

Surrey Serendipity Storytelling Project in Schools Autumn 2009- Summary

By Janet Dowling & Alex Somerville

In the Autumn term 2009 two local Surrey storytellers, Janet Dowling and Alex Somerville, worked with one secondary school – the Beacon, and three of its feeder primary schools- Tadworth, Epsom Downs and Shawley schools.

The aim for all four schools was to develop storytelling skills, and for the primary schools to use the storytelling to address some of the “transition to secondary school” issues. The completion of the project would be for members of the secondary school project, to give a storytelling concert to the members of the primary school project, at the secondary school (as part of the transition process), during National Storytelling Week in February 2010.¹

The secondary pupils met for 10 sessions with a local storyteller. In addition, they had an extra workshop with another storyteller who had previously been a finalist in the National Young Storyteller of the Year competition in 2007 and who is now carving himself an international reputation. There were initially 16 pupils, but by the end of the project there were 9 who performed at the schools concert. One of these represented the project at the Young Storyteller of the Year competition in March 2010.

The focus with the three primary schools was to use storytelling as a way to look at some of the transition issues to secondary schools. The children listened to and retold traditional tales with a focus on helping “King Arthur” cope with becoming King (the metaphor for transition to secondary school), and making up their own stories to support “him”. Each school had 20-24 children one morning a week for four weeks with a storyteller, with the teachers and assistant present.

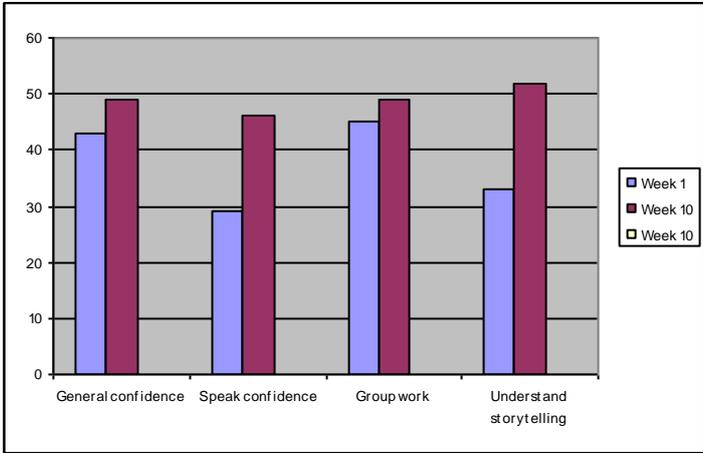
Participants in all four groups completed an evaluation form to compare their levels of confidence at the beginning of the project on four areas, and again at the last week of their participation in the project. The four areas were general confidence, confidence of speaking in front of others, working in groups and understanding storytelling. It was anticipated that working in groups would act as a control, as it was not specifically addressed as part of the project

Evaluation

In the Beacon secondary school, 6 boys completed the evaluation forms at both week 1 and week 10. The confidence scores were totaled for week one, and again for week 10. Group work (the control) had a insignificant increase, as did general confidence. However speaking in front of others and understanding storytelling both increased by over 50%.

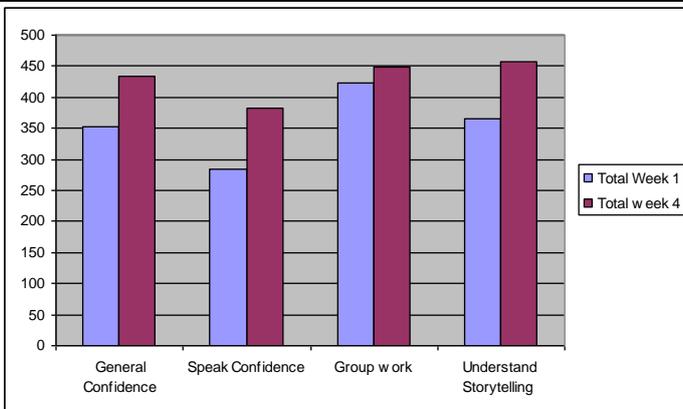
¹ Owing to an imminent Ofsted inspection, the concert was eventually held in one of the primary schools.

Beacon School n=6	Total Week 1	Total week 10	% change
General Confidence	43	49	+13
Speak Confidence	29	46	+58
Group work	45	49	+9
Understand Storytelling	33	52	+57



In the 3 primary schools there were 53 pupils who completed the evaluation forms in both week 1 and week 4. The confidence scores were totaled for week 1, and again for week 4. Group work had an insignificant increase, with general confidence and understanding storytelling increasing by 25%, and speaking in front of others increasing by 34%.

Primary Schools n=53	Total Week 1	Total week 4	% change
General Confidence	353	433	+23
Speak Confidence	285	383	+34
Group work	423	448	+6
Understand Storytelling	365	457	+25



Comments from primary school pupils

- I liked it because we made ourselves more confident
- It was so fun to learn how to tell storytelling and learn more stories from them
- I liked it when we went to Epsom school and heard Charlie's bloody story
- I liked that I was thinking for myself and improving my imagination

Comment from primary school teacher on storytelling skills

- The children had the opportunity to work with each other and develop skills that have not really been taught before. The children learnt lots of different stories that had meaning and were appropriate to their age and interests. Watching Janet the children were inspired to become better and more expressive.

Comment from primary school teacher on addressing transition issues.

- Got the children thinking and relating their own concerns within a wider context; enabled children to talk openly about concerns / worries in a less personal way – through King Arthur

Comment from primary school teachers on how they will use storytelling in the school

- This was a big impetus to the whole of year 6 to set up storytelling sessions, and we will be continuing with this. It was exciting to be part of this project.
- Have used the picture storyboard as a planning tool for children's own stories. Will refer back to the sessions and the issues that were raised for King Arthur as a way of engaging children in the PSHE work that we will undertake in the Summer Term connected to them moving on to secondary school

Comment from primary school teacher on the impact of the storytelling concert with the secondary pupils

- Very impressed with the Beacon boys. Love their confidence and their little comments all the way through the stories. It was nice for our children to see the big boys think it perfectly fine to stand up and tell stories, and it's also a good example as it shows them how it is done.

Comment from secondary school teacher on storytelling skills

- The students were engaged and they all developed and progressed in a variety of skills that will be applicable in other aspects of their education.
- Increased confidence to stand up in front of their peers and perform. The opportunity to develop friendships with people they wouldn't normally mix with. Skills they can take into GCSE subjects they are studying (English drama)

Conclusion from the storytellers on the overall project and outcomes

We feel the project has demonstrated that working with a live storyteller can have an impact on the storytelling skills and confidence of the participants, and it remains to be seen how the long term benefits will be developed by the schools.

The project would like to broaden its influence to see a cultural change within schools to regard the arts and storytelling as a significant contribution to students' school life. This requires efforts on the part of head-teachers and their managers to make a suitable and supportive space within the school for the progress and the results of a project like this to be celebrated and understood by teachers and students. We hope that this project is part of that process.

The storytellers were

Secondary School project- Alex Somerville www.SpeakUpStorytelling.com

Primary School project- Janet Dowling www.JanetTellsStories.co.uk

Funding was obtained from

- Awards for All- through the Surrey Storytellers Guild
www.SurreystorytellersGuild.co.uk
- North Downs Confederation with the help of Vanessa Lygo-Baker

A fuller version of this report with more detail on the process and evaluation will be available on request and from the Surrey Storytellers Guild website from April 2009

Many thanks to the teachers who participated – Pip Beacher, Emma Masters, Vanessa Hall and Jane Lee – and Confederation Manager Vanessa Lygo-Baker without whose support this project would not have been possible.