

University of Northampton

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Training and Development Agency for Schools R&D Award (SEN):

**Improving group dynamics to support learning and social inclusion: developing and enhancing CPD tutor capacity**

**SEN R&D Award TDA34736**

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## Final Summary Report

### ITT Research & Development Awards (SEN) – G03036

**Title:** Improving group dynamics to support learning and social inclusion: developing and enhancing CPD tutor capacity

**Key words:** *social dynamics, emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, Consultation, Appreciative Inquiry, Solution Focused Thinking, student participation, Inclusion, Growing Talent for Inclusion (GTi) , educational psychologists, behaviour support services*

#### Project Overview

This project is based on the premise that students' motivation to learn and achieve in school can be affected by difficult interpersonal relationships in class. This situation can produce high levels of unacceptable behaviour and possibly lead to students becoming socially excluded. The aim of this project, which we have called Growing Talent for Inclusion (GTI), is to promote more effective interpersonal relationships by identifying what is already working in the class rather than focusing on the difficulties and problems. The GTI process is based on Appreciative Inquiry, Solution Focused Thinking and collaborative consultation. The researchers involved in this project had already used this approach in a number of classes in Key Stages 2 and 3 across a range of primary, middle and secondary schools in Northamptonshire. During 2008-9, they worked with a focus group of Educational Psychologists , SENCO's and Inclusion Managers to produce , pilot and evaluate a set of resources to enable Educational Psychologists, tutors working in ITT and CPD and teachers to use this approach, in schools and other learning contexts.

#### Key Staff

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## Key Findings and recommendations

- Collaborative Consultation and Appreciative Inquiry are useful approaches that enable trained professionals to support colleagues in identifying and prioritising the skills most pertinent to improving social dynamics /working relationships in any learning community. They are not widely used by teachers yet but have the potential to make a significant impact on the way in which professionals engage with students and each other. An Educational Psychologist has already observed how a teacher in the Focus Group is *'using the skills she has acquired in the GTI project to manage concerns that have arisen in school. In fact, there was one potential 'behaviour' case where the class teacher wanted my involvement but following a brief and reassuring email from me, the teacher appears to have helped the class teacher to manage the situation and develop the child (and teacher's skills).'*
- Collaborative Consultation and Appreciative Inquiry are processes which require an understanding of the underpinning psychology and the development of the skills associated with this type of approach. This was noted by the Focus Group and revised materials will include more information about Appreciative Inquiry, Solution Focused Thinking and collaborative consultation.
- The knowledge and skills required are best acquired in practical workshops, led by a trained facilitator, with the opportunity to practise the skills between sessions and return to share experiences and learn from each other.
- The GTI process involves the collection of data described as 'class information' which is collected and shared at the start and at the end of a project. It draws on the information obtained from consultation with the class teacher. A 'provocative proposition' (a term used in Appreciative Inquiry), is a statement which best describes the teacher's aim for the class and the talents which contribute to this over arching aim are identified and carefully described. The teacher uses a solution focused rating scale (in line with solution focused approaches) to identify where the class is at this time. This is a tool familiar to many teachers now and can be used at any time during the lifetime of a project.
- This stage is followed by a first meeting with the facilitators and the class which includes observation of the class at work with immediate appreciative feedback and the teacher's articulation of their problem; this is critical to the success of the approach as the teacher who raises the issue, owns the issue and is therefore most motivated to work towards resolving the issue. This is in contrast to a problem solving approach where the problem is often seen as being located within the class who may not feel any ownership and therefore the motivation to solve it. Students are invited to assist the teacher with their problem through collaborative consultation which elicits information from the students about how they would like the class to be and the benefits for them in working together. All students are offered an interview. During individual interviews , students are asked about their interests and motivations, what it is like to be in their class, their solution focused ratings of the class on the teacher's provocative proposition, who they prefer to work with and 'talent spotting' where they indicate who in the class at the present demonstrates the talents most of the time. This information (both qualitative and quantitative) is analysed and shared with the class in a lively presentation, typically using power point. (results of the social inclusion survey are not shared but are useful to indicate students who are isolated and to measure impact of the project on inclusion of these students.) A selection of the

slides can then be displayed in the classroom as a visual reminder. At the end of a project teachers and students are interviewed again and the results shared as before.

Teachers have reported improvements in classroom behaviour following these initial sessions, before any skill building has commenced. Comments made by the students in individual interviews often show a real insight into classroom dynamics, and an understanding of the benefits of improved working relationships. The difficulty is that this part of the process is very time consuming but the benefits of it have proved very compelling. Educational Psychologists and Behaviour Support Services who are able to prioritise working in this way may find it a more productive use of time than working with individual students where classroom dynamics /working relationships are a significant underlying cause of an individual's difficulties.

- Skill building is familiar to many professionals who use Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) for example. This project is unique in providing a session format which focuses on developing behaviours (described as 'talents'), identified through collaborative consultation and Appreciative Inquiry involving teachers and students. Shared understanding and articulation of the talents to be developed enables teaching to be responsive to the needs of a learning community. Teachers can draw on SEAL and other resources to support skill development.
- A further important element of the skill building session is the 'fanning' of identified talents through 'talent spotting' by students themselves and anyone who works with them; this must be an ongoing activity throughout the school week and teachers have found solution focused rating scales and 'Talent Spotting' posters important visual reminders to everyone of the talents which are being developed.
- The 'Class Project' is another important ingredient in the development of a learning community. Interdependence in goals is important for group process and one attribute of a group is that they work on common tasks for agreed purposes. The class project is planned, organised and carried out by the students themselves with the teacher as a facilitator. It is important that this project is agreed, planned, monitored and realised. A significant element of later skill building sessions is devoted to supporting students in organising a class project. They are shown how to brainstorm ideas and use Nominal Group Technique to democratically choose their project. This requires teachers to be facilitators in the planning and implementation of the process. This project has been shown to have a significant impact on the development of student self-efficacy:  
*"If they remember one day from school it will be 'Relaxation Day'. They could see that working together had allowed them to put on that day." (teacher)*

Implementation of a GTI 'class project' requires knowledge and understanding of how groups function and the processes of brainstorming and nominal group technique. It also requires an exploration and understanding of the role of the teacher as a facilitator and how this may differ from their more usual classroom role.

## **Background and Context**

The Focus Group met at the University of Northampton on four whole days in June and October 2008 and January and June 2009. Educational Psychologists contributed to the reflections and discussion drawing on their expertise in consultation and experience of facilitating GTI projects. Teachers piloted the approach and the materials in their schools.

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We also benefited from input from Ann Fergusson  
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## **Methodology and Evaluation**

The approach Growing Talent for Inclusion contains five cells of activity:

1. Consultation
2. Appreciative Inquiry
3. Skill Building
4. Class project
5. The complete GTi model

A focus group of three educational psychologists and five teachers evaluated the training materials over the period 2008-9. Each session followed a structure which began with feedback from the previous session, introduced a new cell of activity and the allocation of a post session task to pilot the approach. The first task involved teachers conducting a collaborative consultation in their own school, using a

proforma we had developed and both consultant and consultee were asked to complete an evaluation of the process.

The second task asked teachers to work with a colleague to identify six talents that emerged from a consultation, to define these behaviourally and comment on how they used that information in any teaching or modelling with students.

The third task required participants to plan a session that focused on one or two talents that had emerged from a Consultation/Appreciative Inquiry and to video record a section of that session. Participants were very responsive and their feedback was recorded and transcribed for analysis. Video material of a skill building session was also obtained.

Interviews were carried out with all participants during April and May and recorded and transcribed for analysis. Data relating to the development of teachers' consultation skills is in the process of being analysed to identify key concepts which will identify issues of common importance to teachers and educational psychologists and also those themes which are specific to particular groups and individuals. A presentation is to be made at ECER Vienna in September 2009.

### **Benefit Realisation: dissemination, outputs and continuation**

It is important that the GTI project

- continues to evaluate impact on working relationships in the classroom through cases studies to secure an evidence base for the approach
- develops training materials, including good quality video and practical resources to support the implementation of GTI.

### **Developing GTI in schools**

We now have a GTI file which contains training materials, theoretical background, practical resources and proformas organised as follows:

- Consultation
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Skill Building
- Project Management

These are in the process of being revised in response to evaluation from our focus group with a view to publication in the future. The readership would include professionals working in schools, educational psychologists Behaviour Support Services, Healthy schools Advisors and Mental Health professionals.

Growing Talent for Inclusion features in [Northamptonshire Healthy Schools: Northamptonshire Shoebox. Published by Northamptonshire County Council.](#) This publication is available free to all Northamptonshire schools which is a resource to help workers in schools to support the inclusion of students where there are concerns about their social, behavioural, mental or emotional health. It contains key national initiatives; information gathering tools, a range of models, approached and links to resources and training possibilities for schools. It can also be downloaded from [www.empower-plus.co.uk](http://www.empower-plus.co.uk)

### **Recent Conference presentations**

- Doveston, M and Keenaghan, M. (2009) Developing teachers' consultation skills to support colleagues to identify acknowledge and amplify skills pertinent to improving social dynamics within the classroom. Paper accepted for ECER Conference Vienna September 2009
- Doveston, M. (2009) "I Have a Problem and I Need Your Help" IATSE 21<sup>st</sup> Annual International Conference "Partnership for Learning 11 – 13 June, 2009

- Thomas Becket Catholic School Class 9 Presentation of their GTI Class project at School of Education Research Seminar June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009
- Lumbertubs Primary School, Class 4 Presentation of their Growing talent for Inclusion Project to BA QTS Year 3 Undergraduates at The University of Northampton November 2008

#### Media

- "Research and Development in SEN: Working with the Wider Workforce" 2009 Video 34701 Teachers TV

#### Papers

- Doveston, M. with Keenaghan, M. (2006) Growing Talent for Inclusion: an appreciative inquiry into classroom dynamics. *JORSEN*. 6 (3) 153-165
- Doveston, M and Keenaghan, M. (2006) Improving classroom dynamics to support students' learning and social inclusion: a collaborative approach. *Support for Learning*. 21 (1) 5-11

#### Additional Information and sources

- <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/research/themes/inclusion/Enhancingskills/Growingtalentforinclusion>
- Solution focused thinking: [www.brieftherapy.org.uk](http://www.brieftherapy.org.uk)
- Appreciative Inquiry:  
Hammond, S.A. (1998) *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*. Thin Book Publishing Co.

Joe Hall and Sue Hammond have written a useful summary available from <http://www.thinbook.com/docs/doc-whatissai.pdf> Accessed 3rd July 2009

#### How the project will be sustained

Now that we have a training file and a feature on Teachers TV, we are in a stronger position to disseminate this approach beyond Northamptonshire.

We are planning to do this in the following ways:

1. by developing our research basis through analysis of transcripts obtained from our focus group participants and construction of case studies to inform an ongoing evaluation of GTI
2. conference presentations e.g. ECER Vienna September 2009
3. publications in academic journals and practitioner magazines e.g. *Special* published by NASEN
4. continuing to work with our current focus group to support their implementation of GTI projects in school; they will be able to contribute to ongoing dissemination in future training events and publications
5. two new GTI projects to be facilitated as part of the Targeted Mental Health Project in Northamptonshire
6. GTI included in SEAL training in Northamptonshire
7. Offering GTI Training as a 30 credit 'Institution Based Learning' module on the MA Education course at the University of Northampton.
8. establishing a second focus group drawing participants from other localities to disseminate GTI. Marketing this course is a challenge in terms of costs and time

for participants because our model involves four whole day training events spread over three terms.

9. maintaining & developing GTI site on NILE Blackboard (The University of Northampton's Integrated Learning Environment) making it accessible to a wider audience of interested professionals
10. applications to funding organisations to support dissemination of GTI
11. filming aspects of the GTI process to support training in collaborative consultation, Appreciative Inquiry & Solution Focused Thinking as applied in the project

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