

'I have got too much stuff wrong with me': an exploration of how young people experience the Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) label within the confines of the UK education system

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Introduction

The article focuses on the educational experiences of young people who have been labelled as having SEBD. The employment of such labels will shape how the young person is perceived by the adults surrounding them. This will not only have an impact on the relationships that are developed between the pupil and the educator but also how the young person sees themselves in terms of their own identity.

Methods

The paper draws on 13 in-depth case studies. The study aimed to develop innovative, exploratory strategies to harness pupil voice. To allow for a more detailed insight into the pupil's experiences each case study included a range of participants: namely the pupil, their parent/carer and a teacher. The researcher ran a series of activity sessions and interviews with the young people in order to track their educational journeys and to gain an insight into how they experience the UK education system.

The pupil's experience was that they felt blamed

The increasing emphasis on raising standards and improving discipline in schools has led to those who do not fit in to feel they are regarded as somehow lesser

You always got blamed for everything in normal schools...because you have got disabilities (Jacob)

The pupils were able to identify the antecedents for their behaviour

The pupils were able to reflect on both school and home circumstances which would have an impact on the behaviours they displayed in the classroom

Sometimes I end up bringing it into school and I end up taking it out on everyone and getting into more fights (Daniel)

Taking on the label – the pupils recognised that they internalised the labels of others

Despite the recognition of both school and home circumstances, the pupils still take ownership of their labels. This is evidenced in the following quotes '*I am stupid*' and '*I am dead think*'. It is perhaps not surprising to hear such comments given that adults continue to place labels on young people.