

Spring NewsLetter No 17

“Belonging Matters”

Visual Aids in Mainstream Classrooms

Advice from Postgraduate Course Tutor, Dr Amanda Barrie

We are used to seeing visual timetables in classrooms, a line of pictures depicting the day's learning interspersed with break and lunch time and ending with home time. They are commonplace in primary setting, but they should be more common in secondary schools – though perhaps in a different form. Many children have their own 'visual timetable' enhancement in the form of now and next boards.

But why do we have them, why are they so important?

1. Visuals are a permanent reminder – words disappear once they are not fully committed to memory, which they often aren't in a busy classroom.
2. Visuals allow time for the processing of language. Many children with SEMH needs will have some issues with executive functioning and be unable to process information quickly enough.
3. Visuals help prepare for transition. This can be a now/next but a visual timetable linked to time limits will mean children are ready for what is coming next – and they will know what it is more importantly.
4. Visuals help children see what you mean. A picture helps when children don't have the language skills necessary to understand what is said.
5. Visuals help build independence. If children can see what they need to do they can get on and do it without adult reminder and it will eventually become something they know how to do unaided.
6. Visuals are transferable between environments and people. Its snack time now whether my teacher is Ms Smith or Mr Jones, or if I'm in my classroom or on a school trip.
7. Visuals have no attitude. Children cannot misunderstand the tone of a picture, pictures aren't going to shout.
8. Visuals help with anxiety. If it can be seen, then it is not being forgotten and children can be more relaxed with less fear of making mistakes.
9. Finally – visuals are good for all children, whatever their age or ability. Have a think about how you can incorporate visuals into your classroom. Refer to them regularly throughout the day. Make them interesting and meaningful to your students.

From Managed Moves to Directed Off-Site: Unpacking the Lived Experiences and Giving Voice to Children, Families and School Staff. By Marcia White.

This is an abridged account of the interview with Marcia, Dominic Gunn & Dr Rob Long. The full interview is available [HERE](#)

I'm **Marcia White** and I'm the secondary outreach lead for Bromley Trust Academy. Our resolve is to reduce permanent exclusions in the London Borough of Bromley, which means working alongside young people, working alongside families, working alongside schools in order to do that. So, it's quite a varied and multi-agency role. We have Educational Psychologists, soon to get a Speech and Language therapist, and a couple of ex Sencos. So, quite a varied team with vast expertise to draw on.

I became interested in some of the children that were on my caseload as outreach children, and they were having these managed moves. So, they were moving from school to school and at the time, a managed move was a move from one school, so school A to school B, to avoid a permanent exclusion. So, almost as an alternative which schools were using to avoid a child being permanently excluded. That now has changed so actually a managed move is a permanent move. It used to be called a managed transfer and now a temporary move is called an off-site direction. So, just to confuse us, so we've changed some words, but ultimately, they will mean the same. So, I had these children moving from school to school and I was really interested around the decisions as to why they were being moved and there didn't seem to be any evidence base behind the movement.

I was just exposing this process - that managed moves are part of the permanent exclusion process. I don't think it is exclusion and it's not inclusion.

I don't know what it is, it kind of sits in this middle space. So, I wanted to understand the lived experience of children that were going on these moves, and get some voice also from their parents and school staff involved in these processes. So that was the starting point of my research really.

Dominic Gunn

I think exposing actually is a suitable word, not in terms of uncovering some intentional deceit or anything like that, but just revealing it because through practice, it's become a bit murky, and it also varies from place to place so much. So exposing, do you, Rob, feel that Marcia is kind of revealing something?

Rob Long

I think it definitely is the right word. I think your study highlights so many areas that are of concern, from prejudice, to who are the young people that are being managed moved. You know, there's so many factors. We're just looking at one level - there are causes behind that that we need to unpick as well. I found your research a fascinating read. You touch on so many issues that I care about deeply. The first one I wouldn't mind just actually putting to you is how do we stop people talking about challenging behaviour? That expression seems to point the finger at the student. We have a student and we have a young person who is challenging. And yet we know quite often their challenging behaviour is because of the context, circumstances, things that have happened to them kind of thing. And in a different context, they can behave very differently. So, I'd love to hear, how can we move away from that kind of language?

Marcia White

That's a really good question. The cynic in me says, we can't. I think it really starts off with something as basic as the language that we use when we are talking about vulnerable children, when we're talking about permanent exclusion, when we're talking about managed move or off-site directions. At work, when I hear schools talk about off-site directions, it feels like you've got a new outfit on, but the same hat. You know, you've changed something, but ultimately, it's all still the same. And I think for me, problemising the child is a big issue. What they're hearing about themselves becomes their internal working model. So, they start to believe that they don't belong and they don't matter, that they're not important, that they need to be moved. So then actually what that does, it detaches from the decision makers and exclusion is a decision. To move a child is a decision. It doesn't just happen. Somebody makes that choice. So, I think for me, it is certainly around the language that we use and how we use it and what we are saying to children when we do these things. I think you touched on as well, the importance of a multi-agency and I go on in my research to talk about a multidisciplinary approach. So having all of those experts around the table, but with multidisciplinary working, if we look at the AP task force, is about having the experts in one place. And the Youth Justice Service have a very similar model to that, whereby you are able to see a Speech and Language therapist, you are able to have a Youth Justice worker, you're able to have a mentor and, you know, you have a learning mentor and, you know, have all of these different people, the school nurse, for example as well, and they're all in the same place.

So, you're getting those decision makings, but made as a team and made collectively through a lens that is shaped by experts. Ideally, you just wouldn't move children and you would have this model that the SEND paper talks about, where we're all very inclusive and we keep them all in schools. But that has to come from a real top-down approach and at the moment, we're not there yet. So, we can change things from the bottom up, which I absolutely believe in, or else I wouldn't do this work.

But it needs to be about seeing that the problem isn't the child. I talk about this in my conclusion, that there's a real cost to these practices. You know, somewhere in the region of £270,000 and £370,000 across the lifespan of a child, when they have to draw on services like probation, youth justice, mental health services as adults. Why not put that money into these schools now rather than us as a taxpayer pay on the other end? I'm so sorry, that should have been a much shorter answer.

Dominic Gunn

You've said ideally, we wouldn't move children, but actually in your work, you don't totally dismiss managed moves in principle. So, what are key improvements do you think could make the approach safer, fairer and more effective for these children it's supposed to protect?

Marcia White

I think I've gone on a journey during the course of these studies and I guess that's the whole point apart from new knowledge, it's about me learning about myself as a practitioner and as a researcher. I was very much influenced by the work of Sarah Martin Denham and her scope and trying to ascertain the national picture of management. And I thought maybe I'll just come up with a best practice model and all the LAs will implement it and it'll be hunky dory. But actually, the more I started to understand some of the discourse around management moves and offsite directions, it's part of a bigger problem around unexplained absences and lost learning. And there's a lot around that at the moment.

Dominic Gunn

All of us have the privilege really of knowing a large number of schools and don't they interpret their responsibilities differently? Do you think perhaps if there was more clarity in statutory responsibilities around managed moves that would help schools actually be less variable in the way that they support children and make these decisions.

Marcia White

I think yes, in the short answer, I think it would create accountability, which currently there is very little. With Academy Trust, it's a lot easier to move children from school to school and who is tracking and monitoring that data? And now we're in a situation where schools can very quickly go to one of their other Trust schools and direct a child to attend there for five days or four days or two days. Is that recorded the same way as a suspension or a permanent exclusion? I don't think so.

So, I think there is the issue of accountability and there's also the concern. One of the things that came out of my research was about consistency. So, we have schools managing.... managing, that's a funny word, facilitating off-site directions and managing moves, but in very different ways and very different approaches. And again, going back to the top down, that will be based on the school's ethos and how they see these processes and whether it's a punitive, or a supportive mechanism.

Rob Long

There's so much that I've read from what you've done in your research about belonging. And then there's the part that says that there are some schools that have got a significant number of youngsters who are at risk of actually going down the exclusion permanent management moves and everything like that.

What are your thoughts about how we could use your research to actually say to some of these schools, we can be proactively, because I mean, kind of your research highlights that if there isn't a sense of belonging, there's that alienation, there's that sense of being different, that sense of being identified, marginalised and everything, which almost like lends itself to problematic behaviour. And you feel with your report that we could condense some of the kind of issues around belonging to help schools and staff understand that when a child doesn't feel that they belong, you're actually helping them on that wrong path, marginalised and everything, which almost like lends itself to problematic behaviour.

Marcia White

That's a really, really interesting point. I went on some training probably about two or three years ago now, and it was by one of your lot, an Educational Psychologist. And she really changed my thinking. Not that I didn't know there was a word for belonging. I always knew there was a word for belonging because I feel like as a practitioner, I've always tried to make children feel like they belong, but she named it and she talked about a school where the Head teacher made it a point that every single member of staff, if they walked past a child, they had to say something positive or pleasant. Nice uniform, nice haircut, did you enjoy the football yesterday? Something. And then she went on to talk about the importance of mattering.

She said that you can wear a school uniform and feel as though you belong, but that doesn't necessarily make you feel as though you matter. So, I think for what you what you're saying, Rob, is really important because actually belonging is key, isn't it? And we all want to feel like we belong to something. But actually, if you're moving children from school to school, what does that say about them and whether they matter? How important are they? Because although a managed move in an off-site direction is meant to be consent based, often these are used in a way that can be quite threatening, quite scary to parents. If you don't do this, your child becomes completed. And that's not the language that the guidance suggests, but often, sadly, that is what happens and they feel like there's no choice. So, if I'm being moved from school to school, I think that is telling me it's a bit of a self-fulfilling prophecy. You don't matter. So actually, if I don't matter, why should I engage with anything? Why should I engage with society? You know, it's like you said, it's pushing them out to all these other factors that are going to take them down a path, which then becomes very difficult and challenging for them to kind of get back to where we need them to be.

I shared my article with just a couple of colleagues that I knew from that LA Youth Justice Service, just anyone I could sort of say, go and have a read. And one of the schools I worked with, I got an e-mail from somebody at a secondary school and he said, it really challenged him. I think he's quite a child-centered person anyway, but he said they had an off-site directive that was coming up with a young person that was moving to their school. Sorry, no, it's I use children, not young people in my research, because that keeps them vulnerable. That's really important to me as well. And he said, from the time this child comes to our school, he's going to wear our uniform and he's going to be our boy. We're going to treat him as such. And it did make me think it is a choice. You are making a decision about whether you will keep a child and make sure that they belong and they matter. It hasn't been perfect. He's had ups and downs, but actually that commitment and him knowing that they want him there has made such a difference to his self-esteem and his confidence.

So, I think, yeah, I think you're right, Rob. I think it can, it can challenge in a supportive way. Schools, you know, kind of getting alongside them and coaching them about how we can do this differently. And I'm finding myself, I use the word infiltrate, infiltrating spaces, meetings, conversations. I mean, I've been in meetings now where somebody says offsite direction, my colleague will start looking at me like, oh no, don't get us started because they know I'm going to challenge you, I'm going to ask you about what are the decisions behind this. And if it's a case where they're already moving by the time they come to my service, then I ask to be part of that journey. I will follow them through their off-site direction and try and get all the right people around the table.

Dominic Gunn

Isn't language important? Just as we said at the beginning of this, and you brought up the word mattering there, which I didn't have in the original notes, but of course it is starting to be used a bit more. And once we ask ourselves and help our colleagues use the word, does the child matter to me? Does the child feel that they matter? In their environment. It reframes your thoughts, I feel, in a positive way. So that language really is crucial, isn't it? And if you're infiltrating, as you say, to groups and you start using that language, I think Kerry Murphy would use the word provocation. It's going to make me look all around this issue that I'm dealing with and ask myself, you know, how do I, how am I really thinking about a child's life in this case and their future? So I think bringing matter into it is a really important word and we have seen it crop up from other researchers, other organisations, haven't we? So, it's like another layer of belonging.

Marcia White

We've started with the belonging, which is great, everybody looking the same or feeling like they look like everybody else or whatever it is your approach to belonging is. But actually, we're taking it a step further. I'm keeping you in mind, you know, you've told me that you've got a hockey game. And then when I, when you come in the next day, I say, well, how was your hockey game? Well, you've told me that your mum's having an operation. How's your mum doing? It's just really holding those children in mind. And that isn't actually, no, we're talking about managing philosophy directions. That isn't just about children. That's about staff as well. You know, this is really challenging work. And not having that support and not feeling like you matter can also be really soul destroying as well, which is so why so many teachers and even their profession, but having that support as well and having teachers voices, the amount of schools that I go into and I, you know, I don't mean to, but I end up offering a space for people to talk about how they're feeling because sometimes they feel like they want to take a really child-centered approach and they want to, you know, make a child feel like they belong and they matter. But there are systems and processes that block that from happening. So, it's also about making staff feel like they matter and they belong and that they're important as well.

Rob Long

I think, you've caught people saying, "we've got to get rid of this". I'm quoting what they said to you, or you picked it up. So it's like passing the parcel and you realise that children are being objectified and you suddenly realise that you need to help people see when you talk like that, this is the meaning behind it. And these are the implications that follow from talking about just moving this thing on because it's a problem. Yeah, so I love that. And it's almost like provocatively confronting people in a caring way. But it needs to be said. So well done. And that was another one of my questions. I wanted to make sure that you're beginning to change the way language is used, it is so important.

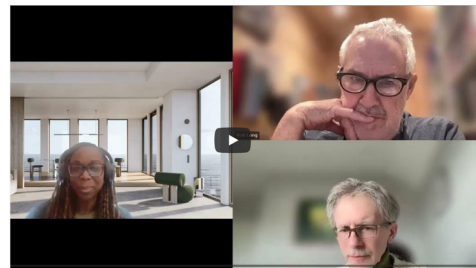
Marcia White

Yeah, and I think, I mean, my undergrad was in linguistics, not that I can speak or write at the moment, but to me, you realise how important a tool language is. We take it for granted, don't we? We just think meaning comes from nowhere, but actually meaning is constructed through our discourse, through our conversations and the language that we use and the labels and how we categorise the world. And I'm really, even though it was painstaking, I'm really pleased that I did end up using IPA, which is interpretive phenomenological analysis, because you actually capture, as you said, you capture somebody's words and what they said and how they felt and how they made meaning of their experience. And then my job is to have the privilege of now deconstructing that even further and making further meaning of that and drawing and developing some themes. So it's a real privilege to be able to do that, you know, when I think about that now if I wasn't in the role and hadn't had the experiences in terms of my jobs, I don't know if I could have been, I would have been able, sorry, to do it in the same way because I can kind of be an outsider looking in and of course could have done some interviews. But the fact that I had a relationship with my participants apart from one, it meant that I had an automatic in whereby they felt safe and they felt comfortable. I did have to make sure, of course, ethically, you know, there was that divide between researcher and practitioner. But, you know, that aside, it provided a really safe space, I think, for them to understand, certainly the children as well and one of the parents how this experience affected them, because you don't, it's all very quick and quite abrupt, some of these moves. And there's not really time to focus on what's happening, how you feel about it. It's just kind of happening to it. And sometimes participants felt like they were outside of those experiences. And now that they're able to sit down and make some meaning of it, it's like, well, actually, yeah, that made me feel really sad or that made me feel really angry. Or there's one quote by Maya who talks about, you know, people thinking that she's a really immature little girl because she gets permanently excluded at age 13. You think, give it, that's making it sound like your responsibility and it's all your fault. It's, yeah, it's really, Yeah, I mean, it's a labour of love, obviously. But like you said, I'm hoping that is able to create opportunities for conversations to really understand the impact and the implications of moving children

Dominic Gunn

Thanks so much, Marcia, and thanks, Rob, for your questions as well there. Is there anything else that we need to sort of sum up here? I was going to make sure that everyone had seen a copy of the Journal and that's where your work is published, Marcia. We'll make sure people know how to read that when we post this podcast. And it's probably worth mentioning as well that the editor of that, Professor Harry Daniels, also works with the team Excluded Lives. So, we did talk earlier about the lack of figures on some children, where children are and what they're doing when they're not in school or partially in school and excluded lives is looking into that at the moment. So that's another organisation worth getting to know.

Full Podcast available [here](#)



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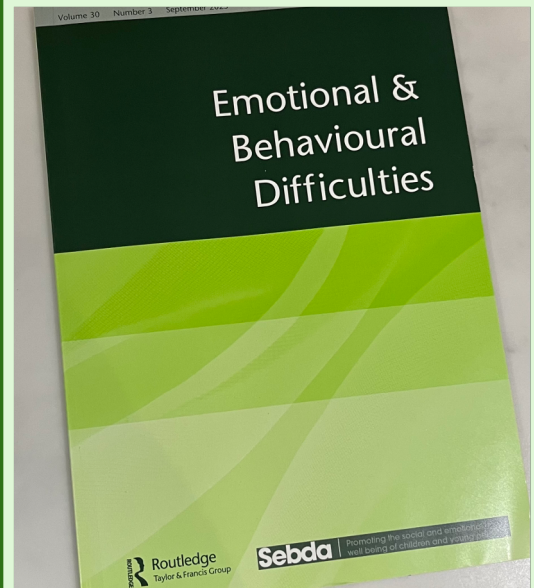
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