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**Professional Certificate in Education (PCET)
Action Research Project**

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“How does the use of teaching strategies benefit a post 16 learner with an Additional Learning Need within a creative education setting or design based learning environment.”

Introduction and Justification

Within my Action Research Project I have decided to focus my research and literature review on texts that will aid me in gaining a further insight on the title of the assignment; “How does the use of teaching strategies benefit a post 16 learner with an Additional Learning Need (ALN) within a creative education setting or design based learning environment.”

The aim of this assignment as a whole will be to identify and implement within my own practice the key aspects of teaching methods which benefit the post 16 learner with an additional learning need, such as anxiety. I have specifically chosen to look at ALN’s within the creative and vocational sector of learning as that is my specialism and I believe that creative subjects provide a somewhat therapy type relief for those within education.

Through asking these three key research questions, I believe that it will lead my research to reach a conclusion of how the teaching methods and strategies implemented within the post sixteen sector can be beneficial to an individual suffering with an additional learning need whom studies within the vocational arts or design based learning environment. I aim to delve into the key characteristics of example additional learning needs by expanding on how they are combatted in the classroom to give the student a more efficient and positive learning experience.

1. What is an additional learning need?
2. How may an additional learning need present it’s self in the classroom and what are some of the key characteristics that may be experienced?
3. What positive effects do teaching methods and strategies have upon students and how can I portray it within my own practice?

Review of Literature

Dewis Cymru (2022), the health and wellbeing partner for Wales states that "The term 'additional learning needs' has a legal definition and refers to children and young people with learning, physical or sensory needs that make it harder to learn than most children of the same age". Dewis go on to list the ways a young person can be aided or what they may need support with, these can range from school work abilities, socialisation abilities to even medical or physical abilities. The term ALN recently has replaced the older term of SEN (Special Education Needs). Whilst this is more focused on school children, it must be said that it is applicable within the higher education setting as an additional learning need is not something that only concerns children or those within compulsory education and is widely considered even in employment.

The Equality Act (2010), states that a person is considered to be disabled or have a disability 'if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'. 'Substantial' is stated by the Act as 'more than minor or trivial'. An impairment is considered to have a long term effect if it has lasted for at least 12 months or likely to last at least 12 months, or potentially last for the rest of their life. As fore mentioned above, an ALN is something that can develop in childhood and continue for a prolonged amount of time. This means that the individual in question would struggle to do daily tasks such as getting up in their mornings to attend education, being unable to maintain personal hygiene and even things as simple as remembering to feed themselves.

It has been said that over the past two decades in Scotland there have been significant changes in the number of children with special education needs (SEN) and additional support needs (ASN), year upon year evidence shows an increase of figures with an average of 5% within the school age population in 2007 and close to 29% in 2018. Contradictorily England have seen a decrease in children being diagnosed with an SEN, going from 20% down to 15% (Peer & Reed, 2021). Despite these studies being based on compulsory education aged children, it must be mentioned that there is potential for the ASN or SEN disabilities to be carried throughout a young persons life with them through to higher education, as per the Equality Act 2020's definition of a disability. It is long term and something that potentially lasts the length of someones life, meaning that the support for an ALN will need to be carried through out the individuals life span for them to gain the

right adjustments and support that they need. By providing the support at an early age, through to higher education the student should feel supported and that they're able to function in education at the same level as their non ALN peers. For example, a student with dyslexia in a design based discipline may get differentiated deadlines and more time to complete their work. Taking into account their disability, it would mean that they have more time to slowly go over and read everything compared to a student without dyslexia.

However, The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) have published statistics every year from 2016 through to 2021 showing the figures of how many students are enrolled in higher education institutes within the UK as a whole. One of the categories within HESA's table's is disability, the data shows that from 2016 to 2021 over 132,230 students with a known disability have enrolled onto a higher education course. This proves that the numbers of diagnosis' are climbing and so are the number of students with a learning disability, correlating with the need for educating teachers, tutors and lecturers in additional learning needs. It is crucial that educators are aware of these disabilities, what they entail and how to make the classroom a more inclusive environment for those suffering with the disability. They can do this by making reasonable adjustments and using appropriate teaching strategies that will benefit the learner. By adding modules in to teacher training on additional learning needs it supplies the individual with the toolkit needed and sufficient knowledge to adapt their teaching to suit the student needing additional help.

Due to the diversity of what is considered an additional learning need, there are many strategies, adjustments and techniques of teaching that may be useful to some but completely irrelevant to others. It's important to consider each student and their disability, as each one brings about it's own set of complexities.

For example, David Mitchell (2008) gives the answers both "Yes" and "No" when the question of "Do learners with special educational needs require distinctive teaching strategies?". He then goes on to list the plethora of disabilities that an educator may come across in their day to day life when teaching. Students that have visual or auditory impairments will need aids such as braille, a guide dog or an induction loop. All which are crucial things that someone with those disabilities may need, not just in an education setting. In terms of learning however, The National Centre for Deaf and Blindness (2022) state that to enhance the students experience you will need to use "tactile learning

strategies are paired with approaches that incorporate the other senses (e.g., smell, taste, proprioception)". He then further discusses his answer "No", and that a disabled student simply needs good teaching.

Tactile Modelling is another technique that is outlined by Downing and Chen (2003) and used when a blind student needs to learn a physical activity. As a non disabled student would learn through watching demonstration, the disabled student would need to learn through touch perhaps even physically touching the demonstrator to understand what movements their hands are making (Smith, 1998). This is a very valuable technique especially for a visually impaired student whom studies design, many design based lessons are taught through the use of hands and making art with your hands proving this teaching technique very useful. Despite the source being very dated and technologies advanced greatly since the publishing date, it must be said that there is nothing more valuable than physically learning through your own experiences.

Furthermore, physical and impairing disabilities only account for a small portion of disabilities. Where the physical ones cause demand for more physical adjustments to be made, there are an amount of mental disabilities that call for more long term mental aids and reasonable adjustments. Mental disabilities range from depression, anxiety, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) to even post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or ADHD affects between 2% and 8% of college students (DuPaul et al. 2009). Although this is a very small amount this means in a class of 100 there could potentially be two to eight students who suffer from ADHD. Whilst that is a very small number which may seem insignificant, it is a great hinderance on the students who are studying and suffering. A study by Kuriyan et al. (2013) found that 50% of students with ADHD are enrolled onto more vocational courses, furthermore proving the need for teaching strategies to be implemented within design based education and learning environments. O'Regan (2021) describes the disability as being a triad of three core characteristics;

1. Poor Attention Span
2. Excessive Impulsivity

3. Hyperactivity

Not only are these three characteristics frustrating for the individual who suffers with ADHD, it can become disruptive for the remainder of the class who are trying to focus on doing their work. There are other smaller symptoms such as being disorganised, easily distracted or fidgety. O'Regan goes on to say that the disorder can affect many aspects of someone's life from childhood all the way through adulthood, it can stop them from learning facts and crucial essential skills which may cause disruption further on in life. Along with these it can "cause behavioural, emotional and social difficulties which affect their psychological well being". This furthermore proves that by giving the student lifelong support through education for their ALN, it gives them more structure, support and aid.

There are a vast range of teaching strategies that can be used to combat the ADHD's ability to stop a student from learning effectively. One is by pairing the student with another student who is more confident with tasks such as reading and take it in turns to read. This way of teaching would work extremely well in a design based environment, using a seminar would be a good example as when it comes to higher education and a dissertation must be written, after a lecture a seminar would take place. By using group work in a seminar it becomes more of a collation and joint effort to gather the information which may make it easier for someone with ADHD.

Another method for keeping students with add engaged would be a schedule of the day. If a student is particularly fidgety and struggles to stay still for long periods of time they may benefit from having an itinerary, so that they understand how the day is going to happen before hand and know when the breaks are. By having regular 20 minute breaks within the day perhaps an hour into the class and an hour after lunch the student understands how long they need to be engaged for before they can disengage for a period.

Lastly, teaching strategies are subjective. There is no one right or wrong way to add a student with their ALN, what works for one person may not work for another.

Methodology

Action research is defined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) as an “Action Research Spiral” which appears to be more of a process led method of work than an approach as to how they view the work. They start with a plan, which then moves onto act & observe, then reflection. A process which can repeat itself many times (spiralling) only for the research to gain more depth and insight each time the circle is completed until a conclusion is reached.

However, Bob Dick (2001) breaks down his idea of action research into a very clear and digestible definition. He describes as “true to it’s label”, with the action bringing about change and the research giving a greater understanding, which is exactly what an action research project aims to discover. He goes on to say that action, research and reflection all compliment each other to work in tandem to create a well rounded ARP.

Another methodological definition is; “An approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis” (Bryman, A. & Bell, E., 2011). In this case, the client is the learner with additional learning need, the diagnosis is the additional learning need itself (such as visual impairments, ADHD, Dyslexia etc) and the solutions being looked at are the teaching strategies which benefit the learner. Whilst there is no solid definition of what action research definitively is, it is open to subjective interpretation to each practitioner within their research process.

Whilst there is clear use of statistics and real life data of how many students have an additional learning needs or have a disability throughout education, it again is proving to be subjective. The diagnosis of the students ALN/disability is subjective to the doctor or medical professionals discretion when being assessed. This also reflects in how the ALN's or disabilities are handled when it comes to learning strategies, as what works for one student may not work for another (Bahari, 2012).

Lastly, a research project isn't without it's limitations and ethical considerations. Due to being such a personal topic of additional learning needs and disabilities, it only felt respectful to conduct research from a secondary data point of view. Subsequently using real people to gain information is a valuable aspect of research, it's apparent that there is plentiful information and data about these conditions from both an educational point of view and medical prevalent in books, journals and the internet. By gaining this information through these sources it provides complete anonymity for participants that the information is based upon.

Results and Discussion

Description and Feelings

Through the brief use of Gibbs (1988) reflective guide, I intend to reflect and discuss the results of my findings through my secondary research. I initially wanted to focus on one type of additional learning need, however thought there may not be enough scope or research within the specific fields to do so especially without doing primary research to back up the information. Instead I decided to do intense research through multiple practitioners from credible sources that cover up to two to three additional learning needs that often present with in the post sixteen education settings.

Evaluation and Analysis

By having more than one disability to research into would allow more room to compare and contrast the the teaching methods and tools implemented when teaching students that have additional learning needs. By focusing on one, it would pigeon hole the research to one specific area of ALN and stunt the breadth of sources available to the research process.

Overall, writing a research project is a great learning experience as a whole. Not only does this allow for more knowledge to be gained but also and insight into various other additional learning needs that one may not familiar with. It also provides valuable insight into the specific techniques and tools used to aid with the individuals learning experiences with an ALN, which can be gained through the research. Through the use of a research project it has opened up a breadth of academics and practitioners that may not have been considered initially when the idea of additional learning needs may have been discussed. It shows that there is a much wider scope to ALN's and that ultimately they are subject to the practitioners or professionals discretion.

On reflection, carrying out primary research would have been beneficial and solidified the findings of the research. Although it proves to be a lengthy process when having to apply for ethical permissions through the university board and setting up a method to gain information from an individual. The methods to gain information from the participants could be something as simple as using a questionnaire to a lengthy in depth recorded

conversation, with either one or multiple participants. By recording this information and having it on record it gives the researcher more time to sit down and analyse the results. There are claims by practitioners that primary research is one of the most important practical skills that a student can take away from their studies (Marfleet and Dillie, 2005). Although upon first glance not having primary research would lead someone to deem the research project as a whole un valid, the use of collating other practitioners research combined with real life data from valid sources makes for a stronger argument as the information is from multiple sources coming to one conclusion. Whereas information collected by primary research could have anomalies or abnormalities if a practitioner is not familiar with the process of collecting this type of data.

Additionally, it must be said that through the extensive research for information, there is a lack of data present in books and peer reviewed journals that are based upon additional learning needs within post sixteen education sector. So throughout the research on multiple occasions, research is based upon primary or secondary education with consideration and relations made to the post sixteen sector where possible.

“Action research has the potential to be a powerful agent of educational change. AR helps to develop teachers with professional attitudes that embrace action, progress, and reform rather than stability and mediocrity” (Mills, 2003). This further proves that the use of secondary action research and it’s benefits as discussed above. It’s method of taking action to gather the data, process of analysing the data to provide an outcome and then then to take action and then act upon the information that was found, lays the foundations for what can bring about ground breaking change. I feel that through this method it will allow for the information to be embraced and allow the outcome of data to effect educating practitioners and how they teach students with additional learning needs.

Action Plan

The methods that were discussed in the literature review in regards to additional learning needs have great benefits such as gaining the students attention, regaining interest and preventing distractions especially within students that suffer from for example attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). By researching these methods within teaching, it may lead a teacher to include these strategies within their own teaching mechanisms and further gaining the students attention which will engage them more in the lesson. The “Removing Barriers to Achievement. The Government’s Strategy for SEN” acknowledged that trainee and newly qualified teachers would be expected to demonstrate that they can: understand their responsibilities under the special education needs code of practice, differentiate and plan their teaching to meet the needs of the pupils, identify and support the pupils who experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, prevent discrimination against disabled pupils and spend time with the special education needs coordinator (SENCO). Through the teachers and teaching assistants being aware and trained in these areas it provides a greater chance of preventing students from not being identified or tested for additional learning needs where needed, as many students can be diagnosed later on throughout life after completing compulsory education with an undiagnosed learning difficulty.

Whilst there is no specialist training required to teach additional learning needs within the post sixteen sector, being familiar with the potential of coming across an ALN within the classroom, the breadth of them and what they entail would be extremely beneficial for teachers of all ages whether they are newly qualified or have been in the industry for some time. Now that courses such as Post Compulsory Education Training (PCET PGCE) include modules such as “Additional Learning Needs” and even a BA undergraduate programme in Education Studies: Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion, it is further proving that individuals entering the education sector to teach need to be aware and equipped with the toolkit to take on such students with ALN’s (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2021). This would leave no excuses for students to “fall through the gaps” if a well equipped practitioner is teaching. Once a student is identified not only will teaching strategies be put in place but perhaps even a formal testing through the use of signposting a student to committees such as “student services” which have protocols in place to aid students in getting the support that they need.

To put this into practice, a teacher wanting to broaden their knowledge in the additional learning need area would benefit greatly from being taught a teaching module that falls under the ALN sector before becoming a qualified teacher. Although a module may not cover all the information needed on specific ALN's, they could further their studies by taking on heritagological studies and broadening their own knowledge by taking on more specific information regarding ALN's in their own time. By researching themselves a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of the disorders they would be even more well equipped to perhaps in the future welcome a student with those needs into their classroom.

Conclusion

The research indicates that through extensive inquiry into additional learning needs within the creative and vocational sector that each experience is subjective to the individual, the professional giving the diagnosis and the education type in question. Whilst the question of "what is an additional learning need?" can be answered with a definitive answer, any further information on is dependent on the student themselves.

When answering the question "how may an additional learning need present it's self in the classroom and what are some of the key characteristics that may be experienced?", again it is very subjective and depends on the additional learning need that the student present in class experiences. Someone who suffers from a physical disability such as wheelchair users or individuals with visual/audio impairments would need very different reasonable adjustments compared to someone who has a mental based disability such as depression, anxiety or ADHD.

When answering the question "what positive effects do teaching methods and strategies have upon students and how can I portray it within my own practice?", again it is proven through the research that by making these reasonable adjustments for the individuals then the students productivity is more likely to materialise into the student producing work.

Overall, despite the many factors that can affect the outcome of what benefits a student with an additional learning need it essentially comes down to the individual themselves, the ALN that they have and the teacher's knowledge and ability to cater/work around the ALN.

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