

BUZZING ABOUT BEES:

Exploring Active Storytelling for Transforming Children's Environmental Agency



Project Background:

This project engaged children with a dance show and active storytelling workshop activities about bee decline, examining the significance of active storytelling for increasing children's sense of agency over environmental crises. The project was inspired by research in environmental and neuro-psychology (see de Meyer et al., 2021) which details how we need to tell stories which go beyond just helping people understand *what* is happening, and which develop people's capacity to take on environmentally-conscious behaviours through modelling actions. Recognising the importance of developing strategies for transformative environmental education, this work examines this understanding in a child-focused context.



Results:

In total, 239 children took part in the survey. Key results show that the workshop increased children's confidence to engage with bee-friendly activities, as well as sparked their interest in learning about other animals.

We identified four parent themes in the focus group data. In addition to exploring ideas for future workshops and examining the knowledge children already had, the findings focused on understanding the value of active storytelling methods for a) education and b) agency development. For example, one child spoke of how the storytelling activities helped them to process knowledge about bees:

"It was really fun, only because I thought it would just be facts and I hate facts I think it was better to process things, and so then it was fun how we did like the planting and then the dance as well".

We also identified how the workshop helped support both children's interest in and sense of capacity to engage with bee-friendly activities:

"I like to help bees and... I would want to plant lots of flowers out... in the garden".

Teachers further communicated how children's interest in bees continued beyond the workshop.

Workshop Details and Methods:

During the research workshop children began by watching a dance show, co-developed by the lead researcher and choreographer in 2021 (see Portus, 2024), which follows the fictional tale of a young bee called 'Bibi'. This bee is seeking to 'find her purpose' as a bee, but encounters many challenges along the way, such as flower scarcity. Following their watching of the show, children learnt some dance moves and created their own shows about helping 'Bibi' as humans. They also made their own wildflower seed pots. Following the workshop, children completed a survey and took part in a group interview. Teachers fed back on any longer-term impacts of the children engaging with the activities. All research took place in Jan – March 2024.

Conclusion:

This work shows how active storytelling methods not only support children's engagement with knowledge and skills acquisition but also encourages their sense of personal agency and systems thinking capacities. This work also shows how helping children to explore their capacity to take action through movement-based imaginative storytelling provides them with an opportunity to understand their – often positive - feelings as linked to pro-environmental behaviour. However, the research further reveals how children often focus on fact acquisition as the main outcome of educational experiences. This highlights the need for expanded active learning strategies in environmental education, giving children the opportunity to recognise their capacities as change-makers.

Project Team:

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References:

de Meyer et al. (2021). Transforming the stories we tell about climate change: from 'issue' to 'action'. *Environmental Research Letters*, 16(1).
Portus, R. (2024). Making a song and dance about it. *Bee Craft Magazine*.