

Understanding Your Pupil's Behaviour: A pilot study from two primary schools in Kent

Abstract

The Solihull Approach was developed to help frontline workers be more effective in their work as they are in the ideal position to intervene early in any potential emotional or behavioural difficulty for a child. The Approach has been developed for both early years' practitioners and those working with young people in their school years. The theoretical model has been developed from three concepts: containment, reciprocity, and behaviour management, taken from psychotherapeutic, child development and behavioural models respectively. A new programme specifically for schools, Understanding Your Pupils Behaviour, has been developed.

At present most of the evaluation and research has been on the 0-5-year work with Health Visitors. Further work needs to look at the effectiveness of this in the school years and in other settings outside of the health sector. The piloting of the Solihull Approach in a school setting to help school staff better understand their pupils' behaviour provides an ideal opportunity to assess the impact of the approach in this setting.

A mixed method design combining both quantitative measures and qualitative interviews was used to assess the impact of the training. The study focuses on 2 primary schools, an experimental school that received the training and another matched control school. Data was collected pre-training and 6 months after the final training session. The teacher variables measured included anxiety, burnout, compassion satisfaction and fatigue, self-concept and teacher efficacy. Interviews with 7 school staff who have received the training were undertaken.

Quantitative statistical analysis found that six months after training, teachers in School A showed a statistically significant increase in satisfaction with their helping role, self-esteem, and teacher efficacy scores as well as a decrease in feeling burnt out/stressed. The teachers at School B who did not receive the training only showed an improvement in teacher efficacy over the period.

Qualitative thematic analysis found that overall, the teachers found that following aspects useful: that they were offered a framework that underpinned all aspects of the work they do; focus on the relationships not only with pupils, but teachers, support staff and parents as well; and the focus on well-being and its link with learning

Conclusions should be treated tentatively due to limitations associated with samples size, matching of school and the inability to control for other factors.

Introduction

Understanding Your Pupil's Behaviour (UYPB) is a course for care professionals who work with school-aged children, younger people and parents. It is based on the Solihull Approach (Douglas, 2012), which is built on three main principles: emotional containment from psychodynamic theory (Bion, 1959) and reciprocity (Brazelton, 1974) which lead to effective behaviour management – a concept from Behaviourism and Learning Theory (Skinner). Containment

describes the process of helping someone to manage their own emotions and anxieties in a way which does not leave them feeling overwhelmed, which enables them to start to think about the situation and possible solutions. Reciprocity describes the two-way nature of communication, with a typical interaction having a sequence of several components from beginning to end. If the parent or caregiver does not follow this sequence then it can cause distress to the infant. If both containment and reciprocity are successful, then there will be effective behaviour management – parents are able to teach their child boundaries and self-control. This approach focuses on the emotional well-being and mental health of children, as well as the role of parenting and early attachment.

The Solihull Approach in Kent is part of a consultancy, training and development programme run by Salmons Centre for Applied Psychology at Canterbury Christ Church University in collaboration with the Solihull Approach. It has been funded by the Local Authority and Primary Care Trusts. The particular area of focus was training for frontline practitioners, with all frontline staff trained in understanding young people’s emotional well-being, mental health and development, and of the role parenting plays in this process. It was rolled out via a cascade model (see Figure 1). The trainer groups were predominately made up of Educational Psychologists, Primary Mental Health Workers, Specialist Teachers and Health Visitors. Front line practitioners were provided with two full days of training, six practice development sessions and a resource pack.

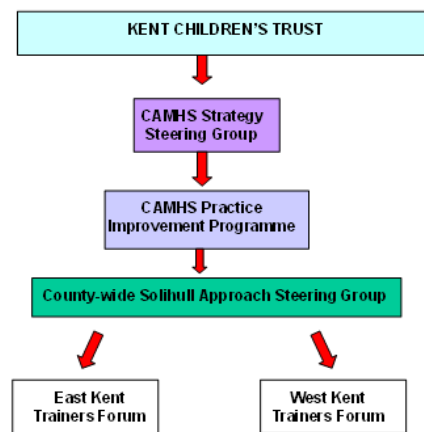


Figure 1. A diagram showing the cascade of multi-agency train the trainer model in Kent

Multi-agency support for this approach was developed through consultation with locality groups. The countrywide steering group provided strategic direction and guidance. Two trainers’ forums (East and West) made up of about 40 trainers were set up in order to cascade the training to frontline staff. In order to be able to sustain and increase this capacity, two train the trainers courses are run a year, with training rolled out at a locality level across the county. Through this, we have been able to train about 2500 practitioners, and over 100 managers, and have an annual conference with over 250 people attending.

Following the sessions run by these trainers, evaluations have been carried out over several years to assess the impact on parents and their children. An evaluation indicated that there were positive outcomes for those children and their families who worked with a Solihull Approach trainer practitioner on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (both parent and child versions) and also found that parent’s anxiety levels had improved (Hassett, 2012). Data from two qualitative research

studies also indicates the positive impact of the training, in particular the School Years Solihull Approach training within a multi-agency context. Analysis revealed that the training helped facilitate multi-agency working and enhanced training practices within universal children's service more generally (Derry (2009) & Sodhi (2009)). Course feedback also shows a high level of satisfaction with the training. A survey of participants one year after the courses revealed that over 90% reported using the skills, making use of the resources and felt more confident at work (Hassett, 2008) unpublished). These evaluations show that the Solihull Approach training had both a positive impact on the practitioners being trained as well as on the young people and families they were working with. The provision of multi-agency training appeared to have contributed to joint working and the development of a common language for understanding children and young people's social and emotional development.

Due to the positive nature of these evaluations, the decision was made to try to deliver the approach in schools, through UYPB. The aims of the Solihull Approach training are to provide the framework of the Solihull Approach model for UYPB to support pupils to learn, through understanding how relationships affect behaviour, and the importance of relationships for brain development. This is done through providing a 'framework for thinking' when learning about behavioural techniques. This will then enable practitioners to apply their knowledge of behavioural techniques more effectively through understanding their pupils' behaviour (it does not aim to teach new behaviour management techniques).

This research will investigate what impact the Solihull Approach Understanding Your Pupil's Behaviour course has on teachers' levels of stress, anxiety, mood, sense of teacher efficacy and self-esteem at six months after training. Our hypothesis is that teachers will feel more contained themselves, and therefore be in a better position to be attuned to the behaviour of their pupils, the parents, and their colleagues. In doing this, they will then feel less stressed and more able to do their jobs.

Method

Participants:

Participants were two groups of school staff (teachers, support staff, administrators and head) from two primary schools in Kent. The experimental school had 26 staff members and the control school had 30 staff members. Staff from the experimental school were invited to participate in an interview. Staff interviewed included 4 female teachers two of whom had only attended the training and not the support sessions and 3 support staff one of whom had only attended the training and not the support sessions.

Design:

This study used a mix-methodology to explore perceptions of change in the school receiving the training. For the quantitative data an independent groups design was employed, with one group allocated as the experimental group who received the training, and the other group allocated to be

the control group. In order to assess the impact of the training a pre-test follow-up at six months design was used. The qualitative design relied on interviews and a thematic analysis of the data.

Measures:

Various measures were collected from the teaching staff relating to a variety of variables that previous research had indicated had changed for health visitors.

1. The Professional Quality of Life Scale (PROQOL) (Stamm, 2009). The ProQol comprises three discrete scales that measure:
 - a. compassion satisfaction – the pleasure that one derives from being an effective caregiver;
 - b. burnout – feelings of hopelessness, difficulties in dealing with work, or carrying out the work effectively, and
 - c. compassion fatigue – psychopathological symptoms associated with secondary exposure to stressful events.
2. The Robson Self Concept Questionnaire (Robson, 1989) – a self-report scale measuring self-esteem.
3. Teacher Efficacy Scale (Guskey & Passaro, 1994), which looks at teacher efficacy in term of internal and external orientations.
4. The Generalised Anxiety Disorder Assessment Version 7 (GAD 7) (Spitzer et al., 2006), which measures levels of anxiety.
5. The Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) (Kroenke et al., 2001), which measure mood i.e. feelings of depression.

Semi-structured interviews which asked about their views on training, whether there had been any impact, what they felt had facilitated and hindered the process. This data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Procedure:

The training was delivered over three twilight sessions to teachers, support staff and administrators including the head of the school. A total of 26 school staff were involved. Six support sessions were then delivered with a group of interested staff. Approximately 10 staff attended these monthly afternoon sessions. These sessions offered an opportunity to reflect on pupils' behaviour and emotional difficulties in terms of the approach they had been trained in.

Seven teachers from the school that originally received the training were then interviewed used semi-structured interviews nine months after training. Data from the interviews were then analysed using thematic analysis as in Braun & Clarke (2006). This process of coding entailed is performed in six phases to create established, meaningful patterns. These phases are: familiarization with data,

generating initial codes, searching for themes among codes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Data was collected from the control school over the same period from 30 staff members made up of teachers, support staff and administrators including the head of the school. This was a school serving the same local area as the school receiving the training.

Results

Quantitative statistical analysis found that six months after training, teachers in School A showed a statistically significant increase in satisfaction with their helping role, self-esteem, and teacher efficacy scores as well as a decrease in feeling burnt out/stressed. The teachers at School B who did not receive the training only showed an improvement in teacher efficacy over the period.

Qualitative thematic analysis found that overall, the teachers found that following aspects useful: that they were offered a framework that underpinned all aspects of the work they do; focus on the relationships not only with pupils, but teachers, support staff and parents as well; and the focus on well-being and its link with learning.

Impact on interactions with children:

Teachers reported that the training has had an impact on their interactions with their pupils. They felt it offered a different perspective on the pupils' behaviour, examples of these can be found below in Table 1

Table 1 Subthemes related to the impact on interactions with children:

Sub-theme	Quote
Taking a developmental perspective	"I was fascinated to learn what the baby was actually doing at that point. When they sort of close their eyes or they turn away from you and they withdraw, you go 'oh all right' and that's that, so you didn't need to look at them and they didn't need to look at you. But I didn't realise that that was what the baby was doing and what I was doing, so I was absolutely entranced to discover the deep significance of all these early interactions that you have with a child, it's absolutely wonderful, yeah I liked that a lot".
Taking the child's perspective	"we were sort of learning about the fact that children can feel uncomfortable in environments so things like turning around erm, being scared of, you know like little noises, all those sorts of things, I think that's made me think more about the fact they're not necessarily misbehaving and that there are all sorts of behaviours like even when they're sitting on the carpet and listening, that actually don't necessarily signal that they're yeah not focussed or they're not doing as they're told".
Understanding where certain behaviours may be coming from	"there was the one thing that struck me, a child always looking over their shoulder, I just thought right fidget and can't sit still you know, what are you looking over your shoulder for all the time, there's nothing behind you. Rather than thinking WHY are you looking over their shoulder all the

	time, what have they learnt to associate with behind them, you know what danger could be creeping up on them”.
Understanding the theory behind why children may behave the way they do	21 remember the sheet of the behaviours and what they might mean because that just stuck in my mind for use in the classroom and I really liked the idea of containment because I’ve seen that done before and I’ve thought wow that’s interesting and do learning the sort of theory behind it and how you could use it I thought was also useful.2
Using containment with behaviour management	“There’s somebody in my class who joined quite recently, quite challenging behaviour. And as well as very firm boundaries I have used the reflecting back to him how he is feeling and erm, year it’s worked... It’s enabled him to calm down and be more reflective himself to work out a bit more in other words to think he’s actually said ‘it’s helped me to think twice’ so I think that’s rather good”.
Understanding the concept of chase and dodge	“I was fascinated to learn what the baby was actually doing at that point. When they sort of close their eyes or they turn away from you and they withdraw, you go ‘oh all right’ and that’s that, so you didn’t need to look at them and they didn’t need to look at you. But I didn’t realise that that was what the baby was doing and what I was doing, so I was absolutely entranced to discover the deep significance of all these early interactions that you have with a child I don’t mind so much when children turn away from me!”

Impact on themselves:

Teachers reported feeling less stressed, with improvements in their well-being and more confidence in their ability. Several teachers mentioned that having a different perspective and support from other staff had made them feel more relaxed. Examples of quotes from teachers are shown in the table below.

Table 2 subthemes related to Impact on themselves:

Sub-theme	Quote
More relaxed	“I guess that sort of helped me and helped me to relax, especially some of the children I’ve got in my class it just made, yeah, it made me more relaxed anyway and it also lets me, I feel I can let go of things more when I’m going home rather than taking things maybe going over and over them and then also the same with parents and the fact they need to get, and also teachers, get things off their chest, go through all sort of things and accepting that you can listen to somebody who’s not happy about something and they can sort of get it all out in the open and then it’s okay to listen and then you can then sort of start building bridges from there”
Confidence	“It’s given me the confidence to do things that I was sort of doing and do them more or just change, perhaps adapt the way I’m doing things”
Containing anxieties and being more reciprocal	“I could sort of use that with him and that made me again more relaxed with him so that I could sort of, erm because I was worried I was doing the wrong thing... having someone’s input in that way helps me think that I’m not going to do him damage by acting the wrong way. Because particularly because he’s got certain needs, so generally I don’t worry about that so

	much but when there's a certain children that you know certain things have happened in the past, it's definitely more of a worry that you're going to do more damage so having someone to then talk about things you just get the reassurance that actually it's okay and you know you can adapt things and everything. So in that way, I've definitely used that as well".
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Impact on interactions with parents:

They also reported that it had helped in their interactions with parents both in terms of containing the parent's feelings and trying to understand their perspective.

Table 3 subthemes related to Impact on interactions with parents:

Sub-theme	Quote
Containing parents' feelings	"I don't know it's all sorts of things that you have to always be evaluating what, I don't know, the way people react to you and then try to think 'well okay, well how can we move on so that we're both benefitting' and I guess maybe consider that more and how they might be feeling and whether I need to, again like parents, whether I need to let them sort of you know I don't know go through, explain something and then move on. Sometimes it's that real discussion rather than sort of listening a short sort of worry and then trying to run with it straight away. It's trying to get into the nitty gritty and then move on and when somebody's ready to move on I guess that's something I try to keep in mind more, I didn't really think about it before. It's having all that extra understanding, that's what it is.. Rather than panic and think oh I must sort this out sooner it's like actually no it doesn't necessarily work the best way, I suppose it's knowing... yeah there are alternative ways, it's not this huge rush.
Understanding their perspectives	"So that you restate them and say them back to them, you reflect it back to them so that they can feel, how can I put it, when you hear somebody say something back to you it's distanced from you and therefore you can see it with a slight perspective as it were so it's easier for you perhaps to deal with."

Impact on interactions with other staff members:

All the staff reported that staff relationships/interactions had changed:

Table 4 Subthemes related to Impact on interactions with other staff members:

Sub-theme	Quote
More sharing and openness	"we were bonding really and sharing things so even though it was different experiences they all linked very much to the same thing. Erm and then also the fact that I feel I got lots of knowledge of the children that are going to come to me in you know, however many years".
A willingness to show vulnerability	"Erm, all of the teachers who have done the sessions, they're huge changes. And because they are people from each year group except the one year group who only had one LSA, just the management of their classes is completely different. Also their ability to say 'I'm not coping,

	I'm just not coping' because before they would just suffer in silence coz they didn't want anyone to know they weren't coping".
Not reacting so fast to things	"I think it's it helps you not to react so quickly, I think it helps YOU to put a distance, a thinking time between you, what you feel and how you react. It makes you take that extra step, I think that's very good".
People being more amenable to discussions with other staff	"Because we talk and because we talk, we don't tend to keep children or worries or things to ourselves, we tend to share because it's just easier that way as we have to work in a team. That was how we worked and we knew that's how we worked with children and to actually have something that's kind of re-iterating that but is actually an official, if you like, approach, it's actually really – it's really good for our own practice because it kind of refines our practice but it also thinks yeah, we thought it worked. And actually now we're getting the kind of underlining that yeah, it does work".

It appears that staff felt the Solihull Approach offered a structured way to think about their interactions. This in turn led to changes in support structures with morning briefings, planning, preparation and assessment time, phase group time, staff meeting time, and focus group. All staff are now focused on joint working and sharing information about pupils, particularly those with challenging behaviour.

Staff reported that they felt as though this has led to a wider school approach:

"We've actually had a really calm year...I would say that erm, the ways that were used and the ways for treating children, for being with children, for approaching children, for taking in children, for absorbing from children, all of those, all of those ways are being used and are discussed amongst staff of being used. So therefore, you end up without enflamed children. Because instead of tiny sparks blowing up, if they're treated from that initial first bit of a smoulder when they start to feel bad, if they're treated in that right way then, yeah."

Discussion

The results of the quantitative analysis showed that teachers in the experimental group who received the training showed benefits six months later, a statistically significant increase in satisfaction with their helping role, self-esteem, and teacher efficacy scores and a decrease in feeling burnt out/stressed. The fact that the teachers who did not receive the training only showed an improvement in teacher efficacy over the period suggests that it was receiving the training which caused these benefits, rather than just more experience teaching over time.

The qualitative analysis also supports this conclusion, as receiving the training benefitted teachers' wellbeing, with them reporting feeling more relaxed and confident in their ability as a teacher, which in turn led to them being more reciprocal and more effective at managing behaviour. Communication has also improved as a result of this training, with it having a positive impact on interactions between teachers, pupils, parents and other staff members, which has led to changes in support structures. This will hopefully lead to continued benefits to teachers, as they reported being focused on joint working and sharing information about pupils. These results support the hypothesis

that teachers will feel more contained and be in a better position to be attuned to the behaviour of their pupils, parents and colleagues, which leads to increase in self-esteem and subsequent reduction in stress.

There were some challenges with rolling out this training to teachers, in particular not all staff taking up the approach, time and funding, and parents not having the same information. Future research will aim to improve knowledge of why the UYPB training is useful for teachers, and to give adequate information to parents.

This study shows the importance of training as a whole staff and including support staff and administrators, as training was found to improve interactions between colleagues.

Limitations:

The conclusion one can make from these results are limited in terms of:

- Sample size. The size of the samples at both schools were small and therefore any statistical significance needs to be treated with caution.
- Matching of schools. Both schools had a similar staff mix and served the same communities however it was not possible to completely match the schools.
- Could not exclude other factors. It was not possible to account for many other variables that were impacting on the schools at the time.

In spite of the limitations the results are showing promising signs that needs further investigation.

To conclude: both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the Solihull Approach UYPB has had a positive impact on teachers. The quantitative data suggests there had been an impact on teachers' interactions with their pupils, the parents and colleagues, and it has led to wider school changes. The results from this study are extremely promising, and set a basis for further evaluations and training for teachers throughout the United Kingdom.

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