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A storytelling project in two sets of co-located mainstream and special schools in Country and City:

findings from an action research project

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Biography of the author

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Glossary

ASD	autistic spectrum disorder
MS	mainstream school
PSHE	personal social and health education
PMLD	profound and multiple learning difficulties
SS	special school
SEN	special educational needs

[i] www.talk4meaning.co.uk

A STORYTELLING PROJECT IN TWO SETS OF CO-LOCATED MAINSTREAM AND SPECIAL SCHOOLS IN COUNTRY AND CITY

The findings from an action research project

Aims of the project

This project sought to bring knowledge of storytelling and communication to developing relationships between co-located special and mainstream schools.

The project aimed to:
- develop empathy and friendship between pupils in mainstream and special schools
- improve oral and other language and communication skills in these children
- bring co-located special and mainstream schools closer together.

The specific objectives were to develop, for the pupils:
1. friendships through story sharing sessions with children from two neighbouring schools
2. communication skills through the sharing of anecdotes of daily events.
3. the ability to express feelings and to make connections with others.
4. skills of empathy and supporting others.

The project planned to achieve these aims through the promotion of:
- narrative skills and a story-telling culture in all the schools involved
- positive attitudes among mainstream children and staff towards the pupils with learning difficulties in their co-located schools.
- co-operation and social inclusion between the staff and pupils of the co-located special and mainstream schools.

INTRODUCTION

Co-location and inclusion

Recent Ofsted reports (eg Ofsted, 2006) have noted that the physical co-location of a mainstream and special school is no guarantee of collaborative or inclusive practice between the two institutions.

There is a need for deeper understanding of how such collaboration can be fostered and inclusion in every sense taken forward. The chance to work with two pairs of schools presented the possibility of furthering our understanding of this important area within the context of programmes to develop narrative cultures in the schools.

Background rationale

The aim of promoting collaboration between special and mainstream schools based on the same site sits within government policy (DfES 2004). Ofsted has recently addressed the issue of special and mainstream schools working together (Ofsted 2004) and has examined the provision and outcomes of different settings for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities (Ofsted 2006).

Lindsay et al (2005) in their first interim report on federations note that government guidance suggests that 'federations can be a good way of linking up its different priorities through schools working together to raise standards, promote innovation and inclusion or, for example, to work on behaviour, gifted and talented, or school workforce issues'.

In their second interim report on ten selected case studies they found that for some federations inclusion was a focus: 'special as well as mainstream schools and are developing collaborative practice, at the level of teachers (e.g. staff visits/swaps) and pupils (e.g. pupils from special and mainstream schools having experience of the other provision)' (Lindsay et al 2005). Federations are formal agreements of groups of schools to work together which is not the case here, but the literature is useful in considering how any schools might collaborate.

In the final report on school federations (Lindsay, Muijs, Harris et al 2007) the authors report that the largest group of headteachers and governors considered that they had been successful with respect to the inclusion of pupils with SEN, raising achievement and sharing good practice.

Two examples of primary mainstream and special schools with well established programmes of working together are given in Appendix 6.

Why use storytelling?

The learning of storytelling techniques promotes communication and oral language skills, particularly through the use of pupils' 'personal stories'. Communication and oral language skills make an important contribution to children's educational attainment, particularly literacy, and to their social, emotional and behavioural well-being. This is supported by much recent research (for example, Johnston 2008 and see below).

The sites

This project took place in two pairs of co-located special and mainstream primary schools in Country and City. The genesis of the projects and the implementation of the storytelling were slightly different in each setting, but in most main points the design and procedures were similar.

The chief differences between the two settings were in population: the City schools had multi-cultural school populations; the Country schools had mainly white British populations.

Shared aims and objectives

In each case the aims and objectives of the projects were similar.

It was hoped that the work would lead to increased opportunities for the head teachers and staff of the co-located schools to work together.

The research questions

1. Have the teaching staffs' views of narrative cultures and the development of communication skills changed in the pairs of schools?

The effects of the project on the views of teaching staff are discussed under the headings level two and level three in the discussion section (page 32).

2. Have the relationships between the schools changed through the project? The project's role in bringing the co-located schools closer together is discussed under the heading level four in the discussion section (page 34).
3. Have the pupils benefited both socially and in communication skills through the project?

The areas evaluated cover friendship, disability awareness and positive attitudes, and oral and other language skills. These are covered in the discussion section under the headings level one, level two and level three (pages 32-34).

The storytellers

Both projects were guided by Nicola Grove, who specialises in narrative intervention with children and adults who have communication disabilities. She founded the Unlimited Company of Storytellers, a training project in community storytelling for people with learning disabilities.

The group of five storytellers in the Country schools consisted of two learning disabled people and two others with a professional background (teaching and speech and language therapy) who formed the Unlimited Company. There was also a volunteer assistant for the artwork who had a nursing background.

The storyteller in City was a professional with a background in both teaching and speech and language therapy. A local authority educational psychologist supported the programme here, both practically and through before and after expressive language assessments.

SENJIT explored the effects of the storytelling project through the experiences of the pupils and staff members. Feedback from the participants provided valuable information for future developments.

STORYTELLING

What is a story?

Stories are a particular genre of narrative discourse: not all narratives count as stories. The following definitions of a story are offered by an Unlimited Company handout (Grove 2005, based on McCabe and Peterson, Labov):

- A story is an account of experience (fictional or real) which is told to one or more people.
- A story is always told for a social purpose (entertainment, moral instruction, shock, persuasion, sympathy, etc).
- Stories differ from reporting or accounting in that they are highly evaluated (ie the emotional significance is central) and they involve conventional rhetorical elements that are specific to particular cultures.
- Stories fall into two broad categories: fictional (traditional oral tales or authored written tales) and personal (anecdotal accounts exchanged in conversation). Fictional stories are more highly structured than personal anecdotes, which are often told collaboratively.

Storytelling: rationale for and skills promoted by storytelling

Storytelling aims to increase pupils' oral and other language skills. These skills have a significant impact on the development of literacy and numeracy and for the development of emotional and social competence. Personal stories and the recording of their personal history are important for all children. But for those who have little effective communication and have difficulty recalling and initiating conversations about their experiences, it is hard to imagine how they can make sense of events, develop a secure identity, and learn the conversational strategies needed to make friends without a high level of sensitive narrative intervention.

The skills promoted by storytelling pervade all areas of spoken language and many of those for literacy. The planning and development of the structure and overall organisation of the story require the ability to sequence events within episodes. They require the ability to introduce and describe the setting and actions, to lead to a high point in the story, and to bring about a resolution and closure. The emotional content, including descriptions of protagonists' reactions to events, implicitly or explicitly guides how the audience should judge the event. Metaphor and repetition can enhance the story. The storyteller's ability to monitor audience reactions, the use of eye contact and relationship to the audience are part of social and pragmatic skills. Finally, the range of linguistic skills is developed through use of vocabulary and syntax.

The role of the listener is also developed. The listener's skills range from the early stages of being prepared to sit and attend as a member of an audience,

to the greater sophistication of engaging with and contributing to the story using gestures and comments. A well-developed response would be to tell another story related to an element of the preceding narrative.

Personal history and sense of self

Pupils who are at a very early stage of language development and who are likely to experience limited opportunities for interaction with others may be at a very early stage in the development of a sense of themselves and in the ability to recognize the importance of their life history. Developing the ability to tell personal stories permits the expression of events that are significant to the narrator and to the development of their view of themselves in their world (Fivush and Nelson 2006).

Nelson states that pupils' knowledge of familiar events plays a significant part in the formation of their early mental representations which in turn influence their thinking, talking and acting. Pupils' event knowledge includes information about their social and cultural world. Their perceptions of these events are structured through the use of scripts, an organised body of knowledge which is learned through experience. These in turn contribute to cognitive development in the form of mental schemas (Nelson 1986). Pupils' memories for specific events are supported by their general knowledge of events, these are scripted and structured and can be stored and retrieved on future occasions (Hudson 1986).

Parents' and carers' conversations with young pupils help them to understand the past and present and the feelings of themselves and others which have been experienced at different times. The children come to recognise their own unique perspective on the past. Language is essential to construct an understanding of the self and others as psychological entities that exist through time (Fivush and Nelson 2006). Pupils whose mothers were encouraged to spend more time in narrative conversation with them improved in their ability to describe events and especially to use decontextualised language (about events removed from the immediate context). The use of decontextualised language has been suggested as an important step in the acquisition of literacy skills (Peterson, Jesso and McCabe 1999).

Literacy and numeracy

Language skills are therefore a vital precursor to the development of literacy achievement. The concept of literacy can be defined very widely. However, within the aims and purposes of the National Literacy Project, literacy is defined simply as 'the ability to read and write' (www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk). This contrasts with the definition offered by Heath who suggests that literacy skills are not the same as literate behaviour. She feels that through literate behaviours 'individuals can compare, sequence, argue with, interpret and create extended chunks of spoken and written language in response to a written text in which communication, reflection and interpretation are grounded' (Heath 2002). These literate behaviours are a consequence of historical and cultural influences and are also important contributors to the development of children's thinking.

The Rose Report stated that the simple view of reading relied on two main processes: word recognition and language comprehension.

'…word recognition is the process of using phonics to recognize words. Language comprehension is the process by which word information, sentences and discourse are interpreted: a common process is held to underlie comprehension of both oral and written language' (p 38 Rose 2006).

The underlying linguistic comprehension process is the same for oral and written language, one is accessed through hearing and one visually. In this way linguistic ability underpins literacy. Linguistic ability consists of some important contributory language skills such as vocabulary knowledge, and metalinguistic skills such as phonological awareness. Pupils learn new words from hearing stories, and those with already larger vocabularies and who actively participate learn new words more easily (Elley 1989, Senechal and LeFevre 2001). Phonology with reading and oral language interventions were both found to have effects in literacy skills although in different areas. The authors of this research suggest that early support for oral language development followed by targeted reading help would be ideal in developing literacy (Snowling and Hulme 2008). The development of phonological awareness may also be supported in storytelling through the development of vocabulary and emphasis on specific words and sounds eg through alliteration.

Numeracy may also be supported by good language skills, such as the development of vocabulary for concepts of size, time, position and direction.

Storytelling therefore is a type of narrative discourse which feeds into the broader conceptualization of literacy, by supporting the receptive and expressive processes which are needed to understand, construct and transmit accounts of experience and imagined events.

Social, emotional and behavioral development

In the telling of personal stories the emotional content is an integral part of the narrative, bringing out the significance of the event and allowing the sharing of meaning. Learning to identify, describe and express emotions is an important stage in emotional and social development. The recognition and sharing of feelings allows the development of social skills and friendships.

A relationship has been noted in research between language impairments and social emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Pupils who have difficulty in understanding or expressing themselves verbally are more likely to experience SEBD. The converse has also been noted: children with SEBD are likely to experience language deficits (Benner, Nelson and Epstein 2002). Research has established that young children whose mothers have conversations with them about feelings and who have used language to describe emotions are more knowledgeable about emotions and better able to guide their own emotions (Denham, Cook and Zoller 1992). Mothers' conversations with their children have been found to play a key role in helping children make sense of mental states, enabling a child to make sense of others' behaviour and to initiate and maintain friendships (Harris, de Rosnay and Pons 2005). In another study intervention for delayed language development with pre-school pupils

led to an increase in their socialization skills (Robertson and Weismer 1999). Having experience of talking about feelings and emotions and the vocabulary and language with which to do this is therefore an important stage in establishing a child's understanding of the feelings of himself and others, which in turn may increase his social skills and ability to make friends.

Inclusion and pupils' attitudes to disability

Many pupils may not have had the opportunity to examine their attitudes to others with physical or learning disabilities through discussion or experience. Their perceptions of disability may depend on their experiences, for example if they have a sibling with a disability they may be more aware of disability generally and the issues surrounding it. A child's cultural background may affect how they interpret disability. Pupils' ages may affect their understanding of different disabilities, for example physical difficulties may be more salient than learning or psychological difficulties for younger children. Their ideas about the permanence and the effects of disabilities may vary with age as well (Lewis 2002, Smith and Williams 2001, 2005). Whitehurst and Howells (2006) found that middle school pupils with little experience of disability reported feeling apprehension and unprepared to work with children with severe and complex learning difficulties in an arts based project. With appropriate support from teaching staff, adequate preparation and involvement of all pupils in the performance understanding was increased.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Setting: Country

The mainstream first school (4-9 years, up to Year 4) and the special school for pupils with moderate, severe and complex learning difficulties and disabilities (4-16 years, up to year 11) are located each side of a car park on the outskirts of a rural town. The local population is mainly white British.

The special school has a very varied intake in terms of SEN and has 47 pupils. The mainstream school has 300 pupils. The mainstream school intake achieved a good standard in all areas at their last Ofsted inspection (2005), and the special school a satisfactory standard in nearly all areas at their last inspection (2007).

The project had originally been arranged to take place in a different pair of co-located special and mainstream schools. Just before the start date the original schools had to withdraw due to unforeseen circumstances. This reduced the preparation time available for the actual participating schools.

Setting: City

The two co-located schools occupy different ends of the same recently well-refurbished building. A corridor on each of the two floors connects them; there are no physical barriers such as locked doors. However, the playgrounds are separate.

The schools draw pupils from an area with many minority ethnic groups including a number of refugees and asylum seekers. Many pupils are at an early stage of language acquisition and/or also have English as an additional language. The area does not compare favourably with the national picture of social and economic backgrounds.

The mainstream school has 197 children on role, plus 45 part-time in the nursery, aged 3-12 years. All recent Ofsted gradings were either satisfactory or good (Ofsted Report 2006). The special school has 55 pupils on role aged 3-12 years. They include pupils with complex needs, severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties, also some with autistic spectrum disorders.The Ofsted gradings were either good or outstanding (Ofsted Report 2007).

Introductory procedures: City and Country

Before the project proper began the targeted classes from each school took part in ‘getting to know you’ sessions which were designed to be mainly social

and friendship building. The emphasis was on sharing enjoyable activities. In Country, the pupils listened to a story and joined in with actions, co-operative games and art activities. In City pupils were involved in a series of joint activities in small groups, such as music, cooking, art and parachute games.

In both mainstream schools the classes who were going to be involved took part in a focus group session with the storytellers or with the evaluator to ascertain their experiences and views of learning difficulties and disabilities. The pupils in City had a training session on how to help pupils who had little or no verbal language to tell stories.

The staff of both sets of schools took part in a training session on storytelling. In Country the staff had an after school session with one of the storytellers and visits to the participating classrooms. In City Nicola Grove gave a full day of training to all the staff of both schools at the beginning of the autumn term. This was followed up by a visit and demonstration in the participating classrooms. The headteachers of the four schools were also interviewed to ascertain their expectations of the project.

Following these sessions, the storytellers and class teachers identified pupils from specific classes from the mainstream (City: 6 aged 9-11, 3 male 3 female; Country: 8 aged 7-9, 3 male 5 female) and special schools (City: 7 aged 8-11, 3 male 4 female; Country: 8 aged 7-11, 6 male 2 female). Pupils were chosen for their willingness to participate and the staff's perception that they would benefit from the experience. The mainstream pupils' agreement was gained to be storytellers who would tell their own stories and would also learn to support the pupils from the special school in telling their stories. The teaching staff and the storytellers grouped the MS and SS pupils with those they felt they would work best with.

The criteria for the selection of the special school participants were:

- No major behavioural difficulties
- No children with autistic spectrum condition
- Some intentional communication (can make eye contact, vocalise deliberately, may use some gestures, may have a few words (P level 3-4) OR
- Higher levels of communication (verbal or sign language)
- Ability to relate to other pupils that they do not know well
- Ability to concentrate for about 20-30 minutes at a time (with breaks/activities)
- Parental consent for videoing, pupils themselves are happy to be filmed

Criteria for the selection of mainstream participants were:

- Ability to use and understand basic sentences in English (three words together minimally)
- Likely to relate well to children with disabilities
- Volunteers
- Parental consent for videoing
- Pupils are happy to be filmed themselves

Information sheets were provided for the pupils, the staff and the parents and given to the schools to distribute.

All pupils from participating classes were given simple story diaries (see inside back cover) to record anecdotes and events to use as a basis for their story sharing. The diaries included an introduction with suggestions for how to go about recording stories and then several 'story of the week' pages with prompts and symbols to help provide structure. In particular, a prompt was given to record the emotional content of the story.

In the Country small groups of four pupils, two SS pupils and two MS pupils, spent 30 to 40 minutes with the storytellers, developing their own narratives and helping the special school pupils tell their stories for either 5 or 6 sessions. In the City groups of 2 MS and 2 SS pupils shared 4 sessions for 15-20 minutes.

Storytelling and participants: Country

The Unlimited Company visited the special school (SS) for one day a week for eleven weeks. The pupils were all white British who had English as their first language. Eight pupils from years 3 and 4 (aged 7-9 years) from the mainstream school and eight from the special school (aged 7-11 years) were involved. Some of the SS pupils were at an early stage of language development, one child had no verbal communication, two were blind, seven had behavioural difficulties on their statements and six had severe attention difficulties. Several of them used signs to supplement their oral language. There were two morning sessions with two pupils from each school (two mainstream paired with two special school) attending for four sessions each half term. The sessions included time for art work and lasted 40 minutes. The story diaries were brought to the session as a basis to work from. All the sessions were conducted under the Story Tree which provided a safe circle in which to sit and share experiences. The Story Tree was a large garden umbrella decorated with leaves and fairy lights; underneath was artificial grass. Chairs were arranged in a circle around the tree.

Storytelling and participants: City

The storyteller attended the special school for one day a week for eight weeks. In the morning he ran the storytelling groups, each session lasting 30 minutes plus some preparation time, with pupils from both schools. The thirteen pupils were from multi-ethnic backgrounds, nine had English as a second language. There were two groups of two mainstream pupils from Years 5 and 6 (aged 9 to 11 years) and two special school children (aged 5 to 11 years) for four weeks each in four groups. The SS pupils were mainly at an early stage of language development, two were non-verbal, three had single words, two used short sentences, one used a communication aid and several of them used signs. The storyteller ran three additional storytelling sessions lasting about half an hour with mixed groups of mainstream and special school children, and also one each in the three mainstream participating classes (years 4, 5 and 6) each week. The Story Tree was located in the entrance to the special school and this was later transformed into a Story Tent with carpet and cushions to provide separate and special space for the storytelling.

FINDINGS: Country

Pre-project interviews: head teachers

Benefits for the pupils from the project

Both school heads hoped that the pupils would benefit from increased self-esteem and confidence. The special school head felt that the social benefits of pupils being able to recall events and being able to convey meaning in any way they could, were very important. At the same time, the disabled storytellers would provide role models for the pupils, who would be able to see that people with learning difficulties can go on and achieve and give something back to the community.

The mainstream school head wished to promote inclusion, through enriching the pupils' communication. He felt that the story diaries would help the children with their storytelling and writing. It would fit with the school's emphasis on stories and their emotional and social development practice; it would reinforce what they already do. The pupils' own experiences would be a source for stories and they would see themselves as part of a society where people have different needs.

Benefits for the staff from the project

The SS head said that the project was an opportunity for staff to learn new skills that could be incorporated into lessons. The MS head was not sure at this point what benefits to expect for his staff but felt that he would know more in time.

Contact between the two schools in the past

The SS head had only been in post a year. The two school heads already met regularly. Pupils had had social contact in the past, and a few children go to the mainstream school regularly for short periods. There is a joint after school club once a week. The MS head felt the co-location was a huge resource.

Benefits for the two schools of working together on the project

The SS head felt that there was good learning to be done on both sites: the pupils from each school becoming accustomed to some aspects of the other school. He hoped that this would be further developments in time.

The MS head wanted to work more closely with the special school. He said that the special school had a material resource base that they tapped into, but that they had not 'tapped into' the pupils yet. He felt that the mainstream pupils would learn about the special school pupils and that getting to know their names and faces would be quite effective.

Potential barriers to the success of the project

Both school heads felt that organisation was a potential barrier, for example timetables and swimming sessions which conflicted with the storytelling times. There was also the physical barrier of the car park. The MS head was concerned about the acceptability of some of the behaviours of the special school pupils.

Identifying successful outcomes

The SS head thought that the continuation of the project should count as a success criterion. He felt that the two schools working together on future projects would also be a successful outcome.

The MS head hoped that the pupils would be able to talk confidently about their experiences and that they would have time to reflect on these. He liked the idea of pupils feeling that they have a voice.

Focus groups with mainstream pupils

Three classes were divided into two groups, making six groups altogether. The purpose was to establish what the pupils already knew about the children in the special school and to prepare them for working with them the following term. From two classes around half had attended the 'getting to know you' sessions (one class was out at swimming). In each group, except one, around half the pupils knew a child at the special school, and several had shared activities with them.

Table 1: Responses to questions 1, 4, and 8

	Year 4 Group 1	Year 4 Group 2	Year 3 Group 3	Year 3 Group 4	Year 2 Group 5	Year 2 Group 6
Number of pupils in group	14	13	13	13	13	13
Attended 'getting to know you'	Some	Some	None	None	6	5
Q1. Knew special pupils before	2	6	9	8	None	7
Q4. Doing things together:						
Difficult	3	6	2	–	–	1
OK	–	–	–	1	1	–
Easy	2	5	1	4	–	1
Q8. Had heard the term 'special needs'	12	10	5	5	3	3

The pupils were asked whether it was easy or not to do things together with the special school pupils. This was not a simple question for them and many did not give judgements about this, although some were willing to express an opinion. Some anxieties were expressed about coping with the communication and behaviour of the SS pupils, and some pupils, mainly those who had experience, felt that it was quite easy to do things with them.

The pupils were more confident about suggesting the ways groups of people might be the same or different although these at first tended to be physical, such as hair or eye colour. Many of them, especially the older pupils had heard the term 'special needs' and were able to suggest meanings for this, again tending towards the concrete and physical aspects. Quite a number of them knew disabled relatives, neighbours or friends.

They were able to make suggestions about how they might be the same or different from the SS pupils, and how they could help them. They were less confident about putting forward ideas for helping the SS pupils communicate. Appendix 1 has further information about this.

Storytelling sessions

Strategies used by the storytellers to promote storytelling included:

- helping the pupils work together, for example in art work making hand print butterflies
- modelling emotive reactions to events, including vocalisations indicating surprise, dismay, pleasure such as 'oh, uh, wow, no, eerrgh'
- scaffolding storytelling by giving an incomplete sentence and pausing to allow the pupil to finish it. An example: 'On Saturday you went…'
- using repeated phrases for others to join in with
- when appropriate, directing and structuring the narrative so that other listeners did not lose interest
- exaggerating facial expressions
- using a Big Mack (a communication aid able to record and play words and phrases for less or non-verbal children)
- starting the story from a written account in the pupils' story diaries
- using questions carefully to promote more detailed responses
- one adult managed the group and another noted individual contributions from pupils, such as quietly spoken single words
- using props to add drama to the story, for example, toy spider and towel in a story about finding a spider in a towel at bath time

Successful outcomes

Successful outcomes for the pupils were identified by the storytellers (see below). A few are noted here from the video film recorded at the time.

- Joining in with actions, gestures, sounds and repeated phrases
- Remembering each others' stories
- Recognising common experiences

Two examples of storytelling from the storytellers

K (from special school) goes swimming

'We start with J (MS) describing going on a water slide. The group all join in, making sounds and gestures to support his storytelling. K (SS) has a story about going swimming and we have a go at acting it, with Ja (MS) narrating. This was at the beginning of the project. Ja can remember – with a bit of help – all about K's story. After this, K and M (SS and MS) met each other in the swimming pool at the weekend and had a good chat.'

The storyteller commented on L's story about a fairground:

'Using repeated phrases comes naturally in a story and helps us attend. L's (MS) story shows that everyone has something to say about being on a swing or a ride or a boat, or even just falling – and what happens to your insides! So the more we tell these stories the more we learn HOW to tell them.'

Post-project interviews: head teachers

The special school head was interviewed by telephone. He felt that the best thing about the project was the opportunity for the special school and the mainstream school to work together. As he had hoped before the project, it had strengthened the links between the schools. Successful outcomes for the pupils were displayed in the assembly which showed the work that had gone on. The stories were shared in the classes after the storytelling session. The storytellers and the learning disabled storytellers were very helpful and were role models.

The head would have liked his staff to have been more involved and to have had an opportunity to work with the storytelling group so that they could learn to continue the work. He thought that the project needed to run for a longer time and that the pupils needed a longer time. It would be really good to continue the project and embed it in the school curriculum.

The head of the mainstream school was interviewed by telephone. He was pleased with the project. He felt that the best things were that it was excellent for the eight pupils who took part. It was a challenge for them but this was overcome. He liked the use of story diaries across the school – they are now using them for their drama week. He liked the opportunity for the children to work orally in small groups with professionals, without writing. He liked the development of the children's own stories from their experiences; this basic storytelling is encouraged in the school.

The head felt that it was good that none of the pupils who took part mentioned to anyone that the Storytellers used adults with learning difficulties: they were wholly accepted. NG was very talented in drawing out the stories and was calm and flexible. The KS2 class teachers in the mainstream school noticed changes in the storyteller pupils, though they did not have time to take up the support and activities themselves. An additional 20-25 pupils visited the special school. The schools had a celebration assembly to share the project.

The parents of the eight pupils who took part gave 'lots of positive feedback'. The biggest barrier to success was the timetabled swimming session on Monday. They had investigated trying to change the day but it proved too difficult. He was pleased that the pupils were willing to miss swimming to do the storytelling. The head teacher would have liked there to have been more follow up back in school. He would have liked the project to reach further into the school and have more pupils understanding and celebrating landmarks in their lives. The project was helpful to join the schools up and to reinstate and develop new links. He felt that it was a very positive experience and would do it again.

Discussion points

Both head teachers had hoped for increased confidence and communication skills in their pupils. This was evident in the SS pupils in the celebration event and the class teachers' accounts (see below), and in the MS pupils' increased confidence and the use of the story diaries to promote personal stories. See also the interview with the MS pupils below. The MS head wished to promote inclusion and this did happen with the participating pupils, but as he stated in the interview he would have liked more of his pupils to have had this opportunity.

The benefits to the staff of both schools were less evident. The SS staff had some contact with the storytellers; however, the MS staff did not. Neither staff were involved in the sessions with the exception of some PMLD staff. For these reasons their opportunities to learn from the storytellers were limited.

Both head teachers were positive about working together and the storytelling project was another step in this process. Closer working, such as inclusion in each others' curricula, was not achieved yet.

Interview with two special school class teachers

Two class teachers from the special school (Class 1 and Class 2) were interviewed in a classroom. They liked the story diary and the (pictures of) faces in it that encouraged emotional expression. The pupils in their classes had difficulty communicating but they felt that they now did more speaking and listening in class. They would have like the project to be longer and they would have liked to have been more involved themselves.

Phone interview with an experienced supply teacher

This teacher felt that the project was good. She felt that SS pupils may react differently to visitors or even a different room and may not like changes which might have caused problems. However, the room and the decoration were good and consistent. The storyteller was very sensitive to children in the group and kept everything very calm. She included many pupils. There was very good interaction with each child.

She felt that the story diaries were very good and parents started to write in them regularly including one set of parents who had not sent any written communication to the school before. She would have liked the project to continue for the rest of the year.

Special school pupils

Three pupils from Class 2 were interviewed by storyteller NG. The information shared by the pupils showed that they remembered who they had told the stories with and something about the stories that were told. They all expressed positive views about the experience.

'I liked storytelling because we told lots of storytelling all together'.

Changes observed by the storytellers

Comments from the storytellers illustrate some of the positive changes that were observed within all the groups that paired up pupils from the two schools.

1. The development of sharing and the enjoyment that it brings.
   A special school child initially refused to let anyone join in her story or make a shared picture. In her final story she held one side of a coconut and banged it against another child's. She also made a joint picture.
2. The pupils learnt to make connections to others' stories.
   A mainstream child said: 'That's funny because I did that too!'
   All the pupils enjoyed talking about similar experiences.
3. The development of listening skills. Most of the pupils learnt to show interest through their faces and to use certain body language and exclamations to give positive feedback.
4. Improvements with attention control and turn taking skills.
   A special school child initially chose to always start off each session himself. By the last session he was asking: 'Who's going first?' Another special school pupil learnt to interact with the other pupils by handing a prop to each of them.
5. Better coping strategies when listening to some bad experiences and improvements recounting these. Most pupils became more confident about talking about their feelings.
6. The pupils began to show more empathy to others over the course of the project. One special school pupil said to another: 'You must be really sad that your guinea pig died.'
7. All the pupils developed their skills of 'joining in' with others. The less verbal pupils learnt ways to compensate by using actions and sounds in the stories. They also learnt to follow prompts from the other pupils.
8 The development of confidence in recounting simple anecdotes. Most of the pupils learnt tactics to make their stories more interesting, often through using humour. In one child's story about the doughnuts all getting burnt, he cheekily added 'All except one which I ate!' A special school pupil learnt to make his story more interesting by asking his audience: 'What do you think happened next?'
9. Developing the memory to recall experiences. Most of the pupils went away to tell their stories again in a different setting. One special school pupil told his story in the classroom. He was so excited about telling his story that his mum said he drew the best picture he had ever done.
10. All the pupils improved in their ability to use a multi-sensory approach to storytelling. Many pupils initiated ideas to use props or sounds.

Group interview with eight mainstream pupils

The eight children who had been directly involved in storytelling with the special school children were interviewed together in a classroom in the mainstream school.

The pupils' comments were almost all extremely positive about the project.
All the pupils interviewed said they would have liked the project to last longer

and they all said that they would like to take part again. The only exception was some anxiety expressed about some of the behaviours of some of the special school pupils. This had been discussed with their teachers and the pupils had been reassured; their anxiety decreased further after they had taken part in the sessions. They demonstrated a good level of understanding and enjoyment of stories and were developing understanding of the difficulties experienced by the special school pupils. See appendix 2.

Storytellers

Storyteller volunteer (assistant for artwork)

EL was a volunteer on the project and unfamiliar with this type of work. However she felt that it was a good experience and she would do it again. She felt that the all pupils learnt and that they all had a turn in telling a story. She would have liked feedback from the parents and would have valued input from the school staff. EL would have liked longer sessions and for the project to have continued for longer.

Interview with storyteller

VR felt that the project went really well for her, although it had been 'a bit of a whirlwind'. She learnt a lot from NG (experienced storyteller). She felt that the SS children improved although it was difficult to catalogue or quantify the changes. The MS children enjoyed the storytelling and became more confident. She felt that there should have been more contact with parents so that more use could have been made of the story diaries. She would have valued liaison and input from the school staff. She would have liked the project to have continued for longer and for more mainstream pupils to have been involved.

Interview with main storyteller

NG reported that she observed the pupils' friendships developing. She felt that there was evidence of their learning, participation and cooperation. She would have liked more input from the staff, more contact with parents and more funding to develop the project, particularly in the initial stages and then to continue the project for longer.

FINDINGS: City

Pre-project interviews

Head teacher of special school

The head teacher felt that the story telling project would help the pupils in his school by operating on several levels. The impetus was based around the opportunities for social inclusion for the pupils. He felt that there had been a lack of sustained work with the co-located mainstream school (due to the many staff changes there). This project was built around the English curriculum and language development, including ideas about 'pupil voice', prompted by Ofsted and responding to pupils' ideas to develop their learning. He would like to work towards the point where a child with complex and profound learning difficulties can impact on the decision making of the school. Getting pupils to tell their stories felt like handing over power to them. He hoped to embed the story-telling culture in the school so that it became part of the school culture.

He thought that the project would help the staff understand what a story is, for example, identifying the highpoint of a story and how you can develop the story and its highpoint based around the child's needs and abilities. He hoped that it would impact on the curriculum. The staff were helped by the visit of the storyteller (NG) to demonstrate some of the ways stories could be reinforced in the classroom, and in the discussion afterwards in the staffroom. The three stages of 'see it, be it and tell it' were a useful way of looking at the process.

He hoped for successful outcomes when the special school pupils engaged in relationships with the mainstream pupils. The best possible outcomes would be those around emotional development, self-esteem, relationships, communication and understanding difference. 'Here we have the opportunity to develop pupils' understanding of difference from a really early age so that they don't have to leave school never having met a person who has other barriers to their learning or who has other difficulties or needs. I guess that would be the most treasured outcome'. He also looked for changes in the staff culture of the schools and that the staff would have taken some steps to working and thinking together. He felt that pupils should be able to go where they are able to learn best and that that was not difficult to arrange. He hoped that the parents of the special school pupils would be pleased to see that there were opportunities available for their pupils to learn in the mainstream school and that would be a very positive move and would help them in the way they thought about their pupils.

Head teacher (temporary) of mainstream school

The head teacher was new at the beginning of the autumn term and was a temporary appointment until a permanent head could be appointed. She reported that the storytelling training day took place at the very beginning of term so at first it was a little confusing. However, when NG came to work and speak to all the classes, the programme was clarified quite well. People were now beginning

to see the difference between news time and storytelling; pupils were seeing that they had stories to tell and how these were out of the ordinary. Storytelling would bring the pupils together into a community. She had been surprised to find that the mainstream and special school on the same site were so separate. She thought that this was education for life and the pupils were learning through collaborative work.

The headteacher felt that the pupils needed to develop their speaking and listening, and there were large numbers who were quite emotionally deprived. Some of them had quite staggering stories to tell about their lives. Their news was nothing compared to what they had been through to be in this country. She felt that sometimes, as adults, we perhaps don't listen or don't have that empathy with pupils and their stories in that biggest picture. The staff should benefit from hearing the pupils' stories and helping the pupils to share their stories.

Mainstream pupils (years 5 and 6): interview groups after 'getting to know you' sessions and before the project

The pupils were interviewed in groups of half a year class at a time, making four interviews altogether. In three of the four groups a teaching assistant from the class was also present. The purpose of the group interview was explained: to find out if the Storytelling Project was one that pupils would enjoy and would help pupils do things together. Nearly all the pupils taking part in the interviews had also taken part in the 'getting to know you' sessions with the special school pupils held earlier.

The session was audio-recorded in order to preserve the data but no names were taken from the pupils so that their contributions remained anonymous. They were asked: whether they had known any of the special school pupils before their 'getting to know you' session, when they had done anything with the special school pupils and how they found this: difficult, easy or OK. In addition they were asked whether they had heard the term 'special needs'.

Table 2: Responses to questions 1, 4, and 8. Numbers in square brackets have been extrapolated from the answers given and were not directly counted.

	Year 5 Group 1	Year 5 Group 2	Year 6 Group 1	Year 6 Group 2
Number of pupils in group	15	13	12	17
Attended 'getting to know you'	15	12	12	16
Q1. Knew special pupils before	0	10	5	2
Q4. Doing things together:				
Difficult	0	[5]	1	1
OK	12	[2]	8	2
Easy	0	[5]	3	14
Q8. Had heard the term 'special needs'	10	2	6	7

The pupils mentioned that there might be difficulties with interactions, including understanding the special school pupils and making themselves understood using words. They had noted that the special school pupils made noises, and used gestures and signs. In addition, anxiety about the special school children's behaviour was brought up by some of the pupils. Some pupils said that they found it easy and fun to work with the special school pupils.

On the whole the mainstream school pupils appeared happy with the 'getting to know you' sessions. They liked the activities and several pupils said they had enjoyed them. A Year 6 child said: 'It was fun because they had a song for everything'. Some pupils mentioned joining in games together, eg playing 'It' in the playground: 'She knows how to play and it was really easy' (Year 5). A Year 6 child mentioned helping a special school child in the art session and said: 'I was doing art but I enjoyed cutting with them and we were doing little flowers and we were sticking… and using glitter'. A Year 5 child said about signs 'They [teaching staff] taught us one so we could say 'good afternoon'.

Around half the pupils said that they had heard the term 'special needs'. They were able to suggest a wide variety of people that they believed had special needs. These ranged from a child with a sibling at the special school and children with SEN who attended the mainstream school, to relatives and acquaintances with disabilities.

The pupils were asked for suggestions about what might help communication with the special school pupils. One of those put forward was: 'They have these little key rings and it has picture of like someone eating and it says 'eating', and it has a picture of someone sleeping and it says 'sleeping. You say 'sleep' and they go [demonstrates sleeping]' (Year 6). Another pupil described her experience: 'I don't know if she can understand or talk or anything because… she just really sits there… When we say 'Hi' and say her name, she blinks at you… When you talk to her she blinks' (girl in Year 6).

Many of the children in Years 5 and 6 were trying hard to make sense of their experiences with the special school children and to relate this experience to their other knowledge of illness and disability within their family, friends or acquaintances. They tended to concentrate on physical and sensory difficulties and on the whole did not describe learning difficulties. However, communication difficulties were described and when asked they suggested a range of ways to communicate including sign, pictures and facial expressions. Some pupils expressed anxiety about the behaviour of the special school children and this, along with communication skills, are obviously areas in which they require adult support during the Storytelling Project. See appendix 3.

School staff: storytelling training day

All the teaching staff of both schools attended a whole day of training on storytelling run by NG. The purpose of the day was to explain the rationale for storytelling and how to encourage and use storytelling in the classroom.

Evaluations for the day were very positive but, as noted in the interview with the MS temporary head, it was perhaps too early in the term for some teachers who had yet to meet and get to know their classes.

Storytelling sessions: strategies from video recordings and notes

The strategies used by the storyteller (MJ) are listed below and taken from videos and his written notes on the videos. The following strategies were noted:

- wait quietly for pupil to begin
- give verbal, facial or body prompt to indicate readiness
- pre-preparation for the story by checking vocabulary, signs, etc
- checking seating positions so that there was maximum eye contact
- setting the scene (with own narrative, scaffolding the narrative, asking questions)
- carefully phrased questions, eg 'I can't remember what you did' not 'tell me what you did'
- usefulness of a naive listener who really does not know what happened
- on the other hand, shared experiences were useful so that prompts can be given and others can join in
- relating well rehearsed stories, but also introduce new experiences so that children do not become fixated on a particular story
- using well known stories eg the Three Billy Goats Gruff, to help the children focus and model a narrative
- manufacturing events that could lead to a story, eg a member of staff falling into the swimming pool with all her clothes on, bringing a dog and a rabbit into the school
- checking with teaching staff beforehand for shared experiences; this could lead to improved and sustained interest and interaction
- summarising and showing empathy
- using sound effects helped slow the narrative pace and kept the narrative at a level the special school children could understand
- storytellers interpret and frame events to allow children to recount the story afterwards
- sharing anecdotes about similar experiences, eg birthday parties

Successful outcomes identified

Special school pupils:

- becoming animated and using words or signs
- increased use of eye contact and smiling
- joining in a narrative
- using a spontaneous interjection (My party!)
- use of a speech aid for one pupil showed he was more capable both linguistically and socially than had been presumed from earlier sessions

Mainstream school pupils:

- gaining confidence at interacting with special school children

- using gesture, pantomime and sound effects to keep listeners' interest
- learning to tell stories and keep listeners' attention without the use of props, using emphasis and signs instead
- telling a story with skills, confidence and pleasure
- showing understanding and listening by mirroring the SS pupil's gestures and repeating key words
- learning to ask questions to support the storyteller

Both schools' pupils:

- evidence on video of mutual enjoyment of sharing a narrative
- sharing of emotions ('the sharing of emotions is the earliest and most fundamental impulse of communication' Grove 2005).

Some barriers to successful storytelling:

- MS pupils find it difficult to adjust their language to the comprehension needs of the SS pupils
- MS pupils sometimes directed their storytelling to adults rather than the SS children

Two examples of storytelling:

R (TA) fell in the swimming pool.

TA R actually staged herself falling in the swimming pool with all her clothes on! The whole event was captured on video for the children to recount what had happened. Watching the video S (SS) became animated and began to use sign. The story has been well rehearsed. Several pupils who are either non-verbal or have little language were most animated, focussed and able to share an anecdote when they had been involved in an exciting experience shared with the adults. These later included a visit to the library where they met a dog, and a visit to the class by a rabbit. Sharing the experience allows the supporting adults to prompt the children when they are sharing the story with other children or adults who were not there.

G (MS) fell off her bike and went to hospital

Acting out G's story about when she fell off her bike and ended up in Hospital. MJ had coached her on how to bring her story to life for the listeners. Her use of gesture and pantomime was mainly spontaneous, reflecting her sophistication in understanding the needs of her listeners.

City: post-project interviews: head teachers

Assistant head teacher (mainstream school)

The assistant head teacher had been involved with the storytelling project. She thought that the positives outweighed the negatives – they enjoyed the opportunities, both pupils and staff benefited. She felt that the best thing was the developing links between the two schools. The pupils were excited when it was their turn to go to the special school. The training day was a nice way

for the staff to meet together. It would have been good for the staff to have been able to discuss progress. They made time for the project and it was easy to meet up. Unfortunately, the staff member who was originally supposed to oversee the project left so there wasn't one person responsible for this.

Head teacher: special school

The head teacher felt that the best thing about the project was that it offered a structured and creative way to do things together. It had a point and a purpose and was a two way process – both sides getting something out of it. It focussed on a personal dimension for the children and a way of sharing, so it was at a deeper level and not superficial. The children met and there was real social contact. They were shown how to communicate.

The headteacher thought that it was difficult to quantify the project – it was more like life lessons – he hoped it would have a lasting impact, for example on the thinking of the mainstream school children, so they would be able to connect with people with disabilities. He would have liked all the SS classes to have been involved (seven classes were not) which would have made it easier to sustain momentum. The length of time was also a factor.

The main thing the project needed was leadership, possibly from within the schools, but a clearly designated person. MJ's role was an anchor and a driving force, but a link person would also have been valuable.

Three class teachers: special school

A Class (10-11 years)

The teacher said that the best thing about the project was working with the mainstream school pupils. The special school pupils gained confidence as it was a non-threatening situation. They were always happy to go down to the storytelling area. She would like the project to continue.

She said that the special school pupils could teach the mainstream school pupils signs and the mainstream school pupils were excited to be telling stories. She had seen the importance of what personal stories gave to pupils through retelling something that happened to them, she felt that they don't often get the opportunity to tell anyone about these things, for example operations, moving house, holidays, etc. The pupils remembered the stories. She felt that it built up the pupils' confidence. She enjoyed the training day but would have liked there to have been more preparation time and a longer time for the project.

R Class (the children are 3-5 years old)

The teacher thought that the project brought the two schools together which was great. It was nice seeing the mainstream school pupils accepting the special school pupils. The special school pupils loved having the mainstream school pupils here. They were involved for 15-20 minutes in the storytelling area. They were taking in what was going on around them. The days MJ was here the pupils were happy to be involved – there were no tears.

The teacher felt that her pupils' language had developed and that they had enjoyed the experience. She would have liked the MS pupils to have been the same age as hers. She would have liked to get to know the mainstream staff and to have worked together more. She felt that her teaching had developed as a result of the project.

PMLD class (8 to 10 years), (also present were three TAs)

The teacher felt that the mainstream school pupils got over the barrier of pupils with disabilities. They developed relationships. The objectives about interaction were successful. It shifted from telling a story to sharing a storytelling experience. The best things were the interaction – how quickly the SS pupils accepted the MS pupils.

The mainstream school pupils needed more time and more visits to the classroom and perhaps were more concerned with their own story than helping the special school pupils. B class have no spoken language – just vocalisation. There had been the 'getting to know you' sessions but he felt they were not that helpful. They had learnt a way of putting together stories from MJ. They were building up working with the mainstream school. He felt that a real life event was not so important for his class but that learning to join in with the story should be the aim. However, he will continue to work on personal stories. He would like to use technical support (not available in the storytelling area), and more rhythm to get more pupils joining in.

Class teachers, mainstream school

Two of the three class teachers were available for an interview (year 6 and year 4). One of the main issues for both was that they were unable to see the storytelling in the special school as there was no time or support for them to be away from their class. The two teachers viewed the storyteller's visit to their classrooms rather differently. Some of this difference may have been due to the age differences in the two classes and the expectations of the teachers. See the discussion section below.

Year 6 class teacher

The teacher felt that the project encouraged the pupils to talk and tell stories. They were eager to do that, and to learn to listen. There was not a huge change at the time. She felt that more work would need to be done. She felt that it was a bit isolated from other activities and needed to be more connected to the rest of the curriculum. More planning and more time were needed. She was not able to visit the SS to see what they were doing. She would have liked there to have been more structure and her perception was that the brighter pupils could have benefited more.

Year 4 class teacher

The teacher felt that the project promoted storytelling and therefore raised the profile of writing through oracy. She felt that there were challenges with writing, so exploring other ways where the emphasis was on not writing was crucial. There were two pupils in her class with emotional needs and this let them show a sensitive side – it brought out a more nurturing and caring side of each child. It allowed

pupils who were not confident at storytelling to have a go, for example if they presented barriers to them for literacy and communication. It promoted more talk and motivation to share. Everyone was valued. Anxiety was not evidenced as all pupils were allowed to tell something – and it didn't have to be fantastic.

The teacher would also have liked to have observed the sessions and seen the MS pupils bonding with the special school pupils. She would have liked more pupils to be involved not only the six who took part. There was so much positive feedback from the pupils who went.

Mainstream school pupils (from Years 4, 5 and 6)

Four children who had been involved directly with storytelling in the special school were interviewed. They all were enthusiastic about their experiences and appeared to have grown in confidence through their success in participation and through the acquisition of new skills.

- *I made new friends. I learnt sign language. I know how to say my name (signs and finger spells out his name).*
- *We communicated with pupils with disabilities and it makes them feel normal.*

They were asked what new things they had learnt.

- *I got good at telling stories, I can do it all the time now. I couldn't tell stories before. I gave up because I couldn't do it well, I used to go and watch TV.*
- *We're now more confident around disabled pupils. Before that other pupils were scared but now they are not.*

They were asked what they had learnt about disabled pupils and pupils with special educational needs.

- *They are not different from us. People shouldn't judge them. They are in wheel chairs and some can't talk, inside they probably want to play. We don't see that disabled pupils are different.*

These pupils were positive and enthusiastic about their experiences and were clear that they had learnt about stories and about the SS pupils. See appendix 4.

Storyteller (MJ)

MJ felt that one of the best things about the project was watching the pupils from the mainstream school grow in their ability to formulate a story for other people. Most of them could do that (especially the older pupils) by the end of the project.

He also felt that the teachers from the special school responded to the challenge to help pupils tell anecdotes – it was new for them. The staff set up the stories, for example, ones about the rabbit and the dog. One non-verbal girl brought in her dog. She knew all about that dog, she was happy to sit and respond to questions. Her demeanour changed after that session. It was very exciting. He felt that personal anecdotes have an emotional aspect and that was significant.

He was asked how he identified successful outcomes. In the Year 6 class it was very noticeable that their involvement increased over the 10 weeks. The mainstream school pupils' English improved enormously, particularly the two older girls. They changed in the way they communicated, they became more mature, and in the way they asked questions. The other two pupils from year 5, were very quiet at first but developed in confidence and became more relaxed. The Year 6 children didn't want to go back to their class.

MJ would have liked the classroom teachers from the MS to join in with the sessions and felt that the project would have benefited from more support from the school for this. MJ took on more organisation than he expected. It would have been good for the MS and SS staff to get to know each other. He felt that oracy should be valued more in the MS. He suggested that there were ways in which the project could work better if there was another opportunity.

There was one occasion where a mainstream school child spoke in Somali to a special school child and began to get a response. MJ feels that more use could be made of building on the home languages of the children. The children could be paired up – one from each school with the same home language.

Observation and standardised assessments from the educational psychologist's report (City)

The educational psychologist for the City schools was a valuable objective observer of the project. She was able to assess the MS participants before and after on a standardised test for oral expression. Gains for all the pupils were recorded indicating a significant improvement for the group over the course of the project (see Table 3 below).

Table 3: Results of Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, second edition UK (WAIT II UK) oral expression for eight mainstream pupils

Pupil reference as per age group	Year Group	Standard Score[ii] T1: date assessed Autumn 2007, (15.11.07, 11.12.07 and 15.01.08)	Percentile[iii] T1: date assessed Autumn 2007	Standard Score T2: date re-assessed Summer 2008, (20.06.08)	Percentile T2: date re-assessed Summer 2008
a	4	*133**	*99**	141	99.7
b	4	*110*	*75*	133	99
c	5	*74*	*4*	91	27
d	5			moved away	
e	6	*103*	*58*	136	99
f	6	*115*	*84*	136	99
g	7	*116*	*86*	150	>99
h	7	*122*	*93*	154	>99

*Italics indicate initial assessments

She was able to observe the engagement and behaviour of the SS pupils. The following paragraph is the conclusion of her report:

'The sample assessed was limited sample, but gains were achieved for all the pupils at City special and at City mainstream schools, whether this was directly from the experience of telling stories or the fact that pupils in both settings had more attention is not possible to identify. Overall pupils at City mainstream school commented on having enjoyed and valued the experience and thought that they were making progress with their story telling skills. At the City special school, increased engagement with story telling within a familiar setting was evident, possibly due to the fact that the pupils had been engaged in the story telling experience, for example through an outing or the visit of an animal to the school. Both target and non-target pupils at the City special school showed ability to recall the story sequence through anticipation of noises or gestures, although this was not formally measured'. Appendix 5 contains more of the edited report.

[ii] A standard score is based on a hundred pupils of the same age achieving the same or equivalent score.

[iii] A percentile is a way of describing how a child's score compares with 100 pupils of the same age. For example, a score at the 15th percentile would indicate that around 85% of children his/her age would be expected to achieve the same or a higher score.

DISCUSSION: did the project achieve its aims?

Level one: friendship

The MS children were able to relate to the SS pupils and establish common experiences and feelings. They learnt to respond sensitively to each other's stories and to join in and support each other's storytelling. The SS pupils enjoyed the company of the MS children. An example of friendship from Country is the two pupils (one MS and one SS) who met at the swimming pool and chatted to each other. In City bringing in the two pets (a dog and a rabbit) allowed the pupils to share their experiences.

In the City the head teacher of the special school said: 'The pupils met and there was real social contact'. A MS teacher commented on the effects of the co-operation. She felt that the project promoted individual growth and joint working: 'The pupils have something to share and to offer and the SS school has something to offer. They were building new relationships'. She felt that in particular two pupils in her class had benefited from their experience: 'There are two pupils in my class with emotional needs but this let them show a sensitive side and brought out a more nurturing and caring side of each child'.

Comments from the MS pupils in the Country included the following: 'We found out about the special school. We helped others. We made new friends. They need friends – they're lonely. We enjoyed telling stories and hearing other people's. S [SS] hugged and kissed me.' In the City the comments included the following: 'I made new friends. I learnt sign language…I got a partner, S. I told him a story about a rabbit – we had to put him in a cage'. From the storytellers', teachers' and pupils' accounts it is evident that at a social level the sharing of stories led to a level of interaction and friendship that would not have existed without the project.

Level two: disability awareness and the promotion of positive attitudes among mainstream pupils and staff towards the pupils with learning difficulties in their co-located schools

There is no doubt that the experience of working with the SS pupils gave the MS pupils greater acceptance and understanding of them. At the initial interviews some MS children expressed their anxiety about SS pupils' behaviour, although not about communicating with them. A Country pupil said: 'I was nervous at first but not when I actually took part'. After meeting and working with them these anxieties were on the whole eliminated. This was particularly so in the Country

schools where the MS pupils were younger and several SS pupils experienced behaviour difficulties. Most of all they were able to comment on the ways in which they were seen to be the same.

The Country pupils commented that they had learnt: 'how to be with people with disabilities' and that: 'we helped others'. City pupils said: 'I learnt they're not very different'; 'We play with them and sit on the same table at lunch'.

In the Country the head teacher of the MS school said: 'It was excellent for the [eight] pupils who took part. It was a challenge for them but it was overcome'. He would have liked the project to reach further into the school and to allow 'more pupils understanding and celebrating landmarks in their lives'. In the City one of the class teachers said: 'there were links made with the special school… It was a two way thing'. The MS pupils in both settings enjoyed learning more about the pupils in the special schools and grew in confidence and in their ability to empathise. However, the MS teaching staff had fewer opportunities to use the project to increase their contacts with the special school staff and students.

Level three: improving all the pupils' oral and other language skills

The project raised the awareness of narrative skills and story-telling culture in all four of the schools. The Country special school hosted a celebration final day where all the participants had an opportunity to retell some of their stories to a bigger audience. There was also some artwork on display. In City a celebration event was held in the local civic centre with pupils and staff from the two schools, the storytellers, plus LA representatives.

The effects were slightly different in each school. In the City SS school the use of narrative and storytelling was embraced by the classes that took part including the PMLD class. The SS head teacher thought the project would have been even more effective if all the classes had been able to take part and the whole school had become more engaged. In the City mainstream school the results were good for the participating pupils; the spread of a narrative culture depended somewhat on the individual class teachers' willingness to support the project. One of the initial suggestions of the storytellers was that the MS pupils who went to the special school would return to their classes and retell their story to the whole class. However, this did not always happen. The storyteller visited the participating classes to tell stories with the whole class, but again this had mixed reactions from the class teachers, from great enthusiasm to more muted support. However, the assistant head was positive about the results: 'We all have stories to tell... I know that when the pupils were gathered [to go to the special school] they were excited'; 'there was whole class work as well. Some pupils would have liked the opportunity to go to the special school'.

It was not possible to measure specific changes in language from the special school pupils on standardised assessments due to their very early levels of communication and limited progress due to their learning difficulties.

However, the storytellers and school staff observed positive changes through the emphasis on communication and sharing personal stories. The SS pupils reacted with pleasure during sessions, and were judged to increase eye contact, attend better and to produce more verbal and signed communications. They were perceived to have enjoyed the company of non-disabled pupils. One head described the sessions as being 'more like life lessons'.

The benefits to the mainstream pupils were perceived to be increased confidence in speaking, listening and telling stories. In City the standardised assessments of seven MS pupils by the EP demonstrated clear gains in their scores for oral expression. These are particularly significant considering the limited time of the project. She also found increased motivation in two year 7 pupils to further achieve in storytelling, which was an unexpected outcome.

In the MS school in Country the story diaries were used to good effect. The class teachers used them and felt that they supported the children's oral skills and writing. They were going to use them as a basis for their drama project the next term.

The other three schools used the story diaries but there were some concerns. Many parents found it hard to help their children write in the diaries, possibly due to their own limited levels of English or literacy. For example, one parent provided pictures and a story but it was taken from material from another project and was two years old. In the City schools the diaries had been put away and not found until after the project had started. The class teachers did not always ensure that the diaries were taken home. In the future more preparatory work with school staff and parents would be useful if the diaries are to benefit everyone.

Level four: bringing the co-located special and mainstream schools closer together

The project certainly promoted the working together of the headteachers of both sets of schools. All four headteachers at the pre-project interviews had been enthusiastic for the project to take place. In the post-project interviews the comments were also positive. The assistant school head of the City mainstream school said: 'It brought the two schools together and that will last'. The head of the special school said: 'It offered a structured and creative way to do things together. It had a point and a purpose and was a two way process – both sides getting something out of it'. The mainstream school head in the Country said: 'The project was helpful to join the schools up and to reinstate and develop new links'. The Country special school head said: 'The project strengthened the links between the schools. It is part of the links now and helps them to remain strong. It's another opportunity'.

At the level of classroom teachers the effects were often positive. One MS teacher has continued to keep up her involvement with the SS class and the relationship has continued. Some of the SS staff have since mentioned that they learned from participating in the project. However, the head teacher of the City

special school commented: 'the MS staff felt that the project was an additional thing to take on, they needed a mental and emotional stake in it. There has to be clear leadership and a culture in the school that will help'. This was probably in part due to the difficulty for the mainstream teachers of leaving their class to observe the pupils working together, although there were teaching assistants who were able to join in.

In the Country although both heads were positive about working together at classroom staff level there was little contact. Once again, the lack of timetabled time for teachers to leave their classrooms is likely to have caused this.

One of the complications that all schools faced was a lack of time to prepare for the project. In the Country the schools were a late substitution for two other schools, and the mainstream head in City was a new temporary appointment, so their preparation time had therefore been limited. The heads of the Country schools had already worked together through other projects and had established a good working relationship. All expected that the links between the schools would be strengthened through participation in the project.

The responsibility for the co-working of the schools devolved almost entirely on the head teachers. It depended on their vision for their school and their success in carrying their staff with them. Additional help in City came from the EP who was able to provide considerable support for the pupils, school staff and storytellers. There were, of course, some barriers to success. One mentioned by the heads was time and timetables. Another, not specifically mentioned except in relation to the post of head teacher in the City, was staff changes, which made continuity difficult.

The City SS head also commented that the parents of the SS children viewed the proximity of the mainstream school and the possibilities of joint projects very positively.

The heads stated that they were keen to promote inclusion for all their pupils and saw the project as a way of doing this. They all valued the opportunities the project gave for the pupils to work together and the benefits to the pupils were apparent but often in subtle ways which were not easily measurable. The heads of the special schools felt certain that there would be benefits to their pupils through working with mainstream pupils. The heads of the mainstream schools felt that the project would develop understanding and sharing in their pupils. In the City the acting mainstream head noted that the language, learning and emotional needs of some mainstream pupils had also been identified as being significant. She pointed out that they had pupils who were performing at around the same level as the special school pupils so that made their collaboration more likely to work. Joint playtimes for some of the pupils already took place in both areas, although building work had recently affected the Country site which meant that playtimes had to be staggered and no longer coincided.

Staff who were involved enjoyed the storytelling and observed the progress of pupils' communication skills. In the special schools not all of the classes were

involved and not all the staff in all schools had the opportunity to observe or be involved in the storytelling. In Country, perhaps because there were already five adults in the storytelling team, the class teachers from the special school (except for the PMLD class) did not join in the sessions. Although the storytellers reported back, the situation was perceived as a lack of opportunity for the school staff to learn from the project. However, the City SS class teachers affirmed the positive effects of the project on their teaching and the encouragement of communication in their pupils. The mainstream class teachers were also on the whole not directly involved in the joint storytelling, although the teachers of the three classes involved in the City also had visits from the storyteller every week. The lack of opportunity to be directly involved, or for all the teachers in a school to take part, was perceived by at least one head to reduce the momentum and effect of the project among the school staff. The teaching staff perhaps also missed an opportunity to share expertise with each other. In the example of Bridge School (see Appendix 7) the informants noted that teaching staff from the MS and SS were able to offer expertise to each other; the recognition and facilitation of this would be a factor to consider in any future projects.

What can we say about the research questions?

1. Have the teaching staffs' views of narrative cultures and the development of communication skills changed in the pairs of schools?
2. Have the relationships between the schools changed through the project?
3. Have the pupils benefited both socially and in communication skills through the project?

How have the narrative cultures changed in the pairs of schools?
This is difficult to measure objectively. However, the many reports from the head teachers, the teaching staff, the pupils and the storytellers, if taken together, create the impression of positive experiences that will have a lasting effect (For evidence on Country, see pages 15-18; on City, see pages 26-28).

Have the relationships between the schools changed through the project?
A recent report on school federations makes the following comments on the development of effective working: they should build on past collaborations and good relationships; they should have clear aims and objectives for federating; they should develop collegiality, trust and effective communications. These three points are useful when looking at schools working together and in fact the four schools involved had either established these or were endeavouring to put them in place. In addition, Lindsay notes that the successful working of a federation is aided by the schools paying attention to: 'developing a shared set of values and common understanding of the nature and purposes of the collaboration' (Lindsay et al 2007 page 75).

In the City pair of schools the changing leadership of the MS school made the relationship between the head teachers difficult to sustain. In the year's duration of the project there was an acting head for two terms. In the third term a permanent head was appointed but unfortunately she was on sick leave for most of it and the post was covered by the assistant head teacher. In the Country the relationship between the head teachers appears to be becoming well established helped along by the storytelling project. In the City the two staffs were able to meet up in the training day and for some of the activities. Closer relations were formed between at least one set of class teachers and this has continued. In the country the two staffs were less involved in the project so they have not yet been able to establish closer working. The children who took part in both the City and the Country appear to have benefited considerably, see below.

Have the pupils benefited both socially and in communication skills through the project?
The reports from the storytellers, teachers, teaching assistants, head teachers testify that there were benefits to the pupils from both mainstream and special schools. Increased confidence was noted particularly in some of the mainstream pupils. Increased ability in storytelling was also noted in the mainstream pupils, and this was confirmed by the assessment results from the EP. The special school pupils were perceived to be more engaged and more communicative. The children themselves were entirely positive about their experiences.

CONCLUSIONS

The storytelling project, as originally conceived by Senjit, the storytellers and head teachers of the schools involved was developed as an imaginative and practical way for the staff and pupils of the co-located mainstream and special schools to become better acquainted and to learn from each other. It is important to stress that both at City and Country level there was limited funding available, and the project should therefore be seen as a pilot and exploratory.

In practice the aims were sometimes hard to achieve. Some of the problems were purely logistic, such as the storytelling times conflicting with swimming sessions, and about which very little could be done in the short term. The increased involvement of the class teachers and the parents of all the pupils would have required more time to prepare for the project, to explain the objectives and to obtain their willing participation and support. Although this would require more input and resources any future similar project would benefit from ensuring that these two groups were able to make bigger contributions. The projects would also have benefited from a named person in each school to liaise with and to support teaching staff, for example by prompting re-telling of stories in the classroom. Another factor to consider would be to ensure that the age groups of the pupils were a better match.

In spite of the practical problems, all the teachers and all the pupils agreed that the pupils had enjoyed the project and that positive development ensued (the exception was one mainstream teacher who was more doubtful about positive effects for some of her more able pupils). The most significant outcomes were the mainstream pupils' personal development and their understanding of the pupils from the special school, and the special school pupils' enjoyment and benefit from being with typical pupils. Most of the pupils said that they had learnt from participating. Nearly everyone, head teachers, school staff, pupils and storytellers, would have liked the project to have lasted for longer.

The head teachers of both pairs of schools had always enjoyed a certain amount of contact, particularly in the Country, and the storytelling allowed for this to increase further. The project was seen in both settings as another step in their cooperation which could be built on in the future.

It is possible to claim that the storytelling project has had some significant and lasting effects for the staff and pupils of the schools involved. The celebrations in the two settings testified to success for the pupils (including a report of the event in the local press in City). The scope of the intervention, especially given the limits of time and funding, was ambitious. However, these preliminary results indicate that the implementation of any future projects would be well worthwhile in order to promote friendships between groups of pupils, an increased understanding and awareness of disability, improvement of pupils' oral and other language skills, and the bringing together co-located special and mainstream schools.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Interviews:

Storytellers (MJ, NG, VR, EL)
Head teachers and assistant head
Class teachers and TAs
Mainstream children
Special school children
Observations: verbal and written
Videos from both areas
Questionnaires on professional development
Educational Psychologist's data (GU)
Story diaries

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Country – pre-project focus group interviews with mainstream pupils

The children were asked whether it was easy or not to do things together with the special school children; this was not a simple question for them and many of them did not give judgements about this, although some were willing to express an opinion.

Reasons for being difficult:

- *They scream and run round.*
- *I told Miss X I didn't want to do it again [reason not given].*
- *Quite hard because you don't know what they're saying.*
- *Because they scream, it hurt my ears and I couldn't hear you.*
- *It's hard to tell them what to do.*

Reasons for being easy:

- *It's mostly easy because I read easy books to T. It makes him laugh.*
- *Easy playing football.*
- *She was really nice – she helped us do stuff.*
- *I found it quite easy because I just tried to talk and ignored it [the noise].*

The children were more confident about suggesting the ways groups of people might be the same or different although these at first tended to be physical, such as hair or eye colour. Many of them, especially the older children had heard the term 'special needs' and were able to specify this, again tending towards the concrete and physical. Quite a number of them knew relatives, neighbours or friends who had a disability.

- One had a cousin in a wheelchair.
- One had a friend who can't talk (aged 14).
- One had a friend whose cousin is blind and brain damaged.
- One had a neighbour who can't walk.
- One had a granny who has a stick.

They were asked how they thought they might be the same or different from the children in the special school.

Different:

- *They have different jumpers and logos.*
- *We're not blind or deaf.*
- *We don't shout and make silly noises.*
- *They might not talk like us. They might not talk at all. They might make signs, so you know how they are feeling.*
- *They might not understand us when we say things.*
- *They can't do things by themselves.*

Same:

- *We're all children; we both have teachers.*
- *We have feelings: we feel sad or happy.*
- *Both like TV: Teletubbies, Bob the Builder, Cartoon Network.*
- *We both might have bad eyesight*
- *I've got special needs with maths. [Others suggested:] English, spelling, punctuation.*
- *Boys might like football; girls might like basketball.*

The children had ideas about how they could help the special school children with their difficulties.

- *We can: be friendly; buy them new glasses; show them where things are.*
- *We can help with work. Hold on to them so they don't fall over. Help them feel comfy. Don't laugh at them if they do something we don't (like make a noise).*
- *We can help by trying to keep them happy – drawing with them.*
- *Don't take the mickey out of them – don't stare.*
- *Hold their hands and say who it is.*
- *Give M and people who are blind things to do.*
- *Be kind to them.*

They had ideas about how to help them with their talking.

- *You could get a book with big letters, sound it out and say it and try it.*
- *Bring your singing voice [to the group next week].*

Appendix 2: Country – post-project interview with eight mainstream pupils

1. *What are the best things about the storytelling project?*
   We saw how they do things at the special school. We learnt about families; how to write a story properly; how to be with people with disabilities. S. kept asking things. I liked doing drawing. It was good to do. I learnt how to do pictures.

2. *What have you learnt through taking part in the project?*
   We learnt sign language. We learnt how to help blind pupils to feel. They (special school pupils) need lots of friends. I learnt that you need to put eggs in biscuits.

3. *What did you like about it?*
   We found out about the special school. We helped others. I was nervous at first but not when I actually took part. We made new friends. They need friends – they're lonely. We enjoyed telling stories and hearing other people's. S. hugged and kissed me.

4. *Was there anything you did not like?*
   The pupils didn't like some of the behaviour of the special school children. They found it frustrating at times. Some pupils screamed, one tried to get out of the room. They were noisy.

5. *What would you like to do differently another time?*
   They would like the project to last longer. Everyone in the group said they would like to do more. They would like to do a picture of every story. They liked the Santa train.

6. *What would you do again?*
   Everyone said they would like to do everything again. They would like to have time to play in the playground afterwards.

Appendix 3: City – pre-project interview with mainstream pupils

What the pupils knew

The pupils were asked whether they knew any of the special school children before the 'getting to know you' sessions.

In Year 5 Group 1 there were no children who said they had known the special school children before the 'getting to know you' sessions, but in Group 2, 10 children said that they did. There may have been confusion about what the word 'know' meant in this instance, ie, was it seeing the special school children in the playground or more regular or specific interactions? Year 5 children mentioned taking part in a choir, a disco and a Cinderella show where the special school children were present. Year 6 children mentioned music, a drum session, cooking and the Cinderella show.

The children were asked what it was like to do things together with the The special school children and whether they thought it was easy, OK or difficult?

There were very varied answers to this question. The children may have been influenced by the type of activities, for example, possibly it was easier in the art session to offer help cutting out shapes than to offer help in music or cooking activities. In addition, the amount of interactions encouraged or modelled by the adults may possibly have influenced the responses. The children mentioned difficulties with interactions, including understanding the special school children and making themselves understood using words. They had noted that the special school children made noises, and used gestures and signs. In addition anxiety about the special school children's behaviour was brought up by some of the children. Some children found it easy and fun to work with the special school children. The Year 6 children appeared more comfortable with the sessions than the Year 5 children since they offered more examples and descriptions of their experiences

The children were asked to say why they thought it was easy or difficult?

On the whole the mainstream school children appeared happy with the 'getting to know you' sessions. They liked the activities and several children said they had enjoyed them. A Year 6 child said: 'It was fun because they had a song for everything'.

Some children mentioned anxieties about the special school children's behaviour being unpredictable or violent, eg being hit. A Year 5 child said: 'We were doing poetry and I was kind of scared because there was a girl next to me, she kept on jumping and things and I was scared'. Some mentioned language difficulties and the use of sign language, of which they knew only a few signs. A Year 6 child said: 'Sometimes it's quite easy to communicate with them, but sometimes they start hitting you because they can't talk properly'. One Year 5 child said: 'I found it quite difficult but after about 15 minutes I got used to it'. A few Year 6 children mentioned some problems with the parachute game and that some of the special school children had either been scared or had not joined in.

Some children mentioned joining in games together, eg playing 'It' in the playground: 'She knows how to play and it was really easy' (Year 5). A Year 6 child mentioned helping a special school child in the art session and said: 'I was doing art but I enjoyed cutting with them and we were doing little flowers and we were sticking… and using glitter'. A Year 5 child said about signs 'They [teaching staff] taught us one so we could say 'good afternoon'.

Thinking about the same and different

The children were asked what made groups of people the same or different and what things were the same or different between themselves and the special school children.

The children mentioned many different kinds of physical or behavioural attributes that would make groups of people, and particularly themselves and the special school children, the same or different. Examples of being the same were:

- *having the same colour hair;*
- *liking the same TV shows;*
- *we're both learners;*
- *the same religion;*
- *we both eat food at lunchtime.*

Examples of being different:

- *the way we react, it's quite hard for them (the special school children) to react clearly;*
- *they use sign language and we don't;*
- *some can walk but some are in a wheelchair.*

Thinking about special needs

The children were asked if they had heard the term 'special needs'. They were asked if they knew anyone with special needs, what kinds of difficulties they might have in their lives, and what they thought they could do to help them. Lastly, they were asked about how they thought they could help someone who found it difficult to talk.

Around half the children said that they had heard the term 'special needs'. They were able to suggest a wide variety of people that they believed had special needs.

These ranged from a child with a sibling at the special school and children with SEN who attended the mainstream school, to relatives and acquaintances with disabilities. They included examples of deafness, blindness, other physical disabilities, allergies, asthma and communication difficulties. The children were able to identify some of the difficulties which these people might encounter. They suggested:

- *they can't walk for that long;*
- *some of them couldn't chew food, they had to have like these things;*
- *she's disabled she has to have a wheel chair and she has to have a downstairs house because she can't walk;*
- *he's got Down's syndrome and he has to be taken care of;*
- *some might not be able to talk, they have to do sign language.*

The suggestions for helping people with these disabilities included the following:

- *two girls in our school, they can't see and they can't hear properly. One of them has two hearing aids and one of them has one;*
- *you could have a sign to let them know there's someone safe and you can trust us.*

Several of the suggestions related to hearing, vision and mobility difficulties. Help was envisaged with hearing aids, glasses and wheelchairs.

Ways to help the special school children with communication difficulties produced the following suggestions:

- *use sign language*
- *use actions*
- *use facial expressions*
- *draw pictures*
- *use alphabet language (alphabet signs)*
- *speak louder if they couldn't hear*
- *you could write it*
- *you could show them things*
- *they could point to things they might want.*

Two longer suggestions were:
'They have these little key rings and it has picture of like someone eating and it says 'eating', and it has a picture of someone sleeping and it says 'sleeping. You say 'sleep' and they go [demonstrates sleeping]' (Year 6).

'I don't know if she can understand or talk or anything because she never really does. She just really sits there. When…she comes up here, like me and my friends, when we say 'Hi' and say her name, she blinks at you. Otherwise she wouldn't blink. She sits there just like this. She doesn't blink or anything but when you talk to her she blinks' (girl in Year 6).

Many of the children in Years 5 and 6 were trying hard to make sense of their experiences with the special school children and to relate this experience to their other knowledge of illness and disability within their family, friends or acquaintances. They tended to concentrate on physical and sensory difficulties

and on the whole did not describe learning difficulties. However, communication difficulties were described and when asked they suggested a range of ways to communicate including sign, pictures and facial expressions. Some children expressed anxiety about the behaviour of the special school children and this, along with communication skills, are obviously areas in which they require adult support during the Storytelling Project.

Appendix 4: City – post-project interview with mainstream pupils (Years 4, 5 and 6)

Four children who had been involved directly with storytelling in the special school were interviewed. They were enthusiastic about their experiences and appeared to have grown in confidence through their success in participation and through the acquisition of new skills.

- *I made new friends. I learnt sign language. I know how to say my name (signs and finger spells out his name). I got a partner, S. I told him a story about a rabbit. We had to put him in a cage.*
- *We communicated with children with disabilities and it makes them feel normal. We come together to share stories. They understand what we do in real life. They are a part of us. They are normal to us.*
- *We help them to talk to us. When you are disabled they keep it all [?inside]. They just have something difficult to [?cope with]. We encourage them to speak out. We help them make the story more exciting. We ask a question to help them keep going.*

They were asked what new things they had learnt.

- *I learnt sign language. I got good at telling stories, I can do it all the time now. I couldn't tell stories before. I gave up because I couldn't do it well, I used to go and watch TV.*
- *I like stories with disabled children. I like making them happy. We're now more confident around disabled children. Before that other children were scared but now they are not.*

They were asked what they did not like about the project and all of them responded that there was nothing that they didn't like.

What they learnt about children with disabilities and special needs.

- *They are not different from us. People shouldn't judge them. They are in wheel chairs and some can't talk, inside they probably want to play. We don't see that disabled children are different.*
- *I learnt they're not very different. They're basically normal. You can't always understand them. Some people are scared of them because they don't look like them. We play with them at play time and sit on the same table at lunch.*

What they would do differently next time.

- *We would take more control. We were scared at first – but if you're calm they won't hit you. They can't sit still or [they] are lonely. They don't like*

doing things on their own. They look at Michael [storyteller] but they pay more [attention] to us. Michael should let children open up.
- *I would learn more sign language.*

Appendix 5: City – edited extracts from the educational psychologist's post-project report (GU)

The thinking behind the project was:
- How can mainstream school children and pupils with severe and complex needs interact with each other?
- They may share the same site, (co-location) occasionally meet across the playground. How can links be improved?
- What more is needed?

The aim of the project was to improve the collaboration between staff and pupils at the mainstream school and the special school. The focus of the collaborative work between the two schools was a story-telling project.

As the link Educational Psychologist for the special school I was involved with the planning of the project and attempting to gain some measures of the possible educational benefits of this intervention for pupils at the MS and SS schools.

MS staff, who share the same site, engaged with the project and the achievements for their pupils are indicated below. Due to a variety of circumstances key staff involved in the project changed, but the enthusiasm of the pupils and commitment of staff was sustained throughout the project.

The conclusions of the assessments completed with pupils at MS using the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, second edition UK (WAIT II UK) oral expression, which required pupils giving directions, recalling a story sequence and verbal fluency. The scoring of the visual passage retell considered 9 items of story telling including the following and graded them on a 0,1,2 point scale:

A. Explains what the story is about, (main idea)
B. States detail about the pictures
C. Labels character (names)
D. Describes or tells where the story is occurring (setting)
E. Tells what happens or what is happening (plot)
F. Relates a logical order of events (sequencing)
G. Summaries and states a final outcome (conclusion)
H. Predicts what might happen next
I. Compares story to own experiences or to another story

Visual prompts were used some times and at other times learners were asked to visualise their own pictures.

The final results are for 7 pupils at the mainstream school (one had moved away), all pupils reassessed made gains in the areas assessed.

Table 3 Results for seven mainstream pupils on WAIT oral expression

Pupil reference as per age group	Year Group	Standard Score T1: date assessed Autumn 2007, (15.11.07, 11.12.07 and 15.01.08)	Percentile T1: date assessed Autumn 2007	Standard Score T2: date re-assessed Summer 2008, (20.06.08)	Percentile T2: date re-assessed Summer 2008
a	4	*133**	*99**	141	99.7
b	4	*110*	*75*	133	99
c	5	*74*	*4*	91	27
d	5			moved away	
e	6	*103*	*58*	136	99
f	6	*115*	*84*	136	99
g	7	*116*	*86*	150	>99
h	7	*122*	*93*	154	>99

*Italics indicate initial assessments

Pupils at SS were assessed throughout the project using EEL engagement ratings (EEL stands for effective early learning) 2 pupils from each of the following years 3-6, 1-2 and Foundation stage were assessed. The measures used looked at:

- Levels of interest
- Approach to task
- Attention
- Persistence
- Flexibility
- Impulse

The pupils at SS were clearly engaged when stories related to themselves. Photographic prompts were particularly useful to focus all the pupils' attention. Familiarity through repetition also helped focus attention. The interactive white boards available in the classroom were a focal point and supported the pupils in attending to the story being told, as did props. The younger target pupils were focused when stories were told within a familiar setting, but became agitated when taken to non-familiar environments, such as the hall at MS.

The areas identified for improvement when the pupils at SS when initially assessed were impulse control and flexibility. Two pupils particularly found it difficult to control their impulses and were rigid in the order of the story presentation. This did not improve and may relate to the developmental level these pupils are at emotionally which impacts on their attention and concentration. The older target pupils were able to control their impulses and could retell the story from any point.

A second area to be investigated following the initial assessment was whether pupils would attend more during other lessons. This again was the case for the older pupils but was less noticeable in the younger pupils. The learning and developmental needs of the six pupils assessed at SS varied greatly and from

observations had an impact on how they measured on the areas covered by the EEL engagement scale.

The comments made by the pupils at MS related to how much they enjoyed being involved with the pupils at SS school. Some commented that initially they had been a little anxious working with pupils with a range of physical and learning needs but had really enjoyed the experience.

An Educational Psychologist would not normally have been asked to assess the pupils identified by staff at MS. Whilst it was explained to the pupils that the purpose of the assessment was to identify the potential "spin offs" of the project, with a pre intervention assessment and post intervention data, (the project was the intervention). Any form of assessment no matter how informal can generate some anxiety. My impression was that any initial anxiety to being assessed was totally removed when all the pupils were reassessed. The two year 7 pupils stated that they had been practicing verbal fluency strategies when they realised that they were meeting with me again. Motivation to achieve was not one of the expected outcomes of the project.

During the initial assessment of the pupils at MS school an area of story telling that was from the stories told by even competent story tellers was that they did not generate their own stories associated with the prompts being used. This changed when the pupils were reassessed and all the competent story tellers (identified as those achieving at the 99 percentile) spontaneously related the story they recalled to events in their own life.

Conclusions

The sample assessed was limited, but gains were achieved for all the pupils at MS and at SS, whether this was directly from the experience of telling stories or the fact that pupils in both settings had more attention is not possible to identify. Overall pupils at MS school commented that they had enjoyed and valued the experience and thought that they were making progress with their story telling skills. At SS increased engagement with story telling within a familiar setting was evident and possibly due to the fact that the pupils had been engaged in the story telling experience, for example through an outing or the visit of an animal to the school. Both target and non-target pupils at Woodlands school showed ability to recall the story sequence through anticipation of noises or gestures, although this was not formally measured.

What next

Meetings between the staff at both schools will be planned during the next academic year to maintain the collaboration between the pupils and staff at both schools for the benefit of all pupils and staff.

Further details can be ascertained from the author of this summary.

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Appendix 6: Examples of collaboration – two other pairs of co-located maintstream and special schools

The Bridge School and Hungerford Primary School, Islington

Two special schools (primary and secondary) that were on separate sites have each now been co-located with a mainstream school on two other sites about 10 minutes walk away from each other. They are housed in new buildings. The two primary schools are separated by a playground which is shared between them. However, there are areas sectioned off for the special school pupils.

The co-location was a policy decision prompted by a government initiative and was fundamental to the planning. The special school draws its students mainly from minority ethnic groups and a significant number have free school meals. The last Ofsted inspection grades were outstanding in all areas (Ofsted Report 2005). The head teacher and the senior teacher for inclusion were the main sources for the following information.

Every child has the opportunity to join a mainstream class. There are different levels of inclusion, for example, those with more severe needs may have less, but every primary child has an individual programme. Staff look at curriculum levels, PSHE and social and group skills. They discuss the inclusion with the class teacher. Some children are now in mainstream full time, but others who are not so ready and with more difficulties only do some work in mainstream. Some of the work such as music and drama is project focussed.

There is a steering group (mainly the head teachers) which meets every half term; other staff members can be included but not outside professionals. They have devised a development plan which is under constant revision. Each class in the special school is twinned with one in the mainstream school. The two class teachers meet with each other regularly.

There has been great deal of preparation and training for the mainstream teachers and also for the pupils from both schools. A theatre company was employed to carry out awareness training (funded by the school plus a budget for joint projects). There has been a willingness and commitment to joint working. The mainstream head teacher provided uniforms, books and book bags, etc. The heads communicate regularly both formally and informally.

The commitment from the mainstream school exists at a senior level and the teachers there are positive about their cooperation. The interviewees felt that both schools had something to offer to each other. The special school has expertise in ASD, challenging behaviour, PMLD, learning difficulties, etc, so they offered support to the mainstream school which itself has a high level of SEN and so were grateful for their input.

Bridge School staff are confident in the quality of their school. They are comfortable with offering training (which they already provide). Now parents

are moving into the area to be near the school. Their ethos is personal development, not national test (SATs) results and not just academic results.

There is no specific time allocated for meetings although there are plenty of these, including some joint staff meetings and planning times together for class teachers. The teachers in mainstream do initial lesson planning, the senior teacher looks at the plans and differentiates them for the special school children and then the mainstream teachers use the differentiated planning for their group. The two deputy heads meet to devise a 'global curriculum': the thematic approach is the same for both schools but the detail is different.

The inclusion is reviewed week by week for each child. The levels of inclusion can vary; the system is very sensitive to the children's needs. Fifteen mainstream children come to Bridge for 'reverse inclusion' music lessons, library sessions, design and technology, etc. The outcomes, as recorded in reviews of individual education plans, have been highly positive. The mainstream children have benefited from joint working, for example on film-making: they have been excited and engaged. They have made friendships. They have benefited by having more social understanding. The children are now very accepting of difference.

The teaching assistants always go with the children to the mainstream school so they have to have extra staff so that one can remain in the special school classroom.

The school places great emphasis on communication and to assist this the head teacher is planning with the SLT service to have SLT assistants in the classroom. The school will pay for this. It means that the SLT assistants will have to work as classroom assistants (eg carry out toileting) as well as SLT work.

Stanley Special School and Thingwall Primary School , Wirral

The Stanley School head teacher was the main informant for the following information. Other information was gained from the 2003 Ofsted report. The school is for primary age pupils with complex learning difficulties (it was once an SLD school). There are no physical difficulties, the pupils mostly have behaviour difficulties and/or are on the autism spectrum. There are 90 pupils, of whom about 40% have autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The school is accredited by the National Autistic Society (NAS). There is good early diagnosis of ASD in the area, and they now get 3 year olds with a diagnosis of ASD.

The school uses total communication, including BSL and the Picture Exchange Communication Scheme (PECS)[iv]. PECS is more useful in the mainstream school as it is accessible to everyone.

In addition to teachers there are well-qualified teaching assistants, and speech and language therapists who assess the children's receptive and

[iv] PECS is a book of pictures which the pupils with ASD can use to communicate with others.

expressive language, set targets and devise programmes. The classroom staff implement these.

The mainstream primary school is located next to Stanley School. It has approximately 230 children on roll aged between 4 and 11. The majority of the pupils are from a white British ethnic background. The last Ofsted school inspection (2003) notes that they have developed very good links with the neighbouring special school 'enabling pupils to work and play together in a variety of settings. This has clear benefits for both schools and is very effective in developing pupils' personal development and awareness of others'. The school was judged to be very effective and to provide a very good education for its pupils.

The head teacher of Stanley School suggested two questions must be asked about inclusion: does it work and where does it take place? He felt that inclusion had to take account of the social benefits to the pupil, and could also be seen as a way of testing whether the pupil was ready for more inclusion or to move to mainstream provision.

The 'Stanley School Matrix' helped to assess what type of inclusion a child might be ready for. It listed the type of activity, the amount of support and level of supervision, the time of the activity and the targets for the activity. There are five levels and these decide the type, level, duration and support needed for the inclusion.

The head teacher mentioned the work of Vaughn and Schumm (1995) which had been found very useful in the development of their inclusion programme. These authors reported an action research project aimed at the development of more inclusive models of provision in three primary schools in urban areas in the US. The nine components which they suggest lead to effective and responsible inclusion and form part of Stanley School's strategy for integration/inclusion and work with Thingwall School. The principles include the consideration of the needs of the pupils in both schools, consideration of the needs of the staff in both schools, and the provision of adequate resources. The process is monitored informally and formally and the views of the staff and parents are sought at regular intervals.

In both schools' cultures therefore the concept of inclusion is well established.

STORY OF THE WEEK

What happened?

When & **Where did it happen?** ---

Who was there? ---

What was said? ---

How did you feel? *(tick one or add your own.....)*

What did you ---

Write or draw some more about your story here. You could stick on something you found that reminds you of the story.

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