

LONDON BUBBLE

**THE ART OF BUILDING
CREATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

DEVELOPING DRAMA WORKSHOPS FOR
SMALL GROUPS OF REFERRED CHILDREN
AGED 5-7 YEARS (KEY STAGE 1)



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ABSTRACT

This report describes the findings of an action research project commissioned by London Bubble Theatre Company and funded by Knowledge Connect. The study sought to identify the key components of delivering a successful drama workshop programme in schools, focused on improving 5-7 year old children's '*...speaking, listening and attention*' skills, which are key deliverables of Key Stage 1.

The findings of this study are informed by data from non-participant observations of drama workshops in two Southwark Primary schools, recordings of pre and post workshop planning activities by Practitioners delivering the workshop, notes from practitioners reflective diaries, qualitative interviews, and pre and post workshop survey data with a focus on the schools reasons for referring a child to the drama workshop and their assessment of its impact.

The research findings suggest that specific children signal their readiness to engage in the drama workshop in subtle but developmentally significant ways, an action facilitated by a number of factors including a *structured but creative* approach to planning and delivering the drama workshop by the Drama Practitioner. Increased engagement tends to promote

opportunities for the children to use a full range of communication skills in the workshop and also increasingly within the school.

The child's level of engagement is influenced by promoting their capacity to engage more at a socio-emotional level and the importance of an inclusive and collaborative approach to planning and delivering the workshop (which includes the children's participation in that process).

These factors also appear to determine the mechanisms children use to transfer their learning in these sessions to the wider school environment.

Based on the interim results of this study the author of the report suggests ways in which schools can refine their referral criteria for these drama workshops. These early findings focus on the effectiveness of this intervention in meeting the development needs of children who struggle to communicate effectively.

The results of the research are further considered against similar research into introducing drama workshops in schools and we look critically at the limitations of this study.

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1

INTRODUCTION

This report describes the findings of an action research project commissioned by London Bubble and funded by Knowledge Connect¹.

London Bubble was formed in 1972 and has a history of creating popular theatre for Londoners. For many years the company was best known for its summer tours to London parks and open spaces in a large tent. In the early 1990's the tent was replaced with their unique form of promenade theatre with the parks and open spaces of London providing the setting for summer productions. The company actively seeks out creative ways of engaging Londoners in the process of making theatre and this has led to a range of activities including participating in a 3 year project called 'Speak Out' (O'Neill, 2009) which focused on developing the speech and language skills of Lewisham school children.

This research project was co-ordinated by an academic from Birkbeck, University of London with a research interest in child development from a life course perspective and early intervention strategies which may mitigate against the impact of pathogenic childhood experiences.

¹ The '...fundamental aim of Knowledge Connect is to help businesses to grow and prosper through the development of market-focused new products and services'. This development is facilitated by the partnership with universities, further education colleges and research and technology organizations.

The workshops were called 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshops and the research project formally began on 1st September 2009. Data was collected over an eight week period from 29th September until 24th November (excluding half term break) and therefore this report represents the findings from the first term of a three term drama workshop programme in schools.

The programme was delivered through Pupil Development Centres (PDC) within Southwark schools to children at Key Stage 1².

The creation of PDC's emerged out of the 'Nurture classroom' movement, a scheme pioneered by Marjorie Buxall in 1969 in response to the growing number of children who were entering schools with noticeable social, emotional and behavioural problems thought to be a result of 'impoverished early nurturing'.

The PDC's are designed to help restore the child's ability to relate socio-emotionally and engage more fully in general school activities through a targeted programme that focuses on the development of these skills. Southwark NHS PCT and Southwark council describe the PDC's as: having a:

'...common philosophy which is committed to enhancing the wellbeing of children, particularly in relation to their emotional and personal development'.

This initiative is also informed by the National Service Standards for Children (N.S.F.C) framework which places the 'mental and psychological wellbeing of

² Key Stage 1: is the term which refers to the two years of schooling in the England and Wales commonly referred to as Year 1 and Year 2. Pupils are aged between 5 and 7 and this stage covers pupils in Infant school and on occasion the first year of primary school.

children' at the heart of the Government's commitment to improve the quality of life of all children in the United Kingdom. The concept of multiagency engagement with children in order to meet their social, psychological and health needs is one of their guiding principles.

1.1 Story Drama

London Bubbles philosophical and theoretical approach to providing drama workshops in schools is informed by the "Play what you say" work of Vivian Gussin Paley coupled with activities and conventions from the wider canon of drama in education and participatory theatre. "Play what you say" places the child at the centre of the activity, and they become at different times, author, performer and audience.

1.2 Communication Skills in Children

Research in the development of communication skills in children is extensive (Kail, 2004; Werker & Tees, 1999; Chomsky, 1995; Slobin, 1985) and cannot be fully reviewed here.

Much research in this area has focused on understanding how children master the complexity of communication and whether the mechanism for the acquisition of effective communication skills is dependent on external or internal factors

(Chomsky, 1995; Vgotsky, 1934; Bloom and Tinker, 2001) and notably, the role adults play in this process.

A number of Bi-lingual children participated in this study. Research into bilingualism and the impact on children of communicating in two languages at the same time recognises the importance of the social context in creating opportunities for a second language to be learnt (Campbell & Sais 1995).

Greater proficiency in the second language also has an *instrumental* function (to be understood, for work etc) and an *integrative* function (to acculturate, to belong) (Gardner & Lambert 1959)

In this study we sought to consider how to promote communication and engagement in its broadest sense including behavioural (including facial expressions and gestures), verbal, social and emotional communication.

1.3 A 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop

Describing a 'typical' 'Speech Bubble' drama workshop is a complex affair because the context within which the workshop is delivered necessarily affects the way in which it is delivered.

However, if a 'typical' structure exists it consists of the following elements:

- At the beginning of the session, start with Introductions and ground rules using various mediums (visual, song drama etc)

- In the middle of the workshop introduce games or other activity such as re-enactment of a known or group devised story, which has a specific purpose (promotes attention, listening, verbalisations etc)
- End the session by introducing an activity (song with movement etc) which is both fun and recognisable by the children as signalling the end of the workshop

Within this structure the 'story drama' approach to practice creates opportunities for children to shape the way in which the workshop evolves and how the central characters stories developed. These central characters are introduced in physical form (for example, shaping an evolving story around a glove puppet) or by provoking the Childs ability to use their imagination to create a story in his/her head about a mythical creature such as a monster!

'...one of the biggest advantages for me was the fact that the children had equal ownership over the stories that they were telling and you could tell that that had a really positive impact on them...' (Inclusion Manager, excerpt from qualitative interview)

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PURPOSE OF STUDY

The design and focus of the research project was informed by discussions between Senior Management at London Bubble and their academic partner, a Literature review with a focus on research into story drama workshops and the methodological framework generally employed to generate evidence of the effectiveness of this type of intervention.

The overall objectives of the literature review were to:

- Review literature on drama workshops within a school setting
- Review the approach to conducting research (this to include research design, methods and methodology) on drama workshops delivered within a school setting
- Identify which factors render these programmes effective.

The literature review enabled us to clarify the theoretical framework, analyse and identify methods and methodology used in this type of research and the approach taken to data analysis.

We intended for our research design to incorporate 'best practice' in relation to conducting qualitative research within a setting that also required the

management of a number of interrelated and dependent relationships (the School, London Bubble, the Child attending the workshop etc).

After completing the process of collecting and reviewing the literature we developed the following research questions to guide us in the research process:-

1. Do drama workshops improve the communication skills of 5-7 year old children attending small referred groups?
2. What knowledge and skills are required to deliver drama workshops to 5-7 year old children in small referred groups?

3

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

3.1 Who participated in this study?

The research was conducted during the first school term of a three term programme, delivered through two Pupil Development centres in the London Borough of Southwark. The Lead Educational Psychologist for Southwark in conjunction with the Assistant Director at London Bubble decided which two schools would be used as pilot sites for this research.

In designing the research process we recognized that there were a number of people involved in developing, delivering and monitoring the success of this initiative in schools and in order to measure impact using a qualitative research framework, we would need to gather data from four interrelated groups of participants.

Group One: Children

There were two cohorts of children at both pilot sites.

- Cohorts one and two were made up of two groups of ten children aged 5-7 referred to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop by their classroom teachers and/or the Head Teacher of that school. The referral was based on the teachers' perception that identified children could benefit from

additional support to improve their communication skills and consequently improve their enjoyment of education. The Childs ability to develop the use of receptive and expressive language skills³ represents the main focus of the reason for referral. The development of these communication skills are key success indicators for components of Key Stage 1.

- Prior to being referred to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop the children were not formally assessed as having poor receptive and expressive communication skills and no formative referral criteria was made available to those school staff charged with identifying children for this programme. However, the Assistant Director at London Bubble and the Lead Educational Psychologist for Southwark provided guidance to schools about who to refer and who may not benefit from this form of intervention (Please see Appendices 1 for more information).
- Parents of the children referred to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop were asked to sign a consent form to agree to their child participating in the study (please see Appendices 8 for more details)

³ Receptive and expressive language

Group Two: Classroom Teachers/Inclusion Managers

- This group are responsible for referring children to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop.

Group Three: Learning Mentors and PDC Co-coordinators

- This group were involved in co-facilitating the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop with the Drama Practitioner. The PDC coordinators (now referred to as PDC advisors) are responsible for supervising and supporting the practice of the Learning Mentors and overseeing the delivery of the PDC programme in schools throughout Southwark

Group Four: Bubble staff

Drama Practitioners employed by London Bubble theatre and responsible for leading the drama workshop and guiding the use of drama techniques by LM's and PDC advisors.

Diagram 1: Participants in our study



3.2 Approach to data collection

The methods used to collect data for this study were informed by the need to collect the type of information that would provide us with an answer to the research questions that could be evidenced through the process of data collection (see pg., 10 for more information).

The structure of the research

- An action research proposal was developed by the academic partner to guide the implementation of the research in the two schools. The research project as a whole was jointly co-ordinated by both the academic and the Assistant Director of London Bubble. There were two main researchers involved in collecting data for this study: The Creative Director of London Bubble and the academic partner (Lead researcher) observed one of the two schools involved in the study, respectively. They were both responsible for audio recording the drama workshops and the pre and post evaluative sessions attended by the Drama Practitioner, the Learning Mentors and, when present, the Pupil and Development Centre (PDC) advisors.
- Due to the nature of the research questions, a decision was made very early on to view the study as a 'collaborative action research' project (?) and equip staff involved in the direct delivery of the 'Speech Bubble'

drama workshops with an opportunity to contribute to the development of our thinking about the research questions. To this end, the Lead researcher delivered a two hour participatory action research skills training workshop to Learning Mentors, PDC coordinators and the Drama Practitioner a month before the study was due to start. The workshop was evaluated using a formative evaluation (questionnaire administered at the end of the programme).

The focus of the workshop (see Appendices 2 for more information) was to ensure that London Bubble staff and school staff involved in delivering the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop were aware of the research process and how they could contribute to that through their endeavours. It was also an opportunity to transfer knowledge about action research.

- Classroom Teachers/Inclusion Managers were asked to complete a brief questionnaire two weeks before the 'Speech Bubbles drama workshop was due to start. The questionnaire was designed by the Lead researcher to capture basic information regarding their rationale for referring specific children to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop (please see Appendices 4 for more details). The questionnaire was designed to elicit reflective responses from this group and to enable us to decide whether they had

understood and responded to the referral guidance given to them at the start of the project.

At the end of the study we used their responses from the initial questionnaire as the basis for constructing an e-questionnaire designed to collect information about their perception of an improvement (or otherwise) of the referred child's communication skills (see Appendices 5 for more information).

We chose to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect information from Classroom teachers because we were aware of the increasing administrative demands placed on teachers in schools and did not wish to add to it by creating additional paperwork or make their involvement so onerous that it reduced their ability/willingness to participate in the research.

- When the research proposal was written, it was assumed that after the participatory research skills workshop has taken place, Learning Mentors (LM's) would be asked to complete an e-questionnaire before the first school term began in order to assess their attitude towards using drama technique in similar size groups referred to the PDC. The Lead researcher decided to integrate the collection of that information into the participatory research skills training programme delivered to the LM's, PDC advisors

and Drama Practitioners. This decision was made to ensure that all involved in the research had a shared understanding of the others starting point (See Appendices 2 for more details).

- The Lead researcher and the Creative Director of London Bubble observed the interaction between children, Drama Practitioners and Learning Mentors during the drama programme but did not take an active part in the workshop (non-participant observation).

When we considered how to approach observations we decided upon a social anthropological approach to collecting data on social phenomena as it was happening rather than being restricted by a limited focus on the incidences of the use of receptive and expressive communication skills. We were keen to reduce bias in our sample by taking an overview of the experience of all children in the group and felt that this would be manageable given the size of the group and the time frame within which we were observing the group.

Improvement in communication skills is also context dependent (the impact of the adults present, classroom environment, the Child etc) and therefore we recorded the experience of the child as an interaction with self, others (LM's, peers etc) and the environment. The reflective writings of Drama Practitioners LM's and PDCC's had a focus on the content and

process of using/supporting the use of drama techniques, respectively in the 'Speech Bubbles' workshop.

Before each drama workshop took place, the DP's met with the LM's and the PDC advisors to plan the session and reflect on their experience of the group. The researchers observed and tape recorded these planning sessions. This group also completed a formative questionnaire at the end of each session focused on each child and their overall approach to planning and delivering the session (please see Appendices 7 for more information).

- The final data set was drawn from verbatim written recordings of interviews and meetings with the Assistant Director and other senior staff involved in managing the project. These recordings were analysed using thematic analysis

Table 1: Summary of the approach to data collection

Methodology	Methods
Knowledge transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver participatory workshop in action research skills training and collect data on participant evaluation of the workshop • Written reflections on participants view of using drama in schools
Naturalistic enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom-interaction between children the facilitators of the drama workshops and the context. • Observe interaction between LM's, PDC advisors and drama practitioners in their pre and post session planning groups
Qualitative interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbatim recording of the meeting between the Lead researcher and the Creative and Assistant Director of London Bubble • Inclusion Manager

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Post research interview with Creative and Assistant Director of London Bubble
Reflective writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflective diaries submitted by Learning Mentors, Drama practitioners, PDC advisors and the Assistant Director of Bubble
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of an initial questionnaire from the teacher/Inclusion Manager to say why they have referred this child.• Completion of an e-questionnaire by the teacher re their impressions of any changes in the development of a child's communication skills

3.3 Data management and analysis

Analysis of data from questionnaires and other formative evaluations

Electronic survey data was managed and analysed using the online facilities available through question pro (see Appendices 5 for more details)

All other quantitative data including the results of the evaluation form designed for the research skills workshop were analysed using a simple tabular analysis (please see Appendices 3 for further information).

Analysis of qualitative data

In interpretative research it is customary for lone researchers to ‘...record, write up and interpret his or her own work’ (Oakley 1994) but during a collaborative action research process, the process of data collection was periodically discussed, monitored and revised by the Lead researcher and the Assistant Director of Bubble Theatre company as we were engaged in it. For example, it became clear quite early on in the study that planning and reflections for these sessions happened before, during the break between the end of the workshop for Year 1’s and the start of the workshop for Year 2’s and after each workshop took place so the researchers added an additional step of recording the discourse during these times of reflection. According to Lincoln and Guba 1985 (cited in Flick 1998, pp. 232) this additional scrutiny

increases the likelihood of producing research which demonstrates 'trustworthiness, credibility and dependability'. This study generated a huge amount of qualitative data within an 8 week time frame and each data set informed the development of new strategies to collect more data, building in opportunities to engage in both personal and epistemological reflexivity throughout the research process (Nightingale and Cromby, 1999, p. 228).

Approach to analysing the data

The approach we took to collecting and managing the data reflects some established approaches in the field (Oakley 1994, Lincoln & Guba 1985, pp.320-7, 382-4 cited in Flick 1998, pp232; Strauss 1987, pp 22-25).

- Grounded theory was used as the main analytical framework which is described by Strauss (1967) as emphasising the 'generation of theory and the data in which that theory is grounded'. This also allows for 'constant comparison' of the data that emerges at different stages of the research process, specifically during the pre and post planning sessions and reflective writings of the process (using drama techniques) engaged in by those involved in delivery. (Glaser in Coyne, 1997, pp 626).
- Written notes were typed up at the end of each day by both researchers so as to limit the impact of poor recall and to aid reflexivity.

- After the first four weeks of delivering the drama workshop the Lead researcher read all of the notes collected over a seven day period and listened to the audio in order to begin the process of considering whether there were any emerging themes. We did not code for thematic categories at this stage but took the opportunity to ‘develop a relationship with the data, combing it for emerging themes’, in the way described by Oakley 1994 in the extract ‘Thinking through fieldwork’.
- The researcher’s intention was to manage the initial thematic coding of data using nVIVO, a computer software programme used for analysing qualitative data. However, a researcher’s relationship with qualitative data is key to identifying deeper meaning and excavating significant relationships between different aspects of the context. ‘Free-hand’ analysis allows the researcher to develop a complex (Oakley 1994) rather than linear relationship with the data (Walsh 2003, pp 253). Strauss and Corbin 1998 view analysis of interpretive data as an inductive rather than an intuitive process especially if the aim of the study is to consider the relationship between core thematic categories. We used the Paradigm Model at the stage when we were considering the central narrative in the story of this data to consider whether a relationship existed between what we thought we were observing (the

phenomena) and the events which were seen to lead to developing particular phenomena (context etc)

- Reliability and validity in qualitative research can be demonstrated by subjecting aspects of the research to multiple 'challenges' within a particular domain. For example, using the same methodology in different environmental contexts to see if the results of the study 'stand up' to the rigor of further scrutiny. I view this as a type of *strategic positioning* (my emphasis) on the part of the researcher, viewing the emergent data from different perspectives. This is commonly referred to as a process of 'triangulation' and is evident throughout this study. Specifically, triangulation was achieved by collecting data in different ways about the same phenomena to enable comparative analysis of different data sets (methodological triangulation). Environmental triangulation was partly achieved by separate recordings of similar schools hosting the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop and subjecting these recordings to content and thematic analysis and finally. Investigator triangulation was also partly achieved due to the different professional perspectives of the two researchers collecting evidence for this study.

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- We were keen to achieve '...credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity' in our research (Lincoln and Guba 2002; Seale 2002) by subjecting the resulting data to comparative content analysis.

Table 2: The approach to data analysis

Data	Approach to analysis
Theoretical approach: Grounded theory	
Notes from non-participant observations	Thematic and content analysis
Audio recordings of drama workshops	Thematic analysis
Audio recordings of pre and post session planning	Thematic analysis Content analysis
Survey data (questionnaire regarding reasons for referral from classroom teachers/Inclusion Manager at the start of the project)	Thematic analysis
Survey data (electronic questionnaire regarding classroom teachers/Inclusion Manager perception of the impact of the referral at the end of the project)	Data analysed by Questionpro, an online survey facility
Reflective writing	Thematic analysis Content analysis
Formative evaluation of research skills training programme	Calculation of the mean

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*“The children
are the main
characters in
this story”*

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction: The art of building creative relationships

In this section of the report we present the evidence for the core themes identified through analysis of the data.

The concept of the *art of building creative relationships* renders sentient the theme of the central narrative running through our data. We will use case studies to further illustrate our ideas and keep the children’s experience at the heart of our narrative.

Repeated scrutiny of the data led the researcher to narrow the focus of the study to three core themes inherent in achieving the central aim of *building creative relationships*.

These themes were:

1. **Approach to planning** (of drama workshops for children)
2. **Engagement** (by the Child, the School and the Practitioners delivering the workshop)
3. **Transfer of Knowledge and Experience**

These themes will be explored in more details throughout this section.

First we consider the referral decisions made by the school and then we consider in detail the evidence generated from this study which supports the core themes, notion that promoting the Childs engagement with the drama workshop is facilitated by a number of interrelated factors, including the Practitioners approach to planning.

We end this section by examining how knowledge and experience is being transferred to the wider world by the children and the significance for them of this connectedness with the world outside 'Speech Bubbles'.

Children referred to 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop

Reasons for referring each child to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop were subjected to content analysis and from this information we created four case vignettes which broadly represent the characteristics of the children who were referred to 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop (see Table 3 below)

Table 3: Composite case vignettes of children referred to 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop

Referral Group	A
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	Lacks confidence in communicating
Expectations of referral	Develop confidence in speaking Develop confidence in sharing ideas

Referral Group	B
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	Has difficulty organising thoughts and then communicating them
Expectations of referral	Construct a coherent sentence (cognitive and vocal skills)

Referral Group	C
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	Poor attention Poor listening Does not respond to what is being said
Expectations of referral	To listen to what is being said and respond appropriately
Other issues	Behavioural management

Referral Group	D
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	English as a second language
Expectations of referral	Develop greater confidence in spoken English

Some of the children that were referred to the Speech Bubbles drama workshop required attention to help them manage their behaviour. There was evidence of impulsivity (shouting out, not taking turns and lack of co-operative play) in those children who appear to communicate their distress and/or their frustration through causing harm to others, being destructive etc) and these additional

behavioural issues were more likely to be present in the profiles of referral group C children.

Whether these children had more clinically significant behavioural disorders would have been impossible to assess through observation alone.

The fact that behavioural management became central to planning and delivering the sessions is an important factor to bear in mind when considering the impact of the sessions.

'...I need to tune in with where they are at developmentally and therefore what I can do with them'. (Drama Practitioner, reflective diary entry after first week of workshop)

4.3 Exploration of key themes

1. *Approach to session planning and delivery*

'...you cannot create a session plan for each child but some children need more individual attention' (Learning Mentor, comments from transcription of post session planning meeting after third drama workshop)

The approach to the creation of the session plan for the drama workshop was a theme which featured prominently throughout this study and speaks to the need for reciprocity in developing this type of workshop.

The developmental needs and processes engaged in by all those involved in the workshop (which includes the Drama Practitioners, the Learning Mentors, the PDC advisors and the children) was evident in the reflective diary entries, audio transcripts of pre and post planning sessions, observations and audio featuring the children attending the drama workshop.

Everyone in this process struggled with the developmental task of assimilation leading to accommodation of new concepts and ideas and most people would expect this to be the case during the first few sessions of the workshop.

The use of the term 'structure' or variations of this term appeared numerous times throughout the data and was regularly used when children began to engage in boisterous play and were not engaged in the central drama.

'I think that things could have been better planned and more structured'

(Learning Mentor, reflective diary entry after the first session)

'Story square seems more chaotic than it needs to be as the children need the structure to be clearer'

(Pupil development centre advisor, reflective diary entry after the third session)

Presenting a coherent rationale for the content and structure of the session that was also 'contextually relevant' (school based, age appropriate etc) was an important part of meeting the needs of some school staff (Learning Mentors, PDC Advisors) that were involved in co-facilitating the workshop.

There were tangible difficulties in cementing the relationship between Drama Practitioners and school staff (Learning Mentors, PDC Advisors) across both of the research sites due in part to two factors which features in the data gathered from both research sites:

1. Lack of clarity regarding what makes story drama workshops different from ordinary school provision especially approaches to practice pioneered within PDC's

'Overall the session was different from what I expected. I had thought it would be very polished and organised...a finished product or a set technique and procedure that ran in a particular way...' (Learning Mentor, extract from reflective diary after Session 2)

'I think there is a sort of tension. Everyone seems to have different expectations of the sessions/children/purpose of it' (Learning Mentor, reflective diary entry after Session 3)

2. An initial belief that there was little difference between PDC provision and a Speech Bubbles workshop quickly followed by the realisation that it was very different.

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'I think that the drama techniques we will be using will be similar to those used in the PDC sessions' (PDC advisor, extract from reflective diary after initial meeting to discuss 'Speech Bubbles' workshop)

The structure and activities that were introduced to the session became increasingly context specific (age, child's capacity, Childs needs etc) as the sessions developed (at least in terms of responding to the needs of individual children in order to promote engagement).

'I mustn't play too safe and remember that they need pace and pair work'
(Drama Practitioner, reflective diary entry after session 6 of a workshop for Year 1's)

As the sessions progressed the Drama Practitioner's began to recognise the need to articulate their rationale for using certain drama techniques at particular times during the session to support school staff in converting this new 'knowledge' into an opportunity to develop their own reflective and creative approach to professional practice. A more inclusive style of planning and delivering the workshops began to emerge in one of the schools very early on in the process:

'The practice I need to develop with others is developing a strategy with the other members of the team to encourage participation, deal with the behaviour and allow the majority of the group to contain the activity...'

(Drama Practitioner extracts from reflective diary after first session)

It is noticeable that the rhetoric of the Learning Mentor at the same school changed quite significantly when a more inclusive style of planning and delivery was better established amongst the adults:

'The fact we are all taking different parts of the session is really working'

(PDC Advisor, reflective diary entry about fourth session)

The need for a *structured but creative approach* to developing these workshops was a central theme running through the different data sources: how to be more structured without losing a focus on creativity and how to be creative within a coherent structure.

Reflection on findings

We know from research that children learn more effectively within a safe and contained environment and that adults are central to ensuring that the demands placed on children are manageable. There was a perception that a child was no longer developing new skills if they began to behave in a boisterous manner. However, the capacity of the child to remain engaged with the demands of 'Speech Bubbles' appeared to be partly intrinsic and partly due to the approach the Drama Practitioners and Learning Mentors took to planning the workshop (we will explore this issue in more detail in the next section).

We cannot be completely sure what impact this lack of cohesion between the adults had on the children, but we do know from research that children learn in a number of different ways notably through imitation, mirroring and repetition of actions: concepts which are also central to how children engage and learn through their experience of attending these story drama workshops.

2. Engagement

At the most basic level a child needs to be engaged in the workshop in order that they have an opportunity to develop and/or refine their communication skills. The results of this study suggest that a Childs *engagement with 'Speech Bubbles'* appears to be affected by the relationship between three core constructs: *the capacity of the child, the approach Drama Practitioners take to planning and delivering the drama workshop and, the Childs compulsion to share their experience and learning to the wider world (includes the school, their Parents etc).*

The Child

There were noticeable differences in the way that children in our study responded to the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop and through constant comparison of the data collected from both schools, we identified the following intrinsic and extrinsic factors as key to promoting engagement of children:

3. How/whether an awareness of the Childs developmental needs were integrated into session planning and delivery
- The function of the Childs relationships with self, others and the wider world (including School) play in their life

- Flexibility in delivering the plan for the session
- How group rules were established including the timing of rule setting, introduction of new drama and drama techniques used.

The approach to planning, choosing drama techniques (and when to use them-timing) and a story drama approach to delivering the workshop had a noticeable impact on children referred to 'Speech Bubbles'.

Developing a *structured but creative* container for the expression of the Childs creativity became an underlying theme in this study.

Facilitators used a multi-sensory approach to engaging children in creating the rules for the drama group, a process which was increasingly informed by a greater understanding of the individual needs of children attending the group.

'It feels in general that we haven't quite settled as a group: children adults, rooms everything. We need to keep working, keep listening, keep adapting!'

(Drama Practitioner, reflective diary entry second session)

Children were actively engaged by the Drama practitioners in establishing the rules for the drama group.

A variety of methods were tried and tested including the use of photographs of children dramatising a particular rule such as how to sit well, how to demonstrate that you are listening etc (please see Appendices III) for more information. Other methods were also trialled such as integrating an adapted form of school and PDC rules to the needs of the 'Speech Bubbles' workshop.

'We agreed on ground rules-using school and PDC rules and adapting them to our needs-having visuals for the rules and a visual timetable'

(Drama Practitioner, reflective diary entry after first session)

Rules were established and maintained through a process of continual reinforcement, consistency in applying the rules, increased equitability in who was subject to rules, repetition and decisive action in response to a Child flouting the rules of the drama workshop. This approach also helped contain and manage the behaviour of referral group C child and limited the impact of their behaviour on the other children's enjoyment of the workshop but conversely increased referral group C children's engagement with the workshop. The notion of equitability in applying the rules may seem like a mute point but as the workshops developed most children in our study displayed a strong sense of

injustice if they perceived other children as 'getting away' with flouting the rules and subsequently disengaged from the adults and the workshop as a whole.

A 'story square' was used in both schools but in different ways. Story squares can be likened to small forum theatres and children in this study would be invited to use this square as a performance area where stories would be enacted by the children through movement, facial expressions, gestures and words. As one Learning Mentor remarked, promoting 'turn taking' by using the story square as a forum for this activity meant that '*...they knew they would have to speak eventually*'.

It wasn't clear whether the children initially understood the function of the circle but combining a verbal description of the function of the story square coupled with modelling, opportunities for imitation and repetition (of its use from workshop to workshop) children began to assimilate this new concept. Year 1 children would often respond to the story square by performing a few hopscotch moves through it or by running around the periphery of the square. As one researcher remarked in his observation notes it surprised him how quickly the story square became 'important territory' where boundaries were continually tested.

'I noticed that Child X was trying to get Child Y to obey the 'sitting nicely' rule but he kept sticking his legs into the middle of the circle!'

(Inclusion Manager, quote from transcript of third session)

It became evident that when rule setting was integrated into planning in a proactive way there was an increase in incidences of a Childs personal industry and desire to master the rules of certain games (especially if these had a competitive element to them including receiving praise for getting the rules of the game right). Reactive rule setting (which often occurred when some children in the group began to 'act out') seemed to increase the incidences of disharmony and disengagement from the workshop by the quieter children in our study (referral group A & D).

Many of the drama techniques used for this age group were multi-sensory in nature (please see Appendices III for more details) and it was noticeable that all children, despite their particular communication difficulty could engage at some level with the workshop (please refer to the extended case vignettes on page... for further information). This was particularly relevant for referral group A & D who generally lacked confidence in speaking and hadn't necessarily developed strong social relationships with their peers.

In both schools it was noted that a strong indicator of when a Child was ready to engage fully with the workshop seemed to centre on the child seeking proximity to the adults in the room. This is characteristic of attachment behaviour in children and is most evident when a child receives consistent, nurturing and responsive attention from adults. Again, the nature of the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshops which contained opportunities for imitation, repetition, mastery of certain games and activities and risk taking (especially in the use of communication skill) recreated opportunities for children to form new attachments with new adults and their peers.

**Box 1
How children use one to one
relationships with adults**

Boy 1 is in referral group C. He starts his 'Speech Bubbles' journey by needing a lot of attention from the adults in the room for his disruptive behaviour. During the second and third workshop he is seen moving to sit next to one adult and then another. He uses imitation of the actions of that adult as a means of engaging in the activities in the group, copying their behaviour rather than responding to verbal instructions. As the workshops progress over the coming weeks he is noted to be less focused on the actions of a single adult and increasingly engaged with the drama being demonstrated by his peers.

The function of attachment relationships include a need to manage stressful situations, to take risks knowing that there is a secure base to return too (the adult). In this study it was evident that children in the referral group A & D would often vie for position to sit either side of the Lead practitioner. Observations suggest that these children would increasingly use more eye contact when responding to questions and demonstrate some distress if their space next to the practitioner was 'taken' by another Child. This need for proximity to the Lead practitioner appeared to be transitory in nature and there was an increased reliance on the evolving relationships with their peers, facilitated by the experience of the drama workshop.

As an example (see Box 1), some children use a 1-1 relationship with an adult in the room as a platform for engagement. Only one of the schools integrated an understanding of the importance of this proximity to adults in fostering increased engagement in their planning for the next session

'It was decided that I would sit with Child B where possible as he responded to me'

(PDC Advisor, reflective diary entry after third session)

To illustrate, we have extended our case vignettes on the children referred to Speech Bubbles to include factors which promote or hinder engagement with the drama workshop

Table 4: Factors which encourage children in our referral groups to engage in the workshop

Child	A
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	Lacks confidence in communicating
Expectations of referral	Develop confidence in speaking Develop confidence in sharing ideas
Factors which promote engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group drama activities such as the 'Name song', 'Traffic lights', 'Monsters'- games designed to seek rewards in the form of praise • Establishing peer relationships which extend beyond 'Speech Bubbles' • Games which start with solitary activity such as drawing a picture and lead to a 'show and tell' moment where the Child is asked to explain their picture or is supported to encourage other children to dramatise aspects of their drawing

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Games/activities which promote eye contact • Ball rolling whilst naming the receiver • Close proximity to adults
Factor which hinder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor peer relationships with other members of the group • Activities which require child to be at the centre of the drama (without the protection of peers).

Child	B
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	Has difficulty organising thoughts and then communicating them
Expectations of referral	Construct a coherent sentence (cognitive and vocal skills)
Factors which promote engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition & reinforcement • Consistency in the content of the workshop over time and the way in which the workshop is structure • Time to make a contribution (verbalise thoughts) • Proactive approach to rule setting and rule maintenance • Initial 1-1 work

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<p>Factor which hinder engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of personalised attention from adults when engaged in activity • An acute sense of injustice especially when rules appear to be being broken by other children unchecked
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Child	C
<p>Gender</p> <p>Reason for referral</p> <p>Expectations of referral</p>	<p>Male or Female</p> <p>Poor attention</p> <p>Poor listening</p> <p>Does not respond to what is being said</p> <p>To listen to what is being said and respond appropriately</p>
<p>Factors which promote engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive development of relationship with adults • 1-1 attention to manage difficult behaviour • Mastery of the rules of games, the workshop etc • Recognition and praise promotes periodic engagement (rewards) especially when child actively seeks positive attention
<p>Factor which hinder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When child feels rejected or

engagement	<p>excluded from the central drama. For example, games which include an elimination component do not suit this child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External factors such as difficult peer relationships, family discord etc
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Child	D
Gender	Male or Female
Reason for referral	English as a second language
Expectations of referral	Develop greater confidence in spoken English
Factors which promote engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition and consistency • Opportunities for participation in group games • Establishing new peer relationships • Opportunities to use a range of communication skills and not rely exclusively on verbalisations • Proximity of child to adult
Factor which hinder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruptive behaviour of other children • Poor or shifting peer relationships

Reflection on findings

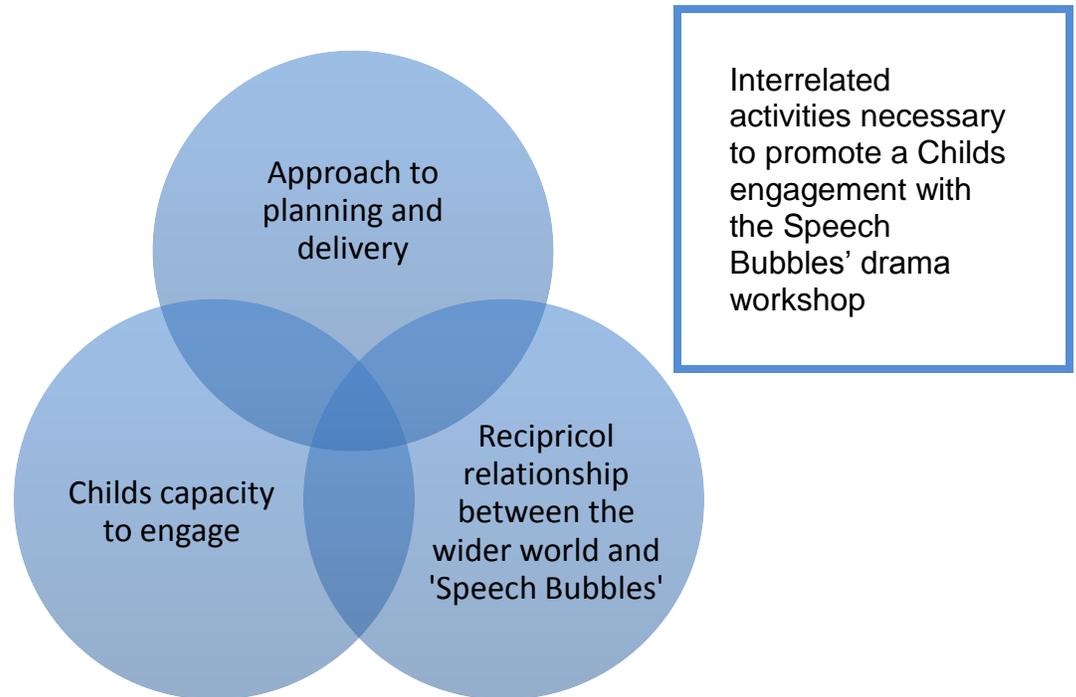
This core theme appears to be understanding how contextual factors affect planning, style of delivery and how this promotes engagement from the children attending the workshop. Contextual factors such as the age of the child and the age appropriateness of the drama activities, the Childs cultural identity (in its broadest sense) and how this impacts on their ability to assimilate new cultural perspectives and the Childs capacity to engage in multi-sensory activities.

Knowledge of these factors should also influence referral decisions.

In the same way that development within one domain may affect development in another domain the development and success of the drama workshops are affected by a systemic understanding of how one aspect of the process affects the other. How planning, choice of content, capacity of the child and involvement of the school affect whether the workshops meet their overall aim.

Responding to attachment signals in children as a means of engaging a range of children to participate more fully in the workshop and therefore increase their communication skill capacity, is essential knowledge to integrate into drama practice especially in this setting and with this age group. This area requires further investigation beyond the scope of this study.

Diagram 2:



3. Transfer of learning and experience

The bridge between 'Speech Bubbles' and the wider world has not been fully explored in this study and data on this area is too limited to subject to analysis partly due to limited contact with teachers/Inclusion Managers who originally referred the children to the workshop.

However, we thought it important to reflect briefly on the fact that anecdotal evidence suggests that children are beginning to share their learning and experience in Speech Bubbles with their peers, school staff and their families.

6

CONCLUSION

The basic premise of this study centred on discovering whether attendance at a story drama workshop could contribute to improving the communication skills of 5-7 year old children in small referred groups. We also sought to determine which skills were required to deliver drama workshops to 5-7 year old children in these groups.

The findings of this study lend support to the notion that the nature of the approach to designing and delivering 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshops in schools enabled most of the children to develop confidence in using a range of communication skills (and this despite their particular communication difficulties). In order for this process to be effective, an integrated and reciprocal relationship needs to be developed between the School and the organization providing the lead of that particular intervention.

Enabling children to actively contribute to the design and the delivering of the drama workshop and to 'own the stories that they create' proved pivotal in establishing the groups' identity in the first term of a three term programme (O'Toole 1992).

Partnership working between the Art sector and Schools is mutually beneficial once opportunities for shared learning and development are prioritised as part of the partnership (Donelan et al 2009).

Strengths and limitations of the study

This study represents the activities of the first term of a three term drama workshop programme in two schools. Our approach to analysing and interpreting the data that we gathered through multiple means sought to allow the reader to gain an insight into the experience, learning and challenges presented by this type of provision in schools. There were limitations regarding how much access we had with school staff responsible for both identifying the children referred to 'Speech Bubbles' and for their ongoing learning and development.

We wanted greater contact with school staff to consider whether the drama workshop was having the desired effect on communication skills in other context (reading aloud in class, increased turn taking and reduction of impulsive behaviour etc) but only a few members of staff were available to provide the level of reflection on the process/impact that they perceived Speech Bubbles had on the children.

An inclusive approach to designing, delivering and measuring impact of the 'Speech Bubbles' drama workshop would help clarify and cement the relationship between the School and promotes reciprocity: essential for establishing these types of partnership relationships.

6.2 Recommendations

General

- Develop referral guidance for schools informed by the results of this study
- Establish a regular space for the workshop to take place
- Integrate an understanding of the development needs of 5-7 year olds into the approach used to design sessions for the drama workshop. This may be achieved by developing a more reciprocal relationship between schools and the Arts
- Support Learning Mentors to develop confidence in using drama techniques in their everyday practice.

This might be achieved if the approach to planning the drama workshops were adapted. Specifically, pre-workshop training for school staff on using certain drama techniques, time for all Practitioners to plan more co-

operatively allowing each practitioner to own and deliver aspects of the programme and, knowledge transfer sessions provided to other school staff not directly involved in the workshops in order to demystify the 'Speech Bubbles' drama process.

Ongoing research

- How story drama workshops encourage positive attachment behaviour in children with avoidant, ambivalent and/or disorganised attachment styles.
- How to integrate an understanding of the development needs of 5-7 year olds into the approach used to design sessions for the drama workshop.
- Continuing to identify the specific communication abilities that are developed in children through attendance at a story drama workshop and how the drama techniques used facilitate this development.
- Conduct an audit of drama techniques: identify the function of each technique (what each is designed/known to promote) in and out of specific contexts

8

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APPENDICES

APPENDICES I

Referral Guidance

The KS1 children chosen (twenty in total, in two groups of ten) should be those who you feel are exhibiting some form of delay in their communication skills and are not achieving their expected speaking, listening and attention targets, this may be affecting their ability to manage in the classroom or in peer to peer relationships. The issue could be around their receptive or expressive communication and may present in terms of behaviour, shyness (getting lost in the classroom) over talking, inability to listen to others; peers, teachers. Inability to respond appropriately to questions, tasks etc. The programme is not designed to address issues which would require one to one speech therapy or general behavioural problems.

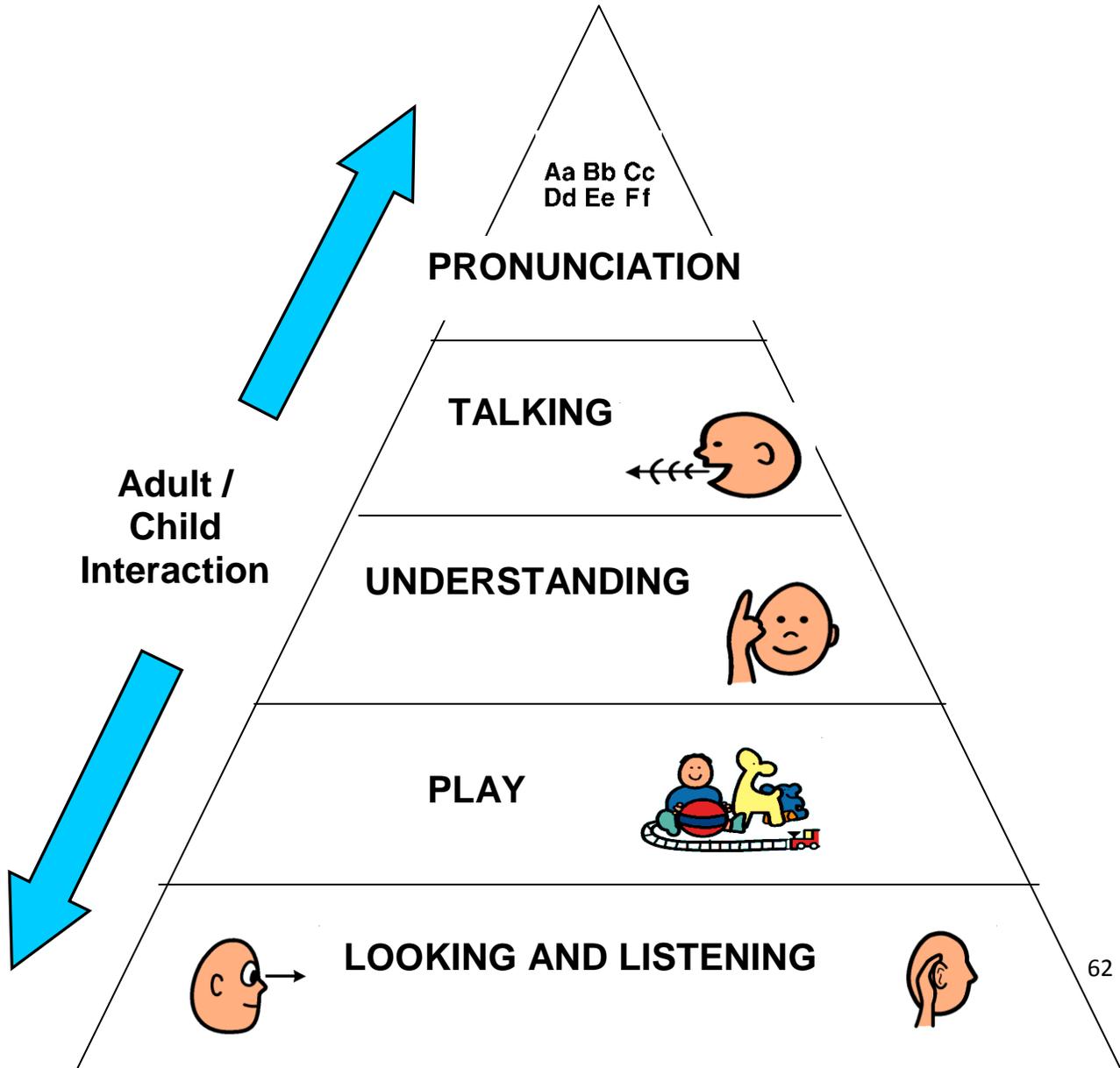
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APPENDICES II: LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PYRAMID

<http://www.southwarkpct.nhs.uk/index.php?assetId=3281&assetGroupId=321>

Skills at the bottom have to be in place before the skills above them can be developed.



APPENDICES 111: EXAMPLE OF DRAMA TECHNIQUES USED IN BOTH SCHOOLS

Purpose	Drama Technique	Impact
<p>Promotes speaking, attention and listening (includes good eye contact, focusing on tasks which require close attention, paying attention and responding appropriately to what is being said, non-verbal expression which still demonstrates attention and listening, turn taking etc)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Play what you say: Each child tells/makes up a story – it is scribed by an adult. An adult reads out the story and it is acted out (in turn) inside the story square 2. Person to Person: Parts of the body are named and joined together, in pairs or in group. Later children get a chance to be the caller. 3. Telling the developing story: Using the story square to recap the developing work on a story from week to week. 4. Role play: Small group spontaneous role play 5. Pair talking: 1 minute to describe their picture to their partner and then partner says to rest of group one thing they liked about the drawing etc. 6. General games: Games which involve a combination of 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increases attention, empowers the story-teller, involved in developing a character in the story, peer learning and confidence building 2. Develop listening skills, promotes whole group work, promotes attention, movement, and speaking 3. Promotes listening, attention, turn taking and positive relationships with others 4. Encourages verbal expression, promotes peer relationships 5. Promotes speaking, listening and recall. Whole group work and positive peer relationships 6. Listening to and following instructions,

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	<p>listening to instructions and responding appropriately often with movement</p> <p>7. Set building: In pairs building objects from a story out of paper, fabric and cardboard.</p> <p>8. Drawing in role: Children asked to draw pictures which allow them to use their imagination to extend a story or drama.</p>	<p>having fun whilst positively channelling energy</p> <p>7. Promotes group work, developing co-operative play</p> <p>8. Promotes concentration and imaginative play</p>
<p>Developing positive relationships with peers and adults</p>	<p>1. 'Hello' song: A song which allows the whole group to sing their name and the names of their peers in order.</p> <p>2. 'Banana song': A song accompanied by movement. Fun ritualised ending to a session</p> <p>3. Forum theatre: Learning to express ideas, practicing interacting with adults, learning how to be persuasive</p>	<p>1. Promotes eye contact, verbal expression, attention and promotion of peer relationships</p> <p>2. Promotes whole group work, movement and acted as a basis for the development of new songs by the children</p> <p>3. Promotes verbal expression, imaginative and, co-operative play, attention, listening and positive interaction with adults</p>