



For ten years Big Wide Talk has been developing a way of working with children and families to improve outcomes for all. The approach is encapsulated in Theatres of Learning that combine the self-directed exploration of children with shared reflection and deliberative dialogue. Theatres of Learning always include seminars for participants.

Big Wide Talk has worked with more than 30,000 children. Almost without exception these children have loved being in Theatres of Learning and been eager to reflect on their experience. This has been especially true for children in years 5 and 6 at the end of primary. Big Wide Talk is offering today's seminar as evidence that intervention to reignite children's desire to learn at this stage in their lives, that is, before they go to secondary, has huge potential.

Many teachers and other practitioners who take part are delighted to see how the freedom in Theatres of Learning brings out aspects of children's behaviour not previously seen. Both teachers and parents say things like 'I've never seen him concentrate like this before' or 'I've never seen her play with other children before' or, although this is unusual, 'I've never heard him speak before.' Taking part is revealing on many levels.

But it is film that brings the complexity and depth of the children's experience to centre stage and thereby the opportunity for lasting change in the way we relate to our children. Using the film for reflection brings a new dimension to professional development, to the pleasures of parenting and to the excitement of learning.

We have created a film portal on our website www.bigwidetalk.org to enable the public but especially children, their families and teachers who have taken part in Theatres of Learning to revisit their experience and share it more widely. Schools across the country are signing up from places as far apart as Porthleven in Cornwall to Morecambe in Lancashire.

Big Wide Talk has an archive of film covering children's experience in a variety of Theatres of learning in very different parts of the country. See www.bigwidetalk.org for more detail. There are some 38,000 film clips or extracts in this ever-growing archive. It is a unique account of children's experience in these settings since 2001. Big Wide Talk is seeking partners to make this archive available; to the public in the places where the Theatres took place, to researchers and to professionals from all disciplines who need to understand children and communicate with them.

Theatres of Learning work best and are most cost effective when several schools preferably 10-15 take part offering the experience from start to finish to as many as 3,000 children, their families, their schools and the practitioners who work with them. With a flexible ethos schools can weave the children's priorities for learning into lesson planning, maintaining and growing the engagement achieved in the Theatre of learning as Avonmouth have done. But other practitioners have seen the benefits of Theatres of Learning. Speech therapists for instance have been active participants observing children's communication at first hand in unforced contexts. Others have marvelled at the way climbing expeditions and the use of the Perspex climbing wall shines a light on the nature of 'informed consent' and the approaches to communication that create the conditions in which this basic right can be secured.

For schools and communities confronting multiple disadvantage Theatres of Learning engage children and parents on the edge of exclusion but they work for all children and everyone can take part. That is their power.



Juicing at 'Our Bristol Children', November 2010.