

What is Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)?

According to Daley and Birchwood (2010), ADHD is a developmental, neurobiological condition which generates hyperactive behaviour, making it difficult for individuals to concentrate for long periods of time. Molina and Musich (2016) states that ADHD is the most common type of Additional Learning Need (ALN) in young children, with up to nine percent of three to eleven year olds within education being affected by the condition in the United Kingdom (Holden et al., 2013). Powell (2014) also states that children with ADHD can become careless with their work, and constantly want to change the task that they are doing, whilst also excessively talking, moving and being unable to sit still for a long period of time.

Benefits of children receiving one-to-one support from a Teaching Assistant (TA)

The Foundation Phase Framework: Revised (2015) states that all children, including those with learning difficulties, must be provided with a curriculum which promotes their development and skills; however these aims do not always happen within mainstream education, as Stagg (2010) states that many children who have been diagnosed with ADHD will experience some type of academic or behaviour problem whilst they are in education, as children with ADHD tend to be disruptive, have lack of control over when they speak, and can be reluctant to sit down with their peers within the classroom, and listen to the instructions given to them by their teachers; therefore resulting in the teacher spending a large amount of the lesson time focusing on the one individual with ADHD, and paying less attention to the other pupils within the class. Stagg (2010) explains that although this can benefit the child with ADHD, because they are having more one-to-one attention and support, it also has a negative impact on the other children in the classroom, as they are not receiving the attention they also need from the teacher, as the teacher is concentrating on the other child. A study conducted by Hart et al., (2011) focused on thirty three children who have been diagnosed with ADHD, and examined their work performance in large groups, small groups and individually. Hart et al., (2011) discovered that the children with ADHD worked better within a small group of peers, or when they were working individually, as they did not have as many distractions, making it easier for them to concentrate on their classroom tasks. Therefore this may suggest that children with ADHD may benefit from working in a small group or individually with a one-to-one teaching assistant, instead of within a large classroom.

UNCRC/Equality Act

The Equality Act (2010) and Article Twenty Nine of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children should receive an education which promotes their talents, abilities and their personalities, as well as respecting their human rights, which William et al., (2016) states should be no different for children who have been diagnosed with having an ALN, such as ADHD. However if the TA is having difficulty in controlling the behaviour of the child, then it may also make it difficult to educate that child. An article written by Garner (2014) explains that sixty four percent of parents believe that their children are being taken out of their classrooms and away from their peers because they have been diagnosed with having an ALN, which is making them feel as though mainstream education is failing their children and not providing them with a stimulating and enjoyable education. An article written in the Secret Teacher section of the Guardian Newspaper (2017), talks about their own experience of being a teacher, and working alongside a TA in a classroom where there were children with different ALN, such as ADHD or Autism. The author of the article explains the difficulty that themselves and the TA experienced whilst trying to teach children of different abilities and ALN's, and states that although they had a Special Education Needs Co-ordinator (SENCo) at the time within the school, the SENCo had a large workload themselves, therefore found it difficult to also provide support, information and guidance for the teachers and TA's who have children with an ALN in their classrooms, therefore instead they would provide them with large folders of information for them to read, which could be time consuming, making it difficult to support these children.

Children becoming too reliant...

Furthermore, an article written by an anonymous author in The Secret Teacher column in the Guardian newspaper (2016) spoke about how they feel, from their own experience as a TA, that children are becoming too reliant on their TA's, and are losing their ability to become independent learners, as the TA's are having to complete their work for them, instead of encouraging them to attempt the task themselves. This relates to a theory created by Vygotsky in 1978, which believed that children learn through using a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), to get to the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the stage where children can complete a task for example, with a small amount of support from someone who may have more knowledge on the task than themselves; this could be an adult, such as a teacher or TA, or a peer who may have more knowledge (Kuusisaari, 2014). Therefore, this may suggest that the TA's do not have to complete the work themselves for the child, however they can encourage the child and provide them with support and guidance in order for them to complete the task.

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In-class TA's

Children were often taken out of the classrooms and away from their peers in order to complete specialised lessons with a TA, however Hodge (2015) states that this is not a successful way of supporting children with ALN, as they are being taken away from their teachers and their peers, both of which are important to their development within education. However, Hodge (2015) does believe that TA's are still an effective way of improving a child's education, however they state that the TA should be situated within the classroom, where the child feels the most comfortable, and is not being taken away from their peers. This relates to a theory called the 'Hierarchy of Needs', which Lester (2013) states was created by Maslow in 1954, which believes that everyone's basic needs are separated into five categories, which are physiological, safety and security, belongings, esteem and self-actualisation, and that each person must have completed each layer of the pyramid in order to move on to the next step; for example, if a child who has been diagnosed with ADHD is removed from their classroom in order to go and have specialised lessons with a TA, they may not feel a sense of belonging within their classroom and with their peers because they are the only child being taken away, therefore Maslow would say that the child would not be able to move to the esteem or self-actualisation level, where it is considered that the individual then becomes 'whole' (Lester, 2013). Therefore this may suggest that the child would benefit greatly from staying within the classroom with their peers, where they are able to feel a sense of belonging. However, Johnston (2011) suggests that because the hyperactivity is strong within some children with ADHD, even one-to-one sessions with TA's in the classroom do not positively affect them whilst they are at school, as they are always wanting the attention of others around them, and not just one individual, resulting in the child's educational aims not being met.

Warnock Report

According to Cannell (1990), In 1978, after the Bullock Report, Mary Warnock was called upon by Margret Thatcher to provide a review into the provisions for children with an ALN in both England and Wales, which resulted in a change in the way that children with ALN were taught in the UK, by having 'inclusion' as the main topic of the Warnock Report. The Warnock Report then lead to the implementation of the Education Act 1981, which ensured that children who have been diagnosed with having an ALN are educated and supported correctly within mainstream educational settings (Cigman, 2007). McVittie (2007) also states that the main topic of the Warnock Report was that all schools should provide the children with more 'in class' support for children who have an ALN, such as teaching assistants and one-to-one staff, instead of the children having to attend special schools elsewhere, or leaving the classroom to have specialised lessons with TA's.

Conclusion

To conclude, Powell (2014) states that children with ADHD can become careless with their work, whilst also excessively talking, moving and being unable to sit still for a long period of time, therefore Hart et al., (2011) believes that one-to-one sessions with a TA is an effective method to support and encourage children's education. However Hodge (2015) states that this is not a successful way of supporting children with ALN, as they are being taken away from their teachers and their peers, which may result in them losing friendships and not being able to create those bonds with other children of their age; therefore Hodge (2015) believes that the children should receive the one-to-one support within the classroom with their peers, so that they do not feel the subject of discrimination. However, an anonymous author in The Secret Teacher column in the Guardian newspaper (2016) spoke about how they feel, from their own experience as a TA, that children are becoming too reliant on their TA's, and are losing their ability to become independent learners, therefore the TA's should further their knowledge on how to effectively provide support for the children without doing the work for them.

Positive Reinforcement

According to Freeman (2013), many children who are diagnosed with having ADHD experience low self-esteem and confidence in themselves to succeed within education, and their teachers do not have enough time to focus on the child and effectively support them, therefore TA's are a useful strategy to help support these children and to motivate them one-to-one. Freeman (2010) explains that by having someone talk positively and praise the child when they are behaving well and completing their work, and not react negatively to their outbursts of behaviour, such as shouting at the child, it will put the child in a positive mind set for the lesson. This relates to a theory created by Skinner in 1953, which Toats (2009) states talks about positive reinforcement, and how individuals learn a certain behaviour when they are rewarded with something that they enjoy, which could be praise from their TA, as they may get a feeling of achievement when they are praised, which makes them feel positively about themselves, resulting in a high possibility that the child will repeat the same positive behaviour. However, Abreu and Santos (2008) believes that using positive reinforcement does not have an effect on individual's behaviour, as once the positive reward is gone, the person will then return to their previous behaviour. They will not learn a new behaviour, instead they will only learn to behave in that certain situation in order to receive praise from the TA.

ALNET Bill

However, since The Additional Learning Needs and Educational Tribunal (Wales) Act (2018) (ALNET) came into place at the beginning of the year, the way that children with ALN are supported has now changed. Dauncey (2015) states that instead of children with ALN being the responsibility of certain TA's within the school, there will now be an ALN Co-ordinator (ALNCo), who's role it is to support and create an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for children with ALN; these could be head teachers, teachers and TA's. However, Burns (2015) states that the ALNET Bill does not take into consideration the fact that the ALNCo's will have to still carry on their role as head teacher, teacher or TA for example, as well as carrying out the role of supporting children with ALN, which may be trying and time-consuming for them, resulting in them being unable to fulfil both job roles.

Extended Reading...

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