

Teachmeet Presentation for

NABMSE Conference

12/10/2017

I am Principal in the Offaly School of Special Education in Tullamore where we cater for children with Severe/Profound I.D and for children with ASD and a significant I.D.

As many of you know, parents long for and aspire to a mainstream education for their child. For some this cannot be achieved in a mainstream setting. Some years ago, in an effort to offer some mainstream experiences to our children, we initiated relationships with 3 local mainstream schools.

The objective was to enable the children from our school and from the mainstream schools to get together for an hour or thereabouts every few weeks to complete some piece of work. Sometimes this would be an art project, music, drama or pottery.

The class teachers from both schools would initially meet to discuss what they might do which would benefit both groups of children. Having decided on the activity, the host school would prepare the venue and have all the necessary materials ready.

Following this, the children would be introduced to each other. Usually, the mainstream children would be frightened of our children but as the visits would continue throughout the year, they would cease to see the disability and see instead, the person.

For an art activity, one of our children would be paired with a child (or children) from the mainstream setting and together they would complete the activity. Often this would mean that the mainstream child is doing all the work and our child is a passive participant. Staff would circulate around the room and encourage the mainstream child to help our child to participate (eg, hand over hand, verbal prompting, physical prompting or demonstration). The resulting masterpiece would then be taken and laminated or mounted for display. Some of the displays would go in our school and some in the mainstream school.

For musical activities, often the mainstream children would play their instruments for our children and this is always a very successful and mutually enjoyable activity. This would usually be followed by allowing our children to accompany the musicians with their percussion instruments – again always a very successful and enjoyable activity.

Drama would usually involve a familiar story being told to the entire group of children. This would be dramatized and props would be used. Generally the children love this activity.

The overall benefits of this programme of interaction with mainstream school have far exceeded our expectations. Firstly the parents of our children are delighted that their child has the opportunity to engage meaningfully with their mainstream peers. The mainstream children benefit in terms of hugely increased understanding of I.D. and we hope that this increased understanding will follow them into adulthood where the benefits would extend to society as a whole.

All the activities and visits would be recorded both with photographs and with videos. This in turn served to help our children to recall the events at a later date.

For the teachers in mainstream who accompany their classes to our school and host visits from us, they have the opportunity to engage with our teachers and discuss any SEN pupils they may have in their classes and discuss strategies for managing certain behaviours or conditions.

As a result of this interaction, the mainstream school have invited our children to their sports days, Halloween parties, Christmas plays etc. which provides another forum for interaction for the children but in a less formal way. Similarly, in the past, we have invited small groups of mainstream children to attend our Christmas plays but due to space restrictions, this can no longer continue.