

Developing inclusive practice Meeting learners' needs

"It is not possible... to meet all pupils' every need, ... but it ought to be possible to respond to those needs which are substantially common."

Simpson and Ure, 1994.

Mary Simpson and Jenny Ure, in their study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools some years ago concluded that there was no one strategy which was, of itself, more effective than any other. The key to success, they found, was the extent to which the strategies used enabled teachers to be responsive to the needs of each learner. If teachers failed to respond to individual needs, or were unsure how to create the conditions that would allow them to do so, no strategy was very effective. If teachers acknowledged their pupils' needs and found ways of meeting them that they and their students were comfortable with, success was likely to follow. The wider the range of strategies teachers were able to employ, the more likely they were to be able to meet the needs of a wide range of learners.

Simpson and Ure pointed out that this did not mean that teachers had to devise a different lesson to each pupil, because all pupils share certain learning needs. If those common needs can be catered for, the requirement for individual measures is reduced.

Their list of key requirements (see below) applies to all learners. They correspond well with the current **Four Capacities** of the **Curriculum for Excellence** and with the approaches associated with the **Assessment for Learning** programme (in Scotland), despite being written more than a decade and a half ago.

According to Simpson and Ure, learners have shared needs associated with the following:

the curriculum - the need to be given appropriate levels of work; to know about what is to be learned; to be set realistic, short term targets; to have support in the acquisition of component or pre-requisite skills; etc

cognition - the need to have explanations which are comprehensible; to have misunderstandings and misconceptions identified and rectified; to be given 'conceptual scaffolding' which will enable the organisation of detail or the elaboration of abstract concepts; to have available such strategies as concept-mapping, to assist in the development of understanding; etc.

the management of learning - the need to have support in the self-pacing or management of work; to be assisted in understanding how to work profitably in groups or teams; to be able to identify strategies for problem-solving/tackling exam questions/taking notes/highlighting key

points/revising etc; to develop a strategy for asking for assistance with problems; etc.

motivational factors - the need to be motivated to learn; to expect success and progression in learning; to be confident; to expect problems to be capable of resolution; to have high but attainable goals; to recognise purpose in the learning process; to value the skills and knowledge acquired in school and to have an expectancy that these are a springboard for future learning; etc.

personal factors - the need to have idiosyncratic personal issues taken note of, eg times of crisis or stress; to have personal circumstances taken into account, eg lack of facilities for doing homework, lack of parental support or encouragement; to have assistance with improving personal and inter-personal skills; low self-esteem etc; to have help in dealing with peer group pressure etc.

Simpson, M. and Ure, J. What's the Difference? A study of differentiation in Scottish secondary schools. Northern College Publications, 1994 (page 85)