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Secondary School Success for Students with Asperger's Syndrome

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Many students approach the transition to secondary school with feelings of both excitement and apprehension, but it is excitement that usually prevails. For students with Asperger's Syndrome, however, those aspects of secondary school that most students anticipate with great enthusiasm, such as being in a new and larger environment, having different teachers and increased subject choices, and meeting new people, are sources of great anxiety. Despite the increasing numbers of students being diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (Safran, 2002), many teachers have limited understanding of the condition, or of appropriate strategies for the successful inclusion of students with this diagnosis (Williams, 2001). This paper examines aspects of secondary school that are particularly challenging for students with Asperger's Syndrome and describes ways in which these issues were addressed by teachers who approached these challenges with flexibility and ingenuity.

Lorna Wing first coined the term "Asperger's Syndrome" in 1981, acknowledging Austrian Hans Asperger's 1944 description of children with unusual social and behavioural patterns (as cited in Cumine, Leach & Stevenson, 1998). It was not until 50 years later that the term first appeared in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, 1994) under the broad umbrella of Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). While there is still some debate about whether Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is actually a high functioning form of autism or a quite separate condition (Freeman, Cronin & Candela, 2002), AS is now broadly accepted as a pervasive developmental disorder affecting

approximately 3.6 children per 1000 (DSM-IV 2000-TR; Safran, 2002), with a 4:1 male to female ratio (Attwood, 2003).

Challenges Facing Secondary Students with Asperger Syndrome

The Triad of Impairments

In addition to bringing AS to the attention of the English-speaking world, Wing has contributed significantly to a theoretical understanding of this condition. A major contribution has been her conceptualization of the *Triad of Impairments* (Wing & Gould, 1979), which defines the characteristics of Autistic Spectrum Disorders. These three impairments

relate to social interaction; communication skills, and lack of creativity resulting in atypical or repetitive behaviours. An understanding of the impairments in these three areas of social development provides some insight into the potential impact of AS for the secondary student.

Impaired social interaction refers to difficulty engaging in, and maintaining normal social contact. Individuals with AS lack "social intuition" (Myles, Troutman & Schelven, 2004). Their general demeanour immediately identifies them as different: unusual eye contact, odd posture and unusual facial expressions. They have little awareness of such critical social understandings as personal space or interpreting the body language of others (Asperger, 1991; Wing, 1981). Being identified as different in social situations is, of course, something that most adolescents neither value nor approve of, hence this aspect of AS has serious social consequences for the secondary student.

Impaired communication skills further isolate the adolescent with AS. Despite having average to superior vocabulary levels (Attwood, 2003), they have difficulty understanding the verbal input of others, and interpret questions and statements in a very concrete manner (Church, Alisanski & Amanullah, 2000). They do not often communicate for the conventional reasons of communicating feelings, retelling events or commenting on issues (Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005). They have particular problems with words that have multiple meanings. Their speech is often pedantic and stilted. Apart from their tendency to communicate in long monologues, individuals with this diagnosis have difficulty knowing how to initiate a conversation, or maintain one. Indeed it may be that the reason they engage in long monologues, is because they do not know any other way to engage in "conversation". Their inability to converse in the language or in the manner of their peers

heightens their essential difference from other secondary students.

Individuals with AS also display little creativity or imagination, which leads to *atypical behaviour*. This may take the form of repetitive motor movements, an all-encompassing interest or obsession, or a need to maintain a particular routine or ritual (Asperger, 1991; Attwood, 2003; Linn & Myles, 2004; Williams, 2001). In addition to these behaviours setting them apart from their peers, being prevented from engaging in them causes them great distress, which often leads to an escalation to even more aberrant behaviour.

Baron-Cohen (1996) added to our understanding of why individuals with AS have such difficulties in social situations. He developed the notion of "Theory of Mind" to explain most people's ability to understand that each person experiences the world in a unique way, and that people may view and experience things differently. Individuals with AS do not appear to have this ability; they do not realize that people think differently from them, or as Happe (1994), suggests, they cannot "mind read". As most people interact with each other, they tend to monitor how the other person is reacting to assess if they understand, agree or disagree. These judgments are based on the other person's facial expression, stance, tone of voice, level of eye contact and other aspects of body language. Individuals with AS have great difficulty doing this. They assume the person they are talking to has the same level of interest in the topic of their monologue, whether it be trains, photocopy machines, or distances between Australian towns, despite the yawns, the fidgeting or the edging away. They do not pick up on the subtle and sometimes not so subtle signs that their audience is not interested. This egocentric manner is viewed as arrogance, or even worse, "weirdness", rather than a lack of

ability to pick up on the social cues of a person having a very different experience from their own.

In addition to the three characteristics mentioned above, which essentially define Autism Spectrum Disorders, people with AS can experience additional difficulties. A proportion of them perceive normal sensory stimuli as being unbearable intense (Attwood, 2003; Safran, 2002). Sudden or sharp noises such as clicking pens, or complex noises such as those found in busy environments like school playgrounds, cause particular problems. The normal physical proximity involved in large numbers of people moving along busy corridors can be perceived as threatening by a student with AS. Changing for physical education, lining up at the canteen, travel to and from school, assemblies – all can be perceived as an assault on the senses for some students with this diagnosis.

Individuals with AS may also experience problems in executive functioning, which result in poor impulse control, reduced planning ability, problems organising themselves, difficulties both starting and stopping activities, and difficulty adapting their behaviour according to context (Myles & Adreon, 2001). The ability to monitor behaviour so that it is appropriate for a particular setting, so that one doesn't "stand out" is a life skill for adolescents. Lack of these abilities further isolate the secondary student with AS.

Because these students usually have no obvious physical impairment, have average to above average intelligence and generally have no difficulty learning basic academic material (Attwood, 2003; Myles et. al., 2004) it is often assumed that their social difficulties are the result of their arrogance; that is, their social difficulties are essentially the student's own fault. Such difficulties are not perceived as a disability, and do not attract the same level of understanding or tolerance as a clearly identifiable disability would. Because they desire social interaction but

lack the skills to engage successfully with their peers, adolescents with AS are particularly vulnerable to depression, and are at increased risk of suicide (Kim, Szatmari, Bryson, Streiner & Wilson, 2000; Shoffner, & Williamson, 2000).

It is clear, then, that the characteristics of AS can lead to significant issues for students with this diagnosis, and that secondary schools may pose particular problems for this population. School communities need to be prepared and willing to provide a range of support services so these students have the same opportunities for a successful and rewarding secondary school experience as their peers.

Supporting Students with Asperger Syndrome in Secondary Settings

The following section describes strategies that were used by teachers in the southern Sydney and south coast regions of New South Wales to facilitate the inclusion of secondary students with AS in mainstream classes. These strategies, based on a review of the literature, were presented throughout a series of six workshops over a four-month period. The workshops were designed to support 30 teachers of 14 secondary students diagnosed with AS, who were enrolled in eight secondary schools. Feedback on the use of the strategies and adaptations made by individual teachers have also been included where appropriate.

The strategies are organised according to each of the three identifying characteristics of AS. Firstly, strategies to support *social inclusion* are discussed, with an emphasis on managing the transition to secondary school and unstructured times. This is followed by strategies to develop the *communication* skills of students with AS. Managing *behavioural issues* forms the focus of the third section. An additional section on organisational strategies addresses the executive functioning deficits many of these

students experience.

Before proceeding, the students mentioned in the following discussion need to be introduced (not their real names). Their responses, and in some cases suggestions, informed the workshops as they progressed.

Adrian was a Year 7 student. Most of his behavioural problems related to his perfectionism; he would regularly destroy his own and group work when dissatisfied with it. His special interest was recycling.

Sean was also a Year 7 student whose special interest was calculating the distances between Australian towns. His overbearing manner and loud voice were a constant source of irritation for his peers.

Bailey was a Year 8 student with great interest and skill in using computers. When distressed he would shout and become verbally abusive.

Megan was in Year 8, and the only female student represented. Her diagnosis had come relatively recently, after an extended period in primary school of being a selective mute. She had no particular passion or interest, was quiet and somewhat aloof, and had great difficulty using social courtesies.

Adam was a Year 9 student whose special interest was frogs and tadpoles. He tapped his teeth, chewed his clothing and walked with an odd, stiff gait.

Nathan was also a Year 9 student whose great talent was detailed drawings. When distressed, Nathan would engage in self-injurious behaviour.

Jeremy was the third Year 9 student represented by teachers at the workshops. Jeremy loved words and finding new word meanings. He had an extremely low frustration tolerance level and would rapidly escalate to violence.

Seth was in Year 11 and his passion was

volcanoes. He had a high sensitivity to noise, and wore headphones most of the time. He had very poor gross and fine motor coordination. His posture was poor and he walked with permanently downcast eyes.

Strategies to Facilitate Social Inclusion

Plan the transition. Many problems can be minimized for secondary students if there is an appropriately planned transition (Black, 1999; Schoffner & Williamson, 2000) and professional development of school personnel *before* the student arrives at the school. This needs to take place over approximately a six-month period, which provides time for all members of the school community to be included in workshops that explain AS, and how it can affect learning and behaviour. It also provides time for the student with Asperger to meet staff and students, and to become familiar with the school environment and expectations. In several of the cases mentioned throughout the workshops, staff knew nothing of the students' particular needs until meeting them on the first day of school and peers were similarly unprepared.

Provide supports for less structured times. Those times before and after school, the transitions between classes and the lunch period are usually associated with increased noise levels, close physical proximity to other students and less defined rules, all of which can increase the stress for students with AS (Adreon & Stella, 2001; Myles & Adreon, 2001). Reduced teacher monitoring during these times also increases the vulnerability of students, thus these occasions require specific management strategies. The use of a buddy system to accompany the diagnosed student between classes was the solution most schools chose to the problems that arose during transition between classes. Some schools also targeted areas of potential concern for increased teacher monitoring.

Travelling to and from school on public transport was proving to be particularly difficult for Adrian. He was having difficulties managing the close physical contact, the pushing and the volume of noise that bus travel entailed, to the point where, two weeks into the school term, he refused to travel by bus at all. Two strategies were effective in helping Adrian overcome this problem. Firstly, the bus driver was invited to a meeting at the school, and Adrian's condition and needs were explained to him over a cup of tea. The bus driver was immediately sympathetic and proved to be a strong ally for Adrian. The other strategy that worked particularly well in this case was based on the SODA (Stop, Observe, Deliberate, Act) strategy developed by Bock (2001). Adrian's aide taught him simply to "watch what Simon does". Simon, a popular student who travelled on the same bus, was happy to accompany Adrian to and from school. In addition to providing a model of behaviour, Simon's presence prevented any further victimization of Adrian.

Close physical proximity was also an issue in school assemblies for a number of students. Arranging seating at the end of a row was a practical preventative strategy. Ensuring that other staff members were aware of the students' special needs, and that the diagnosed students were permitted to leave if necessary, prevented most problems.

At Seth's school, the regular performance of the school rock band at assemblies was very popular with most students. For Seth, however, the noise was unbearable. Wearing earphones when the band played meant that he could remain for the whole assembly.

Lunch is often the most enjoyable time of the day for most students, but it can be a time of anxiety and sensory overload for students with this diagnosis (Adreon & Stella, 2001). Using different strategies, lunch periods were managed

successfully in quite different ways in the schools represented at the workshops. Adrian, for example, had lunch in the company of a small group of willing students, the "Lunch Bunch" (name suggested by Linn & Myles, 2004), in a separate area. Students volunteered to be part of this as a strategy that emerged from a "Circle of Friends" activity (see below for further explanation). Bailey had a particular friend, a female student who enjoyed "mothering" and organising him, and they had lunch together every day. These relationships are more common in earlier years, before peer pressure ensures that most girls reject the "dorky" boys, but occasionally such a relationship continues into secondary school. In this case it was a mutually satisfying friendship. Jeremy also enjoyed the company of another two students, both of whom also had special needs. Because of Jeremy's rapid escalation to physical violence if he felt overwhelmed or threatened, he was usually accompanied at a distance by his "social adviser", a young male teacher's aide who was available to participate or intervene as required. His presence in the vicinity also prevented any overt bullying.

Sometimes a student's particular needs must override what would normally be considered good practice. Seth, a Year 11 student, would eat his lunch in the company of others, but go to the Library immediately afterward. This was a period when he could research his special interest (volcanoes) as a reward for concentrating on relevant subjects during lessons, and having his lunch with the other students. While isolated computer use did not develop his social interaction skills, it was decided that the pressure of the senior years of secondary school, and the increased time he needed to spend on subjects outside his special interest, meant that some allowance had to be made for a young man who became increasingly

frustrated if he did not have regular opportunities to explore his own interests. Once this decision was made, Seth's behaviour and attitude improved, which ironically improved his relationships with peers.

Using Social Stories. Carol Gray's (1995) Social Stories have been used for over a decade to help young people understand social situations. Social stories are written specifically for an individual, and relate to a particular social difficulty the individual is having. The story explains where and why a situation occurs, how others feel or react, and what prompts these feelings. After describing the social situation from the individuals' point of view, the Social Story provides some guidelines on what could be done.

Social Stories were used with a number of the younger students referred to in this paper. A Social Story explaining how you should behave when losing at games helped Adrian modify his poor behaviour when he lost games of chess, which he played during most lunch periods in the library. The brief story explained that everyone feels disappointed when they lose, but the sensible thing to do is to say "well done!" to the winner, or "maybe my turn next time". The three-paragraph story was read with Adrian for five consecutive days before lunch. After three days, he was allowed to play chess at lunch again, and he was able to respond more appropriately. Several weeks later, there was another incident when he lost. After three days of rereading his Social Story before lunch, he was again permitted to play chess during lunch. In the four-month period since then, there have been no further incidents. Social Stories were also used successfully with Jeremy, to help him ignore students who teased him; with Sean, to help him reduce the volume of his voice; and with Megan, to increase her use of "please" with requests.

Use cartooning. Gray (1995) also developed the notion of using cartoons with speech bubbles, to help explain social situations and what other people may be thinking. This strategy has been found to be successful in a number of studies (Myles & Adreon, 2001) and also proved to be useful in helping Jeremy to interpret facial expressions.

Explicitly teach the "hidden curriculum." Every situation, no matter how unstructured, has rules governing behaviour. Most people intuitively tune into these rules and understand how they work simply by observing what goes on around them. This is the "hidden curriculum" – how to dress, how to act, who to speak to and when (Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005). In schools, part of the hidden curriculum is knowing which teachers you can joke with, understanding when a teacher is really serious, which teachers are hard markers, how tolerant different teachers are of talking in class, and so on. It also includes understanding who the "cool" kids are, and when someone is baiting you. Understanding how the hidden curriculum works helps a student fit in, make friends, and stay out of trouble. Most secondary students sort this out within the first week of school and students with AS inevitably do not (Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005; Attwood, 2003; Lavoie, 1994; Myles, Troutman & Schelven, 2004).

Normal social experiences are not usually effective for students with AS, as they do not attend to the subtleties of social behaviour, or even understand what is relevant and what is not relevant in social interactions (Myles & Adreon, 2001). A Social Skills Club that specifically targets skills is often recommended for this population (Cotter, Warren & Pearson, 2001). While not strictly within a formal club structure, Jeremy was given specific social skills instruction. He met with volunteer peers to rehearse joining a conversation, requests for

help, and a general help-seeking strategy (Bullard, 2004).

Establish a Circle of Friends. A Circle of Friends (Frederickson & Turner, 2002) is designed to act as a social network for students who do not automatically develop one. It should be made up of willing peers who basically follow school rules, and who see the value of establishing a friendship with a student with AS. The parents of the diagnosed student should be aware that a Circle of Friends is being established. Opinion differs as to whether the student himself should be aware. The group meets together under the direction of a teacher or school counsellor to discuss why the student doesn't have friends; how it must feel to be without friends; the good qualities the student possesses, and how some social interactions could be organised. The Circle should be large enough that too much pressure is not placed on a few individuals, and it should be presented as a valuable and worthwhile enterprise. When high status peers take on the role of befriending a student with AS, the modeling of this positive behaviour can also be a powerful influence on other students. In Adrian's case, the Lunch Bunch was created as a practical expression of the Circle of Friends. This was an arrangement whereby different classmates accompanied Bailey to and from the resource room and engaged in some conversation with him. Because these periods were usually short, the conversational opportunities were relatively successful, and gradually Bailey expanded the number of people he felt comfortable with.

Use social autopsies. Lavoie (1994) developed the strategy of the social autopsy over a decade ago to help students understand and correct social mistakes. This is not intended to be a punishment, but is rather a problem-solving strategy. The student works with a teacher or supportive adult to determine: the sequence of

events; what the social error was; who was hurt by the mistake; and how it could be corrected. This strategy was used to help Bailey when he didn't respond to a birthday party invitation, given by a student who had been acting within his Circle of Friends.

Teach cooperative roles. The value of cooperative learning groups has been well established for all groups of learners, and has been successfully used with students with a range of special needs (Jenkins, Antill, Wayne, & Vedas, 2003). The increased use of such groups places an added stress on students with poor interpersonal skills and an inability to interpret social behaviour (Safran, 2002). Students with AS can participate successfully in these groups if the groups are selected carefully, and if all member of the group are explicitly taught their individual roles, how to listen, and how to acknowledge the contribution of others. Adding visible time cues such as an egg timer, can also help the student with AS judge a fair contribution to the group discussion. Building on the student's strengths such as highly competent IT or drawing skills, also demonstrates how the individual student can make a genuine contribution.

Strategies to Facilitate Communication Skills

Check for understanding. The verbal fluency and extensive vocabulary of many students with AS can mask comprehension problems (Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005). Some students have difficulty with very common expressions. The "small population" of a country town was interpreted by Sean as everyone in the town being of small stature; similarly Megan thought "the larger community" referred to the population's physical size. Seth was completely confused when told to "think outside the box". Teachers need to continually check for understanding, as students may simply repeat or parrot information and will

often fail to seek clarification, as they may not even realize that they do not understand.

Explain abstract and symbolic language. It is important to explain abstract language specifically to students with AS. Explaining that "I'll be with you in a minute" may not necessarily mean in precisely sixty seconds was extremely important for Adrian. "Does the cat have your tongue?" would be a truly confusing question for students with this diagnosis. Sarcasm and exaggeration (which would not be recommended under any circumstances) only serve to confuse them.

Teach multiple meanings of words. As vocabulary increases, students with AS need to be specifically taught new meanings of words. The multiple meanings of the words such as *sound*, *light*, *switch*, and *current* can cause great confusion. The Macquarie Dictionary (1998) has 14 different and relatively common meanings for the word "ground". Teaching new meanings requires more than simply a definition. Multiple exposures to both examples and non-examples of the new meaning are required on different occasions if deep processing is to take place. Sean became quite distressed by all the words that had new meanings when he did a unit on electricity. His teacher gave him a small notebook where he could list multiple meanings of words, and she or a peer reviewed this with him regularly in class. Several other students also requested a notebook for new words, and it became a useful class-wide strategy.

Strategies to Address Behavioural Issues

The need for routines and in some cases rituals, the obsessions, the sensory sensitivities, and the emotional vulnerability mean that students with AS need a supportive environment that has structures aimed at maintaining stability.

Maintain strong routines. All students represented at the workshops responded

positively to well-established routines, with timely warnings when there were inevitable disruptions. This is strongly supported by the literature (Adreon, 2002; Attwood, 2003; Safran, 2002). As with all students, the routines were most effective when explained and taught, almost like a unit of work, at the beginning of each year.

Organize seating and teams. Managing seating placements is important (Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005; Safran, 2002) as students with AS are easily victimized. Chadwick (cited in Myles & Adreon, 2001, p. 82.) recommends placing tolerant peers two deep in all directions around the student with AS. Seating students with AS away from high traffic areas such as doorways and equipment centres will also avoid other students brushing past them. Teachers attending the workshops believed that some students are best placed next to an empty seat as this seemed the most effective strategy in their classrooms. It is also recommended in the literature that teachers be responsible for team or group selection, as no student deserves to be the last member selected every time, the fate of many students with AS (Lavoie, 1994; Myles & Adreon, 2001).

Identify triggers and early signs of distress. Each student has unique ways of demonstrating that they are becoming agitated: Adrian's breathing would become very shallow and rapid; Jeremy would make soft vocalisations; Bailey's voice would get louder; Nathan would begin to scratch at his arms; Adam would chew his clothing; Seth would slap his thigh. Monitoring students' emotional state, and becoming skilled at identifying early signs of distress is an important preventative strategy. Efforts should be made to reduce the number and intensity of stressors in the environment. Jeremy's inability to tolerate close physical proximity and noise made lining up a continuing problem. Being permitted to leave the classroom a few minutes

early to make his purchases, or move to another classroom, helped him avoid the main crowds and the incidence of behavioural outbursts was greatly reduced.

The impact of noise on many of the diagnosed students was partially solved through the use of earplugs or headphones, as recommended by Attwood (2003) and Myles and Adreon (2001). Seth used earphones at assembly when there were noisy items; Adrian often used his earphones on the bus; and other students used them during transition times to limit the noise.

Organise a "home base." All students with AS need to have a place where they can go to plan for their day, escape when they feel overwhelmed, prevent a meltdown, or regain control if there has been a major incident ((Adreon & Gerhardt, 2005; Bullard, 2004; Safran, 2002). There is usually a resource room or a study room in the library that meets this need. It is important that this room is always available, and that it is not used for timeout or punishment – it needs to be viewed positively. It should also be possible for the student to do normal work in the room at times when the classroom is too stressful. Adam's support teacher arranged for him to start each day in the resource room to get organised for the day, and to ensure that he was prepared for anything different that was to occur throughout the day. Teachers of the first period each day knew that Adam would arrive late, and usually left notes on his desk to orient him to the lesson.

Organise a "safe person." In addition to a safe place, most students with AS need a person they feel comfortable with, and in whom they can confide (Myles & Adreon, 2001). In Jeremy's case, it was his "social adviser", a young male teacher aide who was very popular with all students because of his fashion sense and knowledge of popular trends. Jeremy was able

to take considerable advantage of having such a valued person in his life. Nathan, however, bonded with the school general assistant. Megan found her Year Adviser the best person to talk to, and the home or support class teacher fulfilled this role for many students.

Increase use of visual supports. There is increased evidence that students with AS respond more to visual cues than to verbal input (Savner & Myles, 2000). Visual aides such as daily timetables (written rather than in picture form for secondary students), task outlines, and checklists can help students organise themselves and can help prepare them for changes in routines. Visual aides such as graphic organizers, skeletal diagrams and flow diagrams can also assist students to both record and study essential content. Adrian, Seth and Megan all found visual aides to be very useful in focusing their attention on the key points of topics, rather than on irrelevant minor details. Charting his progress on individual graphs inside each of his folders was a motivating exercise for Adam. This strategy made his progress much more concrete – he could see the graph grow as he completed more and more tasks.

Use special interests. Students with AS need periods of time to indulge in their special interest, as recommended by a number of researchers and writers in the field (Adreon, 2002; Attwood, 2003). Where possible, special interests should be incorporated into normal school life. Jeremy was given a list of new content words at the beginning of each new unit of study. His task was to find the definitions and prepare a glossary for the rest of the class. Adrian's interest in recycling was used when the class did a unit on this topic, and elements also included when his class did units on consumerism, pollution and advertising.

Use mentors. Mentors can greatly affirm the existence of young people who have highly

specialised interests that are different from their peers. With their greater experience and maturity, mentors can usually provide significant emotional support and stability, and thus nurture the emotional health of the young people.

Adam's fascination with frogs and tadpoles resulted in firstly his bathroom at home and then the backyard being turned into frog habitats. Finding a local Frogs and Tadpole Interest Group led to Adam meeting a university lecturer (also with AS) with a similar interest, and a firm friendship was born.

Nathan could repeat detailed patterns and complex designs and spent much of his time doing that rather than any other academic work. An insightful art teacher mentored him, and showed him how to develop his skill. Nathan found that his skill was easily converted into complex graffiti, a talent greatly valued by his peers. Fortunately, a local youth centre provided a legitimate avenue for this talent to be demonstrated. At the time of writing, Nathan had just been offered casual employment with the local council, decorating signboards, bus shelters, and other council property.

Organisational Strategies

As discussed previously, the executive function deficits that many students with AS experience can greatly affect their organisational ability. Not only does this cause great frustration for the student, his teacher, and any peers involved in group tasks, but poor organisational skills prevent the student from being able to achieve full potential.

Use priming. Priming (Wilde, Koegel & Koegel, 1992) has three major purposes: it helps to familiarise a student with material before it is taught; it makes classroom activity more predictable and therefore less stressful for the student; and it increases the student's success. Priming of material usually occurs the day before

it is covered in class, and can be done by a parent, a teacher aide, or a peer. This was used as a Circle of Friends activity with several students mentioned in this paper. Priming is different from teaching, and should be conducted in a relaxed manner. Priming sessions should be short and should provide a brief overview of the material, the assignments that might be set, and any new terminology that may be introduced. Seth nominated this to be the most helpful strategy in helping him complete class tasks successfully.

Break tasks up. Because of their poor organisational skills, multi-component tasks can cause a great deal of difficulty for students with AS. Dividing these tasks into smaller units has been shown to be a successful strategy (Adreon, 2002, Bullard, 2004). Projects, book reviews, and many types of major assessment tasks are more easily managed if divided up, and only one section at a time given to the diagnosed student. If each section can be marked before the next is submitted, the student is provided with important feedback, which increases the motivation to continue. Timing tasks, as recommended by Bullard (2004) also provides some students with the required impetus to start and complete tasks.

Organising their materials is a major problem for many students. Adrian's support teacher helped Adrian to "Sort 'n' Save" (Konza, 2001) his material during the last period each week. He filed loose papers, cleaned out his locker, threw out rubbish and recycled appropriate materials. This was soon adopted for the whole class.

Colour-coding each subject helped Sean. Placing a matching coloured dot on the spine of all books and materials needed for each subject, and attaching a plastic wallet to the inside of each folder to hold a pen and pencil (Myles & Adreon, 2001) helped him arrive at classes with everything he needed. Having a

plastic envelop in each folder for papers that needed to be taken home also ensured that he had everything he needed for homework assignments.

Be flexible. Students with AS may not always be able to complete tasks in the same way as their peers, but the teachers in these workshops demonstrated that a flexible approach helped their students accomplish a great deal. Giving additional time was all some students needed. Using a laptop to compensate for poorly coordinated writing for note-taking in class, for example, solved most of Seth's problems in this area. Adam's teacher highlighted study guides so he could concentrate on the most salient facts, rather than labour with his poor reading ability through less relevant material. Bailey's history teacher always had a model of an acceptable assignment to demonstrate what was required

in her class. Jeremy's English teacher listed the exact criteria for all assignments, so he understood that he would be assessed on presentation and spelling as well. The teachers' willingness to experiment with a range of alternatives greatly increased their students' ability to participate meaningfully in their classes and improved their success rates.

Conclusion

A common theme in all these strategies is that they provide structure and support for students who will struggle if left unassisted. The willingness of teachers to try new strategies, and the success of many of the strategies mentioned in this paper reveal that with flexibility, support and the cooperation of the school community, teachers can help students with AS have a successful and enjoyable experience at secondary school.

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