



Overview

Speech Bubbles is a targeted, year-long, evidence-based intervention for children in Key Stage 1 who display a Speech, Language and Communication Need. The programme runs over 24 weeks across an academic year (eight per term). It aims to support 20 children in Year 1 and Year 2 in developing their Speaking, Listening and Attention Skills. The programme also aims to enhance the skills of a member of school staff (a high-level TA, Learning Mentor or SENCo (Special Educational Needs Coordinator), for example) to run small group creative work. Speech Bubbles was originally created by London Bubble.

The programme aims to celebrate children as storytellers: in the roles of author, performer, and audience for each other's stories. Children who are struggling with their communication are empowered to tell their stories and act them out. They are encouraged to feel confident using their voices and develop and improve their listening and attending skills, as well as performance skills and overall confidence in verbal and non-verbal communication. The programme invites parents to attend two sessions (at the end of the first term and the third term) so they can share their child's achievements.

In 2012-2013, Half Moon ran a pilot Speech Bubbles programme for two Tower Hamlets primary schools and a primary school in Brent. This pilot was in partnership with London Bubble, supported by SHINE. Since then, we have grown the project in Tower Hamlets. In the academic year 2020-2021, with the support of funding from East End Community Foundation and Tower Hamlets Arts Education Service (THAMES), we were able to offer five subsidised places to schools in Tower Hamlets.

Schools

Marion Richardson Primary School
Mayflower Primary School
Our Lady and St Joseph's Primary School
Stebon Primary School
Wellington Primary School

Monitoring

- 96 Participants
- 60 Male, 36 Female
- 58 English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- 39 in Year 1, 57 in Year 2
- 39 eligible for Pupil Premium
- 5 Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or Statement

Evaluation and Impact Measurement

The programme ran in five primary schools in Tower Hamlets between September 2020 and July 2021 over 24 weeks (eight per term). In each school, 20 children in Year 1 and Year 2 were referred to the programme. The 20 children referred were divided into two groups of 10 who each received a 35-45minute session each week. Each group is normally a mixture of



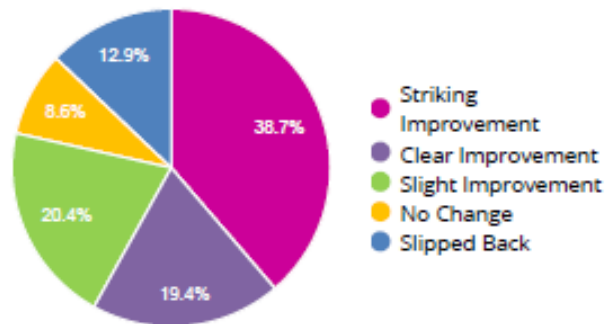
Year 1 and Year 2 children but due to class bubbles this year, most schools had a Year 1 group and a Year 2 group.

In each school the programme was delivered in partnership between a Half Moon drama practitioner and a member of school staff (a high-level TA, Learning Mentor or SENCo, for example). The programme relies on consistency: in terms of room, day and time of sessions, delivering practitioner and member of school staff. All school staff and drama practitioners (seven from Half Moon) attended a day-long training session with London Bubble at the start of the programme. Schools and practitioners also attended and contributed to termly evaluation sessions.

The programme ran well with excellent outcomes for participating children. Teacher assessments showed that 78% of pupils involved in Speech Bubbles improved their learning, speaking and listening skills this year:

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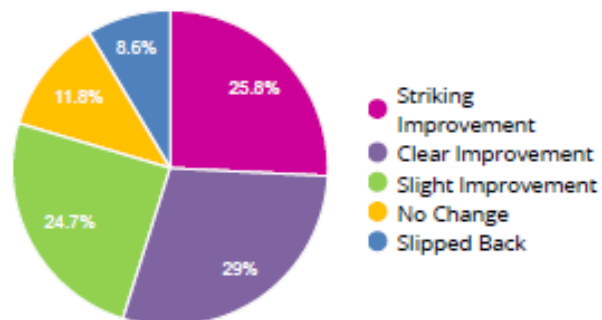
Learning, Speaking and Listening



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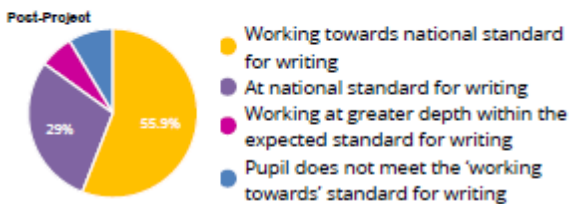
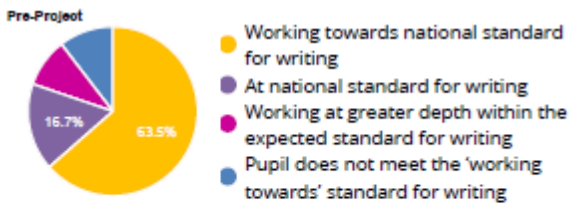
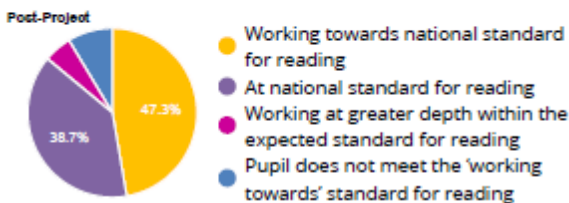
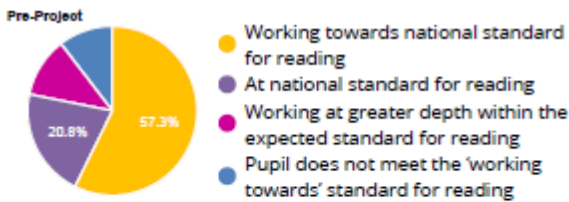
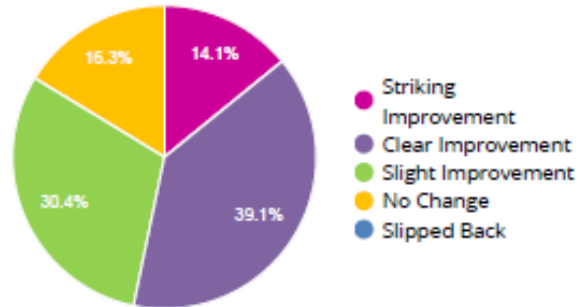
Emotional Behaviour and Conduct Behaviour



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Teacher Comments



Speech Bubbles is designed to support children's communication development but we have also started to see its impact on supporting literacy development in the participating children. The number of children who were below age-expected targets for literacy (either working towards national standard or not meeting national standard) also fell from 68% at the start of the programme in reading and 74% in writing to 56% in reading and 65% in writing at the end of the programme. The number of children working at or above national standard rose from 32% in reading and 26% in writing at the start of the programme to 44% in reading and 35% in writing at the end of the programme.



Logistics in Delivery

This year brought the most challenges in terms of logistical issues, given everything schools were having to deal with in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Only one school started in September as planned, with the other schools all waiting until after the October half term. When all the schools closed again in January 2021, we delivered a mixture of in-person sessions and online sessions in the second half of term, depending on what best suited the particular school. One school delayed all spring term sessions until the summer term. We then had a very full-on term in the summer with some schools having two sessions a week, as well as having to make last-minute changes due to class bubbles closing. We were able to complete all 24 sessions in two of the schools, with three of the schools completing 23 sessions each. Schools and Half Moon staff worked harder than ever to ensure that sessions could take place, meeting in different rooms and with different members of support staff in schools. We felt it was vital that the children who attend Speech Bubbles, many of whom would be most significantly impacted by the disruption to their learning, took part in the programme as consistently as we were able to manage.

Analysis of Pre- and Post-Project Forms

For each child referred to the programme, teachers complete a pre- and post-project online form. These forms note the frequency of behaviours related to 'learning, speaking and listening' (scored 1-6) and 'emotional behaviour and conduct behaviour' (scored 1-6). Teachers are asked to make comments about whether the child is currently reaching age expected targets for reading and writing. In the pre-project form they provide a short statement as to why the child has been referred to the programme; and in the post-project form, comments to help us understand any changes observed in the child. At the end of the programme the scores are compared, and children are then placed in the categories of 'striking improvement', 'clear improvement', 'slight improvement', 'no change' or 'slipped back' based on the scores and the comments made.

In learning, speaking and listening 39% of children showed an overall striking improvement, 19% showed a clear improvement, 20% showed a slight improvement, 9% saw no change and 13% slipped back.

In emotional and conduct behaviour 26% of children showed an overall striking improvement, 29% showed a clear improvement, 25% showed a slight improvement, 12% saw no change and 8% slipped back.

In teacher comments about the change, they had noticed back in the classroom, 14% of children showed an overall striking improvement, 39% showed a clear improvement, 31% showed a slight improvement and 16% saw no change.

Examples of pre- and post-project scores and comments for those children who have made a 'striking improvement' overall:

AM scored 14 in learning, speaking and listening and 9 in emotional and conduct behaviour at the start of the programme

AM scored 29 in learning, speaking and listening and 20 in emotional and conduct behaviour at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[AM is] A reluctant speaker who has a limited vocabulary'

Teacher comments about at the end of the programme:

'Through Speech Bubbles, AM has made good progress [...], she enjoys retelling stories to her friends, especially traditional tales that she has read on a regular basis. She can now make up her own stories with some encouragement and support. AM is developing her negotiating and taking turns skills. She is very keen to share her ideas with the class. AM listens attentively and participates when topics interest her'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'She pulls the best faces when playing games and becoming the characters'

FS scored 12 and 6 at the start of the programme

FS scored 29 and 20 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[FS is] A reluctant speaker, does not communicate with adults'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'FS is growing in confidence and keen to share his ideas with the class. He listens attentively and participates when topics that interest him. He enjoys taking part in our role play activities.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'FS was really funny throughout Speech Bubbles; he came out with some brilliant one liners [...] He lacked confidence but by the end we couldn't shut him up! A perfect Speech Bubbles child'

TZ scored 11 and 6 at the start of the programme

TZ scored 30 and 20 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[TZ] is reluctant to speak in class.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'TZ is making great effort in participating in class discussions and voices her opinions. When speaking in front of an audience, she is shy at first; however, TZ quickly gains self-confidence and speaks persuasively. Now she can start a conversation with an adult she knows or with her friends.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'TZ is brilliant at communicating with her body. She is so good in the story square at becoming the characters and has real talent for movement. [...] I think she enjoyed the safe space to be able to be wrong without judgement in Speech Bubbles'

KB scored 16 and 10 at the start of the programme

KB scored 28 and 20 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[KB is] Selective mute. He very rarely speaks in class but shows good focus. He loves acting and puppets (watching it mainly), but this is something that could have a big impact on his attainment and achievement'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'KB has come on leaps and bounds this year! He is answering his name in the register, contributing to class discussions, and is becoming very chatty with his peers! He will ask for help when he needs it and communicates his needs to adults.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'Our success story of the year. KB is selective mute. As the weeks went on, he wouldn't speak and would need my support throughout. As the year came to an end, we started to hear him, he added his name in the bucket, shared what he liked in the session and then in the final week, told [us] a story 1-1. He didn't need any help, he confidently told us what happened in his story. It was a funny story, the 3 of us were all laughing, and this was his moment! I am so proud of how far he has come in Speech Bubbles.'

LN scored 16 and 11 at the start of the programme

LN scored 35 and 24 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[LN was referred to the programme] to support with his vocabulary, sentence structure and self-confidence.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'LN has become a lot more confident in himself. He loves to share his ideas on the carpet, and he has lots of friends. He has formed solid relationships with the adults in the class and communicates regularly and confidently'

Examples of pre- and post-project scores and comments for those children who have made a 'striking improvement' in Learning, Speaking and Listening:

SA scored 17 at the start of the programme

SA scored 31 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

He struggles with reading and writing. He is not confident with his numbers or alphabet. He has poor concentration and is easily distracted. He is quiet and he enjoys playing with his

friends, but he can be 'lost' at times in the day. For example, he goes to year 1 for reading and phonics every day, but often I will find him in the corridor unsure about where he is going and where he sits. He needs adult guidance, including when making choices about what to play. He is unable to attempt or complete work without an adult helping him and prompting what to do next.

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

SA is very chatty and very keen to talk to me about all sorts of things. He has a vivid imagination and will make up stories about things (which he swears are real but are clearly fictitious).

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'SA has made the biggest progress throughout Speech Bubbles. At first, he had no idea what was going on and was very lost. But now takes part in everything - constantly says how he loves Speech Bubbles and was very sad that it had come to an end. Speech Bubbles was made for students like SA'

YA scored 17 at the start of the programme

YA scored 34 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'YA has limited vocabulary and low attendance at school. He has low levels of engagement and finds it challenging to concentrate during carpet sessions. He is distracted by peers and follows the crowd. He is not forthcoming with ideas. He has low confidence.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'YA has gained lots of confidence this year! He is much more comfortable participating in class discussions during carpet sessions. He is now able to communicate with his peers and adults alike, whereas before he was much more reluctant. He is often able to advocate for himself. He takes part in drama games or acting in the classroom. His attention has improved during carpet sessions, and he wants to try hard. He has established relationships with children outside of the classroom.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'I have seen the biggest transformation in YA. He really lacked confidence at the start and his understanding was very low, but he always puts his hand up and is willing to give everything a go even if he doesn't understand what he is supposed to do. I am so pleased for him and how he has blossomed throughout the year.'

YA scored 15 at the start of the programme

YA scored 28 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[YA] finds it difficult to express emotions, he cannot maintain focus, and finds it difficult to attempt a challenging task'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'[YA] is a born performer, not the most loud or expressive, he is subtle, and all his characters are so well observed- a lot of his acting is in the details. He gets so much joy from becoming

something else. He takes his time to think and when he lands on an idea it's a delight to see him act it out.'

Examples of pre- and post-project scores and comments for those children who have made a 'striking improvement' in Emotional and Conduct behaviour:

DO scored 11 at the start of the programme

DO scored 19 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'DO is very reluctant to speak in class and when he does it is a whisper. He needs lots of encouragement to follow instructions and complete activities and this seems to be because of a lack of confidence. He will often say he doesn't know when asked to do something and will stop when an adult is not present.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'DO plays well with other children and communicates comfortably with his peers in social situations.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'DO has come really far. He would never speak, share his name, come into the story square, or tell a story. Now, DO is full of confidence, enough so to do things a bit different to get a laugh which is a joy to watch. His stories used to be a list of animals, for example, whereas now they are full of interesting characters and plot.'

AU scored 12 at the start of the programme

AU scored 19 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[AU has a] severe lack in self-confidence. Latched onto one specific pupil and finds it difficult to play with others except that child. Very artistic and enjoys being alone and crafting. Cannot maintain eye contact and tends to find it difficult to approach adults.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'[AU is] confident in communicating'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'AU is a confident performer now and likes to contribute to the sessions. He is quick to improvise and embellish scenes and had a lot of fun'

AA scored 15 at the start of the programme

AA scored 23 at the end of the programme

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'AA needs to develop her personal, social and emotional skills. In the classroom, she struggles with boundaries and following instructions (to which she responds with defiance and/or humour). She will often want to play with the same child / children but in a way that her peers

find overwhelming (she touches their hair, follows them around, etc.). Her visual impairment is certainly among the causes of her lack of confidence and over dependence on the adults in her life.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'[AA is] A very keen and apparently confident young person, though sometimes hid behind a "this is silly" approach when she was feeling anxious or unsure about an activity. Over the project she became more thoughtful, funny and expressive.'

We can celebrate all the positive results for the children detailed in the sections above, but we must also comment on the children for whom comparing their pre- and post-project assessments show fewer positive results.

No Change or Slipped back:

Three children were shown to have seen 'no change' or 'slipped back' in the scoring system for their learning, speaking and listening score or emotional behaviour and conduct behaviour score and their teachers' comments at the end of the programme reflected that they had seen no change in the children back in class. For example, one child showed no change in learning, speaking and listening and -7 in emotional and conduct behaviour, which concurs with the teacher's comments. This may mean that the Speech Bubbles model has not specifically worked for a particular child (for instance, their difficulties may need more intensive, targeted support such as one-to-one Speech and Language Therapy) or that a particular child would benefit from taking part in the project for another year (the improvements they are showing in the Speech Bubbles sessions have not yet transferred back into the classroom, for instance). Comments by the practitioner at the end often show the improvements the child was making in the sessions, even if this wasn't yet translating to the classroom.

There were children whose scoring was moderately reduced at the end of the programme compared to the start of the programme, but the teacher comments suggested some improvement. For instance, one child reduced -5 in both learning, speaking, and listening, and emotional and conduct behaviour, yet received strong positive comments from their teacher and the practitioner at the end. This reflects how our scoring system is not a perfect method and that there can be discrepancies due to teachers' scoring children more rigorously at the end of an academic year, than at the beginning. This is supported by the fact that teacher comments for 17 children who were scored as having 'slipped back' (-1 to -4 difference between start and end score) or shown 'no change' (0 difference between start and end score) reflect some overall improvement having taken place. Of these 17 children, 14 had seen an increase in one of their scores, even if there was no change or 'slipped back' in the other score. Given that these 'decreases' are only small numbers and our assumption that teachers' scoring may be more rigorous at the end of the year, they do not warrant further analysis below.

Examples of children who have made a 'slipped back' in both Learning, Speaking and Listening and Emotional and Conduct Behaviour:

SZ had 'slipped back' overall (-5 difference between pre and post score in learning, speaking and listening and -5 difference between pre and post score in emotional and conduct behaviour)

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'SZ arrived in nursery from Italy with little English. He is a polite, chatty boy but it can be difficult to understand his speech at times. He is always willing to try hard and contribute his ideas.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'SZ has grown in confidence. He is more willing to participate in whole class discussions and is more open when discussing his personal experiences. He really enjoys the speech bubble sessions!'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'SZ loved telling me random things and loved to laugh. We had to teach him when the right time to say random things was and not in the middle of the session. His confidence and acting skills have grown throughout the year and he wasn't afraid to give things a go even if he might get it wrong.'

SZ also moved from 'working towards national standard' for reading and writing to 'at national standard' for both.

SA had 'slipped back' overall (-4 difference between pre and post score in learning, speaking and listening and -2 difference between pre and post score in emotional and conduct behaviour)

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:

'[SA is] very shy in answering questions. She has low self-esteem and cries easily if finds tasks difficult.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'[SA is] more confident in speaking to adults in class and communicating with different peers. She still gets anxious when faced with difficult tasks'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'SA has really come out of her shell recently. Her body language is much more relaxed, she maintains good eye contact and is smiling more. She has become more vocal with her ideas, contributing to group stories, and answering questions voluntarily. She prefers the whole group games to the spotlight of putting her name in the bucket.'

AR had 'slipped back' overall (-4 difference between pre and post score in learning, speaking and listening and -2 difference between pre and post score in emotional and conduct behaviour)

Teacher comments at the start of the programme:



'[AR is] shy and quiet in class. [AR is] developing independence in activities such as getting changed.'

Teacher comments at the end of the programme:

'AR is reluctant to share his ideas in class but is responding well to positive praise. He communicates well with peers but is sometimes shy with adults.'

Practitioner comments at the end of the programme:

'AR was very shy at the beginning of the year and was quite rigid in his body language. However, he began to engage with the sessions more, and enjoyed others' stories. With support he is exploring his whole-body physical expression more. He has also developed his vocal range, such as when he put his name in the bucket as a dinosaur. His body language has become more relaxed, he is smiling more, and his focus has improved. He appears much more confident and engaged during the sessions. He is happier to share ideas within the group.'

AR has moved from 'working towards national standard for writing' to 'at national standard for writing.'



Areas for Development

- We will continue to urge all schools to consider sending two members of staff on the programme Induction Day in September to ensure that there is a member of staff with the appropriate skills available to cover if the main staff member is ill.
- We will offer an online INSET in new schools for all staff members who would like to know more about how Speech Bubbles works.
- We will ensure that if a school is using Colourful Semantics, we will incorporate this into the Speech Bubbles programme.
- We will consider sticking to groups made of just Year 1s and just Year 2s in some schools as it does work well in certain contexts.
- We will encourage teachers to come and observe their pupils in Speech Bubbles sessions.
- We will continue to give really clear guidance and support to schools during the referral process so they do not refer children for behavioural needs alone.
- We will talk to schools continuing with the programme for another year about whether the children who have appeared to 'slip back' or experience 'no change' would benefit from an additional year of the programme or different, more targeted support.
- We will create new materials for each school to be able to create a display in their school about Speech Bubbles.
- We will give examples to schools as to why it is imperative that they write more detailed comments on each child in their pre- and post-project forms – making reference to the end of year impact report.
- We will produce a timeline document for the lead contact at each school to ensure they know at the start of the academic year when we will be in touch with them about assessments.

Conclusion

The Speech Bubbles programme is now embedded in some schools in Tower Hamlets and offers increasingly good, and often excellent, results for schools and participating children. It is important to always underline the need for consistency in the delivery of the programme, in terms of room and staffing; and ensure that it is delivered as a true partnership between the school and Half Moon. It is also important that schools are given an opportunity to make changes to their referrals, if necessary, after they have been delivering the programme for a term. Overall, Speech Bubbles has had excellent results in 2020-21, given the difficulties of the last academic year for schools and we look forward to continuing the programme in the coming academic year working with four of the five schools again and three new schools.