



CARNEGIE
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Autism & Learning in Scotland: Policy & Practice

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Autism – a constructed concept?

- Perceptions of autism vary across cultures

e.g. France - focus on psychological / emotional origins and causes.

Reliance on a medical model of autism

(Chamak & Bonniau 2013)

Autism in Scotland (education context)

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder of biological origin. (Wing 1996 p27)

- biological perspective (focus on genetic origins - with possible environmental trigger)
- Social model of autism (deficit view of environment, not individual)
- Avoid medical language where possible (abnormality/disorder etc.)
- Refer to Autism or Autism Spectrum Condition (NOT Disorder).
- Focus on accepting and celebrating 'difference'
- Refer to 'autistic person' or 'person on the autism spectrum' (Kenny et al. 2015)

Diagnosis in Scotland

Based on ICD – 10 (Triad of Impairments) and
DSM- V (Dyad of Impairments):

Difficulties with:

- **Communication:**
expressive / receptive / non-verbal
- **Social understanding:**
social rules / mentalising
- **Flexibility of thought/behaviour**
repetitive thoughts / actions,
focus on 'sameness'
- **Sensory processing:**
hyper/hypo sensitivities

U.K. Statistics:

- **1 in 100** children are on the autism spectrum ('best estimate' prevalence rate)
- Over **695,004** people (adults and children) in U.K. with ASC
- Over **147,991** children under 18 in U.K. with ASC
- Over **58,249** people in Scotland with ASC (40% with a learning disability).
- Over **11,578** children 0-17 in Scotland with ASC.
- **8,274** children 4-16 in Scotland with ASC

(From: 2011 Census figures)

- Boys are **four times** more likely to develop autism than girls.
- **21%** (1 in 5) of children with autism have been excluded from school at least once. (Reid & Batton 2007)

Policy Context: Scottish Strategy for Autism (2011)

‘Autism is a national priority’ (p2)

‘Our vision is that individuals on the autism spectrum are respected, accepted and valued by their communities and have confidence in services to treat them fairly so that they are able to have meaningful and satisfying lives’

(Scottish Government 2011, p6)

Key Objectives:

1. Services developed in cooperation with people with autism, families, carers and professionals
2. Access to training and development in autism for front-line practitioners
3. Easy access to useful and practical information about ASD for practitioners e.g. autism toolbox for teachers
<http://www.autismtoolbox.co.uk/>
4. Multi-agency working and delivery targeted at individual needs
5. Service evaluation to enhance provision based on feedback from individuals with autism and their families

(Scottish Government 2011)

Policy Context: Inclusion

- Scottish educational policy requires that all pupils be educated in mainstream settings ‘except in exceptional circumstances’.

(The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000).

- However, HMIE (2006) acknowledges:

‘The challenges facing education and other professionals, and the young people (on the spectrum) whose needs are being addressed, are considerable. The key issues is to see past the presenting issues, often behavioural in nature, to the communication disorders beyond that and to find what works for each individual concerned’ (piii)

Teachers need to understand autism

Because untrained staff tend to:

- misinterpret autistic behaviour as defiance / ‘naughtiness’
- use behaviour management strategies, sometimes punitive
- find it difficult to enable inclusion

Research suggests that:

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND AUTISM AND
INCLUSION

(Ravet 2011, 2015)

Policy Context: Inclusion

Scottish National Inclusion Framework:

- The education of children with autism must be understood within a **social model** of disability as set out in the **Scottish Inclusion Framework**.

<http://www.frameworkforinclusion.org/>



Framework for Inclusion



Key themes:

- All children must be educated in mainstream schools (except in exceptional circumstances).
- Teachers have legal responsibility for the inclusion of all children in mainstream
- Teachers have a duty to plan for ‘everybody’ **NOT** ‘many’ or ‘some’
- Teachers should adopt an open-ended rather than a fixed view of ability

Planning for Autism: SPELL framework

- S- structure
- P- positive approach
- E- empathetic attitude
- L- low arousal
- L- links

Structure:

‘The terms structure in autism interventions generally describes organisation of time, space and sequences of events within the learning environment in order to make learning activities clearer and easier to perform.

(Mesibov & Shea 2010 p572)

Provide visual structure

e.g. timetables, task schedules, prompts

- Reduces reliance on words
- Helps to sequence time, space and events
- Easier/faster to process
- Promotes independence
- Provides predictability and control

(see: Mills & Marchant 2011)

1. Structuring the physical / sensory environment

e.g. workstations, removal of sensory triggers, colour coding areas / buildings

- Reduces reliance on words
- Avoids teacher prompts / learned helplessness
- Enables independence
- Reduces anxiety

2. Structure the learning environment

- Provide visual structure e.g. timetables, task schedules, prompts, worksheets
- Use **TEACCH** approach e.g. left/right task organisation
- Use mind maps to review learning and to promote transfer of knowledge
- Present learning intentions and success criteria visually
- Phase in new tasks slowly where there is resistance
- Keep learning as concrete as possible
- Encourage choices and evaluation with choose boards and traffic light systems
- Be flexible!

(see: Mills & Marchant 2011)

3. Structure the Social Environment

- Clarify social rules and conventions e.g. turn-taking, social greetings. Support transfer across contexts.
- Foster peer support / friendships e.g. 'Circle of Friends, Buddy schemes
- Support unstructured time e.g. playtime, waiting rooms
- Explicitly teach social skills e.g. making friends via video feedback, social stories.
- Praise / reward appropriate behaviour (getting it right).

P- for Positive

Act positively to reduce the disabling effects of autism e.g.

- Learn to recognise stress early on and intervene positively.
- Build 'time-out' into the day to reduce stress (time-limited)
- Be flexible e.g. be prepared to 'drop down' developmentally when introducing new tasks (forward and backward chaining can help).
- Use obsessive interests positively.

E- for Empathy

- Try to understand how the autistic pupil thinks, communicates, learns and experiences the world (autism lens).
- Start from their perspective –BE PUPIL LED.
- Try to remain calm and empathetic when pupil is feeling overwhelmed and out of control. Aversive reactions generally escalate pupil stress.

L- for Low Arousal

Create a low arousal environment:

- Talk much less, use visual supports much more!
- Try to keep visual input (e.g. worksheets) simple and uncluttered
- Avoid chaotic and noisy environments (workshop task)
- Reduce clutter and distractions wherever possible
- Be aware that the smells in some environments (e.g. canteen, science lab) can trigger sensory arousal.

L- for Links

- Maintain close links with parents to share decision-making and problem-solving, establish consistency and celebrate achievements.
- Maintain close links with support services.
- Pro-actively seek opportunities for inclusion in playground, social events, extra-curricular activities, etc.

Reading: Theory into Practice

Ravet, J. (2015) Theory into Practice: Enabling Participation, in *Supporting Change in Autism Services: Bridging the Gap Between Theory & Practice*, p47-70.

Theory into Practice

- Uptake is erratic!! (Ravet 2015, Humphrey et al. 2015)
- Autism & ITE research project – to enhance student teacher provision. Autism embedded across 4 years undergraduate training.
- Postgraduate Masters Pathway in Autism & Learning – to support professional development

Case Study 1:

Addressing Parental Concerns

- You are a SENCO in a primary school and have been contacted by the parents of Jo, a nine year old with Asperger syndrome.
- Jo's parents are concerned that their son is returning home each day extremely agitated. They are finding it increasingly difficult to persuade him to come to school.
- How would you respond to this situation?

Case Study 2: Challenging Behaviour in a Special School

- You are a new teacher at a special school. Jack is a 7 year old boy with severe autism in your class.
- He displays severely challenging behaviour which involves physical aggression, shouting and screaming.
- Jack is obviously distressed when these incidents occur.
- How would you manage this situation?

Case Study 3: Transitions

- You are a SENCO in a secondary school, responsible for advising colleagues in the area of special educational needs.
- You are aware that an 11 year old boy with Asperger syndrome will be joining the school in the next autumn term.
- What preparations would you make?

Case Study 4: Challenging Behaviour in a Mainstream School

- **Adrian is a sixteen year old with Asperger syndrome attending a mainstream secondary school.**
- **He was friendly with another pupil who left in the previous year.**
- **In recent weeks, Adrian has become prone to frequent outbursts of shouting and throwing objects in the classroom.**
- **How would you manage this situation?**

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