Using Deep Talk to hear the voices of children

The River and the Donkey Stories have been developed for a research project to enable researchers to hear the voices of children. The stories can be adapted for other contexts.

We would love to hear how you use these stories - please contact Kathryn Lord (kathryndeeptalk@gmail.com)

Phases of the Deep Talk session

1. **Transition from the interview to the Deep Talk phase with a clear shift in focus.** If the child chooses for the parent(s) to stay in the room, they are invited to just watch and listen quietly. If they are in the room the storyteller positions themself so the parents are not in the line of sight of the child.

2. **Helping the child to get ready** Check in to see if the child is ready. “Are you ready for the story?” They may, for instance, need to go to the toilet before the Deep talk session starts.

3. **Setting the atmosphere and creating a contemplative atmosphere**
   The researcher moves the sand, whilst saying “This is an open place. A place where there are no rights and no wrongs.”

4. **Inviting the child to play with the materials and the sand.** A playful, imaginative, participatory story-based setting is created. The researcher plays with the sand and invites the child to do so too.The researcher takes the felt from the basket and asks: “I wonder what this could be?” The researcher responds to the child’s suggestions. The child chooses what to do with the felt pieces and where they are placed.

5. **Setting up the story.** The researcher moves the felt pieces to create the scene for the story and says “Now we are ready to begin the story"

6. **Telling the story.** The child participates only as a listener, while the researcher’s eyes are looking down at the sand.

7. **Wondering about the story.** The researcher looks up and asks the child what they liked or didn’t like about the story.

8. **Transition to the next phase**. The story pieces are put back in the baskets.

9. **Representing feelings about the day.** The researcher asks “I wonder what your day is like? How are you feeling?” and offers the child the sand and baskets of felt pieces and wooden blocks to help express themselves. If the child uses words then the researcher can invite them to represent those words by drawing in the sand or choosing the pieces. If the child doesn’t use words the researcher can invite the child to say what they are thinking or feeling. The intention is to engage with the child with natural, light conversation about the day’s events and feelings and to build trust. The researcher also puts their day and feelings in the sand.

10. **Using the Metaphors of the story to express thought and feelings about the screening or the positive diagnosis**. The researcher carefully holds the pieces representing the key

metaphor of the story— the pieces of river or the donkey, and asks a clear question: “Let’s imagine the river is …….what kind of river would it be?” and “Would you like to place the river in the sand? “Lets imagine that the donkey is ……. If the donkey is …….., what would the donkey be like?” and “Would you like to place the donkey in the sand?” The researcher encourages the child to represent and describe the river (e.g. size, depth) and the donkey (e.g. size, behaviour).

11. **Follow-up questions to hear more from the child both verbally and non verbally.** Follow up questions may be asked about their feelings, what they think they will need, and what will happen in the future.
12. **An invitation for the child to choose a figure that represents themselves** and to take themselves through the river / place themselves in relation to the donkey. They may also choose to place other people in the landscape, e.g. parents, siblings, other relatives, teachers, friends, doctors, nurses This may have already occurred naturally during phase 10.

13. **Ensuring the child has expressed all they would like to.** The researcher checks that the child is happy with what they have expressed. “Are you happy with what you have put in the sand? Is there anything you'd like to change?”

14. **Allowing the child to capture their thoughts and feelings as a photo, which may elicit new things and is a helpful record**. The child is asked to take a photo of the landscape (they can crop the photo however they like). Then the researcher and child look at the photo together and talk about what’s in it.

15. **The researcher takes photos of the landscape as a full record of the play.**

16. **Closure** The researcher and child calmly put the materials away together and the researcher thanks the child.

Since this is an audio recording and it is not easy to take observational notes while working with the child at the same time, the researcher must be attentive and comment verbally on the child’s actions: “You knew right away where to put the river.” “You looked very pensive just now, or you looked a little sad.”

Instead of asking many questions, one could focus more on active or so-called “radical” listening, in which, rather than asking questions, one allows for silence or, for example, repeats what the child has said: “You said the river is wide. Would you like to tell me more about that?”

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

The River Deep Talk Story

Move the sand into hills and valleys and then smooth it out.	This is an open place where there are no rights and no wrongs.
	Would you like to play with the sand as well? We will try to leave a little gap at the edge so the sand stays in the bag
Hold out, one by one, the yellow sun, grey clouds, brown sticks, brown logs, light blue puddles, green trees and red flowers. Encourage playfulness by playing with the pieces in response to what the child says they might be. Leave the pieces on the sand in the places that the child puts them or suggests.	I wonder what this / these could be? Encourage the child to consider that each object may be more than one thing.
When the play comes to an end, take the pieces off the sand, flatten the sand and then carve out a river by pushing the sand up the banks of the river to reveal the blue. Lay out the six pieces of the blue wool on the river bed. Place down a brown stick, a brown log, three light blue puddles, a green tree, held up between two wooden bricks, and three red flowers. Place an adult by the log.	Let's get ready for our story.
Look at the child to ensure they are ready. *When they are ready, look down to tell the story.*	Are you ready?
Place a child next to the adult. Stick the sun vertically in the sand and then add the cloud half covering it	There was once a child who played by the side of a river in all weathers.
Walk the child to the river, throw the stick in the water and float it downstream from your right to your left.	They threw sticks in the river.
Jump the child onto the log and walk along it. Make the child fall off - towards the adult - and get back on again.	They balanced on logs. Sometimes they fell off - but they got back on again
Jump the child into the puddles.	They jumped in puddles and got wet.
Walk the child to the tree.	Sometimes they sat quietly under a tree with the flowers.
Move the adult to the child. Walk them both to the river. Place down the log bridge, the blue puddles and the boat made from the two wooden bricks (leaving the green tree on the ground).	One day it was time to go across the river to the other side. They wondered how they would get across. Perhaps there would be a bridge or a shallow place where they could walk across or perhaps they would get across in a boat?
Look over at the other side. *Slowly move the sun and the cloud in an arc over to the other side.*	And they wondered what it would be like on the other side.
Invite wondering about the story.	I wonder what you like about the story? I wonder what you don't like about the story?

Carefully clear the pieces away in reverse order. Close the sandbag.	
Open up the sandbag. 0ffer the basket of felt pieces to help express their feelings. (Keep the people and animals and the blue wool at your side - to be used later). Afterwards, add something to show your day and feelings - keep this quite gentle. Offer feelings that may not have already been expressed by the child.	I wonder how your day is? How are you feeling? You can move the sand and draw in it or use these felt pieces.
Hold all six pieces of blue wool in your hand whilst asking the question. Invite the child to choose how they would like to represent the …….. and invite them to place the river pieces in the sand. They can choose to use as many of the pieces as they wish.	If the river is ……., I wonder what sort of river you would like to make and where will it go?
Invite the child to express their feelings with objects, actions and words.	I wonder how you are feeling about ……..?
Invite the child to express what they need with words, objects and actions.	I wonder, what do you need to get across the '.....' river?
Invite the child, if they haven't already, to choose a person to represent themselves. They may wish to choose other figures to represent people like parents / carers, other family members, pets, medical staff.	Would you like to add yourself?
Invite the child to take the person across the river. This may help them to realise there are other things that might help them.	Would you like to take yourself across the river?
When the energy for the wondering seems to be coming to a close, ask the question, leaving space for the child to say or add more or to rearrange the pieces.	Is there anything else you would like to say or do?
Offer the iPad to the child. Offer help as needed. Then look at the photo together with the child and talk about what's in it. *Then take photos yourself, including an aerial view.*	Are you ready to finish? Would you like to take a photo of what you have made? Would you like to say anything about this photo?
Leave silence to ensure the child is ready.	Is this good enough? Are you ready for me to clear this away?
Hold your hands around the sand bag whilst saying the closing words. It may be that the child wishes to make some gesture to show that this is good enough as well e.g. a thumbs up.	This is good enough. Thank you.
Carefully clear the pieces away (in reverse order as far as you can remember) and close the sand bag. The child may want to help you clear away.	










The Donkey Deep Talk Story

Actions	***Words***
Move the sand into hills and valleys and then smooth it out.	This is an open place where there are no rights and no wrongs.
	Would you like to play with the sand as well? We will try to leave a little gap at the edge so the sand stays in the bag.
Hold out, one by one, the yellow sun, grey clouds, green trees, red apples, orange carrots and brown sticks. Encourage playfulness by playing with the pieces in response to what the child says they might be. Leave the pieces on the sand in the places that the child puts them or suggests.	I wonder what this / these could be?
When the play comes to an end, take the pieces off and flatten the sand. Make the apple tree by placing the green felt between two wooden blocks and place three red apples onto it.	Let's get ready for our story.
Look at the child and then look down to tell the story.	Are you ready for a story?
Draw two vertical roads and two horizontal roads.	There was once a village with narrow streets.
Place the apple tree in the sand, plant three orange carrots in a line in the sand.	There were farms near the village.
Stick the sun vertically in the sand and then add the cloud half covering it. *Hold out a donkey and carefully place the felt basket with the carrot and the apple in it over the back of the donkey.*	Whether it was sunny or raining… the farmers brought the fruit and vegetables into the village on their donkeys.
Place the donkey on the road nearest the child so the donkey is facing to your left.	One day a donkey was blocking the way!
Place two people at the end of the road to the right of the donkey and one person at the other end of the road. Ensure you choose the correct poses for the people. Walk the people towards the donkey - one at a time. Leave enough room so you can easily place a stick and a carrot on the arms of the people.	The people couldn't pass and they didn't know what to do.
Place a brown felt stick on the arm of the person who is nearest the back of the donkey.	One person said "The donkey is in our way. Let's move the donkey with this stick"
Place a carrot on the arm of the adult next to the donkey's head.	Another person said "The donkey might be hungry. Let's give the donkey a carrot."
Walk the third person towards the farm.	And another person said "The donkey might be scared. Let's find the farmer."
Invite wondering about the story.	I wonder what you like about the story? I wonder what you don't like about the story?

Carefully clear the pieces away (in reverse order) and close the sand bag.	
Open up the sandbag. 0ffer the baskets of felt pieces and the wooden blocks to help express their feelings. (Keep the people and animals at your side - to be used later). Add something to show your day and feelings - keep this quite gentle. Offer feelings that may not have already been expressed by the child.	I wonder how your day is? How are you feeling? You can move the sand and draw in it or use these felt pieces.
Hold the donkey with the basket over its back in your hand whilst asking the question. Invite the child to hold the donkey and then to place the donkey where they would like them to go.	If the donkey is …….. what is the donkey doing? Where would you like to put the donkey?
Invite the child to express their feelings with objects, actions and words.	I wonder how you are feeling about ……..?
Invite the child, if they haven't already, to choose a person to represent themselves. They may wish to choose other figures to represent people like parents / carers, other family members, pets, medical staff.	Would you like to add yourself?
Pointing to the donkey.	I wonder how you can live well with …….?
	Further questions may be asked. E.g. I wonder what might help you to live well with ……?
When the energy for wondering seems to be coming to a close, ask the question, leaving space for the child to say or add more.	Is there anything else you would like to say or do?
Offer the iPad to the child. Offer help as needed. Then look at the photo together with the child and talk about what's in it. *Then take photos yourself, including an aerial view.*	Are you ready to finish? Would you like to take a photo of what you have made? Would you like to say anything about this photo?
Leave silence to ensure the child is ready.	Is this good enough? Are you ready for me to clear this away?
Hold your hands around the sand bag whilst saying the closing words. It may be that the child wishes to make some gesture to show that this is good enough as well e.g. a thumbs up.	This is good enough. Thank you.
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