

Working with families helps me break down barriers to learning by Sue Richards-Gray



I started being interested in how people learn way back when I was at secondary school myself, in Wolverhampton. I was lucky enough to find learning easy but I noticed some of my friends struggled. What stops some people from learning? It was a question I was always asking. When I was in the sixth form, I volunteered in a special school and was interested in how you can get people to do more if you build a relationship with them.

I went to university in Cardiff and studied English literature. Then I did a PGCE at what is now Brunel University in London, I trained as a middle school teacher, thinking I could be more creative in a primary school but wanted to retain my subject specialism.

My first job was in a village primary school in Essex called Churchgate, a small community school where most of the children felt safe, confident and had family backing. Then I did voluntary service in Sarawak, Borneo. I taught English in a secondary school. Each class had 50 children, mostly they lived too far away to come in every day, so they would board in very basic accommodation term time. I managed to build up relationships with many of their families, even visiting their homes despite many of them being over eight hours walk away.

When I came home I got offered a job in Wolverhampton teaching what were then known as remedial classes. It was not a happy place, the children were put into that 'sink' class regardless of their specific difficulty or their year group. I taught them maths, English, history, and geography. They didn't want to be there and I'm not sure I did either.

That's when I moved to Elm Court, a special school in south London. I became early years coordinator for children aged five to eight. The children had a wide range of special needs. I was team teaching 14 children, and everything came back to making a difference to the individual; who had a problem learning and how could I help?

I wanted to do further training in understanding children's behaviour and looked at courses and came upon the Caspari Foundation course for teachers and educational psychologists. I had to be in therapy myself and study a baby from newborn to one year and an older child every week of their life for a year. The school supported me, I did it in the evening and weekends and got one afternoon off a week to do the clinical work.

My training and experience changed the way I taught. I was thinking about the whole child and where they were coming from and what their experience was. I became particularly interested in the notion of attachment developed by John Bowlby and ideas of containment. This is basically the idea that if you feel safe you can take risks and learn but if you don't it's hard to learn; you're too busy looking over your shoulder to see what's coming at you. It's the role of a parent to make their child feel safe, but what if parents aren't able to do that?

I've worked a lot with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) over the years in schools and realised some families don't like the idea of it because they think it labels them or their child as "mad". They don't turn up to CAMHS appointments which can be miles away. At Elm Court we decided to set up a one stop shop where parents could come into the school for therapy once a month and meet and talk. They could refer themselves or teachers could advise them to come if their children had emotional or social blocks to learning – it was a real success.

Now I work as a therapist with Schools and Family Works. What we do in schools is close to family therapy based on the Marlborough model of multi-family therapy groups which were originally set up to help families with anorexia and schizophrenia - but in an educational setting.

We work with families a group to help children who have blocks to learning. This might be children who are very withdrawn or particularly disruptive. I go into several different schools and work with a member of the senior management team, as well as parents and children from an average of eight families, so it's quite a big group. All the family is welcome but very often it's the mother and the child. We meet once a week for two hours in school. It's structured and it's safe.

As a therapist I listen and observe: is there a power imbalance? Is the child screaming at the parent or vice versa? We base our work on big targets such as we would like to see 'Jenny' functioning in class, or going to bed and getting up on time for school or being able to talk to friends and not hit them. We play structured games. Parents start to be a resource for their children and for each other. I see the therapy as a bridge for families and schools. Teachers don't have time to spend with families in this way to find the space to breathe, to grow. Usually parents are called into school when something extra terrible happens. But to get in there before, when families aren't coping, is very important.

I think families are crucial for learning. That's the conclusion I've reached through my chequered career. A child needs a whole package and a school needs awareness of the whole child - that includes their families - they don't come on their own. If there's damage with the family's relationships that has an effect on the child and it goes in circles.

I feel most comfortable with my new role because I know that this is really making a difference and that education doesn't exist in a vacuum. I think there's a danger that we separate education too much from real life and that really concerns me. If I'd known all this when I was teaching full time it would have helped me immeasurably.

**ALL THE QUESTIONS IN THIS EXAM
MUST BE ANSWERED IN ENGLISH**

1ª QUESTÃO

USE YOUR OWN WORDS to answer the following questions according to the text in complete sentences. DO NOT COPY FROM THE TEXT! Answers which are literally transcribed from the text will NOT be considered.

1. What made Sue Richards-Gray decide to study in order to become a middle school teacher?

2. Why was Sue unsuccessful in her job in Wolverhampton?

3. What made Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) more successful at Elm Court?

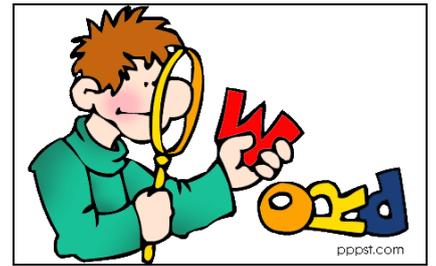
4. Which conclusion did Sue reach through her experience as an educator?

5. What has always been Sue's focus throughout her career?

2ª QUESTÃO

Complete the following sentences using the words below taken from the text.

be in therapy – set up – the role of – stop them from –
board in – turn up – build up – regardless of –
one stop shop – looking over



1. The kid's parents could never _____ misbehaving.
2. Young people are always eager to _____ their own business.
3. After years of marriage, they managed to _____ a connection with their in-laws.
4. She would make appointments to see a doctor, but would never _____.
5. He accepted the job right away, _____ salary or working conditions.

3ª QUESTÃO

Use your own words so as to complete the conversation between Sue Richards-Gray (S) and an interviewer (I), while she is applying for a job.



1. (I): _____?
(S): I studied English literature at Cardiff University.
2. (I): What kind of experience did you have abroad?
(S): _____.
3. (I): Where did you receive your psychology training?
(S): _____.
4. (I): _____?
(S): Well, I had to do it in the evenings and weekends.
5. (I): _____?
(S): I hope to establish a bridge for families and schools.

4ª QUESTÃO

Use your own words so as to complete the following sentences about Sue Richards-Grey.



1. Even though Sue really loves her profession, she _____
_____.
2. Sue thinks parents must come to schools from time to time, otherwise, _____
_____.
3. By the time Sue turns 50 years old, she _____
_____.
4. Sue decided that, rather than changing careers, she _____
_____.
5. As long as her school keeps supporting her, Sue _____
_____.

5ª QUESTÃO

Number the sentences below from 1 to 6 in the correct order so as to create a coherent paragraph. The first sentence is already numbered for you.

Educational therapy



- () This form of therapy offers a wide range of intensive interventions that are designed to remediate learning problems.
- () The difference between traditional tutoring and educational therapy is dramatic.
- () The therapy helps the student strengthen the ability to learn.
- () The student engages in activities that help academics as well as teach processing, focusing, and memory skills.
- () Such interventions are individualized and unique to the specific learner.
- (1) Educational Therapy is a form of therapy used to treat individuals with learning differences, disabilities, and challenges.

(Disponível em: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Educational_therapy>. Acesso em: 5 set. 2013 – Adaptado).