

# Evaluation of the Teachers Telling Tales (T3) Project

Commissioned by the Verbal Arts Centre



*Draft Report*

July 2<sup>nd</sup> 2007

**The present draft report has been prepared by Channel Research**

**Please address all communications concerning the offer to:**

**Ms Garance Manguin, Project Manager**

**19, Rue de l'Église Saint Etienne  
1380 Ohain  
Belgium**

**[manguin@channelresearch.com](mailto:manguin@channelresearch.com)**

**Tel: 00 32 2 633 6529**

**Fax: 00 32 2 633 3092**

**channelresearch**

19 Rue de l'Église St. Etienne 1380 Ohain Belgium  
Tel +32 2 633 65 29 Fax +32 2 633 30 92  
www.channelresearch.com info@channelresearch.com  
VAT No 864 560 703

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>EVALUATION METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>7</b>
	2.1 <i>Objectives.....</i>	7
	2.2 <i>Method.....</i>	7
	2.3 <i>Limitations of the methodology.....</i>	8
<b>3</b>	<b>FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
	3.1 <i>Questionnaires.....</i>	9
	3.2 <i>Focus Group Responses.....</i>	17
	3.3 <i>Interviews.....</i>	18
	3.4 <i>Watching a teacher telling stories.....</i>	19
<b>4</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>APPENDIX:.....</b>	<b>23</b>
	6.1 <i>Appendix I.....</i>	23
	6.2 <i>Appendix II.....</i>	27

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This evaluation was carried out in April 2007 in order to assess the overall approach of the delivery of the T3 Master Classes using the framework of the ‘Teachers Telling Tales (T3)’ programme implemented by the Verbal Arts Centre of Derry/Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

The T3 programme targets teachers undergoing training, newly qualified teachers and experienced teaching staff to tell stories and use storytelling in their teaching practice to deliver the curriculum. The Master Classes were divided up into four, day-long sessions, each delivered in both Derry/Londonderry and Belfast aimed at teachers from primary schools all over Northern Ireland, between February and May 2007.

The four Master Classes were taught by different teachers; each of them with expertise in one of the following issues:

- Thinking Skills & Using Stories in the Classroom
- Numeracy
- Literacy & Creating Your Own Stories
- Storytelling and Citizenship

Through the delivery of the T3 Master Classes, the Verbal Arts Centre (VAC), wanted teachers to achieve the following aims of the programme:

- To become proficient at telling stories,
- To use storytelling as a teaching tool,
- To incorporate storytelling into their curriculum and methodology, *as well as “passing the skills on to their students”*.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the project was that T3 would provide teachers with *“strategies for responding to storyteller and writer residencies ..., developing more creative and effective follow up activities linking the experience effectively to the curriculum and learning”*<sup>2</sup>

By developing a program such as T3, the Verbal Arts Centre aimed to develop the storytelling skills of teachers and provide sustainable tools to tell stories in an appropriate classroom context. In the past there had been previous experiences of Teacher Training Institutions in Northern Ireland delivering some aspect of storytelling training to teachers but with limited time and expertise and hence little sustainability and continuation once the inputs had finished: *“storytellers and writer residencies schools run previously by VAC and other agencies have been very successful(...however, education adviser and senior management report that much of the creative practices and methodologies teachers pick up from artists in residence are not sustained by the teachers after the artist leaves.”*<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Grant Application to Esmée Fairbairn Foundation from the Verbal Arts Centre.

<sup>2</sup> Idem.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

By asking academics<sup>4</sup>, rather than storytellers, to teach teachers through Master Classes, the VAC aimed at developing storytelling as a tool that would become an integral part of teachers' practice.

## 2 EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Objectives

The Verbal Arts Centre required an analysis of the **quality** and the **effectiveness** of the project in supporting teachers using storytelling in the classroom. More precisely, the evaluators were asked to assess how the teachers implemented the resources after their initial period of Master Class input.

### 2.2 Method

In order to carry out the evaluation, the team went to Derry and Belfast to attend the third T3 session, as well as to watch one of the teachers using storytelling in her classroom.

Before coming to Northern Ireland, the team had prepared anonymous closed and open answered **questionnaires**<sup>5</sup> that were subsequently distributed to the participants of the Master Classes. These questionnaires referred to the following areas of the T3 programme delivery:

- the quality of the training experience (quality)
- the usefulness of the approach being proposed in the training (effectiveness)
- their prior knowledge of storytelling (effectiveness)
- their confidence in using storytelling (effectiveness)
- finally, there were six open questions about storytelling and their experience of it (effectiveness)

Besides these questionnaires, the evaluators have worked with a **focus group** method, asking teachers to answer the following three opened answers questions:

- Why did you decide to attend these sessions?
- What were your expectations for these sessions (were they met)? (effectiveness)
- How are you using storytelling in your school at the moment (and has anything changed in your approach since these classes)? (effectiveness)

The teachers wrote their answers on three different coloured post it papers and placed them on the appropriate flip chart response sheets before and during their lunch break.

---

<sup>4</sup> Each facilitator distributed his/her own material to the participants.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix I.

Finally, the evaluators conducted several **interviews** individually and in pairs with volunteers from the group at the end of each of the sessions in Derry/Londonderry and Belfast. During these interviews, teachers were asked questions along the lines of the questionnaires but were provided with an opportunity to provide a more in-depth and qualitative response. Small group interviews such as these were chosen as a supportive methodology to enable the participants to feel more comfortable and to use each other's experiences as a means of initiating a broader discussion.

Using these three methods of questioning enabled the evaluation team to work with three complementary approaches. In the questionnaires both open questions aimed at encouraging qualitative information with more detail and explanation, and closed questions which enabled the evaluators to have a quantitative approach which can provide a more uniformed analysis of responses .

The interviews were used as a method of exploring further issues that had been raised in the questionnaires and enabled the evaluators to clarify some of the different contexts and experiences of the respondents. This enabled the evaluation team to contextualise the information being received and allowed the interviews to be built on broad information.

The second part of the evaluation consisted of watching one of the teachers who had attended the Derry Master Classes and who had volunteered to have an evaluator come into her classroom. The teacher had been previously selected by the Verbal Arts Centre and had a good profile within the T3 group since she had attended all the Master Classes in Derry.

This part of the evaluation was deemed important to assess the extent to which teachers are actually implementing the methods taught by T3 facilitators. One teacher as a sample was too small to draw overall conclusions about the use of the methods being made by all the participants; however it provided a clear picture of what was possible given a supportive school environment and an enthusiastic and committed staff member.

### **2.3 Limitations of the methodology**

This section raises the issue of the limits of the methodology used for the evaluation. Given the resources the team has only been able to carry out one observation in a school, although constant contact was maintained with the project throughout the evaluation process.

Apart from the questionnaires and focus groups, the evaluators had to use a convenience sampling of a number of participants in order to conduct interviews, which meant that not all the teachers have been questioned.

The evaluation team has not been able either to watch more than one teacher telling stories in a classroom because of the time constraint and also that some teachers may feel more confident implementing this methodology after completion of all the storytelling modules.

However, in order to carry out the evaluation and to be able to draw some general conclusions, the evaluation team has used all the information it gathered, without making any distinction between the information coming from the entire group or only from some of the participants.

In order to have a better sense of the overall impact in terms of effectiveness the Master Classes have had, it would be relevant to undertake another assessment in several months or in one year to watch more teachers using storytelling with their pupils. At this stage, participants will have had the time to implement or refute the methods they have been taught and to assist in identifying any longer term possible weaknesses of T3. This report is therefore a final report of the implementation of the T3 Master Class programme but will remain more of an interim report on the overall impact of the project, without any follow on observations and interviews.

### **3 FINDINGS**

#### **3.1 Questionnaires**

The questionnaires that were handed out to the participants were divided into five different sections relating to:

- the quality of the training,
- the usefulness of the approach proposed in the training,
- the prior knowledge of storytelling,
- the confidence in using storytelling,
- storytelling.

Apart from the last section, questions had to be answered through a ranking process. Each participant could answer the question by ticking the mark s/he wanted to give. For each series of questions we have added up the totals of answers for the rankings 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, five being the best mark, in order to see which answers got the maximum for each question.

### 3.1.1 Quantitative Responses

#### Quality of the training

#### **Trainer / facilitator of staff training**

	Number of responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
Introduction to process	0	1	5	6	10
Use of Energisers/ Games/ Icebreakers	0	2	3	10	7
Communication skills	0	0	0	4	18
Ability to encourage interaction			1	5	16
Listening skills				6	16
Ability to involve all participants				7	15
Knowledge of subject/ theme				3	19
Ability to clarify points				6	15
Ability to keep group focused				4	18
Confidence				2	20
Ability to motivate group				5	17
Overall planning			1	6	15
Time management			3	7	12
Closure			2	7	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>211</b>

It can be seen from the responses that overall there was a high level of satisfaction in the design and delivery of the training being provided. This would be important to acknowledge since most participants in this programme will be relaying the content of what they learnt and the quality of their training back to their teaching colleagues. Future T3 programmes will also be built on the reputation of this course.

## Organisation and format of training

	Number of responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
Organisation and design			3	13	6
Format and presentation of information			2	10	10
Opportunities for participation			2	8	12
Mix of activities			3	10	9
Degree to which own experience and knowledge were drawn on			4	8	10
The quality of the venue, facilities, food		1	4	7	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>57</b>

This section asked respondents to describe the comfort of the training including how valued they felt themselves throughout this process. We can see from the figures that there was a very high degree of satisfaction from the participants, which is important because if in training sessions they feel they were put down or ridiculed they will associate this approach with the topic and will be unwilling to put their own colleagues through that process or their own students.

## Usefulness of the approach proposed in the training

### Rating of value of approach

	Number of responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
The theoretical approach being proposed			3	14	5
The rationale for using storytelling as a methodology			1	10	11
The skills needed to implement this approach			3	12	7
Your own understanding of storytelling			4	13	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>28</b>

In this section respondents marked a high level of satisfaction relating to how well they understand the rationale behind using this approach. If teachers have a thorough understanding of why a subject is important then they can more easily convey this to colleagues, put forward appropriate arguments for resource allocation / time and prioritise the use of this methodology in the current school curriculum.

### Confidence in implementing the approach

	Number of responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
The theoretical approach being proposed			8	11	3
The rationale for storytelling			6	12	4
The skills needed to implement this approach			10	10	2
Your own understanding of storytelling			5	14	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>12</b>

In this section teachers were asked to describe their level of confidence in carrying out these activities themselves. A high level of confidence such as that shown above indicates there is a high possibility of teachers carrying on the tasks themselves once training has finished, whereas a lower level of confidence would have indicated that more ongoing support would have been needed or a higher risk of the tasks would have not been continued once the support of the Master Classes was withdrawn.

### Prior knowledge of storytelling

Rating of value of approach	Number of responses				
	1	2	3	4	5
Your prior knowledge of using storytelling methodologies yourself		5	10	7	
Your prior experience of using storytelling methodologies either in school or other community / youth groups	3	4	7	8	
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>15</b>	

This section provided a context to the experience level of the participants and therefore the existing skill level before this training started. We can see there was a mix of experience although most respondents have shown a willingness to try out this methodology prior to the training. This indicates that this programme is building on some form of foundation and therefore is more likely to be sustainable in the future.

### Confidence in using storytelling

Rating of value of approach	Number of responses <sup>6</sup>				
	1	2	3	4	5
Your confidence to try this out in your own school before T3	1	5	9	7	
Your confidence to try this out in your own school after T3			1	18	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3</b>

This section refers directly to the immediate impact of the course on the confidence of participants and shows an increase in confidence directly attributable to the course.

<sup>6</sup> 1 = none at all    2 = insufficient    3 = somewhat    4 = reasonable    5 = very high

### 3.1.2 Qualitative Responses

The last section of the questionnaire requested participants to answer open questions about storytelling.

#### Overall Experience

For the first question, *“Please comment on your overall experience of this training”*, answers were very positive. Some words came up recurrently such as enjoyable, useful, practical, creativity, enlightening, and enthusiasm. It seems teachers have found their experience relevant using positive qualifying that indicates their enthusiasm regarding Master Classes.

#### Class Themes

The following question relates to the themes used for each Master Class: Thinking Skills and Using Stories in the Classroom; Numeracy; Literacy and Creating Your Own Stories.

Regarding the first session, **Thinking Skills and Using Stories in the Classroom**, the following kind of sentences have been written: *“excellent for helping children to explore questions about life”* ... *“was extremely useful and gave practical tools”*; *“it helps to encourage decision making and children ownership”*; *“It is an opportunity to think deeper”*. Generally speaking, comments focussed on how practical and useful Robert Fisher’s class was.

Opinions about **Numeracy** were much more mixed. While some of the participants said it was useful, other comments were harsher. One could find sentences such as *“It was not relevant- you need to understand the maths to make sense of the story”*; *“Questionable- not convinced”*; *“Not very useful”*; *“Not so sure- stories told were very complicated & hard to remember”*.

About **Literacy& Creating Your Own Stories**, teachers expressed great enthusiasm: *“It gave great ideas for developing skills and language”*; *“Gave children confidence”*; *“it helped to develop language and promoted oral expression”*; *“it is valuable for children who are reluctant writers”*; *“it was very innovative”*.

One can note the facilitator’s enthusiasm has particularly been well perceived by the participants who were keen on the way she taught the class. Moreover, teachers have particularly been struck by her creativity and the innovation of her methods.

As regards the last session, **Storytelling and Citizenship**, appraisals from teachers were very positive as well. Most of them thought storytelling is a very useful means to teach pupils about issues related to citizenship, which might be in certain circumstances a sensitive matter to deal with. One could find in the questionnaires a couple of comments such as: *“Vital to maintain a safety net for discussion of issues”*; *“invaluable starting point for discussions”*; *“I’m very convinced of the usefulness of the storytelling in the promotion of storytelling in schools”*; *“Storytelling is so important when dealing with citizenship, all children, especially those with special needs, can respond to story.”*

When one analyses the answers, a clear distinction between the Master Class 1, 3 and 4 and the Master Class number 2 can be made. In the judgment of practically all,

sessions one and three were much more relevant than session two. Whereas, most of the participants have hardly answered the question about the Numeracy session, all of them have expressed their keen interest on the two others.

During face-to-face interviews, this issue has been raised as well and most of the teachers explain this negative impression by the fact that Numeracy might not be as appropriate to storytelling as the others. Moreover, it seems the facilitator was perceived as being less effective in the delivery of the course content than the two other Master Class tutors.

### **Influencing Others**

The third question of the questionnaire asked about the ways in which participants will pass on the methods they have learned during T3 to their colleagues. This question is a strong indicator as to the way teachers intend to implement T3 tools, not only for themselves but also within the framework of their own school.

Most of the teachers answered they would disseminate the information through informal channels. Participants want to share what they learned by “*explaining ideas given – letting other teachers participate in some of the activities used during the Master Class*”, “*through discussions and workshops*”, “*via staff meetings*”, “*disseminating the materiel via the web or intranet*” “*doing presentations to the staff members*” “*recommending Robert Fisher’s book*”. However, one of the teachers who answered the questionnaire said he had been sent by his headmaster and will have to report formally to other teachers in his school on the Master Classes.

### **Future Use of Storytelling in Own School**

The fourth question asked teachers to state how they intended to use storytelling in their own school. There were various answers but most of the participants answered they would use some of the practical tools they have been taught during the Master Class such as the stories boxes, the emotions graphs or the object buzz. Some of the participants said they would use storytelling more regularly in their activities as *a whole school approach through talking and listening* and to *become more enthusiastic and practical*.

### **Recommendations for Future training**

Question five was about possible recommendations participants would make in order to improve the approach to storytelling proposed in the training. Only six participants answered that question. The following suggestions have been made:

- Clear resources should be sent home, such as a list of stories with reminders suitable for age group.
- It would be useful to hand out at start of course the notes of PowerPoint slides with a space to write beside. (made twice)
- Keep the course very practical.
- Numeracy was not useful.
- Make more oral work until basic concepts of structure become consolidated.

### **Any Other Comments**

The very last section of the questionnaire asked teachers to add any other comments. All the comments were very positive and keen on the Master Class.

The questionnaire method was used by the evaluators in order to try to answer the two main questions of the evaluation: the issues of **quality** and **effectiveness** of the training.

Regarding the **quality**, the first two questionnaire grids show that most of the participants were satisfied with the facilitators with a majority of number five answers for every question in the first part. For the second part relating to the organisation of the training and its format, people's expectations seem to be fulfilled with a majority of number four and five answers.

About T3 **effectiveness**, the second part of the questionnaire enabled the consultants to see whether, compared to their prior knowledge of storytelling, participants felt the Master Classes approach was useful and if it has built up their confidence in storytelling. Again, overall the rating is good, maximums ranging from three to five.

The open answer section is fairly self evident, participants were very satisfied with the Master Classes and intend to use the tools they have been taught as well as to pass them on to their colleagues at school.

However it must be noted that it is impossible to guarantee at this stage if they will actually do so, hence the interest to conduct another evaluation in 7-9 months time in order to assess whether the content of the Master Class has been enough to ensure the sustainability of a schools based approach to storytelling or if it would be relevant to deliver a new session or provide other support mechanisms to the existing participants.

## 3.2 Focus Group Responses

As stated in the methodology section, focus groups were used with both groups comprising all the participants of the two Master Classes, in Derry and in Belfast. Just before and then during their lunch time, participants were asked to individually answer three questions written on a flip chart, and mark their responses on individual post it sheets.

The questions asked focussed on T3 effectiveness, asking participants why they had decided to attend the Master Classes, what were their expectations, have they been met, how do they use storytelling at school and have the Master Classes changed anything in their approach<sup>7</sup>.

### Course Expectations

Answers to the first and second questions, *why did you decide to attend these sessions?* and *what were your expectations?*, can be summarised in table form as follows:

Reasons/expectations	Number of answers
Because of participants' school position (head of library/literacy co-ordinator)	6
For personal interest	14
To find new ideas/ skills/ to enhance creativity at school	19
Asked to attend	7

It is equally interesting to note that teachers unanimously answered their expectations were largely met by sessions 1, 3 and 4 but not by session 2, which confirms conclusions drawn from the questionnaires.

### How Are You Using Storytelling at the Moment (and Will You Change Anything)?

The last question asked to the focus group was: *How are you using storytelling in your school at the moment (and has anything changed in your approaches since these classes)?* Most of the teachers were familiar with storytelling before joining the Master Classes, although some of them more than others.

Overall, the teachers reported that T3 enabled them to get new ideas in order to make their classes more creative and interactive. The idea that the Master Classes showed the teachers the way to give more space to pupils at schools comes up regularly among the teachers' answers. It seems there is a willingness to give priority to oral activities instead of writing tasks. Teachers want to further involve pupils in their own learning and become themselves more *"facilitators rather than director"*.

Another pattern in the participants' answers was in relation to Robert Fisher's book. It is important to recall that the evaluation took place during the third Master Class.

---

<sup>7</sup> Full answers to all the focus group answers can be found in Appendix II

At this stage, participants had not had the chance to integrate the third facilitator, Theresa Cremin's, material and had not yet attended the last Master Class. Which means evaluators cannot conclude if only Robert Fisher met success, but one can notice Robert Fisher has been able to pass on concrete and practical tools, which seem to have been widely used by teachers after they attended his session.

### 3.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted at the end of the two sessions in Derry/Londonderry and in Belfast with participants who volunteered to stay behind. The respondents were therefore entirely arbitrarily chosen. In Derry/Londonderry, the evaluators interviewed four participants in two pairs; while in Belfast, one evaluator interviewed one pair of teachers and another teacher on his/her own

The interviews were unstructured but directed along the lines of the questionnaire and took place as a discussion between the evaluator and participants. The latter were invited to share with the evaluator and each other their feelings and impressions regarding storytelling in general and the Master Class in particular.

Finally, the evaluators asked participants about their opinion of the Master Classes, the use they will make of the training and if there is a need for follow up support from the VAC.

As with the questionnaires and the focus groups, interviewees were enthusiastic and satisfied with the training. Most of them said they have learned more than expected. Again, they got very useful and practical ideas from sessions one and three and were keen on using them with their pupils. Some of the participants were asked by their principal to make a formal presentation of what they have learned during the training but most of them intended simply to pass on the information to other teachers by talking to them. Some of the participants were in fact head teachers and one school had both a head and another member of staff present at the training.

In relation to the follow up support, all of them said it would be useful, particularly via the Verbal Arts Center website. It would help to give "*a push up*" and it would be "*useful in terms of offering support resources and pointing out stories*" they could use. Another interviewee said it would give teachers the opportunity to "*come back, to share what they have been doing and what else they should be doing*".

It is important to mention that the VAC has already loaded material on its Website and is regularly updating it. However, an idea could be to have a forum on which teachers could chat about their experiences of storytelling and exchange some ideas.

Another suggestion made by a couple of interviewees is that the Master Classes could have adapted its content according to the class level of the participants. However, most of them realised that, so far, the structure and the logistic does not enable the VAC to split up participants in different classrooms according to their class level, even though it would be an option that might be taken into consideration if the Master Classes process becomes more important in the future.

The last very important comment that has been made by most of the interviewed participants is that the Master Classes fitted perfectly well with the Revised Northern

Ireland Primary Curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2. Indeed, the new curriculum is set out in six areas of learning, one of them being Language and Literacy (including talking and listening, reading and writing and opportunities to incorporate drama).

The whole curriculum intention is to “*develop children’s personal, interpersonal and learning skills and their ability to think both creatively and critically*”. Consequently, “*Children should be given opportunities to think creatively across a range of tasks*”.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, this training fitted perfectly well with the new recommendations made by the Department. The Master Classes allowed teachers to pick up new ideas and tools to put the creativity into practice through storytelling.

This combination of circumstances was highly appreciated by some of the participants for whom it is still difficult sometimes to see concretely how to entertain their pupils while teaching them efficiently.

This also means that the VAC could think of potentially further develop storytelling Master Classes presenting it as a concrete tool for teachers in the framework of the Revised Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum; which could, in the long run, make the obtaining of grants easier.

### **3.4 Watching a teacher telling stories**

The last part of the evaluation consisted of watching one of the Derry /Londonderry participants teaching her class. As previously mentioned, that participant had attended every session since the start of the Master Classes and had shown a particular enthusiasm toward the programme, which was one of the primary reasons why the VAC had selected her as a volunteer for the evaluation.

Watching her while she was teaching was relevant in the framework of this evaluation in that it enabled the evaluators to assess how a participating teacher actually used the tools she had been taught during T3. This was particularly relevant in relation to one of the objectives of the evaluation which was to assess the effectiveness of the project in relation to supporting teachers using storytelling in the classroom.

However, it is presumptuous to draw overall conclusions from only one observation. The value of what has been watched is somewhat limited given that the evaluation took place before the completion of T3; consequently, the teacher had not had time to fully assimilate the content of the Master Classes.

The teacher we watched had been using storytelling in her class previously, but since she has attended T3, she has particularly been using Robert Fisher’s method. The programme for that year was related to ancient Greek civilization. She was using storytelling in order to help children to develop thinking around this topic and to creatively rather than passively assimilate the content.

---

<sup>8</sup> The Revised Northern Ireland Primary Curriculum Key Stages 1 & 2

The method she used consisted of telling a story every day, bit by bit, and then asking her pupils questions related to what had been told to them.

The day before we came in to watch her, she had told a story to her pupils. When we came, she asked one of the children to tell the class the story. When the boy finished, the teacher asked children to do, in pairs, a series of exercises that made them think around the story.

We could clearly see the teacher was totally comfortable using Robert Fisher's methods and her pupils were keen on participating in the exercise. According to her, her pupils were delighted she attended the Master Classes given she was using more and more storytelling in class, which they apparently enjoyed.

We also noticed that pupils were concentrating and very motivated. They had memorised every bit of the story, apparently without any particular effort. This would indicate that storytelling is an effective teaching tool and that it helps to get children involved in the learning process.

One can conclude from that observation that the teacher had thoroughly integrated aspects of the training, which indicates the methods have been taught effectively by the facilitators and that teachers were able to implement the tools.

## **4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section has pulled together many of the comments made throughout this report and highlighted them here in the form of a series of recommendations.

1. The Master Class course has a limited time and resource allocation and therefore if this course is to be repeated it would be important that the appropriate participants are targeted for this training. This evaluation highlighted that many of the participants had some, if only a little, prior knowledge or experience of storytelling before attending T3. This prior knowledge has embedded the learning of T3 quickly and offers a more sustainable approach than starting from scratch. This approach would need to be followed for other courses and may require some initial assessment or application process to ensure this.
2. The timing of this programme coincided with the revision of Primary School teaching methodologies in Northern Ireland, which meant that many teachers saw the relevance of this approach in a more regional context than might otherwise have been realised. However having established the links to the new curriculum approach this would be an opportune time for the VAC to seek support and resources to develop the course and run it again by presenting an application based on the new Primary School Curriculum.
3. Several teachers mentioned the desire for an ongoing support resource. This would obviously have financial implications and at this stage of the programme it may not be clear exactly what kind of information would be required and in what other format than the Website.

4. The issue of ongoing training, either to new participants or an advanced version of training, possibly when two groups have done this course, has also been raised as part of the ongoing support needs. Advanced and ongoing training to new participants would also contribute to the sustainability of the storytelling approach rather than constantly bringing in new teachers.
5. It has been mentioned several times during the course of this evaluation that it would be useful to carry out ongoing evaluation visits to teachers that have just completed this course. Feedback from future visits should also be targeted to ensure that information in relation to T3 is collected but also that information is also collected in areas such as: developments in other areas of curriculum support; changes in school administration; the capacity to train other teachers using internal school mechanisms; monitoring head teachers' responses and resource allocation being provided for this approach.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the two main evaluation aims, looking at the quality and the effectiveness of the training in terms of the implementation of the methods, this report can conclude that, at the stage of the evaluation, the aims have been reached by the VAC.

With specific reference to quality: the questionnaire results are positive, as illustrated through grids one and two, about the facilitation and the organisation of the training, which got a high level of number five answers.

Moreover, during the interviews, participants were asked about the quality of the Master Classes in terms of venue, food, organisation, etc., and all of them unanimously answered it was very well organised though very few of them had previously attended other similar Master Classes and therefore had few elements of comparison.

In relation to the effectiveness of the training: the results of all the data collection methods including the questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and the teacher watching, this report concludes that to date there is a high level of effectiveness and relevance to the training.

The quantitative questionnaire answers show an average of answers scoring three and four, which is slightly weaker than the quality section, probably because it was less easy for the participants to rank their feelings or their impressions about those questions. They might have wanted to qualify their answers and preferred not to give the maximum.

However, the open questions section of the questionnaire provided very positive answers and the use of words positively connoted confirms this. The only negative point is in relation to the questionable relevance or difficulty in implementing storytelling and numeracy.

Regarding the dissemination of the training content as well as its implementation by the participants, results are promising since teachers were keen on passing the information on to their colleagues as well as implementing the methods in the

framework of their school's curriculum, though it is still too early to have tangible proof that it has actually happened.

Through the focus group responses it is possible to see that participants' expectations were largely fulfilled by the Master Classes. Most of them got new and practical ideas that will enable them to increase creativity at school. One can deduce from the given answers that teachers plan to implement these ideas and methods in their classes but, again, we have not yet had the possibility to see if they actually do so.

As regards the interviews, the two relevant points that should be raised are the follow up support issue as well as the relation between the curriculum and the Master Classes. One can notice there is a real demand from participants for a follow up support from the Verbal Arts Centre. This should be taken into consideration if the VAC does want to consolidate the knowledge of the Master Classes and wants to make sure participants actually implement what they have been taught.

The curriculum issue is also a strong asset for the VAC if it wants to run the same kind of Master Classes in long term. By talking with teachers the evaluators could feel that the Master Classes had triggered something important. There is a strong will to change the way of teaching and the mentality. Teachers do want to be more creative and are looking for tools and methods to do so. In that context, T3 has been very well received by the teachers eager for new practical and creative ideas.

Finally, watching the teacher using storytelling in her class was probably the most relevant part of the evaluation in order to assess the effectiveness of the Master Classes. We could see in practice to what extent the teacher was able actually to implement the storytelling method and, especially, to see how comfortable she felt doing so. Here also, the result was very positive, for her in the way she was teaching her pupils as much as for her pupils who seemed to be very keen on storytelling. Nevertheless it will be essential that another evaluation assess a larger sample of teachers in order to evaluate the real impact of the Master Classes.

One can conclude that T3 training has reached its goals from a technical point of view by delivering a well conceived and well organised series of Master Classes. But it also had a global impact on the way teachers are perceiving teaching. Indeed, we are deeply convinced it has triggered the desire for some of the participants to bring creativity in their way of teaching and this fits very well with new curriculum demands.

If it is still too early to conclude if T3 has actually reached its overall goal, which is making storytelling a tool that is an integral part of teachers' practice, we can already state it has at least triggered the will for most of the teachers to do so. Then, the next step will be to see if teachers have been able to realise this in their own school environment.

## 6 APPENDIX:

### 6.1 Appendix I

Anonymous closed and opened answers questionnaire:

## Evaluation Questionnaire

### Verbal Arts Centre

### T3 Evaluation

Please complete this questionnaire, as your feedback will help to improve the training process

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of the Facilitator: \_\_\_\_\_

## Quality of the training experience

This part of the evaluation is to obtain feedback on the training process.

1 = poor    2 = fair    3 = good    4 = very good    5 = excellent

Trainer / facilitator of staff training	Score				
Introduction to process	1	2	3	4	5
Use of Energisers/Games/Icebreakers	1	2	3	4	5
Communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to encourage interaction	1	2	3	4	5
Listening skills	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to involve all participants	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of subject/theme	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to clarify points	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to keep group focused	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to motivate group	1	2	3	4	5
Overall planning	1	2	3	4	5
Time management	1	2	3	4	5
Closure	1	2	3	4	5

1 = poor    2 = fair    3 = good    4 = very good    5 = excellent

Organisation and format of training	Score				
Organisation and design	1	2	3	4	5
Format and presentation of information	1	2	3	4	5
Opportunities for participation	1	2	3	4	5
Mix of activities	1	2	3	4	5
Degree to which own experience and knowledge were drawn on	1	2	3	4	5
The quality of the venue, facilities, food	1	2	3	4	5

## Usefulness of the approach being proposed in the training

This part of the evaluation is to ascertain a) to what extent you feel the approach being proposed in this training course is appropriate and useful for you to work with your students and b) to what extent you feel competent to implement this approach in your school. Only fill in the ratings in b) if you feel the approach has some value.

a) *Please rate the value or usefulness of the following elements to your work.*

1 = of no use    2 = not very useful    3 = fairly useful    4 = very useful    5 = extremely useful

Rating of value of approach	Score				
The theoretical approach being proposed	1	2	3	4	5
The rationale for using storytelling as a methodology	1	2	3	4	5
The skills needed to implement this approach	1	2	3	4	5
Your own understanding of storytelling	1	2	3	4	5

b) *Please rate your sense of the level of your competence in implementing the approach now that you have completed the training, in particular your confidence to train other teachers in your school.*

1 = not at all    2 = insufficient    3 = somewhat    4 = reasonable    5 = very high

Rating of your confidence in implementing the approach	Score				
The theoretical approach being proposed	1	2	3	4	5
The rationale for storytelling	1	2	3	4	5
The skills needed to implement this approach	1	2	3	4	5
Your own understanding of storytelling	1	2	3	4	5

## Prior Knowledge of Storytelling

This part of the evaluation is to ascertain the level of skill or experience that you might have had before you entered this training.

a) *Please rate the value or usefulness of the following elements to your work.*

1 = none at all    2 = insufficient    3 = somewhat    4 = reasonable    5 = very high

Rating of value of approach	Score				
Your prior knowledge of using storytelling methodologies yourself	1	2	3	4	5
Your prior experience of using storytelling methodologies either in school or other community / youth groups	1	2	3	4	5

## Confidence in using Storytelling

This part of the evaluation is to ascertain the level of confidence that you might have had before you entered this training and after completion.

a) *Please rate the value or usefulness of the following elements to your work.*

1 = none at all    2 = insufficient    3 = somewhat    4 = reasonable    5 = very high

Rating of value of approach	Score				
Your confidence to try this out in your own school before T3	1	2	3	4	5
Your confidence to try this out in your own school after T3	1	2	3	4	5

## Storytelling

<b>Please comment on your overall experience of this training.</b>

---

**How useful do you think storytelling is for each of the following subject areas;**

Thinking Skills and Using Stories in the Classroom

Numeracy

Literacy & Creating Your Own Stories

Storytelling and Citizenship

**Please recommend any improvements that could be made to the approach to storytelling being proposed in this training course.**

**What areas (if any) would you welcome further training in?**

**How are you intending to use the storytelling in your own school**

**Any other comments? (please use another sheet if needed)**

## 6.2 Appendix II

### Focus groups answers:

Focus Group Session – Derry

24<sup>th</sup> April 2007

#### *Why did you decide to attend these sessions?*

- As head of library in school I was sent
- As an escape from administration! Passionate about literacy and storytelling – take it back to school
- Want to concentrate on talking and listening across whole school
- Basically through a love of literature, creativity and storytelling
- As literacy coordinator in school – and it sounded interesting
- I became interested in using storytelling through visits of storytellers to my school.
- Started a journey of change – thought this sounded what I might need and use.
- I thought new ideas would be useful for improving practice
- Asked to come by our Principal – have an interest in storytelling in classroom
- Interested in storytelling and asked to come
- Asked by Principal – I felt it would be useful – Helped develop own storytelling + make me more aware of users
- Asked by Principal – felt I must be either pretty good and he wants to develop ability or really poor and I need help!
- ‘Proper’ Storytelling + talking and listening need more focus.
- Asked to attend + interested in storytelling as learning experience.

#### *What were your expectations for these sessions (were they met)?*

- Session 1 and session 3 were excellent I really got a lot of new ideas.
- For new ideas, to extend my skills and approaches to storytelling. To enrich the curriculum back at school.
- To be enabled and enthused and firing to go.
- To learn new skills which I can use in my classroom to pass onto my children.
- Session 1 more than met expectations stimulating and motivating, session 3 proving worthwhile in extending repertoire for storytelling activities.
- I expected to learn how to use storytelling more effectively, get more ideas – session 1 yes, session 2 no, session 3 yes.
- To get ideas on how to use storytelling more effectively within the classroom.
- First session was better than expected. Hoping for useful ideas and got quite a few.
- To get practical ideas and resources to aid storytelling in our school.
- I hope to improve my storytelling, to learn new strategies and obtain resources.
- Stimulation and refreshment – yes expectations were met but ‘freedom’ at school is limited to practice.
- To get resources and to get ideas for staff and namely myself.
- Ideas for developing throughout school. Sessions 1 and 3 very useful, session 2 disaster after having expectations raised after session 1.

- To gain ideas to develop storytelling with children, expectations met (only in attendance on Day 3).

***How are you using storytelling in your school at the moment (and has anything changed in your approach since these classes)?***

- Storyteller used in creative arts project last year to help develop oral language. Storyteller used to help develop writing – want to develop teachers as storyteller to help raise literacy standards.
- Storytelling, thinking skills – teacher/child, child/child interaction is so important now.
- Yes I am using storytelling but will use today's strategies in future sessions – and allow children to 'pass'.
- Have given talk to staff + they used some ideas from course. Have a storytelling day in the school, have done storytelling with own class.
- Allowing more time to fully engage with my pupils! Exploring text more! – Presentation to whole staff – others attempting what I have learned.
- Storytelling has become more important to me, I would like to improve the skills of other staff in this area.
- We are taking time to enjoy and explore stories and to extend children's thinking – less driven by the writing task.
- More talking and listening, being child- led, questioning by children, teacher as a facilitator rather than director.
- Not as much as I would like because of the transfer test. I would do a lot more after Christmas next year; most of my current storytelling would be based on personal stories.
- Presenting *listen and discuss* stories with class – children love hearing traditional stories and retelling them to each other. I don't do enough of this because of pressure within myself to do more academic work.
- I'm using stories more and making up my own to teach different aspects e.g. maths. I tell the staff all that we cover here at staff meetings.
- Not done adequately and certainly not in this 'come alive' way.
- To give more time to storytelling let the children become more involved in telling stories.
- Have begun to use Robert Fisher's ideas in my own planning. I'm giving more emphasis and time to storytelling.
- Would love the whole staff to participate in these sessions e.g. Baker days.
- Using storytelling in a more creative way trying to get away from the more mechanical approaches to literacy.
- First session I teach P[primary]1 and enjoy capturing the children orally as opposed to reading a book. Try to do so once a week.

## Focus Group Session – Belfast

25<sup>th</sup> of April

### ***Why did you decide to attend these sessions?***

- Our school focus this year is talking & listening and language development so I thought it would give me ideas & a personal interest in literacy, stories and writing and I'm the literacy coordinator.
- Extension of personal skills to utilise in the class room and interest in language/ visual arts/ performance.
- English is my degree subject, have studied a number of modules towards my MA in education on reading and early years & have found this course most useful. Has inspired me to look at aspect of storytelling for my dissertation.
- A literacy coordinator & wanted to develop my ideas in story writing & how we can link our oral session to written session.
- The school focus is talking and listening & grammar development.
- Strategies use & materials to use for stimulus and starters & I have enjoyed and learned a lot from the course & will use ideas.
- I was asked by the principal if I would be interested.
- Wanted to make stories more alive and responses more creative. Fed up with killing stories (by) teaching phonics, grammar, syntax!
- As literacy coordinator I thought it would be suitable to inform my T & L policy which I will be working on next year.
- To learn about storytelling & to try to inspire me with outset revised curriculum.
- Been asked to attend by the principal & I'm the literacy coordinator.
- Principal asked me to go.
- Had been part of the original storytelling pilot & wanted to know more.
- To learn more about the art of storytelling.
- To develop creativity & thinking skills, relevance to revised curriculum & Literacy team member in school

### ***What were your expectations for these sessions (were they met)?***

- To learn how to develop storytelling skills in the classroom – yes.
- For ideas to use in class because I love listening to stories and I want to improve my own storytelling.
- Practical & usable activities to use in class.
- To develop my ideas/strategies in story writing.
- Give ideas on how to develop creativity /thinking through storytelling – yes.
- To learn more about story telling. Get ideas for practical use in classroom. Yes they were met.
- I expected to build up a bank of stories & activities that I can use with my class- some sessions have been great for this and some not as effective.
- Given experience of storytelling activities & ideas on how to include, to develop storytelling in the classroom & opportunity to share idea/activities.
- Expected to gain practical advice on how to manage storytelling & expectations more than met.

- Gaining a range of ways to tell stories & getting stories to tell – yes.
- Didn't know what to expect- but I've enjoyed the first & third sessions – practical ideas for the classroom.
- To be inspired to do something different to enhance children's experience in my classroom.
- To get some new ideas for responding to text.
- Have only been to two, 1 & 3. Absolutely fantastic and immensely practical & more of these needed I think helped my .... skills.
- Learning/developing comprehensive, practising new skills to inspire children in classroom – some sessions met expectations.

***How are you using storytelling in your school at the moment (and has anything changed in your approach since these classes?)***

- We use storytelling in all areas of the curriculum throughout the school. Older pupils create material for (class?); younger pupils will be a bit more adventurous
- We've invited a storyteller in & we're using drama to promote stories and language development . I've tried some Robert Fisher's ideas and it has helped me to deepen children's awareness of the themes in stories and to make them feel they can ask and answer 'big' question.
- Have had a storyteller visit at the school but I haven't really developed it in the classroom; used traditional stories to continue on an adventure but only very limited.
- Have used past stories from the courses, retold them and done accompanying activities e.g. : willow plate, numeracy shape story, story platter.
- Have used willow pattern idea and it worked really well & have requisitioned Robert Fisher's books.
- Trying to incorporate some of the ideas from each session in my own class.
- More child led- letting them take control.
- More talking partners will be used & I won't force pupils to participate.
- 1st session – plan to do less written work – more storytelling.
- I will do less writing.
- From variety of books will attempt to ad lib more & become more creative and enthusiastic.
- Have used Fisher's ideas – bought his book – especially liked the one on storytelling.
- Focused on encouraging parents to read to children at home. Modelling storytelling for parents.
- Storytelling relates more to thematic areas. Personal storytelling features less although opportunities have come to arise & enthusiastic approach.

