

My Name Is Sohail, and I Am in Year 5 — ‘This Is Me’: A Fictional Narrative

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This is a fictional ‘This is me’ to signify the challenges we face in the emerging world and spaces we work in. It is a piece of narrative to illustrate the socio-political discourse we can, if we do not espouse or protect certain frameworks, subject children to. I have used a ‘This is me’ format simply because it related to the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) framework.

This Is Me

My name is Sohail, and I am in Year 5. I am in Range 4 for Cognition and Learning, and Range 3 for Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs. I am really grateful for this help, as I wasn't sure what to do with myself without this special assessment.

I was born premature to a mum who couldn't look after me. She tried her best but she loved drugs more than me. Anyway that doesn't matter; I am not that bothered, especially after she stopped seeing me and then stopped sending letters to me. I haven't heard from her since I was seven years old. I never knew my dad; he was always busy with his own family. My mum used to say I look just like him and that I can get angry just like him. When I was younger (well until four years old) my mum never really played with me, and my dad was never there. When he was, he just shouted at my mum. I hated him for that, but I just listened. When I was five, I went to live with one family, but I didn't quite feel comfortable there so then I went to another. Now my social worker says that I am finally in long-term foster care. I live with a family with my new mum and dad and one other boy they look after. I see my grandma sometimes.

When I first started at nursery, I didn't understand what to do or how to play or share. I used to kick and hit other children, because they messed up the way I ordered my toys. I never really noticed their smiles or words, because most of the time I didn't like looking at people. When my mum loved drugs more than me, she always used to say look down, and when my dad came round, I was scared of his face sometimes.

Anyway, when I started to go into Year 1 and Year 2, we just had to listen and do more work! But I find it hard to concentrate, whatever that is, because I can't sit still. My Year-2 teacher was lovely, and she gave me a sticker chart, a circle mat to sit on and fun things to do after I did lots of boring things. She sent me to a special corner in the classroom or the head teacher's office if I was naughty. I don't really like writing or reading, but I love listening to stories and making things. When I don't make stuff exactly like I want to, I feel funny inside, and I just want to break the thing. I just hate my mum and dad sometimes, but I wish they were with me sometimes.

When my behaviour got really bad, the school called this special person to help the teachers, me and my mum (the person I live with). The special visitor in Year 2 said that I may have ‘Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome’, ‘Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder’ or even ‘Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder’ with a mixture of ‘Disorganised Attachment

Disorder'. People said my brain wasn't looked after properly, that it wasn't my fault but I have to do a lot of things to make it better. Wow! I thought I could have all these things, which I thought was pretty cool. But, in school, I still found it hard to sit, learn, think, concentrate, understand people, work in groups (or really just sit in groups).

All my school life, I have been told that I am below age expectations (nobody tells me by how much), which is funny, because my foster mum says that I control things and talk at her like a grown up. My year-4 teacher was lovely...she got me. She really got me...she took time to get to know me; she made learning fun; she let me sit with clever people, too; and she asked me if I wanted a sticker chart or cushion to sit on (which I didn't by the way) and if I wanted to speak to people. She asked me if I found learning safe. She asked me if her marking and feedback was useful, and I am so glad she just didn't compare me with other kids in my class. I think she loved me, and I loved her.

In Year 4, the school called another special visitor, who took me to a room and did these cool fun games. He was really cool, and we drew pictures and talked about school and teachers. I only saw him twice. My mum (not my real mum) told me that the cool guy told her that I have moderate learning difficulties. I could've told him that, if he asked me, and I could've told him that I fixed a puncture on a bike, worked out some change in a shop, read the 'Twits' and even wrote a story for my teacher! A few months after this cool guy, I had to go for extra reading, writing, speech and language, fine and gross motor, maths, social skills groups, but I missed working in the class, doing what other people were doing; I missed my friend Natalie and my lovely teacher.

Well I won't go on... I have a special person coming to see me next week. My head teacher thinks I may have Autism. Hopefully, that will tell me what to do...

I hope the piece tackles many things that I feel are important. Some of these issues are along a spectrum, despite being presented as an 'either/or'; although, it is important to reflect on what our position is along these different poles:

- inclusive pedagogy versus 'additional to and different from' provision;
- fixed-ability thinking versus a holistic view of a child;
- formulation (or not to formulate);
- labelling (or not to label);
- what really works and what people think works;
- evidence-based thinking and what is evidence;
- subject experience and expert knowledge;
- expert model versus compassionate non-judgmental thought; and
- relationships, love, attachments versus curriculum/measurement/relentless summative assessment.

I wanted to encapsulate the above points but from a perspective of a young person who may have no control, power or intuition to even be consciously aware of what is going on around them. It was supposed to reflect the power we have to do good but perhaps even more power to do harm. Therefore, self-reflection, deep authentic dialogue and working with systems are crucial to avoid these kinds of narratives. It is viewing our work as a continuous pursuit and not an end goal.