

Research for Teachers

Positive alternatives to exclusion

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What is being done by schools to reduce and avoid the social and formal exclusion of specific groups of pupils?

For this TLA research summary, we looked at a study that was set up amid increasing national concern about the growing number of pupils, including primary school pupils, who are permanently excluded from school. The authors recognised the position of many teachers whose unions were demanding protection for their members and for pupils by excluding unruly pupils from mainstream schools. The authors believed that many teachers did not see exclusion as an acceptable solution to the problems posed by the most challenging students. These teachers were looking for alternative solutions which nevertheless dealt effectively with their concerns about antisocial and disruptive behaviour.

In this study the authors' concern is not just with formal exclusion but with pre-empting it. In this context the focus of their research is on the identification and development of processes that counteract the forces that seem to propel pupils, not only towards formal exclusion, but also to exclusion from the normal social and educational life of the school. This broad definition of exclusion includes pupils who are not disruptive but who are passively disengaged from the education process, described by Pye (1988) as 'invisible' and by others, such as Oakley (2001) as 'Rhinos' (really here in name only).

The study was aimed at generating the understanding and practice that could contribute to positive change in the schools involved in the project. The authors wanted to know how these schools viewed the problem of exclusion and what they were doing about it. The case study evidence was at least as strong in identifying difficulties in tackling exclusion as in effecting change. The authors therefore offer both detailed information about possible solutions and about obstacles that may well need to be tackled by teachers as they use and interpret this research.

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Overview

Why is the issue important?

A growing number of students, including primary school pupils, are being permanently excluded from school. But many teachers do not see exclusion as an acceptable solution to the problems posed by extremely challenging students. These teachers are keen to find alternative solutions and strategies for pre-empting students' exclusion from the normal social and educational life of the school.

What did the research show?

Drawing on data from across the six case study schools, the researchers put forward five frameworks that practitioners could use to support the review and development of their own work:

- the relationship between values and structures
- attempting to reconcile dilemmas of intervention
- allowing for the dynamics of feeling
- providing three-dimensional support
- recognising and creating alternative narratives, based on the belief that change is possible and that there are alternative ways of thinking that can alter the path of an individual student's development.

How was this achieved?

The researchers drew examples from the case studies to illustrate each of the five frameworks. These included:

- introducing a whole-school 'positive discipline for learning' policy complemented by a statement of the rights of teachers and students and teachers were given extensive advice on how to lessen the chances of confrontation in the classroom
- introducing 'circle time' to help reconcile dilemmas such as the need for correction and the need for understanding
- organising meetings and professional training in ways that contributed genuine dialogue and a climate of learning, experimentation and support with regard to students' behaviour
- a 'personal tutor' scheme which gave at-risk students the opportunity to express feelings and frustrations in a 'safe' way.

How was the research designed to be trustworthy?

The study involved five volunteer schools and one college of further education. The research focused on the day-to-day thinking of staff and students about what they did and why they did it. The individual case studies were designed within a common overall framework which included:

- interviews and questionnaires, involving staff and pupils
- observations in classrooms and other locations in and around the school, sometimes using video
- teacher logs and audio diaries
- case studies of individual students at risk of exclusion
- school documents, for example, behaviour policy, pupil referral logs, etc.

What are the implications?

The study showed the importance of:

- tackling problems of disaffection and exclusion in the context of the particular school rather than imposing solutions which have worked elsewhere
- responding to specific, individual cases of disaffection and challenging behaviour
- responding to individual students' emotional needs
- supporting students at risk of exclusion
- finding out the students' perspective.

What do the case studies illustrate?

The case studies showed the importance of:

- adopting firm and fair behavioural policies that emphasise the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils rather than rigid adherence to rules and regulations
- responding to students' needs while recognising the needs of teachers too
- building a shared approach to the rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community
- effective record-keeping, effective communication between staff about pupils with problems and an effective referral system
- focusing on the solution rather than the problem
- identifying quietly disaffected students and intervening to improve their attainment.

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Study

What were the aims of the research?

The researchers set out to develop, by means of systematic and detailed case studies and in collaboration with the case study schools:

- understanding of the ways in which teaching staff, students and, where possible, parents and communities, thought about the issues surrounding school exclusion, including its nature, causes and effects in the schools involved in the study
- models of enquiry, analysis and reflection capable of promoting effective practice in the common identification and handling of behavioural problems in educational settings and the prevention of exclusion
- understanding of the ways in which educational institutions could help to prevent student exclusion and at the same time promote positive student engagement with the school community.

Another aim was to use the project itself as a developmental instrument, building shared understanding about behavioural challenges and working partnerships between teachers and researchers in each case study school.

The authors thought it unlikely that they would find a simple set of tried and tested strategies for addressing the problem of disaffection. Rather they took the view that effective approaches incorporated a 'particular orientation' to tackling the problem, which included:

- a belief in schools' power to make a positive difference to pupil behaviour
- a willingness to listen and learn from others, especially including the pupils themselves
- a commitment to taking any action necessary to enhance the quality of pupils' engagement with all aspects of school life.

How does this study connect with other strands of evidence?

The authors' starting point was their concern over the human cost of school exclusion, and the urgent need to

reverse this process. Among other indicators they noted:

- the increase of 400% in the rate of exclusion between 1991 and 1996, with fastest increase in the primary sector (Parsons, 1999)
- the proliferation of unofficial exclusion arising from collusion between schools, parents and pupils themselves (Stirling, 1992)
- the observation that of a group of 265 children excluded from three UK LEAs, (see Hayden, 1997), a high number of them experienced a combination of personal, family and schooling difficulties. These difficulties include a greater likelihood that they will have:
 - personal difficulties in the form of few or no friends, low esteem and behavioural difficulties
 - families experiencing difficulties in the form of relationship problems, social services involvement, violence or abuse among family members, criminality and family trauma
 - experience of educational underachievement
 - attended schools experiencing staffing problems, budget difficulties, unsuitable school accommodation and problems of communication and record keeping in relation to the excluded child's learning difficulties and needs.

Whilst there is considerable variation among researchers about what constitutes disadvantage (Morris et al, 1999) the authors suggest that this combination of factors creates an 'at risk' category of children who are more likely to suffer exclusion than other pupils. The authors were concerned to communicate the thinking that went on among teachers in schools committed to inclusive approaches aimed at counteracting the influence of those factors on the performance of the children in school.

Another strand of educational research that relates closely to some of the findings is the work of Jean Ruddock et al (2000) and John McBeath (1999) (see further reading)

What was done to tackle and to research exclusion?

The researchers selected five volunteer schools and one college of further education that shared similar values and commitments to those that lay at the heart of project. The complete absence of exclusion was not regarded as a prerequisite because the researchers recognised that working to reduce and prevent exclusion was a long-term developmental process.

The authors used the case studies to:

- probe beneath the surface of particular policies and practices by means of questionnaires, interviews and observations
- analyse and make explicit the values and ideas which underpinned them
- relate them to the contexts of the individual schools
- identify outcomes arising from the research process across the different case studies.

The researchers actively involved their teacher colleagues in the schools at every stage of the research process. The university researchers set out the broad foci of the research as:

- teacher thinking about the nature and factors involved in pupil disaffection
- the knowledge, understanding and reasoning which influenced teachers' judgement in deciding what strategies to pursue
- how teachers evaluated the outcomes of action taken.

However, the specific focus was decided by the teachers in the schools themselves, in consultation with the researchers.

At William Shakespeare Upper School the researchers recruited and trained some pupils as interviewers. The authors saw the involvement of pupils in this way as a natural extension of the partnership approach.

The design of the study was itself developmental rather than intending to produce generalised findings in what is a highly context specific and complex field. The research was seen as a vehicle for both the identification and the facilitation of positive alternatives to exclusion through a research/school partnership that nurtured the growth of the school as a learning institution. The researchers then looked for any insights

that the case studies collectively provided into the task of building positive alternatives to exclusion that could be used by others to inform development work.

All the schools, except Sprowston High School, Norwich (Rhino study), chose to remain anonymous.

What were the main outcomes?

Drawing on data from across the case studies, the authors were able to put forward five frameworks that practitioners could use to support the review and development of their own work. The frameworks related to:

- the relationship between values and structures
- attempting to reconcile dilemmas of intervention
- allowing for the dynamics of feeling
- providing three-dimensional support
- recognising and creating alternative narratives, based on the belief that change is possible and that there are alternative ways of thinking that can alter the path of an individual's development.

The authors used the case studies to show how different examples of the frameworks could be put into practice. They aim to help teachers understand and tackle disaffection, and to develop positive alternatives to exclusion.

These included:

- systems of formal behaviour management strategies such as the positive discipline for learning programme
- introducing devices such as 'circle time' at secondary level
- continuous professional development and clearly identified support mechanisms for teachers
- social and pastoral support such as the individual 'personal tutor' scheme.

What else did the study highlight?

Context

The authors used a number of imaginary scenarios to show both the importance of context in using the frameworks and the transferability of the frameworks between contexts. These scenarios suggested ways in which the frameworks could be applied in diverse school and LEA contexts.

Personal experience

The personal experiences of staff and students were found to be a significant feature of all successful interactions in the case studies. There were many examples of genuine communication and empathy between students and teachers; and a demonstrable connection between the process of inclusion and the act of trying to understand.

Dialogue

The need to provide opportunities for dialogue emerged across all the case studies. Dialogue was seen to be important not only as a tool to help decision-making but also to give people an opportunity to talk about their experiences, and to be listened to. This approach to dialogue grew from the awareness that part of the task of building positive alternatives to exclusion involved addressing the emotional needs and experiences of teachers as well as students. The authors suggest that not only do teachers need to feel supported they also need to feel they can seek advice from their colleagues without fearing repercussions if they admit to having problems.

Levels

Their research led the authors to conclude that the frameworks could be used at a number of levels, including:

- teachers - individuals, groups, whole school staffs
- management teams
- teams involving parents, governors, communities and the LEA
- support services
- policy makers at national level.

Framework 1: the relationship between values and structure - what works?

Evidence from two of the case study schools is given here to exemplify how this framework could be applied in practice. First, to promote good pupil behaviour and positive engagement with the curriculum at William Shakespeare School the headteacher had made it a top priority to:

- develop a strong framework of agreed shared values among staff
- make the structures (policies and strategies) clear
- ensure that the values and structures were tightly related.

This approach sought to embed a fairly rigid system of formal behaviour management strategies in what the authors termed a 'therapeutic and person centred' school ethos.

Secondly, teachers at T. S. Eliot High School had introduced a 'positive discipline for learning' (PDL) policy. This was a whole-school initiative that aimed to develop a behaviour policy complemented by a statement of the rights of teachers and students.

The aims of the behaviour policy included:

- pupils' self-control
- pupils' self-motivation
- tolerance of and respect for the rights of others.

Alongside these aims were set the rights of teachers and students among which were to:

- learn without interference
- teach without disruption
- be heard and supported.

Teachers were provided with extensive advice about the policies for preventing and correcting student indiscipline, all of which was designed to lessen the chances of confrontation in the classroom. Teachers at the school approved of this approach:

'It's a lot better for teachers' sanity not to be confrontational...you've got to remain calm. Getting excited and shouting at kids is not going to help...It's only going to make you more angry and more tense and the kids will pick on it.'

A system of behavioural sanctions was communicated to the pupils. Staff appreciated the pressure it took off them:

'(Now) the whole thing is codified. Children know now much more which actions are going to lead to reprimand and what is going to happen. The worst thing for kids is not knowing in a situation what particular actions are going to lead to if they do things, and they get confused because they don't know what that's going to engender.'

Starting point for teachers

The authors suggest that teachers looking for a starting point might ask: what is the relationship between the

espoused values and ethos of my school and the systems and structures that are in place to foster pupils' positive behaviour?

Framework 2: the dilemmas of intervention - how to respond?

Analysis of teachers' thinking in the case study schools highlighted what the authors describe as 'dilemmas of intervention'. These dilemmas suggested a way of thinking about the complexities of the teacher's task in deciding their response to challenging behaviour. The authors identified seven dilemmas, including those between:

Fairness (treating all the same)	Fairness (recognising difference)
Rights/needs of the collective	Rights/needs of the individual
Need for correction	Need for understanding

The authors suggested that the way teachers resolved dilemmas on a daily basis affected their subsequent relationships with the students and their students' attitudes towards them, towards learning and towards the school. They point out that a preoccupation with policies based rigidly on values to the left in the above diagram could make exclusion more likely. For example, at William Shakespeare School teachers recognised that whilst the school had a clearly established hierarchy of responsibility for dealing with behavioural incidents there also had to be a flexibility that allowed the system to be circumvented if the need arose.

However, the evidence from Virginia Woolf School showed that shifting policy and practice strongly in favour of values recognising that all students were different and needed understanding, also created tensions for staff. As an illustration of an effective approach that addressed both sides of the dilemma simultaneously the authors cited the idea of 'circle time' at Virginia Woolf School.

Implications for your own practice

In Anne Fine School a tension was described between the goals of developing obedience and autonomy on the part of pupils. Teachers recognised that teachers' institutional role of authority figure could be difficult to reconcile with the relationship of trust and intimate interpersonal understanding that may be essential for significant learning. How do you, as teachers, resolve such dilemmas, as you respond both individually and collectively to disruptive behaviour? What are the circumstances that lead you to resolve dilemmas in certain ways?

Framework 3: the dynamics of feeling - how to meet emotional needs?

The authors argue that the challenging behaviour of pupils can powerfully undermine teachers' sense of professional identity and worthiness. They suggest that traditional cultures of teaching place such a high premium on teachers' ability to keep order that teachers are often loath to discuss difficulties openly and seek support from their colleagues.

Evidence from Virginia Woolf School demonstrated that how teachers and students felt and behaved in school and their readiness to meet the challenges of learning, was dependent on their emotional state, including:

- feelings of belonging or isolation, inclusion or exclusion, and difference from or identity with the group
- feelings of power or powerlessness
- feeling cared for, valued and listened to or rejected and marginalised.

Teachers and students could react in similar ways to the fear of failure and to challenging situations that placed them in the role of the learner. They all needed acceptance, understanding and support, without which they found it harder to face the challenges of the classroom and school life. For the teachers this was particularly true for the difficult interactions with students. There was evidence in all the case studies that

when students and teachers were regularly acknowledged and listened to, understood and cared for, they were more likely to be open to learning.

The authors suggested that schools needed to organise meetings and professional training in such a way as to contribute to a genuine dialogue and to a climate of learning and experimentation with regard to students' behaviour. They argued that experiences of dialogue and constructive support were not simply essential pre-requisites but also the means by which both pupils and teachers learned to handle challenging behaviour.

Implications for practice

Where can you, as a teacher, turn in order to feel supported or to ask for advice about managing challenging behaviour? Can you identify situations where you could raise such issues? Can you identify opportunities you have had for discussing your problems with colleagues? What sorts of dialogues take place in your school?

Framework 4: providing three-dimensional support - what can we do to support students at risk of exclusion?

The authors use evidence from Virginia Woolf School, to show how teachers implemented a range of strategies to support pupils at risk of exclusion. These initiatives aimed to:

- help reduce pressures so that success in coping became more likely
- build students' inner resources, giving them more to draw on to cope successfully with the pressures on them
- provide opportunities for feeling a sense of personal satisfaction and belonging.

A central feature of this school's approach to inclusion was the 'personal tutor' scheme, which involved ten members of staff each working to support six students. The students were identified as at risk by heads of year. The scheme proved popular with students and there was always a 'waiting list' of children who wanted to join the scheme.

Students clearly found it helpful to be able express feelings and frustrations in a 'safe' way:

'Being able to talk to her about it (has helped me to change). Getting it all out of my system 'cos usually I keep it all bottled up inside and I don't say nothing, but with Miss I can tell her everything that happened and then it's out in the open.'

Not only did the personal tutor scheme help reduce pressures on students, it also enabled student's to build up their self-esteem. One student commented:

'I wrote up a list of things that were good about me...yes it was helpful. Yes, because whenever you feel like that you can sort say it in your head.'

The authors also found that teachers in other case study schools were aware of the need for support for particular pupils although this was often at the level of the individual member of staff, rather than as a whole-school policy. As an experienced teacher at T. S. Eliot High School commented:

'It takes a lot of time and a lot of patience, but I think after a while, if you have a little bit of a mother hen approach with these kids, you manage to establish some kind of relationship with them...basically they start trusting you a little bit more. From the moment they start trusting you they stop being confrontational and they are better behaved.'

As further evidence of the value of social and pastoral support, 85% (n = 273) of students surveyed at Ogden Nash Upper School cited school staff among those who fulfil this important role.

Implications for practice

What policies does your school have in place for supporting pupils at risk of exclusion? Which strategies from the case studies might work best in your own school context?

Framework 5: creating alternative narratives - what's the student's story and how will it end?

Teachers in all the case study schools believed strongly that it was possible to find alternatives to exclusion. At Ogden Nash Upper School discussions of individual pupils at risk of exclusion in the light of all available documentation left the staff with a strong sense of how things might have been if such an exercise had been undertaken earlier. These teachers:

- discovered that none of them had had access to the whole story. It was as if different people had been reading different chapters at different times, not necessarily in the same order
- saw that there had been critical moments when action could have been taken that might have significantly altered the course of events that had led the particular student to the brink of exclusion
- realised that teachers' powers to make a difference depended to some extent on the quality of information available and the opportunity to form an informed collective view about action to be taken. Although this is time consuming for all staff, it is particularly difficult (because of the large numbers of staff involved) and most important in secondary schools, where 'chapters of the story' are held in so many different hands.

This exercise at Ogden Nash also highlighted the way structures designed to secure and maintain discipline could inhibit teachers and students from altering the onward path to exclusion. The authors argued that the system of escalating sanctions, operating in most schools becomes a force for exclusion, as sooner or later the available options run out and the 'only alternative' is to exclude the student.

In another example, teachers at William Shakespeare Upper School refused to accept that a boy's behaviour was irredeemable. Whilst they recognised that exclusion was a possibility, they worked hard to provide as many positive alternatives as possible. They listened to him to find out how he saw things. They gave him an opportunity to explain his behaviour. When he was disruptive in an English class, his head of year took him out and sat him near her. She tried to make him feel valued:

'...I was thinking what he could do to make him feel valued. And I said, 'Do you like writing poetry?'. And he said, 'Yes.' I said to write a poem about school. It was funny. It rhymed, and it was very funny. We published it (in the school newspaper) and we gave him a prize for it.'

The boy was also sent to a behavioural support centre for one day a week for six weeks, which allowed him a respite from school and time for reflection. Despite the school's best efforts exclusion could, in this case, not be avoided. However, the school was successful in retaining students at risk in other cases.

Further Education Colleges are increasingly becoming alternative sites for providing inclusive education for students at risk of exclusion. An illustrative example is given by the experience of Year 11 students at Rudyard Kipling College, which is presented in the study. Evidence from this college suggested the more adult environment in such centres helps some students.

Strategies adopted by teachers in the Rhinos case study were successful in identifying disaffected students and in altering the course of their school careers.

Implications for your own practice

At Ogden Nash School the teachers were deeply affected by the sense that maybe things could have been different for individual students if alternative possibilities had been recognised and exploited earlier. Can you think of 'at risk' students where piecing together the story from their point of view might help teachers identify alternative possibilities?

What can we do to tackle disaffection effectively in different contexts?

The authors suggested that whilst the frameworks, or approaches, they have highlighted provide ways of understanding and analysing behaviour and disaffection, the strategy followed in a school will depend very much on the context. They provided three imaginary scenarios to illustrate the sorts of problems that schools, teachers and LEAs might face in different circumstances. They use the evidence from the study to show how the frameworks could be applied to resolve the situation.

- Scenario one concerns a recently amalgamated primary school in a metropolitan school area.
- Scenario two concerns an LEA advisor and behaviour support team who want to reduce exclusions.
- Scenario three concerns a newly appointed head of History in an urban comprehensive faced with challenging behaviour.

All three scenarios illustrate a willingness to approach problems in a spirit of enquiry, to listen to and learn from pupils, and to develop practices in the light of understandings and in the belief that what teachers and schools do can and will make a difference.

Scenario 1: how might the frameworks be used in a newly amalgamated metropolitan primary school?

Staff here are concerned about an increasing number of pupils who have difficulty adhering to the school's expectations and guidelines about behaviour. Fixed term exclusion has been used and staff are keen to prevent further exclusion but unsure how to proceed.

The authors suggest that as this is a newly amalgamated school the staff group might not have had enough time to discuss and negotiate a common framework of values. Framework one: the relationship between values and structures, might be useful in examining the relationship between the existing school values and ethos and the systems in place for promoting positive engagement with the curriculum.

The staff might need opportunities to build trust and overcome any tensions left over from the amalgamation process. Framework two: dilemmas of intervention, might be a useful tool for staff to explore and reflect on their values and practices in a way that encourages discussion and avoids polarisation of views. Approaching staff discussion in this way would help acknowledge the challenging nature of the task and the absence of simple and straightforward answers. Framework three: the dynamics of feeling, could be used to help lay the foundations of emotional support and trust amongst the new staff team needed to create the emotional space for learning.

Staff might like to reflect on how they resolve dilemmas in connection with particular students who are giving most cause for concern. For example, they might find that they respond differently to these individuals than to other students. Staff discussion might focus on the three-dimensional approach to support described in framework four: providing support, as a means of recognising the kinds of support currently in place and considering what else might be done to change the balance of pressures, resources and opportunities in a way that would be enabling for the pupils.

The authors suggest carrying out shadow observations of individual pupils and reflecting on the aspects of the school environment that seem to cause difficulty and what might be done to reduce them. For example, pressure on individual children might be reduced by introducing structured play activities at dinner-time, and children might have greater opportunities to achieve a sense of personal satisfaction if they were offered choices and opportunities to pursue personal interests through the curriculum. The authors argue that such work would, by its very nature, help to reinforce teachers' belief that it may be possible to influence and enable children to respond differently if conditions change in ways that support and foster such positive developments, as described in framework five: alternative narratives.

Scenario 2: how might these frameworks be used in culturally, linguistically and socially diverse school settings?

An LEA team want to develop a strategy that will use available resources to support schools in the most positive and effective way possible. The LEA serves a culturally, socially and linguistically diverse

community and there are variations between schools in the rates of exclusion.

Although the authors use an LEA setting for this second scenario, the use of the frameworks that they describe could also be applied in individual school settings where there is social, cultural religious and linguistic diversity. These have been highlighted here.

Framework one: the relationship between values and structures, and framework two: dilemmas of intervention, could be used in individual schools to provide a focus for positive development work. Framework four: threedimensional support, could be a powerful tool for exploring, from the perspective of a particular group of students, what the school could do that would make a difference. It might lead to a consideration of the particular pressures of students, for example, who are new to English, who are refugees, or whose cultural, religious, or linguistic background differs significantly from the majority of staff and/or students in the school. It could focus attention on racial harassment or social exclusion and what the school could do that would make a difference.

The second focus of framework four is on 'building inner resources'. In a multi-ethnic context this might be used to reinforce the confidence, motivation and self-esteem of students, for example, by incorporating the specific cultural, class, religious and language identities of students into curriculum activities; or by developing mentoring schemes involving older pupils or members of the local community.

For examples of good practice aimed at raising the self-esteem of ethnic minority pupils, see the GTC research of the 'making the difference: teaching and learning strategies in successful multi-ethnic schools', which summarises the work of Maud Blair and Jill Bourne and co-workers.

Scenario 3: how might teachers use the frameworks to deal with difficult pupils?

A new head of history in an urban comprehensive is dismayed to find that her expertise in establishing positive relationships with her classes does not seem to have transferred into her new situation. One Year 9 boy continually challenges her authority. The teacher is unwilling to ask for help as she establishes herself with her new colleagues but is not sure how to address the problem constructively.

In this third scenario, the authors suggest that the teacher experiencing difficulties could examine and analyse her situation, using framework three: the dynamics of feeling. This would provide her with a resource for thinking through the dynamics of her own relationship with the student and crystallise for her the awareness of the part that her own fear of failure was playing in the situation, preventing her from seeking support from colleagues and information to help her understand the pupil's perspective and build a more positive relationship with him. It would help the teacher to refocus and think about the pupil's behaviour not simply as a threat to her professional identity, but from the pupil's point of view, as a possible expression of his feelings of failure, alienation or powerlessness.

The authors suggest that the teacher might draw on framework five: alternative narratives, to develop a positive strategy. She might start by trying to talk to the pupil, away from other students, in a person-to-person way that communicated genuine respect and willingness to listen. By recognising that change depends on creating conditions in which teachers, as well as pupils, feel accepted, cared for and listened to, the teacher might seek the support of a carefully selected colleague, or colleagues, to discuss what was happening and explore possible options. If other teachers experienced similar problems with the student, such an initiative might provide a catalyst to build up a fuller picture and help the staff decide on an action to help the student find an alternative, more constructive experience of school life.

How important is personal experience?

'The teachers believing me is the most important sort of help I could have.' - (Pupil, Virginia Woolf School).

'It helps me to say 'I care about you very much as a human being and I want to do my best by you, and I want

this school to be somewhere that you want to be, and to achieve in.' - (Headteacher, Anne Fine School).

The enriching of the personal experiences of staff and pupils through interaction and shared approaches emerged as a significant feature of all successful interactions in the case studies. One of the questions the research team asked as the case studies got underway was, 'What makes a difference?' At the end of the project they realised that everything teachers do can enrich their pupils' experiences and so make a difference.

The case studies provided many examples of genuine communication and empathy between students and teachers. There was a demonstrable connection between the process of inclusion and the act of trying to understand. For example, the behaviour policy at Anne Fine School, by containing elements contributed by the pupils themselves, formally recognised the pupils' perspective. If the object was to prevent bullying then the policy was to prevent bullying as defined by the children.

The authors suggested that when schools and classrooms worked most effectively towards inclusion, both teachers' and students' personal experiences included a sense of:

- being valued as a person
- belonging and involvement
- personal satisfaction and achievement
- being accepted and listened to
- congruence between personal and institutional values
- the meaningfulness of the tasks of teaching and learning for those involved
- of power to influence things for the better.
- In the latter regard the authors considered how assessment practices across the school might be used to develop person-centred approaches. They drew readers' attention to the review of research evidence by Black and William (1998) and particularly its emphasis on the relationship between formative assessment by the teacher and self-assessment by the pupils.

Teachers wishing to find out more about formative assessment should refer to the GTC RfT 'Inside the black box' which summarises a study of this topic by Dylan William and Paul Black.

What else does the study contain?

This summary has been concerned with the report of the project as it related specifically to inclusion and to teacher and pupil perspectives on challenging behaviour. However the full report of this project also contains information about the developmental aspect of the work, for example:

- how the project itself actually affected what happened in the schools
- how effective the project was in terms of its aspirations for collaboration and partnership
- the extent to which the project lived up to people's expectations
- which aspects of the project were seen as 'successful' and which were 'unsatisfactory'
- what the participants saw as likely and desirable ways to build on and extend the project in future.

These details are in the final chapter and were gathered through a focus group held after the work was completed.

How was data collected?

The researchers worked from the premise that no two schools are exactly alike, although they may appear to share common characteristics. They took the view that whilst different schools may adopt identical formal patterns of organisation, such as student grouping, management structures, etc. The impact of these organisational patterns on the daily experience of individuals could vary enormously because of all the other factors in the school that are not identical, for example, pupil intake, teaching staff, non-teaching staff, relationships between teachers and pupils, etc.

For this reason the research focus of each school was different and the data collection methods were

separately agreed in each setting, along with the responsibilities for collecting and analysing the data. The focus of the research was on the day-to-day thinking of staff and students about what they did and why they did it. Within each case study steps were taken to ensure the research built on systematic data. Although individual case study data sets were designed to be fit for specific purposes they were all designed within a common overall framework and so included:

- interviews and questionnaires, involving staff and pupils
- observations in classrooms and other locations in and around the school, sometimes using video
- teacher logs and audio diaries
- case studies of individual students at risk of exclusion
- examination of school documents, for example, behaviour policy, pupil referral logs, etc.

Implications for practice

When writing this RfT we became aware of a number of implications that practitioners may like to explore in their own schools.

School leaders may like to consider the following questions:

- This study made a strong case for tackling problems of disaffection and exclusion in the context of the particular school rather than imposing solutions which have worked elsewhere. This requires detailed examination of the problems in relation to the school's values, policies and structures. Would it be helpful to set up working groups of teachers, management teams and teams involving parents and governors etc to explore the problems and issues?
- The research suggested that issues of disaffection and exclusion could be explored and understood within five frameworks (below). Would these be useful starting points in your school for exploring the issues of disaffection and exclusion?

The frameworks were:

- Are school values relating to behaviour and exclusion reflected in school structures?
- How should the school respond to specific, individual cases of disaffection and challenging behaviour?
- How can we respond best to individual students' emotional needs?
- How can we support students at risk of exclusion?
- The students' perspective - what do students see as the way forwards?

Teachers may find it helpful to consider the following questions:

- What would you find to be the most effective way of clarifying and reinforcing your school's values and objectives in relation to behaviour and exclusion so that all students are aware of them?
- What systems and procedures would help you to meet the needs of students at risk of disaffection or of becoming more disaffected and alienated from school - Could the rewards and sanctions system be improved, perhaps through consultation with students? What kinds of support should excluded students have? What would be the most effective way of re-integrating students after exclusion - for the student, for the rest of the class and for the teacher?
- What would you find helpful for your own professional development and support when dealing with challenging behaviour and trying to engage disaffected or potentially disaffected students?

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Case studies

The five project institutions included here all chose to give themselves pseudonyms. They encompass a broad range of types, sizes, locations, socio-economic and performance characteristics. In addition, the 'Research for Teachers' team included the Sprowston High School case study from another project.

Anne Fine Primary School

Anne Fine Primary School, 197 pupils on roll and an urban intake which was mixed socio-economically, with about 25% of pupils from multi-ethnic backgrounds.

This case study highlighted the importance of adopting firm and fair behavioural policies that emphasised the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils rather than rigid adherence to rules and regulations. The policy established by the school was detailed and included:

- the rights and responsibilities of pupils, staff and parents
- a detailed description of bullying in all its form
- a variety of examples of unacceptable behaviour.

The behaviour policy, drawn up by the whole staff, emphasised rewards rather than sanctions. It was based on an 'insistence on high standards of behaviour at all times, drawing its strength from community of purpose, consistent practice and constant vigilance'.

The headteacher had a 'special mentions book' for pupils whose behaviour or achievement was worthy of recognition, backed up by citations in assemblies and newsletters and presentation of certificates. There was also a system of 'behaviour books' in all classrooms, dining hall and playgrounds, to enable the headteacher to monitor and follow up bad behaviour.

Whilst Year 6 pupils were cautious in their evaluation of the 'behaviour books', generally pupils from Year 5 downwards endorsed these and other aspects of the school's positive approach to behaviour.

Year 4 pupil:

"The bullying book [sic] keeps you in control and all that 'cos you know you are going to get in the 'behaviour book' if you do something really naughty"

Year 5 pupil:

"It is really good because of the bullying, because in case some people were getting bullied, they put the bully book, and it was really good because some people could maybe open up a bit more about it. They thought what can they do? But now they can do quite a lot about it".

Many pupils appreciated the special mentions book. One of them commented:

"That is very good. It makes people feel better about themselves as well for doing something very good, and it actually gets mentioned."

The teachers were very supportive of the whole school approach but they were equally clear that there were weaknesses and work that needed developing. A common theme was clarity; the importance of shared expectations for teaching and ancillary staff, for children and for parents. One teacher said:

"One of the really good things has been that in all of the work that we have done as a staff, we have become much, much clearer... in our own expectations and in our expectations of the children. I also think the children are much clearer about what's going on."

One member of staff found this sense of purpose, combined with the security of written evidence, very supportive in this aspect of her work:

"I would say that [the 'behaviour books'] have been fantastically useful in identifying patterns in behaviour,

in providing evidence, in providing a tool to be able to work with children and parents together."

Virginia Woolf High School

Virginia Woolf High School, an aged 11-16 urban comprehensive in an economically disadvantaged area and with 950 pupils on roll.

This lengthy case study illustrated the importance of responding to students' needs while recognising the needs of teachers too. It highlighted:

- the tensions that arise in school as teachers grapple with dilemmas and examples of how teachers resolved them
- school initiatives aimed at supporting all students especially those at risk of disaffection
- evidence about the emotional states of the teachers who dealt with difficult pupil behaviour and of the pupils themselves
- examples of initiatives that supported excluded students on re-entry
- a scheme to support excluded students on re-entry.

The case study showed that teachers' sense of professional identity and worthiness was threatened by challenging behaviour. In particular the authors found that:

- the teacher was forced into the position of learner when faced with 'difficult' behaviour from students, and the emotional dimension of learning could become unbearably uncomfortable
- the teachers' experience mirrored that of the students
- addressing the needs of the staff was essential for progress towards inclusion.

Recognising and responding to the needs of the pupils

The following quotation illustrates the tensions teachers felt between their concern for the individual pupils and their sense of responsibility for the rest of the class:

"(X) probably has tremendous family problems but we don't know, we don't know this! ...and that still doesn't excuse the fact that one person will be allowed to disturb the whole class."

and another said:

"My fear is that with the amount of pupils in a class, if you don't give (X) aggravation he will just sit and it's easier not to aggravate him and leave him to do nothing".

The initiatives that won the support and commitment of staff were those that addressed both sides of the dilemma. For example, the introduction of 'circle time' contributed to the development of positive, non-confrontational relationships. 'Circle time' was an innovation, common in primary schools, which had been introduced firstly into Year 7 and then into other years. This activity gave students the opportunity to talk about their concerns. Issues pupils talked about included bullying, dealing with bereavement, relationships, what made them sad or happy and so on. 'Circle time' helped pupils to develop their self-esteem while helping them to ease the pressures they experienced.

The 'personal tutor' system involved teachers taking responsibility for 6 pupils each and helped pupils deal with their emotional state. Interview data illustrated how useful these approaches were to pupils:

"It's a really good idea I think for children like, well, me that need help. To talk to someone. Not every child can bottle it up."

and

"She just like understands how I feel...and she'll say something, like, that'll mean something."

The build up of pressure was fuelled by day-to-day experiences that reinforced feelings of isolation, of not belonging. Pupils talked of feeling excluded from the processes of the school and of the classroom, being bullied and singled out, being unable to complete work or being identified as being different on the basis of family reputations.

Interviews with three students who were receiving personal tutoring showed that this experience made a real difference to how they felt about school, because it reduced the sense of emotional isolation and gave them a sense of being cared for.

This case study also provided examples of scaffolding that helped prevent exclusion and supported excluded students on their return to school. In addition to the 'personal tutor' scheme and 'circle time', the school had:

- implemented a new PSHE (personal, social and health education) scheme designed to meet the specific needs of students as elicited via questionnaires and discussion. The scheme involved activities including discussion, role-play and external speaker contributions, with a major emphasis on building student self-esteem
- set up a literacy working group to explore and enhance students' literacy development. One of the main aims of the group was to work with departments to ensure that at risk students had the necessary language and literacy skills for successful engagement with the subject
- introduced a GNVQ project-based course. The more personal approach to study implicit in this approach, allied to close monitoring and feedback was regarded as particularly beneficial for at risk students
- supported students returning from exclusion by trying to reduce pressures while building their inner resources. Students kept an audio diary and were closely monitored by staff. Behaviour targets were negotiated with teachers and these were scored by staff at the end of each lesson.

While students valued the sustained personal support on offer and regarded the report card as helpful, it made some feel like "everyone's watching me all the time".

The staff perspective on these issues was varied. Some were pleased the students were being supported; others felt that it was rewarding bad behaviour; and others felt it was an intrusion into their own discipline and practices.

Recognising and responding to the needs of the teachers

Questionnaire responses from 24 teachers indicated that their views about the kind of relationships that they wanted with their students were broadly in line with the kind of relationships that the students identified as being important. Like the students they emphasised the importance of listening, developing coping strategies, understanding individuals and helping students feel included. But many teachers talked of feeling separate from the senior management, from other teachers, from the governors, from parents and from the students, as the following quotes illustrate:

"It would be nice if the respect I try to show them, they would reciprocate. Their attitude is always negative, aggressive and disruptive."

"If only the students knew what the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are. It is far from acceptable and total lack of support from senior staff is perpetuating the problem."

The staff who were interviewed about students at risk of exclusion also expressed a sense of powerlessness to influence and change the situation for the better:

"I have tried absolutely everything I can think of: praise, positive reinforcement, encouragement, rewards, maybe the task is too hard, but nothing had any effect."

Responses from staff displayed a range of tensions of the sort described earlier. From this information the school was able to initiate a development programme in which descriptions of the tensions provided a shared language for staff and management to analyse, and in specific cases to respond to, student disaffection. This approach contributed to a climate in which teachers felt acknowledged and listened to.

T.S. Eliot High School

T.S. Eliot High School, a 12-18 comprehensive (it starts at Year 8) with over 2000 students and a large sixth form, situated on the edge of a city.

This case study showed the importance of building a shared approach to the rights and responsibilities of all members of the school community. At the heart of this approach was the school's positive discipline for learning programme (PDL).

When the school joined the project only one pupil had been permanently excluded in the previous two years (for unacceptably dangerous behaviour). Although the staff were proud of this record they were also concerned about disaffection and disruptive behaviour, particularly in the present Year 10. The PDL included both preventative strategies, and corrective strategies which helped teachers deal with behaviour in the least confrontational way.

Preventative action

Staff were provided with clear advice which aimed to help them prevent or minimise unnecessary disruption. This list included a range of measures including:

- make your room aesthetically pleasing and functional
- arrive on time
- plan interesting lessons
- cater and plan for mixed ability
- have clear, fair positive rules and make consequences known
- plan the language you use when disciplining
- plan to acknowledge and affirm positive behaviour.

The guidance to teachers, which went with these rules, emphasised consistency, an encouraging atmosphere, the use of positive feedback, and respect for students.

Further evidence of the importance of the above measures in tackling disaffection is provided by another study, by Sharon Goodman (2002), which identified good practice in dance education. This research used video recordings of practice to identify and disseminate strategies and techniques that help to manage behaviour and create enthusiastic, independent learners. The strategies proposed by the author included:

- rephrasing questions to ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to understand and to become involved
- repeating questions to allow all pupils enough thinking time
- reinforcing expectations by quietly reminding pupils about behaviour
- making the process successful
- differentiating tasks eg. giving a difficult pupil a different task from the rest of the class can raise his/her status.

Corrective action

Specific rules and their consequences were negotiated with the students, in relation to six aspects of discipline:

- attendance
- punctuality
- attire
- class behaviour
- treatment of others
- school environment.

Infringement of agreed rules, recorded through the use of 'yellow slips' led automatically to the operation of specific sanctions, (such as tactical ignoring, rule reminder, 'time out' room for dangerous behaviour, for example).

How teachers responded to the policy

Fifteen teachers volunteered for one of their classes to be observed and to be interviewed. The teachers' views provided an insight into the complexities of implementing a whole-school behaviour policy and how individual teachers made sense of the new requirements.

The data showed that the PDL policy was being used, experienced and understood in different and sometimes contradictory ways by different members of staff and this influenced what they had to say about its value and impact, its strengths and limitations and its relationship to their own beliefs, values and practices.

Teachers endorsed the positive non-confrontational approach:

"One of the things I had taught to me was never put a child hard up against a wall with no way out...always offer them choices even at the very last...once they've lost face and are against the wall, there is nowhere to go, is there?"

One teacher felt that PDL policy had had a positive effect on the children's attitudes and responses in lessons because:

"...children know now much more which actions are going to lead to reprimand and what is going to happen."

For another, the clear link between rules and consequences made disciplinary matters more straightforward and helped to avoid confrontation:

"Now you can disassociate the teaching from the discipline so you don't have a conflict in the classroom. You simply fill in the yellow form and post it. You reduce the confrontation."

However, it was also clear that the opportunities provided by the PDL did run the risk of over simplistic application, as epitomised by one teacher who saw the PDL policy uniquely in terms of its potential to remove students to the 'time out' room:

"I do feel that the PDL is good, it is very good because it does enable us to get rid of students."

Some staff supervised the 'time out' room in a consultative and therapeutic way, discussing students' problems with them in a supportive way. Other staff performed the duty in a custodial, punitive way, using the time to interrogate and instruct the students on how they might mend their ways.

The overriding impression was that teachers' practices remained bound up and infused by their personal philosophies, understandings and with styles of interacting with students developed throughout their teaching

experience.

Ogden Nash Upper School

Ogden Nash Upper School, a Roman Catholic upper school with 380 pupils on roll, situated on the edge of a light industrial area.

This case study highlighted the importance of:

- an effective record-keeping
- an effective communication between staff about pupils with problems
- an effective referral system.

Practice at this school also illustrated some of the features of schools which gave rise to issues which had to be addressed on a whole-school basis if the problem of avoiding exclusion was to be dealt with adequately. For example, among the staff there were a number of sub-groups based on different sets of beliefs and understandings about the school:

- one group saw a formal motivational system of rewards and sanctions as central
- another placed the emphasis on relationships and individual student support
- another was pessimistic about the ability of the school to influence behaviour of pupils.

The apparent divisions among the staff were reflected in student attitudes. Responses to a questionnaire given to all students at the school (n = 383), of which 320 were returned, showed that:

- the school did not communicate its formal behaviour monitoring policy effectively to students
- although the majority of students did appreciate the school's reward system, a significant, and possibly the minority most likely to be disaffected, saw no benefit in the reward system
- a majority of students valued the personal support of teachers.

To some extent the school staff reflected a degree of complacency about students' behaviour. This originated in the fact that Ogden Nash was a faith school and staff assumed its Christian ethos would establish and maintain appropriate standards of behaviour. One slightly sceptical member of staff commented:

"You benefit from the fact that parents actively chose to send their children to this school because it is a church school so you've got some kind of shared ethos - an idea that 'come on, look, everyone is backing you. You can't be too disruptive because it's not fair on other people.' There is a vague notion, I am not sure it's quantifiable, I don't think the discipline in the school is quite strong enough."

Other teachers however were aware of the need to get to know the children thoroughly and not to make assumptions about them:

"I suppose knowing his background as I do when he is in the classroom I am fairly tolerant...it is more important that he is here, than for me to put too much pressure on him to achieve. You try to make allowances, avoid situations."

There was a widely held view among the staff that the school lacked a systematic approach to at risk students. Staff did not ways interact effectively and this led to a fragmented approach. One example of this concerned a girl who was being disruptive. The facts of her behaviour were well documented and widely known among staff, but the information that she might be suffering from an eating disorder had not been recorded anywhere in writing. Staff were also aware of other cases where relevant information about students which had been recorded was not easily accessible.

The evidence from staff reflected some of the tensions which had been observed in other schools. These tensions included those between:

- fairness (treating all the same) and fairness (recognising differences)
- need for correction and the need of understanding
- formal procedures and actual practice.

There were clear inconsistencies between formal procedures and actual practice. One staff member had a sceptical view:

"Where do they [referrals] go? I think it is important the tutor gets one. They can go to the head of year but you don't want to go to the head of year every time there is a referral but [the system requires that] you do."

Another teacher commented on variations in the use of the referral system by staff:

"In a small department word of mouth is used instead of the system so there is no record. Some teachers perceive behaviour in a different way to others so some might make a referral and others not. We have agonised about the system for a long time."

William Shakespeare Upper School

William Shakespeare Upper School, an aged 13-18 comprehensive with 280 students on a falling roll, in one of the most deprived areas served by Greater London LEA.

This case study illustrated the importance of:

- adopting an informal and personal approach to student disaffection
- effective communications among staff and between staff and students
- focusing on the solution rather than the problem
- taking a pedagogic approach to student behaviour.

The ethos in the school laid great emphasis on a positive approach to disaffection. The success of this approach was supported by evidence collected from students who had been excluded from other schools. Students appreciated the positive tone set in the school. One pupil who had been excluded from another school commented:

"No [I didn't have any disciplinary problems when I came here], not really, because the way they do it [here] is they all speak to you about it. They don't go straight in with punishment...The teachers here are a lot more friendly, and are easier to learn off, because they are like your mates as well. As well as being a teacher."

When interviewed all the students who had been excluded from other schools compared the more personal and humane way of dealing with disaffection they experienced at William Shakespeare with the bureaucratic and punitive discipline systems at their former schools. One student graphically described the system of escalating sanctions that reflected the quantity rather than the quality of poor behaviour he had experienced and highlighted its inconsistencies:

"C1 is getting your name written on the board, and C2s are five minutes after the lesson...from a C1 to a C2, what is the difference? Say like you turned around, and they didn't want you they would say, 'C1!' and then you did the same again, it would be C2. There isn't any difference between them! For instance, if someone was talking they got a C5 and sent to the headmaster. There is a difference between someone fighting and they get sent to the headmaster!"

In interviews these students expressed a strong sense of satisfaction with the quality of relationships they shared with staff:

"I think these teachers (at William Shakespeare) care a lot about, not only in school but out of school - what we do. They would say, 'What did you do at the weekend?' or something like that...I play hockey. I can talk to my PE teacher about what I do; my achievements...and he will listen and say: 'good!' at what I have done. And that really does help. You feel a lot easier when it comes to lessons.' and carry on sort of thing."

Many teachers resisted the conceptual separation of 'classroom management' and 'teaching'. These teachers drew on good quality interpersonal and social relationships in the classroom:

"I like the children to be able to communicate with me...and ask questions. And I like for them to be able to communicate with each other, and ask questions. Obviously a by-product of this is if they are allowed to talk, then some of it is going to get a bit off the straight and narrow track."

This view of teaching and learning has a striking affinity with the contemporary theory and practice of learning as a complex of affective, social and cognitive processes. The latter approach to understanding the nature of learning in the classroom emphasises the importance of interpersonal relationships between teacher and learner in promoting cognitive development.

Teachers wishing to find out more about promoting cognitive development should read the GTC RfT 'Improving learning through cognitive intervention'. This research summary describes and explains the work of Shayer and Adey who were the designers of the influential cognitive acceleration through science education (CASE) project.

Rhinos (really here in name only)

Sprowston High School, Norwich, 1,400 pupils in Years 8-13. The school is on the northern outskirts of Norwich, and has a very homogeneous population. Although unemployment levels are low, academic expectations are also low and the area is not affluent.

Aims

The object of this teacher research project was the examination of disaffection among a group of pupils attending Sprowston High School in Norwich. The pupils in question were given the name Rhinos, which stood for 'really here in name only'. Because the group in question did not disrupt lessons in an overt way, or break the school's basic conventions, their disaffection was not immediately apparent. In fact, although most teachers felt that there were pupils fitting this description in almost all classes, evidence for their existence was purely anecdotal. The enquiry sought to identify such pupils, to examine their learning and motivation, and to explore intervention strategies that could enhance their experience of school.

Summary of findings

- Rhinos were a real phenomenon and it was possible to identify them through careful observation.
- These underachieving children suffered badly in a poor learning environment because:
 - they were anonymous in a noisy class, getting little teacher attention if other more actively disruptive pupils were allowed to dominate
 - they were bored by uninspiring material as it robbed them of the opportunity to express their creativity
 - they responded well to teachers who were interested in them and who had the time to help them, but they rejected others who just go through the motions of teaching
 - they were individuals in a large organisation, who found it hard to gain attention
 - they were unaware of career opportunities although they had an idea that they needed to do well at school to get a good job.
- Traditional school reporting methods were not effective in identifying Rhinos
- While it was possible to intervene to counteract 'Rhinoism' each individual pupil required a different set of strategies.

Context

The school draws its pupils from Sprowston, the surrounding countryside and the north of the city of Norwich. Intake is just below national average in terms of reading age and cognitive testing. GCSE results are in line with national averages, although girls rather than boys underachieve compared with national figures. There is a good staying on rate in the 6th Form.

The project

The research was based on the identification of a small number of pupils whose progress was monitored during the summer term of 1998. The researchers realised that in order to improve the attainment of these disaffected pupils it was necessary to provide varied and interesting tasks, to offer help when it was needed, and to spend time explaining what was required. Most of all it seemed essential to spend time building relationships with each individual pupil.

Examples of individual strategies included:

- A regular correspondence was established with one pupil's mother. The boy was placed on a report for two weeks, and his homework journal was checked everyday. Teachers were asked to write the homework into the journal. At the end of the two weeks he asked to remain on report. After two months he felt he was ready to come off report. He had become much more responsible for himself, eg, he brought letters about absence without having to be asked. Although the quality of his work still needed a lot of improvement, he was better organised and usually managed to take the correct equipment to lessons. His communication with his teachers had improved and he had a friendly relationship with his science teacher. His average short report grade improved from 6.57 to 7.67
- Another boy who was interested in creative arts was helped to make contact with a local drama group. Once again a dialogue was established with home, and his mother helped him find a work experience placement with a local theatre. He started to work with a visiting youth group. This helped to help build his self-esteem and he too became much more communicative.

Despite the small number of pupils who took part in this study the authors concluded that Rhinos do exist and that determining each pupil's particular agenda was a key step in improving his or her attainment. When intervention strategies were adopted, they appeared to produce results in a fairly short time.

The most significant finding of the study was how badly these children suffered in a poor learning environment. They were anonymous in a noisy class, getting little teacher attention if other more actively disruptive pupils were allowed to dominate. They were bored by uninspiring material as it robbed them of the opportunity to express their creativity. They responded well to teachers who were interested in them and who had the time to help them, but they rejected others who just go through the motions of teaching.

They were individuals in a large organisation, who found it hard to gain attention. They were unaware of career opportunities although they had an idea that they needed to do well at school to get a good job. With the possible exception of one pupil all the pupils involved were positive in their wish to cooperate. All wanted to get more out of their schooling.

Implications for practice in the case study school

Individual 'target setting' was adopted at Sprowston as the means towards improving individual attainment. For Rhinos the study shows that this could be of great benefit if it involves meaningful one to one contact with their teachers. However if 'target setting' is allowed to become a number generating exercise, to be completed by teachers in too short a time span, it could further anonymise these pupils as statistics of failure.

Contact

Further reading

What else might I enjoy reading?

Morris, M., Nelson, J., Stoney, S. and Benefield, P. (1999) Disadvantaged youth: a critical review of the literature on scope, strategies and solutions. London: DfEE

Parsons, C. (1999) Education, exclusion and citizenship. London: Routledge

Hayden, C. (1997) Exclusion from primary school: children in 'need' and children with special education needs.

Emotional and behavioural difficulties, 2 (3), pp. 36 - 44.

Stirling, M. (1992) How many pupils are being excluded? British Journal of Special Education, 19 (4), pp. 128-130.

Goodman, S. (2002) Improving practice through research into practice. Project report for Practice and Research Drama Conference at Exeter University April 2002

Pye, J. (1988) Invisible children: who are the real losers at school? Oxford: Oxford University Press

Cooper, P. (2000) Positive Alternatives to Exclusion. London: Routledge.

McBeath, J., (1999) Schools must speak for themselves. London: Routledge

Ruddock, J. Wallace, G. and Flutter, J. (1999) Students' voices: what can they tell us as partners in change?

In: Stott, K. and Trafford, V. (eds.), Partnerships: Shaping the Future of Education. London: Middlesex University Press, pp. 10 - 26.

Where can I find out more online?

Disaffection talks

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-archive-reports/disaffection-talks.cfm>

Talking back: pupil views on disaffection

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-reports/talking-back-pupil-views-on-disaffection.cfm>

Three to remember: strategies for disaffected pupils

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-reports/three-to-remember-strategies-for-disaffected-pupils.cfm>

With all respect: reviewing disaffection strategies

<http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/other-publications/downloadable-reports/with-all-respect-reviewing-disaffection-strategies.cfm>

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Appraisal

Robustness

The overall research aim was clearly defined by the researchers, who set out to identify and, in partnership with teachers, to develop practice that could contribute to preventing both formal exclusion and exclusion from the normal social and educational life of the schools. They reviewed previous relevant studies in this difficult area of research and set their work in that context. The researchers involved the staff of the case study schools in identifying their own areas for action research, based on their specific problems and issues. This meant that there was a variety of types of evidence collected from activities initiated by the schools. However, all the methods used were designed to respond to the same practical pedagogical challenge. The researchers recognised, and worked with, the individuality of each school's situation.

Relevance

Teachers across all phases and age ranges are likely to find this topic relevant and the way in which the evidence from the action research is presented offers scope for them to make links with their own pupils and practice. The case studies span a wide range of mainstream schools. They reflect a range of problems, including behaviour, disaffection and disengagement from the educational process, and offer snapshots of possible solutions.

Applicability

There is a clear focus on the relationship between teachers and pupils. The work is well contextualised. For example, the school settings in which the case studies were carried out were authentic and well described. The case studies contain evidence to show which strategies were effective and why, and are vividly exemplified through the use of teacher and pupil voice. The problems identified by each school and the intervention strategies designed to address them were described in such a way as to offer other teachers enough detailed information to enable them to reflect on their own situations and to initiate or modify, if necessary, their own strategies. The authors use the findings from the case studies to help them devise frameworks that other teachers might find useful for their practice.

Writing

This book was easy to read. It is well planned and the reader is guided through by the authors' use of signposts. The structure of the book is outlined at the end of chapter one. Introductions to subsequent chapters contain an overview of the chapter and all chapters are summed up at the end with concluding remarks which draw the discussion together. The book has been written in such a way as to enable not just classroom teachers but school management and education authorities to relate it to their practice. There is very little jargon and, since this was an action research project, there is no statistical data. The review of previous research is a useful resource.

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