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SEMH NEWS

Issue 9 Autumn 2022

Sebda

Promoting the social and emotional well being of children and young people

IN THIS ISSUE:

Dr Amanda Barrie describes her doctoral research project looking at LEGO® therapy and we signpost you to other research into creative therapies.

SEBDA News Update

New Provision Support

SEBDA is joining a multi talented team to support the creation of a new London Borough provision. It will support children and young people who face a range of SEMH challenges. Since the pandemic there has been a growing number of young people finding it difficult to attend mainstream education. The new provision will endeavour to provide support in education, social engagement and well being.

Whole School Mental Health Audit

Members of SEBDA's National Council and tutors on the SEBDA/Oxford Brookes SEMH PG Diploma are designing a Whole School Mental Health Audit to support settings in creating environments that are SEMH sensitive, friendly and supportive. More on this in future issues.

New website

Look out for SEBDA's new website—launching in December.

SEBDA

and the

University of Birmingham

present an

International Conference

in Birmingham on 7, 8, 9 September 2023

'Global solutions to working with vulnerable children and young people'

- Sharing international insights into the inclusion of socially and emotionally vulnerable children and young people.
- Celebrating their resilience in surviving trauma, loss and displacement.




SAVE THE DATE !

Requests for papers and details of keynote speakers and booking information coming out soon.

LEGO® Based Therapy, or LEGO® Club (LeGoff et al, 2014) is a popular intervention in the schools where I work as a specialist advisory teacher. For my doctoral research I decided I needed to know what the children who were sent to this intervention thought about it. Getting the thoughts of children, especially those with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs can be difficult. To help with the interview process we took photographs in the sessions, and at the end of the intervention I carried out Photo Elicitation Interviews (PEI) (Collier and Collier, 1986; Epstein et al, 2006). The evidence gathered in the PEI demonstrated that the children noticed improvements in their social and play skills, better peer relationships and the importance of place.

LEGO® Based Therapy (LeGoff et al, 2014) was conceived as an intervention to support children and young people with autism to develop their social skills. LeGoff also suggested it might be relevant for children with related needs. Children with SEMH needs often lack the social skills that enable them to get along with other children; they are on the edge of playground games or are in the middle, sabotaging the play of others. Thus, a play-based intervention seems a good choice to help them develop those skills that would enable them to get on better with those around them and reduce the times they 'find themselves in trouble'.

For the purposes of my research I worked with groups of four children over an eight-week period. The sessions were an hour long. The first part of the session was a shared build where the children constructed a LEGO® kit together, taking on different roles as set out by LeGoff et al (2014). The roles were builder, supplier and engineer. For the purposes of my research I had added a fourth role of photographer.



Children's thoughts on LEGO® Based Therapy

Dr Amanda Barrie

What was built and which role the children took on for that session was negotiated at the beginning of the session. The second half of the time was for free building when the children could build something of their own choice from a large selection of bricks. The sessions ended with all bricks being put away ready for the next group.

Children with SEMH needs often have speech and language needs too (Cross, 2004). Often, when they are asked for their thoughts, they reply with "I dunno" which can make access to pupil voice difficult, and it is often overlooked, despite the importance placed on accessing pupil voice by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Using PEI provided the children with a "communication bridge" (Collier and Collier, 1986). They did not need to look at

me when they spoke, and I often did not need to ask any questions as the photographs prompted thoughts that flowed comfortably from the children. The photographs provide "a comfortable space for discussion" (Epstein et al, 2006).

Analysis of the evidence gathered from the PEI showed that all the children thought their building skills had improved – some participants had not built with LEGO® before. While this may seem a trivial point, it needs to be noted that fine motor skills, hand eye co-ordination and spacial awareness, all of which are vital in the everyday classroom, are all also required for successful building with LEGO®.

Almost all the children in the study said that their relationship with the other children in the group had improved. This varied from being more able to



tolerate a particular child, with whom they had not got on in the past, to being able to work alongside, and with, classmates. There were also newly established friendships where they played together at break times at school and were invited to each other's birthday parties. Several of the children said these 'getting along' skills had transferred to the classroom. As the purpose of LEGO® Based Therapy is to support the children to develop social skills, it was good to note that the children felt that they had improved in this area too. Some of their comments showed that they recognised the importance of listening – not necessarily acknowledging that they were better at it though. Others felt they were more patient now – there can be a lot a waiting during the sessions, especially during the shared build. While these skills may not all be evident in the classroom, children noticing them in themselves is a step towards them being generalised to the classroom. Space was an important area that came from the analysis. There were many photographs of the rooms or views out of the windows where the groups had worked. These were brought into the discussion during the interviews and the children who had taken the photographs commented that they had wanted to record where they had been working. Children are often set to work in corridors, when the evidence from this study suggests that being in a room where they can relax and feel safe is important to them. This links to Bowlby's concept of a Safe Base (Bowlby, 1998) and the idea of a containing space (Bomber, 2007).

To conclude, while much research around LEGO® Based Therapy is quantitative and adult lead, this small qualitative research project, where children's voices were considered, demonstrated that the children also valued LEGO® Based Therapy as a useful intervention to develop their social and relationship skills. It also indicated that the children needed to know that they have a regular and safe place in which to work.

References:

Bomber, L. (2007) *Inside I'm Hurting*. London, Worth
Bowlby, J. (1998) *A Secure Base*. Abingdon, Routledge
Collier, J. and Collier, M. (1986) *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press.

References cont.:

Cross, M. (2004) *Children with emotional and Behavioural Difficulties and Communication Problems. There is always a reason*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Epstein, I., Stevens, B., McKeever, P. and Baruchel, S (2006) 'Photo Elicitation Interview (PEI): Using photos to elicit children's perspectives'. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2006, 5(3)
LeGoff, D., Gomez de la Cuesta, G., Krauss, G.W. and Baraon-Cohen, S. (2014) *LEGO® Based Therapy: How to build social competence through LEGO® Based Clubs for children with autism and related conditions*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers

Coming up in the next issue we will feature an article by Steve Russell:

Behaviour or Relational Policy? – What's in a name?



In a word – everything! The values and beliefs that underpin a policy that focuses on 'behaviour' (often with an emphasis upon rewards and sanctions) can be quite different to those that see behaviour within a relational context. This upcoming article will give an overview as to why such a change can be a very positive development for a school and will include some practical ideas as to what might be included in a relational policy, including findings from research related to attachment, trauma and neuroscience.



Read more of the research into creative therapies by reading these articles from SEBDA's peer reviewed academic journal 'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties'. SEBDA members can access the full text when they log in to the SEBDA website.

Here's one I made earlier!' A qualitative report on creativity in a residential primary school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties,

Abstract

The impact of project-based learning has been shown to be effective in increasing pupil motivation, improving problem-solving skills and thinking skills in studies by Barrows and Williams. 'Project Hour' was set up in order to conduct a longitudinal study over the course of one academic year, to observe and record progress and development in independent and imaginative learning in a sample of primary school-aged children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This group was highlighted as having poor development and experience of language and school that has detracted from this aspect of their learning. 'Project Hour' allowed the children to have freedom in their creativity regarding a four-week project chosen individually. The role of the adult was to support the child with materials required and assist the child as the child requested. Over the period of an academic year, the children progressed in their own thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and creative and organisational skills. The children's behavioural problems in the learning situation reduced and children were keen to participate and to be included in the Project Hour groups.

Massey, A. & Burnard, S. (2006) 'Here's one I made earlier!' A qualitative report on creativity in a residential primary school for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 11:(2), 121-133.

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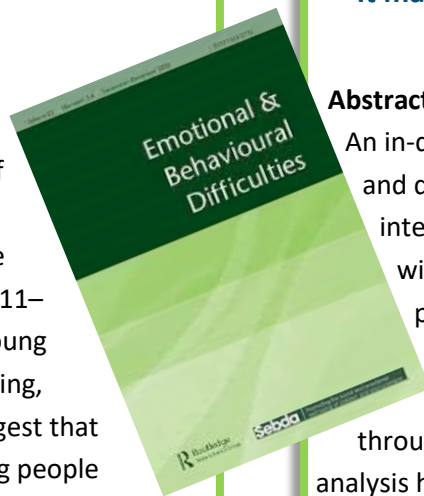
More articles from the journal 'Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties'. Members of SEBDA can access the full text via the SEBDA website.

Becoming other: social and emotional development through the creative arts for young people with behavioural difficulties'

Abstract

This article focuses on the effects of an arts-based intervention for young people deemed at risk of school exclusion because of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Using a range of qualitative methods, including observations and interviews, the study explored from the perspective of 11 young people (aged 11–16) the potential for creative arts interventions to transform young people's difficult social situations of development and, in so doing, effect changes in behaviour and way of being. The findings suggest that the interventions that the arts organisation offered these young people provided alternatives to their personal, cultural and historical ways of experiencing the world. In 'becoming other' as an artist, experimenting with different art media and trying out creative ideas within a safe environment, the young people chose to try out becoming a different version of themselves. This process of adopting a new identity in becoming an artist enabled some young people to recontextualise their relationship with the social worlds around them. The introduction of an element of socialised play through creative arts interventions helped these young people to negotiate the crisis of a social situation of development. These findings suggest that imagination, invoked through the social situation of play, can help disengaged young people to change their perceptions about the imagined worlds of the future.

Thompson, I. & Tawell, A. (2017) 'Becoming other: social and emotional development through the creative arts for young people with behavioural difficulties', *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22 (1), pp. 18-34.



"It makes me feel alive': the socio-motivational impact of drama and theatre on marginalised young people"

Abstract

An in-depth, longitudinal, idiographic study examined the impact of theatre and drama involvement on marginalised young people. Semi-structured interviews, at three separate time points over 2 years, were conducted with four young people (15–21 years of age) involved in a theatre project. Interpretative phenomenological analysis suggested that drama and theatre create space and support for the authentic self, and provide optimal conditions for promoting growth and resilience through voluntary engagement in a positive activity. In particular, the analysis highlighted the pivotal role of interpersonal relationships and a nurturing environment in re-engaging young people. Some participants' accounts also suggested that drama provides a uniquely engaging and therapeutic way to reflect on, express and explore experiences. The results are discussed in relation to core psychological processes underpinning self-development and key directions for further research.

Hanrahan, F. & Banerjee, R. (2017) "'It makes me feel alive': the socio-motivational impact of drama and theatre on marginalised young people", *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22 (1), pp. 35-49.

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E-mail: admin@sebda.org | Tel: 01233 527044 | www.sebda.org