

## A Community Storytelling Learning Project

Lenny Alsop Storyteller

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This is a cross-generational community venture, ideally organized around a single school or selection of schools. It is a language and arts based project that utilises a range of original participative storytelling and performance-based activities to release creative learning potential, and culminates in a *grand public event* consisting of performances, installations and exhibitions.

I have been delivering it within education and municipal communities throughout the UK for the past twenty years, and have taught its principles to professionals, members of the public and students of all ages.

It works best when based within an educational setting because a school is an accessible and usually trusted focal point within a community, with a resident population of hopefully amenable youngsters and interested elders, who are well connected with the neighborhood. It can also provide a point of connection for normally separated communities.

The underlying purpose of the project is to explore, enjoy and develop the natural gifts of verbal communication, in the context of how we use our voices creatively with one another in everyday life. A valuable feature of the process is to be found in the depth of engagement typically entered into by the students both with topics of personal concern as well as the wider issues of the day. Because these themes arise spontaneously and unforced out of the immediacy of natural talk with peers and equals, their importance and relevance is uncontested.

The method consists in participative visits, workshops and learning activities, and makes direct use of natural neighborhood links to pursue outcomes beneficial to all concerned. Inclusive in spirit, playful, and anchored in participants' real-life experience, it seeks also to help foster understanding and concord within the community as a whole.

An important premise behind the past successes of this project is an understanding of the need for respect and sensitivity when working within the diversity of organizations and institutions, and especially when dealing with issues pertaining to peoples' personal lives.

*"It has been my experience that the concepts underpinning this project can bring joy and meaning to elderly and young alike, and enhance any community. They facilitate a natural and positive encounter in these days when such encounters are often either rare or else imbued with suspicion and fear on both sides. And they enrich that encounter, drawing together both sides of the age divide through the most immediate, familiar and human of all media - 'talk'. Ultimately, the project gives rise to a celebration that has 'a real power to shift something' for all concerned."*