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# 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

Photo c/o Bag Books

# 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

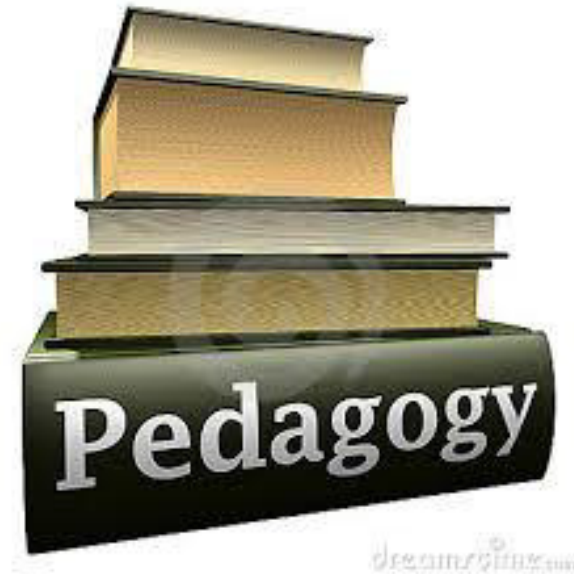
# Common features (1) Individualisation

- Most storytelling sessions – group activities.
- But teachers stressed importance of individualising , presenting same story in different ways to address individual
  - preferences
  - tolerances and intolerances
  - needs



# 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 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)

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*Thank you  
for listening*



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