

Part 1.

OVERVIEW

“Sometimes, as a means of survival, you do bury things, you put aside what you need so as to function, you just function as a robot ... I think a lot of people in this pandemic have just been functioning as robots, just doing what is necessary, what is practical, and everything else gets put away into a box for another day.”

– Teacher AA

This text accompanies a short digital film that sets out:

- the context and rationale for this work;
- how Big Brum collaborated with teachers in response to the ‘Socially Distant’ monodrama and the moment we all found ourselves in;
- how we used an adapted version of ‘Socially Distant’ as a stimulus for pupils;
- how the teachers and children responded to this work.

The film can be viewed via www.bigbrum.org.uk.

A more detailed account of the process can be found in the Guidebook.

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The centre of ‘Socially Distant’ is isolation, disconnection and repression. The centre of the programme is the antithesis of these concepts: integration, connection and expression: making the world tangible and meeting ourselves as humans.

How can we connect with ourselves and be social in a world that is making it difficult for us to be our natural human self? Richard Holmes and Ben Ballin discuss the project in a podcast with therapist Amanda Seyderhelm:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/6bftv1QdYdx-tyT8r5M2PqS>.

HOW BIG BRUM COLLABORATED WITH TEACHERS

As an angle of connection to the concepts in ‘Socially Distant’ (and their opposites) we began by asking the teachers two questions:

- An image of the world that sticks out for you in this period;
- An image of yourself in this period.

We then shared rehearsal moments from ‘Socially Distant’, focusing on objects, action and image. We explained that the man in the story is a teacher who has lost his son. We went on to ask the teachers, ‘where in those moments did you see social distance?’

The teachers talked about these things and then began to discuss what they could do with their children. It was important to establish that there would be no right or wrong answers.

“Children knowing there is no right or wrong response. Us creating a safe space for them to not just explore their ideas, but to share an opinion and know that they’re safe to share that opinion”

– Teacher GU

USING 'SOCIALLY DISTANT' AS A STIMULUS FOR PUPILS

When we came in to work with the children, we used four dramatic images adapted from 'Socially Distant'.

Image 1. 8 p.m. Thursday night during lockdown

The Father stands with a pan and spoon, banging, enjoying the moment as part of the clap for carers. We create the clap for carers with the children.

Image 2. 7.30 p.m. on the same Thursday night during lockdown

It is 30 minutes before the 'clap for carers', which we showed in Image 1.

The Girl is wearing a brown hoodie, trying to write a letter. She then scrunches it up.

She tries again. This time she writes 'sorry' three times in large letters and puts the paper in the envelope.

At the bedroom door is the Father, watching/listening.

The children reflect on what they see.

Image 3. 8 o'clock that night

This returned to the same situation as in Image 1, but this time we added an extra layer.

We revisit Image 1, the Father and the street clapping, but this time the Father has his back to the Girl.

The Girl takes off the hoodie, places the arms around her and holds it in an embrace.

Following Image 3, in small groups, the children are given the hoodie. They play with what they have seen, are asked to whisper, perhaps place the father outside the room. What can she hear? What can't she see?

Image 4. 8.15 p.m. the same day

The Father has cling film. He enters the room, wraps the case and letter and leaves the room without saying a word.

Some children's responses to Image 4:

"Her Father is trying to stop her being full of worry"

"He's taken away her Mother ... her heart and her memories"