INCLUSIVE STORYTELLING WITH CHILDREN AND ADULTS WHO HAVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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Aims of workshop

• To show why storytelling is important for children and adults with disabilities
• To demonstrate some practical techniques
• To learn from the experts - those who have disabilities, and families
Content of workshop

• Presentation 1: background and research
• Presentation 2. Tandem Telling technique
• Presentation 3. Kamishibai telling
• Presentation 4. Little Dolphin story
• Presentation 5. The life of a storyteller
• Break
• Practical exercises
• Discussion
• End
What is storytelling

- Oral storytelling is not reading from a book
- Stories are told directly to the listener
- The stories can be
  - Traditional (myths, legends and folktales)
  - Historical (events that really happened)
  - Personal (anecdotes and life stories)
How storytelling helps child development

• If children can narrate a story they are likely to do well in school - because of all the skills involved
  - McCabe, 2008 (review); Hulme & Snowling, 2009

• Children remember events better if they have narrated them as a story to an adult
  - Nelson, 2004; Hoerl, 2007

• Stories help children to develop their social and emotional skills
  - Boudreau, 2008; Killick & Thomas, 2010; Mello, 2001; Fivush, 2011

• Stories about our lives help build confidence and a sense of who we are (identity)
  - Sfard & Prusak, 2005; Baumann, 1996; McAdams, 1993
Sharing stories makes friends
What I like about it, is that it's a really good story about how he started off as a poor washing boy, and it reminded me of when I was young I was always a little boy and could do nothing but play with toys, watch TV and read books, but like Aladdin he always had to do a lot of washing, but one day he discovered he wanted to go somewhere he could find a magic lamp, and it's like me, feel like I really want to go out to a place to visit like a castle or a cave or something, and as he rubs the lamp a genie comes out with the three wishes, it reminds me of wanting to get a job and make a lot of money. And then he falls in love with this girl and becomes rich, and to me it makes me feel like I want to go out in the world and talk to people.

Robin Meader, Openstorytellers 2005
Problems with narrative
Children with developmental disabilities

• Memory and attention
  • Many sensory impairments – hearing, vision, epilepsy

• Understanding complex information

• Speech and communication
  • Many children communicate nonverbally

• Emotional and behaviour difficulties
  • Children don’t understand social situations
What happens in schools (UK)

• Multisensory storytelling is used a lot (Lawson et al., 2012; Grove, 2005)
• Personal stories do not appear in the curriculum (Grove, in press)
• Personal stories are rarely told in the classroom (Dickinson, 2012)
What happens in adult centres for people with intellectual disabilities (UK)

• Staff mostly communicate with people about their needs and wants or their behaviour. They also use jokes and compliments and caring. But they only tell stories to other staff. (McHutchison, 2006)

• Families and staff find it difficult to recall personal stories for people who communicate nonverbally (Grove, 2007)
Implications

• Children may grow up unable to remember much of what happens in their lives
• They find it hard to make sense of experience
• They find it hard to make friends
• They may not have a strong sense of who they are
• They don’t learn how to use story and narrative to make their lives better (e.g., complaining, reporting abuse or crime)
• It’s difficult to have a good conversation – because so much of our talk is about sharing experience
Principles of successful storytelling

• Work with the strengths of the children
• Use the musical, rhythmic language of storytelling
• Help them to join in wherever possible
• They can’t do everything, but they can do something!
Strengths of children with learning difficulties/intellectual disabilities

• Show feelings
• Respond to other people
• Communicate nonverbally
  • gesture and sign; communication aids; pictures; touch; vocalise
• Understand simple, concrete language; understand more complex language in context
• Use their world knowledge
• Join in
  • Sounds, gestures, use of props
• Appreciate, use and respond to music, beauty, arts
Strengths of children with ASD (autistic spectrum disorders)

• Respond to ritual and things they know well
• Show interest in objects
• Often respond to music and rhythm
• May respond to rhythmic sound of language, enjoy strange words
• Join in on their own terms
If we use storytelling well....

• Children can learn how to attend and join in
• They get a lot of enjoyment and fun
• They develop confidence and communication
• They learn to share the stories that are important in their own culture