

OutoftheBox

Story and Play in OutoftheBox and its Benefits in Schools



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OutoftheBox uses story and play to promote personal and community wellbeing. It is a form of Deep Talk in which one box of beautifully crafted materials (or in fact any objects the storyteller has to hand) can be used to tell any number of stories on cloth, on sand or on the earth. A core set of 49 Wisdom stories are in development, and stories from six other genres will follow. OutoftheBox stories are being used with children and adults in a range of contexts, including schools, care homes, hospitals, workplaces, faith communities, community groups, therapeutic settings and in spiritual accompaniment.

A one-year pilot phase from June 2021, involving over 20 schools in the UK, was instrumental in refining the OutoftheBox approach and the ways by which OutoftheBox Training supports and collaborates with storytellers. The pilot also generated evidence of how OutoftheBox complements the school curriculum and supports children's wellbeing.

1. Development of OutoftheBox

1.1 The Context

OutoftheBox was developed from the desire to find a playful storytelling approach to support personal and community wellbeing in UK schools as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It evolved from the understanding that story and play are the primary languages of children and are the means by which children can learn, find connection and make meaning. Godly Play, a well established¹ imaginative approach to religious education² created by Jerome Berryman, has been offered in UK schools for over twenty years. The influence of Maria Montessori's educational principles is to be found in Godly Play, which uses a carefully prepared environment with sensorial materials³ and the "Help me to do it myself" motif of the Montessori pedagogy. It was felt by some Godly Play practitioners and trainers that a similar approach, but without the exclusively Christian religious language of Godly Play, would be beneficial for schools.

Godly Play had been the inspiration for a storytelling method called Deep Talk⁴ developed by the Finnish Godly Play trainer, Tuula Valkonen. Deep Talk uses short wisdom stories from all faiths and none, and was originally developed for adults in workplace settings. Since 2015 it has also been used with children aged 2-6 in day care centres; researchers in Finnish schools

¹ The foundational literature for Godly play can be found at <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/research/foundational-literature>

² Berryman, J. (1991) *Godly Play - An imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Fortress.

³ Berryman, J. (2002) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How to lead Godly Play Sessions*, Revised and Expanded, Vol. 1, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, p. 95.

⁴ Berryman, J. (2013) *The Spiritual Guidance of Children - Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future*, New York, Morehouse Publishing, p. 160. Berryman refers to Deep Talk as a diffusion of Godly Play.

have data on how Deep Talk supports children in storytelling, language development and in their social and emotional wellbeing.⁵ OutoftheBox developed from discussions about how UK schools could similarly benefit from this kind of Deep Talk storytelling.

1.2 The Box

In March 2021, Deep Talk and Godly Play practitioners and trainers both within and outside of the UK began experimenting with new ways of presenting Deep Talk stories, making them more user-friendly for a school context. When developing resources for OutoftheBox, it felt important to gather a variety of natural and beautiful pieces with which to tell the stories which could also enable participants to respond to the stories. The resources needed to be 'to hand' for the storyteller and the participants and easy to transport. In addition the cost of the resources should not be prohibitive. Consequently, materials were chosen and designed (144 pieces of felt and 94 wooden and natural pieces contained in baskets and bags) that could be stored in one round box to tell all of the 49 Wisdom stories - which gave this new approach its name and OutoftheBox was born!

OutoftheBox has been created so that all the stories can be told on cloth or sand using objects from the same round box. Having the same items used across different stories allows people to make connections between the different stories. And having all the items available for the response time means people can continue to make connections across all the stories. However, OutoftheBox stories can be told anywhere and using any medium, for example: on the woodland floor with twigs and leaves or with objects found in a classroom. The objects are played with as 'loose parts' and each object can represent different things, depending on the story and the imagination of the children.⁶

1.3 An OutoftheBox Session

Stories can be shared with individuals or groups in sessions that last from 10 minutes to up to an hour or more. There is permission in OutoftheBox for the storyteller to choose which elements are needed by the group for any particular session, depending on the time available and the needs of the group. Whilst usually not a religious space, an OutoftheBox session can be considered to be a pilgrimage where a different language is spoken and a different atmosphere is held, and so it is important to mark the thresholds of coming in and going out in some way. The elements of an OutoftheBox session are thus bookended with thresholds:

Building of the circle to ensure that everyone is ready for a story.

Sharing of the story with care, slowing down the pace, and opening it up to the imagination.

Wondering using open questions in a space where we let go of judgement.

⁵ The research process involved teachers, parents/carers and children. To date, the research led by Tuula Valkonen, and Juli-Anna Aerila based at the University of Turku has not been published but articles on Deep Talk for educators have been written and data has been collected. www.aoe.fi

⁶ <https://early-education.org.uk/loose-parts-play/>

Community Play to reflect together about something of particular interest or importance to the group.

Creative response as an opportunity for people to continue to play, e.g. create new stories with the OutoftheBox materials, paint, build, write, dance, walk in the woods.

Celebration with food and drink to allow people to connect socially and offer a threshold to move on from the OutoftheBox session to the rest of the day.⁷

In the Community Play “participants are able to mould the reality of their community by using the tools of the story. The guide of the Deep Talk session leads the work gently. She or he offers some topics from the story which can be handled in communal play. It is very important, however, that the group decides or brings up the topics the play is heading to. The leader just follows.”⁸

1.4 OutoftheBox Principles and Values

The premise of OutoftheBox is that we find wellbeing through a loving connection with ourselves, each other, nature and whatever else might be beyond us. The OutoftheBox principles and values can be described through seven principles of OutoftheBox:

Breathe - taking time out to pause and be still

Trust - thinking about what it means to build up trust in each other and how that makes things feel different

Listen - actively listening and being present to each other

Feel - being attentive to how we feel

Wonder - being curious and open to questions

Play - valuing playfulness and creativity

Love - recognising that all we do is an attempt to learn to love better

The inspiration for the logo came from Theory U by C. Otto Scharmer.⁹ The dots remind us of the discs that are used when telling OutoftheBox stories on cloth to represent a pathway or a journey, and the shape of the curve shows us that the journey is one of descent and re-emergence. The descent down the left side of the curve symbolises brave trust: a letting go of control and settling down into being present to our interior conditions through breathing, trusting, listening and feeling (the first four dots from violet to green). The journey back up the other side represents the transformation and new awareness that emerges through the creative process of wondering and play (yellow and orange). The gap before the last red dot represents the risk that we take as we learn to love, as well as the freedom, creativity and momentum that can come when escaping expected structures and



⁷ This information is taken from the OutoftheBox website www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about

⁸ Valkonen, T. *Deep Talk: Theory and Practice*, available at <https://deep-talk.blog/journal-of-deep-talk/p.8>.

⁹ Scharmer, C. O. (2018) *The Essentials of Theory U: Core Principles and Applications*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers

instead thinking ‘out of the box’. It is implied that the dots could continue to make a full circle and that ‘the process will begin again, for it is the very stuff of life’¹⁰

1.5 Genres and Contexts

As mentioned, OutoftheBox was in response to finding a way of supporting wellbeing in UK schools. The team of storytellers looked for stories that would act as springboards for children to discover their own wisdom and the wisdom of their peers. Hence the first genre was named Wisdom stories. The source or inspiration of these stories, of which 49 are being developed, was from children’s literature and different religious or folk stories and the intention was to keep the context open and inclusive.¹¹

Five other genres are being developed that are also suitable for non-confessional contexts: History,¹² Arts, Nature, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and Religions. This means that OutoftheBox offers a variety of languages that can enrich core curriculum subjects in schools in ways that can be measured by the school inspection process (and so does not need to be limited to extra-curricular activity or PHSE only).¹³

There is a seventh genre of OutoftheBox stories that is being developed. This is called Faith and is for confessional, faith community settings, not schools. The Faith genre will have several sub-genres, the first being Christianity; we hope that others such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism will follow as our storytelling community becomes more diverse.

OutoftheBox is being used in a range of settings, including schools, care homes, hospitals, workplaces, community groups, parenting groups, play groups, families, therapeutic settings and faith communities.¹⁴ In the first 12 months of operation there were two pilot studies - one for the school context and another for all other contexts. Section 2 outlines the findings from the Schools’ pilot.

1.6 Membership and Training in OutoftheBox

OutoftheBox Members belong to an online peer learning community¹⁵ and have access to the scripts and videos of the 49 Wisdom stories as well as the self-led training resources. A Member can then choose if and when to attend the trainer-led courses. In this way storytellers can develop in the art of OutoftheBox through self-led, peer-led and trainer-led

¹⁰ Berryman, J. (1991) *Godly Play - An imaginative Approach to Religious Education*, Minneapolis MN, Augsburg Fortress, p. 96.

¹¹ For example, the Donkey story was inspired by a Jewish story, in which the people ask the ‘wise rabbi’ to tell them what to do. In the OutoftheBox version the people say ‘Let’s ask our leader.’ The story can be viewed on Youtube and the script downloaded at <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about>

¹² The OutoftheBox team worked with Lord Alf Dubs to develop the story of his fleeing Nazi-occupied Prague at the start of World War II. *The Children’s Train* can be found at <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/about>

¹³ Caroe, C., Caroe, K., Lord K., and Fytche, J. (2021) *OutoftheBox Links to the National Curriculum, Ofsted and SIAMS Inspection Frameworks*, paper available from <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>

¹⁴ <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>

¹⁵ The online peer learning community is www.outoftheboxstories.circle.so

learning¹⁶ as well as experiencing OutoftheBox for themselves.¹⁷ The organisation also sees its role as training the trainers and equipping and empowering storytellers to support and train colleagues in their communities and places of work, such as a lead teacher in a school. The low cost of Membership (a one-off fee of only £49 until the end of 2023) means that finances are not a barrier to schools adopting OutoftheBox.

2. OutoftheBox Pilot in Schools

2.1 The Pilot

The purpose of the pilot in schools was to enable reflective practice both for the storytellers and for the team developing OutoftheBox. Participants were asked to submit feedback through a questionnaire using Google forms. There were nine open questions including one question on educational impact and one on wellbeing.¹⁸ The online survey informed participants of how the data would be used and that data would be reported anonymously. Data was gathered between June 2021 and June 2022 from 52 feedback forms and from seven recorded interviews which took place in May 2022.¹⁹

Participants were encouraged to submit multiple forms - up to five - although in practice many did not. There were 19 storytellers working in over 20 church and community schools in the UK. The storytellers attended a 90 minute online session in June and July 2021, which gave training in how to share OutoftheBox stories and lead wondering.²⁰ Some of the participants also chose to attend a 'Going Further with OutoftheBox' 90 minute training session on Zoom during the pilot year to enhance their skills. There was no training in Community Play although some storytellers had already been trained in Deep Talk and included this playful tool in the sessions. Participants identified themselves as teachers, teaching assistants, governors, chaplains, ministers, children and family workers and volunteers in their school settings. 18 out of the 19 storytellers were already trained in Godly Play.

The sessions ranged quite significantly in length from less than 15 minutes to over an hour. Approximately 50% of the sessions were between 15 and 30 minutes, 20% were between 30 minutes and 45 minutes and 20% were between 45 minutes and an hour. The context also varied quite widely but the majority identified story time and circle time as the chosen opportunity to carry out the OutoftheBox session.

- 48% involved learners from Key Stage 1 (Years 1-3) with children aged 5-7
- 34% involved learners from Key Stage 2 (Years 4-6) with children aged 7-11

¹⁶ See the Events page on the website for upcoming training

<https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/events>

¹⁷ The story of how a participant in a Story Circle become a storyteller can be read here

<https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/an-outofthebox-journey-from-participation-to-storytelling>

¹⁸ See Appendix A.12 for the full set of questions

¹⁹ Six of these interviews can be watched by going to

<https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/blog/interviews-with-people-using-outofthebox-in-schools>

²⁰ The storytelling included time for the story, wondering and creative response.

- 10% involved learners from Preschool with children aged 3-5
- 8% of the stories took place with a mixed group of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

2.2 Children as key stakeholders in research

Measuring the impact of storytelling approaches for children raises the important question of how the voices of children are captured in feedback of this kind. They are key stakeholders. However, research ethics rightly demand high standards of good practice, ideally signed off by an ethics panel in a UK context. Without expertise in conducting research with children, this pilot has approached storytellers to be the research participants, gathering their perceptions only.

Yet research actively involving children in the research process is a growing area of interest for sociologists in childhood studies with understandable emphasis on the need to reflect critically on the issues raised.²¹ Berryman warns researchers that “one needs to be patient and wait for [children] to reveal themselves at their own time and in their own way’ and particularly so when they do not have ‘the words to say what they mean,’”²² which presents a dilemma for researchers required to work within time and budget constraints. There is also the well-known difficulty of the researcher’s presence to disrupt the ‘normal’ environment being observed, especially in a contemplative context such as this where approach and atmosphere are key.

2.3 The benefits of OutoftheBox in the pilot schools

The language that Brené Brown uses for safe and brave classrooms where children can turn up ‘to be seen, to be heard and to be curious’ chimes with OutoftheBox.

“We are ethically called to make our schools and classrooms places where all students can walk in and, for that day or hour, take off the crushing weight of their armor, hang it on a rack, and open their heart to truly being seen.”²³

Whilst acknowledging that this is not academic research, the anecdotal evidence from the storytellers’ feedback and the video interviews with storytellers gives a good indication that OutoftheBox is having a positive impact on the wellbeing of children in schools and can fit within the school curriculum. The findings from the feedback forms are summarised below and more details with quotes from storytellers can be found in Appendix B.

OutoftheBox:

- uses materials that draw children into the story
- creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom

²¹ Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds) (2014) *Understanding Research with Children and Young People* London, Sage. p. 1.

²² Berryman, J. (2002) *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How to Lead Godly Play Sessions*, Vol. 1, New York, Morehouse Education Resources, pp. 116-117.

²³ <https://brenebrown.com/hubs/daring-classrooms-hub/>

- models good relationships in the class
- enables children to process emotions and express feelings
- develops empathy and strengthens values
- OutoftheBox gives children agency and provides a springboard for play and creativity.
- encourages in depth thinking
- uses simple stories that are easy to tell
- is inclusive of children with SEN/EAL or of those who often opt out or who tend to be quieter
- becomes more effective over time

2.4 The way forward in schools

The benefits to children's wellbeing through an OutoftheBox session points to the opportunity to grow this young movement so that there are more OutoftheBox storytellers operating in schools. Whilst the feedback focussed on the positive impact of OutoftheBox on the social-emotional wellbeing of children, there is much to be explored about how it can also support children in other ways. For example, language development is fostered when children co-create stories. In the pilot schools, children were naturally drawn to using the loose parts of OutoftheBox materials to make their own stories and play freely with their ideas. OutoftheBox seemed to provide teachers with a mechanism to stimulate children's creativity, a cross-fertilisation of ideas and sense of personhood and agency. Further work, perhaps in collaboration with researchers from Finland,²⁴ as well as UK researchers, is needed.

Only stories from the Wisdom genre were piloted, so the links to the academic curriculum were limited. Stories from the genres of History, Arts, Nature, STEM and Religions are being developed so that stories can be a springboard to 'thinking with the heart' about all subjects, as in the Charlotte Mason philosophy²⁵. As the movement grows we hope to have more Story Development Groups who will create new stories in the different genres.

OutoftheBox is a movement of story and play which clearly is much broader than simply using OutoftheBox stories. With this in mind the trainers have created in-service training for schools and other contexts called Wisdom, Wonder and Wellbeing workshops. Through experiencing OutoftheBox themselves, staff in schools are helped to understand the principles and values of the OutoftheBox approach and how they can be applied to any activity, not just when sharing OutoftheBox stories. OutoftheBox is also a movement of hope that 'turns things upside down' empowering children and adults to trust their own wisdom which leads to the transformation of individual lives and communities and also our systems and institutions.

²⁴ Since 2015 Deep Talk has been used with children aged two - six in day care centres and researchers in Finnish schools have data on how Deep Talk supports children in storytelling, language learning and in their social-emotional wellbeing

²⁵ To read a summary of the Charlotte Mason philosophy and how it relates to OutoftheBox <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/s/TheCharlotteMasonPhilosophy-enhl.pdf>

Appendix

OutoftheBox was piloted in schools between June 2021 and June 2022. Storytellers gave feedback on their experience of using OutoftheBox in the classroom and their observations of its impact on the children, particularly in relation to:

1. The OutoftheBox materials
2. The calm atmosphere
3. Its impact on relationships
4. The opportunity to process and express feelings
5. The opportunity to strengthen empathy and good values
6. Play and creativity
7. In-depth thinking
8. The ease of telling OutoftheBox stories
9. Its inclusiveness of children who don't normally engage
10. Links to the curriculum
11. Its growing effectiveness over time

Section A12 lists the questions that were asked in the schools' feedback form.

A.1 OutoftheBox uses materials that draw children into the story

The box created a sense of anticipation, wonder and curiosity. The visual stimuli offered by the materials helped pupils find meaning in the stories. The pupils were intrigued by the materials, wanted to play with them, raise questions about them, and use them to create their own stories.



“Being natural somehow engenders a feeling of calm.”

“The sensory aspect of them is very appealing to the children who couldn't stop playing with them.”

“The children loved touching the figures and the cloth.”

“They are beautifully made and very tactile.”

“They make intriguing sounds as stories are told and they look lovely.”

“I love all the pieces for playing and storytelling myself, they are tactile and fun, but thinking particularly about using them with younger children; the felt pieces and larger wooden pieces are great for the children to play with.”

“Lots of excitement and anticipation of what was in the box”.

“Children were very engaged. Able to seat them so all could all see despite whole class and smaller classroom. Children responded to wondering questions well and made really interesting suggestions about where they as a class might be in the story. Able to link to learning in the morning. Excited to hear what would 'come out of the box' next time.”

“There was a sense of anticipation and wonder.”

“Children were excited at the box coming out, with one child saying "What's in the box today?" to everyone!”

“The other teacher couldn't believe how quiet the children were during the story and how engrossed they got.”

“Even though there were more children they were all more engaged and really paid attention to the story itself.”

“The way the children incorporated parts of the story that I had told into the one they then told me afterwards showed they had been focussing and engaging and they were able to relate the story to other stories they already knew.”

“I decided to share the monster story as it is about conflict and the children are talking a lot about the conflict in Ukraine and I thought it was good to talk about how we treat each other.”

“The children had not heard a story for a while and were so excited when they saw the box. One child who struggles with reading said 'I love these stories' when he saw the box. He has not seen a story since before the summer holidays so it shows the impact they had on him. Another child asked me where she could buy the box from. They were extremely engaged and focused. They responded really well to the questions and many shared their thoughts and ideas.”

A.2 OutoftheBox creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom

It was often noted that the class or group was more focused and calmer than usual. The importance of a quiet undisturbed environment was noted. Storytellers found that large groups need more time to prepare the OutoftheBox space e.g. ensuring all can see, allowing enough space for storytelling materials to be laid out.



“Children were calm and focussed, engrossed, intrigued in the story and were reflecting on each character and their actions. They were very calm after the story had been put away which is unusual for my lively class of 20 boys and 9 girls! Children continued to discuss so I gave them some reflection time for a drink and to continue their conversations.”

“Opportunity for a calm time.”

Calm atmosphere aided thinking and responses. “Teachers plant the tree and we rest on top of it” “We are the roots holding it all together” “The child is like our parents”

“One child said that they liked that they felt so calm during the story.”

“It really felt like a space in time where the children (and I) could just be in that moment.”

“The children are calmer whilst the story is being told and some of the children will come and chat with me during the response time. These children are the ones who are seeking adult attention, needing a bit more emotional support.”

A.3 OutoftheBox models good relationships in the class

The process seemed to be helping the children to re-build relationships in the classroom (post Covid-19)

“During the wondering you could see the children listening to each other's perspectives and sometimes affirming each other or adding to what the others had said. It gave them a safe place to say what they really thought and felt ie. non-judgemental environment with freedom to interpret the story for themselves.”

“Another boy who had become very upset after a fairly minor incident and put himself in the corner of the room put himself back into the circle after the whole class invited him to join

us. He decided to sit next to me, and chose to tell his own very involved and elaborate story. His energy levels were very positively lifted for the rest of the afternoon.”

“I think it gives them an opportunity to focus on themes of wellness, but also gives them a time just for them - a time just to be themselves. The storytelling that they do can give them a chance to process big feelings and make emotional connections with their friends”

“This was steeped in wellbeing language, care and empathy. The children worked together to bring wellbeing to one another, so the child who struggled to engage was encouraged by another member to join in.”

“These children will always have challenges with concentration so seeing the children so absorbed was amazing. Afterwards three children who do not get on together asked to walk together to create their own story. The teacher videoed it. It was about being friends and being there for each other - something they would never get on paper... This is a huge step forward in the wellbeing of the children in the school environment.”

“They worked well together, they came up with clever answers and empathic answers. There was a natural leader in the group who gathered all the ideas together, but she also enabled other less verbal and assertive children to say what they thought and kept making sure they felt included. She was very playful and would make a natural storyteller!”

A.4 OutoftheBox enables children to process emotions and express feelings

OutoftheBox sessions gave children confidence to be themselves, process their feelings e.g. the opportunity to take the lead, freedom to choose how to respond to the story in a safe, non-judgemental space.



“One boy made a rainbow cube out of bricks. His friend made a hollow rectangle with bricks as his precious stone and attached it around the cube. A girl made a house to surround her mother's grave, 'but it fell down'. In the discussion time she'd said that her precious stone was the bracelet charms her mum had given her before she died. A boy drew the darts his grandma had given him two weeks before she died, and the football shirt belonging to his

cousin he'd been given after his funeral. Possibly a quarter of the group had experienced the death of a close family member. The session enabled them to speak about them and say how precious they remained."

"It gave them a safe place to say what they really thought and felt ie. non-judgemental environment with freedom to interpret the story for themselves."

"The storytelling that they do can give them a chance to process big feelings and make emotional connections with their friends"

"The children responded thoughtfully, including one boy whom I had worked with last year, following the death of his father. He said he didn't like that one person had an easy path, while another had to go up mountains and down valleys: it wasn't fair."

"Children were asked how the story made them feel... "peaceful," "felt like a lifecycle," "I liked the birds landing on the tree." "I felt sad." "It gave a home for the birds." "All the stories remind me of my mum because she's nice to me. People are kind in the stories"

" "You can have a little emotion and if people pull at it it gets bigger. The monster is all the mean stuff. Kindness takes away all the mean stuff." This was from a child who had previously been bullied. It was fantastic to watch her discuss how she felt emotions can manifest and felt the monster was the visualisation of that"

"The monster growing I liked the best" This child has behavioural issues and struggled to settle down at first. He was very fascinated by the monster and identified strongly with it." "The teacher felt that it was fantastic and really helped connect their emotional response to their thinking processes in a creative way. She may come and train."

"The child who identified with the donkey was angry and talked about personal space and respecting space - this was important for her wellbeing. I noticed this group of children compete with one another rather than work together and listen to one another."

"The children really understood the idea of the story. They talked about the 'lost childhood' of the first character and shared their own experiences of times when they had felt both happy and sad for different reasons."

A.5 OutoftheBox develops empathy and strengthens values

The stories help children to see things from another perspective and to focus on values.

"The children were great at discussing why it is good to be kind to people."

"Children very much on the side of the child throwing the starfish back - one child introduced another passer-by to help and support the child and help them to stand up to the first passer by."

“Children realised that the monster wasn’t as big when the people were kind to it. They said the story was showing that you should listen to others and care for others even if they are different to you.”

“A child linked story to school’s values of compassion and respect.”

“Great story, I chose this because my class are struggling with making the right choices so used this as a basis for our circle time and how we all have choices and can ask for help if we need to.”

“There was a move in the wondering time picked up by myself and the teaching assistant from the children wanting to solve the situation from their perspective to wanting to see the situation from the donkey’s perspective. P wanted to talk to the donkey and find out if it was lost and stuck. The children were beginning to empathise with the donkey and listen to one another.”

“Most children had compassion for the monster and wanted the people to change their ways to be kind and not mean to the monster. We talked about how this might be like issues at playtime.”

“The listening that emerged brought empathy and together trust as they listened to each other. Wellbeing came through the telling of a personal story for moments, deep listening, and integrating each other’s stories.”

“Real conflicts emerged for the children as they responded to their lived experiences in recent times. Learned that different children lived differently but all were welcome, just as the donkey was in the end by having a shelter built and food provided.”

“They talked about the child being kind, thoughtful, loving, and learning to live well (the school values are learning, loving, living). These were attributed to the story, they also talked about gratitude that one child was so thoughtful to try to save as many starfish as possible and discussed that this would be a good way to be, whether in a group or on your own.”

“The ability to work together cross-culturally, the healing and understanding that came from this. Children from the travelling community spoke of understanding and working with animals showing respect and finding out what was wrong, others wanted to kill the donkey - but learnt it was better to do things differently.. Some children felt they needed to build shelters and hiding places as they thought the villagers were scared... The UK children from the school showed how they could build a new way with a different pathway, listening to the leader who could be trusted.”

A.6. OutoftheBox gives children agency and provides a springboard for play and creativity.

When the OutoftheBox session included time for creative response the children often chose to play with the materials to co-create new stories and to tell their own stories. The loose

parts of OutoftheBox were also used in circle sharing to enable children to talk about their feelings and a description of this has been recorded in an interview with a Deputy Head teacher.²⁶ Many storytellers reported that there was maximum impact when more time was given for this creative response (an hour seemed to work well).



“I think the level of freedom and control given to the children gave them confidence and focus I do not always see - one boy in particular is generally very anxious about any kind of failure. There was no way to fail at this activity and he seemed to thrive when given the opportunity to tell a story. I think rather than being able to "tick boxes" in this instance it felt more like a gift I was giving the children. A time where they would not be micromanaged, and they could take the lead.”

“They took the initiative to want to become storytellers themselves and they worked together to tell me their story.”

“This group in recent weeks queried whether there is any point to a school council as they felt it was pointless for various reasons. The school asked me to do some story telling with them to help. The children identified with the adult and not the child in the story. They felt it was pointless. In the discussion they began to see small things made a difference, they saw a new perspective from that of the child... By the end the school council began talking about how small things they do or say makes a big difference in school life.. Inspiration and motivation began to grow. The first step of a long journey.”

“The children were very engaged in the story as I told it, and were very keen to create their own stories in the response time. They loved the opportunity to freely respond and use the paints.”

²⁶ To watch the interview https://youtu.be/Lo_460j_HDw

“I allowed them to play with the pieces afterwards to make their own pictures and stories and they spent a lot of time engrossed in that. Speaking with the staff afterwards they said they were surprised at how engrossed the children were playing with the pieces and making their story pictures. I was only meant to stay half an hour and ended up staying for a whole hour as they just wanted to carry on being creative and curious.”

“The children also loved the chance to explore the pieces afterwards and be creative with them making their own stories and pictures.”

“After the story and wondering questions, one child created a picnic story and another a story about a mysterious forest and the adventures of a young boy in the forest. The child actually wanted to tell me their story (mysterious forest) and I sat and listened. It was brilliant! The imagination and creativity too was wonderful and spontaneous. It was very detailed and descriptive.”

“In creative response: once again the same two children from the first session wanted to create and tell me a story using the resources. The one child spoke about planting seeds to grow poppies-watering seed but not seeing any change (link to Acorn story and Remembrance Day) and went on to elaborate on growing other things and so on in their story. The second child also spoke about trees in their story and mystery once again and trying to work things out. A third child created a story too but did so quietly. I felt that through their storytelling that they were processing and thinking deeply about things as there was a lot of detail and thought that went into their stories. The reason I say that is that after their storytelling they opened up about some personal feelings of what they were going through in their lives. Also a lot of drawing and making with play dough.”

A.7 OutoftheBox encourages in depth thinking

The story and the wondering questions engendered in-depth thinking and discussion, responses, and reflections. Children made connections between the story and their own experiences in school and at home, between the story and other stories (not just OutoftheBox stories)



“Superb conversations between themselves about what might be happening in the story. Detailed responses at the end of the story and in-depth thinking.”

“Children responded thoughtfully and respectfully. Most of the children placed themselves in the role of the child saving the starfish. They believed that they could make a difference. Collective response that they as a whole class would be trying to make a difference.”

“The children's response to the story was striking. Nearly all the class wanted to be a starfish and one child said "we all need to be loved and saved." Another said she wanted to be the sea because she “could wash away people's problems” “

“The children were enjoying a discussion about why a good leader would leave in the first place and what makes a good leader.”

Some of the children's responses: “The leader was trying to test the people when he went away to see how they would respond to the monster,” “the leader was a good example to the people,” “the monster could be symbolising hate and depending how you deal with it how it will grow,” “treat others as you want to be treated,” “the monster was being discriminated against and they didn't even try to get to know it,” “be kind with your words,” “this links into our values of compassion and respect.” Some wanted to be the monster, others the leader. One child wanted to be in the crowd so he could be a positive influence on the other people to treat the monster better. Wondering where they saw their class in the story - “we are all different -so tricky to say” and “we all try to be there for each other.”

“The children were great at discussing why it is good to be kind to people. They all tried to make up an ending as they wanted it to finish.”

A.8 OutoftheBox uses simple stories that are easy to tell

Feedback from the storytellers suggest that OutoftheBox works for them because it is easy to remember and the preparation time is short.

“Short story but very effective - easy to learn and deliver.”

“The story was simple but powerful. It was easy to remember and fun to tell. I liked the fact the image created was bright and colourful but also not over busy and also that it filled the whole story circle. I liked the fact that it was something that the children could all relate to in their own lives.”

A.9 OutoftheBox is inclusive of children with SEN/EAL or of those who often opt out or who tend to be quieter

The storytellers and other adults in the room noticed that children with special educational needs or English as an additional language were able to access the story and that children who tend to be quiet were participating both verbally and non verbally.



“Wondering about the story is a good way of encouraging children to express their thoughts and ideas: some quite shy children responded (who don't usually say anything in response to questions in Collective Worship with me, for instance)”

“Lots of contributions including several from children with SEN.”

“Children were engrossed including SEN/EAL”

“I noticed that a child who often 'opts out' started to add things to the beach and say what they were. They enjoyed the fact that they could be in the story and change the story. When I emphasised this, it promoted more exploration of the materials.”

“The teaching assistant commented that one of the children who responded to the questions would never normally contribute in that way”

“They worked together well, they were creative, they were happy and the quieter children were included in a really great way by their peer group.”

A.10 OutoftheBox links to the curriculum

A paper outlines how OutoftheBox supports the core curriculum subjects in ways that can be measured by Ofsted and SIAMS (and so does not need to be limited to extra-curricular activity or PHSE only).²⁷ During the pilot only stories in the Wisdom genre were available but over time there will be many more links to the curriculum as stories in the genres of History, Arts, Nature, STEM and Religions are developed.

²⁷ Caroe, C., Caroe, K., Lord K., and Fytche, J. (2021) *OutoftheBox Links to the National Curriculum, Ofsted and SIAMS Inspection Frameworks*, paper available from <https://www.outoftheboxtraining.org/users>



“Teacher took notes of responses: very helpful! These will go in class Reflection Journal, part of the school's RE provision (each class has a journal, where the teacher/ TA or individual children note reflections and responses to spiritual activities)”

“Children made links between the stories and the environment.”

“During the creative time afterwards two of the children talked a lot about the acorn growing into a tree and crouched down to be an acorn and then 'grew into a tree'. The staff are going to follow up on the story with their topic work as they are looking at nature and the environment so they have said they are going to reflect back to the story as they do activities throughout the rest of the week.”

“Children are very aware of environmental impact - most responses to questions about where they see themselves in the story (often as a class). “The boy helped the environment,” “Not just the tree growing but the child growing too,” “Boy didn't play with the acorn but planted it,” “Circle of life,” “boy made a difference.”

“Children linked the story to life cycles, fairy tales, forest school work on growing, nature. They were asked what the story might be teaching us... “To look after nature, like our story from forest school” “To care for the world” “I'd like to be one of the boys who planted a tree” “I'd like to be one of the birds and sing beautifully and explore” “the story is about looking after nature and not chopping so many trees down””

“Children linked to knowledge of the environment and importance of trees to give animals homes - saw creatures as innocent and in need of a home.”

“Children made links between the story and the environment and the need to plant more trees.”

A.11 OutoftheBox becomes more effective over time

In schools where repeat sessions were held, the children were enthusiastic and wanted more. They soon became familiar with the OutoftheBox process e.g. they became more confident with wondering. Storytellers often noted that they, and the pupils, 'settled into the process', storytellers gaining confidence with setting up the space, getting familiar with the materials and pupils gaining confidence with wondering, discussing and responding.

"I think especially with younger children there has been a real benefit in doing a string of sessions rather than a stand alone one off session. If I had only done the first session on its own then I would have been left thinking that it isn't as effective with younger children but as I've done more I have seen them learn the flow of sessions better which helped them grow and engage better."

"They were much more confident in using their own imaginations to tell their own stories this time. Their attention span was also much greater this time."

"This is the third time I have done OutoftheBox with these children and they have really begun to understand the pattern of a session. As soon as I walked in they were all very keen to know what was in the box and began clearing a space for the story circle. There were less children there today so we decided to try again with the whole group rather than a separate smaller group. Even though there were more children they were all more engaged and really paid attention to the story itself rather than the pieces. None of them tried to touch or take the pieces until I allowed them to after the story and the only calling out was in reaction to the story, for example making gasping noises and saying things like 'oh no' when the monster got bigger."

"Children very engaged - second story they had been told and this seemed to help as they were excited but knew what to expect."

"One child said ' I wish I could do this everyday.'"

"It's been a real privilege to be part of this pilot and I feel I have been growing and learning too, alongside the children."

A.12 The questions on the OutoftheBox schools feedback form

The participants of the schools' pilot were asked the following questions in the feedback form.²⁸

1. Job title / role within school (teacher, teaching assistant, head teacher, RE lead, chaplain, volunteer, minister from local church)
2. Date of session

²⁸ 'Feedback from OutoftheBox session in schools' google form can be viewed here: <https://forms.gle/CqKAGvtJBtvxKL2J6>

3. Your role in the session
4. Year group
5. Number of children in group
6. Other adults observing or present to the group (eg teacher, teaching assistant, volunteer)
7. Story shared
8. Length of session
9. Context of session
10. What went well?
11. What didn't go well?
12. What might you do differently next time?
13. Reflecting on the children's responses - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
14. Reflecting on the impact in terms of education that this session had - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
15. Reflecting on the impact in terms of wellbeing that this session had - what did you notice? Quotes from the children or short vignettes are helpful. Also observations from onlookers.
16. What do you think about the story materials?
17. Please provide your feedback on the particular story you shared.
18. Any other comments?
19. Name (optional)

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