

Integrating Lisa: A Student with Down's Syndrome in a Second Level School

Lisa's enrolment in a second level school was not without its problems. With careful planning, intervention strategies and staff commitment however, Lisa's educational needs were met by the school. In so far as was appropriate, the full curriculum was offered to Lisa and she was enabled to sit for state examinations.

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A PROFILE OF LISA

Lisa was the first child with Down's Syndrome to enrol in our school, a mixed post-primary school, with an enrolment then of 400 pupils. She transferred from her local national school, in Lisa's case a rural two-teacher school. Her psychological report at 12 years 2 months stated that she was functioning in the mild range of mental handicap and on the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale her IQ was 58. Lisa's scores on the Drumcondra English and Mathematics Attainment Tests Level 3, administered to incoming First Years, were in the lowest percentile rank. Five other pupils however, had similar scores. On the Gap Reading Test, Lisa's reading comprehension age was 7 years 8 months. Two pupils scored lower reading ages.

SECOND LEVEL EDUCATION

Two years prior to Lisa's enrolment her mother made contact with the Principal with a view to enquiring as to whether our school could meet Lisa's educational needs. There was at the time no school policy on integration. As remedial teacher, I was introduced to Lisa's mother who outlined Lisa's achievements and abilities. I subsequently visited Lisa's national school where I met her teacher and saw samples of her school work. Lisa appeared well-adjusted and, I was assured, mixed well with her peers. Lisa was subsequently accepted as a student in our school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES TO LISA

Lisa's enrolment in secondary school initially resulted in some negative student attitudes. In our school, teachers remain in their subject room and pupils move from one subject room to the next. During these unsupervised periods and during break time and lunch time there were incidents of name-calling, teasing, and ridiculing of Lisa by other pupils. Lisa retaliated by giving chase on the corridors, making faces, using bad language, thumping other pupils and getting caught in the act. In supervised class situations these incidents did not occur.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEMS

All members of the teaching, caretaking and secretarial staff were alerted and asked to report any incidents of unacceptable behaviour to me. Two pupils in Lisa's class agreed to report unacceptable behaviour to me or to the Guidance Counsellor. By careful monitoring I felt we could begin to solve the problem.

The constant movement from classroom to classroom created as many as ten unsupervised situations in the course of the day. Break time and lunch time were also largely unsupervised. It emerged that even senior students were encouraging Lisa to misbehave. The more she misbehaved the more she was becoming the object of negative attention. This negative attention reinforced her misbehaviour. Clearly we had an attitude problem throughout the school population.

Lunchtime was identified as the time where the most unacceptable behaviour occurred. It was also the largest unsupervised period of the day.

EARLY INTERVENTIONS

1. The lunchtime problem was discussed with Lisa's mother. Going home was impractical as Lisa lived 9 miles from the school. Lisa's mother arranged with a friend to allow Lisa have lunch in her house in town. This entailed crossing two busy roads, which Lisa was unable to manage independently.

In the early days Lisa's mother drove Lisa to the lunchtime venue, and two other teachers and I helped on different days. Lisa's mother gradually trained Lisa to cross the road and before the end of her first year in the school she was able to make the lunchtime journey independently.

2. The Guidance Counsellor devised a programme which he conducted with each class throughout the school. Attitudes to individual differences were discussed. Disabilities were discussed ranging from short-sightedness to mental handicap.

Pupils were facilitated to work through their prejudices, fears, hostilities and intolerance.

3. All senior students attended an open day in the local Community Workshop for the Handicapped. Subsequently Transition Year students acted as volunteer helpers in the swimming pool, where they helped adult trainees from the Community Workshop.

4. In the second term of Lisa's first year the *Cara Programme* was introduced as part of the Personal and Social Development Programme for senior classes.

RESULTS AND ON-GOING INTERVENTIONS

In the second term of Lisa's first year there was a noticeable decrease in the number of reported incidents of unacceptable behaviour. Lisa's mother commented on the sizeable number of pupils who were very friendly towards Lisa outside of school, for example, when they were shopping or at the swimming pool.

Continuing Interventions

1. Lisa continued to have lunch out of the school during her second year, but in her third year she stayed in school for structured supervised lunchtime periods, such as table tennis tournaments and basketball leagues. In her fourth and last year no lunchtime interventions were necessary and Lisa regularly stayed in school at lunchtime.

2. The programme devised by the Career Guidance Counsellor was continued with every first year class and was part of the Personal and Social Development Programme for First Years while Lisa remained in the school.

3. Throughout Lisa's four years in the school every effort was made to allow Lisa work with groups of pupils outside of her own class group.

(a) In her second and third year she took extra swimming lessons with different groups of first year pupils. This helped Lisa to integrate on a social level with these groups who got to know her as a good swimmer, more able than many.

(b) The school musical involved pupils of Fourth and Fifth year only. As part of the integration programme Lisa was given a part in the chorus while she was in Third year. This was very successful and improved her diction and self-

esteem. She participated again while in Fourth year.

LISA AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

In her first year Lisa's core subjects were Irish, English, Maths, Science, P.E., Religion and Personal and Social Development. The following subjects were introduced to Lisa's class on an eight week cyclical basis: Art, History, Geography, Home Economics, Woodwork, Mechanical Drawing, Metalwork, Commerce and Computers. She stayed with her class for all subjects and her mother helped with preparation and reinforcement at home.

During her second and third years, Lisa followed the Group Certificate Programme in Irish, English, Maths, Home Economics, Commerce, Art and Science. She also had P.E., Religion, Careers, Personal and Social Development and a Study period. I devised reading programmes during these years which Lisa's mother implemented at home.

Interventions were made with the full support and co-operation of Lisa's mother. Where possible Lisa was withdrawn from Irish, Commerce and Study periods. The following alternatives were implemented:

- swimming classes with different groups of first years;
- typing with post-leaving secretarial classes;
- work experience in the local Community Play Group - part of her community work for the President's Award;
- shopping expeditions with her mother were substituted for Commerce classes; Lisa had not had any experience of using money when she first enrolled in the school, and she now had the responsibility of budgeting for her personal requirements, e.g. toiletries.

EXAMINATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Lisa sat three Group Certificate subjects: English, Rural Science and Home Economics. She passed the practical Cookery and Needlework examinations in Home Economics.

In her fourth year Lisa followed the senior Certificate Programme: Mathematics, Social and Cultural Studies, Work and Communication Skills, Irish, Computer Studies, General Technology, Food Science and Agriculture, and Religion. Along with the rest of her class she participated in a work experience programme one day per week. She worked in a small supermarket and in a community

playgroup. Where timetabling and resources permitted, Lisa was offered alternatives to Irish and Maths, eg. extra English, Cookery and Social Maths. Her reading programme was continued at home. Lisa submitted projects for, and sat four subjects. She passed three: Food and Agriculture, General Technology, Social and Cultural Studies. While attending our school, Lisa participated in the President's Award and received both Bronze and Silver Awards.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Hegarty (1988) integration "entails significant changes in ordinary schools." This certainly proved true in Lisa's case. Stobart (1985) had advocated the need to develop social skills in the non-handicapped as well as the handicapped in mainstream situations. Again our experience bore this out (O'Brien, 1988).

Lisa left our school having participated in all aspects of school life. Vital factors in her successful integration seem to have been the unremitting support of Lisa's mother, my own coordinating role as remedial teacher, structured interventions both for Lisa and for other pupils and the goodwill of all the staff.

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