

children dealing with trauma can learn to help themselves

Cumbria, 2001: considerable distress among school pupils and staff following the foot and mouth outbreak was affecting their capacity to learn or teach. In response, this ambitious pilot project was planned by a primary school's Acting Headteacher and LEA Advisor in partnership with Singer and Heath Educator Jill Rakusen. An inspiring report has just been published.

The 4-day arts residency with infants and juniors, was based on '*Giving Voice*', Jill Rakusen's unique approach to learning on all levels involving the strategic use of sound and song.

The pilot more than fulfilled its far-reaching aims, which included helping children to become more able to experience joy, confidence, understanding and healing rather than merely coping or surviving. Many children made huge discoveries about their own capacities, and 88% indicated a positive experience in self-assessment questionnaires.

Considerable group learning was demonstrated. After singing together in 4-part harmony, juniors were invited to reflect on their experience and how they had created such beautiful music. The words 'co-operation' and 'self-discipline' were put forward. These were written on the whiteboard as follows: $\text{co-operation} + \text{self-discipline} = ???$ When asked for the answer to this equation, a nine-year-old boy answered without hesitation: "FUN!"

Some children opted to do "homework" with a song of their choice. One junior boy worked with a song about finding peace. He said: "*This song was important to me...I don't know why.*" When he woke up with it, he felt "happy". This was unusual for him. He kept thinking and dreaming about the song. On being asked why he thought the song kept coming back, he said "*It's trying to make me help myself*".

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One staff member said: “all the children seemed to have some sense of inner peace” (after the first session involving the whole school). One infant said: “It made me feel sort of comfy inside”.

While many junior boys do not normally enjoy singing in school or elsewhere, with this approach they displayed very little negativity in behaviour, comments and questionnaires, and junior boys made as much use as girls of the opportunity to work individually with Jill.

As part of her residency, Jill ran a session for all staff and governors. Comments included “I feel fantastic” and “I feel enlightened”.

The report on the pilot residency indicates many areas of potential development, both within the curriculum, e.g. in Personal Safety Education, History, Social awareness, Music and communication, and externally in the form of presentations, a training pack, and INSET days e.g. in multicultural issues, sustainable development, citizenship, health, and music.

Facilitator Jill Rakusen says: “*Giving Voice* can help participants discover more about how to enjoy life, how to handle difficulties with greater ease and understanding, and even move through them. When people are drawn together through trauma, it is possible for communities as well as individuals to harness what *Giving Voice* offers.”

ENDS

summary report or full version of the report
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