EFFECTIVE SCHOOL AND INDIVIDUAL APPROACHES TO STUDENT BEHAVIOUR: AN APPRAISAL.

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ABSTRACT

All those concerned with educational matters are committed to ensuring that all students attending schools are provided with the opportunity to obtain a comprehensive, balanced and equitable education. The paper attempts to analyse the essence of meeting the needs of individual students, those whom teachers regard as the 'most difficult to teach' because of their behaviour, and the needs of the whole - school community. The author adopts a libran research approach to the study. The study reveals that a range of interacting factors will affect student learning and behaviour. Some of these factors dwell within the students, whereas others can be traced to an inappropriate curriculum or related to conditions within the learning environment. The paper suggests that teachers and the school can dramatically affect the learning and behaviour of their young people.

INTRODUCTION

Students and teachers came to school with an enthusiastic sense of purpose, knowing that they are going to learn something about the subjects, the world, about themselves and each other. In the pursuit of these ideals, they will feel physically and emotionally safe but challenged, Students feel secured because their future is valued and that the members of staff take active interest in this. The schools should value students as individuals who can be encouraged to excel in academic and non-academic areas (Leask et al, 1997). Professionals are committed to ensuring that all students attending schools are provided with the opportunity to obtain a comprehensive, balanced and equitable education. Such an education promotes the holistic development of each individual, and ensures that students are provided with opportunities to prepare them for their present and future roles (Preedy et al, 1997).

Experience has shown that some teachers encounter problems in their classrooms in the bid to fulfil their tasks of meeting the needs of individual students. These problems arise as a result of those whom teachers regard as the 'most difficult to teach.' They are referred to as the 'most difficult to teach' because of their behaviour which does not conform to the needs of the whole-school community. Schools are institutions for teaching and learning and this cannot take place if students in the group are behaving inappropriately. Lund (1996) points out that effective teaching and learning is more likely to take place within an environment where all members of the school community understand, and work within, an effective whole, school behaviour policy based on a set of shared values and a positive ethos.

The paper will address the issue of diagnosing the students learning and behaviour difficulties. It will be concerned as well with ways to support schools in managing their most difficult students and in developing effective approaches and policies that highlight both staff and students needs. The paper will also suggest ways of enlisting positive cooperation and mutual understanding between schools and parents to form an effective response to the needs of students with difficult behaviour.

Diagnosing the Students' Learning and Behaviour Difficulties.

There is no other way to understand the factors, which cause a particular student to experience difficulties than through consultation with the student concerned. Many students exhibit learning and behaviour problems, which their teachers very often do not take cognizance of. It is easy for a skilled engineer to trace the cause to a single fault when a simple mechanical

device fails to function well and rectify the problem within a short time. However, learning and behaviour difficulties are not very often caused by a single uncomplicated factor but rather it is result of a complex interaction of different factors. Some of these factors are easily observable, while others are 'hidden' among features of the setting in which they occur (Charlton 1996).

Attempts to seek to identify and respond to the causes, which are observable, will only produce temporary solutions to the problems.

The complexity of human behaviour in a way affect the way in which different people attempt to describe the causes of difficulties. The roles of people, their values, interests, personalities, past experiences, knowledge base, and theoretical inclinations will all affect the way in which they are inclined to analyse and describe causation. Norman's (1997) as described below, illustrate some of these points:

> My views on the quality of teaching originate with my own experience
> at a boy's Grammar School. The general philosophy was to motivate
> pupils to try harder by always focusing on the mistakes they made.
> So no matter how well you did the teacher would always find something
> wrong with it. If you were doing fairly well then this could prove motivating (p.37).

He was always determined not to let the teachers get him down and their negative comments stimulated him to work harder. However, this approach had the opposite effect on Norman's brother. He rather found the work a bit more difficult and all the negative comments eventually made him feel that he was a failure and he gave up. The teachers were quite happy to label him as a failure. He eventually left the grammar school with no examination passes. According to Norman:

> He was not a rebel and I feel the system failed
> him rather than vice-versa. This helped me
> formulate my fundamental philosophy of teaching:
> the teachers should always develop a positive
> relationship with each pupil, any criticism
> should be responding to individual needs. (P.37)

Learning and behaviour problems which are encountered by students in schools are also usually caused by a mixture of interacting factors and as in the above case, different people (e.g. teachers, students, parents, associated professionals) have sometimes differing views about the causes of these problems, depending on their own interests, values, experience, knowledge based and theoretical inclinations. The study carried out by Croll and Moses (1985) shows that many teachers believe that the main causes of learning and behaviour problems are related to:

- factors innate to the child (example IQ ability)
- the child's attitude or concentration
- home circumstances.

Thus, like Norman and the brother, many teachers identified causes, which were external to them. Only few of them take cognisance of the fact that problems could be caused by factors which were within their control, such as the curriculum, classroom activities or their own actions. However, Ainscow (1993) asserts that many students face problems because the teachers are not able to provide classroom experiences that are meaningful and relevant to the interests, experiences, skills and knpwledge of a particular student.

Students' learning and behaviour will be affected by a range of interactive factors, some of which dwell within the students, whereas others can be traced to an inappropriate curriculum, or related to conditions within the learning environment.

Sources of Learning and Behaviour Difficulty Within the Student

The quality of hearing and vision are the most obvious 'within student' factors, which can influence student learning outcomes. However, these factors have sometimes been overlooked. Where these problems of hearing and vision are not detected, they are likely to cause considerable difficulties for the student concerned. Ainscow and Muncey

(1981) developed some indicators that can help teachers to identify students who have these problems. Some of the indicators of hearing problems include the following: a student who tilts at an angle to hear sound or shows frequent lack of attention during oral lessons: when a student fails to respond when questioned or has difficulty in following directions; a student who depends on classmates for instructions and shows defect in speech, etc. Similarly they also identified some indicators of vision. These include among others:

A situation where a student rubs eyes excessively;

Shuts or covers one eye;

Squints, blinks or frowns when doing close work;

Holds reading materials too close or too far;

Complains of pains, itching or aches in the eyes;

Complains of burred or double vision.

Sources of Learning and Behaviour Difficulties Within the Curriculum

For some students the curriculum moves too fast and highly diversified, again it could be very difficult for their level and / or is lacking in purpose. Other becomes bored because they are constantly revising work, which moves at too slow a pace. As Charlton and George (1993) say, 'it is difficult for (and unreasonable to expect!) pupils to engage in, and sustain, good behaviour when their school days are filled with material and presentations which fail to arouse their interest and industry' (p. 41). Supporting this view, Charlton (1986) comments that,

> Those who are disinterested in, or disenchanted and dissatisfied
> with the educational programmes schools offer to them, may
> well direct their interest and energies away form school tasks
> towards a variety of maladaptive behaviours (e.g non-involvement
> in academic work, truancy, abuse towards teachers) which
> facilitate an excitement and involvement unavailable elsewhere
> in school (p.56)

Teachers can to a large extent ascertain the adequacy in any curriculum package. They are the first to be aware of problems in the curriculum through the 'products' of student learning. Some of the most visible signs that children are experiencing difficulties include incorrect written responses to exercises, poor verbal responses and uncoordinated motor actions.

There is the tendency for students to face difficulties in learning if their teachers do not give them control over learning processes. In other words, students should not be spoon-fed but should be involved in every stage of the learning activities in class. Teachers should elicit information from the students and the teachers should interact more with the students in the class. If teachers prompt students to each stage, they will soon learn that they do not have to remember the process for themselves. The students should be taught how to learn and not how not to learn. (Charlton, 1966).

There are learning difficulties and behaviour problems which are caused by a lack of purpose (UNESCO, 1993). The assertion is the "children who are not getting on with their work in class almost always seem to lack understanding as to the purpose of what they have been asked to do" (p.3). When students are asked the reason why they are doing something, many will respond by saying that they are doing it because their teacher told them to. This is personal to them. This is a big problem because if students do not understand why they are doing a particular task they will not have any control over it. UNESCO (1993) suggests that,

> Learning is about finding personal meanings from experience. It
> requires us to understand what we are about and relate this to our
> existing knowledge and previous experience. Consequently, if we
> are unclear about the purpose of an activity, learning is less likely (p.4).

Teachers who are effective always stress meaning in their work. They find ways of helping their students understand the purposes of particular tasks, the reasons why they have

been set, how they are to be carried out and when.

Sources of Learning and Behaviour Difficulties Within the Learning Environment.

Some factors which make up the learning environment, like the number and quality of books, computers, educational games and seating arrangement may be the most visible, but not all the most important features of the environment, which affect learning and behaviour. Some teachers have visually impaired students and others with hearing impairments. The feature of learning environment, which is probably of most important to the majority of students, is the quality of teacher-student relationships.

There is also the influence of the peer group. As Chalton and George (1993) rightly point out peer groups in most cases, have their own sets of values and norms and where there is a conflict with those of the individual's family or the large society, the student has to make up his/her mind over which of the conflicting or differing expectations to follow. However, other students are emotionally upset by the fact that they do not feel accepted by their peers. This can in some situations lead to withdrawn behaviour, which will militate against learning.

A failure to adequately put into consideration any one of these factors, or the interaction between them, is gambling with the very heart of what affects learning for a particular student. It is important for teachers not to overlook the danger of only addressing those causal factors, which are high!}' noticeable. Whereas note should be taken of other influential factors which are 'hidden' and which others (especially students) are likely to be in a better position to notice. It is only when the whole spectrum and not just a part is taken into account that useful responses to learning and behaviour problems are likely to take place. So far the issue of diagnosing the students learning and behaviour difficulties had been addressed. Another major purpose, which the paper addresses, is the ways to support schools in managing their most difficult students and in developing effective approaches and policies that highlight both staff and students needs.

Ways to Support Schools in Managing Their Most Difficult Students

It has been observed that schools have policies that are sometimes not operating effectively. The reason may be because those required to perform specific tasks are not given the necessary resources, and/or that the members of staff do not support and understand them. This is why roles should be clarified and provision made for the necessary resources. Effective school policies for promoting good behaviour should make clear the normal expectations of all members of the school community. Those expectations, which are possible rewards and sanctions that should result from desirable or undesirable behaviour. It is also necessary to make

clear where teachers are free to adopt their own rules. A good example is in a school where it is against the school regulation to chew gum, a teacher who condones chewing gum will be undermining the efforts of the school. If, however, there was no such regulations regarding chewing, each teacher will need to establish his or her own rules and expectations and should then be consistent.

In a situation where a student most of the time fails to meet the normal expectations. there may be need to offer support and possibly guidance in addition to any disciplinary structures that the school may consider appropriate. There is also need for some support, perhaps in the form of guidance or simply listening, though this may not be formally arranged. Some of the students receive adequate motivation, reward and support through normal classroom interaction with the teachers and parents. There is also the need for provision on how to take care of the needs of these students who are undergoing the stresses of normal life like growing up, failing in class tests and examinations, etc.

No matter how effectively the school policies have been developed how clearly defined the responsibilities or how clearly defined the responsibilities or how generously resourced the preventive aim of the school support, some students and their teachers need further support.

(Preedy at al. 1997). This kind of support will depend upon a coherent system for the identification of those in need and the adequate provision of necessary resources.

There is this observation that school systems are not very sensitive to feedback about what is actually happening in classes. Detailed questioning of teachers showed that time is not usually provided for teachers to share their concerns, even if a teacher is well informed. There is need of specific responsibility and time to be given for the identification of the students in greatest need of intensive help. This is because the process of identification is the most important step towards describing needs.

Teachers have differing perceptions of incidents of inappropriate behaviour: one teacher might see a particular behaviour as deviant and therefore unacceptable, whereas another teacher might see it as a normal and rational reaction to intolerable stresses within the students life and as such, acceptable behaviour. For the individual concerned, the behaviour may be acceptable, but at the same time, as behaviour within group, it might be unacceptable (Lund, 1996). Inappropriate behaviour can also lead to 'labelling'. The adults within the school community often reject the student who exhibits intolerable behaviour and this may result to exclusion. Teachers who are operating under extreme stress tend to have low self-esteem and do not have the emotional energy to look beyond the surface behaviour of their students.

The school system should aim, not only to identify those students successfully and recognize their needs, it is important to meet those needs from within the available resources (Preedy et al, 1997). There should be provision for support for students who have special needs and this can vary depending on the population of the school. There is also need for the provision of rooms for the support coordinator or year tutors to provide a space for calm intervention when a classroom crisis occurs. As the level of difficulty increases, it becomes necessary that the functions of discipline and support and constructed separately. This is because, it is difficult for both parties, in case of complex or long-term difficulties over behaviour, when the year tutor, for example take on the role of befriender and disciplinarian at the same time.

Suggestions of Ways of Enlisting Positive Cooperation and Mutual Understanding Between Schools and Parents.

There should be an established pattern of 'concern meetings' in which those directly involved in teaching a student can share their concern outside the teaching time and day. There is also need for a kind of within-the-day meeting opportunity for form teachers and heads of departments to discuss individuals and to develop with the authority if necessary, a specific action plan.

The way the curriculum is organized and presented Is of crucial importance in stimulating interest, creating relevance and enabling the student to succeed in learning and in teacher-student relationships. This in turn reinforces the process of self-esteem, enhancement and emotional adjustment. Positive behaviour management should be an integral part of the curriculum planning.

Students should be involved in the planning of learning programmes and teaching activities. Teachers who are able to differentiate their approaches and work through the interest of the students will often not need in-class support.

There has been a growing involvement of parents in the assessment of their children's special educational needs; the need to consider the interests and views of students should be seen as very important. This is regrettable, because there is growing body of evidence, which shows that, under the right conditions, students can provide useful insights into important matters, which affect their learning.

There is need for all teachers and students within the school community to share common routines in the process of teaching and learning.   This is because it promotes a stable learning environment and consequent appropriate behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The paper has reviewed various ways of supporting students for effective teaching and learning. It has suggested some approaches to be developed to enhance learning. It is the view of the writer that schools can satisfactorily meet the needs of the most difficult to teach for much more of the time than many now do. Strong commitment on the part of the school authority is what is needed. With the firm commitment of the school authority and within an effective whole-school supportive approach, it is possible to improve significantly the support available for the most difficult to teach. Teachers need qualities of maturity, warmth, insight and a sense of humour to be able to have insight into the learning and behavioural needs of their students.

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