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A Primary School Teacher And A Comprehensive School Teacher

Title :

Changing Perceptions

Abstract :

This date is a combination of two papers. One by a learning support co-ordinator and learning support teacher in a primary school and the other a teacher in a comprehensive school who both ask the question: Can Changing Perceptions within the Classroom Remove Barriers to Learning?

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The Primary School Teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Sam is eight and has cerebral palsy and epilepsy. She is a pupil at the mainstream primary school where I work part-time as a learning support co-ordinator and learning support teacher. Sam has a statement of educational needs and a full time special support assistant (SSA). She walks with a K – walker, but can also walk short distances un-aided. She needs assistance with toileting, and occasionally, rectal valium administered – should she have a seizure.

It is recognized in schools that for some pupils the transfer to Key Stage 2 can be just as difficult as the transfer to Key Stage 3 is for other children. At Sam’s annual statement review questions were raised as to whether or not it would be more appropriate for Sam to repeat year 2. Since we operate a vertically grouped system – where two year groups work together – it was suggested that the benefits of her repeating the year would outweigh the negatives of her not transferring up with ½ of her class. All the adults present at this review, the parents, the educational psychologist, the speech and language therapist, the occupational therapist, the physiotherapist and the school staff agreed with this idea. Sam was not present at the review (she was seven at the time) and was not consulted.

The decision was therefore taken to keep Sam back a year in her Year 1/2 class so that she could have some extra time in which to consolidate some of the basic skills she was slowly acquiring and longer to begin familiarizing herself with her new PC before the demands of the national curriculum at KS2 took over. There was concern that the academic progress she had struggled to make in year 2 should not be diminished in any way, little thought was given to the whether her advancement as a social person would be “diminished” by her not moving up with her chronological group. Therefore although Sam is really a year 4 pupil, she works as a year 3 (in a mixed class of year 3/4s).

I based my first project on learning to appreciate some of Sam’s insight into some of her difficulties in learning. In the process of that research I discovered other aspects of Sam’s life in

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school, that were of a high priority to her, that could perhaps be restructured to envelop and exploit the diversity that she, like every other pupil, brings to school. This project is devised to look at the curriculum and furthermore, to plan and analyse an intervention to that curriculum.

It is often thought that the word “curriculum” means the national curriculum... a group of subjects that are planned and delivered to children in a school classroom by a teacher. The curriculum is indeed that, but it is also much more. The term “curriculum” also includes the so-called “hidden curriculum” which incorporates the idea of a school as a microcosm of the society in which it functions, which explains how important to that society is the socialisation process that schools provide the school, via all the “messages” that are sent consciously or unconsciously by those people. My work with Sam can be more clearly understood within the framework of this definition.

At the present time Sam sits at a group table in the classroom for only a small amount of her day, it is really seen as a bit of a treat for her, when she is not doing “important” work. For her real work she sits on her trip-trap chair at the PC facing the wall. When she was in year 2, we took her to the ACE in Oldham, for an I.T. assessment. The physiotherapist and occupational therapist involved with Sam had intimated that because of her lack of shoulder stability – which has a knock on effect regarding her fine motor skills – a PC would be the best way forward for her to record her work. Sam nevertheless still writes with her hand too as she enjoys it, and it’s what everyone else does! ACE spent a day with Sam and her various support team members, made all their recommendations and we bought the equipment using Sam’s statement money. Consequently she has her own Acorn 5000 and colour printer on a veritech trolley at which she sits on a trip-trap chair. Initially some members of staff queried where certain pupils extra equipment would be kept in school – which was seen as a necessary discussion point as our school is Victorian, and as such, has small classrooms...especially with 30+ children wedged into them. This has turned out not to be such a problem in reality and to date space has always been found for computers, wheelchairs, walking frames and Jenx chairs when and as needed. However the solution has not always been perfect, and from time to time someone will suggest a better idea to be taken on board and implemented. In her class, Sam’s varitech trolley is against a wall, in between two group tables.

AIMS

My first project on this course was to look at how I could improve Sam's concentration levels in class, to make her more tuned-in to the task in hand, to "stretch" her, and make her work more quickly. It became apparent when I was interviewing Sam about how she does her work, that a very important aspect of her work, in her eyes, was that she would really prefer to be sitting with the other pupils to do her work, rather than in splendid isolation at her PC. I therefore decided to look into this myself for this subsequent project. We have learnt over the years that learning is primarily a social process. Much of the learning that takes place in primary schools today is collaborative. Therefore it would seem appropriate to assume that Sam's learning could possibly be being inhibited by her position of isolation, by sitting facing the wall for large periods of the day to word process. I wanted to see if Sam's social interactions could be increased by changing her workstation, the assumption being that an increased level of interaction on her part with the people in her class would not only verify and enhance her feeling of belonging to the group, but ultimately her work skills as well. My investigating will this time, be onto whether Sam's social skills can be further developed, if her friendships or collaborative working can be enhanced in any way at all, simply by altering her seating in the class.

METHODS

I had intended to set the school camcorder up on it's tripod and let it do the observations for me – the aim being to be able to record a longer session than I would be able to physically watch myself and then I could analyse the situation at my leisure – with the added benefit of the pause button and re-wind switch. But it turned out in practice not to be feasible.

Firstly the position of the only socket in the classroom involved using two extension leads draped around the room, but more importantly, my positioning of the tripod was restricted by the density of furniture in the room; to the extent that I was unable to get the whole of the group table in the frame. I asked several colleagues at work if they could see a different way round this, so that I could use the camcorder, to no avail. So feeling very frustrated, I was forced to jettison the camcorder and rely completely on observation schedules.

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I discussed the proposed alternative seating arrangements with Sam's teacher and SSA. Both were in agreement that it would be a positive move for Sam and could see that she might benefit in many ways both social and academic. I explained that in a setting such as that at our school, where we actively promote collaborative learning we may be actually handicapping Sam, simply by inhibiting her social interactions. Her SSA however admitted to being somewhat skeptical as to whether she would be able to produce her written work as quickly with even more distractions that sitting on the group table would provide. Sam's class teacher felt that it was difficult for Sam to see the blackboard from her PC, and that a change of seat would help in that respect.

FINDINGS

Initial observations

The first session I observed was Sam sitting at a group table in the classroom. They had been measuring themselves and the activity in hand was to transfer those measurements into a scale drawing of themselves on graph paper. The table consisted of eight seats, of which one was unoccupied, one was Sam's, one her SSA's and the other five were occupied by girls in the class. My observation lasted for twenty minutes. In that time, thirty-six social contacts were made within the group (including one by the class teacher). Sam only made one contact in the period observed, and that was to her SSA. None of the children initiated contact with her at all.

The second session I observed was an Art lesson in the resource hall, which adjoins the classroom door. Sam, her SSA and another girl from the class were doing some marbling. It was a very quiet activity, all three were engrossed in what they were doing despite the fact that this hall has five other large group tables in it and six computer work-stations. The SSA was really having to help both pupils with the technique of marbling. She made three social interactions to each child, Sam made one back to her SSA, and two to the other pupil, who in turn made one to the SSA and two to Sam. They were so engrossed in what they were doing that there was little need to chat of any sort.

For the third observation Sam was working on her own, sitting at her PC against the wall. She was copying from a first draft that her SSA had scribed for her on the previous day. It was a

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piece of writing about the Vikings to go into her topic book. Sam initiated two interactions in the twenty minutes I watched her – both with her SSA- who responded twice and initiated two further interactions. Sam plodded on very slowly, pausing frequently to look over her shoulder at what was going on in the rest of the room, or out of the window behind her PC. She really made hard work of the final draft, you could see her heart was not in it at all. The piece of work took nearly two hours to complete in all.

THE INTERVENTION

The famous power socket loomed into sight once more as we began to see what our options were for moving Sam's work station into a different area of the classroom. The class teacher decided that I could try whatever I thought was best, with the help of Kevin the caretaker to lift the furniture. I wasn't that happy to change her room without her, but she was. We agreed that it would be a trial only, so that after a month she could come back to me if it wasn't working and we would have a re-think. The morning that the class was at swimming that week was the time chosen by Kevin and I to actually change the classroom around.

When the children came back I helped the class teacher to settle them in to their new places then left. When I got to the classroom door I looked back to see Sam giving me the thumbs up sign.

FOLLOW UP OBSERVATIONS

My first observation after moving Sam's seat, took place in the resource hall. The class had written about Viking long-ships earlier in the week, and were asked to illustrate their final draft. Sam and four other pupils were sitting around a large group table drawing and colouring their pictures. For the first time I saw Sam just fitting in like all the others. In fact when I went into the hall to do the observation I couldn't see Sam, I had gone over to her SSA to ask where she was, she laughed and said you've just walked right past her. She was on the bench, without any special apparatus or an extra adult shielding her. While I was there for twenty minutes, Sam initiated five social interactions with four children, all of which were followed up by the other child. There was no interaction between her and her SSA, who was working at the next table

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with some other children. Every child at the table made more interactions with Sam than anyone else.

My second observation took place in the classroom. Sam was sitting at her new place on the group table. They were all doing a written activity of various sorts. The information that the pupils needed was on the blackboard. In order to differentiate the work appropriately Sam's SSA had precised the work, scribed it, attached it to a copyholder on the side of her PC monitor and she was word processing her final copy. Sam stayed on the task unsupported for the twenty minutes I observed her. Of the three children sitting with her, the only child she had no contact with was the boy who was sitting directly behind her monitor, and was therefore out of her line of vision completely – which I later found out was exactly why the class teacher had put him there. She made three interactions with the girl nearest to her, who reciprocated twice. The subject of these discussions was all task related as Sam was having difficulty reading the rough draft her SSA had written for her. She finds cursive writing more difficult to read than print. Her social interactions with the other child were not however all task related, they were just having a “natter” with each other!

My third observation took place in the resource hall. The group were doing independent spelling activities while the SSA gave each of them an individualized spelling test. There were five children including Sam. She initiated social contact with four of the children during my twenty minute observation. In fact very reciprocal relationships seemed to be developing between Sam and three of the children. With one there were four contacts from her and three from him (MW), she made eight contacts with a girl (KP), who made seven contacts back and with another girl (AK), Sam made three contacts and she made two back. There was also quite a bit of whispering, sharing of felt tips and giggling going on. The SSA kept her distance physically from Sam for most of the session, although there were a few “looks” thrown at them from her, but finally had to intervene to refocus them on the task in hand.

In my final observation Sam was sitting at her seat (next door to her workstation) where she now sits when she's not using her PC, or where her SSA can sit if needed. They had been researching Viking crafts and were designing a shield of their own. Sam initiated five interactions with the

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three other children on the table during the twenty minutes I was observing them. Which was totally comparable to the interactions the other children made with other.

At the end of my observations I interviewed Sam to ask her what she thought of the new classroom arrangements. She was very positive in her responses. She started by telling me that she loved her new seat on the group table because she was near the pipes – the heating pipes are old, about eight inches in diameter and run around the periphery of the room – and it was warm. She then told me how much better it was because she could see the blackboard, and what was going on... without having to turn around all the time. She also liked sitting next to Helen – who was kind. She said that she hadn't liked sitting by the wall because she was all alone, and now the other children would help her ... and she could help them. But best of all Sam liked where she was now because "I'm like everyone else". when we discussed whether she was working better now she said that she was. I told her that one of the reasons I'd changed the classroom around was so that she could work with other pupils, but what I wanted in return was for Sam to do her "best" work, to really concentrate and to try and speed up her word processing times for me. When I asked her if she thought she could give it a try she replied "Yes, yes, yes!" we shook hands on it, and she gave me a hug.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My research question had originally arisen from my first assignment from the course – pupil's perspectives. I had then intended to look at ways of making Sam improve her listening and attention skills, and to motivate her to spend more time in task; the end result to be that she would produce more work in her class, than she was currently doing. My approach was to be purely behavioural. I planned to set in place a behaviour modification plan – a contract between Sam and school. I would have discussed what targets we wanted her to aim for, probably using a time for set pieces of work, and also what rewards she would like to receive when she achieved those targets.

Sam had raised the issue of her unsatisfactory seating arrangement in the classroom with me when I interviewed her for the first assignment, and it was this, coupled with points what we

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debated in the tutorials of my course that other perspectives became more obvious as an option to me, hence my study of the effect of the hidden curriculum on pupils behaviour.

What surprised me most was the speed of the effect of my intervention had on Sam's social flowering within her class. She would appear not to have experienced any problems with peer group acceptance at all. The timescale of this study was of necessity very short, I spent two weeks on the initial observations, altered the classroom arrangement, then spent two weeks doing my follow up observations. In those two weeks the change in Sam as a person was quite remarkable, she had quickly become "one of the gang". Her social interactions were not limited to just the same two or three characters either – although some children did crop up on several occasions. In all, she was with twelve different pupils during my observation sessions. In one of my initial observations Sam only made contact once, and that was with her SSA, despite being surrounded by children. By the end of my observation slots, she was almost on the verge of making too many social contacts – if such a thing be possible!

The main implication of this research has for me been looking more closely at what inclusion really means for schools. Working with others is an important facet of growing as an individual, it is part of the hidden agenda of schools, and as such must be nurtured, but to nurture it, it first has to be acknowledged, and in doing so be given validity – by all the people who work within the institution.

I have decided to review all the children with a physical disability in my school, with a particular focus on how, where and why they are seated in a particular way.

The importance of the SSA's role must be highlighted too. There are many issues to be investigated to ensure that the SSA is able to offer appropriate support, to enable the child without hindering them in any way. It is vital that an SSA does not assume the role of a "minder", appropriate training must be offered so that they know when to intervene and when to withdraw, and to always bear in mind that the child should be encouraged not to lean too heavily on them, as independence must be the ultimate aim.

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In the best of worlds, it should be possible to bring all staff together to take ownership of inclusive practices within the institution and it became obvious to me that was something I – as learning support co-ordinator must take on board and attempt to set in motion.

I was very surprised to discover the lack of contact between Sam and her teacher. In a way this is not that remarkable as, because of her very efficient SSA and her social isolation, she personified the typical withdrawn child who was quite and therefore be easily overlooked. In the course of this research I discussed this with the class teacher. She basically agreed that what tended to happen was that she expected her SSA to take the role with Sam that she took to others, that the SSA would make sure she was on task and help her with any work problems. She recognized that this could often mean that Sam – unlike the other pupils – was being taught by her SSA a lot of the time. She and I raised this informally in the staffroom that lunchtime amongst the gathered teachers and SSA's – we have thirteen teachers and eleven SSA's in school – and most acknowledged that the same division of work had developed within their classrooms to. It was decided that a slot should be arranged in the directed time sessions for me to offer some of the staff development to try and clarify our professional roles and move us all forward together.

CONCLUSION

The main points that have emerged from this assignment are many and various. Firstly that the function of an education system is not simply to school children in a set of subjects – or curricula – it is much more wide reaching, despite the fact that this is what the majority of people think.

Children with physical disabilities often experience difficulties with social acceptance by their peers, and here we were in a school that espouses integration almost endorsing it in our dealings with Sam. Therefore I set out to see if by changing Sam's seating arrangements I could intervene to help increase the number of social interactions she participated in, and thereby aid friendships to develop. Before my intervention I observed Sam initiate one contact with another pupil, while two were made with her. Whereas after changing the classroom arrangement, I observed her initiate 27 contacts herself, while 31 were made with her by her peers. Which would seem to

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suggest that Sam is now totally included by her peers. There is however quite a way to go with the adults in the school. I have come to realize that perhaps we are all sometimes guilty of paying lip service to the concepts of integration without really being aware of, and valuing, everyone's perspective of the issue.

Sam undoubtedly feels happier in school now, as she said herself "I'm just like everyone else", her SSA and classteacher are pleased with the way she has matured as a person and also as class member, so all that's left now is to see if this new social creature will begin to trade off some of these skills to enhance her learning. Although it's really far too early to tell, I do feel very optimistic for her.

The class teacher is also very pleased with the way things have turned out and has a much more positive view of Sam. She can now see her as an asset to the class. She also much prefers the new layout of her room and can manage the children more easily as she can place herself in the center of the room, therefore any pupil movement is in one direction. The SSA, Sam and I discussed how she would scribe for Sam, as it became apparent that her handwriting could be a lot clearer to read for Sam than it sometimes was; I also raised with her the point that it would be fitting for Sam to dictate to her, and her writing to go in Sam's book, rather than have Sam endlessly word processing. There needed to be a clearer lesson objective – was the primary focus content, or word processing skills, the idea of differentiating by outcomes is a very difficult concept to legitimize for some professionals. I also realized there was a great need for further in school training of all staff to facilitate joint planning, to look at roles and responsibilities and generally share experiences and expertise.

Regarding the methodology I used there are two points that I have learnt. When I began this work I was irritated that I was unable to use the camcorder for my observations, but now I have realized that the observation schedules were perfectly adequate. I've learnt that new technology is not always the only answer. I wouldn't have seen anything different with a camcorder – just more of it. The other point is that if I were to carry out such a study again I would have asked the teacher if I could do a class sociogram at the beginning and at the end of the assignment. A sociogram – where the children are asked to write their three favourite children in their class and

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their least favourite children in their class – can give a quick overview of the dynamics of a large group of children, and would have provided me with more evidence of a global nature.

The main point I will take away with me from this research is that having well planned programmes of work arranged, delivered by well intentioned staff is not enough – cognitive needs and social skills must be nurtured equally in school, because school is just a small part of our life, and it's after school when the living starts.

The timetable of this course, of necessity, dictates the depth of research that can take place, but when I began this assignment I never contemplated that such a simple idea would have such an important impact. I suspect that the ripples from this work will reverberate around my school for quite a while yet. And I would like to think that I will continue to develop further insights into aspects of the hidden curriculum and the power it exerts on us all.

READING AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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The Comprehensive School Teacher

INTRODUCTION

The school I teach at is a large, mixed comprehensive school situated in the suburbs of Liverpool. With over 1500 pupils and 90+ staff the school has a diverse cultural and socio-economic pupil population and prides itself on the success of its students, especially in public examination results.

I am sure it has much in common with many other similar schools in other parts of the country, and that for those in those schools also, life seems very hectic and speeds along at a frantic pace. There seems to be little time for the needs of the individuals as more and more we are being asked to judge the success of our teaching and the way we organize our schools by the results the pupils achieve in examinations. The pressure on teachers to deliver the goods is continually gaining momentum, especially now that it seems to be linked with pay through the Performance Related Pay Scheme, and Performance Management coming into effect soon.

It appears that although academic progress of the pupils is at the heart of these new initiatives, we may be in danger of rendering the pupils themselves as anonymous.

I already hear staff refer as 'my 'A' grade class' and individuals as 'a 'C' grade candidate'.

Categorising and labeling pupils in such ways may be a shorthand used by teachers to pinpoint pupil progress and attainment, but it does not really tell us much about the children themselves.

My concerns within the confines of this action research project lie with those pupils who we already identify as a particular group, removing their individual identities and replacing them with 'brand names' such as 'Special Needs children' and 'the Remedial Group'.

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Some may argue that by separating, sifting, identifying and labeling we can better cater for the individual needs of children, witness how many schools organise teaching groups based mostly on academic attainment.

Many in the teaching profession are still looking for the quick answer; identify what the individual needs of the child are and then prescribe the correct 'treatment' and get on with the business of education, or so the theory goes! But using this medical model as an example of how we seek to label children does not sit easily with the drive for inclusion in education which we are now witnessing, and are a part of. For many of the teachers this conflict of priorities is difficult to come to terms with. On the one hand we have the pressure to 'produce the goods' in relation to academic progress and on the other to accept into mainstream schools children who may otherwise have received their education in perhaps a Special School, where a different set of priorities may have been in place. However, I believe that having given a child or group of children a particular label our expectations of them may also change to suit our understanding of what we perceive them capable of. Rather than teach the individual we may, I fear, be guilty of responding to the label.

Where pupils are identified, especially as a result of behavioural patterns, there seems to be a different view away from the medical model. Here it seems that there must be a change precipitated by the child in order for academic improvement to be made. The barrier to progress being firmly pointed at the pupil themselves. Assistance is provided often in the form of behavioural management schemes and the appointing of Learning Support Assistants, but often the end result can be the removal of the child from the classroom, and with it denied access to the curriculum. This, I feel is clearly a concern for any school, and we should question ourselves on how we arrived at this situation and what can be done to provide a positive learning environment for all our students.

Having previously worked with a pupil described as having Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), I witnessed at first hand how teachers can enter situations with pre-conceived ideas and beliefs of pupils and then allow these unsubstantiated assessments to formulate their teaching strategies. Also in my work I had, through reviewing old school reports and interviews

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with the pupil, formed a strong opinion that academic progress was more in evidence when a positive and harmonious relationship existed between teacher and pupil.

My feelings led me to believe that here was a pupil who was becoming increasingly removed from the teaching situations due to the interaction between himself and the teacher. Behavioural patterns were being established and accepted as normal. This, I also felt, was creating a domino effect, the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) working with the pupil did not seem to be enjoying a positive relationship, and certainly the child himself was often found trying to live up to his image in front of his peers.

Expecting a child to change their behaviour, especially when they seem to be attracting all the attention, seems a little unfair, even more so when one considers the negative aspect of many of the strategies in place; loss of free time, removal from the classroom.

The approach I decided to adopt was to concentrate on finding a way of changing perceptions and opinions, breaking down the negative barriers and bringing positive aspects to the fore.

I realised the difficulties I was going to face, asking colleagues to adopt a different approach, may seem as if their past actions were being put under scrutiny, and how many teachers would be willing to make this change without seeing some form of condition being attached.

My conviction was that the end result would prove worthwhile for all concerned, and that a new framework would evolve in which staff and student would value the contribution each was making towards an improved working relationship.

AIMS

In my previous work with the child (Child A), I had become increasingly aware of the importance he placed on his relationship with his teachers. He recalled in detail events that at various times had left a marked impression on his perception of school life, and there are clear

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links with his academic profile that illustrate how his work in school was subsequently affected. (Dyson, 2000).

Having transferred from Primary to Secondary school and coming up to the completion of his first year, it was now becoming evident through conversations with staff who taught him and others closely involved, such as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and his LSA, that they were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with what they would often describe as, ‘Child A’s behavioural problems’.

By the very nature of ADHS, supported by the fact that Child A was taking Ritalin, there would be some aspects of his persona that he himself would find extremely difficult to come to terms with. Even so, I was convinced that I needed to influence a change in teacher perception of Child A rather than let it continue as it was, which I felt was presently creating the framework within the classroom which appeared to be producing a less than conducive setting for learning. A better understanding and increased awareness would hopefully change opinions and enable teachers to see his different behaviour was not meant as ‘challenging’ and that through a different approach progress within the classroom could be made.

Therefore my original intention for this piece of curriculum development was to act as a ‘go-between’ (Child A was not in any of my teaching groups), attempting to bring all concerned to a different level of understanding of each individual’s perspective.

Several questions helped me to formulate my method:

- Can teacher perceptions of Child A be changed?
- Will this affect relationships within the classroom?
- What will be expected of Child A in order to alter perceptions of himself?
- From my removed position how can I influence proceeding?
- How can I measure progress?

METHOD

I consulted with the SENCO at school to explain my intentions and to see what his response might be. Other than Maths, Child A was taught in mainstream classes of mixed attainment, the SENCO was not directly involved in the child's teaching, but I needed to gain approval for my work and ensure that I was not going to disrupt any initiatives that were already in place.

I was able to gather much in the way of factual information from school reports, assessments, examination results, samples of work and notes from meetings. What I did not have access to however, was an insight into how the relationship between teacher and pupil was functioning within the classroom. For this I consulted both the staff and Child A.

I decided not to involve all the staff who taught him, this was for a number of reasons:

- I wanted to preserve some degree of 'normality' so that comparisons could be made
- With what could have been a delicate proposal, I wanted to approach staff who were known to me and I could rely on their cooperation
- Keeping the project within manageable proportions

Seven of Child A's teachers agreed to be involved, and I attempted to cover as many variances as possible such as gender, subject taught, time of day.

I outlined my proposals and then asked each to complete a behaviour checklist for Child A.

The LSA was also included in my initial research, as of course was Child A who, as well as an informal interview was asked to fill in a questionnaire regarding his feelings on teachers and the lessons.

FINDINGS FROM PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Asking the staff involved to fill in a behaviour checklist was intended to serve two purposes, firstly to focus directly on Child A and then consider the impact that some of his behaviour was having. Secondly to provide information for my discussion with Child A so that we would have areas that the child might like to focus on.

This may seem that I was about to turn the project around and look at Child A's behaviour, and ways in which he should attempt to address the problems that it presented. My real intentions at this point were to involve the staff and to commit themselves to working positively with the pupil. The behaviour checklist was only to be used to identify two target areas that Child A was involved in selecting, and would then be used in a positive reinforcement programme. The aim being that he would succeed in achieving targets set, thereby providing a valuable boost to his self esteem and a reinforcement to the staff that their change in attitude towards Child A was succeeding.

The questionnaire that I asked Child A to complete provided baseline information on how he felt the lessons were going and what he felt about the relationship with the teacher. I intended to repeat both of these exercises on completion of the curriculum development I was about to put into practice.

As was expected, my opportunities to talk to staff and explain their involvement were limited. But the overall feeling was that they were all ready to embrace any initiative that would improve behaviour and relationships. Two of the staff were rather indignant that they should have to perhaps make 'allowances' for his behaviour. One commenting that they were "...already bending over backwards".

After speaking with Child A I got the feeling that he was much more prepared than some of the staff to apply to the principal of the project. Discussing his likes and dislikes concerning teacher attitudes towards him, he highlighted several areas; he did not like it when teachers shouted and he felt that at times he was being unjustly picked on for disturbances that were going on around

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him. He also felt that it was unfair that he was not allowed to sit next to his friends – in a number of lessons Child A was closely supervised by the LSA who occasionally sat next to him and seemed to have the power to remove him from the classroom or detain him after the completion of the lesson.

These comments I felt further demonstrated the rationale for my work, they seemed to be identifying Child A as a child who must be different in some way and needs the close supervision of an extra adult in the classroom, and singling out one pupil as the cause of disturbances maybe because of his past record. It was these attitudes and images of the child that I wanted to challenge.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

I wanted teachers to focus on the positive aspects when working with Child A, and I intended the project to run for the next two school weeks. Unfortunately the half term holiday came in the middle and I was conscious of the effect that his might have when determining the outcome of the programme.

I made a booklet that he would take and give to the teacher at the beginning of each lesson. An introductory statement explained the emphasis on positively reinforcing the efforts he was making and asked them to award a mark out of five for his success rate of the task. With a maximum of forty points obtainable, we set a target of twenty-five for the week.

Child A and I agreed on the two targets he was going to work towards, areas that staff had highlighted but, more importantly, areas in which he felt he would be successful.

1. avoiding tapping with his pencil or ruler.
2. not calling out to the teacher

In our previous discussion we had talked about rewards, he mentioned things like being allowed to sit next to who he wanted, this was something I felt was inappropriate as it was teacher

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attitudes and not classroom organisation that I wanted to concentrate on. Being allowed a play area for just himself and his small circle of friends was also something he asked for but was, I felt, a very contentious topic. Having teachers quietly compliment him on his efforts and ask, in passing if everything was OK seemed simple enough requests and I spoke with his teachers who agreed. Perhaps the biggest and most unusual demand I made of the staff was to provide compliments and praise by way of a code. Child A is deeply into the world of American Wrestling which is full of characters with their own catchphrases. At home Child A and his mum use the catchphrases of one wrestler, 'Cactus Jack' as a private way of saying 'well done'. He was now asking if staff would also use this as a more personal way of complimenting him. I felt that this offered a valuable opportunity for very positive reinforcement and so staff were asked to add the words 'Bang-Bang' to some of their comments. Finally, if he achieved the agreed target of twenty-five points for each of the focus areas I said that I would buy him the latest issue of his favourite wrestling magazine.

During the two weeks I intended to keep in touch as much as possible with the staff and Child A, a record of conversations and events being kept in a diary. At the end of the two weeks I would again circulate the questionnaire and behaviour checklists for completion and final interview with child A.

The LSA was involved in the project but only in so far as providing positive reinforcement verbally or with gestures and signs, smiling or thumbs-up, for example.

FINDINGS FROM CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The first week; the booklet was given to Child A prior to the start of his first 'target' lesson and a quick word with the teacher, it was now up to the two parties concerned.

During the week I saw Child A a couple of times in passing, checking if he still had the booklet and was remembering to get it filled in. I made more of an effort to see the staff and get their views. This was maybe not the best thing to do if I wanted the project to run independently, but I felt a certain degree of responsibility towards my colleagues, was I asking them to radically

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change their approach and if so how much confidence did they have in me? Quite clearly in my conversation prior to the commencement of the scheme the majority had welcomed the idea of some form of assistance, almost as if they had been looking for help.

This had set me thinking at the time about the role played by the LSA and the SENCO, especially as a number of staff had expressed similar concerns, in particular the relationship between Child A and his LSA. I examined his Statement and the latest Individual Education Programme (IEP) and observed that there was only one objective, very general in nature;

“To settle into secondary school life in such a way that he can move towards independent learning”.

With no clear plan as to how this was going to be achieved and no guidance for the LSA. I traced all of his Annual Statement Reviews and found that the original statement had not been changed in all this time, a period of seven years.

Evidence of the fact that the LSA was still working to this document came on Thursday of week one. An incident in Physics led to Child A being removed from the lesson by the LSA who was following the teachers request. This intervention strategy was detailed in his Statement in 1993. The LSA was of the opinion that this was till the best course of action for Child A, and commented further on the programme, that it was “...not going well”. This may have seemed the case earlier in the week when he was not only receiving scores of two and three, but teachers also saw fit to make written comments in his booklet.

Perhaps it was a way of establishing authority and having the last word, but it appeared that negative comments had to be written about Child A to support the low scores he had been given. I felt at this time that the staff had either not fully taken on board the principal behind the project or they have been unsure about how much 'control' of the situation they were prepared to allow Child A to have.

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Proof of this uncertainty came with the comments that they wrote, instead of looking at the target behaviours and passing on a certain amount of trust, they simply removed the problem, in this case the ruler, so that ‘tapping’ ceased to be an issue. Obviously not the strategy that I had hoped for.

By the end of the week progress had been made, comments in the booklet were now positive and a number of staff having tried the ‘Bang-Bang’ code were most impressed at its effectiveness and the rush of enthusiasm that followed. Child A seemed to be responding to something, and by the end of the week he had achieved the points target we had agreed on.

In our meeting on the Friday, Child A spoke about the incident and being removed from the room during the Physics lesson. His view of the situation was that there were other pupils involved, but that he was removed to save him from getting into further trouble. By adding an observation that he felt that the teacher ‘...didn’t keep the agreement’, it shows that he is fully aware of his and others’ responsibilities and commitments.

He was pleased to have achieved his target, and during the following week which was half-term, he received the magazine I posted to him.

Monday of week two, a brief meeting with Child A, he was delighted with the magazine and was full of enthusiasm for the target scheme. We had previously set a new points target of twenty-seven points but now he wanted to aim even higher and go for thirty, with a promise to work and try really hard all week.

There was a change in Child A’s approach to his work but what evidence was there of a change of teacher perception? Two distinct points emerged from week two.

The first was the positive way in which staff were responding towards developing their relationship with Child A. He spoke of occasions when teachers not only used the ‘Bang-Bang’ code, even writing it into his booklet – a big change from the negative comments in week one, but also how he had been referred to as a ‘sweety pie’. Child A himself had noticed this change

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in teacher attitudes. Most lessons that week he said he had enjoyed, and in Music, “ Miss was enthusiastic and positive”.

Indication of how far trust and understanding had progressed came from the same conversation with his music teacher;

“I always used to like making loud noises on instruments, but now I wanted to get on with my work, but my partners won’t let me, they want to keep making a noise, and they’re holding me back. I get upset. Miss says she realizes this”.

The sort of reassurance that he needs, the fact that he is not always being linked or identified with noise or problems, and the realization that teachers understand his dilemma, and are responding positively towards him.

“I did something I’ve never done in my life before – I understood every single word in History. I answered a hard question and Miss actually said ‘Bang-Bang’ in front of the class”.

The second point from week two concerned an issue that had become significantly more important as a barrier to the progress being made in establishing relationships and removing labels and stereotypes.

The role of the LSA does not seem to have been reviewed since the original Statement in 1993, when one of his main requirements was to remove Child A from disruptive situations. This is clearly creating an area of conflict between the LSA, Child A and staff. Removing one child from a situation because his Statement requires it is almost like an admission of guilt, and in the eyes of pupils and staff it may seem that they are being offered a tailor made scapegoat, which in some cases they may be only too willing to accept.

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When asked about his relationship with the LSA, Child A went very quiet, puffed out his cheeks and then pulled a funny face. Teachers trying to build up a positive relationship may see the injustice of child A's removal or being detained at the end of lessons and, although not entirely the fault of the parties concerned, it does not provide the kind of support required.

With the exception of one incident, the second week went exceptionally well. Child A achieving a maximum forty for one target and thirty-eight points for the other. His reward for this week was provided by his Mum and Dad – an outing to an American wrestling show being held in Liverpool.

The second set of behavioural checklists shows an overall reduction in figures for excessive occurring behaviour, and in fact one of Child A's targets, 'calling out to the teacher', has fallen out of the 'top five behaviours' list. The other target, 'tapping pencil or ruler' is still on the list however.

Although they were not designed to draw major conclusions, the statistics do show a shift in a positive direction of teachers 'assessment regarding Child A's behaviour, and this correlates to the improvements shown over the two weeks in his target books.

More importantly the questionnaire shows an equal or higher rating in all the subjects included in the project, an indication that in his opinion the classroom is a more pleasing and productive place to be, with better relationships being developed.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I wanted to show that by labeling or categorising children, and then using stereotypical values and judgements we begin to lose sight of the child and see only the label that now represents that person.

From this viewpoint we begin to see only what we are told we should see, we adjust our expectation, and the child responds accordingly.

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We may now feel justified, the original diagnosis must have been correct, we are comforted in the knowledge that there is a large and competent support network for 'these children', and that our responsibility towards them has diminished.

Without doubt, most schools identify pupil groupings with labels of some kind. In most schools it will be as a 'set', in others a 'band', but whatever the label we need to question the criteria applied and the effects it may have on the children themselves.

The child at the center of this project will soon be entering year eight in September, and this means in many subjects pupils will be arranged in teaching groups according to academic attainment.

I have attempted to show how the achievements of an individual can be affected by the perceptions and expectations of their teachers. In the short space of time that I have been working with Child A, I feel that a significant change has occurred in both the more positive approach that Child A now has for his school work and in the improved working relationship with the majority of his teachers.

I originally began working with Child A in late March, 2000, as part of a previous project, and samples of his work both from before and after that period show how considerable the progress has been made in that time. This, I feel reflects the positive attitude that I have tried to foster both within Child A himself by raising his self-esteem, and in his relationships with me and his other teachers.

One interesting point concerning a sample of work is that it came from a Geography lesson – Geography was not one of the focus subjects within this piece of curriculum development. I feel that this shows how far the influence of this work has permeated into other areas, and further supports my view concerning the value of a harmonious working relationships brought about by changing teacher perceptions of Child A.

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One of the major concerns that I have which has been highlighted through this project, is the extent and value of the support system which can be called upon to help with the education of pupils identified as having Special Needs.

Child A has been assigned a full-time classroom assistant as part of the requirements of the Statement.

The relationship with Child A was not, it seemed to me and many of the teachers I spoke with, of the highest quality and at times barriers to his education were in evidence as a result of this. Not only was Child A given the label ADHD, but he was also given a signpost to hang it on, for him and everyone else to notice, namely his LSA who was with him throughout the day. Rather than creating additional barriers to learning, the role of the LSA, I feel, should be in helping the child to overcome them. The support system in this case was clearly not functioning as was intended when the Statement had been written.

Two points emerge from this, firstly the importance of the Annual Review and the recommendations that are advised. In this instance I feel that for too long the existing Statement has been passed from year to year until it is no longer entirely appropriate for Child A.

Secondly the work of the LSA. Who is directly responsible? Should they not be encouraging good working relationships between Child A and all the staff who work with him, and also between all of the staff themselves, and for much of the same reasons?

My final consideration would be towards the curriculum of the school and the messages, both visible and hidden, that are conveyed to pupils and staff.

The organizational elements of the curriculum inform us all of the importance of academic attainment, through the grouping of students, to how 'exam week' commands such importance in the school calendar, for example.

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If we are to remove stigma and raise the aspirations and value of all the pupils in our schools then we must begin to assess the damage that is being caused by the over-riding pressure of exams and the quest for optimum grades.

CONCLUSIONS

My work with Child A was rewarding both for me and hopefully for the staff and Child A himself.

I feel that I have made an impact on his life in school, his relationships within the classroom seem more harmonious and the staff still consult me over situations they encounter with him.

After two weeks the curriculum development did not end, however Child A insisted that I continued working with him and together we produced target booklets for the next two weeks containing different areas of focus. The second week I asked him to assess himself rather than use teacher assessment, in an attempt to help with his IEP objective of 'moving towards independent learning'.

I have also been in touch with the family, and they have requested that I may be present when Child A's Annual Review takes place in the next couple of weeks.

This I have found particularly rewarding as I came in to this area of education with little background and now find myself interested, involved and motivated to continue with this work.

I am also mindful of the role the 'support' staff play in Child A's education and feel that at the moment not enough is being done to help him overcome the barriers to his learning.

With the push in education for Social Inclusion it will become increasingly more important that the needs and requirements of all pupils are met within the school setting, and it is equally important that this is recognized as an essential ingredient for a happy and successful school.

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