

Action Learning Set - Report

Rationale:

This pilot was aimed at trialing an Action Learning Set in a Hounslow secondary school which would be proposed as part of the portfolio of initiatives that a commissioned SL&C team would introduce and sustain for a schools cluster - in order to address SLCN issues in specific, targeted and universal areas of work.

Description of ALS:

An Action Learning Set (ALS) is a group of people who agree to come together to take part in a mutually supportive evidence-based learning activity, with the following terms of reference:

- All content is confidential and there is no adverse comment on what is said
- The participant who presents an issue agrees to act on the advice of their choice and report back to the group at a future meeting – thus sharing the evidence-based learning.

Each meeting has a very specific structure:

- (a) Past presenters feedback on the outcome/learning of the action/s tried out and re-grade their level of concern about the issue.
- (b) An individual presents his/her issue for 5 minutes and rates his/her level of concern about the issue using a simple numerical grade.
- (c) The rest of the group each take a turn at asking probing/clarifying questions (without commenting or problem-solving).
- (d) Each person then takes a brief turn at giving suggested actions/thoughts on the issue.
- (e) The presenter reflects on each suggestion in turn and then announces which actions/ideas s/he will try out.

The number of presenters depends on the time allowed for the group.

Design:

It was agreed that volunteers should be recruited for an 'SLCN Special Interest Group'. After a presentation from the Pathfinder team and a short trial between 3 centre members of staff, the main group met fortnightly for a series of 3 meetings over the summer term of 2010. It consisted of 2 Centre staff and 6 mainstream teachers. The first meeting included an explanation of how ALS works plus two presenters and the two subsequent meetings featured two people feeding back and two more presenting.

Results A: Qualitative Outcomes

Person	Issue	Pre-level of adult concern	Pre-level of pupil difficulty	Post-level of adult concern	Post-level of pupil difficulty	Précis of Comments
A	Losing my temper with inattentive class which adversely affects my communication with them	6	"n/a"	2	"n/a"	Class responded well to my honesty on how I was feeling. We all encouraged each other to be quieter. Designing a less active start was calming for me and them.
B	Year XX boy who reports bullying to Mum but will not talk about this at school.	10	8	8	8	Pupil enjoyed the extra attention but did not have (language) skills to reflect effectively.
C	Disruptive pupil with low literacy, poor focus and poor turn-taking.	7	9	6	9	Passed on to next teacher two things that would improve his focus and concentration. This fostered good relationships with other teachers/departments as we shared strategies.
D	Quiet students being bullied but not enough evidence.	7	10	6	9	Creating anonymous survey on SurveyMonkey re. bullying for all pupils. Initial trials proven to work. About to try it with target group.
C	Getting quiet girl to speak up and volunteer more answers in class	4	7	2	5	Raised pupil's awareness and increased her confidence. Now applying strategies to other pupil, including feeding back to them on their good progress.
E	Pupil who can't work successfully with peers but can individually.	8	9	5	5	Pupil likes being able to reflect. He says it makes him 'want to have a good lesson here (in the centre)'.
F	Non-compliance and 'disgruntlement' of mainstream Year XX pupil.	3	4	2	No data (<4?)	Actions taken have helped somewhat but an on-going issue.
	Total:	45	47	31	39	
	Gross Outcome:	92		70		Represents a positive outcome of: approx. 26% reduction of problem.

Results B: Quantitative Feedback

Aspect	Summary of comments
Structure of sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • effective at engaging the person with the problem productively • it involves everyone and ensures everyone has a chance to speak • mix of mainstream and centre staff worked well • having 6-8 people limit meant that sessions were not over-long • it was very focused – you really have to listen and concentrate • we came up with a lot of constructive ideas in a very short space of time • I like the strict structure – it allowed a great deal of information to come out • No one person was allowed to take over the meeting – everyone is equal • We were not allowed to stray from the topic so it kept sessions tight and focused • The structure enabled us to keep within the time limit
Helpfulness of sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It raised my awareness of issues about pupils beyond what happens in class • Useful to hear about issues/solutions from the viewpoint of others • It developed my own thoughts and helped to generate ideas • It encouraged me to actually do something about problems • Interesting to hear solutions that are not my own • The mixed range of people resulted in ideas that I would never have thought of • It widened my thinking • I related what was being discussed to similar situations I encounter
Are you using suggestions from the group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The action form and the 2 week time frame was good at making people commit to actions • The fact that a couple of my suggestions were acted upon gave me confidence – I enjoyed being part of this process • I adopted two solutions which really helped • The results have had a positive impact on my students. • The discussion resulted in do-able and hands-on ideas • The pupils did respond • It was interesting to share ideas from the group with other colleagues • I will continue to use the suggestions • The suggestions were clear and made us feel accountable
Further comments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I constantly reflect on problems talked about and continue to think about acting on ideas • An excellent group! • I would recommend this to others • I want to share this ALS model with my department • I think this structure and format would be useful for all meetings in school!
Would you be interested in attending future group?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • Yes • Yes – possibly with a different mix of people to get an even greater range of suggestions! • Yes • Yes! • Yes • Yes – maybe with a group representing an even wider range of experiences • No – but only because I am retiring this year!

Discussion:

It was evident from all types of feedback gathered that this project was a success. It is clear that the actual process itself was a positive and gratifying experience for all concerned as well as effective in working on solutions to problems (resulting in an approx. 26% combined reduction of concern and pupil difficulty). Even where the actual pupil level of difficulty did not change, it is clear that the mind-set of the adult could change, e.g. one teacher realised that there was a language barrier to what had seemed to be an attitude problem in a boy who was reporting bullying to his Mum.

The broad skill mix seemed to be an important factor, along with the time-efficiency, focus, clarity and inclusivity of the experience.

Conclusion:

Action Learning Sets are likely to be a positive, inclusive experience for school teams, effective in contributing to problem-solving, with a good chance of learning being disseminated to the wider team. An ALS should be included in a portfolio of work that schools could commission from an SL&C Team.

One unexpected result of the project was that the supervisor of the NQT involved identified the ALS as an excellent way of developing skills and confidence for teachers new to the profession.

Appendix 1

Action Learning Set @ ?? Secondary

Name:

Date:

Issue:

Scale of Concern: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Degree of difficulty for pupil/s 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Chosen Action:

Planned Date to Review:

Actual Review Date:

Scale of Concern: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Degree of difficulty for pupil/s 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Comments:

Action:

Signed: