

What theories influenced your practice in order to improve the learning of two students with similar specific educational needs? Critically evaluate and analyse the contribution of these theories and their application to students' learning.

The aim of the Salamanca Statement was to publicise the need for an inclusive approach to education in all schools. This need is summarised in the following statement, 'Reaffirming the right to education of every individual [...] to ensure that right for all regardless of individual differences' (UNESCO, 1994: vii). The core message of the Salamanca Statement is that education is a human right, and regardless of the barriers, educational institutions have a duty to meet the needs of all individuals so they are able to access education. By making education accessible to all individuals 'regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all' (UNESCO, 1994: ix), therefore by having an inclusive policy in all schools we are creating a more inclusive, tolerant and understanding society.

The message from the Salamanca Statement is undeniably positive; ideally all institutions should provide for the individual needs of their students, workers and members of community. Equally, I agree that the place to begin changing our society to be more inclusive starts with educational institutions, however, educational reform is made problematic without a common understanding of the term and process of inclusive education. Mel Ainscow states that there is a lack of clarity among different stakeholders regarding the term inclusion:

The use of the term 'social inclusion' has been associated mainly with improving attendance and reducing the incidence of exclusions from schools. At the same time, the idea of 'inclusive education' has appeared in most national guidance in connection with the rights of individual children and young people categorized as having special educational needs to be educated in mainstream schools, wherever possible. Most recently Ofsted has introduced the term 'educational inclusion', noting that 'effective schools are inclusive schools' (2005: 14).

The lack of transparency among educational institutions concerning the meaning of inclusion makes the application of strategies difficult to address uniformly across all schools. Moreover, there is a clear tension within national policy to include students who have been identified as having special needs and at the same time raise the attainment of the school.

In addition to the problem of defining the term inclusion there is also much debate concerning the definition of special needs. The Salamanca Statement stated that 'special educational needs refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disabilities or learning difficulties' (UNESCO, 1994: 6). However, Ofsted also consider students with behavioural and personal issues to be categorized with having special needs, and thus expects teachers to meet the emotional and educational needs for all their students. The Salamanca Statement states that 'It [the Framework] assumes that human differences are normal and that learning must accordingly be adapted to the needs of the child rather than the child fitted to preordained assumptions regarding pace and nature of the learning process' (UNESCO, 1994: 7). The Salamanca Statement notes that we should not assume that all children progress and achieve in a uniform manner; however, in practice the attainment levels and

statistics are the only tangible method of tracking progress, which does not take into account the emotional and social development of the students, despite Ofsted expecting teachers also to meet these needs. In principal I agree that teachers should aim to meet all the needs: emotional, physical and educational, however, in practise it is difficult to address all these needs within the classroom whilst also trying to meet the requirements of a rigid curriculum and raise attainment.

In this essay I shall be tracking the progress of two students with similar Additional Educational Needs (AEN) within a secondary school in the XXX borough of London. I shall refer to the school in question as School X, and to the two students as Student A and Student B to maintain the students' and school's confidentiality. School X is a large school, catering for 1090 students ranging from Year 7 to A Level. The school is situated in an area of low socio-economic growth, with a high level of unemployment, and the number of students to whom it offers Free School Meals (FSM) is above the national average. The school's ethos is focused on inclusion by promoting 'mutual respect', 'responsibility' and 'equality for all'.¹ The school has a policy of not excluding students, but prefers to organize managed moves for students whose behaviour is incompatible with the school's ethos and rules. School X prides itself on including students of all educational, physical and emotional needs within the school's mainstream curriculum. The provision in place for meeting all these needs is a strong Inclusion Team that offers in-class support for as many students in as many lessons as possible. Students who need tailored support are provided with a learning mentor who delivers social or educational support in one-to-one lessons. Students with statements of AEN receive resources and provision as specified in their statements. Students who need emotional support are directed to the

¹ This ethos can found in the Principal's letter on School X's website.

in-school social worker that provides one-to-one sessions to meet the students' welfare needs. As demonstrated here, School X appears to offer a lot of support to students in order to break down the barriers to their pupils' education.

The following information outlines some important details concerning the students on whom this essay focuses:

Student A is a Year 8 male student. He has been diagnosed as autistic, and sits on the mid-to-severe end of the autistic spectrum. He displays some of the more typical autistic trends, such as: he is unable to infer meaning, he is very literal and he does not understand the social inappropriateness of using swear words. On a positive note, Student A has excellent aural and oral skills, he is able to communicate in writing as long as he is given a structure to follow, he is confident enough to participate in lessons and he is a pleasant and respectful student towards adults. Despite Student A being on the autistic spectrum, he does not have a Statement as his parents want him to have a normal experience in school.

Student B is a Year 7 male student also on the autistic spectrum. As well as being diagnosed with autism, Student B also has a range of other learning needs: dyslexia, Beta Thalassaemia, which is a blood disorder affecting his bone development for which he wears a brace. Student B has Horizontal Gaze Palsy, which means he cannot see anything until it is 45 degrees of his midline. Lastly, Student B has Nystagmus, which is an involuntary side-to-side movement of the eyes. As well as these medical and physical conditions, Student B's autism makes social interactions with his peers difficult. He calls out and makes inappropriate comments. His strange behaviour can be seen as a form of amusement to his peers who can manipulate him into behaving

inappropriately for their entertainment. Student B will act silly and inappropriately when he is nervous, agitated or scared. What is more, Student B has real difficulty in articulating an incident that has upset him, and when the issue is not dealt with sufficiently he will take matters into his own hands. Student B does have a Statement, and always has a Teaching Assistant with him in all lessons to help him get organized and ensure he is completing the work.

Since teaching these students I have observed three main gaps in the available provision to meet their educational need. Firstly, the students are timetabled to come to my French lessons twice a week, however, in practice they are removed once a week to have lessons on Social Skills and literacy. French is not a core subject and the students are removed from my lessons for this reason. This presents problems when trying to include the students in the lesson. Although the school is trying to meet the learning need for these students, the fact that they are removed from a subject not only puts additional pressure on the teacher and student to meet attainment levels in half the time of their peers, but also it goes against the principle of inclusion as stated in the Salamanca Statement.

Secondly, the SEN co-ordinator confessed to me that there is a lack of resources and manpower within the Inclusion Team. Ideally, she would like to have regular meetings with classroom practitioners of AEN students to discuss progress and strategies for effectively providing for these pupils. However, the volume of AEN students admitted to School X and the limited number of staff within the Inclusion Team make this task very difficult.

Thirdly, parents have the power to refuse AEN support for their child despite the obvious need for it, such as in Student A's case where despite being diagnosed for

ASD, he does not have a statement. This means that any available support is being denied at the detriment of the pupil, and the school is powerless to prevent it.

In light of these findings, I believe that the school has a responsibility to meet the needs of all its students, and therefore should not be making statements and policies about inclusion for which it does not have the manpower and resources to provide. In addition to this, it should be the school's responsibility and right to assess students' needs for additional support regardless of the parents' wishes. Lastly, the school should make it very clear to all members of staff and parents what they determine as inclusion to ensure there are no misunderstandings on procedures for providing for the students.

Critical Narrative based on Professional Practice

The reason I have chosen to focus my research on these two students is because I feel that their AEN in class is preventing them from accessing and progressing in this subject. Moreover, I believe that their difficulty to interact with their peers is having an effect on their enjoyment of learning this subject. Due to both students' ASD they are prone to saying inappropriate things without understanding the implications of certain lexicon. In both students' cases, they have been victims of bullying in class and outside of lessons due to pupils misunderstanding each other. I decided to focus on these students to track their social and behavioural progress rather than their academic progress due to the amount of violent outbursts in lessons among the students.

As previously mentioned, although Ofsted and school policy expect teachers to be accountable for the students social and emotional development it is much harder to track such progress as it cannot be recorded using hard data. However, I would

argue that it is more important to ensure that the social and emotional development of students is tracked, especially in cases where there is a cause for concern, because as a classroom practitioner it is my responsibility to create a positive learning environment in which every student can feel safe and can enjoy learning.

In this essay I shall be looking at Student A and B's social and emotional development in lessons in order to improve the learning environment for all the pupils in my class. I shall look at three main areas of concern: the students' behaviour, learning and social skills. For each area of concern I tried different methods either suggested by colleagues or those on the National Autism Society website. What is more, I tracked the Students' behaviour in a diary format, which can be seen in more detail in Appendices 1 and 2. I decided that a diary would be a detailed method of collating information and tracking the students' social progress. Currently, in School X there is no method for tracking such information, although teachers are required to give a behaviour mark on the students Progress Reports ranging from 1, which indicates exceptional behaviour to 5, which indicates disruptive behaviour. This is recorded every 6 weeks on School X's database along with academic progress by National Curriculum levels.² Moreover, I used the Individual Educational Profile for Student B to inform me about how I can provide for the pupil's needs. Lastly, I worked closely with the Head of Special Educational Needs (SEN), the SEN co-ordinator, to help me develop my understanding of the Students' needs and how best to provide for them. I shall first discuss Student A and then Student B. For each student I shall detail the improvements and/or observations of their behaviour, learning and social skills.

² See Appendix 3 for more details.

A specific concern of mine regarding these two Students was their behaviour. Because of their ASD they are prone to making inappropriate comments to their peers, which can escalate to violent outbursts between students. See page 1 of Appendix 1 for a detailed account of a violent incident that occurred between Student A and one of his peers. Although this was a very unpleasant experience that affected everyone negatively, I decided to use it to reflect on the incident in order to observe how to avoid similar situations occurring in my future practice. I concluded that the incident could have been prevented if Student A had been given suitable work which would have prevented him from lifting his head and staring at his peers. It also prompted me to research the National Autistic Society webpage to see if they had any advice for preventing a similar event from occurring in the future.³ What is more I organized a meeting with the SEN co-ordinator to discuss my concerns for Student A.⁴ The outcomes of the meeting with the SEN co-ordinator was that I was provided with a set of ideas for creating differentiated worksheets. Moreover, we established that Student A needed to be seated in a different area, isolated from the rest of the group, facing the white board in order to prevent him from getting distracted. I also did some research on the National Autistic Society website which suggested that a Circle of Friends strategy could be initiated for autistic children and their peers in order to improve understanding for the condition.⁵ The SEN co-ordinator was very keen to implement this for Student B as he is in Year 7 and his parents are supportive of making his autism public to his peers. In Student A's case, the parents are adamant that their child should receive as normal an education as possible, and do not want

³ www.autism.org.uk

⁴ See page 2 of Appendix 1 for the Minutes of the meeting with the SEN co-ordinator.

⁵ See pages 3 and 4 of Appendix 1 from the meeting with the SEN co-ordinator which details the Circle of Friends strategy.

their son's condition to become public to his peers. Therefore, we could not initiate the Circle of Friends idea with Student A.

Following from the meeting with the SEN co-ordinator and the research I did, I created differentiated worksheets for Student A to enable him to access the material. Moreover, I changed the seating plan so that he was sitting at the front. The learning outcome of this lesson was positive as Student A was able to access the material, and he began participating in the lesson, which for was quite a progressive step as previously he was very reluctant to offer answers. However, the culture in the class is particularly negative, and the other students got very annoyed that Student A was participating. What is more they noticed he had different work from them and began getting verbally abusive about this to the point that Student A walked out of the classroom.⁶ In light of this I created another Action Plan for the following lesson which included revising the seating plan and meeting with the SEN co-ordinator again. In the second meeting with the SEN co-ordinator I reiterated the need to make Student A's learning need public to his peers, however, his parents' reluctance to make the condition public prevents us from being able to address this. What is more, the SEN co-ordinator is aware of serious past incidents between Student A and other pupils, which she was unable to disclose to me. These events made her equally reluctant to make the Student A's ASD public. Following from this meeting it was decided that the seating arrangement in the class had to change from grouped tables to single rows so that Student A would always be facing the board and to ensure that he is sufficiently isolated from particular classmates.⁷ In addition to this it was decided that when creating differentiated worksheets I should stick them in Student A's book

⁶ See page 5 of Appendix 1

⁷ See page 6 of Appendix 1 for the Minutes of the second meeting with the SEN co-ordinator, which details an Action Plan.

prior to the lesson so that it is not obvious that he has different work from his classmates.

In the following lesson Student A was able to follow the lesson and he participated appropriately. He completed the first two tasks on his differentiated worksheets, which were stuck in his book. He behaved correctly and there were no incidents between him and the rest of his peers.⁸ However, although Student A had completed the first two pages of his work he had not turned over the page to continue with the other tasks. I thought that this was because he was distracted by the activities of the class; however, when discussed with the SEN co-ordinator it seems that Student A's ASD prevents him from knowing when to turn over the page of a book. In a subsequent meeting, the SEN co-ordinator and I decided to train Student A to complete the tasks from a page and tick a small box at the end of the page to act as a signal for turning it over.

In lesson 4 I decided not to create worksheets for Student A to assess whether they actually made a difference to his behaviour. There were no incidents in that lesson, as he sat in his allocated seat and had no reason to look around and could not get disrupted by his peers. However, no learning took place as his book was empty and he did not respond to any questions I asked. This demonstrated to me that the differentiated worksheets addressed his learning needs, whereas the social skills lessons and changed seating plan had addressed the behaviour problems between him and his peers. This prompted me to ensure that every subsequent lesson needed to have differentiated worksheets created for him so that his overall enjoyment and academic progress could improve.

⁸ See page 7 of Appendix 1 for an account of the lesson.

Student A's learning was greatly hindered by his inability to access the material because he was unable to infer meaning and found long-winded instructions difficult to decipher. The SEN co-ordinator advised that I should use one word instructions such as: sit, enough, go, match up etc so that he could better understand what was required of him. She also advised that I created differentiated worksheets that asked him to match up visual images with the vocabulary, and then place the newly learnt vocabulary in columns next to the English translations, and finally creating a True or False plenary to test his comprehension of the vocabulary. She advised that following a particular format and routine would really help Student A feel confident about his learning. This coupled with a very simple lesson plan on the white board for him and the rest of the class to see would help him feel less nervous about the progress of the lesson. I followed the advice of the SEN co-ordinator and found that these strategies greatly helped to improve his learning and progression in French.

The last area of concern was Student A's social skills. As previously mentioned Student A's ASD caused him to shout out inappropriate comments to teachers and pupils. However, instead of seeing this as a problem I decided to see his comments as transparent and useful observations of my practise and the classroom environment. Kelly Chandler-Olcott and Paula Kluth say in their study of autistic children that 'in addition to the unique gifts and interests that autistic students bring to the classroom as people, their responses can serve as an early warning system for pedagogical problems that are happening in the classroom as a whole' (2009: 548). I would concur with this statement, as Student A will always be the first to say what the other students undoubtedly are thinking, which helps me to adapt accordingly to address the problem. In previous lessons, when Student A had walked out of the

lesson or shouted out inappropriate comments I had issued him a detention and talked to him sternly about his inappropriate behaviour. I wondered why the same behaviour would repeat itself in subsequent lessons. Whilst researching for this essay on the National Autistic Society website, I found that Social Stories were a more successful means of giving context and meaning to students with autism. Social Stories use pictures or drama to explain a social situation. One of the aspects of ASD is an inability to put oneself in somebody else's shoes; the Social Stories remove this problem, as autistic children can understand the context through the images and/or drama. After lesson 1 and 2 when Student A shouted out inappropriate comments and walked out of the classroom, I reprimanded him and used the one-to-one opportunity to use Social Stories as a means of explaining why his behaviour was unacceptable and what he should have done in order to avoid a punishment. This is the kind of techniques that the SEN co-ordinator uses with him as well during his Social Skills lessons, therefore Student A was used to this process and after lesson 2 I have not had any similar problems with him in the classroom.

Student B's behaviour problems are not as violent as that of Student A's. His peer group is much more mature and understanding, and the Circle of Friends idea has really taken off positively for this student.⁹ In addition to this, all Year 7s were reading 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time' by Mark Haddon in their English literacy classes, which is a story that discusses issues of autism. This provided an excellent, impersonal way of discussing autism and making the students

⁹ See pages 2, 3 and 4 of Appendix 1 for the details of the Minutes of a meeting with the SEN co-ordinator. Pages 3 and 4 discuss the procedure for initiating the Circle of Friends strategy.

understand that people have different learning needs.¹⁰ I believe the combination of making Student B's condition public and the discussions arising from this book in the students' English lessons have helped to improve behavioural issues between Student B and his peers.

With Student B I also created differentiated worksheets, not only to diminish the amount of writing he is required to do, but also to help address his visual impairment. All teaching staff of Student B has been informed to create worksheets or print outs of PowerPoint displays at front size 16, and wherever possible to minimize the amount of writing he has to do, as he is frequently getting headaches because of his sight impairment. He is a slow writer, but does not like to miss out and get behind his classmates. With this in mind, I debated whether it was necessary for him to write the learning objective and date in French, and concluded that this was slowing him down unnecessarily. Resulting from this, I briefed his Teaching Assistant to write it down for him, or whenever possible I would have it pre-written on his differentiated worksheet. Student B is a visual learner; therefore, picture match up tasks was a particularly successful activity. I also found that careful monitoring of his work and asking him questions to answers I knew he had the correct answer to, boosted his confidence. One negative aspect of creating worksheets for Student B has been that the Teaching Assistants see this as an opportunity to withdraw the student from my lesson, working with him on his own on the tasks. Although he is getting through the material adequately and making progress in terms of his learning, he is not among his classmates. Whether intentional or not, the act of removing the student to complete the class work on his own with his Teaching Assistant only compounds the problem

¹⁰ See Appendix 4, which are notes of an lesson observation I conducted of an English lesson where the theme of autism was discussed using Haddon's book.

of inclusion. I have raised this issue with the Teaching Assistants and hope that in future lessons this will not occur again.

Like Student A, Student B responded better to Social Stories when discussing with him inappropriate behaviour. I noticed, however, that when I was giving him positive praise I reverted to my previous way of explaining the situation and not using Social Stories. I realized that although Student B was gaining an understanding of what negative behaviour looked like through the medium of Social Stories, I was not teaching him what positive behaviour looked like using a similar method. I addressed this, and although there is no tangible evidence for the improvements in his social skills, I can safely say that these skills have been gradually improving in the lessons in which he has attended by looking back at the diary entries which tracked improvements in his behaviour.

Evaluation of Practice

The purpose of this essay was to document and observe the social and emotional progress of two students for whom interaction with peers was difficult due to their ASD. It was previously discussed that I would track their progress in a diary format as tracking behaviour cannot be logged using a tangible, numerical method. I felt that the diary process was quite effective to help me process the events of the lesson. The most positive result of the diary format was it allowed me to reflect on the successes and failures of my strategies to address behaviour, learning and social skills for Student A and B. Chandler-Olcott and Kluth state that, 'having to meet the needs of students with autism has forced teachers to be more reflective about their teaching' (2009: 548), with which I would wholeheartedly agree. The diary served as a means

for me to reflect on my own practice, and gave me platform for deciding the points of my mini-Action plans.

From the diary entries and reflections, I can conclude that the differentiated worksheets were a huge success for both Student A and B. The students were able to access the material, they were able to participate more in the lessons and their increased confidence was obvious from their eagerness to engage with the material and questions. I feel that the Social Stories enabled me to discuss important behaviour points with the students so they could understand and in turn reflect on their behaviour to improve it. Lastly, I think that the lesson plan outlined on the board and the one-word instructions for tasks not only benefited the autistic students, but also the entire class. I noted that the class were tracking the progression of the lesson from the lesson plan on the board and were keener to learn the grammar points and vocabulary in order to play the plenary game. The one-word instructions made it very clear to the entire class what was required of them, and helped the weaker students understand the tasks.

I believe that the differences in learning environments between Student A and B's classroom were due to the amount of knowledge the students have about autism. In Student B's classroom, as a result of reading the book by Mark Haddon, the open discussions about autism, and an open policy about Student B's learning needs, there is more tolerance and understanding in my classroom. Whereas in Student A's classroom Student A has to be isolated from his peers in order to ensure that verbal and physical fighting does not break out among the students. This I feel does nothing to improve the level of inclusion in the classroom. In addition to this, the purpose of creating the differentiated worksheets was to allow both students to access the material so they could engage with the lesson and participate more. I found this did

occur in the case of Student A. However, Student B's Teaching Assistant took to removing him from my lesson because the worksheets allowed him to work in any environment.

Despite the school's provision and inclusive policy, both students are experiencing forms of exclusion. If by inclusion we mean putting an AEN student in a mainstream school, then Student A is fully included within the school; however, Student B is not included as the differentiated worksheets alienated him from the class, and provided the Inclusion Team with the opportunity to withdraw him, thus defeating the point of inclusion. On the other hand, if we aim to meet the Salamanca Statement in 'combating discriminatory attitudes and creating welcoming communities, to build an inclusive society and achieving education for all' (UNESCO, 1994: ix), then it is necessary that the school defines what it means by inclusion, insists on making different learning needs public and understood by students, and ensures that students of all abilities are catered for within the classroom.

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