Exclusion Prevention Programme:
Are we missing the point?

Educational Diversity Research Project 2016/17

During the academic year 2016/17 Educational Diversity, were given an exciting opportunity to conduct some research into looking at some causal factors around exclusions. The evidence in our own setting (a diverse Pupil Referral Unit in Blackpool, catering for 330 young people) was clearly pointing us in the direction that maybe educational practitioners have been missing the point when it comes to establishing why young people misbehave.

In 2012, we completed an audit of speech, language and communications needs (SLCN) and it could be argued, that until then, we too were missing the point. We were astounded to discover that 100% of our KS2, 97% of KS3 and 86% of KS4 students were found to have an SLCN, many of which had previously been undiagnosed. This learning led us to deliver a number of projects within our own settings and indeed within our local mainstream secondary schools. We explored new ways of assessing

> "The only people who see the whole picture, are the ones who step out of the frame"
>
> Salman Rushdie | *The Ground Beneath her Feet* | 1999

young people identified as having 'challenging behaviour' and then developed individual, carefully targeted interventions.

Ultimately we were interested in enabling the young people with the opportunity to achieve their potential. For that to happen, we first needed to better understand them and from there teach them the skills of self-awareness and resilience. This also required supporting staff in raising their awareness of how better to identify and meet the needs of the students who were typically struggling to maintain behaviour acceptable for mainstream education.

By working across four different settings in Blackpool including two mainstream schools (primary and secondary), and two specialist behaviour settings (KS2 PRU and KS2 Special Education Resource Facility - SERF), we explored the impact of utilising improved assessment tools and carefully targeted interventions based on clear information gleaned. We focused heavily on building resilience in both the students and the staff which included delivering training, coaching and developing a curriculum focused on Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Outcomes in attendance and behaviour were used as statistical measures, alongside more subjective measures to assess progress with behaviour,

Sharing our Research

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using our own designed behaviour checklist. Our data showed that with careful planning and delivery of personalised interventions, the majority of the very vulnerable pupils, involved in this project, made improvements with their behaviour and attendance.

Our project was relatively short term, spanning approximately nine months. As a result, our data was limited. Despite this, while each provision developed along different paths, it was possible to maintain the common goal of improving assessments and interventions to support students and understand what may lie behind their presenting behaviour. To this end, the project was successful. However, to truly understand the impact of the overall project; to find out if this approach to supporting vulnerable young people really can reduce or even prevent permanent exclusions, more time is needed to embed the learning and practices. What is clear, though, is that if all schools considered the following when supporting their vulnerable children with presenting behaviours, they would certainly start to see positive outcomes:

The Blackpool Team at the Laurel Trust Conference 2017

While maybe we can't guarantee that those involved won't be excluded, it is clear that this approach to both identifying root causes behind presenting behaviours and then subsequently delivering appropriate support interventions, clearly has promise. With thorough and fully embedded processes, the long term potential impact is significant.

Looking forward, our work with Right to Succeed, is extending in schools both locally and within a national context, to embed some of the learning from this research project. Locally, some of the secondary schools / academies have approached us for guidance on developing their own internal behaviour support programmes, based upon the successes of the short term intervention initiatives. Nationally, Right to Succeed have approached Educational Diversity to lead on some school improvement work with colleagues from other local authorities in extending this research into other regions across the country for which collaborative working will be imperative.

Avoid making assumptions

Conduct thorough assessments and analysis of pupil needs, as many of the behaviours are often simply avoidance tactics

Address the primary need and not the presenting behaviours

Screen all pupils for SLCN

Invest in whole school training around SLCN and strategies to support in the classroom

Ensure all assessments are purposeful – plan interventions (SEND, SLCN, behaviour, resilience, etc) that are genuinely needed

Act on clear evidence: use data collected to demonstrate reason for support plan

Ensure behaviour and SEND teams work collaboratively

The findings of this research project should enable more staff within schools and PRUs, to be encouraged to step outside the frame and "see the whole picture" (Rushdie, 1999). Through improved understanding of the impact of unmet needs, the evidence clearly demonstrates that more vulnerable young people will be able to realise their potential and have the opportunity to achieve high academic outcomes, whilst "remaining" within the changing landscape of mainstream provision.

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