

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY OF THE MOUNTFIELD CDU

The data presented in this chapter and next has been collected and assimilated from observation, field-notes, vignettes, and profiles, IEPs and other reports (written by researcher). It applies to the pupil group in the MCDU in the Spring of 2001, who were boys (with one exception) of between 12 and 15 years of age.

(See appendices 3, 4 & 5)

The case study of Mountfield CDU

This unit (CDU) was opened in 1998, following the recommendations of the 1996 Scottish Office paper “The Education of Children with Language and Communication Disorders.” Its principal aim is to provide an inclusionist setting for secondary-aged autistic spectrum pupils – higher functioning, that is from moderate learning difficulties to very able levels, with potential to benefit from following the widest possible mainstream curriculum

General introduction

Mountfield Secondary School, to which this unit is attached, is situated in the southern suburbs of the city and has a school roll of approximately 1,000 pupils. The CDU in this school operates entirely separately from the Learning Support department. It has a principal teacher, reporting directly to the director of special needs of Glasgow city council and in school matters to the head teacher. There are five secondary qualified teachers, two auxiliaries (one male, one female) and a part time secretary. The auxiliaries act as classroom assistants and accompany certain pupils to mainstream classes. They take charge of the pupils at break and lunchtime, offering support in the playground, lunch hall and at lunchtime clubs. In session 2001–02, the CDU had eleven full-time pupils. Additionally, it has some responsibility for three autistic pupils who have all classes in mainstream but require some input, and a place to go at break and lunchtime.

The pupils, all aged between 11 and 16, are spread across year groups:

S1 - two boys

S2 - three boys

S3 - two boys (+ one mainstream)

S4 - three boys, one girl (+ one mainstream)

S5 - (one boy mainstream)

Since the unit opened, we have had four other pupils for times varying between three months and two years. Three boys spent time with us on assessment, but in each case a decision was finally taken that none was on the autistic spectrum and all went elsewhere.

The fourth was a girl with Asperger syndrome allied to other difficulties who spent two years with us, but who now attends a residential school in England which will be able to meet her quite complex needs better than we could.

All our pupils have been diagnosed as having a communication disorder, some just before they came to us. They all have a Record of Needs, and most are considered likely to have a disorder at the higher end of the autistic spectrum. Some have dyslexia, others have a history of a language disorder. All now speak, although in their past some were mute or echolalic. Most pupils join the CDU after referral, visits, and an induction period at the beginning of S1, and are expected to wear the same school uniform, keep the same school rules (for example, homework) as others. The new pupils spend approximately six to eight weeks settling in and getting used to the spread of buildings, the noisy and big mainstream pupils, the crowded corridors, and other pupils misdemeanours being dealt with by the school's senior management.

The school day in the unit mirrors that of the mainstream school, and the new pupils, who have all their classes in the unit initially, learn when the bell goes to move from one area to another, taking their jackets and bags. The five unit teachers all teach their specialist subject plus another they can cover on a short-term basis. The five teachers can teach 13 subjects, some of which they will continue to teach in the unit

until the end of S2 and maybe beyond. I, for example, teach French as my specialist subject, but cover Home Economics and sometimes Art and Craft on a short-term basis.

Around the October holiday week, integration into mainstream will begin for the S1s (twelve year olds), usually starting with the subjects for which they have a preference or aptitude. It has to be said that some departments are more suitable for these first experiences, being more welcoming or structured. We also consider it a priority to place pupils as quickly as possible into subjects where we lack expertise or equipment. Regular “firsts” are technical, music and computing followed by RE, science and maths (which is either very suitable or very unsuitable). Home Economics is popular in the unit, but unfortunately quite stressful in mainstream as it takes place in a hot, fast-paced and noisy environment.

Our typical pupil will have half a timetable or more in mainstream by the end of first year, with teacher or auxiliary support in most classes, and by the end of S2 up to three-quarters in mainstream, partly unsupported. (It depends on the individual, and those with dyslexic problems continue to have intensive support.) By S3 or 4 most will be doing a majority of mainstream standard grade subjects, mainly unsupported. (By this stage the pupils want no support teacher, but some subject teachers insist on it.) However there are casualties from time to time, and some after a while do need a reduction in the number of subjects they are doing, as overload can lead to stress and other problems. The new Access 2 and 3 courses are providing for some a less stressful way to get certification in a broad mix of subjects. In the session 2001–02, English, History and PSE will be added to French as subjects we can offer at Access 2 and 3 in the unit. At the beginning and end of S4 the pupils take part in a week’s appropriate work placement.

By this time some will have a nascent or clear idea of what they want to do in the future. They will have had discussions about this with their Link teacher (in preparation for their Future Needs Assessment meeting in S.3 and review in S.4) and with their mainstream Guidance/Social Education teacher. Some of our group have

already got plans for their future career. These include becoming a journalist, designer of computer games, zookeeper, bus driver, actor and vet. (It is likely that in S.5 a few of our pupils will sit Highers and others will continue subjects to Intermediate 1 and 2. Most should go on to further education.)

The teachers' roles and areas of responsibility

The five teachers who teach, support and guide these young people are determined that their pupils will fulfil their potential in school and go on to lead useful, independent lives. Each teacher has the following areas of responsibility:

We work as a **specialist subject teacher** in the unit (I for example, teach French).

There is considerable scope for using one's initiative to develop an appropriate curriculum, differentiate mainstream materials, introduce and evaluate new courses such as Access 2 and 3.

We work as a **link teacher** to two or more pupils – do daily home and school diary, keep in touch with parent by telephone, hold weekly tutorial with pupil, write pupil profiles for annual reviews, compile, monitor and evaluate individualised education programmes, (see Appendix 5 for example) liaise with mainstream teachers, and be an advocate or diplomat as required.

We all work as a **support teacher** in mainstream subjects – any subject or level, any pupil, as timetable dictates. This means we accompany our younger pupils through the school corridors and across the playground, which they can find a daunting experience because of the noise and close proximity of others also moving around. In school, we usually sit with the pupil and help him get organised throughout the lesson, particularly making sure homework is taken down correctly. Some pupils need continual help because of dyslexic difficulties. More often our pupils need focusing to get started on the task and one or two have a real problem with doing just this in structured mainstream classes. In maths, for example, where there is a lot of individual work, our pupils work well once started (one works with the aid of a small clock to maintain a suitable work speed). The support teacher is most likely to be required to help our pupil who is being slow to get started on a task, getting stuck in

one part of the task which they insist has to be completed to perfection or becoming very stressed because they *are* just about keeping up with the class. Such stress is most apparent in classes which lack structure or good discipline, where the lesson is divided into whole-class activities and tasks which need to be completed in a short time scale and where there is a lot of subject related noise (for example, in home economics and science, which are both subjects where I regularly support CDU pupils).

We work as **outreach teacher** (when required) to give advice, support and direct teaching to those in local area not part of this secondary school.

We work as “**consultant**” in autistic spectrum disorders of the high functioning type – to subject teachers, student teachers and visitors. This sometimes takes the form of giving in-school presentations to staff about these disorders and the barriers they cause. This session we have given talks to first year pupils (in Social Education classes) to raise awareness of autism/Asperger syndrome, and the pupils and the unit in their school.

The Teaching of Modern Foreign Language in Mountfield CD Unit

As the focus of this paper is on the experience of learning an MFL for CD pupils, this sub-section will describe the progression in this subject for a typical MCDU pupil.

All pupils coming into Mountfield CDU in S1 will learn a MFL, which is French. As with all pupils going into secondary school, some have already studied a little bit of a foreign language (so far always French), and others coming from special schools have done none. No knowledge at all is therefore assumed.

Most pupils will be taught French in the CDU for S1 and 2 at least (there has only been one exception to this). It was and still is felt that this mix of communication disordered pupils would learn better in a small group, with intensive one to one practice and additional auxiliary support as required.

Those for whom a Standard Grade French is felt to be overload (perhaps doing six Standard Grade exams) or too difficult, will continue with French in the unit in S3 and 4 following the Access 2 and 3 course and achieve appropriate certification. The Scottish Executive's recent declaration of an entitlement of 500 hours of MFL learning could potentially affect what is offered to our pupils at the Secondary 3/4 stage.

S.1 pupils come into this school and unit aged around 12 and in S.1 and S.2 the French classes taught in MCDU shadow the mainstream course. The small teaching groups of up to five pupils use the same course-books as mainstream (Escalier 1 and 2) and associated taped material, and also have three periods MFL per week. A highly personalised approach can be taken for the group or an individual's learning style and needs as appropriate (see Appendix 3 for an example of one individual's programme).

As with pupils in mainstream beginning a MFL, there is an emphasis on oral work which these pupils all enjoy. Their observed lack of self-consciousness in a small group means they will copy the accent of the foreign language in a literal way and some excel in this aspect, being good mimics. Others need the back-up of the written word to reinforce learning, and those with added dyslexia seem to benefit from as many sensory channels as possible being engaged in the learning process. Differentiated worksheets have now been made up to accompany the S1 and S2 course, which offer explanation (in English) and extension work which allows the pupils a measure of independent working. (see appendix 3)

By the beginning of S3 (14 years) MCDU pupils will have decided or have been advised on which subjects to take over S3 and S4 culminating in a Standard Grade or Access 3 award. Our pupils currently continue a MFL until the end of S4 (15/16 years). A few will take Standard Grade (French), unsupported in a large mainstream class. Most will continue learning in similar small groups in MCDU, completing (minimally) the three Access 3 units over two years. This course builds on their existing knowledge and allows for over-learning which is suitable especially for

those with added dyslexia. Units are assessed internally (by me) and can be completed at whatever pace is appropriate. Extra units can be added which give breadth to their learning. Access 2 “Life in another country” allows the pupils to do some individual project work and raises their awareness of another country’s culture and people as well as its language. It is possible that Intermediate 1 French will be taught in S.3/4 in MCDU from 2002.

This research involved observation of the MCDU pupils in these small MFL classes, who were in the age range 12 – 16 in the Spring of 2001. All the pupils studied were boys.

Mountfield CDU Case Study Findings

Over a three-month period I observed the MCDU pupils in MFL classes in the CDU both formally and informally. This allowed me to identify which autistic impairments give rise to barriers, and strategies for reducing them, common to many MCDU pupils. I will present these findings below. They will be used also in Chapter Five in conjunction with results from the questionnaires sent out, to present a picture of barriers and strategies typical in a group of 66 CD pupils, which is summarised in the grid found in the Epilogue.

In the spring of 2001, a few in the group researched seemed to have difficulty with transitions and to be affected by inflexibility in some way. The specific learning difficulty dyslexia, and a lower cognitive level, appeared to affect the way a few learned the MFL.

Transitions

Barriers:

- First period in the morning can be a problem (making the transition between home and school). But other times of day as well difficulties can arise, for example, – after break, P.E, Assembly.

Strategies:

- Give a short period to settle in.
- Work with other pupils, but allow him to join in by nodding.
- Give motivator - for example, going on computer for last ten minutes

Inflexibility

Barriers:

- If daily routine of greetings, or the date on board, is not observed, one or two become upset.
- Some pupils don't like an occasional covering teacher who speaks or runs the class differently.
- Some like to sit in same seats, and pick same book.
- Some pupils don't like play acting which involves moving around (for example, "buying" a drink or snack in a cafe, when one plays waiter, others the customers.)
- Some have a problem with less structured approach (for example, choosing between drawing and labelling café snacks, or playing café game on computer).

Strategies:

- Try to introduce gradual changes into usual routine.
- Let those reluctant to play act just watch until perhaps they are tempted to join in.
- Help them make choices by suggesting a time up to which to do drawing (3 p.m.) then go on computer (until 3.30).

Pupils with additional dyslexia

Barriers:

- Avoidance of reading and writing
- These pupils know reading and writing is their weak spot and often adopt delaying or avoidance tactics

Strategies:

- Give small manageable amounts of written work.
- Do reading or writing with this group when have extra help.
- Utilise the opportunity for plenty of oral and aural work which they prefer
- Encourage listening skills by practice with oral number games in French
- Use multi sensory techniques where possible – for example,
 - Count with fuzzy felt Dalmatians
 - Use little plastic men (in 4 colours) – these have many uses, including practising colours and prepositions – for example, le rouge est devant le vert (the red is in front of the green).
 - Make a drink (citron pressé: lemon drink) to complement work being done on café topic.
 - Computer games for language [Départ 1-3]
 - Video film for increased cultural awareness [for example, tourist view of Paris or recorded TV programmes].
 - Use pictures or word matching exercises to increase vocabulary. [Folens 'Specials']
 - Use drawing for reinforcement and sense of achievement [Drawing exercises developed from the textbook used. Also activities which link with art, for example, collage with autumn leaves for C'est l' automne]

Lower cognitive ability

Barriers:

- Understanding the lesson content and instructions
- These pupils may 'struggle' where others in the group have no problem - for example, understanding (other than simple) instructions, choices, changing tasks, getting the gist of what is required for homework.

Strategies:

- Give short verbal instructions. Reinforce by writing also on whiteboard.
- Offer opportunities for over-learning.
- Use all multi sensory techniques above.
- Keep language content simple. Don't over complicate.
- Set simple learning tasks for homework.
- Praise well-produced or learnt tasks (for example, numbers) – if in a group of mixed abilities, they need to achieve some success for motivation.

As well as tackling barriers, however, it is important to capitalise on these pupils' strengths, in the modern language classroom as any other. Multi sensory techniques have been raised (above) to complement other methods, particularly useful for those with dyslexic or cognitive challenges. These almost certainly will cover some clusters of ability that all pupils have such as drawing or doing calculations and especially in this high functioning communication disorder group, who have a very uneven learning profile (language ability much higher than performance on Wechsler tests). As every pupil in each class group remains an individual, and will only have certain characteristics in common with others in the class, strategies may vary depending on the particular clientele. For example, some groups have had a "critical mass" that loved music and so singing French songs became a strategy for learning. The great advantage of teaching French in a CDU is the adaptability, versatility and spontaneity it can offer, relating to those individuals on that day in those moods. Whilst generally individualised differentiation is usually understood to mean a reduction in overall content, because of this group's special characteristics, this is not always the case.

When I was consulting with the mainstream MFL staff about the S1 and 2 course and course-book at the start up of the MCDU, I was recommended to omit one chapter, because “ all the kids find it boring”. This was the chapter on public transport which I decided to include: bus lines, Paris metro stations, routes and connections – a sheer delight to our group of pupils, as Hans Asperger noted back in 1943. The children he studied memorised the names of tramlines in Vienna. (Frith (1991), p.75). The chapter on public transport has become a favourite, and can be used to practise wider vocabulary, numbers, greetings, cultural awareness and incorporate a multi sensory approach (see above – drawing, moving model buses and so on).

The unit setting allows for this kind of innovative but individualised approach which would probably be unworkable in a mainstream secondary class. By teaching French this way, pupils may have a better chance to experience success and gain some benefit from studying a MFL. Unfortunately (as one CD unit surveyed recounted) there are still those at Senior Management level in schools who feel our population “has enough to cope with already”. This surely is short-sighted policy, when so much can be achieved. This will be discussed further in my final chapter.