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Using the Speech Bubbles program to improve pupil attainment in schools

Submission date
17/07/2018

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
24/07/2018

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
13/09/2021

Condition category
Other

[_] Prospectively registered
[_] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims
The Speech Bubbles intervention is a programme that aims to improve children's reading, communication and social skills by providing them with weekly creative drama sessions. An independent review of the Speech Bubbles approach indicated that it had promise to develop pupils' self-efficacy and communication skills. This trial provides an opportunity to build on this evidence and look at the impact of Speech Bubbles on improving pupil attainment.

Who can participate?
Children with weak communication skills in Year 1 or 2 will be preferentially selected for the programme.

What does the study involve?
Children referred to the programme by their teachers will be randomly allocated to either receive the Speech Bubbles intervention for a duration of the 2018/19 academic year or to continue with business as usual. The Speech Bubbles intervention is a weekly drama session, where children will be able to act as the author, performer or audience. Parents and carers will also be asked to take part in the activity towards the end of the programme. Teaching assistants attend an initial training day and a second day with their drama practitioner halfway through the project. After each session, the teaching assistant and drama practitioner reflect on the session and co-plan the activities for the next week.
Children will be asked to complete tests to assess their reading, communication and social skills after taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
The possible benefit to participants of taking part is that drama programmes such as this have been show to improve language-related academic attainment, and Speech Bubbles itself has been shown to improve speech, language and communication development. There are no known risks to participants taking part in this study.

Where is the study run from?
The study is run by the London Bubble Theatre Company (London) and the evaluation is lead by the Behavioural Insights team in collaboration with UCL Institute of Education (London).
The schools participating in the study are based in London and Manchester.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
May 2017 to December 2019

Who is funding the study?
Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (UK)
The Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) (UK)

Who is the main contact?
Kimberly Bohling (Research Advisor - The Behavioural Insights Team)
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Contact information

Type(s)
Public

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Additional identifiers

Study information

Scientific Title
Independent evaluation of drama intervention supporting children's communication skills, confidence and wellbeing.

Study objectives
Speech Bubbles intervention improves reading attainment and oral communication skills in children ages 5 to 8 years old with below expected communication and social skills.

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
University College London Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee, 20/03/2018, Z6364106/2017/11/56

Primary study design
Interventional

Study design
Interventional two-arm randomised controlled trial

Study type(s)
Quality of life

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Academic attainment

Interventions
Approximately 1040 pupils will be recruited across 26 schools, and randomised into two groups - the intervention group or the control group. Children in each school are stratified by year level and within each block, a random number will be generated for each child. The children with the highest X numbers in the Year 1 block and the highest Y numbers in the Year 2 block will be assigned to treatment. X and Y will sum to 20 and reflect the share of children referred by year level. For instance, if 16 children are referred from Year 1, and 24 from Year 2, X would take a value of 8 and Y a value of 12.
Participants in the intervention group will receive the Speech Bubbles intervention, which aims to improve children's reading, communication and social skills by providing them with weekly creative drama sessions. It is targeted at pupils with below-expected communication and social skills. uring the sessions trained practitioners encourage children to tell, act out and reflect on their own stories by creating a safe and playful environment, promoting children's communication, confidence and wellbeing. This is based on the Helicopter Stories pedagogical approach. The intervention comprises 24 weekly drama sessions over the course of three terms. Weekly 45-minute creative drama sessions will be delivered at schools by a Teacher Assistant (TA), selected by the school, and a trained freelance drama practitioner, recruited by London Bubble and trained in the Speech Bubbles approach, to two mixed groups of 10 pupils from Year 1 and Year 2. Each session follows a clear and repeated routine centred around the telling and re-enacting of stories that are told by the children. The sessions include activities that support expressive language, receptive language and turn taking.
Participants in the control group will not have any intervention provided.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
The following will be assessed at the end of the intervention period - the end of the 2019 school year:
1. Reading ability (phonics, literal comprehension and reading for meaning) assessed using the Progress in Reading Assessment (PIRA)
2. Oral narrative skills (information content, sentence length, grammatical usage and independence), assessed using the Renfrew Bus Story test

To account for baseline variation in attainment, the child's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) will be used.

Key secondary outcome(s)

The following will be assessed at the end of the intervention period - the end of the 2019 school year:
1. Social skills, assessed using the Social Skills scale of the Social Skills Improvement System (SSiS). This is assessed across the following subscales:
1.1. Communication
1.2. Cooperation
1.3. Assertion
1.4. Responsibility
1.5. Responsibility
1.6. Empathy
1.7. Engagement
1.8. Self-control
2. Self-perception of ability to generate and use ideas in their school work, assessed using an adapted version of the ideation sub-measure of the writing self-efficacy measure, with significant simplification to make it age-group appropriate

To account for baseline variation in attainment, the child's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) will be used.

Completion date
31/12/2019

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Schools:
1. Located in the North West, South London and East London (for programme delivery purposes)
2. At least a two-form entry school (to reach the required sample size across a smaller number of schools)
3. Have discussed participation with Speech Bubbles and signed an MoU detailing the conditions of participation (opt-out process, pupil data provision, endline assessment, participation in IPE activities etc)
4. Able to refer 40 children into the study

Schools with an average or above average share (14.1%) of Free School Meal (FSM) children will receive priority in recruitment.

Pupils:
1. Years 1 and 2 in the year of the intervention delivery (2018/19)
2. Referred into the programme on the basis of Speech Bubbles referral guidance
3. Not been opted-out of the study by their parents.

Participant type(s)
All

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Child

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
1006

Key exclusion criteria
N/A

Date of first enrolment
01/12/2017

Date of final enrolment
08/06/2018

Locations

Countries of recruitment
United Kingdom

England

Study participating centre
London Bubble Theatre Company
5 Elephant Ln
London
SE16 4JD
London
United Kingdom
SE16 4JD

Study participating centre
Behavioural Insights Team
4 Matthew Parker St
Westminster
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Study participating centre
UCL Institute of Education
20 Bedford Way
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Sponsor information

Organisation
Education Endowment Foundation

ROR
https://ror.org/03bhd6288

Funder(s)

Funder type
Not defined

Funder Name
Education Endowment Foundation

Alternative Name(s)
EducEndowFoundn, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), Education Endowment Foundation | London, EEF

Funding Body Type
Private sector organisation

Funding Body Subtype
Trusts, charities, foundations (both public and private)

Location
United Kingdom

Funder Name
Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

Participant level data is sensitive, as it contains personal and academic information that could be used to identify trial participants. As such, this data will not be made publicly available. However, participant level data will be transferred and stored with the Education Endowment Foundation (the project funder) and (in an anonymised form) the UK Data Archive.

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Funder report results		01/09/2021	13/09/2021	No	No
Study website	Study website	11/11/2025	11/11/2025	No	Yes