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Research brief/question

**The use of Outdoor Education
to aid the social development
of pupils with Special Educational Needs.**

In July 24-30 pupils age 13-15 with special educational needs will take part in a residential outdoor education course. This will involve all pupils in team building and problem solving tasks. The focus of the research will look at how well the pupils interact with other pupils, before during and after the weeks course. The outcome of the research will show how the course has enhanced the social development and confidence of pupils. The week is organised by Suffolk County Council, a copy of their material is enclosed (appendix one).

The Spiders Web.
The team plans how they are going to get through

Background information

This section will look at three basic areas:

1. What is outdoor Education?
2. How does special education work (in a nutshell)
3. What is self-esteem?

What is Outdoor Education.

Definition of terms- For the purposes of this paper the terms “outdoor” and “adventure” education will be used interchangeably to mean activities of an outdoor and adventure activity style (although activities may be inside!) like canoeing, climbing, and problem solving tasks.

“Much has been written about the concept of adventure, from a philosophical and romantic point of view. There is now considerable literature tracing the roots of adventure education from Plato and Aristotle to William James, John Dewy, and Alfred Whitehead amongst other” Hopkins, D & Putnam, R (1993) p66. And so why is it that there is a belief that OE can help with the personal development of young people?

Is it that in their everyday life they are too sheltered from situations that will aid development? For some of the youngsters studied, past experiences of life have hardened them so that they are afraid to open up, to communicate with others and to confront their weaknesses.

Mortlock (1984) provides a model of adventure education in four levels:

1. Play- person is working considerably below ability.
2. Adventure- Person is working in their comfort zone, no learning is taking place.
3. Frontier Adventure- person is pushing their limits, learning is taking place, however they are still within the safety limits.
4. Misadventure- Person working over person ability and safety limit, no learning taking place injury likely to occur.

After Mortlock (1984) p22

He suggests that educationalists should provide experiences that lie in level 3 frontier adventure. This can be achieved within safe working limits as most pupils perception of risk is greater than the real risk once all safety precautions have been taken. For example a group rock climbing, the leader is top roping them up a section, there are three good anchors, the rope is sound, all the pupils are wearing harnesses and helmets. The risk of a fall or injury is very slim, yet if it is their first experience most pupils will show signs of fear from falling, which is very unlikely to occur. The real risk is small, the apparent risk is great.

However we must make sure that because as leaders we know the risk to be small that we do not push others to a highly frightened state. Many believe that our risk threshold is personal and differs in everyone in the same way that our sense of humour differs. “.. we must ensure that, when dealing with group of young people, we are not pushing some over their own personal boundaries of risk into unacceptable activities

simply because we, or the rest of the group, do not share the same anxieties or have the same threshold or tolerance to risk and perceived danger.” Gair, N. P. (1997) p48

There is much written about adventure / outdoor education to suggest that it can aid personal growth. Here is not the time to discuss this fuller, nor is there time to discuss the values of risk.

How does special education work (in a nutshell)

What really makes this important is the discussion about the special type of mix of pupil you have at an school for Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD). The numbers of these schools are relatively few, 2 or 3 per county.

The pupils all have a statement of special educational needs (SEN), this is in accordance with the Code of Practice for SEN *DFE (1994)*. Their statement identifies them as having Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) as opposed to Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) or Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD).

“ Children with MLD typically have verbal and performance IQ scores in the 50-70 range, that is two or three standard deviations below the population mean.” Barrett, H. & Jones, D. (1997) p45

MLD covers a wide spectrum of problems. Characteristically they usually they have below average literacy and numeracy skills and other associated problems.

Pupils may:

- ◆ Be low attendees
- ◆ Suffer with a condition or syndrome, autism, epilepsy, hearing impairment, etc
- ◆ Be socially unable to mix with peers
- ◆ Display inappropriate and / or disruptive behaviour
- ◆ Be poorly co-ordinated.
- ◆ Have disadvantaged home circumstances

Pupils may suffer with one or any combination of the above, most do not neatly fit into any one box they are all unique.

And so when trying to work on self-esteem you are presented with a very skewed distribution of young people that you might otherwise expect from a “normal” school. All who bring plenty of personal baggage to any situation.

“Three points can be made with certainty: first, there is a strong association between the presence of MLD and social disadvantage (at least for a large number of children with MLD); second, a substantial proportion of children with MLD have social skills deficits; third, children with MLD constitute a distinctly heterogeneous group.” Barrett, H. & Jones, D. (1997) p45

The sheer logistics of the operation can be very frustrating, because it can take ages to get them all appropriately kitted out for the session, just to find that one has thrown a “wobbly” and gone off round the corner. The next 5 minutes may be spent trying to coax the individual back in, once that has been achieved someone else flies off in the other direction and you are back to square one. Eventually the activity may start.

The expectations in terms of the amount that can be completed should not be too great but the expectations in terms of personal and social development can afford to be generous, for often (personal experience of the author suggests) they will be exceeded.

In summary, a group of pupils with MLD will have a wide range of abilities within the group, but generally they will all display poor social skills.

What is self-esteem?

The Chambers dictionary (1986) gives the following description of self-esteem "Good opinion of ones self, self respect." Kimberly Ann Klint in Miles, C & Priest, S (1990) describes self-esteem as part of self-concept. This being the whole picture that one develops about oneself. She further states that "self-esteem refers to satisfaction and confidence in oneself, while self-confidence connotes confidence in one's abilities and powers to accomplish a goal or task." Klint, K. A. in Miles, C. & Priest, S. (1990) p164. In her work on Self-esteem in young offenders McRoberts, M. (1994) make no reference to a definition of the area and it is left very much to the individual to draw from their own understanding. Yet it seems that self-esteem in clinical terms is part of self-concept.

"Self-concept can be thought of as an organized representation of our theories, attitudes, and beliefs about ourselves." Pressley, M. & McCormick, C. B (1997) p210

Psychologists generally accept that there are many parts to self-concept "Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton (1976), for example, have suggested that the self-concept can be divided into the academic (cognitive), emotional, social and physical self-concepts..." Barrett, H. & Jones, D. (1997) p49. This can lead to the suggestion that pupils with problems in one area of self-concept will not necessarily have problems in other areas.

If as suggested by Barrett, H. & Jones, D. (1997) much of self-concept is developed from a basis of being able to reflect upon the life going on around. Then pupils who have difficulty with stringing a sentence together are going to have problems reflecting on their own self-worth. If the outer voice is confused as in some speech could not the "inner voice" also be confused? Pupils have a tough time coping with the present without reflecting on what has gone by. Certainly from personal experience pupils find it very hard when having to reflect on a session, and say what they did that was good or useful and what they did that was not good or useful. In the same way the author has used a video camera to record the activity of some sessions. When the group views the recording often pupils have a really tough time being faced with what they said or did. You cannot argue "it wasn't me sir" if its clearly recorded on the tape for all to see.

Summary

The terms, Outdoor Education, Moderate Learning Difficulties, and Self-esteem have been defined in terms of this limited paper. Further discussion of these three areas has followed.

- Outdoor education is often used as a vehicle for personal development.
- Perceived risk can be a useful tool to aid personal discovery.
- MLD pupils are a heterogeneous group.
- Poor self-concept is linked to poor cognitive ability to reflect.

School Situation

The school is one for children with Moderate Learning Difficulties (MLD) and caters for approximately 120 pupils between 8-16yrs. The term MLD is a widely used one, at this school it means that there are pupils with autism and at the other end of the scale there are pupils that academically should be able to cope in a mainstream school, but socially they can not cope. At anyone time about 30 pupils are in residence. Some are in residence Monday to Friday others just for or two nights during the week.

The school has three main departments, keystage 2(8-11 yrs), keystage 3 (11-14yrs) and keysatege 4 (14-16yrs).

The pupils for the study are from keystage 3, their ages ranged from 12- 14 yrs.

The school is situated in a medium size town on the coast in East Anglia. The catchment area is very large (approx. 20mile radius) with some pupils travelling from 50 miles.

The author is employed at this school.

Forest Challenge is a five-day activity camp organised by the Outdoor education Organiser for the Local Education Authority (LEA). In 1998 it was based at Thetford Forest. Pupils spent five days and four nights away from home and school. During this time they took part in a variety of team development challenges and adventure activities. These included:

- Spiders web
- Save the Whale
- Over the pole
- stepping stones
- orienteering
- canoeing
- raft building
- mountain biking

and culminated in the "Big Swing" at jump from a tree 20' up.

Sessions included reviewing their success and weakness as a team and individuals.
The programme for the week was as follows::

Day	Early morning	late morning	Afternoon		Evening
Monday		Arrive ice breakers, Star 'o', issue kit, Site quiz	low level challenges, platform swing, Tarzans tyres, Spiders web, big tyre challenge, big game- rounders	tents and bedding	wide game (campsite) dark walk through woods (cross via bridge)
Tuesday	Short site orienteering site Challenges: zip wire, save whale etc	Diary session	cycle track Quieter activities- pond dipping, bark rubbings, news paper, tree hugging!!!!		swim wide game (herbivores and carnivores)
Wednesday	Expedition- whole day Canoe, cycle, walk, Mid day split		Prepare bivi		signalling fluorescent trail night line, Bivi
Thursday	higher challenges, big swing Group1 large 'O' course group2	big swing Group2 large 'O' course group1	Whole group raft race using canoes		Swim, BBQ and camp fire Centipedes, socialising presentations
Friday	Fun time -choice of activities wash up, clean bikes, clear tents, clear campsite return kit.	Complete questionnaire's	review, certificate s etc.		

Methodology

There are very obvious problems with research about feelings and confidence with any pupils. When pupils have learning difficulties with poor language skills the difficulty is increased.

The author felt that some sort of comparative study could be made looking at pupils' perceptions of themselves. As this is an area of feelings an ethnographic (Bell, J. 1993) style of study would need to be used. The author as a member of the staff leading the camp is living in the same environment and doing the same job as the study group. "This form of participation observation enabled the researchers, as far as was possible, to share the same experiences as the subjects and so to understand better why they acted in the way they did" Bell, J. (1993) p10

The study has not followed strict ethnographic lines as two surveys will be used to receive quantitative data about qualitative issues of self-concept.

A before and after study was used to compare the feelings of pupils before and after the camp. The questions are based on McRobertst, Morag, (1994) study of self-esteem in young offenders. They alternate in inference so as to make it difficult for pupils to respond in the same way to each question. A sample copy of the questionnaire follows on the next page.

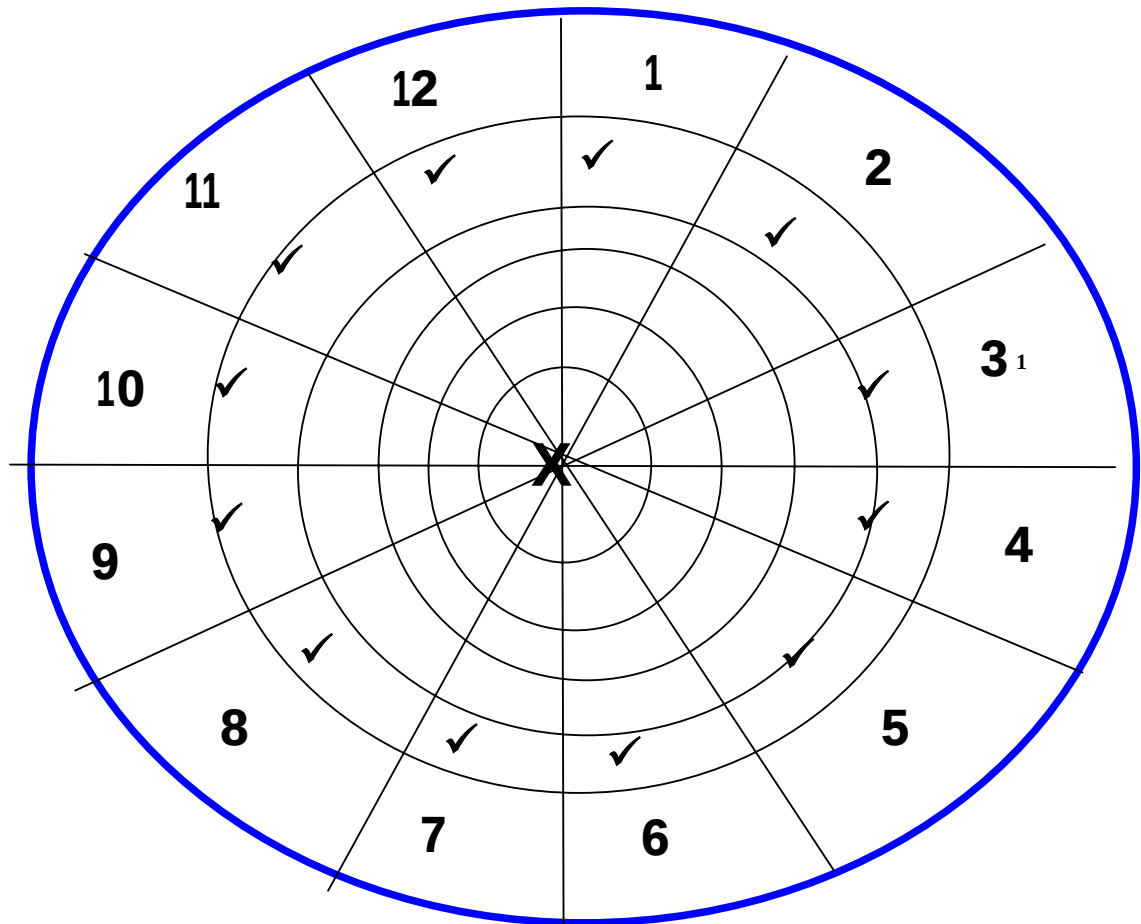
The questionnaire was tested on 3 pupils from the same age group who were not attending the camp, but whom had recently had an outdoor education experience that could be used as a basis for the questions.

Pupils where interviewed on a one to one basis, this was important to make sure that pupils understood the question and how to fill in the chart accordingly. Pupils coloured in the chart depending on how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. The interviews were taped, this was especially useful when re-interviewing after the camp as it meant that the reasoning behind the answers could be recorded.

From the web scores have been made based on how positive the answer was, 5 points for a positive answer, 0 points for a completely negative one and increments in between. This has meant that the scores of before and after can be compared to give a numerical score of change during Forest Challenge.

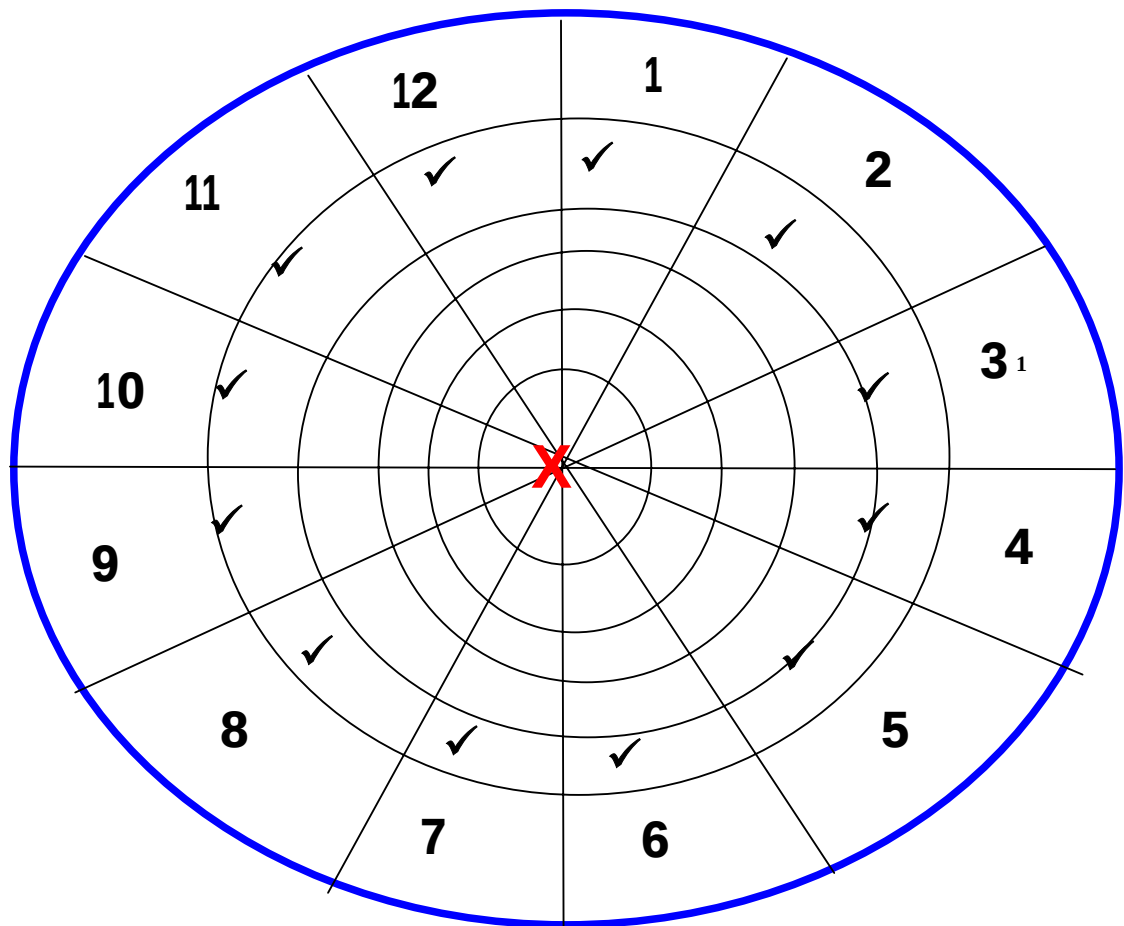
Questions f

1. I am lonely
2. I don't have many friends
3. I feel I am able to do most things well
4. I break a lot of rules
5. I am a success
6. I feel sad
7. I am a leader
8. I lose my temper
9. I am an average sort of a person
10. I am worried and on edge
11. I trust people
12. I have not done much to be proud of



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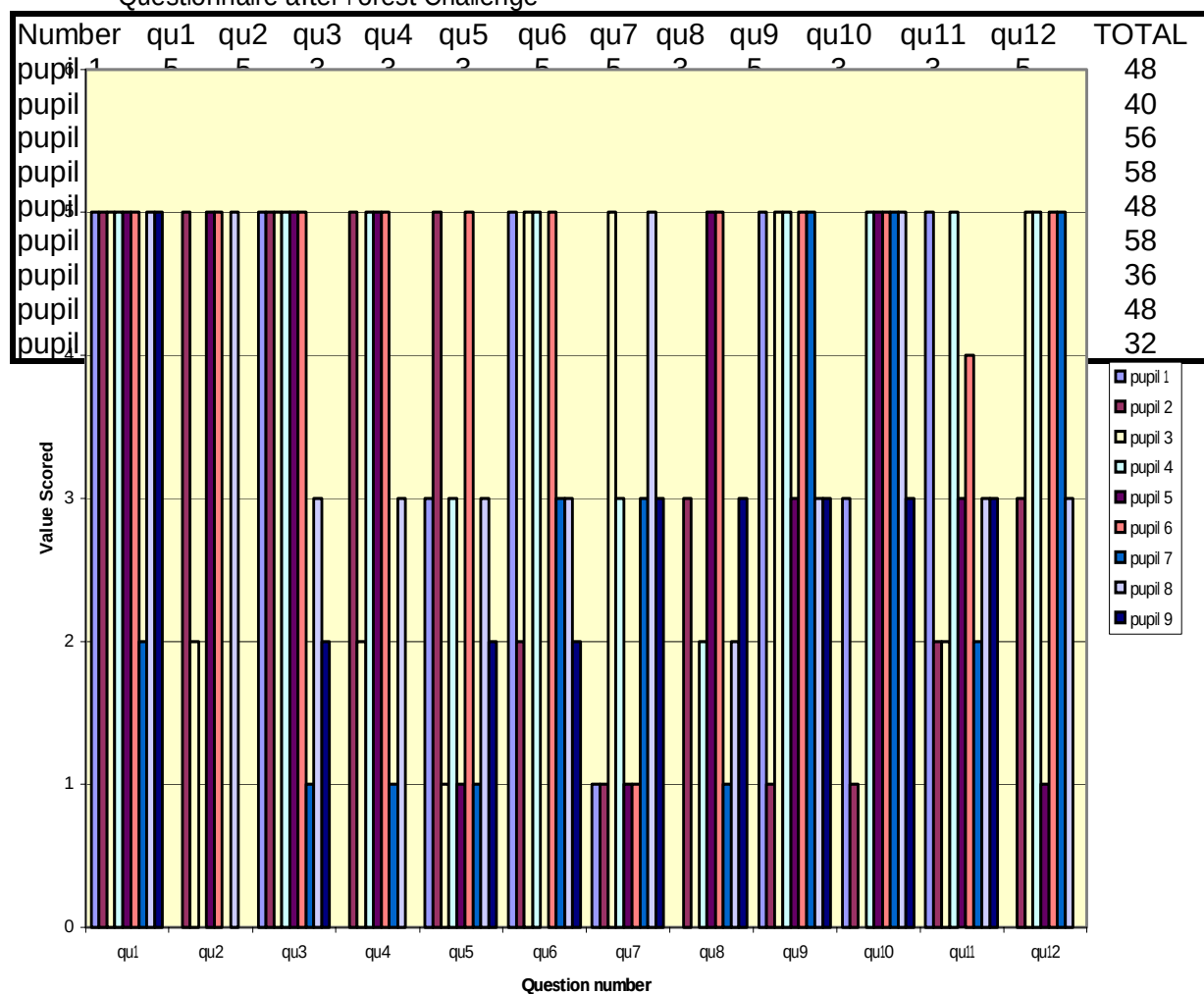
Any other comment.

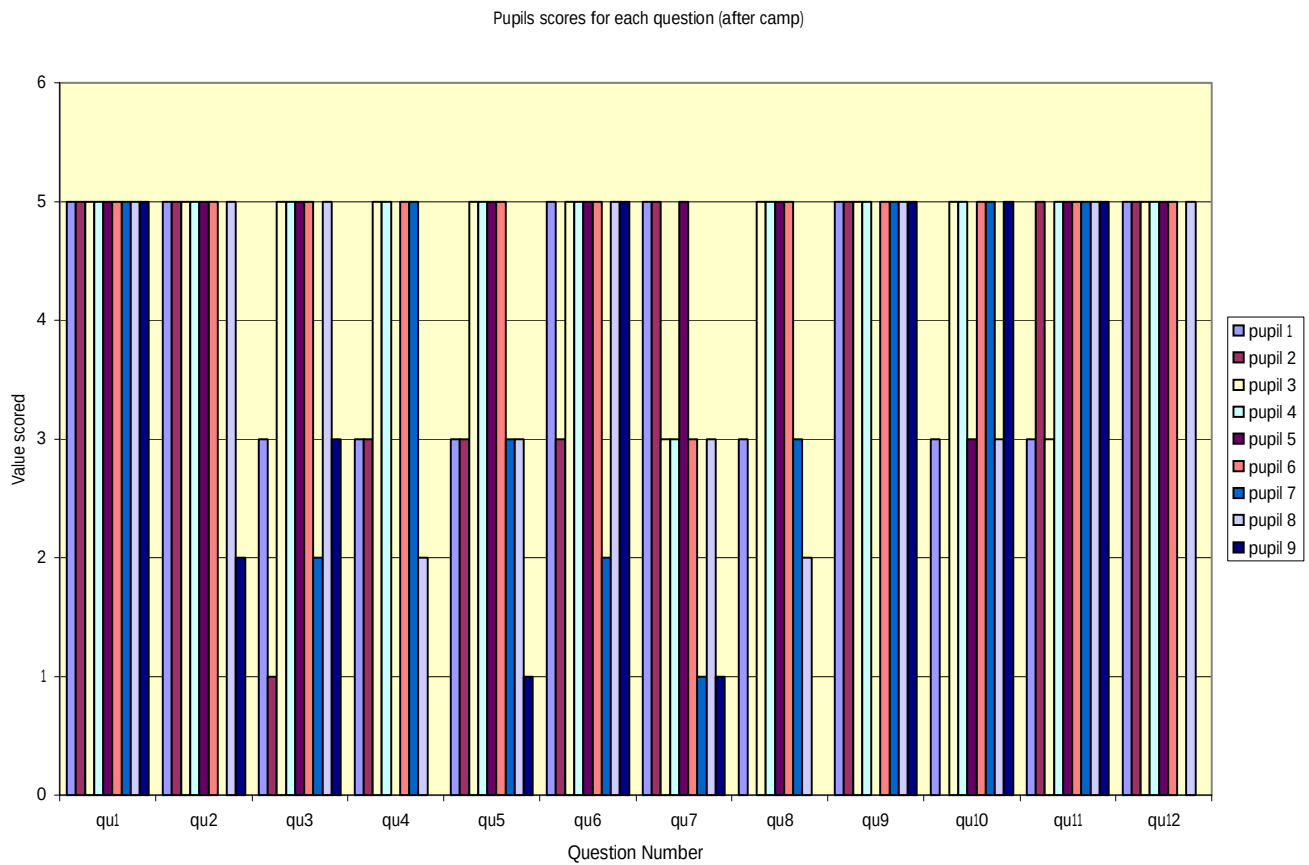
Results

Questionnaire before Forest Challenge

Number	qu1	qu2	qu3	qu4	qu5	qu6	qu7	qu8	qu9	qu10	qu11	qu12	TOTAL
pupil 1	5	0	5	0	3	5	1	0	5	3	5	0	32
pupil 2	5	5	5	5	5	2	1	3	1	1	2	3	38
pupil 3	5	2	5	2	1	5	5	0	5	0	2	5	37
pupil 4	5	0	5	5	3	5	3	2	5	5	5	5	48
pupil 5	5	5	5	5	1	0	1	5	3	5	3	1	39
pupil 6	5	5	5	5	5	5	1	5	5	5	4	5	55
pupil 7	2	0	1	1	1	3	3	1	5	5	2	5	29
pupil 8	5	5	3	3	3	3	5	2	3	5	3	3	43
pupil 9	5	0	2	0	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	0	26

Questionnaire after Forest Challenge
Pupil scores for each question (before camp)





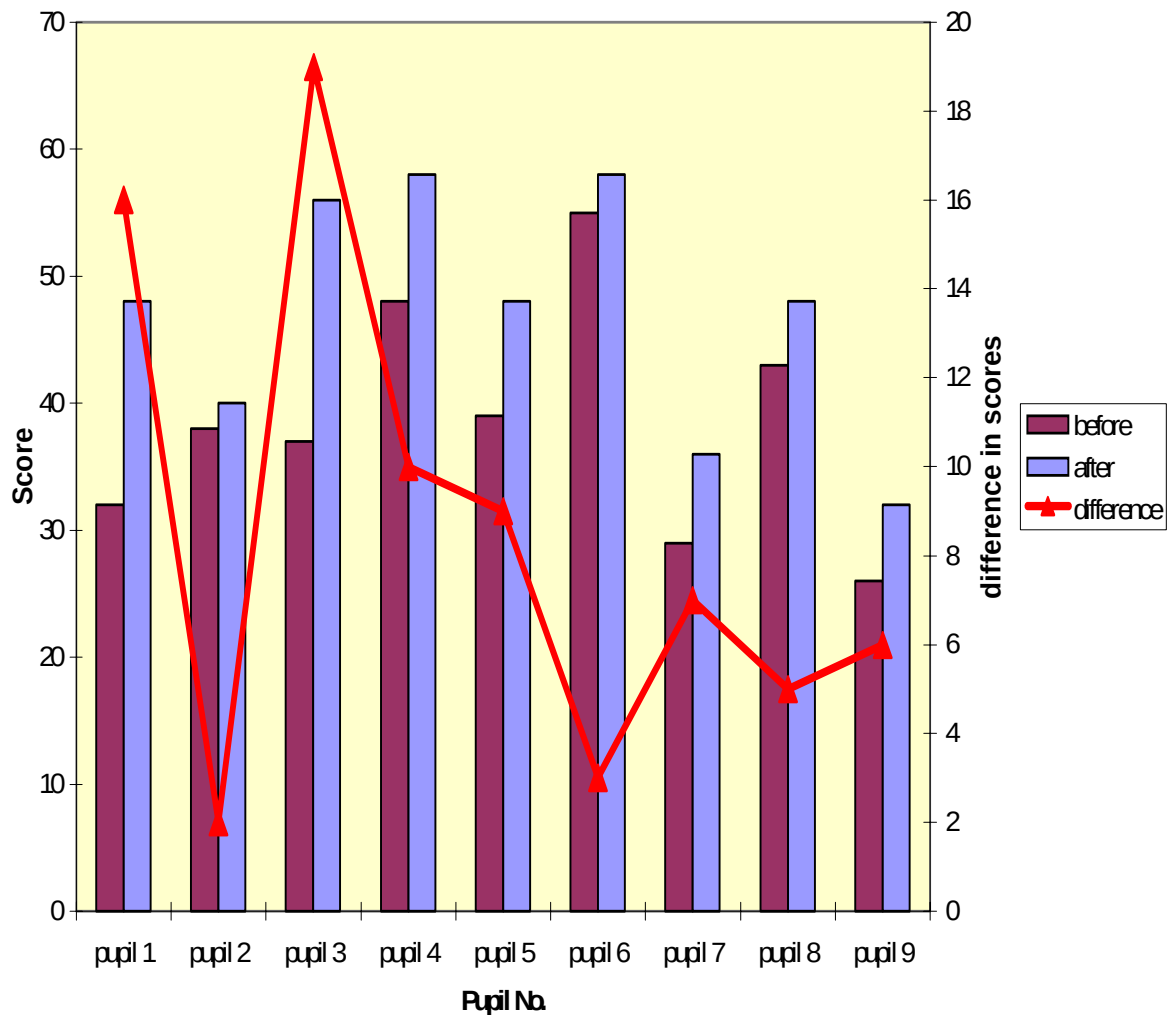
Comparing both scores

Number	before	after	difference
pupil 1	32	48	16
pupil 2	38	40	2
pupil 3	37	56	19
pupil 4	48	58	10
pupil 5	39	48	9
pupil 6	55	58	3
pupil 7	29	36	7
pupil 8	43	48	5
pupil 9	26	32	6

There is not enough data to use a statistical test, however the standard deviation, average, and median are given.

Standard deviation	5.73
Average	8.56
Median	7.00

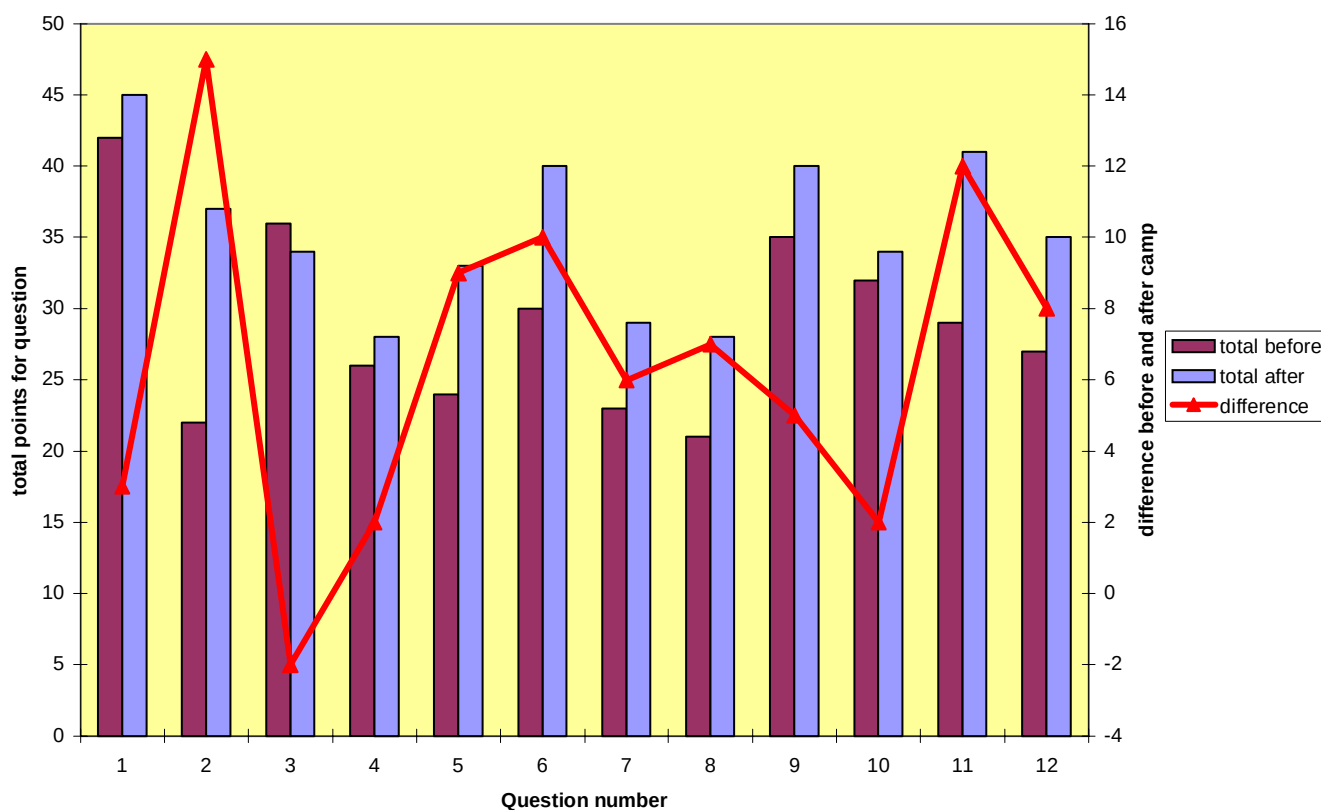
Comparing scores of before and after



Results for each question

Question No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Total
total before	42	22	36	26	24	30	23	21	35	32	29	27	347
total after	45	37	34	28	33	40	29	28	40	34	41	35	424
difference	3	15	-2	2	9	10	6	7	5	2	12	8	77

Totals for each individual question



Conclusion

The key points from the results have been identified as follows:

- for all pupils there was an increase in self-esteem during the week.
- the increase in self esteem was greatest for those who started off with a lower self-esteem.
- out of the total 77 points that moved:
 - 15 were for question 2
 - 12 were for question 11
 - 10 were for question 6
 - question 3 got a negative difference of 2

For all the pupils the score after the camp were higher than those before the camp. This shows an increase of self-esteem/ self-concept during the week.

When the totals for each question before and after the camp are compared it can be seen that the pupils:

- perceived having more friends after the camp (question 2)
- had greater trust in other people (question 11)
- and did not feel so sad (question 6)
- felt that they were a success (question 5)

Friends

The camp was a joint camp with another Special MLD school. The pupils in most cases did not know anyone from the other school. It is reasonable to expect that during the course of a week's residential camp under canvas that friendship groups would develop. It is also true to say that the special school community is a small one and most pupils fit into the friendship groups on the playground. Therefore it was not expected that there would be a rise in the number of friends pupils perceive as having. The rise must be because pupils had made new friends in challenging circumstances.

Trust

Most pupils stated that they trusted people more as a result of the camp. This was pursued verbally during the final interview. Mainly what had grown was pupils trust in others adults. This must surely be because there were numerous occasions when the pupils depended on the adults for their survival, eg showing them how to make a bivi, making sure their harness was secure and tied to the rope correctly etc. In addition they could see how hard the adults on the site were working and that they joined in all the activities. The author has felt the knock effect from the pupils once back at school. The respect for the author as a person seemed to have grown.

Happiness

This, as trust and achievement is part of self-concept. Pupils had had an enjoyable week. It is strange that at the time most had a moan about some aspect of the camp and yet on reflection they all stated how much they had enjoyed the week. This is perhaps part of human nature. Happiness is a good measure of self-concept because

you usually feel happy when you have achieved something, feel secure, and have friends.

Success

Success and/ or achievement are some of the biggest things that special schools try to develop. The week focused on all pupils achieving in both physical terms of completing tasks and social interaction with peers. It usually takes a little longer and a lot more patience from the leader but success can be found. "Unfortunately, for many children with MLD in our society, that time is not allowed and there is an increasing recognition and concern..." Barrett, H. & Jones, D. in Varma, V (Ed.) (1997) p56

Question 3 and the negative balance

Two pupils had negative experiences on the last day of the camp, which was very unfortunate.

One pupil did not wish to complete the "Big Swing" but was persuaded to go to the platform for a photograph, once the photo had been taken every effort was made to persuade the pupil to take the swing. The pupil had quite a panic attack and was escorted off the platform. As all the other pupils completed the swing this seemed to leave quite a mark on the pupil.

The second pupil seemed to be suffering from "fridayitis" and displayed inappropriate and disruptive behaviour and so was separated from the rest of the group.

The negative score for question 3 can be directly attributed to these two pupils.

Evaluation

There are two key areas that must be discussed here:

1. Possible sources of error
2. Changes that would be made if the work were to be completed again.
3. Areas to develop from this work.

Sources of error

The small number of pupils observed could lead to unrealistic generalisations being made about a population. If more results could be obtained so that statistical analysis could state the use of such finding in relation to the population of MLD pupils nationally. This could be obtained using results from a number of years and represents a longer-term project.

The study has attempted to give some sort of numerical order to an ethnographic type of study looking at pupil's feelings and thoughts. This together with the low numbers could give rise to inaccuracies if to wider generalisations are formed.

Completing the questionnaires

Although pupils were interviewed separately on both occasions it is possible that they did not express their true feelings on the questionnaire. This could be due to a lack of understanding about what they were being asked to do. The information on MLD states how difficult pupils find it to reflect and that is the key skill involved in completing the questionnaire.

To help pupils understand the questionnaire, the author verbally explained anything they did not understand. This could lead to error if pupils inferred different meaning to a question compared with other pupils.

The help to clarify pupils understanding of the questionnaire could have possibly misled pupils. As the author is a member of staff at the school pupils could have put an answer that they thought would be pleasing to the author, or similarly displeasing. The interviews were taped so that this could be compared. It is the author's opinion that this had little effect on the results.

Changes that would be made if the work were to be completed again.

- Try to use a larger number of pupils, if as in Forest Challenge two schools are brought together, use pupils from both schools.
- Test more fully the phrasing and wording of questions prior to their use.
- Try to clearly focus questions on differing aspects of self-concept.

Areas to develop from this work.

- Identify and if needed develop simple methods of reflection that can be differentiated for the variability of a group, but that progress to develop pupils' skills in this area.
- Identify methods of reflection that concentrate on specific areas of self-concept.
- Identify/ develop studies focusing on the ability of pupils to reflect and the impact this has on self-concept.
- Does a residential experience have a greater effect on self-concept than the same amount of time spread out over a year as part of an ongoing programme?

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The use of Outdoor Education to aid the development of pupils with Special Educational Needs.

By
Lawrence
Chapman