

Reflections from an independent teacher of Paws b

CASE STUDY SUMMARY

School:	Various
Location:	Liverpool & East Lancs
School Type:	Various
MiSP Curriculum:	Paws b
Age Group/s:	Primary
Author:	Nicky Beattie
Role:	Independent Teacher
Issue/s Addressed:	SEN, inclusion, support

I'm not sure just when **Paws b** first came into my conscious awareness, but a bell really rang for me after a particularly challenging visit to a highly inclusive inner city primary school. The Deputy Head Teacher said "What we could do with here is something like **Paws b**."

I've been working with children and young people all my life and my teaching history was predominantly with those children at risk of, or currently excluded from, the mainstream of education. Since 2000 I have been working independently to support schools and children's settings with developing strategic approaches to inclusive practice, with a particular focus on those children who are on the SEN register. My work can include anything from whole staff training on Communication and Restorative Practices to

one-to-one work with individual children and, since early 2019, the **Paws b** curriculum.

To be honest, as a sole trader, I was curious about developing an additional income stream which was congruent with my values and beliefs, and which would complement the work I was already doing, and fit well in settings where I was already established as well as in those where I wasn't already known.

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"What's **Paws b**?" was my reply to the DHT that afternoon, and my journey began. I Googled MiSP, had a tootle around the website, became really excited by what I saw and decided to make the investment of time and money to embark upon my training.

I enrolled for the eight-week online version of **.begin**, already considering myself to be a mindful person. Well, I practiced yoga twice a week and had my fair share of click-and-play mindful-type stuff so I wasn't sure why I needed to do the eight weeks, but it was part of the learning journey so I couldn't argue.

I wasn't prepared for the fascinating and joyful experience which was about to unfold. "How can this possibly work via Zoom?" I remember thinking as I logged on for that first session. And yet, with careful, kind and skilful teaching from MiSP's Faiy Rushton I

progressed through the activities and tutorials and my own exploration of sitting practice began. I started to understand just why I would need to wait two to three months (which was potentially the really frustrating part) in order to develop my practice before embarking upon further training.

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I attended my Teach Paws b training in Liverpool and was guided through the sessions by MiSP's amazing teachers Kate Norfolk and Emma Naisbett. The group was wonderful and diverse and a real opportunity to celebrate and share. Some of us were freelance and others teachers in a school or group of schools. We are all still in contact now through a group chat and share our successes and support each other with practicalities and encouragement ... and useful inside information such as where to source Weebles or Snowglobes. A great source of continuing support for my own practice as it develops, is the opportunity to take part in the monthly online sits which are led by MiSP's Ben Chalwin. I always look forward to getting together with others as a group, (working freelance can be a bit lonely at times). Having the chance to be skillfully guided and to share observations and experiences as well as a chuckle or two is hugely nourishing.

Once the training was complete I set about generating interest (which wasn't that difficult as pretty much everyone I come across within education values the mental health and wellbeing of children and staff alike). It's the funding part though. That's the biggest challenge. Don't get me started ...

I decided to offer the whole course for free to Y6 in a school where I was already well established with my other work, and which I knew to be part of a larger network. There were benefits here for everyone and it gave me an invaluable opportunity to 'cut my teeth' whilst providing the programme where it was much needed. It turned out to be a win-win. I also practiced each lesson at home using my ever-patient husband Steve who alternated, with ease, between being an entire Y6 class and a Y4 group.

It had been a little over 12 months since that original conversation with the DHT. Training to **Teach Paws b** and the subsequent planning and logistics make for a bit of a 'slow burn' if you work for yourself. I found that by remaining mindful and applying all I'd learnt to the setting up, designing of leaflets, creating contacts, preparing resources, doing some stuff for free in the hope that there will be 'buy in', has all paid off in ways that are immeasurably more than purely financial (although my bills still need to be paid!)

I couldn't know at the outset that the right schools would come to me in just the right way at the just right time, and that I would be delivering to more schools and more children than I anticipated. It's usually by word of mouth and sometimes through publicity that schools find me or I find them.

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What I could never have possibly anticipated are some of the insights and observations of the children. I recently worked with a class in which one child has physical ticks which can affect their capacity to focus in class and also impacts upon the quality of their friendships. After a lesson one day they said "Nicky. When we were doing our **Paws b** today I wasn't ticking ... I tried it yesterday lunchtime and it helped me to stop ticking ... when I do a **Paws b**, it feels like I'm at home and I don't tick at home."

Another child last year around Mother's Day told me, "I'm going to give my mum a mindful hug and let my insula really notice ... so my hippocampus can remember what she feels like for ever."

... oh yes, and there's the ability to remain calm and focused during SATs too - mustn't forget that.