

Transforming the practice of teachers within a mainstream school setting using Appreciative Inquiry and Transactional Supports from the SCERTS model

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Editorial comment

The author of this study was the Lead Teacher of an Autism Provision (AP) in a mainstream primary school. She worked with three teachers in the main school to enhance their autism practice. Using an Appreciative Inquiry approach, the staff reflected on their current practice with the author and set goals to develop this, using the Transactional Supports advocated within the SCERTS model. This led to positive changes in their understanding and the strategies they used. The author makes the point that focusing on changing the actions of the staff rather than changing the children was important. As the founders of SCERTS and other practitioners maintain, this is easier, more respectful and likely to be more effective.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully thank the three mainstream teachers who took part in this project. They shared their insights and experiences with enthusiasm and interest throughout the process. Also to Annie Etherington for her truly inspiring guidance and support.

Introduction

A study in mainstream school settings by Feroni-Bast et al (2020) found that autistic students were often viewed as difficult to teach by their teachers and that staff can have misconceptions about autism. In addition, autistic students often report feeling misunderstood by their teachers (APPGA, 2017) and incidents of bullying and social isolation can occur (Humphrey and Hebron, 2015). Having a diagnosis of autism has also been identified as a risk marker for exclusion from school (Brede et al, 2017). There is therefore a need to enhance autism practice in mainstream schools.

Within the Autism Provision (AP) where I was the Lead Teacher, considerable effort went into embedding the use of the SCERTS approach (Prizant and Wetherby, 2006). This prioritises developmentally appropriate and meaningful activities which focus on building trusting relationships. The Transactional Supports domain was key to staff development and crucial to the overall implementation of the SCERTS approach. However, there remained a disparity between autism understanding and practice in the AP when compared to practice in the mainstream classrooms.

Aim of the study

The key question that this study addressed was:

“Does specific coaching in relation to the Transactional Supports lead to transformational autism practice in a mainstream primary school?”

Transformational change can be understood as the systematic development in support, processes and systems which result in a desirable change of attitude and behaviour to achieve optimal outcomes (Atkins et al, 2015).

Transactional supports in the SCERTS approach

Transactional Supports are concerned with the ways in which partners, such as professionals or parents, can modify the environment as well as themselves to enhance the learning opportunities for autistic students. These supports are categorised into two areas:

- 1 Interpersonal supports
- 2 Environmental supports

Interpersonal Supports refer to the adjustments that communicative partners can make in their language use, emotional expression, interactive style, prompting, communicative modelling and responsiveness. Environmental Supports refer to the supports put in place and used in the student’s environment to enhance engagement, understanding and to optimise arousal levels. Specific coaching in relation to these Transactional Supports has already been shown to impact positively on the self-efficacy and problem solving capabilities of parents and professionals (Wetherby et al, 2018).

Bringing research into the classroom

Bringing research into the classroom has been identified as a key component of transformational change and collaboration between researchers and teachers has been identified as an important way to bring research into the classroom (Parsons et al, 2018). SCERTS has already been shown to impact positively on the socio-emotional trajectories of autistic children when incorporated into their natural and environmental

routines. This study examined whether Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperider and Srivastva, 1987) was a valid coaching framework for the implementation of the SCERTS Transactional Supports, thereby bringing research into the classroom, with the overall aim of enhancing autism practice in three mainstream classrooms within the school where the AP was sited.

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry was first conceptualised by Cooperider and Srivastva in 1987 in response to traditional problem solving approaches to people management which, it was believed, often resulted in demotivated and demoralised teams of people. Appreciative Inquiry can be understood as a philosophy for thinking or as a method and has been described as:

“A group process that inquires into, identifies and further develops the best of ‘what is’ in organisations in order to create a better future” (Preskill and Catsambas, 2006, page 1).

It has been suggested by Emily Rubin, co-author of the SCERTS approach, that central to the implementation of SCERTS in schools is Appreciative Inquiry peer coaching. She states:

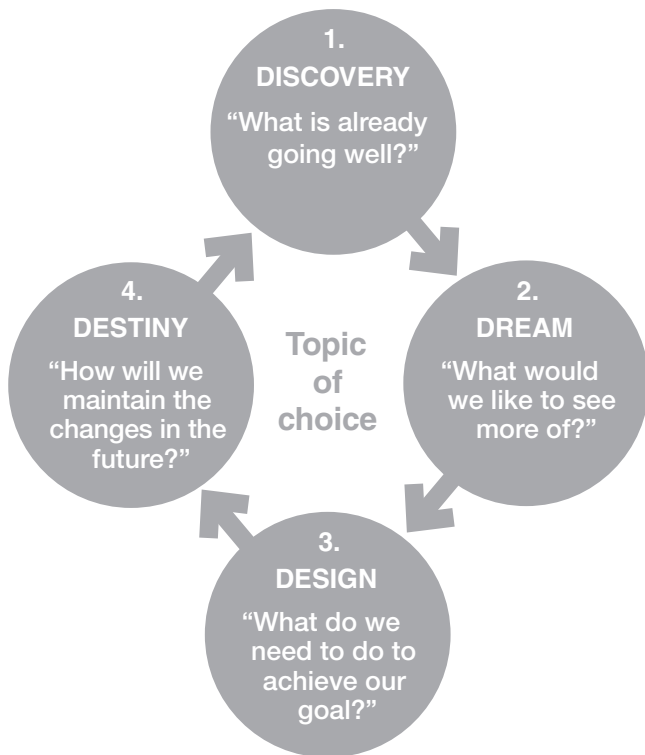
“This philosophy is based on the premise that a collective discussion of ‘what’s working?’ in a classroom lesson fosters active engagement in the process of imagining ‘what could be’ and a collective development of an action plan for ‘next steps.’ This process reduces the need for an ‘expert’ model of consultation that is based upon more coercive or persuasive mechanisms for planned change” (Rubin, 2016, see *Appendix 1*).

Appreciative Inquiry follows a four stage cycle:

- Discovery
- Dream
- Design
- Destiny

(as shown in *Figure 1*).

Figure 1: The Appreciative Inquiry cycle, adapted from Chapman (2011)



Combining Appreciative Inquiry with Transactional Supports

The project setting was a two form entry mainstream primary school with an Autism Provision in inner city London. At the time of writing, the total number of children with Educational and Healthcare Plans (EHCPs) at the school was 35, with 31 of those for autistic students. Twelve children with an EHCP for autism learned within the AP, with 19 other students with an EHCP for autism, learning within mainstream classes. Three mainstream teachers, from each Key Stage within the school, were selected to take part in the study. The project was intended to take place over an 8 week period but this varied during the project. As the study progressed, the teachers followed individual timelines and Appreciative Inquiry sessions were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The teachers produced and implemented individual targets based on their own action plans.

Table 1: Timetable for Implementing Appreciative Inquiry over 8 weeks

Week 1	The teachers completed a short questionnaire prior to the study commencing. Questions were adapted from the SCERTS Transactional Supports to gain their initial self-rating scores to allow a comparison at the end of the study (see <i>Appendix 2</i>).
Week 2	The teachers took part in a 30 – 40 minute semi-structured interview, with questions adapted by the author from the Transactional Supports (see <i>Appendix 3</i>). The interview allowed the teachers to share their views on current practice and to identify areas for development in relation to autism. Their initial attitudes to autism and practice were also captured.
Week 3	The Discovery phase continued with an unstructured classroom observation focused on Transactional Supports. The author and the teachers conducted a Dream Conversation to identify the positive features of their current practice they would like to build upon. In the Design phase, the teachers and author co-generated an Action Plan containing one goal, which identified the Transactional Supports needed to achieve this goal.
Weeks 4 to 7	The teachers implemented their action plans over 4 weeks. Resources, equipment and further explanation of specific strategies and approaches were made available to the teachers.
Week 8	The teachers and the author took part in a Destiny Conversation, reflecting on what had been implemented and the changes that were made. The teachers identified the Transactional Supports they would continue to use and reflected on any changes to their autism understanding or practice.

Developing an Appreciative Inquiry coaching conversation

In order to run the Appreciative Inquiry sessions in Week 3, advice was taken directly from the *SCERTS Quick Reference – Case Study Coaching and Mentorship document* (see *Appendix 1*) and followed specific time allocations as shown in *Table 2*.

Table 2: The elements of the Appreciative Inquiry coaching conversation

5 minutes	Introduction: The author and teacher discussed the aims and format of the Appreciative Inquiry session.
10 minutes	Discovery Conversation: The teacher shared which Transactional Supports were going well and the author shared her observation feedback, with reference to Transactional Supports.
5 minutes	Appreciative Inquiry Animation: The teacher watched an animation to support their understanding of the process.
10 minutes	Dream: The author and teacher discussed what was already working and which Transactional Supports they wanted to see more of. They co-created the action plan goal.
10 minutes	Design: The author and teacher discussed which Transactional Supports they wanted to implement and how and when to do this. This formed the Action Plan.
5 minutes	Timescale: The author and teacher confirmed the dates for the implementation of the Action Plan and set a date for the review meeting.

The findings

Semi-structured interview data:

Expressions of uncertainty

Expressions of uncertainty were evident in all three of the teachers' initial interviews. When talking about teaching and interacting with autistic students, the teachers used words and phrases such as "difficult", "hard", "I've struggled", "I don't quite know" and "I don't feel I'm getting that one quite right." These feelings were also reported in research by Goodall (2015) where teachers often felt they did not have adequate autism knowledge and understanding, which resulted in insecure decision making. Autistic students were also described by the teachers as doing "not what the rest of the class is doing", working "alongside the rest of the class" and as "not accessing what the other children in class are accessing." Goodall (2015) also found that teachers found it difficult to include autistic students as full members of the class and that autistic students might be vulnerable to becoming isolated from their mainstream peers (Tonnsen and Hahn, 2016).

Celebrating the Transactional Supports already being used

The observations took place in each of the teachers' classrooms and lasted 30 minutes. They were given a copy of the SCERTS Quick Checklist - Transactional Supports (see *Appendix 2*) prior to the observation so that they could see what the focus of the observation would be. Specific examples of the Transactional Supports relating to students and classroom practice were shared and celebrated.

Appreciative Inquiry Action Plans and goals

During the Dream phase of the Appreciative Inquiry sessions and based on the positives that had already been observed and shared, the teachers were invited to co-create a goal around "Based on what is going well, what do we want more of?" Once a goal had been identified, it was time to Design the Action Plan and Transactional Supports were selected.

Table 3: Transactional Supports observed in the three classrooms

Teacher (name is fictitious)	Anna	Elena	Kodi
Interpersonal Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner mirrors student's emotional tone. ● Partner offers support when the student is showing signs they are not available for learning. ● Partner balances asking questions with commenting / giving instructions. ● Partner recognises and responds to behaviours as serving a purpose to communicate or to regulate emotions. ● Partner uses non-verbal cues to support understanding. ● Partner allows the student to reject, refuse or finish an activity or object. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner gives praise and prompts the student when needed, without directing the student too much. ● Partner offers support when the student is showing signs they are not available for learning. ● Partner uses appropriate words and voice to support engagement. ● Partner gives the student adequate time to complete activities without rushing or prompting too much. ● Partner recognises behaviours as serving a purpose to communicate or regulate emotions. ● Partner brings student back to the activity when the student is regulated and ready for learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Partner gains student attention before communicating. ● Partner models appropriate emotional tone. ● Partner recognises behaviours as serving a purpose to communicate or regulate emotions. ● Partner uses appropriate words and voice to support engagement.
Environmental Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual supports showing start and finish of steps in task / activity. ● Visuals used to organise the student's day and help with transitions. ● Visual and nonverbal supports are used to help the student's understanding. ● Student's environment is modified to enhance learning. ● Timetable reflects a balance between moving and sitting tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual supports showing start and finish of steps in task / activity. ● Visuals used to organise the student's day and help with transitions. ● Student given permission to leave activities when dysregulated. ● Sensory needs are considered in learning tasks. ● Student's environment modified to enhance learning. ● Materials and topics chosen based on student's interests and strengths. ● Timetable reflects balance between moving and sitting tasks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual supports are used to organise the student's day and help with transitions. ● Student's environment is modified to enhance learning. ● Sensory needs are considered in learning tasks.

Table 4: A summary of the three teachers' co-created goals

Teacher	Dream Co-created goal from Appreciative Inquiry coaching session "What do we want more of?"	Design Transactional Supports "What do we need to achieve the goal?"	
		Interpersonal Supports	Environmental Supports
Anna	To confidently lead a whole class Attention Autism session in Maths once per week, using visuals to support students to attend.	Wait and encourage participation. Allow child to leave if they are showing signs they are not available for learning.	Visuals to organise student's day; Photos for schedule and first/then board. Motivating equipment for the sessions (nothing too loud). Set place for child to sit on the carpet, close to edge so easy to leave.
Elena	To feel confident providing activities that are irresistible and incorporate student interests.	Provide adequate time for the tasks and don't prompt or push them to do it quickly. Wait and encourage children to approach me if they need help or are finding it tricky.	Choose materials that I know interest the children. Continue using in-task schedule in the sessions so children know start and finish. Offer repeated and varied learning opportunities to practise the same skill. Modify the difficulty of the tasks to enhance learning
Kodi	To provide in-task schedules in Maths and Literacy so students know the expectations in a task.	Wait and don't over prompt. Recognise signs of dysregulation and offer support as needed.	Visual supports to show the start and finish of a task. Visuals to break down a task into manageable steps. Modify the environment to enhance learning (so children can easily ask for help if they need to).

Identifying transformational change

During the agreed 4 weeks, Anna and Elena were able to put their Action Plans into place, while Kodi, due to competing workload pressures, did not implement her goal in the allocated time and instead planned to implement her goal in January after the project

had ended. For Anna and Elena, who did manage to implement their Action Plans, change was much more evident in their reviews than for Kodi, suggesting that the Appreciative Inquiry process of co-creating goals with reference to Transactional Supports, can lead to a change in attitude and practice.

Table 5: A summary of changes to attitudes and practice

Teacher	Destiny		What has changed for the teacher?
	Transactional Supports	Environmental Supports	
	Transactional Supports to be continued “How will we maintain the changes in the future?”		
Anna	Positive support such as reading behaviour as serving a purpose and responding, like letting them leave if they need to.	Visuals to structure the day and to make adults aware of where they need to be. Weekly Attention Autism maths sessions and apply to other curriculum areas such as phonics.	“There has been a shift in what I want children with autism to get out of each session. I don’t want them to just comply, but to achieve an aim in a way that fits them.” “My understanding of how to support children with autism has changed and I now allow them to join in, or not if they don’t want to, and not force them to come.” “I also feel better equipped to support other teachers with their classroom practice to benefit other autistic children.” “Previously, I would rely on the 1:1 adult to know the child more but I feel happy to step in and support best practice now.” “It helped to boost my confidence with how I support and interact with the autistic children.”
Elena		Keep using activities that incorporate specific interests. Create opportunities for independent learning through other interest-based learning opportunities. Repeat but slightly change activities so children can practise the same skill, but it looks different.	“I have realised how much we expect our children to comply throughout the school day and how often we discourage children from voicing their disinterest in an activity.” “I feel more confident planning activities my students will engage with. I thought I would get it wrong, but I haven’t.” “I realised it was actually such little effort on my behalf.” “I have been empowered to support other members of staff too.” “Because of taking part in this project, I have watched a child who has always hated maths, open his maths book and laugh like I have never heard him laugh before. Truly a moment I will never forget!”
Kodi		Continue breaking tasks down into parts as much as possible so students know and can see all the steps of a task, but also making sure that it is as low maintenance as possible so it is achievable.	“I’m more confident supporting children with SEN in a mainstream classroom.” “It has drawn on everything I know so far and shown how I can develop it further.”

Figure 2: Average self-rating scores for Interpersonal Supports pre and post project

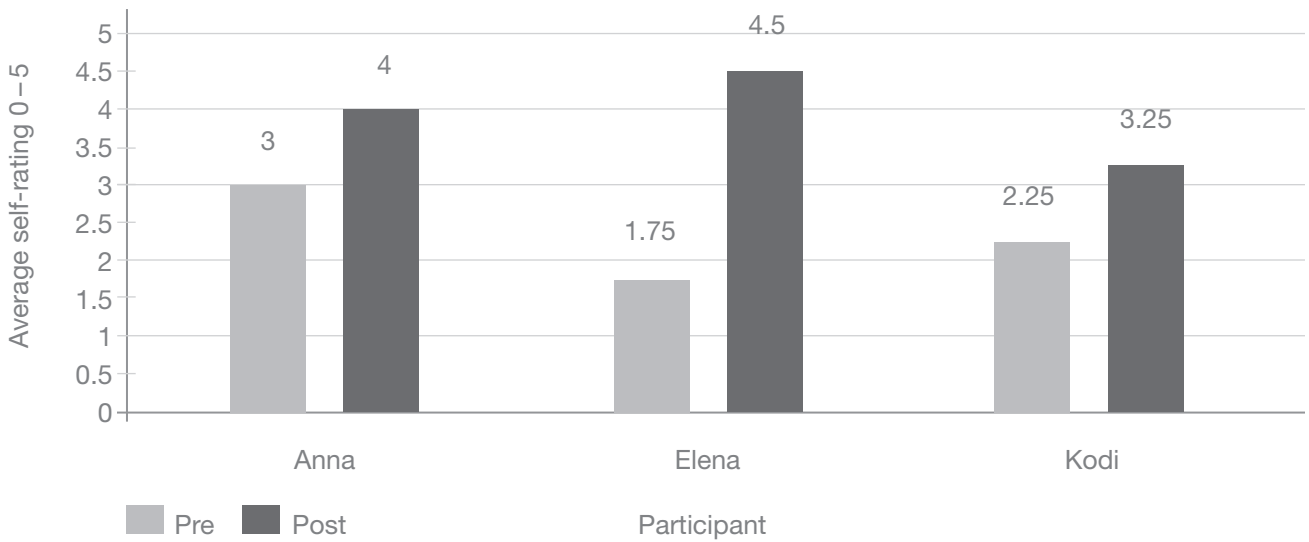
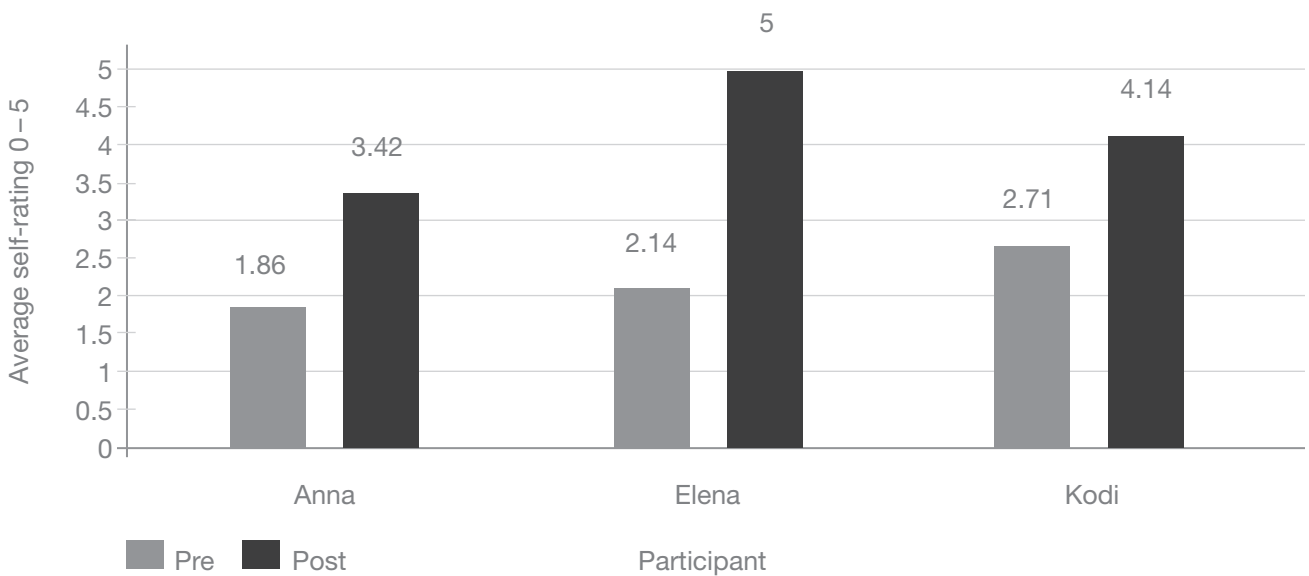


Figure 3: Average self-rating scores for Environmental Supports pre and post project



Pre and post project questionnaires

According to the data from the questionnaires, all three teachers' self-rating of their understanding and use of Interpersonal and Environmental Supports had improved following the Appreciative Inquiry coaching cycle. There was a big increase for Elena who, of the three teachers, had the lowest self-rating score prior to the study and the highest subsequent self-rating score.

The impact of Appreciative Inquiry on teacher attitudes

The primary aim of the project was to examine whether Appreciative Inquiry led to changes in teachers' attitudes to autism. One challenge of facilitating the sessions was ensuring adherence to the Appreciative Inquiry cycle guidelines. The creation of the Appreciative Inquiry Action Plan document was useful for a novice coach to work towards by providing a clear structure to follow. The author noticed that the teachers became more relaxed as the Appreciative Inquiry sessions progressed and the positive feedback which was shared and celebrated seemed to alleviate their anxieties around the observation feedback. Elena commented that:

"The positive approach to giving observation feedback has been so encouraging."

This supports the central idea of Appreciative Inquiry that people are responsive to positive comments and enjoy hearing about what they have done well (Johnson and Leavitt, 2001). Moreover, the positivity generated in these sessions is very valuable and urgently needed within autism education. Focusing on what was going well and celebrating the teachers' successes within the Discovery phase appeared to prevent negative conversations about autistic students from taking place. Despite some criticisms of Appreciative Inquiry as failing to address negative issues that teachers may want to explore (Fieldhouse and Onyett, 2012), it is important that work is done within autism education to actively change the discourse from negative to positive.

Creating personalised goals

The use of Appreciative Inquiry within this project enabled the teachers to create a personalised goal which was relevant to their current situation. An

important element of Appreciative Inquiry is that it enables participants to be 'active partners' (Kadi-Hanifi et al, 2014, page 584) and when the same tools are used with different staff within a school, this can lead to a consistent whole school approach.

The impact of Transactional Supports on practice

The significance of focusing the study on teacher practice is similar to the argument put forward by autistic scholars that autistic people should be part of the research team and not merely the subjects of research (Chown et al, 2017). In this study, the teachers worked with the author (the researcher) to discuss and co-produce plans about their own practice, rather than merely being observed (as a subject) and choosing goals for the children. The goals co-created by the three teachers were all concerned with modifications to the learning environment to enhance student engagement or promote student independence. An issue identified during the Appreciative Inquiry coaching process was to help the teachers to create a goal about themselves and their practice, rather than a goal about what they wanted their students to do. It was helpful to refer back to the Transactional Supports checklist as it enabled the author to ask the teachers questions such as, "How will you facilitate that?" or "What will you do to support your student to achieve that?". This was extremely important as it helped teachers to see the change as coming from them, rather than seeking to change their autistic students.

The relationship between Environmental and Interpersonal Supports

Despite the prominence of Environmental Supports, the teachers' testimonial comments revealed that there had been changes in their Interpersonal Support. For example, with reference to the project, Anna stated that:

"It has helped to boost my confidence with how I support and interact with autistic children."

Similarly, Elena's review comment suggested that she was recognising and responding to behaviours as serving a purpose to communicate and recognising when students are not available for learning, both of which are Interpersonal Supports. She stated:

"I have realised how much we expect our children to comply throughout the school day and how often we discourage children from voicing their disinterest in an activity."

It would be interesting for further research to examine the relationship between Environmental Supports and Interpersonal Supports and whether one leads to the development of the other, as the findings of this study seem to suggest.

Empowerment to support other teachers

Changes in attitude have been considered a hallmark characteristic of transformational change and from which an individual's subsequent actions are born (Stadnik et al, 2019). Anna and Elena's transformation was evident in their testimonial comments which suggested that this project had a wide reaching effect within the mainstream school. Elena stated:

"I have been empowered to support other members of staff."

while Anna said:

"I also feel better equipped to support other teachers with their classroom practice to benefit other autistic children."

These statements reflect Atkins et al's (2015) conceptualisation of transformational change as being underpinned by 'peer influences' (Atkins et al, 2015, page 2). Both Anna and Elena had influenced or supported the practice of other teachers in the school.

Concluding comments

The findings from this project contribute to the debate on what can be done to enhance the understanding and practice of mainstream teachers when teaching autistic students. The results suggest that there is a positive relationship between engaging teachers in a positive and affirmative conversation about their autism practice and their subsequent attitudes to autism. While

attitudinal changes to autism have been attributed to more inclusive practices by teachers (Pellicano, 2014), it was beyond the scope of this project to measure the impact this had on individual students within the school. It would be very useful to examine this in future research.

The findings suggest that the Appreciative Inquiry cycle, in combination with the Transactional Supports, are an effective method for sharing autism knowledge and practice between colleagues. Throughout the study, the teachers were exposed to the language of Transactional Supports and encouraged to use this when reflecting on and identifying features of their own practice. It is important, though, that the transformation does not stop when the project ends and that support for the teachers continues.

While this project focused on transforming the practice of three mainstream teachers, transformational change needs to happen at a leadership level to maximise its impact across all areas of the school. It has been argued that,

"Any sustained and meaningful change of practice needs to work its way through the ecology of the education system" (Leat et al, 2006, page 337)

The adoption of evidence based practices at a leadership level has, moreover, been shown to have greater transformational impact on educational settings (Stadnik et al, 2019). As a result, the author recommends that ideally, the Senior Leadership Team within schools should adopt this model or a similar way of working and that this is then incorporated into the School Development Plan. If adopted, there are a number of considerations to take into account:

- Careful planning and adequate time allocation is needed for the Appreciative Inquiry sessions
- Times scheduled for reviews and follow-up sessions
- Support and opportunities for teachers to share their knowledge with each other and with the support staff and senior management

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Appendix 1: SCERTS Coaching and Mentorship guidelines



SCERTS Case study coaching and mentorship – quick reference

The Appreciative Inquiry philosophy

When implementing SCERTS, the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry can guide our coaching and mentorship. This philosophy is based on the premise that a collective discussion of 'what's working' in a classroom lesson fosters active engagement in the process of imagining 'what could be' and a collective development of an action plan for 'next steps.' This process reduces the need for an 'expert' model of consultation that is based upon more coercive or persuasive mechanisms for planned change. The following guidelines are offered to foster a productive and emotionally regulating coaching session across service providers:

- 1 Engage in initial conversation (5 minutes): Provide an opportunity for the teacher, co-teacher, parent, or caregiver to share perspectives on target activity and child, including a) the overall goals, b) what has worked, and c) any questions related to where a child's active engagement might be increased.
- 2 Describe the process of appreciative inquiry (5 minutes): Particularly for those who are new to this process, it is important to share that effective coaching begins with sorting out what is already working, rather than solely looking for 'deficiencies' or 'problems.' We are not, in fact, trying to 'fix' things, but rather, we are focusing on 'what's working' and then where there may be 'opportunities' are for increasing active engagement.
- 3 Record and discuss 'what's working' (10 minutes): Use the SCERTS Observation and Action Plan checklist to identify 'what's working' in each section.
- 4 Consider questions regarding a child's or the groups' level of engagement to gain consensus and agreement (5 minutes): Consider questions such as, "Did it appear that the child or children might be able to increase their prediction of..." or "Would you agree that there are opportunities for the child to increase his or her initiation?"
- 5 Select the questions that are mutually agreed upon by the group.
- 6 Collaborate to discuss possible 'next steps' (10 minutes). Allow wait time to ensure that the teacher, co-teacher, parent or caregiver can initiate the collective discussion. Questions to stimulate collaboration might include, "How might we provide support for helping the child....predict the purpose, the sequence, the steps, what to say, how to regulate his or her emotions..."
- 7 Identify an action plan of next steps and who is responsible for action.

Handout updated by Emily Rubin, MS, CCC-SLP.

Appendix 2: Initial questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Please answer the questions below as honestly as possible.

This questionnaire has been adapted from the SCERTS Transactional Supports Checklist (Rubin, 2016)

Interpersonal support: This section refers to the ways in which you interact with autistic students

How would you rate your...	Low		Medium		High	
Ability to interact with the child	0	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to engage the child in learning opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
Understanding of the child's behaviour as communicative	0	1	2	3	4	5
Confidence recognising when the child needs a break	0	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyment working with the child	0	1	2	3	4	5

Environmental support: This refers to the ways in which you modify the environment for autistic students

How important are the following learning supports...	Not very important		Quite important		Very important	
Visuals which organise the students' day	0	1	2	3	4	5
Visuals and non-verbal aids which support transitions	0	1	2	3	4	5
Repeated and varied learning opportunities to practice the same skill	0	1	2	3	4	5
Visual supports showing the start and finish of a task or activity	0	1	2	3	4	5
Access to sensory or movement breaks	0	1	2	3	4	5
Including the child's interests and strengths into tasks	0	1	2	3	4	5
Modifying the environment to enhance learning eg a particular carpet space	0	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview questions

Topic	Possible Questions	Possible follow-on
Participant experience so far; setting the scene	Could you tell me a little bit about your teaching experience so far?	Tell me more about... (reference to teaching child with autism).
Interacting with the child	Could you give me some examples of how you have successfully interacted with an autistic child? What would you say are some of the main difficulties for you when interacting with a child with autism?	What did you do? How did you do that? How did you respond? What works well? How does that make you feel?
Learning opportunities / Engagement	How do you engage a child with their learning activities? What supports do you feel the children need in order to access their learning activities?	How does that make you feel? When is that most successful? How do you know that...?
Behaviour as communication & recognising signs of dysregulation	Can you give me an example of when you have found behaviour concerning / challenging and some of the strategies you have used? How does the child let you know that they are becoming dysregulated? How do you know when the child has had enough / needs a break?	How does that make you feel? What was your response? What works well? How did you interpret that behaviour? Do you think such behaviour might have a particular function for the child?
Providing sensory breaks / movement	Can you tell me a little about how movement breaks are currently used in your class and if there is an impact, positive or negative, on the child? How do you currently take account of any sensory needs / differences?	How do you know that? What do you mean by...? How can you implement this?
Use of visuals (whole day / start and finish)	How are you currently using visuals in your class? How does the child with autism currently respond to / use visuals in your class?	Do you feel these support child with autism? What are limitations, if any?
Transitions	What do you find are your main concerns when it comes to transitions for the child with autism? Can you tell me about how you structure transitions in your classroom? What is the impact of this?	How do you know that? What might work well? What have you tried already? How did you notice that...?
Strengths and interests of the child	Can you give me an example of when you have used the child's interests and strengths in a task and the impact of this? What happens if the child is not interested? What would you do?	What is the difference when interests are used? How does that make you feel? If you notice the child is not interested / motivated / engaged, how would you respond?
Modifications to the learning environment	Have you made any modifications to the classroom / learning environment? Why? Do you think any other modifications are needed? Why / Why not?	What was the impact? What led you to make that decision? What differences do you see, if any?

Appendix 4: SCERTS Transactional Supports

Student:

Date:

Staff members involved:

Place of observations:

Transactional Supports

This checklist looks at how key people interact with the student, as well as the resources that are in place to support the student. This observation is based on the **adults working with the student**.

Not met	Inconsistent	Consistent	0	1	2	Scoring: Tick the behaviours based on your observations and the reports of key staff. Are the strategies being used by key adults in most situations (consistent-2), by fewer people/in fewer situations (inconsistent-1) or not yet used or seen (not met-0). Add the total at the end of each section and shade the total number in the summary box.
						For further in-depth assessment of each area, complete the SCERTS full assessment. This form has been adapted from the SCERTS full assessment
						Interpersonal support – This looks at how ALL of the key people involved interact with the student (eg class teacher, LSA, SENCo, family).
						Partner looks at or talks about what the student is attending to.
						Partner mirrors student's emotional tone (eg partner smiles when student is happy).
						Partner offers support when the student is showing signs they are not available for learning (eg ceasing an activity if the student is becoming dysregulated).
						Partner schedules, offers or allows the student to have regular breaks from activities or interactions when the student's behaviour suggests this is needed (pause, change in activity, class duty).
						Partner brings the student back to the activity when the student is regulated and ready for learning.
						Partner looks expectantly at the student and waits for them to initiate using verbal or non-verbal means. Partner also encourages this by offering more choices, turn taking in fun games, using sabotage etc.
						Partner balances asking questions with commenting/giving instructions
						Partner gives the student adequate time to complete activities without rushing or prompting too much.
						Partner recognises and responds to behaviours as serving a purpose to communicate something or to regulate their emotions (eg student is hitting to gain social attention from others).
						Partner allows the student to reject, refuse or finish an activity or object.
						Partner gains the student's attention (eg calls their name or touches their hand) before communicating.
						Partner uses appropriate words and voice to support engagement. Partner is quieter and calmer or more loud and intense depending on whether they are trying to alert or soothe the student.
						Partner repeats the student's verbal or non-verbal communication or modifies it to make it more successful when the student is not understood.
						Partner gives praise and prompts the student when needed without directing the student too much.
						Partner uses nonverbal cues to support understanding, i.e. gestures/facial expressions/voice with words.
						Partner uses language at the level appropriate for the student's development (eg for a student not yet using words, the partner uses mostly single words or repeats simple phrases).
						Partner models appropriate emotional expression: partner models gestures (eg clapping) and expressions relating to the situation (eg laughing, smiling when the activity is fun).
						Partner models a range of communication (social communication, regulation), eg greeting others by waving, pushing undesired activities away.
						/36 Total

			Not met	Inconsistent	Consistent	
			<p>Scoring: Tick the behaviours based on your observations and the reports of key staff. Are the strategies being used by key adults in most situations (consistent-2), by fewer people/in fewer situations (inconsistent-1) or not yet used or seen (not met-0). Add the total at the end of each section and shade the total number in the summary box.</p> <p>For further in-depth assessment of each area, complete the SCERTS full assessment.</p> <p>This form has been adapted from the SCERTS full assessment.</p>			
0	1	2	<p>Learning support – This looks at the supports that have been put in place in the student’s environment and how they are being used (eg visual timetables, emotion key rings, workstations, timetables).</p>			
			Visual supports are used to show the START and FINISH or steps of tasks/activities (eg singing a song at the start/end of a group activity, using work baskets, checklists, timers etc).			
			The student is offered repeated and varied learning opportunities to practise the same skill in similar activities/different situations across the day (eg choice making offered at snack time, lunch and free play; requesting ‘help’ in class and in the dinner hall using a ‘help’ card).			
			Visual and non-verbal supports (gestures, pictures, photos, symbols, signs, objects) are used to help the student’s understanding (eg showing photos of a pirate and acting out when working on a task around pirates).			
			The student’s understanding and expression of emotion is supported visually (eg using gestures, pictures, photos, symbols, signs, objects to label and talk about emotions).			
			The student is given permission to leave activities when dysregulated.			
			Visual supports are used to organise the student’s day, help with transitions and to show the sequence of part or the whole day (eg objects of reference, photos, checklists, planners etc).			
			Difficulty of tasks is modified based on the student’s developmental level to provide opportunities for success. A task is then made more difficult after repeated successful learning opportunities.			
			Sensory needs are considered in learning tasks (eg working in quieter, less distracting areas).			
			Student’s environment is modified to enhance learning (eg physical barriers to limit distractions, a particular place to sit on the carpet to help the student to remain focused).			
			Materials and topics are chosen based on the student’s interests and learning strengths (eg favourite characters from stories, messy play).			
			Timetable reflects a balance between moving and sitting tasks.			
			/22	Total		

Summary

Transactional support																																				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	Interpersonal support
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22															Learning support

Notes:

Appendix 5: Appreciative Inquiry action plans and reviews

Appreciative Inquiry Action Planning; Anna

<p>1. Share perspectives on current practice</p>	<p>Areas of confidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognising when a child needs support in any way ● Modelling emotions and emotional vocabulary ● Structured sessions ● Modelling and explaining using visual examples too 	<p>Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making and using social stories ● Modelling real-life situations ● Explaining and modelling consistently with visual and verbal cues ● Starting to use the Attention Autism approach for whole class 	
<p>2. What's already working well?</p>	<p>Interpersonal supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognising behaviour as serving a purpose to communicate something ● Calm and soothing presence with clear directions 	<p>Environmental supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual and verbal supports to aid understanding ● Visual representations of emotions including talking about emotions ● Visuals to organise a student's day 	
<p>3. Goal setting</p>	<p>What do you want more of?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To confidently lead a whole class Attention Autism session in maths once per week using visuals to support students to attend <p>How important is this change for the participant: very important/important/low importance?</p>		
<p>4. Why is this goal important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It's important for including autistic children into whole class activities that they can access and enjoy. And I'll be able to direct the adults about where they need to be and at what time 		
<p>5. Action plan</p>	<p>What is needed to achieve the goal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1 x Attention Autism maths session planned in each week ● Photo of carpet area for T's schedule ● Attention Autism maths planning from SAP for reference 	<p>Who?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Anna 	<p>When?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A. A sessions once per week in Maths
<p>6. Choose transactional supports</p>	<p>Interpersonal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wait and encourage participation ● Allow child to leave if they are showing signs they are not available for learning 	<p>Environmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visuals to organise student's day. Photos for schedule and first/then board. ● Motivating equipment for the sessions (nothing too loud) ● Set place for child to sit 	

Review; Anna:

How did the action plan go? Better than expected/as-expected/not as-expected?

- I managed 1 Attention Autism session per week over the four weeks and ALL the children in class were present for 2 of those sessions, the most recent 2 that I did, because I think one of the children in particular was confused by the change in routine but now he seems to want to be in the sessions.

What, if anything, has changed (for the participant)?

- There has been a shift in what I want children with autism to get out of each session. I don't want them to just comply, but to achieve an aim in a way that fits them.
- My understanding of how to support children with autism has changed and I now allow them to join in, or not if they don't want to, and not force them to come.
- I can make adjustments to the environment so when I saw it wasn't working and was too busy on the carpet, and I provided a chair instead which worked.
- I know how to use the visual timetable well.
- I am confident to lead a session which is engaging for my whole class.

Transactional supports to be continued:

- Visuals to structure the day and of making adults aware of where they need to be and also the importance of the visuals.
- Weekly Attention Autism maths sessions and apply to other curriculum areas such as phonics.
- Positive support such as reading behaviour as serving a purpose and responding, like letting them leave if they need to.

Did this project 'make a difference'? Yes/No?

if No, why not?

- I can confidently lead Attention Autism groups and I would like to do more sessions.
- It made me focus on the children with autism and I know how to impact their behaviour in a positive way.
- It reassured me with my practice that some of what I am doing is effective and is good autism practice.

Testimonial comment on the project:

- This project has really helped to boost my confidence with how I support and interact with children with autism. Previously, I would often rely on the 1:1 adult to know the child more and know what to do. But I feel happy to step in now and support best practice. I also feel better equipped to support other teachers with their classroom practice to benefit other autistic children. I am also thinking more about how to make other curriculum areas more engaging.

Appreciative Inquiry Action Planning; Elena

1. Share perspectives on current practice	Areas of confidence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soothing calm voice when interacting/ giving information • Visuals to show start and finish of task and whole day • Adapting visuals to structure the whole day 	Highlights: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding why visuals are put into place and adapting children's schedules to support them such as putting the reading corner on the schedule. 	
2. What's already working well?	Interpersonal supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soothing voice • Praise and prompts without over-directing • Making positive relationships and valuing individual 	Environmental supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of individual schedules for two children • Incorporating interests into learning tasks 	
3. Goal setting	What do you want more of? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To feel confident providing activities that incorporate individual interests but which are still in-keeping with what the rest of the class are doing. <p>How important is this change for the participant: very important/important/low importance?</p>		
4. Why is this goal important?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I'll have more time because the children might be able to work independently if they are motivated to do it in the first place. 		
5. Action plan	What is needed to achieve the goal? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of interest-based learning from SAP • 1 activity created per week (same maths theme as rest of class if possible) 	Who? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elena • SAP resources from L 	When? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once per week in Maths
6. Choose transactional supports	Interpersonal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide adequate time for the tasks and don't prompt or push them to do it quickly • Wait and encourage children to approach me if they need help or are finding it tricky 	Environmental: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose materials that I know interest the children • Continue using in-task schedule in the sessions so children know start and finish • Offer repeated and varied learning to practise the same skill • Modify the difficulty of the tasks to enhance learning 	

Review; Elena:

How did the action plan go? Better than expected/as-expected/not as-expected?

- I aimed for once per week, but I actually managed 3 or 4 per week.
- I realised it was actually such little effort on my behalf, but student response was so positive.

What, if anything, has changed (for the participant)?

- Confident asking the children what they would like me to put in their learning.
- It was easier than I thought to incorporate interests but also to plan the activities. I thought it would take a lot of time but it hasn't.
- More confident planning activities my students will engage with. I thought I would get it wrong but I haven't.

Transactional supports to be continued:

- Activities that incorporate specific interests
- Creating opportunities for independent learning through other interest-based learning opportunities
- Repeat but slightly change activities so children can practice the same skill but it looks different.

Did this project 'make a difference'? Yes/No?

if No, why not?

- I feel more confident overall
- So nice to see students engaged in learning when before they were just doing learning by complying, but now they want to do it.

Testimonial comment on the project:

- Taking part in this project has made me realise the difference between a child complying and a child completing an activity because it is truly exciting and engaging. I have realised how much we expect our children to comply throughout the school day and how often we discourage children from voicing their disinterest in an activity. This project has made me realise that if a child is truly excited by an activity they will complete it just because they want to. Lilly has been so supportive throughout this project, giving me so many amazing ideas for learning activities which are engaging and exciting. Her knowledge and influence has had such a positive impact on my teaching practice and my understanding of autism. Lilly's positive approach to giving observation feedback has been so encouraging and because of her, I have been empowered to support other members of staff too. Because of taking part in this project, I have watched a child who has always hated maths, open his maths book and laugh like I have never heard him laugh before. Truly a moment I will never forget! Thank you so much for all of your guidance. We are so lucky to have you!

Appreciative Inquiry Action Planning; Kodi

<p>1. Share perspectives on current practice</p>	<p>Areas of confidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mirroring emotional tone and modelling different emotions ● Making timetables for the children which reflect multi-sensory balance and individual needs and overall providing structure 	<p>Highlights:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using gestures and facial expressions to convey meaning ● Giving a balance of moving and sitting such as integrating movement breaks ● Using schedules for whole class and personalised photo-symbol for individuals that need further support 	
<p>2. What's already working well?</p>	<p>Interpersonal supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tone of voice to support engagement ● Using dialogic teaching, so not asking too many questions 	<p>Environmental supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visuals and symbols to structure the day ● Tick list on a whiteboard, ad hoc, to remind students what to do ● Organising furniture to minimise distractions and make it clear what happens in each area of the room 	
<p>3. Goal setting</p>	<p>What do you want more of?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To provide in-task schedules so the students know the expectations in a Maths or Literacy task. <p>How important is this change for the participant: very important/important/low importance?</p>		
<p>4. Why is this goal important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher confidence to provide visual structure and also support students to make progress with independent learning and not just do a holding activity. 		
<p>5. Action plan</p>	<p>What is needed to achieve the goal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Examples of in-task checklists from the SAP ● A Maths and Literacy in-task visual which can be laminated and reused 	<p>Who?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Kodi ● First/then and visuals from Lilly 	<p>When?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trial in Maths sessions each day
<p>6. Choose transactional supports</p>	<p>Interpersonal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wait and don't over prompt ● Recognise signs of dysregulation and offer support as needed 	<p>Environmental:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visual supports to show the start and finish of a task ● visuals to break down a task into manageable steps ● Modify the environment to enhance learning (so children can easily ask for help if they need to) 	

Review; Kodi:

How did the action plan go? Better than expected/as expected/not as expected?

- The visuals for Maths and Literacy are made, but not trialled yet due to other demands on time and priorities. it will be used in January at start of new term.

What, if anything, has changed (for the participant)?

- Thought through how to structure support for the children with SEN, but who can still access a differentiated curriculum.
- I am happy with the visuals I have created because they are personalised. I can see that they will be easy to adapt moving forwards.

Transactional supports to be continued:

- Continue breaking tasks down into parts as much as possible so students know and can see all the steps of a task, but also making sure that it is as low maintenance as possible so it is achievable.

Did this project 'make a difference'? Yes/No?

if No, why not?

- It is nice to see vision realised on paper because this is something I've wanted to do for a while.
- It has drawn on everything I know so far and shown how I can develop it further.

Testimonial comment on the project:

- This has increased my confidence supporting children with SEN in a mainstream classroom and will help me help them to be more independent in their learning and hopefully giving them more confidence.