Dealing children a helping hand with Book of Beasties: the mental wellness card game

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Abstract

Aim(s)

Play contributes uniquely to effective learning and the development of socio-emotional skills. This study investigated Book of Beasties: a school-based, socio-emotional intervention centred around a card game which aims to improve children's emotional literacy and wellbeing through playful learning. Exploratory research was conducted to determine its potential as an effective resource for school staff and other professionals working in school settings with responsibility for supporting pupils' mental health.

Method

A single case study comprised one London primary school. Four children (aged eight to nine years; two boys and two girls) received the intervention. Qualitative data were collected from session observations, a focus group with children and semi-structured interviews with school staff (the delivery agents) and parents/carers. Data were collated and thematically analysed.

Findings

Integrated findings suggested intervention recipients had benefitted in terms of increased socio-emotional skills and wellbeing. Child and adult participants agreed that Book of Beasties was valuable and acceptable and thus socially valid. Specific components which contributed to the intervention's effectiveness were elicited. These included fantasy elements of the game and sensory-focused activities.

Limitations. Data were collected from a single, volunteer school. The class teacher (delivery agent) selected the children who received the intervention, potentially biasing the findings.

Conclusions

Exploratory research indicated that Book of Beasties was a promising resource for practitioners in schools and can contribute to the evidence-based socio-emotional literature. A full evaluation using both quantitative and qualitative methods was recommended to examine intervention effectiveness on socio-emotional outcomes, process issues and potential adaptations.

Introduction

Play in its myriad forms provides a unique channel for stimulating children's growth and development from infancy to adolescence. The contribution of play to children's lives is so vital it is recognised by the UN as a right of every child (UN, 1989). Play is broadly defined as displaying features of non-literality, positive affect, flexibility and intrinsic motivation (Krasnor & Pepler, 1980). A body of evidence (e.g. Zosh et al., 2017) supports play's contribution to learning and the acquisition of physical, cognitive and socio-emotional skills. Hands-on, child directed, playful learning experiences (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009), characteristic of Book of Beasties (BoB*)*, are considered the most effective for enhancing child development.

BoB is a socio-emotional intervention centred around a traditional card game with linked, sensory-focused activities embedded in play. It is delivered in primary schools to children aged 6-11 years in small groups (up to five). Its ethos is underpinned by the belief that every child should have the confidence to talk openly about their emotions and mental health. Its aims are to destigmatise mental health, promote wellbeing and develop emotional literacy: 'To inspire the conversation, normalise the subject [mental health] and make it less daunting when experiencing difficulties' (Book of Beasties, 2019, p.2). The intervention is facilitated by school staff who are given introductory training. It can be delivered to general groups or those comprising children identified by practitioners at risk of developing emotional difficulties. Five, one-hour sessions are run over five consecutive weeks. There is an accompanying manual, *'The Beastie Guide'* which contains five lesson plans. However, these are intentionally flexible to accommodate each group's unique needs. The manual recommends an introductory session to familiarise players with the characters and rules of the game and a feedback session after the final week. Teachers and parent/carers are invited to complete an evaluation questionnaire.

The Book of Beasties' story is set in an imaginary world inhabited by ten, uniquely designed characters, the 'beasties'. Each one is described as having specific attributes (e.g. self-consciousness or lack of energy) associated with emotional difficulties (e.g. anxiety or depression). The objective is for players to help as many beasties as possible by following the 'action' cards (with instructions for play) and locating certain 'item' cards. These relate to simple wellbeing exercises and are linked to the difficulties the beasties are experiencing. Exercises include yoga, origami, art and craft activities and mindfulness practice. During turns players collect 'comforts' (cards which can be used to help another player) and try to avoid 'minotaurs' and 'fevers' (cards which hinder the beasties e.g. by players missing a turn). An overview of the intervention is presented in Table 1. At the start of each session children are introduced to two beasties to look out for during play and encouraged to describe how the beasties might be feeling. Regular pauses are permitted to allow for discussions as they arise and dedicate enough time for the linked activities in line with the preferences of the group.

The development of BoB has been largely practice driven and informed by feedback from delivery agents and parents/carers. Nonetheless, several theoretical influences are discernible including positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), competence enhancement models (Durlak et al., 2011) and frameworks which incorporate games as a subset of playful learning experiences (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017).

Aims

The aim of the current study was to investigate key stakeholders' (recipients, staff (delivery agents) and parents/carers) perceptions and experiences of the Book of Beasties socio-emotional intervention. This exploratory research was conducted to determine the feasibility of conducting a full evaluation to examine effectiveness and process issues.

Table 1. Overview of the intervention from *'The Beastie Guide'* (2019)

Beastie	Description	Characteristics	Item card and brief descriptor	Action card activity	Comfort card
Populo	'Everyone has a foggy brain sometimes, especially poor Populo who loses her puff and can't bring herself to do anything' (p.40)	Loss of concentration, low mood	Bellows: 'Our breath has the power to calm us' (p.43)	Make paper boats to race (practising deep breathing and relaxation)	French rabbit (a cuddly toy for physical comfort)
Deki	'Deki is so conscious about how she looks that she goes around borrowing people's clothes to cover up' (p.34)	Worthlessness, isolation, low mood	Gogglys: 'The gogglys show us the best in everyone…you just have to look a little further than skin deep' (p.46)	Discuss notions of beauty and draw what 'inner beauty' looks like	Home (a place of safety and respite)

Literature review

Recent societal trends have seen a radical shift in the nature of play with a marked decline in playful learning and a concurrent rise in children's psychological distress (Gray, 2011). Evidence also suggests that over the last 20 years opportunities for free play during the school day have been systematically reduced with shorter break times (Baines & Blatchford, 2019). Spontaneous, child initiated, free play encourages creativity and self-expression and has been positively associated with socio-emotional development (Yogman et al., 2018). A study by Chaudron et al. (2018) revealed that by the age of eight, girls in particular, were ready to abandon play involving physical toys. Digital modes of play have diminished the popularity of conventional toys and games yet produce fewer playful learning opportunities (Healey & Mendelsohn, 2019). They offer limited unscripted interactions and rules which are not easily modified, consequently, children's social encounters are impoverished (Lancy & Grove, 2011).

In contrast, traditional, practical games, including card games, are highly social. They provide ample opportunities for dispute, cooperation and negotiating the rules (Lancy, 2017). Ethnographic studies have shown these games are less about players understanding the rules and sticking to them and more to do with learning to negotiate (Hughes, 1991). Through these play experiences children develop essential communication skills and practise how to function effectively as social beings.

According to Fisher et al. (2011) children are better equipped to understand narratives and deal with situations in their daily lives when they have experienced similar concepts through play. Pretend play, enacted individually or in a game with others, is positively associated with children's ability to cope and regulate their emotions (Blair & Raver, 2012). Imagining different experiences can help children manage similar content in real life (Phillips, 2010). A study by Christiano and Russ (1996) compared play habits in a group of

seven- to nine-year-old children who had experienced an invasive dental procedure. Children who engaged more in fantastical play reported a higher number and variety of coping strategies and less distress during the procedure than other children.

Sociodramatic play also increases children's perspective taking abilities as they become aware that others have intentions and desires that may not match their own (Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Studies with both young children and adolescents showed that engaging in fantasy or role play was associated with greater empathy and altruism (White, 2012).

Research suggests that guided play with adult scaffolding is more effective for a range of learning outcomes, including socio-emotional development, than either free play or didactic methods (Weisberg et al., 2013). Children learn best in interactive environments which invite them in as active collaborators and contain content they find meaningful (Chi, 2009). Book of Beasties uses a guided learning approach to create a playful learning experience which supports children's socio-emotional development.

Increasing numbers of children and young people are experiencing emotional difficulties (Sadler et al., 2018). The new relationships and health curriculum (Department for Education, 2019) places statutory responsibility on state funded schools to promote wellbeing and mental health, reduce stigma and provide appropriate support for pupils experiencing difficulties A major challenge for school leaders tasked with implementing prevention strategies and early intervention initiatives is limited knowledge about the most effective and appropriate approaches. Robust evaluations are needed to generate case studies of good practice for schools to share (Brown, 2018). Book of Beasties offers a flexible resource for practitioners, including educational psychologists, with responsibilities for supporting children's wellbeing and mental health, but requires formal evaluation. The current study

aimed to generate preliminary evidence towards that end and contribute to the growing socio-emotional intervention literature.

Method

Design

The study was a single case design comprising one west London primary school. An exploratory method was utilised to establish the feasibility of conducting a full evaluation of BoB. This approach was supported by methodological literature (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) that posits the potential value of any new intervention should be tentatively established first. Key stakeholders' (recipients, staff (delivery agents) and parents/carers) perceptions and experiences of BoB were investigated.

Qualitative methods comprised researcher observations of the five BoB sessions, a focus group with intervention recipients, interviews in person with staff delivery agents and telephone interviews with parents/carers of children who received the intervention.

Participants

Child participants comprised primary school pupils (aged eight to nine years; two boys and two girls). Adult participants were two school staff (delivery agents) and four parents/carers.

Procedure

Full ethical approval was granted by the university ethics committee. Written consent was provided by the head teacher, parents/carers and adult participants. All sessions were run consecutively by school staff in line with the manual and were observed by one or both researchers. A focus group with children was facilitated by Researcher A and audio recorded two weeks after the intervention finished. The focus group incorporated a drawing activity to gather non-verbal data. Interviews in person with staff delivery agents and telephone interviews with parents/carers were conducted by Researcher B within two weeks of the

intervention finishing. Data were thematically analysed using a six-phase guided approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Findings

Four thematic categories and eight subthemes were generated from focus group and interview data. Observational data were integrated and subsumed within organised themes to contextualise the exploratory framework. Thematic categories (Table 2 and Table 3) and a supporting narrative analysis (pseudonyms were used) are presented.

Table 2. Children's perceptions and experience of BoB

Thematic category	Subtheme	Illustrative quotation	Illustrative quotation
Making sense of BoB	Perceptions of purpose	'We could help them [the beasties], then they didn't have worries' (Dave)	'You help her [Deki beastie] to know that she's really beautiful' (Bea)
	Perceptions of play rules	'If you get a beastie, you can help it with a comfort card' (Bea)	'As we did more sessions I kind of slowly understood it' (Olivia)
Fantasy world component vs. real world component	Pretend level engagement	'I feel it's nice to help [the beasties], to encourage them to do something even though I don't get encouraged well' (Olivia)	'He [Bronze Child beastie] is sometimes stressed … and I think it's worth helping him' (Dave)
	Literal level engagement	'I kind of just find drawing really calming...it's also really fun' (Olivia)	
Knowledge and application of socio-	Language and awareness	'He's [Bronze Child beastie] so cute and	It's kind of annoying that people try to change themselves to fit in….you

emotional literacy		sometimes he has the same problems as me' (Pug)	should just stay who you are' (Olivia)
	Strategies of support/coping mechanisms for self and others	'I'd probably just talk to him [a peer needing support] and help him to not be shy' (Dave)	'I also sometimes have a foggy brain. I need to take a deep breath in and so does Populo [beastie]' (Bea)
Assessment and development of BoB	Perceptions of value and acceptance	'Every time I get annoyed or when I couldn't sleep I took deep breaths and it really helped 'cos it calmed me down' (Olivia)	
	Building a better BoB experience	[Next time] 'When you help a beastie, put it in a separate pile and at the end you can count that pile and see how many you've [the group] saved' (Olivia)	

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1 Table 3. Staff and parents/carers' perceptions and experience of BoB

Thematic category	Subtheme	Illustrative quotation (staff)	Illustrative quotation (parents/carers)
Making sense of BoB	Perceptions of purpose	'The aim was clear- it is all about helping children, their wellbeing' (Kate)	'I thought it would help him open up to us...he doesn't like to talk a lot and he is always keeping things to himself' (Pauline)
	Perceptions of play rules	'You really need to get your head around the cards first. It took me a couple of times before I felt confident'(Sue)	
Knowledge and application of socio-emotional literacy	Language and awareness	'I don't think [the child] spoke about his own emotions or feelings and what makes him feel good [before] and I think this was actually really nice for him to reflect on that' (Sue)	'His whole outlook on actions has changed, as has the way that he views those around him' (Kelly)
	Strategies of support/	'She is going to use the breathing technique in class	'By trying to help the beasties...he focused on

	coping mechanisms for self and others	when she gets these feelings to help her calm down' (Sue)	solutions rather than reacting directly to the behaviour or judging it' (Kelly)
Assessment and development of BoB	Perceptions of value and acceptance	'It was an effective intervention. [Children] wanted to come. There was a structure… which was easy for us to pick up every week' (Sue)	'My husband and I were not prepared for the dramatic [positive] transformation we saw in our son over the past few months' (Kelly)
	Building a better BoB experience	'I liked the lesson plans, but I did find the book slightly confusing' (Kate)	'I think it helped her, but something like this needs to be ongoing' (Nikki)

Making sense of BoB

Children demonstrated their understanding of BoB on both a conceptual and practical level. The subthemes, 'Perceptions of purpose' and 'Perceptions of play rules' encapsulate these two components respectively. In terms of the game's objective, the notion of helping the beasties was commonly understood: 'The beasties were like people and they had worries [and we] try to help them to come up with ways to solve their problems' (Olivia).

Participants identified their favourite beastie and demonstrated empathy with the particular worries of the character. Some children reported these as mirroring their own concerns, for example, having a 'foggy brain' (Bea) or 'feeling stressed' (Pug). Visually, the beasties appear androgynous, although accompanying descriptions specify gender. Three of the four children chose a favourite beastie the same gender as themselves. In the focus group drawing activity children were invited to create their own beastie and/or design a comfort item. Children's designs demonstrated their conceptual understanding. For example, descriptions of their beasties included: 'Everyone makes fun of him'; 'He is left out most of the time' (Pug) and 'She gets anxious about things and activities' (Olivia). Comfort items included a pair of colourful headphones for listening to soothing music (Bea) and a terra block (brick) that 'protects him [the beastie] from negative comments and helps him calm down' (Pug).

Games are distinct from other types of playful learning (e.g. free play) as children compete according to rules and the objective is usually to win. Although BoB has game rules, play is intentionally flexible to suit different interests and accommodate discussions and wellbeing activities. Observational data indicated some children (and staff) were unsure how to use the cards at the start and they later revealed not fully understanding all the rules. Nonetheless, children were sufficiently engaged in play that this was not of particular concern

to them and did not hinder enjoyment. A critical component of learning through play is agency (Zosh et al., 2017) and children demonstrated their ability to negotiate the rules and continue play. This suggests their desire to be supported rather than directed by adults.

Staff and parent/carer accounts revealed they understood BoB's aim was to support children's wellbeing and encourage conversations about emotions and feelings. Staff reports also confirmed their initial difficulties with following the game. In contrast to the children, staff were more concerned with knowing the rules, for example when a type of card should be picked or when players could swap cards. Nevertheless, they allowed children to play according to their own version of these rules. Studies on the various roles adults can occupy within children's play have indicated that sensitivity to the child's needs in the moment is paramount (White, 2012). Therefore, adults should be flexible in the manner they intervene and always willing to take the child's lead and this was demonstrated.

Delivery agents' training and understanding of an intervention are imperative to the quality of implementation and treatment fidelity and thus inextricably linked to programme outcomes (Durlak & DuPre, 2008). In line with the guided learning approach, staff delivering BoB initiated the learning process and set the structure for each session. For example, they identified which beasties to look out for during play, however, the children were continuously active in their own learning.

Fantasy world component vs real world component

This thematic category refers to components of the intervention which encouraged children to engage and contribute to its effectiveness. 'Pretend level engagement' comprises the imaginary aspect of BoB which absorbs children in pretend play. Children knowingly and intentionally participated in a mentally represented alternative reality: 'I like the one [Beastie] who goes into people's homes to get their clothes [Deki wants to change her appearance]...

you can help her to know that she's really beautiful' (Bea). The notion of heroically entering the beastie world was appealing to children who were enthusiastic in the pretense: 'I liked the beasties and how you can help them, I liked helping them' (Olivia).

While research (Drewes & Schaefer, 2016) suggests overt pretending diminishes significantly in middle childhood, other studies (Bergen & Williams, 2008) indicate older children are increasingly inclined to engage in fantasy play in the context of popular digital games. The imaginary world of BoB introduces fantasy characters and players are tasked with a mission to help the beasties through problem solving and collaboration. Pretend play in BoB is inherently social as children work together in an alternative reality, practising social skills and cooperation. According to Hughes (1991), when children engage in social play, cooperation goals and maintaining harmony within the group takes precedence over competitive, individual goals. Through social games children learn how to function as a team. In the case of BoB, collectively helping as many beasties as possible was how success was broadly perceived by children rather than acknowledging a single winner.

Reality is suppressed through pretending and children develop inhibitory control and self-regulation, including levels of emotional arousal (Blair & Raver, 2012; Bodrova & Leong, 1996). As posited by Fisher et al. (2011) and Phillips (2010), pretending about specific content helps children cope with similar events in real life: 'If I had a friend [like Akky with low self-esteem] I'd tell them they don't have to worry about how they look and about what other people think of them and just remember they should just be happy' (Olivia). Overall, children were sympathetic towards the Beasties, demonstrating perspective taking abilities (Hirsch-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003). Their responses were consistently prosocial and supportive, including from Olivia who admitted feeling unsupported herself when she needed encouragement in a real life situation.

'Literal level engagement' refers to the verbal and practical tasks linked to play which comprise discussions (e.g. about emotions or difficulties) and wellbeing activities (e.g. yoga and mindfulness). Observations showed the children were willing to participate in all of these aspects of the intervention and the activities were unanimously described as fun. A popular game was racing paper boats (by blowing through straws) and although designed to practise deep breathing, the emphasis was on having fun and nobody seemed to mind who won.

The wellbeing exercises used in BoB are sensory focused and involve active learning. According to Durlak et al. (2011) participatory elements which concentrate on developing specific skills (e.g. self-regulation) are integral to socio-emotional interventions. A review by Burke (2010) concluded that interventions which incorporate mindfulness practices were accepted and well tolerated by children. A body of research supports mindfulness training (Napoli, 2005), yoga (Hagen & Nayar, 2014) and art activities (Irwin, 2006) for reducing stress and improving wellbeing, especially when delivered in a non-prescribed manner such as through play.

Children's perceptions of their contribution to the game's development as valued emerged as a meaningful factor. Players were invited to donate designs for novel comfort items for possible future iterations of the game. Incorporating follow-up activities may retain children's engagement with BoB and help sustain any positive effects from the intervention.

Knowledge and application of socio-emotional literacy

This theme relates to children's socio-emotional development and was subdivided into 'Language and awareness' and 'Strategies of support/coping mechanisms for self and others'. Children demonstrated a mature and sensitive awareness of the socio-emotional issues brought into focus through play and the problems manifested by the beasties. An understanding of terms like 'self-esteem' and 'stress' was demonstrated: 'When you're

stressed it kind of affects your life' (Dave). A grasp of concepts such as 'inner beauty' and the importance of 'just being happy' (Bea) was revealed. This was supported by a parent's observation: 'She said that the things that matter the most are kindness, honesty, being nice to other people and not your size' (Nikki).

In addition to a semantic understanding, children showed signs of personal emotional awareness. For example, Pug described a beastie as having the same problems as him and Bea suggested: 'It helps us to talk about our feelings'. The second subtheme is closely related to children's awareness and understanding and refers to the application of socio-emotional learning. Children proposed several self-directed coping mechanisms for when they felt worried or stressed, citing personal preferences (e.g. yoga tree stance, drawing and deep breathing exercises): 'I also sometimes have a foggy brain. I need to take a deep breath in and so does Populo [beastie]*'* (Bea). Strategies for supporting peers experiencing difficulties were also suggested: 'I would go and play with them…try and get their mind of it' (Bea) and 'I would probably just talk to them and it would make them happy' (Dave). Children's responses revealed a proactive, problem solving approach to help peers in real life; the same tactics they had employed to help the beasties.

Staff commented on children's prosocial behaviour during sessions, for example, helping if a peer had difficulty understanding a card or task. Parent/carer reports indicated that children were demonstrating new socio-emotional skills at home: 'I noticed she became more empathetic with her friends and even other children' (Nikki). Outside the sessions staff had observed children applying some of the yoga poses and breathing exercises in situations when experiencing mild stress (e.g. before a test). Staff accounts also suggested an impact on children's behaviour in the classroom after the intervention: 'She seems a lot more talkative and more confident in class, not just in the group' (Kate). Review evidence suggests that

socio-emotional skills are associated with positive behaviour in the classroom (e.g. high levels of attention and engagement) and academic outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011).

Assessment and development of BoB

The final theme comprises stakeholders' perceptions of BoB as a valuable and acceptable intervention and includes suggestions for improvements and development.

Children described their experience of BoB as fun and reported an increase in wellbeing: 'It cheered me up a lot' (Pug). Observational data showed children were engaged and motivated during the sessions. A body of research (Howard & McInnes, 2013; Sawyer, 2017) has shown when children perceive an activity as play they are more engaged and motivated and display higher wellbeing. Children explained how using some of the activities was helpful: 'Every time I get annoyed or when I couldn't sleep I took deep breaths and it really helped 'cos it calmed me down' (Olivia) and 'It helps you to relax, to do a tree pose [yoga stance]*'* (Bea).

Children offered their suggestions for improvements. For example, designing a mini rule book to enhance players understanding of the game and keeping a tally of group successes to increase satisfaction: 'When you help a beastie, put it in a separate pile and at the end you can count that pile and see how many you've [the group] saved' (Olivia).

Overall, staff and parents/carers views aligned with the children's and they considered BoB beneficial. For staff, it was a useful tool for promoting and supporting children's mental health and could be adapted to the unique needs of different groups. Staff identified the wellbeing activities as one of the most important parts of the intervention: 'I think they gave every child the opportunity to express themselves creatively' (Sue). The perceived need for any intervention and its acceptability from staff and parents/carers are considered crucial factors in its success (Lendrum et al., 2013). Staff revealed they were planning to incorporate

some of the activities (e.g. yoga stances and breathing exercises) in their lessons. Sue was keen to point out the potential for tailoring the activities so they could be adopted more widely across the school curriculum: 'I think any class can tailor them, maybe not the card game itself, but you can tailor the activities' (Sue).

Staff recommended clearer guidelines and more time initially to introduce emotions, as some children were described as more emotionally literate than others. Both staff and parents/carers concurred that ongoing provision or support was needed to sustain and enhance the initial benefits children had gained from attending the brief, five-week intervention. This corresponds with research suggesting that for optimal impact, socio-emotional learning needs to be embedded within a whole school, multi modal approach (Goldberg et al., 2018).

Limitations

The current study had several strengths, including the use of multiple methods and an explicit and open research process, however, there were limitations. The methodological weakness arising from research activities being conducted by different researchers was addressed by cross validating codes and themes generated from the analyses. High concordance between researchers was established with minor revisions to labels of some themes. A further limitation concerns the fact measures were not implemented to ascertain the degree to which socio-emotional development could be attributed solely to the intervention. The participant school (in a prosperous west London area) volunteered to participate in the study thus data were collected from a single, research-friendly school. Moreover, the class teacher was responsible for selecting children which introduced additional risk of bias.

Conclusions

The aim of this exploratory research was to determine the feasibility of a full evaluation of Book of Beasties and this was supported. Findings suggested BoB had benefitted recipients in terms of increased socio-emotional skills and wellbeing and was a socially valid intervention. Potential underpinning mechanisms (e.g. reality inhibition associated with the fantasy element of the game) and specific procedures (e.g. sensory-focused, therapeutic activities) were identified as contributing to successful outcomes.

Children's unique contribution to evaluating interventions targeted at them was recognised in the current study. Research suggests children are better informants than either parents/carers or teachers on measures gauging emotional symptoms (Jellesma et al., 2007). However, a multi-informant approach increases methodological rigour (Goodman et al., 2000) and is recommended for a full evaluation of BoB using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Play experiences are essential for healthy child development and practical games offer an important pedagogical tool for socio-emotional development. Children are engaged when content is interesting and meaningful (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017) and they are active collaborators in the learning experience (Chi, 2009). Aligned with this playful learning approach, BoB is a promising socio-emotional intervention for primary schools. It can be delivered by a range of practitioners including class teachers, learning mentors and emotional literacy support assistants and others working is school settings such as educational psychologists. This flexibility may relieve implementation issues in schools such as waiting times for interventions due to limited specialist resources.

The views of staff and parents/carers, as well as recipients, help inform school leaders and others tasked with intervention implementation decisions. BoB's non-prescriptive design was desirable to recipients and staff delivery agents. The potential to extrapolate elements of

the intervention for use across the curriculum, identified by staff, suggests BoB can be integrated within a school's existing mental health strategy. However, staff voiced areas for improvement, including clearer guidelines. Some practitioners would benefit from training beyond a basic introduction to the game and linked activities, which is currently offered. For example, training in socio-emotional development with on-going support. Additional support could also be provided from the developers or more experienced fellow practitioners. Children's recommendations were centred around enhancing recipients' experience and provide valuable feedback for future developments.

As previously stated, the number of children experiencing emotional difficulties has grown (Sadler et al., 2018). Greater attention to preventative approaches and early intervention, referred to as 'low level' mental health services, has been strongly recommended (Children's Commissioner, 2019). The pivotal role of schools in this process has been well documented (Department of Health (DH) and Department for Education (DfE), 2017). Decision makers should rely on the strength of the evidence to ensure the most effective and appropriate interventions are selected and case studies of good practice are needed (Brown, 2018). A full evaluation of Book of Beasties has been proposed to examine intervention effects on socio-emotional outcomes and process issues to contribute to this evidence base. Additional research is needed to investigate intervention effects on different subpopulations. Potential adaptations of BoB to suit the needs and local resources of specific school environments and alternative delivery locations (e.g. health/community settings) also warrant consideration. Further research is intended to contribute to the burgeoning socio-emotional intervention literature and help ensure evidence-led practice is informed by robust evidence-based research.

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