

‘Support for Children and Young People with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties: The Perspectives of Children, Young People, Families and Practitioners’

Submitted by **Sally Penna Bray**, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational, Child and Community Psychology May 2010.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signed:

Overview of thesis

This small scale study was informed by Symbolic Interactionism and Interpretivist Analysis and was carried out in a county within the south of England, referred to as 'Southshire'. File searches and questionnaires were employed to gather contextual data. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather participant views and thematic analysis was used to analyse these interviews.

This was a two part study consisting of two papers. The participants in Paper one of the study were young people with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and their parents or carers. Paper one focussed on the participants' views and experiences of mainstream and special education after they had experienced both. The views of the special school keyworker were also sought in order to improve understanding of the support and barriers that exist for young people and families. Views were elicited through individual semi-structured interviews which were analysed qualitatively using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006). To gain contextual information within the county and to help in the process of selecting participants, the files of fifty young people identified as experiencing BESD were searched and analysed and relevant information was recorded.

Paper two focussed on practitioners' experiences of supporting young people with BESD. An electronic questionnaire was sent to practitioners from a wide range of agencies and collected qualitative and quantitative data which informed the researcher of the local context and gave insights into practitioner views. Five practitioners were invited to take part in individual semi-structured interviews to explore their views on supporting young people with BESD. Interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis approach. Findings from papers one and two were assimilated and the implications for Educational Psychology practice were considered.

The following research aims were addressed:

1. To improve our understanding of the support and barriers experienced by children and young people with BESD in a Local Authority
2. To develop a better understanding of how Educational Psychologists can support children and young people experiencing BESD, their parents, carers and other practitioners.

Summary of findings

The key finding within Paper 1 was that both the young people and parents/carers reported experiences that were contrary to the intentions of current inclusion policy. Broadly, negative

experiences were reported at mainstream school and positive experiences were reported while at special school for BESD. Participants felt that they had been treated negatively by mainstream practitioners in particular and that young people had been denied access to the curriculum and activities within mainstream school. Additionally the young people had experienced bullying at mainstream school and the bullying had been ignored or the young people themselves had been perceived as the bully despite being the victim. Perceptions of and attitudes towards the 'unseen' disability of BESD were also referred to and parents and carers reported feeling isolated while their child was attending mainstream education.

The key finding within Paper 2 was that practitioners also reported experiences that were contrary to the intentions of the current inclusion policy. They reported many challenges that are faced by practitioners when trying to include young people with BESD in mainstream schools, and when supporting them within the Local Authority. Participants felt that negative attitudes towards BESD exist within mainstream schools, that working with other agencies to support young people with BESD is difficult, that parental involvement is key, but not always possible and that elements within the government and Local Authority context conflict with the inclusion agenda and with meeting children's needs.

Significance and Contribution

Through a design informed by Symbolic Interactionism and Interpretivist Analysis the participants authentic voices have been heard in order to deepen our understanding of their experiences. Previous research has explored the views and experiences of young people, families and practitioners; however this is the first time that they have been considered together sufficiently in order to identify shared views. Additionally, young people, families and keyworkers views were sought at a specific point within the young person's journey - after they had attended both mainstream school and special school. Furthermore experiences of the transition from mainstream school to special school were considered.

The findings within this study suggest that the application of a simple solution (i.e. including young people with BESD in mainstream schools) to a complex problem (the social inclusion of young people with BESD), has had a negative impact. In fact the findings seem to imply that the inclusion of young people with BESD within mainstream schools has actually created the social exclusion that inclusion was designed to alleviate. The evidence for this is present within the findings within this study.

In relation to BESD, the medical model has been criticised for individualising the 'problem', however if an educational model view of BESD is taken we are led to consider that the education system itself

is imperfect. Therefore taking the educational model approach and applying the simple solution of ‘inclusion’ to the very complex problem of social inclusion highlights many areas of difficulty. These areas of difficulty have been outlined in the findings of this study and of previous studies. The identified issues are entrenched within the education system and can only be tackled through an examination of the system itself. The reported experiences of inclusion are more nuanced than the powerful message my data suggests, therefore it is essential to note that this study is not simply suggesting that inclusion is ‘negative’ or ‘bad’ and that special school is ‘positive’ or ‘good’ – a much more complex picture has been presented.

The complexities that have been highlighted within this study have also been considered alongside the role of the Educational Psychologist and how they can facilitate inclusion and essentially social inclusion through their work with young people, families and practitioners. As a result of the findings, it has been suggested that further research should focus on examining the education system and in particular the dichotomy between the inclusion agenda and results centred teaching and the specialist provision for BESD that exists since the implementation of the inclusion agenda and whether it is meeting the needs of young people. Further research may also focus on whether the case presented for young people with BESD in this study is similar for young people with other types of SEN. This further research on how inclusion policy translates into practice will be particularly pertinent as new government policies and agendas unfold.

Table of Contents

Paper 1

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Abstract | Pg 9 |
| Section 1: Introduction | Pg 11 |
| Section 2: Literature Review | Pg 14 |
| Section 3: Methodology | Pg 19 |
| Section 4: Analysis | Pg 24 |
| Section 5: Discussion | Pg 40 |

| | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| References | Pg 48 |
|-------------------|--------------|

Paper 2

Contents

| | |
|---|--------------|
| Abstract | Pg 55 |
| Section 1: Introduction | Pg 57 |
| Section 2: Literature Review | Pg 61 |
| Section 3: Methodology | Pg 66 |
| Section 4: Analysis | Pg 70 |
| Section 5: Discussion | Pg 80 |
| Section 6: Synthesising findings from Papers 1 and 2 | Pg85 |
| References | Pg 91 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Table 1 Participants | Pg 21 |
| Table 2 Darren case study | Pg 24 |
| Table 3 Jake case study | Pg 28 |
| Table 4 Simon case study | Pg 30 |
| Table 5 Kai case study | Pg 34 |
| Table 6 Shared case study themes | Pg 38 |
| Table 7 Questionnaire respondents | Pg 67 |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Table 8 Semi-structured interview participants | Pg 68 |
| Table 9 Kathryn's themes | Pg 70 |
| Table 10 Julie's themes | Pg 72 |
| Table 11 Fleur's themes | Pg 74 |
| Table 12 Kiera's themes | Pg 75 |
| Table 13 Jasmin's themes | Pg 76 |
| Table 14 Shared practitioner themes | Pg 78 |
| Table 15 Key findings | Pg 85 |
| Table 16 Coleridge School | Pg 99 |
| Table 17 Elliot School | Pg 100 |
| Table 18 Golding School | Pg 101 |
| Table 19 Goudge School | Pg 101 |
| Table 20 Kingsley School | Pg 102 |
| Table 21 Clarke School | Pg 103 |
| Table 22 Seeking and listening to the views of children and parents/carers | Pg 153 |
| Table 23 Working with other agencies, services and provision | Pg 154 |

List of Appendices

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Appendix 1 File search findings | Pg 99 |
| Appendix 2 Leaflet for children | Pg 104 |
| Appendix 3 Parent/Carer interview schedule | Pg 105 |
| Appendix 4 Child interview schedule | Pg 107 |

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Appendix 5 Keyworker interview schedule | Pg 109 |
| Appendix 6 Simon case study initial coding thoughts | Pg 110 |
| Appendix 7 Simon's parent interview extract with line by line coding | Pg 111 |
| Appendix 8 Simon interview extract with line by line coding | Pg 126 |
| Appendix 9 Simon's keyworker interview extract with line by line coding | Pg 134 |
| Appendix 10 Simon parent's coding sample | Pg 139 |
| Appendix 11 Simon's coding sample | Pg 140 |
| Appendix 12 Simon's keyworker coding sample | Pg 141 |
| Appendix 13 Simon's parent thematic map | Pg 142 |
| Appendix 14 Simon's thematic map | Pg 143 |
| Appendix 15 Simon's keyworker thematic map | Pg 144 |
| Appendix 16 Practitioner questionnaire | Pg 145 |
| Appendix 17 Summary of questionnaire responses | Pg 150 |
| Appendix 18 Practitioner interview schedule | Pg 159 |
| Appendix 19 Initial coding thoughts for Julie | Pg 160 |
| Appendix 20 Interview extract for Julie and line by line coding | Pg 161 |
| Appendix 21 Interview coding sample for Julie | Pg 168 |
| Appendix 22 Thematic map for Julie | Pg 169 |
| Appendix 23 University ethics approval | Pg 170 |
| Appendix 24 Literature Review | Pg 172 |