

‘Exploring young people’s experiences of a placement in specialist provision for behaviour, emotional and social difficulties’ May 2014.

Since the Warnock Report (Department for Education and Science, 1978) successive governments have promoted and encouraged the inclusion of children and young people with special educational needs in mainstream schools where appropriate. Where this is not deemed appropriate, Local Authorities have developed specialist provision to meet the educational and social needs of these children and young people. Despite specialist provision being available for young people with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties, research findings suggest this population continues to be disadvantaged and provision continues to be questioned in relation to its quality and effectiveness. The current research was conducted due to the Local Authority in which it is based, aiming to develop specialist provision settings for young people, particularly those experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The current research was interested in what Educational Psychologists can learn from young people’s experiences and how these experiences can inform the development of future provision.

The current research explored the lived experience of six young people attending specialist provision for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Three superordinate themes were constructed during the analytical process. The first, ‘Relationships’ highlighted the importance the young people place on their relationships with staff and their longing for stronger peer relationships. The second, ‘In group / out group identity’ identified the social stigma the young people feel is attached to them attending specialist provision and how this made them feel different to what they consider the ‘norm’. Thirdly, ‘Power and Control’ identified the lack of information and involvement the young people felt in relation to the decisions being made regarding their educational placement.

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