

INTERACTIVE THERAPY GROUP

How can I help children who are shy, socially isolated or even selectively mute in school? This was the question I faced when my school's SEN screening system identified a large number of such children a few years ago.

Drawing on ideas from Speech, Movement, Music and Drama therapy, I put together a programme for small groups. This was implemented during school time, for 20 minute sessions several times a week.

The aims were to provide a relaxed environment in which all forms of communication were accepted and encouraged, to encourage relationships between a limited number of children, to provide chances for the children to experiment with being loud and to make the sessions an enjoyable experience.

I adopted the role of a senior group member, initiating ideas, building on their ideas and participating in the games with the children. The content of the sessions was varied but each contained several different activities.

The games involved individuals responding to me or each other, pairs work between the children, and whole group activities. Games like rolling balls, boats and quoits pulling helped develop eye-contact. Activities like parcels, statues, sliding and swinging developed trust. Musical instruments and puppets (especially squeaky puppets) allowed the children to be legitimately noisy, something they do not normally have a chance to do in the classroom.

All the children involved in such groups over the years have benefited from the experience, becoming more confident and better able to relate and communicate. A few selectively mute children have begun to speak as a result of sharing in the Interactive Therapy Group sessions.

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