Drawing the Ideal School Technique

Using a drawing technique based on personal construct psychology with pupils with ASD

Dr Jane Williams DEdPsy 2014, DECP Conference January 2016
Overview

- Context of initial Drawing the Ideal School Technique (DIST) work
- Context for EPs gathering children’s views
- Establishing the case for PCP and drawing techniques to seek views of children
- Study design
- Findings of study
- Discussion and implications for future practice
Context of initial Drawing the Ideal School Technique (DIST) work

- Action research seeking views of pupils with ASD about important features of school, informed future provision
- Interest in Personal Construct Psychology locally
- Adapted drawing the ideal self approach (Moran 2007)
- Positive response from all involved (pupils/staff/parents/LA officers/health colleagues)
- All 15 children in study engaged

*Surprise finding!*

*Children with an ASD showed sophisticated understanding of school ethos and the impact of this on wellbeing of themselves and others*
The sort of school Connor would NOT like to go to: ‘St Asbo’s School’
The sort of school Connor WOULD like to go to: ‘Fun School’
Context for gathering children’s views

- National/international statutes and legislation underpin responsibility of EP to seek children’s views
- Children have a right to have their views given due weight *(Article 12 UN Convention Rights of Child)*
- Children with SEN likely to experience barriers to expressing wishes, aspirations and support needs
- Children with an ASD are especially vulnerable
- Range of potentially valuable techniques BUT risk of offering donated content for children to respond to?
Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) Kelly (1955)

- Kelly proposed that we hold our views about the world as ‘constructs’
- Constructs are “patterns that are tentatively tried on for size” (p9)
- Our behaviour is ‘checking out’ that our views of the world (constructs) are valid
- PCP framework can be conceptualised as a ‘guidebook’ for life which is endlessly elaborated
- Constructs are bi-polar – held in contrast
Using PCP drawing techniques to seek views of children: the literature

- “Children behave in particular ways because it makes sense to them” Butler and Green (2007)
- Ravenette (1980, 1997 and 1999) leading proponent in using drawings with children to elicit their construct system
Responses of children with ASD to structured drawing tasks: the literature

- Huge literature - focus upon comparing the way in which children with ASD develop drawing skills
- ASD profile includes **difficulties with creative thinking and theory of mind** which would predict that relating to drawing tasks will be problematic
- But robust range of evidence shows children with ASD can and do use drawings within structured tasks to convey what they know
- ASD children are as consistent as peers in what they identify about their drawings afterwards (Allen 2009)
Use of other structured drawing tasks to gain children’s views: the literature

- ‘Draw and write technique’ (Brading and Horstman 1999 and 2002 and Knighting et al 2010)
- Used with 99 children in hospital who were chronically sick at GOS – drew ideal hospital
- Also used in wide-scale study (Knighting et al, 2011) to gather the views of children about cancer and health behaviours.
Multi-modal meaning making by young children

- Socio-cultural context – impact of media and visual culture (Fawson 2009)
- Using visual images as symbols enables child to cognitively and socially engage in their environment (Jolley 2010)
- Children do not readily discriminate between different ways of communicating
- **Drawing is complementary to - not separate from - talking** (Vygotsky 1995, Matthew 1999, Coates and Coates 2006 and 2011)
Aim of DIST research study

To give further consideration to how a successful PCP approach (with therapeutic roots) can be used effectively by staff in educational contexts to gain the views of children with an ASD.

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Research questions were:

1. Can the DIST be refined for independent use by a range of adults supporting children with an ASD?
2. Does the new tool still provide a rich picture of school life for the child with an ASD?
3. How useful or valuable do the adults believe are the views expressed by children who participate?
4. Are there differences in the experiences and views of adults using the DIST in the AOS or SENCO role?
5. What themes do children with an ASD choose to express through the DIST?
DIST research study: Methodology

- Pilot study informed changes to original DIST and development of guidelines for independent use
- A flexible case study design was adopted qualitative paradigm (Robson 2002).
- Two groups of adults: AOS staff and SENCOs
- 30 pupils with an ASD invited – 16 pairs of adult/pupil participants
- Adults completed scaling and feedback q’naire
- 16 pairs of drawing and comment proforma, covering 7 aspects of school life, 224 in total
Aspects of school life covered by DIST

1. The outside of the school
2. The playground or school yard
3. The classroom
4. The children
5. The adults
6. Me
7. The most important thing
Sample DIST A3 drawing proforma

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DIST research study: Analysis

Analysis of adult feedback:
- Matrix analysis using a template approach (Miles and Huberman 1994) utilised
- Data gathered presented visually charts and through charts formed from a thematic analysis

Analysis of pupil drawings and comments:
- Used 5 stage data analysis a framework approach proposed by Pope, Ziebland and Mays 2000
- Resulted in a thematic map and interpretations

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Findings from DIST research study: adult feedback

1. DIST was successfully used independently to seek pupils views by both adult groups
2. Both groups rated combination of drawing and comments of pupils as rich
3. Difference was that AOS group judged product to be more useful than SENCOs, although no discernible difference in the pupils’ responses
4. Appeared to be different levels of confidence between the groups, AOS group adapted and enjoyed work
5. Some SENCOs disappointed with predictability of responses

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Pupils’ responses to using the DIST

- All pupils engaged meaningfully
- Combining the drawings and comments produced rich and elaborate data
- The developmental level of the drawing did not equate with how effectively child communicated views
- Small minority produced sparse drawings & brief comments
- Many pupils made imaginative responses
- Pacing the work was important for a small minority
- Asking about the ‘most important thing’ was valuable
- Structured drawing frames contained work
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

Domain and code
- Environmental features (EF)
- Ethos (ETh)
- Adult qualities (AQ)
- Child qualities (CQ)
- Self qualities (SQ)
- Characters (C)
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

- **Domain, code & illustration page**
- **Theme and code**
  - Building design (EF:B)
  - Equipment/facilities (EF:Eq)
  - Quality (EF:QU)
- **Descriptor of theme**
  - External/internal/landscape features
  - Fixtures and fittings provided in the building
  - Standard/maintenance of fixtures, fittings and building

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DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

1. Environmental features WOULD – building design, equipment/facilities and quality

“Everyone would want to go there!”

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DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

2. Ethos WOULD— activity, procedures, events
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

2. Ethos NOT – activity, procedures, events

Domain: Ethos, Theme: Activity: NOT

Illustrative quotation

"The children can talk in the classroom and have fights."

Illustrative drawing

Commentary on link

Comment highlights range of activities tolerated within ethos. Drawing of classroom alone appears to focus upon environmental features.

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DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

3. Adult qualities WOULD– behaviour, demeanour, emotional state
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

4. Child qualities WOULD—behaviour, demeanour, emotional state

“They are chatting: taking turns in communicating and telling jokes”
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

5. Self qualities NOT – behaviour, demeanour, emotional state

Child comments: “Mum dragging me to school...No No No No No...dragged holding on for my life...birds running for their life...hate it there.”
DIST findings: themes expressed by pupils

6. Characters NOT – named person/animal, fictional character(s), fictional animal/creature(s)
DIST findings: distinctive views

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Discussion summary

1. Appears refined DIST can be used independently of EP by other adults, with no discernible difference in responses of pupils with an ASD
2. Adults agreed that drawings and comments combined gave rich information
3. Level of knowledge and understanding of children with ASD challenges some of current psychological discourse
4. Key element of DIST is bi-polarity at crux of PCP
5. Tool is content free beyond simple drawing proforma
6. Child can only draw and talk about his own constructs or knowing of the world

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Implications for future practice

1. DIST offers contrast to other tools available: questionnaires, play materials, computer games
2. Fixed set of materials will influence range of responses and leave child more reliant on adult skill
3. Opportunities and threats of IT media
4. EP support for most vulnerable pupils and staff who meet their needs?
5. Finally if the DIST can be used successfully by pupils with social communication difficulties then could it be used more widely?

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Further information

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Publication of revised DIST and guidelines is in currently in preparation

Previous GAP paper details:

Key references


