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Violence Prevention Education in Liverpool Schools

A Narrative Evaluation and Teacher's Guide

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0151 233 3007



0151 225 3275



liverpool.direct@liverpool.gov.uk



Violence Prevention Education in Liverpool Schools



Children work together creating characters for their domestic dramas

A Narrative Evaluation and Teacher's Guide

23 May, 2007

Some 80 per cent of 11 to 16-year-olds at school said violence was a major problem, according to the new NSPCC survey. Figures showed that 42 per cent of children said they had been kicked, punched or hit while at secondary school while three-quarters admitted experiencing bullying of some kind. Children's exposure to violence extended outside the school gates also with 25 per cent saying they had seen adults in their family displaying violent behaviour.

Dame Mary Marsh, NSPCC chief executive, said: "Although a snapshot, this survey shows how children themselves feel that violence invades their lives at school, home and on the streets, sometimes daily. "Children should not have to accept violence as part of growing up. Much of it could be stopped if governments across the UK took action.

24th May, 2007

The Unicef report which placed Britain at the bottom of a child well-being league has been analysed by a statistician who said the figures are far more of a reflection on England.

Dr Kevin McConway told BBC Radio 4's More or Less programme that although the UK was at the bottom of the list of 21 industrialised nations, the figures were much more pertinent to England rather than Wales or Scotland.

The Unicef report was based on 40 different indicators including health, relationships, family and poverty.



Brother Richard, the main character in the drama is welcomed into the family's home.

Violence Prevention Education Project

Introduction

Violence is a problem in our schools, homes and on the streets. It is with us in the media and in the reality of our lives. A critical issue for us educators, though, is how do we teach violence prevention? What curriculum and pedagogy will support our children's learning about this crucial problem of our times? It is the aim of this drama project to find answers to these vital matters.

Pedagogy - the crucible paradigm: stirring the pot together

It is entirely possible within a drama lesson for the teacher to direct the youngsters by telling them where to stand, what to do and how to do it. In terms of any kind of product a directed approach may well come up with similar results to more negotiated ways of working.

The Violence Prevention Education Project, however, involves a pedagogy that emphasises the process of building narrative ideas with the children. Our contention is that more effective learning and understanding flow from this way of working.

The teaching process that we use is sometimes referred to as the crucible paradigm i.e. we are all putting something into the pot together, stirring it up and seeing what emerges. Rather than a more transmissional classroom where the teacher tends to own knowledge, the 'crucible' is a place where

everyone, teacher as well as pupil, is learning about and discovering answers to questions. Apart from the teaching there will also be other implications to this pedagogy which we should be aware of.

The teacher does not simply observe the pupils' contributions, they also signal that they are a participant in the unfolding story. At times they may be clarifying what is being offered, sharing in decisions, challenging stereotypes, modelling involvement and engagement and structuring pupils' ideas into a coherent narrative form. These activities will sometimes resemble 'facilitation' rather than conventional teaching.

So much for the principles. What is at the heart of the work, how does it evolve and what are the drama strategies that underpin the teaching and learning?

What follows is a set of ideas to help structure and add detail and conviction to the narrative. They should not be seen as decontextualised games or exercises but rather as ideas in a teaching toolkit which will add layers to the story and support pupils' responses. Within the account the reader will see photographs of the work in action in the classroom, which, we trust, will bring the project to life, together with 'real' reactions, quotes and responses and suggestions for follow up activities.

Story

The effectiveness of the drama flows from the power of story to express and describe human needs, emotions and problems. The effective development of the story will depend on the commitment of the pupils to the characters whom they create and to the situations that those characters find themselves in.



The crucible paradigm - stirring the pot together

With the help of the children the teacher uses their ideas to set the scene and build the story. Whenever possible pupils sit in a circle so that everyone can more easily contribute and see the unfolding story.

A simple picture of a cross, which a girl is holding at the centre of the photo, is the starting point as our space will come to represent the office of the head of the monastery/nunnery (See 2 recreating the moment of drama). The contents of the room will be decided by the children.

The teacher structures the pupils' contributions to shape the story.

What follows is a description of the strategies and ideas that have been used within the VPE Project to help construct the narrative. These strategies do not have to be followed as and when we describe them here but teachers can use them when opportunities occur organically in the course of this narrative (or, indeed, in any lesson or story).

A Setting the Scene

1 framing the question

Drama is a man in a mess or, if you like, a person with a problem. In drama we are presented with a fork in an individual's path through life where a psychological conflict or problem is to be faced and, hopefully, resolved. It may be a humdrum or world shattering issue, a domestic or political conflict. The nature of the conflict is negotiable but in drama the fact of the conflict is not.

So in deciding on a starting point, there has to be some issue or focal question that requires a response.

We need the pupils to sympathise with the difficulty that the character finds himself/herself in and we also want them to be able to analyse that situation

and thus help the character negotiate their way through the narrative. The subject under consideration is violence in and out of the home. Our character will find what they see unfolding around them confusing and frightening. Our dramatic aim is for the children to help the protagonist understand and overcome the problems that they encounter.

The chosen fictitious character is a monk/nun, Brother Richard/Sister Mary (The choice is the teacher's. This may be significant where the teacher takes on the role) who has lived a life of quiet and contemplation for many years in a monastery/nunnery.

Suddenly the abbot/mother superior orders them to see how people live in the world outside. There will be no way back for at least six weeks. This person has been thrown in at the deep end and they now approach the pupils as sympathetic and understanding people who will help them analyse and appreciate the complexity and difficulties of the new world in which they suddenly and unexpectedly find themselves.

2 recreating the moment of drama -planning; sound and visual aids

To engage the youngsters and heighten belief and commitment, we briefly recreate the world of the monastery because the pupils need to have a sense of where our character has come from in order to appreciate their present plight.



In order to engage with and commit to the characters in the story it is useful to use visual aids and music. In this picture the nun shows a picture of her bees back in the nunnery garden. “They produce,” she says proudly, “the sweetest honey.”

We found that, far from finding the idea of beekeeping boring, the children were often fascinated by their subject. While this does give a real sense of character and setting initially, we must, nevertheless, always be careful not to let the bees divert us from the main point of the story!

As part of setting the scene we ask the children to imagine what the inside of the abbot's/mother superior's room might be like. This can first be planned and drawn on a board or flip chart and then created three dimensionally.

Resources like photographs of a monastery, a beehive (because beekeeping is the monk's/nun's occupation in the monastery) can assist in building up a sense of place. Recorded music like Gregorian chants helps create the right atmosphere and builds belief and commitment.

The point is, though, that we are attempting as far as is possible to use the pupils' ideas and contributions to set up a situation. We may need resources to prompt and support but the 'crucible' paradigm requires us to accommodate what they offer.

So, this naïve character who has spent a secluded life behind monastery/nunnery walls, is summoned and told that they will be sent into the world outside to stay with a friend of the abbot in an inner city house. This is the bombshell beginning.



3 “physicalising” the space: involving everyone

Drama can sometimes be dominated by confident pupils as they are generally more inclined to talk and participate without anxiety and embarrassment. However, in order to accommodate larger numbers or even the whole class, and to encourage involvement and engagement, pupils can physically represent objects as well as people. These can range from photos on the walls to the abbot/mother superior's door that Richard/Mary gingerly knocks on. Another way of managing the class is to ask our classroom audience to appraise what they see. The teacher can ask individual children to specify what they liked about a particular performance or idea. This will help develop and sharpen critical awareness among the watching pupils.

4 teacher in role

The teacher may take on the role in the story as the person with the problem. The key principle is that this role should be low status so that the pupils will find it easier to support the character. Because the protagonist is in difficulty they will be relying on the children's ideas to help understand the nature of what they are facing. Role play does not require a performance as it is not the same as acting. Without going into detail about the distinction between the two, role play generally involves representing yourself in a given situation whereas, when acting, you assume a totally different persona and this often involves adopting a different voice, mannerisms and attitude.

At the start the teacher simply has to assert that they are taking on a role and briefly explain that it will involve the pupils helping their character.

Pupils generally have no difficulty in knowing when teachers are being themselves and when they are role playing a person in a story.

This device encourages pupils to 'own' the narrative and offers them the potential to steer it. They generally appreciate it when their teacher is engaging in the action alongside them. It also gives the message that this is an ensemble activity rather than a 'teacher-led' one.



To investigate how shell shocked Richard was when told by the abbot that he had to go into the outside world, the teacher asks for a child to be Richard while he role plays the abbot. The pupils are asked to focus on the status of the role assumed by the teacher, considering particularly the way the abbot addresses and behaves towards Richard. The pupils advise Richard how to respond i.e. what to say and do. When he leaves the abbot's office they help him articulate his feelings and thoughts as well (see thought tracking 5).



Here the teacher is the mother superior and a child Sister Mary. The children's faces reflect their interest at this intriguing moment in the drama.



It is easy to step out of role, as this photo illustrates. A few minutes before the teacher was in role as Brother Richard but he has stopped the action momentarily to consider the impact of the moment when the monk arrived at Lime Street Station.

He shows a picture of the station to the children. They have noted on the board the noises that would confront Brother Richard in the station. These noises can be recreated, if need be, as a soundscape of his arrival in the bustling city.

Alternatively, the teacher can simply narrate what happens or use a pupil to stand in for the character to demonstrate the character's confusion and anxiety.

It is always better to show rather than tell as this will give the story more visual impact which discussion and narration may not.

B Building the picture

5 thought tracking

How does the monk/nun react to the news that they must go into the outside world?

As part of building the character we can explore their thoughts as they sit alone in their humble but familiar cell on the night before leaving.

Again this helps form the character and our belief in them (see also 8 role on the wall). It is also a good foundation and preparation for developing speech and dialogue work as talk is influenced by inner thoughts and attitudes. Drama activities also develop speaking and listening and writing as they provide concrete references for detailed description. Thus the dramatic process serves to underpin quality written work.

6 still image

On the first night in the family home where they will live for next six weeks, Brother Richard/Sister Mary waits alone in the sitting room for the evening meal when they casually pick up a remote control device. The teacher can now take on the role of the character and describe subsequent domestic events along similar lines to the following:

"As I was waiting for the meal I picked up a rectangular piece of plastic with numbers on. The strange thing was that, as I touched the numbers, a large black box in the corner of the room came alive. It had images on it which I could not comprehend. Each time I pressed a number, a new image

replaced the last. I was confused and disturbed by what I saw. I was hoping you (the pupils) could help me make sense of them..."

When the teacher works in this way the ball is immediately lobbed into the pupils' court. It is for them to offer answers. It also becomes a fun activity as they help the character understand television, remote controls etc.

The benefits of being in role as opposed to narration are its immediacy, impact and irony. The children play along and enjoy the game of dramatic story making.

As part of assisting the character they will now decide what the television images might have been. From past experience pupils tend to suggest that they are scenes and episodes from wars, horror films, cartoons, soaps and the news.

The character notes these ideas on a flip chart or board and asks for clarification:

"Would you please recreate these images from that fateful first night and help me understand what they mean?"



The children begin to recreate the horrifying television images for Brother Richard.

It is interesting to note in this powerful picture how the boy has incorporated the tables piled up at the side of the classroom into his idea. When he was asked why the sniper was hiding he said, "I'm scared." One of the watching pupils suggested that he was anxious in case the enemy noticed the smoke coming from the end of his gun. It is always pleasing when someone visualises something so imaginatively!

When possible, it is a good idea to use the classroom for drama. Tables can be put to the side and in the vast majority of classrooms there is sufficient space to set up scenes. This will avoid the necessity of timetabling the hall.



This picture illustrates a war where prisoners are captured.

The watching children pointed out to Brother Richard that some of the dead were innocent bystanders and others had lost close friends and relatives in the conflict.

Still image work is sometimes called 'freeze frame' or 'tableaux'. The advantage of still image is that it makes the participants focus on a particular moment. Children often want to act out long sequences of action straightaway. In our experience it is better to start with a moment and then build the story via other strategies like thought-tracking, role on the wall etc. Thus the work can be planned and considered in greater detail. This helps avoid stereotypes and creates greater conviction within the narrative.

To demonstrate how still image works the teacher can come out of role and choose one of the pupils' ideas as an example for modelling. Pupils are invited to contribute to and shape the image gradually until the completed version is there for all to see and appraise. It is important to emphasise the need for concentration and stillness to ensure that our character can comprehend its meaning. Remember pupils can also "physicalise" objects as well as people within the image (see above SETTING THE SCENE - 3 "physicalising" the space) When the pupils understand the process of forming images, the ideas on the board can be assigned to smaller groups arranged around the classroom.

As the freeze frames are shown the teacher/character uses other strategies and ideas to analyse and develop the image. For example they might ask, 'What is this person in the image thinking (thought-tracking)? What might they been saying to their friend in the picture (dialogue)? What caption could we put to this picture?

The spectators, too, can comment on what they see, identifying the best features of each freeze frame e.g. its symmetry. Suggestions for improvement may be offered provided that they are sensitive and they follow positive comments. This is a useful way of engaging the watchers as well as the actors and hones critical skills.

Thus far we have emphasised the need to take pupils' ideas seriously and incorporate them into the narrative. This does not mean, however, that their contributions do not sometimes have to be challenged. For example, there was an image, created by one group, of Homer Simpson strangling Bart. The

watching pupils laughed at this. In role as the monk, the teacher asked why they were laughing. They responded by saying that cartoons are funny and therefore should be laughed at. The teacher said, "But the father is trying to kill his son. Why is that a matter for humour?"

This intervention caused them to pause and reflect on the moment.

7 music and morphing

As in any teaching, detail is built incrementally. If the pupils are especially responsive to the still-image strategy, the teacher could suggest that they create another image of a television set (e.g. two pupils represent the shape of the set, another the aerial etc). They can then practise slowly (over a count of, say, five seconds) converting the television into the image on the screen.

This is called morphing. This dramatic transition reinforces the feelings of dislocation and disorientation experienced by the ingénue character. New televisions and images can be introduced by the teacher saying a number which signifies both a new group of pupils to perform and their new channel to appear on the television.



The pupils have cleverly arranged the image with newsreaders in the foreground and war on the imaginary screen in the background. The soldiers, when interviewed, say that they are happy that they have killed the enemy and trample on their bodies.



Cartoon violence and arguments are shown here. In the photo Marj shouts at Homer and Bart to do the dishes.

Music which has proved particularly effective as a soundtrack to this section of the story has been Mars from The Planets Suite by Holst and Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. Although the main aims of the project are to explore and challenge attitudes towards violence, it is nevertheless the case that the more interesting and gripping the work is as a story and piece of theatre, the more resonant the learning, interest, and understanding will be.

C New Tensions and Difficulties

After the character's initial problems they begin to settle down to the new rhythms and pace of life with the family. This family consists of a mother and father and a twin boy and girl.

One evening, however, when the character is in their room they hear the sound of raised voices downstairs followed by something being smashed and a door slamming. Then all is quiet. They do not leave their room. In the morning when they come downstairs into the kitchen, the children, who are normally friendly and open, are quiet and withdrawn. What has happened to cause this change?

With the youngsters, we replay the scene in the kitchen. The teacher can narrate or role play the character. The class decide on the layout and volunteer pupils take on the role of the twins. They simply have to sit in silence as Brother Richard talks to them. Sensing there is something wrong he leaves the children in the kitchen but offers to listen to their problems if they wish to divulge them.

At this stage it may well be productive to ask the class whether they would confide in such a person. It is important that children articulate the qualities of a good and reliable listener and this moment in the story is a good focus for discussion. The key characteristics of a person who can be trusted can be agreed and listed for present and future reference.

The task now is to speculate on what might have happened the previous night. In order to do this we need first to think about who is in the family.

8 role on the wall

The teacher uses one of the parents to model this strategy to the whole class. Using a sheet of A1 paper the teacher draws a gingerbread figure and writes/draws the pupils' ideas of the character down within and around this basic human outline. First a name is agreed. This should not be the name of anyone who is known to the children. We are creating a fictional account which will be informed by our experience but will be distant enough to allow us to invest in it without undue risk. The character's age, occupation, hobbies, dreams, pastimes, sayings, clothes etc can be added until a full picture of the person is created.

This exercise allows for complexity and depth of characterisation.

For example in one school, the father was seen as a kind and supportive person who cared for his children but who was, nevertheless, prone to bouts of aggression and temper which caused domestic heartbreak.



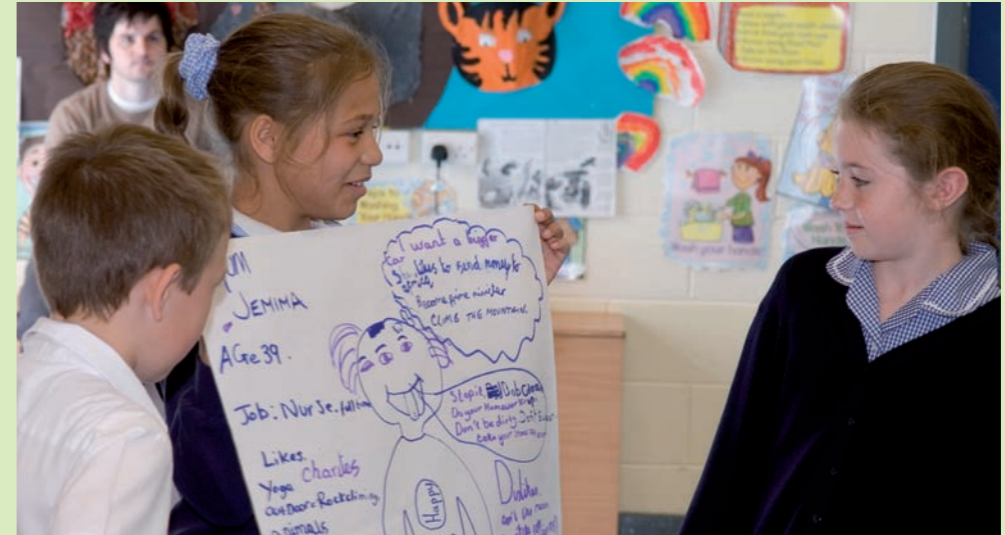
Breakfast in the house.

In the morning when Richard comes downstairs (see NEW TENSIONS AND DIFFICULTIES), the children of the family are unusually silent and sullen.

The teacher takes on the role of Richard while two pupils play the children. The rest of the class watch intently and 'read' the children's reactions and attitudes. It is important that the audience have a role to play as commentators on and shapers of the narrative.



Before looking in detail at the events of the previous night, it is important to think about the people involved. The teacher models the role on the wall strategy on a flip chart. The whole class contribute ideas about the chosen character. Soon they will develop different characters in smaller groups on large sheets of paper so that everyone can see and share.



A group feeds back its decisions about their character to the rest of the class.

Sometimes pupils may become preoccupied with clothing a character in a particular way. This may be especially true where they wish to dress the children in the story in particular brands of clothing and trainers. While this may be something that the teacher will want to discourage in the longer term, persisting with the exercise will reveal potential areas for curriculum planning. For example, one child said, "My clothes get me respect."

This will, naturally, be challenged and discussed at an appropriate time.

The names and ages of the rest of the family are then agreed with the whole class.

More often than not pupils decide that the twins should be the same age as they themselves are.

The class can then be divided into smaller groups to describe in detail the remaining family members on the large sheets of paper. When this is done each group reports back the features and nature of their chosen person. Often, as characters are delineated, pupils will be identifying potential causes of conflict. These include habits like father going out drinking with his mates every Friday or mum enjoying going away for weekends with the girls.

When this planning has been done they are ready to recreate last night's events.

9 short scenes

As the pupils have already practised still image, developed characters and decided on where the action will happen (kitchen), they are now ready to recreate last night's events as a short play.

In groups they will first have to discuss a story outline, who will play which part and practise the scene ensuring that they include the four significant things that the guest heard: raised voices; the sound of smashing; door slamming; silence.

The teacher can walk around the groups and check that they are on task and working to the framework of the story and characters. The scene need not be longer than a minute, in fact keeping it short will help avoid irrelevant and stereotyped behaviour.

If the teacher is unsure whether the youngsters are ready to embark on a longer scene, they could always do three freeze frames illustrating the beginning, middle and end of the incident.

Each group then shows its ideas to the whole group. As above, it is useful to give spectators the task of positively evaluating the work and suggesting potential improvements.

There may not be overt violence in any of the scenarios offered but they all involve a family under pressure with their different interests and tensions.

Sometimes it will be problems with neighbours, elderly relatives, drink, lack of consideration or it may even be the pressure of having a visitor staying with them in the house!

Our character can still cause domestic pressure even though they may be kind and sympathetic and keep themselves to themselves. What these scenarios always reflect are the concerns which pupils themselves have. In wider school communities where feuding neighbours are causing problems, that issue will surface in the presentations and, consequently, it will be an important theme to take on and deal with via our storyline.



An angry mother tells her son to go to bed immediately while his father and sister look on.



Mum takes a chair to her husband and tells him to get out. You can just see the daughter cowering behind the table as she listens to the row.



The family are hot seated (10 hot seating) by counsellors.

10 hot seating

When we ran out of teaching time on the VPE Project we tended, at this point, to 'hot seat' family members. 'Hot seating' is a familiar strategy to many teachers and it involves pupils taking on the role of real or fictional people. It is an especially useful device in history lessons where someone can represent a historical person or in literacy where they become a character from a story or play.

Volunteer pupils can take the parts of family members and respond in character to the questions they are asked. An added dimension is provided by assigning the role of experienced counsellors to the watching pupils who must show sensitivity and sympathy as part of their brief. Where the whole class is not aware of the methodology of counselling, we can list on the board the relevant protocols.

We have found that this often reveals unanticipated attitudes from family members. When conflicts are encountered, 'the counsellors' can use their professional expertise and experience to help determine how the family can move on.

11 time out

On the occasions when volunteers are not sure how to respond, the teacher can call 'time out'. Hot seated pupils can then ask for help from a group of supporters, who have been previously identified by the teacher, to support an individual character. These could easily be other people from the group who worked on the role on the wall exercise above (8 role on the wall). When the member of the family has been offered fresh ideas, the questions can resume.

12 counselling

If there is time and space, it is a very useful idea to set up a full blown counselling session. Quite often we have found that pupils are familiar with these. It doesn't matter if they are not - they can make intelligent guesses. On the board the teacher can write and draw the pupils' ideas for furnishing the counselling room and for creating its essential ambiance. This is likely to involve special attention to lighting, décor, seating, individual placements in the room, refreshments, the tone of the counsellor's voice and attitude. We could write a job description and a person specification for the position of counsellor.

Before the interview(s) can take place these discussions will be very important. The teacher or a pupil could take on the role of a trainee counsellor and the class could be experienced practitioners who are there to offer advice at this, the trainee's first solo session.

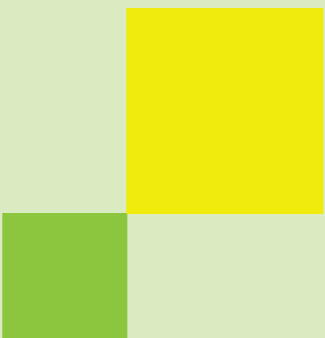
There could be a 'two way mirror' in the room behind which the watching class monitor the discussions. Occasionally they may 'ring' the counsellor and, as they answer a phone in the room, suggest alternative approaches and strategies to adopt over the questioning.



The teacher takes time to check with a pupil exactly what he means by an idea that he has suggested.

The class may well decide not to tell the interviewees that there are people watching behind the mirror. They will, naturally, have to justify their decisions.

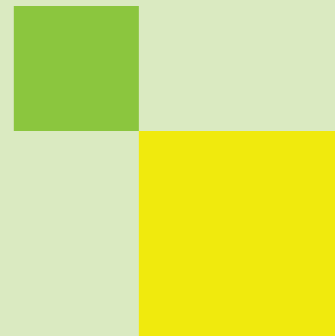
Out of this session the class develops a collective plan of action for the family. They might wish to ask the family to accentuate the positive and concentrate on better times. In which case they could use still image to create a three dimensional photo album of the good times they had enjoyed together. In past projects pupils have suggested ideas to the children so that they can take some of the domestic pressure from the parents. They have come up ways in which the dad could begin to demonstrate rather than just state his affection for his wife e.g. by not returning so late or so drunk after a night out with the lads or by buying flowers to express his regret for his thoughtlessness. The beauty of drama is that it allows us to rehearse, practise, test and refine these possibilities as we see what works best.



SUMMARY

In the course of the project during Summer 2007 we worked in 9 schools for at least four weeks. In each school we worked with two classes. The schools and numbers of pupils we worked with were as follows:

Barlows Primary	23 and 23
Sacred Heart	25 and 14
Leamington	23 and 22
Breckfield	22 and 21
St Hugh's	26 and 17
Blueberry Park	22 and 23
Phoenix	20 and 20
Walton St Mary C.E.	30 and 32
St Nicholas	26 and 24



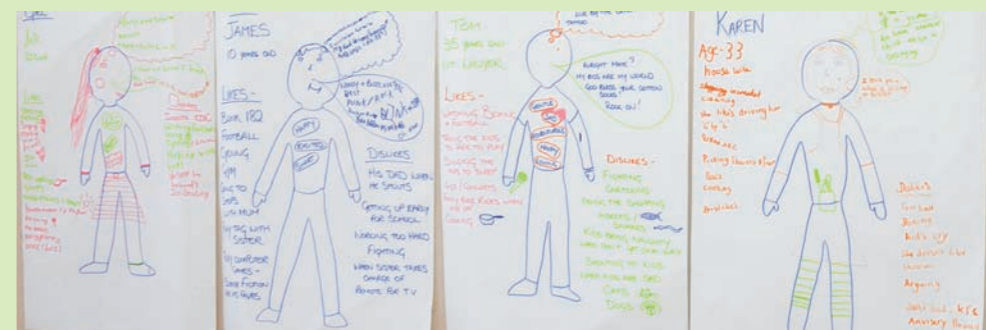
This makes a total of 413 pupils and over 20 teachers who were involved in the project.

In several schools, teachers have followed up the drama work with other activities. This has included writing diaries, posters, poems and plays. Where teachers build on the dramatic episodes, the impact of the project both in terms of pupils' learning and teacher confidence is particularly significant.

Where this has happened most successfully, there has been a lead teacher who has been involved in the planning and delivery of the project from the outset. The actor/teachers have also tried to model a way of working where they, as facilitators, are involved in the pupils' story. So, where teachers have joined in the action, the pupils' response has been more positive. Where teachers watch from the side or mark books, pupils are less energised and enthusiastic.

We have used two teachers in the sessions so that, as one leads the other can watch and suggest interventions, reflections and new ideas. We have found this to be a useful way of honing and developing our teaching skills.

In essence, the VPE Project uses the pupils' ideas, interests and experiences to determine the path of the learning. The dozen strategies we have mentioned are a framework for the different chapters and passing points in the developing story. In the course of making dramatic narrative the pupils are exploring causes and consequences of and possible solutions to unacceptable behaviours.



The role on the wall sheets (8 role on the wall) can be added to and refined as the story develops. This exercise provides a springboard for writing and other aspects of literacy.

This is, however, not just a discrete project about violence; it is cross curricular. Detailed talk and discussion leads to writing and story making. Within the drama we cover characterisation, scene setting, dialogue, narrative and many other aspects of literacy and, of course, pschyce.

In helping someone else within the fiction of the drama to grasp what is going on, the children are able to reflect on their own situations and conflicts in relative safety. They can then bring that analysis and consideration into their lives and so make them richer, more fulfilled and more peaceful.

Epilogue

1 safeguarding

When working with pupils on this and other programmes, all adults must follow the Local Safeguarding Children Board and School's procedures, and refer concerns about a child's safety to the school's Child Protection Co-ordinator and/or manager as appropriate.

2 references / contacts

■ Kaye Gee	0151 233 3901
■ Chris Ball	0151 722 6601
■ Carl Cockram	07796 563 154
■ Rebecca Shiels	07811 673 868
■ NSPCC. Hargreaves Centre	08448 920 264
■ Liverpool Safeguarding Unit	0151 225 6207

Thanks to all the schools involved in the Violence Prevention in Education Project.