

The History of the Association

(Marion Bennathan, Allan Rimmer and Ted Cole;
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SEBDA has grown from an amalgamation of two groups, the Association of Workers for Maladjusted Children [AWMC] and the Association for Therapeutic Education [ATE], both working in the field of care and education of children said, before the 1981 Education Act, to be 'maladjusted'. In changing circumstances AWMC and ATE decided that they could serve their client group more effectively by uniting, in 1981, to become one Association, re-named in 1992, the Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. It took on its new name, "Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA) in 2003.

'Maladjustment' was seen as a 'handicap' requiring 'special educational treatment' in the regulations following the Education Act, 1944. The latter gave an impetus to the growth of special provision, much of it residential, which is where many of the members of the AWMC and ATE worked.

Most of the founders of the older organisation, AWMC, ran independent special schools, and had experience in services for 'juvenile delinquents'. There they came to see the limitations of an 'orthodox' approach for children and young people with SEBD. They saw that the latter needed understanding and support if their behaviour and social skills were to improve. Provision should be made in communities where control was by building positive relationships, by collaboration, by seeking and listening to the young people's views, not by regimentation and punishment¹.

Some of these pioneers shared their formative experiences with the founders of the Child Guidance movement, and had undertaken training as psychiatric social workers in the USA where psychodynamic ideas were a major influence. Such ideas have always been part of the Association's tradition, but used pragmatically, and increasingly used alongside practice emanating from other theoretical perspectives (e.g. humanist, cognitive-behaviourist)².

The ATE consisted mainly of former students of the London University Course in the education of the maladjusted, working in special education, schools or units, day or residential and mainly LEA provision. Membership of both organisations also drew on professionals involved in assessment and organisation of services.

Although, the first national study of maladjusted children, reporting in 1955³, highlighted some provision being made for such children in 'ordinary' schools and off-site units known as tutorial centres, and indeed encouraged more mainstream and community based provision, the 'maladjusted' tended increasingly to be seen as a group apart, best educated outside the mainstream. Provision for the 'maladjusted' grew rapidly with LEA and independent schools opening, along with many off-site special units for pupils deemed 'disruptive'.

This trend caused concern because of cost and uncertain outcomes, and, arguably, the right of all children to education with their peers. The move toward inclusive education was given impetus by the 1981 Education Act. This Act led to major change: official categories of handicap were replaced by assessment for 'special education needs' and 'statementing'.

The emphasis was on mainstream schooling for all children. Perceptions of children with 'emotional and behavioural difficulties', the term (used in the 1955 Underwood Report) that replaced 'maladjusted', were also changing. The condition was now seen as part of a continuum, with a growing realisation that social and educational conditions contributed to many children's difficulties. There were now seen to be many more children with 'EBD' in mainstream schools than in 'segregated provision'. Greater expertise was needed if there was to be progress towards inclusion for these pupils. In these changing circumstances, AWMC and ATE decided that they could serve their client group more effectively by uniting, in 1981, to become one Association, re-named in 1992, the Association of Workers for Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. To meet the growing needs of staff coping with EBD in mainstream settings, AWMC sought to expand its training and support activities making them appropriate for mainstream teachers, emerging behaviour support services and staff in special units (that became 'pupil referral units' [PRUs] in the 1990s).

AWCEBD also increased its contributions to national policy and government policy papers. The still-current English government's guidance on EBD, Circular 9/94⁴ owes much to an AWCEBD committee working with the government. AWCEBD made authoritative responses to many draft government policy papers. As well these contributions, there were explicit AWCEBD publicity campaigns. Conference proceedings were recorded and written up to provide low cost and popular booklets. The Association's Journal (now *'Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties'*) grew from an interesting in-house magazine to a respected academic publication. The sporadic cyclostyled newsheet was replaced by the all colour magazine/ newsletter (now called *'SEBDA News'*), which, expanding in scope and content, developed a considerable following.