Exploring pupil and adult perspectives of learning and teaching in a secondary school: using a group learning process to gain pupil voice

Jane Gould

Newcastle University
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Declaration

I can confirm that the work submitted in this thesis is all my own work and has not been submitted as part of any other degree or qualification. I confirm that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

Jane Gould

1st September 2011

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Thanks to the pupils and staff who were part of this research, to work colleagues who encouraged me, to Liz who believed I could finish. Finally my deepest thanks go to Joe, Rachel and Alice who lived this with me, supported and encouraged me. Without their support and patience I would not have completed this thesis.

Abstract

This research uses a group learning process to investigate pupil and adult perspectives about their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning difficult. I was interested in finding out how a group learning process could help in gaining the perpsective of underachieving secondary age pupils. From my initial interest in pupil views about ways to maximise learning and attainments, a research question emerged: What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

A qualitative case study group learning situation was used with an underpinning epistemology of post positivist social constructivism. Secondary age pupils took part in a group learning process to give their perspective about how best they learn and attain, and to explore what is important for their learning. The group learning process intended to facilitate pupil experiences of giving their voice and to find out about situations that elicit pupil voice. The activities completed in the group, the views expressed in the group and individual interviews with each pupil formed the data. Key adults were also interviewed, pupils evaluated the group learning situation and a research diary was kept which formed additional data. Thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was the tool used to systematically analyse the textual data.

Seven Global Themes were identified summarising the wealth of textual data and aspects of the group learning process that appear to promote pupil participation and pupil voice. I

conclude that there is some consistency of my research findings with current literature. This research adds to existing knowledge by highlighting the importance of language and relationships to pupils' learning and attainments. Benefits of using a group learning situation to gain pupil perspective is highlighted. The unique contribution of the research and the limitations of the study are recognised. Through this research I had the privileged opportunity to enter the lives of a group of underachieving pupils, to look inside the perspectives of pupils and adults and to rethink learning and teaching. I suggest that a way of understanding the themes that emerge is through the relationships that are formed within the learning situation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter outlines the background to this research and seeks to make explicit the process by which the research focus was identified. The context in which the research developed and the rationale underpinning the research will be covered to show how the research focus evolved.

1.1   The research - the personal and professional journey

This research arose from my personal and professional journey dating back many years. On reflection, this journey can be traced back to feelings of frustration arising from a rigid interpretation of a system that prevented me even sitting the 11+ test because a child ranked higher failed the test. Thus aged ten I was not only denied a voice of protest but also left thoroughly confused and lacking self esteem by a system that led to a separation from friends and siblings, with accompanying feelings of worthlessness. I can see now what a profound effect this had on my own learning journey. Considerable time was taken to overcome feelings of worthlessness, feelings of not being as bright as others and not being able to learn as effectively as others. This was undoubtedly the beginning point of a determination to overcome adversity, to overcome barriers to learning, to overcome lack of confidence and a poor image of my own learning. Perhaps this was also the beginning of a life long commitment to promote equality of opportunity and educational inclusion, to a commitment to empower others to affect positive outcomes on their own learning destiny.

An interest in psychology and in particular educational psychology was perhaps inevitable given such an early experience. When older I transferred to the local grammar school, moved from a low band into the top band, succeeded in examinations and went on to university. At the time, perhaps not fully understanding the motivation from roots in my own learning experiences, I proceeded to follow a traditional route into educational psychology, a first degree in psychology, teaching followed by post graduate educational psychology training. As a teacher I experienced some discomfort when faced with the traditional "remedial" socially exclusive approach and was soon overcome with feelings that questioned the equity of such approaches. My confusion grew about why some pupils succeed and others do not, what factors are important, why do some pupils who are identified as potentially having difficulty seem to succeed and others do not? From these beginnings developed unease and questioning of the traditional intelligence notion, and idea of pupil potential with a growing commitment to empowerment and inclusive approaches. My interest grew in the importance of interactions and relationships and their possible impact on effective learning.

Finally fully qualified and working as an educational psychologist in an area of significant multi ethnicity and social deprivation my feelings of unease strengthened. I had a growing awareness of the strict interpretation that some colleagues employed in the use of cognitive assessment findings in predicting learning potential for pupils, seeing intelligence as fixed and true, to categorize need and inform provision. Such experience led me to challenge this notion of intelligence, of intelligence testing and potential given that such a theoretical stance did not seem to account for why apparently similar pupils

may succeed in learning and others do not and did not seem to explain my own learning experience. As an educational psychologist I have continued to try to understand why some pupils who are deemed to have limited ability/ intelligence defy all odds and achieve whereas others who should achieve based on this theory do not. Thus an interest emerged in the narrative of effective learning and not only a disillusionment with, but a moral and philosophical difficulty with ideas of intelligence, ability and potential. I tried to make sense of why some children and young people who seem to have "everything going for them" fail to succeed with their learning.

From my personal and professional journey has also developed an unwavering commitment to empower others, to find ways to gain pupil voice and to promote equality of opportunity. I was fortunate I have overcome the adversity and unfairness from a flawed and rigid system – but what enabled me to do that when classmates in the similar position did not? What meant that others who had passed their 11+ did not progress academically in higher education? Thus through this journey has emerged an educational psychologist working from a moral and philosophical stance of equality of opportunity, of inclusion, of empowerment and a conceptual framework of social constructivism. Social constructivism recognises the importance of context and culture, drawing on the interactionist / social nature of human behaviour and learning. This piece of research developed from this beginning and this conceptual framework. This conceptual framework will be expanded on during chapter 2 of this thesis and drawn on throughout the later chapters.

1.2 Context in which the research developed

The research developed from work with a large secondary school which was facing a number of challenges. I approached the school to gain their interest and consent to develop a research project.

The school was a mixed 11 to 19 comprehensive serving a town of approximately 17,000 people in the north east of England. It was situated in an area of social and economic deprivation; attainments when pupils entered Year 7 were below average. Pupils who entered the small sixth form also began their courses with below average attainments. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and or disabilities was higher than average. There were few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. At the time the most recent Ofsted inspection deemed the school to be satisfactory in providing particularly well for pupils with learning difficulties. Ofsted also recognised that the school had made considerable improvement recently, particularly in raising academic standards and improving pupils' behaviour. GCSE examination results in the year that the research was carried out had shown improvement from 35% in the previous year to 44.5% gaining 5 + A* - C. The results continued to improve in the two following years, the results were 55% and 68% gaining 5 + A* - C.

1.3 The research focus

This research is about the use of a group learning process to investigate pupil and adult perspectives about their experiences of learning and teaching and what makes learning difficult. I was interested in finding out how a group learning process could help to gain

the perpsective of secondary age pupils. Initially my interest was in pupil views about a term that adults use, namely "barriers to learning" (what makes learning difficult) and in their views about ways to maximise their learning and attainments. I was interested in using a group learning process to find the pupil perspective about how to attain in school, to find out about what is important to pupils about their learning and their perception about what makes their learning difficult. The group learning process was intended to give pupils the experience of giving their own voice and intended to find a situation that enabled pupils to give their voice. My purpose in using a group learning process was not to fix or change pupils but was about listening, about hearing their voice, gaining their perspective about a system to enable rethinking about their learning and attainments and to explore how systems can best help. Given the complex nature of investigating pupil perspectives and recognising that learning occurs within a context of which adults are part; I felt that pupils perspectives could not be seen in isolation, thus I was also interested in gaining adult perspectives, which were gained through interview.

My interest in the pupil and adult perspectives about their experiences of learning and teaching and what makes learning difficult and how the group learning process may help in gaining pupil perspective led to my research question:

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

School were positive and eager to engage in exploring the use of a group learning process to provide the opportunity to engage in practitioner research. It was agreed that a group would be run with pupils with the aim of gathering research data. The commitment of school was evidenced through their ongoing flexibility to release pupils from lessons, to provide a suitable venue and release a teaching assistant. Throughout, staff and pupils showed an interest in the research.

A qualitative case study approach, a group learning situation involving secondary age pupils, was compatible with my underlying conceptual framework of social constructivism. The activities completed in the group, the views expressed in the group and individual interviews with each pupil, formed the data. I was not only interested in the perspective of pupils but also the perpsective of adults about their experience of teaching and what makes learning and teaching difficult. Data were produced from interviewing key adults, evaluations by pupils of the group learning situation they had experienced and a research diary I kept. Thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was the tool used to systematically analyse the textual data.

1.4   Structure of remaining chapters

Chapter 2, the literature review begins with an explanation of the conceptual framework underpinning my professional work as a practising educational psychologist and this piece of research. Chapter 2 then goes on to explore my research question by covering key areas of relevance to the topic and in so doing my thoughts emerge as to how best to engage with pupils to elicit their perspectives about their learning and attainment and

what makes their learning difficult. Chapter 3 addresses the methodology by outlining the factors that needed to be taken into account in identifying an appropriate methodology. Chapter 3 continues by outlining why a qualitative methodology was employed, the research as planned and as it occurred in practice. Finally the steps taken in analysing the data are covered, that is, the process, the method utilised and the stages of data analysis. Chapter 4 covers the results of the research. Chapter 5, the discussion chapter, presents a summary of the main findings, discusses key points, implications for educational psychology practice, limitations of the research, implications for future research, the unique contribution of the research and finally sets out the conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1   Introduction

From my interest in pupil and adult perspectives of their experience of learning and teaching, what makes learning difficult and how the group learning process may help in gaining pupil perspective, I had already formed a research question before beginning this literature review. My research question was:

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

I used this literature review to explore the conceptual framework underpinning my professional work as a practising educational psychologist and this piece of research. I used the literature review to explore my research question covering key areas of relevance to the topic and in doing so allowed my thoughts to emerge as to how best to engage with pupils and adults about how to elicit their perspectives about their learning and attainment and what makes their learning and teaching difficult.

2.2   Conceptual Framework

Through my personal and professional journey (see Chapter 1, Section 1:1) there emerged a moral and philosophical commitment to equality of opportunity, inclusion and empowerment based on a conceptual or theoretical framework of post positivist social constructivism. This section covers the background epistemology and the philosophical, theoretical underpinnings to the research. The methodology and the method used to carry

out this research will be covered in Chapter 3 Methodology. Epistemology and methodology are related, epistemology being the philosophy of how we come to know the world and methodology being the practice (Trochin, 2006). It is crucial to be clear about the conceptual or theoretical frameworks underpinning research and hence this initial focus. I acknowledge as a practitioner and as a professional working in educational settings and within a local authority that research can be difficult to access and even more difficult to then apply to day to day practice. I have found it useful when reflecting on the idea of theory to consider what Todd (2005) referred to as logical ideas, connecting ideas or issues in an aspect of practice. As reflective practitioners, educational psychologists seek to enhance understanding and in doing so to help inform future action. I would like to suggest that my already stated commitment to equality of opportunity, inclusion and empowerment can be seen as complex areas within which Todd (2005) suggests theory is important. There are of course a number of conceptual or theoretical frameworks that could be used to consider complex areas such as equality of opportunity, inclusion and effective learning.

A positivist quantitative methodology was considered; this is one which seeks to establish truth or falsity of a theoretical statement, favouring the collection and analysis of numerical data (Greig & Taylor 1999). This was rejected in favour of a post positivist social constructivist qualitative methodology which makes the effort to understand the child's perspective by entering their world. Actions, thoughts, intentions and meaning cannot readily be conveyed by the numbers of the quantitative approach, but a qualitative approach seeks to understand the social world from the point of view of the person living

in it. A positivist methodology with its recognised problem of being removed from reality (Grosvenor & Rose, 2001) seemed incompatible with the fundamental essence of my research being about the pupil and adult perspectives. As data is converted into numerical form (within a quantitative positivist approach), although it helps to make comparisons, a lot of information and meaning is lost to the point that context can disappear (Hayes, 2000; Parker, 2006).

A positivist methodology begins from the stance that the world is as it is and that it can be measured. This traditional scientific approach appears too removed from the reality I have experienced throughout my personal and professional journey, it appears to be an approach that is too controlled, too detached from the world of educational psychology that I experience. I find that the positivist reliance on control, on numbers, on the premise that theories can be tested, proven or disproven again does not fit well with my view of reality and the world. Undoubtedly my early exposure to psychology was at a time when a positivist stance was dominant which suggested the goal of knowledge was to describe what we experience and to stick to what we can observe and measure. This was the psychology of the "rat runners" as Trochin (2006) refers to, or the psychology of what can be observed and measured directly. This psychology is based on a positivist belief in prediction and control, in cause and effect that uses deductive reasoning to postulate a theory that can be tested.

My early psychology was very much at a time when empiricism was dominant with the key approach being the use of experiments to discern natural laws through direct

manipulation and observation. The emphasis was on narrow and inappropriate research methodologies rooted within a positivist paradigm (Burden, 1997). Perhaps linked to frustrations that such a methodology does not seem to fit the world as many experience it, was the growth of the argument for an alternative approach to research, one emphasising the real world, being grounded in naturalistic research recognising there are limitations to an experimental-control group type design and instead focusing on ways to shed light upon the actions of ordinary people in their everyday lives.

Thus traditional laboratory based experimental psychology was questioned and the struggle of applying inappropriate research designs to real world situations and problems was recognised. It has been suggested that psychologists perhaps lagged behind other disciplines in applying more radical new paradigm approaches to research (Burden, 1997). Similar to other educational psychologists I have been drawn to the growing interest in methodologies based on a post positivist epistemology such as, case studies, action research, grounded theory and qualitative analysis. A criticism of the positivist approach has been that it placed researchers firmly outside and separate from the subject of research in the search for objective knowledge. It has been argued that there are benefits of taking a more holistic, pluralist and egalitarian approach by engaging in participative inquiry and adopting a self reflexive critical awareness in participatory action research:

> *whose emphasis is on establishing liberating dialogue with impoverished and oppressed peoples (Reason 1994, pg 325).*

I also acknowledge that there are critics of post positivist approaches, which I will return to.

Similarly, according to post structural theory, society is not only constructed of people but also constructed by people. Professional practice, including educational psychology, can be seen in the same way, constructed of and by educational psychologists. Educational psychologists construct ideas, themes, narratives, discourses and these are the beliefs that educational psychologists have about how things are or could be, they are given the status of truths. Language is active in forming our constructions and all the terms that we use in our professional practice are constructed terms that have grown over time, for example in the area of educational psychology such terms as "special needs", "potential", "barriers to learning", "ability", "effective learning" are all terms constructed over time in response to complex needs (Todd, 2005). It can be useful to interrogate the terms, the discourses of our professional practice. This is known as deconstruction or critically investigating words, terms and ideas including those related to educational psychology practice and those that I am particularly interested in and committed to.

As already made clear, I am drawn to a post positivist approach rejecting the positivist approach, recognising that all observations are theory laden and that scientists are biased by cultural experiences and world views (Trochin, 2006). I hold the view that knowledge including so called scientific knowledge is not a neutral body of data independent of cultural norms and values but is in fact socially constructed in support of certain values and understandings. Within psychology, knowledge and facts are not givens or self-

evident but are culturally constructed. Thus I support a social constructivist view, that is, the sociological theory of knowledge that applies general philosophical constructivism to social settings, that groups construct knowledge for one another collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artefacts with shared meanings. Social cultural cognitive developmental learning processes are products of society and culture, different cultures have various systems – beliefs, values, manners. There can be differences in specific societies making up the larger culture, our culture teaches us behaviour which may vary according to society. Our socialization is within a very specific culture with society moulding our behaviour. Constructivists believe we construct our view of the world based on our perceptions of it and that since our perceptions and observations are fallible then our constructions must be imperfect. Constructivists recognise that we are all biased and all of our observations are affected and are theory laden. The best hope for objectivity within a constructivist approach is to triangulate across multiple perspectives and objectivity can be improved by critically reflecting:

> *we should think about the assumptions we make about the world when we conduct*
> *research (Trochin, 2006, p3).*

Positivist approaches have in addition been looked at from a critical realist standpoint being critical about the proposition that it is possible to know reality with certainty, all observations are fallible and with error and all theory as revisable.

It is also useful to reflect on constructivism and set it within a historical context. Constructivism emerged from reflections on the problems and difficulties posed by empiricist and rationalist accounts of knowledge and other perspectives that maintain

separations between the knower and the known (Masolo & Pollack, 1997). According to Jackson (2006) the emphasis of constructivism is on the social construction of reality and of human relations consisting of thoughts and ideas rather than material conditions, that is, constructivism is seen as an "idealist" philosophy rather than the "materialist" philosophy of positivism. The social constructivist view of the social world is that it is not a "given", does not exist independent of thoughts and ideas of those involved, is not an external reality with laws that can be discovered through scientific research and explained by scientific theory as positivists argue. Everything in the social world is made by those within it and thus makes it intelligible to them; it is a world of thoughts, beliefs, ideas, concepts, languages and discourses, signs, symbols and understandings, an inter subjective domain meaningful to those who made it and live in it.

As humans we live within a social world and the world of human interaction is very different from the natural world of physical phenomena. As humans we rely on understanding each others' actions and assigning meaning to them. Thus it can be postulated that in order to understand human interaction we can't just describe it as we would describe physical phenomena and thus we need a different kind of interpretative understanding and an epistemological approach that recognises this. I am particularly drawn to post positivist social constructivist epistemology as it seems compatible with my own view of the world, including concerns with "within child" models. Narrative practices of social constructivism refer to externalisation, locating problems not within the child or individual but as products of culture and history – problems are seen as socially constructed and created over time (Todd, 2005).

Therefore as I have argued, I am drawn to a social constructivist conceptual framework because of the emphasis it places on the importance of context and culture, on an interactionist perspective, on the social nature of human behaviour and learning and because it questions within child models of deficit. This fits with my view of the world and the reality that I see as a practising educational psychologist. According to social constructivism, knowledge is constructed and is based on the importance of culture and context. Social constructivism recognises that the social world of humans is interaction based and thus our understanding has to be based on this. For example, a pat on the face will be interpreted differently depending on the context, ranging from a sign of affection to an aggressive act. Social constructivism is interested in human behaviour and recognises that there are different points of view. It recognises that narratives are constructed and are socially based on cultural context. Thus social constructivism proposes that:

> *meaning is a constructed product of human activity rather than an innate characteristic of the mind or an inherent property of objects or events in the world… reflects variations on the theme that the knower participates in the known and vice versa (Masolo & Pollack, 1997, pg 1).*

Each of us has our own unique constructed view of reality. Knowledge is always subjective and filtered through human consciousness. This is particularly pertinent to me as a practising educational psychologist committed to empowerment and promoting effective learning since the proposition arising from social constructivism is that learning is constructed by the individual within a social context rather than merely being received.

Relevant to this research is the premise that pupils are part of a social world and their learning, behaviour, knowledge and perceptions are socially created and constructed. Thus pupils' views of learning and teaching are constructed within a complex social context, this context includes adults who similarly construct their views of learning and teaching within this complex social context. Given this complexity my reflection was that pupils' and adults' perspectives cannot be seen in isolation. Learning theory and effective learning will be returned to in a later section of this literature review.

Related is the consideration that people are not only aware of the narrative content of their lives but they behave in ways that are planned to be consistent with this narrative and thus intelligible to themselves and others. Narratives engage linguistically encoded interpretative concepts that belong to a social and historical collection that can be called discourse. Knowledge is expressed in language; language is meaningful within the linguistic context of a discourse thus the scientific concept of "objective knowledge" is relative to the discursive context. No discourse escapes the historical, cultural, socio-political context within which it developed. Power is not only enacted within a relationship of inequality but also within a discourse, that is each party in the interaction has it's own set of linguistically coded meaning and discourses (Keen, 1997).

There is a suggestion that the scientific research community has in fact contributed to an authoritative maintenance of the status quo, have promoted knowledge that is compatible with or promotes the social and political interests of the dominant few that are in power. It has been suggested that:

science is socially constructed … in their constructions scientists must cope with very real constraints from nature (Sargent, 1997, pg 94).

Constructivism entails the assumption that our knowledge claims remain relative to cultural contexts, that all scientific knowledge is based on evidence that is deemed authoritative as it is compatible or promotes the social and political interests of those with power. Although since the 1950s philosophers of science have rejected the positivist conception of facts and methodology, this does not mean all knowledge is epistemically suspect. Scientific areas that focus on human behaviour, including psychology and educational psychology, are more difficult for those traditional scientific methods. A number of scientific facts are theory laden and are interpreted in light of the currently accepted theory, the way results are interpreted preserves the position and are interpreted in light of currently accepted theory.

Social constructivism presents a way to speak about what we find. Critical realists accept scientific enquiry operates in a climate of epistemic relativism, that is, knowledge is always provisional, is open to challenge. Critical realism sees science as the ongoing process of improving concepts used to understand mechanisms for study. Relativists see varieties of truth constituted within different discourses or narratives. Social constructivism recognises the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. Social constructivism relies on insights to emphasise the importance of meaning and understanding.

According to Parker (1998) critical psychology involves not only reflecting but engaging in reflexive inquiry. A further critical view of positivist approaches detachment from the world being researched comes from ethnography. Ethnography implies not only that there must be engagement with the world being studied, but that in searching for meaning we must suspend our preconceptions and have a commitment to discovery. It is suggested that in research there can never be an invisible fly on the wall, thus questioning the notion that non participant observer research is possible. It is suggested that approaches that place a researcher within a real world situation, whatever the role, will influence the data. Thus a researcher must reflect, must consider the subject's perceptions of the researcher and how this might have influenced what they said (Ball, 1990). This links to the view of critical psychology that we need to attend to constructs that we have taken for granted, that we need to challenge and question paradigms, that we need to interrogate the effects of social constructions on individual thoughts and feelings and actions. From ethnography and critical psychology I have been encouraged to challenge, question, interrogate, deconstruct what we have taken for granted and to reflect upon how I might have influenced a situation; and from social cultural theory that everything that makes up the psychological processes join together to form our self image, identity and reality are products of our culture and society.

A qualitative methodology was felt to complement my post positivist social constructivist conceptual framework, the essence of the research as well as the research question being investigated. Qualitative research is an umbrella term with the common element being a concern with meanings and the way that people understand things (Denscombe, 1998).

Although there is no single qualitative method, the focus is on the context and integrity of the material (Parker, 2006). The data are words but only become data when used as such and the data is produced by the way interpreted (Denscombe, 1998). According to Hayes (1997) qualitative methodology is a holistic approach associated with meanings and context which is less insistent on control and more interested in listening to and analysing what participants can tell them. Qualitative research recognises the strength of a reflexive spiral and respects the meanings brought by the researcher and characteristics of the situation (Parker, 2006). Similarly, Tindall (2006) refers to reflexivity as a distinctive feature of qualitative research which attempts to make explicit the process by which the material and analysis are produced.

The strengths of qualitative research are seen as being that data and analysis are grounded in reality producing a richness of detail (Denscombe, 1998), the depth of examination of meanings rather than merely a skim over the surface (Parker, 2006) and allows a focus on human meanings in information and allows for gaining a much deeper understanding of complexities (Hayes, 2000). As already stated there is no one method, but qualitative research draws on a range of techniques, for example, interviews and observation. Advantages of particular methods have been highlighted, for example, Fletcher (2001) highlights interviews as being valuable once mutual trust is established as interviews enable the exploration of complex issues in detail by probing beneath the surface and by using a tape recorder the researcher can focus on the interactions rather than the notes.

Disadvantages of qualitative methods have been identified, for example, that the data is less representative, the interpretation is bound up with the researcher and that it is possible through interpretation to actually de-contextualise the meaning taking words out of context or oversimplifying (Denscombe, 1998). If a tape recorder is used then it will capture the words of the informants but can inhibit interactions (Fletcher, 2001). Hayes (2000) also points out that since qualitative methods can be distorted by the assumptions and beliefs of the researcher, they are prone to self-fulfilling prophecies, bias and distortion. Thus much attention is given in qualitative methods to rigour, which includes showing explicit and rigorous steps taken in the research, being aware of problems of distortion and bias by including reanalysis and reappraisal.

Within this first section of the literature review I have outlined the conceptual framework of post positivist social constructivism that is the underpinning epistemology for my research and a qualitative methodology. Reflecting on the conceptual framework has highlighted the complex nature of my research interest. Adopting a social constructivist framework recognises the social interactive nature of learning and teaching and the difficulties in trying to see pupil and adult perspectives in isolation from each other. As already outlined I have used the remainder of this literature review to explore my research question considering key areas of relevance to the topic. I do so in order to support my emerging thoughts about how best to engage with pupils to elicit their perspective about their learning and attainment and what makes their learning difficult while recognising the complexity of the situation that I am interested in and that considering pupil views in isolation from adult views does not recognise this complexity.

Issues relevant to my research question will be highlighted as I explore the topic. As a reminder my research question was:

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experiences of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

2.3   Effective learning

In this section I begin to consider the discourses that have been constructed around the complex area that this research covers, effective learning. My interests, from which this research arose, are ways to maximise learning and attainments, pupil views about their learning and barriers to learning. I am interested in why some children and young people, in apparently similar circumstances, appear to learn effectively and achieve while others do not. I am interested in how a group learning process could help to gain the perspective of pupils. I am interested in the perspective of children, their voice, about how they can best learn and attain and what their perspective is of what is important for their learning. This interest in the perspective of children is grounded in reality and based on a social constructivist conceptual background; this recognises that learning is context based, that children learn within a complex context and that the perspectives of children cannot be seen in isolation from the context in which they are constructed and that adults are part of this. My hope is to inform a rethinking of learning and teaching to create learning contexts that maximise learning and attainments but recognise that this rethinking should be informed by pupil and adult perspectives. In particular, through the literature review I hope that my thoughts will continue to develop about how best to engage with pupils to

elicit pupil perspectives and adult perspectives without compromising, negating or inhibiting pupil perspectives.

2.3.1 Learning

Thus as a starting point I consider learning and as I focus on learning theory I will emphasise learning from a social constructivist standpoint, that is, as an active process in which individuals make meanings through their interactions with each other and with the environment in which they live. Knowledge is thus a product of humans and is socially and culturally constructed. Learning is "constructed" by learners individually or socially rather than simply being received from whoever is teaching or instructing. Since each of us has a uniquely constructed version of reality we must have a uniquely constructed version of learning. From a social constructivist perspective cognitive developmental learning processes are seen as products of society and culture. Knowledge is always subjective and filtered through human consciousness. This standpoint is influenced by Vygotsky (1978) recognising that any learning always has a previous history, learning and development are interrelated and proposed the new idea of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) proposes the importance of interacting with adults within the context and co-operating with peers. Learning is seen as a matter of enhancing our capacity to interpret our world with our interpretations being shaped by the repertoires of interpretations that are possible within our context. Learning is seen to occur within interactions with more "expert" others and in schools around tasks which elicit particular forms of language and action. Learners are helped to interpret possibilities for action and are supported in being able to use these (Edwards, 2001). The

importance of active social interaction context based learning is illustrated by Engestrom (1999) and Cole (1996). This view of learning seems to fit with the reality that I have experienced throughout my personal and professional journey and the world of educational psychology that I experience. In particular I appreciate this active and social interactive view of learning, that this includes both adults and peers, and I am interested in the value that seems to be placed on interactions and relationships.

2.3.2 Effective learning

The view of the learner as an active participant and the proposition that active participation promotes effective learning is one that complements my social constructivist stance. To continue, I will consider personalised learning, a term that has recently appeared in government literature (Park, 2004) emphasising the need to use the learning needs and talents of children to guide decision making and promote effective learning (DfES, 2004b). I suggest that this is in fact not a new concept, literature identifies a number factors important to effective learning linked to active participation and personalisation, such as, children viewing themselves as active participants who reflect on learning strategies they use, are aware of thought processes and self theories, making skills learnt explicit and link to experiences (Booth et al, 1997; Carnell, 2000; Morton, 1996; Timmons, 1999). Consistent with a social constructivist view of learning is this collaborative view of learning and the recognition of the importance of questions and dialogue (Carnell & Lodge, 2002; Gersch, 1996; Preece & Timmons, 2004). Although consistent with a social constructivist view of learning, I suggest personalised learning is nothing new but a vague concept (Ecclestone, 2007) that can be seen as just good practice

which during my experience as a teacher and an educational psychologist I have witnessed being used to establish a context for effective learning.

I will move on to consider motivational and emotional factors. It has been suggested that the most important aspect in determining effective learning are a child's emotional reaction to the learning situation, their attitude, motivation and expectation (Gersch, 1996). The effects of labelling on a child's sense of self worth, motivation, behaviour and learning are well known, the self fulfilling prophecy (Ross & Nesbett, 1991). I would suggest that it is also interesting to consider how learning failures and disappointment are interpreted and attributed. If learning failure is seen to be related to effort, teaching or learning strategy these can be interpreted as factors that can be altered which is consistent with a social constructivist view. Learning failure attributed to a child's ability not only perpetuates a within child deficit model but is seen as unalterable. Viewed in this way the disempowering nature of a deficit model may shed some light on why ability labelling is such an insidiously powerful influence on children with the resulting entrenched oppositional behaviour and seeking to enhance self esteem in other ways, for example, via an antisocial peer group culture (Dixon, 2004; Dixon, 2005) and a resulting negative effect on learning outcomes. I would suggest that the testing and reporting culture that has been created helps to perpetuate such feelings of worthlessness within our children. I would suggest that there is more hope from a social constructivist notion which sees that factors can be altered. Within the literature there are a number of examples, teachers intervening to build the learning capacity of children (Dixon, 2005) or adults developing their skills in enhancing the ability of children and young people to engage more

effectively (Burton, 2008). This is very much in keeping with my experiences which support a social constructivist view that context affects learning, I have witnessed the positive and unfortunately sometimes negative effects that adults have on the learning of our children and the effect that positive, empowering learning interactions and relationships can have.

Emotional reactions to the learning situation are also crucial and benefits of group processes and drawing on psychological principles have been seen to be useful. For example, literature suggesting children's awareness of their own learning promotes effective learning, they learn better if they know more about themselves as learners and can ask about their learning. In order to do this a vocabulary to talk about learning is needed but children are not used to doing this, or looking at themselves positively as learners (Todd, 2003a; Todd, 2003b). Children are more likely to succeed if they are part of decision making and contribute to intervention planning (Todd, 2003a). Consistent with the social constructivist view of learning is the suggestion that interventions are more likely to succeed if children are part of the decision making, are able to contribute information and views about skills, abilities and interventions, that resilience skills, attributes and abilities enable individuals to adapt to hardships, difficulties and challenges (Chessor, 2008). There is evidence within the literature emphasising the importance of relationships and relational quality for learning, for example, McLaughlin & Clarke (2010) suggest the idea of "school connectedness", those activities and experiences within the school community that promote relationships.

Consistent with a social constructivist standpoint is the suggestion that children learn effectively when they are actively participating in a social learning group situation where interactions and relationships positively affirm and empower feelings of worth, a can do approach where the adult role is to alter factors so that learning success is achieved. A within child deficit ability labelling model is not consistent with this view. This is an empowering and hopeful view of the social learning situation which values the impact of interactions and relationships. Pertinent for my developing thinking for this research was the suggestion of the importance of group processes, interaction, discussion and self awareness for pupil voice.

When thinking about effective learning from a social constructivist standpoint, social and emotional aspects cannot be overlooked. I will continue by reflecting upon one recent government initiative designed to promote children and young people as effective learners, Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL), (DfES, 2005). It is pertinent to briefly reflect from a historical perspective. In the 1990s the traditional notion of intelligence as a measure of school success was questioned and the usefulness of emotional intelligence emerged (Goleman, 1996; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) and by the turn of the 21st century the debate around the importance of social, emotional and relational aspects of learning had gained momentum, illustrated by the introduction of SEAL as part of the national strategy to improve behaviour and attendance. SEAL has been presented as a curriculum which aims to develop the underpinning qualities and skills necessary for positive behaviour and effective learning.

There appears to be conflicting evidence about the impact of SEAL on outcomes for children. A national evaluation of the impact of SEAL in secondary schools (DfE, 2010) highlighted a range of barriers to implementation and reported a failure to have a significant positive impact on social and emotional skills, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems in the schools sampled. There was some evidence of improved feelings of autonomy and influence in children and some positive changes in general outcomes, for example, a reduction in fixed term exclusions and some improvements in behaviour, interpersonal skills and relationships (DfE, 2010). Another recent evaluation Banergee (2010) has shown that SEAL implementation and school ethos are directly associated with attainment results and indirectly connected with attainment through the link with positive behaviour. According to Banergee (2010) an important quality of SEAL implementation is having a genuinely whole school universal approach and schools with a more positive social and emotional ethos have more positive peer interactions and higher attainments. These evaluation studies seem consistent in their findings with other literature about the importance of the process of a whole school implementation and ethos. Inconsistencies may be explained by the fact that the curriculum materials of SEAL focus on developing skills in children with the expectation being that the process of implementation will bring about a change in the school environment (Hallam, 2009). In my experience establishing truly genuine whole school universal approaches within schools, especially secondary school because of size and complexity of context, can be challenging and I would suggest that the inconsistencies shown in the literature may be a reflection of this.

In addition to this inconclusive evidence of the impact of SEAL highly critical reflections have emerged. Critiques do not question the need to tackle behaviour problems or to develop an ethos within schools that builds positive relationships, promotes pupil voice and where appropriate behaviours are modelled. Critics suggest that although well meaning, the formal teaching of social and emotional skills for all is risky and may backfire (Craig, 2007). Critics are not saying emotional aspects are unimportant, nor suggesting that self concept, motivation and achievement are not important or that there is not a need to address emotional problems seen in a minority of our children and young people nor dismiss the usefulness of therapeutic interventions in certain contexts. Critics are cautious about the increased emphasis on emotional aspects or a 'therapeutic' turn in education, which is defined as the emphasis on emotional aspects, on feelings over intellect (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). Critics suggest that developing a "therapeutic ethos" within schools is extending therapy based activities into an everyday mindset that expects and accepts emotional fragility legitimising the belief in the "diminished self" rather than the empowered autonomous resilient self (Ecclestone, 2007). The danger is of an emotional underclass, where the old notions of deficiency and individual pathology appear in new emotional guises. There are concerns about labelling, inequality and the danger that a systematic programme approach for all with evaluated checklists may result in emotional learning outcomes becoming targets for improvement (Craig, 2007). In addition there are concerns about a growth of commercial aspects of therapeutic education (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). Literature is critical of the underlying therapeutic ethos and the 'diminished self' image being illustrated through such labels as "vulnerable learners", "at risk learners", "fragile identities". There is recognition that education has

always been prone to labels, usually ability and intelligence based, but that labels now focus on emotional aspects (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). The challenge made is that the therapeutic ethos highlights and encourages an emotional response to everyday challenges, an obsession with emotional fragility and 'diminished self'. Therapeutic education is criticised as profoundly anti-educational creating a curriculum of the self that lowers education and social aspirations, that is far from empowering but rather invites a lowering of expectations as children are seen as flawed and vulnerable. Such a therapeutic ethos can be seen as dangerous because emotions are being opened to assessment and the social engineering of emotionally literate citizens who are coached to experience emotional well being (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009).

Thus a discourse is emerging that suggests emotional vulnerability and diminished educational aspirations are powerful cultural narratives (Ecclestone, 2007) and argues that educators committed to social justice need to resist images of diminished self. The challenge does not question the fundamental importance of developing an ethos within our schools that builds confidence, positive relations, empowers and promotes pupil voice. As an educational psychologist I have for a number of years, been aware of the power of promoting the emotional well being of all our children and the adults working with them in our schools. I have supported the development of school environments that are emotionally inclusive and supportive yet recognised that a minority of our children will require a more focused and individualised supportive package of interventions. I continue to struggle with the notion of labels and diagnosis and heavy therapeutic interventions in the school environment. I struggle with the lack of involvement and

consideration of what our children may feel about, think about narratives of emotional vulnerability, emotional fragility, diminished educational aspirations, diminished self, and therapeutic ethos that seem to be emergent dominant narratives within education policy.

Thus I have reflected on effective learning from a social constructivist standpoint which has highlighted the importance of interactive and relationship bound learning enhanced through social learning situations where social emotional factors are optimised to enable children to use dialogue and language to be active and reflective participants in their own learning. Critical reflections on SEAL suggest that we need to be mindful to not disengage or disempower our children by promoting an image of emotional fragility and vulnerability, the 'diminished self', but to promote their empowered autonomous resilient self.

To summarise, particularly pertinent for my research is what the literature is saying about how pupils learn most effectively and how best to engage with pupils in order to elicit their perspective. According to the literature, effective learning is an active participatory process where the learner's interactions with others are useful for meanings to develop. The importance of questions, dialogue and discussion to learning is acknowledged as are the emotional reactions of the learner. The role of adults within the learning context seems to be about setting the context for these interactions crucial for learning, to see learning as interaction based and to change or adjust the context allowing for these interactions with adults and peers to be fostered so that learning is achieved. Thus in

considering how to address my research question this led me to consider that the group learning process should be one that promotes active participation of pupils, that recognises the importance of the interactions, the language, dialogue and discussion, that promotes emotional well being and where the role of adult is to develop a context that enables pupils to achieve and learn.

2.3.3   Barriers to learning

For some time I have been interested in what pupils views are about the adult term, "barriers to learning" (what makes learning difficult) and whether pupils and adults have similar constructions of the term. It is very evident that there are differing points of view about pupil achievements; for example, the media frequently report that as an educational system and society we are not succeeding in enabling all our children to become effective learners and thus achieve. The media frequently report concerns about standards in basic skills, about how our children and young people perform poorly compared to other countries both in attainments and in social and emotional factors. The media report on examination results, suggesting declining standards. A discourse running through is that pupils are not achieving. The discourse "barriers to learning" is relevant here, barriers to learning has become a widely used term in education in thinking about when learning is not effective.

The Green Paper, Excellence for All (DfEE, 1997) talks about "removing barriers" that get in the way of meeting the needs of all children and thus by implication get in the way of learning. The term has continued to be used within a range of documents, including the

QCA National Curriculum Inclusion Statement (1999), the revised Code of Practice (DfES, 2001), Every Child Matters: Change for Children in Schools (DfES, 2004c), with the focus appearing to be to find out what barriers to learning are and to find ways to overcome them, some being things wrong with the child that can be mended. It is acknowledged that difficulties in learning arise from unsuitable environments with the school organisation, curriculum and family circumstances being mentioned (DfES, 2004a).

Thus within the literature there are a number of barriers to learning suggested. I will highlight the range of factors that have been identified in terms of barriers to learning some related to individual pupil factors, some adults factors and some environmental and system factors. There is also a large body of literature about effective learning, what it is and how to promote it which suggests that a number of factors important to effective learning. This has also informed this reflection on barriers to learning.

Barriers to learning can be related to individual pupil skills, one being poor literacy levels. Literature highlights concerns about literacy levels, for example, 30 to 40% of pupils at age 11 and 14 have literacy levels that are below the expected levels and alarmingly 16 % of adults have some literacy difficulties (DfES, 2003: Lewis & Wray, undated). In addition other pupil skills can from barriers, for example, numeracy skills, thinking and problem solving skills, language and communication skills. In addition sensory and medical factors can impact on learning, hearing, vision and physical difficulties.

A further barrier to learning can be that pupils are not active participants in their own learning, pupils who acquire a view of themselves as active participants in their own learning are more committed and effective learners (Carnell, 2000). Effective learners are active, responsible, collaborative and able to reflect upon and develop appropriate learning strategies (Carnell & Lodge, 2002).

Metacognitive skills, pupil self awareness, past pupil experience, clarity of why something is being learnt can all form barriers to learning; that is difficulties with developing metacognitive skills or lack of awareness of their own thought processes (Timmons, 1999; Wray & Lewis, undated). Situations where pupils are not encouraged to use questioning or have dialogue promoted (Stevens et al, 2001; Gersch, 1996; Preece & Timmons, 2004; Carnell, 2000)) can be a barrier to learning. Similarly a barrier can be if it is not clear to pupils they should learn specific skills (Medwell et al, undated), or where the benefit of linking back to the experiences of pupils is not recognised (Booth et al, 1997). Further barriers can be related to difficulties in facilitating pupil involvement, developing positive relationships and the use of our self theories, that is, what we say in our heads about ourselves as learners, learning how to learn and when to apply different skills helps foster confidence in learning strategies (Carnell & Lodge, 2002; Morton, 1996). Similarly difficulties in understanding and planning work and acting on teacher feedback and guidance (Timmons, 1999) can form a barrier to learning.

Further barriers can be related to poor motivation and behaviours that prevent effective learning. Poor motivation can be related to pupils construing classroom activities in a confused way due to difficulties in understanding and planning work and acting on teacher feedback and guidance, (Timmons, 1999). Off task behaviour can be context related with pupils making a choice because of their perceived lack of prospects to succeed and wish to avoid failure (Stevens et al, 2001). Emotional aspects feature as powerful barriers to learning, for example, the effects of ability labelling can be one of the most insidiously powerful influences that can effect pupils' learning (Dixon , 2004) and how teachers can strengthen capacity to learn, the choices and actions of teachers can not only lift the constraints on pupils' learning but also increase learning capacity. By concentrating on promoting capacity to learn teachers can transform that capacity by improving expectations, engagement in learning and respect for each other, (Dixon, 2005).

Barriers to learning can also be related to emotional factors, for example, a learners emotional reaction to the learning situation (Gersch, 1996), how resilient a learner is in adapting to the challenges of the learning situation (Chessor, 2008), whether positive supportive relationships are created within the learning situation (McLaughlin & Clarke, 2010) and whether learners have developed the underpinning emotional well being and social emotional skills needed for effective learning (DfES, 2004a; SEAL 2005; SEAL 2007).

Barriers to learning can also be systemic or societal factors, for example, does the learning environment provide appropriate learning materials, awareness of learning styles, appropriate curriculum, assessment and assistance levels, appropriate facilities to promote learning and appropriate behaviour and learning management approaches. Poverty, family circumstances, peer, parental and community aspirations and support are crucial factors that can form barriers to learning.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list but I suggest is evidence of the emphasis that is placed on an individual deficit within child model. Barriers to learning are highlighted that may result from school organisational factors, teaching quality, curriculum issues, or barriers to learning associated with cultural or social disadvantage or poverty.

It appears pertinent also to consider that the notion "barriers to learning" as seen within the literature and government agenda is not only an adult construction but a construction from the standpoint of dominant, powerful, professional adults. I would suggest that the dominant construction of learning, effective learning and barriers to learning are adult constructions and an adult view that is educator not family, parent or carer based. This may be linked to power; the preservation of the status quo and dominant social advantaged and maintenance of the subservience of the underclass and socially disadvantaged. I am suggesting that barriers to learning is a buzz word in education; is presented as inclusive and pupil empowering, for example, advocating personalised learning. I question whether it is pupil centred, inclusive, empowering and suggest it is in

essence a within child deficit model that gives legitimacy to perpetuating social disadvantage. It appears to place the emphasis on pupil attributes and changes that pupils have to make rather than focusing on the interactive nature of learning, the role of adults in maintaining a system rather than changing the system. I suggest that a criticism of this model of barriers to learning is that it does not seem to account for those pupils who with apparent barriers to learning, achieve.

Through this consideration of "barriers to learning", I would suggest that, although the importance of learning within a context is acknowledged the emphasis is very much placed on responding to within child needs. In my work as an educational psychologist it seems that, although the rhetoric has been to recognise the importance of the context, in reality it has appeared that where there have been discussions about improving the effectiveness of learning, it has often been the child not the context or the system around the child that has made adjustments. This is not compatible with a social constructivist viewpoint of learning that I am drawn to.

As a practising educational psychologist since the early 1990's my work has focused very much on children with barriers to learning, those who do not learn effectively, those grouped together under the label of special educational needs (SEN). Since this research grew from my interest in effective learning I feel I cannot overlook the term SEN. The discourse of SEN has become highly contentious and problematical. Contributing to this has been the standards agenda, league tables and judgements being made about value added. Additional factors have been the notion that all children should be progressing at

set rates in relation to national curriculum levels and suggestions that too many are identified with SEN. I will briefly consider the discourse around SEN from a social constructivist standpoint and in particular how children and young people become constructed with an identity of children and young people with SEN, what their experiences and their views are. The relevance for me is not to deconstruct the term but to understand the context for considering effective learning.

The term SEN is highly emotive, some children and their parents desperately seek to have a label of SEN, others desperately seek to not have a label. Schools fluctuate depending upon a range of factors including funding, accountability, rights, statutory requirements. While I have been working as an educational psychologist the relationship between achievement and attainment and social disadvantage has been well recognised and there has been a period of time where areas of considerable social disadvantage received significant targeted resources. The relationship between SEN and social disadvantage has been less well publicised and recognised. The educational context of testing, league tables, accountability about value added has further complicated the area of SEN.

It is pertinent to note the critical role that psychology has been perceived to play in maintaining discriminatory discourse and practices of power, for example, the use of culturally unfair intelligence tests (Kaye, 2000). The suggestion is that psychology is not neutral but that there are social, ideological and political interests and privileges, and concepts and practices that have benefitted dominant groups at the expense of marginalised and less powerful groups. Increasingly we have lived in a society that has

tested, measured, examined and categorized. We have used standardised norms and the normalization divide, such terms as "adjusted" / "maladjusted", "normal" / "abnormal", "intelligent" / "not intelligent". In doing so, it has been suggested that psychology, although perhaps 'unwittingly', has been complicit in maintaining the dominant "social order" and "power" relationships, often to the detriment of the "disadvantaged" (Kaye, 2000). Children with SEN have become subjected to scrutiny at all times and much more so than pupils with no SEN. Although this is presented as being as a result of concern, actually it constructs children as objects of power and knowledge (Allan, 1996). The term "norm" is used, with SEN being defined in relation to distance from the "norm". Thus children with SEN have become objectified, categorised and compared to others, they have become an object of power and knowledge (Allan, 1996). There are aspects of the discourse of SEN that leave me feeling uncomfortable, in particular, the power adults have over children, the use of categories and labels, and the profoundly limiting effect to the outcomes for children. Thus children with SEN have their identities constructed by adults through the use of categories or labels, and a deficit within child model of SEN.

This model is at odds with the social model that the disability movement has promoted. As the SEN discourse has been deconstructed the usefulness of the term SEN has been questioned since the classification of what and who is special does not relate to the discourses of the disability movement and the social model (Corbett, 1993). Many have rejected the medical deficit within child model of SEN in favour of the social model of disability (Rieser & Mason, 1990). Historically there was an omission from SEN research and literature of disabled and SEN researchers and subjects. I suggest that this reflects

that the power with regard to SEN and disability has not been with those who are identified as having SEN or being disabled.

With regard to children with SEN, I would like to suggest that there has been a tendency to see all children with the label as the same, for example, all excluded children as one, overlooking that there are different factors and perspectives around the exclusion. This relates to how identities are constructed and appears to me to be hugely important. Children's identities as SEN are constructed by their parents, their teachers and professionals, often based on a deficit model of SEN rather than a social model. If this is how identities are constructed then SEN and barriers to learning are not seen as being socially constructed and fashioned by curriculum, teaching style and organisational factors. Professionals, including educational psychologists I would suggest, are very much part of this construction and perhaps like other professionals have been complicit in perpetuating the dominant model not challenging or reflecting childrens' perspectives. I would challenge whether this is the identity that children would construct for themselves. There is a view that while acknowledging identities are fashioned by the processes of schools and professional practice, we cannot guarantee that these are the identities actually desired by the children themselves. The challenge is that as professionals we need to understand the role we have in shaping identities and consider how we can assist children in developing their own preferred identities (Todd, 2005). In addition it is recognised that involving children is difficult in the area of SEN due to the complexity and contradictory nature of the area.

Thus there are two polarised views: the discourse of SEN that sees the problem as within child is in effect an internalising model. On the other hand, an externalising model, sees SEN as a product of culture and history with the problem socially constructed and created over time. How do children with SEN become constructed as children with SEN? Allan (1996) suggests that research has a role to find out what goes on in classrooms and how in fact children become constructed as SEN. We need to understand the experiences of children with SEN and we need an analytical framework to look at the formal and informal discourses which have constructed children with SEN. Thus hugely relevant to this research is this notion that we need to explore by understanding the experiences of children with SEN and how their identities have been constructed within their contexts. There is further evidence of the complex nature of the area of SEN, barriers to learning and how pupil and adult perspectives become constructed.

Thus to summarise, building from my preferred post positivist social constructivist conceptual framework is the notion that I, and the children that I work with, construct our view of the world based on our perceptions. Our identities are socially constructed over time within the contexts in which we live, our identities are a product of our society, our culture and our history. Our world is a social world which is interaction based. The self image, identity and reality that we each create is a product of our culture, society and our history. I am interested in gaining the pupil perspective about their learning, but coming from a social constructivist conceptual framework I recognise that the pupil perspective cannot be seen in isolation from the context in which it is constructed, this context is hugely complex in nature and includes adults in schools. Literature refers to pupil views

about effective learning, barriers to learning and SEN, these appear to be adult constructed discourses. I am interested in the pupil view, I am particularly interested in trying to further understand the experiences of children who experience barriers to their learning and SEN and how their identities have been constructed within the context of their lives. It appears that existing knowledge will benefit from further consideration of the child view about how their identities as children with barriers to learning and SEN have been constructed and more powerfully how we can promote children constructing identities as children who learn effectively. Relevant for this research is the recognition that this is a hugely complex area, the perspectives and identities of children are constructed within a complex context, adults are part of this context thus I suggest a real problem in this area and for this research is the danger of seeing childrens' perspectives in isolation from the context in which they are constructed and in isolation from adult perspectives.

2.4   Pupil voice

As already outlined my interest in using a group learning process to investigate pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching and what makes this difficult emerged from my personal and professional journey. This literature review has highlighted that investigating pupil perspective is highly complex suggesting that pupil perspective can not be seen in isolation from adult perspectives. The literature review will now focus on the discourse of pupil voice which I will consider with relevance to my research question and in particular what the main messages are to emerge from the literature and how pupil voice has been investigated. I have touched on voice in the previous section, in particular

in relation to the voice of children regarding their effective learning and SEN. My focus continues to be from a social constructivist standpoint. In so doing my definition of "voice" and what I mean by voice being heard will emerge, as well as points to consider when setting out to gain that voice.

In considering "voice" I begin with a historical reflection. The historical shift in national policy and professional practice to a recognition of, and emphasis on, consulting with children is complex and confusing. The legislative and quasi legislative context for consulting with children about professional actions is intricate. National policy can be directly related to the establishment of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by the United Nations in 1989 and an increased recognition that children are not invisible. The UNCRC came into force in the UK in 1991 (Burke & Grosvener, 2003) and the commitment to consult with and empower children continued to grow with additional impetus from the Salamanca Statement's right for every child to have access to education (UNESCO, 1994) and the endorsement of inclusive education. The historical legal perspective, which presumes adults to be competent but children to be incompetent (Fundudis, 2003), is incongruous with the requirement of the UNCRC child's right to freedom of expression and child's voice. Much past legislation has been silent on the issue of the child's right to be consulted, e.g. 1981 Education Act until the 1989 Children's Act placed a statutory duty to take account of child wishes in care proceedings and consequently had a major effect on practice, initially social workers, and has contributed to the increasing promotion of the concepts of partnership, consulting with and empowering children's involvement in shaping their own learning destiny

(Children Act, DES, 1989; Excellence for All, DfES,1997; Action Plan for SEN, DfEE, 1998; SEN Code of Practice, DfES, 2001).

Such principles of participation and listening to children fall within the upper levels of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation and Shier's (2001) model of pupil participation. Hart (1992) uses a ladder with eight rungs to show degrees of pupil participation, ranging from pupils being asked for their views, adults perhaps using some of these but not telling pupils what influence they may have had, to pupils initiating ideas, setting up projects and inviting adults to join them in decision making. Shier (2001) presented a similar model based on five levels of participation with at each level three stages of commitment being identified: opening, opportunities and obligation; with the highest level of participation being where children share power and responsibility for decision making which the feeds into practice.

Thus from a rights and legislative background has emerged a more active participatory view of children having the right to exercise influence over their own circumstances (Gersch et al, 1993; Greig & Taylor, 1999) with the concept of children's involvement in their own education becoming well established. However, there is a clash with the historical view of children not being competent to make life decisions, children should be seen and not heard, not mature enough to have their views taken seriously, seen as unable to cope with the task or not taking it seriously enough. Whilst acknowledging the active participatory view, recognition has been given to the limited experience of children (Gersch, 1996) and that listening is not the same as simply doing what children ask.

There has been a major increase in educational research focusing on the child's perspective on a range of related topics, for examples, greater clarity in reflecting upon the efficacy of processes of, and types of, provision (Hobbs et al, 2000), greater ownership of their own learning (Fletcher, 2001). Evidence is growing of direct involvement of children in their education, illustrated by OFSTED now interviewing children and young people and writing to children, an increased representation on development groups, such as school councils and Youth Parliaments, and in the authority where I work young people being involved in the recruitment processes of senior officers. In addition the move from tokenistic involvement of children with additional needs in reviews to more imaginative ways to promote engagement, for example, person centred planning techniques.

Although the principle of hearing the voice of the child is now established in legislation in reality history has shown that what actually happens is hard to change (Burke & Grosvener 2003; Fletcher, 2001). In 2010 children still report that they do not always feel listened to, that teachers are not always fair and many feel that their voices were only occasionally or partially heard (Aston & Lambert, 2010). This is consistent with other literature suggesting that pupils are not convinced that their views are being heard (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003). Thus although there is a body of research and literature on the subject of children as active and competent members of society, of the value of listening to children and acting on their voice, it can be questioned whether children are really listened to and whether children feel listened to. Consistent is the suggestion that children are not convinced that their right to have a say is genuinely respected, and that although

children might be consulted this may not lead to involvement in the challenge of change. It is suggested that children still feel controlled by adults and that their views are not heard and that approaches such as school councils give a surface appearance of involvement rather than genuinely reflecting institutional interest in pupil views (Baginsky & Hannam, 1999; Burke & Grosvener, 2003). The views of children as active participants in shaping their social identities and as competent members of society, whose voice should be heard, has emerged (Burke & Grosvener, 2003). In addition, listening to children can support reflective professional practice by helping us examine some of the habits we have taken for granted.

Moving on, it is not surprising, that given this context, the links between the rights of the child, their treatment by society and their "voice" has become of interest for those who work with children (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). There is a danger though, that as voice has been reinterpreted in different collaborative relationships and applied to an increasing range of issues, that it could become a buzz term that loses much of its original meaning. Voice is used widely and increasingly sought as we continue to move towards social inclusion. Within the literature a number of themes can be identified, including favouring the excluded, silenced or subordinated voices over dominant voices in terms of initiating or guiding change, an inclusive idea that recognises the proliferation of voice and the increasingly fragmented nature of people's experiences and their understanding, The converse of having a voice is being silenced; people can be silenced in many ways, for example, being ignored. Undoubtedly voice is linked to issues of participation and empowerment with the growing view that children are in the best position to talk about

what it's like to be young and give their experiences, beliefs, opinions. It must be worthwhile listening to them. As has already been pointed out, the core challenge to this arises from the roots in how society sees the child; this has changed over time but some still see children as immature and not making real sense of the world. There is also challenge from the suggestion that children's views are not really their own but are influenced by the views and agendas of others (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). Professionals find themselves in a difficult position recognising that children know a lot about their lives while aware that they are often unable to see the limits of this knowledge.

I will continue by considering the issue of power, which is central to the notion of voice, that is, are children able to make their voice heard within a context that professionals (including teachers, educational advisors, researchers, educational psychologists) are in positions that give them power (Hobbs et al, 2000). Within education it can be argued that it still tends to be the voice of teachers that are dominant (Hadfield & Haw, 2001). It is suggested that despite advances in seeking children's perspectives the concept of power has been under analysed (Armstrong, 1995). Throughout my time as a teacher and as an educational psychologist I have been very much aware of power relationships and the effect on gaining children's perspectives. Of interest has always been how can we, being aware of the imbalance of power between a professional adult and children, set a context in which the voice of children can be heard. This is central to the development of this research.

Particularly pertinent for my research is the importance of setting the right context to enable the voice of children to be heard. Gaining access to the perspective of children requires skill in communicating meaning and also understanding the meanings embedded in the language and behaviour of children. It also requires an understanding of the nature of interactions between adults and children. Assumptions made by adults about the behaviour of children may lead to the rationality of children's actions being questioned and to their voices being disregarded, with adults justifying this to themselves as being in the child's 'best interest'. Thus children may be further disempowered through the use of inappropriate methods of 'listening' (Armstrong, 1995). Ways need to be found to engage the interest of children and the impetus to speak and to find methods of collecting and representing views in ways that genuinely illuminate the realities of their experience. The importance of creating a meaningful listening environment, a true listening ethos that ensures children are heard effectively has been highlighted (Gersch, 1996). The number of techniques used to gain pupil perspectives has grown, for example, school councils, pupil profiles, pupil section of school reports but within each is varying practice in listening to children (Gersch, 1996; Gersh & Nolan, 1994; Jelly et al, 2000). Literature recognises that involving children is not easy, that it takes time and training and is influenced by the nature of decisions to be made. I know only too well from my day to day practice that just asking is not enough, when we ask we do not always receive the answers we hope for or expect, sometimes we get silence. A critical approach is needed, one that involves creativity and is suitable for the individual and the situation (Todd, 2003). It has been reflected that those voices that are the hardest for us to gain and reach are in fact the ones that we most need to hear (DFES, 2001). Research does tell us that

by adopting appropriate methods we can gain the voice of our children, even the most difficult to reach, for example, the likes and dislikes of children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (Harding, 2009). Thus highly pertinent for my areas of interest and this research is what factors promote eliciting the voice of the child, even those most difficult to reach.

In addition, particularly relevant for this research is an awareness of how pupil voice has been investigated, what methods have been used to gain pupil voice. The literature suggests that there has been a tendency to use questionnaires (Jelly et al, 2000), individual interviews with pupils (Dann, 2011; Harding, 2011; Hartas, 2011; Robinson, K.) or focus groups (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Hartas, 2011; Mallinson, 2009; Robinson, 2010) to elicit pupil voice. Some literature has used other techniques, for example, Q sort (Bradley & Miller, 2010) or the use of the computer (Barratt et al, 2011). Thus the traditional method of choice to elicit pupil views has been the use of questionnaire or interview.

As can be seen from earlier in this section on voice, although the rhetoric is not only a drive but an expectation to consult and involve children, from this deconstruction it can be questioned whether our children are actually being empowered to not only have a voice but one that is listened to and acted upon. There are suggestions that our children are simply pawns within a system that perpetuates their subjection to education that dominant adults continue to have control over. My view of pupil voice being heard has emerged, and can be summarised as:

> *socially just, inclusive practices that enable people to question and challenge*
>
> *their positioning in a way that gives voice to the marginalised and does not*
>
> *reproduce unequal power relations (Kaye, 2000, p 206).*
>
> *children know so much more than we think they know, they certainly know more*
>
> *about themselves than we do (Todd, 2003c, pg 19).*

I am led to the view that we need to develop and promote practice that enables the voice of our children to be truly and genuinely heard.

I suggest that if we wish to know what children think then they need to be asked; we need to listen to them but to do this we need to enable children to be able to tell us. In order to truly enable we need to provide children with the space, freedom and security to tell their story. I wish to promote the view that children do know best about their education and hence should be enabled to be consulted to give their voice. Voice is hugely important to my role as a practising educational psychologist. Like other educational psychologists I hope that that I have encouraged greater active involvement of the children and young people that I work with, but like others I recognise the difficulties this poses, and continually reflect upon how we can be truly collaborative with children (Hobbs et al, 2000; Todd, 2005). As an educational psychologist I must, like other professionals, take into account the complexity of the situations I work in and how this may affect the setting up of an ethos that truly and genuinely enables the voice of children to be heard. I particularly recognise that within the situations educational psychologists work the complexity of balancing the different stances and viewpoints of competing clients and

thus the difficulty in hearing what children have to say amongst the needs, views and discourses of others.

In considering how to enable voice to be heard I was particularly interested in Wengraf's (2001) adaptation of the biographical narrative interpretive method (BNIP). Wengraf uses an initial question to encourage narration of events which is reported to be a good way of finding out the informant's story. The initial question Wengraf suggests is:

I want you to tell me your life story,

all the events and experiences which were important to you, up to now.

Start wherever you like.

Please take the time you need.

I'll listen first, I won't interrupt,

I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your

experiences. (Wengraf, 2001, pg 121)

Wengraf encourages readers to change the initial question to fit with their particular research purpose e.g. tell me about the story of your life in school… The interviewer then asks questions that encourage narrative e.g. you said there were things at school that made you feel angry, can you remember a particular occasion when you felt angry. Wengraf reports that by using this approach details emerge that wouldn't otherwise, or that the researcher may not have thought of asking about and thus allows issues to emerge from the informants. I was interested in the possibilities such an approach may have for promoting pupil voice. This seemed to be consistent with my post positivist social constructivist conceptual stance and the qualitative methodology being adopted.

Particularly pertinent was how an adaptation of Wengraf's (2001) approach could be used alongside other important ideas, the importance of group processes, interactions, discussion and self awareness.

It is also relevant to consider the issue of empowerment. For me empowerment is about giving people choices and control. For example, people being able to agree or disagree to my involvement as an educational psychologist, to have control over the way that my involvement evolves. This appears to me to link to the rights issue of active participation and voice, and a moral philosophical notion of choice and control over our own destiny. As a practising educational psychologist this can be an emotive stance to take, schools want action, parents want action and as already discussed often have a desire to explore a label, a diagnosis, often with little or no discussion with the child themselves. School staff and parents can find it hard to accept the view of the child being empowered to influence involvement. Similarly, for some educational psychologists this can be a challenging stance as it challenges the usual power relationship between the expert and the client, true empowerment shifts that power balance.

In summary, the main messages that emerge from the work on pupil voice will be highlighted. Investigating pupil perspective is highly complex and cannot be seen in isolation from the context which includes adult perspectives. There has been an historical shift to emphasise the importance of consulting with and empowering children's involvement in their destiny. Although an active participatory view of children's involvement in their own learning has emerged there is still evidence that children remain

unconvinced that they are really listened to. Thus the suggestion that children are in the best position to talk about what it's like for them is promoted but the challenge of power, being marginalised and silenced is recognised. The fundamental importance of setting the right context to gain pupil voice is acknowledged, a listening environment where communication and interactions empower pupils. The dominant method of gaining pupil views appears to be the use of questionnaire or interview. The fundamental importance for me emerges of empowering learners who question and challenge, in using techniques that promotes children telling their story and that empowers choice and control over the learning destiny of those who may otherwise be marginalised.

Despite all the suggestions and claims that we live at a time when children are empowered to give their voice and for this to be acted upon, I suggest that we still exist within an adult dominated educational world where little has really changed about truly and genuinely listening to the voices of our children. I am interested in considering how we can empower our children to give their voice in particular in relation to furthering understanding of how identities are constructed for children as effective learners.

2.5   Summary

I began this literature review with a research question already formed:

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

I have used the literature review to arrive at a conceptual framework underpinning this piece of research that is consistent with my professional work as a practising educational psychologist. I have explored key areas of relevance to the topic of my research question to enable my thoughts to develop about how to engage with pupils to elicit their perspective in order to address my research question. I will now summarise the points that have emerged through this literature review that have helped my thinking to develop and thus a metholdogy to emerge to address my research interest and question.

An underlying epistemology for my research has emerged of post positivist social constructivism which compliments and is consistent with my view of the world as a practising educational psychologist. In this chapter, I explored and rejected other conceptual frameworks considered and adopted a qualitative methodology, which will be developed further in the methodology chapter.

This literature review has highlighted the active participatory nature of learning and the importance of the learner's interactions with others for meanings to develop. The importance of the contextual nature of learning has been highlighted with interactions with adults and other peers being crucial to learning as are questions, dialogue and discussion used within the learning context and the emotional well being of the learner. The role of adults within the learning context seems to me to be one of setting the context to enable this to happen, seeing learning as interaction based, engaging in learning supportive interactions and changing or adjusting the context accordingly so that learning continues to take place. The complex nature of the learning context has been highlighted.

My thinking about the group learning process has developed, highlighting that the process should enable pupils to actively participate, should promote interactions and emotional well being. My interest in exploring children's views about how their identities as children with barriers to learning and SEN are constructed has been further developed, and more powerfully how we can promote children constructing identities as children who learn effectively. I have arrived at my view of pupil voice and empowerment.

This research was therefore about the use of a group learning process to investigate the pupil and adult perspectives about their experience of learning and teaching and what makes learning difficult. It was about finding out how a group learning process can help to gain the perpsectives of secondary age pupils. It was about enabling pupil voice. It was about setting a group learning process to enable pupils to have the possibility to experience themselves giving their voice. It was not an intervention study with the aim of teaching the pupils new things it was about using a group learning situation to sensitively introduce activities to investigate the perspectives of the pupils who were part of the group. I had no intention of using a group learning process to attempt to fix or change pupils but my intention was to set a context to listen, to hear their voice, to gain their perspectives. Since this research was about investigating the perpsectives of pupils the literature review highlighted the great complexity of doing this. The social constructivist conceptual framework highlights that we construct meanings and knowledge collaboratively and that learning occurs within a context and through interactions with peers and adults. This highlighted that investigating pupil perspectives in isolation for the

context in which these perspectives are constructed and in isolation from the adult perspectives was an oversimplification. Therefore, this research was about exploring the pupil and adult perspectives recognising the possible difficulties in including both pupil and adult perpsectives. Knowing the complexity, all efforts were taken to ensure that pupil perspectives were not contaminated or diminished by including adult perspectives. Adults were not able to comment on or change pupil views, the pupil views expressed were respected throughout the research.

This literature review has suggested further exploration of the possible benefits of gaining the pupil voice by setting up situations where the intention is to set a context where interactions and relationships empower and enable pupils to give their voice. We know from reflections on therapeutic interventions that it appears to be the quality of the relationship that matters. Literature does refer to the need to create a setting that allows for the voice of children to be listened to with the suggestion made that if voice is not given then the wrong listening environment has been created. Thus this research seeks to explore the environment created by a group learning process to enable pupil voice to be heard. This is consistent with the social constructivist conceptual framework I have chosen to adopt. I have also chosen throughout my personal and professional journey to promote the empowerment of children, this research aimed to counter the narrative of the disempowered "diminished self" by promoting the narrative of the autonomous empowered self. This literature review has helped my reflection on the manner in which identities are constructed through the social context in which we grow. Within the context of education adult identities are constructed which provide powerful ways so that voices

are heard and given prominence, the identities of teachers, educational psychologists, parents all have a voice. I have been encouraged to reflect and question the extent to which our children are able to construct identities which promote their voice. I have reflected upon how children and young people have identities constructed as children and young people with SEN, with barriers to learning, as disempowered "diminished self". This research hopes to explore how identities can be created for children as effective learners. Consistent with my social constructivist conceptual framework, I am concerned by within child deficit models and would suggest that barriers to learning are context based, as White (2007) powerfully states,

externalising conversations can provide an antidote to these internal understandings by objectifying the problem. They employ practices of objectification of the problem against cultural practices of objectification of people (White, 2007, pg 9) .

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter begins with the research question and from my conceptual framework of post positivist social constructivism, the underpinning epistemology of this research builds on my thinking, developed through the literature review to consider a suitable methodology to address the research question. The chapter goes on to then consider why a qualitative methodology was used, goes on to explain the research plan, the research in practice, the data gathered, issues of reliability and validity and finally the process for the analysis of the data.

Research question:-

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

3.2   Identifying an appropriate methodology

To identify an appropriate methodology to address the research questions a range of issues were considered:-

- The research was located in professional practice

- The research focused on gaining the views of pupils

- The ethical dilemmas associated with involving pupils in research

- The dilemmas of engaging in practitioner research.

I will consider each of these factors to show how I arrived at the chosen methodology.

3.2.1 The research was located in professional practice

This research was located firmly in day to day educational psychologist practice, that is, it was negotiated as a project in one of the schools that I regularly visited. My work is approached from an interactionist perspective recognising that all we do is context based, with my role as an educational psychologist being one of primarily partnership to empower parents, teachers and pupils. The dilemmas associated with locating research within day to day practice are explored in a later section. The conceptual framework underpinning this research is that of post positivist social constructivism, post positivism values qualitative research methods and recognises the importance of context, and social constructivism emphasises that meaning and understanding grow out of the social encounters we have. The challenge was to find a methodology that was consistent with both my day to day professional practice, the conceptual framework underpinning it and which addressed the research question.

3.2.2 The research focused on gaining the views of pupils

My focus and interest in listening to pupil voice has run through my professional journey and was highlighted in the literature review. This research was about finding ways to listen to pupils and aimed to provide the space, freedom and security to enable pupils to tell their story, to empower them to give their voice. This research promoted the view that pupils know best about their education and hence we need to find ways to enable them to give their voice and we as professionals should consult pupils.

In considering a methodology I was aware of the fundamental challenges of engaging pupils and creating true listening environments. I was aware that I needed to find ways to engage pupils' interest and impetus to speak and of finding methods of collecting and representing pupils' views in ways that genuinely illuminate the realities of their experience. In addition I was aware of the need to communicate meaning, to understand the meanings embedded in the language and behaviour of pupils and to be aware of the importance of the nature of interactions and the power involved between adults and pupils in research situations. I was also mindful of the importance of creating a meaningful listening environment, a true listening ethos that ensures pupils can be heard effectively (Armstrong, 1995; Gersch, 1996). In considering a methodology account was taken of historical trends around pupil voice and the fact that despite the rhetoric there continues to be evidence that children continue to feel controlled by adults, that their views are not truly heard, they are more likely to succeed if they are part of decision making and planning for their learning and that they need the vocabulary to talk about learning (Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Todd, 2003a; Todd, 2003b). In considering a methodology I was very much aware that educational psychologists' practice has achieved greater active involvement of pupils but that consulting with pupils does pose difficulties and of the need for educational psychologists to consider how their work can be truly collaborative with pupils (Hobbs et al, 2000). Thus the methodology adopted needed to be one that enabled pupil voice to be heard that took into account the need to create a context, an empowering and listening environment to enable pupil voice to be heard. I was also very much aware that an approach was needed that would capture the perspectives of pupils about their learning and teaching and what makes this difficult, that

would recognise the richness of these perspectives and that these perspectives emerge through the social context and the social encounters that pupils have with adults. I was conscious that an approach was needed that recognised the complexity of investigating pupil perspectives, that recognised the difficulties in gathering pupil perspectives in a vacuum, in isolation from the context in which they are constructed. Thus an approach was needed that allowed for pupil perspectives to be gathered while also enabling adult perspectives to be considered.

3.2.3   The ethical dilemmas associated with involving pupils in research

The research developed from my interest in investigating pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching and what makes learning difficult, thus pupils and adults needed to be participants in the research, pupils who had some experience of learning that may not always be effective. In considering a methodology I therefore needed to carefully consider the ethics of involving children in research and ensure that I complied with sound ethical professional practice.

The ethics of involving children require consideration of whether the research really does require the involvement of children, is it necessary or can the research can be answered in a different way (Greig & Taylor, 1999)? From a social constructivist standpoint I recognise that the context within which we exist helps shape our responses, that pupils exist within the context of schools and their community and that this context helps shape their responses to their school and their community. Thus these systemic context issues needed to be recognised and taken into account in arriving at a methodology.

Informed consent is a benchmark, a fundamental human right enshrined in the Nuremburg Code 1946 following the past abuse of human rights, for example, in the second world war prisoners gave no consent to be used in medical research (Denscombe, 2002). There has been a fundamental historical change, a move from very manipulative studies treating participants as subjects who had little or no say in whether they would even take part to our current ethical approaches to research. Social responsibility within science reflects that it is located within a social context promoting the importance of respect for research participants who have a right to know about the research and a right to withdraw (Hayes, 2000). Informed consent is now a well used term, it is built on mutual respect and confidence between researcher and participants (Tindall, 2006). However, I was very aware that it is very difficult to gain the informed consent of a child (Fox & Randall, 2002). In this research initial consent was gained from the school but it was recognised that informed consent must be sought from the individual participants. In seeking informed consent I was aware of the flaws associated with seeking permission on a group basis, the effects of peer pressure, pupils opting out and not participating (Fox & Randall, 2002). I also took note of the view that informed consent can be seen as true volunteering, giving the choice of whether to participate or not, the right to withdraw and be given knowledge about their role in the research (Grieg & Taylor, 1999) and the degree to which people feel free to say 'no' (Denscombe, 2002).

I recognised that due to the age of the pupils both the pupils and their parents needed to be consulted to gain informed consent (Robson, 2002). Thus informed parental consent

was sought by letter (see appendix 1) with the offer to meet any parents who would like to discuss the research. Before the research began I met each pupil individually to gain their informed consent. In addition at the beginning of the research session I gave an explanation about who I was, what I had planned and why, thus I was being open and honest about who I was and what I was doing (Tindall, 2006). Research ethics is about being clear about the agreement the researcher arrives at with the participants and being clear about personal motivation and values (Grosvenor & Rose, 2001). Thus I used approaches that respected and accurately reflected the views and opinions of the pupils (Harker, 2002), ensured that adults are informed (Fox & Randall, 2002), ensured that the rights, interests and feelings of those involved are taken into account (Denscombe, 2002) and took note of the need to use "emotionally sensitive" ways to undertake research (Weare & Gray, 2003). The fact that one pupil declined the invitation to be part of the research and another dropped out after the first session illustrated that the process was one that fully empowered pupils, they had the power to give their informed consent to be part of the research and to decline or withdraw their consent to be part.

Since the research aimed to explore the pupils' experiences and gain their views about their learning, it was planned to be a fully participatory process giving space and time for pupils to vocalise, to reflect upon and discuss issues (Mayall, 1999). The research adhered to the idea that no one will participate unless the situation created is one that promotes individuals well being and provides a safe, secure ethos within which individuals can contribute. Throughout the research the feelings and emotional well being of all involved was considered and thus took account of the view that it is not sufficient to

just be aware of issues about values and ethics but that they must form part of the research itself (May, 2001). I can illustrate the consideration of values and ethics to my research through the example of taping group sessions. Early in the research I stopped taping sessions because the pupils were obviously uneasy, they were unresponsive, uncommunicative and disengaged and pupils commented that being taped hindered their responsiveness and ability to take part. I restarted taping as pupils appeared more relaxed, this was fully accepted and the taping did not stop the flow of discussion for the remainder of the group sessions. Thus the methodology adopted needed to meet the ethical requirements when undertaking research in a school setting using pupils, for example, in the selection of pupils forming the group and in the manner in which pupil perspectives were considered through data analysis along with adult perspectives. These ethical dilemmas will be returned to in later chapters, illustrating that ethically sound research practice was used.

3.2.4   The dilemmas of engaging in practitioner research

As already stated my research was undertaken in a school that I regularly visited as an educational psychologist. This was a methodology of practitioner researcher, according to Robson (2002) this is someone who while working carries out systematic enquiry that is relevant to their work. Similarly it can also be seen as research in which work as a practitioner and the thinking that informs it are the focus (Easen, undated). My role as an educational psychologist was to offer support and advice to the school on a range of issues and concerns that school raised. The research was of relevance to me as educational psychologist and to the school community, it provided the educational

psychologist with a research opportunity, provided a group learning experience for pupils encouraging reflective thinking about their learning and provided some insights into pupil perspectives.

I recognised that being a practitioner researcher raised ethical issues. While carrying out the research I continued to work with the school as their link educational psychologist. Thus I was not truly impartial. None of the pupils in the group were known to me as their educational psychologist prior to the group and I was not asked after the group to become involved with any of the group. On ethical grounds, if educational psychologist involvement had been requested I would have asked a colleague to have become involved.

I was aware that being a practitioner researcher can be problematical. A researcher may be too close to the situation; have difficulties in remaining detached and objective; may have preconceptions about the issues and solutions that may colour the research (Robson, 2002). A researcher has a responsibility to make clear their own part in constructing the research findings (Parker, 2005). As the educational psychologist who regularly visited the school I was very aware that I was sometimes viewed as an "expert" which could lead to status and power issues. I was also aware that regularly visiting the school made me an "insider" and that this can bring advantages, benefits from pre-existing knowledge and experience of the context and a likely reduction in implementation problems (Robson, 2002).

One of the benefits of engaging as a practitioner researcher was the practical benefit that I found it easy to fit the data gathering into my regular visiting pattern to the school. I found that once I had engaged the interest of the school it was easy to protect the time and make the practical arrangements to carry out the data gathering. I felt that the positive relationship I had with school and my contextual background knowledge in fact supported the research well. Insights available from being a practitioner researcher can help in research design and carrying out the analysis, hopefully since the context is known the planned research is seen as useful and appropriate for both the school and the educational psychologist. It could be argued that the commitment seen from the school and the pupils was evidence that the research was in fact appropriate and useful to all parties. I was also very aware of the need to remain objective and was prepared to follow any difficult issues or disclosures. I was aware of possible vulnerabilities as a lone adult working with a group of teenage pupils for both the pupils and myself, hence planned to not be alone. I felt ethically this was appropriate for the pupils and myself. I was aware that potentially having a member of staff present may be seen to compromise pupils expressing their views but took this into account in setting the context of the group, for example, establishing the ground rules and establishing a positive group ethos.

Thus the challenge was to find a methodology that was consistent with both my day to day professional practice and the conceptual framework of post positivist social constructivism underpinning the research. It was essential that the methodology also recognised the complexity of investigating pupil perspectives that are constructed within a context that includes adults. The methodology needed to enable adult perspectives to be

gathered while meeting the ethical requirements when undertaking research in a school setting with pupils, and the dilemmas of undertaking research as a practitioner researcher.

3.3   A qualitative case study research methodology

Thus a research methodology was necessary that built upon the foundations of my day to day practice as an educational psychologist while taking account of the ethical dilemmas of involving the pupils in research and being a practitioner researcher. Bearing all this in mind a qualitative methodology was chosen. Other methodologies were considered but rejected. I have already covered this in the conceptual framework section of chapter 2 (section 2:2).

3.4   Reliability and validity

Issues of reliability and validity were considered before moving on to the research plan and data analysis process. In so doing I was aware that the classical, traditional definitions of reliability and validity have generally been viewed as problematical for qualitative researchers. Traditionally reliability has been about the use of standardised research instruments, tests and scales, the neutrality of their effect and the consistency of the results produced. Validity has been about the accuracy, correctness, truth and the strength of the conclusion, was the conclusion right and can it be generalised to other situations? While these traditional definitions have been appropriate for quantitative research methodologies, qualitative researchers have looked for more appropriate ways to view and operationalise the terms reliability and validity for their research methods. In so doing the fundamental importance of the qualitative researcher has been recognised. The

way that quantitative researchers discuss validity and reliability has not been seen as helpful by qualitative researchers because of the assumption that good research can be replicated. Qualitative researchers don't make claims about replicating research. Qualitative researchers suggest that research can be repeated but that it will be a different piece of work because it will be a different researcher, different subjects and different meanings. The aim in qualitative research is not so much about replicability but about specificity; ecological validity is sustained when the meaning of the research is explored, when exploration is thorough, when research is done "with", "not to" or "against" the subject, when volunteer characteristics and experimenter effects are visible and accountable. Qualitative researchers see that any findings are as fragile and mutable as real life (Parker, 2006).

Qualitative research recognises the importance of the researcher and reliability can be thought of in terms of "would the same results and conclusions emerge if someone else repeated the research"? As there is really no way of knowing an explicit account needs to be provided of the research aims, how it was undertaken, the reasoning behind the decisions made (Denscombe, 1998) or considering the reliability of methods and practice, being honest, thorough and careful, and showing where you have been (Robson, 2002) through the use of an audit trail. Replication for qualitative researchers can also be seen as being about reinterpreting the findings from a different standpoint or exploring the same issues in a different context rather than expecting consistent outcomes (Tindall, 2006).

As regards validity in qualitative research it can be useful to think in descriptive terms by providing a valid description of what is seen and heard (Robson, 2002) or in terms of the researcher understanding and representing meanings with more valid research using multiple styles, checking out interpretations with participants and taking their comments as additional sources of information (Tindall, 2006). A complementary view is that validity is about whether the conclusions do justice to the complexity and avoid oversimplification while being internally consistent. Has the researcher recognised their own possible influence and taken care not to cause bias or use one sided reporting. Have alternative possible explanations been explored demonstrating that the first explanation that fits has not just been accepted but that findings have been triangulated with alternative sources. That confidence has been bolstered by feeding back any findings to the informants to get their opinions about explanations being proposed, and that it has been considered how far the findings and conclusions fit with existing knowledge and how far they translate to other comparable situations, (Denscombe, 1998).

Quantitative research can be seen as emphasising the importance of reliability but losing validity in the process whereas qualitative as emphasising validity, the main goal being not to produce results that can be replicated but to develop a true understanding of what is going on. Thus the emphasis is on the communications from the participants and the social processes that are taking place. The qualitative researcher acknowledges that the uniqueness of human beings means that the research findings are unlikely to be replicated very easily (Hayes, 2000).

The present research takes account of the possible threats from inaccurate or incomplete data by utilising the suggestion of the benefits of using a tape recorder (Robson, 2002), of checking the validity of the initial explanations with the informants and checking on early analysis to avoid possible bias or over involvement of the researcher.

3.5   The Research

The remainder of this chapter will describe the research process, that is, the research plan, the research in practice, the data collected and finally the data analysis.

3.5.1   The initial plan

Having initially secured the interest and consent of the Head Teacher, the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and the Lead Teaching Assistant (TA) they became the primary contacts and supporters of the research process. The plan was that school would be asked to form a small group of between six and eight pupils from year 8 from groups where some pupils were finding aspects of learning easy and some aspects a little more difficult (barriers to their learning). The group were being selected towards the end of the autumn term. Since staff felt their knowledge of year 7 pupils was still rather limited it was decided to select from year 8 as they were settled in school, they would know about school and staff knew them. I deliberately asked school for year 8 pupils who were in groups where pupils were finding some aspects of learning difficult. I did not want a group of the highest achieving pupils who would have limited experience of finding learning hard. Similarly I did not want those pupils who tend to contribute their voice through existing channels, such as, school council. I wanted a group of pupils who had

some experience of learning being hard and who were not usually asked to give their voice.

Once the group had been formed the plan was that consent would be sought from the parents and the pupils themselves. Parental consent would be sought by the school by letter (see appendix 1) with the opportunity being given for parents to meet with me or discuss any issues that may need clarification over the phone. The plan was that I would have an individual interview with each pupil to explain the background to my research, the aims of the group and gain their informed consent (see appendix 2). In this interview I would explain that the pupils were invited to be part of the group because of the teaching groups they were in, where some pupils find some aspects of learning easy and some aspects a little more difficult. Finally consent would be sought from the school representative who was going to be part of the sessions. An individual interview would be held with the Lead TA to outline the aims and process (see appendix 3). It was planned to make it explicit to both parents and pupils that the group was being run by an educational psychologist, that there was a research focus with links with a university. The plan was that I would explain that the group was to investigate the perspective of pupils about their experience of learning and what makes their learning easy or hard.

In the planning phase I prepared a number of activities to be used within the six group sessions and an additional follow up session (see appendix 4). This group learning process was designed to facilitate pupils experiencing giving their voice. Activities in the initial session were planned to check on consent, to provide an opportunity for the group

to get to know each other and for ground rules to be generated. The plan was that the initial session would then use an activity that would explore pupil views about what makes learning hard in school. Further sessions were planned which followed a similar format, that is, reminding about what had been discussed in the previous session and continued to explore pupil perceptions about their learning experiences. The plan was for the following sessions to use activities for the pupils to explore what makes learning easy/hard, the learning context, barriers to learning and how learning can be made more effective. The activities were aimed to promote pupils reflecting on their experiences of learning and teaching through individual reflection, paired and group discussions. The plan was for activities to promote active pupil participation. It was planned that in the sixth sessions pupils would evaluate the group. A follow up session was planned to be held after about a month to enable pupils to be given a summary of what had been covered and the emerging themes. The intention was to set up a group learning process that enabled pupils to experience giving their perspectives about how best they learn and what's important for their learning. As discussed in the literature chapter, to facilitate this there was an unstructured narrative element to each session based on an adaptation of the biographical narrative interpretive method (BNIP), Wengraf, 2001. Wengraf's initial question was adapted for use in the sessions:-

> *I am interested in what it is like to be a pupil at this school. Tell me about school.*
>
> *I'm particularly interested in when you find learning easy and hard.*
>
> *Tell me about the last week.*

Of central importance to this research was the group learning process used to elicit pupil voice and in particular how the sessions were structured to facilitate interactions. Fundamental to this was promoting an ethos of respect for each other throughout the sessions, for example, the group generated their own ground rules and revisited these at the beginning of each session. There was always an unstructured part where the group reflected on the how things had been since the last session. Each session then consisted of a number of planned activities designed to explore their experiences of learning. These planned activities involved a combination of individual, paired and group work. The group learning process thus enabled interactions between group members and relationships to develop. In doing so the intention was that the interactions would enable pupil voice to be heard. The intended distinctiveness of this approach to gaining pupil voice was the use of a group learning process to facilitate interactions and relationships to enable pupil voice to be heard.

The plan was that between the sixth session and the follow up session each pupil would be interviewed individually (see appendix 5) and key adults (see appendix 6) interviewed.

3.5.2   The plan in practice

In practice, I found that the group sessions did not run exactly as was proposed in the initial plan and some minor amendments to the plan were made.

Consent was given by school, a group was formed and a regular time each week was agreed for ease of planning for all. School were committed and agreed to the group being

held in curriculum time, to provide a room and to release the Lead TA. As already

mentioned, a letter was sent out to parents to gain consent. All parents gave consent and

no parents asked for additional information or to speak to me in person. Eight pupils were

invited to be part of the group, a mixture of sexes and all from year 8. No additional

information was gathered about the pupils. I interviewed the eight pupils individually in

order to gain their informed consent. In this interview I gave background information

about being an educational psychologist and that the group was to investigate their

perspectives about their experience of learning and what makes their learning difficult.

Pupils were told that the group was formed from their teaching group because some may

be finding aspects of learning easy and some aspects a little more difficult. It was made

very clear to all that it was research and that there were links with a university. During

the interview seven pupils gave consent to be part of the group. The Lead TA was

interviewed individually, given the same information as the pupils, consent was gained to

be part of the group and it was agreed that their role would be to support and help with

the activities.

Having set up the group carefully gaining consent from all relevant parties, planned the

sessions and secured the interest and support of school, seven of the pupils attended the

first session. At the beginning of the second session one girl requested to no longer take

part in the group. No information was gathered about why the pupil did not want to be

part of the group. The remaining six pupils maintained their commitment to the group and

their attendance was excellent. The Lead TA was present during all of the sessions. Table

1 below shows the attendance and group make up. The table shows the attendance of the

pupils at each phase of the research, that is, pre research individual interview, the

sessions, individual interview and follow up session. As can be seen attendance was

Table 1: Group attendance

Pupil	1 male	2 female	3 female	4 female	5 male	6 male	7 male	8 female
Pre research individual interview	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Session 1	✓	✓	✓	x did not attend	✓	✓	✓	✓
Session 2	✓	x holiday	x holiday	x	✓	✓	✓	x withdrew
Session 3	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Session 4	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Session 5	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Session 6	✓	x in school isolation	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Session 7	x excluded	✓	✓	x	x illness	✓	✓	x
Individual interview	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x
Follow up session	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x

excellent, overall for the 8 pupils 72.5% but excluding the 2 who chose not to take part

90%. All pupils were in year 8 at the time that the group began. The group sessions began

during June, 4 were held in consecutive weeks, the 5th session 2 weeks later and sessions

6 and 7 were held in the last week of September and first week in October when pupils

had moved into year 9. Individual interviews were held in October/ November and the

follow up session was held in the first week of December. The sessions and interviews

were all held in school time at a regular time each week. Thus, in practice 7 sessions were

actually held with an additional one being included as a recap session following a gap between sessions 5 and 6. The group actually met together on 8 occasions.

In planning the research I intended to consider the feasibility of taping each session, in the planning stage it was difficult to be more precise about the feasibility of taping since I was not clear about the suitability of the room, but more critically the responsiveness of pupils to being taped. Initially all discussion stopped when the tape recorder was switched on. During session 4, I began recording again and it did not stop the flow of discussions. Session 4 and all those that followed were taped.

All the activities used in the sessions were used as planned. The use of the adapted Wengraf question produced some valuable, illuminating discussions. Included in the last session was a celebration with pupils being given a certificate to mark their attendance and contributions they had made. During the research each pupil agreed to be interviewed individually. This was included to ensure that all views and feelings were fully gained, including those who appeared slightly quiet during the group sessions.

In order to gather adult perspectives I interviewed a number of adults whose roles involved a focus on supporting pupils who may find aspects of their learning hard. The Lead TA, the SENCO and the Learning Support Unit (LSU) Manager were interviewed. In addition to supporting underachieving pupils the SENCO and LSU Manager also had teaching experiences to draw upon. These adults were selected because of their knowledge and experience of working with pupils who find aspects of learning hard. In

addition I had intended to interview teachers from a wider curriculum background but in practice this was not possible due to time pressure and difficulty within school in identifying willing adults and then releasing them. To promote consistency all the interviews, both pupils and adult, followed the same semi structured outline. All interviews were taped. Table 2 below shows the makeup of individual interviews.

Table 2: Individual interviews

Pupils		Adults		
Pupil 1	male	Adult 1	female	SENCO and English Teacher
Pupil 2	female	Adult 2	male	LSU Manager and Science Teacher
Pupil 3	female	Adult 3	female	Lead TA
Pupil 4	withdrew			
Pupil 5	male			
Pupil 6	male			
Pupil 7	male			

The follow up session was a means to check with the pupils that the themes emerging through data analysis appeared reasonable in representing their views and was a check to validity before embarking on further data analysis.

3.5.3 The data collected

During the group sessions and the interviews with pupils and adults a wealth of data was collected. Table 3 shows a summary of the data collected and in which phase it was

Table 3: Summary of data collected and analysis

Research Activity	Source of data	Phase in research process	Data	Analysis
1) **Tasks completed during sessions**	Pupil responses	Sessions 1 to 7	All task records Evaluation of group learning process	Initial analysis Final analysis
2) **Research diary**	Researcher	All phases, pre research interview, sessions 1 – 7, individual interview, follow up session	Diary	Initial analysis
3) **Taped sessions**	Pupil responses	Sessions 4 to 7	Transcript of sessions 4, 5, 6, 7, and follow up session	Thematic analysis
4) **Individual interviews**	Responses from Pupil 1 Pupil 2 Pupil 3 Pupil 5 Pupil 6 Pupil 7 SENCO LSU Manager Lead TA	Between session 7 and follow up session	Transcripts of 10 interviews Responses about group learning process	Thematic analysis Final analysis

collected. A reminder is provided of the research question:

What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

The table explains the wealth of data gathered throughout the whole research process. The responses pupils made to the activities presented in the seven sessions formed one piece of data, see appendix 7 for examples. One of the activities completed was an evaluation of the sessions by the pupils. Another aspect of data were the notes that I made during the research in the form of a research diary, including reflections on the process as well as information elicited in the sessions, see appendix 8 for an example. The final four sessions were taped and these were transcribed and so became data, see appendix 9. Finally data came from the interviews carried out with pupils and adults. As already explained, these followed a pre set interview schedule, were taped and then transcribed, see appendix 10 for examples of transcripts of pupil interviews and adult interviews. Thus a wealth of data, all of which was text, was collected and formed the data that was analysed.

3.5.4   Data analysis

The method chosen for data analysis was thematic analysis. This data analysis method was chosen because of the flexibility it allows for the development of a coding frame that fits with the data (Anagnostopoulou et al, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006) and that it allows patterns to be created from the text that go together in meaningful ways (Richard, 2011). According to Oliveira (2010) thematic analysis is useful as the pictorial representation is a visual tool for illustrating the thought processes of the analyst making sense of the data through stages of analysis, firstly a reduction or breakdown of the text, followed by an exploration of the text and finally integration of that exploration.

Thematic analysis is a systematic and painstakingly careful process (Attride-Stirling, 2001) which acknowledges that the process of deriving themes from textual data and illustrating these with some representational tool is well established in qualitative research. Thematic networks offers web-like networks as an organising principle and a representational means and makes explicit the procedures employed in going from text to interpretation.

> *Thematic networks systematize the extraction of (i) lowest order premises evident in the text – <u>basic themes</u>; (ii) categories of basic themes grouped together to summarise more abstract principles – <u>organising themes</u> (iii) super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principle metaphors in the text as a whole – <u>global themes.</u> These are then represented as web-like maps depicting the salient themes at each of the three levels and illustrating the relationships between them. (Attride-Stirling 2001, pg 388).*

This is shown in diagram 1.

Thematic analysis provides a tool for arriving at a rich and detailed account of data using themes which capture something important about the data, there are no hard and fast answers to what constitutes a theme. This could be a disadvantage of the method as it is the researcher's judgement that is vital about what forms a theme. I was interested in using an inductive approach to the analysis, where the data would be read and re-read for themes rather than applying a theoretical approach where I was looking for codes based on my reading of literature and a theory being explored (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I was attracted by the opportunity thematic analysis provided to read and re-read all the text
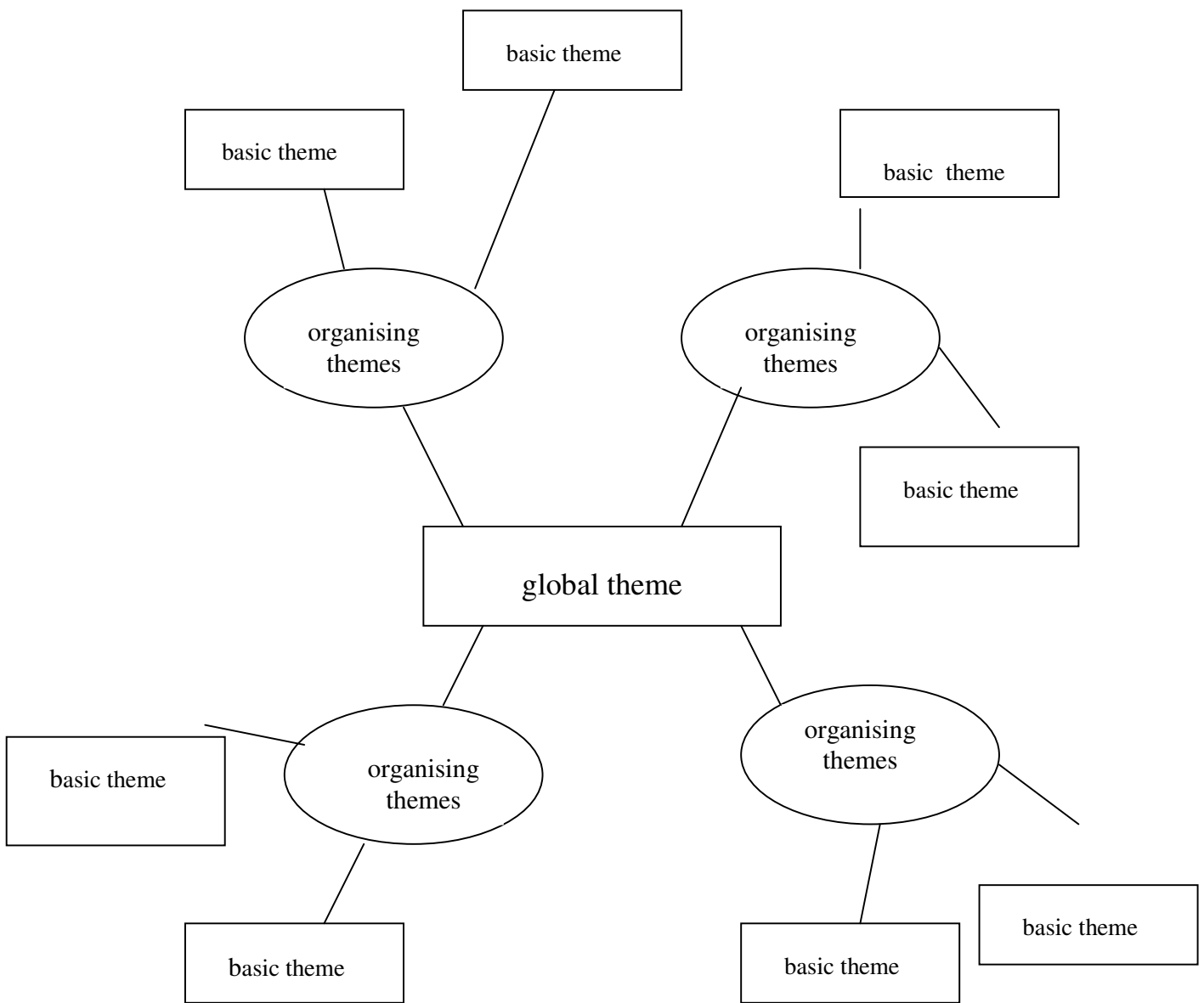
Diagram 1: Structure of a Thematic Network (Attride-Stirling 2001)

looking for repeated patterns and in allowing the codes and themes to emerge from the data. This was particularly important for this present research as it was unclear what pupil and adult perspectives were going to be and it was vital to respect the pupil perspectives, to not conflate them with my or other adults views and perspectives and to allow the themes to emerge.

The literature stresses that what is important with thematic analysis is that the analysis must be explicit, it must be clear what has been done and why (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis begins with noticing, looking for areas interest and issues during data collection. Then a very detailed and rigorous moving backwards and forwards through the data, reading and re-reading the data identifying codes, sorting codes into potential themes, analysing themes to form overarching themes until global themes are derived and visually represented. Throughout this there must be painstaking recording so the analysis is transparent and explicit.

In deciding to adopt thematic analysis I was aware of criticisms and pitfalls in using the method. Critics claim that anything goes and that it has limited interpretative power beyond description unless used with existing theoretical framework that anchors claims. It is also claimed that it prevents retaining a sense of continuity and contradiction through an individuals' account which may miss revealing points. Thematic analysis used badly may use the data collection questions as the themes so no real analysis is undertaken, or extracts are simply lumped together or the contents are merely paraphrased. Analysis

may be very weak resulting in too much overlap between the themes (Braun & Clarke 2006).

I was aware that in using adopting thematic analysis care would have to be taken, that being anecdotal must be avoided and that analysis needed to produce a convincing set of results so that someone who has not read the entire data are persuaded of the plausible argument (Braun & Clarke 2006). The attraction of thematic analysis was that it was not a complex method but through rigorous application would enable insightful analysis, because of it's flexibility it appeared to fit well with my research area, underpinning conceptual framework and methodology.

The wealth of data collected was analysed systematically, see table 3, with a distinction being drawn throughout between pupil and adult generated data. Initial analysis involved a careful review of the notes taken during sessions in the research diary and the pupil responses to the tasks completed in the sessions. Session by session the pupil responses and the discussion notes were summarised to give the main findings and emerging themes were noted. To arrive at this summary only pupil data was used and the notes I had taken in the sessions. There was no data from adults in school. This summary was shared with the pupils in the follow up session. Thus at this first stage of analysis, to minimise threats to validity and reliability, there was a checking out with the pupils that these initial findings and themes identified appeared reasonable and sensible. This initial analysis helped the continued process of data analysis by suggesting main findings and emerging themes from the pupil data.

Thematic analysis was then used, at this stage of data analysis the main focus of data were the transcripts of group learning sessions 4 to 7, the follow up session and the individual pupil interviews. The transcripts of the adult interviews were also part of these data. While analysing data great care was taken to maintain the pupil and adult data as separate data so that there was no risk of conflating the views of adults with pupils. The themes that emerged are covered in the results chapter, the intention here is to describe the thematic network analysis leading to basic themes; organising themes and global themes. Appendix 11 shows an example of the process of thematic analysis by taking an extract from the interview with Adult 1 and highlighting transcribed sections with the codes given. It is then shown how the codes were analysed to produce first basic themes, then organising themes and finally a global theme.

3.5.5 Identifying basic themes

Basic themes were identified by reading all text generated from transcribing the taped sessions and interviews. Transcripts from the group sessions, the pupil interviews and the adult interviews were read highlighting any words and recurring issues that provoked my interest. The highlighted words and issues were referred to as codes. In so doing 21 codes in total emerged, as shown in table 4.

The text was carefully read again painstakingly dissecting all the text into segments putting one of 21 codes against each segment and indicating whether pupil or adult text

Table 4: Codes identified

Codes	
exclusion	help
behaviour	task
teacher	LSU
feeling	reason
reading and writing	strategy
do right	commitment
unfairness	law
hope	listening
environment	language
understanding	pupils
system	
Total 21	

segment, (see appendix 12 for example). The segments varied in length. In total 359 text segments were highlighted. The text segments were then read again and on reading again it was felt that some had been given the wrong code and so were moved and changed.

All the text segments for each code were grouped together by rewriting each text segment under the relevant code category, this was initially a pencil and paper task which was later typed, (see appendix 13 for an example). Throughout care was taken to keep pupil and adult text segments separate thus preventing any risk of combining or mixing together pupil and adult views. These groupings were then examined and issues identified. From the 359 segments 183 issues were identified. It was noted that a number of the segments were referring to the same issue. Each extract was painstakingly cross referenced with each extract being given a number within the code. The issues covered within each code were then looked at for connections. In total 32 basic themes were identified, an example of this is shown below in table 5, see appendix 14 for all 32 basic themes. Throughout, text segments were noted as being pupil or adult generated. I

Table 5: Example of basic themes

Thematic Analysis - basic themes		
Code **(number of extracts)** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult**	**Issues identified** **(extract number)**	**Basic themes** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult**
Hope (12) P 12 A 0	to like school (1) help explain (2) achieve behave better (3) respect (4) like teacher (5) aspiration (6, 7, 10,,11) influence parent (9) role model (8) achieve want to do it (12)	<u>Basic Theme 1</u> relationships (P) motivation (P) aspirations (P) pupil behaviour (P)
Strategy (6) P 6 A 0	self talk (1, 2) move (3) let it go over head, take it (4, 6) make right choice (5)	<u>Basic Theme 2</u> strategies (e.g. self talk, disassociation, make good choices)(P)
Behaviour (16) P13 A3	admit truth (1) mess about no practical, spoil it (2, 3, 4, 6) like lesson work hard (5) Just get on easier for teacher (7, 9, 11) tactics (8, 10) teaching and learning easiest when listen and don't mess (2, 13) hard when sit with mates talk (12, 13) quality of teaching affects behaviour (14, 16) pupils dislike bad discipline (15)	<u>Basic Theme 3</u> teaching quality (A) encouragement (P) behaviour management (A) <u>Basic Theme 4</u> impact of learning styles (P) <u>Basic Theme 5</u> learning behaviours (A)

Considered separating the pupil and adult comments but decided not to as I felt that in doing so I would have missed the opportunity to identify and highlight the areas of similarity and contrast between pupils and adults perspectives.

3.5.6 Identifying organising themes

The themes were then assembled into groups. Some of this was done in pencil and paper and cutting up and moving around the pieces and then typed. In doing this 25 organising themes were pulled out, see table 6.

Table 6: Example of basic themes, organising themes and global themes

Thematic Analysis – basic themes, organising themes and global themes		
Basic themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult	**Organising Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract**	**Global Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract**
Basic Theme 16 pupil must fit (A) inflexibility / blame (A) pupil wrong (A)	pupil at fault (A)	blame culture - barriers to learning seen as within child (A)
Basic Theme 25 child can't learn (A)	barriers are pupil attributes (A)	
Basic Theme 17 positive impact of curriculum changes (A, P) Basic Theme 12 is it work in LSU (P) Basic Theme 13 can make positive changes to systems and policies (A)	changes can have a positive impact (A, P)	policy and system change needs planning and preparation (A, P)

3.5.7 Identifying global themes

Again connections were looked for and reduced to 7 global themes, see appendix 15 for all basic themes, organising themes and global themes. Each global theme was

represented as a diagram relating back to the organising and basic themes showing whether pupil or adult extracts. See table 6 and Diagram 2 for an example of a global theme. The 7 global themes will be discussed in the results chapter.

In addition I was interested in the group learning process and how the process itself may have helped in gaining pupil perspective. Thus I summarised the pupil evaluations and their reflections on the group learning process in session 7 and from the structured interviews and the reflections of the Lead TA and myself.

3.5.8 Reliable and valid data analysis

At a number of points during the data analysis I made the effort to promote as reliable and valid data analysis as possible. From a post positivist conceptual framework I saw valid analysis as analysis that the participants would see as a valid description of the data they had generated. I was very aware of the potential difficulties from my own influence or bias. I saw reliability as being about whether similar conclusions would emerge if someone else analysed the data and providing an explicit account of the research. The remainder of this chapter will highlight examples of some of the efforts I made to ensure the data analysis was valid and reliable.

Initially during data analysis I used the follow up session as a forum to check out with the pupils that my initial summary of findings and emerging themes appeared reasonable and sensible. In this way I kept the group informed and involved. This took account of ethical considerations but also provided an opportunity to check reliability and validity.

basic theme
pupil must fit (A)

basic theme
inflexibility/ blame (A)

basic theme
pupil wrong (A)

organising theme
pupil at fault (A)

global theme
**blame culture - barriers to
learning seen as within child
(A)**

organising theme
barriers are pupil attributes (A)

basic theme
child can't learn (A)
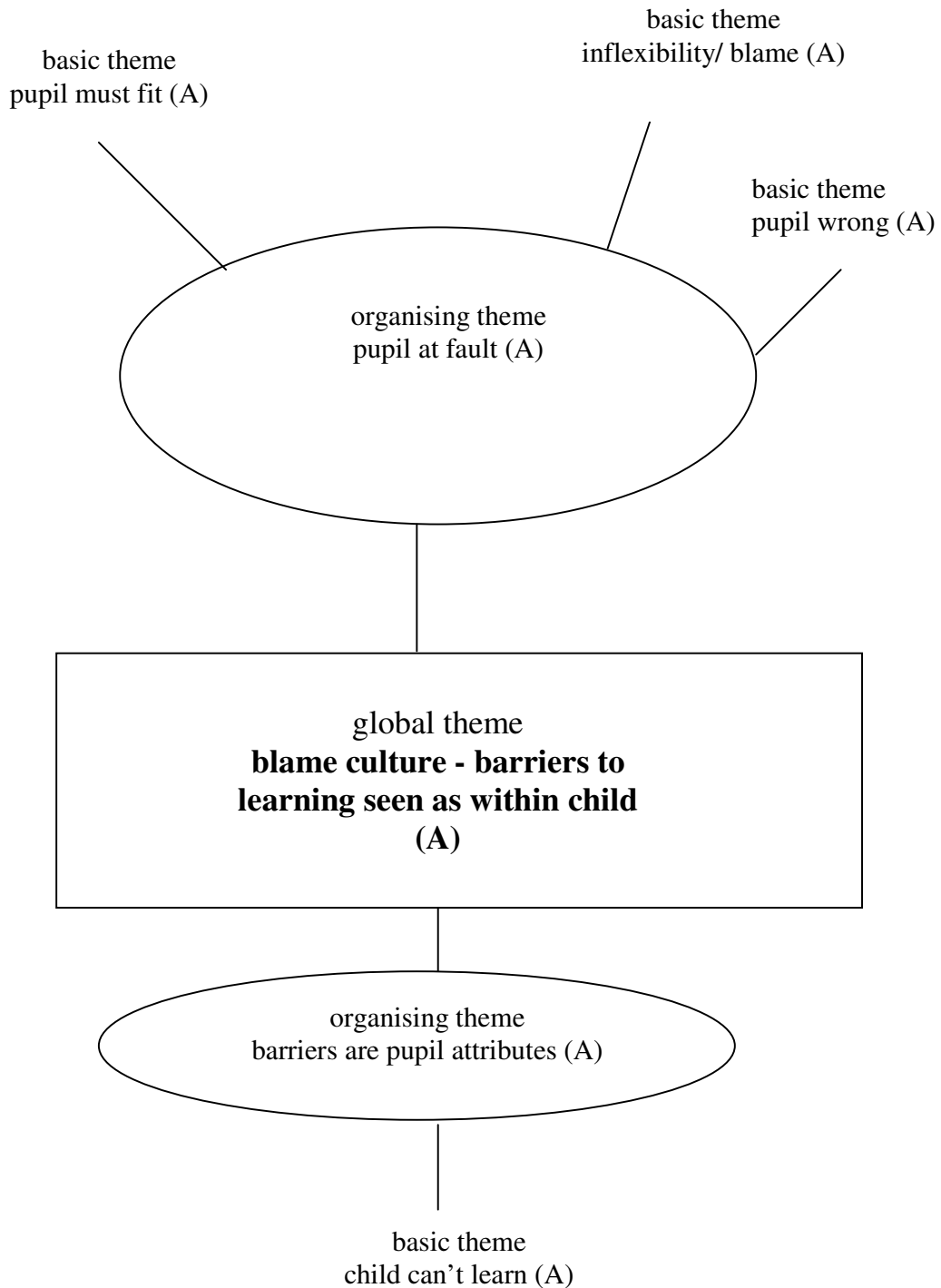
Diagram 2: Example of Global Theme

Later in the data analysis, at the point of identifying the 7 global themes I went back to the extracts and checked that the issues and themes identified were valid by checking that all themes had been covered and that none had been missed. Some small aspects were found to have been overlooked and so were added, for example, pupils dislike bad discipline had not been represented so was added.

I took text segments and codes and asked a small number of colleagues to put a code against a segment. It could be argued that asking a colleague to check is at odds with a post positivist approach. I felt that this was important since my definition of reliable analysis was about showing that the analysis I undertook and themes that I found were not researcher biased but were themes that others would find as well. There was no context, that is, the transcript of the interview or session was not given, colleagues were just asked to code a text segment in isolation. There was no definition given for the codes. The responses for colleagues were analysed and compared to mine. See appendix 16 which shows the text segments and codes given to colleagues and an example of a colleagues coding compared to mine. Given the extent to which the exercise had been de-contextualised and that no definition was given of the codes I did not expect to get a high rate of consistency between my coding and that of my colleagues. Analysis showed a reasonable rate of consistency between colleagues and the researcher, that is, 42% consistency, that is, an exact match of codes. For those where there was not an exact match of codes there was great similarity. Table 7 illustrates this. I concluded, that given the extent to which the context had been reduced, that text segments and codes were given to colleagues in isolation with no context or explanations about my construct of the

Table 7: Example of extracts coded by colleagues

Text segment	Code I gave	Code colleague gave
"want to be a beautician"	Hope	Hope
"if someone annoys him then right moody with us as well"	Teacher	Teacher
"was difficult to follow because language. Didn't understand it"	Language	Language
"Maths it goes slow … I hate Math"	feeling about the task	Task
"I don't get it … the word is confusing"	language	understanding
"I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on play station than be at school, exclusion is stupid"	exclusion	LSU

code, this text segment /code check supported that my coding of text segments was reasonably reliable and valid.

3.6 Summary

To summarise, this chapter has outlined the methodology adopted to investigate my research interest and question. I have explained my rationale for using a qualitative methodology and fully described the planning of my research including the gathering of data and the process for analysis. Throughout I was mindful of the issues of involving children in research and in undertaking qualitative research in a rigorous and systematic way. I was careful to deal as carefully as possible with pupil and adult data ensuring that

data was kept separate, clearly identified as pupil or adult so that there was no conflating

of data.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter I initially give an overview of the findings of my research. Before doing so I will remind the reader of the focus of my research. My interest was in using a group learning process to investigate the pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching and what makes this difficult. I was also interested in how a group learning process may help in gaining pupil perspective. My research question is:-

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

The data analysis used was described in chapter 3 Methodology. In so doing I gained the pupil perspectives about barriers to learning, identified seven Global Themes using thematic analysis to summarise pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching and what makes this difficult, gained the perspective of the pupils and the Lead TA about the group learning process. I reflected throughout on how the group learning processes may help in gaining pupil perspectives. I have structured this chapter by initially giving an overview of the research findings to orientate the reader before exploring in more detail the themes that emerged. Finally, I suggest that a way to understand the themes that have emerged is through the relationships that are formed within the learning situation and reflect on my research question.

4.2   Overview

4.2.1   Barriers to Learning

Pupils identified a number of "barriers to learning" that are encountered generally within their learning in school. These fell into four broad areas, that is, the context or environment that their learning occurs in, features of the task and lesson presentation, the explanations that adults give and finally factors related to teachers and pupils.

4.2.2   The Seven Global Themes

As outlined in chapter 3, thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) was used and seven Global Themes were identified which are summarised below in table 8. The diagrams showing the web like networks representing each of the Global Themes are included in the relevant sections throughout this chapter.

Table 8: Summary of Global Themes identified through thematic analysis

Global Theme	Adult/Pupil	Summary
Global Theme 1 **blame culture – barriers to learning seen as within child**	Adult generated in individual interview	Pupil must fit into the system. Rigidity and inflexibility of system. Must be pupil factors if not learning, the pupil is wrong. Barriers to learning are within child factors. Adults blame pupils and pupil attributes for not learning.

Global Theme	Adult/Pupil	Summary
Global Theme 2 **policy and system change needs planning and preparation**	Adult generated in individual interview	Some positive comments about changes to policies and systems but stressed need for preparation for change. Changes in curriculum offer led to more positive culture of learning. Changes need planning and preparation.
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	The LSU is a positive place to be but some frustrations related to the learning. Teaching and corrective aspect of changes to behaviour policy and system seen as positive although some apprehensive about the suggestion of change.
Global Theme 3 **positive behaviour management approaches**	Adult generated in individual interview	Adults report pupils feel humiliated about reading aloud. Positive alternatives to exclusion e.g. internal school seclusion.
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	Attend school because have to – lack of aspiration and motivation. Exclusion doesn't work, not a deterrent but does go on record.

Global Theme	Adult/Pupil	Summary
Global Theme 4 **social inclusion**	Adult generated in individual interview	Environmental influences, lack of encouragement and aspiration. Reluctance to move away from area. Positive school environment impacts on motivation. Is increased aggression related to poor play skills and problem solving skills? Is adequate progress being made?
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	Positive school environment impacts on learning. Is bad behaviour rewarded? Desire for honest feedback.
Global Theme 5 **curriculum assumes competent language skills**	Adult generated in individual interview	Language is a pre-requisite skill for learning. Strong emotional reaction from pupils reported when asked to read aloud. Quality of differentiation of content and instructions.
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	Language is a pre-requisite skill for learning. Importance of listening to understanding. Oral explanations are important. Pupils perceive that adults think not understanding is linked to not listening and evokes frustration. Heavy reliance on literacy skills within the curriculum. Strong emotional reaction to being asked to read aloud.

Global Theme	Adult/Pupil	Summary
Global Theme 6 **quality teaching for all**	Adult generated in individual interview	Pupils vary in how they cope with poor teaching. Teachers impact on pupil lives. Hopeful that can improve teaching Importance of training and professional development.
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	Learning experience quality crucial - relationships, motivation, aspirations, behaviour. Qualities of teaching – teaching approaches, help, explain, discipline, encouragement. Managing pupil behaviour. Not knowing what to do is frustrating.
Global Theme 7 **emotional literacy**	Adult generated in individual interview	Pupils show responsibility when they support each other. Lack of engagement – passive detachment from learning. Teach behaviours for learning.
	Pupil generated in the group and individual interview	Reciprocity and mutual respect. Pupils can develop strategies to support their achievement. Impact of learning styles. Sense of justice - dilemma protect friend or tell truth. What is learning – is copying learning? Pupil commitment. Learning more important than liking lesson. Emotional factors / confidence.

The above table is intended to give a broad summary of the Global Themes as they emerged differentiating the pupil perspective from the adult perspective in order to begin to highlight similarities and differences.

4.2.3 Promoting pupil voice through a group learning process

Pupils were very positive about the experience of being part of the group, they reported that they liked the group learning process because they had an opportunity to talk to others. The Lead TA commented that the facilitation skills employed, the boundaries set and the ethos established had been helpful for the pupils. I reflected that pupils were enabled by the group learning process to participate and experience giving their voice, for example, pupils were able to say when they did not understand instructions that were given. Based on the evidence and data as a whole I suggest that essentially it is the interactions and relationships, and factors such as the language used within these interactions that appeared important to enable pupil participation and pupil voice.

Having provided the reader with a broad summary and overview of the findings of the research I now intend to discuss the results in more detail. I have chosen to structure the chapter into broad connected ideas that relate back to my initial interest and research question; pupil and adult perspectives on "barriers to learning"; pupil and adult perspectives on learning and teaching; the importance of language; the interactive nature of learning and teaching; benefits of using a group learning process for pupil voice. Finally I summarise the results and suggest a way of making sense of the results in through relationships.

(All the quotes that are included in the remainder of this chapter are direct quotes taken from the pupils and adults and can be distinguished by (P) pupil and (A) adult at the end of the quote.)

4.3   Barriers to Learning

This research grew out of an initial interest in the pupil perspective about a term that adults use "barriers to learning" which for me meant 'what makes learning difficult'. I was very interested to gain the pupil perspective. Within the group and individual interviews, the pupils identified a number of barriers that were encountered generally within their learning in school which I suggest fall into four broad areas related to the environment, the tasks they are presented with, the explanations that adults give them and finally factors related to their teachers and pupils including themselves. I will expand on these areas of pupil perspectives and then consider the adult perspective through Global Theme 1. Reflections on pupil and adult perspectives then follow.

4.3.1   The pupil perspective

Pupils identified barriers to their learning that are related to the context in which their learning occurs, the environment. Pupils highlighted that the fabric of the school, in particular the state of classrooms hampers their learning. This is typified by pupil comments within the group discussion, such as,

> *"it's hot in maths … I don't like it ... I can't explain it some classrooms are right*
>
> *hot and you can't work and some are really cold"(P)*

"if it's cold you won't learn because you're always thinking how cold it is and if it's warm the same"(P).

Features of the task and lesson presentation also emerged as a barrier to learning, hard work, boring tasks and having negative feelings about the task e.g. being asked to read aloud. In addition, the explanations that adults give were very powerfully reported by pupils to be a barrier, within the group discussion pupils pointed out difficulties when teachers,

"don't explain it"(P)

"some teachers don't really explain properly what you're meant to do"(P).

I was particularly struck and perhaps surprised by how much tasks and explanations emerged as a major feature affecting pupils' learning, at worst significantly hampering learning. Very strong feelings associated with not understanding a task were a recurrent feature within the group, typified by one pupil saying

"sometimes I say and some teachers say just get on with your work ... they say you should have been listening"(P),

I was dismayed by this perspective.

Other comments that pupils made within the group about barriers to learning were associated with what I have termed teacher and pupil factors, for example, the manner in which pupils are treated by teachers: one of the most extreme comments made by a pupil being,

> *"sometimes when you say you don't know what it means they have a go at you …*
>
> *so… you don't say in case they shout at you"(P).*

The self protection and self preservation expressed within this statement is very apparent and perhaps understandable. Although teacher factors are identified, pupils also reflected upon their own part in the learning process, their confidence, understanding and behaviour are contributory factors and form barriers to their learning.

> *"it's hard to do if not confident then it's hard"(P),* (confidence),
>
> *"just don't get it"(P),* (understanding),
>
> *"hardest lessons that I don't really enjoy and when there's like people interrupting the lessons and stuff you can't really work"(P),* (behaviour).

4.3.2 The adult perspective

The adult perspective was highlighted through Global Theme 1: blame culture - barriers to learning seen as within child, see Diagram 3. (The diagram shows the global theme in the centre within a rectangular box, organising themes network from the global themes and are within an oval box, finally the basic themes network from the organising themes are not in a box.) The global theme emerged through the thematic analysis of the data. I was struck and a little surprised by some of the comments from adults that indicated a culture of blame. Adults appeared to perceive the pupils are at fault, blaming pupils about barriers to learning and their learning not being effective, "pupil at fault" was one organising theme that emerged.

Basic theme
pupil must fit (A)

Basic theme
inflexibility/ blame (A)

Basic theme
pupil wrong (A)

Organising theme
pupil at fault (A)

Global theme
**blame culture - barriers to
learning seen as within child
(A)**

Organising theme
barriers are pupil attributes (A)

Basic theme
child can't learn (A)
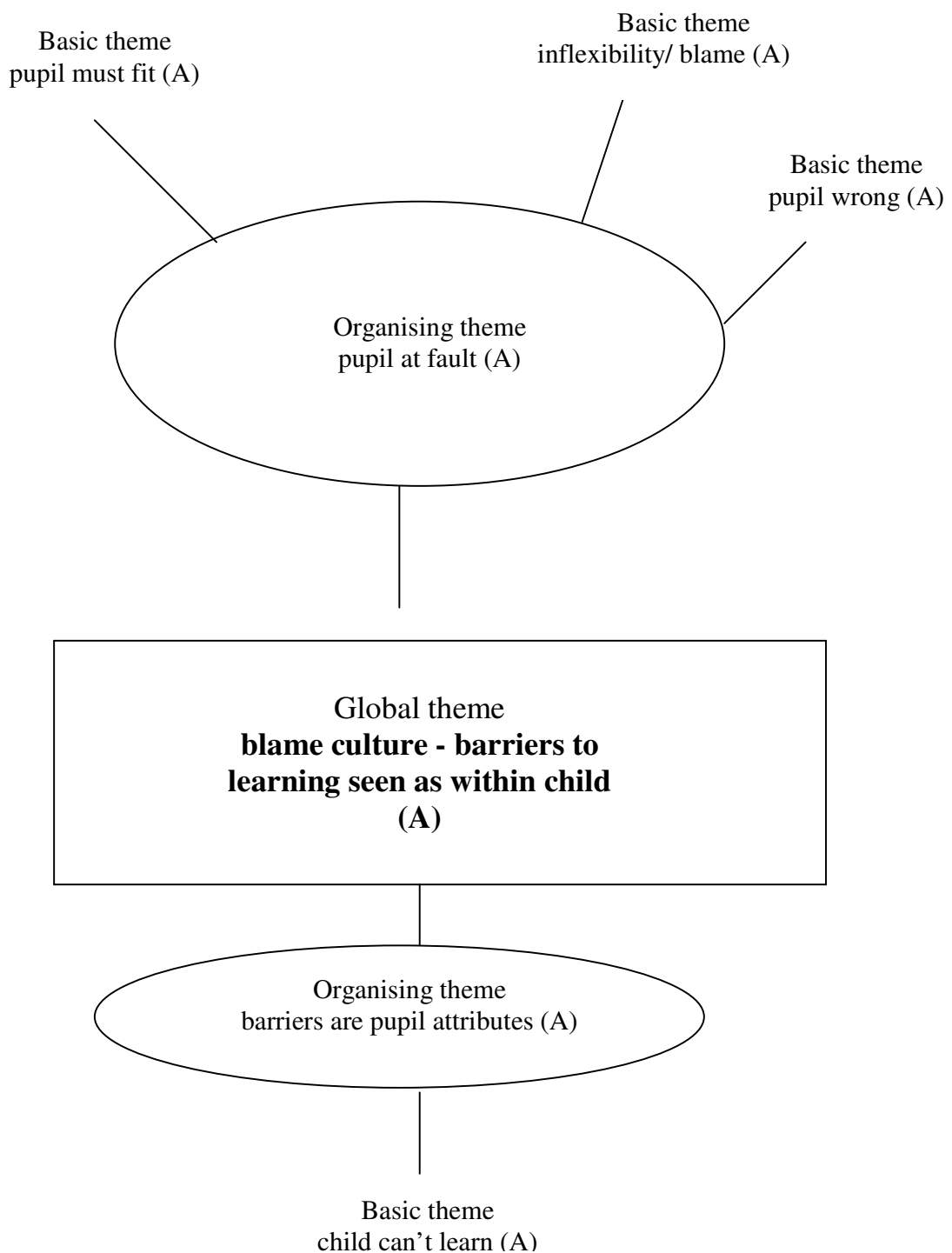
Diagram 3: Global Theme 1: blame culture - barriers to learning seen as within child

A basic theme "pupil must fit" emerged, related to pupils being expected to fit into the system in place, the expectation being that pupils are the ones to adapt rather than adults adapting the curriculum, teaching methods or the system to meet the needs of all pupils, this adult perspective is illustrated by the comment of one adult within an interview,

> *"schools systems have not been very supportive of a lot of our students because it's one size fits all" (A).*

Similarly the view of a rigid, unchangeable system emerged in the basic theme, "inflexibility/blame",

> *"every child has got to do this and if he's different the child must be wrong" (A)*
>
> *"it's this rigidity of this is how and anything else is anarchistic, anarchy is going to ensue" (A)* and
>
> *"there's a blame culture in education" (A).*

A third connected basic theme, "pupil wrong", emerged from adults in interview, the view that it's not the system, the curriculum or teaching styles since most pupils do learn effectively so it must be pupil factors that explain ineffective learning, that are barriers to learning, an example being the comment,

> *"if the child is not learning it must be the child's fault" (A).*

Related, a second organising theme emerged, "barriers are pupil attributes", highlighting that the adults involved in this research reported that they saw the dominant view among their colleagues about barriers to learning being pupil attributes. The adults interviewed suggested that the adult perspective among their colleagues appeared to be that barriers to learning are within child factors, forming a basic theme "child can't learn", an example being of what one adult said within interview being,

"people tend to think that it's only the pupil attributes that are causing the

barriers to learning … barriers to learning seem to be focused on the pupils" (A).

Thus the adults I interviewed were suggesting a culture where their teacher colleagues blame pupils with barriers to learning being identified as related to pupil attributes.

4.3.3   Reflections on the pupil and adult perspectives

In some ways I was not surprised by the contrasting perspectives of pupils and adults about barriers to learning but I was a little surprised by the strength of the culture of blame that the adults interviewed suggested as dominant amongst their colleagues. Pupils seemed to have a wider view of barriers to learning than adults and although adults featured in pupil narratives about barriers to learning there was no hint of blame. Pupils seemed to accept adults, faults and all. I return to reflect further within the discussion chapter.

4.4   Pupil and adult perspectives on learning and teaching

In this section I will outline the main pupil and adult perspectives on learning and teaching running through three of the Global Themes not covered through other sections.

One thread was change within schools, Global Theme 2: policy and system change needs planning and preparation, see Diagram 4, the adult and pupil perspectives highlighted positive aspects of changes to policies and systems but stressed the need to prepare for change. Adults discussed changes to the school behaviour policy being

Basic theme
is it work in LSU (P)

Basic theme
positive impact of
curriculum changes (A)

Basic theme
can make positive changes to
systems and policies (A, P)

Organising theme
changes can have a positive
impact (A, P)

Global theme
**policy and system change needs
planning and preparation
(A, P)**
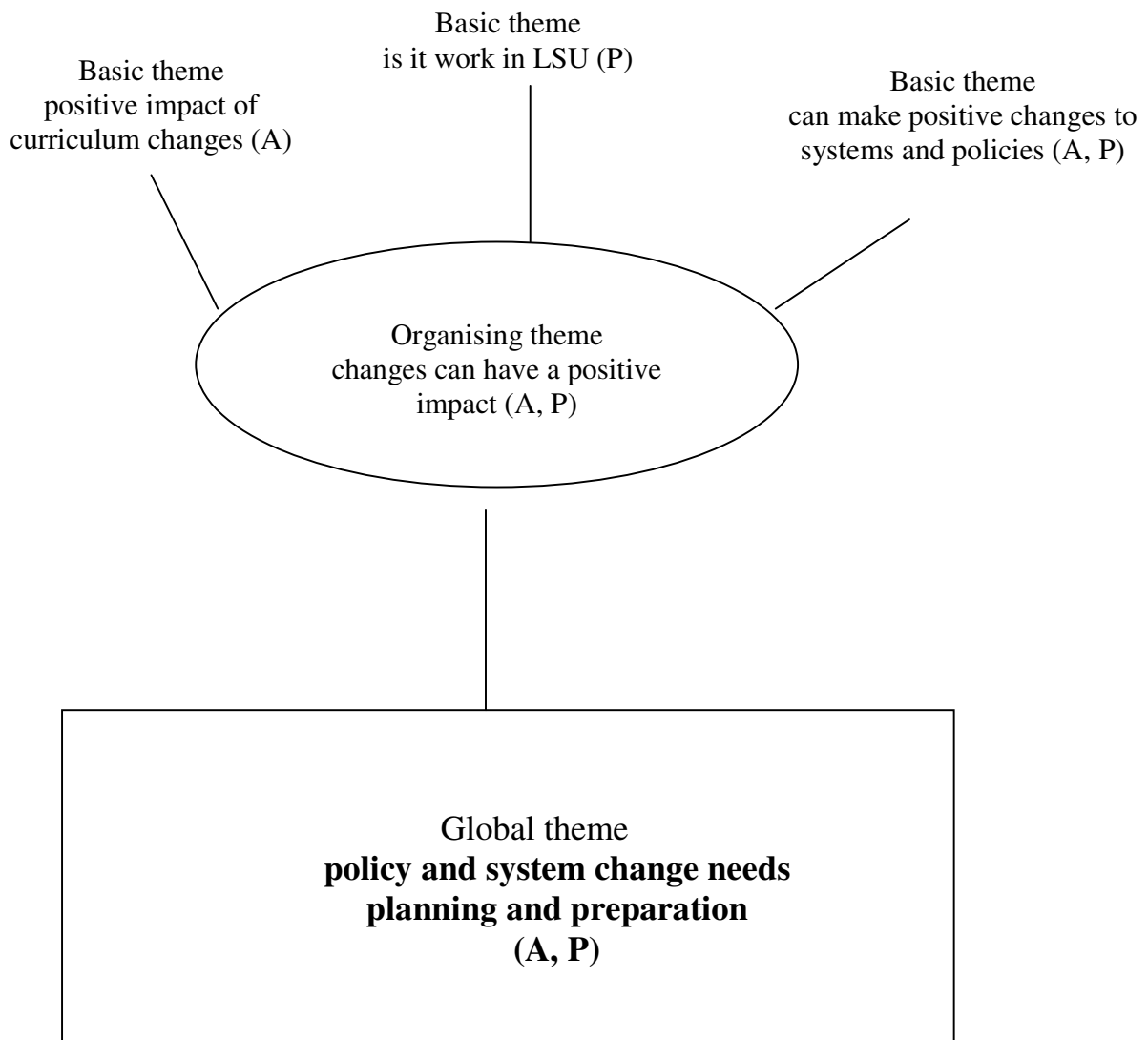
Diagram 4: Global Theme 2: policy and system change needs planning and

preparation

introduced, aimed to develop a more consistent staged approach to managing behaviour using a coloured card system giving warnings, prompts to support behaviour change and room exit arrangements. The basic theme "can make positive changes to systems and policies" emerged. Pupils perspectives also emerged recognising positive outcomes including a teaching and corrective aspect of changes,

> *"before they just used to send you on call straight away but now they tell you what you're doing so I think it's better"(P),*

(on call being a system to ask a senior member of staff to remove a pupil). Similarly adults commented on changes, for example,

> *"atmosphere so much calmer"(A).*

I was struck by the cynical view of pupils about the longevity of change with a "we've seen it before" and "it won't last" perception, illustrated by one pupil ending a positive comment with an implication that adults will not maintain the change,

> *"but give it time"(P).*

Not surprisingly, the suggestion of change evoked some feelings of apprehension and anxiety. For example, one pupil described feeling about the tutor group changes,

> *"I was really bothered by them when they first made changes"(P).*

The adult perspective was that aspects of change can be problematical and there is a need for preparation, skill development, confidence building, illustrated by,

> *"I think there's difficulty among staff because people have been launched into roles that they are ill prepared for"(A).*

Through the basic theme "positive impact of curriculum changes" adults commented on the past tendency of teachers going,

"through the process of delivering a lesson but not engaging the students in teaching and learning"(A)

within a culture of,

"students turn up because they have to … most they just went through the process .. they weren't engaged in the learning(A).

Whereas, as a result of curriculum developments within school, they reported a move to,

" more emphasis on teaching and learning"(A),

"different courses .. more daring about the curriculum" (A).

Adults noted a positive impact perceiving that the developments in school around curriculum and behaviour policies were beginning to,

"change the culture of some of the students … who now are pretty determined to succeed"(A) .

Support arrangements within school were a point of discussion, one of the in-school support bases, the LSU was viewed by pupils to be a positive place to be but there were some frustrations related to learning, through basic theme, "is it work in LSU", typified by pupil comments,

"I like it more but it's not work … you get work half way through"(P),

"don't do work just copy"(P),

"I think it's easy"(P).

Thus there was similarity between pupil and adult perspectives both seeing schools as organisations that need to change but that this needs care and preparation for positive change.

A second thread running through the pupil and adult perspectives on learning and teaching focused on motivating and managing behaviour Global Theme 3: positive behaviour management approaches, see Diagram 5. An organising theme "law says attend" and basic theme "come to school because have to" emerged, suggesting that some pupils find nothing intrinsically motivating or rewarding about school, illustrated by,

"just come to school because I have to"(P).

One recurring discussion point was reading aloud in class exemplified by an adult organising theme "negative approaches to manage behaviour" and basic theme "humiliation as a tactic to manage behaviour", for example,

"(pupils)talk about how humiliated they feel when they're made to read out loud

…I often wonder if people use that as a method of suppression, humiliation"(A).

The adult acknowledged that their evidence was comments pupils had made to them.

A recurring subject of interest for pupils was exclusion, an organising theme "exclusion is not an effective approach" emerged and a basic theme "exclusion does not work", illustrated by,

"I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on play station than be at school.

Exclusion is stupid.. it's your education .. goes on record.. but it doesn't

Basic theme
come to school
because have to (P)

Basic theme
humiliation as a tactic to
manage behaviour (A)

Organising theme
law says attend (P)

Organising theme
negative approaches to
manage behaviour (A)

Global theme
**positive behaviour management
approaches (A, P)**

Organising theme
exclusion is not an
effective approach
(A, P)

Basic theme
exclusion does
not work (P)

Basic theme
long term effect of
exclusion (P)

Basic theme
exclusion is not punishment
(P)

Basic theme
seclusion is more effective (A)

Diagram 5: Global Theme 3: positive behaviour management approaches

work miss my brother was never at school from year 7 to 9 but now he's at

college"(P),

"I play on X box … I don't get no work"(P).

The view expressed by the pupils was not supportive of the argument that exclusion is a useful deterrent and this was collaborated through a basic theme exclusion is "exclusion is not punishment", exemplified by,

"not really a punishment if you think about it you can go out"(P),

A contrasting pupil view within the basic theme, "long term effect of exclusion" suggested that exclusion is a deterrent,

"you're missing out on all the work and you're not like getting taught or ought so you won't know anything"(P).

"not being able to get a good job that's the bad thing about getting excluded because it goes on your report"(P).

The final basic theme to emerge was related to effective alternatives to exclusion, "seclusion is more effective" which was an adult view, demonstrated by,

"think the seclusion room is a really good idea because too many of the kids here are allowed to just go on the exclusion and have a days holiday and there is no deterrent in that at all"(A).

Thus pupils offered perspectives on exclusion, questioned whether exclusion provides a deterrent without damaging prospects and the adult perspective suggested that positive alternatives to exclusion were useful.

A third thread identified that falls within this section of pupil and adult perspectives on learning and teaching was the Global Theme 4: social inclusion, see Diagram 6. One organising theme emerged about "local cultural factors" and a basic theme "environmental influences" in which the adults discussed cultural influences. A very powerful narrative was talked about by the adults of a mindset amongst pupils of an;

> *" underclass …. massive influence on the place, the school and the whole society round here …don't want to do anything when they leave school"(A).*

Adults also talked about pupils who would attend school in all circumstances,

> *"regardless of whether they are ill or not …happier being here"(A).*

Adults also recognised that circumstances for some pupils are difficult,

> *"They've got so much baggage from home and things affecting them" (A),*

I was not at all surprised that self esteem was a factor adults referred to,

> *"it comes down to self esteem they've never been given the opportunities they've never been given the encouragement"(A),*

> *"quite fearful of their own ability and facing the fact that they might not be very good"(A),*

> *"sign themselves off to the fact that if they can get away with not doing any exams they can't fail"(A).*

I was not really prepared for the strength of feeling that emerged from adults as a basic theme "not leave area", that pupils present as being reluctant to consider moving and leaving the area for education or work,

"they don't want to do anything when they leave school…they want to stay in X. X is great … there's a sub culture of X because it's left alone .. they don't want to

Basic theme
school environment
(A, P)

Basic theme
not leave
area (A)

Basic theme
aggression and
problem solving skills (A)

Basic theme
think doing OK but
reaching potential (A)

Basic theme
environment
influences (A)

Organising theme
local cultural factors (A, P)

Organising theme
progress judgements (A)

Global theme
social inclusion (A, P)

Organising theme
honesty (P)

Organising theme
flexibility to meet
individual needs (P)

Basic theme
truthfulness (P)

Basic theme
tensions reward
bad behaviour (P)

Diagram 6: Global Theme 4: social inclusion

go to leave the place they never consider going to Southampton or Bristol or stretching

their wings and flying somewhere else"(A).

I considered this could be self protective for pupils lacking self esteem within a culture of lack of aspiration.

Both adults and pupils identified the "school environment" as a basic theme commenting that the refurbishments were being well received,

> *"it (school) used to look awful, it looked dilapidated that's improved. The*
>
> *students are taking more pride in school"* (A),

Earlier in this chapter in the section on barriers to learning I pointed out that pupils identified that the fabric of the school, in particular the state of classrooms, impacted on learning.

I had not expected the reflective challenge from adults related to progress pupils make through the organising theme "progress judgements" with one basic theme "think doing OK but reaching potential". Adults did not question the principle of inclusion but did challenge themselves about the judgements they make about what is appropriate progress and lack of progress, for example,

> *"we think he's doing very well but actually I don't think he is, I don't think he's*
>
> *learning to his potential at all"(A).*

The view that was being presented was that inclusion itself is not enough and that pupils must make progress with their learning. Such a view opens a debate about what is adequate progress and how do we measure this.

I was interested in the reflections of pupils in organising theme "flexibility to meet individual needs" and basic theme "tensions reward bad behaviour", suggesting that the flexibility created within the system for alternative curriculum pupils experience in effect rewards bad behaviour,

> *"You know like if you are pretty naughty you get to do this college thing in year 10 and 11 and go to college … some of my mates went on it and they said it's right good"(P).*

I was particularly struck that one pupil seemed to present as if this was his preferred pathway mapped out and so, although he did not say it, the implication was what did he need to for this pathway to materialise, how much did he need to misbehave.

The final perspective of learning and teaching in this section was a pupil generated organising theme "honesty" and basic theme "truthfulness", where pupils seemed to be trying to make sense of messages they are given by adults, illustrated by one pupil who was told that her group were,

> *"doing better than any other group and doing better work"(P).*

Having been told this she expected her report grade to reflect this and be good; she reported that she was disappointed with the grade given. My reflection was that pupils want honesty, a true reflection of their achievements, not false hope.

This Global Theme has highlighted adult perspectives related to environmental influences, low aspirations, an insular sub culture and challenges and dilemmas with

inclusion. Pupil perspectives to emerge were also related to the impact on learning of the school environment but also questioned whether flexibility in the curriculum rewards bad behaviour. Pupils want honest feedback about their learning.

4.5   The importance of language

One of the things that really struck me through this research was the importance of language for learning. I will show this by highlighting pupil and adult perspectives illustrated through the predominantly pupil generated Global Theme 5: curriculum assumes competent language skills, see Diagram 7. One of the organising themes "vicious circle – language/ understanding/ listening" reflects the interactive nature of language and learning. Both pupils and adults made comments about a basic theme "language a pre-requisite building block" highlighting language is an essential building block for learning. This was apparent to me when I was asking the group to complete activities and through the data analysis. A perspective that emerged from the adults interviewed was the importance of language to concept formation and learning, illustrated by,

> *"learning's not just about taking it with you but the concepts aren't being formed … how can you live without basic maths concepts … the relationships between things and the language of mathematics"(A).*

As this theme continued to emerge I was surprised by the intensity of feeling that language within the curriculum provoked from pupils clearly indicating the importance of language for learning for pupils. This was a recurring topic for pupils as they were discussing their learning, in particular the importance of understanding the language used

Basic theme
quality of
differentiation (A)

Organising theme
differentiation content
and instructions (A)

Basic theme
literacy skills
relied on in
curriculum (P)

Basic theme
literacy skill
deficit arouses
strong feelings (A, P)

Basic theme
understanding
equates with
listening (P)

Basic theme
adults
frustration (P)

Organising theme
understanding and
listening (P)

Organising theme
reliance on literacy -
literacy is emotional (A,

Global theme
**curriculum assumes
competent language skills (A, P)**

Organising theme
vicious circle - language,
understanding, listening (P)

Organising theme
reliance on oral
explanation (P)

Basic theme
language a pre-requisite
building block (A,P)

Basic theme
listening key
to understanding (P)

Basic theme
importance of oral
explanations (P)

Diagram 7: Global Theme 5: curriculum assumes competent language skills

in the classroom. Pupils talked about occasions within the classroom when they did not understand the language that was being used, illustrated by two comments,

"was difficult to follow because language"(P),

"didn't understand it (language)"(P),

These examples highlight the pupil perspective that their learning is affected by language and that sometimes they do not understand the language being used by adults. A number of other themes further highlighted pupil perspectives on the importance of language to their learning, for example, "listening key to understanding", showing the importance of listening to understanding and following instructions. This was illustrated by one pupil commenting on a peer not understanding,

"because they've not been listening"(P).

Pupils suggested factors that help their listening, for example,

"sit away from people who are talking"(P).

"I like small groups because then they'll listen"(P),

and being interested and motivated by the task,

"miss reads it and you have to remember it … I think it's easy… we can remember it .. it's more interesting and fun you want to know what's going to happen .. it's like a cliff hanger"(P).

Related was an organising theme that emphasises the "reliance on oral explanation" within the curriculum with a basic theme "importance of oral explanations" emerging as part of the pupil perspective. This was powerfully illustrated by the difficulty I ran into in a group discussion about their learning aspirations when I used the word "goal".

Although I had not anticipated it, I soon became aware that none of the pupils understood my use of "goal". The pupils were thinking of a football goal and appeared unaware of another meaning. Their confusion was illustrated by their responses,

> *"I don't get it .. the word goal is confusing"(P),*

> *"I don't get it either … what is a goal"(P),*

> *"I don't get what you mean"(P. .*

It was interesting for me to reflect that I had anticipated that the term "barriers to learning" may be confusing and to avoid confusion I followed the phrase with "*things that get in the way*" of learning but did not anticipate any difficulties when I used the word "goal". This highlighted the impact that the language of oral explanations and instructions has and the fundamental importance and reliance within education of oral explanations and instructions. Pupils talked about the profound repercussions for learning if instructions and explanations are not understood, for example,

> *"sometimes it's not even explained … sometimes teachers just say turn to page and it doesn't give any instructions and they just expect you to do it"(P).*

To continue, pupils talked about the reaction they received from adults when they admitted not understanding, this formed an organising theme, "understanding and listening" and a basic theme "understanding equates with listening". This focused on the pupil perspective that they feel adults think that not understanding is as a result of the pupil not listening, for example,

> *"they say you should have been listening(P)" .*

Pupils described responses they received from adults that seemed to imply frustration, and formed a basic theme, "adults frustration", illustrated by,

> *"they have a go at you so don't say (don't understand) in case they shout at you"(P),*

> *"sometimes when you say you don't know what it means then they have a go at you"(P).*

When I was reflecting on the group I acknowledged that these examples perhaps were not representative and could have been unusually extreme, but I was struck by the comments that pupils made and the impact of the language adults use was having on learning.

Literacy skills evoked strong feelings from pupils. Although literacy skills were not highlighted by pupils as a barrier to learning they emerged as an organising theme "reliance on literacy - literacy is emotional". One basic theme was "literacy skills relied on in curriculum". I was a little surprised by the pupil perspective that written tasks dominate the curriculum, illustrated by,

> *"it's just writing all the time … I don't like writing out of books .. I don't like copying off board either"(P),*

> *"you always have to copy out of books and that and it gets right boring"(P).*

Another striking feature was the strength of feelings surrounding literacy skills from both pupils and adults, in the basic theme "literacy skill deficit arouses strong feelings". Such feelings tended to be related to reading aloud, typical pupil comments being,

> *"I hate reading out in class"(P),*

> *"I don't like reading out in front of class I start stuttering"(P),*

"I stutter all time and I can't say it ...I hate it"(P).

One pupil described one way of coping with such a situation was just sitting and saying,

"well I'm not reading out loud" (P).

The adults interviewed appeared to empathise, based on evidence from what pupils have said to them, one suggestion was that pupils felt,

humiliated when they're made to read out loud"(A).

The final theme to emerge connected to language, was the subject of differentiation which formed an organising theme "differentiation content and instructions" and a basic theme "quality of differentiation". This theme was generated from the adults interviewed and revealed some despair about the quality of differentiation seen in the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. One dismal adult view of differentiation was,

"people water it down rather than explain it in simple terms the concept of what they are trying to teach"(A),

Uncertainty about the amount of differentiation within the curriculum was suggested by one adult,

"(differentiation) I don't know how much they are"(A).

Implications of poor literacy skills were highlighted for curriculum access,

"students who have low literacy skills don't fit into the school system, they may have everything they need to engage with the learning but they haven't the skills so the curriculum lets them down"(A).

This section has highlighted the pupil perspective that the curriculum assumes competent language skills, and has shown that language for learning was seen as being vital for learning. I was struck by the implication from pupils that they want adults to *"help us" (P)* by *"explaining it"(P)* to avoid the feeling *"I just don't get it"(P).* This section has also highlighted adult perspectives about the importance of language as a pre-requisite skill for learning, that literacy skills are emotive for pupils and the importance of the quality of differentiation.

4.6   The interactive nature of learning and teaching

I will move on to begin to consider a thread running through this research of the interactive nature of learning and teaching, which highlighted that these cannot be seen in isolation from the context in which they take place. To do this I draw on aspects of two of the seven Global Themes that emerged through the data analysis. The first one of these was Global Theme 6: quality teaching for all, see Diagram 8, this was generated by adults within interviews and pupils through the group and interviews. One organising theme was "qualitative aspects crucial to pupil achievement" which highlighted the pupil perspective that emerged that achievement is influenced by factors related to the quality of their learning experience. One basic theme was "relationships" which emerged as a feature for pupils for their learning, relationships with both adults and peers, positive features highlighted by pupils were,

> *"you get on with people in the lesson"* (P),

> *"treated proper"(P).*

Pupils suggested difficulties arise when they did not have firm relationships with their

Basic theme
relationships (P)

Basic theme
motivation (P)

Basic theme
aspirations (P)

Basic theme
pupil behaviour (P)

Basic theme
teaching approaches (P)

Basic theme
encouragement (P)

Basic theme
behaviour
management (P)

Basic theme
not knowing
what to do (P)

Organising theme
qualitative aspects crucial to
pupil achievement (P)

Organising theme
qualities of teaching
(P)

Global theme
quality teaching for all (A, P)

Organising theme
hope – improved
teaching quality (A)

Organising theme
great divide (A)

Basic theme
training (A)

Basic theme
increase understanding (A)

Basic theme
teacher impact
(A)

Basic theme
coping strategies
(A)

Diagram 8: Global Theme 6: Quality teaching for all

teachers, cover staff were highlighted,

> *"I think people mess about because they don't know you and you don't know
> them"(P).*

Two further basic themes identified were connected to the learning context "motivation" and "aspirations" which suggested that pupils were not necessarily intrinsically motivated by learning illustrated by comments such as,

> *"it's boring … just don't like school"(P),*

There was evidence that in some circumstances learning can be exciting and motivational, for example, drama was described as,

> *"different to every other lesson"(P),*

and it was obvious that this was a positive experience. I formed the impression that motivation was linked to factors surrounding the pupil/adult interaction. I was surprised that the future aspirations of pupils centred on staying in the area which could have been linked to trends within families. Pupils did have clear aspirations for the future, typified by one,

> *"I want to work more this year and try harder because I want to do engineering
> when I'm older"(P),*

and another,

> *"I want to do that college thing"(P).*

Another basic theme related to the learning context was "pupil behaviour", pupils recognised that their own behaviour and the behaviour of their peers affects learning and appeared to be linked to whether they like the lesson,

> *"I think it's because everyone likes them lessons so they're going to work*
>
> *hard"(P) ,*

whether they saw positive consequences,

> *"if you just listen to them all the time then it goes right quick and you learn more*
>
> *stuff instead of just writing all the time"(P),*
>
> *"settle down .. don't talk and they won't be mad .. they might do more interesting*
>
> *things"(P).*

The size of the group was also important, for example,

> *"it's hard as well if you're in a right big group I just like small groups because*
>
> *they'll listen"(P).*

A second organising theme "qualities of teaching" emerged and was related to the

interactive nature of learning. This organising theme was formed from pupil perspectives

and consisted of four basic themes, the first, "teaching approaches". Pupils highlighted

the variety of teaching approaches used in lessons as a factor important for their learning,

illustrated by,

> *"the way they teach you, like I want them to like to teach you talking like in*
>
> *French they always talk and you read out but when you're just in Science you*
>
> *always have to copy out of books and that and it gets right boring .. yes like*
>
> *design, drama, PE, music, more physical"(P).*

Another factor that pupils highlighted related to teaching approaches was related to the

interest level with pupils hoping that lessons would be,

> *"interesting"(P)*

"entertaining(P)".

"rather than doing same thing every lesson"(P),

In addition, the way that teachers help pupils emerged as a factor with suggestions as to what they would like to see teachers,

"help us .. explaining it"(P),

"walking round class helping you read"(P).

Again explanations were highlighted, illustrated by,

"teachers don't really explain properly what you're meant to do so if they explained it more it's probably easier"(P).

Pupils clearly valued variety in teaching approaches, illustrated by,

"we write but we write and then do something fun we're looking forward to doing something after we've finished writing"(P).

A further basic theme was "encouragement" emerged highlighting pupils need encouragement to learn, one pupil highlighted that they liked it when others,

"encourage you"(P),

Encouragement was not equated with materialism, report card systems were mentioned but this was highlighting the expectations of behaviours and recognition of achievement. Pupils appeared to be encouraged by their interactions with adults, commenting on liking adults when,

"talk to us"(P),

"help us"(P),

"explaining it"(P).

Related was the basic theme "behaviour management" and this very definitely emerged as being a crucial aspect of the interactive nature of learning. Pupils preferred good behaviour management where good, fair, effective discipline enables pupils to concentrate on learning, highlighted by pupils describing their best teachers as,

> *" strict teachers"(P),*

> *"really strict so we can get on with our work … we always learn"(P),*

who adhere to the behaviour policies or in pupils words,

> *"stick to rules"(P).*

Pupils commented on discipline that was not effective and were frustrated when not given a fresh start. Reflecting on what pupils said there was a fine line between being seen as strict in a positive way and being seen as just impossible to please, illustrated by,

> *"every little thing I do wrong now like they give me detention"(P),*

> *"I walk into lessons and they start having a go and give me detention and like Mrs x the other day I walked into her lesson taking it* (an ear ring) *out and she tried keeping me in detention so I just walked out"(P).*

Finally within this organising theme "qualities of teaching" is a basic theme "not knowing what to do", illustrating further pupil frustrations when they do not know what to do.

A third organising theme within this global theme illustrating the interactive nature of learning and teaching was the "great divide" which was an adult perspective. One of the basic themes was "coping strategies", an adult perspective that some pupils (the more

able) manage better than other pupils (less able) when the teaching was not the most effective. In addition the second basic theme was "teacher impact", again generated from adult interviews highlighting that teachers significantly impact on the lives of pupils. It was interesting, but perhaps not a surprise, that this research highlighted that this impact was sometimes negative, illustrated by one adult,

> *"it's not surprising the students are very unsettled … some students tend to go from one difficult situation to another where the teaching isn't at their level and the quality of what they are getting sometimes is not appropriate …. I was talking to one student and he loves the maths group he's just moved to because he does things and sir does things, he uses the interactive white board and he does things to the extent that there were about 6 different things going on in one lesson"(A).*

The final organising theme within this global theme "hope – improved teaching quality" was adult generated with a basic theme "increase understanding". Adults referred to their understanding of and skills in delivering high quality teaching illustrated by,

> *"teachers have got to commit themselves to understanding rather than the 10 top tips for teachers approach because actually it's rigid and it doesn't fit the needs of any of our students …. The emotional literacy and positive teaching methodology are vital .. it's a myth that methodology cannot be taught. It was thought that it* (teaching) *was a vocational gift and all kids would be receptive to it but all kids are not receptive to it. Methodology can be taught, you can't make people charismatic but you can help them deliver a more interesting and varied*

curriculum. You're not going to make the person exciting to be with but

methodology can be taught ... something teachers can change"(A).

The final basic theme "training" was also adult generated and referred to the continuing professional development of adults in schools, illustrated by one comment,

"we're results led, the pressure is on .. teachers are still of the opinion they've got

to get work down, it's got to be neat and marked. Students have that idea as well,

if they've got a neat book, it's marked and they're up to date its learning. Where

in actual fact a lot of learning takes place is nothing to do with writing down ...

there's no time to actually look at the students as a group of learners and change

that environment .... I think ideas and concepts about what learning is and how it

takes place and how it's most effective need to change"(A).

Global Theme 6 has been used to illustrate some aspects of the pupil and adult perspectives to emerge about the interactive nature of learning and teaching, this has highlighted the importance for learning of the pupil adult relationship. The pupil perspective was that the quality of their interactions and relationships with adults were crucial to promoting motivation, aspirations. The adult perspective highlighted the impact that teachers have on pupils learning and the crucial importance of developing teachers with an understanding about the learning/ teaching context and high quality teaching skills.

Pupil and adult perspectives about the interactive nature of learning and teaching were further highlighted through Global Theme 7: emotional literacy, see Diagram 9. Both pupil and adult perspectives were represented in one of the organising themes "problem solving skills and active engagement". A basic theme "respect" emerged from the pupils and reflected an awareness and acknowledgement by pupils of the reciprocity of relationships and behaviour, this was illustrated by one pupil,

> "*you give them respect and they respect you, some teachers that not had before if you're naughty they'll think you're like that all the time so however you treat them they'll treat you the same*"(P).

The adults interviewed generated a second basic theme "responsibility" highlighting pupils were able to show responsibility for themselves and for others, exemplified by,

> "*one of our most aggressive students was twagging but he found one of our most vulnerable students outside very upset and they brought him in to me .. they need the opportunity to be responsible*" (A).

In another example an adult described pupils supporting others,

> "*They are empowered to be able to care for somebody else, to look out for them and they start to realise that their actions do really affect and influence the actions of the younger students*"(A).

A further adult generated basic theme was "engagement", adults suggested that pupils were continuing, despite all efforts to promote engagement through curriculum

Basic theme
engagement (A)

Basic theme
responsibility (A)

Basic theme
learning
behaviours (A)

Basic theme
respect (P)

Basic theme
strategies (e.g.
self talk,disassociation,
good choices) (P)

Basic theme
confidence (P)

Organising theme
problem solving skills and
active engagement (A, P)

Organising theme
emotional factors (P)

Organising theme
pupil empowerment (P)

Global theme
emotional literacy (A, P)

Organising theme
question and reflection (P)

Organising theme
awareness of
learning styles (P)

Organising theme
sense of justice and
morality (P)

Basic theme
is copying
learning (P)

Basic theme pupil
commitment (P)

Basic theme
at least we learn (P)

Basic theme
sense of justice (P)
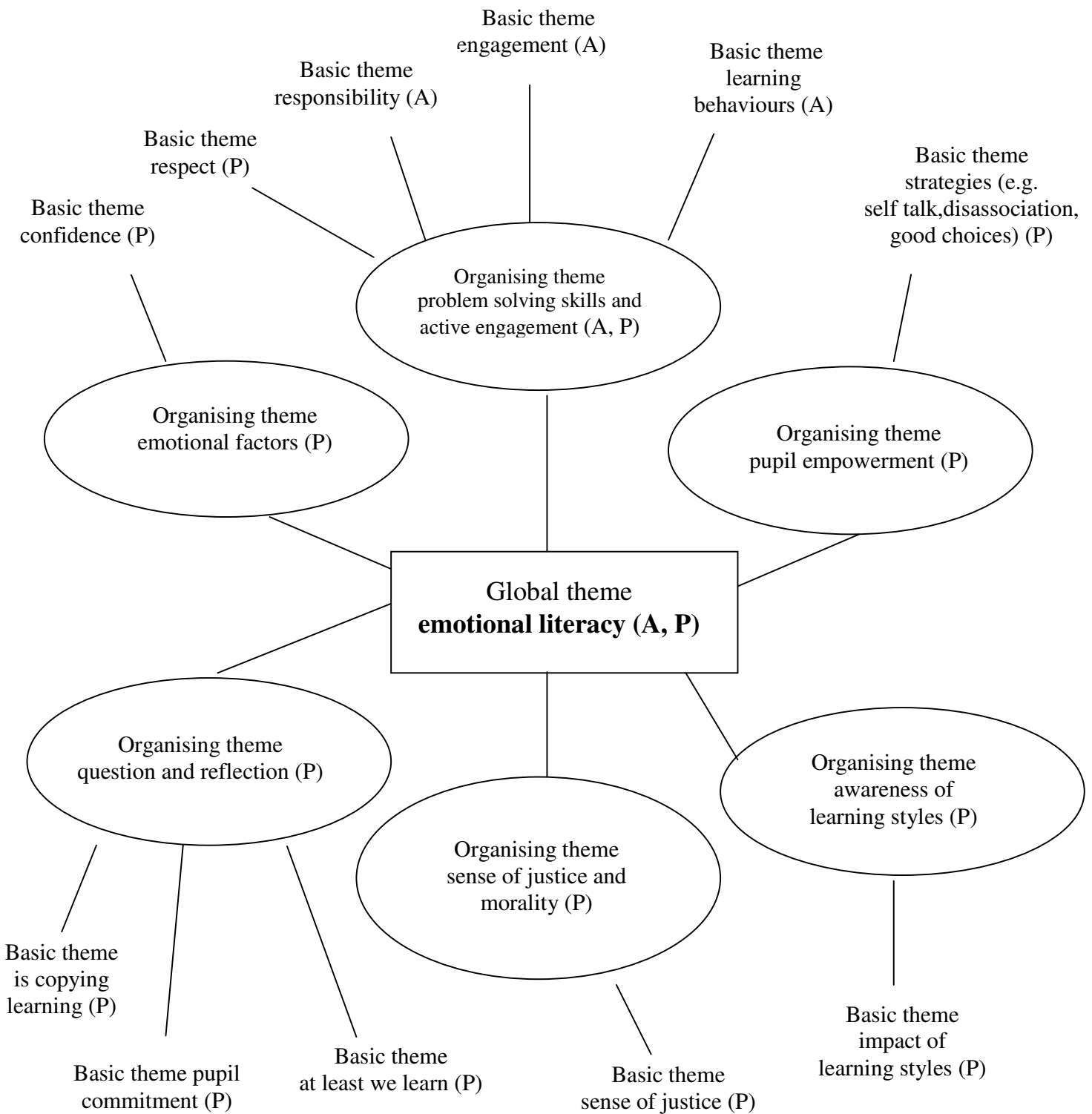
Basic theme
impact of
learning styles (P)

Diagram 9: Global Theme 7: Emotional literacy

enrichment programmes, to remain passively detached from their own learning,

> *"they're not actually ready to address their own learning, they're not involved in*
>
> *their own learning(A),*

and were not developing learning maturity,

> *"we've got very immature kids, poor learners, they don't have ownership of it …*
>
> *they don't have the emotional component in their learning .. it's still school and*
>
> *people making them"(A).*

One suggestion was made that it would be useful to encourage understanding of learning

pathways,

> *"showing them each step of where they're going and how they're going to get*
>
> *there. It's assumed that children know.. I don't think it's explained to children*
>
> *where they are going, they don't understand the roots and the purpose it's all*
>
> *open ended"(A).*

A third adult generated basic theme emerged called "learning behaviour" which focused

on behaviours to promote learning. The adult perspective was that we were still remiss in

encouraging pupils to be aware, understand and use behaviours that may help learning,

that we were still expecting pupils to just know about learning, know the ways that they

can help their own learning, demonstrated by,

> *"(pupils) are not taught to be learners, they are just thrown in a classroom and*
>
> *expected to know how to learn"(A),*

This was likened to,

> *"being thrown in a party and knowing which knife and fork to use"(A).*

We can all recall occasions where we have felt as if we have been thrown into a situation and not known the rules yet the suggestion is that we continue to expect pupils to do this with their learning. Adults talked about using approaches to increase awareness and knowledge about learning,

> *"to actually talk to them about an effective learning environment has massive consequences to the groups"(A).*

The implication was that it is helpful to encourage pupils to reflect on the impact they have on the learning context, demonstrated by,

> *"they need to change their idea of what learning is and what they take into a classroom and that they are powerful within a classroom to be engaging or not"(A).*

Examples of ways that were used to support pupils developing better behaviours for learning and the impact on the learning environment was talked about,

> *"barriers can be broken down.. getting the loud student to accept that there are times that they need to be quiet and listen to others but they can be powerful in doing that and as soon as they've taken that on board it's been an amazing effect on groups"(A).*
>
> *"it all comes down to self esteem, they've never been given the opportunities, they've never been given the encouragement and they actually are quite fearful about their own ability"(A).*

A further organising theme was identified by the pupils, "pupil empowerment" with a basic theme "strategies (e.g. self talk, disassociation, good choices)". During the group

sessions pupils talked about strategies they used to try to improve their learning. One pupil talked about wanting to,

> *"like school a bit more"(P),*

and said that,

> *"I used to come to school saying I didn't want to go but now I say to myself I want to come and enjoy it more.. some days I come wanting to and sometimes I don't, I just say to myself I want to go"(P) .*

Another pupil appeared to use disassociation, they said that,

> *"I just don't listen to them"(P),*

Another pupil was at risk of exclusion and seemed proud when he explained,

> *"no exclusions … when I'm getting done just sit there and let them have a go at me instead of like starting shouting back at them"(P).*

Other strategies pupils said that they used to try to improve their learning seemed to involve making good or better choices, for example,

> *"settle down .. don't talk just get on with work"(P),*
>
> *"I don't sit near my mates and then I don't talk at all"(P),*
>
> *"just listen and get on with each other"(P).*

One pupil described how he knew that he had to make a real effort to be careful about

> *"what I do and what I say"(P).*

The same pupil remembered back to primary school and reminisced about being part of a small group called *'pixies'*, recalling how the group,

> *" pixies helped you work better ways out"(P),*

going on to recall things he could remember he had learnt in the group. I was heartened by this as it seemed to suggest pupils at least remember approaches used. These examples demonstrate pupils were trying to take some control over their learning.

Another pupil generated organising theme "awareness of learning styles" and basic theme "impact of learning styles" showed pupils were aware of learning styles. It was interesting that pupils reflected on a television programme and although they didn't use the word they were talking about different learning styles, for example,

> *"I was watching this thing last night it was called the unteachables …. I can't remember what they called it,, but they didn't learn through paper they learned through doing stuff"(P).*

The pupils agreed that they preferred a practical active learning style rather than reading and writing but that they were often faced with a learning style that involved books and writing, illustrated by,

> *"don't learn stuff like we do writing stuff down they learn it a lot better way … they talk rather than writing"*(P).

They felt that their learning would be improved if the learning style was considered,

> *"can learn it a lot better and get batter marks if they are shown it not just told about it"(P).*

A further pupil generated organising theme was "sense of justice and morality" and basic theme "sense of justice". The pupil perspective was demonstrated that on occasions they were torn between admitting things and protecting their friends, for example, one pupil

talked about the dilemma of telling the truth to prevent an unwarranted exclusion but risking falling out with a friend,

> *"didn't want to fall out with my mates but if he's going to get excluded for 2 days it's not worth it .. I'll go and see Mr**"(P).*

Continuing the theme of the interactive nature of learning and teaching a pupil generated organising theme "question and reflect" emerged with three basic themes. One basic theme was "is copying learning" which illustrated the pupil perspective about what constitutes learning. One activity used within the group was to generate definitions of learning, the group very easily generated definitions and were quite consistent for example, see table 9. This shows the definitions generated by the pupils, the definition agreed by the group and the dictionary definition shown to the group.

Pupils talked about the tasks they were asked to complete and appeared disheartened that in their eyes the majority involved writing and text books. Pupils questioned whether this was learning, aptly illustrated by one pupil,

> *"in some lessons we just have to copy out of book .. we're not really learning by copying"(P).*

Pupils showed they were able to reflect and work together, for example, pupils agreed that learning was demanding,

> *"it needs to be hard or you won't learn anything if it's easy you don't have to try and you don't learn anything"(P) .*

Table 9: Definitions of learning

Source	Definition
Pupil 1	where you learn and something you learnt about different things
Pupil 2	where you learn new things and get grades and then get a good job
Pupil 3	something you get to find out if you don't know already
Pupil 4	learning is when you learn new things that you didn't know before
Pupil 5	when someone or something tells you a bit of information that you will keep in your mind that you didn't know before(P)
Pupil 6	finding out what you don't know
Agreed group definition	finding out something new that you didn't know before, new knowledge
Dictionary definition	learning is gaining knowledge or skills though study

A further basic theme was "pupil commitment" where pupils demonstrated they were committed, for example, to running in sports day even when unwell,

> *"I didn't feel well but I ran"(P).*

A further example was one pupils desire to attend the group,

> *"I need a note for Mrs *** because I'm supposed to be isolation, I'll just take a*
> *note to her and ask her .. thanks miss I'll be back in a minute"(P),*

and he was back soon having displayed tact and got the outcome he wanted, that is he was taking part in the group rather than being in isolation. The third basic theme "at least we learn" emerged from pupils discussions about lessons that they liked and disliked, with one perspective being that learning is more important that liking the lesson.

The final pupil generated organising theme was "emotional factors" with a basic theme "confidence", pupils recognised the importance of confidence to their learning illustrated by,

> "*it's easy it depends upon whether people have confidence*"(P),
>
> "*it's hard, not hard to do, if not confident then it's hard*"(P).

The global theme emotional literacy further highlighted the thread running through the results of the interactive nature of learning and teaching. The implication was that it is important to promote educational environments that promote learning and teaching. A number of factors emerged within the pupil and adult perspectives as to what may help promote environments supportive of learning and teaching.

4.7   Benefits of using a group learning process for pupil voice

In this section I will present the findings, from the pupils and the Lead TA, and my own reflections, about the social group learning process and then consider how the processes involved in this research promoted pupil participation and pupil voice.

During the final group session pupils reflected on and evaluated the group. This showed that generally they were very positive about the experience. All pupils said that they had enjoyed the group experience.

The purpose of the group was to give pupils the experience of giving their perspective and for their voice to be heard. I was interested in whether there had been any incidental learning and so asked pupils if they felt that they had learnt anything from the group. There was an inconsistent response to whether they had learnt anything in the group, half of the group felt they had and related this to how they had been trying to improve their learning, Although there was uncertainty about what had been learnt there was a unanimous conclusion that the group had been helpful, in particular it was reported that it was helpful to have had the,

> *"chance to talk to other people"(P).*

> *"a good way of getting better at things(P)".*

The pupils were asked to reflect on what they had liked about the group and there were a variety of responses but all focused on the opportunity to talk,

> *"the way we talk about things"(P),*

> *"listening about things what's happened to others"(P),*

> *"we would talk about stuff"(P),*

> *"everyone joining in"(P).*

The majority view was that there was nothing about the group that had been disliked but 2 of the 6 pupils said that they had not liked the experience of having the group sessions recorded,

> *"the tape recorder because it records you"(P),*

these pupils did not explain why they had disliked being recorded but perhaps this was to do with self consciousness.

In addition pupils and adults reflected on the social group learning situation during the structured interviews. Pupils reinforced that they like the opportunity the group had given them to talk with others

    "could talk about things"(P),

that this was helped by

    "knowing others in group can talk"(P),

and one pupil reflected by that it was similar to a small group, called pixies, attended in primary school

    "this is like pixies .. helped you when getting done"(P).

Reflecting on the process the Lead TA likened it to,

    "group mentoring"(A)

and felt that the factors that promoted participation were the group facilitation skills, for example,

    "you made the boundaries very clear didn't you"(A).

The Lead TA went on to suggest that developing peer support groups may be useful and thought of possible applications, for example,

    "I think if the aim was for individual students to address their own barriers to learning and have a proactive problem solving approach to it would be very valuable"(A),

    "might work particularly well for year 9 students who seem to be falling by the wayside"(A).

Finally, I reflected upon pupil participation and pupil voice and in particular what aspects of this research had enabled pupils to participate and their contributions to be heard. I felt that pupils undoubtedly did participate and gave their voice, demonstrated by the regular and consistent attendance of the pupils, their willingness to participate, engage and contribute. This was illustrated for me by two of the pupils. One pupil, the quietest of the group, initially appeared quite apprehensive but showed that he wanted to be there and attended every session and contributed to all the activities. Though the evaluation and individual interview he gave positive feedback about the group. Thus the process of the group enabled this quiet pupil to feel comfortable within the situation and to contribute. A second pupil, had a lot to contribute and although he talked about incidents he was involved in that may have led to fixed term exclusions he behaved impeccably every session. This pupil contributed much to the discussions in the group, he showed tact and diplomacy that enabled him to attend even when he should have been in isolation.

On more than one occasion, pupils talked about not admitting when they didn't understand something in lessons, yet within the group they had no reservation to emphatically declare when they didn't understand the language I was using, for example, "goal". On reflection I felt that this demonstrated that the group learning process that was employed enabled the pupils to feel secure enough to say when they did not understand, and that showed that pupils were empowered.

I was interested in this research to investigate aspects of the group learning process that enabled pupils to feel empowered and secure. On reflection I felt that aspects of the group

process that enabled pupil participation and pupil voices to be heard were related to the facilitation skills utilised, the boundaries set and ethos of making pupils feel safe, secure and valued. This is essentially about the interactions and relationships within the group learning situation and about an understanding and recognition of the importance of factors such as language used within these interactions and relationships.

4.8   Summary and making sense of the results through relationships

In trying to make sense of the wealth of data and the themes running through the results, I have reflected on the relationships formed within a learning situation and suggest that this is a helpful way to make sense of the data. I will return to this further in the discussion chapter that follows.

To summarise I will reflect back on my research question and draw together the results.

> What can we learn through a group learning process about the pupil and adult perspective of their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning and teaching difficult for pupils who are underachieving?

This research used a group learning process to gain pupil perspectives about their experience of learning. Pupils were able to reflect on their learning and what makes their learning easy and hard. Pupils were able to discuss the adult constructed term "barriers to learning" and identified barriers to their learning for example, features of the explanations they receive. This research used interviews to gather adult perspectives and some differences were seen in the way that adults were reported as viewing barriers to learning.

For example, adults saw barriers to learning as within child pupil attributes, a deficit model, the child must change and fit into an inflexible system. Difficulties with understanding explanations and tasks, and how pupils perceive being treated by adults when they ask for help emerged. Pupils used phrases like *"have a go at you"* to describe how they felt adults reacted when they said they didn't understand. I suggest that explanations, the manner in which they are given and the responses from adults when asked for help are to do with interactions and relationships. I suggest there is a connection between interactions and relationships and effective learning.

This research showed the importance of language for learning, that is, pupils understanding the language used and adults making instructions and explanations accessible for the pupils. The emerging pupil perspective suggests that pupils think adults assume their understanding equates to listening; and that pupils perceive that adults consider not understanding relates to poor listening; pupils perceive that adults do not consider that pupils may genuinely not have understood the explanation or instruction given. I suggest that how adults respond to pupils when they don't understand is important to learning and I suggest the link is through interactions and relationships.

Environmental factors are highlighted in this research as an important factor to learning, in particular the low aspirations for the future and the insular cultural expectations to stay within the area. Again I suggest the link is through interactions and relationships.

This research highlighted the importance of the interactive nature of learning and teaching and again interactions and relationships are highlighted. The suggestion is that relationships are important to learning through pupil motivation and aspirations to learn and through the positive manner that adults interact, deliver explanations and instructions and respond when clarification and help is sought. Schools as complex interactive organisations are highlighted in which change and development needs careful management.

When pupils reflected on the group learning process they reported enjoying the group and finding it helpful to be able to talk. Pupils appeared comfortable and secure with the group process, illustrated by their willingness to say when they did not understand something. Pupils suggested that the positive relationships they developed with others in the group were helpful. The Lead TA reflected that the group facilitation processes used, positively setting boundaries and the ethos of making pupils feel safe, secure and valued were important. The interactions and relationships within the group situation appeared important for enabling pupil perspectives to be gained. Factors such as the language used, the explanations, instructions, and the manner in which additional explanations and clarifications were given appeared important aspects of the interaction and relationship for enabling pupil perspectives to be gained.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1   Introduction

In this final chapter I aim to discuss the main findings (see section 4:8 of the results chapter) of this research in light of the literature review and then to consider implications for educational psychology practice. Limitations of the research and implications for future research will be considered before making reference to the unique contribution that this research makes and then drawing final conclusions.

This chapter now moves on to discuss the main findings in light of the literature review. For consistency I am following the headings used in chapter 2: Literature Review

5.2 Conceptual Framework

This research developed from an underpinning epistemology of post positivist social constructivist conceptual background. The research explores the complex ideas about learning and ways to enable pupil voice to be heard. These can be viewed as theory or logical ideas, complex, connected ideas as suggested by Todd (2005). These are issues that are an important aspect of educational psychology practice. In developing this research I adopted a post positivist social constructivist conceptual framework rejecting a more traditional positivist approach. I did this because of the emphasis placed on the importance of context and culture, an interactionist perspective, recognising the social nature of human behaviour and learning, questioning the within child deficit model. Within this framework knowledge is seen as constructed within a culture and context and the narratives are created by those involved. From this conceptual framework a

qualitative case study research methodology was adopted where as, practitioner researcher, I was able to not only gather the qualitative narrative data but also reflect upon my part in the research.

The research findings support the use of this conceptual framework and choice of research methodology. There were a number of reasons that a quantitative positivist approach was not adopted amongst them were the fears that such approaches are too far removed from reality and the risk that meaning and information would be lost on conversion to numerical data (Grosvenor & Rose, 2001; Hayes, 2000; Parker, 2006). The attraction of a qualitative case study approach was that it complemented my day to day work as an educational psychologist, met the ethical dilemmas of involving pupils in research and being a practitioner researcher while enabling pupil voice to be heard. A qualitative approach afforded a holistic view to be taken with a focus on the context, narratives and meanings from those in that context, in this case the school. This research recognised and made all efforts to deal with the complexity of the area of investigation. The qualitative methodology allowed for pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching to be gathered sensitively and respectfully. The strength was that the data and analysis were grounded in the reality of the subjects producing a richness of detail (Denscombe, 1998; Hayes, 1997; Parker, 2006) that would not have been afforded through quantitative approach. A real strength of this research was that the research methodology adopted allowed pupils to be enabled to give their voice while also allowing adult perspectives to be gained without any conflating of pupil views and since the research question was about gaining pupil and adult perspectives the research

methodology was appropriate. Since great care was taken to seek informed consent and throughout the research to take account of pupil feelings (for example, pupil feelings about sessions being recorded) I feel that by using this research methodology ethical issues and dilemmas were appropriately catered for.

5.3   Effective Learning

5.3.1   Learning

Through the literature review my emphasis became focused on learning from a social constructivist standpoint seeing learning as an active process in which we learn through the interactions we have with others. The literature reviewed highlighted the social interactive nature of learning and the importance of language (Cole, 1996; Edwards, 2001; Engestrom, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978). The findings of this research are consistent with this interactive nature of learning, the social basis of learning and the importance of language within the learning context.

5.3.2   Effective learning

Through the literature review the active participatory nature of learning became clear. This research confirmed that pupils are able to reflect on their learning, they agree that learning constitutes learning new things and question whether everything they do in school is learning. Pupils demonstrated that they have much to contribute, can reflect on their own learning and in so doing were critical of some of what they are asked to do in school. The pupil perspective was that their learning sometimes was dull and uninspiring, pupils were critical of the amount of writing and copying that seems to feature in their

learning, questioning whether all they do is "learning". Adults involved in this research presented the view of pupils as passive, detached learners who still have some way to go in being active participants in promoting their own effective learning. Thus there was evidence that the picture that adults painted did not fit with the way pupils presented in this research. It may be that this research is not representative and that these teachers painted a bleak black view and that further investigation will show that pupils are not as passive as the adults involved in this research suggests.

There is a large body of literature about effective learning, what it is and how to promote it. In the literature evidence suggests that a number of factors are important to effective learning, for example, active participation (Carnell, 2000; Carnell & Lodge, 2002); metacognitive skills (Carnell, 2000; Gersch 1996; Preece & Timmons, 2004; Timmons, 1999; Todd, 2003; Wray & Lewis undated); pupil self awareness , past pupil experience, clarity of why something is being learnt (Booth et al, 2007; Gersch, 1996; Medwell et al undated); pupil involvement, relationships and self theories (Carnell & Lodge, 2002, Morton, 1996) ; emotional aspects and strengthening the capacity to learn (Dixon, 2004; Dixon, 2005). This research is consistent with the body of evidence in that the pupils suggested similar factors as being important in promoting their effective learning, for example including, use of a variety of learning styles and teaching approaches, positive and supportive classroom management, a supportive physical school environment, positive and productive peer and adult relationships and an exciting and engaging curriculum.

I was a little surprised, that given the emphasis in recent times on raising teacher awareness and skills and the prevalence of the phrase "quality teaching for all", with the implicit emphasis on promoting effective learning, that this would have emerged as a very positive theme for both pupils and adults, but this was not the case. There appeared to be a gulf between the rhetoric and practice. There was evidence that learning can be exciting and pupils can be motivated by a curriculum relevant to individual need delivered in an ethos that supports emotional well being and thus effective learning; but there was evidence that this is not always the case. The suggestion is that "quality teaching for all" needs further embedding.

The fundamental importance of language for learning is highlighted and this finding is one of the contributions to knowledge that emerges from this study. One conclusion from this research is how vital for pupils' learning and well being is the language for learning that is used and how we as adults take for granted and assume understanding. This research highlighted the importance of the quality of explanations, the quality of differentiation and the quality of verbal instruction within the curriculum. These pupils expressed their voice saying they want their teachers to *"help us"* by *"explaining it"*. The pupil perspective was that the major input in the curriculum is through language, written and spoken yet inspite of all the initiatives and developments they reported that they feel in a state of *"I just don't get it"*. This suggests that we are failing to ensure that all of our pupils have the skills they need to access the curriculum and that we continue to put some pupils in a situation for them to fail in.

5.3.3 Barriers to Learning

This research has taken the view that considering barriers to learning helps in our understanding of effective learning. Through the literature review the term "barriers to learning" was considered recognising that although content and contextual factors are referred to, pupil attributes also featured. The suggestion was it is an adult constructed term and it was unclear about the usefulness of the term for pupils. This research supports this to some extent through the suggestion that some adults may see barriers to learning through a within child deficit model focusing on pupil attributes that are lacking, that the pupil must change, the pupil must fit into an inflexible system.   On the other hand interestingly, this research has shown that pupils understand the term barriers to learning and through identifying a number of barriers to learning show that they are consistent with literature and identifying content and context factors as barriers alongside pupil factors. Pupils took a holistic view of barriers to learning. Interestingly the adults involved in this research did not see themselves as representative of all their colleagues, although they presented a wider view of barriers to learning than just pupil attributes they suggested the majority of their colleagues would see barriers as within child pupil attributes.

This research suggests that further investigation is needed to tease out whether these adults are representative and whether their suggestions that the dominant view among their colleagues would be that barriers to learning are within child, is replicated. This research adds to the current body of literature by showing the term "barriers to learning" is useful for pupils. There is some consistency between the pupils and adults in this study

that barriers are wider than pupil attributes and that features of the school system can form barriers to learning exacerbated by the inflexibility of the system. This research suggests some similarity and consistency between the pupils and adults perspectives on barriers to learning although there was a suggestion from the adults taking part in this research that their views were not consistent with the dominant perspective within their colleagues. This may be explained by the skills, expertise and interests of these teachers and that they are not representative of their colleagues. Clearly further investigation would be needed.

5.4   Pupil voice

Literature traces the historical development that led to the now well established recognition of the concept of pupil involvement in education (DES, 1989; DfE, 1994; DfEE Excellence for All,1997; SEN COP 2001; UNCRC, 1989; UNESC, 1994). Even so there appears to be gulf between the rhetoric and practice with the literature suggesting that there is evidence that pupils continue to not feel listened to (Aston & Lambert, 2010; Burke & Grosvenor, 2003; Fletcher, 2001) and that although there has been increased interest in the pupil perspective there continues to be issues with power (Armstrong, 1995; Hobbs et al, 2000) and questions continue to be raised about whether in fact adults continue to have the dominant voice (Hadfield & Haw, 2001).

Literature refers to the ways in which pupil perspective is gained with appropriate methods of listening to pupils being highlighted (Armstrong, 1995) and the way in which views are gained should fit with the pupil and situation (Todd, 2003c). Literature

recognises the importance of finding ways to engage pupils and that communication, genuineness, creating a positive, fully participatory listening environment is important (Gersch, 1996; Mayall, 1999; Todd 2003a). The question of informed consent also features in literature, highlighting that informed consent should be built on mutual respect and confidence taking account of the rights, interests and feelings of pupils (Denscombe, 2002; Harker. 2002; Hayes, 2000; Robson, 2002; Tindall, 2006;). Literature suggests that pupil perspective should be gained in ways that are emotionally sensitive (Weare & Gray, 2003). Through the literature review my thinking focused on how group processes may be supportive in eliciting pupil voice. This was a unique feature of this research, it aimed to provide pupils, through a group learning process with the possibility of experiencing giving their voice. The real strength of this research was about setting the group process up so that a mutually supportive environment was created that enabled pupils to be listened to. Thus this research does focus on pupil voice, on what pupils want to tell us but it is not just about trying to find out what pupils think, it is about enabling pupils to give their perspective. My purpose was not to change or fix pupils but was to listen and hear their voice. This research developed from the notion that our understanding of learning is constructed by adults, teachers, parents, the government, educationalists, researchers and that within this are ideas and thoughts about barriers to learning, effective learning, quality teaching for all, personalised individualised curriculums, alternative learning packages and school improvement. However, what is missing is the interaction, the interactive nature of the learning process. Pupil voice is not just about hearing but is about what we need to do so that pupils are enabled to give their voice. Within this research, pupil voice was gained within a context that recognised and promoted the

interactions, the relational aspects of the group process and in so doing was the strength of the research. This research was not just about getting pupils together to talk, it was about doing something together, it was about building trust, about fostering interactions to elicit pupil voice. The research was about setting up an interactive group learning process to elicit the pupil perspective but more than that was about respecting pupils and thus respecting their views. Pupil voice is not just about adults listening to pupils; it also raises the question of what we have to do to elicit pupil voice.

There appeared to be a gap in the literature looking at eliciting pupil voice through a group learning situation. This research could have used methods generally employed to gain pupil perspectives through the use of questionnaire, interview or a focus group without using a group learning situation. The significant contribution to knowledge of this study was that it used a different way to elicit pupil voice. This research chose instead to use a group learning process with a follow up interview to explore pupil perspectives and thus gain pupil voice. Why did this research enable pupil voice to be heard? This research enabled pupil voice to be heard because pupils felt secure and so were able to give their perspective. Pupils reported that they liked the opportunity to talk. I suggest that the use of the adapted Wengraf (2001) question may have encouraged pupils to talk. The activities that were used to explore learning generally involved discussion. Essentially the group learning process gave opportunities for pupils to explore their perceptions about their learning through discussion while completing activities together; it was not just views being gained.

5.5   Making sense of the results through relationships

Literature recognises the relevance of drawing on psychological principles (Chessor, 2008) and continues to emphasise the psychological underpinnings to emotional literacy (Goleman, 1996; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) which have been developed through the SEAL agenda. Recently literature has emerged that emphasises the importance of relational quality and what has become known as "school connectedness", according to McLauglin & Clarke (2010) school connectedness is a summary way of describing a nexus of activities and experiences including relationships, pupils participating within a learning community. The body of evidence re-emphasising the importance on relationships is growing (Bird & Sultman, 2010; Monroe, 2010; Roffey, 2008; Tew, 2010) with the suggestion that the quality of relationships has been a casualty of the educational focus on targets and outcome. There is an emergence of recent evidence to support the premise that the atmosphere and ethos of a school shapes the social context that promotes or inhibits emotional literacy, well being, mental health and the need to create environments that support relational connectedness (Bird & Sultman, 2010; Cullen & Monroe, 2010; Roffey, 2008; Tew , 2010). Thus what seems to be emerging is the need to create an ethos within schools to promote environments supportive of relational connectedness, recognising schools as dynamic systems of connected relationships that promote positive interaction and relationships. The link between positive high quality peer relationships and engagement, achievement and well being is acknowledged (McGraith & Noble, 2010) and the importance of the quality of the instructional relationships (Murray-Harvey, 2010).

This research adds further evidence for the importance of relationships to learning. I suggest that a way of understanding the findings of the present research is through relationships. The present research showed the interactive nature of learning and in doing so that relationships are key, from both the pupil and adult perspectives relationships emerged as being important. I was struck by the great impact we as adults have on pupils. The pupil perspective to emerge through this present research is that they want the adults involved in their learning to be honest; to teach them; to encourage them; to explain things; to manage their behaviour; to use a variety of teaching approaches; to be aware of different learning styles; to build their confidence. Pupils want to learn. This research highlights the interactive nature of learning, that is, that learning cannot be seen in isolation from the context and that the context can be complex. The complexity is a result of the interaction of pupil factors, the system and adult factors and this research highlights the importance of relationships and connectedness. There was evidence that relationships within the learning situation can sometimes become part of a vicious unsupportive circle. Within this present research pupils recognised their part within this interaction.

The present research supports the notion of "school connectedness" that recently has emerged from literature and thus leads me to consider how to create an appropriate environment to maximise effective learning. This present research suggests that how schools manage change and development in their system is important and that consideration needs to be given to how we support change and development. This

research suggests that pupils have a contribution to make and that for change to be effective appropriate planning and preparation needs to have taken place so that pupils and adults feel they have been involved in the changes and have confidence that they can successfully be implemented and maintained.

This present research adds to the evidence base of the importance of relationships to learning, the importance of the school behaviour policy and ethos, the importance of accessible language and accessible oral explanations and instructions, the importance of good quality teaching.

As I explained in the introduction to this thesis, this present research arose from my personal and professional journey dating back many years and has built on many years of working as an educational psychologist. This present research was undertaken by taking the role of practitioner research and included a reflection on the implications for educational psychology practice.

5.6   Implications for educational psychology practice

Literature recognises the growth and benefits of the innovative and preventive role of educational psychologists (DfEE, 2001; Farrell et al, 2006) and there is much evidence in the literature of innovative ways of educational psychologists working, from short term intensive interventions with individuals and groups to staff support and training (Bath et al, 1999; Brooks, 2002; Buckle et al, 1999; Chessor, 2008; Todd et al, 1999). There are references to support for schools in applying strategies to enhance peer relationships

(Binnie et al, 2008; Butterfield, 2009; McGraith & Noble, 2010). The literature suggests that educational psychologists are particularly well placed to gain pupil views and to influence attitudes that pupil voice should be heard and can be heard (Harding, 2009). This present research is supportive of much of the present evidence from literature.

I will structure the implications for educational psychology practice that this present research suggests by thinking about local authority, school, group and individual pupil level.

5.6.1 Local Authority

- This present research highlights that educational psychologists are able to carry out small scale practitioner research which could be very usefully used to support local authority priorities and needs.
- Educational psychologists are well placed to gain pupil voice and to add to the knowledge base about effective ways of gaining pupil voice which could very usefully be disseminated across the local authority. We should be promoting ourselves within local authorities as champions of pupil voice.

5.6.2 Schools

- This present research provides further evidence to support the view that educational psychologists can work in innovative ways in schools.
- Educational psychologists can carry out small scale practitioner research in schools and we should continue to promote this aspect of our work.

- This research has highlighted the importance of relationships and "school connectedness" for learning. Educational psychologists are well placed to support schools in recognising this.

- This research has highlighted the importance of ethos and context for effective learning. Educational psychologists are well placed to support schools to develop an ethos and context that supports effective learning.

- This research has highlighted the importance of language for learning. Educational psychologists are well placed to raise the profile in schools of the importance of language of instruction and language for learning.

5.6.3 Groups

- This present research adds to the body of evidence that educational psychologists can work with groups of pupils to set situations to enable pupil voice to be elicited, to enable pupils to reflect upon their learning and what makes learning hard.

- Educational psychologists are well placed to continue to add to the knowledge base about effective ways of eliciting the voice of groups of pupils.

5.6.4 Individual pupil

- Educational psychologists are well placed to be championing pupil engagement, empowerment and pupil voice in their individual focused work.

- Educational psychologists are well placed to challenge others and advocate for pupil voice to be heard.

- Educational psychologists are well placed to continue to add to the knowledge base about effective ways of gaining pupil voice for individual pupils we may be working with.

- Educational psychologists can advocate for constructing identities of pupils with SEN and barriers to learning as "effective learners" and for pupil perspectives to be heard.

5.7 Implications for teachers

- Pupils in this study identified a number of barriers to their learning which fell into four broad areas, the context or environment that their learning occurs in, features of the task and lesson presentation, the explanations that adults give and factors related to teachers and pupils. This suggests that teachers should consider carefully with the pupils they are teaching what may form barriers to their learning and then take account in their planning to reduce the impact. In doing so teachers should be aware of the learning context and the danger of a culture of blame developing.

- This research has highlighted that schools are complex interactive organisations and that changes and development of policy and systems should be carefully and painstakingly planned with time taken being taken to prepare for any change.

- Teachers should consider carefully the importance of language for learning that this research highlights, that is, teachers should ensure that pupils understand language being used, teachers should make instructions and explanations

accessible and the quality of the differentiation and verbal instructions used within the learning context should be appropriate.

- This research emphasises the importance of relationships to learning. Teachers should be aware of the importance of relationships to learning, that is, the quality of the pupil adult relationship, how teachers respond when pupils have difficulty understanding and the interactive nature of learning.

- Teachers should be aware that this research has shown pupil voice can be gained through an interactive group learning process where the interactions and relational aspects are key. Teachers should be aware that this research has shown the importance of interactions and relationships, of the language used and the manner in which explanations, instructions and clarification are given.

5. 8   Limitations of the research and implications for future research

By adopting a qualitative case study methodology I was aware that traditional views on reliability, consistency of results, and validity, accuracy of results and generalisation were not particularly helpful. By adopting a qualitative approach I was aware that any results would be as fragile and mutable as real life is (Parker, 2006) but I aimed to make the methodology, the reasoning behind my research, the plan and the data analysis as explicit and transparent as possible.

The aim of the present research was to increase understanding in the area of effective learning and pupil voice and throughout I have aimed to undertake ethical research. Recognising the uniqueness of human beings I wanted to understand the setting and

context that I was researching rather than expecting or hoping for anyone to be able to replicate my findings. Using a multi session group learning experience was one way that the validity of the research was enhanced as I elicited pupil perspectives over a number of weeks. Meeting with each of the pupils individually was another way of enhancing the validity as I was able to offer the opportunity for perspectives to be given that were not given within the group as pupils may have been inhibited. I recognised the complexity of the area I was researching, that investigating pupil perspectives was problematical but felt that I could not investigate pupils perspectives in isolation from adults perspectives.

There are limitations to this present research, one being that my role was one of practitioner researcher, and although great care was taken to avoid it, it may be that the results were a reflection of my personal style and personal qualities. It could be that I was looking for things that I wanted to see. It could be that the pupils and adults simply told me the things that they thought I wanted to hear. I was very aware that as practitioner researcher I may just be seeing what I wanted to, thus I took steps to minimise this by using the pupils themselves and work colleagues to collaborate my findings and in doing so showed that my analysis made sense to pupils and colleagues. A case study approach was used with a very small sample of pupils from just one school so generalisation to other groups of pupils and schools may be limited. Having acknowledged the weaknesses of a very small scale case study approach I felt that the benefits outweighed these. The benefit that a small scale case study afforded was that I was able to investigate pupil perspectives and ways to elicit pupil voice in real depth by using pupils who could be viewed as hard to reach. The pupils who formed the group were not pupils who generally

would have a voice through usual routes in school in gaining views, schools councils, questionnaires, group discussions. I suggest that in fact this was a significant strength of the study. Further limitations are connected to the procedures that I used within the group learning process. I planned the activities and group sessions and so used activities that I was comfortable in using, the language I used to introduce activities and seek pupil perspectives was language I was comfortable with. Without realising it and unintentionally it is possible that I used activities and language to simply look for what I wanted to see and validate what I thought. Being aware of this possible weakness I included an unstructured narrative element to each session, this was included deliberately as it was not researcher led thus gave pupils the opportunity to take control in determining the topics discussed. Again I suggest that in practice this was actually an area of strength of the research. I was aware that I may have influenced the pattern of results of this study but being aware of the possible limitations I acknowledged these and took steps to address and thus minimise potential weaknesses.

I suggest that there are implications for future research. It would be interesting to explore whether other group situations would have enabled pupils to have been secure to elicit their voice or whether it was the type of group learning situation that I created that enabled this to happen. Other interesting areas for future research would be to explore whether the pupil and adult perspectives shown in this present research are representative of pupil and adult perspectives working in other schools and regions and with other adults. How would the adult views compare with adults undertaking a different role in a school? Would older and younger pupils present similar views to these pupils?

This present research has implications for future research into pupil voice since it has indicated that it is possible to elicit pupil voice through the use of a group learning process which involves discussion, an adapted Wengraf (2001) initial question, tasks and activities to explore the area being investigated and while doing that listen to pupil voice elicited. This is different from methods of questionnaire or interview that are usually used to gain pupil voice that involved asking pupils to give their voice.

5.9   The unique contribution of this research

This research has made a unique contribution to knowledge, a unique contribution to the understanding of the pupil and adult perspectives about learning and teaching, to methods to elicit pupil voice and to educational psychology practice. This research has made a unique contribution in four areas:-

1. The use of a group learning process as a means of exploring and eliciting pupil voice. This research is unusual in that it used a group learning situation involving an adapted Wengraf initial question, activities and tasks to promote discussion and reflection about learning as a means to enable and empower pupils to make their voice heard. The tasks and activities, the interactions, the discussions were all part of the context of the group learning process that engaged and empowered pupils. The group learning process was a unique method to use to gain the voice of those usually voiceless, and thus a contribution to knowledge.

2. This research has shown that language factors within a learning situation are important to enabling pupil learning, engagement, interactions and relationships.

Language for learning – the explanations and instructions that are used within a learning context and the manner in which explanations are given and additional explanations and clarifications are given, are important. This research suggests that the relationship and affective aspects of language are crucial, that is, how pupils feel about the way explanations are given.

3. This research has added to the knowledge and literature about barriers to learning, specifically contributing pupil views about barriers to learning. This research has shown that pupils recognise barriers to their learning and appear to take a holistic view of barriers to learning. The pupil perspective is that barriers to learning can be related to pupil attributes, features of the school system and environment.

4. This research recognised the complex nature of investigating pupil perspectives about learning, recognised that learning occurs in a context of which adults are part of. This research sought to investigate pupil perspectives alongside adult perspectives. This research has shown that it is possible to seek pupil perspectives alongside adult perspectives without conflating pupil perspectives.

5.10   Conclusions

This research used a group learning process to investigate pupil and adult perspectives about their experience of learning and teaching, and what makes learning difficult. The aim was to provide a secure environment through a group learning process to enable pupils to tell their story, to elicit pupil perspectives about their learning. In doing this, the research took account of the challenge of carrying out research with children, of the challenge of gaining informed consent, of the challenge of working within a school

situation in an innovative way, of the challenge of working with a group of pupils in an interactive group learning situation. This research investigated pupil perspectives alongside adult perspectives and in so doing pupil perspectives were not conflated by adult perspectives. There was some consistency of the research findings with the current literature evidence base and the findings of the present study added to the evidence in relation to the importance of language, relationships, in using a group learning process to gain pupil voice and showing pupil and adult perspectives can be sought alongside each other. The research suggests a number of ways that educational psychologists can support schools to reduce future incidence of pupils feeling "I just don't get it" and promoting what pupils wholeheartedly want to do, that is, learn effectively.

Through this research I had the privileged opportunity to enter the lives of a group of underachieving pupils but in addition I have been able to explore my own personal and professional journey. This has allowed me to finally put my past in context. Through this research I have been able to reflect on my own very personal learning journey and how this may have influenced my professional journey. I am hugely grateful for this experience and I have emerged even more committed to promoting the values of empowerment and inclusion.

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Appendix 1: Letter to gain parental consent

Dear

We would like ---------- to be part of a research group being run in school by the educational psychologist, Jane Gould who visits school and is also studying at Newcastle University for a PhD. The group will meet weekly for 6 weeks. *** from school will also be present. The group will investigate pupil views about effective learning.

Please sign and return the slip below in the envelope provided to give your consent for ------ being included in the group.

If you would like more information about the group or would like to speak to Jane please telephone ***** .

Thank you.

Yours sincerely

******   Jane Gould
SENC   Educational Psychologist

_____

Effective learning Research Group

I give consent for _____ being included in the research group.

Signed   _____ (parent/guardian)

Date _____

Appendix 2: Informed consent – initial pupil interview

Initial individual pupil meeting to gain consent

Covered   Who I am
What an EP is
What hoping to do – find out more about what makes learning easy/ hard and learning context
The group
Gain consent
Research diary
Tape sessions

Appendix 3: Informed consent – initial Lead TA interview

Initial Meeting with Lead TA to gain consent

Cover   What hoping to do - gain pupil views about their learning, what makes it easy/ hard, views about the notion of barriers to learning and the learning context

TA Role – to support and help me with the group activities and help me notice things.

Research diary

Tape sessions

Appendix 4: Examples of activities used

Session 1

- Break ice   name game and quiz

- Why group   - EP doing research. Interested in finding out more about what makes learning easy / hard in school. Will help in my job. Work with you and interviewing teachers in school. You and your parents have all agreed to be part of the group.

- Establish ground rules

- I am interested in what it is like to be a pupil at this school. Tell me about school. I'm particularly interested in when you find learning easy and hard. (Wengraf)

- What is learning. Learning is _____ . Individual thinking time, share with a partner, record a statement and then share with group. Dictionary definition – Learning is gaining knowledge or skills though study.

- What makes learning hard in school. In pairs – think of one time that you found learning hard, tell each other. What makes learning hard. Share and discuss as a group.

Favourites Quiz

	My favourite	Another person
Pet		
Sport		
Lesson		
TV programme		
Band/ pop star		
Food		
Football team		
Hobby		

Learning is

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

What makes learning hard?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Session 2

- Welcome

- Remind of ground rules

- Tell me about the last week. (Wengraf)

- Learning easy/ learning hard
What are you doing
What are others doing
What is happening

- The learning context – what affects or influences you in your learning
What could be put in the boxes

When Learning is Easy	When Learning is Hard
What am I doing?	What am I doing?
What are others doing?	What are others doing?
What is happening?	What is happening?

What influences my learning

I learn or I don't learn
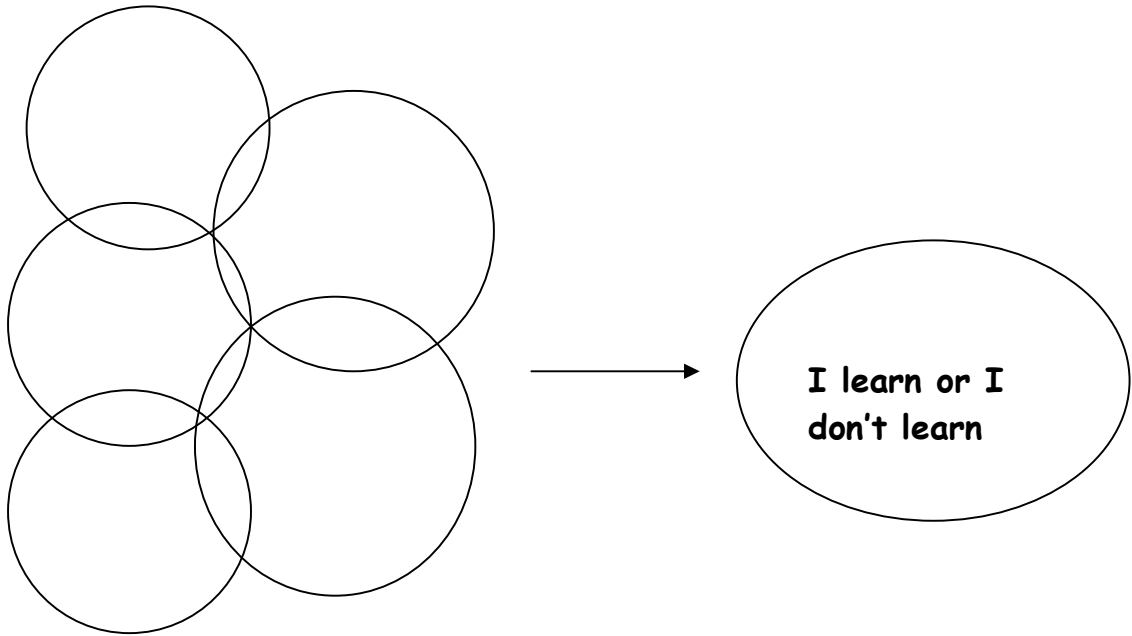
Session 3

- Welcome

- Remind of ground rules

- Tell me about the last week (Wengraf)

- Influences – I've put together your ideas. Are there any more to add? Which can you exert some control over and which are out of your control.

- Pupil views on things that get in the way of your learning - barriers to learning. Identify barriers pupils see in to learning

Influences on learning

The future

Teacher encourage ment - merits

TV

Friends

Teacher verbal encourag- ement

Yourself

School – how it works

I learn or I don't learn
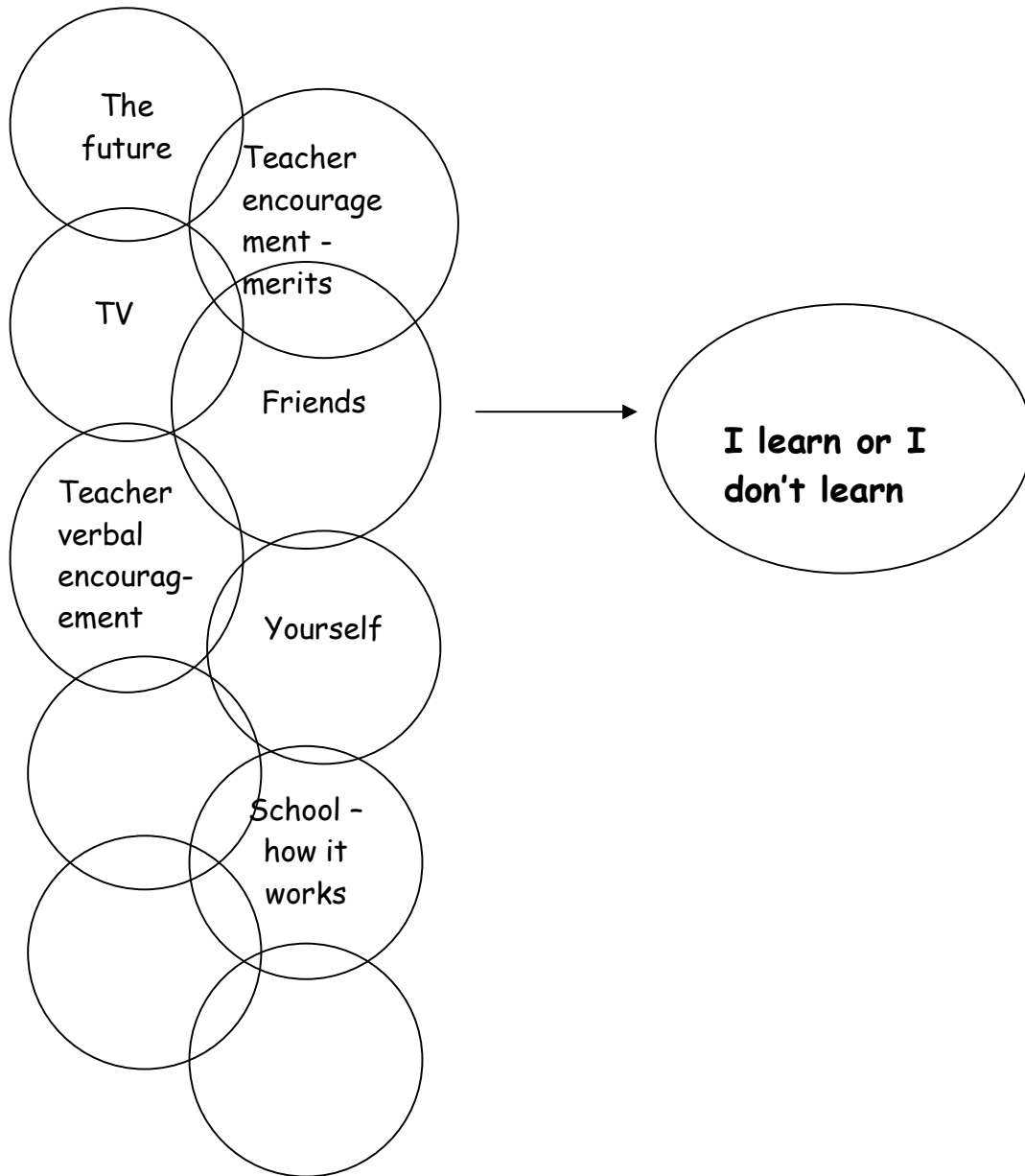
Follow Up Session

- Welcome

- Want   to hear how things have been
  for me to report back on my research
  to check things out

- Tell me about how things have been since we met last (Wengraf)

- Recap on what covered in group sessions
  what is learning, learning is ....
  what makes learning easy, hard
  what are you doing, others doing when learning is easy, hard
  the learning context, what influences learning
  barriers to learning

- Go over summary of what they did/said

  What is learning?
  Agreement that about finding out something new that didn't know before, new knowledge

  What makes learning hard?
  Context   - how you and others behave, concentrate and attend
  Task   - how relevant, interesting, explained, understood
  You   - confidence, feeling at best, think you can do
  Teacher   - style and management, whether you like

  Influences on learning
  The future
  Teacher encouragement – merits
  TV
  Friends
  Teacher verbal encouragement
  Yourself

Movies games internet
School – how it works
Famous people
Family parents

Barriers to learning (things that get in the way)
Content, the task
Explanations
Teacher behaviour
Pupil behaviour, confidence, attitude
Environment

We also talked about changes and school generally. I was interested in
- o The importance for you of the teacher relationship, teacher interaction, lesson content and the environment.
- o You did not mention your skills in literacy as a barrier, an influence when we were talking about learning.
- o The amount of writing is mentioned in terms of the lesson as a switch off.
- o The importance of language, what we as adults take for granted eg goal, the amount of verbal instruction.
- o That the obvious observations are often overlooked eg the major input that you get in the curriculum is written and spoken language yet are we ensuring that you have the skills – are we putting you in a situation for you to fail.
- o That there is a blame culture – pupils and teachers sometimes say it's their fault

- Any more thoughts/ ideas

Appendix 5: Semi Structured Pupil Interview Schedule

Pupil Interview

- Gain agreement for the interview to be taped

- I am interested in what it's like to be a student and a teacher at school.

Tell me about school. In particular tell me, as you have in the group, about pupils learning.
Prompts
Tell me about when   you find learning easy
                       you find learning hard
                       others find learning easy
                       others find learning hard
                       teachers find teaching easy
                       teachers find teaching hard

- Tell me about the beginning of term and the changes being made in school. What is different now?

- I am interested in your views on
  - What influences pupil learning
  - Barriers to learning
  - The Learning context

- How can learning be made easier, more effective, more successful for you and other pupils
  - What can you do
  - What can others do
  - What can school do

- What have you felt about the group

- Any other points you would like to make

- Thank you very much

Appendix 6: Semi Structured Adult Interview Schedule

Adult Interview

- Gain agreement for the interview to be taped

- I am interested in what it's like to be a student and a teacher at school. I've asked students to tell me about school.

Tell me about school. In particular tell me about pupils learning, when they find it easy and when they find it hard and when teachers find teaching hard and when they find it is easy.

- I am interested in your views/thoughts on
  What influences pupil learning
  Barriers to learning
  The learning context

How can learning and teaching be made easier, more effective, more successful for pupils and teachers -

- Any other points you would like to make

- Thank you very much

Appendix 7: Examples of pupil responses to activities

Session 1 Task 1

Learning is _thi were you Learn new_
thing and get grase and
then get a good job

Learning is ___w___
where you learn
something you
learn about different thing

Learning is _Something you get_
to find out if you
dont alredy no.

Learning is _learning is when_
I learn new things that
I didnt ~~no~~ know before.

Learning is _When someone or something_ _lets you a bit of information that_ _you will keep in your mind._ _that you didn't know before_

Learning is _for ~~getting an education~~_ _finding out what you don't know._

Session 1 Task 2

What makes learning hard?

- Don't understand what class seem to understand
- People talking
- Talks right fast
- Don't listen
- bored when don't know what to do
- Don't explain properly
- Don't understand
- Poorly — missed something
- Homework sheet — don't know what to do.
- Have to stay in when not done all
- Missed things
- People talk distract
- Get done
- copy up — not learning

What makes learning hard?

When it is barning
Lose consentrason
When you do unerstand
what the teacher saying
2 mosh n
people talking
teacher goes 2 fast.
When you dnt fu 100%
confertaine.
2 many worksheet makes
it easy and lose intrest

What makes learning hard?

When it is boring — text book.
When you lose concentration
When you don't understand what the teacher is saying
When it is noisy in the classroom.
When the teacher goes too fast
When you don't feel 100% you can't concentrate as well
Too many work sheets makes learning too easy and
        so you lose interest.

What makes learning hard?

Text books are boring
Loose consentration
When you dont understand what the
teacher is saying
When it is noisy in the classroom.
When the teachers goes to fast!
When you not feeling 100% you cornt
consentrat as well.
To many work sheets makes it too
easy and lose intrest when too
easy.

Session 2 Task

1   Session 2.

look at it
think
cau'r do
it
but then
teach?
explains
it .

When Learning is Easy	When Learning is Hard
What am I doing?	**What am I doing?**
listen *lookhard but its easy	messing about
paying attention	talking
not messing about	falling asleep — tired boted
joining in	ignoring teacher
following what asked	can't be bothered.
know what you doing — easy	
What are others doing?	**What are others doing?**
listen doing same.	messing about
trying	talking
not messing about / distracting !	distracting you
What is happening?	**What is happening?**
everyone listen	teacher shouting
attending ,	all noisy
	supply teacher - mess about.
	explanation — if quiet + can listen

• think
cau'r
don't
try.
- have to
ask if
don'r led
want to
do.

• ask
teacher
,
might
shout
cos don't

When Learning is Easy	When Learning is Hard
What am I doing?	**What am I doing?**
Listening, Can look hard but its easy, paying attension, not messing about, Joining in, easy, able to do the work, get involved,	messing about, talking, falling asleep, ignoring teachers Ask people and they don't Know what todo, Cant get bothered, think you cant Do it.
What are others doing?	**What are others doing?**
Listening, paying attention, trying, able to do the work, not messing about	messing about, talking, distracting,
What is happening?	**What is happening?**
when listening.	Cant be bothered, teacher shouting, all noisy, all messing about.

When Learning is Easy	When Learning is Hard
What am I doing?	What am I doing?
listening paying attention not messing about able to do the work can look hard but it's easy	messing about falling asleep talking egnoring the teacher think you can't
What are others doing?	What are others doing?
listenin Paying attention trying able to do the work not messing about	Messing about talking destracting others egnoring the teacher not paying attention
What is happening?	What is happening?
every ones listening	cant be bothered teacher shouting noisy all messing about

When Learning is Easy	When Learning is Hard
What am I doing? listening Pay attention Not mess about able to do the work get involved	**What am I doing?** Falling asleep Ignoring the teacher cant be bothered
What are others doing? listens Pay attention try and able to do the work not messing about	**What are others doing?** messing do about talking distracting others
What is happening? every once listening ~~Falling asleep~~ ~~ignoring the teacher~~	**What is happening?** Cant be bothered teacher shouting

Appendix 8: Example from Research Diary

Research Diary

Session 1

Quiz - reminded me of the need to be very clear with directions and instructions. Taping did not work, group all shut up and became very self-conscious. Need to have time to become used to me and the group.

Found "tell me about" very difficult but was exacerbated by the disruption of the taping. Feel need to continue with this because hopefully as they become established may become more receptive to the "tell me about".

Ground rules - the group contributed to this very positively - it was more structured an activity and perhaps less threatening.

Learning is … Definition. Were able to give their ideas. When shown the dictionary definition one said but not just studying and gave example of riding a bike. When this was explored they felt that similar because need to be shown , helped and gradually ride a bike - to do with confidence. My story about riding my bike shared.

Task set and written in diary.
Quiz went well, learning is went well.

Learning is hard in small groups. They came up with ideas - the context, them and teacher instructions seemed important.

Some of group more verbally confident than others, P 4 and P 6 appear that they may need more support.

3 pupils at end of session presented me with report cards. Had been excellent through session and I would not have predicted from their behaviour in session that they would be on report.

Group were responsive and pleasant. Some were reflecting very well. Not only identifying teacher and self issues/ factors but also identified context and wider context as well.

Session 2
P 4 did not want to continue with group but politely said not for her.

Did not attempt to tape wanted the group to settle and feel comfortable.

Discussion about the last week. P 1 talked about detention and on call for talking and telling someone to shshsh. Talked through what might have been a better strategy - keep quiet.

Talked about changes in Sept about form groupings. Pupils all identified some positive and negative feelings about the changes. The positive was the prospect of mixing more with other year groups.

Very positive group, only 4 present all had diaries with them and had kept note of their reflections.

Perhaps now can begin to tape for more accurate records as seem to have relaxed, very talkative, responsive and positive.
Lead TA had been told by someone out of school that P 1 had been telling them about the group.

Reports again presented.

Appendix 9: Example of session transcript

Example of transcript of part of session 4

P 2 Sometimes I say and some teachers say just get on with your work … they say you should have been listening

How would you like them to be?

help us …. explaining it

Do you help each other in lessons

ALL yes

P 1 first thing – trying with school work … how will you know… on call less because talking. If in lessons and not liking it what happens ? I start talking .. on call. New system colour cards – more on call – very tight warning

P 3 less people on call.. but give it time.. it was like that with that dinner time thing people stopped getting on called

So new system less people on call

P 5 Yes it's because punishment is worse. Old system if got caught then detention on Friday but no after school detention .. more of deterrent.. don't want another… sometimes it doesn't even work..

What would work – isolation..
P 1 Exclusion doesn't – I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on play station than be at school. Exclusion is stupid , it's your education when you get excluded.. goes on record .. but it doesn't work miss my brother was never at school .. he was in isolation from year 7 to 9 but now he's at college and he's getting really good marks in behaviour he always got low marks in tests and he got excluded but now he's getting really high marks.

What's different?

P 1 It's something else to do isn't it you get treated proper don't you

Work you get paid

Detentions not fair if live so need a bus just say can't do

Teachers shout – if you shout back, my mum shouts at me and I shout back – *discussion about fairness and teachers shouting*

P 3 Sometimes when you don't like a teacher and they don't like you and you go home and they talk about you and your learning and you keep thinking about them talking about you, *that bothers you* – yes

Appendix 10: Example of interview transcript

Pupil Interviews

Pupil 1

Nothing didn't like about group
Could talk about things (helpful)

Learning easy – can't think how to explain it .. when teacher talks to you and comes to help you

Hard - When like just tell you what to do and just say turn to page .. and have to work from it

This term - my eyebrow stud

Changes - It's alright I like it cos I've got my best mate in it .. I don't really talk to anyone else .. do register , miss tells us messages that come in register and sometimes do things in groups .. year 7s in my group are OK cos they know the older ones and sit and talk to them .. everyone likes it

Like

Make it more fun and practical rather than writing all the time and way teacher talks to you

How have things been?

Alright. No exclusions. I don't know .. when I'm getting done just like sit there and let them have a go at me instead of like starting shouting back at them.

Lessons?

Good.

Best lesson?

Art, I like what we're doing in it. Yes (always liked) but what we were usually doing was boring. (now) you know sweet wrappers and bubble writing all that.

Design, can have a laugh as well.

Tutor group – alright, talking to more people, can't remember their names but they're in year 10 and 11. *What do* – nought really just sit there and talk

Generally school, changes cards

Being used. Not really made a difference.

Did a practice choice in PSE what you think you might take, it was good, chose that resistant materials and some design and can't remember a BTec. I asked Miss Mc you like resistant materials and all that like what you do in it and she said she would try and find out for us before we pick our real ones cos I didn't want to pick it and then not like it and be stuck with it for a year.

How do you manage to sit and not react?

Just don't listen to them

Pupil 4

Easy hard learning

Don't know really

Changes

Houses and stuff // I think its quite good cos you get to know people out of different years like year 10 and 11 .. yes talk to different .. every Wednesday we do like a questionnaire in a group no one same year and talk to each other

Year 7? Alright now but I think they started might not I think helped because know who different people are

Changes card ?   I haven't got a red one yet .. before they just used to send you on call straight away but now they tell you what you're doing so I think it's better .. on cards it says that you're doing wrong and asks the teacher why your behaviour isn't appropriate and stuff like that

Example of part of transcript of adult interview
SENCO

Qs What is it like to be a student and teacher at school, in particular when learning and teaching is easy / hard?

What's it like to be a pupil here?

In this school there's a great difference between styles of delivery of the teachers and those with good discipline and good planning have the better lessons and better relationships with our students and they speak very highly of people like KM who are always on top of the game, always produce interesting lessons and are always firm. They hate going to lessons where its chaotic and the discipline is poor and the lesson content is poor. It's really a great divide, the few people who are not on top of the game as teachers have a big impact on our students.

What are the factors that put them 'on top of the game'?

I was talking to you teacher recently and she said because of something she'd to do in PSE she'd spent 4 hours at the weekend differentiating the material for the likes of CD because there was no way he could understand the concept of media. So it's as if to differentiate people tend to water it down rather than explain in simple terms the concept of what they are trying to teach. The kids don't know what the expectations are. A lot of the more academic subjects don't get differentiated very well at all and I know the long words are difficult to differentiate but I know that some of the work I've seen coming out of those low ability classes I mean it's not surprising the students are very unsettled. And some students tend to go

from one difficult situation to another where the teaching isn't at their level and the quality of what they are getting sometimes is not appropriate. Whereas more able students can actually cope with that better pupils who aren't very able can't cope with inconsistency and poor planning and the children do complain. The students say I hate going into that lesson and things like that and they there's them that's badly behaved but it doesn't alter the fact that they hate the lesson and they talk about humiliated they feel when they're made to read out loud and things like that in class.

Appendix 11: Example of analysing a piece of transcript using thematic analysis

Extract from transcript from interview with adult. Underlined is the section and code ascribed to it in red in brackets

People tend to think that it's only the pupil attributes that are causing the barriers to learning. (extract 1a) *(pupils)* Barriers to learning seem to be focused on the pupils. (extract 1b) *(pupils)* There's a blame cultures in education (extract 1c) *(pupils)* if the child is not learning then it must be the child's fault. (extract 1d) *(pupils)* Not I think that we are altering that. I think that people that work in SEN are altering that and I'd like to think that we are as a department in school. I haven't been able to affect the curriculum up to yet but that's really being changed in the upper in KS4 but I still think the KS3 curriculum leaves a lot to be desired. I've got children who have a great deal of difficulty with their own language and actually communicating learning an additional language. (extract) *(language)* Now we always seem to pick on modern foreign languages but nonetheless it's a valid point that the curriculum isn't suitable for these students we have. (extract) *(task)* I don't know how much they are understanding. (extract) *(understanding)* If you ask a child what they have understood about what's going on we're delivering the science curriculum but do they really understand it (extract) *(understanding)* and it's rushing through the curriculum (extract) *(understanding)* in a watered down way. I'd rather they understood one topic well in a year and made it exciting (extract) *(understanding)* well not one topic but fewer than having to stick to this rigid

national curriculum for those kids who it's really quite a big proportion of the school who aren't going to take it with them when they go. I know learning's not just about taking it with you but <u>the concepts aren't being formed</u>. (extract) *(understanding)* Their maths skills are poor how can you live your life without basic maths concepts and <u>they're going into higher order skills before they know the number systems and relationships between things and the language of mathematics</u> (extract) *(understanding)* and it's such an underpinning. It underpins everything and <u>school systems have not been very supportive of a lot of our students because it's one size fits all</u> (extract 21) *(system)* and we are moving away from that but <u>every child has got to do this and if he's different the child must be wrong</u> (extract 22) *(system)* and <u>I go back to the primary model, if the child can't sit on the carpet you must make him, the kid has got to sit on the carpet no matter what</u>, (extract) *(system)* if you're a dyspraxic child it's horrendous,. I had one child eating the carpet, how could I stop him eating the carpet, stop him sitting on the carpet. You know the kid was distressed but <u>it's this rigidity of this is how and anything else is anarchistic, anarchy is going to ensue of we've one kid not sitting on the carpet</u>. (extract 23) *(system)*

Extract number	Code	Issues identified	Basic themes	Organising Themes	Global Theme
21 "schools systems have not been very supportive of a lot of our students because it's one size fits all"	system	one size fits all	pupil must fit	pupil at fault	blame culture - barriers to learning seen as within child
23 "it's this rigidity of this is how and anything else is anarchistic, anarchy is going to ensue"	system	one size fits all			
22 "every child has got to do this and if he's different the child must be wrong"	system	child wrong	inflexibility / blame		
1c "there's a blame culture in education"	pupils	blame culture			
1d "if the child is not learning it must be the child's fault"	pupils	child fault not learning	pupil wrong		
1a "people tend to think that it's only the pupil attributes that are causing the barriers to learning … barriers to learning seem to be focused on the pupils"	pupils	barriers to learning are pupil attributes	child can't learn	barriers are pupil attributes	

Appendix 12: Example of coding text segments

Example of transcript of part of session 4

P 2 <u>Sometimes I say and some teachers say just get on with your work ...</u>
<u>they say you should have been listening</u>   *teacher*

How would you like them to be?

<u>help us</u> .... <u>explaining it</u>   *hope*

Do you help each other in lessons

ALL yes

P 1 first thing – trying with school work ... how will you know... on call less
because talking. If in lessons and not liking it what happens ? I start talking
.. on call. New system colour cards – more on call – very tight warning

P 3 <u>less people on call.. but give it time.. it was like that with that dinner time</u>
<u>thing people stopped getting on called</u> *system - behaviour*

So new system less people on call

                                    system

P 5 <u>Yes it's because punishment is worse</u>. Old system if got caught then
detention on Friday but no after school detention .. more of deterrent.. don't
want another... sometimes it doesn't even work..

What would work – isolation..

                                    exclusion

P 1 Exclusion doesn't – <u>I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on</u>
<u>play station than be at school. Exclusion is stupid</u> , it's your education when
you get excluded.. goes on record .. <u>but it doesn't work miss my brother was</u>
<u>never at school</u> *exclusion* .. he was in isolation from year 7 to 9 <u>but now he's</u>
<u>at college and he's getting really good marks in behaviour he always got low</u>
<u>marks in tests and he got excluded but now he's getting really high marks</u>.
hope

What's different?

P 1 It's something else to do isn't it <u>you get treated proper don't you</u> *hope*

Work you get paid

<u>Detentions not fair if live so need a bus just say can't do</u> *system*

Teachers shout – if you shout back, my mum shouts at me and I shout back – discussion about fairness and teachers shouting

P 3 <u>Sometimes when you don't like a teacher and they don't like you and you go home and they talk about you and your learning and you keep thinking about them talking about you</u>, that bothers you – yes *feeling*

Appendix 13: Example of text segments for a code

Law

(1) I just come because I have to (P)

Commitment

(1) I didn't feel well but I ran (P)

(2) I need a note miss for Ms *** because I'm supposed to in isolation, I'll just take a note to her and ask her … Thanks miss I'll be back in a minute (P)

Unfairness

(1) We're doing better than any other group and doing better work (P)

Teacher

(1) miss has got quite a loud voice (P)

(2) they have a go at you .. so don't say (don't understand) in case they shout at you (P)

(3) sometimes I say (don't understand) and some teachers say just get on with your work … they say you should have been listening (P)

(4) had a right go at us (P)

(5) Ms *** strict but mess about with supply teachers (P)

(6) but sometimes moody (P)

(7) if someone annoys him then right moody with us as well (P)

(8) can be moody (P)

(9) she won't (science experiment) (P)

(10) I hate it when we have cover teachers they just tell you to go to a page and do task and they just sit on lap tops and you ask for help and they say no you should have listened (P)

(30) different styles of delivery of teachers and those with good discipline and good planning have the better lessons and better relationships … always produce interesting lessons and are always firm. They *(pupils)* hate going to lessons where it's chaotic and discipline is poor and lesson content poor. It's really a great divide, the few people who are on top of the game as teachers have a big impact on students (A)

(31) more able students can actually cope with that better *(teaching not at level and inappropriate quality)* pupils who aren't very able can't cope with

inconsistency and poor planning and the children do complain .. say I hate going into that lesson (A)

(32) one of the biggest barriers … teacher training … they come into class and they've got to handle TAs, manage differentiation, they've got to understand language development, dyspraxia, dyslexia, ADHD, they don't even know what the words mean (A)

(33) They *(teachers)* learned easily, they read easily therefore the kid can't be trying very hard (A)

Appendix 14: Thematic Analysis – basic themes

Thematic Analysis - basic themes		
Code **(number of extracts)** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult**	**Issues identified** **(extract number)**	**Basic themes** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult**
Hope (12) P 12 A 0	to like school (1) help explain (2) achieve behave better (3) respect (4) like teacher (5) aspiration (6, 7, 10,,11) influence parent (9) role model (8) achieve want to do it (12)	Basic Theme 1 relationships (P) motivation (P) aspirations (P) pupil behaviour (P)
Strategy (6) P 6 A 0	self talk (1, 2) move (3) let it go over head, take it (4, 6) make right choice (5)	Basic Theme 2 strategies (e.g. self talk, disassociation, make good choices)(P)
Behaviour (16) P13 A3	admit truth (1) mess about no practical, spoil it (2, 3, 4, 6) like lesson work hard (5) Just get on easier for teacher (7, 9, 11) tactics (8, 10) teaching and learning easiest when listen and don't mess (2, 13) hard when sit with mates talk (12, 13) quality of teaching affects behaviour (14, 16) pupils dislike bad discipline (15)	Basic Theme 3 teaching approaches (A) encouragement (P) behaviour management (A)
To help (36) P 21 A 15	encouragement (1) pupil strategy, talk better way (2,,16, 17, 23, 24, 25) adults – read, explain, entertain, vary, interest (3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19) learning style, approach (4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15, 20, 21) link pupil behave lesson content (13, 37) no supply (22)	Basic Theme 4 impact of learning styles (P) Basic Theme 5 learning behaviours (A)

	engagement in learning (26, 27, 28, 35) not teach learning behaviour (29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36) group dynamics responsibility (31, 32, 33)	
Reading writing (28) P 23 A 5	lack of skill (1, 2, 3, 13, 22, 23, 28) skills needed (3, 4, 5, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 25) feelings (7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27)	Basic Theme 6 literacy skills relied on in curriculum (P) literacy skills deficit arouses strong feelings (A, P)
Task (47) P 44 A 3	boredom, frustration – writing but some tasks worse (1, 6, 8, 15, 18, 19, 27, 44) interest variety (2, 3, 4, 5, 0, 22, 23, 27 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 39, 41, 43, 46) copying is not work (7) lack of understanding (7) lack of explanation – just do (9, 11, 14, 30, 34) challenge of learning (10) variety of learning styles (12, 13, 14, 30, 34) copying - don't take in (16, 17, 37) SATs prep writing lot (21) if confident seems easy (25,26) ALU – no teacher explanation (35) ALU – distracting (36) have a laugh and work (40) teacher talk too much (42) good no writing (42) poor differentiation (45, 47)	Basic Theme 7 is copying learning (P) Basic Theme 8 importance of oral explanations (P) Basic Theme 9 confidence (P) Basic Theme 10 quality of differentiation (A)
Environment (25) P 6 A 19	improved school environment positive (3, 5, 6, 29, 22, 23) negative aspects of school hot rooms, size groups (1, 2, 11) positive ICT (4) underachieving girls (7) baggage from family (8, 9, 17) health (10, 12) stability from school (13, 14) lottery of timetable which teacher (15) complex interaction influence (16) school systems can change (18)	Basic Theme 11 environmental influences (A) school environment (A, P) not leave area (A)

	get weighed down difficult to keep focus on change (19) culture of area not to leave (21, 24, 25)	
LSU (3) P 3 A 0	music calms (1) not work (2) easy (3)	Basic Theme 12 is it work in LSU (P)
System (53) P 20 A 33	novelty wears off (2) improvement (3, 32, 34) detentions (4) emotional literacy (5, 26) changes in systems (1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17) ALPs reward naughty behaviour (8) report (10) cards chance to correct (13, 14, 16, 20) issues supply teachers (19) one size fits all (21, 23) child wrong (22) staff training understanding (24, 25, 26) curriculum constraints (27) groups too big (28) high expectation and rigour (29) teach learning strategies (30) positive reactions to changes (31, 36, 37, 42, 43, 44, 45) adults find change difficult (32) pupil positive qualities responsible (35, 45, 46) pupil engagement (38,39, 40, 41) creative curriculum (47) local view influence (48, 49) indifferent effect (51) readiness to change (52, 53)	Basic Theme 13 can make positive changes to systems and policies (A, P) Basic Theme 14 tensions reward bad behaviour (P) Basic Theme 15 training (A) increase understanding (A) Basic Theme 16 pupil must fit (A) inflexibility / blame (A) pupil wrong (A) Basic Theme 17 positive impact curriculum changes (A) Basic Theme 18 respect (P) responsibility (A) engagement (A
Feelings (37) P 36 A 1	writing is boring (1, 24) school is boring (3) tasks can be interesting (2) positive lessons (5, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36) don't know what to do (4) best lesson (5, 6) good goes fast (6)	Basic Theme 19 humiliation as a tactic to manage behaviour (A)

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	hate goes slow (7) don't like (8, 11, 21, 28) easier to admit can't (9) like teachers (10, 26, 27, 30) bad lesson (12) report grades (13, 14, 15) parents feelings (18) at least we learn (17) EL group talking useful (19, 20) house/tutor group (22, 23) LSU (25) get annoyed (31) behave well (36) get on together (36) humiliation (37)	<u>Basic Theme 20</u> not knowing what to do (P)
Commitment (2) P 2 A 0	ran even though unwell (1) commitment to peers (2)	<u>Basic Theme 21</u> pupil commitment (P)
Listening (3) P 3 A 0	don't listen don't know what to do (1, 3) not helped – should listen (2)	<u>Basic Theme 22</u> at least we learn (P)
Understanding (13) P 11 A 2	don't understand language (3, 4, 7, 8) just don't get it (1, 2, 5, 6) admit don't know what means adult has a go (9) don't understand (10) understand (11) curriculum inappropriate rushing through, watered down (12) must understand basics (13)	<u>Basic Theme 23</u> understanding equates with listening (P) adults frustration (P) <u>Basic Theme 24</u>
Language (7) P 6 A 1	language difficult to follow (1) language confusing, don't understand (2, 3, 4, 5, 7) lack of explanation (6)	language a pre-requisite building block (A,P) listening key to understanding (P)
Pupils (8) P 0 A 8	blame culture – child fault not learning (1) barriers to learning are pupil attributes (1) family issues (2)	<u>Basic Theme 25</u> child can't learn (A) <u>Basic Theme 26</u>

	poor problem solving skills (3) poor reflecting skills (3) aggression link to problem solving skills (4) poor play skills (5, 6) pre- requisites not there (6) barrier not attribute but confusion associated with (8)	aggression and problem solving skills (A) Basic Theme 27 think doing OK but reaching potential (A)
Law (1) P 1 A 0	I come because have to (1)	Basic Theme 28 come to school because have to (P)
Unfairness (1) P 1 A 0	are told we are doing better that any other group but reports grades disappointing	Basic Theme 29 truthfulness (P)
Reason (2) P 2 A 0	safety rule lunchtime (1) chip shop cheaper (2)	
Do Right (1) P 1 A 0	don't want to fall out but exclusion not worth it	Basic Theme 30 sense of justice (P)
Teacher (45) P 29 A 16	teacher has a go if don't understand (2) don't admit to not understand so not shouted at (2) shout (1, 17, 24) has a go (4, 14) supply don't know rules or pupils, mess about, don't help (5, 10, 12, 13, 16) strictness (5, 21) moody (6, 7, 8, 17, 27) won't do experiments (9) help (11) tell off when confused (15) everyone talks (18) take advantage of new teacher (19) talk no practical (20) poor instruction, did, do again (20) teacher qualities (11, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 19) good discipline good planning (30, 43, 44, 45)	Basic Theme 31 teacher impact (A) coping strategies (A)

	pupil dislike poor discipline and planning (30) great divide – impact of teacher more able cope better (30) less able cope badly with poor planning etc (31) teacher not prepared for managing TAs, differentiation, pupil needs (32) can train teachers (36, 37, 38, 41) blame culture teachers learned easily pupil can't be trying (33) can make pupil safe so can express themselves (35, 36) systems and methodology ca be taught (36) differentiate content not instructions (38, 40) instructions what do they mean e.g. pack it in (39) teacher personality important (42)	
Exclusion (13) P 12 A 1	does not work (1) at home TV DVD (1, 7) on record (1, 11) brother excluded now at college (1) bad behaviour exclusion (2, 3, 4, 5, 6) like a punishment (8) it's your education (1, 10) not really punishment can do what want (9) consequence for future job prospect (11) not really excluded still good job (12) seclusion room (13)	<u>Basic Theme 32</u> exclusion does not work (P) exclusion is not punishment (P) seclusion is more effective (A) long term effect of exclusion (P)

Appendix 15: Thematic Analysis – basic themes, organising themes and global themes

Thematic Analysis – basic themes, organising themes and global themes		
Basic themes **(P) Pupil (A) Adult**	**Organising Themes** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult extract**	**Global Themes** **(P) Pupil (A) Adult extract**
Basic Theme 16 pupil must fit (A) inflexibility / blame (A) pupil wrong (A)	pupil at fault (A)	Global Theme 1 blame culture - barriers to learning seen as within child (A) (adult)
Basic Theme 25 child can't learn (A)	barriers are pupil attributes (A)	
Basic Theme 17 positive impact of curriculum changes (A) Basic Theme 12 is it work in LSU (P) Basic Theme 13 can make positive changes to systems and policies (A, P)	changes can have a positive impact (A, P)	Global Theme 2 policy and system change needs planning and preparation (A, P)

Basic themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult	Organising Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract	Global Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract
Basic Theme 28 come to school because have to (P)	law says attend (P)	Global Theme 3 positive behaviour management approaches (A, P)
Basic Theme 19 humiliation as a tactic to manage behaviour (A)	negative approaches to manage behaviour (A)	
Basic Theme 32 exclusion does not work (P) exclusion is not punishment (P) seclusion is more effective (A) long term effect of exclusion (P)	exclusion is not an effective approach (A, P)	
Basic Theme 11 environmental influences (A) school environment (A, P) not leave area (A) Basic Theme 26 aggression and problem solving skills (A)	local cultural factors (A, P)	Global Theme 4 social inclusion (A, P)
Basic Theme 27 think doing OK but reaching potential (A)	progress judgement (A)	
Basic Theme 14 tensions reward bad behaviour (P)	flexibility to meet individual needs (P)	
Basic Theme 29 truthfulness (P)	Honesty (P)	

Basic themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult	Organising Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract	Global Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract
Basic Theme 23 understanding equates with listening (P) adults frustration (P)	understanding and listening (P)	Global Theme 5 curriculum assumes competent language skills (A, P)
Basic Theme 10 quality of differentiation (A)	differentiation content and instructions (A)	
Basic Theme 6 literacy skills relied on in curriculum (P) literacy skill deficit arouses strong feelings (A, P)	reliance on literacy – literacy is emotional (A, P)	
Basic Theme 8 importance of oral explanations (P)	reliance on oral explanation (P)	
Basic Theme 24 language a pre-requisite building block (A,P) listening key to understanding (P)	vicious circle – language, understanding, listening (A,P)	

Basic themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult	Organising Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract	Global Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract
Basic Theme 1 relationships (P) motivation (P) aspirations (P) pupil behaviour (P)	qualitative aspects crucial to pupil achievement (P)	Global Theme 6 quality teaching for all (A, P)
Basic Theme 3 teaching approaches (A) encouragement (P) behaviour management (A) Basic Theme 20 not knowing what to do (P)	qualities of teaching (A, P)	
Basic Theme 31 teacher impact (A) coping strategies (A)	great divide (A)	
Basic Theme 15 Training (A) increase understanding (A)	hope – improved teaching quality (A)	

Basic themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult	Organising Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract	Global Themes (P) Pupil (A) Adult extract
<u>Basic Theme 18</u> respect (P) responsibility (A) engagement (A <u>Basic Theme 5</u> learning behaviours (A	problem solving skills and active engagement (A)	Global Theme 7 Emotional Literacy (A, P)
<u>Basic Theme 2</u> strategies (e.g. self talk, disassociation, good choices) (P)	pupils empowerment (P)	
<u>Basic Theme 4</u> impact of learning styles (P)	awareness of learning styles (P)	
<u>Basic Theme 30</u> sense of justice (P)	sense of justice and morality (P)	
<u>Basic Theme 7</u> is copying learning (P) <u>Basic Theme 21</u> pupil commitment (P) <u>Basic Theme 22</u> at least we learn (P)	question and reflection (P)	
<u>Basic Theme 9</u> confidence (P)	emotional factors (P)	

Appendix 16: Example of check of coding text segments

Put one of the following codes against each piece of text

<u>Codes</u>

exclusion	system
behaviour	help
teacher	task
feeling	ALU
writing and reading	reason
do right	strategy
unfairness	commitment
hope	law
environment	listening
understanding	language
pupils	

Pieces of text

- Was difficult to follow because language. Didn't understand it.

- Boring but better than writing.

- History is getting good because doing about Jack the Ripper.

- Things do in class make a difference.

- It's boring … just don't like school

- when always asking you what to do and if you don't know then you can't help them and you don't do any work because you don't know…. do your head in

- not been listening or just don't get it"

- English best lesson recently have watch video … went outside… always goes fast does English

- Maths it goes slow… I hate Maths

- It's hot in Maths and miss has got quite a loud voice … I don't like it"

- I don't get it

- I don't get it either … what is a goal

- I just come because I have

- I don't get it.. the word goal is confusing

- I don't get what you mean .. goal what is it… I don't get it… I don't like school my goal is to like it a bit more

- It's a tricky question.

- sometimes when you say you don't know what it means then they have a go at you .. so don't say in case they shout at you

- right sometimes it easier to say than others

- sometimes I say and some teachers say just get on with your work … they say you should have been listening

- help us

- explaining it

- system colour cards …. less people on call.. but give it time.. it was like that with that dinner time thing people stopped getting on called

- yes it's because punishment is worse

- I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on play station than be at school. Exclusion is stupid

- but it doesn't work miss my brother was never at school .. but now he's at college and he's getting really good marks in behaviour he always got low marks in tests and he got excluded but now he's getting really high marks.

- you get treated proper don't you

- detentions not fair if live so need a bus just say can't do

- sometimes when you don't like a teacher and they don't like you and you go home and they talk about you and your learning and you keep thinking about them talking about you, that bothers you – yes

Colleague code and my code

My code	Extract	EP colleague code
language	Was difficult to follow because language. Didn't understand it.	language
task	Boring but better than writing.	task
task	History is getting good because doing about Jack the Ripper.	task
task	Things do in class make a difference.	system
feeling	It's boring … just don't like school	environment
understanding	when always asking you what to do and if you don't know then you can't help them and you don't do any work because you don't know…. do your head in	understanding
listening	not been listening or just don't get it"	unfairness
feeling	English best lesson recently have watch video … went outside… always goes fast does English	task
feeling	Maths it goes slow… I hate Maths	task
environment	It's hot in Maths and miss has got quite a loud voice … I don't like it"	teacher
understanding	I don't get it	understanding

My code	Extract	EP colleague code
understanding	I don't get it either … what is a goal	understanding
law	I just come because I have	law
language	I don't get it.. the word goal is confusing	understanding
hope	I don't get what you mean .. goal what is it… I don't get it… I don't like school my goal is to like it a bit more	hope
understanding	It's a tricky question	understanding
understanding	sometimes when you say you don't know what it means then they have a go at you .. so don't say in case they shout at you	unfairness
feeling	right sometimes it easier to say than others	language
teacher	sometimes I say and some teachers say just get on with your work … they say you should have been listening	exclusion
hope	help us	help
hope	explaining it	teacher
system	system colour cards …. less people on call.. but give it time.. it was like that with that dinner time thing people stopped getting on called	system
system	yes it's because punishment is worse	reason

My code	Extract	EP colleague code
exclusion	I'd rather be sat at home watching DVD and playing on play station than be at school. Exclusion is stupid	LSU
exclusion	but it doesn't work miss my brother was never at school .. but now he's at college and he's getting really good marks in behaviour he always got low marks in tests and he got excluded but now he's getting really high marks.	system
hope	you get treated proper don't you	do right
system	detentions not fair if live so need a bus just say can't do	strategy
feeling	sometimes when you don't like a teacher and they don't like you and you go home and they talk about you and your learning and you keep thinking about them talking about you, that bothers you – yes	feeling