

# Transitions in lifespan development

Technology, Development



The objectives of this case study are; a) to develop a better understanding of Asperger syndrome, b) to identify the role of the unit in assisting the students in their education and personal development and finally, c) to investigate how integrated are students with Speaker's in mainstream schooling. Case Study As a secondary school teacher for the past five years in a mainstream school the aim of this case study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Special Needs Assistants help students with Speakers, as well as investigating how included these students are in our educational system.

During the initial stages of planning the research, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were considered. Firstly, the use of survey questionnaires was considered to study teachers' perception of their role in educating students with special needs as well as measuring the experience of students with special needs in mainstream schooling. However, the nature of the research questions involved a lot of ethical considerations and the time scale available was not sufficient to address for the purpose of this assignment.

Due to the fact that the unit currently catered for two students with Speaker's syndrome a qualitative approach was more appropriate for this research study. The unit in which the research took place is situated in a community college in North Dublin, where the socio-economic profile ranges from working to middle class. There are three Special Needs Assistants currently working in the unit and the unit caters for six full time students with autism and two students with Speakers. The students with Speakers spend the majority of their time in mainstream education but come to the unit if exempt from certain subjects and on a needs basis.

For example, if there had been difficulties with behavior or the student required time out for themselves. It was for these reasons that it provided the ideal setting needed to investigate the research questions posed by the author. In the initial visit it was clear to the author that the unit was differed in it's lay out and atmosphere too normal class room. The unit was very bright, airy and spacious, as opposed to rows of tables and chairs there ere little working areas. Each of the students had their own working space and computer. The unit also had an art area, kitchen, common room, office and a sensory room.

It was immediately sensed by the author that overall it was very relaxed area and the students themselves were very content and calm. The layout of the unit helped to create such an atmosphere giving the students the opportunity to sit at their own workspaces and listen to music if they became agitated. The author was hugely interested in the sensory room especially built for the two students with Speakers. There are frequently sensory issues with those with Speakers meaning that they can have a heightened sense of smell, taste, or sound.

Their senses are often hyper-acute resulting in an over-reaction to ordinary sounds such as fluorescent lights, fans, and other electrical appliances. Thus, things that might be annoying for the average person can be amplified and uncomfortable to the person with Speakers. The aim of the sensory room was to help the students with this hyperactivity of their senses. Also the room was used as a space for them to withdraw if they had being involved in

a highly stressful situation for example argument with teacher or another student.

Over-reaction to situations is common occurrence for students with Speakers. Therefore, "time out" is an essential coping mechanism for students with Speakers. Results from eleven studies published from 1989 to 2003 indicated that those students with disabilities, both visible and non-visible, experience bullying more than their non-disabled educational peers and that boys were bullied more often than girls (Adkins, 1996; Memory & Hillier (1989). Both students with Speakers involved in this case study were themselves victims of bullying.

John (student one) was recently a victim of bullying and as a consequence was now suffering from very low self esteem. The Special Needs Assistants were working with John, rebuilding his self esteem and helping to create new friendships. In order to accomplish this, the Special Needs Assistants organized that John would learn how to make a pizza and have John invite some students in his class to have a pizza party. San (student two) experienced bullying within the classroom. San has great difficulty differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate social responses.

He has learned to be argumentative and aggressive which has caused some problems for him in school. San's behavior made him the perfect target for bullying where other students would provoke him within the class causing him to lash out at teachers and at students. The teachers felt that San was the culprit and causing hassle and was often removed from the classroom. Clare his Special Needs Assistant is helping him to identify different

approaches to certain scenarios' he may encounter in the school environment.

She uses teaching material which looks at recognizing SNaN's feelings ND improving his social skills. The Special Needs Assistants in the unit are all in agreement that their role is to develop the students social and life skills. Clare highlighted some of the characteristics of the syndrome which include 'poor choice of words when speaking, motor clumsiness, non-verbal communication and social interaction which is the most noticeable difficulty. Clare stressed that these impairments in social interaction work strongly against people with the syndrome.

Therefore, it is important that this area in particular is worked on with the students. While great work is being carried out with the students it can sometimes be difficult for the Special Needs Assistants. While they work on strategies to help San and Johns' behavior in the classroom it can be frustrating as cooperation from colleagues doesn't come easy at times. Clare feels this is partially due to the fact that teacher training colleges and universities don't give time to train teachers in regards to special needs.

Also Special Needs Assistants are seen as a quick fix for students with special needs. But it can often lead to isolation rather than inclusion for the students. Analyses theoretical aspects One of the most striking aspects of the above case study is the huge impact the lack of social skills has on those students with Speakers, as they can be excluded by other students in a school environment. One of the most significant problems is their difficulty

understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, since empathic imagination is lacking (Convict, Dizzied, Hastens, Rogers, & Wolf, 2007).

In addition, their brains work differently more effort is required to be in a relationship than for neurological people. As expert Tony Attwood points out, "Conventional social occasions can last too long for someone with Speaker's syndrome, especially as social success is achieved by intellectual effort rather than natural intuition. Socializing is exhausting," (2007, p. 91). So the desire to be social and the difficulties involved with being social are often at odds, creating an uncomfortable dilemma that requires understanding and patience from others.

They often behave in unattractive ways to others, leading to repeated rejection and ridicule (Gauss, 2007). Bullying is also common (at least 4 times the rate reported by neurotically from 4-17 years old), nice those with Speakers tend to have a trusting nature along with the inability to predict the thoughts of others (Attwood, 2007). As a result, there is often a lack of adequate social support resulting in a sense of isolation, which has such clinical repercussions as depression and anxiety (Gaudiness, 2005).

Speakers display varying degrees of international dysfunction in that some may suffer greatly and be noticed for it while others "pass" as normal (Standard, 2004). Some examples of unspoken social rule errors those with Speakers make include speaking too loudly in inappropriate situations, cutting ahead of lines, interrupting invitations, failing to notice social cues such as when someone wants to leave or finish a conversation, taking

innocent jokes as serious criticisms, and taking jokes too literally so that the punch line is not responded to in the desired manner (Gauss).

Sensory integration problems that are common in Speakers can make "touching and physical closeness uncomfortable or even painful" (Love, 2005, p. 199). Unaware individuals may touch or hug a person with Speakers, unwittingly putting him or her in the awkward position of wanting to avoid that person yet still seeming interested in being social. As seen with the case study, the lack of social skills can cause those individuals with Speakers to be judged negatively by others with higher expectations for their functioning, such as parents or teachers. According to Love (2005, p. 72), "There is research that shows that autism spectrum disorders do seem to cause many people to live in a state of hyper-arousal - a sort of preparing state that can be very debilitating." Thus, those with Speakers need more time to rest, recuperate and become refreshed between activities causing difficulties in cases where regular work schedules are demanded. In addition, sensory issues like problems tolerating the light wavelengths and intensity of fluorescent lights, which are common in workplaces of all kinds, may interfere with comfort and performance at work (Attwood, 2007). I have spent my life trying to find a place for him in our educational system. It must be appreciated how different children with autism are from each other and no one recipe will work for all children simply because they have a diagnosis of autism/Speaker's " (The Educational Provision and Support for Persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Report of the Task Force on Autism 2001). Another issue highlighted from the case study was the inclusion of students with Speakers in main stream schooling.

Due to the fact that many students with Speakers have proficient verbal expression skills and an overall IQ within the normal or above normal often mask outstanding deficiencies observed primarily in socially demanding situations, thus decreasing other people's perception of their very salient needs for supportive intervention (Kiln and Palomar, 2000. P. 342). 'Inclusive Education' and 'mainstreaming' promote the ideal of equality of opportunity, acceptance, belonging and social inclusion by providing choice and quality of support.

The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004), considers home, school and community sources of information about children with special needs. All can provide perspectives to implement programmes and strategies that can help the needs of a child with Speakers. However, this collaborative approach can have its difficulties, for example the diagnosis of an autistic spectrum disorder is a stressful and significant event in the lives of families.

Such a diagnosis often follows years of uncertainty where parents struggle to cope with their child's 'difference' and try to rationalise behavior that is unusual, unmanageable and often unresponsive to parental controls. In Ireland, diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorders remains problematic, with significant delays being the norm in many instances (The Educational Provision and Support for Persons with Autistic Spectrum Disorders: Report of the Task Force on Autism 2001).

Also a label can be incredibly stigmatising for an individual, and some interpret this dark mark as a message that society has given up on him or



her, which may lead to learned lifelessness and giving up on one's self too (Standard, 2004). Another issue of inclusion for students with Speakers is that inclusion can be left to the discretion of the individual teacher.

In a study of provision for pupils with special educational needs by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (1998) it was indicated that the main areas of concern that emerged were teacher training, teachers' attitudes, and the less developed nature of second-level systems in dealing with special educational needs. If inclusion is to be affective the Task Force considers the legal obligation on all schools to submit a Whole School Plan which includes a description of how the school plans to include students with special needs in the mainstream, as an important feature of department policy.

**Conclusion** As seen from the case study improving social skills is important to the development of students with Speakers. Counseling can provide an environment to work on such skills, one such technique is Cognitive behavior therapy (CB). CB teaches people to monitor their own thoughts and perceptions with the hopes that they will become more aware of their interpretive errors.

Psychotherapy is becoming more widely perceived as a viable treatment modality for individuals with Speakers (Attwood, 2007; Jacobsen, 2003) and some authors have recommended the use of cognitive-behavioral therapy (Attwood, 1998, 2004, 2006; Gauss, 2007; Hare & Paten, 1997). CB can help people with Speakers learn to re-conceptualize social interactions and become more able to more accurately "read" the behavior of others. Once

they understand others' motives they can more easily monitor their own behavior and adjust their responses to other people and situations.

It is quite evident that living with Speakers poses many obstacles. These obstacles have implications for the individual's personal life, physical well-being and employment. As a Career Guidance and Counselor it is vital to provide appropriate and effective supports and accommodations to students with Speakers. While counseling might be seen to be helpful for students with Speakers, it is vital to acknowledge that they may not have the ability to recognize problems they may be experiencing especially emotions. Therefore, it would be critical to work on the client/counselor relationship in the initial stages.

Counselors are able to develop positive relationships with clients when they possess the personal qualities of Warmth, sincerity, congruence, understanding, acceptance, concern, openness, respect for the client and the willingness to be challenged by others' (Corey, G, 2008 IPPP). These characteristics pave the way for counselors to develop positive therapeutic relationships with students, which would be vital to students with Speakers which sometimes are excluded by society. References Attwood, T. (1998). *Speaker's syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.