



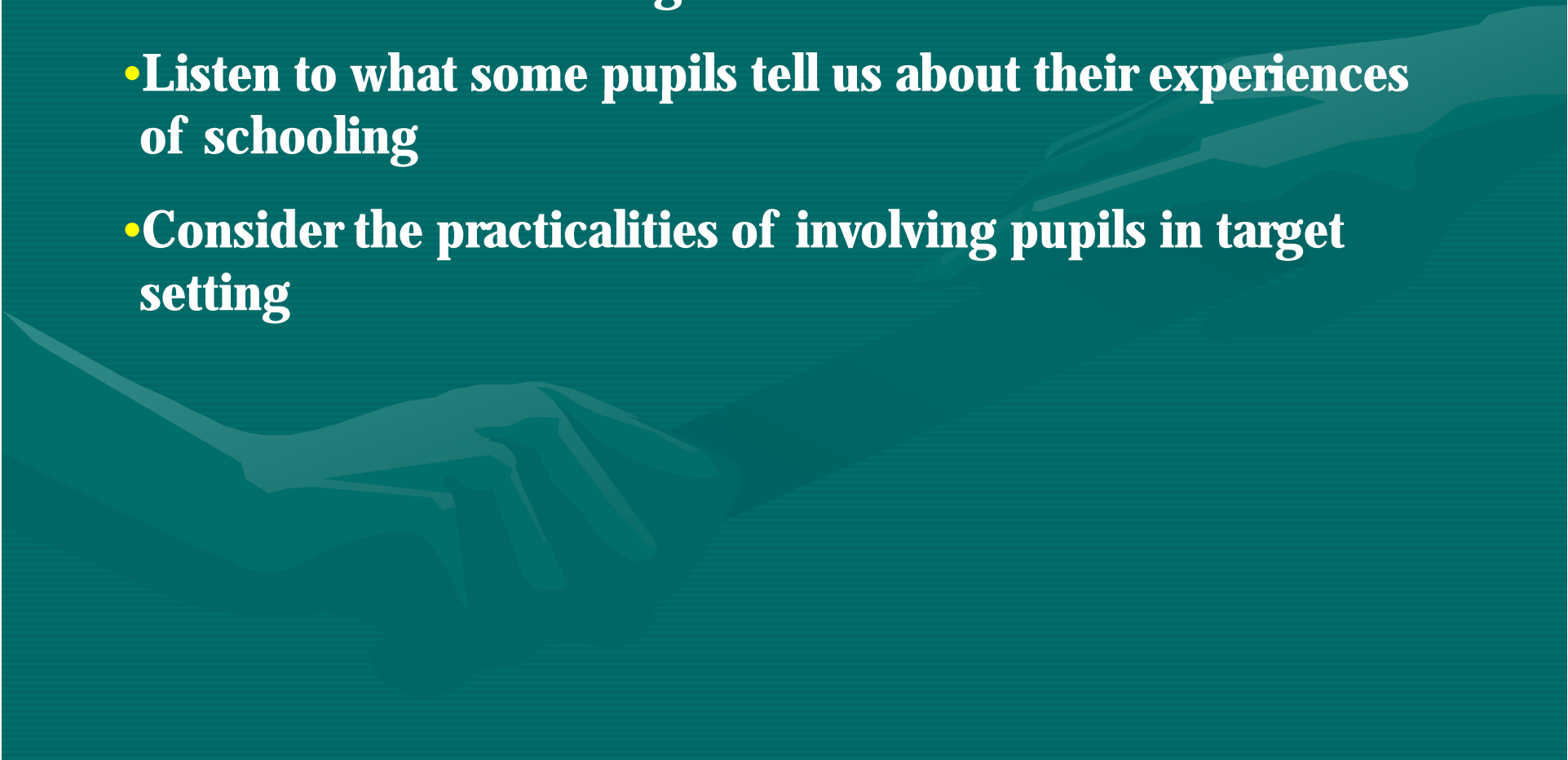
**Annual Conference,
'Building Capacity through Future Visions'.**

Students with Special Educational Needs as Target Setters

**Richard Rose
Centre for Special Needs Education and Research,
University of Northampton, UK**



During this session we will...

- **Consider why we should involve pupils in decision making about their own learning**
 - **Listen to what some pupils tell us about their experiences of schooling**
 - **Consider the practicalities of involving pupils in target setting**
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Why Involve Pupils in Decision Making?

“I would like to suggest that we need to involve students in the assessment process not only because it is more likely to motivate them as learners, not only because students should be entitled to such an involvement, but also because, when done well, it can save the teacher time and make the process more manageable.. Moreover, involving students in their own assessment is more likely to lead to accurate judgements about their attainments.”

(Munby, S. (1995))

Requirements for Involvement

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

Article 12.

“Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

How able are pupils in expressing views?

“This place of learning should never be somewhere to fear, nor should it restrict free speech and ideas, or be somewhere which will strip you of the confidence and individuality you need to succeed in life. School is there to prepare you for your future life, not to make you scared of it. My ideal school is a community, which upholds your strong points and overcomes your weak points. Teachers should always know how much they should be involved in your private life, but they refrain from depriving you of a life outside school untainted by the shackles of school work.”

(Angela, 15 Croyden)

How able are pupils in expressing views?

“ We (pupils with special needs) want to let people know what we can do with our mouths, our hands, our brains. We want you to think about what we are saying, what we feel about things. It isn't easy. Don't turn your back on us and try to understand that lots of people on the street have difficulty and writing (sic). Sometimes they treat us like zombies, like people from another planet. But we can speak for ourselves. We would like to do better. Treat us like human beings and we can all work together.”

(secondary aged student UK)

Pupil Views

“Sometimes children should have a say...if something is really hard for children they might feel scared...if they have a say the teacher might understand more”

(Year 8 pupil Ireland)

“I find it very patronising to be told ‘you shouldn’t do that because it’s not for you and wouldn’t suit you’. And ‘we’re really thinking about you, you know’. And actually it’s not us that has to change. It’s the environment that has to change; it’s the exam system that has to change; it’s the schools and the teachers that will have to re-organise themselves to allow young people with disabilities to get a decent education.”

(Disabled student, Belfast)

What advantages does the literature suggest for pupil involvement in target setting?

- **Enhance self-esteem**
- **Foster positive attitudes to school and learning**
- **Encourage independence**
- **Increase pupil focus upon personal learning needs**
- **Create positive self image**
- **Increased respect for teachers and other adults in school**
- **Assist teachers with planning and assessment processes**

Research Project - Target Setting for Pupils with Learning Difficulties

(Rose, Fletcher and Goodwin 1997/98)

- **Action research project established with an intention of improving existing school procedures.**
- **Project examined existing practices in involving pupils with severe learning difficulties in decision making and established strengths and difficulties.**
- **A checklist of pre-requisite skills was developed and trialled within school.**
- **Checklist modified and now used as an assessment procedure**
- **Skills from checklist incorporated into school planning and classroom practice.**

Principles of a Target

- Is it achievable?
- Is it motivating and intrinsically worthwhile to the pupil?
- Is it incremental, ie, a stage towards greater goals?
- Is it appropriately challenging?
- Is it measurable from a clear base line, ie subject to an established success criteria?

Potential obstacles - related to pupils

Suggestibility: Many pupils with severe learning difficulties are eager to please and are therefore led into making decisions which they have not thought out for themselves.


Communication: Some pupils are unable to communicate through conventional means and may require augmentative systems of communication.

Dependency: Pupils who have never been encouraged to make decisions take a long time to break away from dependency upon adults.

Timing: Some schools not beginning to involve pupils in target setting until the later years of schooling. Resulting in **a)** insufficient time to develop competence, **b)** difficulties in breaking established dependencies.

Lack of component skills: Independent decision making and becoming an effective target setter is dependent upon the acquisition of a range of specific skills. These should not be assumed and are likely to need to be taught.

Potential obstacles - related to school and outside factors.

- **Inconsistent expectations of adults within schools.**
 - **Over dependence upon didactic teaching approaches**
 - **Parental anxieties about the autonomy of their children**
 - **Teacher apprehensions about levels of behaviour**
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Assessment of required pupil skills

Observations of pupils involved in target setting revealed that those pupils who were most effective had developed skills and understanding related to three specific areas.

- **Negotiation**
- **Knowledge and recognition of potential**
- **Prediction skills - concept of time**

Negotiation (1)

The pupil:

1. Can state an opinion with confidence
2. Can disagree with confidence
3. Takes part in a two way conversation
4. Can say 'yes' and 'no' in response to requests
5. Seeks clarification and help when unable to understand
6. Expresses personal feelings and needs
7. Maintains and develops a topic of conversation effectively and appropriately
8. Stands up for self and can represent his or her own feelings in an assertive and non-aggressive way.

Negotiation (2)

- 9. Makes suggestions and gives opinions in the correct context**
- 10. Has well developed skills of refusal which are used effectively and appropriately, ie. the ability to oppose something he or she does not agree with, and to use appropriate verbal or non-verbal skills to reinforce the refusal.**
- 11. Achieves a good balance between listening and responding**
- 12. Is able to initiate conversations successfully.**
- 13. Adapts behaviour and language to the context of the listener.**

Knowledge and Recognition of Potential (1)

- 1. Recognition/identification of achievements**
- 2. Knowing when something has been achieved**
- 3. Identifying personal strengths and weaknesses.**
- 4. Identifying likes and dislikes.**
- 5. Identifying possible future leaving (post school) needs.**
- 6. Recognition of having had an effect upon decisions.**
- 7. Identification of something that cannot be achieved.**
- 8. Recognition of something which cannot be done yet, but which can be achieved.**

Knowledge and Recognition of Potential (2)

- 9. Identification of possible learning strategies, including support required.**
- 10. Recognition of something which the target setter could not do, but can do now.**
- 11. Acknowledgement and identification of difficulties or non-achievement experienced.**
- 12. Understanding of concepts of hard, easy and manageable.**

Prediction skills, concept of time

1. Understands the concept of time in relation to the target set.
2. Understands differences in time scales - day/week/term etc.
3. Identifies/recognises/states the benefits of achieving a target

Guidelines for Target Setting

- **Conduct assessments regularly in order to identify pupil strengths, weaknesses and needs.**
- **Plan the pre-requisite skills to become part of teaching and everyday procedures**
- **Begin teaching these skills and involving pupils in decision making as early as possible**
- **Involve all school staff**
- **Involve parents/carers and in particular discuss the principles with them**
- **Make targets as visible as possible around the classroom as a reminder to pupils**
- **Provide means of celebrating pupil achievements on a regular basis**

Target setting - what do teachers say?

“We cannot just expect any pupils to suddenly become target setters. Thus we give them choices in as many areas as possible and more importantly we try to let them see the consequences of their choice; we help them to develop a range of skills and develop their self confidence and self esteem. In this way it is hoped that they will be ready in the senior years to become more independent learners, whatever their levels of ability.”

“I would argue that it is one of the most important issues in education as it enables students to feel empowered and to have to take on board the idea of ownership. Education is not just something that is done to them as a passive audience and self advocacy requires students to take responsibility for themselves.”

Hertfordshire teachers

Target setting - what do pupils say?

“I’m working on telling the time to ten past the hour. I chose it with a bit of help. When I leave school I want to be able to tell the time properly. Some bloke might ask me the time - it would be nice to tell him.”

“We look at our folders, choose what we’ve found difficult and think it over with a member of staff. A lot of people need a lot of help, I need a bit too.”

“You should choose things that are hard. I feel sad when I’ve not done my target. It’s better when you choose something you’re interested in.”

Pupils in a Hertfordshire Special School

Teacher skills in supporting pupil involvement

- **Attitude:** pupils must believe that you value their opinion and that you will act upon your word.
- **Expectations:** low expectations will result in pupil failure
- **Honesty:** pupils need to be confronted with unrealistic expectations, but in a supportive manner

References related to the research

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