social inclusion in a mainstream school for children with communication needs.

This dissertation will aim to explore various applied drama techniques that might aid communication development amongst children from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds. To do this, the first chapter of this dissertation will look at the definition

of SLCN and how it can best be identified, looking at the correlation between communication difficulties and social disadvantage.

The second chapter will present the development of speech and language in children and discuss the impact that having a SLCN may have on this development reflecting upon the theoretical positions of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky.

The third chapter will identify the importance of play and storytelling in communication development and share the thought that, 'drama is a basic method of learning that has grown out of play' (RAWLINS & RICH. 1985. Pp.v) In their book *Look, Listen and Trust*, Rawlins and Rich offer drama methods to be used in the classroom as a means of 'personal discovery and development' (RAWLINS & RICH. 1985. Pp.vii) Rawlins and Rich split the methods into observation skills (look), listening skills (listen) and personal awareness, confidence and working with other (trust). Although aimed at introducing drama to the classroom, the techniques offered could also be of use when supporting a child with SLCN to learn. Notably their games listed under the headings; *Understanding and Accepting* and *Non-verbal communication*; offer ideas to develop expressive language skills. It is also worth considering the drama techniques that are adopted in an English language classroom for speakers of other languages. In *Drama through Language through Drama*, Butterfield suggests that the use of drama in a language learning environment 'provides the vicarious experience closest to real life that can be offered in the classroom and it allows us to practice living.' (BUTTERFIELD. 1993. Pp.2) This idea of being able to 'practice living' is essential for children with SLCN. Providing a safe way for them to explore and react allows them to nurture their development without the children feeling threatened or being misunderstood. This chapter will also discuss the results of the Speech Bubbles programme as identified

by Dr Jonathan Barnes, suggesting the importance of play and storytelling within drama.

Chapter four will look at the importance of Drama for personal, social and emotional development and discuss why this is relevant for children with SLCN. For children with SLCN developing positive social and emotional skills will help enhance their opportunity for inclusion both within education and socially. Having the skills to play positively within group situations, enables children with SLCN to learn language and communication skills from children whose skills in these areas are well developed.

Finally, this dissertation will conclude by bringing the key elements together from the chapter discussions and suggest a need for a way forward with supporting children with SLCN.

CHAPTER ONE

Speech, Language and Communication Needs

‘Communication is at the heart of the educational process. Language whether written or spoken, is the most effective medium for a child to show that he or she understands a topic in class and can access the curriculum’ (DfEE. 2000. Pp.1) Most children upon starting primary school will have a sufficient vocabulary, be proficient with their speech, language and communication skills expected of their age, and are able to express themselves with clarity. Children whose speech, language and communication skills that have not developed for varying reasons at the expected level for their age, may be described as having speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) or difficulties and this affects around 10% of all children.

These difficulties are often paired with one or more other developmental conditions such as general learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorders, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), dyspraxia or hearing impairments. SLCN may also be present in children who have English as an additional language, and in a small numbers of cases, speech and language difficulties may exist as a result of physical, emotional or sexual abuse. SLCN are also found to be a growing concern in children from a socio-disadvantaged background. ‘Studies indicate that poverty can seriously hamper parent’s ability to adequately respond to their child’s early language needs and provide a home learning environment which is best suited to enhancing language and communication skills in the early years.’ (SAVE THE CHILDREN. 2013) The correlation between Special Education Needs (SEN) such as SLCN and social

disadvantage has also been highlighted in a 2006 government report on SEN, stating that it is 'undeniable that socially deprived children tend to have more educational difficulties.' (EDUCATIONAL SKILLS COMMITTEE. 2006. Pp.17)

To help raise awareness of these issues, The Communication Trust was established in 2007 by Afasic, BT, Council for Disabled Children and I CAN. This trust now consists of a coalition of 50 not-for-profit organisations who work together to support everyone who works with children in England to support their speech, language and communication. In 2008 the communication trust reported that as many as 50% of children from socio-disadvantaged areas have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than children from more affluent areas of the same age. Speech and language difficulties present themselves in a variety of different forms and it is often known as the 'hidden disability' (THE COMMUNICATION TRUST. 2013); children can become quite 'proficient at hiding the true nature of their difficulties' (THE COMMUNICATION TRUST. 2013) and difficulties are not always easily identifiable. 'For this reason, children with language difficulties can be misconstrued. They may be accused of difficult behaviour if they show frustration at not being understood.' (DAINES. 1996. Pp.13)

The impact of this in later life, if support is not given to these children is the increased likelihood of them coming into contact with the youth justice system. Recent research has highlighted 'these difficulties as a significant area of unmet need, whilst also noting that they may be more prevalent in the offending population than in the general population.' (NACRO. 2011) The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists conducted a campaign study called 'Locked Up' that highlighted the impact of communication difficulties on offenders and noted the

importance on identifying SLCN early on to prevent offending behaviour. Young offenders with communication problems will have difficulty in grasping the terminology used by professionals around them and will lack the ability to 'understand the processes that they will be subjected to.' (NACRO. 2011)

An evaluation of the YOT assessment tool, Asset, indicated that of 3,395 young people in contact with youth justice teams, a quarter had special needs (with just over 60% of these in possession of a statement of educational need), 27% had literacy and numeracy needs, 26% had unspecified problems and 42% showed indications of under-achievement. Any of these factors could be indicative of an unidentified speech, language and communication need. (NACRO. 2011)

These statistics reveal the importance of identifying communication difficulties amongst children and young people at an early age and supporting them to overcome these issues in order to succeed. This idea is supported by the work of Bishop and Edmundson (1987), who conducted a study on a group of children with a persistent language difficulty. They found that the children whose communication needs were met by the age of 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ were likely to develop competent reading and writing skills and would continue to develop proficient communication skills throughout their school education, leaving school with little sign of any difficulty. There are several areas of communication where a child with SLCN may be identified as having a difficulty. This difficulty can cover one or many areas and range from mild to severe. The most easily recognized area of difficulty affects the production of speech. Speech may be incoherent and hard to understand due to the

child being unable to use certain sounds. Differing words such as 'catch' or 'cat' may sound the same, the child may stutter when trying to produce repeated sounds that are difficult and they may also have difficulty in using intonation to add meaning to their speech.

A child with receptive language problems will find it challenging to understand spoken language. Identifying this area of difficulty can sometimes be complicated as young children often use visual cues to support their understanding of what is being said. Children with receptive language problems will find it difficult to follow instructions; they will also have a short attention span and will find it difficult to work in groups. Written language could also be misunderstood, for example, a child with SLCN might misunderstand the statement 'the boy was kicked by the girl' and think that it was the boy who kicked the girl. Long term difficulties in receptive language may also lead to behaviour problems both in and out of school.

As-well as speech and receptive difficulties, a child with SLCN may also have difficulties with their expressive language. The child may have a limited vocabulary or be unsure of grammatical structures. Children with expressive difficulties, may also know what they wish to say in their minds, but will be unable to express this verbally. You will find that the child may use sentence structures more appropriate for someone younger, for example a four year old child with SLCN may say 'me got them' instead of 'I got them'. They will also have difficulties with learning and remembering new words, using the correct tense and using the correct vocabulary to express feeling.

A fourth area of difficulty present in children with SLCN is pragmatics. This refers to the social use of language and the way in which language is used to interact with others. This includes the use of verbal and non-verbal communication. 'Many

children who have speech and language difficulties can be described as being pragmatically immature'. (SPEAKE. 2003. Pp.7) Evidence of this can be seen in how the child plays and also in their peer relationships. They may shy away from eye contact, be unable to take turns and will be unaware of the body language of those around them. They may also 'over-use stereotypical phrases including rather adult language or language borrowed from films.' (SPEAKE. 2003. Pp.7) These children may also display selective mutism, be over-quiet or overly confident.

Other difficulties that are associated with SLCN are voice disorders, where the child's voice may have an unusual quality or be persistently harsh. A child with a SLCN may also have poor fine or gross motor skills and may clap or flap their hands when excited. It has also been noted that a child with SLCN will present behaviour difficulties in the form of verbal or physical aggression, inappropriate behaviour or low level annoyances. These behaviours are likely down to the child being unable to understand what is going on around them and being unable to respond and express themselves clearly.

The consequences of severe SLCN could lead to social isolation and increased pressure on families. 'Sometimes the ability of a child with severe SLCN to participate in decision making can be severely restricted, leading to potential ethical dilemmas.' (ICAN. 2011. Pp.12) It may make communicating with these children difficult and it is often a reason as to why disabled children are not consulted. 'Young people themselves want to be seen as individuals first and disabled second' (WATSON et al. 2000), but in some cases the views of children with communication difficulties are ignored.

There is currently no definitive identifiable cause for how or why speech and language difficulties may develop in children. Evidence collected from a study of

children with speech and language difficulties has shown that genetic factors affecting brain development may be a likely cause as speech, language and literacy difficulties may occur in several people from the same family (BYERS BROWN and EDMUNDS. 1989) There are also other factors that have been suggested, but currently there is no evidence to back up these ideas of pre-natal infections and early brain damage. (BISHOP. 1992)

Most children with SLCN will have been identified as having difficulties before they start primary school, and will be seen by various specialist professionals such as speech and language therapists. The benefits of identifying these needs at an early stage will ensure that the children do not miss out on vital developmental stages and can access education from the correct age. This will also ensure that the underlying behaviours that are a result of the communication difficulties will be given the correct response. If the difficulties of the child with SLCN go un-detected upon entering the school system, the class teacher will be the most likely person to identify any need. 'For some of these children, the first signs of difficulty with language may be poor educational progress or the emergence of behavioural problems.' (SPEAKE. 2003. Pp.9) It would be at this point that the child would be referred for therapy, which would reveal the extent of the child's need.

To help with the referral process and assist the teacher in positively identifying speech and language difficulties, checklists like the Afasic checklist, are used to help decide which children may need help. These checklists help the teacher to focus on the child's communication skills in a structured way enabling them to identify the specific area of speech, language and communication where the difficulty may lie. The information is usually gathered over a period of weeks which helps give a

broader picture of the child's need. An example of an Afasic Checklist can be seen in Appendix 1.

It is upon being identified as having a need that children with SLCN can be helped and supported and this will come from a variety of people, who will each have their own role to play. 'The key to success is good communication between all the people involved with an individual child.' (SPEAKE. 2003. Pp.21) Such people may include, teachers, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and more recently creative arts therapists including art, play and drama therapy. Over time with the help and support they receive, these children will develop the skills needed to enable them to cope both educationally and socially. By raising awareness of speech, language and communication needs and having them supported in an effective and positive way, the less chance there will be of these children with SLCN, having their behaviours unrecognised and misunderstood, leading them to come in to contact with the law. This will require a greater commitment from both education and health care services and the involvement of specialist therapists and interventions.

CHAPTER TWO

The Development of Language

‘Through development, language functions as a means of communication, of reflecting on and re-organizing experience and as a way to receive and transform knowledge and values of the community.’ (MEADOWS. 1986. Pp.117) The use of language and communication is an essential feature of human life and ‘social interaction and social communication are fundamental to normal development.’ (RIPLEY, et al. 2001. Pp.1)

The development of language begins in the majority of babies when they are between four and six months old by producing babbling sounds. ‘Spontaneously the baby produces sounds which resemble words and is rewarded by parental approval’ (CHAPMAN & GALE. 1988. Pp.62), this social reinforcement encourages the child to continue exploring with sound and thus begins the early stages of speech.

By around one years of age, a child with normal development will be able to produce single words and use voice, gesture, eye contact and facial expression to communicate with others. They will also understand phrases such as “Where are your eyes”, and have comprehension of more words than they can say. By the age of eighteen months, a child will be developing a vocabulary of around twenty words.

At the age of two years old, the child will have developed a vocabulary of around two hundred words and be able to formulate short sentences. They will also be able to understand simple instructions when the context is easily identifiable for example, “get your shoes”.

With continued normal development, by the time a child reaches four to five years of age, they should be using a vocabulary of around 1500 – 2000 words. They will be able to understand more complex instructions and be able to use fuller sentences that can be understood by others. At this age the child will also be confident in their speech and be able to express their own interests and feelings in an appropriate way. Appendix 2, gives a detailed description of the development of speech, language and communication from birth to sixteen years of age.

The majority of children will have established Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) upon starting education; they will understand classroom instructions, take turns in conversations, use descriptive language and be able to use questioning to deepen their understanding of the world around them. Progressing through the school system however; will require children to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), as the language in the classroom becomes more formal and challenging. For children with SLCN, progressing to this stage requires a lot more support from school staff and specialists.

The healthy development of a child both mentally and physically requires positive input from the child's parents and close family. Communicating is a social activity and 'early language develops most successfully, in a social context with parents or carers interacting in a dynamic with their infants.' (RIPLEY, et al. 2001. Pp.3).

Unfortunately, for children from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds, this parental input is lacking for various reasons and is instead replaced by television or games consoles. 'Families who experience social disadvantage often have to contend with a multitude of stresses which impact on their ability to interact and actively cultivate their children.' (I CAN, 2007. Pp.9) The result of this is that a child does not develop the pragmatic communication skills needed to succeed in social experiences and

interactions, impeding on the development of the child's self-concept, behaviour and positive self-esteem.

There are many theories surrounding the development of cognitive skills such as language and one key theorist on social constructivism was Lev Vygotsky. Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) was a developmental psychologist who believed that social interaction played an important role in helping to develop cognition and theorised that community is central to the process of being able to make meaning. Vygotsky argued that 'learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function' (VYGOTSKY. 1978. Pp.90); before development can happen, social learning needs to take place.

Jean Piaget (1896 – 1980), offered an alternative view to cognitive development, suggesting that a child's development was not influenced by social interaction, that the child 'was the author of their own thinking.' (OATES & GRAYSON. 2004. Pp.307) According to Piaget's theories, cognitive and language abilities develop in four stages.

The first stage is the Sensorimotor stage, which lasts from a child's birth until they are two years old. At this stage language skills are seen as physical; babies use their mouth's to imitate sounds that they hear being made by their parents, experimenting with the shapes that their mouth can make.

Stage 2 is the Preoperational stage, which begins at two years old and continues until a child is around six to seven years of age. This stage consists of the child talking constantly with the defining feature of the stage being egocentricity. The

Concrete Operational Stage then follows this between the ages of seven until eleven or twelve.

Upon reaching The Concrete Operational Stage, Piaget suggests that a child uses language to refer to specific and evidence based facts, not mental concepts. Piaget also believed that some children would remain in this stage for the rest of their lives.

The final stage in Piaget's theory is the Formal Operational Stage. Here a child uses abstract reasoning to make mental distinctions between themselves and an idea they are considering. Piaget theorised that this fourth stage began when a child reached eleven or twelve years of age. Children at this stage are able to use language to convey and question theoretical concepts found in mathematics or philosophy. Piaget felt that all four stages of development were universal and although some children may not reach the fourth stage, it was not possible for a stage to be missed.

Unlike Piaget's stages of development, Vygotsky placed precedence on culture and social factors affecting cognitive and language development. He also felt that thought and language are initially separate processes from birth; only combining from the age of three years old, whereas Piaget believed that thought preceded language. Vygotsky suggested that children learn from being in contact with those who were able to impart knowledge and model behaviour. The child would then seek to understand the knowledge and internalise the information before interpreting it themselves.

Having this role model to learn from is what children from socio-disadvantaged areas so often need. Failure to develop language and communication skills will lead to difficulties in all aspects of school life. Verbal instructions from teachers may become

confusing and the ability to learn new topic based vocabulary will be considerably impaired. 'The pace and level of language used to teach the curriculum therefore acts as a barrier to learning, rather than a facilitator.' (THE COMMUNICATION TRUST. 2008. Pp.5) Good communication skills are also required to be able to form and sustain close friendships. Due to their lack of skills and confidence, children with SLCN will withdraw from peer groups leading to isolation and behaviour difficulties. Supporting the development of communication skills, is therefore vital for a child's overall well-being and progress.

CHAPTER THREE

Dramatic Play and Storytelling for Developing Communication Skills

Dramatic play has been widely recognized as being a fundamental tool in supporting child development, health, well-being and happiness and the notion of play is a collective experience, with children from across the globe and from all cultures engaging in play and recreational activities. Play is a significant part of a child's learning process and allows them to investigate humanity and its surroundings from within a secure environment. It gives the child a place to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world, organise their thoughts into language and practice social behavior. Dramatic play also promotes the use of expressive language, as children learn to communicate their own desires and also the wishes of the characters or roles they have embodied during play. When engaged in dramatic play, children assume and control a variety of identities and characters, playing out stories and conventions of their culture and environment and by using these make believe stories, children can begin to make sense of their surroundings.

Peter Slade, a pioneer in child drama, wrote about the importance of play in his published works, '*Child Drama*' and '*Child Play*'. Slade theorized that children developed a sense of self through two stages of play; personal and projected.

In personal play, the child is active and the whole body is engaged in the activity. 'Personal play is obvious Drama; the whole person or self is used. It is typified by movement and characterization.' (SLADE. 1954. Pp.29) Children use a variety of means to express themselves outwardly to become the object or character they wish to convey. Personal play may include role play, acting, sports and running around.

Projected play develops at a later stage to personal play and requires a higher level of patience, concentration and organization; usually taking places when the child is still and involves the use of the hands. It consists of a more personal inward approach with the energy being transferred from the physical self into physical objects such as dolls, books, cars or drawing and painting. These objects are used to create or 'play out' scenes from the child's imagination. 'This projection onto objects develops into personal role play. At this stage the objects become extensions of the role, not the role itself'. (HENDY & TOON. 2001. Pp.13) Slade suggests that a sub-conscious memory is recorded of the activity detailing the child's idea and feelings at that particular moment in time. It is 'in this way that we learn to work with symbols in developing such basic skills as reading, writing and mathematics.'

(JACKSON. 1989. Pp.156) Symbolic play takes the use of one object and turns it into something completely different. For example a child playing with a hairbrush, may also use it as a phone or microphone. Wagner states that 'like drawing, symbolic play is a way of saying "This stands for that"'. (WAGNER. 1998. Pp.25)

It is through learning to think symbolically that language and dramatic play develop together, encouraging children to articulate their emotions and embody social behavior. To completely develop language and imaginative thinking, children need to 'make their own stories in which metaphor and symbol become a strong feature.' (HENDY & TOON. 2001. Pp.47)

The use of stories and storytelling are also regarded as being a vital tool to support children's learning and development. Hearing stories being read gives a child the opportunity to listen to spoken language and to learn about intonation, expression and the rhythmic pattern of language. 'Storytelling enables not just teachers but children to actively use, experience and repeat the grammatical constructions which

are part of the literary language of some stories and the repetitive oral refrains’.

(HENDY & TOON. 2001. Pp.4)

Before words were communicated through writing, knowledge was passed on through word of mouth. Traditional tales and stories of folklore allow children to gain access to intricate issues that challenge and affect us as humans. Themes representative of human life such as good and evil, rich and poor, young and old, and self discovery give insight into human behaviour and how to respond to it. The act of passing on knowledge via oral storytelling is a lasting form of education. Stories can be accessed by everyone and are a creative way of being able to communicate and contemplate existence. As Simms informs us,

‘Storytelling is the direct and shared communication of something true being alive. It is not only the story, but a combination of a living storyteller, situation, sound and rhythm of voice, silence, gesture, facial expressions, and response of listeners that makes it potent’ (SIMMS. 1982. Pp.22)

Stories provide children with a fantasy platform with which to imagine new worlds. They can also give account of cultural heritage and provide hope and aspirations for the future, giving children the opportunity to dream, question and develop their understanding of society and emotions. All of this provides a vast amount of material for discovery through drama. ‘It is the bringing alive of stories through role play, and other drama techniques and conventions, that enables important social learning to take place’. (DICKINSON & NEELANDS. 2006.Pp.58) Stories also offer the opportunity to introduce moral and social themes that are highly beneficial to the

development of critical thinking skills and moral imagination in drama. By engaging in the story text, plot and characters, the children will extend their understanding of the themes presented, learn new vocabulary and explore the issues that may be present. It also gives an opportunity for the development of expressive communication skills in the form of gesture, eye contact and body language. 'In dramatizing a concept, the child finds the natural method for concentration and continuity and satisfies the intuitive belief in hidden meanings. (PALEY. 2009. Pp.6)

Through story-drama and the retelling of personal or traditional stories, children have the opportunity to increase their self conviction of their oral language skills whilst adding to previous story experiences. By doing this they are able to control the way they interpret and utilize the language as they 'organise the structure of the tale and make spontaneous choices about vocabulary, style, language and imagery'.

(GRAINGER. 1997. Pp.38)

By exploring story through drama, children can learn to understand a wider range of feelings, themes, relationships and language. Through embodying the variety of roles offered to children in stories, they can enter the world of others; being able to delve into the characters' lives' and learn from the stories. This will in turn, allow the children to gain an insight into their own lives.

The work at London Bubble Theatre Company champions the use of play and storytelling in aiding children from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds with SLCN. In partnership with Southwark Borough Council pupil development centers, London Bubble created a drama intervention programme in response to a report by the Communication Trust that stated that 50% of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds have communication skills significantly lower than children of the same age from more affluent areas. Named 'Speech Bubbles', the programme aims at

impacting children who are unable to communicate their thoughts, have poor attention and listening skills, lack the confidence or developed skills to communicate or children who have English as an additional language. Some composite examples of children who are likely to join the Speech Bubbles programme can be found in Appendix 3.

Children who have been identified as having a SLCN participate in a programme of 24 weekly sessions, in a secure, friendly and playful environment. They are joined by a drama practitioner and either a TA or learning mentor from the school who joins in with the play environment. The sessions are designed to provoke bona fide, fantasy play and to stimulate the imagination, aiming to increase the child's gratification in learning, develop communication skills, improve social relationships and develop improved attention skills. Speech Bubbles centres on the story drama approach which uses the text, plot and characters of a story that has been told by one of the children. By exploring the text using a mixture of play and a variety of drama techniques the children gain an awareness of body language, the use of gesture and eye contact, the importance of facial expressions, sounds and words. This then leads to the children developing and using a deeper vocabulary and increased social and personal confidence. In 2011 78% of referred pupils showed teacher assessed improvement in Learning, Speaking and Listening...and 70% of participants showed improvement in emotional and conduct behaviour. (Annand. 2011)

The Speech Bubbles sessions were also found to help develop fine motor skills as children would use finger movements in the warm up and cool down activities and 'the physicality of the plays and group construction of body-sculpture scenery, like castles, deserts and forests...helped refine gross motor skills'. (BARNES. 2012. Pp.12) Dr Jonathan Barnes research findings reported in *Promoting Social and*

Personal Well-being in 5-7 Year Olds, found that the drama based sessions clearly promoted communication through sounds, words, the face and body. There was also found to be a clear improvement in vocabulary relating to the activities found within the Speech Bubbles structure. The children in the sessions appeared to also develop greater emotional involvement and empathy resulting in longer and more complex interactions with peers. By using the children's own stories in the group sessions, the children had a sense of ownership, 'SB aims to give disadvantaged children control over their stories. The lack of adult's interference in the words and ideas of the children's stories was frequently brought up by the children.' (BARNES. 2012. Pp.17) This empowerment filtered through to the child's body language with children becoming more attentive and open.

Dr Barnes has concluded that the success of Speech Bubbles' simple structure in encouraging play and enjoyment through storytelling motivated a 'positive change in both children and their TAs. This change is measured not only in measurable reading, writing, speaking and listening improvements, but in the visible indicators of well-being amongst participating children and adults.' (BARNES. 2012. Pp.18)

This is why dramatic play and indeed all play is enjoyable and full of fun. Exploring and discovering what is within ourselves is a liberating and joyous experience; 'any approach to language and thought that eliminates dramatic play, and it's underlying themes of friendship and safety lost and found, ignores the greatest incentive to the creative process'. (PALEY. 2009. Pp.6)

By using dramatic activity and stories children can imagine and 'wonder if', finding out their capabilities of being able to alter the events in the story. They can question alternative endings and outcomes 'wondering if' things had been done differently. Developing reflective and creative skills needed to adopt and change a story a child

hears or reads also gives the child the ownership of being able to alter their own story. 'They can be more than they imagined, they have the power to change the stories that shape them, their communities and the world they will inherit'.

(DICKINSON & NEELANDS. 2006. Pp.61) For children with SLCN from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds, learning to be reflective and being able to take ownership of their own story will empower them to find a voice and become accepted both educationally and socially.

CHAPTER FOUR

Personal, Social and Emotional Development through Drama

The importance of supporting the development of personal, social and emotional skills for children with SLCN is a vital part of their overall development. Due to their lack of conversational and non-verbal skills and limited social perception, children with SLCN are extremely likely to find it difficult to create and maintain relationships with their peers. This may lead to social exclusion and being targeted by bullies. Long-term affects of social difficulties may result in a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, behaviour issues and poor educational achievement. As these children grow older they are 'more likely to have poorer emotional health, and in adulthood there is a stronger likelihood of mental health problems.' (I CAN. 2009. Pp.7)

Just as drama can support the development of communication skills, it can also be effective at developing personal and social stability. By engaging in drama, children are bringing their current knowledge whilst exploring something new. As previously mentioned, drama can help support children to understand the ever-changing world around them. Within dramatic exploration, they can learn to develop new skills and thought processes that will aid them as they come up against various challenges. 'Being a social activity, drama requires children to develop and use their social skills to engage in it.' (HENDY & TOON. 2001. Pp.56) The experience of drama is best shared with others as it is the combining of many people, each bringing their own attitudes, ideas and experiences that will influence the outcome of the activity; thus allowing us to learn from each other. Working with others within a group context also provides the opportunity for the development of communication skills needed to be successful socially such as listening skills, co-operation and sharing. Drama also

gives children the opportunity through the observing and taking part of role, to understand empathy, and value diversity in beliefs and culture.

The use of role reversal in drama can be used to encourage children to think and act in a different way. A shy, quiet child may play the part of ruler or hero and save the rest of the group from an evil enemy. This leads to the child feeling empowered and gaining a sense of value and respect about themselves. 'Through adopting a role children can be given a voice and a forum where their ideas will be valued and interaction with their peers developed.' (HENDY & TOON. 2001. Pp.59) This group exploration, without the fear of failure, becomes a collective experience for all who witness it and regular participation in dramatic activity can lead to a child with SLCN becoming socially more confident, leading to an understanding and approval of self and an acceptance of others. 'Specifically, creative drama provides participants an emotional release and the opportunity to develop social skills in a nonthreatening environment.' (FREEMAN. 2003. Pp.132)

By playing out social situations in dramatic play, children can learn to comprehend human behaviour when in certain scenarios. They will gain an insight into feelings and emotions such as happiness, anger, jealousy, sadness and hatred, etc. Having the capability to understand the emotions and minds of others and ourselves is essential if we are to be able to relate to one another. The ability to rehearse and map out our lives in a safe environment is a significant feature of drama. Bringing acquired knowledge of the real world and combining it with the imagined, allows it to be confirmed or manipulated and then placed back into the real world. Holding both the real world and the imagined world in our heads allows for a duality of action to take place. As adults, we may use this strategy to rehearse going for a job interview;

role-playing the interview process so that we can learn how to control it successfully. We would then use this imagined experience and apply it to the real life situation.

The development of social and emotional skills through drama can be supported by the use of a number of different dramatic conventions. The use of dramatic conventions such as teacher in role, frozen images or hot seating can be utilised to help structure the learning to focus children's attention on issues, themes, and questions that may arise from within the story or dramatic play and be related to common issues. These techniques can be used to detach, freeze or concentrate on particular moments in the action, which can then be opened up, for exploration. Dramatic conventions help to build character, un-ravel plot and expose themes, giving children a deeper understanding and commitment to both the story and themselves.

From 2002 until 2005, The University of Turku, Centre for Extension studies in Finland co-ordinated a drama based project titled *Drama a Way to Social Inclusion*, Drama Way for short.

Part of the European Union Socrates, four countries took part in the study, Spain, Portugal, Estonia and Finland each with their own project focus. The projects ranged from using fairy tales to learn about sexuality, using creative arts methods for children escaping family problems to gain new perspectives on their lives and using Catalanian clowns to speak out about the injustice of global trade. Bringing together young and old, prisoners and non-prisoners, artists and non-artists, immigrants and non-immigrants for a common purpose, promoted the sharing of knowledge, dramatic exploration and leading towards a process of understanding.

The project's aim was to study the use of drama as a forum based tool to connect drama with learning and as a way to social inclusion. Designed for children who had been excluded from mainstream education because of behaviour difficulties it noted that there was a need for 'alternative and more adaptable ways of learning for the young people who are under threat from exclusion.' (PIEKKARI. 2005. Pp.9) It was felt that more experiential and participatory methods were needed for children threatened with exclusion and drama was felt to be an effective method of doing this.

Drama Way recognised the essential need for play and that by giving educationally and socially excluded children, the chance to play through drama, they are being given a second chance to learn and enjoy the learning process.

Drama has functioned as a motivating impulse for people with learning difficulties or low motivation for learning. Therefore, the use of drama in such situations has also opened doors for social inclusion by increasing self-esteem, personal and emotional skills and approve creativity. (PIEKKARI. 2005. Pp.12)

This creative way of skills development is an attractive and accessible way for children with SLCN to become included, both socially and educationally. Drama provides the safe non-judgemental place for exploration and discovery to take place. The togetherness of group work and collective sharing within drama, allows children with SLCN to develop at an individual pace and work through the ideas presented to them before coming up with their own conclusion. The sense of empowerment

bestowed on children through this journey will ultimately be a positive attribute for the rest of their lives.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has presented the potential benefits of using drama through the form of play and storytelling in aiding children from socio-disadvantaged backgrounds who have speech, language and communication needs.

Having proficient language and communication skills is essential to not only literacy development, but they are also the building blocks needed for understanding, speaking and listening, expressing thoughts and ideas, reading and writing. Healthy early language development is connected to the growth of social and emotional skills, along with the child's abilities to become attentive, form relationships and experience through play. Children with SLCN have not developed at the usual rate and will not have the skills, vocabulary or emotional development to help them learn or interact with peers. Drama as a social activity is a versatile and positive technique that should be utilised to support children with SLCN.

At the heart of all drama is communication, allowing people to communicate with and understand others in innovative and creative ways. Drama inspires creativity in problem solving and encourages us to question not only our view on the world but also the view of one's self.

Through exploring in a safe and imagined environment of story and make believe, children can not only practise and develop a more complex language and acquire improved social skills, they can also reflect on possibilities for their own beliefs and thoughts. Children are given the opportunity to not only be themselves within drama but also to imagine themselves living the life of someone else.

To see drama, therefore as a method of stimulating environments for talk, as the descriptions in the National Curriculum orders tend to, would be to ignore it's power as as immediate and accessible symbolic form which young people can use together to represent, try out, interrogate and express key areas of human experience.

(GRAINGER. 1997. Pp.53)

Being able to practice areas of human experience and rehearsing language before stepping out into the 'real' world is a crucial task that should be utilised for children with SLCN. Successful inclusion into school and adult life becomes difficult without the necessary social skills as individuals will be unable to form friendships or communicate their feelings leading to isolation, behaviour issues or depression.

By getting to grips with SLCN at an early stage, will also mean finding a solution to some of the achievement and behaviour issues that are present in many schools today. As both London Bubble and Drama Way have discovered, drama is an effective and creative way of doing this. The accessibility of drama is appealing and the group activities allow for sharing and understanding to take place amongst the participants. The empowering effect of playing roles of status or exploring new worlds through the eyes of someone's story leaves children developing confidence whilst also developing social skills such as listening and turn taking.

Current education reforms are seeing drama take a back seat in the curriculum despite the supporting evidence showing that drama is an effective and powerful

learning medium. Concerning SLCN, there is neither a national strategy nor service framework currently set up to support communication skills for all children. With increasing statistics showing that more children from disadvantaged background are developing SLCN, it is time that the government look to alternative interventions such as those that are drama based to support this growing concern. Ultimately, as the Communication Trust states,

We all need to concentrate on speech, language
and communication because of the massive impact
these skills have on children's overall development.

All children including the most able, will benefit
from support with speech, language and communication.

(THE COMMUNICATION TRUST. 2008. Pp.5)

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APPENDIX 1: Example page from an Afasic Checklist



The Afasic Checklist

Checklist 6—10

Speech and language screening test for 6- to 10-year-olds

Child's name _____

School _____

Age _____ years _____ months

Boy

Girl

First language _____

Checklist completed by _____ Date _____

Read each statement and decide whether or not it applies to the child. If it does, tick the box. If you are in any doubt, leave the box empty. At the end of each subsection add up the ticked boxes and enter the number as the subtotal.



1 Response to sound

40 Shows confusion between vowels, consonants, and consonant clusters, leading to difficulty in learning phonics and word-attack skills

.....

b) Cannot imitate a simple handclap rhythm

.....

c) Has difficulty in recognizing simple tunes

.....

d) Has difficulty in discriminating pitch

.....

e) Has difficulty in screening out irrelevant sounds and attending to verbal information e.g. when the teacher is talking

.....

SECTION TOTAL _____

2 Movement and motor skills

- a) Finds judging speed and distance difficult
e.g. when catching a ball
.....
- b) Has not established a preference for the right or left hand or the right or left
foot
.....
- c) Has poorly developed self-help skills
e.g. has problems with dressing, eating, washing
.....
- d) Has poor pencil control
.....
- e) Has poor co-ordination e.g. finds it difficult to use alternate feet when
walking
downstairs, to hop on one foot or to kick a ball
.....

SECTION TOTAL _____

3 Cognitive processes

- a) Has difficulty in understanding the language of sequencing
e.g. **before, after**
.....
- b) Has difficulty in ordering a sequence of activities required to complete a task
e.g. cooking
.....
- c) Has difficulty in learning the order of days of the week, months, seasons
.....
- d) Has difficulty recalling three or more items in short-term memory
.....
- e) Has poor verbal long-term memory for single words
.....

SECTION TOTAL _____

The Afasic Checklists © Afasic 1991

© *How to Identify and support children with speech and language difficulties* LDA

Found in (SPEAKE, 2003. Pp.12)

Appendix 2: Speech, Language & Communication Development Chart

Taken from:

PORTSMOUTH COUNCIL. (2013, November 21). *Speech, Language & Communication Development Chart*. Retrieved April 05, 2014, from Portsmouth County Council: www.portsmouth.gov.uk

Stage and age	Listening and attention	Understanding of language	Speaking	Social communication
The early communicator Birth to 11 months	Turns toward a familiar sound then locates range of sounds with accuracy. Listens and responds to familiar voices, sounds, words or finger plays. Quietens or alerts to the sound of speech. Looks intently at person talking, but stops responding if speaker turns away. Fleeting Attention – not under child's control, new stimuli takes whole attention.	Stops and looks when hears own name. Starts to understand contextual clues, e.g. familiar gestures, words and sounds.	Communicates needs and feelings in a variety of ways including crying, gurgling, babbling and squealing. Makes own sounds in response when talked to by familiar adults. Lifts arms in anticipation of being picked up. Practises and gradually develops speech sounds (babbling) to communicate with adults; says sounds like ' <i>baba, nono, gogo</i> '.	Enjoys the company of others and seeks contact with others from birth. Gazes at faces and copies facial movements, e.g. sticking out tongue. Responds when talked to, for example, moves arms and legs, changes facial expression, moves body and makes mouth movements. Recognises and is most responsive to main carer's voice; face brightens, activity increases when familiar carer appears.
The attentive communicator 8 to 20 months	Moves whole bodies to sounds they enjoy, such as music or a regular beat. Has a strong exploratory	Developing the ability to follow others' body language, including pointing and gesture.	Uses sounds in play, e.g. 'brmm' for toy car. Uses single words. Frequently imitates words	Likes being with familiar adult and watching them. Developing the ability to follow an adult's body language,

	<p>impulse.</p> <p>Concentrates intently on an object or activity of own choosing for short periods. Pays attention to dominant stimulus but is easily distracted by noises or other people talking.</p>	<p>Responds to the different things said when in a familiar context with a special person (e.g. “<i>Where’s Mummy?</i>”, “<i>Where’s your nose?</i>”)</p> <p>Understanding of single words in context is developing e.g. ‘cup’, ‘milk’, ‘daddy’.</p>	<p>and sounds.</p> <p>Enjoys babbling and increasingly experiments with using sounds and words to communicate for a range of purposes (e.g. <i>teddy, more, no, bye-bye</i>).</p> <p>Uses pointing with eye gaze to make requests, and to share an interest.</p> <p>Creates personal words as they begin to develop language.</p>	<p>including pointing and gesture.</p> <p>Learns that their voice and actions have effects on others. Use pointing with eye gaze to make requests, and to share an interest (by 18 months).</p>
<p>The innovative communicator</p> <p>16 to 26 months</p>	<p>Listens with interest to general talk.</p> <p>Enjoys rhymes and demonstrates listening by trying to join in with actions or vocalisations.</p> <p>Rigid attention. May not appear to hear.</p>	<p>Selects familiar objects by name and will go and find objects when asked, or identify objects from a group.</p> <p>Understands and follows simple instructions (e.g. “<i>Throw the ball</i>”).</p>	<p>Copies familiar expressions, e.g. ‘Oh dear’, ‘All gone’.</p> <p>Beginning to put two words together (e.g. ‘<i>want ball</i>’, ‘<i>more juice</i>’).</p> <p>Uses different types of everyday words (nouns, verbs and adjectives, e.g. <i>banana, go, sleep, hot</i>).</p> <p>Beginning to ask simple questions.</p> <p>Beginning to talk about people and things that are not present.</p>	<p>Gradually able to engage in ‘pretend’ play with toys (supports child to imagine another’s point of view).</p> <p>Looks to others for responses which confirm, contribute to, or challenge their understanding.</p>

Stage and age	Listening and attention	Understanding of language	Speaking	Social communication
<p>The developing communicator 22 to 36 months</p>	<p>Shows interest in play with sounds, songs and rhymes. Listens with interest to the noises adults make when they read stories. Single channelled attention. Can shift to a different task if attention fully obtained – using child’s name helps focus. Recognises and responds to many familiar sounds e.g. turning to a knock on the door, looking at or going to the door.</p>	<p>Identifies action words by pointing to the right picture, e.g. “<i>Who’s jumping?</i>” Understands more complex sentences, e.g. “<i>Put your toys away and then we’ll read a book</i>”. Understands ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’ in simple questions (e.g. <i>Who’s that/can? What’s that? Where is?</i>). Developing understanding of simple concepts (e.g. <i>big/little</i>)</p>	<p>Uses between 50 and 200 words. Learns new words very rapidly and is able to use them in communicating. Uses gestures, sometimes with limited talk, e.g. reaches toward toy, saying ‘<i>I have it</i>’. Uses a variety of questions (e.g. <i>what, where, who</i>). Uses simple sentences (e.g. ‘<i>Mummy gonna work</i>’). Beginning to use word endings (e.g. <i>going, cats</i>).</p>	<p>Uses language as a powerful means of widening contacts, sharing feelings, experiences and thoughts. Holds a conversation, jumping from topic to topic. Enjoys being with and talking to adults and other children. Interested in others’ play and will join in. Responds to the feelings of others.</p>
<p>The questioning communicator 30 to 50 months</p>	<p>Listens to others in one to one or small groups, when conversation interests them. Listens to stories with increasing attention and recall. Joins in with repeated refrains and anticipates</p>	<p>Understands use of objects (e.g. “<i>What do we use to cut things?</i>”) Understands prepositions such as “under”, “behind”, “on top” by carrying out an action or selecting correct picture.</p>	<p>Beginning to use more complex sentences to link thoughts (e.g. using <i>and, because</i>). Can retell past event in correct order (e.g. <i>went down slide, hurt finger</i>). Uses talk to connect ideas, explain what is happening</p>	<p>Beginning to accept the needs of others, with support. Can initiate conversations. Shows confidence in linking up with others for support and guidance. Talks freely about their home and community.</p>

	<p>key phrases in rhymes and stories.</p> <p>Focusing attention – still listen or do, but can shift own attention.</p> <p>Is able to follow directions (if not intently focused on own choice of activity)</p>	<p>Responds to simple instructions e.g. to get or put away an object.</p> <p>Beginning to understand ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions.</p>	<p>and anticipate what might happen next, recall and relive past experiences.</p> <p>Questions why things happen and gives explanations. Asks e.g. <i>who, what, when</i>.</p> <p>Uses a range of tenses (e.g. <i>play, playing, will play, played</i>).</p> <p>Uses intonation, rhythm and phrasing to make the meaning clear to others.</p> <p>Uses vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them.</p> <p>Builds up vocabulary that reflects the breadth of their experiences.</p> <p>Uses talk in pretending that objects stand for something else in play e.g. <i>‘This box is my castle’</i>.</p>	<p>Forms friendships with other children.</p>
<p>The skilled communicator 40 to 60+ months</p>	<p>Maintains attention, concentrates and sits quietly during appropriate activity.</p> <p>Two-channelled attention –</p>	<p>Responds to instructions involving a two-part sequence. Understands humour, e.g. nonsense rhymes, jokes.</p> <p>Able to follow a story without</p>	<p>Extends vocabulary, especially by grouping and naming, exploring the meaning and sounds of new words.</p>	<p>Has confidence to speak to others about their own wants, interests and opinions.</p> <p>Initiates conversation, attends to and takes account of what</p>

	<p>can listen and do for short span.</p>	<p>pictures or props. Listens and responds to ideas expressed by others in conversation or discussion.</p>	<p>Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in play situations. Links statements and sticks to a main theme or intention. Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events. Introduces a storyline or narrative into their play.</p>	<p>others say. Explains own knowledge and understanding, and asks appropriate questions of others. Shows awareness of the listener when speaking. Expresses needs/feelings in appropriate ways. Forms good relationships with adults and peers. Works as part of a group of class, taking turns.</p>
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**APPENDIX 3: Composite Examples of Children Likely to Join the Speech
Bubbles programme**

- The child who comes into the room, sits down quietly and smiles if you catch his eye but then disappears from view for the duration of the session. He will answer a question if directed straight at him but you might find yourself not quite catching what he said. This child may have English as an additional language.

- The child who seems to be getting on okay in the group, but physically freezes when she is asked even the most straightforward direct question. She doesn't choose to take a turn to speak but may be able to engage in conversation with her peers. You might find yourself not involving this child in order to spare her what appears to be a deep level of discomfort.

- The child who does not stop speaking, often quietly and often to herself, occasionally causing disruption to the group with a loud comment about someone else. You might find yourself stepping up the level of sanctions – with no discernible effect.

- The child who is interested in everything, distracted by anything new and cannot sit still. He might offer to take turns in joining in group talk or answer questions but often his input will be at best tangential or more likely about something else entirely.

(CONVENTION. 2011. Pp.142-143)