# Chapter 9 Activities

Web activity WA9.1

Auditing the learning environment

You might to choose to assess the degree to which the learning environment is conductive to positive learning and behaviour by using the list below as an auditing tool:

Are learning objectives appropriately differentiated for all learners?

Does the teacher use of multi-sensory – visual, verbal and kinaesthetic – approaches in his/her teaching?

Does the teacher find ways of explaining abstract concepts in concrete terms, for example making word problems in mathematics ‘real’?

* Are visual aids: signs or symbols, photographs, computer animations, and so on, and/or tangible real/concrete objects used in the lesson?

Does the teacher use simplified tasks with, for example, short, concrete texts for groups that need this approach, and extended tasks with, for example, longer abstract texts with other groups?

* Are tasks made open for some learners, and more closed for others, according to needs?

Are all pupils seated in a way that enables them to see and hear the teacher and any resources s/he is using?

Does the teacher organise different groupings of learners so that they can listen to each other and develop their thinking and understanding together with peers?

Does the teacher clarify, display and return to new or difficult vocabulary and/or subject-specific terms?

Does the teacher check that all learners have understood the content of lessons, tasks, understanding of instructions, and so on?

* Are learners able to explain them in their own words? Are they regularly asked to do this?
* Are questions pitched so that learners at all levels are challenged?
* Are expected outcomes made clear?

Is the learning environment safe for learners to make mistakes without feeling humiliated?

* Does the teacher give the class personal thinking time and support before responses are required?
* Does s/he give progressively more scaffolding until learners can answer correctly?

Does extra adult support promote learners’ autonomy (i.e. self-directed learning) and increase learners’ inclusion within their peer group?

* Do the adults providing the support know what individuals or groups are to learn?
* Does the teacher work directly with the learners with SEN(D) as well as with other groups?

Are pupils provided with, and regularly reminded of, resources to help them be independent? (e.g. relevant material from whole-class session kept on display, word lists or mats, dictionaries of terms, glossaries, number lines, tables squares).

Is scaffolding used (e.g. problem-solving grids, talk and writing frames, clue cards) to support learners?

Has the teacher made arrangements, for example adult/peer support, recording where necessary to ensure that all learners can access written materials?

* Does the teacher make effective use of ICT, for example speech- or sign-supported software, on-screen word banks, word processing, to enable learners to access the curriculum?
* Has the teacher planned alternatives to written tasks, where appropriate?

Does the teacher notice and praise appropriate behaviour?

Are all learners involved in setting their targets and monitoring their own progress?

A number of tools for auditing the inclusivity of the classroom environment are available on the internet. For example, at the time of writing, Wigan Borough Council has uploaded a useful classroom inclusion framework at <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Docs/PDF/Resident/Education/Educational-Support/TESS/QFT-Checklist-Secondary-Class-Strategies.pdf>. You might choose to access this now.

Web activity WA9.2

Appropriate use of behaviour checklists

The table below illustrates how a behaviour checklist might be designed.

Think about a young person about whose behaviour you have some concerns.

How might you adapt the checklist to suit the collation of evidence about his/her behaviour?

To which colleagues might you give this checklist to complete?

What guidance would you give these colleagues about how to interpret the terms ‘always’, ‘often’, ‘sometimes’, ‘never’? Would you, for example, tell them how many times you consider each term represents?

Checklist of inappropriate behaviours

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Please tick the relevant box | Always | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| Interrupts teacher or shouts out in class |  |  |  |  |
| Constantly demands teacher’s attention |  |  |  |  |
| Annoys other learners in class |  |  |  |  |
| Leaves seat to wander about in classroom |  |  |  |  |
| Damages or steals other learners’ property |  |  |  |  |
| Verbally bullies or intimidates peers |  |  |  |  |
| Physically bullies or intimidates peers |  |  |  |  |
| Is bullied by others verbally |  |  |  |  |
| Is bullied by others physically |  |  |  |  |

Web activity WA9.3

Using 'Talking Stones' to elicit learners' views

Wearmouth (2004b) describes the use of a projective interview technique, ‘Talking Stones’, as an interesting assessment strategy to help students represent problematic relationships and situations as they see them. This technique is derived from techniques related to Personal Construct Psychology and developed from Crosby’s therapeutic work with adults (unpublished report, 1993, Centre for Personal Construct Education). ‘Talking Stones’ is designed to address the challenge of engaging with a student’s perspective meaningfully in order to work through what are often difficult situations in schools, and matching provision to real needs. The assumption underpinning this technique is that, for the individual learner, everything is perceived and mediated by what is salient, socially and personally. This view of behaviour implies that it is possible for a person acting in support to enter the student’s reality and hold dialogue.

During an individual interview, a student is given a pile of stones of varying shapes, sizes, colours and textures and encouraged to explore thoughts and feelings about school and him/herself in relation to it by projection on to them. The individual selects one stone to represent him/herself in school and discusses his/her choice. Subsequently s/he selects more stones to represent significant others in the context about which there is current concern, describes why they have been chosen, and then places them on a rectangular white cloth or large sheet of paper. The edges of this set a boundary to the positioning of the stones and their distance from each other. Stones, their attributes and their positions in relation to each other can be understood as a student’s representation of individually-constructed meanings.

One way in which a procedure such as ‘Talking Stones’ can contribute to the process of assessment in schools is in the manner in which it can open up problematic relationships between, typically, teenagers and staff members, and facilitate dialogue or conversation. The student is not seen as ‘mad’ and therefore unintelligible and threatening, but engaging with life in an alternative mode.

‘Talking Stones’ is a powerful procedure. The ethics surrounding its use should therefore be taken into careful consideration. It should be used only where there is positive benefit to the student. Its use is ethically questionable unless there is a clear benefit for the student. Teachers using ‘Talking Stones’ should be aware of ethical principles associated with techniques of a counselling nature, for example those of ‘non-maleficence’ and ‘beneficence’. As McLeod (1998, pp. 272–273) notes, ‘non-maleficence’ refers to the principle of not doing any harm, and ‘beneficence’ to promoting human welfare. Asking personal questions may be construed as prying into a student’s privacy. It raises a question about what teachers and schools should do with sensitive information of this sort that is very important to understanding individuals, but may be used by some to belittle or stereotype students.

Raising self esteem is frequently set as a target for students seen as having a low self image. However, attempting to raise self esteem may have little point if teachers are not aware of major factors driving students’ behaviour. It also raises the question of who should decide whether the risks of using a technique such as this outweigh the benefits.

There are many instances in schools where students disclose very sensitive information about themselves to teachers. Before engaging in any activity where this is likely to happen, including using ‘Talking Stones’, teachers need to familiarize themselves very well with any guidelines that may exist in their own schools about handling information that may emerge from student self disclosure, for example information relating to sexual abuse.

The assessment of students’ perceptions of, and feelings about, their own behaviour depends on very finely-tuned listening skills as well as suspension of judgmental responses on the part of professionals.

‘Talking Stones’ is a technique not to be used lightly. As noted above, if a student begins to disclose personal information, it may be difficult for an inexperienced teacher-interviewer to bring about closure in a way that leaves the student in a frame of mind sufficiently comfortable to return to regular classroom activities. Sometimes also, as with other conversations of a personal kind, when abuse or other information is disclosed, it may need to be referred to the safeguarding officer in the setting, school or college. What do you think?

Web Activity WA9.4

Factors affecting home–school partnerships

Not all families feel comfortable in formal school/college settings particularly if, for example, their own educational experiences were difficult. From your own experience what would you say are the most important issues to take into consideration when working in partnership with families?

In a recent discussion with a group of SENCos from schools and colleges across the sectors, the following principles were agreed as important in establishing effective partnership-working with parents and families:

* Building trust and rapport.
* Keeping parents up to date.
* Transparency – under promise and over deliver.
* Communication with all involved that enables everyone to be heard.
* NB differences between primary and secondary.
* Mutual respect – ground rules.
* Listening without talking.
* Establish understanding of the three-way partnership.
* The meeting must be ‘going somewhere’.
* Consistent approach between home and school.
* Consistent personnel – single point of contact for families.
* Clear channel of communication and process within the school and with other agencies.
* Child needs led.
* Clear communication.
* Openness in a safe environment.
* Trust and shared realistic expectations.
* Accessibility of information.
* Positive and collaborative working relationship.
* Resourcing.
* Consistency.

To what extent do you feel these principles are important? Do you have any to add?