

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD) and ICT

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What do we mean by Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (EBD)?

Emotional and behavioural difficulties in learners may be apparent in a variety of forms, including:

- social withdrawal, isolation or underachievement
- low self-esteem or depression
- school phobia
- hyperactivity and lack of concentration
- disruptive, anti-social and uncooperative behaviour
- frustration, anger and threat of or actual violence
- emotional damage resulting from abuse, neglect or psychological trauma.

A learner with EBD may demonstrate one or more of these learning barriers, all of which may disrupt the learning process and may require high levels of professional support and guidance.

Why should I use ICT with EBD students?

For learners with EBD, information and communications technology (ICT) can provide a non-threatening environment in which to achieve success. For many, learning may have become associated with the fear of failure, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of those around them. The computer can provide a neutral setting in which to experiment, with students confident that they are controlling the pace and level of work. Many learners with EBD find it hard to establish relationships, and have little ability or perceived need to relate to others. Using a computer can avoid this problem, and can often offer an entry point for another person to join in alongside, in a non-threatening manner.

For some learners, the frustration of additional difficulties such as a specific spelling difficulty or poor co-ordination can intensify the feelings of defeat and low self-esteem. For these, ICT can remove the barriers to writing accurately and affect their attitude to learning as a whole. However, they may need extra support or training to establish a smooth routine for using the equipment.

Many learners with EBD find it hard to relate well to other people and may find group work, turn-taking and being part of a class quite stressful. The use of ICT may remove discipline problems, as it often changes the style of teaching. For example, instead of the teacher being the expert at the front of the class who is perceived as some kind of challenge or authority figure, the teacher becomes a guide and mentor. The use of ICT therefore renders the relationship less confrontational, and teaching becomes more individualised, with emphasis on discussion and problem-solving rather than passive listening.

How can EBD students benefit from the use of ICT?

1. Communication and self-expression

The word processor provides learners with opportunities to experiment, in the knowledge that, once they are happy with what has been written, they can print out their work in an attractive layout and type style. For poor spellers, the spellchecker or word bank gives confidence, enabling users to concentrate on the content of their work rather than the mechanics of the writing process. Students

with poor handwriting can be reassured that the final product will look as good as their classmates' contributions. All these features combine to help students gain in self-esteem and confidence in their learning.

Various types of software packages may be used to aid communication and self-expression, such as spelling, drawing and desktop publishing. These packages are available for a wide range of machines, and can be used not only by those with special needs but by all learners. For students who are lacking in self-confidence or who are easily frustrated, the professional results these packages produce can give a real sense of achievement. Often, the learners are delighted by the appearance of their work and are prepared to try even harder. Text entry is only a small part of what students can do to express themselves with ICT.

Many teachers report that students seem to have an increased attention span whilst working on a computer. Interactive talking books are one example of effective use of ICT for children who have short attention spans. The stories are not just read aloud but also have hot spots which set off animations or sound effects or lead to other screens. The child has to click to make things happen and gets drawn into the world of the book. Examples include *Grandma and Me* for younger learners, and *Sheila Rae the Brave* for older learners and *Dorling Kindersley's Castle Explorer and Stowaway*.

Music technology is another creative aspect of ICT, allowing students to explore and make choices about sounds. Many students with EBD would not have the patience or discipline to learn how to play a musical instrument. With recording equipment, they can record sounds and reuse them in different ways or record a number of their own performances and collect the best parts. This way, they are able to judge their own performance instead of being on the receiving end of judgement or criticism from others.

There are a range of products that allow users to mix sampled sounds and create their own videos. For example, *Dance EJay*, *Music Maker* and *The Music Factory* all give students the chance to explore sounds and build compositions at quite a sophisticated level. With MIDI and sequencing equipment, students can experiment even further by editing sounds and creating new compositions. Add a keyboard, and it is possible to try out different tempos and accompaniments. Music technology is part of the real world outside the school gates: it offers street credibility as well as the chance to create something personal and meaningful.

With ICT, it is possible to simulate real-life scenarios, and interacting with words, pictures, video and high-quality sound and producing documents of professional quality are now simple to do. Students can create their own images with a digital still camera costing £50–£70. Schools and pupil referral units have been aware for some time that students can produce wonderful work if they are given the opportunity to work with images and sound.

2. *Problem solving*

Students who have EBD are often reluctant to take risks, test out ideas or enter into unfamiliar situations. Problem-solving develops self-reliance and confidence, and by helping the students to develop problem-solving strategies, staff may also be giving them a set of skills which could transfer to other areas of their lives.

Certain types of software package may help students with problem-solving, such as adventure programs, control, logo and simulations. Adventure games allow students to develop their problem-solving skills, test out ideas and think logically. They can be highly motivating for young people and are intended to be fun and encourage concentration, memory, recall and hypothesis. Adventure games can also help students to develop language skills and problem-solving strategies. As people share solutions and ideas, they have a reason to work together and communicate, and subsequently develop and extend their social skills.

Unlike more passive-type computer games, adventure games can encourage people to explore and try out different roles and worlds. One example which combines an adventure game format with learning is *Mission to Planet X*, part of the *Internet Coach* series. This takes the user on a quest

through cyberspace where they learn different functions of the Internet. The object of the adventure is to rescue Star Surfer from the aliens and, in the process, they learn about surfing, downloading information, e-mail and safety issues on the Internet. This program features live actors, striking graphics, animations and audio and comes with a set of lesson plans and worksheets relating to the National Curriculum.

Group work is often not easy for EBD learners, but the power of the computer to give instant feedback can give reassurance and encourage confidence in decision-making. Software programs can often be used to develop social conventions such as turn-taking and discussion. It is important to note that adventure games and problem-solving activities can cause frustration if they are pitched beyond the child's capability. However, it can be argued that it is better to give vent to these frustrations in a controlled environment where they may be more easily defused.

Building and controlling models, and working with sensors to capture information are other ways of engaging young people in practical activities and giving them first-hand experience. Creating web sites and multimedia presentations with products such as PowerPoint, Mediator and Front Page can be an exciting and positive experience for students. With tools to combine real images, sound and personal writing, students can reflect on their own culture, enhancing their credibility with their peers and reinforcing positive self-images.

3. Record keeping

Giving praise when earned, and rewarding positive steps either in terms of academic attainment or in attitude and behaviour, are essential elements of working with EBD students. If records of personal achievement are to have the maximum impact, they must follow the achievement very quickly and be well presented as a document. The latter point is especially true with older students, to whom image and peer pressure may be more important. ICT can enable teachers to quickly store and retrieve statements which can be adapted for a range of uses and audiences.

Leavers' Profiles and Reports can also have a major impact when used as a formative tool, and for setting targets for individual students through negotiation. Used in these ways, profiling can give students some control and ownership in the learning process and thus increase the likelihood of their involvement in that process. If the profile content is based on attitude, behaviour and emotional state, it can then be used as a negotiating tool by providing the information on which to base the negotiation. It can also be used to give students clear guidelines and targets.

Since the primary aim in drawing up contracts and profiles is to gain the student's co-operation, it is advisable that they should have some input in the content. One approach could be to allow the student to go away and draw up his/her own contract in private and then compare this with the teacher's version. A word processor enables the most appropriate parts of each contract to be 'cut and pasted' into a new file. This means that both teacher and student have ownership of the final product and much useful negotiation will have taken place along the way. Word processors can also be used to store banks of statements or targets from which students and teachers can select in order to design an individual programme for the student. Using this technique, the statements can be personalised and printed out for reference.

A number of commercial profiling packages are available that not only assist in formative profiling but can also be used to produce reports. The reports can be designed for a range of audiences and be personalised to the individual student.

Can integrated learning systems (ILS) be of help?

In order to keep students motivated in their work, some may require a structured program with regular rewards to keep them on task. Some schools have found that integrated learning systems are an ideal solution, as they give students the chance to work intensively for a short period and be tested regularly. The Academy of Reading from AutoSkill is one example of a testing, training and management system for reading which provides instant feedback and rewards. Literacy and numeracy levels are likely to improve when students are cut off from distractions and unhelpful

stimuli, and they feel encouraged when they receive the printed certificates to show them what they have achieved.

Other sources of information

Becta publications

Special Needs and ICT Information Sheet

Becta. 2000, Free

<http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/senict.html>

Becta Educational Software Database

<http://besd.becta.org.uk/>

The Becta Educational Software Database (BESD) contains information about software packages which are educational in nature, available in the UK and targeted at the pre-school to the further education market.

Internet

Principles into practice: effective education for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), 1999.

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/public/docs00/ebdreport.htm>

Disruptive and Disaffected Pupils in Mainstream Schools

<http://www.stockportmbc.gov.uk/az/d.htm>

(results of a GEST project by Stockport LEA and gives practical advice and help for schools)

Organisations

Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (AWCEBD)

Tel: 01622 843104

<http://www.awcebd.co.uk/>

This site contains links to other sources of information on EBD.

This sheet can be accessed in full text on the Internet in a choice of formats:

- standard HTML: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/html/behav.html>
- PDF: <http://www.becta.org.uk/technology/infosheets/pdf/behav.pdf>

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