

Labels of SEN: The perceptions and experiences of young people with a Behavioural, Emotional & Social Difficulty

Background

Why BESD?

- BESD is the most frequently occurring special educational need (SEN) in secondary schools in England (DfE, 2014a).
- BESD is associated with exclusions from school (Hayden, 2007), which in turn is associated with poorer academic outcomes and later offending behaviour (Daniels & Cole, 2010).

Why labels?

- Labelling is a controversial issue in the extant psychological literature, with some authors criticising their use as an application of 'medical model' psychology.
- Research with adults suggests that the degree to which people engage with their labels of SEN and incorporate them into self-concepts varies.
- Limited research has focused on the awareness and understanding of children and young people with SEN of their labels.

Why pupil views?

- Increasing opportunities for pupil voice to be heard has been brought to the foreground by current legislation (Children and Families Act, 2014) and is a major theme of the revised SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 2014b).

Research Questions

RQ1: Are young people with a BESD aware of this and other labels and how do they evaluate these labels?

RQ2: How do young people with a label of BESD describe themselves and their experiences at school?

Methodology

Design

A constructionist Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM) was employed for this research as it was felt that simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis would allow for greater flexibility and adaptation, thus capturing pupil voice in the most effective way.

Participants

9 young people (YP) aged 13-16 with a Statement of SEN for BESD attending mainstream secondary schools in an inner London Local Authority.

Measures

A common interview framework was adapted from the work of Kelly & Norwich (2004) which focused on awareness of labels, application of labels to the self, evaluation of labels, self-concepts, school experiences and attribution of behaviour.

Analysis

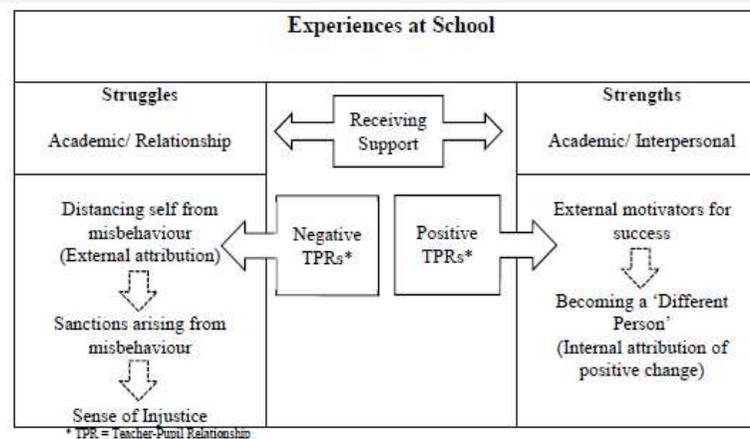
Grounded theory procedures were followed in line with Charmaz (2006). The model was shared with five of the YP in a debrief session. This debrief was transcribed and subjected to analysis procedures to fully saturate categories in the model.

"It's just that in year 7 and year 8 it's your mess around years... But year 9 you need to get some kind of good grades for you to come to year 10 and be in the higher classes."

"I just saw sense. I just saw GCSEs and think I need to knuckle down."

"I think I do need that [support] in some ways but I really am trying to be better, it can be hard for me because, yesterday when I found out what's happening to me I'll be going into a foundation learning class they said the best way for you to learn is special help and learn how to cope in class but I thought this is this is gonna affect me because people are going to keep bothering me for not being like them."

Resulting Grounded Theory Model



"He's just a good teacher to be honest I don't know, we just have a good relationship, like the whole class like our geography teacher, like every time I'm actually willing to learn something in geography rather than like maths or English."

"My behaviour is not bad but sometimes I get in trouble for silly things."

Results

RQ1

- 2 of the 9 YP interviewed were aware of their Statement of SEN.
- Only 1 of the YP had heard of BESD; despite this 3 would apply it to themselves.
- 8 of the 9 YP evaluated the label of BESD negatively.
- 6 of the 9 YP had heard of SEN. They had all heard of dyslexia.
- All YP debriefed felt that the new label of Social, Emotional and Mental Health Difficulties was **more** negative than BESD.

RQ2

- The resulting grounded theory model conceptualises YP's experiences at school as consisting of struggles and strengths. Teacher pupil relationships and receiving support were found to contribute to both good and bad times at school.
- YP internally attribute their successes and externally attribute their negative behaviour. They often perceive their behaviour as 'silly' and not serious.
- External motivators for change included family support, aspirations for the future and forthcoming exams at school.

Implications for Practice

- EPs play a key role in ensuring YP are afforded full rights to participation as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; including right to information and the right to express views.
- Pupil's views should be considered when constructing descriptions of need as part of the Education, Health and Care Plan process.
- EPs working with YP with BESD should consider the importance of teacher pupil relationships and how these can be improved through evidence-based strategies.
- Policy makers should consult with young people on all aspects of change that will affect them; including the changing of labels of SEN.