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**Conference or Workshop Item**

**Title:** Multi-sensory storytelling (MSST): a tool for teaching or an intervention technique?

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**Version:** Presented version

http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/8709/
Multi-sensory Storytelling (MSST): A Tool For Teaching Or An Intervention Technique?

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Multi-sensory storytelling (MSST)

- Method of storytelling supported by use of relevant objects, chosen for
  - sensory qualities
  - appeal to students
- Introduced late 1980s (Chris Fuller)
- Identified as enjoyable activity for individuals with Profound Multiple and Learning Difficulties and other Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Focus of research

• Number of studies undertaken over last decade by e.g. PAMIS (Scotland), University of Groningen (Netherlands) into use of MSST with learners with PMLD, including
  • use with individuals (sensitive stories)
  • Impact on e.g. attention of individuals
  • adherence to protocols/guidelines

• This study – more fundamental issues
  • How is MSST used in day-to-day practice in schools?
  • What do teachers see as benefits/otherwise?
  • What factors influence their use?
Methodology

• Exploratory case study, using semi-structured interviews & unstructured observations

• Selection criteria – school type, range of SEND, age range, location, familiarity with MSST

• 5 special schools across E Midlands & SE England
  • 27 interviews with teachers and teaching assistants
  • 18 observations from Early Years to Post-16
  • Analysed using Thematic Coding Analysis
Results (1) Breadth of use

• MSST used
• In classroom within structure of lessons...
• but also: indoors, outdoors, holiday play schemes, home, residential, assembly, lunchtime

• Individual, small group, large group, whole school

• Across wide range of students – not only PMLD, but also autism, Severe Learning Disabilities, Visual Impairment, ADHD
  • 7 of 18 (40%) MSST sessions observed were with mixed groups)
Results (2) Breadth of purpose

- Used for English and literacy, but also:
  - Other curriculum areas (geography, science, etc)
  - To support the development of skills
  - To support assessment
  - To support socialisation
Common features (1) Individualisation

- Most storytelling sessions – group activities.
- But teachers stressed importance of individualising, presenting same story in different ways to address individual needs:
  - preferences
  - tolerances and intolerances
Common features (2) Teachers’ decisions

• Underpinning all of the different ways MSST used and adapted...

• The judgements and decisions teachers made:
  • How?
  • Where?
  • When?
  • Why?
  • With whom?
Comparison with previous research on MSST

• Findings may seem unsurprising
  • “I mean, that’s just teaching, right?”

• But – comparison with literature on MSST identified a number of key issues regarding:
  • Function of MSST
  • Design of MSST
  • Delivery of MSST
Function of MSST

• Much of research literature re MSST focused on individual problems/issues (Lambe *et al* 2014; Watson 2002, Young *et al* 2011)

• **BUT...** no teachers / schools had used MSST in this way

• MSST in literature and as used by these teachers – very different
Design and delivery of MSST

• Much of the literature (and training notes for ready-made stories) stresses importance of strict adherence to identified guidelines.

• The teachers we observed and interviewed – 0% of ‘home made’ stories aligned with PAMIS guidelines (no teachers aware of them anyway)

• ‘When you are telling a multi-sensory story, you’re continually adapting, assessing and making judgements...Those types of things that you’re always doing as a teacher.’
Can we really evaluate the impact of MSST?

• Individuals with SEND experiencing MSST may be receiving a number of interventions – educational, pharmacological, dietary, physiotherapeutic...
  
  • “we use multi-sensory stories along with a whole range of other strategies...phonics boxes, Big Macks, structured teaching with visual teaching strategies, PECS, symbols, objects...”

• ‘Impact’ of MSST may be confounded by myriad factors – ill health, epilepsy, hunger, tiredness

• As a result seeking to identify specific impact of MSST may be impracticable
Conclusions

• Comparison between this study and other recent research on MSST:
  
  • suggests desire to develop quantitative evidence base may be leading to artificial/unnecessary limitations regarding ‘good practice’
  
  • much research fails to acknowledge breadth/range of uses...and validity of uses
  
  • emphasis on adherence to guidelines...fails to acknowledge pedagogic skills of teachers, and their knowledge of the children they teach
Teaching

“...a process that calls for intuition, creativity, improvisation and expressiveness – a process that leaves room for departures from what is implied by rules, formulas and algorithms.”

(Gage, 1978, p.15)
References


Thank you for listening

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