

Supporting in Moray Classrooms

A sample of education auxiliaries were asked to talk about their experiences of supporting in Moray classrooms. The responses are intended to inform CPD provision and to highlight good practice. Here's what they said.....

There were four key themes that ran through the discussions with all the auxiliaries. These were; fulfilment at work, communication with the teacher and finding the right level of support

Fulfilment at Work

"I love my job....it's just so fulfilling, it's tiring and there are days when you leave here just mentally exhausted"

Most of the auxiliaries talked about how they 'loved' their work and how it is 'more than just a job'. This is work that is demanding, tiring and can leave folk feeling exhausted by the end of the working day. Yet, sitting amongst our children and young people, those tiny incremental steps in the learning process can be seen firsthand.

"The days just fly past, there is never a moment where you think 'what am I going to do now.?' It's always a busy, busy day"

Helping children to make the most of their education and potential is stimulating and each new day brings fresh challenges.

Communication with the Teacher

Communication with the class teacher was viewed as paramount by all the auxiliaries who talked to us, with clear expectations and shared understandings being a huge help. Nobody experienced specific meetings in which ideas could be shared and expectations of how to support could be clarified.

"....a 10 min meeting in the day would be excellent, just a pow-wow, to drop ideas. But everything is in the passing, which is quite tricky."

Nonetheless, some people talked about having great ad hoc communication throughout the lessons.

"Just sharing information. The teacher lets you know what she wants you to do and you make it quite clear to them any problems."

An on-going dialogue between teachers and supporting adults allows shared understandings to develop within the team about support strategies, how children can be supported as part of a group and how also that supporting adults can move around the class and that the teacher might spend some time with children with additional support needs. All the auxiliaries who spoke to us appreciated it when teachers were really clear with their expectations, shared as much information as possible and also asked them for direct feedback.

Strong communication leads to mutual respect between supporting adults and teachers, understanding about what was expected of them and allowed them to feed back observations of child learning and ideas of their own.

“....if we know that they appreciate us for what we are doing and we feel that we are doing the right thing then everyone works better together, don’t they?”

Good communication, mutual respect and well supported learning all go hand in hand. The more folk felt respected, the more confidence they had in asking for clarification and sharing ideas.

“...you do sort of get tuned in to the children that you are working with quite quickly. You know what sort of levels they will be at.”

All that time in contact with children can allow supporting adults to really get tuned in to how the children learn and what motivates them. It’s a different perspective to being a class teacher and

Finding the right level of support

Some concern expressed that parents might not be happy if they felt their children were not being supported for a specific number of hours. The flip side of this concern was the possibility that children could become too dependent on support, not developing their own strategies, interacting less with their peers and also less with the class teacher.

“....he needs to learn to be able to think things for himself without me always stepping in and doing everything for him. But that’s it, that’s supposed to be my role.”

There is a fine line to tread between effective support and over support, but careful observation and on-going discussion can make this possible.

“I am not there to do their work, but it’s prompting, it’s praise.”

Some people talked about how they started out feeling that they should support children by doing as much for them as possible. After a while, specific ideas started to develop about what the most effective form of support was.

“Sometimes if it’s a harder task I would have to sit and go through things, break it down if it was maths or whatever....”

“..... instead of doing a whole writing piece, break it down into sections, ask.. ‘What would you do?’, have a scrap piece of paper and then get them to write, break it down so it’s much simpler for them.”

“...I used to scribe for him but I think that was a lazy way for him, ‘cos he just copied, so now he has to say the word and I’ll say, ‘what does that start with?’... before.... he wouldn’t have a clue what he was writing, but now because he has to think what letters make the words he has more of an understanding of what he is writing, so I do that for him.”

Implications for Practice

Good communication and team working between teacher and other adults supporting in class underpin effective support practice. We should aim to:

- Share understandings of strategies to support and make it clear that auxiliaries don’t always have to be in direct contact with ‘supported’ children. The additional support is to enable children to be included in the class more effectively.
- Ensure that there is feedback of ideas and observations from support staff to teachers. Teachers and support staff can have different and complimentary perspectives on learning. Feedback from support staff aids formative assessment.
- Seek to development mutual respect which increases confidence and job satisfaction.
- Make explicit that good support does not encourage a dependent learning style. Appropriate support is about giving only the amount of support required to enable a young person to progress by themselves or in cooperation with peers.

A follow up questionnaire is due to be circulated as a means of gaining a wider range of views on support in Moray classrooms. Responses to the questionnaires will feed into the current review of support resource allocation