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Title: What is the impact of a peer counselling approach to help vulnerable children during lunchtimes?

Date: November 2008

Originally published as: University of Chester MEd dissertation

Example citation: Tindall, A. M. (1995). What is the impact of a peer counselling approach to help vulnerable children during lunchtimes? (Unpublished master’s thesis). University of Chester, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/85611>

**WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF A PEER COUNSELLING
APPROACH TO HELP VULNERABLE CHILDREN DURING
LUNCHTIMES?**

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**Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Master of Education in the
University of Chester in part fulfilment of the Modular Programme.**

November 2008

Abstract

There are many forms of peer support and collaboration projects and they are becoming increasingly popular throughout the world in both secondary and primary school.

Peer counselling is individualised and palliative and this study examines the impact of four trained Year 5 and Year 6 counsellors on four Year 4 and Year 5 vulnerable, marginalised children with an extremely low sociometric status, who would become the focus group. The aim of the study was to increase prosocial interactions of the focus group.

Sociometric testing was used before the project in order to identify the focus group and counsellors. Sociometric testing was used after the project to assess the impact of the intervention. Behavioural observations and questionnaires were also used to provide variable support for the projects effectiveness.

Although two of the focus group left before the end of the project, the outcome was that positive interactions with peer counsellors and other children in the playground during lunchtimes very gradually increased. One child of the two remaining had a higher social status at the end of the project.

Peer counselling proved a very useful model for a healthier world outside the classroom and a useful supplement to existing pastoral and inclusive strategies.

The work is original and has not been submitted previously in support of any degree qualification or course.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the school for its co-operation and help during this project.

My sincere thanks go to Mandy and Laurence for their support and friendship during this project.

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Introduction.

The question to be researched is: What is the impact of a peer counselling approach to help vulnerable children during lunchtimes? Two issues will need to be contextually defined in order for the question to be clarified. What is meant by peer counselling and what is a vulnerable child?

There are many forms of peer support. Carr (as cited in Cowie & Sharp, 1996, p.12) counted over thirty different terms to define peer-helping situations including ambassadors, facilitators, helpers, assistants, councillors, educators and tutors. The project needs to be linked to a definition which includes support rather than cognitive processes of learning and lends itself to a peer counselling approach which Cowie & Sharp (1996, p.19) defines as being, “a more structured form of helping, including one-to-one and group counselling, active listening, reflections and expressing empathy.” Within school there is already an established, active peer counselling support system in the playground which acted as a foundation for the research project. De Rosenroll (as cited in Cowie & Sharp, 1996, p.19) makes the point that this type of support programme, “aims to expand or augment counselling and support services already there”.

Vulnerable children are generally defined as pupils who present behavioural and or emotional difficulties in school. Within the context of the project, they will be children who have problems with peer interactions, who may be sad and lonely and therefore have a low sociometric status. Asher and Renshaw (as cited in Smith, J., Christopher, D. and MacMillan, V., 1991, p.23) claimed that “as many as 5% to 10% of elementary school children may not be chosen as a friend by any of their classmates.” Research also indicates that without peer interactions some children may fail to develop the social skills needed for positive interpersonal relationships and behavioural development Asher & Renshaw (as cited in Smith

et al.,1991, p.23). They may also experience academic underachievement and failure Kohn (as cited in Smith et al., 1991, p.24) and juvenile delinquency Roff, Sells and Gordon (as cited in Smith et al.. 1991, p.24). Therefore, the research project will be an early intervention attempting to increase prosocial interactions, during lunchtimes, with a small group of marginalised children assisted by peer councillors.

The Background to the Project

Research will take place in an inner-city Birkenhead school of 370 pupils. 53% have special needs and over 50% are on free school meals. I am an Assistant Head at the school and have responsibility for the pastoral care of the junior pupils. Several factors contributed towards the choice of the research project. During the past two years, I have been involved with C.A.M.H.S., a mental health project initiated by the L.E.A. This was a funded programme designed to encourage teachers and assistants to implement a short term programme of their choice, which would contribute to the mental health of pupils. As part of this project a questionnaire was completed by staff and over 75 children were diagnosed as having possible mental health problems, many of whom were in Years 3 and 4. Therefore, the research project is a contribution towards this initiative and the professional reason for choosing it. The idea has the full support of the Head, Governors and Staff.

Early in 2006, Staff at the school decided that work needed to be done regarding the climate and ethos of the school and that the Every Child Matters agenda needed to be successfully embedded. During previous years, there had been major behavioural problems, particularly in 2006. The attainment and progress report for 2005/6 specified that eight pupils in Year 6 exhibited very challenging behaviour. Staff were particularly concerned how this would affect the Year 5 children as an exemplar group, when they reached Year 6. It was therefore decided to develop a whole school policy to lift morale, self-esteem and a sense of security and provide more of a quality framework for the pupils. We worked as a staff with the support of Chester University's Experiential School Based Continuing Professional Development Programme in order to implement a whole school approach to enhance children's learning and their understanding of themselves as learners. It was also designed to raise standards as well as improving the climate and ethos of the school, encompassing Mind Friendly Learning, Assessment For Learning and Bully Busting Activities. It was designed to be a holistic

activity recognising that the whole person is important throughout the learning process. The project was a success which was borne out by results from parents and pupil questionnaires at the end of the project. Establishing a climate which affirms worth was a key concept of the policy and created a firm foundation on which to base the chosen research project and to sustain and support a positive input towards the mental health of the children.

Alongside the E.S.C.P.D. project in 2006, I established a playground peer counselling scheme, during playtimes and lunchtimes. Year 5's and Year 6's were trained through role play, group discussions and shadowing. In two's and three's, their task was to support children who felt sad, lonely and or depressed. Need for support is signalled by sitting on a designated bench. Councillors wear hats in order to be easily identifiable to those on the bench, or others who wish to seek support, whilst walking around the playground. This scheme has proved very successful and many children are using it as a support to enhance their social interactions. It was another useful foundation for the project. A further factor contributing to the choice was the fact that a Nurture Room is still operative within school. This will play a large part in the study and provided a secure, private comfortable base with a very experienced supervisor who liaises with many parents and outside agencies.

Literature Review

Governmental criteria and requirements, including those of Ofsted, were taken into account when the research question and project were proposed. During inspections, account is taken of the ethos and climate of a school and recommends that it should, “enable all pupils to take full advantage of the educational opportunities offered, to feel secure and have a high but realistic expectation of themselves.” (Ofsted, 1995, p.60). The Ofsted Handbook (1995, p.60) states that judgements will be made on pupils regarding, “showing respect for other people’s feelings, values and beliefs” and the “level of respect between teachers, pupils and other adults in school.” Q.C.A. (1999b, p.84) stipulates, “The quality of relationships in schools is of crucial importance in forming the pupils’ attitudes to good social behaviour and self-discipline”. So, governmental requirements include an effective school climate providing a secure environment, promoting positive, prosocial interactions. The project is therefore sustaining these aims and building on the success of the 2006 E.S.P.C.D. project with Chester University.

Underpinning these governmental aims and philosophies is a desire for the well being of the pupil, which has strong links to the ethos of a school. These aims are encapsulated in the Every Child Matters document which stresses the need for pupil’s mental and emotional health, security and stability, personal and social development, engagement in decision making and supporting the community. Emphasis on well being, as well as academic achievement is reinforced by suggesting that the curriculum should promote pupils’ self esteem and help them to form and maintain worthwhile and satisfactory relationships. Excellence and Enjoyment. A Strategy for Primary Schools (2003, p.24) identifies key aspects of learning that are the focus of teaching in the primary years, “enquiry, creative thinking, managing feelings, problem solving, empathy, reasoning, self-awareness, information processing, communication, motivation and social skills.”

Therefore prosocial interactions are very much part of an effective school climate and pupils' wellbeing and many of these attributes could apply to the playground as well as the classroom. It is about the whole person. Schools therefore need to develop a social as well as educational vision in order to contribute towards mental health. The research project will, hopefully, sustain and further this philosophy outside as well as inside the classroom.

History

The formal history of peer support is about 30 years old and began in North America in the 1960's. There are now many structured models in Canada, U.S.A., Australia and Europe. Peer counselling and mediation emerged in the 1980's mostly in educational settings but are now established in a variety of institutions across the world in order "to increase a persons's ability to "find safe and satisfactory solutions to problems." Harvey Jackins (as cited in Cartwright, 2005, p.45) developed a peer co-counselling model worldwide, which will be used in the project. Students who have learnt to co-counsel give one-way attention to other students who are in need of support and focuses on teaching listening skills; working in pairs, confidentiality; self esteem games; conflict resolution; handling emotions and leading and using a support group.

Classic Literature

Both Vygotsky and Piaget believed that a peer co-operation process helps children construct shared understanding. Vygotsky's perspective (as cited in Murphy, 1999, p.74) was that "joint problem solving occurs between partners whether they be peer or adult". Piaget believed in independent work between equals, "who attempt to understand each others views through reciprocal consideration of alternative views." (Murphy, 1999, p.74). Views differed as to the type of peer support given. Vygotsky believed that social guidance aids children's learning

from the first years of life. Piaget thought that young children were impervious to social influences until middle childhood and that discussions with adults was unlikely to achieve cognitive development because of unequal power relations. “It is despite adult authority and not because of it that the child learns.” (Murphy, 1999, p.78). Vygotsky’s ideal partners were not equal, “the inequality is in skills and understanding rather than power.” (Murphy, 1999, p.78). Both theories suggest that interactive work with either adults or peers can bring about cognitive growth. Feuerstein’s work seems to have bridged the gap between the two previous theories. He also believed that a mediated learning experience was a major determinant of cognitive development and concentrated mainly on adult with child mediation. He, like Vygotsky, thought the mediator should be more cognitively competent than the learner. However, five of Feuersteins twelve criteria of mediated learning experiences have been operationalised in studies of infants and young children Feuerstein, Rand, Hoffmann and Miller (as cited in Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.61). Therefore the gap between Vygotsky’s and Piaget’s philosophies seems to have diminished. Whichever theory may be correct, they all suggest that through collaboration, partners may develop ways to communicate about difficult problems and advance the solution of the problem. Relationships are important and all theorists emphasis the importance of partners understanding each other. Peer support and counselling fulfils the criteria of this conclusion and the project will investigate if it can be applied to the playground as well as the classroom situation.

Status of Children

The status of children in society and how they are to be studied is another theme. In the 17th century views concerning the child were expressed by Thomas Martin Kissen (as cited in Pollard, 1985, p.38), “First emotions of mind will be emotions of evil ... we bring with us into the world a nature replete with evil propensities.” Therefore, children were seen as needing a great deal of strict moral guidance. Rosseau in Emile, 1762, expressed the opposite

view,” the first impulses in nature are always right.” (Rosseau as cited in Pollard, 1985 p.38). There seems to be a dichotomy of expectations regarding a child’s place in society which affects adult perceptions of what they are capable of. Compulsory schooling meant that children were then placed into another social dimension for long periods of time and more recent literature claims that the child is still a victim of subjective, societal perceptions. “Societal aims emphasise what is deemed that the child needs to be taught for the benefit of society, while the individualistic aims stress personal growth and self expression.” (Ashton as cited in Pollard, 1985, p.39). The dichotomy between requirements of society and the needs of the child is now being emphasised. Calvert (as cited in Pollard, 1985 p.19) analysed this point even further. “Children are supposed to be dependent when adults prefer dependence and responsible when adults prefer that.” Therefore children are in a difficult position both inside and outside the classroom and having to chart a course between the influence of their peers and the expectations of school and society. However, recent governmental publications, discussed earlier, confirm that a child’s individual and social needs are now thought vital to personal development. Peer counselling attempts to further this evolution by trusting, taking risks and sharing or delegating power to young people. The dichotomy between the needs of the child and those of the wider community or group is much narrower. The project attempts to test this hypothesis.

Social Climate

Research seems to agree that in order for this enhanced child status and responsibility to evolve further, a suitable social climate should be fostered. “Peer counselling seems to flourish in settings where there is already an established system for working together in co-operation with one another.” (Carr as cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.12). Pollard emphasises this point and advocates that the social atmosphere in schools should be one where children, “know their efforts will valued and judged fairly.” The project, Circle of

Friends (Newton, Taylor and Wilson, 1996) fostered inclusion of a special needs child within the peer group. Open discussion and empathy were encouraged during Circle Time regarding the individual's vulnerability. The initiative was successful and recognised and emphasised the importance of peer support and social context in the formation of successful social interactions. This was also true of a successful spelling project with under achieving adolescents using peer counselling and "produced a new climate into the school and introduced a new element of positive co-operation into the relationship between staff and pupils." (James, J., Charlton, T., Leo, E. and Indoe, D., 1991, p.168).

Therefore peer support can be successful in helping create a successful social climate. Research seems to indicate that it is intrinsically linked to a positive, empathetic ethos. Again, why should this not be relevant to the playground as well as the classroom. This will be another theory tested by the project.

Attributes

Holistic teaching, taking account of both the educational and emotional needs of a child, is deemed to be good practice and would seem to be relevant to the playground. Another theme throughout the literature which lends credence to this last statement is what attributes make up a good peer councillor. In order to illustrate the point the role needs to be defined within the context of the project. It will be to heighten the marginal child's awareness of their existing social performance and to teach more socially approved modes of behaviour as well as to encourage greater problem solving skills in order for there to be a greater chance of successful social interactions in the playground.

Lawrence (cited in James et al., 1991, p.165) recommends that a, "peer councillor should have a warm, sympathetic personality and a lively intelligence." (Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.14)

says that peer helpers should be selected on the basis of their “personal development and willingness to help others.” Sharp (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.19) stresses that counselling training and approaches “should include active listening skills, reflecting back feelings and expressing empathy for the client’s emotional state.” De Rosenroll (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.19) suggest that a peer councillor should be “an enquirer – be able to question and share their own experiences in joint exploration.” Topping (1996, p.25) makes the point that peer counselling approaches should “emphasise such skills as listening, clarifying, summarising, questioning, supporting, reassuring and problem solving.” Therefore, much of the literature seems to be in agreement as to the attributes of a successful peer councillor. These facets correlate with present day governmental requirements for the emotional well being of pupils. They can also surely be linked to Guy Claxton’s theory of learning. He states that “being a good learner is about the whole person.” (Claxton, 2002, p.16). He compacts this philosophy into the four R’s of learning power, resilience, resourcefulness, reflectiveness and reciprocity. These four attributes encompass most of the qualities mentioned and include “the ability to ask good questions and to like questions in order to support development, creative thinking and problem solving; (Claxton, 2002, p.25) “stopping every so often to take stock of progress” (Claxton, 2002, p.31) and being able to, “balance relationships with other people.” and using “empathy and listening skills” (Claxton, 2002, p.43). He sees all these facets combining to produce resilience. Therefore attributes which contribute towards holistic teaching and learning in the classroom, can surely be applied to and paralleled in the playground. These skills need to be encouraged in both contexts in order for a child to reach their full social as well as academic potential, which the project hopes to achieve.

The aim of the project is that peer councillors would help the focus group explore the problems they are experiencing and help them arrive at a new understanding of the problem

and to develop a solution to the social difficulties they are encountering. Therefore the training had to fit this objective. As early as 1966 Zunker and Brown (cited in Topping, 1996, p.25) were raising questions as to whether counselling by professionals was any more effective than counselling by a peer? Bower (cited in Topping, 1996, p.25) describes peer counselling in schools, “involving a substantial amount of training for the volunteer councillors.” Garibaldi (cited in Topping, 1996, p.25) described training secondary school pupils in, “fundamentals of guidance counselling.” Training peer councillors is therefore not a new concept. However, the method of councillor training has gradually evolved over a period of thirty years. Lawrence (cited in James, et al., 1991, p.165) believed that, “the personality of the councillor was of major importance and counselling techniques require a briefing rather than training.” By the 1980’s there were more elaborate programmes such as the Total Involvement Programme for peer facilitators (Mitchum cited in Topping, 1996, p.25) Lieberman (cited in Topping, 1996, p.25) reported on a project involving the training of fifteen peer counsellors trained in “facilitative responding”, “listening skills,” “helping characteristics and problem solving techniques,” “positive relationships awareness of feelings, scheduling and maintenance of logs.”

Therefore by the late 1980’s peer counsellor training had evolved from a “briefing” into an elaborate training system encompassing many of today’s governmental requirements for the well being of children.

Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.63) stress that, “the training programme you design for your school will reflect the type of service you wish to provide.” They also describe overlaps in training for several types of peer collaboration such as befriending, peer counselling and mediation. These include, “trust building, awareness of feelings of others and development of active listening skills.” (Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.46). Christopher, Hansen and MacMillan, (1991,

p.29) when training peer helpers for children who had no-one to play with also emphasised the importance of, “handling negative behaviour from the target child”, “maintaining the interaction” and “initiating interactions with the target child.” Both sets of authors stress the importance of reflection during supervision and learning to manage as well as learn from mistakes. McCaffrey and Lyon (1993, p.76) recommend that training should include, “working through negative or aggressive feelings” and “reinforcing group members sense of identity.” This seems particularly important in the light of governmental mental health findings and requirements. Cartwright (2005, p.46) stresses the ethical importance of teaching counsellors that serious disclosures would be bound by the Children’s Act and should be passed on to the facilitator or myself. However, general confidentiality also needs to be emphasised.

James et al. (1991, p.167) advise that the relationship between the counsellors and focus group should be built up gradually and that counsellors should be, “encouraged to relate success to effort.”

Therefore counsellor training seems to concentrate on instilling and or fostering the required attributes of a good counsellor which correspond with Claxton’s four R’s of learning power, reciprocity, resourcefulness, resilience and reflectiveness.

Time limits for peer councillor training are similar. Christopher et al. (1991, p.29) suggest, “two thirty minute sessions on two separate days in a private room in the school with regular five minute booster sessions throughout the project.” Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.50) suggests an initial training series of short sessions of forty-five minutes with each counsellor.

Lawrence (cited in James et al., 1991, p.166) carried out three one hour training sessions.

De Rosenroll (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.42) reports that, “school staff often complain that they spend as much time on training and supervision as they previously spent counselling young people.” Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.42) emphasises that, “supervision is essential for the maintenance and continued development of a quality peer counselling service and therefore does take time.”. They also stress that without it a school could be seen as negligent. Supervision can take the form of an extended initial training programme. Guttman (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.43) held weekly group meetings including individual and group counselling activities. De Rosenroll (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.43) offered an initial training programme and a series of weekly support meetings. Carr (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.43) reports on the benefits of a city wide peer counselling training programme of networking and, “greater accessibility to appropriate trained personnel, to offer training and ongoing support.” Supervision will ensure that ethical issues such as possible disclosures and confidentiality are tackled effectively, sensitively and responsibly and that pastoral roles will be assigned.

The project, therefore, will hopefully test the validity of the suggested format, content, time periods and ethical issues of peer councillor training programmes apparent in the relevant literature.

Pedagogy

Research indicates that primates having some concept of injustice and reciprocity also have support systems. Judge states in his study of aggressive encounters between pigtail macaques there were observed third party reconciliations. “Individuals not involved in the conflict demonstrated affiliative acts with the aggressor. These individuals included kin of both aggressor and victim.” [This behaviour could be] “seen as an attempt to conciliate the aggressor or reconcile the two in conflict.” Judge (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.3)

Smucny and Aureli (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.3) studied chimpanzee behaviour after a conflict. They noticed, "Contacts between bystanders and the victim which appeared to console the injured party." Therefore reassurance and reconciliation appear to be instinctive social attributes of primates, allowing them to cope with the socially negative effects of aggression.

O'Toole and Burton (2005, p.274) during their successful work on conflict resolution with adolescents state that it is not always possible to resolve conflicts but suggest, "they should be de-escalated and sometimes to achieve this, third party mediation is necessary." The same project (p281) stresses as one of its key cognitive concepts that anybody can be bullied and that, "all have a responsibility and a potency in escalating or de-escalating bullying situations." Counselling would seem an ideal method of contributing towards and fostering these social values.

Human beings seem to be, however, the only species that has a pedagogical trait. Homo docens, the teaching man, is a concept used by Barnett (cited in Williams, 2007, p43) when he discusses teaching as a human attribute. Marton and Booth 1997 (cited in Williams, 2007, p.44) argue that mankind, "is the only species with a pedagogical intention who actively teaches the young of the species." Premack (cited in Williams, 2007, p.43) argues that, "teaching arises from the need of an older generation to affect a younger one." Marton and Booth (cited in Williams, 2007, p.43) also explain the meaning of pedagogy. "Teaching is an activity which deliberately sets out to bring about some sort of change in another member of the same species." They also stress that it is not a casual occurrence. "It has to persist until the change is achieved in some measure." (Marton and Booth cited in Williams, 2007, p.44). Premack and Premack (cited in Williams, 2007, pp.308-309) reinforces this point. "In order to teach effectively, one individual must understand what another one sees, knows, wants and is

trying to achieve.” Their definition is that the teacher has a deliberate goal with what he or she wants to achieve in the situation with the learner. Martin and Booth (cited in Williams, 2007, p.45) see pedagogy as, “the ability to take the part of the other, being able to judge the success of the achievement and being able to adapt the intervention according to the learner’s ability.”

Therefore pedagogy is linked to intentional instruction. William’s study of peer teaching in a Swedish primary school produced results which indicated that young children possess pedagogical traits. Four children of ages between seven and nine who could play Chinese Checkers were chosen to teach a peer the game. The four peer teachers were successful. They all showed, “an ability of being able to take the part of the other and show awareness of changes in the learning child and continue to teach until a change is achieved in some measure.” (Williams, 2007, p.68). There was a variation in teaching styles, for example, in the way which they set up frames for the teaching situation and to what extent they proceeded in the situation. But, “they were all able to teach their peers by teaching visually, verbally and through varying the content.” (Williams, 2007, p.68). Also none of the peer teachers were permanently dogmatic.

There did seem to be an inherent pedagogy but it was not a homogenous process. This finding challenges the theories of Marton and Booth that the aim of pedagogy is to teach the young of the species and that it arises from an older generations need to affect a younger one.

Shamir and Tzuriel’s study of a peer mediation, cognitive intervention between first and third grade elementary students was based on Feuerstein’s principles of mediated learning.

Feuerstein argued that, “M.L.E. interaction with an adult is a major determinant of individual cognitive change.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.65). The study adapts and contracts these principles in order to produce a working model to be used by children rather than adults. The status of the learner and the mediator are distinguished. “The mediator is perceived as more competent than the learner on the basis of having more experience with mediation as well as

being older.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.65). The specific object of the programme was, “to enhance a mediating teaching style as a means of developing learning skills and cognitive modifiability and to facilitate the performance and learning skills of learners mediated by their peers.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.65). Two groups of peer teachers, one control and one experimental took part in the experiment.

In their findings Shamur and Tzuriel point out that, “children might show spontaneously, in their interactions with their peers, some indications for intentionality and maybe a low and negligible level of other mediations as evidenced in the control group.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.73). However the experimental group after the exposure to the programme showed a “dramatic change in mediational teaching style.” The children used, “more principles and generalisations and offered more mediations relating to rules and insights. They also used “more rewarding and feelings of success (competence) with their peers and helped them to regulate and organise their behaviour and adapt it to the task demands.” The authors do not rule out inherent, pedagogy in children but suggest that, “intentionally developed structural tuition and guidance can be advanced and developed.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.73). The project will attempt to highlight pedagogical traits, styles and strategies used by the counsellors.

Literature Review

In order to develop the performance and heighten the social awareness of the marginal group there needs to be an analysis of group norms and cultures in the playground. Relevant literature indicates that this domain seems to be heavily influenced by both adult and child perceptions. Most adults including researchers will have hazy memories of life in the playground. Fine and Sandstrom (1998, p.72) emphasise the point that, “children’s behaviour may be interpreted through old frames of reference.” Corsaro and Streeck (1986, p.15) state that, “Besides our own memories of childhood we have little first-hand ethnographical information on the world children live in.”

Cattel (cited by Forgas, 1981, p.183) suggests that. “within small primary groups the study of how situations are perceived by individuals should be of central interest to psychologists.”

There also seems to be a link between sociometric position and a member’s perception of the group. Forgas (1981, p.200) in studies of small primary groups such as sports teams suggest that, “persons who are themselves socially competent tend to weight social skills higher in differentiating among others than do persons who are low in social competence,” and that “dominant individuals are more evaluative and critical in their judgement of others.” (Forgas, 1981, p.200) It also suggests that marginal children may find it very difficult to gain social status as they would be evaluated and criticised by members of established groups. This reinforces the importance of heightening the focus groups awareness of their existing social performance and the teaching of improved skills. Lack of these skills could prove detrimental throughout later life. Corsaro and Streeck (1986, p.16) point out that, “some of the children’s complex interactive strategies may be solely linked to specific organisational principles of peer cultures.” And that if a child is not part of this social structure, “later in life they may not develop intricate structures of interaction.” Duck (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.9) reinforces this point. “If you are unpopular at school you are more likely to become as an

adult someone who has interpersonal difficulties. Children who are rejected, actively disliked by peers are even more at risk.” In the longer term this can affect social success or lack of success in later life.

Research is also indicating that young children are much more socially complex than was previously thought. The playground is a complicated social system. Pollard (1985, p.49) emphasises that, “children’s culture develops within an informal social structure of friendship, hierarchy and status.” This is certainly indicated by the project’s sociometric data. Pollard continues (p50) that, “within children’s friendship groups, commonsense, knowledge, shared values and collective strategies will be developed to cope with the world of adults.” Studies at Moorside Middle School cited in Pollard (p58) shed some light on these group norms and cultures. Certain types of friendship group were seen to exist. ‘Good’ groups saw themselves as honest, sensible quiet and friendly and tended to distance themselves in the playground and from the “more common activities of other children in the school.” (Pollard, 1985 p.59). This group were close and valued the companionship and reliability of their small, friendly units. They seemed to “just enjoy talking and being together.” “Joker groups” (Pollard, 1985, p.60) thought of themselves as being good but, “felt good groups far too boring.” They were active in the school playground and were centred around the school football and netball teams. Boys and girls within this group often chased and joked with each other. “Gang groups” saw jokers as “show offs” (Pollard, 1985, p.60) and good groups as “goody-goodies.” There seemed to be inter-gang rivalry within this type of boy, girl mix group. “Causing trouble was one major type of activity” (Pollard, 1985, p.65) and “sometimes fighting produced rapidly changing groupings in order to establish status within the groups.” Peer group membership in this case seemed to reflect the ambiguity of each child’s structural position. However, at least they were in a small primary group and although competence sometimes had to be proved, membership gives a defensive value against other children and possibly adults. It allows a

sense of solidarity and as Pollard says is linked “to assertion and the defence of self.”

(Pollard, 1985, p.65). The marginal child has none of this security, affiliation and interplay which leads to social development. The playground is a very complex and structural domain to break into especially if you have limited social skills. The longer one is marginal, the more difficult it is to break through the group norm and cultural barriers and as already discussed peer groups will be making critical, evaluative social judgements. Coping strategies do not just materialise. Peer counselling offers an opportunity to practise these capacities and gain experience of different roles and responsibilities

Relevant biological studies of conflict, aggression and reconciliation show that there are parallels between the social worlds of animals and primates. De Waal (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.3) suggested, “that in primate society, the complex interplay between aggression and co-operation contributed constructively to social relationships within the group.”

Whilst observing chimpanzees in the Yerkes Regional Primate Research Centre, DeWaal (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.4) also found that, “food encounters” were characterised by increasing levels of “both aggressive and appeasement behaviour” and often “involved a transfer of food from one chimpanzee to another, including reciprocal sharing.” Chimpanzees who were not generous in sharing food were rebuffed when they came to their group for their share. De Waal (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.4) concluded that, “through these selective, aggressive responses to others that they had some concept of injustice and lack of reciprocity.” This is echoed in human social interactions

Conflict seems to be a major component of playground interactions and social development.

The literature indicates that conflict can have either a positive or negative effect. Hartup and Selman (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.7) stress that peer groups can behave in ways which are, “deliberately designed to cause pain and hurt and conflicts can have damaging effects on the group as well as on the individual.” Their studies refer to a victimised child. Some peers were able to show awareness especially those who had experienced victimisation, but there may be pressure from the peer group not to intervene. Others may want to help but don’t know how. Therefore, the victim may never realise that others care about him or her which can lead to, “profound feelings of unworthiness, loneliness and despair.” (Hartup and Selman cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.7)

Trevarthen and Logotheti (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.7) suggest that if children are exposed long term to lack of affection and little valuing of the person they will, “become unsociable, uncultured,” and “remorseless in exploitation of others.” Therefore social isolation may incite bullying in the marginal child, illustrating how important peer relationships are and that power relationships are part of their make-up. Besag, Oliveus, Smith and Sharpe (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.9) emphasise that, “problems arise when power is abused, taking advantage to cause harm or distress,” and that bullying behaviour can “cause psychological damage to both the individual and the school community at large.” This had in fact happened to school prior to the E.S.C.P.D. project, but the marginal group had still slipped through the net and were making no social progress despite the whole school approach and effort. Something extra was required, a major reason for carrying out the research project.

Conflict, however, can have a positive effect within group dynamics. Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.8) stresses that conflict can often be a part of friendship not, “inevitably linked with aggression and disruption.” Shartz (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.8) suggest that conflict

resolution by young people themselves is how they “learn about relationships” and “gives the opportunity to engage in social problem solving.” It can be also be linked to the development of reciprocity, a necessary social attributes and skill. Larsen (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.6) in a study of adolescent conflicts, found that “disagreement with friends and partners were associated with lower levels of negative affect, higher levels of continued social interactions and improved relationships after the dispute.” Positive outcomes included ego development, enhanced understanding of relationships and the realignment of roles.

Reciprocity and co-operation are attributes which seem synonymous with peer groups.

Corsaro and Streek (1986, p.296) states that, “before reciprocity is internalised as a mental concept, it is achieved as a solution to conflicts of interests.” Shartz (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.8) suggests that conflict is often resolved by young people themselves and “through this they learn about relationships.” It gives them the opportunity to “engage in social problem solving,” “one of the most important dimensions of social competence” and “taking the perspective of others.” which is an attribute of reciprocity. Cicourse (cited in Corsaro and Streeck, 1986, p.296) reinforces this finding and states that peer group interaction is, “skewed towards reciprocity which thereby rises as the superior moral principle of the child’s own world. Therefore, children’s worlds are endowed with their own rules, rituals and principles of conflict resolution coupled with strong undercurrents of co-operation and reciprocity.

Relationships with siblings can also have an effect on social development and interactions.

Dunn (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5) sees “links between the quality of the relationships between siblings in the pre-school period and the children’s behaviour at a later age.” Those who had grown up with an aggressive or unfriendly sibling, “were more likely to have emotional difficulties in their relationships with others than those whose siblings had been warm and affectionate to them.” Katz (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.4) stresses that

there is conflict in a sibling relationship but this “may facilitate social development because there is a safe context in which to practise ways of responding to conflict, aggression and distressing feelings.” Putallaz (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5) found that there can be inter-generational effects. Children can also be influenced by their mother’s recollections of her own childhood. “This recollection affects the way in which she prepares her children for peer relationships.” Putallaz (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5).

It has also been suggested that labelling by peers may contribute to the maintenance of negative social status. For example, Cowen (cited in Christopher et al., 1991, p.23) states that labelling may continue, “even when behaviours correlated with peer rejection are no longer emitted.” Kohler and Greenwood, and McForrell (cited in Christopher et al., 1991, p.83) recognised this point, “reputational bias may minimise generalisation of social skill improvement by reducing reciprocal social exchanges that facilitate entry into the natural “trapping” of interactions with the peer group.” They also suggest, “involvement with socially responsive peers,” as a way of “increasing generalisation of improved skills.”

Corsaro and Streeck (1986, p.14) see language development, “producing increasingly complex and grammatically correct sentences” as an important component of socio-cognitive skills and interactive structures of social activities in which the child takes part. “They must meet their partners’ informational needs and levels of understanding.” They stress that the study of language development should be, “viewed as a part of the study of the development of interactive abilities.” Not being able to communicate effectively and confidently, it could be a major setback to joining an established peer group culture and add to the complications of reciprocal, focused and collaborative interaction.

By utilising these explanations of social isolation the project will attempt to analyse why the marginal group does not fit into peer norms and cultures because of the absence of a coping strategy, which Corsaro and Streeck (1986, p.155) defines as, “as a creative but semi-routinised and situational means of protecting the individual’s self.”

Methodology

Research narrative.

It was noticed, particularly by lunchtime supervisors and pupil councillors, who reported back to myself, that certain children wanted extra attention during lunchtimes and seemed to have few or no friends, trouble developing relationships and occasionally seemed to express marked anger and aggression. Organised activities were available twice a week because of Play Council funding, but this group of children still seemed to be outsiders. During a discussion at a staff meeting, teachers commented that they had also noticed the same pupils often wanting to stay inside at lunchtime, which lasts for seventy-five minutes. It was also a major concern that despite the improved social climate of the school, the vulnerable group were still marginalised.

Therefore, as a staff, it was decided that the focus of the project would be vulnerable children in the playground at midday. The majority of these pupils were in Years 3 and 4. After discussions between myself, the Head and the Nurture Group supervisor, it was decided that four vulnerable children would be selected for the project from years 3 and 4 and four councillors from Years 5 and 6 would work with the chosen group on a one to one basis.

Justification for paradigm.

Rowan as (cited in Cartwright, 2005, p.45) states that peer support “originated in humanistic psychology.” This method reacted against the pre-occupation of psychology with negative features such as anxiety and depression and concentrated on, “potential rather than difficulties and weaknesses.” Petersen & Seligman (as cited in Cartwright, 2005, p.46). It favours qualitative research methods as the most suitable for understanding the whole person. It also seems to adhere to the theory of constructivism where the child is viewed as subjective, contextual and self-determining rather than positivism which is more in line with Piagets

concrete rather than abstract ideas on child development. This model favours quantitative data, children as measurable and subject, “to the same laws and principles which govern the structure of the universe.” (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007, p.49). Therefore a humanistic, constructivist approach seems to fit the holistic aims of the project, which is to develop the full potential of a vulnerable child outside as well as inside the classroom.

The Action Research paradigm seems to equate with this philosophy and the context of the project. Several definitions of this model correlate with the planned research. It wants “to plan, implement, review and evaluate an intervention designed to solve a local problem.” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.79). It is “concerned with improving the social conditions of existence.” (Grundy as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.227). It wants to combine “diagnosis with reflection, focusing on practical issues that have been identified by participants and which are somehow both problematic yet capable of being changed.” Elliott (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.79). The paradigm comprises many of the characteristics which will be relevant to the project. These include, “empowering participants, collaboration, promotion, praxis and equality, being content specific and interventionist.” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.79). Also key terms and issues of the model again stated by (Cohen et al., 2000, p.79) will be used throughout the research such as reflection, monitoring, evaluation, planning, review and improvement. Action Research was therefore the chosen paradigm.

Qualitative and Quantitative Tools

Action Research is methodologically eclectic. The project includes quantitative data, “eliciting responses to predetermined questions” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.28), including sociometric studies and questionnaires and qualitative interpretive data such as participant observation, accounts, diaries and discussion. Cohen et al. (2000, p.112) points out that the

use of “two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” fulfils the requirement for triangulation. Both types of data also fit into the projects time period, issues, representative samples and collaborative aim. Sampling for the groups covered four age groups and six classes and initial observations by various staff have been taken into account. Also the qualitative data gave an opportunity for all participants to express feelings, anxieties and thoughts and sociometric studies were repeated at the end of the project.

Questionnaire

A quantitative questionnaire was used at the start of the project in order to choose the focus and mentor groups. Without one it would have been difficult to pinpoint the significant vulnerable group and as Cohen et al. (2000, p.267) state it “enables comparisons to be made across groups in the sample”. Oppenheim (as cited in Cohen et al, 2000, p.267) suggests that closed questions should be used on order to code for analysis which in this case is a sociometric one. Bell (2005, p.137) points out that question wording should be “clear” and “word processed” with no “leading or presumptive questions”. The closed questions were word processed on an attractive, visual printed sheet and synchronised as part of a P.H.S.E lesson on ‘Friendships’ in order to ensure a relevant context, confidentiality and anonymity. Aims of the project and sensitive administration were discussed at a staff meeting before this lesson. A sociometric study also provided support and evidence for the effectiveness of intervention.

Child friendly questionnaires were given to each class in the Year 3 and Year 4 group (72 children). The question was – Which three children would you play with in the playground? Pupils were asked to pick only children from their class. The questionnaire was then administered a second time but the children were able to pick from the whole year group. All the children are together at lunchtimes so a more extensive choice was needed in order to

correlate both sets of quantitative sociometric data to see if certain children stood out, thereby ensuring that the most socially vulnerable pupils were chosen.

Validity

Invalidity was minimised by triangulation methods suggested in Cohen et al. (2000, p.116) Several have been mentioned earlier, such as, “standardising procedures for gathering data and administrating tests” and “allowing the appropriate timescale.” Putton (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.114) points out that “having multiple data sources does not ensure consistency or replication.” To minimise this the quantitative data and final correlations all measured the same construct, whether there had been an improvement in the social status of the focus group and will contribute to validity.

The qualitative data, transcripts and diaries had the benefit of investigator triangulation. Silverman (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.113) refers to the use of more than one observer in a research setting which he suggests can lead to “more valid and reliable data”. The facilitator and councillors had an observational role as well as the lunchtime supervisor. All data was correlated at the end of the project and a repeat sociometric study carried out on Years 3 and 4 to assess the impact of the intervention.

Ethics

Research ethics are described by Cohen et al. (2000, p.50) as “a growing awareness of the attendant moral issues implicit in the work of social researchers.” The Every Child Matters agenda is the culmination of several decades of emerging appreciation and recognition that children have rights. The use of “non-maleficence” cited in Cohen et al. (2000, p.158) is stressed throughout the literature regarding research with minors. The Geneva Convention, Nuremburg Code and Declaration of Helsinki all examine the issue of children as research participants in relation to informed consent. “This should be sought in addition to that of the

legal guardian”. (Greig et al., 2007, p.163). As Greig et al. points out parents are

“gatekeepers” and relationships with them are of prime importance.

The participants and parents of the focus and mentor groups were all consulted individually at the beginning of the project and as Cohen et al. (2000, p.51) suggests “given a fair explanation of the procedures to be followed and their purposes” and “a description of the benefits reasonably to be expected.” All parties were given an opportunity to say that they do not wish to take part and as Fine and Sandstrom (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.51) recommend “that all objections will be duly respected.” An ‘open door’ policy for questions from parents and participants was adhered to throughout the project and stated during consultations.

The 1989 Childrens Act prescribed limits to confidentiality. If abuse or significant harm is suspected, adults must pass on their concerns about the pupil to the appropriate authorities.

This knowledge was imparted to the young peer counsellors in a child friendly way.

The staff monitored the project as a method of identifying problems which should be dealt with by adults. Each peer counsellor also had the opportunity of regular contact with named members of staff in order to discuss all worries and concerns. Confidentiality was kept within the nucleus of the counsellors and facilitators, which required a build up of trust and specific relevant counsellor training in the initial stages of the project.

Bell (as cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.245) points out that “all participants will be offered the opportunity to remain anonymous.” When writing up the project children are not named.

Confidentiality was emphasised during consultations with parents and participants and will be stressed during councillor training sessions, group discussions and the covert lunchtime observations. Greig et al. (2007, p.182) poses the question “how much responsibility is it reasonable to give the child?” This is particularly pertinent regarding the peer councillors who will, as mentioned earlier, be given diaries, reflection and discussion opportunities throughout

the project and were able to talk to myself or the Nurture group facilitator at any time in order to discuss concerns or anxieties. Data and other paperwork were stored in a private area of the Nurture room and privacy was assured by using this discrete setting. Studies by Labo in the 1970's (cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.125) showed that during group interviews the language of children varied according to the, "friendliness of the surroundings and demeanour of the adult." Extended responses were noted in congenial surroundings. There were timetabled sessions and a very experienced facilitator, who is well known to the children and most parents. Appreciation and reward stressed by Greig et al. (2007, p.168) as an important component of ethics, were stressed and group discussions ended with refreshments, encouragement and support.

In line with Bells suggestion (cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.245) copies of the project outline was discussed with the Head and all participants were informed. The final report was shown to the Head and the L.E.A, who are financing the project.

THE PROJECT

Choosing the Focus Group

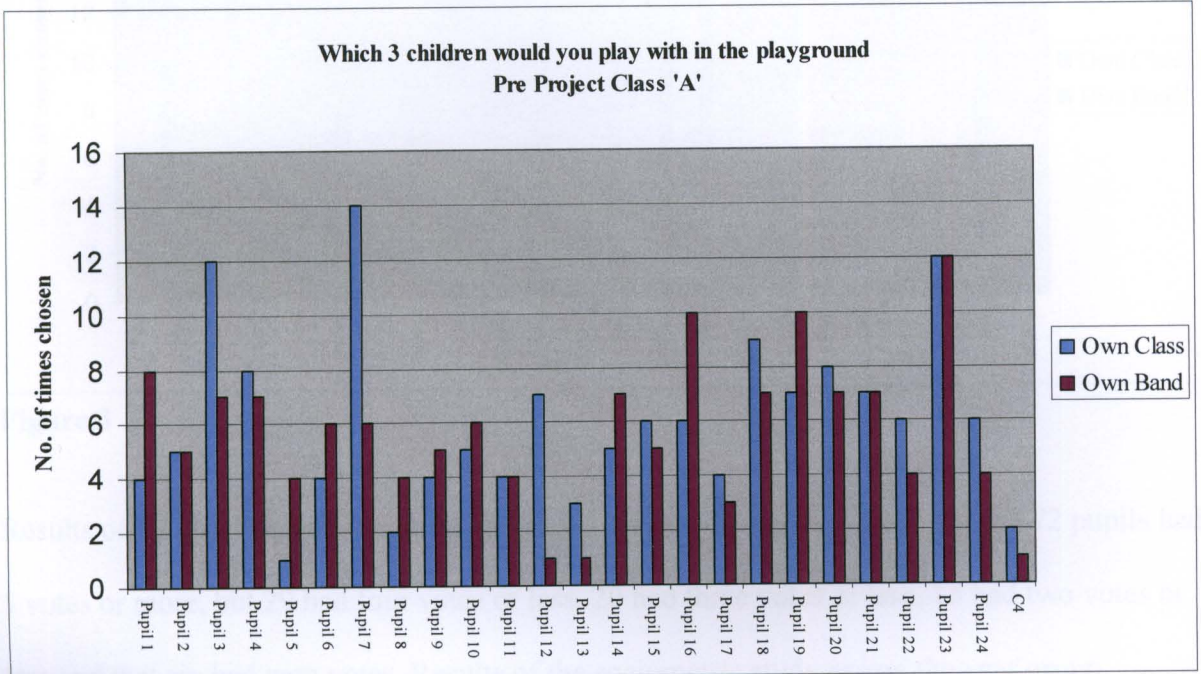


Figure 1

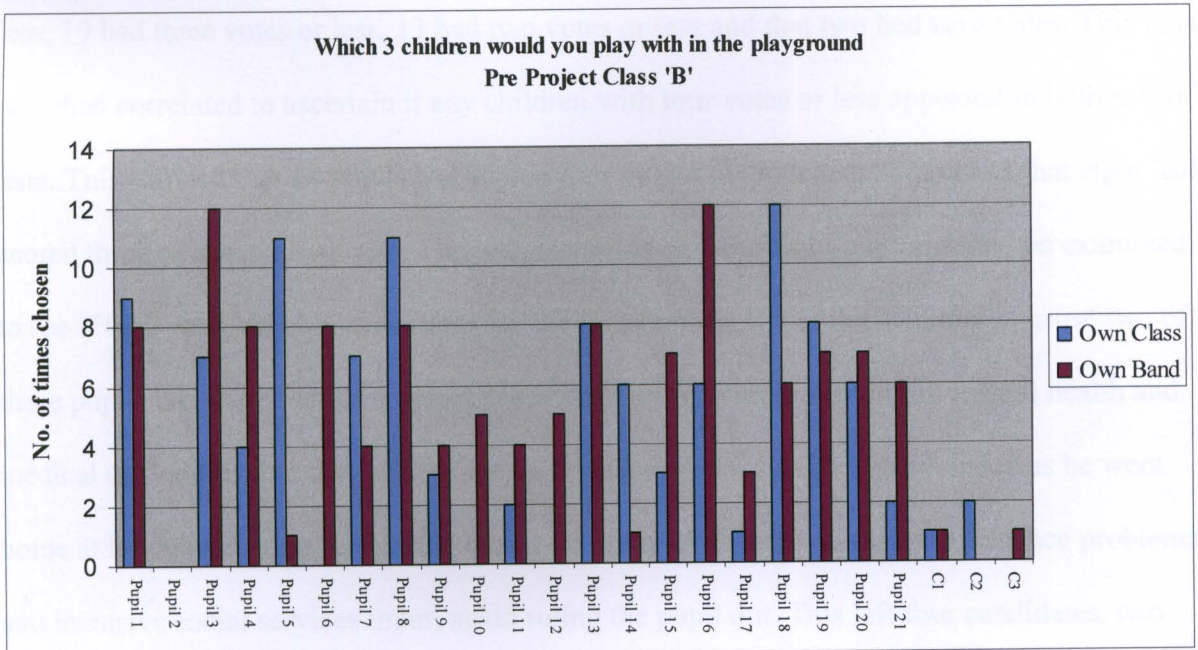


Figure 2

Which 3 children would you play with in the playground
Pre Project Class 'C'

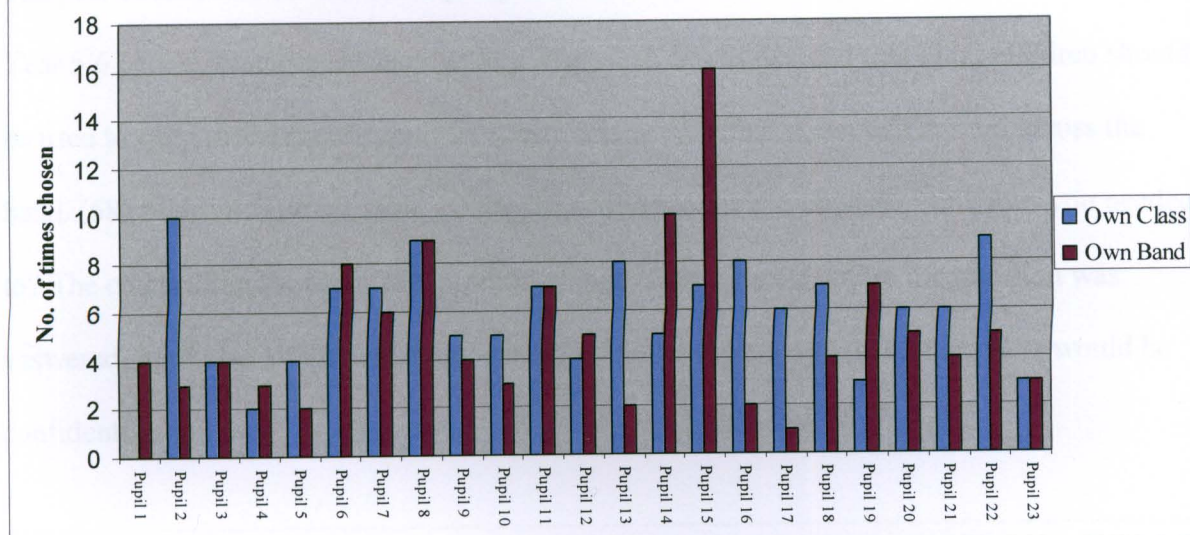


Figure 3

Results of the first sociometric study in classes indicated that the majority of the 72 pupils had 5 votes or more, but 29 had four votes or less, 20 had three votes or less, 15 had two votes or less and that six had zero votes. Results of the sociometric study across the year group indicated again that the majority of the pupils had five votes or more, but 32 had four votes or less, 19 had three votes or less, 13 had two votes or less and that two had zero votes. This data was then correlated to ascertain if any children with four votes or less appeared in both sets of data. This showed that 18 pupils had scored four or less on both sets of data and that eight had scored three or less on both sets. The circumstances of these eight pupils were then examined to see if they were suitable candidates for the focus group. It was decided that because two of these pupils had major social services input and very specific behavioural, mental health and medical difficulties that they should not be included. A third child was excluded as he went home at lunchtimes, thus ruling him out of the study. A fourth had major attendance problems and intensive social services input, again ruling the pupil out. This left four candidates, two girls and two boys. Their scores are shown as C1, C2, C3 and C4 on figures 1, 2 and 3.

Choosing Peer Counsellors

The peer counsellors for the focus group were then selected. Because of the well established Year 5/6 peer counselling system in the playground, it was decided that older children should be used to support the focus group. A questionnaire was then given to Year 5/6 across the band. (68 children). The question asked was – who would you choose to talk to if you needed to? The counselling aspect of the question was stressed by staff before the question was answered. Staff also stressed that any gender could be chosen and that all answers would be confidential.

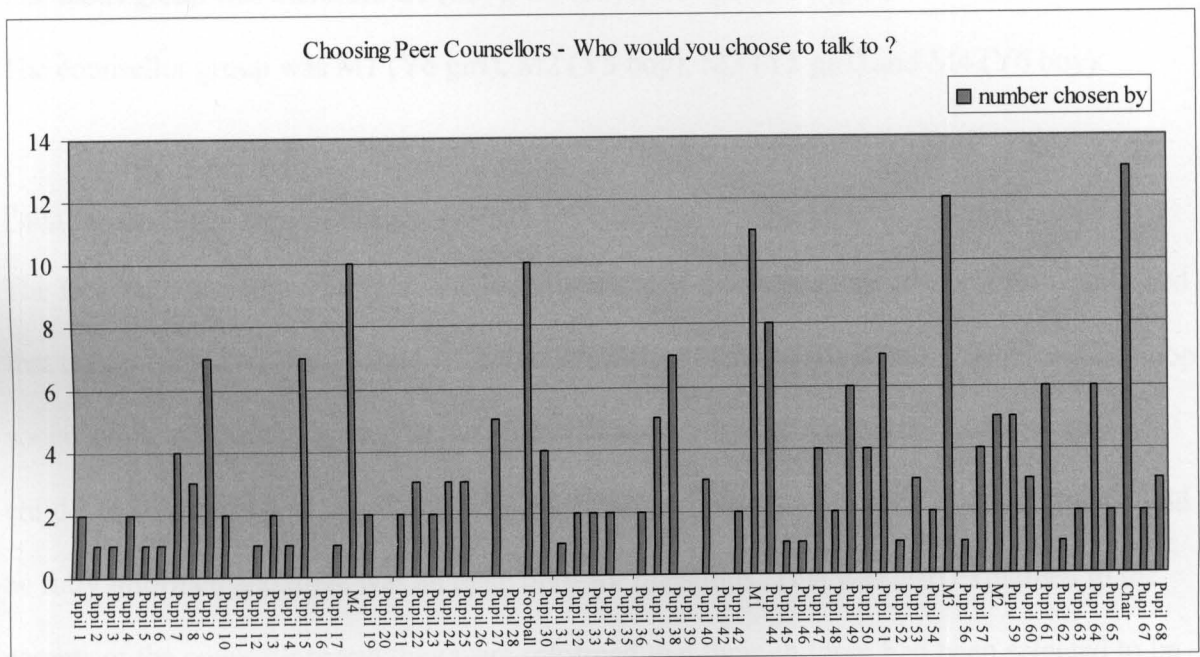


Figure 4

Results of this sociometric study indicated five high scoring children with ten votes and above. Four of these were in Year 6 and one in Year 5. Ideally we wanted two from each year group in order for the Year 5's to continue and extend the project the following year.

Therefore one Year 6 high scorer was removed from the list. This person was the Chair of the School Council and had many responsibilities and commitments and therefore would have had insufficient time to devote to the project. Another high scorer was not considered because he was in charge of the 'football book' and carrying out the rules and responsibilities.

He greatly enjoyed his football and his football responsibility and again would have had insufficient time for the project. The two high scoring Year 6's left were a boy and a girl. Although they had high scores, they both seemed to lack some confidence and self esteem. It was thought that the project was a good opportunity to enhance these. The Year 5 girl with a high score was chosen. The highest scoring Year 5 boy only had five votes but was quite vulnerable himself and needed to increase his confidence. He had also been a good 'buddy' to class mates and younger children. It was therefore decided he would be the fourth counsellor.

The focus group was therefore C1 (boy), C2 (boy), C3 (girl), C4 (girl).

The counsellor group was M1 (Y6 girl), M2 (Y5 boy), M3 (Y5 girl) and M4 (Y6 boy).

Parental, Staff and Counsellor Agreement

The facilitator and myself then spoke to the parents of the vulnerable group. It was explained that the project was a playground initiative in order to increase friendship groups and develop social skills. All parents agreed to the project. The parent of C4 expressed a worry that her child had no friends and hoped that the project would help. Parents were told that they would be fully informed and there was an open door for questions. This was also explained to the parents of the counsellors and they were informed that their children had been selected to be counsellors. All parents readily agreed. An open door policy was again stressed.

The project was also explained and discussed at a staff meeting. Staff were made aware of the children involved. All agreed to the choices. Lunchtime staff were informed and Key Stage 2 M.D.A.'s were spoken to in more detail as the children involved were from that key stage.

The head teacher was closely involve in the initiative from the beginning, and explained the project to the School Governors who were very supportive and in full agreement. The School Nurse, also a Governor, was made fully aware of the children involved.

The chosen peer counsellors were spoken to next. The initiative was explained. All were positive and no one asked why they had been chosen. A friend of M3 was concerned about being lonely at lunchtimes. A friendship rota had just been set up between herself and M3. She was given a lunchtime job and told would only be involved in counselling for part of the lunchtime. Confidentiality was stressed to all informed groups. The focus group were then informed of the project and told it was to widen their group of friends by the use of 'buddies'. Peer counselling was explained, that it was a support to help them in the playground. As part of this consultation a pre-intervention questionnaire was given to the focus group to assess their feelings about the playground.

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire Findings and Background of Focus Group.

Pre-intervention questionnaires designed by myself and the facilitator were given to the focus group in order to assess their attitudes to the playground.

CHILD 1

Before Intervention	After intervention
1. What is it like for you in the playground?	
I like it outside, I sometimes get angry because sometimes the others wind me up. I don't get on with some children.	I feel better in the playground because I have more friends. M1's friends play with me. The mentors help me if I am angry or upset. They stop me hitting anyone, they talk to me.
2. Do you have someone to play with?	
Yes, I play with some boys in my class and one girl.	Yes, I have friends and I go to Games Club with M1 and M2.
3. Do you have friends in school?	
Yes	Only a few.
4. What do you do at lunchtime?	
Play outside and sometimes get angry. I like it when the people come with the toys.	I look for the mentors and they help me.
5. If you could change something at lunchtime what would it be?	
Don't know.	More games outside from Play Council

Figure 5

Of the four focus group children C1 was by far the most limited in academic ability and communication skills and found it extremely difficult to “open up”. In the playground, he was ‘labelled’ by peers as being easily annoyed and as becoming aggressive. This exacerbated his marginal status. He had a troubled relationship with his mother, who occasionally worked in school. She often seemed to favour his two younger, female siblings. C1 would often walk at the back of the family group and communication between mother and child was limited. C1 often quarrelled with his siblings. He had joined school in Year 2 and had found it very difficult to make friends.

Questionnaire findings.

Comments from C1 about having 'friends' did not correlate with staff and M.D.A.

observations. He was often alone and could be prone to tantrums All adults observers agreed that his communication and social skills were poor and he would often find excuses to be inside rather than in the playground. He seemed happier on days when the play council were present at lunchtimes. This was a temporary initiative funded one day per week. He also seemed to be 'stuck' as to how he could improve or how the playground `

CHILD 2

Before Intervention	After intervention
1. What is it like for you in the playground?	
I don't like the playground it is too rough.	I feel better in the playground. I play football with M4.
2. Do you have someone to play with?	
No, I don't really play with anyone. Sometimes I play football by myself.	I play football. I don't look for the mentors they see me playing football and they think I am ok.
3. Do you have friends in school?	
Yes, about 20 who play football.	Some.
4. What do you do at lunchtime?	
Sometimes just walk around on my own.	Football, they (mentors) have not even asked me if I have something to do.
5. If you could change something at lunchtime what would it be?	
Bigger space for football.	The bigger children should help the little children. The play area should be better it should have a slide.

Figure 6

C2 was one of four siblings, all of whom had different fathers, and his mother was expecting another baby. He did not like or get on with his siblings. His older male sibling had been permanently excluded from mainstream schooling because of difficult, aggressive behaviour. C2 had decided to hide away in the playground and seemed generally lonely. His perceptions of friendship were hazy.

Questionnaire Findings.

C2 seemed to think that anyone he played football with was a friend. Because he was quiet and insular he was almost invisible in the playground and would often be alone. He also would try to find excuses to be inside at lunchtime or stay near the M.D.A.'s and seemed to have no idea of how to improve things in the playground and appeared 'helpless'. C2 joined the school in Year 1.

CHILD 3

Before Intervention	After intervention
1. What is it like for you in the playground?	
I don't like it in the playground. I don't always have something to do.	It is better outside. M1 helps me to play with the others. M1 makes up some games.
2. Do you have someone to play with?	
No, I always play on my own.	Only M1 and some others.
3. Do you have friends in school?	
No.	No, I still don't have any friends.
4. What do you do at lunchtime?	
Sit on the bench and watch the others. I do talk to dinner ladies, they ask me to play games with them but I don't.	Play on the pole, but not with anyone.
5. If you could change something at lunchtime what would it be?	
More things to play with.	I don't think I want anyone to help me in Y4, I am alright on my own.

Figure 7

C3 was the oldest of three siblings and often had to supervise them. She also seemed very lonely in the playground and like C2 had become 'invisible'. She occasionally played with two other children but they often quarrelled and seemed to lack any social skills or cohesion. If others did make an effort C3 would respond in an unfriendly manner and walk away. She seemed to have no idea of how to reciprocate. Staff and M.D.A's commented on her lack of social skills.

Questionnaire findings.

C3's answers indicated that she was aware of having no friends and was often completely alone. She also appeared 'helpless' within the context of the playground.

CHILD 4

Before Intervention	After intervention
1. What is it like for you in the playground?	
It was ok, sometimes I wanted to go inside.	I feel happier because I have the mentors to go to. They help me a lot if I am upset.
2. Do you have someone to play with?	
When my friend is off and that was a lot, I was on my own.	If I am alone the mentors come over to me. Sometimes I look for them. They get others to play with me. They get a game to play.
3. Do you have friends in school?	
I have two friends.	The children in the group are my friends. If I have no one to play with I look for them. I usually look for them anyway.
4. What do you do at lunchtime?	
I play tick and if no-one was in I would ask the dinner lady if I could go in and colour.	Talk and sit on the bench. Gardening Club with M2. Play games inside (Games Club) with the mentors
5. If you could change something at lunchtime what would it be?	
I like it when the Play Council come in, could they come round more often. I would like to play inside more.	I don't know.

Figure 8

C4 had been an only child for much of her life and lived with her grandparents and her mother, who had recently had a baby. Her stepfather was in the army and away from home for a lot of the time. She occasionally played with a few people and could communicate fairly well but she would often become angry with peers if she had to follow the rules of a game and try to dominate others. Her class teacher commented that she would often interrupt in class and attempt to answer for other children. She was involved in many minor arguments in the playground and was not popular with the other children. I had taught her mother and she also

had the same social problems, although she was now very concerned about her daughters lack of friends.

Questionnaire findings.

C4's answers indicated that she was uneasy about the playground. She would find excuses to be inside at lunchtimes instead of being alone.

Therefore in all four cases attitude towards the playground was negative. There were various reactions to being marginal from angry and belligerent to insular and almost invisible. All four children seemed helpless as to how they could change the pattern and develop socially. They were all, however, happy about being chosen and were keen for the project to begin

Training and Background of Counsellors

M1 was quiet, responsible and popular inside and outside the classroom. She responded well to adults and peers and had a good sense of humour. She lives with an older male sibling and her mother, who was about to marry again.

M2 was in the care of his grandparents. He had a very troubled relationship with his aunt who was younger than himself. She would often 'bully' him and criticise him about his weight. His mother, who suffered from substance abuse, would often miss appointments to see him, but his father was very supportive of school. M2 had a troubled time in the playground in Years 3 and 4. He would often have tantrums, storm off and lose his temper easily. He was given the role of a 'buddy' to younger children in order to build up his self-esteem and resilience and he was extremely good at this. Circle time input in Year 5 had also increased his confidence and social development.

M3 was very popular with peers and was very mature for her years. She lived with an older male sibling and her mother and father. She had spent some time in a refuge with her mother

and brother because of domestic violence within the home. Her relationship with peers was good. She would often quarrel with her 'best' friend, who was very possessive of M3.

M4 had a good sense of humour, played football all the time and was popular with all his peers. He lives with his mother, a single parent, and two younger siblings. His mother was often aggressive and unresponsive to staff. He would often arrive late after getting himself and his siblings ready for school.

M5 who eventually took over from M2 had proved himself to be an excellent playground counsellor. He suffered from A.D.H.D. and had a daily lunchtime dose of ritalin. M5 lived with two male siblings. The older one had also been diagnosed with A.D.H.D. His mother, a single parent, was very supportive of school and the project.

As stated in the Literature Review a training programme should prepare peer mentors for the type of support being offered and Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.46) suggest, "should reinforce the notion that learning is a continual process," and that they should, "continue to learn through reflection and sharing during supervision." The rigorous sociometric selection process indicated that the chosen mentor group all had a high social status and because of the nature of the questions asked to classes and year groups, also seemed to have demonstrated attributes required by good counsellors, an ability and an aptitude to help and listen to others, build relationships and act responsibly. The final choice also reflected a gender balance.

Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.46) suggest that training should be done by, "an experienced counsellor, "or "in collaboration with support agencies for the school, such as educational psychologists, behavioural support teams or educational welfare officers." The Nurture group supervisor, myself and the Head Teacher felt that this was not feasible, in a school with over fifty percent of special needs pupils. Support agency time is very limited and has to be booked far in advance. Also, children are prioritised for appointments and the focus group

children would not have fitted into this category. During the School's Ofsted inspection in 2006, personal, moral and social education was deemed outstanding and an established nurture regime highly commended. I have over thirty years experience of pastoral care within schools and the nurture group supervisor had undergone some counsellor training and is very experienced in dealing with vulnerable children and building positive relationships with parents. We also knew the children and their parents very well. Therefore in order to save valuable time we decided to design a training programme ourselves.

It had to be based on the project's aims, the role of the counsellor and relevant research suggestions which had been studied as part of the research module. The aim of the counsellor training programme is akin to Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.50) definition of peer counselling, "to enable the client to explore and define the problem that they are experiencing and to help them arrive at a new understanding of the problem or to develop a solution to the difficulty they are encountering."

Again, based on project time constraints the training programme consisted of five sessions of about forty-five minutes each and included discussions and role play on listening skills, building trust, understanding the qualities of a peer counsellor, dealing with difficult emotions and body language. Because of my full teaching timetable the nurture group supervisor was the facilitator. The Nurture Room was timetabled into the project and provided a private, secure base for training and group discussions. Counsellor 3 was already a playground counsellor and had undergone some listening skills coaching and role play as part of this role. At this stage the counsellor group was not told who the focus group would be. The first session began with the facilitator and the group discussing the aims of the project and the counsellor's role and skills (Appendix 1 Counsellor's role and skills).

Research indicates that listening skills are an important attribute of a peer mentor. “The counsellor listens very attentively without interrupting or giving advice, (Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.54). We felt that active listening should be encouraged by requiring the listener to use appropriate body language and avoid making judgements, offering advice or changing the subject. Therefore the second session involved the counsellors discussing how this could be achieved. (Appendix 2 Listening and body language) and taking part in some paired role play in order to encourage attentive listening postures such as eye contact, facial expression and gestures.

The third session concentrated on developing empathy. The group were encouraged to discuss how they would feel if someone was not listening to them. (Appendix 3 Not listening – how would you feel?). Body language was again stressed and discussed.

The fourth session emphasised the client-counsellor relationship. Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.50) advise that, “The peer counsellors should be able to recognise and accept that their relationship with their client is restricted to the time they spend in the counselling situation.” We thought this a relevant criterion of training because of the focus groups need to enhance social skills and solve social problems themselves. Therefore, during this session a group discussion took place on how the counsellor role differs from that of a friend. Counsellors were also asked to make a list of a network of friends with themselves in the centre. They then discussed with the facilitator the difference in roles and behaviour and how they relate to children younger than themselves. Emphasis was now placed on the fact that counsellors are not in the playground to ‘stick up’ for their clients and that they should encourage them to put any of their own solutions into practice in order to try to develop social problem solving skills.

The fifth and final session concentrated on questioning techniques (Appendix 4 Questioning techniques.) including role play and feedback from each other and the facilitator. Possible actions and reactions of the clients were discussed such as sadness, aggression and lack of response.

Councillor training, therefore, consisted of five forty minute sessions throughout March 2007. The Nurture timetable, my teaching commitments and looming S.A.T.S. made it difficult to fit these sessions in, especially for the two Year 6 counsellors. They had to take place during celebratory assembly time.

Sessions highlighted the fact that the counsellors had been given a lot of responsibility. They would be dealing with extremely vulnerable, marginal children. The training programme, therefore, had attempted to focus on attributes and activities emphasised as being advantageous to successful peer collaboration such as responsibility, resilience, resourcefulness and reciprocity. It was also designed to help counsellors become aware of values and judgements which they bring to the counselling situation and keep them sensitive to the problems which the focus group were experiencing. At the end of each session the group were assured that throughout the project they would have chances to meet with the facilitator or myself to discuss any worries, anxieties or problems and would receive support whenever necessary.

Diaries were used by the counsellor group if they wanted to express views, concerns or ideas. Use of the diary was discussed during counsellor training sessions and the diaries also provided a qualitative method of data collection which could be correlated against others. Burgess (as cited in Bell, 2005, p.381), “expresses concern about the extent of intrusion” and states that “impact on the respondents must always be considered.” They were also in this

case a vehicle by which we could provide informed support and encouragement as and when necessary and provide a focus for reflection time, a recommendation running through the relevant literature. Although confidentiality was encouraged in the training, it was also stressed that anything really important should be discussed with myself or the facilitator. Covert observations by the M.D.A. staff did also monitor this possible scenario.

Observations

Morrison (cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.290) argued that observations enable the researcher to gather data on “the human setting”. The observation sheets given to two designated lunchtime supervisors, involved monitoring the focus group, playing with a friend, staying by staff, playing alone, having fun, feeling cross, finding excuses to be inside, and using a counsellor. As Cohen et al. (2000, p.306) state, “this data facilitates the making of comparisons between situations, frequencies, patterns and trends to be noted or calculated.” However Cohen et al. (2000, p.310) observe that as a research tool, “it is beset by issues of reliability and validity and additional methods of collecting data should be employed. The project does contain several forms of qualitative and quantitative data. The categories chosen were based on “traits” of the focus group initially noticed by the lunchtime staff and therefore provided familiar foci for the observer to introduce systematisation and reliability into the procedure. The observers also adopted a passive, non-intrusive role in order to give privacy to the focus group and to be able to concentrate on monitoring. Lunchtime supervisors were asked to make at least two observations a week. Daily observations would have been difficult because of movement of classes to and from the canteen, the amount of children in the playground and dealing with playground incidents.

Focus Group and Counsellor Sessions

Because of whole school timetabling and staff deployment demands it was decided by myself, the Head and the facilitator that the counsellors and focus group would meet together over the course of a term once a week in the Nurture room for approximately one hour and that they would lunch together once a week. The latter would hopefully provide another setting and fairly relaxed atmosphere for the two groups to get to know each other. The facilitator kept a personal transcript after group sessions. The content of each session and the input of the facilitator was discussed and planned by myself and the facilitator once a week after school. This had the full backing of the Head. The S.E.N.C.O. was invited to these meetings be kept informed and offer advice as and when necessary.

During the first session both groups sat and introduced themselves to each other, although they already knew each others names. The aim of the project was reiterated in child friendly terms and groups discussed what they could do outside. Year 3's and 4's wanted someone to go and talk to if they were lonely or angry. C1, a boy, was particularly angry when outside. Year 5's and 6's mainly listened during this session. Wet playtimes were seen as a particular problem to the focus group. It was agreed that one of the counsellors would go with C2 to a games club. C2 was particularly withdrawn and the group felt it might help him socially. C1, 3 and 4 were to play an organised activity (probably a game) with the other counsellors in a class or the library. M.D.A's were kept fully informed of these developments by the facilitator. The group agreed that the vulnerable group did not have to stay with one counsellor.

The second session was another 'ice breaker' using talking point cards that we had designed. (Appendix 5 Talking About Me cards). It gave the focus group a chance to talk about themselves and to give information and ideas to each other and the counsellors. C1 was

particularly reserved with a very poor verbal response. He has very poor literacy skills and found it difficult to express feelings.

The children chose their own counsellors for this session.

C1 (Y5 Boy) with M1 (Y6 Girl)

C2 (Y3 Boy) with M2 (Y5 Boy)

C3 (Y3 Girl) with M3(Y5 Girl)

C4 (Y3 Girl) with M4 (Y6 Boy)

It was also decided that counsellors would have daily input into the focus group. A meeting between the groups would take place at the beginning of every lunch time for about ten minutes in order to discuss worries and friendship groups. Once a week both groups were to have lunch together in order to bond, discuss any worries and improve social skills.

After this session counsellors discussed their diaries with the facilitator. They were to be filled in whenever they felt necessary. The counsellors suggested lunchtimes. Diaries were kept in the Nurture room.

The third session was an attempt to get the focus group to talk with more confidence and relaxation. They worked together drawing, writing or talking about favourite dreams. C4 and M1 paired up for this activity and worked well together. M2 offered to help C2 write and describe his dream. M3 and C3 worked together. M4 tried to talk and help C1 but both seemed 'shy'. C2 was very reluctant to join in towards the end of the session and said he couldn't remember dreams.

The fourth session was again designed to inspire confidence, relaxation and talking. The group discussed what they would like to dream about. They talked amongst themselves and were helping each other. C2 seemed much more relaxed and was laughing and was talking to

M1 but like C1 did not respond to talking in a group. C1 kept his head on the table when others were talking. Therefore the two boys C1 and C2 were still relatively shy and withdrawn. C3 and C4, however, were growing in confidence and talking more.

The fifth session concentrated on 'talking about myself' again. All children seemed more relaxed and were willing to talk and give some answers. C2 was enjoying himself and appeared to be developing a bond with M1. He seemed relaxed and happy in his company. C1 was joining in more. C3 and C4 offered to help others by passing pens and paper around. C4 was about to go into hospital the next day to have her tonsils out. During this group session M2 dominated the conversation and wanted to talk about himself. Therefore it was decided to use an object to pass around in order to indicate who could talk.

During the sixth session C4 was absent and M1 and M4 had booster S.A.T.S. sessions. There was a relaxed atmosphere and the group discussed weekend activities. C2 said that he did not want to talk about his because he had 'been naughty'. C1 opened up a little more and talked about himself. C2 then decided to tell the group about his weekend. There was good supportive input for C2 from the rest of the group. C2 listened to advice. C3 was saying little about herself. C1 and C2 expressed concern about moving into the top juniors. M2 and M3 said that you feel that way in Lower Juniors but that the teachers were kind and understanding. The group discussed what makes you happy and sad. There was more eye contact within the group and more talking freely including C1 and C2 who were excited about their shared lunch the next day. C3 still seemed to be taking a 'back seat'.

During circle time in my class it became apparent that M2 was experiencing personal and social difficulties at home and was dominating group sessions more and more. After discussion with project leaders M2 felt he wanted to give up his role. He expressed a wish to

maintain contact with the group and meet everyone on Wednesday lunchtimes. This was agreed. At the same time C2 was absent for two weeks. During this time another counsellor was chosen. It was felt that a very experienced counsellor and play leader should be chosen because it was too late in the project to repeat the role play and group work. A year 6 boy was chosen. This child had expressed great interest in counselling and had developed into an excellent playground councillor. This child will be called M5.

The seventh and eighth sessions concentrated on friendship. Because of timetable commitments these took place at lunchtimes. Counsellors went to collect the focus group. They all seemed relaxed and chatty. The group talked about the role of a friend and kinds of friendship. C1 seemed to think that all the footballers were his friends just because that group allowed him to play. C2 did not know how to describe a friend. C3 thought that friends were groups of people. C4 thought that all friends were best friends. None of them could describe qualities that friends should have indicating that they had never experienced reciprocal friendship. Both groups were asked to draw a network of friends with themselves in the centre and on the outside, friends they had in school, after school clubs and near home. The counsellors all seemed to have a broad network of friends. M4's was not as broad but he was very much part of the lunchtime and playtime football group. C3 and C4's networks consisted entirely of counsellors within the project. C1 and C2's consisted of some counsellors and a few children in class as well. However, there was no evidence at all of these 'friends' in the playground or the classroom.

C2 then moved out of the area and changed schools because of difficult home circumstances. By this time S.A.T. timetable pressure was mounting. M4 expressed a wish to leave because of wanting to play football and S.A.T.'s work. This was agreed. At this late stage and because we had lost a member of the focus group we decided not to replace M4

The ninth session was the last group session of the project. It consisted of a celebratory party with refreshments and games. M2 and M4 joined the group. The atmosphere was relaxed with all children chatting and laughing. They all agreed that they had enjoyed the project. The focus group were all encouraged to use playground counsellors and not be alone. M4 expressed a wish to be a playground counsellor the next year. C1 then left the school as the family moved area.

Outside Meetings

As agreed in the second counsellor group sessions a meeting between groups would take place at the beginning of every lunchtime for about ten minutes. The facilitator as part of her lunchtime supervisory post, as much as time allowed, kept a covert eye on some of these sessions. Personal transcripts were made after these observations. During the fourth week of the project it was noted that C1 was becoming very dependent on M1. C2 was being dominated by M2 and not being allowed to be more self reliant. C3 and M3 seemed a successful match. They seemed happy and relaxed in each others company. C4 and M4 got on reasonably well but M4 was beginning to resent losing football time outside. This was expressed in his counsellor's diary and missed two lunchtime meetings with C4. Just after C4 had returned to school M1 approached her to ask if everything was ok. C4 appeared angry and slapped M1. M1 was very upset. The facilitator in her role of as M.D.A spoke to C4 about this, who apologised to M1. M1 was extremely understanding. She was also showing great responsibility by constantly checking on the others. M1 now brought her friends along and played with Year 3 and 4 children at lunchtime. Counsellors after this incident were encouraged to make time for themselves at lunchtime. M3 often played with her group of friends after initial meetings with the focus group. M4 also played football every day. M2 by this time was having little input into the project.

By the sixth week of the project initial lunchtime chats were well established. It had become apparent that C1 was continuing to be very dependent on M1 and was seeking more and more attention. During one lunchtime, C1 became angry. He had argued with another child in class and had been called names. C1 kicked the other child who then got a group of boys to hit C1, who became very angry and ran down the side of the playground building. M1 attempted to talk to him. C1 walked off. M1 stayed close by and suggested they go inside. An M.D.A then took C1 to the library to calm down. C1 remained angry about a card swapping incident and stayed angry. M4 and a friend checked on C1 and played a game with him in the library to calm him down.

By the seventh week of the project C1 was playing 'tick' with three other boys from his class. As the game went on C1 was becoming agitated because he was the one that was on. He punched the others instead of ticking them. This caused the other children to say that they did not want to play with him if he continued to do this.. C1 walked away and kicked the wall, mumbling to himself. One of the other children went to him and spoke to him. C1 smiled but started to kick the wall a number of times. He was clenching his fists and looking around to see what the other children were doing. When he noticed the others were playing he went over to one of them and pushed him in the back and ran away. M1 had been aware of the situation with C1 She had been watching from a distance. She went over to C1 and asked if he would like to sit with her while he calmed himself down. He walked away from her, so M1 went and sat on the nearby bench and called C1 over. He slowly walked over with his head down and kicking the ground. He sat at the opposite end of the bench from M1. M1 turned to face C1 who kept his head down. M1 talked calmly and quietly to C1. He did not talk back but did begin to nod his head slowly. As M1 was talking to him she moved slowly up the bench towards him. C1 began to talk back to M1 but would not lift his head up at all. C1 also moved a little closer to M1 One of C1 classmates came over so M1 suggested they sit on the bench.

This meant that she could move closer to C1. M1 talked to both children to set up a game which she would lead. C1 listened well and then got up to join in.

The next observation was made by one of the supervisors responsible for covertly monitoring the focus group. C4 was sitting alone in a classroom during a wet lunchtime. The M.D.A. suggests that she joins in activity with another group. She looked to see who is in the other group and says, "No, its ok, I will stay here." She looks around the room but does not make eye contact with any particular child. She sighs and reaches for some paper to draw with, the M.D.A. asks if she wants to play a game with her and some other children but she shakes her head and says, "no." The M.D.A. sends for M2 and asks him in the corridor if he would like to help in the classroom. As M2 goes into the classroom with the M.D.A. C4 immediately looks up and makes eye contact with him and gives a little wave. He smiles back and gives a little wave. After talking to the M.D.A he approaches C4 and asks if he can sit next to her. C4 shows him what she has been drawing and they begin to talk. C4 says she is no good at drawing and attempts to screw up the paper. M4 stops her and smooths out the paper pointing out what he thought was good on the picture. He then reaches for a bigger sheet of paper and suggests they do some drawing together. C4 agrees and begins to chat away moving her chair closer so that they can share the paper and pens. Other children sit at the table. They ask what they are doing and can they draw on the paper also. The four children at the table talk freely to one another including C4. When M2 has to go for his lunch the others continue with the activity. C4 decides to talk about how M2 has helped her when she was feeling lonely. These observation's correlate with the counsellor's explanations of the same events. The facilitator scribed their interpretations because of time restraints.

These diary entries were transcribed by the facilitator.

M1: C1 was playing with his friends, I had already asked him at the start of lunchtime if he had someone to play with and he said he did. I said I would be in the playground if he needed me. I had noticed him playing tick with some other boys and I did know that one of the other boys often winds him up and makes him get angry. As I looked over again I could see C1 walking away towards the wall he began to kick the wall. I continued to watch to see what was happening and to decide if C1 needed me to talk to him. I went over but not to close and asked him if he wanted to sit with me and tell me what the problem was but he walked away. I called to him that I would sit on the bench if he wanted to come to me. It took a couple of minutes for him to come over. He sat away from me and kept kicking the floor I could see he was hot so I asked him if he wanted a drink he didn't answer. I turned to face him and said that if he didn't want to talk about what had happened did he want me to sit on the bench still he nodded his head. I sat quietly for a few minutes then I started to talk about something funny that had happened to me that weekend, this made him smile. I was then able to talk about friends and then about what he had been playing with his friends he did not want to sit much but he listened when I began to talk about playing fair. When another child came over we then all took it in turns to talk about what games we like to play and how we could be fair to each other, I then suggested we play a game together also with one of my friends.

The second incident was observed and described by a M.D.A., who was very impressed by the counselling techniques shown by M1. It was transcribed by the facilitator.

C1 was playing 'tick' with three other boys from his class. As the game went on C1 was becoming agitated because he was the one that was on. He punched the others instead of ticking them. This caused the other children to say that they did not want to play with him if he continued to do this. C1 walked away and kicked the wall, mumbling to himself. One of the other children went to him and spoke to him. C1 smiled but started to kick the wall a number of times. He was clenching his fists and looking around to see what the other children

were doing. When he noticed the others were playing he went over to one of them and pushed him in the back and ran away.

M1 had been aware of the situation with C1. She had been watching from a distance. She went over to C1 and asked if he would like to sit with her while he calmed himself down. He walked away from her, so M1 went and sat on the nearby bench and called C1 over. He slowly walked over with his head down and kicking the ground. He sat at the opposite end of the bench from M1. M1 turned to face C1 who kept his head down. M1 talked calmly and quietly to C1. He did not talk back but did begin to nod his head slowly. As M1 was talking to him she moved slowly up the bench towards him. C1 began to talk back to M1 but would not lift his head up at all. C1 also moved a little closer to M1. One of C1's classmates came over so M1 suggested they sit on the bench. This meant that she could move closer to C1. M1 talked to both children to set up a game which she would lead. C1 listened well and then got up to join in.

The third incident is a transcript by the facilitator after an incident with C4.

M2 said he had been to see one of the other children in the group when the M.D.A. asked if he would come in and help in the class. She did explain to him that C4 was looking a bit lonely even though she had tried to involve her in activities. When he went into the class she looked at him and smiled so he smiled and waved back. C4 told him that she did not want to join in with the other girls because one of them was very bossy so she chose to sit alone and draw. She then said that her drawing was not good. "I am rubbish at drawing" she said. She began to roll the paper up to put it in the bin. M2 said he took the paper from her and smoothed it out and he pointed something on it and said that is really good. "I asked C4 if we should get one of the big sheets of paper and draw on it together." We decided to copy pictures from a book that the class had been using that morning as we did. C4 told me what the story was about.

Two other children came to see what we were doing and asked if they could join us. When I went for lunch they were talking and laughing together and were still at the table when I returned. As the rain had stopped we tidied up together and the other children asked C4 if she would like to play with them, they also asked me. I said I would like to go and play football with my friends really so C4 said, “you go and play football then and we will play our game together.” C4 smiled at me as she went off. At the end of lunchtime she waved to me from her line.

M1’s diary illustrates how much conflict, anger and confliction were part of C1’s life in the playground and show C1’s lack of social and communication skills. Even when he plays with a ‘new friend’, he seems to react by doing something confrontational such as kicking a ball on the roof. It also illustrates how much he relied on M1 for support and attention and how much counsellor time he demanded.

M2 did not fill in his diary but M5 noted the extreme behaviour of C1 and tried to provide a positive input..

M3’s diary indicates that she was less interactive than M1 but she has also picked out C1 and his difficulties. She had also noticed that C3 was alone and tried to help. She thought that counselling was time consuming. During this time she was also dealing with her possessive friend and their ‘group’ and was torn between this issue and the project. However, she did seem to enjoy helping the focus group.

M4 was interactive in the playground and notices C4. He seems to feel that she has “no problems” but at the same time is “lonely and sad.” He is taking notice of the focus group. He

also picked up on the difficulties of C1. He seems to enjoy counselling but would rarely fill in his diary because of wanting to play football.

All counsellors were much more interactive in the playground than the scant diary entries indicate, which the transcripts illustrate.

Because of the volatile nature of the first incident described M1 was given time on her own to discuss the incident with myself and the facilitator and then to write up the incident on the Nurture Room computer.

Lunchtimes and Later in the Project

Shared lunch meetings on Wednesdays were monitored by the lunchtime supervisor but groups were allowed to socialise without adult guidance. The atmosphere was friendly. The more time spent together the more relaxed they became within the groups. This session was covertly observed and monitored by the facilitator. This transcript refers to a shared lunch during the eighth week of the project. There was a lot of communication between them all at lunchtime. C1 sat next to M1 and M3 and talked happily to them. C1 did not appear as shy as usual. He was making good eye contact and not putting his head down as often. C3 and C4 were the quietest around the table. M5, M2 and C2 were laughing together and sharing personal experiences about spiders. As they were laughing a lot the rest of the group joined in with them and shared experiences. They went on to discuss a news item about a missing child. They shared views, listening to each other, all contributing to the discussion. They then played outside for fifteen minutes. Around this time, also, it was noticed that C2 was playing football more often and that M4 had been encouraging him to play. C4's class teacher also noticed that C4 had not been making excuses to be inside as often. It was also discovered that C2 was leaving. He said that he wanted to stay. M2 said, "It might be nice at a new school."

C2 just shrugged his shoulders. M2 spoke to C1 about his feelings regarding extra help at lunchtimes from the group. He said he had liked it

Post Intervention Questionnaire Data Analysis

The playground questionnaire was administered to the focus group again at the end of the project. See Figures 5 to 8.

C1 felt more secure in the playground and was responding to counsellors advice regarding aggression. He seemed to be communicating better. His perceptions of friendships had not changed and he seemed reliant on the counsellors as a focus for lunchtime activities. He was very reliant on M1

C2 filled in a questionnaire before leaving the school. He seemed to have developed a good relationship with M4 and played football more often. Although this provided a social focus he still did not seem to be secure, "they think I am O.K." Also C2 thought that counsellors were not doing enough to help him and does not seem to have developed any independent social strategies but, at least, was not playing football on his own anymore, C2 was particularly vulnerable at this time because he was leaving. It may have affected his answers and perceptions of the counsellors because he did not want to leave.

C3's perception of herself seemed to be that she had not made any social improvement and still seemed locked into helplessness. "I am alright on my own." She does say that she plays with M1 "and some others" which is an improvement on "no friends."

C4 seems more secure in the playground because the counsellors are there but she still seems quite reliant on them. She does, however, now play with "others they find for her" but still needs the security of playing inside.

Therefore, the focus group generally feel more secure because of counsellor support and guidance but as yet seem incapable of any independent, improved, positive social interactions

and seem ready to maintain their marginal status.

M.D.A. Tick Sheet Data Results

Results of the M.D.A.'s tick sheets were correlated and tabulated in order to supply data regarding the focus group's behaviour during the project. Due to their pressure of work the M.D.A.'s could not do observations every day. There were 16 observation periods over nine weeks of the project.

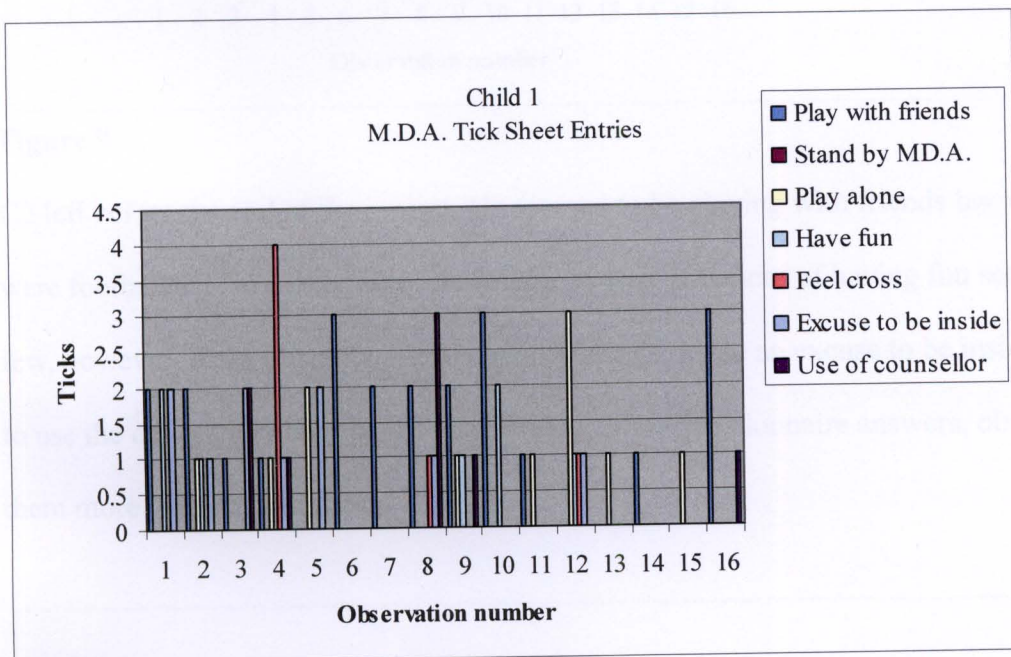


Figure 8

C1 seemed to be playing with more people by the end of the project. He was occasionally still playing alone but it was at a minimum. The seventh week was a bad week and Ca played alone on three days. This week corresponded with the aggressive, angry episodes when M1 was counselling him intensively. Being angry seemed to be diminishing and C1 seemed to having some fun in the playground but he was still finding quite a few excuses to be indoors and using mentors occasionally but was not using M.D.A.'s for support. These findings generally correlate with C1's post intervention questionnaire answers. He was less angry.

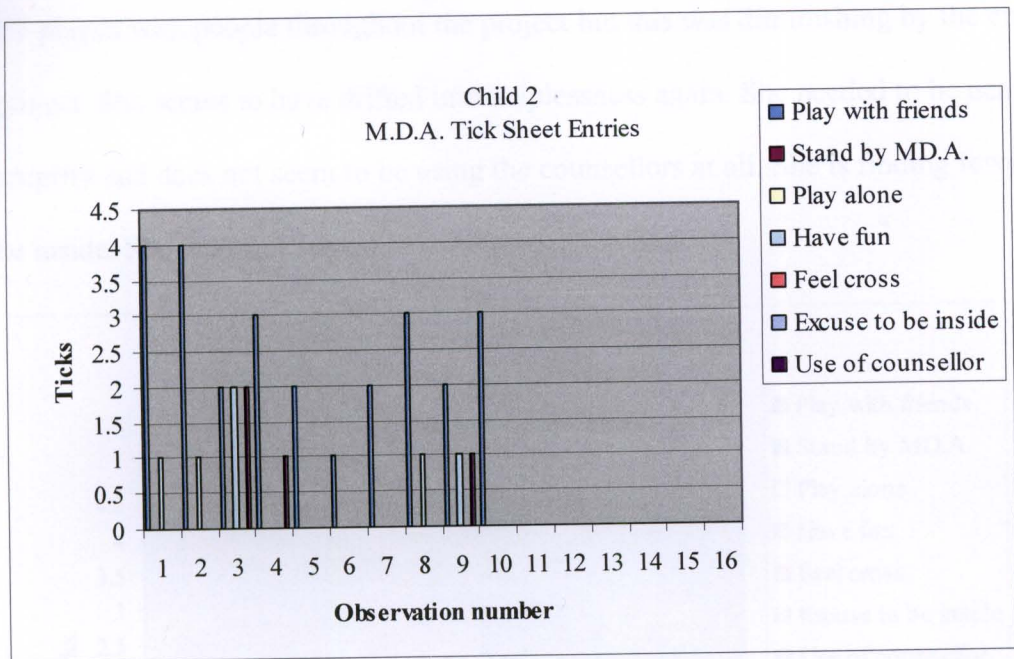


Figure 9

C2 left before the end of the project. He seemed to be playing with friends but most of these were footballers. He looked less lonely than he was. Instances of having fun seemed to be few, however, there was only one occasion when C2 made an excuse to be inside. He seemed to use the counsellors only once but according to his questionnaire answers, obviously needed them more than he used them.

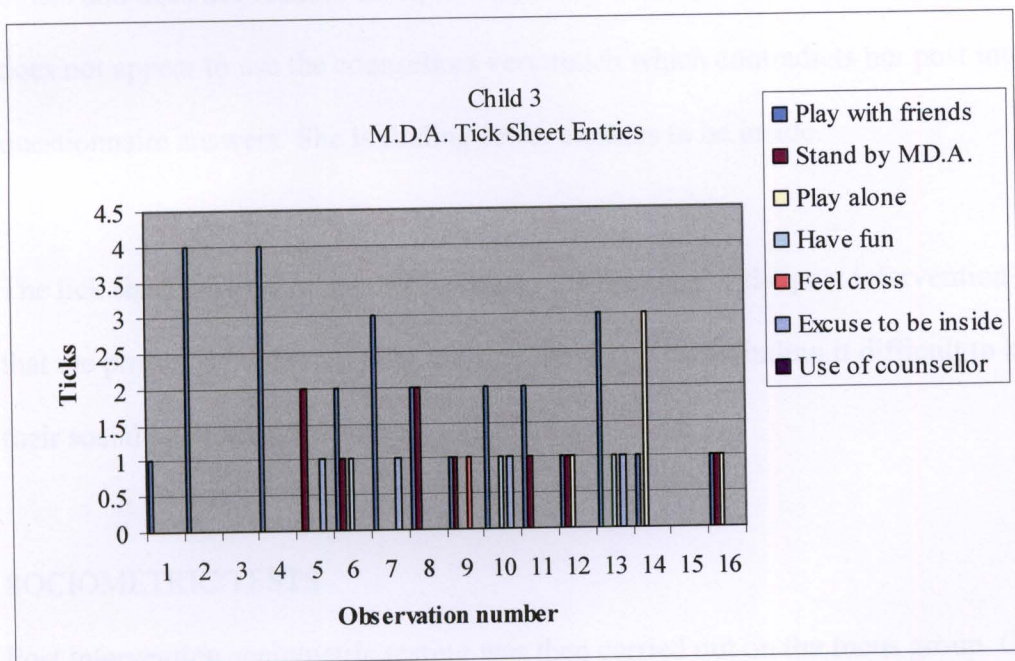


Figure 10

C3 played with people throughout the project but this was diminishing by the end of the project. She seems to have drifted into helplessness again. She needed to be near M.D.A.s for security and does not seem to be using the counsellors at all. She is finding fewer excuses to be inside. She does not appear to ever have much fun.

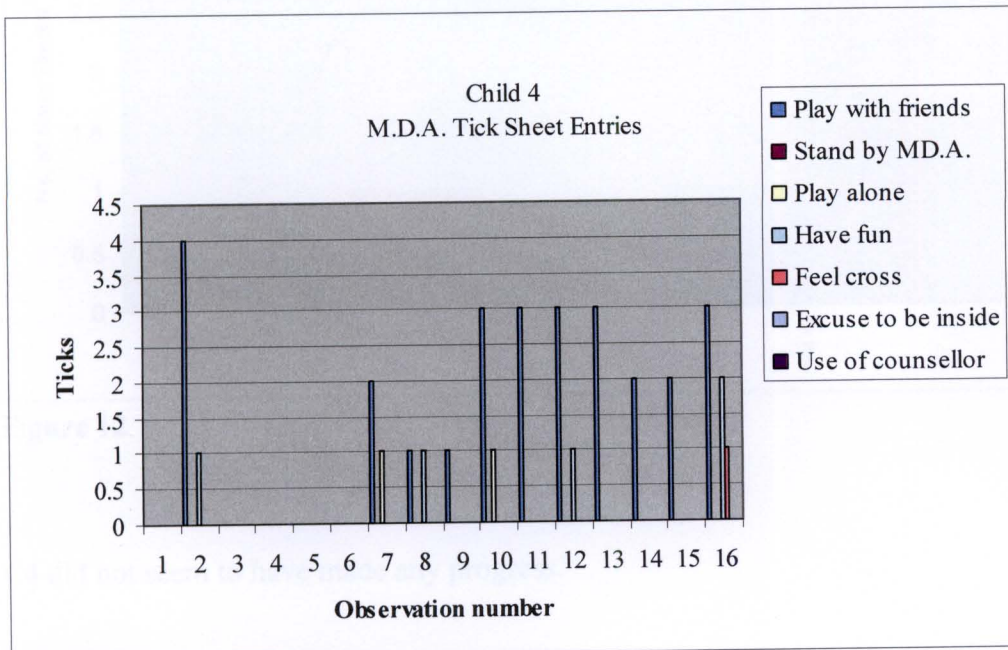


Figure 11

C4 was absent for two weeks. She seemed to be more pro-active in the playground than the others and does not seem to be alone very often but does not look as if she is having fun. She does not appear to use the counsellors very much which contradicts her post intervention questionnaire answers. She is finding fewer excuses to be inside.

The tick sheets therefore, generally upheld the findings of the post intervention questionnaire that the project provided security but that the group were finding it difficult to break out of their social helplessness.

SOCIOMETRIC TESTS

Post intervention sociometric testing was then carried out on the focus group. C3 had moved up two places over the band and one place within class.



Figure 12

C4 did not seem to have made any progress.



Figure 13

Throughout the project the parent of C1 was consulted and informed about his behaviour and social needs. They were referred to On Track, a child and family group. The family then moved house and C1 left the school. Appointments were not kept. C2 had left the area. The

parent of C3 was pregnant and did not enquire about the child's experience. The parent of C4 was very supportive and said that the experience had been a very positive one for the child.

Post Project Statements

End of project statements by the two M.D.A's indicated that they had found the project a positive experience.

M.D.A. 1

"The children did benefit from this and I think we did too. It has made us more aware of the quieter children. I look around more to make sure all the children have something to do or someone to play with. C3 smiles more in the playground and looks like she enjoys the company of others. It is very rare that she is alone. C4 is happier, she joins in with others and listens and shares ideas."

M.D.A. 2

"I am more aware of children who do not appear to have friends to play with everyday. As a result of this I encourage the children to join in with the others. I spend more time getting to know the children individually to help them feel more relaxed in the noisy environment. C3 is never without a friend – she is often the leader in a game - she is more confident and laughs and smiles more. C4 does not spend as much time as she did talking to us – she plays well with others. She looks happy too.

Several months after the project ended C3 and C4 were asked to describe what it had meant to them. Their statements were transcribed by the facilitator.

C3 – It was helpful having the older children, if I had no one to play with they would find someone for me. They would even play with me too. They were all kind.

I get along better in the playground now. I even have two best friends. I am happy at playtimes and lunchtimes. I always have someone to talk to. If I didn't I would talk to the dinner lady. If I could see someone with no friends I would find them someone or play with them myself.

C4 – I think it was a good idea. It was very useful to have other children to talk to and help you. I was comfortable talking to them. My mum said it was a good idea too.

They made me feel happy and cheerful, they helped me to make friends, they were my friends too. I get along better with other people. I am more confident. I like lunchtime and playtime now. If I needed someone to talk to it would be a playground counsellor or a dinner lady. If I could see someone alone I would be their friend to help them make friends.

Project Findings

Collaborations

As a result of the project, were the prosocial interactions of the marginalised client group advanced through collaboration, thereby supporting the theories of Vygotsky, Piaget and Feuerstein?

Results of the post-intervention sociometric study on the focus group indicated particularly positive those of the client group indicated that of the two children left in the project one had a marginally higher social status than at the pre-intervention stage. The validity of the findings is supported by the fact that the study consisted of the same voters as the pre-intervention sample. M.D.A. observation data and post project statements indicate that the focus groups communication skills and reciprocity were slowly developing. Therefore, collaboration seemed to have a positive effect.

Other examples of positive, collaborative social outcomes include a 1993 project by Christopher, Hansen and Macmillan in West Virginia which examined the impact of a playtimes peer helper intervention on the low rates of pro-social interactions of three elementary school boys. Direct observations and sociometric ratings by peers indicated that the intervention, “appeared to be effective in increasing the positive peer interactions of the three boys” (Christopher et al., 1991, p.45) although, “a more thorough analysis of the effects on the peer helpers was needed.” Another study which supported collaboration theories was a 1991 peer counselling project by James, Charlton, Leo and Indoe. Eight seventh year and eighth year students were paired with under achieving second year pupils who had, “gained little from traditional remedial teaching.” (James et al., 1991, p.165). Results indicated that the client group’s spelling improved and that “some pupils who are receiving remedial tuition in spelling and reading are likely to make greater progress if this is supplemented by

counselling to enhance self-image.” (James et al., 1991, p168). Therefore collaboration seems to have had a positive effect both academically and emotionally.

Shamur and Tzuriel’s 2004 peer study in Israel, described earlier, also supported collaboration. A 2007 cross-age peer teaching project was carried out in Sweden in by Pia Williams. All four peer teachers were successful and “able to teach their peers by teaching visually, verbally and through varying the content.” (Williams, 2007, p.69).

Collaboration and mediation whether by peer councillor, peer helper or peer teacher seems to have had, in varying degrees, a positive effect on all groups and participants. Several decades of consistent research results indicate positive results and encompass social, emotional and academic studies, age ranges and geographical areas including Britain, America, Israel and Sweden.

Therefore findings support the collaboration theories of Vygotsky, Piaget and Feuerstein, indicating that interactive work by partners may develop ways to communicate about difficult problems and advance the solution of the problem, thereby contributing to cognitive development both inside and outside the classroom.

Status

Although the three educational philosophers agreed that collaboration was a major determinant of cognitive development, their views differed as to the type of support given. Vygotsky and Feuerstein favoured “unequal partnerships” whilst Piaget supported independent work between equals. Did the findings of the research project adhere to any of these theories?

Relevant research literature both classic and modern does not seem to define or analyse the meaning of the word peer. The Cassell Concise dictionary definition refers to, “an equal in any respect, a group of people equal in status”. Although broad, these statements imply homogeneity. Hopkins (cited in Topping, 1996, p.24) notes that any assumption of the existence of a homogenous peer group is hopelessly naïve, and that, “the definition of peers needs to be much more precise.” Hopkins is correct in that children of exactly the same age may have different levels of complex social and academic skills. It is almost impossible to define or make a perfect “equal partner” match, which surely makes it difficult to support or refute established theories.

Peer education continues to expand and is now seen as a valid teaching and learning tool. A number of case studies are mentioned in McNeill (cited in Topping, 1996, p.24) and include; The Home Start scheme involving parent –to-parent peer education; The University of the Third Age senior citizen scheme; The Teenage Parenthood network and the C.S.V support programmes for peer education in English language. These projects are homogenous in that they include people experiencing similar activities and or challenges. However, members of these large scale groups may not have the same specific age group, socio-economic status or cognitive skills, but in fact are more likely to be “unequal partners”. Therefore, a rigid definition of the word peer does not seem socially and or academically feasible. There seems to be no standard precise definition in the literature studied. Shamir and Tzuriel (2004, p.61) refer to their choice of term “peer mediation”, because of the relative age proximity between the trainer and the learner, in this case two years. This method statement referring to cross-age research seems to be one that most researchers in peer collaborations adopt. Without actually specifying or clarifying a definition the equal age gap between collaborators may be as much as five years or more. This therefore indicates that most researchers into peer collaboration adopt Vygotsky’s and Feuerstein’s “unequal partners” approach and adopt a broad definition usually related to age proximity, as did this peer counselling study. Therefore, Hopkin’s wish

for a more precise definition does not seem to have been fulfilled within the relevant academic research.

The present study chose a cross-age peer support system because of the experienced, established playground counselling scheme by Year 5 and 6 pupils and the challenging nature of the focus group who had an extremely low social status despite whole school input. The chosen counsellors, as suggested by the sociometric study had developed communication and social skills and would provide valuable, experienced role models for the focus group. The social skills required in group and lunchtime sessions and incidents involving the focus group in the playground, were complex and intuitive and ethically required more experienced rather than same age peers, which supports the views of Vygotsky and Feuerstein.

Therefore the general usage of a cross-age approach and the major involvement by adults in most peer projects indicates that 'unequal partners' seem to be more popular and practical than Piaget's 'equal partners'. The majority of the programmes involved counsellors and peers at different stages of either social or academic development. However, Piaget's idea of 'unequal power relations' is given some credence because of young peoples growing receptivity to peer rather than adult support. It also bears out earlier research by Hamblin 1974, Good and Brophy 1980, Ruge 1983 (cited in James et al.1991, p166) that cross age peer counselling rather than adult may be more effective.

Definition of a Peer.

Cartwright (2005, p.47) when describing the formation of Secondary School peer support , anti-bullying and stress management programmes over a twenty year period, states that, "they all had a clear process for selection committed to peer supporters reflecting the student body in relation to gender, ethnicity, physical and academic ability. Some use positive

discrimination with peer and/or adult nominations to ensure this balance. Therefore democratic peer elections and/or adult choice was involved.

The peer spelling project initiated by James et al. (1991, p166) chose a cross age approach because they believed, “there are times when counselling by peers (who are just a few years older than the pupil being counselled) may, be as effective, or even more effective, than counselling administered by an adult.” The twelve senior students recruited to act as peer councillors to second year students were chosen by tutors and heads of year according to empathetic attributes.

A global peer project involving Sweden, Malaysia and Australia concentrated on reaching conflict peer resolution through drama. What began as a same age collaboration project developed into cross-age secondary to primary peer teaching which the authors found, “created positive networks of trust among older and younger students.” (O’Toole and Burton, 2005, p.277). Younger students consistently reported that their older peers understand their conflicts better than teachers or other conflict management systems in schools.

“Transferability of the knowledge and its utilisation in real-life has been consolidated throughout the project, particularly with those students who had the opportunity to peer-teach their younger colleagues.” (O’Toole and Burton, 2005, p.274). Therefore the cross age approach benefited both peer teachers and their students.

A successful Swedish Chinese Checkers peer teaching project by Williams (Children Teaching Children) did not specify why the older children in the mixed age class of seven to nine year olds were chosen as peer teachers but it is likely that they were the experienced, knowledgeable players.

Shamir and Tzuriel (2004, p.62) point out “Vygotsky made no attempt to elaborate the activities of human mediators beyond their function as vehicles of symbolic tools.” Also he “did not refer to the differential effects of cognitive level of the mediator or the learner.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.62) They also observed that he, “did not specify the exact processes by which the developing individuals internalise the mental tools offered by adults or peer.” (Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.62). The authors developed and operationalised a programme of mediated learning experiences based on Feuersteins criteria and akin to Vygotsky’s “unequal partners”, in an attempt to provide the mediators with these processes. Third graders taught first graders in a learning situation. The learners lower cognitive level was found to effect mediation for meaning of the mediator, request for meaning from learners and the giving of meaning from the mediator was higher in interactions with learners of a lower cognitive level. The authors concluded that, “the findings of the present study contribute to Vygotsky’s and Feuerstein’s theories,” and, “there seemed to be learning taking place when learners displaying different levels of cognitive attributes co-operate to complete a given task.” ((Shamir and Tzuriel, 2004, p.59). These studies seem to support the “unequal partners” theories both in social and academic contexts.

There is evidence, however, that same age peer collaboration can be successful. The Circle of Friends (Newton, Taylor and Wilson, 1996) was a class based project involving fairly successful children and focus children with severe emotional difficulties in mainstream schools and was an attempt to encourage their acceptance within peer groups. The authors also state, “that most ‘circles’ have needed the support and prompting of the adult facilitator before they have been able to listen to each others contributions.” (Newton, Taylor and Wilson, 1996, p.45). Therefore the strong presence of the facilitator in this social context lends credence to Vygotsky’s and Feuerstein’s ‘unequal partner’ approach.

A study examining the impact of peer helpers on the low rates of prosocial interactions in West Virginia by Christopher, Hansen and MacMillan on three eight year old 'marginal' boys was also an exact age project. There was a systematic increase in the percentage of positive interactions. The peer councillors were chosen by teachers based on criteria such as, "regular attendance, appropriate, frequent, interactions with peers, compliance with teacher instructions, ability to initiate behaviour that a trainer models and staying on task." (Christopher et al., 1991, p.29). Additional criteria were, "that peer helpers from each classroom be friends with one another and the same sex as the target child." (Christopher et al., 1991, p.29) Adults again were highly profiled in the project and played a major role in the selection process of peer-helpers.

Conclusions

Both cross and same age peer projects do have elements of success whether they be social or academic. It is interesting to note that Cartwright's recent research indicates the development of a more egalitarian choice of councillors. During the present study the democratic choice of counsellors ensured that they were considered approachable and supportive and is inclusive rather than token choices which may be suitable for adults but not for those being supported.

Compared to earlier examples of peer research, however, as was true of the project, there is still a substantial amount of positive discrimination and adult facilitation, both in the initial stages and throughout the peer-support programmes. A more covert adult approach seems to appeal to young people. The global drama project is a case in point. Throughout the project, adults maintained covert, egalitarian and non-judgemental roles but were always there to facilitate and support as and when necessary.

Children's Worlds

Recent governmental publications, as discussed earlier, confirm that a child's individual and social needs are now thought vital to their personal development. Is the dichotomy between the needs of the child and those of the wider community much narrower and of what relevance is peer collaboration, particularly peer counselling within this social context?

Recent research methods of children and their social contexts are an indication of modern, societal perceptions regarding young people and their worlds. The humanistic, positivist, constructivist approach, mentioned earlier, acknowledges that children are complex beings. Research studies for example in children's language have moved from strict experimental hypothesis to a more, "naturalistic and interpretive approach", which "reflect a recognition of our lack of knowledge of children's worlds and peer cultures," and the realisation that, (Corsaro and Streeck, 1986, p.15) "young people are not primitive versions of adult social functioning," but that, "children's worlds are endowed with their own rules, rituals and principles of conflict resolution," and "not always easily accessible to adults." (Corsaro and Streeck, 1986, p.15). This view is supported by peer research findings, for example, the Brisbane Dracon drama project, where young people preferred peer rather than adult support. Therefore, although modern, adult society has a more empathetic and egalitarian attitude towards young people there still seems to be a reserve and distance between the worlds of adults and children.

For several decades, research and popular opinion has indicated that many young people are not contented members of society and are suffering from mental health problems. In 1990 Dryfoos (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.10) following research in the United States found "an increased number of young people are at risk of destructive social and health behaviours." In 1994 the consortium for the Promotion of School Based Competence quoted statistics,

“which suggest that in North America young people are less prepared to assume responsible places in society that their parents were.” (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.10). The Primary National Strategy. Developing Children’s Social, Emotional and Behavioural Skills, a Whole Curriculum Approach (2003, p37) states that, “research is showing that children suffer from a surprisingly high level of mental health problems, many more than had previously been expected”, and that, “the idea of innocent and untroubled childhood is largely a myth.” (p10). The document also refers to, “a massive rise in use and availability of drugs, marital breakdown and alcoholism.” (p37). It is recognised that, “the development of emotional and social competence and well being can reduce mental health problems of young people e.g. depression, anxiety, suicide, eating disorders and stress.” (p37). The 2006 publication 2020 Vision by the Teaching and Learning Review group emphasise that, “the gap in average attainment at Key Stage 2 between pupils eligible and not eligible for free school meals is not decreasing significantly.” Therefore many children are still stuck in the deprivation cycle. A 2007 article written by Leaman mentions the open letter, published in the Daily Telegraph (Greenfield et al, 2006, cited in Education Review Vol. 20 p.69 Walking in their Shoes) presenting the concerns of a number of academics and professionals (including authors Jacqueline Wilson and Philip Pullman) regarding the demise of childhood. The letter warned that computer technology, test orientated education and advertising were, “corroding the essence of childhood.” It linked this to an increase in child obesity, depression and anti-social behaviour.” Leaman (2007, p.69) had the view that depression is not due to the loss of childhood but, “a lack of understanding of their own emotions.”. She points out that we are in a technological age, like it or not and that society should have, ”genuine and thorough empathy,” and not, “media frenzies, governmental policies and author backed campaigns.” (Leaman, 2007, p.69).

In November 2007 Seldon and Morris (2007, p.46) asked the question whether schools should be teaching happiness and well being because, “child depression as well as adult depression and mental illness was at an all time high.” They support Leaman’s view that young people are sent into jobs and higher education, “without fundamental knowledge of how their minds work; what the main emotions are that they will encounter and how to deal with them.” (Seldon and Morris, 2007, p.44). As early as 1999 the National Curriculum Handbook (p10) was stating that, “we need to be prepared to engage as individuals, parents, workers and citizens with economic, social and cultural change including the continued globalisation of the economy and society.” (QCAb. 1999) Therefore, there is a widely acknowledged, global, mental health problem and indicates that many children and young people appear to be vulnerable, lacking in a sense of self and or responsibility, indicating that despite an increase in the social status of children there is still a sizeable dichotomy between their emotional needs and the momentum of social demands, requirements and pressures.

The government also acknowledges that there is an identity crisis among young people. Making a positive contribution, part of the Every Child Matters agenda, includes; engaging in decision making, supporting the community and environment; developing positive relationships and successfully dealing with significant life changes and challenges.

These official responses therefore put the onus firmly onto schools to support young peoples well being both physically and mentally in order to bridge the dichotomy which exists. Personalised learning, strongly advocated in 2020 Vision, has attempted to give a working model to support well being in the classroom but the playground, an important and complex social domain still largely remains an uncharted area where governmental advice and support are concerned.

However, in 2006, Wirral L.E.A acknowledged the need to engage young people in the community and I was appointed as the first advisory teacher for child participation. It was my job to liaise with schools and the youth service community in order to develop peer projects, school councils and community programmes involving young people. Enthusiastic and successful participation in, for example, local and European Youth Parliaments and the Childrens Parliament on the Environment, proved that young people can have a sense of responsibility, civic pride and awareness but they have to be given a voice. Research studies into peer befriending by Konet (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.14) stress that young people were, “given a voice and this was an important stage in the process of feeling more positive about themselves.” They must also be given an opportunity, resourced and encouraged. Therefore there is still a dichotomy between the needs of the child and the wider community.

Peer collaboration projects imbue the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda and are excellent examples of participative citizenship could be a means of narrowing the gap between the needs of the child and society. The project attempted to contribute towards this evolution. Was it successful?

Although small scale, it followed the Primary National Strategy (2006, p.37) recommendation that schools should, “develop emotional and social competence and well being.” It also adhered to the Report of the Teaching and Learning in 2020 Review Group (2006, p21).statement that schools should be, “conducting regular surveys on the quality of the school experience.” The mental health survey conducted prior to the project was a partial impetus of the research. The sociometric data, not only pinpointed the focus group and councillors but also provided a useful social analysis of gender groups, E.A.L children, other vulnerable pupils, and class groupings. Staff have now decided to regularly use social data in

order to monitor and support vulnerable children in the playground, which will greatly support and contribute to the Every Child Matters agenda.

The humanistic, interactive methods used throughout the project acknowledged the fact that children are individuals and that the playground is a complex setting. Although adult facilitation was an element of the project it empathetically provided support when necessary and adopted a covert, unobtrusive role and encouraged true peer support in an effort to imbue a “sense of self” to the focus group and councillors. As part of their conclusions on the Circle of Friends project, Newton, Taylor and Wilson suggest that social constructivist (Mallory and Newton 1994) and interactionist theories (Dowling and Osborne cited in Newton, et al., 1996, p.47) should be embraced because, “we need a theory that recognises the importance of social content in the formation of a sense of self.”. This inclusive statement encapsulated the ethos of the project. Statements by C3 and C4 made several months after the project had ended indicated that they had a greater awareness and sense of self.

Participative citizenship was a feature, incorporating a range of practices such as participating actively in the life of society and providing opportunities for self development. It particularly supported the positive contribution outcome by encouraging the focus group to develop relationships and face some of the challenges the playground offers and provided an opportunity for the councillors to make a positive contribution to their community. The report of the Teaching and Learning group also emphasises the importance of engaging pupils and using them, “as learning resources for one another helping their peers to learn and develop within the classroom and beyond.” (2020 Vision, 2006, p.21). The councillors were active in the life of the school community and taking the perspective of the focus group, who did make some social progress.

Therefore the project encapsulated all the recommended elements of a successful well being strategy. Its conclusions also support the view that peer counselling and collaboration, citizenship and participation should be an important part of a creative curriculum both inside and outside the classroom. It emphasises the fact that participation and empowerment are issues central to the practice of peer support and supports the findings of King and Occleston (cited in Cartwright, 2005, p.49) that, “The principle of participation is fundamental. Children and young people can gain understanding and take action in their own lives and community.” and can contribute towards narrowing the gap between the needs of the child and society.

School Climate

Findings mentioned in the literature review indicate that peer support is intrinsically linked to a positive, empathetic ethos. Sustaining and establishing a climate which affirms worth and embedding the Every Child Matters Agenda were key priorities for school in 2006. Alongside this was an established playground peer counselling scheme. Together, these were to provide a useful foundation for the research project. What constitutes a positive climate? Did the project have an impact on this positive framework and vice-versa?

The Curriculum Management Audit, first carried out in Ohio in 1979 is a management and leadership strategy for industry and education. An aspect of this is C.J. Downing’s “Quality Fit Framework” referred to by Frase, English and Poston (2000, pp.11,12,14). Downing identified 18 common core premises such as “continuous improvement”, “a community of learners and learning teams”, “concentration of resources on priority targets”, “use of assessment data to adjust, improve or terminate ineffective practises or programmes” “planning for change” and “establishing a climate that continually affirms the worth and diversity of all students.” This model is still in use today and is highly relevant to the present study. It highlights governmental requirements for present day education and the importance

of an effective learning environment whilst implying that a school curriculum should be organic, changing as and when necessary, in order to maintain a “quality system”. This idea is also discussed and promulgated by Wragg (1997, p.92).

Therefore the curriculum is seen as more than a collection of subjects and syllabuses, “the whole of what is experienced in schools can have an impact on pupils e.g. subject matter, patterns of behaviour and forms of teaching and learning employed”. (Wragg, 1997, p.5). It also states that, “the curriculum is endlessly changing” (Wragg, 1997, p.92) and that there are “many ways it can be taught, learned, modulated or extended” (Wragg, 1997, p.95).

A report to Ofsted in 1995 from the University of London Institute of Education as discussed by Elliott (1998, p.83) defined eleven key characteristics of effective schools, many of which echoed the findings of the Curriculum Management Audit such as “shared vision and goals”, “pupils rights and responsibilities”, “positive reinforcement” and “high expectations”. Therefore, opinions as to what contributes towards an effective school climate seem to be fairly consistent over almost a thirty year period.

A whole school approach, in order to be successful, also needs, as discussed earlier, an effective learning climate, a sense of community, and shared social vision. Elliott (1998, p.29) expresses the view, “I have come increasingly to recognise that most learning in most settings is a communal activity, a sharing of the culture”. Wragg (1997, p.92) asks the questions, “Does the curriculum support the idea of community?”, “Are there social and team channels”, “Do pupils support each other?”, “Do teachers support pupils?”

The Ofsted Handbook (1995 p.60) says that judgments will be made on pupils regarding “showing respect for other people’s feelings, values and beliefs” and “the level of respect between’s teachers and pupils and other adults in school”. QCAa (1999, p.84) stipulates “The

quality of relationships in schools is of crucial importance in forming the pupil's attitudes to good social behaviour and self-discipline. Therefore a sense of community is vital to a "quality framework." Underpinning these philosophies is a desire for the well being of the pupil, which has strong links to the ethos of a school and are now encapsulated in the every Child Matters document.

Had school achieved this prior to the project?

Extensive work in Canada on peer counselling indicates that the best settings are those where there is a policy which actually promotes values of co-operation. (Carr cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.28). The Elton Report (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p28) demonstrated that schools could actively promote positive relationships between peers and adults. The 2006 E.S.P.C.D. whole school project fostered co-operation between staff and pupils. Academic results, and feedback from pupil and parent questionnaires indicated that the project was a success and had a positive impact upon attainment and behaviour in the playground. Running alongside this was the playground councillor scheme which was in its third year of existence. The children involved had been excellent role models and had built up a repertoire of intermediary, reconciliatory, negotiational and listening skills. The School Council is well established and school is in the process of establishing an Eco committee and a Year 6 Fair Trade initiative. Pupil participation is part of the school's framework. Therefore staff and children are well used to be given responsibility and having a voice. Therefore the staff saw the curriculum as more than a collection of subjects and syllabuses and believe that in order to create a successful learning climate, a school needs to develop a sense of community and a shared social vision.

Did this have an impact on the research project?

Development of the school climate had a positive impact on the curriculum and sustainability of the positive ethos and had prepared the background for a well-being initiative. S.E.A.L. and Miss Dorothy initiatives were incorporated into the P.H.S.E. curriculum, encouraging awareness of safety, relationship development, group work, communication skills, anti-bullying strategies and conflict resolution skills.

Because of the success of the whole school approach the school community such as Mid-day assistants, the nurture group facilitator and teachers were all keen to be a part of the research. Practicalities in terms of time, location and resources all had the clarification and support of senior management, governors and the Head. Therefore a positive climate did have an effect on the research project. It was not in isolation Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.28) states that, “without the work of a whole-school policy, the impact of any intervention will be restricted to a small sub-section of the school community and is unlikely to be maintained over time.”

Did the project have an impact on the school ethos?

Kneidler (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.29) describes five core qualities needed within a school to help maintain constructive relationships. They are co-operation, communication, positive emotional expression, appreciation of diversity and conflict resolution.

These attributes, which contribute to the common good, bear a strong resemblance to some of the values, aims and purposes explicit in the National Curriculum Handbook (1990, p.11).

Pupils, “should develop their knowledge, understanding and appreciation of different beliefs and cultures,” “be responsible and caring citizens,” “develop their ability to relate to others” and “make informed judgements and decisions.” These consistent opinions as to what contributes to the common good provide criteria from which to analyse the projects impact on the ethos of the school.

Kneidlers (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.29) defined emotional expression as, “learning to express feelings (including anger, fear, frustration) in ways which are not aggressive or destructive.” The nature of the project reinforces the value of discussing problems and difficulties with peers. Both councillor and per group shared thoughts and feelings throughout the project in their group sessions and lunches. Counsellor diaries and transcripts confirm attempts to alleviate aggressive outbursts by the focus group. Each individual member was given the implicit message that it is safe to have needs and admit that sometimes coping is difficult and that when you do you can rely on others for support. It is unlikely to be the focus group alone who have these feelings M2 illustrates this point.

Appreciation of diversity is described as “respecting difference and similarities”. The project was inclusive. It was designed to pinpoint and support marginal children and has sustained this aim by regularly using sociometric data in order to include and nurture vulnerable children and support C3 and C4.

Conflict Resolution is defined as “responding creatively to conflict.” DeCecco and Richards (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.30) suggest that, “it needs to be taught otherwise children tend to resolve conflict by using aggression, bullying or avoidance.” C1 had fallen into this pattern and very gradually began to respond to the support of the counsellors. A peer approach offered an alternative solution.

Co-operation is defined by Kreidler (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.29) as, “individuals working together, to trust help and share with each other.” The project was a communal effort including children senior management, class teachers, teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors and parents. This collegiality continues both in and out of the classroom through

the P.H.S.E. curriculum, child participation and peer collaboration initiatives. It supports Konet's finding (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.14) that befriending indicates a number of important advantages, for those who are helped, for those who help and for the school environment as a whole."

Kreidler (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.29) defines communication as, "individuals learning to observe more carefully, communicating needs and wants and listening sensitively." M.D.A.'s check lists and statements, counsellor diaries and transcripts all illustrate the use of focused observations. The focus groups communication skills did improve as their confidence and trust developed within group and lunchtime sessions.

There was, therefore, prior to the project, a collective responsibility for maintaining constructive relationships which was shared by adults and young people within the context of the school. It affected how the curriculum was delivered and how communications within the school were managed. The project sustained this and therefore the school did have an impact on the research project and vice-versa and on how individuals and groups related to each other both in and out of the classroom, during lunchtimes and when moving around school. James, et al. (1991, p.168) encapsulates this shared vision ethos when defining the effects of "peer counselling", "the very effort of helping creates a sense of autonomy and worthwhileness." and "a new element of positive co-operation into the relationship between staff and pupils." Therefore, peer counselling seems to affirm Kneidler's research based on constructive relationships and emphasises its relevance to the playground as well as the classroom.

Attributes

Can Guy Claxton's key attributes of learning which contribute to holistic teaching and learning in the classroom be applied to the playground and do they correlate with the suggested desirable attributes of a successful peer councillor cited in the literature review?

Reciprocity seems to be a dominant feature of many peer collaboration projects. Claxton (2002, p.37) defines it as, “team-work and collaboration,” and “the ability to listen, take your turn and understand the viewpoint of someone else.” Strain et al. (cited in Christopher et al., 1991, p.46) suggests that, “reciprocity increases the social skills of the socially isolated child” and that during their peer-helper intervention project, “the presence of socially responsive peers may have played an important role,” in increasing positive peer interactions.

The sociometric selection process of counsellors indicates that they were displaying a certain reciprocity and empathy in the playground in order to have been chosen. Group sessions, diary extracts and facilitator’s observations all illustrate the intuitive responses, teamwork and supportive attitude of the counsellors and also the lack of these attributes in the focus group. The gradual, though minimal, increase in the focus groups reciprocity indicates that it is a skill which can be learnt and an important attribute of a successful counsellor and component of playground dynamics. It supports the findings of Hansen and Macmillan.

Claxton includes imitation as a facet of reciprocity. He cites Vygotsky (Claxton, 2002, p.39), “The way we interpret the world, we have internalised from the significant others with whom we have worked, played or solved problems.” Both C3 and C4 in their statements stressed the importance of having a friend which in turn helped them make friends. The counsellors were excellent peer models, which supports Vygotsky’s view.

Listening is seen by Claxton as another core component of reciprocity. He suggests that it is the , “main medium through which empathy is generated and communicated.” (Claxton, 2002, p.39). Burns (cited in James et al. 1991, p.167) suggests that in peer collaboration ,”being a good listener is of first importance.” This is supported by Cartwright (2005, p.45) who states that in co-counselling people, “learn how to rediscover their natural ability to give

Resourcefulness Claxton (2002, p.25) defines as, “having a good repertoire of attitudes and strategies for confronting the world when it becomes strange or out of control.” These strategies include reasoning, different modes of thinking and capitalising, “good learners capitalise on resources around them including people.” The counsellors high social status indicates that they had developed these strategies. Their popularity indicated that their social problem solving skills were advanced. The vulnerable group, however, were in a social rut and had become dependent on M.D.A.’s and or relative isolation in the playground. They may have already developed “learned helplessness”. Martin Seligman in his book *Learned Optimism* sees this as a side-effect of depression caused by a pessimistic attitude. Claxton also stress helplessness when discussing ineffective learners, “They don’t bother to look for order or meaning because they have learned that they are not to be found.” (Claxton, 2002, p.20). This indicates a lack of Claxton’s fourth attribute of a learner, resilience. “If you think there is something wrong with you as soon as you get stuck you are not going to be able to maintain engagement.” (Claxton, 2002, p.23) In his book, Seligman suggest that optimism can be learned and helplessness alleviated. Both resourcefulness and resilience are major components of problem solving skills. McCaffrey and Lyon (1993, p.75) define, “three essential building blocks fundamental to problem solving.” These are, “communication, co-operation and affirmation.” These skills can be practised and improved by those who are experiencing difficulties with relationships.” These views echo those of Seligman and Claxton and suggest that improving emotional and mental health will lead to positive social and academic results.

Emotional intelligence is a term first coined in the United States in 1995 by psychologists John Mayer and Peter Salovey (cited in TES October 15th 2004, p.11). They defined it as, “the ability to perceive, access, generate and reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.” In 1995 the American author and psychologist Daniel

Goleman published his bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence*. By the late 1990's EI techniques were being used by psychotherapists, and schools began integrating aspects of it into the curriculum through techniques including Mind Friendly Learning, peer and self assessment and Brain Gym. The basic idea was to enhance self-awareness, emotional control, self-motivation, empathy and the ability to handle relationships. These skills were linked to effective learning and seen as bridging the gap between cognitive and emotional problem solving skills.

Initial playground questionnaires all indicated that the focus group were depressed. They had resigned themselves to social isolation and had "learned helplessness." The project provided a framework for creative problem solving. The group and lunchtime sessions allowed time for communication and co-operation. C1 and C2 gradually became more responsive. Affirmation and non-judgemental support was provided by the counsellors. The extent to which social problem skills had developed is illustrated by statements from C3 and C4 several months after the project.

Sociometric status may not have initially greatly improved but skills and confidence had obviously been acquired. C3 and C4 had continued to be supported by class circle time, friendship rotas and playground counsellors. Therefore findings supported the view of Seligman, Goleman and Claxton that there is such a mental state as learned helplessness and that coping strategies can be taught and learnt, resulting in emotional and social development. Claxton's learning attributes would seem just as relevant to the playground as the classroom.

A fifth attribute could be added to Claxton's list, that of responsibility. This was an attribute of the counsellors. They were generally on task and committed to supporting the focus group.

Thus proving that primary school children can accept and carry through challenging tasks and make a positive impact upon the community.

Peer Counsellor Training Programme

In order to achieve a relevant, personalised training programme and considering the intense nature of the project and the age of the counsellors, the more recent approach of a tailored training programme was adhered to. Timetable restrictions and relevant literature comparisons meant that five, forty minute sessions were allocated to training. Any less than this would have been insufficient time for preparation which is an ethical issue.

The specific nature of counselling required the inclusion of sessions on the aims of the project and the tools necessary for carrying out the task such as empathy, listening skills and body language. Group sessions, diary extracts and observations indicated that these skills were greatly needed, and should be a vital component in a counsellor training programme and therefore support the views of Cowie and Sharp (1996) and Christopher, Hansen & MacMillan (1991), discussed in the literature review.

The project highlighted the importance of attributes required by an effective peer counsellor and corresponded to Claxton's four R's of learning power, particularly reciprocity. Resourcefulness and resilience were also illustrated. Many entrenched behaviour patterns were repeated by the focus group and required all four R's to deal with them. This indicates they are just as relevant outside as well as inside the classroom. The training sessions on interaction techniques and handling negative behaviour were important and foster all of these qualities and support the findings of Smith et al (1991) and Cowie and Sharp (1996). The extended diary extracts of M1 and M4 indicate how important these attributes are when dealing with marginalised children.

Because of the nature of the selection process, the counsellors were shown to already have reciprocal qualities in the playground. However, resilience needs to be fostered and encouraged. Constant support and supervision played a major part in this. Adults involved in the project had regular contact and counsellors had daily access to adult support. Covert observations also kept adults informed of potentially difficult and or volatile situations. Assigned pastoral roles greatly supported cohesion and effective supervision and support. Supervision underpinned the development of the project and provided a safe place where difficulties were shared and ethical dilemmas confronted. This ethical ethos should be a major feature of any counsellor training. A finding supporting the view of Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.42), "Supervision is essential for the maintenance and development of a peer counselling service. Although the selection process was rigorous M2 found that the responsibilities of the role too demanding. If as democratic selection process is used some sort of assessment of counsellors could be built into a training programme. The difficulties experienced by M2 were not apparent until later in the project. Also it is very difficult to predict how the home situation will impact upon resilience and commitment, and again stresses the need for adequate adult supervision and sensitivity and freedom to leave the project if necessary. Therefore counselling projects undertaken by young children need extremely regular support and monitoring to ensure safety and the fostering of resilience.

Mixed group sessions and shared lunchtimes were an important part of the project.. It enabled both groups to get to know each other and built relationships. Without these lunchtime interactions would have been very difficult and added to the responsibilities and pressures of the counsellors. They also helped them put some of their skills and attributes into practice, instil trust and assess the focus group and were a learning and communications vehicle for the focus group, thereby developing confidence. This was particularly important for C1 and C2

and supported the findings of James et al. (1991, p.167) that relationships of counsellors and focus group should be built up gradually.

Because of time pressures and the logistics involved Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.42) suggestion that the training should be carried out by an “experienced counsellor or outside agency” is not feasible in many school situations and can waste valuable time. It can just as easily be tailored to suit the school and project by experienced, committed staff with assigned pastoral roles.

Ethical and legal implications stressed by Cartwright require that a peer counselling project must include confidentiality as part of its programme. This was not an issue, but is a very important point. Because of mentor and focus group domestic circumstances, there could have been disclosures from either group.

Pedagogy

Pedagogy is at the heart of teaching and learning. The National Strategies are an attempt to address this fundamental issue. The Pedagogy and Personalisation (2007, p.1) document states that the teaching profession has lacked, “a consistent and shared view of what constitutes pedagogical knowledge and expertise.” It defines pedagogy as, “the act of teaching and the rationale that supports the actions that teachers take. It is what a teacher needs to know and the range of skills that a teacher needs to use in order to make effective teaching decisions.” (p.1). Two of the core principles of pedagogy seemed pertinent to the project.. (p.2), “develop learning skills, thinking skills and personal qualities across the curriculum, inside and outside the classroom” and “develop positive and supportive relationships by creating conditions for learning.” (p.2)The project supported this ethos by helping to establish a social climate which encouraged the development of social skills outside the classroom and enhancing thinking skills and personal qualities of counsellors and the focus group. The

learning was personalised. Although the booklet refers to pedagogy and adult teachers, certain aspects can be applied to peer collaboration. Within the teaching and learning models learners are, "required to collaborate and learn together" and includes group problem solving. (p.4), another requirement fulfilled by the project. Subject and curriculum knowledge requires that, "individuals become partners in their own learning, understanding what they are learning and why." The focus group understood why they were part of the project and relied on counselling partners as part of their learning process. The teaching repertoire of skills and techniques category stresses the need for a, "range of active engagement techniques designed to draw the learner in and demand participation." (p.5). The conditions for this learning category requires that teachers should interact effectively with learners to include them and use language to build mutual respect." The project was successful in engaging the focus group. They very much looked forward to meetings and daily support. Often they used language which denoted mutual respect such as "my friend". Positive interaction was a major component of the study.

Therefore, there were pedagogical skills inherent in the project. These skills were just as pertinent outside the classroom and incorporated many of the elements of personalised learning.

Saljo (cited in Williams, 2007, p.44) argues that, "learning takes place in every interaction between human beings and constitutes an opportunity for the participants to learn." The focus group, however, seemed to have stopped learning and were in a negative social spiral, and seemed to be in a state of "learned helplessness". Therefore they needed a pedagogical model in order to make any social development. Premack and Premack (cited in Williams, 2007, pp.308-309) define such a model as observation going, "in both directions: novice to model but also model to novice." They also suggest that, "the model judges the novice according to internal standards and intervenes actively to modify the novice's performance should it depart

from the model's standards." Although this model defines adult pedagogy it also fits the project's peer counselling approach. The counsellors needed a higher social status as a benchmark of expectations for the social group and their successful social skills and standards provided aspirations and positive example.

Pedagogical traits do need to be fostered and nurtured. Relationships and trust had to be built up between counsellors and the focus group and a climate established in order for the collaboration to flourish. Pedagogy need not be the older generation teaching the younger one. Children are capable of teaching children. Certain counsellors showed more pedagogical input than others but they all showed an inherent ability. They all set out to bring about some sort of change in the focus groups behaviour. They attempted this by example, visually, verbally and by adapting to the varying needs of the focus group as M1's and M4's diaries illustrate. Apart from M2, who continued to be a playground councillor, the other mentors persisted until the project was completed. These findings also support the findings of Smucny and Aureli (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.3) that, "affiliative, conciliatory, support systems and reassurance are attributes of higher primates including our species."

The study also supports the views of Shamir and Tzuriel that tuition and guidance can advance and develop mediational styles. Without the support of an initial teaching programme the counsellors would not have had a chance to develop their pedagogical skills.

Playground Norms And Cultures

Why didn't the focus group fit into playground norms and cultures?

1). Focus Group

Perceptions were highlighted in the findings. All of the focus group, as was evident in group sessions, seemed to have a hazy perception of friends, considering them as numbers of people rather than quality relationships. Perhaps this was because they had never experienced stable ongoing friendships. This supports the view of Cattell (cited by Forgas, 1981, p.183) that perceptions are a component of small primary groups and the finding of Forgas (1981, p.200) that sociometric position has a link to a members perception of the group. Compared to the focus group the counsellors had strong friendship webs and had more complex perceptions and definitions of friendship. Therefore perceptions need to be analysed in more depth to ascertain a clearer understanding of playground norms, cultures and marginalisations.

Because of observations throughout the project, it became evident that the counsellors did belong to particular cultures which adhered to those mentioned by Pollard in the literature review.. M1 belonged to the 'good group', M3 to the 'joker group' and M2 and M4 to a 'gang group' which was based around football. The focus group, even though C2 played football, could not break into these groups. Through a lack of social skills they did not fit into any category and therefore had no social status. This supports Trevarthen and Logotheti's findings (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.7) that long term isolation had caused "unsociable and uncultured behaviour." Several factors could have also contributed to this. C1, C2 and C3 all had uneasy, aggressive relationships with siblings, which could support the theory of Dunne et al. (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5) that positive relationships with siblings enhance social development. However no mention is made of only children who have no siblings to interact with. None seemed to have experienced positive conflict which as Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.3) emphasises is necessary for social development.

C1 and C2 had limited academic, communication and language skills and this may have contributed to C1's aggression and lack of response and C2's insularity, which supports Corsaro and Streek's (1986, p.14) suggestion that language is a significant factor in the development of interactive abilities.

As Christopher, Hansen and MacMillan suggested labelling by peers could have contributed to the marginalisation. C1's aggression and anger C2's insularity and C3 and C4's frequent belligerent, unresponsive behaviour marked them out as being difficult in the playground. C1 and C2 were often easily 'wound up' by peers.

Another factor highlighted by the project was the possible effect of transience on social development. C1 and C2 had both attended several schools. They joined the school part way through Year 1 for C1 and Year 2 for C2. They both left in Year 4, again interrupting any attempt at social cohesion. C4 was an only child and had been brought up by her mother and her grandparents. and as Putallaz et al. (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5) stated, "may have been influenced by her recollections of her own childhood." She was however extremely supportive of the project and has continued to liaise with support staff to work on C4's social skills. C4 has recently become a playground counsellor and is responding well in circle time and P.H.S.E. lessons and as her statement indicates is making social progress. This supports findings again by Putallaz et al. (cited in Cowie and Sharp, 1996, p.5) that, "there is the possibility of discontinuity between parenting beliefs and behaviour across the generations." C4 as an only child had no chance of positive relationships with siblings and had to rely on peers. This could have impeded social development.

The counsellors as well as the focus group all had fairly disruptive home lives but had successfully learned to cope in the playground. Cowie and Sharp (1996, p.5) are then correct

when they suggest coping strategies and qualities of resilience need further research. This knowledge could greatly help marginalised children.

All of these findings indicate that marginalisation is a complex issue and can be caused by many factors and that playground norms and cultures are part of a complex structured domain.

Conclusion

The project illustrated that Claxton's four R's of learning could be just as relevant outside as well as inside the classroom. Findings from the project indicate that reciprocity is a major characteristic of higher primate societies, including small dynamic groups such as those found in the playground and supports Corsaro and Streeks (1986, p.296) finding that, "interaction is skewed towards reciprocity which therefore rises as the superior moral principle of the child's own world." and is a vehicle of positive conflict and or affiliation. The absence of this attribute as illustrated by the focus group can lead to isolation but peer counselling illustrates that it is a skill which can be learnt.

Researchers such as Spence, 1980; Goddard and Cross, 1987; Asher and Cole, 1990 (cited in Newton et al., 1996, p.42) looked at interventions to minimise peer rejection. Their work, "seeks to delineate individual deficits, create typologies of rejected children and look to their developmental and family histories for the origins of their difficulties." The project exemplifies this model. The focus group were all marginal but had individual needs and experiences. Specific social needs coupled with the complexity of the playground means that isolated children need to be put into context in order for their behavioural and social difficulties to be understood. As Newton et al. (1996, p.46) point out, "Actions cannot always be taken at face value because sometimes the most aggressive are those who are feeling lonely or sad. These insights can give a delightfully generous view of other people." Peer counselling proved to be a suitable and effective model for this type of research.

Throughout the project some children displayed more resilience than others despite being from similar troubled backgrounds, as illustrated by the mentors. Perhaps research needs to be carried out on how personality variables are related to criteria such as mental health and coping strategies in order to help construct effective social intervention strategies for children,

inform peer collaboration projects and understand what factors contribute to this important attribute.

The study emphasised that schools have unequalled influence in children's lives with respect to social, moral and behavioural as well as intellectual development. Peer counselling provides such an influence in a realistic and practical way. It also introduced an element of positive co-operation into the relationship between staff and pupils and created a sense of autonomy.

Peer counselling was seen to fulfil many of the aims of the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement but outside rather than inside the classroom. It, "provided support from adults and peers when needed.." (Handbook for Primary Teachers in England Key Stages 1 & 2, 1999, pp.30-35) and helped pupils, "develop the skills they need to work with a partner or group," and "manage their emotions." It "met the specific needs of individuals and groups of pupils." It can foster equality of opportunity by avoiding gender stereotyping and can incorporate looked after children, and pupils with medical and specific emotional and academic needs. It bridges the dichotomy between the needs of the individual and the needs of the wider community or group and can make a positive impact the effects of circular causation and could play an important pastoral role in transition programmes.

The study emphasised that peer counselling contributed towards citizenship and democracy through pupil participation. Pupils were, "helped to develop a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens in a modern democracy." a requirement of the National Curriculum. (Handbook for Primary Teachers in England Key Stages 1 & 2, 1999, p.4). It can also be used alongside well-being programmes such as S.E.A.L. and S.E.B.S. to enhance self awareness and social development.

The focus group continue to be supported because of existing P.H.S.E. and pastoral structures already set up and the project validated these. However, to sustain peer collaboration programmes schools need committed and experienced staff co-ordinators and senior management involvement. Recent research suggests that L.E.A.'s and government need to invest more in mental health and play projects in order to help vulnerable young people.

Therefore, peer support and collaboration projects foster and develop children's inherent empathetic and pedagogical traits. Although not a 'quick fix', peer counselling provides a framework for problem solving, support and active intervention. It is an effective, realistic way of enhancing and mobilising a small community's impact on one or more of its individuals and provides a model for a healthier world outside the classroom. Trust and taking risks by sharing or delegating power with the young will ensure that these systems will evolve with peer support at the centre, meet governmental requirements and help to address the specific needs of vulnerable children.

What are the aims of the counsellors ?

- To encourage children to feel part of the school community.
- To help them to understand the rules.
- To help them to know how we behave.
- To help them with any worries.
- To be there to listen to them.
- To encourage them to make new friends and to develop good friendships.
- To be a safe person to consult.

What skills are needed ?

- Communication.
- Showing you care about the feelings of others.
- Seeing things from their point of view.
- Recognising different responsibilities.
- Showing you understand.
- Suggesting alternative solutions.
- Explaining that actions effect themselves and others.

Listening skills.

- Sit facing them and look at them.
- Encourage them to continue.
- Concentrate.
- Nod and say, ‘mmm, and ‘I understand’.
- Do not interrupt.
- Show interest.

Body language – How you use your body.

- How you sit.
- How you move.
- Watch their movements.
- Look at their hands.
- Look at their face.
- Use sympathetic smiles and nods.

Not listening – How would you feel ?

- Frustrated.
- Angry.
- Fed up.
- Upset.
- Let down.
- Unimportant.
- Bad tempered.
- Irritated.
- A nuisance.
- That they don't care.

Questioning Techniques.

- Closed questions have yes or no answers.
- Open questions have lots of answers. E.g.
What did you want to do ?
How did that make you feel ?
- You can use WHY questions and multiple choice questions.

**I laugh
When.....**

**When I need a
hug I go to....**

**I feel different to
other people
sometimes,
when.....**

**I like to
daydream
About....**

**I get really cross
when.....**

**I am not
very good
at.....**

**I am good
At....**

**When I am at
school sometimes
I feel....**

**The most
exciting thing I
ever did was....**

**I get
Frightened
When.....**

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