Autism: Considerations for the Future Education of Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools: Experiences from Research in Ireland

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Overview

- Limitations
- Research Participants and Contexts
- A Rights Based Approach
- Towards an Understanding of ASDs
- Educational Provision for Children with ASDs
- The Data
- What Matters
- Final Observations

Limitations

- Researcher-Effect

- Literature Reviewed

- Sampling Process

- High Levels of Motivation of Teachers and Principals

- Ethnography of Any Human Group is Incomplete

- Methodological Design – interviews; classroom observation; videoing (24-54 min periods); photographic data; teachers' choice; halo effect; time-sampling; participant-feedback

- Analysis

- Heterogeneous – Internal and External Environments

Education in the Irish Context

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Imaginative
- Aesthetic
- Moral
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Social
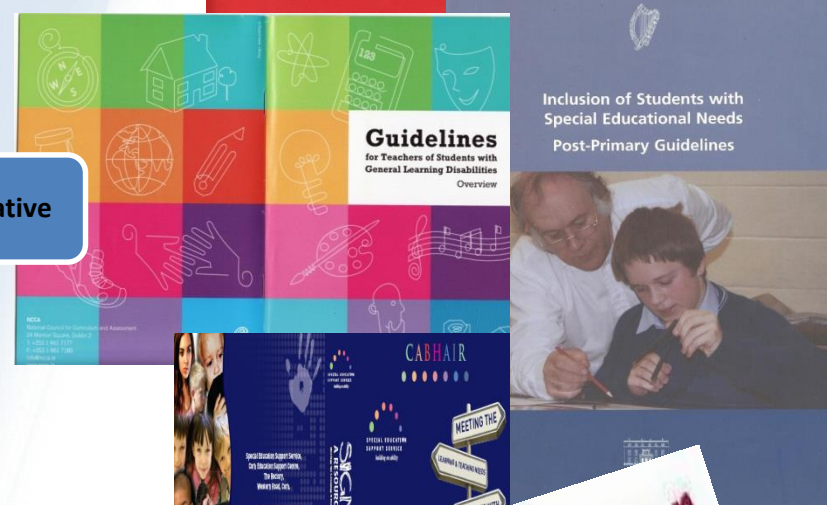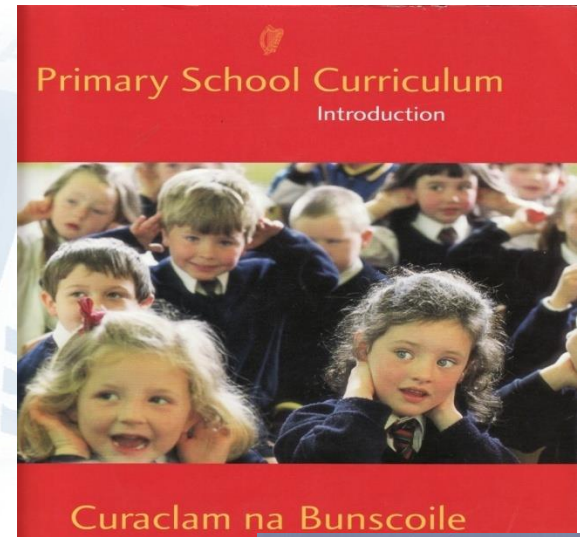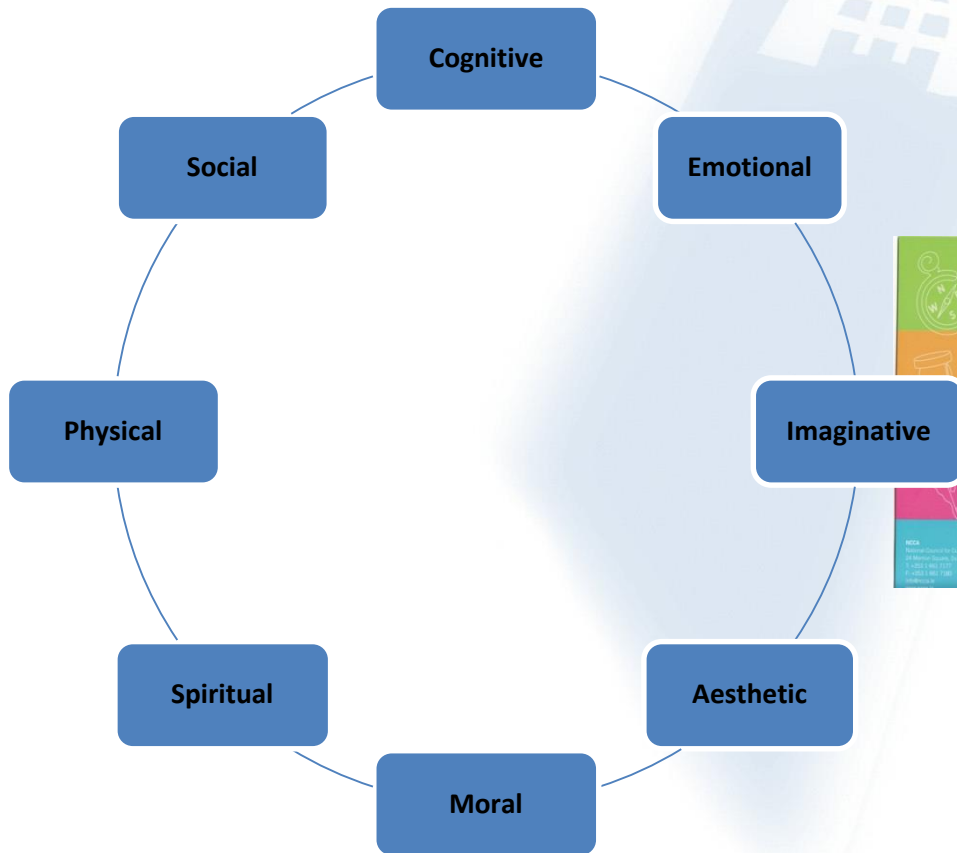
Very interesting…The overall conclusion was one of immense gratitude and pride that one of our own as it were took the trouble to articulate the problems we deal with on a daily basis and come up with sensible solutions to deal with them...Encouraging...Interesting and useful findings...Useful and to the point...Enlightening that someone understands the challenges faced by teachers...Very valuable research...These findings will be invaluable in the future...Depth of content

Research Participants and Contexts

- Of 87 letters sent to teachers – 20 indicated interest

- 10 teachers in ten classes for children with ASDs

- 10 principals

- 18 teachers in other classes

- Age range 21- 65 years – experience 2 - 33 years.

- 45 children with ASDs aged 3 years 9 months to 16 years and 8 months – 3 children absent.

- 5 teachers in classes in mainstream schools and 5 in special schools (1- severe to profound general learning disability, 2 - moderate and severe to profound general learning disability, 1- mild general learning disability, 1- mild to moderate general learning disability)

Ireland: A Rights Based Approach

- Constitution
- Legislation
- UN Convention

Towards an Understanding of ASDs
Triad of Differences

Social

Communication

Inflexibility of thought and behaviour

Sensory Dimension
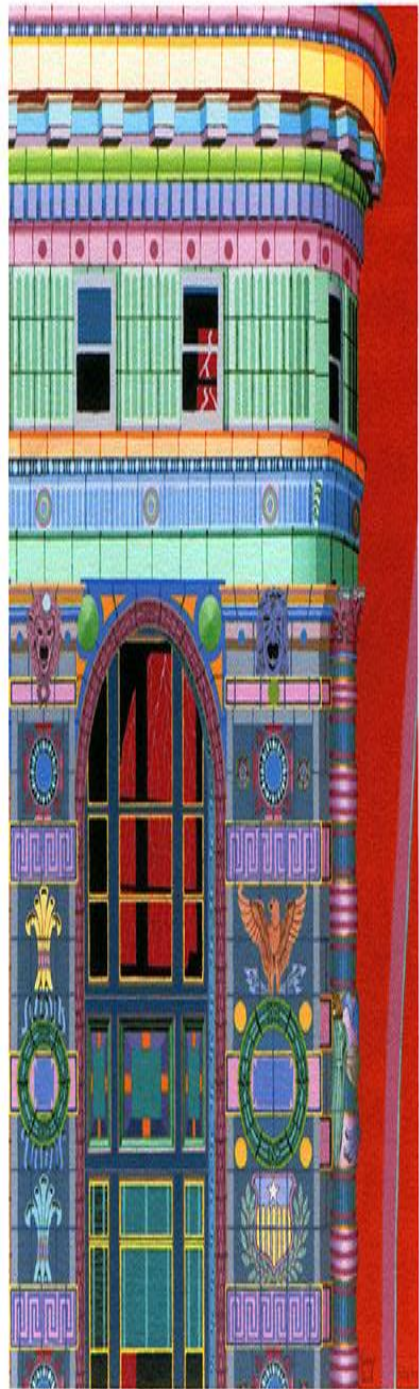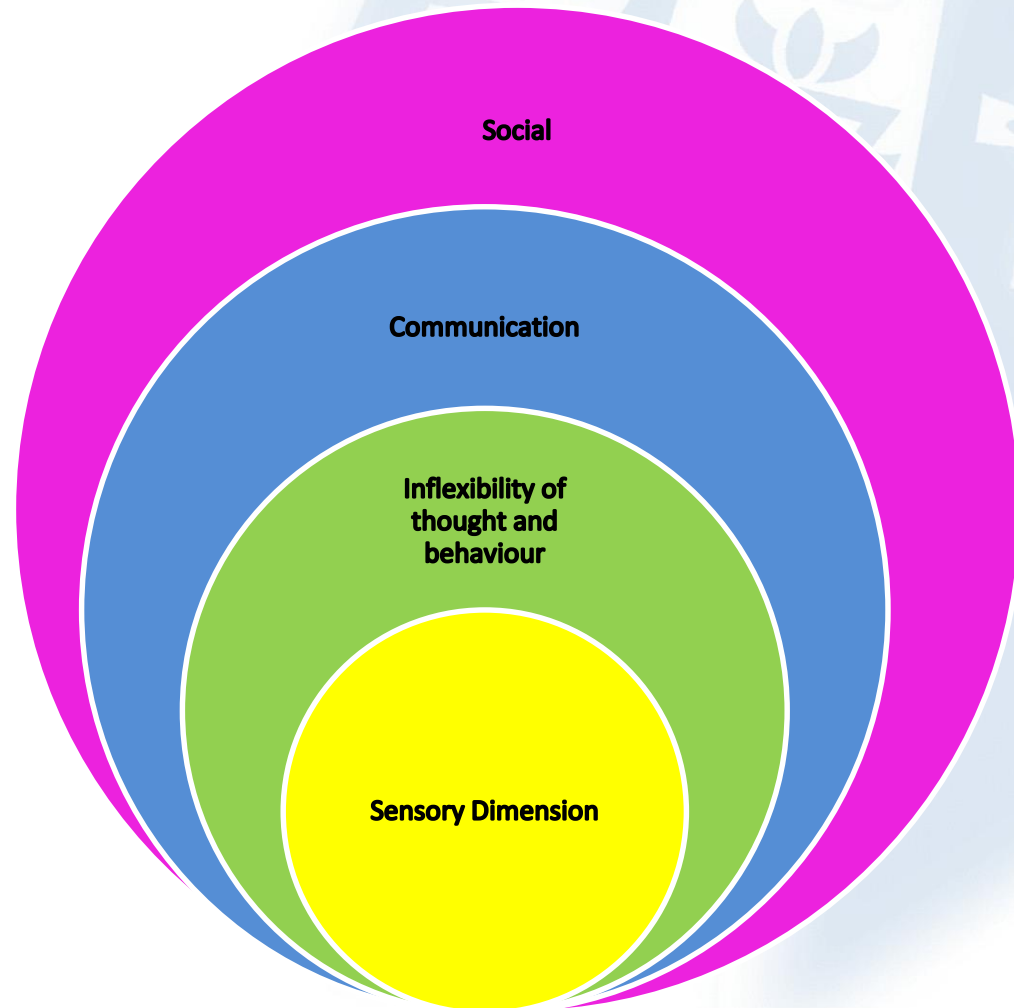
Donna Williams

Clara Claiborne and Jessica Park
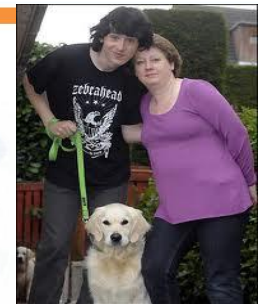
Nuala and Dale Gardner

Luke Jackson

Gunilla Gerland

Jenny and Evan McCarthy

Temple Grandin

Olga Bogdashina

Wendy Lawson

Cathleen Lewis

Clare Sainsbury

Kamran Nazeer

Philip Aston

Autobiographical

Autistic Spectrum Disorders

- Visual Learners
- Emotional Difficulties
- Autistic Spectrum Disorder Awareness
- Reliance on Routines
- Memory
- Literal Thinkers
- Restricted Interests
- Repetitive Behaviours
- The Enigma of Social Interactions
- Autistic Emotions
- Differences in Sensory Perception
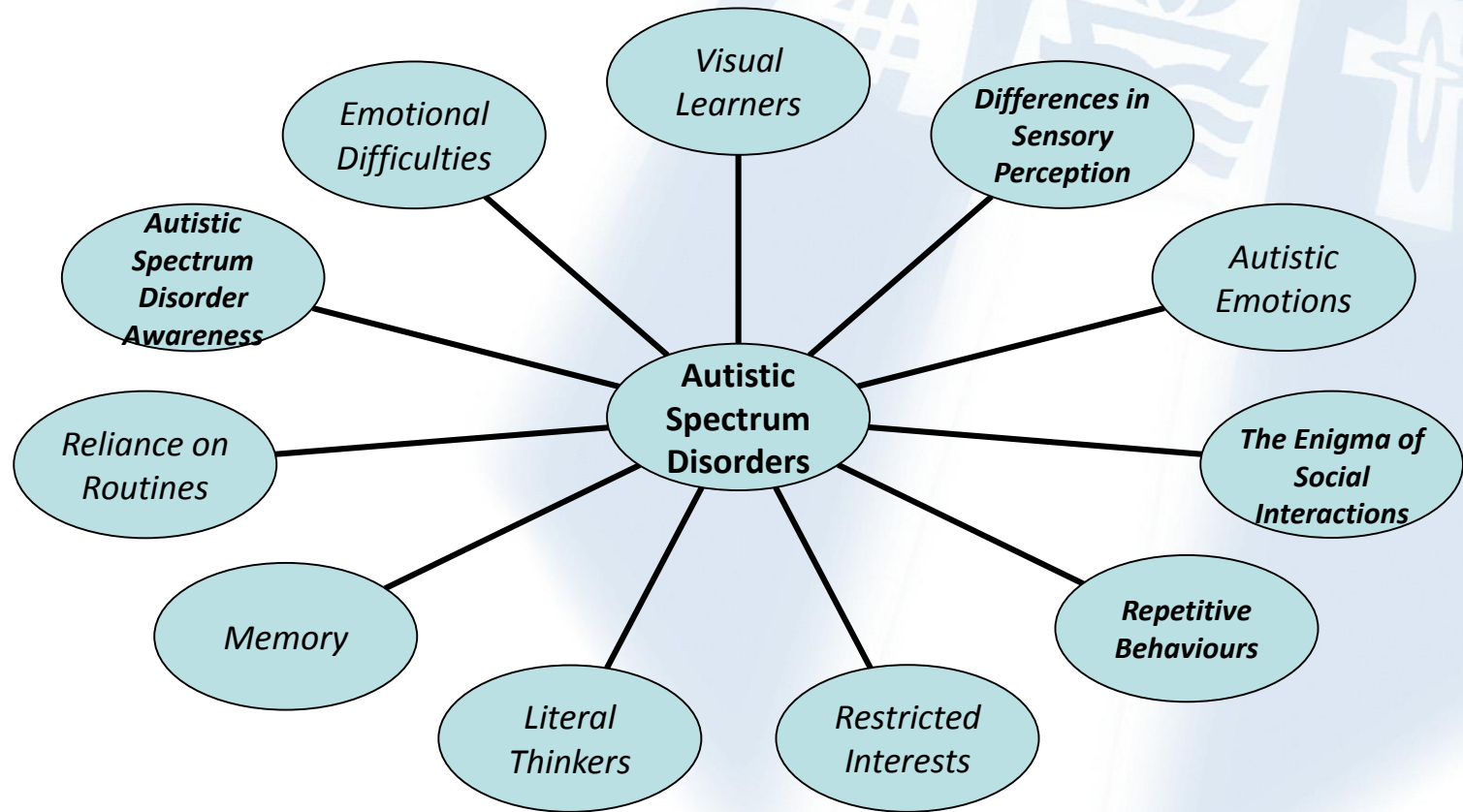
The Data

- **20 individual semi-structured interviews with school principals (10) and class teachers (10).**

- **10 focus-group interviews with other teachers in the school.**

- **Photographic classroom data.**

- **Video-data comprising periods of classroom observation of 26 to 54.**

- **Two-minute sampling of individual children's behavioural outcomes were determined from the video data through a two-minute time-sampling process.**

On-Task Activity

On-task activity was defined as the extent to which pupils were engaged in their respective tasks in an appropriate manner and off-task behaviour was recorded where pupils' behaviour appeared to interfere with task engagement. While on-task activity cannot be equated with learning, the on-task pupil and his or her peers are more likely to see and hear important instruction and the teacher is more likely to use instructional strategies associated with increased on task-behaviour (Heward et al., 1996).
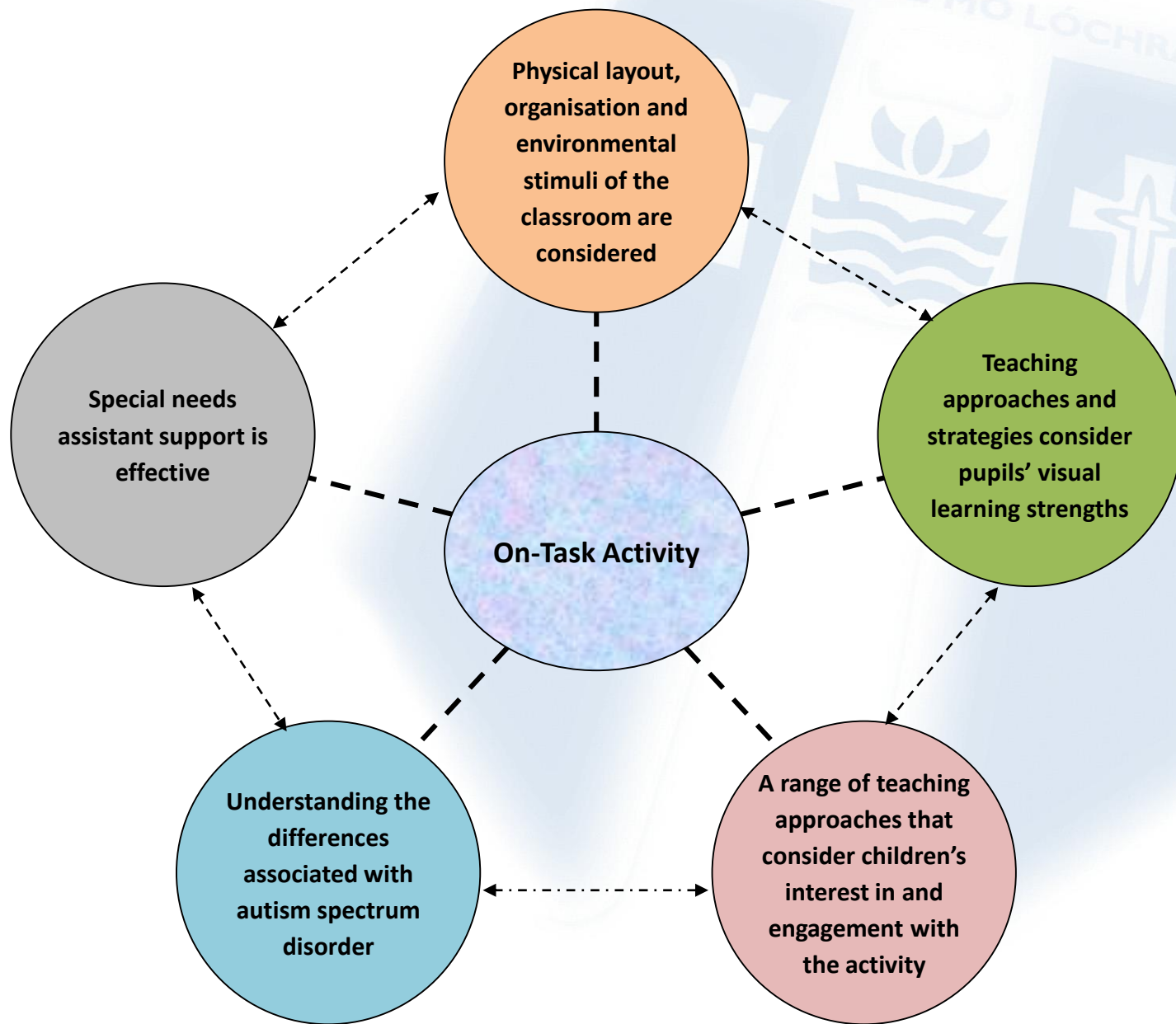
The Environment considers Children's Sensory and Perceptual Sensitivities

- Low stimulus environments
- Muted paint colours
- Reduced distractions in group and individual teaching areas.
- Dimmer switch
- Auditory stimuli

A Range of Teaching Approaches that Consider Children's Interest in and Engagement with the Activity

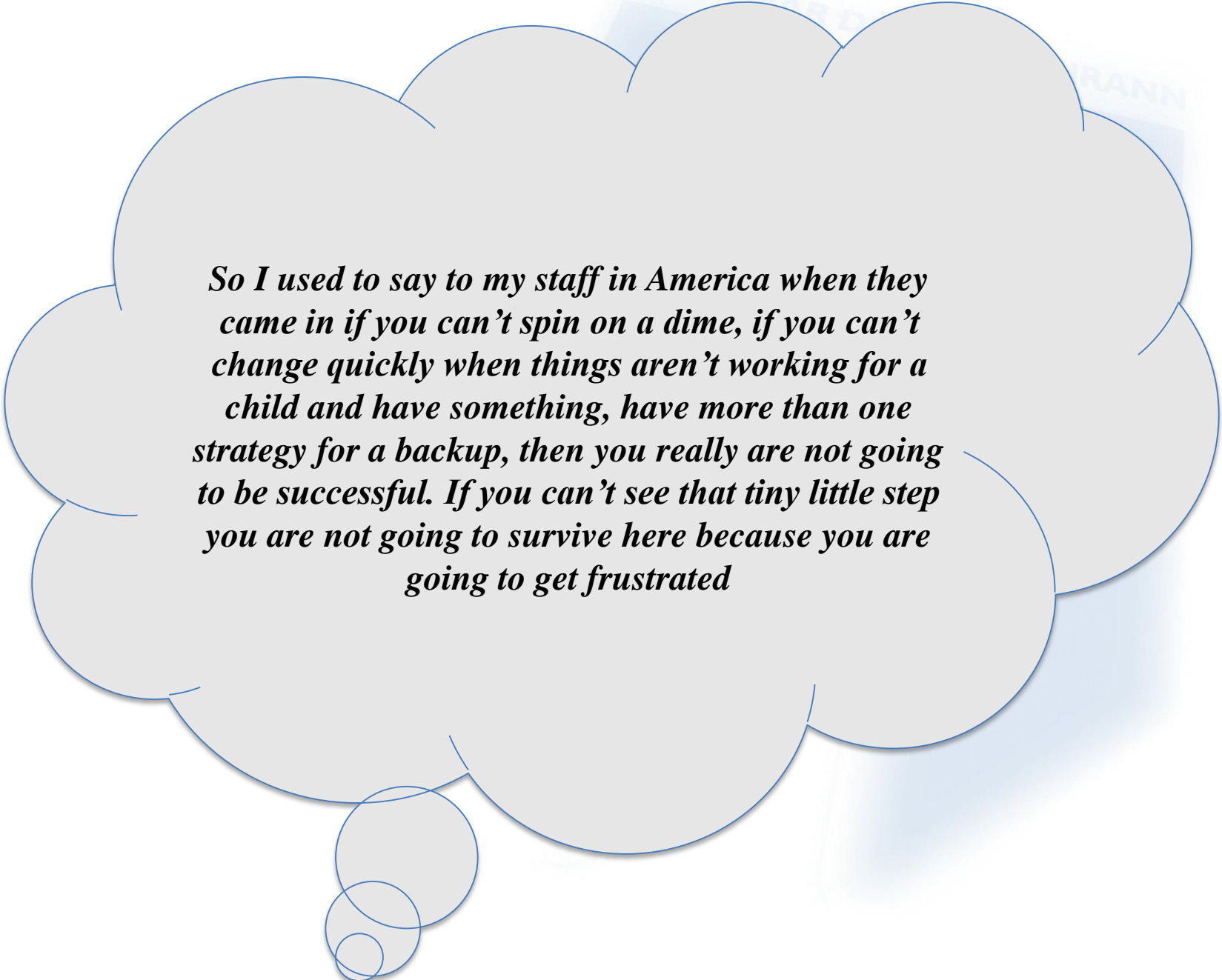| Schools	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
. Common Pedagogic Approaches										
Common Pedagogic Approaches – Clarity in the Learning and Teaching Process										
Clarity of Purpose	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Teacher Modelling	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Clear Presentation of Lesson	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Teaching in Small Explicit Steps	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Providing Feedback and Monitoring the Pupil's Response	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
A Consistent and Varied Use of Positive Reinforcement Strategies	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Review and Continuity with Previous Learning	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Common Pedagogic Approaches – Teacher Expectations										
Positive Pupil-Expectations	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Monitoring Pupils' Attention to Task	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Anticipating Disruptions	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Common Pedagogic Approaches Linked to the Primary School Curriculum										
Knowledge of Subject	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Flexibility and Proficiency in the Choice of Teaching Strategy	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Incidental Teaching	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	
Activity Learning	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Constructivist Learning	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Experiential Learning	√		√			√	√	√	√	√
Structured Questioning	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Talk and Discussion	√		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Common Pedagogic Approaches – Prompting Systems										
Physical Prompts	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Verbal Prompts	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Gestural Prompts	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√		

ASD-Group Pedagogic Approaches

Schools	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
TEACCH	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Communicative Approaches	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Interactive Approaches	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Behavioural Approaches					√	√				√
Social Responsiveness	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

I felt that the more I learnt the more I understood these children and the calmer a teacher I was and the more I was able to cope...I was learning very new things...it was like you had access to this wealth of knowledge and experience...it was always delving underneath to understand why you were doing something and it was very person-centred as well...It's the logical background to autism from the people who have autism who have told us, one thing at a time, make it visual, give us time

Curriculum Insights

Curriculum	
Areas	**Subjects**
Language	English
	Irish
Mathematics	
Social, Environmental and Scientific Education	History
	Geography
	Science
Arts Education	Visual Arts
	Music
	Drama
Physical Education	
Social, Personal and Health Education	

So I used to say to my staff in America when they came in if you can't spin on a dime, if you can't change quickly when things aren't working for a child and have something, have more than one strategy for a backup, then you really are not going to be successful. If you can't see that tiny little step you are not going to survive here because you are going to get frustrated
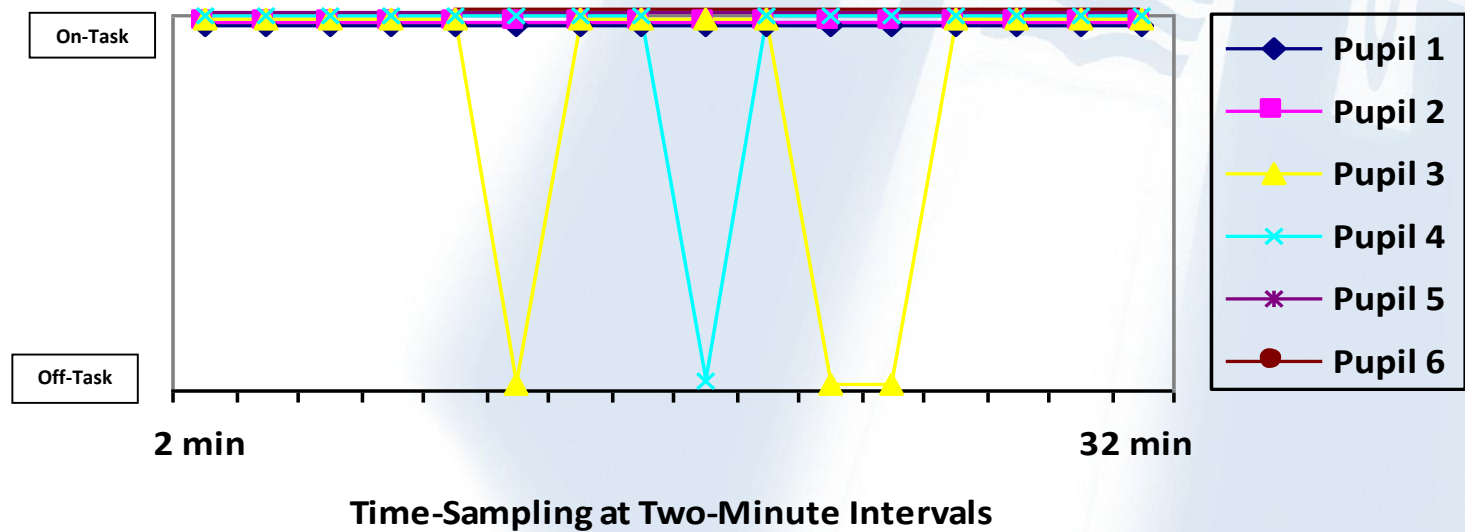
Classroom Assistant Support is Effectively Managed

- **Assistants have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibility,**
- **Assistants have a knowledge and understanding of autism**
- **Collaborative practice with the class teacher is evident**
- **A balance is maintained between providing support and maintaining children's independence**
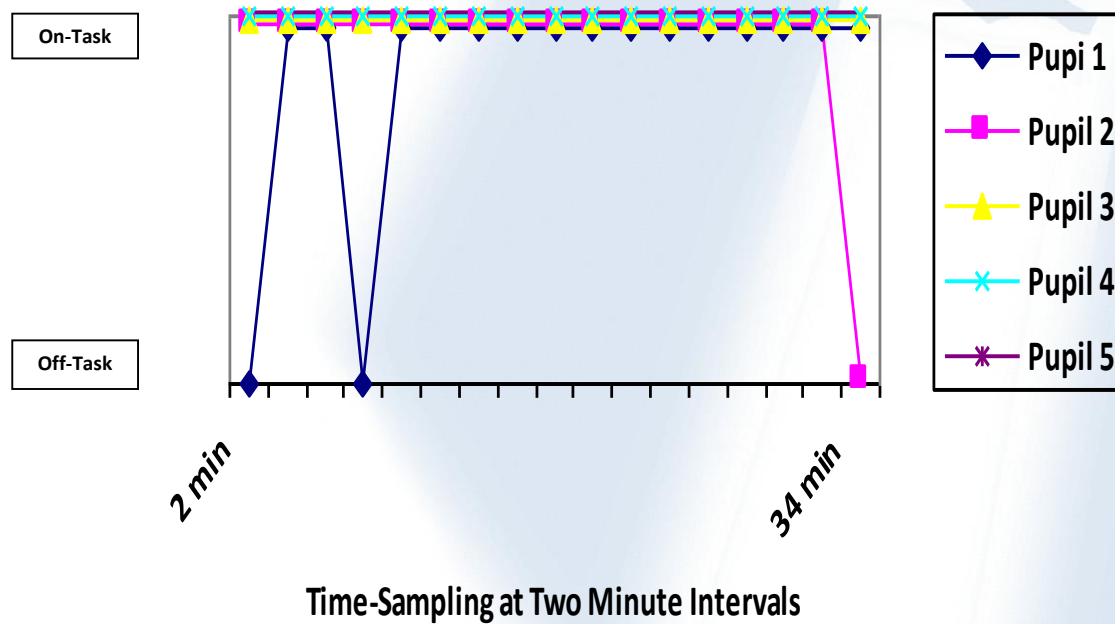
School A

Final Observations...

I don't think anyone could ever fully understand autism because children are so unique. And I even with my qualifications are still finding out new things and learning

Míle Buíochas

Grazie Mille

Thank you

BRIATHAR DÉ MO LÓCHRANN

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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

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