

Be Yourself: Beyond the Screen- A Virtual Digital World to Prevent and Reduce Bullying Behaviours in Children.

Arianna Pulsoni, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Consultant (Lecturer in Psychotherapy and Counselling at University of Essex)

Norman Gabriel, Sociologist (Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies at University of Essex)

Vito De Feo, (Lecturer in Artificial Intelligence applied to Brain and Mental Health at the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering University of Essex)

Katerina Bourazeri, (Lecturer in Serious Games and Virtual Reality at the School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering.



INTRODUCTION

The Be Yourself intervention arose from careful reflection on critical issues emerging in our society and on social networks. It is the result of carefully considering difficulties experienced by children related to body image, body-shaming and related to bullying and cyberbullying. This intervention was designed as part of an exploration around the overlap between child psychotherapy, sociology and computer science.

AIM

In this research, the main focus, was to prevent body shaming, bullying and cyber bullying in a classroom based intervention. Issues of integration, race and equality amongst children were explored and addressed.

METHODS

Be Yourself was a pilot intervention study. The six-weeks classroom based intervention involved up to one session per week with 21 children aged nine and one session per week in the school playground. The sessions were led by a child psychotherapist and by a teacher. Material created by children during the intervention were analysed using thematic analysis.

RESULTS

In BE Yourself it was attempted to bridge child psychotherapy with avatar technology and to 'reposition' child psychotherapy in the digital age. The purpose of this study was to test the efficacy of Be Yourself school-based intervention protocol which was carried out with 21 students aged nine years of age. This innovative school-based intervention resulted in an improvement in body image difficulties, self-representation, self-esteem and emotional well-being. It was effective in helping children to rebuild body image, considering Identity. Race, equality, diversity and differences were also addressed in order to promote integration and prevent bullying and cyber bullying amongst children. Children had improved also their relationships with schools staff.



CONCLUSIONS

.This intervention could play an important role in the assessment and prevention of early signs of body shaming and to prevent and address difficult group dynamics, bullying and cyber-bullying.

Table or graph title

Table or graph title

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With thanks to the many families and children, school staff, teachers and managers who have given their support and ideas to the BE-Yourself programme and intervention