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**An exploratory study of the systems of support to help young males with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties to remain in post 16 Education**

Submitted by Lorraine Mary O'Sullivan to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational, Child and Community Psychology, September, 2011.

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(Signature) .....  
Lorraine O'Sullivan

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## **Paper 1 An exploratory study of the systems of support to help young males with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties to remain in post 16 Education**

### **Abstract**

This paper is positioned within a co-operative inquiry interpretative paradigm. This paper is one of two. This study focused on YP with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and their views and experiences of the system of support to help them remain in EET. An adapted co-operative inquiry (CI) methodology was employed which emphasised participation

This research aimed to address this gap by giving voice to the YP and their views of the education system. Additionally, the views of the YP were sought to deepen our understanding of YP's needs and level of support they require to remain in EET.

The research took place in a unitary authority in the South West of England. The participants in paper one were five male students who had left specialist provision for YP with SEBD following completion of year 11. Ages ranged from 16.5-17 years. Their views were elicited through individual semi-structured interviews which were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006).

The key finding from paper one was the value YP placed on relationships they formed with practitioners who supported them. For many of the YP Grovehill School (SEBD) was their first positive experience of the education system. The YP making the transition into mainstream EET expressed the view that there was no support in place once they left Grovehill. Additionally, the lack of practitioners in post-16 that

knew and understood their needs, coupled with feelings of a lack of belonging and acceptance in their new environment, were identified as particularly challenging.

Three out of the five participants became NEET before the end of their second year of post-16 EET. The YP identified the presence of Erica, a learning mentor as the most important source of support. However when the YP were unable to access Erica it was evident that the lack of a wider system of pastoral support presented as a significant challenge for this vulnerable group.

Findings from papers one and two were assimilated and the implications for improving future policy and practice were considered in the final section of paper two. Consideration was also given to the role Educational Psychologists (EPs) and how EPs could inform future ways of partnership working to secure positive outcomes for YP with SEBD.

## **Paper Two: An exploration of practitioner's view of the current system of support for YP with SEBD making the transition into post-16 mainstream education, employment and/or training**

### Abstract

The aim of this paper was to explore practitioner's views and experiences of the system of support in place to meet the need of YP with SEBD making the transition from specialist to mainstream post-16 EET.

This small scale study was conducted in a unitary authority in the South West of England. A total of eleven participants took part in the semi structured interviews (six males and five females). The participants were selected to represent the range of provisions offered to YP with SEBD in post-16 EET. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit their views. A thematic analysis approach to analysis was adopted.

Findings were that practitioners identified the importance of cultivating caring relationships, however, a distinction emerged in the FE setting where the focus was on behaving like an adult and conforming to an existing system. Disparities also emerged between settings value and beliefs systems, which appeared to shape the teaching practice and interaction with YP. The lack of support practitioners receive from outside agencies to understand and support YP with SEBD emerged as important factor. Additionally, issues such as the impact of the change of environment from specialist to mainstream EET and school culture emerged as salient features. The dilemma of inclusion versus attainment was found to be a significant

challenge for practitioners when trying to meet the needs of the YP. Findings which related specifically to transition identified; across settings there was a lack of a formal transition plan and limited access to resources and funding in post-16 settings. Within FE settings the lack of accessible pastoral support was identified as a key area for development. Finally, all participants identified the need for a clear strategic vision to inform future practice.

Systems theory provided a useful conceptual framework to understand the complexity of the interlinked factors which impact on YP access, or lack of access to support to help them remain in EET. Shared themes were identified across the phases of the study which identified that it is not one single factor, but rather a combination of interlinked factors which contribute to YP becoming NEET. The information gathered showed participants across the settings recognised the need for greater partnership working and help for practitioners to help them understand and support YP with SEBD. The study also illuminated the need for better communication between practitioners and the wider system of support. Additionally, the study identified a clear role for EPs in supporting YP and practitioners and implications for EP role are discussed. The study has provided a timely insight into the current system of support for YP with SEBD in light of the move for YP to remain in EET up until the age of 18.

