

## **Evaluation Report: Feelings are Funny Things: An Inquiry into Emotions, Thinking and Acting through Stories and Storytelling – A Pilot Project.**

'Feelings are Funny Things' is an Emotional Literacy intervention that was piloted between October 2018 and March 2019 in six schools in Central South Consortium Joint Education Service area. It is aimed at all Key Stage 2 children with a particular focus on children in care; children who may have difficulties in emotional comprehension and control that may be related to difficulties in behaviour, attachment or specific learning difficulties and are vulnerable learners.

The project was designed as a three-day emotional literacy intervention that used stories and storytelling skills to help students become more aware of feelings and build confidence in communication skills. It was aimed at schools where there was a high proportion of Children who are Looked After. The intervention was delivered to a whole class and was designed to be relevant to all children regardless of their levels of emotional literacy or attainment. The intervention had several strands, the first of which was the telling and discussion of stories particularly examining for thoughts, emotions and choices/actions. The second strand focused on learners acquiring oral storytelling skills, which included visualisation and non-verbal communication techniques and the development of oral, creative and imaginative problem solving skills, all of which led to increasing levels of confidence in personal communication. Finally, listening, relaxation and mindfulness skills were also introduced.

The theoretical approaches and techniques were drawn from the fields of Emotional Literacy/Intelligence, Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapies, Philosophy for Children, Circle Time and Restorative Practice. The intervention was designed so that teachers would be involved and could develop the strands beyond the three day programme in ways which would be relevant to the development of the wellbeing curriculum and other interventions aimed at exploring mental health and wellbeing. A twilight training session was also arranged at four of the schools. At the end of the project a collection of stories that could be used by the class were left with the teacher.

The intervention was designed by storytellers Steve Killick, who is also a Clinical Psychologist, and Phil Okwedy, an experienced teacher, and in association with the George Ewart Evans Centre for Storytelling, University of Wales. The techniques used in this project will be available for teachers in a Tool Kit which is currently being prepared.

The intervention was run at six primary schools in each of the different areas of the Central South Consortium and included two Welsh speaking schools. We would like to thank pupils and staff from all these schools for the opportunity to work with them on this project.

### **Evaluation.**

*"The less confident children in the class have been much more able to speak up and interact in the class room setting."* Class Teacher

*"The children are much more open to talking about feelings. It helped one child with anxiety, particularly, to be able to talk about it a lot more. The change is phenomenal."* Class Teacher

### Facilitator's Observations.

As facilitators, we observed that all groups of children were keen to be involved in all aspects of the programme and were engaged by both listening to and learning to tell stories. Throughout the project, we were learning what exercises and structures were most effective. This was especially true in the first two schools but we soon found and continued to refine a structure that appeared to work and engage learners. However, the capacity for a class to engage and concentrate varied widely across the schools. In some classes learners found it hard to focus and our intervention became concentrated on helping the class-as-a-whole learn to become settled. Where a more focused 'mindset' had been established, it was possible to engage the class in reflecting more deeply on the subject matter. One factor concerned the teacher's involvement in the intervention. Teachers who valued the focus on emotions and thinking were able to develop the interventions after we had left. Others who were less engaged in the intervention were less likely to use the techniques we had introduced. The physical environment was also very important. Some classes often had considerable disturbance in the learning environment which impacted on learning. Overall, we felt we developed a technique in which children became engaged and were able to think about their own psychological experience. The intervention clearly seemed to be acceptable to learners and staff and this was reflected in the brief evaluation given. However, the sustainability of the intervention varied across schools which may reflect teacher engagement so it would be worth more consideration of this in future projects. The feedback received from learners and teachers supported this on the whole and we believe this intervention can be developed further and incorporated into the new curriculum with a greater focus given to evaluation.

### Feedback from Learners and Teachers.

A brief evaluative questionnaire was given to learners at the end of the three day intervention. Some examples of some of the words most frequently used in response to questions about what they liked and what they learnt from the intervention are shown in these WordClouds. WordClouds from all schools are appended.



Prior to the intervention a brief questionnaire was given to teachers asking them to identify up to three children in the class who were having difficulties in confidence and engagement with learning. These children were rated on a seven point scale before and after the intervention. Of the 17 children 14 were identified as having made a positive improvement in engagement in learning (n=17, mean 1.9, range 1-4). 12 children were rated higher on confidence and one child was rated lower after the intervention (n=17, mean 1.7, range -1-5). Qualitative questions demonstrated that the teachers, on the whole, saw the children as engaged in the process and becoming more able to speak about their own feelings. A noticeable improvement in oracy was mentioned frequently. Several teachers had maintained many of the activities, sometimes with significant effects. The questionnaire responses are appended. We also conducted a two month follow-up phone interview which had responses from 5 schools. These suggested that several schools had maintained and developed some activities from the intervention and had observed difference in oracy and emotional expression, particularly from the vulnerable learners.

### **Case studies.**

1. The teacher was worried about 'David' as he was very anxious and lacked the confidence to share his ideas with the class. Prior to the intervention she had suggested to David's mother that she take him to the GP for help with his anxiety. However, over the three days David responded positively to each new exercise and his teacher was pleasantly surprised with the confidence he showed especially in the group storytelling on the final day where he performed in front of the class.
2. On our first morning during the class's first experience of absorbing and telling a story themselves, the class teacher reported that she was astonished but delighted by 'Kara's' level of engagement with the process. *"She is usually so difficult to engage. Just recently it took about seven hours for her to produce 80 written words. But look at her now!"* Over the three days Kara maintained this level of engagement - her hand was nearly always the first to offer a response to a question posed, she was keen to offer feedback and she was always first in wanting to know what the next exercise or task would be.

### **Summary**

The brief evaluation of the intervention suggests that using storytelling is an effective way of stimulating learning about emotions. The facilitators learnt much over the course of this pilot and by the third school there was a substantial impact on vulnerable learner's engagement and confidence as measured by the teachers' ratings. It also appeared that the intervention provided an acceptable way of learning to both children and teachers. The sustainability of the project appeared to be more dependent on the teacher's engagement and this might be taken into greater account in future projects. Also, there may be benefits in structuring the intervention to take a place one day a week over several weeks rather than as an intensive block. It may also be useful to provide training to staff to help them use the techniques and it may be especially useful to Emotional Literacy Support Assistants(ELSA's). There are already plans in place to provide such training and the publication of a Tool Kit should also help more schools use this approach.

**Dr Steve Killick**

**Phil Okwedy**

**May 2019**

APPENDICES

WordClouds developed from student questionnaires.



**Teacher feedback- Teacher ratings of three identified vulnerable learner's level of engagement and confidence before and after intervention.**

SCH 1	ENGAGEMENT BEFORE	ENGAGEMENT AFTER	DIFFERENCE	CONFIDENCE BEFORE	CONFIDENCE AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	2	3	+1	1	1	0
2	2	2	0	3	2	-1
SCH 2	ENG BEFORE	ENG After	DIFFERENCE	CON BEFORE	CON AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	2	5	+3	2	5	+3
2	2	2	0	2	2	0
3	2	2	0	2	2	0
SCH 3	ENG BEFORE	ENG After	DIFFERENCE	CON BEFORE	CON AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	4	6	+2	4	5	+1
2	2	5	+3	3	5	+2
3	2	5	+3	2	4	+2
SCH 4	ENG BEFORE	ENG After	DIFFERENCE	CON BEFORE	CON AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	1	2	+1	1	2	+1
2	1	5	+4	1	1	0
3	3	6	+3	1	4	+3
SCH 5	ENG BEFORE	ENG After	DIFFERENCE	CON BEFORE	CON AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	2	5	+3	2	5	+3
2	3	5	+2	2	5	+3
3	2	4	+2	2	4	+2
SCH 6	ENG BEFORE	ENG After	DIFFERENCE	CON BEFORE	CON AFTER	DIFFERENCE
1	2	4	+2	3	5	+2
2	3	5	+2	1	6	+5
3	2	3	+2	1	4	+3

**Post Intervention Questionnaire Teacher Comments**

<b>Q. 4</b>	<b>What were your impressions of how the class responded to the activities?</b>
	Children had a positive attitude whilst taking part in the activities
	The majority of the children were engaged and responded with enthusiasm, especially the physical activity
	They responded really well and enjoyed participating in all activities. They were mindful of each other and weren't afraid to share.
	They were fully engaged for nearly all of the time, and enjoyed the activities.
	The class have really enjoyed and engaged with the activities

<b>Q.5</b>	<b>In your opinion, what was the most significant benefit of this project to your class?</b>
	Introduction to a variety feeling words that children can relate to and use
	<b>The development of imagination, working together and building storytelling techniques was so beneficial.</b>
	<b>Their listening skills, empathy and ability to discuss quite difficult emotions.</b>
	Receiving teaching and modelling from experts.
	The class co-operating and different children being taken out of their comfort zone. Also children participating.

<b>Q.6i</b>	<b>How useful was it for you as a teacher to participate in this project from the perspective of i) Being able to do follow on activities including storytelling</b>
	Very useful. Will be using some of the strategies
	Very beneficial, as I know I could use the storytelling activities to enhance future genres and incorporate oracy more openly
	The children then continued to 'perform', record and evaluate their stories, giving relevant feedback to each other, as well as self-assessing. Some even chose to role-play – great
	Lots of ideas to encourage recognising feelings and emotions

<b>6ii</b>	<b>How useful was it for you as a teacher to participate in this project from the perspective of ii) Being able to observe your class</b>
	Very useful to step back and observe children responding to each other and other adults. Made many observations that were useful
	I enjoyed taking a step back and observing reaction and interaction. Engagement was key, and I learnt more about pupils
	I had a broader view of the personalities and characters and was pleasantly surprised by their responses
	Interesting to see how they interacted with the story-tellers and each other. Their confidence grew as time went on.
	Being able to look at the interactions within the class

<b>7</b>	<b>Do you think the project was suitable and useful for this age group</b>
	Yes. I feel that the mixed class responded appropriately to the project and benefited
	Yes, very suitable, the reaction and facial expressions during 'storytime' was fascinating.
	Very –particularly for this class
	Yes
	Yes, very useful and suitable

<b>8</b>	<b>Do you think you will be able to carry on any of these activities</b>
	Yes, using Talk for Writing
	Yes, I will use the storyteller toolkit much more frequently, together with games and breathing exercises.
	Yes
	Yes
	Yes, I hope so as the confidence built has been fantastic

<b>9</b>	<b>If you would like to continue working with stories would you like further resources</b>
	Yes please. Easily accessible resources would be useful
	Any resources would be a gift. Thank you!
	Yes please. Thank you very much for the three days. WE really enjoyed it.
	No, but thank you for the 'Telling Tales' book!
	Yes please, anything would be helpful.

## Follow-up interviews (summary of interview responses) Two months later-by telephone

<b>1</b>	<b>What have you noticed about the impact of the project?</b>
	The LAC child (who was presenting considerable problems) has since moved on
	It widened vocabulary about feelings and they there was much kinaesthetic learning. The children learnt new skills. It impacted on oracy and writing
	<b><i>The less confident children in the class have been much more able to speak up and interact in the class room setting.</i></b>
	<b>Listening skills are much improved and being careful of each other's feelings more. They have talked more about personal feelings. It was good for me to sit back and observe. I got to know their personalities better.</b>
	<b><i>The children are much more open to talking about feelings. It helped one child with anxiety particularly to be able to talk about it a lot more. The change is phenomenal.</i></b>

<b>2</b>	<b>Have you used any of the activities?</b>
	The class has now started an oracy session which includes many of the ideas
	WE have used 'talking partners' a lot for telling stories to each other. We have used other ideas from the toolkit such as thinking about facial expressions
	We do King of Silence(game) regularly and have days when everyone whispers which makes it easier for some children to talk and express their ideas. The project was very helpful. Kids will often tell stories instead of teacher reading one
	They do more storytelling although we haven't used 'the book' yet. We also talk slightly more about feelings more.
	We have put a display up of all the feeling words we used at the time. We do more stories and use ideas in drama. They are working on a project and their oral work is much better. Once the tests are over we will do more work on feelings. They are happier to talk about feelings and its finding its way through to their written work.

<b>3</b>	<b>Is the model useful and helpful to your group (acceptability)?</b>
	We introduced more storytelling and have been reading many stories from the book.
	It was a very acceptable way of learning- and there was lots of listening.. I would have liked more writing activities
	The class responded extremely well to the storytelling.
	Very but the three days was a bit long. It could be split over a longer period rather than one intense block.
	Really helpful

<b>4</b>	<b>Do you think this is a model that can be developed?</b>
	Boys especially enjoyed the session as they are not so keen on writing
	It certainly can be developed further.
	We read a traditional story (from the book) everyday. We now also have a daily mindfulness after lunch using a CD – giving imagery exercises to help them calm. It really works and they need it.
	Definitely. I didn't expect them to respond so well. They were very engaged.
	Yes, definitely