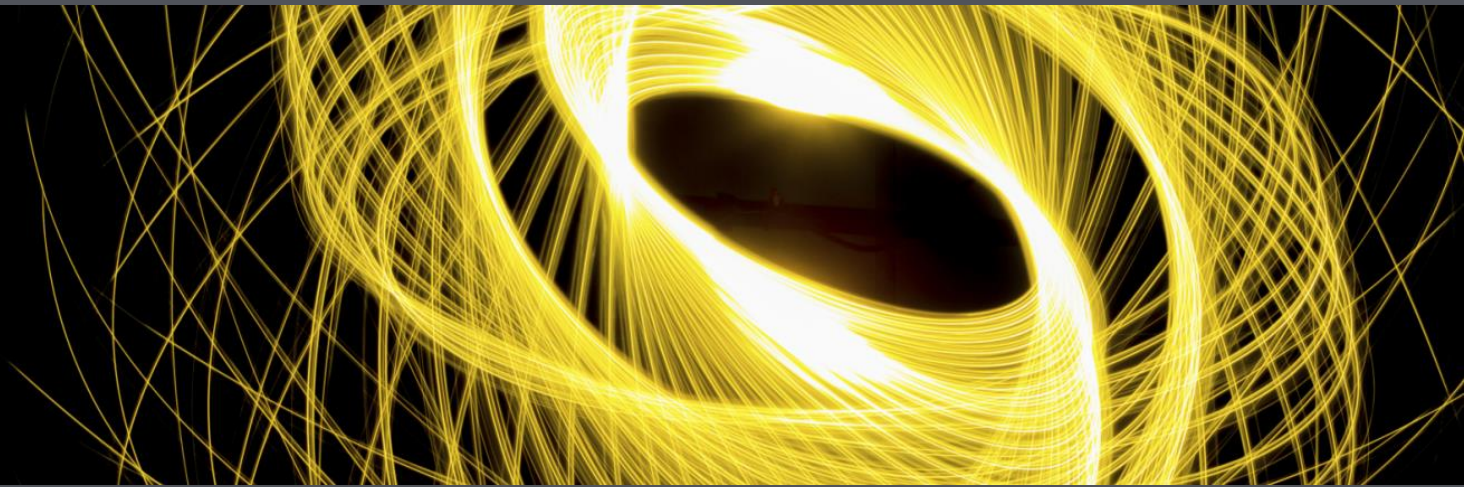


MISSING VOICES: AUTISTIC GIRLS ABSENT FROM SCHOOL



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MISSING FROM SCHOOL

“A growing number of adolescent autistic girls are missing from education, are very vulnerable and proving difficult to place”

Principal Educational Psychologist, LA in the South East of England, 2016

INSIDER RESEARCHER

- Teacher
- Mother
- Parenting Practitioner
- Doctoral Researcher
- #actuallyautistic

WHY ARE THEY MISSING?

- Research Questions:
 - Why are they missing?
 - How did they get to this point?
 - In what ways can this learning inform provision in schools?
- How do we find out?
 - Participatory framework
 - Personal construct of school
 - Life histories

ABSENCE TAKES DIFFERENT FORMS

- Absenteeism – authorised/unauthorised?
- Absent from the classroom or playground or dining hall?
- Physically present but excluded from the processes of learning?
- Discouraged from attending?
- Home education – choice or forced?
 - Gradual disengagement
 - Being out of school may be a good thing for these girls
 - Why are they absent?

MAINSTREAM CHALLENGES TO ATTENDANCE?

- *‘How should we know what her barriers to learning are?’*
Deputy Head (Inclusion), Secondary School, SE England
 - *‘Most pupils don’t know they’ve got one.’*
[pupil passport] SLT, Secondary School, SE England
-
- Are we asking the right questions?
 - Are we asking the right people?

SHE'S FINE

- *She is 'interacting fine'.*
- *'There is nothing. I see nothing.'*
- *'I had to discourage' the time-out space as she had wanted to spend a lot of time there.*
- *'I don't have to cope with anything'.*
- *'We have children who have more needs.'*
- *'I don't think she [mum] can cope'.*
- *'I defy anyone to pick her out in five minutes.'*

(Moyses and Porter, 2014)

- Impact on whom?
- Are all views believed?
- Are we asking the right people?

HIDDEN VOICES

- Autistic girls voices absent from stories of autism and exclusion – why?
 - Not able to tell their own stories?
 - Stories not as valuable or valid as the stories other people tell about them?
 - Time to give them a voice!

PARTICIPATORY FRAMEWORK

- Legislation
 - Key principle of the SEND Code of Practice is clear focus on participation of CYP (DfE & DoH, 2015, p15)
 - UNCRC Article 12: right to an opinion, for it to be listened to and taken seriously
- Addresses power imbalance (Milton, 2014)
- Address imbalance of predominantly male-based autism research.
- Enables dominant views to be challenged (Mogensen, 2011)
- Experts by experience (Pellicano & Stears, 2011, Cridland et al, 2014)
- Powerful insights (Parsons, Lewis and Ellins, 2009)
- Increases chances of finding workable solutions (Iemmi, 2017)
- Helps re-integration (Ryder et al, 2017)

A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

- Three-phase project:
 - Secondary data
 1. Analysis of five years of statistical data from one NHS Trust in England
 2. Case studies of 10 girls diagnosed as autistic by this Trust
 - Primary data
 - 3. Life histories of 10 adolescent autistic girls**
- Qualitative priority
- Constructivist understanding of the world

CONSIDERATIONS

- Advisory Group of three adolescent autistic girls
- 10 adolescent autistic girls who began at a mainstream secondary school but who were no longer attending
- Considerations of how to (eg):
 - Build trust & stay safe
 - Enable communication
 - Build in processing time
 - Address researcher-participant power imbalances
 - Help find meaning
 - Be transformative

METHODS

1. Personal construct of ideal school (1 interview)
 2. Life histories (2-4 interviews)
- Choice of location
 - Choice of method of communication
 - Questions provided in advance
 - Options to provide additional thoughts after each interview

1. IDEAL SCHOOL

- What would their ideal school look like?
 - What aspects of a school create barriers to learning?
 - What aspects may help the most?
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- Explain and describe their views about school
 - Nine categories: mix of open and structured questions
 - ‘The sort of school...’ - not about real schools; less threatening
 - Sets the tone: no right or wrong answers; problem not within them
 - Prioritise answers
 - Identify possible solutions

(Moran, 2011; Williams and Hanke, 2007)

2. CHARTING LIFE EXPERIENCES



‘LISTEN. LISTEN AND BELIEVE.’

- Listening to autistic girls’ voices is vital to understanding when and how to support
- Listening to these girls is free – and can be life-changing

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THANK YOU

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