WOWW: A solution orientated approach to enhance classroom relationships and behaviour within a Primary three class.

Lynne Fernie
University of Dundee - Education
Dundee
United Kingdom

Daniela Cubeddu
University of Dundee - Education
Dundee
United Kingdom

l.fernie@dundee.ac.uk

Abstract

A Working on What Works (WOWW) approach was utilised over six sessions in a mainstream Scottish primary class to enhance classroom relationships and behaviours.

The aim of the intervention was to manage everyday classroom problems within a natural classroom environment. WOWW incorporates positive psychology and implements a solution focussed approach.

The quantitative results illustrated an improvement in the teacher ratings and class ratings for the class goals set by the class teacher and helped the teacher to feel more confident in her class. From the qualitative comments, class teacher and pupils reported a positive experience of WOWW and noticed a difference within the classroom. In summary, WOWW influenced a positive change to relationships and behaviour within the classroom.

Introduction

The national priorities for Scottish education

Within Scotland, education authorities are guided by legislation which governs their policies and practice (The Children [Scotland] Act 1995). The national priorities for Scottish education include: achievement and attainment, framework for learning, inclusion and equality, values and citizenship, and learning for life. As a result of recent legislation such as The Standards in (Scotland's) School Act 2000 and the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 and 2009 a large number of children and young people (YP) with a variety of learning and social and emotional behavioural needs (SEBN) are entering into mainstream education, and it is the responsibility of all agencies involved to ensure that each YP's learning, social, emotional and physical needs are being met. In line with the Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) framework (Scottish Executive, 2005) all practitioners aim to ensure that young people (YP) are placed at the centre and there are consistent and supportive approaches to meet young people's needs.

In order to achieve this Educational Psychologists (EPs) work in collaboration with other professionals in the assessment, planning and reviewing process. Collaborative working is a key aspect of meeting the needs of children and YP as it aims to create a consistent approach for all practitioners involved, by enabling them to focus on improving outcomes for YP and their families. It aims to ensure joint understanding for all the outcomes identified, which then enables those involved to proceed and establish a joint action plan for implementation.

EPs, in taking a holistic approach, ensure that the YP is placed at the centre and that all agencies involved work together to make sure the YP's needs are being met. By applying one or more of the five Currie (2002) functions (consultation, assessment, intervention, training, and research) EPs are able to work within the Staged Intervention Model by contributing to the collaborative assessment process, taking on a consultative role, working directly with a child or young person where there is an identified need for targeted support, reviewing the young person's progress or by enabling capacity building or coaching in context within schools. A Staged Intervention Model is a means of identification, assessment, planning, recording and review to meet the learning needs of children and young people using a solution focussed approach.

The current study describes the successful implementation of a solution-oriented approach, working on what works (WOWW), which aimed to enhance the behaviours and relationships of a class of Primary 3 pupils, 7-8 years of age.

Solution-focussed approach

In line with GIRFEC, the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) (Scottish Government, 2009) and the accumulation of research indicates that an increase in a YP's wellbeing is synonymous with an increase in learning, broader attention, creative skills and more holistic thinking (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich and Linkins, 2009). The strength-based, solution focussed approach differs from other approaches in that it is based on solution-building and actively exploring solutions rather than being fixated on the problems (Iveson, 2002). It focusses on the successes, strengths, positives and future hopes rather than present problems and their origins.

The solution focussed approach to educational psychology practice has been argued to resolve many of the issues associated with the traditional deficit model (Wilding & Griffer, 2015). Previously, psychologists have operated in a way which focuses on identifying the negative reasons why children, YP and people behave and act the way that they do. According to Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh and DiGiuseppe (2004), focusing on the pathology of people's problems or deficits was given more attention, perhaps to the detriment of fully understanding human functioning. As Sheldon and King (2001) argue, inner traits of resilience, strength, hope and optimism, to name but a few, are the reasons why the human race survives. Research conducted by Terjesen et al., (2004) demonstrated that focusing on the positives and enhancing the strengths and qualities that already exist can result in effective prevention of future problems. Terjesen et al., (2004) stated that, by nurturing and focusing on their strengths, children and YP learn that they can effectively manage problems they may be experiencing, and learn how to adapt their behaviour to cope with any future problems they may encounter. In response, EPs have been proactive in moving towards a more holistic and strength-based, solution orientated approach.

Within Scottish schools, the learning outcomes and aspirations set out by the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) could not be achieved without good relationships and positive behaviour within schools. The solution oriented approach is well positioned to assist this by its potential to improve relationships within schools, increase responsibility and promote respect. This approach centres around a number of key principles which inform and direct thinking and change practice. Essentially, the focus is on successes, solutions, strengths and positives. Solution focussed approaches centre on the premise that change is possible by utilising the skills and resources which already exist (Kelly, Kim, & Franklin, 2008). It is an empowering approach that aims to diminish negative thinking patterns which can impact on the possibility of positive change (Kelly et al., 2008).

The method encourages a pragmatic approach by focussing on what people can do, what is working well now, examining situations when the problem is not there, and seeking a positive future (by acknowledging the problems but seeing beyond them) and partnership working (everybody working together to generate solutions). An EP might utilise a solution orientated approach by recognising a YP's strengths, exploring exemptions to the problem, exploring

the desired goals and targets, investigating who can aid in achieving the goal state, detecting the first step towards the goal state, and facilitating thinking about likely solutions (Kelly et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the principles of the solution orientated approach have been adjusted and integrated into an assortment of other approaches which EPs have been utilising within schools. One example of the practical application of these principles being employed within a school environment is the WOWW approach (Lloyd, Bruce & Mackintosh, 2012).

The WOWW approach

Developed by two of the pioneers of Strength Focused Based Therapy (SFBT) (Berg and Shilts, 2004) the Working On What Works (WOWW) approach is an innovative programme designed to improve the quality of education within the classroom. According to Berg and Shilts (2005), by looking for exceptions to the problem situation (times when the problem is less evident or problematic), by working and focussing on what already works (by maintaining and building upon existing good practice) and by believing that change is possible and continual, it is the small, positive changes which can be built upon to bring greater and lasting change. In contrast to the traditional approach of removing disruptive pupils from the class for individual attention in order to tackle their challenging behaviours, which can be unsettling for the whole class, WOWW intervenes at a classroom level, a natural and familiar setting for both teachers and students.

WOWW is described as a practical tool to help solve the everyday problems often encountered within the classroom environment. It responds to the need of the teacher to discover practical behavioural learning activities for children which are based on respectful and cooperative approaches between pupil and teacher. Two of the main underlying assumptions of the WOWW philosophy are that teachers want to have a positive influence on their students, and to feel like good teachers (Kelly & Bluestone-Miller, 2009). WOWW is unlike other classroom approaches in that it utilises what already exists within the classroom without disturbing the daily life of the class and without singling out 'problem' students. It aims to enhance positive classroom relationships between teachers and pupils through shared goal setting and team working. In order to achieve this Berg and Shilts (2005) set out three key stages of the WOWW approach:

- Stage one: Observation. The WOWW 'coach' (someone external to the classroom) observes the class, looking for positive actions to feedback to the pupils and the Class teacher (CT). At the end of each session each pupil is given individual feedback about one positive thing the observer noticed.
- Stage two: The WOWW coach facilitates discussion (between pupils and the CT) in order to set collaborative classroom goals. These goals are then scaled by the pupils

and the CT on a scale from one to ten. The rating provided should take into consideration the class as a single entity. The class is then asked what action is needed to move one point up in the scale.

- Stage three: Regular scaling of classroom success in achieving the goals is noted. Between sessions the CT should remind pupils of the goals and work with them in order to implement the class goals into the daily learning environment.

Each WOWW session should last for approximately fifty five minutes; comprising forty minutes of observation and fifteen minutes of positive feedback. Another element of WOWW is that the learning behaviour is by the pupils (through reflection and working collaboratively with their teacher and peers), rather than being solely defined by the CT. This approach fits well with the CfE which highlights the importance of children being actively involved in their own learning and assessment, including shaping and reviewing their learning by reflection, setting learning goals and next steps, and working in collaboration with their teacher and peers. The WOWW approach also complements the Scottish Curriculum's focus on health and wellbeing in schools, including developing self-awareness, self-worth, respect for others and building relationships (Scottish Government, 2011).

Although few published studies exist pertaining to the effectiveness of WOWW, initial findings indicate that the WOWW intervention has the power to encourage positive change. For example, a study by Berg and Shilts (2004) reported an increase in teachers' perceptions of their classes as better behaved, and an increase in the teachers' sense that pupils would view themselves as better behaved; a finding that was replicated by Kelly and Bluestone-Miller (2009). Within Scotland, one EPS introduced WOWW as part of a wider initiative towards Solution Orientated Schools (Lloyd et al., 2012). Bruce, Mackintosh and McDonald (2009) evaluated the approach and their results indicated that students generally rated the WOWW sessions as positive and enjoyed hearing their feedback. Furthermore, according to the students, the overall class had improved in terms of their behaviours and relationships and they then viewed their teacher in a more positive manner.

Teachers indicated that WOWW had benefitted both their own practice, and their perceptions of the behaviours and attitudes of their pupils. Perhaps one major limitation of these studies is that the longer term impact of WOWW on classroom behaviours and relationships is not identified. It is unclear whether any of the positive impacts found were sustained after the interventions were completed. However, a further study in another Scottish EPS in 2012 found that whole class positive improvements in behaviours and relationships continued to be maintained at 12 weeks post intervention (Brown, Powell & Clarke, 2012).

As a result of the research findings and the inclusive, solution orientated nature of WOWW, EPs are utilising this approach to effectively manage relationships and behaviours within classrooms. This is of particular pertinence as a recent study by Black, Chamberlain, Murray, Sewel & Skelton (2012) demonstrated that it was the low-level disruptive behaviours, such as not listening or paying attention, or talking out of turn, which were much more common and

disruptive to the daily learning environment than more serious adverse behaviours. Furthermore, it was the low-level disruptive behaviours which were most likely to have the greatest negative bearing on the teacher's experience and the greatest impact on class learning time (Black, Chamberlain, Murray, Sewel & Skelton, 2012).

The current study: methodology

The aim of the current study is to utilise a WOWW intervention to improve the relationships and behaviours of a primary 3 class through working collaboratively with the CT and pupils.

Research Design

The participants consisted of a primary 3 class (n=24), aged between 7-8 years, and their class teacher. The WOWW intervention was utilised over six sessions comprising two sessions per week. All the children who took part were from a mainstream primary 3 class and there was no age, race or disability exclusion criteria.

Procedure

Ethical and parental consent was sought before the intervention took place. Due to university commitments and time constraints the Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPS) adopted and applied an abbreviated version of the WOWW intervention. The intervention consisted of Berg and Shilts (2005) three key stages but was limited to six sessions during which teaching and learning were not affected as it took place during a standard lesson. Furthermore, due to time limitations, the TEPs, in discussion with their tutors, decided to set the class goals in collaboration with the teacher rather than the primary 3 class. This allowed the intervention to have a focus on the class goals in session one and allowed for the children to have more time to discuss the goals. Due to time constraints and age of the class, pre-setting class goals allowed the TEPs to create visual aids in advance of session one to support the children's understanding of the goals. The possible limitations of these modifications to the procedure are discussed in the reflections on the sessions below.

During the first session, which lasted for approximately 50 minutes, the coaches introduced themselves and explained the aims of the project and what they hoped the class would achieve. The children were informed about the two class goals set by their teacher ('good listening' and 'working together') and a discussion was facilitated to ensure the children had a deeper understanding of both goals and the intervention.

The discussion made use of visual prompts relating to the two class goals to provoke deeper thinking about what was meant by the goals and how they could be achieved. After the group discussion, the coaches used examples for the children to practice using the scaling method. Some examples included how the children felt about going to the dentist and how much they enjoy the cartoon, Frozen. The coaches used several examples until they felt the children understood the concept of rating on a 1-10 scale (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest).

Afterwards, the children were allocated time to ask any questions they might have regarding the intervention that were answered by the coaches.

Following the discussion, the WOWW coaches observed the class during a usual lesson and noted any positive examples of behaviours individual children demonstrated which met the class goals. The individual pupil feedback was provided by the TEPs to the class using positive, encouraging and solution-focused language.

Subsequently to the feedback, the children were asked to rate each of the class goals as to where they felt the class were on their two scales.

Phase 2 of the intervention (sessions 2-5) consisted of 20-30 minutes of classroom observation, during a regular class lesson, followed by 5 to 10 minutes of positive individual feedback to the children. Following each session, the class was asked to scale where they thought the class were in relation to the class goals. All of the children's individual scores were added together and a class average for both goals was generated to determine where the class were on the two scale goals.

At the last session (phase 3) the coaches observed and gave feedback to the children, similar to previous sessions. Subsequently, the coaches concluded the session by giving praise to the children for their hard work and engagement in the process.

At the end of the intervention, the Class Teacher (CT) completed the pupil scaling form measure as a post measure to investigate the possible influence that WOWW had on each pupil and on the class. In addition, the CT completed the teacher evaluation form which measured her perspective of the impact of WOWW on herself and the class. The form allowed the CT's perspective of the intervention to be gathered.

After the last session, a small focus group of four children were randomly selected and asked questions on the WOWW process.

Results
WOWW class scale

The WOWW class scale was rated by the primary 3 class at each session to generate an average of where the class felt they were on a scale of 1-10 for their two class goals. An overall class rating for each session was made from an average of the pupils' ratings. The ratings indicate that there is a positive incline in both of the class goals at each session of the WOWW intervention.

Figure1. Line graph demonstrating class ratings over 6 sessions.
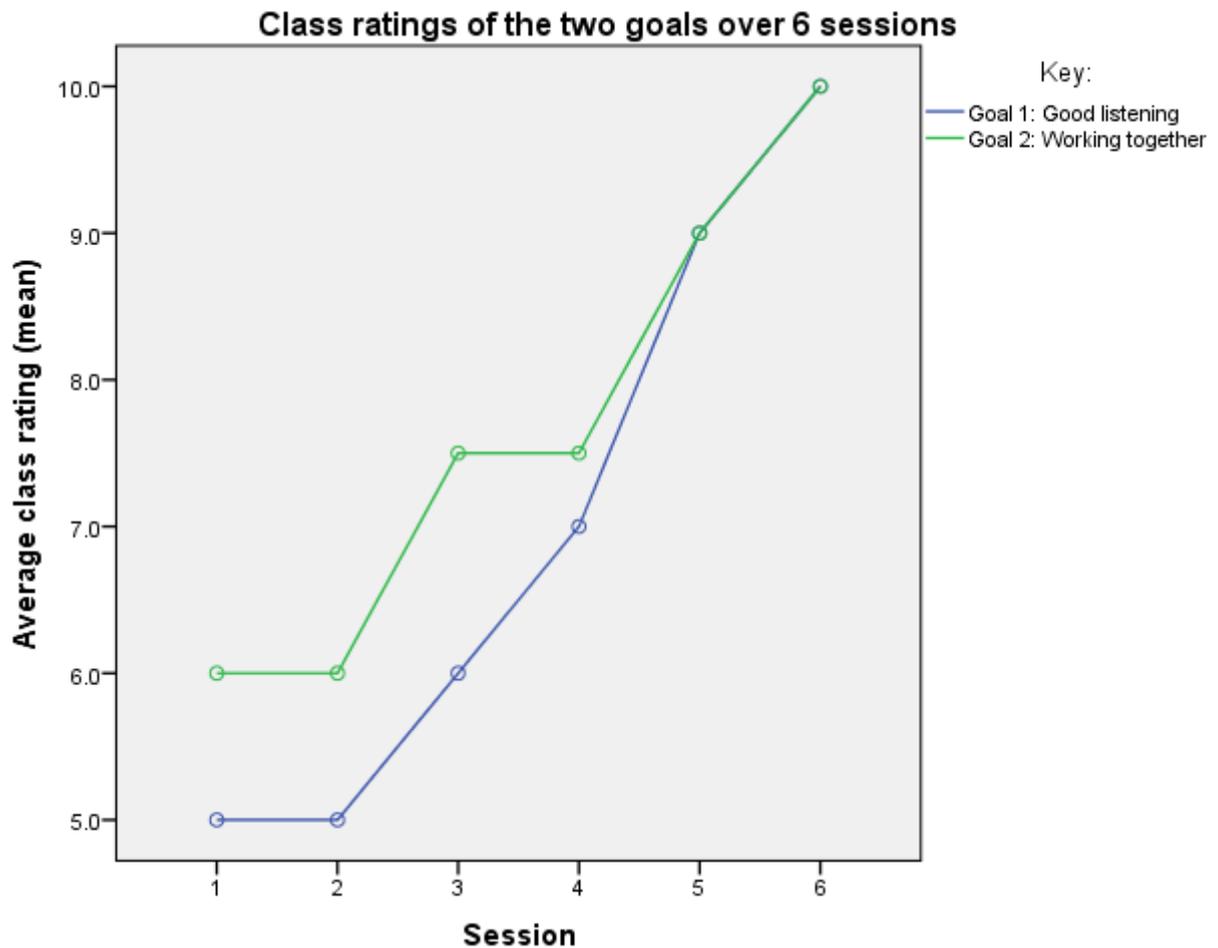
WOWW pupil rating scale

Paired sample t-tests were conducted on the pupil rating scales to examine the difference within the class before and after the intervention as rated by the class teacher on a scale of 1-10. The differences between the pre and post measures are illustrated below in graph 2. All of the paired sample t-tests highlighted that there are significant differences between before and after   the   intervention.

Figure 2. Pre and post variables as rated by the teacher

Error bars: 95% CI
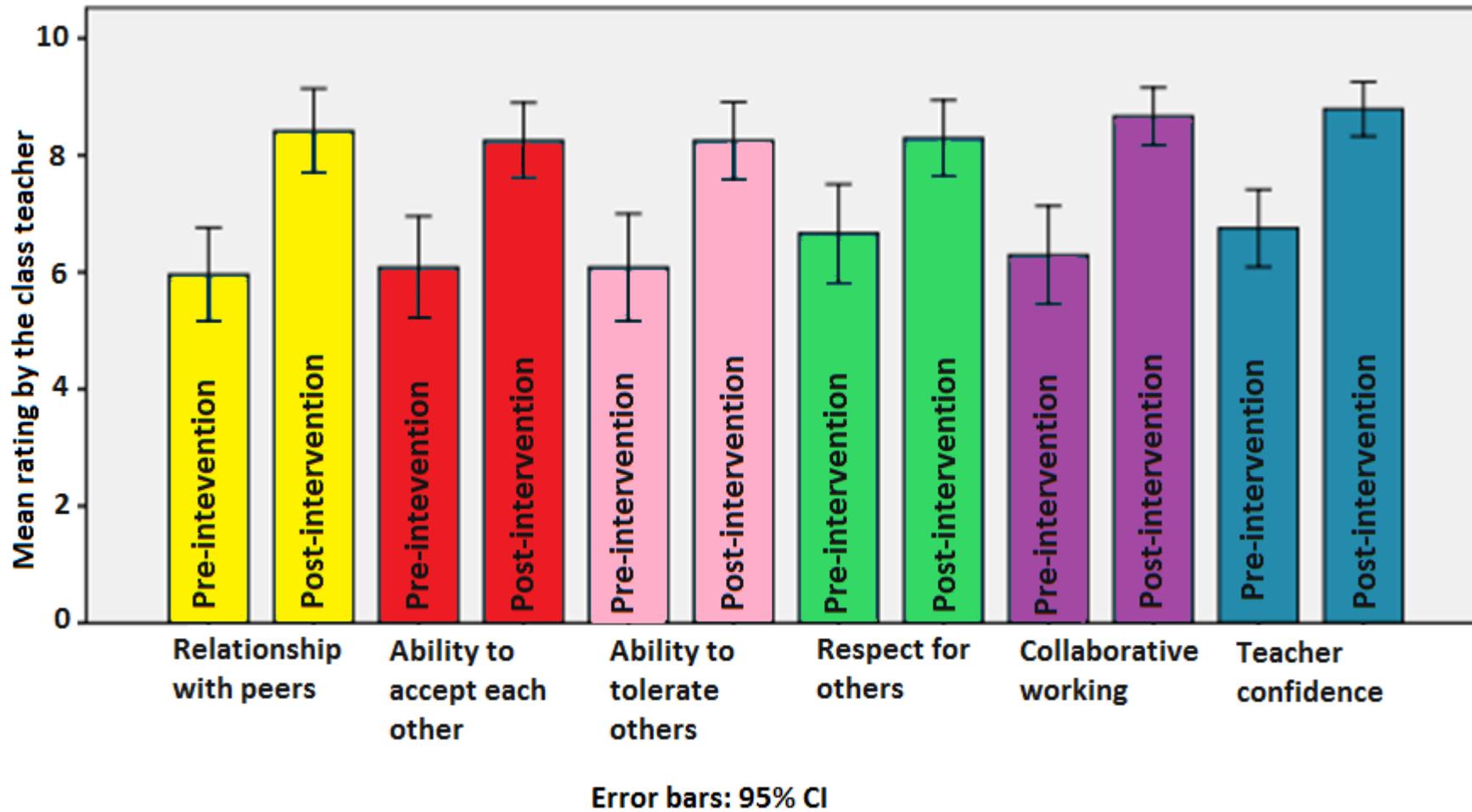
Teacher evaluation questionnaire

The comments from the standard teacher evaluation, devised by Berg and Shilts (2005) in relation to the WOWW approach were analysed. This questionnaire was a standardised WOWW measure (Berg and Shilts, 2005) consisting of five questions which aimed to seek the teacher's thoughts and opinions on the effect of WOWW in relation to classroom behaviours. The questions included evaluations of: peer relationships, tolerance, ability to get on with peers, respect within the class, collaborative working, and teacher confidence. The teacher's response suggested that there was a positive change overall within the class. The CT had stated she had noticed the positive behaviours from the pupils more and that setting class targets was helpful. She felt that by setting goals, the class had a clear focus and understanding of what was expected from them.

However, the CT noted that the use of WOWW would have to be regular to keep children engaged in the process. Suggested improvements from the CT were; having a longer time-scale of WOWW, allowing more pupil say, and visiting at various times for the intervention rather than the same times each session.

Child Focus group

A thematic analysis was employed to evaluate the comments made from the primary 3 children regarding the WOWW intervention. These comments are presented in the mind map below. The thematic analysis adopted the Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks staged approach to examine the data collected. This approach used three analysis stages; reduction or breakdown of text, exploration of text, and summarize thematic networks.

Mind Map
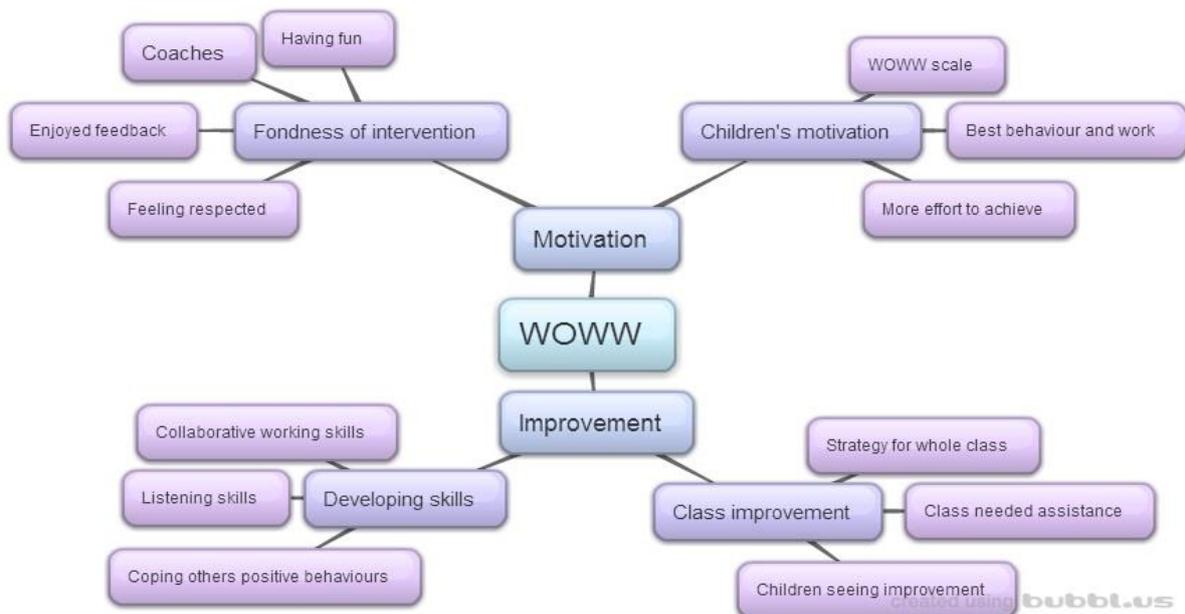
Using this approach, the first step was to code the material and reduce the data. This was done using a coding framework to look at why WOWW was working. Step two was to identify themes by abstracting themes from the coded text and then redefining themes. These basic themes were: listening skills, collaborative working skills, coaches, having fun, class needed assistance, seeing improvement, scale impacts motivation, best work and behaviour, more effort to achieve, copying others' positive behaviours, strategy good for whole class, enjoy feedback, and feeling respected.

Step three was to arrange the themes in small networks and rearrange these into organising themes. Once this was conducted, the researchers deduced the global themes and illustrated these as a thematic network by verifying and refining the networks. The basic themes were refined into organising themes of; developing skills, children's motivation, class improvement and fondness for intervention.

Step four was to describe and explore the thematic networks to help to analyse the text, and stage five was to summarise the thematic network. From the basic themes emerged the concept that the class knew they needed to improve and seek assistance for doing so. WOWW worked effectively as it gave the children motivation to work and behave better as they noticed other children's positive behaviour. An awareness of the WOWW wall freeze allowed the children to see class improvements, and the children enjoyed the positive feedback as it allowed them to feel respected. Therefore, these aspects could be redefined into global themes of; improvement and motivation.

Step six was to interpret patterns and take key conceptual findings in the summaries of each thematic network. The class's need to improve by seeking assistance was identified in the project through a needs analysis with the school. The motivation was a key aspect for the WOWW intervention working as effectively and the coaches and resources added to the children's motivation to work and behaviour better. Through the WOWW process children were able to become aware of and imitate classmates' positive behaviour, this is linked to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The feedback aspect of the project was enjoyed by the children as they stated it made them feel respected. As a whole class approach, this fits in with GIRFEC and its wellbeing indicators of every child being safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included (SHANARRI), as well as demonstrating the children's acknowledgement and enjoyment of a solution focussed way of teaching. The global themes that emerged from the focus group were also: improvement and motivation

Discussion

Summary of results

The findings of this project have indicated that WOWW has a positive influence on the behaviour and relationships of a primary three class. From the differences in ratings seen in the class targets, this suggested that WOWW has increased the primary 3 children's abilities to listen to the whomever is speaking and to work collaboratively with their peers.

The CT has reported WOWW having a positive influence on the behaviour of all the pupils and on her own confidence. The children in the focus group reported that they had noticed a positive difference in the class from the intervention. Thus, the results uphold the research question that the WOWW intervention enabled improvements in the relationships and behaviours of a primary 3 class through working collaboratively with the CT and pupils.

Implications for future research

As this research highlights, the WOWW intervention had a positive effect on the relationships and behaviour of primary 3 children. These results highlight that WOWW could be a useful classroom intervention for future studies in managing classroom behaviour. However, this study was made up from one primary school class and, due to the small sample size of 24 pupils, the findings should be viewed with caution. Further research might use a larger sample size, such as utilising a whole school approach or a specific year group across the authority, to produce more robust results. Similarly, as this study was undertaken with one class, the results might not be generalizable to other classes as other variables such as; teaching style, content, school, authority and culture may impact on the findings.

As this intervention suggested positive results, it may be useful for future research to focus on using WOWW with other children of different ages and backgrounds to explore the influence of other variables. WOWW has the potential to enhance quality of life and emotional wellbeing by enabling a focus on strengths and may be beneficial with vulnerable children of young people. Therefore, future research could perhaps explore a WOWW intervention with pupils who have Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). ASD can present with comorbid conditions including anxiety and depression (Kim, Szatmari, Bryson, Streiner & Wilson, 2000) and, as WOWW incorporates positive psychology, it may be beneficial by moving individuals with ASD away from negativity and help to draw upon their individual strengths from the feedback.

It may also be useful to investigate the impact of WOWW with looked after children (LAC). LAC children are at a greater risk than those children living at home of suffering from mental health conditions (Richardson & Lelliott, 2003). Hence, a positive psychology intervention such as WOWW may be advantageous to this sub-group as it might help them be aware of what is going well and bring a focus on the positives that they are achieving.

Reflections of process and limitations

According to Woolfson (2008) many factors must be taken into consideration when planning an efficient intervention programme, including the strengths of the different systems involved. From the work undertaken the TEPs were able to assess the numerous strengths of the school, for example, the deputy head teacher's dedication to meeting the needs of both the class and the CT, and the school's aim to become more nurturing and solution-oriented in its practice. An essential component of WOWW is to build capacity with teachers to enable them to effectively deal with low-level disruptive behaviours within their classrooms. Therefore, it is essential for EPs to build capacity within schools to enable the staff to meet the various needs of their pupils. However, due to the CT's apprehensions about the intervention the TEPs were unable to determine if they had fulfilled this key aspect as full cooperation is essential in order for teachers to develop their practice.

An additional limitation might have been that, owing to time constraints, the class teacher initially chose the class goals rather than that they were identified or decided by the class. However, the class embraced the goals and so it might be argued that this modification to the process had minimal effect on the outcome. Further research using the class to identify the goals would nonetheless offer further evidence of the importance of this aspect.

Implications for future practice

By completing this project, the TEPs have been able to reflect upon and gain insight into the implications for future practice for EPs within this area. Perhaps for future WOWW interventions a greater emphasis should be placed on the initial needs analysis in terms of the co-operation and willingness from the CT. This could perhaps help ensure the full implementation of the intervention within the classroom environment and therefore enable teachers to have the skills and knowledge to apply their learning within the school. In that case the class teacher may feel more confident, ready and equipped to be able to continue with the principles of WOWW and apply them in different settings and situations.

EPs could further enable greater implementation through capacity building via providing training and ensuring that schools have a designated WOWW 'champion', who would be able to apply the WOWW approach within the school and provide support for teachers applying the intervention in their classrooms. Furthermore, due to the time constraints of this project it was only possible to offer a total of six sessions, two per week, therefore the fidelity of the current study was weakened. A further four sessions might allow better partnership working between the class teacher and EPs as the teacher would have longer to engage with the intervention. Developing relationships between EPs and school staff is essential for effective collaborative working and teacher engagement. In order to aid this, EPs should aim to ensure that future WOWW interventions are carried out in exact accordance with Berg and Shilts' (2005) specifications which state that there should be ten sessions in total, one per week and that the CT and pupils should set the goals collaboratively.

Although there is a gap within the literature regarding the effectiveness of WOWW, this study suggests that WOWW is an effective tool for improving relationships and behaviours within the classroom. However, as noted, these results should take into account that this study modified the length of the intervention and the authors would recommend that teachers adopt the 10 session intervention as suggested by Berg & Shilts (2004), thus perhaps ensuring a longer lasting effect. Therefore EPs could become more involved at the strategic level and help schools implement the WOWW approach in their school behavioural policies and/or in the school improvement plans. In this respect, EPs may be best positioned to explore the longer term impact of WOWW on behaviours and relationships within the classroom by using follow-up reviews.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to utilise a WOWW intervention to improve the relationships and behaviours of a primary 3 class through working collaboratively with the CT and pupils

Literature regarding behaviours within a classroom has demonstrated that low-level disruptive behaviours were most likely to have the greatest negative bearing on the teacher's experience and the greatest impact on class learning time (Black et al., 2012). The WOWW approach is one of the least intrusive and most inclusive ways of helping manage classroom behaviours and relationships because the emphasis is on highlighting and focusing on the skills and positive behaviours which are already present within the classroom. According to Berg and Shilts (2005), by working and focussing on what is already working, positive changes can be built upon to bring greater, longer lasting change.

The results of this research are consistent with others in the area which suggested that utilising a WOWW intervention within the classroom led to improvements in behaviours, relationships, teacher confidence, and the ability of the CT to focus more on the positive behaviours rather than the negative (Berg & Shilts, 2004; Bruce et al., 2009). Furthermore, the results also highlight the importance of utilising a more positive, solution focussed approach in relation to children and young people's learening and behaviour.

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