

The Odyssey: A Transition Project for Vulnerable Learners at CCYD

This project aimed to help vulnerable learners from 10 partner primary schools due to make the transition to Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen Comprehensive School (CCYD), Bridgend, in the next academic year. The project aimed to use storytelling as a tool to increase oracy, emotional literacy, wellbeing and confidence. It also aimed to help learners form new relationships to help aid the transition from primary to secondary school. Vulnerable learners were identified by primary headteachers and attended one day a week for three weeks as a cluster group made up of 3 to 4 schools. This was followed by one day at CCYD where all 10 schools attended and learners met with each other.

The project used the same structure as the 'Feelings are Funny Things' Storytelling Programme that had been piloted in 2018/19; It focused on vulnerable learners developing storytelling skills to help them become more aware of feelings and build confidence in communication and oracy skills. It differed from the previous project in that it targeted vulnerable learners specifically as well as focussing on transition. The selected learners from each primary formed 3 groups of approximately 20 in each group with up to 3 vulnerable learners from CCYD. Each group met in a different participating school each week.

The project ran over three weeks from 30th September to 17th October 2019. The theme for the storytelling was 'The Odyssey'. Stories were told for discussion, debate and exploration of thoughts, feelings and choices. Small groups were also taught some of the stories and devised ways of telling the different stories. The final day saw all three groups meeting and share the different stories they had learnt with each other. The project was co-ordinated by the transition staff from CCYD and supported by the presence of class teachers and it is planned that teaching staff will replicate key components of the programme in future transition projects and incorporate many of the techniques in the classroom. We are grateful to all the learners and the staff involved in the project.

Evaluation

'Simon (not real name) has developed confidence and leadership skills throughout the project and has been very enthusiastic.'

'I am very pleased and surprised by how my pupils responded. I feel it has had a positive impact as it has brought them 'out of their shells'

Teacher comments.

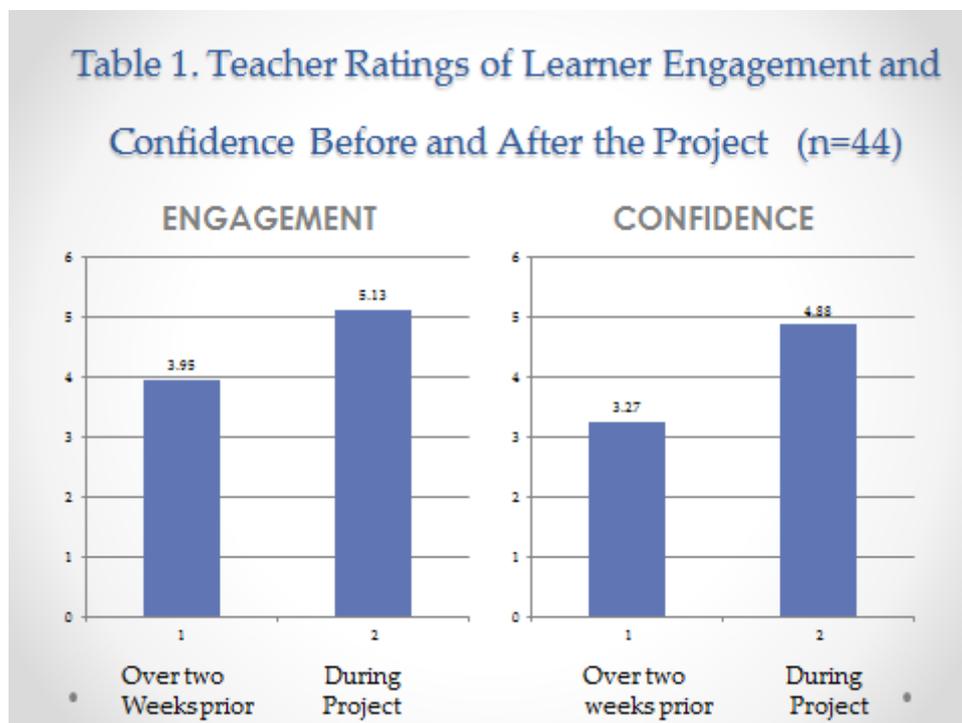
56 children attended from 7 primary schools and as a group from CCYD. Teachers were asked to rate each learner on the dimensions of 'Engagement' and 'Confidence' on a 7 point scale for the time period of the two weeks prior to the project and again at the end of the three days intervention (but before the final session at CCYD). Pre and post data was collect on 44 children and follow-up data was collected for a further 18 children 3 months later.

Engagement in the project

Data was received for 44 of the children; the average 'Engagement' score prior to the intervention was 3.95 (where 1 was 'Low engagement' and 7 was 'High engagement') and the average score for engagement during the project was 5.13. 28 learner's score improved for engagement (with a range between 1 and 5), 9 learners scores stayed the same and 7 declined but by no more the 1 point.

Confidence of Learners

The average rating for 'Confidence' in the two weeks prior to the project was 3.06 (n=44 and where 1=Low confidence and 7=High confidence) and the average rating during the project was 4.88. 37 learners ratings improved during the project (range of 1-4 points), 3 stayed the same and 4 scored lower during the intervention (range -1 to -3). See Table 1.



Follow-Up

Follow-up data was received from four schools to observe if gains in confidence and engagement were maintained. Data was received for 18 learners only. Levels of engagement and confidence fell slightly in both cases but were well above average scores prior to the intervention. See Table 2. Of course there could be many factors influencing these variables three months after the event that no firm conclusions should be drawn except that the data does suggest that it would be worth a more thorough evaluation of this intervention than current resources allowed.

Table 2. Teacher Ratings of Learner Engagement and Confidence Pre, Post and 3 month Follow-Up (n=18)



Learner feedback

Learners completed a short questionnaire on the last day of the project. 50 questionnaires were received. Average ratings for the question, *'How much did you enjoy listening to the stories?'* was 6.08 (where 1 was 'Not at all' and 7 was 'Very much' for all questions).

Average rating for *'How much did you enjoy learning about storytelling?'* was 5.98, Average ratings for *'How much did you enjoy learning about feelings?'* was 5.42 and *'How much are you looking forward to going to CCYD?'* was 6.23.

'Things we learnt' – Some example responses of Learner comments of evaluation of project (full responses are available in separate document).

- It's okay to mess up but you got to get back up again
- speak to people (you) don't know and speak more clearly
- how to show emotions when telling
- speaking louder, confidence
- eye contact when talking to others, you can make a story from anything

'Things we liked' -

- Meeting people and working with others
- Listening to stories, learning things, telling stories
- Telling stories, listening to stories and learning

Staff evaluations

Staff that had been present during the project were asked to complete a short questionnaire about their observations and involvement. Eight Questionnaires were received and some sample responses are given below. Overall, responses suggested they saw the intervention as helpful to the children in developing confidence and skills.

What were your impressions of how the learners responded to the activities? What impact do you think it has had?

- Three of the learners surprised me and interacted more than I expected. I think it's made them more confident to talk in front of others.
- Raise in confidence, self-esteem, ability to structure a story and add detail
- The learners have responded well. The sessions have increased confidence
- When the leader was telling the story, the group were mesmerised. He spoke quietly and calmly. It was amazing to watch the children so engrossed.
- The learners enjoyed taking part and it was good for their confidence with oracy
- All learners responded well. Helped to aide speaking & listening skills.
- I am very pleased and surprised by how my pupils responded. I feel it has had a positive impact as it has brought them 'out of their shells'
- Most learners who engaged developed confidence in speaking aloud. Some learners took longer to engage than others

In your opinion, What was the most significant benefit of this project to your learners? Which activities were most beneficial?

- In my opinion, giving children with 'similar issues' the time to be together, without being dominated, gave them a chance to have their turn, their voice. Last week I was in the class when the children came back into school. They arrived back with such confidence, like proud peacocks. That was lovely to watch.
- Name game-broke down barriers. Dramatising story improved confidence and detail eg facial expression
- Getting the children to link their feelings to stories. Using eye contact and learning how to listen to others.
- Confidence, giving the children the confidence in front of 'strangers'. The acting out game gave them a better understanding.
- Development of confidence orally. The group storytelling supported this

How useful was it for you as teacher/staff member to participate in this project?

- Improved ability to teach creative writing and the impact & importance of drama in the process
- To help the children who aren't great at retaining the story. It would benefit the teachers more if they were provided with the stories prior to the workshop.
- Could have had a clearer focus on transition.
- Take it into class

Do you think you will be able to carry on any of these activities?

- Yes-definitely use during my next story writing block for all abilities & use drama in my topic
- Yes-looking forward to carrying on.
- Yes - I could carry on.
- Not suitable/practical as whole class activities.
- Yes, can deliver to small groups in school.
- Yes. Already planned for after half term
- Some of the storytelling activities can be used to develop oracy.

Follow Up Evaluations

Three months after the intervention, questionnaires were sent out to what impact the intervention had. Four responses were received and sample comments given below.

In your opinion, what was the most significant benefit of this project to the learners who participated?

- The children were nervous before the first session and reluctant to take part. They gained confidence during the first two sessions after forming friendships with pupils from other schools and they supported each other through activities
- Being given the opportunity to express their feeling and emotions.
- Mixing with children of a similar ability, engagement and confidence level to themselves
- The children have increased in confidence and participation in class.
- Pupils have the opportunity to speak out loud in an unfamiliar group

Have any of the learner's showed any changes since the project?

- Improvements in oracy skills is a focus for the school this year and this project has supported this. It is hard to attribute any changes to one specific activity.
- Not a significant change.
- Yes, greater confidence.
- Developed confidence in oracy in a variety of context

Have you done anything differently as a result of being involved in the project?

- I have used some of the ideas and activities during my teaching of English which has benefited the whole of my class.
- Tried a few of the techniques that were used during the workshop. Tried to get the 6 children involved to lead by example and show the others in the class, but it wasn't very successful.
- I use the activities that we took part in.
- We have developed more active listening skills.

Facilitators Feedback and Discussion.

This brief evaluations suggest that young people on the whole responded well and enjoyed the project which suggests that this is an 'acceptable' intervention that engages children. A significant number of children seem to develop confidence. Follow-up data showed it was maintained to some degree but more thorough evaluation is needed to know if confidence levels develop and if activities are brought into other lessons. There were several anecdotal reports that the children were more talkative back in their own school settings. Teacher evaluations were positive and most thought they could continue to develop these activities suggesting that the project has 'sustainability.' . The forthcoming 'Tool Kit' produced after the project should help support this.

As facilitators we noticed that the school environments had a significant impact on participation with acoustics a significant factor. It is difficult to know in advance which rooms will work but on reflection it may have worked better to have been based in one room for all three days. Apart from two schools who were due to be involved but did not appear, transport arrangements worked well throughout the weeks.

There was less emphasis on the emotional literacy aspect as there had been in the pilot project although substantial work was done in this area. This was due to having a slightly shorter working day and having to put an emphasis on working toward a 'performance' on the final day. However, the performance aspect worked extremely well and was a memorable event for all.

This was an ambitious project with learning for staff and facilitators as well as for the young people. Hopefully, it will have given the young people involved a positive experience and confidence in the beginning of their transition to CCYD. They will have made friends from other schools who they will meet again and have become more familiar with the campus. This journey of transition is also an aspect that could be further developed as part of the project. It is planned that the structure of the programme will be replicated by staff involved in the project and will develop over time. We would be very happy to support any staff in future implementation. We have also developed a one-day version of the 'Odyssey' which uses the Mantle of the Expert approach to involve learners in debating the stories from an emotional literacy perspective.

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Mind's Eye Storytelling

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