Welcome to the PGCE Partnership Newsletter – SEND and Diversity Focus

In this third edition of the PGCE Partnership newsletter we reflect upon and celebrate the work within our Partnership which focuses on Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Diversity. This is an area of pedagogical knowledge and understanding which can challenge us all. Although this cohort of trainee teachers has trained under the outgoing QTS Standards, SEND and diversity issues continue to be a high priority for teachers and as such they are threaded through the New Standards for Teachers which come into force in September 2012 and against which trainees will be assessed during their NQT year.

Our Exit Surveys and NQT Survey data indicate excellent training and support for trainee teachers across our Partnership. In 2011, 70% rated the course ‘very good or good’ when answering the NQT Survey Question about preparation for SEND teaching and 68% rated the course as ‘very good or good’ for preparing them to work with TAs.

Diversity Project at Wetherby High School

The aim of our Professional Enrichment at Wetherby High School was to explore diversity with pupils and create posters representing their thoughts and ideas. We sought to highlight the ethnic, religious, cultural, sporting, musical and individual uniqueness of students at the school. From the earliest stages of the project the importance of having a highly visual and clear poster to greet all who enter the school was agreed. We also decided that it was vital to find out what diversity means to the students in Wetherby High School so we conducted a series of lessons with Year 7, 8 and 9 classes. Within those lessons we included questions, tasks and discussions which explored the unique identity of each pupil and what they think diversity means at their school. In the three posters we have created we aim to display a balance between the overall diversity of the school and the uniqueness of each pupil. Therefore, we have created one poster with images of lots of pupils forming the school logo (see accompanying picture) and two other posters which showcase the individual uniqueness of a selection of students involved in the project with us.

Elizabeth McCullough, Science Trainee; John Maguire, English Trainee; Matt Griffin, Maths Trainee

SEND Reflections

Having spent years volunteering as a TA in SEND departments and now having the opportunity to teach SEND students directly, I have learned that using a mixture of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) techniques is of paramount importance. I now plan these into every lesson I teach. In Science this can be made easy by the topic in hand: do a scientific demonstration, show a short video with commentary and card sort activities. This also gives a common structure to lessons for the students’ benefit. Thinking up demonstrations for so many areas of Science widens your ideas and resource pool for other classes. Teaching SEND students can be challenging, but they are some of the most rewarding lessons I teach.

Julia Kennedy, Science Trainee

Useful web links:

TES SEND resources:
http://www.tes.co.uk/sen-teaching-resources/

Autism:
http://www.autism.org.uk/

Dyslexia:
http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/
http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/

Speech, Language and Communication:
http://www.ican.org.uk/

National Association of Special Educational Teachers:
http://www.naset.org/799.0.html
Hello, my name is Oliver and I am a Year 11 student at Fulford School in York. You probably don’t know who I am, and you may not have heard anything about me but just in case you have; Hello, It’s me.

The reason I have written this article is because I have been asked (very politely too) to explain to you what having Asperger’s Syndrome is like, and how you should try and teach those with the condition. Well, I have to warn you now that anyone who is ‘unafflicted’ as I describe it could not possibly understand just what it is. It is NOT simple, and as much as your mind will attempt to simplify everything I tell you, (which is perfectly natural, don’t feel guilty at me scolding you) you will NOT know anything. All I can provide is a very vague picture of what it’s like, so please do not assume it to be either accurate or reliable.

We, with Asperger’s Syndrome, tend to...
*Have deeply focussed interests, allowing us to work exceedingly well on a narrow area of topics. For example, I am very interested in role-playing within the online game World of Warcraft. Did you know that the Arathi Honour Guard wear grey tabards when the actual colour of the city state of Stromgarde is red? Of course you didn’t know, but if you asked me anything on the topic I would probably have an answer
*Decipher the world in a way no one else seemingly bothers to. For example, I would describe opening a canned drink as having similarities to breaking the shell of a crustacean open so that one can feast upon its gory insides, which I doubt is what any other individual would think of immediately.
*We are capable of very abstract thinking which has proved quite the, if not only, beneficial perk of the syndrome if you ask me.

Struggle in communication. How we suffer in this field varies from person to person. I find that despite me being capable of discerning emotion I am not understanding of the proper way to react to such emotion, leaving me below the lower hand. Another factor that I find absolutely agonising is my inability to understand when the appropriate time to speak in a conversation is.
*Find it strenuous to both make and acknowledge friends. I know a few people in my school who like me but I am never, ever, ever sure of what they actually think of me and/or whether or not I can consider them friends.
*Be discriminated against, both passively and directly. I can honestly say that people with Asperger’s Syndrome or perhaps any autism spectrum condition are seemingly looked down upon rather than being placed on the same equal footing of you ‘unafflicted’ people. I have been referred to as being ‘retarded’ and ‘spastic’; you really shouldn’t pretend this stigma doesn’t exist as it is really, really, real. I can also positively guarantee that it exists somewhere within your school. I plead to you, find it and destroy it.

So, here are the things you probably shouldn’t do:

**PLEASE DO NOT**

*Reference the fact we have Asperger’s Syndrome. We really, really, don’t like the fact we have it so if you can avoid mentioning it if at all possible, please do. Thanks.
*Place us near people we don’t like. I understand that this is probably the same with everyone, but I’m pretty sure we people with Asperger’s Syndrome like it much less. You might argue that allocating us to locations within close proximity to those who may irritate us would help invoke resilience within, but really, it does not.
*Try and segregate us from the rest of the class by placing all those with additional needs in the same place (or nearby each other). You may make the excuse ‘well, if they all need support it might be easier if I put them all near each other’ but from my perception all it doing is shutting one off from the rest of the class whilst simultaneously singling us out. If you single anything out in human society it is sadly but unstoppably inevitable prejudice. As such, misconceptions, and discrimination will breed like yeast in a beer barrel. Attempt to mix us in with the class and see what happens first.
*Think of us as being lesser than you or any other ‘unafflicted’ individuals. We are not; you are exactly the same. Stop it.
*Assume that we all think and feel in a similar manner. Just because one individual with Asperger’s Syndrome lacks empathy doesn’t mean everyone afflicted bit does. I have empathy but alas I am incapable of understanding what to do in response to other people’s emotions.
*Assume that nobody finds us annoying. Sometimes (most of the time) it does indeed feel that the majority see me as irritating (I’d imagine you’re quite irritated by me already, and you’ve only read my text!). Sadly, the majority of us are incapable of understanding why we are so grating. If you can aid us in becoming less of a living agony for our peers universally in any way I am sure most of us will appreciate much later that you took the effort and time to do that.
*Ignore the advice that I have given. I have Asperger’s Syndrome, so I understand it much better than you ever could. Take in what you can from what I have written.
*Acknowledge the fact I have written ‘I’ too many times already. Admittedly I am a rather self-obsessed individual, but it makes me upset sometimes due to the fact I am. This doesn’t mean I do anything about it however; I am alas too lazy.
Sensory Impairments

I have spent my Professional Enrichment at a service supporting pupils with Hearing (HI) and Visual (VI) Impairments. The following strategies are suggested:

**Hearing Impairment:**
- Make sure you have the pupil’s attention before starting to talk.
- Keep your face clear and hands away from your mouth.
- Stand away from windows so your face isn’t a shadow – don’t talk to the whiteboard!
- Talking for a long period is very tiring for a deaf child; they will be lip-reading and listening very intently.
- Always use subtitles on DVDs – be aware students cannot access material via Interactive Whiteboard/CD where there is sound but no lip pattern.

**Visual Impairment:**
- All printed materials should be clear, uncluttered and in a good size font ideally no smaller than N14, Arial is clear and accessible. Be aware that laminating pouches can create glare - matt is useful for reducing glare, but may also reduce colour contrast and clarity.
- It is good practice for the child with VI to NOT share any text books.
- It is important for the pupil to sit close to the action at a distance that is comfortable for him/her. Observe and ask he/she what works!
- Black rather than coloured pens are a better contrast on whiteboards. Please remember to clean boards regularly! When boards start to turn grey contrast is poor.

Gemma Omerod, English Trainee

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**Working with pupils from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Backgrounds**

Despite more than forty years of officially documented concerns, many young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds continue to underachieve at secondary school. National data from last Summer’s GCSE examinations shows that only 10.8% of Gypsy/Roma pupil s and 17.5% of Irish Traveller learners gained 5 or more GCSEs (including English and Maths) at Grade C or above, compared to 58.2% of all pupils nationally.

However, children from travelling backgrounds can and indeed do succeed in some schools and Ofsted reported in 2010 that where this happens much is down to effective support “by staff who appreciated a child’s heritage fully”.

As a teacher, then, it is useful to be aware that:

- GRT students may have particular interests in dance, music, creative and expressive arts;
- GRT students may well be creative and enterprising thinkers.

As with all other learners, it is vital to have positive and high expectations of learners from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds and also to see each child as an individual with particular needs, learning preferences and strengths. A unique pedagogical feature of working with GRT pupils is for teachers to try and minimise the effect of absence caused by periods of travelling. Knowing in advance when your pupils will not be in school and perhaps making good use of technology (e.g. your school’s VLE), may help to maintain learners’ educational momentum when they are not actually with you in school.

Catherine Shawyer, English CA Leader

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**The Impact of Applefields**

Applefields gave me a brilliant opportunity to work with and observe various strategies when dealing with SEN students. Teaching through well managed games and drama can allow students to feel as though they have succeeded verbally before tackling the challenge of writing things down. This also allows the teacher to bond with students and establish a trusting working relationship with them which certainly has a positive impact upon their attitude to learning.

But perhaps more importantly, Applefields had a huge impact on me, not just because I learnt various strategies that worked with students suffering from severe educational needs but because it taught me that attitude and rapport are everything.
Helping Dyslexic Children in the Classroom

During my Professional Enrichment placement in the Student Support Base at Graham School, Scarborough, I came across pupils who encountered barriers when it came to their learning. The school’s dyslexia suite employs professionals who can help pupils to access education and make learning a less challenging prospect. Children with dyslexia often cannot remember words by sight and struggle to make links between the letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes). Poor short term memory means that, though the child may recognise a word on one page, they cannot remember it on the following page. Children with dyslexia may also have difficulty in producing written work despite some strengths in other areas. They often have difficulty sequencing and ordering their ideas, miss out important words and sentences and may struggle to spell and punctuate their work.

How might a child with dyslexia feel? Some comments about writing from children with dyslexia:

“I have lots of ideas but I don’t know how to sort them out and I forget them.” “I can’t spell.”

“My teacher tells me to use a dictionary, but I don’t know my alphabet, so I can’t find the words.”

“My teacher can’t read my writing. When she leaves it for a little while, I can’t remember either!”

“I hate writing. It’s such hard work.”

Things you can do as a teacher:

- Provide a copy of the text material for the student prior to the lesson.
- Use video or audio support where appropriate.
- Teach vocabulary associated with the curriculum area (using pictures if possible).
- Keep a supply of differently coloured plastic wallets to slip work into. Some pupils prefer yellow while others may prefer pink or blue.
- Encourage mind mapping to approach the initial stages of any writing.
- Encourage the use of ACE dictionaries. These dictionaries are unlike regular dictionaries. Pupils find words depending on the phonemes they can hear in the word.
- Display commonly used word lists or subject specific word lists in the classroom.
- Alternate coloured pens on the whiteboard for each line to make your text easier to follow.
- Encourage the use of highlighters by the pupil to aid them in their understanding.
- Avoid the use of bright white PowerPoint backgrounds or worksheets (pale yellow is usually more suitable). Use comic sans wherever possible.

Lyn Lambert, English Trainee

WSI session at Manor Academy: Tips for TAs and Teachers working together

For the TA: Promote independent learning alongside your support for a student. Support the teacher through reinforcement of their expectations. Show enthusiasm for the lesson. Make sure you communicate if you know pupils need extra support i.e. increased differentiation.

For the teacher: Introduce your TA (especially if your TA will be constantly there) Find time to communicate with your TA- discuss schemes of work, behaviour expectations, rewards you put in place, what are your TA’s personal strengths. Recognise that behaviour is not the TA’s responsibility - even if one-to-one.

Speak to TAs when writing reports
They generally have a very good understanding of classes they work in. Remember they are not there to photocopy etc, they are there to support learning. Finally, don’t segregate your TA and “their” student from the rest of the class; involve the TA and student fully in group work and pair work.

Rebecca Duerden, History Trainee NQT at Manor Academy in 2012

Of course you are still rigorously checking their IEPs and SEN data on the register but that doesn’t mean you put students into categories and boxes. Many people agree that children with SEN have barriers to their learning but not many realise that attitude is the greatest barrier of all. As a teacher go into the room believing anything is possible and your pupils will too.

Katherine Davies, 2011 Cohort, English NQT, Plume School, Essex

Department of Education
Tel: +44(0)1904 323454
http://www.york.ac.uk/education/pgce

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