THE IMPORTANCE OF NURTURE GROUPS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF SEBD CHILDREN BACK INTO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLING

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INTRODUCTION

During my placement I was a TA in a primary school and a centre assistant in an outdoor centre. It came to my attention throughout this time that there were a great amount of children who weren’t fully applying themselves in class. This got me thinking there are other ways to get more out of children who suffer with Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD), and this was where I discovered nurture groups.

Nurture groups are used as a temporary setting to help children cope with the transition and also the demands of a mainstream schooling system. They were devised by Marjorie Boxall, an educational psychologist, who set up the first groups in the Inner London Education Authority in the early 1970’s (Bennihan & Boxall, 2000) in the UK.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is SEBD? One definition from the Department of Education and Employment states:

“Emotional and behavioural difficulties lie on the continuum between behaviour that challenges teachers but is within normal, albeit unacceptable bounds, which is an indication of serious mental illness. A distinction needs to be made between normal but stressful behaviour, emotional and behavioural difficulties and behaviour arising from mental illness, as each needs to be treated differently.”

A study done in 1997 by Izatt and Wasilewski placed 308 children into nurture groups between 1984 and 1996. 87 percent of these children were able to return back into mainstream school after a placement that lasted less than a year. When this group was revisited in 1995, it found that 83 percent of the original group were still in mainstream schooling, and out of that number only 4 percent needed extra education support, 13 percent were granted statements of Special Educational Needs and 11 percent were referred to Special School provision.

In contrast to these findings, a group of 20 mainstream pupils, who had shown signs of requiring nurture group placement, but places hadn’t been provided for. 35 percent were kept in special schools, and only 55 percent were found by 1995, to be handling mainstream classrooms without the extra support.

Another example from a nurture group after the 12 weeks they are reintegrated. Out of 36 students, who have been in the group since it started, only 2 have maintained progress. One has a statement of Special Educational Needs and the other has developmental delay, causing immature behaviour. This may be seen as a failure of the group, but it isn’t as one of the main benefits of nurture groups is that it allows teachers to get a statement for a child quickly because the primary work has already been done.

I found the school I was working in had their own version of a nurture group, but instead of having groups of 10-12 students, they would go off in pairs with a teacher for 45 minutes once a week to work on their reading, writing and also playing skills. This happened throughout the school with every year group. It proved a positive effect on the students, as I noticed a vast improvement in one student in particular.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of nurture groups is to provide students with a safe and secure environment that provides the right conditions which are needed for a child to develop emotionally, socially and cognitively (Boxall, 2002).

If a child is anxious this will effect their learning, so the more relaxed a learning environment is will trigger the neurochemical changes used for learning. Putting students thoughts and emotions first will facilitate and optimize the learning process (Geake 2009; Geake & Cooper 2003). By only having 10-12 students per group, this will give them the one to one attention needed from either the teacher or TA.

Nurture groups are built on the principle that the foundations of a child’s learning are emotional and social. Children need to learn these skills before they are able to proceed and learn new topics. These features are aimed at helping children feel safe, secure and actually feel good about themselves. It will also help them feel like they are able to work on National Curriculum topics like other students, which, in turn, shows educational progress.

By working one to one with particular student I got more out of said student because I took the time to sit, converse and get to know the student, but I also let him get to know me as well, which meant I wasn’t just some stranger trying to teach them how to read, but I was interested in what this child wanted and learnt about the things he enjoyed.

This will also give them the building blocks needed for later in life, when the time comes for getting a job. Because research has shown that their interpersonal skills are antisocial which is problematic on the job (Gilbert, Schiefele, Fischer, Nelson, Scott & Liaspinus, 2000) thus resulting in the termination of employment, so if an early intervention is set in place, a nurture group, this will increase the chances of getting a better job and building close relationships in later life. As children they need to be made more aware of themselves and others so they are able to make decisions, respect others and give consideration to the situations they are in a relevant norms. By learning to manage their emotions and behaviour, they will then be able to possess behavioural and social skills which will allow them to carry out solutions effectively with others, i.e. in the school or in the work place.

I noticed with the majority of children, especially the ones in care, that I worked with in the outdoor centre, they were lacking the drive and want for a better education. This was because of a turbulent home life, and lack of security in the majority of cases lack of routine and certainty; consequently reflected how they worked at school, which was poorly and badly behaved. If they had the chance for a nurture group, or similar, this would give them the chance to boost their self esteem, confidence and trust in people, thus giving them a better step in life.

CONCLUSION

From the research shown, it has come to my attention that it is of great importance that further research done will have to rely on more of a naturalistic approach. One of the main advantages of this kind of study is it helps define the nature of nurture groups, however there is still a need to put in place more controlled studies in a similar fashion.

From personal experience, working with children who have SEBD, I noticed when working with them on a one to one basis I would get more out of them and they would benefit greater when I would show more interest in what they had to say and do, in comparison to working with a class of 35 students, mixed ability all competing for the teachers and TAs attention.

REFERENCES


