

Autumn 2 2015

Beach School Case Study - Pupil Premium Boy

Focus: Social/Communication Skills

1st session cut short due to weather

Observational case study:- Pupil Premium boy having working memory difficulties and a background of disadvantage.

Beginning of 1st session: An enthusiasm for the visit to the beach was evident. There was observed increased body movement and vocal outbursts whilst the group were getting ready to set off. Little direct involvement with the group, with very little peer interaction was observed, although adults were approached on many occasions and asked questions loudly about what to expect. The same questions were repeatedly asked prior to and during the journey to the beach. Additionally, a significant amount of lip pursing became evident, suggesting feelings of anxiety being experienced. It should be considered that this may be due to working memory difficulties and not assumed it was down to the trip itself.

Weather deteriorated quickly once on the beach. Observation revealed the child to be very alert and curious about the beach environment resulting in a sense of over excitement. This enthusiasm encroached on attention to adults. They were very talkative and keen to participate, but had difficulty listening to boundaries and instructions and were inclined to talk over the top of others. Whilst actively engaged in the exploration activity it was noticeable that the child was inclined to wander away slightly from the rest of the group to explore the mid tide zone where he appeared to be fully absorbed and focussed on the exploration. The exploration itself took place in short sharp bursts as there was a constant return to adults to ask questions about the objects found. Similar behaviour was reflected from the beginning of the session with the same questions repeated several times indicating a need to seek reassurance of understanding and often accompanied with exaggerated blinking motions.

Hot chocolate and reflection time – Difficulty participating in reflective discussion. Persistent agitated movements around the area looking at the cups of peers containing hot chocolate, a reluctance to wait for turns. Repeated questions ‘Will there be more? Can I have more? Is it all the same?’ Drinking

quickly eyes moving around others constantly 'Are you finished yet? Can I have more when I finish?' suggesting a deprivation based anxiety.

2nd Session: - 19th November

Trip to the beach cancelled due to torrential rain and cold temperatures. Inside beach activities were carried out.

The child was actively engaged in the inside activities from outset. Initially a multitude of questions were asked around what would be happening and when. Less facial movement was apparent than the previous session. On entering the room they were observed to become increasingly physically animated upon seeing the activities set up; particularly the tent, and a barrage of questions surrounding how it would be used and 'being allowed in it' ensued. He was very talkative and keen to start but had difficulty focussing on and listening to the adults initially as observation revealed an edging closer to the tent and eyes quickly moving around to look at peers, suggesting a concern around being able to 'get to the tent' first.

They quickly and immediately went into the tent carrying an I pad, and an identification chart. There were objects available in the tent for the children to explore, identify and research. Initially a cuttlefish bone was chosen to look at, and the child identified it using the sheets and asked questions about it in quick succession. The speed of the questions on occasion meant that the next question would be asked over the answer to the previous one. There was participation with peers in discussion; often interrupting to talk over others but with gentle reminders listened with increased attention and independently found a video of a cuttlefish swimming that they were very keen to show everyone. Body movements within the tent were rushed, objects were turned over and over quickly to be explored and there was a lack of spatial awareness observed as the child was seen climbing over laps and holding on to heads in their haste to move around.

They were observed to be calmer whilst accessing the sand activity. Questioning changed from quick fire repetitions to slower exploratory investigative driven questioning. It was noted that the child listened to the answers and open questions asked in discussions without interrupting whilst using an increased amount of eye contact with the adult. Facial movement lessened as focus increased.

3rd Session:- 24th November

Intermittent showers.

Repeated questions and excessive body/facial movement were in evidence from the outset of 'getting ready' to go to the beach, although body/ facial movement had decreased in comparison to the first session. Initiated communication was directed towards adults more than peers. 'Are we having hot chocolate at the end?' was asked on several occasions.

The children independently became teams on the beach to participate in a scavenger hunt. The study child demonstrated more interaction with peers at this time and was observed to approach others and say 'I'll be in your team', before becoming active in gathering the objects required as part of the activity. Contribution to discussion around strategy was observed although as the activity progressed they appeared content to be directed by others within the activity. Lots of smiles were to be seen, indicating an enjoyment in the group activity, however observation showed that once again a noticeable movement away from the rest of the team when gathering objects. Whilst peers would collect several objects at a time the study child collected one, returning with the object to show an adult for reassurance that it was 'the right thing' before taking it to the team.

An enthusiasm to communicate findings was observed at the end of the activity when objects and results were shared by the teams. They were very talkative once again, often interrupting peers to speak loudly over the top of them whilst seeking eye contact from adults for reinforcement/reassurance during their discussion. With encouragement interruptions lessened during the turn of others. 'Are we having hot chocolate now?' was asked on several occasions.

The children had a biscuit with their drink on this occasion, which appeared to create an over excitement in the study child. Similar behaviour as detailed previously was seen; repeated questioning 'Can I have another biscuit after? Is there more than one each? If not can we break them to share?' and a constant alertness to what was happening with the biscuits and drinks of peers. Their exhibited focus on food/drink encroached on their participation in and attention to adult/peers during the group reflection of the session.

In conclusion, working memory difficulties and disadvantage undoubtedly impacted on the study child's participation in the

beach sessions as the difficulties in attention and repeated questions have demonstrated. However, their confidence and interactions with peers were observed to slowly increase over the three weeks, with interruptions during discussions decreasing and a reduction in body/facial movement as the sessions progressed, indicating a measurable improvement in confidence and security. This highlights the social/communication value of outdoor learning experiences for the child and the importance of unaided independent time to explore in order to build confidence, diminish perceptions of uncertainty in their own abilities and develop effective relationships with others.

D Bearham 11/1/16