

Submission to APPG on Oracy

Submission from Adam Annand, Associate Director and Speech Bubbles Lead on behalf of London Bubble Theatre Co Ltd.

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Submission

- That drama should be part of a high quality Oracy education
- That communication strategies beyond the spoken word can support children and young people to effectively express themselves
- That there is evidence of the effectiveness for using drama approaches to support Oracy education
- That there is a skilled and passionate workforce of drama practitioners and theatre educators that could support high quality Oracy education.

This submission will focus on the creative work we do at London Bubble, in particular our Speech Bubbles intervention, this is because that is what I know in detail. However I would like to stress that many other theatre makers and drama practitioners are experienced at collaborating with the education sector and work in ways which promote children's communication development. This passionate and skilled workforce could be harnessed to support schools in developing effective high quality Oracy interventions.

Speech Bubbles is an award winning¹, small group intervention for children in KS1 referred with a communication need. The referrals are non-clinical and seek to identify children with needs that adversely affect their success in the classroom and/or with social interactions. For ten years we have been delivering the intervention in schools in London. Since 2012, with support initially from the Shine Trust, we have extended that through a network of partner organisations to schools in Greater Manchester and Kent. In 2018-2019 school year over 1200 children took part.

We don't currently describe Speech Bubbles as an Oracy intervention; however our approach might develop and extend the ideas of what high quality Oracy education could look like. The practice centers on individual children speaking their own imagined stories and those stories being acted out with their peers. This has been developed from the work of Vivian Gussin Paley² and is often called 'Helicopter stories' or 'Play what you say'. In the sessions the referred children play games and participate in drama activities that develop their confidence to communicate, build expression, develop understanding and promote active listening and attending. Speech Bubbles has been developed in an 'evidence rich' way, building on the findings of research into the effectiveness of other drama interventions³ and going on its own research and evaluation journey⁴. This has led us to being part of the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) 'Learning about culture' programme, a large scale Randomised Control Trial of arts-education projects in primary schools that will report in 2020. Unlike most EEF trials we agreed that the Speech

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZxarYKYTQs>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivian_Paley

³ <http://oro.open.ac.uk/38391/>

⁴ All Speech Bubbles research papers are available at https://www.londonbubble.org.uk/parent_project/speech-bubbles/reports-research-writing/

Bubbles trial should have dual primary outcomes, for academic attainment and for communication⁵.

Of course much of what we do in drama relies on the spoken word, on the verbal interaction between real or imagined characters and sometimes the characters (and the children playing them) are great orators! But we also play with many non-verbal forms of communication, proximity, gesture, tone, pace and rhythm and many verbal forms that are still not words, laughing, crying, or sighing can convey so much, in our work we may need to make the sound of the forest or commuters in the city. More than that we are as likely to make shapes with our bodies as we are to make a speech or engage in dialogue. For all children and young people, and especially those where communication is an issue this 'playing' with gesture, sound and physicality can be a stepping stone to developing the confidence to use their voice, and so to develop Oracy.

In a comparison group study in three schools⁶ Dr H Price (University Of East London) concluded that, 'Our study has shown that 'Speech Bubbles' has a particular proven, statistically significant impact on children's spoken language, storytelling and social interaction, giving children a marked boost in these areas of SLC competence. It is in the three areas of 'Understanding Spoken Language', 'Storytelling and Narrative', and 'Social Interaction' that 'Speech Bubbles' really assists children to shine. The original cohort of 'SB' children outstripped the 'control' children in these areas even though they started each time from a lower baseline. Their lively approach to these questions in July 2016, as much as the scores they obtained, was suggestive of a change in the way they viewed themselves. They appeared as more competent storytelling subjects, with a more confident perspective on their personal worlds. We can therefore conclude that 'Speech Bubbles' is a highly valuable intervention with proven impact.

Since we set up the Speech Bubbles partnership programme we have had no difficulty finding theatre organisations who have the skills, expertise and passion to successfully deliver the intervention in schools local to them. With support and specific training into childrens communication development⁷ good drama practitioners can deliver this programme to great effect. The barrier to replication of this programme has inevitably been finances, this work is in the intersection of education, arts and health, three areas in which austerity measures are presented as leading to significant resourcing issues.

By working together across disciplines and across health, arts and education sectors we can make a significant positive difference to children and young people's confidence to communicate and express themselves. You already have the evidence of why that is important!

⁵ <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/speech-bubbles/>

⁶

<https://www.londonbubble.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/UEL20Speech20Bubbles20Final20Evaluation20Report.pdf>

⁷ All Speech Bubbles practitioners complete the Communication Trust Online course

<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/projects/professional-development/online-short-course/>



'I found a voice through
making theatre and am
proud to be patron of
Speech Bubbles'
Sir Mark Rylance