

**Exploring the experience of young people involved in
counsellor-led group work in secondary schools to
inform the development of good practice in
school-based counselling**

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with exploring counsellor intervention in the social and emotional development of ten Y8 students by means of conducting group work to implement SEAL in two secondary schools in the North East of England with the intention of upholding good practice.

The aim of this research project was to explore how young people experience working in a group that is facilitated by the school counsellor and to give them a say on decisions that affect them. In order to achieve this, the study has been designed to listen to the voice of the young person to find out whether it contributes to their wellbeing.

A qualitative child-focussed methodology using a phenomenological approach was employed to explore the experience of the participants with the following questions in mind: *“What is the impact on the student?”*, *“What is the relevance of counsellor led group work for the student, the school and the practitioner?”*, and *“Is the counsellor-led group work in the best interests of the student?”*

As a result of this process, three main themes emerged that characterised the young person’s experience of the group work: positive school experience; improved self-concept; enjoyment from acquiring new skills. Analysis of the themes indicated that the counsellor-facilitated group work provided a safe, positive place for students to improve social skills as well as providing an element of therapy which contributed to their wellbeing.

The findings determined that school-based counsellors can have a valuable role to play in the development of school social and emotional programmes achievable by working collaboratively with school staff. This study makes a contribution to the development of models of good practice for school counsellors by helping to understand what is significant for interventions to be meaningful for young people. The findings also show that the students experienced a level of self-actualisation during the group work, seeing the self as ‘normal’, possible in a climate where Rogers’ core conditions prevailed.

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to each and every young person it has been my privilege to work with and to the voices of all children and young people everywhere that they may be heard.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASCA	American School Counsellor Association
ASPECT	Association of Professionals in Education and Children's Trusts
BACP	British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BMC	British Medical Journal
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
C4EO	Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services
CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CCYP	Counselling Children and Young People
CSCOR	Centre for School Counselling Outcome Research
CSRC	Counselling in Schools Research Consortium
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
EAC	European Association for Counselling
EMC	Every Child Matters
LEA	Local Education Authority
LAs	Local Authorities
MIND	(Mental Health Charity for England and Wales)
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NHS	National Health Service
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
NSF	National Service Framework
NHSP	National Healthy Schools Programme
NSPCC	National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PCTs	Primary Care Trusts

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS (page 2)

PSHE	Personal Social Health & Economic education
SDQ	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
SEAL	Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning
SEBS	Social, Emotional and Behaviour Skills
SEL	Social, Emotional Learning
TaMHS	Targeted Mental Health in Schools
TCRU	Thomas Coram Research Unit
UNCRC	United National Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (formerly United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
WHO	World Health Organisation

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) became the Department for children, Schools and Families (DCSF) in July 2007. References to DfES and DCSF are used synonymously throughout this study. The current term of reference to this Government department is Department for Education (DFE).

The abbreviation for the Department of Health (DoH) changed to DH from 2004 and references have been written accordingly.

The terms students, children and young people, and youth are used synonymously throughout this study depending upon the context. The same applies to the words students and pupils.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study began with the deployment of counsellor led group work in schools as a contribution to student emotional well-being and emotional literacy strategies. As a school counsellor in the employment of a counselling service that placed counsellors in secondary schools in the North East of England, I had become aware of how my role at the school in which I worked was expanding and evolving to meet the needs of the students. Some schools expressed an interest in group work for skill-building, managing anger and raising self-confidence. I responded by developing group work opportunities, including social skill building for self-esteem and managing emotions, over a number of years.

School staff considered the well established group work resource as concurrent to the ‘focussed learning opportunity’ modelled by the Secondary SEAL (Social, Emotional Aspects of Learning) Strategy (DfES, 2007) and, therefore, a potentially useful aid to consolidate primary school/classroom based SEAL work for Year 8 students requiring additional support. As a new initiative, there was an appreciation that the work could present an ideal research opportunity to reflect on practice and ascertain the impact on young people of counsellor intervention in school activities. Researching how the students experience the group work would enable the counselling practitioner, the counselling service and the schools it served, to ensure that interventions are relevant and in the best interests of the child. An objective of the research was to enable students to feel heard and valued and give them a say on school services in line with current thinking. To determine the best interests of the child, it is crucial that the child himself or herself be heard (Hammarberg (2008).

In an effort to validate the counsellor-led group work, it was my aim to seek expressions of the participants by collecting data that communicates their experience and to find out from that experience whether the counsellor-led group work in schools is a suitable method of contributing to their well-being.

To contextualise this study it was necessary to look at child health and education from a social perspective to help in the understanding of what brought about the school counsellor's involvement in group work interventions in schools and why it was thought necessary to research that intervention. The remainder of Chapter 1, therefore, provides context and background surrounding school counselling, including the counsellor's position, and the conceptual framework to explain the importance of this study. Finally, a rationale is presented to help justify the merit of this piece of research.

1.2 School Counselling: context and background

This section is intended to provide the reader with how I perceive my role as a counsellor working with young people in schools and the relevant educational circumstances and conditions. Looking to the bigger social picture helps to obtain a more pragmatic outline of the place of school counselling in education with an acknowledgement that the education system does not stand alone set as it is within social and historical contexts. An account of the school's position as executor of related parliamentary policy and procedure, and that of the school counsellor whose practice is bound by the same objectives is intended to highlight the role of the counsellor within this inimitable culture. A history of school counselling and of the counselling service involved in this study is dedicated to showing how the work of the school counsellor is inextricably linked to changing attitudes in child welfare and related legislation, with particular reference to social and emotional aspects of development.

Ten years ago a counsellor working in a school was a rare sighting (TES magazine, 2006). However, presently in the UK there are more school counsellors than at any other time in history. School counselling has evolved over time as a result of changes in social, economic, and political conditions (Borders & Drury, 1992); reappearing at a critical juncture in educational and social policy (Jenkins & Polat, 2006). Proctor (1993) maintains that, historically, the establishment of school counselling in the UK began in the 1960s, well after the USA where it began in the 1950s. However, Baginsky (2004), contended "*the notion that schools have some responsibility for the well-being of their pupils is not new*" (p. 4) and makes reference to the idea of pastoral care in schools (owing to the work of pioneering headmasters (King, 1999)) dating back to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the first child psychologist appointed in 1913 (Milner, 1974).

The Newsom report (1963) gave focus to the needs of pupils identified as failing to reach their potential and raised interest in the value of counselling when it recommended the employment of school counsellors. In 1965 counselling courses were established at Reading and Keele Universities for applicants with five years' teaching experience, increasing to nine full-time courses by the 1970s. Paradoxically, there was a national decline of school counselling in the 1970s, with the exception of Devon, one of a number of local education authorities that sought to provide a professional counselling service in the early 1970s (BACP, 2006).

A resurgence of school counselling arose on the back of the implications arising out of the 1989 Children Act with a new approach that directed attention to the special needs of vulnerable and at risk children requiring schools to improve pastoral care provision and stipulating that teachers undergo training in basic counselling skills (Elton Report, 1989). Pressure on teaching staff because of time restrictions as well as lack of follow-ups of the new regulations to provide adequate counsellor-related training (McGuinness, 1998) re-established a tentative practice of employing school counsellors. A defining moment in the growth and development of school counselling came about in 2004 when Margaret Hodge, the incumbent children's minister, stated in an interview that a school counsellor's role is vital and that psychological counselling should be available in all schools because it provides a lifeline and turning point for many pupils (McGinnis, 2004). Increasing recognition for schools being an appropriate setting for providing emotional/counselling support for young people is evident in the literature (Baginsky, 2004; Mabey & Sorenson, 1995; McGuinness, 1998) and has added value to the concept of the school counsellor. Viner & Barker (2005) reinforce this idea when they advocate the school environment for 'getting it right' regarding emotional work with young people.

Evidently, education in the UK has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past 20 years, and the extensive changes in education legislation have resulted in ceaseless change in school culture and development including the deployment of school-based therapeutic support for students. Though not all schools employ or access counselling services for students, school counselling has been steadily emerging as a profession in this country, though there are no precise figures.

At the time of this study around 73% of secondary schools in England provided some access to a trained counsellor for students (Faulkner, 2011). Similar figures were reported by Jenkins & Polat (2006) who estimated that 71% of schools in England and Wales provided some kind of counselling service.

Whilst the foremost contention is that school counselling in the UK has undergone a significant revival (Cooper, 2006; Jenkins & Polat, 2006), with the appearance that it is flourishing, it also appears to be fragmented and not mainstream. Faulkner reports that the support on offer for children and young people varies greatly. Counselling services across the UK are either funded by schools themselves, managed by local authorities, or provided by voluntary sector agencies (BACP, 2009). School counselling is not established in the UK with the certainty it is in the USA; its future, as in the past, dependent upon on Governmental and societal attitudes.

Counselling has, in the recent past, been made available in all post-primary schools in Northern Ireland and Wales, and Scotland has committed to providing counselling in all schools by 2015. England is the only nation in the UK that has no such commitment (Faulkner, 2011). A determinant factor of the future success of school counselling in the UK may be that of producing evidence of effective practice requiring a research based approach by counsellors and services that employ them; a feature that separates the UK standard from that of the USA (Edwards, 2003). Indeed, following a large-scale USA study *School Counselling Effectiveness* (American Counselling Association, 2007) that listed 21 effective outcomes of counselling in schools nationwide, the Institute of Medicine concluded that mental health and psychological services were essential for many students to achieve academically, and recommended that such services be considered mainstream, and not optional. A question is raised about who will be the provider of mental health care within education and the future role of the counsellor within this sector.

1.2.1 School-based Counselling Service North East England

The counselling service in which the researcher of this study was employed provided school-based counsellors to between 8-10 schools secondary schools in the North East of England at any one time.

The project developed from a joint strategy in 2002 between the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team (CAMHS) and Education to provide early intervention for secondary school children/adolescents with mental health problems in the accessible setting of schools.

The service used a collaborative model linking health and education as well as external agencies such as Social Services, Education Welfare, Home and Hospital, Learning Support and Anti-bullying. Aims of the service were to work towards preventing mental health problems from escalating into levels that put young people at risk of exclusion and avoid the need for involvement of other professionals at higher-level tiers. The counselling service was managed within the Educational Psychology Service, the school system and the CAMHS framework employing a co-ordinator to provide line management and clinical supervision to the counselling team. Counsellors generally worked 15 hours a week to meet the mental health needs of young people; specifically those at risk of developing problems such as anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders and self-harming behaviours as a result of physical and sexual abuse, drug misuse, bereavement or relationship problems.

The task of the therapist was to work collaboratively with school staff to assist in early identification and assessment of mental health concerns, to provide an accessible service for children and their families within their own locality, to offer a service that avoided lengthy waiting lists and which was seen as normal and not stigmatising. Students, aged 11-18, had direct access to the counsellor, enabling self-referral to the service as well as referrals through teaching staff. Therapists worked individually with students and also facilitated group work with the aim of promoting mental health and increasing self-esteem and confidence, as well as managing emotions. Elliott (2004) conducted research to evaluate the counselling service including an investigation of the effectiveness of therapeutic approach, gender, age differences and geographical location, from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. Elliott held the belief that this form of counselling service, using the collaborative model on this scale, was not in operation in any other Local Education Authority (LEA) in the country at that time.

Other than Elliott's research, there was ongoing evaluation of the counselling service using the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) system (Goodman, 2007). Otherwise, opportunities for researching the work of the counselling service had not thus far been realised.

1.2.2 Counselling: school's position

Greenberg et al (2003) and Ravitch (2000) contextualise the role of the school in meeting the demands of educational policy. The overarching goal for schools is to concentrate on and be effective in their fundamental mission of teaching and learning (Ravitch). However, as educators and society call for a broader educational agenda that also involves enhancing students' social emotional competence, schools are expected to do more than they have ever done in the past, often with diminishing resources (Greenberg et al).

The social emotional well-being of students in schools had become a primary mission to fulfil the tenets of Government legislation emerging from the Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2004) agenda with head teachers attempting to promote well-being and develop means to respond to the emotional needs of students. A necessary part of this process included the employment of school-based or visiting counsellors alongside other Children's Services agencies, such as Anti-bullying, to provide supportive interventions for students, as appropriate. These measures are sometimes insufficient, however, to address the ever increasing emotional needs of the students entirely in an education system where the climate of economic and time restraints mitigate against extensive individual work. In addition, the requirements of the ECM schema, including the implementation of the SEAL Strategy resource into the school system, placed an onus on schools to maximise existing resources and skills and to identify learning opportunities to support SEAL. To achieve such objectives involved professionals working together to provide students with effective programmes and services.

The schools participating in this study had completed the process of implementing and delivering Wave 1 (see figure 1), which involved the whole school working together to set policies and frameworks for the SEAL strategy.

A SEAL leader had been appointed and was responsible for rolling out and co-ordinating the programme, including the training of staff. A commitment to a whole-school approach had been determined in discussions with school governors, staff, parents and external agencies. Learning opportunities were being identified and put into practice using appropriate resources.

The promotion of the SEAL principles (developing social and emotional skills that encompass self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills for emotional health and well-being) throughout the school was taking place by displaying posters and disseminating relative information. Wave 2 of the SEAL strategy implementation involved conducting small-group interventions for children in need of additional help in developing social, emotional and behavioural skills.

The SEAL strategy recognised group work as an early-intervention approach based on the principle that some children may benefit from exploring and extending their social, emotional and behavioural skills by being members of a supportive, small group that is facilitated by an empathic adult (DfES, 2006). It was envisaged that group work would build on and enhance the curriculum offered to each child within the whole-class setting. Purposes of group work included: facilitating personal development; exploring key issues in more depth; practising new skills within a safe environment; learning more about self; developing ways of relating to others; feeling safe and taking risks; being better equipped to make wise choices; being reflective. Some class-based small-group work occurred on an ad hoc basis, but there appeared to be a need for a more focussed and sustained approach to wave 2.

The existing counsellor-led group work in one of the schools, recognised by the social inclusion department as an opportunity to combine the counsellor's experience and SEAL materials, offered optimal use of resources to contribute to the school fulfilling the wave 2 objective of the SEAL programme.

1.2.3 Researcher/counsellor position

The role of the school counsellor was to provide responsive services for students, including 1:1 counselling and group work to meet the needs of schools. Duties included supporting the emotional health of the students, strengthening emotional literacy and

facilitating the building and management of helpful relationships in the school environment.

The qualities of SEAL, based on emotional well-being whereby a whole-school approach contributes to the development of Goleman's (1995) five domains of self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills are the stock-in-trade of the therapist. It is, therefore, natural for a counsellor to work with this material.

There is largely a tendency for counselling practice in schools to provide therapeutic intervention once an issue becomes a problem rather than involvement in prevention programmes; time restrictions set against demand for therapy being a contributory factor. Counsellors employed by the counselling service involved in this study were supporting the emotional health of students; prevention and cure, theoretically, having equally important functions.

Since the SEAL intervention was weighted towards placing strategies in the education curriculum aimed at reducing potentiality for emotional difficulties in young people, it seemed appropriate for a school-based counsellor to assist in helping children acquire social competencies. However, I was aware that, by assisting in the implementation of SEAL, I would be accepting responsibility to espouse to key school objectives of improved attendance and behaviour. This presented a challenge for me as a practitioner whose approach is rooted in the use of Rogers' (1957) core conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence and whose central principle it is to provide interventions with therapeutic value for client-defined issues to enhance their emotional well-being.

The existing counsellor-led group work in school was receiving positive feedback from teaching staff and evaluation from Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (Goodman, 2007) showing some level of success. Nevertheless, a disquieting voice generated from knowledge that there was disparity of not having the student's view of their experience of participating in the group work needed to find out what group work meant for the participant. In particular, is counsellor-led group work an appropriate means to support the emotional well-being of students? Is it something that students want and value? These questions took on an even greater relevance in the light of the SEAL programme becoming the focus of group work.

This ethics based issue created a ‘moral ambiguity’ (Jones, 2008), accentuating the need to know whether the counsellor-led group work was suitable and appropriate for the students.

The literature reveals that counsellor-led group work conducted in schools is effective, with many compelling reasons to support such interventions (Brigman, 2001; Carey et al, 2005), but from a professional and personal standpoint there was a need to know if the SEAL based group work in question supports this theory. Curiosity and interest in how the students experience the group work, together with a commitment to practice responsibly, urged me to initiate this exploratory study.

In order to clarify my position it would be necessary to give consideration to the underlying concepts relating to professional practice and child development, which are set out in the following chapter.

1.3 Conceptual framework for this study

Ethical and child-centred practice provided the conceptual framework for this study; the words of Camfield et al (2008) reflected my outlook:

“Accessing children’s views in the context of their communities is important and can increase the accuracy and credibility of research data. Crucially, well-being research also foregrounds subjective meanings and experiences and provides the background for interpreting ‘best interests’.” (p.1).

SEAL was the product of Government educational policy that aimed to achieve outcomes for the sake of constructively shaping society and intended as a beneficial contribution to student well-being. My own humanistic-based counselling approach, underpinned by Rogers’ (1957) ‘self actualising tendency’, bases intervention on having therapeutic value for the client that enhances personal mental health and adheres to the values and principles of the BACP Ethical Framework (2010). This approach involves taking the time to reflect on or to research practice in order to evaluate the counselling process and what is happening for both the recipient and me; a method that concurs with Rogers’ (1957) person-centred philosophy and the BACP (2010) Ethical Framework.

In this process of reflection, a challenge arose about ‘competing obligations’ (BACP Ethical Framework, p. 6) and required attention in the interests of practising ethically. It seemed important at this point to gather perspective on the expectations of the group work from the point of view of both the school and me.

1.3.1 What the counsellor hoped to achieve

- That the group work would contribute to the well-being of the participants.
- That the group work would make a valuable contribution to the school’s existing pastoral support system for students.
- That the group work would be a positive experience for participants.
- That there would be some therapeutic value for students of working in a person-centred environment.
- That the group work would afford an opportunity for students to acquire new social, emotional skills or to build on existing ones as a contribution to living a life with improved relationships and enhanced coping abilities.
- Professional development: to gain new skills and competency in group work; to use the voice of the participants to provide well-designed programmes that include appropriate, child-centred interventions; to enhance collaborative working relationships within the school community.

1.3.2 School/student perspective

The school’s objectives were governed by the SEAL Strategy and fostered an inclusive school culture, positive behaviour, good attendance and good professional practice, in accordance with government guidance (DfES, 2007), as well as aiming to alleviate budget and time constraints. The school, therefore, hoped to achieve:

- A supplementary resource that would provide the opportunity for strengthening the implementation of SEAL for those students identified as requiring additional support.
- Opportunity for students to acquire additional social skills that contribute to improved academic results, more effective learning, higher motivation, better behaviour, higher attendance, more responsible students and reduced levels of stress and anxiety.
- A more positive school ethos.

Philip et al (2009) say “*Schools are traditionally settings where pupils are the passive recipients of things which are 'done to' them, most key decisions being made on their behalf by school staff*” (p. 1). This view was reflected in what I had seen from students readily accepting and entering into group work and other school prescribed interventions, but what would they have to say about such interventions given the chance?

In conducting the SEAL based group work in school, making reference to the relevant aspects of the ‘values’ outlined in the Ethical Framework provided focus when considering my responsibilities:

- **Fidelity:** honouring the trust placed in the practitioner. That the practitioner strives to ensure that clients’ expectations are ones that have reasonable prospects of being met; honour their agreements and promises; regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client’s trust; restrict any disclosure of confidential information about clients to furthering the purposes for which it was originally disclosed.
- **Autonomy:** respect for the client’s right to be self-governing. This principle emphasises the importance of developing a client’s ability to be self-directing within therapy and all aspects of life. Practitioners who respect their clients’ autonomy: ensure accuracy in any advertising or information given in advance of services offered; seek freely given and adequately informed consent; emphasise the value of voluntary participation in the services being offered; engage in explicit contracting in advance of any commitment by the client. The principle of autonomy opposes the manipulation of clients against their will, even for beneficial social ends.
- **Beneficence:** a commitment to promoting the client’s well-being. The principle of beneficence means acting in the best interests of the client based on professional assessment. It directs attention to working strictly within one’s limits of competence and providing services on the basis of adequate training or experience. Ensuring that the client’s best interests are achieved requires systematic monitoring of practice and outcomes by the best available means. It is considered important that research and systematic reflection inform practice. There is an obligation to use regular and ongoing supervision to enhance the quality of the services provided and to commit to updating practice by continuing professional development. An obligation to act in the

best interests of a client may become paramount when working with clients whose capacity for autonomy is diminished because of immaturity or lack of understanding.

- **Non-maleficence:** a commitment to avoiding harm to the client. Non-maleficence involves: avoiding any other form of client exploitation.
- **Justice:** the fair and impartial treatment of all clients and the provision of adequate services. The principle of justice requires being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity. It directs attention to considering conscientiously any legal requirements and obligations, and remaining alert to potential conflicts between legal and ethical obligations. Justice in the distribution of services requires the ability to determine impartially the provision of services for clients and the allocation of services between clients. A commitment to fairness requires the ability to appreciate differences between people and to be committed to equality of opportunity, and avoiding discrimination against people or groups contrary to their legitimate personal or social characteristics. Practitioners have a duty to strive to ensure a fair provision of counselling and psychotherapy services, accessible and appropriate to the needs of potential clients.

During the process of reflecting on my position and the values of the Ethical Framework, the following questions arose: *“What does the counselling approach offer in this situation?” “What are student’s perceptions of such interventions?” “What are they really getting?” “What does it mean to them?” “Is it in their best interests?” “What is the reality of counsellor involvement in this activity for them?”*

The importance of taking children's views into account is well documented in child policy: ECM (2004); NICE Guidance 20 (2009); UNCRC (1989). In order to properly hear the views of the students would require an understanding of their experience. Students involved in any extra-curricular support programme would be experiencing different ideas, emotions and expectations which, if communicated, could provide a valuable source of insight for making informed choices on how and where to place resources. Whilst the adult’s assessment of children is a valid and important part of any supportive work it should not be relied upon exclusively for working in the best interests of the child. The child perspective should also be considered (Moss & Petrie, 2004).

Another focal concept of responsible practice is the support and promotion of the profession that permitted me to practice in what I considered a very worthwhile occupation, i.e. contributing to the well-being of children and young people. Counselling services based in secondary schools across the UK are becoming common place (Cromarty & Richards, 2009).

However, services are non-statutory and demand-led (Jenkins & Polat, 2006.). Generally, school counselling services are viewed as ancillary and expendable (Scarborough & Luke, 2008). When a similar scenario existed in the USA, steps were taken by the school counselling profession to develop and implement comprehensive developmental school counselling programmes (CDSCPs) in every school (Green & Keys, 2001; Gysbers, 2001). If school counsellors in the UK wish, likewise, to determine the continuation and expansion of current provision, it is essential that they become proactive by developing research informed counselling services to illustrate how their work is a worthwhile investment in the development of young people and school communities in which they dwell. This study is a contribution, albeit a small one, to that precept.

The importance of researching practice is a concept widely acknowledged in literature (Bannister, 1970; Corey, 2009; Schon, 1983; Stedman & Dallos, 2009) and it is my belief that this study extends the understanding of how the counselling practitioner can learn from the client, in this case the student in school, to support that concept. At the time of this study the existing group work evaluation tool used by the counselling service involved was the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire pre and post measurement, a system that does not provide the information necessary to understand how the students actually experience counsellor-led work in school. Learning from the students would help the counsellor, the school, and counselling service, to determine if and what benefits result out of such work and whether counsellor intervention is an appropriate method towards succeeding in the SEAL strategy aims. To understand how SEAL group work is experienced it would be useful to access the young person's voice in order to represent their views. In efforts to justify why it was considered important to conduct this piece of research a case is presented in the following section.

1.4 Justification for conducting the research

Initiatives for young people set outside the parameters of the regular school curriculum call for validation to ensure justification and ethical practice and would ultimately need to be proven prior to becoming commonplace. Conducting research would promote practice that pays respect to the autonomy of students participating in the group work and demonstrate the value of counsellor intervention in education-based programmes.

The aim of exploring the experience of young people involved in counsellor led group work in the school setting would be to use the findings to consider, early in its establishment, merits or disadvantages, i.e. what works and why, the usefulness for the students and the schools: whether students benefited; appropriate use of resources; contribution to the school's emotional literacy schemes.

Listening to what the students have to say would provide a more inclusive means in seeking to validate the group work. Barclay & Benelli (1995) affirm the merits of drawing on child perception "*children are in a unique position to judge the quality of their early education programmes, and hence can be an important source of information*". (p. 91). According to Bragg (2007) consulting young people helps to make services more appropriate for young people's needs and ensures sustainability because young people will be more committed to and enthusiastic about these services. It helps to raise the profile of projects or initiatives in the following ways: gives them an identity, encouraging more young people to use them; improves policy by making it more sensitive, helping policymakers to understand young people's lives and perspectives; will, in some schools, help overcome disaffection and enhance school improvement; lessen young people's resistance if they feel their views are being taken into account.

Adopting a qualitative approach offered greater possibility for producing rich data to tell the story of what Y8s experience when participating in group work with the school counsellor. It could help to ascertain the effect on the student work, counsellor approach and involvement in SEAL activities. Any resulting implications would be used to inform counselling practice for future group work and suitable employment of the counsellor in the school community.

Feedback from the research to schools and the counselling service could contribute to the advancement of more effective and integrated interventions including the development of a useful, ethically-based model of practice for group work in schools, informed by research.

This study offers some degree of social critique about the way in which interventions in a young person's development are undertaken in the school setting by appraising existing systems to find out their legitimacy. Foucault (1988a) provided a perspective for this concept "*A critique is not a matter of saying things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest*" (p. 154).

1.5 Presentation of the thesis

The thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 is introductory and provides background and history of the development of counsellor-led group work in the schools involved in this study. The relevance of this study is described from the social, educational and researcher's position to help contextualise the justification for this piece of research.

Chapter 2 is designed to establish a knowledge base of significant information for the reader through the review of relevant literature as well as a critique of what information is available from corresponding studies in this field of research. This chapter provides sources of evidence and authority to support the study. Themes include: school counselling, contextualising well-being in youth, especially as it applies to the school setting, and includes a review of the background policy and practice.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to a detailed description of methodology and is concerned with the pursuit by the researcher of information to produce a suitable research design that encompasses principal issues involved in research with young people. References to data sources and collection method are made, including particulars such as the research paradigm, rationale for the research, ethical considerations, recruitment of participants and methodological procedures.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. The aim of this section of the thesis is to convey to the reader the essence of the lived experience for the student of participating in counsellor-led school-based group work. As Polkinghorne (1989) puts it “*I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.*” (p. 46). The findings provide information about the relevance for young people of being involved in group work facilitated by the school counsellor.

Chapter 5 presents the composite textural and structural descriptions of experience as they emerged from the findings as part of the data analysis process.

Chapter 6 sets out the research results in the form of a synthesis, consisting of three core themes: positive school experience; improved self-concept; enjoyment from acquiring new skills; that conveys the essential qualities of the experience of students participating in counsellor-led group work. The research outcomes are listed, the research questions discussed in relation to the literature, and contribution to research stated.

Chapter 7 closes the study with a reflexive account of the researcher process and includes limitations of the study, implications for practice, recommendations, and ideas for further research.

1.6 Research Questions

Ethical practice and child well-being are the focus of this qualitative research, explored with following research questions in mind using terminology that illustrates the best way of finding out is from the experience of the participants:

- 1) *How do I know the group work I facilitate in school is in the best interests of the child?*
- 2) *What is the relevance of counsellor led group work for the student, the school and the practitioner?*
- 3) *How do I know whether this kind of work has therapeutic value?*

The next chapter discusses material emerging out of reviewing the literature in relation to child social and emotional well-being in the school setting and school counselling within the context of the wider social and political issues.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW: CHILD SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

2.1 Introduction

This review of literature is based on the principal issues concerning counsellor intervention in the social, emotional development of young people in the secondary school setting. Looking to research and policy and what children and young people have conveyed about school-based interventions helped to develop an understanding of some of these issues. A search of pertinent matter was conducted using PsycINFO, ERIC and Google to locate literature including research studies, reports and surveys relating to school counselling and child mental health and well-being. The concept of child social and emotional well-being was pursued with specific reference to societal attitude and related legislation with its implications for practice involving the employment of counsellors in schools. The search centred on themes relating to the role of the school-based counsellor and practice that upholds the principle of being in the best interests of the child. The search looked at the policies and practice that frame child well-being and related interventions in schools that support the mental health of students in the context of learning and healthy outcomes. An aim of the search was to contribute to a more informed understanding of the structures and principles that support positive mental health of young people in the school context and the work of the school-based counsellor within that culture.

A backdrop in relation to child well-being is presented to illustrate how youth behaviour in this country is being perceived in society and how concerns raised from that perception have dominated the education and health agenda with efforts being made to forge preventative and curative measures to address what is generally considered an increasingly problematic issue.

An overview of my own concept of well-being is presented also to provide an understanding of the point of reference within which I work as a school-based counsellor.

2.2 My personal concept of well-being

When I think of well-being I view it as more of a concept than something that can be defined.

My idea of what being well in life aligns with person-centred concepts of Rogers (1959) which view human beings as having a unique personal potential and a natural inclination to strive to make their lives better. Rogers describes this continuing process of personal growth and development as the 'self-actualising tendency' which is based on the idea that the self is developed throughout life rather than innate. To what degree an individual attains their full potential depends on the social and environmental influences that surround them during the course of growing up.

An aspect of Rogers' theory separates the self into the real, or authentic, self and the ideal self. Other aspects include being positively regarded by others, having the self-esteem to achieve goals and being open to experience rather than closed and defensive. Two vital qualities of Rogers' (1961) 'fully functioning person' (pp. 187-189) are the ability to trust the self, obtainable by being guided by the organismic valuing process, and the capacity to develop a meaningful interpretation of personal experience free from set belief systems.

From my experience working as a counsellor, my estimation of what affects well-being concurs with Rogers, that though generally individuals possess the desire to function well and be self-actualising, conditions sometimes exist in a person's life that suppress this latent tendency resulting in an inability to maintain the required inner motivation. In my work with individuals I have seen how difficult life experiences have affected their creative ability to develop a positive sense of self. Consequently, personal growth and happiness have been impeded.

I have learned in the therapeutic setting that when an individual experiences that they are understood and accepted, the false fronts bound to defensiveness become less sustainable. Under these conditions the need to support the 'ideal' self dissipates and the authentic self emerges finding that it is safe to be the person they truly are. The true self finds a way to engage with deep experience without pretence and it is at this point that self growth and self-awareness enables the person to move in a forward direction towards improved well-being.

It is my belief that well-being depends on a positive self-concept that comes from developing a balance between the authentic self and the ideal self. A positive self-concept comes about from conditions that enable a person to be able free from denial of experience. Rogers (1957, 1959) describes the relevant conditions for a positive sense of self as positive regard, congruence and empathic understanding.

Again, I look to Rogers (1961) and place value in his viewpoint that individuals are in the process of 'becoming a person' which means 'becoming' (p. 172) at every stage of life whether as a child, an adolescent or an adult. Within this concept holds the value that where conditions suitable for personal growth are present lies the best chance for an individual to function well.

I also believe in a holistic approach to well-being whereby the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual aspects of the individual are taken into consideration. I see each of these aspects as crucial in their relationship to each other. Therefore, when, for example, I think of the child and the huge amount of time spent in school I wonder what might be the implications for their well-being of not being attended to holistically.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

It is acknowledged in the literature that well-being is a difficult concept to clarify with an absence of a universal definition (Pollard & Lee, 2003; WHO, 2004, Hanafin & Brooks, 2005) and ambiguity and inconsistency around the usage and function of the word well-being (Collins & Foley, 2008; ONS, 2009, Watson et al, 2012).

Ereaut & Whiting (2008) view the concept of well-being as intangible, difficult to define and even harder to measure stating that “*well being is no less than what a group or groups of people collectively agree makes a good life*” (p. 3). In its definition of health the WHO (2004) places social well-being and mental health as equal in importance to physical health and more than just the absence of illness. McGregor & Sumner’s (2009) approach uses the concept of a 3 dimensional lens bringing together material, subjective and relational well-being in a holistic way that addresses what individuals feel, as well as what they can do and be.

Research literature attempts to define well-being in relation to domains, the use of indicators and on measurement, the overriding contention being that the meaning of child well-being is the measurement of the quality of children’s lives (OECD, 2009). An array of varying indicators has been applied to many studies to measure child well-being in the interests of developing, evaluating and monitoring policy and practice. Measurement led child well-being studies have been conducted either indirectly using proxies based on observable things that can be counted, or by focussing on the use of subjective indicators such as whether a person feels happy, satisfied etc. based on individuals’ self-report (Thompson & Aked, 2009).

Ben-Arieh & Fronces (2007) assert that any attempts to grasp well-being in its entirety must use indicators on a variety of aspects of well-being including peer relations and opportunities for development. Studies in child well-being conducted by UNICEF (2007) and ONS (2009) used indicators of health and safety, material security, education and socialization, and a sense of being loved, valued, and included in the families and societies in which children are born. Whereas, OECD (2009) applied indicators based on six major policy-based aspects of children’s lives: material well-being; housing and environment; education; health and safety; risk behaviours; and quality of school life.

Pollard & Lee (2003) used a more holistic approach to studying child well-being based on five distinct domains: physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and economic. They maintained that the social domain includes only sociological perspectives and that the psychosocial perspectives fall within the psychological domain which includes indicators that pertain to emotions, mental health, or mental illness, while the cognitive domain includes those indicators that are considered intellectual or school-related in nature.

As in other studies, Pollard & Lee stressed the value of focussing on positive and negative indicators in each of the five domains when researching well-being in young people. Positive psychological indicators included adjustment, attachment, autonomy, capacity to love, competence, positive self-worth, mastery, self-concept, self-esteem. Social negative indicators included negative life events and troubled home relationships. Social psychological indicators included aggression, anger, anxiety, behaviour problems, fearfulness, inattention, loneliness, nervousness, self-centredness, stress, weeping and withdrawal. They found that the relevant social positive indicators for the 11-19 year old age group in the psychological domain consisted of relationships (school, home and peers).

Bradshaw et al (2007), on the other hand, recognised and stressed the relevancy of children exercising their rights in relation to child well-being (children being defined as people under the age of 18) and positive outcomes: *“the realisation of children’s rights and the fulfilment of the opportunity for every child to be all she or he can be in the light of a child’s abilities, potential and skills. The degree to which this is achieved can be measured in terms of positive child outcomes, whereas negative outcomes and deprivation point to the neglect of children’s rights”* (p. 135).

Some studies seek to conceptualise a state of well-being in relation to the definition of emotional health. Related surveys endorse the acquisition of and awareness of personal abilities and skills for emotional health, such as the capacity to develop and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships (Mental Health Foundation, 1999); ability to be sufficiently resilient to overcome problems and setbacks (World Health Organisation, 2004). The views of 16-18 year olds in a CAMHS (2008) review, however, perceive emotional health as being in a state that encompasses self-esteem, being healthy, secure, in control, stable and content.

Scott & Ward (2005) placed emphasis on the relationship between social and economic conditions and child well-being highlighting the importance of a cohesive approach:

“The well-being of children cannot be promoted in isolation, for they will not flourish unless their needs are met both by parents, or other primary carers, and by the environment in which they live.” (p. 14)

Some schools of thought, for example Nemours (2008), estimate that emotional and behavioural health refers to how the basic human tools of thoughts, moods, feelings, actions and reactions positively contribute to a child's healthy personal and social development. Development of such tools positively affect how children look at themselves and others, and at the same time help to evaluate challenges and explore choices, including the handling of stress, relating to other people, and making decisions. This concept is closely related to the ideology of SEAL which supports the healthy development of personal skills.

The launch of the Good Childhood Inquiry in 2006, to find out how children experience life, increased the focus on youth culture and fostered a means to define child well-being, providing a comprehensive set of information. The Inquiry was instigated as a response to the results of comparative research on children's well-being covering 25 countries in the European Union in which the UK ranked 21st, the ambivalent attitude towards youth in the UK reflected in the press, and an acknowledgement that childhood in modern society has changed significantly from that experienced by previous generations. An aim of the Inquiry was to inform, improve and inspire all relationships with children to redress the damage. Responses to questions under the headings of family, friends, leisure, school and education, behaviour, money, local environment, community, attitudes and health, from 8,000 young people surveyed, generated a wealth of information for understanding what they perceived as contributing to or hindering their well-being. Largely, they reflected feelings being generated elsewhere that the target/attainment driven culture can be obstructive to personal progress whereas positive, safe and supportive environments are enabling.

House & Loewenthal (2009) provided a detailed narrative of the findings of the Good Childhood Inquiry, based on the Layard & Dunn Report (2009), of what represents a good childhood according to the young people surveyed. Three cross-cutting themes of quality of relationships, safety and freedom are discussed to illustrate what young people most value in life revealing that high regard was placed on the love and care received by young people by the people they want to love and care for them. They placed importance on positive relationships and fair treatment to themselves and in society generally.

Young people mentioned their safety and how it is compromised by anti-social behaviour, bullying and having little money. They wanted adults to treat them 'right' and felt that it is wrong that they sometimes had to live in fear. House & Loewenthal expressed surprise concerning the third theme of freedom with the view that the children's responses of wanting freedom to enjoy their lives and make decisions, including making mistakes and learning from them, as a sign of thoughtfulness. Two commonly identified themes of importance to young people were family and friends and school and learning. Cross cutting themes emerged repeatedly in relation to family and friends. The significance of friendships in the lives of young people emerged as a very important contribution to their well-being as a valuable source of support. Young people cited education as being a key factor of a good childhood with recognition of importance of their commitment to working hard and achieving for their future well-being. A highly important aspect of school was having friends. Teachers received both negative and positive comments showing a degree of indifference. Positive comments included valuing any support, help and understanding they received and a need for positive role models with wider learning about life. Negative comments included pressure of school work and examinations. Comments about bullying raised a major and concerning issue. The subsequent report from the Inquiry (2009) called for a sea-change in social attitudes and policies to counter the damage done to children by society.

However child well-being is conceptualised or defined, the expression 'child well-being' is used in all contexts and resolutely entrenched in documentation and policy associated with child welfare at the forefront of the political agenda in England because of pressure to determine more positive future socio-economic outcomes. Ministerial publications such as 'Every Child Matters' (2004) and 'The Children's Plan' (2007), structural changes such as the appointment of children's commissioners and the development of the new local authority indicators (ONS, 2009), raised the external profile of child well-being.

2.4 Political Framework

In recent years the importance of developing emotional well-being in children has risen (DfES, 2003; Sharp, 2000) with a drive towards a more holistic approach that is based on all aspects of children's development (Preston & Bignell, 2004; Burton & Shotton, 2004; Sharp, 2000).

Gill (2009) refers to this approach as the emergence of the 'Education for Well-being of Children' movement. This altered paradigm is born out of increasing societal concerns and a response to national statistics that bring to light evidence of the prevalence of emotional disorders amongst young people aged 11-15 across all social backgrounds. Reports from related studies show that at least one in five children and adolescents have a mental health disorder, 20% of children and young people in the UK have mental health problems at some point, and one in ten have a clinically recognisable mental health disorder (CAMHS, 2004; Green et al, 2004).

An inquiry into self-harm revealed that up to one in fifteen British children deliberately hurt themselves on a regular basis (Mental Health Foundation, 2006) and ChildLine report that suicide calls have tripled over the last five years. A 25-year study of adolescent mental health by the Institute of Psychiatry at King's College London and the University of Manchester found that, compared to 1974 figures, today's 15-year-olds are more than twice as likely to display behavioural problems such as lying, stealing and disobedience, and are 70% more likely to experience emotional problems such as anxiety and depression (Barton, 2005). National statistics highlighted the evidence of the prevalence of emotional disorders amongst young people aged 11-15 across all social classes and backgrounds.

Well documented studies show increases in mental health problems and exclusions in schools in Britain (Parsons, 1996). In addition, there has been a large amount of media coverage of criminal youth behaviour and a focus on increased mental health problems amongst 16 to 25 year olds based on issues such as obesity, binge drinking, depression, suicide and behavioural problems intensifying public concern and are constant reminders of the need for the provision of services to promote and care for the mental health and well-being of youth. The Children's Society (2006) provided a brief scan of recent headlines in the UK press to illustrate the contradictory and dichotomous attitudes of society towards children and young people: "*Get these perverts off the street... or parents will*" (The Sun, 14 June 2006); "*Betrayal of innocence*" (The Mirror, 27 July 2006) contrasted sharply with societal fear of children, "*Let's tame these feral children now*" (The Independent, 29 April 2002); "*A generation of young savages*" (The Mail on Sunday, 17 April 2005); "*Yobs are laughing off their Asbo's*" (The Daily Mail, 14 January 2006).

O'Brien (2008) offered an alternative viewpoint that "*if we construct young people's behaviour as problematic and define well-being entirely in relation to pro-social normative criteria, it leaves little room for the exploration of individual's authentic identities in relation to a conception of well-being that goes beyond conformist notions of happiness*" (p. 89) and asked that the body of research on young people be critiqued and the politics that operate within it be taken into consideration.

These concerns have drawn a great deal of attention to the socio-economic environment in which children grow up including lifestyle, numerous external influences, and behaviour patterns developed in youth. The DfES (2005) acknowledged that mental problems can interfere with young people's ability to learn, develop and maintain relationships, and to deal with difficulties. In response, priority was given to conducting studies to evaluate child and adolescent health and redefine goals to promote future positive mental health for young people including: the BMJ (British Medical Journal) (2006) 'Young people's health: the need for action'; the WHO (World Health Organisation) 'Young people's health in context. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study' Survey 2001/2002; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002) 'A national survey of problem behaviour and associated risk and protective factors among young people'; the launch of the Children's Society Good Childhood Inquiry (2006). The studies highlighted the dangers of ignoring youth health and played their part in informing future investment in health and education policies for children and young people. House & Loewenthal (2009) provided impetus when highlighting a perception of the scale of this problem "*The unchallenged assumption that we face an unprecedented epidemic of mental ill-health is now central to social welfare and policy in the UK*" (p. 137).

It is evident from numerous studies not only in the UK but globally also that the swing towards the importance placed on child social and emotional well-being has been enormous and unprecedented in history. A major contributor to this precept has been the institution of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) which has become the bedrock of child policy and practice in the UK including key government initiatives such as the Children's Act 2004; Article 24 making reference to the overriding importance of mental health in good quality of life.

The Children's Act set the Every Child Matters five healthy outcomes (to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being) (DfES, 2003) in statutory form placing a duty on local authorities (LA's) and Primary Care Trusts (PCT's) to co-operate with each other to improve outcomes for children. Key reforms were made to support the statute including the appointment of a Children's Commissioner to champion the views and interests of children and young people. Parliamentary commitment to improving services for child mental health was demonstrated in 2007 when a review of CAMHS, a pledge made in the Children's Plan (2007), was conducted in the interests of promoting child well-being to ensure the meeting of educational and emotional needs of children and young people with mental health problems or at risk of developing them.

With the inception of the Coalition Government in May 2010, a move towards placing the responsibility for the promotion of mental well-being into the public health arena rather than in the domain of a single governmental department had begun, very much in evidence with the launch of the new mental health strategy for England (2011): 'No Health Without Mental Health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all ages.' Child based key principles of the strategy included: interventions involving training of professionals working with young people that enables early identification of emerging mental illness and provision of 'in time' preventative based responses; 'No decision about me, without me' in that services develop practice that involves young people in their treatment plans, outcome plans and evaluation as well as service design and commissioning; 'Commissioning' aimed at ensuring integration of children's services, inclusion of agencies working outside of the NHS or statutory sector, the development of services that are accessible, welcoming, non-stigmatising and appropriate to children's needs. According to MIND (2011) the strategy brought a welcome focus that stressed the importance of prevention and for early intervention in the lives of vulnerable children and, in particular, encouraged a more socially acceptable, less stigmatising, approach to mental health problems. However, RELATE (2011) stated that it should be noted that the government had removed the requirement for OFSTED to take into consideration how well a school protects and promotes its pupils' well-being.

2.5 The relationship between health and education

The escalating uneasiness for youth culture, reinforced by media coverage, hastened debate between the Department for Education and Skills and the National Health Service resulting in a national commitment to increasing investment in child health including addressing the social and emotional aspects of children's learning based on healthier outcomes for the future. Disapproving responses to changes in education policy in the 1990s began to accrue because of an emphasis that was moving away from valuing pupils for their humanity (Robson et al, 1999) and the personal development of children (McGuinness, 1998) towards a performance based approach related to the national economy. Ensuing criticism of an education system that appeared weighted too heavily towards the academic attainment of pupils (Preston & Bignell, 2004; Burton and Shotton, 2004; Sharp 2000) gave renewed vitality to a trend in thinking that placed increased importance in promoting emotional well-being in children. Educational policies such as National Literacy (1997), that previously gave credence to academic achievement and attainment, were superseded by those that pay attention to the emotional and social aspects of learning underpinned by the 'Every Child Matters' framework in England (DfES, 2004).

According to Dr. Elizabeth Morris, Principal of the School of Emotional Literacy, Kirkcaldy, after many years of emphasis on the cognitive and physical aspects of childhood development, organisations and leading authorities welcomed the shift of focus to the social and emotional developmental cycles of children emphasising the point that if you feel good you learn well.

Subsequently, the introduction of parliamentary policy including the Healthy Schools Initiative (DfES, 2003) and the National Framework for Children and Maternity Services (NHS, 2004) irrevocably changed the child educational and health landscape. The children's national service framework (NSF) demonstrated the importance placed on effective communication skills for children.

Two out of the 11 standards of the policy included national targets to improve children's social and emotional development, including communication, with the aim that, by 2008, 50% of children would reach a good level of development at the end of the reception year in primary school made possible by equipping parents and carers through optimising the quality of parent/child relationships sufficiently to help children develop secure attachments to benefit their health.

Other Government initiatives included the commissioning of the NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research) to conduct research to evaluate the SEBS (Social, Emotional and Behaviour Skills) pilot to follow the DfES (2006) report 'Excellence and Enjoyment - a strategy for Primary Schools' publication. The aim of the pilot was to encourage schools to take a whole-school approach to developing social, emotional and behavioural skills amongst staff and pupils and to integrate it in to their existing work. Six local authorities (LAs) were selected to take part in the pilot comprising just over 50 schools (Smith, O'Donnell, Easton & Rudd, 2007). Emerging from this piece of work was the development of SEAL which draws on the experience and learning from the SEBS pilot changing from a focus on improving learning behaviour (as in SEBS) to social emotional development of pupils (Smith et al, 2007). This revised approach to education and learning placed importance on establishing strategies in education that have a dual focus of emotional as well as academic development of young people.

The National Healthy Schools Programme (DCFS) introduced in 1999 was indicative of the strengthening relationship between the departments of health and education in England. Subsequently, the introduction of the 'Children's Plan: building brighter futures' (DCFS, 2008) was testimony to how the Government at that time built on its commitment regarding improving child welfare defining well-being in terms of physical and mental health and emotional well-being, protection from harm and neglect, education, training and recreation, the contribution made by society, and social and economic well-being (section 10 (2) of the Children Act 2004) which translated into the ECM five healthy outcomes.

Studies for treatment approaches, as well as the need to reduce the continual high rates of child mental illness, revealed many implications not least the shortage of adequately trained professionals, service fragmentation and service delivery (DfES, 2003; Shucksmith et al, 2005). This placed a huge responsibility on the policy makers, commissioners, service providers, not least schools, to successfully address the troubling and challenging issue of child and adolescent mental health. As a result there was an expansion in related children's services such as anti-bullying, counselling and other initiatives to provide support and suitable interventions that contributed to the emotional development of young people in schools. The Good Childhood Inquiry Report (2009) added to the debate stressing the importance of laying down policy based on dealing with child mental health with a recommendation for a five year plan for child psychological therapy including training at least one thousand child psychological therapists.

The changes in attitude and policy placed considerable responsibility on schools to develop an ethos that pays respect to the promotion of the social, emotional aspects of child development to contribute to learning and healthy outcomes. With the acknowledgement that all children require education and health services to support their development, it was also recognised that some would need extra help in achieving well-being through targeted and specialist services such as emotional and behavioural programmes (Ward & Scott, 2005).

The firmly held estimation that the education system has responsibility for responding to the emotional needs of young people gained universal strength over the last decade substantiated by Burton and Shotton (2004) *"There is increasing recognition that schools can play a key role in promoting the emotional well-being of children in their care. When children have learning difficulties, special programmes are put in place to enhance their learning. The same can be done to address their emotional needs"* (p. 18). NICE Guidance (2009) stated that secondary schools can provide an environment that fosters social and emotional well-being and equips young people with the ability to overcome difficulties of a social and emotional nature.

The case that schools play an especially relevant role in ensuring the healthy development of children was put by Caccamo (2000) asserting that the school is the most likely entity to take leadership for developing the necessary relationships to surround children and their families with positive supports. Caccamo maintained that the school is the only place where every child comes and that it is the only agency that has the strongest vested interest in ensuring that every child does their best, and therefore the most likely candidate to work as the catalyst to bring prevention, intervention, and treatment components into play.

Key government policy documents and initiatives stress the significance of school settings for addressing the emotional health of young people (DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2007; DH, 2005). The introduction of the NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) 'Public Health Guidance 20' (2009) which stated that "*Secondary education establishments have a clear role to play in promoting social and emotional well-being within a broader national strategy*" (p. 15) supported this point of view, as did other relative studies such as Green et al, (2005), Shucksmith et al, (2005) and Weare, (2004a).

With a recognition of the stresses placed on children and young people by modern society and the need for interventions that support their emotional well-being, allied to an acknowledgement that schools play a critical role in the delivery of children's mental health services (Ringeisen et al, 2003), recent years have seen a substantial rise in the employment of counsellors in schools in the UK to complement new and existing strategies. A huge undertaking to progress efforts to support the social emotional health of school children (aged 5-13) came in the form of The Targeted Mental Health in Schools Project (TaMHS) (DFES, 2008) when the English Government of the time made £60 million available to pilot the scheme with the aim of delivering improved support, including the employment of school counsellors, for children at risk or already experiencing mental health problems.

Examining the policies influential in child well-being and linked to the education system helped to provide perspective and expectations relating to working in the best interests of the child.

However great the support for promoting emotional well-being in the school setting, there is contention of this hypothesis. Ecclestone & Hayes (2009), for example, argued that Britain's diverse concerns are creating a range of ad hoc therapeutic interventions in schools in the name of emotional well-being with little public or academic debate about the educational implications of these developments. Furthermore, they argue that such interventions are conducted without a convincing evidence base to support them. Other concerns involve the emphasis on the therapeutic approach which gives focus towards the emotional and feelings, and away from the intellectual.

2.6 Policy framing child well-being relating to schools

Gaining an understanding of the concepts and politics framing child social and emotional well-being provided perspective in relation to the culture in which the work of the school counsellor is set. Part of that culture is by necessity governed by law, policy and social structures that determine the foundations on which the work will take place. To obtain an in-depth grasp of the framework concerning the provision of interventions to support the well-being of children and young people in schools, a review of some of the key policies was carried out. A high focus was given to the United Nations Children's Rights Convention (UNCRC) because of its application to child well-being policy and guidance world-wide and to the Every Child Matters (EMC) because of its constitutional significance to education in England and its relevance to this study.

2.6.1 United Nations Children's Rights Convention (UNCRC)

The International Save the Children Alliance (1999) state that the UNCRC "*helped to establish an internationally accepted framework for the treatment of all children*"(p. 5). Instituted in 1989, the UNCRC is founded on the United Nations human rights of respect for the individual, regardless of race, gender, language, religion, opinions, wealth or ability. Governments worldwide pledged to apply the rights to all children based on what a child needs to survive, grow, participate and fulfil their potential. The Convention, intended as the guiding principles for those who provide education and guidance for children, plays a leading role in ethical child-centred thinking with four key principles of non-discrimination (Article 2), the best interests of the child (Article 3), the right to survival and development (Article 6), and listening to and taking children

seriously (Article 12). Its progressive approach places an obligation on society to ensure that the consequences of any proposed actions concerning children be analysed and evaluated as a matter of routine before decisions are made. Article 13 states that all young people have the right to express their views on matters affecting them, recognising children as competent social actors, or experts in their own lives, (Prout, 2004) with ability to actively contribute to their environment. An integral aspect of this process is the expectation that children will be consulted, as appropriate.

Whilst it seemed as though there was widespread support for the objectives of the CRC some argued that it is an ineffective mechanism for protecting children's rights as illustrated by those countries that have ratified the CRC but violate the rights of children. This was one of the reasons given by the USA congress for opting not to ratify the UNCRC; other reasons related to sovereignty and parental rights (Blanchland, 2009). Furthering the argument against ratification is the fact that though compliance of countries to the UNCRC is monitored, the UN has no powers to enforce the rights of the Convention.

The Articles of the UNCRC had been built into child policy in England, including the ECM and other key government educational programmes and featured, for example, in the Secondary SEAL Y8 resources that promoted interpersonal and relationship skills. The government's commitment to the CRC was set out in the 'The Children's Plan' (2007): *"Our vision and ambitions set out in the Children's Plan reflect, and are informed by, both the General Principles and the Articles of the UNCRC. The content of each chapter relates to the clusters of the UNCRC and takes forward the recommendations of the UN Committee. As with the UNCRC, this Children's Plan reflects the holistic perspective of children's rights and outcomes that together will improve the lives and outcomes for children and young people"* (p. 195).

2.6.2 Every Child Matters

The Every Child Matters statement for policy, formulated to introduce ideas of support and prevention for children and young people to address disquieting socio-economic trends (Parton, 2006), was viewed by Lownsborough & O'Leary (2005) as *"one of the most significant changes in local children's services in living memory"* (p. 11).

Concerns identified in major public inquiry reports by Lord Laming and the Joint Chief Inspectors provided further impetus for developing the ECM agenda to address child safety and welfare provision in England. The ‘Getting it Right for Every Child’ programme was a similar approach to child well-being in Scotland.

Underpinning the implementation of the Children Act 2004, the ECM’s main focus was the well-being of young children from birth to age 19 with the intention to reform the delivery of public services so that children and young people would be supported to achieve five healthy outcomes: Be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; achieve economic well-being (Hoyle, 2008). A key theme of the ECM policy was the importance placed on integrating available services with the objective of optimising the delivery of accessible and personalised interventions before circumstances and/or behaviours of children and young people reach a crisis point necessitating statutory interventions. The agenda for change for children and young people included effective communication and engagement, personal development, safeguarding, promoting welfare, supporting transitions, multi-agency working and sharing information.

Key objectives included improving educational outcomes for all children, raising standards and social inclusion. The policy highlighted the influences on learning outcomes, namely: school context and ethos; teaching style and pedagogy; resources the child brings; teacher attitude and expectations; curriculum/lesson content.

All the ECM outcomes were considered intrinsic to a child’s development and well-being, each important in their own right and also mutually reinforcing. An immediately obvious problem of the ECM programme was the lack of equivalent legislation in other parts of the UK, i.e. Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, raising concerns that families who move in and out of these areas of the UK would experience different entitlements and differing service delivery arrangements (Hoyle, 2008). Hoyle pointed out that because the ECM was such a positive programme, that sets out to radically change the way services are provided for children and young people in England for the better, it would be easy not to pursue a critical line.

For that reason, Hoyle argued the necessity to develop a critique of political, social and moral relations in relation to ECM. Hoyle identified implications for practice, not least the processes and procedures involved that have potential to seriously invade and undermine the child's right to privacy that risk contravening Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, particularly the construction of databases containing intimate material for the purpose of sharing information. Hoyle outlined other implications such as drawing practitioners into the formal surveillance process, the loss of spaces for young people to explore feelings, experiences and worries away from the gaze of the state, and accountability interfering with creative practice and autonomy of the professional. Hoyle cited Hilton & Mills (2006) who found that children have concerns about invasion of their privacy, raising the question of whether the actual person 'every child' the ECM proposed to support would be reluctant to use 'sensitive services' and consequently turn away from 'official' agencies with more reliance on other sources of help and information.

2.6.3 School-centred programmes supporting the EMC agenda

During the time from the publication of ECM in 2004 until the time of this study four significant programmes were introduced to support the ECM agenda with the aim of securing the well-being and health of children and young people in England, namely: The National Healthy Schools Programme NHSP (2005) - to promote and develop four key themes in schools: PSHE; healthy eating; physical activity; and emotional health and well-being (including bullying); The Children's Plan (2007) - a £1bn 10-year strategy for education, welfare and play for children; the TaMHS programme (DCSF, 2008) – a three-year pathfinder programme aimed at supporting the development of innovative models of therapeutic and holistic mental health support in schools for children and young people aged 5 to 13 at risk of, and/or experiencing, mental health problems, and their families; NICE Public Health Guidance 20 - produced to complement existing national initiatives such as SEAL and NHSP, for all those who have a responsibility for the social and emotional well-being of young people aged 11-19 who attend any education establishment.

Central to the above-mentioned programmes was ‘whole school approach’ with joint working practices that promoted a healthy school framework and viewed young people holistically to cater for their emotional health as well as their academic progress. Schools were encouraged to establish appropriate strategies to support vulnerable individuals and their families and a positive school environment to enhance emotional health and well-being. Explicit values underpinning the healthy schools framework, to be reflected in practice, included the aim to combat stigma and discrimination, and that opportunities are provided for pupils to understand and explore feelings.

Guidance 20 was specific in its requirements and illustrated the relationship between the education and health authorities and a combined commitment to improve school systems involving improving plans, policies and activities that promote social emotional well-being and interventions that are accessible so that emotional, social and behavioural problems can be dealt with as soon as they occur. Schools were guided to ensure that practitioners possessed the knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to develop young people’s well-being defined as happiness, confidence and not feeling depressed (emotional well-being); a feeling of autonomy and control over one’s life, problem-solving skills, resilience, attentiveness and a sense of involvement with others (psychological well-being); the ability to have good relationships with others and to avoid disruptive behaviour, delinquency, violence or bullying (social well-being). Pre-requisite skills of practitioners included competency in listening and facilitating, non-judgmental attitudes, ability to manage behaviours effectively, based on an understanding of the underlying issues, and to identify and respond to the needs of young people who may be experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Difficulties in fully implementing the programmes began to emerge because of increased workloads and demands on time (Thompson & Smith (2011)).

2.6.4 Current Government: approach to policy

The new Coalition Government took up office in May 2010 with signs of new developments and a different approach to child mental health in the school emerging.

Changes comprised of different terminology being used in the child policy sector including the replacement of the word ‘safeguarding’ with that of ‘child protection’, ‘children's trusts’ with ‘local areas, better, fairer, services’ and using the term ‘help children achieve more’ in place of Every Child Matters or the five outcomes. It was difficult to locate anything precise in governmental literature expressing the new government’s intentions concerning EMC. However, the NHSP ceased at the end of March 2011 and the TaMHS Guidance has been archived, available for reference only, with the stipulation that it should not be considered to reflect current policy and guidance.

Education related media coverage reported that child-based organisations such as the children’s services union ASPECT and the NSPCC had commented in support of maintaining the ECM agenda and though concerns had not been raised about the alterations in terminology, there did appear to be speculation as to whether the terminology is a first sign of change in policy (Puffett, 2010). However, Puffett went on to report that the government had denied that changes to terminology outlined in the document indicate a change of policy direction: "*There is no lack of focus on Every Child Matters*" a DfE spokesman said, "*The coalition created the new DfE to carry through radical reforms in schools, early years and child protection.*" Regarding the current legal position of ECM, although it started as a Green Paper, it is not statutory policy. Nonetheless, it supports the current Children’s Act which gives the ECM legal status making it relevant to education policy and unlikely, therefore, to be superseded in the immediate future.

Educational guidance and policy documentation was archived with the following declaration: "*Many of the UK Government publications mentioned in this study have been archived since the inception of the new Government on 11 May 2010. The documents have been made available for reference use but should not be considered to reflect current policy or guidance*" with a caveat that it continues to reflect the current legal position unless indicated otherwise.

As of early 2011 the Government no longer supports or endorses the use of SEAL in schools.

More recent education guidance documents include key changes that place emphasis on behaviour and discipline with Ministers wanting to restore teachers' authority in the classroom. The basis of the guidance framework for education enables schools to provide a safe and structured environment, aided by a strong behaviour policy, in which teachers can teach and children can learn (DFE, 2011). There is a clear contrast in approach to education between the former Government, whose National Strategies and SEAL were based on pedagogy and personalised learning, and that of the Coalition Government whose approach is evident in statements from the proposed new guidance which places emphasis on good order being essential to enable school children to fulfil their learning potential and that pupils who are positively engaged in learning are less likely to have behaviour problems.

A view put by Humphrey et al (2010) is that future educational policy will revolve around the principle of more autonomy and freedom for schools in how they educate their pupils and what use they make of the resources made available to them, "*it is perhaps increasingly likely that schools look beyond SEAL in their efforts to promote the social and emotional skills of their pupils*" (p. 107). Against this background Humphrey draws attention to the reporting of successful implementation in schools of evidence-based programmes such as Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and Second Step and a trend to increasingly adopt such programmes.

2.7 Practice in schools to support child well-being

Examining societal attitudes and policy relating to child well-being and positive emotional health provided a conceptual framework that focussed on providing and delivering services that not only responded to the needs of children and young people in a child-focussed way but also underpinned future outcomes for both the child and society generally. It was evident from the literature that the UNCRC mandates centred on 'the best interests of the child' have been paramount in all decisions affecting children (Article 3) and have undeniably influenced practice in education.

The role of schools in promoting pupil emotional well-being has been well documented in Government legislation and policy including The Children Act (2004), ECM, and the Education and Inspections Act (2006), as well as governmental guidance literature. Whilst emphasising that excellent teaching and learning is the core business of schools guidance, documents make reference to the significant contribution schools can and do play in other aspects of well-being necessary because of the impact on children's ability to learn and develop. The DCSF (2008) stated that schools, as the universal service for children and their families, are uniquely well-placed to contribute to all aspects of their well-being, working with parents and with other services. Collaborative working practices between children's services, multi-agency teams of professionals and school staff to form a 'team around the child' had become the support mechanism for students requiring additional help socially and emotionally.

Reviewing policy revealed some of the key aspects setting and underpinning standards for good practice in the support of the emotional health of young people in schools including 'early intervention', 'child-centred approach', 'collaborative working practice', 'consulting young people', 'environment' and 'practitioner skills'. Each aspect is discussed in the next section to develop an understanding of the contribution practice makes to supporting student well-being.

2.7.1 Early intervention

The reforms of the Education Act (2004) moved away from dealing with consequences of problems towards an emphasis on prevention and early intervention; the school setting considered to be crucial in delivering and supporting effective early intervention where need can be identified and met at the earliest opportunity (Sharp & Filmer-Sankey, 2010), especially for those considered 'at risk' (DfES, 2006). Effective support and early intervention are regarded as critically important factors for improving children's lives and resolving difficulties; the consensus being that, with the right support, many children and young people experiencing difficulties in schools, go on to catch up with their peers (DFES, 2008). Early intervention in helping to manage children's more complex behaviours was viewed as playing a significant role in helping to largely reduce suspensions and exclusions in schools (OFSTED, 2009).

Major government policy documentation stressed the relevance and importance of mental health promotion as part of early intervention strategy, as in the ECM Green Paper (DfES, 2003): *“Too often children experience difficulties at home or at school, but receive too little help too late, once problems have reached crisis point”* (p. 5). This view is voiced in many children’s services sectors, for example, The Early Intervention Expert Group (C4EO, 2010): *“The growing interest in early intervention as a policy issue reflects the widespread recognition that it is better to identify problems early and intervene effectively to prevent their escalation than to respond only when the difficulty has become so acute as to demand action”* (p. 4). The C4EO (Sharp & Filmer-Sankey, 2010) found a rich source of evidence to support the importance of early, not only in terms of the social and personal benefits it can generate, but also in terms of making economic sense; the policy question being *“not whether we should invest in early intervention, but how can we not do so?”* (p. 4).

Evidence from research shows that early prevention programmes for children that develop protective factors are more effective than those which try to reduce existing negative behavior (Browne et al, 2004).

There is increasing evidence of the school counselling as an effective early intervention strategy, i.e an evaluation of the ‘Place2Be’ in-school counselling service in Edinburgh, conducted by MVA Consultancy (Bryan, 2007), reported that early intervention by ‘Place2Be’ made a real difference by being there when nobody else was willing to listen to children. BACP (2011) reported that counselling is a proven effective early intervention strategy for young people who have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and can take the strain away from, and prevent young people needing access to, existing CAMHS services.

2.7.2 Child-centred approach

Contemporary child social policy initiatives such as ECM (2004) and ‘Getting it Right’ (2008) validated the child-centred approach in practice and required that it be incorporated into service delivery. Reid (1996) illustrated the intricacy of ensuring that the child is at the centre of the care they receive:

“Providing a child-centred practice involves a commitment to examining the consequences of professional practice on children, and making explicit the ideological and ethical base on which decisions regarding children are based. It proposes an ethical stance in relation to practice which demands that the interests and welfare of the child be paramount, allowing children to challenge interpretations of their own interests and to express their own perceptions and beliefs” (p. 6).

The interests and welfare of the child as the principal underpinning of child policy and guidance requires services to be child-centred, relevant, accessible, visible and fundamentally focussed on addressing children’s needs, including allowing children to challenge interpretations of their own interests and for self-expression (Wood, 2007; Garcia et al, 2007).

Lavis (2009) draws the distinction between a person-centred approach, defined as one that looks at the needs of the child and designs interventions around those needs, and a child-focussed approach which locates problems within children and expects them to change. Young Minds (Lavis, 2009) found the person-centred approach the most effective between the two.

The child-centred concept is influenced by humanistic psychology brought to prominence by key theorists such as Rogers (1951/1969), Maslow (1954) and Moustakas (1973) whose work involved many years of experience working psychologically with children, recognising the importance of the whole child including feelings, emotions and cognition, advanced a humanistic approach to learning and child development that focuses on developing a child’s self-concept through self-awareness. Rogers’ facilitative style adopted an open and responsive attitude towards students providing conditions of empathic understanding, acceptance and positive regard for maximising potential for personal growth or ‘constructive tendency’ (Rogers, 1980). However, Fler (2003) challenged static child concepts and proposed a greater critique regarding child related notions such as ‘child-centred’ that remove children from the adult world. Fler argues rather for “*child embeddedness*” which means integrally involving children in the real world of their families in rich and meaningful ways.

The perspective of Korczak (1967) encapsulates the essence of child-centred practice: *“An educator who does not enforce but sets free, does not drag but uplifts, does not crush but shapes, does not dictate but instructs, does not demand but requests, will experience inspired moments with the child”* (p. 76).

2.7.3 Collaborative working practice

Integrated working practice amongst children’s services has been central to policy and practice in promoting child and adolescent well-being (ECM/CWDC, 2007). Two crucial societal factors were instrumental in the ideology promoting interagency collaboration. Firstly, the requirement for ‘joined up’ working practices in children’s services arose out of the Laming Inquiry Report (2003) conducted in response to high profile cases involving child protection issues. The intention of professionals joining up to share information was to close gaps in knowledge in the interests of keeping children safe. Joined up practice involves everyone supporting children and young people working together effectively to put the child at the centre, meet their needs and improve their lives. Secondly, the ECM provided a new framework in which integrated working practices within children’s services formed a pivotal role for placing focus on delivering services in which children’s needs are identified and assessed early so that they receive timely and appropriate responses.

Acknowledged as a challenging task, factors instrumental in facilitating collaborative working practice include having a clear understanding of the different roles and expertise of staff, having a clear rationale for working jointly and arranging informal meetings, networking and team building (DoH, 2004). Sharp & Filmer-Sankey (2010) acknowledged that whilst progress has been made in respect of inter-agency working, there is still much more to do, pointing out some of the key characteristics of effective practice which include having a shared vision, sharp focus on improving outcomes, and investment in time for building trust and strong relationships to secure commitment from all agencies. Inter-agency and collaborative working practice is rooted in the relationship between evidence, practice and outcomes and set against a backdrop of challenges involving professional identity and effective management of data and its outcomes (Frost & Stein, 2009.)

Frost & Stein highlight the argument that to significantly improve integrated professional practice requires reflective practice which offers a way forward in balancing policy frameworks and the realities of practice in the front line.

There is evidence to suggest effective collaborative working practices between teachers and counsellors in schools. A study conducted in a school in the USA (Stringer, Reynolds & Simpson, 2003) using the 'Tennessee Self-concept Scale' (Fitts & Warren, 1996) reported a significant increase in the identity score (self-view), post counsellor/teacher collaborative practice, of students aged between 7-9 years. The high self-review scores indicating that student are able to tolerate stress associated with change in other areas of self-concept. A low identity score would indicate students had self-doubt and more inflexible self-concept. Simpson et al view collaboration between teachers and counsellors as a logical option when scheduling time for group counselling, contending that their goals, i.e. working toward the mental health of students, overlap.

2.7.4 Consulting young people

There is a view that often in practice information about children and young people is obtained from adult and professional perspectives and not from children and young people themselves (Reid, 1996). Reid points out that though it cannot be expected for children and young people to have knowledge and understanding both of the concept and process of legislation and government policy, they do in fact experience the implementation of policy and can provide valuable feedback about their experiences in families, schools and services they access. Furthermore, Reid noted that children and young people are eager to express their opinions and experiences of a wide range of issues when asked to do so in a genuine and respectful manner. Kirby (2004) upholds the contention that as soon as they are able to communicate and participate in the decisions that affect them, children should be encouraged to express their views, ask questions and discuss their health worries. The BMA (British Medical Association) (2001) goes further and asserts that if children are excluded from decision-making, there must be justification for that stance.

The Mental Health Foundation (Garcia et al, 2007) advocate listening to what young people have to say as a basic principle of practice including that service users (children and young people) are central to the research process: “*Listening to what young people have to say about services is fundamental to developing new and existing services.*” (p. 14). Carmen Martinez (2004) put forward the public value view of young people stressing the importance of collaboration and urging active participation and partnership to improve the way we serve them, insisting that the more comprehensively we work with young people as service partners, the more we increase our public value to the entire community. A firm supporter of child participation, Korczak (1967), talked about his experience of working with children and how a decisive moment between educator and child comes from speaking not to children but with children, not of what he would like them to be but of what they would like to be and could be. Korczak contended that a great deal could be learned from children; that they make, and have every right to make, demands, conditions and reservations.

There is evidence to indicate a phenomenal increase in the interest in developing pupil participation in schools. Research amongst young people outlines the importance of involving them in decisions and processes about their own mental health (McKenzie et al, 2011). UK school policy and Government directives (for example, DfES, 2003; DoH, 2003/4, DCSF, 2007) required that young people be consulted on matters that affect them, an imperative reflected in a study by the Mental Health Foundation (2007). The findings of Sixsmith et al (2007) reinforced the need to gain children’s perspectives rather than relying on adult perceptions of children’s perspectives, in order to inform quality service, practice and policy developments.

Not only is child consultation seen as imperative for good practice, children and young people actually have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them, promoted in law, policy and guidance such as UNCRC and the Children Act (Badham & Wade, 2008). Moss & Petrie (2004) outline the impact on children of taking into account their perspectives about school and having their rights respected such as an increase in their inclusion and empowerment in the school setting. It has long been established that client motivation and consent to treatment forms an essential part of the therapeutic alliance and therapeutic efficacy of counselling (Everall & Paulson, 2002).

Common practice is that a student's consent is acquired prior to working with a counsellor in school and that the student is provided with sufficient information about the counsellor's role and what counselling is in a way that it can be easily understood. It could be said that this approach acts as a contribution to the positive learning culture defined by Flutter & Rudduck (2004) as one in which students' feel they are listened to, taken seriously and respected.

Despite a universal understanding about the importance placed on consulting children and young people, the extent to which child participation in education practice is realized depends upon the approach of individual educational establishments and their level of commitment to children's rights (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Morrow & Mayall, 2009). Flutter & Rudduck (2004) provide an example of students as fully active participants and co-researchers in the school setting using Hart's (1997) 'Ladder of children's participation' in decision-making (p. 16) wherein students and teachers jointly initiate enquiry, pupils play an active role in decision making, and together teachers and students use data for action plans and reviewing the impact of interventions. (Noted in a review of pupil's involvement in decision making in education by Davies & Kirkpatrick, 2000).

England is some way behind certain European countries in terms of a legal framework for pupil voice and progress is slow. A more recent initiative to ensure that practice adheres more rigidly to policy and guidance was that of the Self Evaluation Form (OFSTED, 2007) that required schools to not only gather views of students for inclusion in schools inspections but also to show that they had been acted upon.

Barriers to child participation in decision-making have been identified, however, and chiefly relate to limited resources of time and staff capacity as well as the low status that adults often accorded to children's opinions on account of their age (Davey, 2010).

2.7.5 Cultivating an emotionally supportive environment

The literature contains a phenomenal amount of material outlining the significance of environment in relation to healthy child development; the consensus being that child well-being and environmental quality are inextricably linked (Thomas & Thompson, 2004).

The WHO (2000) accentuates the growing attention given to the effects of the environment in relation to personal well-being pointing out that research has shown that there can be a strong relationship between social settings and short and long-term emotional well-being.

Within the school context Konu & Lintonen (2006) considered that the school environment has a major impact on behaviour and emotional well-being. Environment was very much on the agenda of Rogers (1969) in his humanistic approach to education which emphasised that 'freedom to learn' can best be achieved in an atmosphere in which students are engaged in collaborative learning activities and classroom talk with peers that require multiple levels of thinking. Rogers contended that students benefit from teacher expertise in an environment where learning is 'facilitated' rather than transmitted and that is emotionally warm and supportive. Furthermore, his research showed the positive effects of a caring empathic approach to students resulting in more positive attitudes towards school and increased self-esteem and attainment.

The DfES (2005) considered four main factors to be significant in relation to environment and impact on learning: physical, relationships, structures and expectations, language and communication, urging school staff to consider what it is about a classroom that might promote positive behaviour for learning, and regular attendance. It is interesting to note the lack of emphasis in relation to any emotional aspects of the school environment at that stage. Relationships, communication, physical aspects of school etc. each exact an emotional reaction or response from students as they go about their school life, e.g. what do students feel when they walk into a classroom with a physical climate that is either jaded and uninspiring or, on the other hand, inspiring and motivational? How does a student feel when carrying around the emotional burden of a difficult relationship?

The introduction of the SEAL strategy acknowledged schools as social systems and led the way in English educational policy to acknowledging the importance of creating emotionally healthy school environments.

Part of the Strategy was to create school environments that would be less likely to trigger emotional and social problems in the first place (DfES, 2007): *“The ongoing challenge for schools will be to... create and maintain a supportive environment, culture and ethos”* (p. 24) .

Factors contributing to mental health and well-being in an educational setting can range from safety and cleanliness of the surroundings to the degree of welcome and enjoyment available (Alexander, 2002). UNICEF (WHO, 2000) emphasised the significance of the personal and social environment of the school on the lives of its students in its healthy schools framework and stressed the requirement for schools to be child-friendly and to ensure a physically safe, emotionally secure and psychologically enabling environment for every child.

Many studies increasingly and consistently show a clear link between the qualities of the school environment and improved learning outcomes (Berry, 2002; Konu & Lintonen, 2006, Van Petegem, 2008). *“Considering how much time most children spend at school, psycho-social dimensions of schools have sparked the interest of a growing number of researchers concerned with school effectiveness and the emotional well-being of young people”* (WHO, 2000).

According to the WHO a school’s environment has the potential to enhance social and emotional well-being for its students provided that it has healthy psycho-social conditions that: are warm, friendly and rewards learning; promotes cooperation rather than competition; facilitates supportive, open communications; views the provision of creative opportunities as important; prevents physical punishment, bullying, harassment and violence, by encouraging the development of procedures and policies that do not support physical punishment and that promote non-violent interaction on the playground, in class and among staff and students; promotes the rights of boys and girls through equal opportunities and democratic procedures.

Patton (2000) specifies other school environmental factors shown to be related to a wide range of mental health outcomes, such as a sense of connectedness, good communication, and perceptions of whether adults are caring. Factors reflected by Clement (Eds.) (Lovat, 2010).

Research and child social emotional well-being policy provide a clear and well documented theory of what constitutes a positive school environment, key elements being that it should be physically safe, emotionally secure, psychologically enabling and generally supportive. The literature indicates that achieving these conditions is reliant on the quality of the professionals working in schools and their ability to create and sustain such an environment highlighting implications for practice. Many studies focus on practitioner skills and approach which have a bearing on the physical nature of the environment, teacher/student relationships, and student self-concept. Groundwater-Smith et al (1998) point out practitioner obligation for providing an emotionally positive environment in the school classroom: *“It is the teacher’s responsibility to value each and every one of the students in their class, so that each student feels special and important”* (p. 95), whereas SEAL fosters a shared responsibility approach with an expectation that every adult working in schools has a role to play in cultivating an emotionally supportive and positive environment.

2.7.6 Practitioner skills and qualities for working with young people

Research has shown that the interpersonal qualities of the practitioner are amongst the strongest determinant of whether or not people engage with interventions (Sharp & Filmer-Sankey, 2010). A point expounded by Humphrey et al (2008) in a SEAL small group work evaluation research report which noted that the skills, knowledge and experience of the small group facilitator were crucial. Research has consistently found that children, young people and families who are in need of support, value and are more likely to engage with practitioners who are accessible, approachable and responsive.

‘The Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children and Young People’s Workforce’ (Common Core) (CWDC, 2010) lists and describes the common skills and knowledge that everyone working with young people is expected to have. The Common Core emphasizes the need for practitioners to have effective communication and engagement with children, young people and families with ability to establish trust, make information purposeful and understood, and know how to listen, empathise, explain, consult and seek support.

Furthermore, the Common Core calls for practitioners to have an understanding of the developmental changes children and young people go through so that their behaviour can be interpreted correctly and responded to in a way that supports their needs as they emerge.

2.7.7 Interventions

2.7.7.1 Overview

The new paradigm in educational policy with focus on prevention and health promotion strategies for healthy outcomes significantly altered the way in which child mental health issues had been addressed in schools over the past decade or so. Schools acted to broaden the base for preventative as well as therapeutic and supportive interventions in the mental health of young people. Efforts had been made to identify effective emotional support mechanisms to keep pace with changes in the mental health requirements of educational policy as expressed by Corey (2008) “*Today, more than ever, mental health practitioners are being challenged to develop new strategies for both preventing and treating psychological problems*” (p. 3). Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small & Jacobson (2009) discussed how the role of teachers in schools in the USA has changed and expanded over the past few decades with expectations for them to support students emotionally at the same time as providing quality instruction with added pressures of attaining test scores targets being widely reported. A similar situation was developing for teachers in schools in the UK.

There were features showing up from research to illustrate that intervention, including supportive relationships, a high degree of participation by staff and students, clarity of structures, boundaries and relationships and encouragement of autonomy, leads to a wide range of positive child mental health and academic outcomes (Weare, 2000). WHO (2004) added weight to this hypothesis maintaining that evidence of the effectiveness of interventions is growing and that a range of biological, environmental and psychological risk and protective factors are amenable to intervention.

Though considerable effort has been spent on identifying need and monitoring outcomes of programmes to support policy objectives such as Every Child Matters, Ward & Scott (2005) suggested that less is known about which interventions are effective. Sorhaindo (2007), however, puts forward the case for the development of life skills and social and emotional development as an effective intervention for reducing negative health outcomes and as such address health risk behaviours by improving young people's experiences in school. Sorhaindo suggested the evidence shows that school interventions are most effective when the whole school is involved in improving quality of the relationships that take place in that setting with recommendations for them being instituted over an extended amount of time rather than for short periods if they are to be most effective.

Generally interventions to support the positive mental health of students in schools in England, sometimes proactive, sometimes reactive, have been implemented in line with Government guidelines at different levels using different approaches comprised of those applied generally across the school population (universal), such as PSHE lessons, SEAL and Circle Time delivered by teaching staff. More specific psychological and emotionally supportive Children's Services interventions have involved special needs staff, educational psychology, anti-bullying, attendance consultants, parent support, transition support (moving schools) and behaviour support services. In Many schools counselling has been offered to those with identified risk factors or early symptoms of developmental health problems brought to light because of troublesome behaviour, learning difficulties or poor attendance. Indicated interventions occur in cases of high risk targeted at those showing early signs of mental ill health (Edwards, 2003).

Health Service interventions include the school nursing service, a speech and language therapy service, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and drug action teams. Increasingly, voluntary and community services are invited into schools including creative arts, sex and relationships education and youth work, and with particular social, faith and ethnic groups (DfES, 2007).

Other interventions taking place in schools such as circle time and peer support systems depend upon contextual factors such as school management mind-set, available resources and identified need.

Research, in the main, supports the role of peer support in schools, albeit with an air of caution, and highlights some of the advantages of including such a programme in the pastoral system (Vincent, Warden & Duffy, 2006; Visser, 2004). Advantages are framed in terms of both the seeker of help of preferring to talk to someone nearer their own age in a supportive environment, and the helper who benefits from gaining skills and growing in maturity (Baginsky, 2004). Disadvantages include time restrictions for sustaining and maintaining peer support programmes, negative peer pressure, and pressures from hearing information of a confidential nature. More grave concerns arose from findings showing serious consequences for pupils if the peer supporters did not receive appropriate and careful training and continued support as well as possible aggravation of problems where they were dealt with unwisely (Baginsky, 2004).

The interest of teachers and educational psychologists in circle time, underpinned by principles of equal participation, reciprocity and collective knowledge, has grown over recent years according to Lown (2002) and is a technique that has rapidly grown in popularity among teachers in the past years. Working in a circle contributes to well-being by helping students to develop trust and respect for diversity of experience and to foster listening and speaking skills. Contemporary reporting of the application of circle time in schools including that of Lown (2002) and OFSTED (2009) supports the view that circle time can have a positive effect on the behaviour of children. However, a conflicting view of circle time in schools came from Ecclestone & Hayes (2009) associating it with therapy and a prioritization of the emotions which they consider to be ‘demeaning’ and leading to diminished selves.

2.7.7.2 Small group work

There is considerable evidence for the value of giving group work a much more central role in educational policy and school practice. A commonly accepted view is that group work gives value for money compared to 1:1 support. Blatchford et al (2008) commented “*Given space and time to develop pupils’ group working skills, teachers can bring about a transformation in the teaching and learning environment*” (p. 3).

The implementation of SEAL into the curriculum of primary schools brought about active encouragement to explore different approaches to support identified school improvement priorities rather than to follow a single model to allow for tailoring interventions to circumstances and needs (Humphrey et al, 2010). In response, some schools elected to deliver SEAL using small group work in accordance with the National Strategies 'Waves of intervention model' (DfES, 2005), either as a universal intervention (Wave 1), or as a target intervention (Wave 2) for those students identified by teaching staff as requiring additional help in developing skills.

The report of a Five-Term Longitudinal Evaluation of the Secondary National Strategy Pilot (Ofsted, 2007) commented on group work being conducted in schools by teaching staff to support the Secondary National Strategy stating that regular group work has shown to be a successful approach in the integration of the Strategy into schools to build cooperation and team work and showing a significant positive effect of pupils' interactions with each other. Proof indeed, of the relevancy of group work in schools and its contribution to the well-being of young people. However, the report further commented: *"These programmes need to be continued for a significant period of time before there is a measurable impact on pupils' skills. This is not a 'quick-fix' approach, but one that takes time, commitment, tenacity, vision and strategic leadership before the rewards are reaped"* (p. 17). This raises the question of time, resources and sustainability of such programmes.

It was difficult to locate research material concerning counsellor led group work in schools in the UK. Though Baginsky (2003a) located evidence of effective group work being conducted in primary schools and Garrett (2005) found that school social workers use group work extensively in efforts to help students overcome common barriers to achieving educational success. Garrett's survey showed that group work has the advantage of serving several students simultaneously, developing social skills, providing a forum for students to give aid to others and accept help, realizing that others share their challenges, collaborating, cooperating, and sharing.

The majority of group work practice in schools and associated research has been conducted in the USA. According to Corey (2007) considerable empirical support has been gathering to prove that counsellor led group work is effective in prevention as well as remedially. The ASCA position statement (1999) regards group counselling to be an efficient and effective way of dealing with students' developmental problems and situational concerns. Thompson (2002) called for group counselling to be an “*integral component of the school counselling programmes*” (p. 222). Carey et al (2005) reported many positive research outcomes relating to group work including: making a significant difference in acting-out behaviours (Brantley & Brantley, 1966); a significant increase in self-esteem and academic self-concept (Bauer, Sapp & Johnson, 2000); improvements in middle school student's self-concept (St. Clair, 1998). Further findings revealed that social skills training group work develops adolescents' skills and reduces aggressive and hostile behaviour (Whiston & Sexton, 1998) and a reduction of teacher reports and referrals for disciplinary problems.

Specific benefits and advantages deriving from small group work in schools have been highlighted in the literature under headings ranging from ‘mutual aid’ to ‘good use of resources’. For example, “*When members give and receive support and help from each other, this mutual aid empowers students to feel useful while learning to accept help and support*” (Garrett, 2005, p. 75). Yalom (1995) found that students receiving support from other students and having the opportunity to be helpful can increase self-esteem. Garrett argued that in addition to being a good use of school social workers' time, groups offer many advantages over work with individual students. According to Greenberg et al (2003) many factors contributed to the effectiveness of group counselling. Examples included: experiencing universality in the knowledge that others have similar challenges (Greenberg et al, 2003) and providing a milieu for peer interaction and observation of peer role models (Brigman & Goodman, 2001).

Yalom (2005) posited that group work is a social activity involving social learning or the development of basic social skills and as such has intrinsic therapeutic value. Also that group work is an instrument or agent of change brought about by process related to the power of the group and the facilitators that acknowledges the possibility of therapy as an outcome.

2.7.7.3 SEAL

The introduction of SEAL into schools acknowledged the principle of the relationship of positive mental health to learning. Being amongst the most prominent of recent changes in educational practice, SEAL highlighted the significance given to the relevance of social and emotional development of children and its contribution to positive outcomes. SEAL is “*a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools*” (p.4) (DCSF, 2007).

The concept of SEAL can be more clearly understood within the context of emotional literacy, i.e. the ability to recognize, label, and understand feelings in the self and others, and its role in education. Being a prerequisite skill to emotional regulation, it is considered to be one of the most important skills that a child can be taught in the early years to enhance problem solving and the development of successful interpersonal interactions (Webster-Stratton, 1999). Salovey and Mayer (1990) originally coined the term ‘emotional intelligence’ stimulating renewed interest and attention to the relevance of emotional literacy in human development. Goleman (1995) and his popularisation of the construct of emotional intelligence has been credited for raising its agenda in education. The SEAL strategy was significantly influenced by Goleman’s concept that the child’s emotional and social skills can be cultivated so that through the building of skills (5 emotional competencies basic to social emotional learning) a child is able to gain advantages with regard to immediate and future well-being. Sharp (2000), however, attributes the increased interest in the area of emotional intelligence and emotional literacy to a “*growing disenchantment with an over-emphasis on IQ and on cognitive skills and ability*” (p. 8). Averill (2004) provided a subjective account of what emotional literacy represents “*...it has an easily recognisable grain of truth. We all know people who are emotionally adept: Whatever the occasion, they seem to experience the right emotion, in the right way, for the right reason and with good effect. Moreover, a disconnect sometimes appears between emotional adeptness and intellectual ability. The academically brilliant but emotionally challenged nerd is more than the fictional object of jokes*” (p. 228).

Drawing on the work of Sharp (2001), Steiner (1997) and Orbach (1999) provides clarity on what can sometimes be a misunderstood aspect of human nature and helps to elucidate the concept of emotional literacy with its central dynamic of relationships with self and others. The importance of this concept was understood many hundreds of years ago being central to the teachings of Greek philosophers, Socrates amongst them, embodied in the words “know thyself”. Goleman (1995) refers to knowing thyself (awareness of one’s own feelings as they occur) as the keystone of emotional intelligence (p. 46). Sharp sees emotional literacy in education as the fourth ‘r’ representing ‘relationships’ with as much value in the curriculum as the three ‘r’s’ of writing, reading and arithmetic. Sharp describes emotional literacy as helping people to recognise, understand, handle and appropriately express their emotions stressing the significance of this in relation to facilitating the nurturing of relationships and of interacting with others, especially within the school education system which can be instrumental in preventing children from constructing habits of meeting needs in negative ways.

Steiner (1997) conveys the significance of emotional literacy in transactional analysis:

“To be emotionally literate is to be able to handle emotions in a way that improves your personal power and improves the quality of life for you, and equally important, the quality of life for the people around you” (p. 11)

i.e. listening to one’s own inner impulses generates information that is more detailed and more specialised about our own lives rather than depending on social convention which is primarily concerned with group survival and not the individual.

Orbach outlines the meaning of emotional literacy:

“being able to recognise what you are feeling so that it doesn’t interfere with thinking, it becomes another dimension to draw upon when making decisions or encountering situation”. (p. 84)

Within education the term emotional literacy has tended to be preferred to emotional intelligence because it breaks away from the notion of fixed level of abilities (Burton & Shotton, 2004). There can be no doubt that emotional literacy contributed significantly to all five national outcomes of ECM (2004) and their specific aims for children and young people.

Primarily, the aims of SEAL were to help schools to create a safe and emotionally healthy learning environment in which pupils could learn effectively and to promote the learning of skills (aspects of learning) identified by Goleman as five competencies of emotional literacy that were considered essential for young people to achieve the following outcomes: self-awareness (knowing myself and understanding my feelings); managing feelings (managing expression of emotions, learning how to change uncomfortable feelings and increase pleasant feelings); motivation (working towards goals, learning persistence, resilience and optimism, and self-evaluation/ review); empathy (understanding the thoughts and feelings of others, respecting and supporting others); social skills (building and maintaining relationships; belonging to groups, solving problems, including interpersonal ones).

The ‘aspects’ were considered to fall into two categories – the personal (e.g. self awareness) and the interpersonal (e.g. social skills). The Strategy proposed that the skills would be most effectively cultivated by pupils and staff through using a whole-school approach to create the climate and conditions that implicitly promoted the skills and allow them to be practised and consolidated. SEAL gave prominence to ensuring suitable conditions for learning which placed emphasis on relationships, staff working well together with high morale and to solve problems, staff to take the well-being of children seriously, an environment that is welcoming, children having opportunities to give their views and to be listened to, staff recognising the impact of what they say and do on the children and the modeling of appropriate social, emotional and behavioural skills.

SEAL resources were available to help delivery and implementation and included staff development activities, reading material, monitoring/ evaluation tools, an introductory booklet, and materials on the themes: a place to learn; learning to be together; keep on learning; learning about me.

SEAL was being delivered in waves of intervention:



Figure 1: The wave model of SEAL delivery (taken from DfES, 2005)

Putting SEAL into practice involved whole school development (discussion, policy making, training, raising awareness), curriculum development (development of student as effective learners) and staff development (improving skills to make positive relationships and manage personal emotions). The SEAL strategy encouraged statutory and voluntary agencies, such as children’s services, health services and local voluntary community services, to become actively involved in developing and supporting the SEAL programme.

Research revealed mixed findings resulting from the small number of studies conducted to evaluate SEAL. According to Thompson & Smith (2011) comments from schools about the SEAL curriculum were mostly positive seeing it as “*an excellent and effective toolkit for staff and children dealing with emotions*” (p. 18). In the primary sector where SEAL was used extensively, it was given a high rating for preventing bullying. Difficulties in the implementation of SEAL were reported by Thompson & Smith with findings showing it to be too time-consuming and difficult to sustain and maintain. The difficulties encountered prevented consistent delivery of the programme. The SEAL resources, however, were considered by schools as “*great*”. Similarly, Humphrey et al (2010) found that though some schools made good progress in implementing SEAL and a number of schools had made comparatively little progress with failure to sustain initial activity levels.

Humphrey identified factors that interacted in creating the conditions for effective (or ineffective) implementation of SEAL, tentatively pointing to staff 'will and skill' and time and resource allocation being the most crucial. Another factor was that of fidelity with a recommendation for the inclusion of a more explicit and structured model of implementation to ensure fidelity to the central SEAL programme.

Humphrey's SEAL based research reflected that of Greenberg's (2003) research involving SEL implementation and practice in the USA which found that well-intentioned SEL based prevention and promotion programmes, typically short-term and fragmented initiatives, not sufficiently linked to the central mission of schools.

Humphrey et al (2010) identified a gap between the efficacy-based evaluations which produce the impressive outcomes upon which the rationale for SEAL is based and the 'real world' experience of schools in England. Recommendations arising out of research for moving forward with SEAL to help bridge such gaps were "*that future school-based initiatives to promote social and emotional skills would benefit from a much more explicit and structured approach, with more detailed guidance on a suggested model of implementation*" (p. 105), including a more explicit, comprehensive and clearly sequenced set of activities at a range of levels throughout the school (e.g. staff development, work with parents, activities with pupils). Barriers to successful implementation of SEAL were noted by Humphrey including a lack of mainly human and financial resources, with a recommendation for such barriers to be overcome for schools to engage fully in SEAL programmes.

Specific criticism of the SEAL strategy involved issues concerning evidence and intellectual rationale, the dangers of psychology and its universal application in schools, including related interventions targeted at millions of children at one time, without any robust independent evidence to support it (Craig, 2007). Craig set out some of the main arguments surrounding the potential dangers of a systematic, explicit approach to teaching social and emotional skills.

Associated concerns included the dangers about indirect/unconscious messages of SEAL material, dosage issues that have the potential to lead to intense prescribing with overload of emotional awareness resulting paralysing introspection, that SEAL is too sophisticated with, for example, a set learning outcomes that are extremely complex and, in the words of Craig, “*would not be out of place in a post-graduate course for counselling skills*” (p. 10). Despite the fact that the SEAL Guidance (2007) states that therapy is not an expectation of SEAL (p. 51), Ecclestone (2009) argued that such an approach is more about therapy than learning.

Other perceived potentialities for the damaging effects of SEAL appear under the headings of ‘Social control, conformity and resistance’ and ‘Impact on parents and teachers’. Craig concluded that it is not helpful to place too much emphasis on fixing individuals and that the time-consuming and costs of the SEAL approach were a distraction from the Government focussing on social and cultural issues such as community and family breakdown.

2.7.7.4 Counselling

The BACP (2010) provided a personalised definition for counselling: listening attentively and patiently, perceiving difficulties from the individual’s point of view; helping people to see things more clearly, possibly from a different perspective; reducing confusion and facilitating choice and change. Whereas the European Association for Counselling (EAC) provide a broad definition of counselling in terms that are particularly agreeable with current child well-being policy:

“Counselling: is an interactive learning process contracted between counsellor(s) and client(s), be they individuals, families, groups or institutions, which approaches in a holistic way, social, cultural, economic and/or emotional issues. Counselling may be concerned with addressing and resolving specific problems, making decisions, coping with crisis, improving relationships, developmental issues, promoting and developing personal awareness, working with feelings, thoughts, perceptions and internal or external conflict. The overall aim is to provide clients with opportunities to work in self-defined ways, towards living in more satisfying and resourceful ways as individuals and as members of the broader society.”

(EAC definition of counselling adopted AGM 1995)

There are many factors involved in effective and ethical counselling practice with children and young people. According to Verberg (1992) the central goal of child counselling is to help children return to or achieve healthy adaptive functioning relevant to their developmental stages. Reid (2006) outlined the importance of respecting the child in the counselling relationship:

- listening to and respecting what children have to say;
- focussing on their needs;
- seeing the world from their perspective;
- acknowledging and believing that the child is the primary client;
- seeing the child as an individual person rather than a member of a class or group.

Examining the role of the school counsellor and attitudes towards school counselling and related research studies, helped to conceptualise its relevance as an intervention in the emotional well-being of children and young people in the school setting. Set against a backdrop of demand for child mental health and therapeutic and associated long waiting lists, school counselling has been seen as cost effective and readily accessible. Baginsky (2004) maintained that it is certain that many children and young people need emotional support in addition to, or aside from, what is given by family and friends and that there is potential difficulty for teachers to combine a teaching and counselling role.

BACP Good Practice Guidance for Counselling in Schools (2006) put forward a view of counselling as a specific activity that gives the client the opportunity to explore, discover and clarify ways of living more resourcefully and towards greater well-being. Jenkins & Polat (2006) stated that it is a “*contracted, therapeutic activity carried out between a pupil and a counsellor, within the context of a school-based service*” (p. 2). Important aspects of school counselling included school culture and structure, confidentiality, responsibilities, supervision, qualifications and continuing professional development.

The DoH (2004) pointed out that the provision of mental health care for children and young people can be emotionally demanding and stressful, particularly where there are high levels of risk, and that support systems that enable staff to practice effectively and safely need to include the availability of supervision, appraisal, continuing professional development and mentoring.

Standards of practice for counsellors include working within the school's child protection guidelines as set out in the legislation and guidance; to respect the ethos of the individual school; working with and alongside other agencies in a collegial manner whilst maintaining appropriate levels of confidentiality (ICSS, 2009). Counselling services are delivered according to the ethical frameworks for good practice of their respective professional bodies. The minimum professional employment standards require that a school counsellor is qualified to at least Diploma level. The Dudley Local Education Authority professional counselling team model requires that they also have teaching qualifications. It is expected that school counsellors are accredited to a professional body such as BACP or working towards accreditation. The BACP Good Practice Guidelines for counselling in schools 4th edition states that a school counsellor needs to be aware of and sensitive to the different needs and demands that a school community imposes on clients and those who have responsibility for them.

School counsellors focus their skills, time and energy on direct work with students seeing young people mainly for 1:1 counselling sessions to help with stress and anxiety provoking issues including working through conflict and improving relationships with others, coping with crisis, decision making, addressing and resolving problems, managing emotions, transition, loss and bereavement. Child-protection issues, depression, and phobia are also features of the work. In cases of more intensive work being required through specialist services such as Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) counsellors will work to support children and young people until the appropriate service is accessed. Baginsky (2004) discusses the theoretical approach of the school counsellor and makes particular reference to the person-centred approach, based on the ideas of Carl Rogers, being used widely and particularly suited to young people because of its understanding of conflict between the 'real self' and the 'self-concept' (p. 25) and the positive experiences provided for clients through 'empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard' (p. 38).

The school counsellor participates as part of the school's pastoral/inclusion team working in a supportive capacity for the best interests of the students. Baginsky (2004) drew attention to the importance of the counsellor's relationship with the school. A crucial aspect of effective counselling is relational and centres on the behaviour modelled by the counsellor and the way in which he/she connects with those he/she facilitates in the course of his/her work (Corey, 2009). Where time permits, counsellors engage in small group work and contributing to staff professional development. In England, the NSPCC, Barnardo's, Dudley School Counselling Service, Durham Schools Counselling Service and Southampton Psychology Department are some of the services credited with conducting effective group work. In some cases, as a contribution to professional development, counsellors involve themselves in the sharing of skills, ideas or expertise with teaching staff, facilitating workshops with a focus on aspects of child emotional health and covering themes such as counselling skills and the management of strong emotions. Other information sharing activities might include staff presentations based on current topical issues such as self-harm or eating disorders. The school counselling role is ever-evolving as it responds to changes in child-related policy and trends (Hines, 2007).

As identified in the literature, the role of a school counsellor is beset with many challenges that may have implications for legitimacy and practice. Examples include pressure on therapeutic confidentiality because of information-sharing protocols precipitated by multi-agency team working, and lack of a statutory base to legitimise counselling claims on scarce resources (Jenkins & Polat, 2006) as well as difficulties in relation to lack a cohesive professional identity. It is well acknowledged that generally the counselling profession has an indistinct professional identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008; Gale & Austin, 2003). Similarly with school counselling, ambiguity surrounds the definition of the role of the school counsellor (Baginsky, 2004; Jenkins & Polat, 2006; McMahon, 2001).

Cooper (2005) and Humphrey et al (2010) point out that secondary schools are complex organisations and as such are influenced by time limitations, and according to Cooper, political and social policy agendas and specific attitudes of headteachers.

From the findings of two studies Cooper outlined how counselling, though not a totally new phenomenon in schools, continues to challenge those at the interface between education and therapy with teacher attitudes towards school counselling ranging from positive, wherein the independence and expertise of the counsellor is valued, to more negative ones because of concerns that students might abuse the counselling service (Polat & Jenkins, 2004) and the service itself might not fully integrate with existing guidance arrangements provided by teachers in schools. The studies also revealed the suggestion of a tension existing between teachers' desires for a counselling service that is integrated into the wider school community and one that remains independent and neutral. Arguments against school counselling include a question-mark over quality assurance and whether it is value for money based on difficulty in ascertaining cause-effect outcomes (Polat & Jenkins, 2005) and that counselling may undermine teacher authority (Kerry, 2001). Research also suggests that there may be a lack of understanding about what counselling is (Baginsky, 2004; Jenkins & Polat, 2006; McMahon, 2001).

Pattison (2009), however, drawing on her huge involvement in school counselling including research, describes counselling as an appropriate intervention to improve the emotional health and well-being of children and young people and advocates the usefulness and accessibility of the school setting for addressing a range of problems and issues because it is a child's major social environment.

In a USA study involving 1,402 school-based personnel who were asked about who is the most knowledgeable of mental health services, Romer and McIntosh (2005) found the top three answers were school counsellor, 49.1%; school psychologist, 25.7%; and school social worker, 11.2%.

Searching the literature revealed that the majority of school counselling based studies conducted in the UK over the past decade have been to evaluate and review school counselling (Cooper, 2004; Harris & Pattison, 2004; Jenkins & Polat, 2006; NSPCC, 2004; Pattison et al, 2007) having been commissioned largely by stakeholders and policy makers rather than counsellors and the services that employ them.

Such studies have concentrated to a large degree on outcomes and measurement using pre and post score questionnaires, driven by the protagonists in politics in their quest to find the most effective preventative and treatment methods to address the prevalence of emotional distress amongst today's youth. Indeed, strategies for supporting young people emotionally in schools have been prepared on the back of some of the resulting documentation: the Welsh Assembly Government (2008) *A National Strategy for a School-Based Counselling Service in Wales*; and the NICE *Draft Scope (2008) for the provision of school counselling*. This level of investment, due in part to evidence of the effectiveness of counselling produced from research, gives a strong indication that school counselling is valued to the extent that it is seriously considered to be instrumental in contributing to the emotional well-being of children and young people.

Key findings from evaluation studies have shown that children and young people approaching counselling services have presented with significant difficulties (Adamson et al, 2006). Favourable reports of the effectiveness of school counselling were found by Cooper (2009) and Baskin et al (2010). Ofsted reported favourably on school counselling in relation to aspects such as pastoral care, special educational needs and drug and sex education (Baginsky, 2004). Phillips & Smith (2011) found that young people reported improved mental health as a result of counselling; feeling happier, less worried and more able to concentrate in class.

As well as adverse implications because of role ambiguity of the school counsellor, the literature highlighted problems around maintaining visibility because of lack of evidence produced to show the effectiveness of their work. Brigman (2006) highlighted the need for school counsellors to conduct more programme evaluation and to collaborate with counsellor educators to conduct research that is generalizable. Despite the prevalence of school counsellors in the UK the research literature revealed very little regarding active research of practice or lived experience being conducted. Rowell (2005) discussed the tentative relationship between school counselling practice and research in schools in the USA where there have been many publications giving possible explanations for the lack of practice-based school counselling research. Studer et al (2006) reported that counsellors have been remiss in documenting how the school counselling programme is an essential component to the growth of school-aged youth.

Whiston & Sexton (1998) and Farber (2006) used the words 'hesitancy' and 'resistance' to describe the approach of counsellors to research. Owens & Murphy (2004) and Ray (2007) explained that to conduct effective research in schools can be problematic. Ray attributed this to a limited ability to control certain variables such as variability of presenting problems, consistent location and time, and intervening factors affecting treatment.

Despite counsellor resistance, negligence and problems associated with school counselling practice research, Owens & Murphy, Rowell, and Ray, amongst others, advocate the necessity and benefits of research with Owens & Murphy arguing that school-based mental health programmes provide a unique environment to explore evidence-based treatments in real-world settings (Ray, 2007).

The train of thought that professional school counsellors have a responsibility to show how their programmes, activities or interventions make a difference in the lives of students has increasingly been acknowledged (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Dimmitt et al 2007; McGuinness, 1989; McKenzie et al, 2011). Mounting pressure on school counsellors to validate counsellor treatments led to a more vigorous approach to evidence-based practice in the USA due largely to the establishment of the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) and its development of the Centre for School Counselling Outcome Research (CSCOR) whose aim is to improve the practice of school counselling to make it responsible and effective.

A major study commissioned by CSCOR, conducted by Carey et al (2005), made a huge contribution to illustrate the status of school counselling outcome research reviewing relevant literature over the past 20 years. Out of the few studies that reported on individual counselling, Prout & Prout (1998) found that school-based psychotherapy had demonstrable beneficial effects on student well-being but not academic achievement, whereas, Wilson (1986) found that directive counselling and behavioural counselling had positive effects on academic achievement with underachieving students. Studer et al (2006) stressed the need for top priority to be given to accountability in educational settings stating that school counsellors can no longer sit back and hope that others will recognize the good things they are doing.

Cooper (2009) made a strong case for greater priority towards evidence based practice advising that in coming years there will be a growing insistence/requirement that schools' counselling proves its efficacy through randomised controlled trials; that pre-/post- data will not be sufficient; and that if this is not done soon, it may be too late.

Strengthening and supporting school counselling practitioner research in schools in the UK is a recent initiative by BACP who have established the CSRC (Counselling in Schools Research Consortium) providing potential for change in counsellor research activity. The research efforts of BACP, including evaluating counselling in secondary schools in Scotland and Wales, and conducting a pilot randomised controlled trial (RCT) of counselling in schools, continue to reinforce and promote school counselling and the value of research.

2.8 School well-being research

Clement (eds.) (Lovat, 2010) reviewed a diverse variety of literature including research studies measuring or observing the concept of student well-being against a number of descriptors such as liking for school, self-concept, self-efficacy, relational trust, mental health and psychological adjustment, social support of parents, peers and teachers, school connectedness, classroom and school climates and communitarian school ethos. Their conclusion was that the concept is, of necessity, holistic, multifaceted and values orientated. Reaffirming other sources such as Sorhaindo (2007); Klein (2009/10); O'Brien (2008); and the Good Childhood Inquiry report (2009), Clement's review found that student well-being is influenced, either directly or indirectly, by the nature and quality of relationships with significant others.

Konu & Lintonen (2006), however, found from their evaluation studies of well-being in schools in Finland that self-fulfilment emerged as the strongest indicator of well-being in the school context with social relationships emerging as the next most significant indicator. Though, it was noted, that the 'self-fulfilment' category had a strong correlation with the 'school conditions' category.

Clement discussed the relevancy of ‘values education’ and the centrality of practice in schools that is informed by values and good practice pedagogy in shaping the ambience of the learning environment and its significance for student well-being and achievement, concluding that “*Student well-being cannot be attained or maintained apart from attention to values and their actualisation in the educational setting, beginning with valuing of students*” (p. 55). The term ‘pedagogy’ is consistently located in school related literature invariably because of implications for practice.

Research conducted by the TCRU (2009) identified key principles of pedagogic practice including that it should focus on the child as a whole person and support for the child’s overall development; that the practitioner view their self as a person in relationship with the child or young person; that while they are together, children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space not as existing in separate, hierarchical domains; that professionals constantly reflect on their practice, to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to their work. A key principle in respect of group pedagogical practice is for children’s associative life to be seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group; build on an understanding of children’s rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislative requirements; place emphasis on team work and valuing the contributions of others - family members, other professionals and members of the local community - in the task of ‘bringing up’ children (Petrie et al, 2009).

Scrutiny of the literature shows the phenomenon of student well-being in school to be influenced by the social and cultural conditions of the environment. School itself seems to be important for well-being, not just at school but as a contributor to being well in general and enjoying mental well-being (Konu & Lintonen, 2006; Klein, 2010); the quality of the environment estimated to be rooted in the kind of values and pedagogical approach to practice existing in schools. Valuing the child as a social being with their own unique and individual experiences and the provision of policies and practice that accord with those principles are crucial factors in a pedagogical approach in children’s services (Petrie et al, 2009). With reference to Konu’s (2002) conceptual model for well-being in schools (see figure 2) a closer study of elements of its theory afforded deeper insight into to the necessary conditions for student well-being.

Well-being in Schools

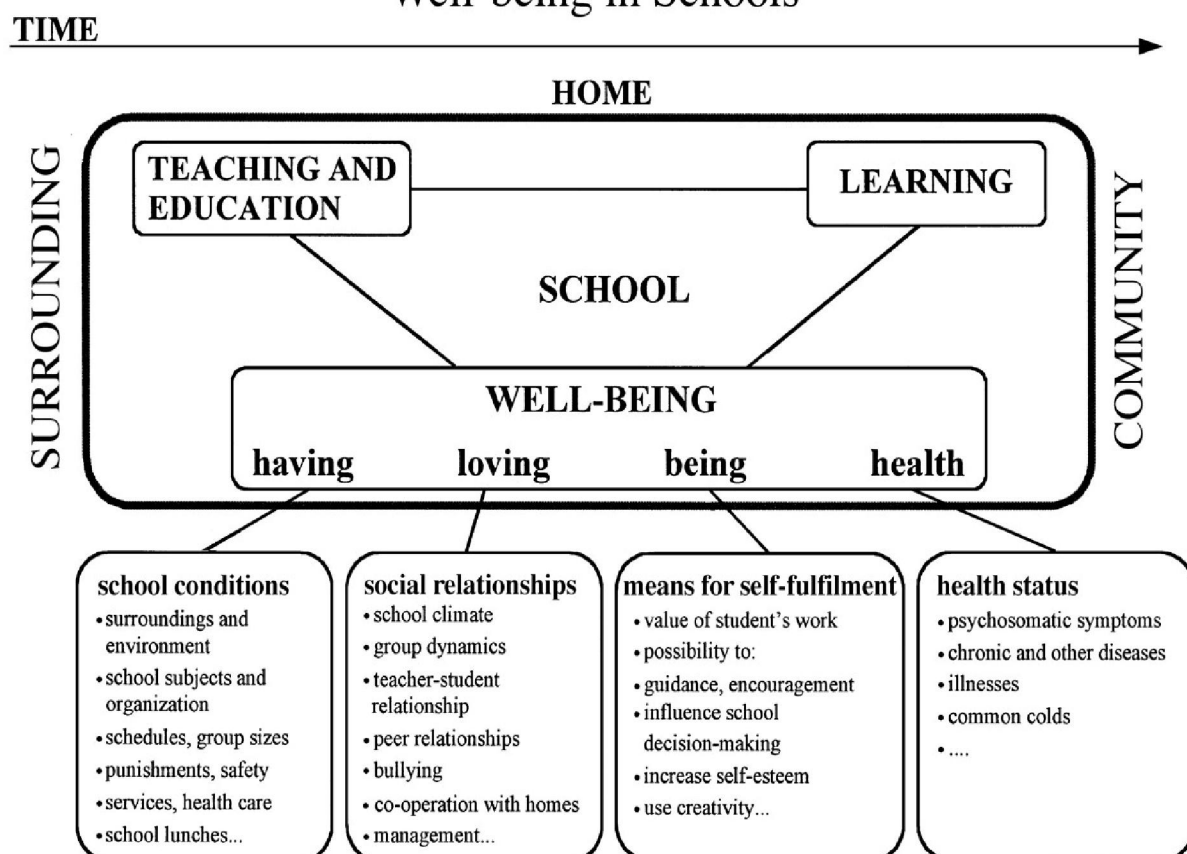


Figure 2. Konu & Rimpela (2002) Conceptual Model for Well-being in Schools
(based on Allardt's (1989) sociological theory of welfare)

The concept of psychosocial well-being acknowledges the importance of intimate relations and social participation (Camfield et al, 2008; Smith, 2006). Evidence from related studies suggested that relationships are fundamental to well-being (Easthope & White, 2006; Klein, 2010; O'Brien, 2008) and this significance takes a particular form in the period of adolescence (O'Brien, 2008; Laursen, 2005).

The rich array of literature substantiating the importance of relationships emphasizes its priority in the lives of students in school. Aston (2008) asserts that people need to have basic safety and belonging needs met before they can engage fully in personal development and learning. This point of view is well documented in policy and guidance material. The literature accords with Maslow's (1954) theory of motivation and personality and 'hierarchy of needs' (see figure 3) which regards positive relationships as an essential human need. Maslow uses the term 'belonging' which encompasses love, affection and being a part of a social group, and posits the notion that belonging is a necessary prerequisite to being able to achieve a sense of self-worth.

Whilst there is acceptance that the human needs specified by Maslow play a critical role in well-being, there is contention as to whether there is sufficient evidence to support a hierarchical order of such needs (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). When tested in other cultures, for example, it was found that it is possible for people to exhibit strong social ties and sense of self despite food deprivation in countries where there is starvation (Neher, 1991).

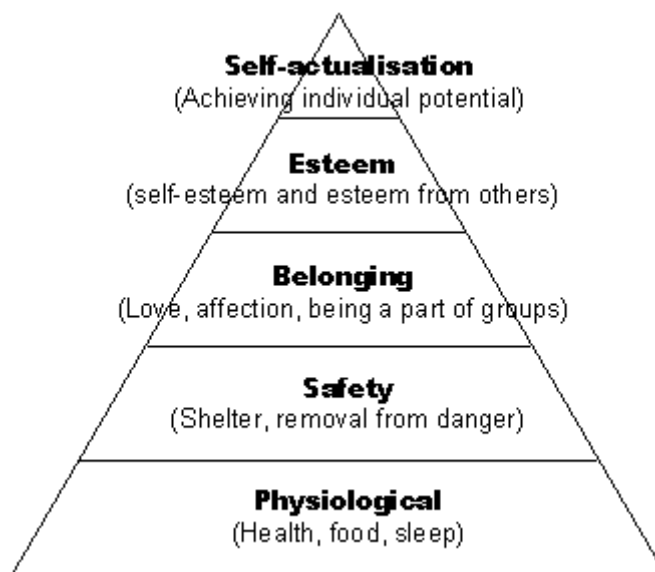


Figure 3: Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs' diagram

Much has been written about belonging as it applies to psychosocial well-being in the lives of children and young people, for example, Woodhead (2004) and Easthope & White (2006). Laursen (2005) and Sergiovanni (1994) discussed the basic human need of belonging and being connected to others in relation to making lives meaningful and significant in the school context and suggested that this can best be achieved for children and young people from building positive peer cultures in education. Sorhaindo (2007) described the positive impact of quality of teacher-student relationships “*Students who perceive their teachers as viewing them positively and providing support tend to display better mental health, increased enthusiasm for learning and perform better academically*” (p.9). It seems that when a student experiences belonging and acceptance in school by staff and peers there is an acceptance of others' authority, increased motivation and the establishment of a stronger sense of identity (Osterman, 2000).

Indeed, the research of Gutman & Feinstien (2008), showed that it is children's individual experiences, such as interactions with teachers, bullying or friendships, and their beliefs about themselves and their environment, which mainly affect their well-being, rather than the type of school they attend.

UNICEF (2007) developed the argument for the significance of positive peer relationships: *"Being liked and accepted by peers is crucial to young people's health and development and those not socially integrated are far more likely to exhibit difficulties with their physical and emotional health"* (p. 27). Laursen (2005) highlighted the importance and power of peer groups, particularly during adolescence. He suggested that adults in educational and treatment settings should find ways to develop helping and nurturing peer groups that provide opportunities to give and become valuable to others which have the potential to increase feelings of self-worth and help to build a more positive self-concept.

2.9 Summary of the Literature Review

The following summary of the literature reviewed in relation to child-wellbeing acknowledges the vastness of this subject area and therefore sets out the main themes that emerged:

2.9.1 Child well-being paradigm

Searching the literature revealed that over the past decade or so enormous efforts have been made globally and nationally to review children's health and well-being and make appropriate responses according to need. This approach had been prompted as a result of serious concerns raised because of increasing incidence of mental health problems in children and young people and a perception of ominous supposition for future society. Conceptualising child well-being, therefore, appears to have been debated largely in terms of societal concerns which are essentially political. Research to measure and monitor child well-being, occurring on a world-wide scale, functions to increase the information base for informing policy making and developing effective interventions in the interests of social progress.

The prevailing paradigm conveyed a convergence of thinking that sees the child as 'being' rather than 'becoming' (Qvortrup 1994) and the Children Act (1989) that promoted acting 'in the best interests' (p18) of children and young people by adults responsible for their care.

Difficulties inherent in research to define child-wellbeing or to draw conclusions are associated with a diversity of research approaches consisting of many variables of data collection instruments, respondents (adult/child), contexts, geographies, time-scales or the theoretical basis for selecting dimensions (Hill, 2006).

Important ramifications became evident from reviewing child well-being in that there had been a shift in emphasis on deliberating child health from a more holistic point of view that takes into account children's rights and the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of child development, and the assertion that the school setting has a critical function in contributing to this tenet.

There was generally a consensus that the school environment and related factors impact on children's subjective well-being. A positive experience in school is considered to be a key factor in the health and wellbeing of young people. Links were made to school climate, characterised by students' relationships with their teachers and experience of the school environment, to emotional, behavioural and social outcomes (Sorhaindo, 2007). However, there are arguments contending this point of view (Craig, 2007; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009) with objection to the influence and government-sponsorship of emotional relevance in education and lack of a convincing evidence base to support it.

Child-participatory research and studies conducted in and outside of schools provided points of view of youth concerning child well-being. Their perception of well-being necessitates having quality relationships, personal freedom and feeling safe in their environment, as in the Good Childhood enquiry. The enquiry revealed how young people value being cared for in a way that treats them with fairness and without threat. They showed a positive attitude towards being helped and receiving support in school and ask for positive role models.

The importance of positive interpersonal relationships for children's subjective well-being emerges from research (Konu & Lintonen, 2006; O'Brien, 2008; Shucksmith, 2006) and echoed in a study conducted by Crivello et al (2008) which underlined the significance of quality and strength of social relationships with family, peer group and, in many cases, their schooling. Words such as 'security' and 'stability' alongside 'being healthy' and 'having self-esteem' were used by young people to describe an emotional healthy state (CAMHS, 2008).

The literature indicated that a child with good mental health and well-being will enjoy certain personal qualities and conditions including feeling good about themselves, feeling safe, having an appropriate level of independence, having confidence to be able to influence the world around them, experiencing positive relationships with others, having language and communication skills to express themselves, being able to understand and express their emotions, and have a sense of belonging. The insights gained into the interplay of conditions existing in the school setting and how they influence school experience have implications for the development of policy and practice, particularly in relation to a greater emphasis being placed on the formation of healthy relationships with the aim of improving a sense of belonging and school connectedness.

The reported views of young people in their assessment of what being well means has a dual focus. On the one hand, they place high value on being a member of society which provides care and quality relationships with a certain amount of personal freedom, whilst on the other hand, they express a need for safety, security and support. What young people want and need to feel well appears to match national well-being based policy and places a duty to fulfil their needs squarely on the shoulders of all who hold the responsibility for their health and welfare.

2.9.2 Policy and guidance framing child well-being

Reviewing policy and guidance supporting child emotional health and related working practices in the school setting helped to identify essential requirements for ensuring good practice that is in the best interests of the child involving cultivating an approach that is child-centred, provides safety and considers the whole child.

A key element of this approach is the provision of a safe and positive environment that facilitates young people. Central themes of well-being policy included: ensuring that services are integrated, implementation of existing policy rather than making new policy, valuing the child-centred approach, provision of support measures that need to be preventative with early intervention, evidence based interventions, and provision of services that young people find acceptable.

In order to maintain good mental health and well-being requires that children and young people have continuous access, not only school-based, but to a range of mental health provision to deal with any difficulties that arise. Predominant features of policy and guidance framing child well-being are that the rights of children and young people be respected and that they are consulted when commissioning and delivering services that concern them.

In applying these principles to the school setting, seeking views from students about their experience of psychological interventions could not only be useful but necessary if society is to authenticate its estimation of child empowerment and young people as active agents influencing policy and practice. Crucially, children are not just adults-in-the-making but people whose current needs and rights and experiences must be taken seriously (Kohn, 1993).

An imperative need for teachers and health providers to work together with children and young people to improve mental health outcomes against a climate of increasing prevalence of mental illness was specified in the literature. Guidance requires that a range of services to deliver prevention and treatment interventions by appropriately trained and supported specialists is the preferred strategy to include an element of evaluation and research to contribute to the evidence base (DH, 2008; NHS Scotland, 2008). To implement the guidelines depends upon professionals and services practising in a way that has the best interests of the child as their focus which requires personal development, professional training in related areas and sufficient time and resources. To maximise the facilitation of such qualities requires the facilitator's approach to accord with current child well-being policy and practice guidelines which require the cultivation of positive environments and relationships.

Many studies highlighted that the effectiveness of social and emotional interventions depends largely on the confidence of the facilitator and their level of self-awareness and training (Lown, 2002; Humphrey et al, 2008).

British Government policy has shown recognition of the importance in schools of a system which adopts an approach to child well-being that is caring and caters for the social and emotional development of students as an essential contribution to academic achievement. Efforts by the DfES (2003) to provide and encourage continuing professional development of school staff by providing training courses designed to help teachers to create “*the climate and conditions that implicitly promote the skills of SEAL and allow these to be practiced and consolidated*” (pp. 6-7) reflected this ethos. Such courses included managing emotions in developing effective relationships, and the development of an understanding of how emotional intelligence can assist management of behaviour in the classroom.

Reviewing child well-being related documentation proved to be a necessary and valuable process to configure knowledge relating to social, political and cultural issues concerning young people and to raise awareness of the special nature of supporting their emotional health in the school setting. It brought to light how social factors influence children’s mental health and that, traditionally, society has not perceived children’s mental health as a public health issue; a concept that is changing. There has been an explicit change of focus from ‘mental well-being’ to ‘social and emotional well-being’; a prime example being the NHS NICE Public Health Guidance 20 (2009). The principle that child emotional well-being requires a social focus has implications for the way in which policy is written, services are delivered and the type of intervention used. A bigger picture has been opened up, arising out of political and social pressures which depend on outcomes, of urgency for investment to provide more consolidated and validated interventions to support the emotional well-being of students in school.

However, despite the apparent interest in child well-being and its clear links to educational achievement, Faulker (2011) noted that there are very few statutory requirements for schools in England to protect and promote well-being.

2.9.3 School-based interventions supporting emotional well-being

It was difficult to locate long-term consolidated research in relation to effectiveness of strategies and interventions that support the emotional health of school children. Studies and reports suggested positive results from the use of circle time, SEAL and peer support as part of schools prevention and support programmes. The search found significant evidence to support the effectiveness of small group work as an appropriate prevention and remedial intervention to deal with a range of problematic issues faced by students, much of which came from USA based studies.

Research showed that counselling in schools is effective, needed, and in many cases has become integrated into the pastoral and support systems of schools; also that it has the potential to become fully embedded in schools provided that interventions are validated by a strong evidence base. However, a shortfall in evidence based practice is apparent with very little published material from school counsellors in the UK, increasing the conviction for the need for counsellors to be more proactive in demonstrating their worth, possible by maintaining their visibility through collaborative working practices with school staff teams and other support services, and by providing evidence of intervention effect through action research.

The social outcome agenda accounts for the fact that the main focus of the majority of school counselling research studies has been to evaluate its effectiveness determined and funded by the political perspective. The growth of school counselling has seen an increase in related literature and though many school counselling research studies have sought the views of students, they do not really address issues from the young person's perspective. It was difficult to locate research based on how emotional and psychological related interventions impact on students in school. A persistent message resonating throughout the literature is that school counselling practitioners ought to be paying much more attention to the identification of research-based practices and the use of evidence-based interventions (Brigman & Campbell, 2003; Carey et al, 2005; Cooper, 2009).

The ‘National Strategies’ programme (DCSF, 2007) promoted the value of individually tailored interventions in the name of ‘personalised learning’ emphasising the key role of this approach to contributing to student well-being and progress. Directives including C4EO (2010) and DH (2009) conceded that a range of interventions able to provide support at different levels of need is what is required. Determining what approach to take to intervene to help children and young people in schools, either universal or targeted, however, has been debated in terms of cost effectiveness with research reports revealing lack of resources and infidelity to the original ethos of programmes (Humphrey et al, 2010; Thompson & Smith, 2011) resulting in problems of sustainability and therefore lack of effectiveness. An important consideration is to ensure that the content and presentation of an intervention is relevant to the context of young peoples’ everyday lives rather than medically defined concepts such as mental illness which they do not relate to (Edwards, 2003).

With a change in Government and a change in approach that gives autonomy to schools to identify suitable methods and interventions for supporting the emotional well-being of students, there is a move away from obligation to existing strategies, including SEAL, towards locating and adopting programmes with an evidence-base.

2.9.4 Relationship between the school counsellor and child well-being frameworks

The child-centred ethos of well-being policy requires that professionals work collaboratively to develop appropriate validated interventions and programmes to support students experiencing social and emotional difficulties. The school counsellor, whose job it is to respond to the emotional needs of students, is in an eminently suitable position for contributing to the current child well-being paradigm possible by integration at a deeper level into the school system.

Many aspects of counselling philosophy accord with child well-being frameworks. A counsellor works to the principles of the BACP ethical framework to ensure safe and non-maleficent practice which is backed by supervision and accreditation processes.

A counsellor works to develop interpersonal relationships that are underpinned by Rogers' conditions of congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathy, and in the school environment, adheres to the 'whole school approach' of modelling respectful attitudes outlined in the ECM agenda. Much of the well-being documentation emphasise the importance of 'resilience' and 'emotional literacy'. The person-centred perspective of a counsellor, based on Rogerian philosophy, meets the ECM criteria as it facilitates emotional literacy and reflection on experience to enable drawing on personal resources for self-actualisation. The skills and experience of the counsellor can contribute significantly to 'collaborative working practices' by transferring skills and knowledge to school staff to enhance their understanding of topical student issues and providing workshops on 'active listening' and other important aspects of human relating.

A lack of validated effective interventions based on research and a lack of action research being conducted and disseminated by school counsellor practitioners has been identified revealing a gap in qualitative knowledge about counsellor intervention. There is scope for the school counsellor to integrate research into practice to establish proven interventions that meet the requirements of child well-being policies since an integral part of the role of the counsellor involves direct access to the students. Owens & Murphy (2004) advocate that school-based mental health programmes provide a unique environment to explore evidence-based treatments in real-world settings. Counsellors work within the boundaries of confidentiality that respect children's rights and in accordance with the BACP Good Practice Guidance for Counselling in Schools (2006) and Ethical Framework (2010) which places them in a suitable position to ensure the safe practice necessary for conducting ethical research.

It could be said that the remit of the counsellor fits well with the principles and expectations of SEAL and its aim for healthy outcomes for students including reaching key school objectives of improving attendance and behaviour. Much of Rogers' humanistic approach to learning, for example, has resonance with the concepts of SEAL. The skills of the counsellor are well suited to contribute to the delivery of such programmes with the potential to add value to the whole school approach as outlined in the ECM (2004).

With a recognition that the lack of human resources in schools contributes to poor implementation of SEAL (Humphrey et al, 2010), the school counsellor could provide a useful additional human resource for contributing to the implementation of SEL based initiatives.

There is much evidence of positive and effective group work practice by counsellors in schools in the USA producing healthy outcomes including therapy. With a growing body of evidence in the UK supporting and encouraging small group work in schools that require suitably skilled and competent professionals to conduct such work, the school counsellor has much potential to fulfil that role. Though there is evidence of some school counsellors in this country being active in facilitating small group work there is very little research to indicate its worth.

This chapter looked at the national frameworks that surround child well-being through the child, social, educational and political lens producing an enormous amount of information that focuses on the child well-being paradigm as it relates to the school setting and the role of the school counsellor. The following chapter sets out the methodology designed to discover the real meaning for Y8 students of their experience of being involved in counsellor-led group work in schools.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the theory of researching experience, provides a rationale for adopting a qualitative approach and explains phenomenology as a tradition of enquiry and why it would be appropriate for this study. Key principles of research with young people are discussed, including ethical issues. Details are given about the research design and procedures followed, including data collection and analysis. Discussion about the pilot study is included to give an indication of the process of selecting suitable methods.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was concerned with finding out from ten Y8 students their experience of being involved in group work facilitated by the school counsellor. In considering how to study these social phenomena, i.e. the lived experience of young people working in a group in the school setting, it was necessary to reflect on my epistemological position, that is, my theory of knowledge (Creswell, 2009). My view is that the phenomenon is unknown and will be more truthfully found out by listening to the voices of the young people concerned. As a Rogerian, person-centred counsellor trained in the humanistic tradition, my relationship with others is centred on the important caring concept of ‘unconditional positive regard’ which relates to phenomenological ‘bracketing’ of personal knowledge and therefore not making preconceived judgements of others.

Increasingly, children’s perceptions are being recognised as providing a unique view of the world; an insider’s view or emic perspective that can positively contribute to child-centred policy and practice developments (Darbyshire et al., 2005). Contemplation and discussion with colleagues from the counselling service helped me form the theoretical framework upon which to base the study in the knowledge that opportunities for researching school-based counsellor-led interventions/practice are not, in the main, being

realised and that many recent studies are concerned with evaluation and measurement driven by policy makers and not predominantly counsellor-led.

The underlying philosophy of SEAL is to prevent rather than cure. Finding out how young people experience interventions into their personal world has potential for raising awareness of how to appropriately identify and address suitable provision towards well-being that will have lasting positive affects. Miller (1998) adds impetus for the need to learn from experience when she inspires people to think back over their lives and see what has formed them based on the significance of the way in which people's first experiences affect their future adult lives and their relationships.

Finding out how young people experience the group work supposes that data are contained within the perspectives of the participants involved as well as the researcher's engagement with the participants in collecting that data. Rogers' (1957) theory of the 'self-actualising tendency' inherent in humans whereby organisms instinctively know what is good for them provides a suitable concept on which to base researching experience to help to gather direct insight which will help to understand the phenomena. Mair (1989) writes about this concept: "*This is not a concern with formalized knowledge, but about persons in process, in being and becoming*" (p. 237).

The methodology was informed by the work of Moustakas (1994) whose philosophy is closely related to Rene Descartes which deals with objectivity – to see what an experience is for another person, not what causes it, or why it exists - dealing with feelings of the person as they exist for him at the moment he is experiencing them and perceiving them as a whole.

A suitable methodology for obtaining such data would need to be relevant for young people in terms of language and environment and reflect Rogers' (1957) person-centred counselling perspective in which the core conditions of unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence are represented. The design of the study required a qualitative approach using a variety of child-friendly data collection methods to appropriately access the lived experience of the students to provide the most inclusive findings available within time and accessibility limitations.

3.3 Rationale for adopting a qualitative approach

“Qualitative research has become increasingly influential within education and health care research. Qualitative inquiry offers a set of flexible and sensitive methods for opening up the meanings of areas of social life that were previously not well understood” (p.1). (McLeod, 2011). McLeod’s exposé relates well to this piece of research since it is not about researching the process of counselling or making measurements to ascertain outcomes but more about the impact on others of the person who is the counsellor using personal training, skills and experience to enhance existing support systems in an educational setting.

Although many studies have taken place to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling in schools, using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, little exists using the voice of the child to express how their involvement in supportive interventions is experienced. This study is concerned with the significance for the young person receiving interventions in schools that the adults responsible for their care choose for them. In order to develop practice that promotes the best interests of children and young people, exploring their personal experience of interventions is an effort to determine the truth of the matter. Brusoni (2010) explained the relevance for qualitative research in this kind of situation: *“The goal of qualitative research is the development and validation of concepts which help us to understand, and evaluate, social phenomena in natural settings, giving due emphasis to the views and experiences of all the participants, in order to devise ways to improve human life”* (p. 4).

Whilst it is important to use quantitative methods to measure the outcome of interventions in the lives of people to find out their effectiveness, they do not necessarily help in the understanding of the complexity of social situations. Strauss & Corbin (1990) express this sentiment *“Qualitative methods can give the intricate details of phenomena that are difficult to convey with quantitative methods”* (p. 19). For example, if a student in school truant from lessons, what can be found out that would explain this behaviour and provide a basis from which to enable that student to feel more inclined to attend.

Similarly, in this research project there is a need to understand what happens in the process of the group work intervention, i.e. the interpersonal processes that happen in a group at any given time that provide insight. Due to the under-explored nature of research in this area, a qualitative approach would have the advantages of enabling in-depth and unanticipated findings to emerge as a result of observing participants' perspectives and interpretation of their world.

A primary aim of choosing a qualitative approach in research is to provide an understanding of how the world is constructed for the participant (McLeod, 2010). Gathering rich data in this way provided optimum opportunity to answer the research questions and present findings to inform future practice. The application of suitable qualitative methods provide the best chance to enter the world of the student and explore how they are constructing the world that is being occupied and interceded by an outside agent; in this case, a counsellor. The social area of life being explored in this study concerned students participating in group work. The aim was to find out students' feelings and experiences from their own point of view rather than from that of the researcher. Darbyshire et al (2005) approached researching the views and experiences of young children with enthusiasm commenting that "*we are engaging with one of the most important, exciting and challenging areas of contemporary childhood research and service provision for children*" (p. 1), reflecting an attitude that is close to the heart of this study.

Researching experience is phenomenological requiring a qualitative approach with a focus on whole experience rather than solely its objects or its parts and involves searching for meanings and essences rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994). It offers a way to obtain descriptions of experience through first person accounts in formal and informal conversations/interviewing. Since qualitative research is language-based, in which experiences, perceptions, observations, etc. are not reduced to numerical form (Cooper, 2008) it is suited to researching the experiences of young people. Exploration of phenomena within a natural setting is a hallmark of qualitative enquiry Creswell (2009).

Depending on the nature of their studies, qualitative researchers may proceed from many different paradigms. Phenomenological approaches are good at enabling deep issues to surface and voices to be heard. In that sense a qualitative phenomenological methodology is in-keeping with the ethos of this research which is to cut through taken-for-granted assumptions and challenge complacency, and was therefore chosen for this study.

3.4 Phenomenology as a tradition of enquiry

"Every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspects of the world in which he lives" (p. 44).

Dewey J (1934)

This section attempts to explain some of the important principles of phenomenological research such as life world, intentionality and imaginative variation that was employed in this study:

3.4.1 Researching experience: the 'life world'

Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study (Creswell, 2009). McKay (2008), writing on Husserl, describes phenomenology in its most basic form as being the study of the consciousness from a first-person perspective, as opposed to, but not exclusive of, a third-person perspective and an attempt to reflect on pre-reflexive experience to determine certain properties of, or structures in, consciousness.

Husserl's (1936/1970) theory of the 'life world', which emphasises that knowledge is rooted in meaning, is prominent in phenomenological study. Todres et al (2007) gave significance to Husserl's theory: *"a world that appears meaningfully to be consciousness in its qualitative, flowing given-ness; not an objective world 'out there', but a humanly relational world"* (p. 55). Moustakas (1994) clarifies the nature of meaning: *"what appears in consciousness is an absolute reality while what appears to the world is a product of learning?"* (p. 27).

3.4.2 Intentionality

Central to Husserl's theories is that human consciousness is intentional (a concept adopted from Brentano, 1890) and about an openness to the world. Intentionality, the notion that consciousness is always conscious 'of' something, is considered to be an important phenomenological concept and a key focus for research. When a person is conscious of something (an 'object') the person is in relation to it and it means something to that person. The researcher's aim, therefore, is to explicate this intentionality connected with the directedness of a participants' consciousness (what is being experienced and how). Moustakas described the role in phenomenology of intentionality and other central concepts relating to meaning such as noema (that which is experienced) and noesis (the way in which it is experienced). Each has its place in the process of reflecting on what a person sees and beginning the process of grasping what has been unknown. Being one of several traditions of qualitative enquiry, phenomenological research differs from quantitative enquiry in that it relies on working with only a few cases but numerous variables.

3.4.3 Imaginative Variation

Imaginative variation (or eidetic reduction) is another important step in phenomenological research developed by Husserl (1913, 1962) in the pursuit of qualitative knowledge. The process involves rigorous reduction of concrete data to its essential characteristics. Elucidation of the essential essence, or what something is, can be brought about by imaginatively varying an object in every possible way, considering opposing and contrasting perspectives intuitively rather than empirically and drawing out the invariable components until the essential structure only remains.

3.4.4 Data collection models

Procedures for conducting a phenomenological study involve gathering rich information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participants.

Moustakas (1994) outlined five qualitative research models of inquiry: Ethnography, Grounded Research Theory, Hermeneutics, Duquesne University's Phenomenology, and Heuristics. Common bonds that distinguish these models from traditional natural science quantitative research theories and methodologies include: focussing on the whole experience rather than solely its objects or its parts; searching for meanings and essences of experiences rather than measurements and explanations; obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in formal and informal conversations and interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

3.4.5 Symbiotic process and epoché

Phenomenological analysis of the information, or descriptions, involves the researcher in a symbiotic process (of a relationship with mutual benefit between two individuals or organisms) of writing and reflection wherein the researcher must 'bracket' prior experience and bring fresh insight to the subject being studied (Hayllar & Griffin, 2005). Moustakas (1994) described 'bracketing' as epoché (a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment) involving "*recognising the value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear in their essence*" (p. 26), an idea developed by Husserl (1970) and influenced by Descartes. Husserl's approach in this respect is that phenomenological research in its purest form seeks essentially to describe rather than explain starting from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions.

The extent to which data can be kept uncontaminated by the subjectivity of the researcher has been viewed differently by social scientists according to their philosophical allegiances (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Heidegger's philosophical stance, for example, differed to that of Husserl taking the existentialist view that human meaning is constructed from experience and personal beliefs; the researcher 'being-in-the-world' of the participant and research question. Van Manen (1990) and Denzin (1989) concur with Husserl in their thesis that the interpretive process of writing and reflection puts the researcher, as well as the subject, at the centre of the research process. Indeed, Hammersley (2000) asserts that the researcher should not pretend otherwise.

In the midst of diverging philosophies the researcher must at least aim to be open to seeing the world differently; a process that involves putting aside how things supposedly are and focussing instead on how they are experienced. Moustakas used the term transcendental to describe the process of being open to the phenomenon when the researcher sees the data “*freshly, as for the first time*” and is “*open to its totality*” (p. 34).

3.5 Participants

Participants were selected not as suitable respondents for research but for participating in group work in accordance with ‘wave 2’ of the SEAL ‘waves of interventions’ model (DFEE, 2007) on the recommendations of senior members of teaching staff. In that sense the participants would be considered to be a suitable sample with the means to provide a unique a view of the subject at hand and representative of a section of the school population that is sometimes not in the mainstream and requiring additional support. According to Patton (2000) the research sample needs to provide “*reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study*” (p.186) and although the study proposed a sample between 18 and 24, the subsequent sample of ten was able to provide the required reasonable coverage. The participants formed two groups of 5 Y8 students, made up of males and females, regarded to be motivated to improve their skills and work productively in a group setting.

Contrary to what was experienced in the pilot study, recruitment of students did not adhere to the research plan with one of the schools not following through with its commitment to participate in the group work. Reasons included four instead of six invited students attending the preliminary meeting, two of whom decided to opt out. Of the two students who did not attend, one had been excluded from school and the second opted out because of the absence of the excluded friend. Due to staff absence and pressures on time and resources the school did not manage to proceed further. Steps were taken to help the two remaining consenting students to understand the reason why the group did not proceed and arrangements made for them to be supported in SEAL work by the school’s social inclusion staff.

Further recruitment difficulties occurred in each of the two remaining schools. In the first case the group unexpectedly consisted of four males and one female instead of four males and two female students. Attendance of both female students had been expected up until the third session when it became apparent that one of them would not be returning to the school. Following discussions with all parties concerned (student, parents and staff) the remaining female student was given the opportunity to reconsider. The student chose to remain in the group and complete the group work. In the second case the proposed group of seven students, consisting of 5 females and two males, resulted in a group of 5 females. One of the male students had taken up a place at another school after the beginning of term having unexpectedly been offered a place from the waiting list. The second male student chose not to be the only male and was offered the opportunity to participate in future group work.

10 students entered data into a journal at the end of each of the six sessions

10 students circled feelings faces at the end of each of the six sessions

10 students completed SEAL self-evaluation questionnaires (post group work)

8 students were interviewed (post group work)

3.5.1 Student profiles

The student participants were aged 12 to 13 years of age. 4 were male and 6 female.

School 1

Student	Need/reason for referral	Length of time	Other current intervention?	Previous intervention
1	Difficulties relating to staff/low self-esteem	1 year	None	Supported in transition from primary to senior school.
2	Serious illness, poor peer relations	3 years	None (except for medical intervention)	Supported in transition from primary to senior school.
3	Low self-esteem	1 year	None	Supported in transition from primary to senior school.
4	Rudeness to staff/disruptive behaviour/low self-esteem	1 year	None	Supported in transition from primary to senior school.
5	Failure to engage in lessons/disruptive behaviour	1 year	None	Supported in transition from primary to senior school.

School 2

Student	Need/reason for referral	Length of time	Other current intervention?	Previous intervention
6	Poor peer relations/low self-esteem	1 year	None	
7	Disruptive behaviour/lower than average attendance	1 year	None	Classroom support
8	Low self-esteem/difficulties relating to staff	1 year	None	
9	Disruptive behaviour/problematic peer relationships	1 year	None	Classroom support
10	Difficulties with peer relations/low self-esteem	1 year	None	

3.5.2 Referral criteria and mechanisms

The students in each school had experienced varying levels of mainstream SEAL learning opportunities (Wave 1) during Y7 and Y8 and had been identified as having additional needs in the area of social and emotional development.

Selection of participants took place prior to completion of the self-report Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ - Goodman, 1997) conducted pre and post group work by participants as part of the Counselling Service's evaluation system. The total difficulties scores (from a range of 0 and 40) pre group work ranged between 14 and 18 (indicating 'borderline' need). Hyperactivity scores ranged between 'borderline' and 'abnormal' with conduct, emotional and peer in the 'borderline' range in most cases, showing congruence with the students needs as identified by the school staff. The 'emotional' score was the most significantly reduced post group work score being well within the 'normal' range, i.e. between 0 and 3 (out of 0 – 10).

Referral: School 1

The students were chosen by the Heads of Year, in consultation with the SENCO. The group was then put together with the school counsellor and Assistant Head (Inclusion). The criteria were that the group would consist of a range of students with disparate needs and personalities with motivation to change and capacity to perform SEAL related tasks. None of the students had major attendance issues, all were above 90% at the time of referral.

Referral: School 2

The students were chosen by the Heads of Year, in consultation with the SENCO. The group was then put together with the school counsellor and the SENCO. Selection for participation was based on members having a range of personal strengths and difficulties with motivation to change and capacity to perform SEAL related tasks.

3.5.3 Group leader/facilitators

The researcher was the leader for both groups. In one case the co-facilitator was the school-based counsellor and in the other the co-facilitator was the Assistant Special Needs Co-ordinator. The group leader's ages ranged between 22 and 53. The group leader had many years experience of facilitating small group work in secondary schools in the North East of England. One co-facilitator had a small amount of experience of being involved in group work with young people. The second facilitator had experience of classroom based small group work.

3.5.4 Counselling approach used in group work

The counselling approach used throughout the group work was based on the humanistic integrative tradition with emphasis on the 'human potential' for creativity, growth and psychological health. The objective of this person-centred approach was to work with the participant's whole experience rather than labels or giving focus to thinking and behaviour. By handing responsibility to them for their thoughts and actions the aim was to provide opportunity for self exploration and drawing on their own resources, i.e. creative instincts, to solve any problems.

3.6 Engaging young people in research

The challenge to find innovative methods for engaging young people in research can motivate a creative approach in the researcher. Kaye Richards of the BACP Research Division, for example, used the idea of the 'Big Brother' diary room to collect data for a youth development study realising that young people easily identified with the TV programme. The method proved to be fun, motivating young people to talk and queuing up to be interviewed.

Increasingly innovative data collection methods including the use of games, role play and exercises, are quite common in academic research, partly for interactional and partly for data gathering purposes (Hill et al., 1996; Hill & Triseliotis, 1991; Morgan et al., 2002).

The 'fun factor' is seen as an important consideration when selecting methods for research with children and young people (Barker & Weller, 2003; Fargas-Malet et al, 2010; Punch 2002b). It has been commonly reported that group discussions are fun, especially when there are activities and exercises (Punch, 2002).

Morrow (2007) stressed the value of qualitative child friendly methods, vital to shed light on children's experiences that would not be possible using adult-centred techniques. Morrow advocated: actively involving young people in research to make it interesting, accessible and engaging; demonstrating that their contributions are valued; providing feedback on research findings and how the research is to be used to improve things for young people; ensuring the tasks are age appropriate for the age, interests and capabilities of the participants. Engagement of this kind requires effective and authentic communication involving meaning, purpose and responsibility, especially connected with the newly found sense of independence that research skills can foster. Moore & Rosenthal (1995) describe the phenomenon of not knowing the extent of your own rights and responsibilities as 'status ambiguity' (p. 234) and remind the researcher of the implications for the sense of purpose felt by young people in research.

Kirby (2004) and Darbyshire et al (2005) ascribed motivation to be key to appropriately engaging young people in research and more important than method. Taking their lead and being guided by Morrow, great consideration was given to employ research methods that ably engage young people, being relevant and motivating and that 'speak their language'. A range of methods, including mixed media of drawings and words, was selected in recognition that participants may vary in ability (Morrow, 2007) and to acknowledge that children are attracted to methods that give immediate pleasure (Punch, 2002).

3.7 Ethics

There is a considerable amount of information and legislation worldwide with many codes and guidelines relating to the ethical issues of research involving children and young people.

Ethics can be described as a set of moral principles or code of conduct. Sieber (1993) defines ethics in research: *“prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful, and to be fair”* (p. 14). The relative issues are discussed in this section to provide insight into the research approach and choice of methods and materials.

3.7.1 Counsellors as researchers

The phenomenological approach with its emphasis on the importance of returning to psychological subject matter with an open attitude was viewed by Wertz (2005) as a suitable method to provide researchers with well established methods capable of securing sensitive insights into human meanings and that this kind of inquiry can be *“seamlessly integrated with counselling practice”* (p. 176).

The Charter for Ethical Practice of the European Association of Counselling (EAC, 2010) provided a clear outline for counsellor researchers: *“Research into counselling should be undertaken by competent researchers who are familiar with the values of counselling. It requires full consideration of ethical issues and concern for the dignity and welfare of the participants. Researchers have a responsibility to behave in ways that are as consistent as possible with the core values of counselling”*. The core values emerge from what the EAC refer to as philosophical principles of the counsellor and are based on respect for universal human rights and for individual and cultural differences underpinned by a set of attitudes and skills which have special regard for the integrity, authority and autonomy of the client.

Counsellors conducting research with young people in the UK refer to the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) Ethical Framework. BACP guidance for research includes: a commitment to fostering research that will inform and develop practice; all practitioners are encouraged to support research undertaken on behalf of the profession and to participate actively in research work; all research should be undertaken with rigorous attentiveness to the quality and integrity both of the research itself and of the dissemination of the findings of the research; the rights of all research participants should be carefully considered and protected.

The minimum rights include that consent be informed and freely given with the right to withdraw at any point and that the research methods used should comply with the standards of good practice in counselling and psychotherapy and must not adversely affect clients.

3.7.2 Power issues

Research is always and inevitably involved with and implicated in the operation of power (Scott and Usher, 1999). This point is particularly important when researching with young people; much of the literature highlighting the implications of power and preserving the widely recognised view that ethically any work with children and young people is conceptualised as being a special case and needs to be underpinned by specific relative ethical principles (Balen et al, 2006; Kirby, 2004; Mayall, 2000; Morrow, 2007).

Whilst some researchers try to address the issue of power in their chosen methods through consultation and the use of ‘managers’, Mayall (2000) contends that “*a central characteristic of adults is that they have power over children*” (p. 121) and it cannot be pretended otherwise. This leaves no doubt for the requirement for careful monitoring of the balance of power in child-based research and the need to invite children to help in efforts to understand childhood. The researcher has responsibility to find empathic, non-patronising ways of communicating with children and young people (Balen et al (2006). Central to the ethical discussion is the requirement for the researcher to obtain informed consent prior to and during data collection stages of research involving children and means adopted to appropriately convey the information in a way that it will be understood.

In the case of research being conducted in the school setting the literature refers to ‘gatekeepers’ (senior staff) as necessary agents who need to be consulted to gain access to students (Brigman, 2006; Morrow, 2008). Neuman (2000) qualifies a gatekeeper as “*someone with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site*” (p. 352), a person from whom permission is required. Masson (2000) made reference to gatekeepers having a positive function, protecting children and young people from potentially damaging research.

The school acts in loco parentis during the school day and school policy is the determinant governor for research procedures i.e. safety of the children and consent. Being mindful of this point would be particularly important when the parent or principal carer is absent and unable to give consent.

3.7.3 Child participation in research

The children's rights agenda has created an environment of awareness in which children have the right to be consulted and heard (Darbyshire et al, 2005). Birbeck (2007) reminded the researcher of the United Nations Rights of the Child mandate (Article 12) that children have a right to express themselves and participate in decisions that affect them. Numerous other studies and reports (Christensen & James, 2000; Edwards & Alldred, 1999; Greene & Hill, 2006; Hill, 2006) reiterated the shift in paradigm, backed by the UNCRC, viewing children as agents of change with the right to express their opinions in all matters affecting them. Similarly, Balen (2006) argued for empowering young people to make their decisions as 'active beings' rather than constructing children as dependent 'human becomings' and in need of protection. Mahon et al (1996) added to the debate maintaining that *"it is neither theoretically nor methodologically appropriate to rely on proxies to represent the views and experiences of children. On the contrary, children's views can and ought to be taken seriously"* (p. 146).

Giving the child a voice in research can embody many positions. It can mean giving the child autonomy by active participation and deciding on structure and content of the research or choices concerning method and tasks; designing the research geared towards being child-centred insofar as choice of method, materials, language and environment (Prout, 2004). On the other hand, a more searching rationale raises the researcher's awareness about issues such as culture and equality, criteria for inclusion and lack of entitlement regarding having a say on changes of practice and policy as a result of research (Hill, 2006). An argument brought to light by some authors is that of the tension sometimes created regarding the extent of youth participation in research because of the contradiction between current ethical committee requirements based on protecting the child and participation.

In this context, a particularly thought provoking ethical dilemma is highlighted by Gill (2003) in conducting school-based research when she argued the point that some important research would not have been carried out given current ethical requirements in the school setting and that some studies have had to undergo major modifications rendering them unlikely to fulfil their original intent.

As the movement towards young people as ‘active agents’ heightened, so did the criticism. Bragg (2007) cited Orner & Ellsworth to question student participation: Orner (1992) contended that calls for student voice as a central component of student empowerment “*perpetuate relations of domination in the name of liberation*” (p.75) because they do not take into account the intersection of identity, language, context and power that informs all pedagogical relations. Ellsworth (1989) argued that “*every expression of student voice (is) partial and predicated on the absence and marginalisation of alternative voices*” (p. 103). The view was that unless participation in and consultation of young people’s views takes place on a massive and equitable scale, there is potential for inequality insofar as race, creed, culture and gender being represented in societal policy. In this vein Bragg offered the argument that, in theory, schools offer an environment in which it is possible to reach a diverse range of young people, adding to the already prominent choice for school being a suitable environment for researching child views.

Examples of positive outcomes from child participatory research come from the NFER (National Foundation for Education Research) (2006) and Bragg (2007). The NFER undertook a scoping review of the literature to determine the extent of the importance of child participation in research finding evidence of involvement of young people as key players. The positive impact of consulting young people was viewed as enhancing their well-being by means of generating confidence and self-esteem; social, personal and emotional competence including improved peer relationships, enhanced adult/youth, home/school relationships and increased sense of commitment and connectedness to their school with a sense of a belonging; sense of responsibility, efficacy and autonomy including own sense of maturity and accountability; and new knowledge and skills seen as contribution to preparation for adult and working life.

Negative impact included disillusionment because of respondents perceiving their involvement in research as tokenistic with a lack of impact on policy and practice; and conflict with other priorities, e.g. through extra commitment and time pressures placed on young people involved in giving their voice. NFER convey a concern that whilst a shift in paradigm from constructing and reconstructing children's experiences based upon adult-centred standards to recognizing children as knowing subjects with capacity for expressing their experienced knowledge, researchers may be in danger of the disenfranchisement of already marginalized young people.

Bragg's (2007) extensive school-based review of literature was able to claim that consulting young people will make services more appropriate for young people's needs such as: sustainability because young people will be more committed to and enthusiastic about services; helping to raise the profile of projects or initiatives and give them an identity so that more young people will be encouraged to use them; improving policy by making it more sensitive, helping policymakers to understand young people's lives and perspectives; helping to overcome disaffection in some schools and enhance school improvement; lessening young people's resistance if they feel their views are being taken into account.

The extent to which young people are to be involved in research depends largely on the approach of the researcher. Sixsmith (2007), for example, found in a child participation study on concepts of child well-being that children's conceptions are at least as detailed and complex as that of adults and teachers and contends that their contribution in research should not be under-estimated. In the case of this research, the level of child participation was based on the scope, timescale, and setting and underpinned by the view of the participants as 'social actors' and competent which was determined by their ability and appropriate consenting.

3.7.4 Location/environment for research

One of the most important tasks during the research was to create a climate in which young people felt safe to express themselves freely. The evidence suggests that, provided children and young people are immersed in a supportive, natural and encouraging environment, they are likely to report their experience honestly. This idea is supported by Creswell (2009) who regards a 'natural' setting for obtaining data in qualitative research as an integral characteristic of the methodological tradition of inquiry and Greene & Hill (2006) who promote conditions for researching young people that can capture the nature of children's lives as lived rather than rely on taking children out of their everyday lives into a professional's office or "lab". Considering these environmental factors helped to inform the selection of the most congenial conditions for conducting the group work research.

Whilst there is affirmation of school being an appropriate setting for conducting research with young people, fitting in with the school regime can pose challenges to the researcher. An inevitable and not inconsiderable concern of carrying out the research was to negotiate a system revolving round the school term of holidays, time-tables, core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science), tests and examinations. An understanding by the researcher of the school structure with its rules, regulations and policies proved to be essential for accessing staff and students and for scheduling with minimal disruption to all concerned.

The group work in each of the two schools took place in a confidential setting located in purpose-built learning support accommodation with minimal chance for interruption in accordance with BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice (2010). The researcher took steps to ensure that the allotted rooms were appropriate for group work, with windows providing natural light, sufficient space to allow for movement, and equipped with readily available child friendly resources. Being a natural setting for the students, the school provided a suitable context for qualitative research with minimal chance of material leading to contrived findings (Creswell, 2009).

3.7.5 Informed Consent

Initial consent was obtained from the School Counselling Service management team and the headteachers of the schools involved in the study (Appendix 3). Consent to access the participants throughout the study was gained from the school's designated 'gatekeeper', the Assistant Head/Social Inclusion Co-ordinator, throughout the research process.

Consent from participants was gained directly from them (Appendix 5). The participants were helped to understand the ethics being applied to the research: that they have the right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish, without detriment to them; how far they would be afforded anonymity and confidentiality; given opportunity to reject the use of data-gathering devices, i.e. a digital recorder; the purpose of making notes/recording for research purposes.

In addition to the written consent obtained at the outset of the group work verbal confirmation of consent was obtained at appropriate stages. The participants were reminded in the final group session about the use of their personal journals for research purposes. Every member consented to information from the journals being used and none of the participants wished to have the journal returned following the research project. One participant requested that a word she had written in the journal be crossed out. Participants were given the option of completing the SEAL self-evaluation forms and their consent was requested to use the information.

Consent was requested for participation in the diary room interviews. With the end of a very busy summer term approaching offering new and different opportunities for students such as creative activities and outings, two students opted not to participate in the diary room interviews in favour of attending other activities. Letters were sent to them to convey support and understanding of their decision. The 8 remaining participants consented to attend interviews. Consent for the use of the interview material was requested following the diary room activity. Each member gave their verbal consent to the interview material being used for research.

Consent from the parents/legal guardians of the students was requested by letter enclosing a research information sheet including an invitation to contact the school, university or researcher to discuss further the research further if required (Appendix 7). Provision was made in the case of parents not consenting whereby the researcher and the school staff would take steps to support the student and ensure that they would not be disadvantaged. One parent telephoned to speak to the researcher/counsellor prior to consenting to find out more about the research project and how it would affect the child. Parental consent was received in every case.

3.7.6 Confidentiality

The use of the research data complied with the Data Protection Act (1998). Methods for preserving the privacy of data were adopted including secure storage in a locked cabinet in the counselling room to which school staff do not have access. Privacy and anonymity has been preserved by the removal of identifiers such as gender and the use of pseudonyms. Confidentiality was discussed with the students who were assured that the data was used for the purposes of writing up a doctoral thesis and would be shredded once the process had been completed.

3.7.7 Child Protection/Safeguarding

In accordance with ‘Safeguarding Children and Young People’ (Children Act, 2004) and school policy, it was made clear to research participants that research data given in confidence does not enjoy legal privilege and that disclosures of serious risk would need to be shared in the interests of safety.

No ‘safeguarding’ issues arose during the course of the group work or research procedures.

3.7.8 Addressing the affects of research on participants and the school community

The possible impact of the research on participants and the school community were identified as loss of formal learning and personal or academic issues/vulnerabilities arising out of the group work and addressed as follows:

Parents were formally requested to encourage the students to make-up any important work they may miss as a result of the group work/research study and teaching staff, having been consulted and informed about the research group, agreed to provide any necessary academic support that may be required.

Time and resources to allow for follow-up counselling and teaching support were made available for participants. Follow-up counselling sessions were arranged for one student to provide support for anger management. Support in Mathematics lessons was also provided for the student as a response to his/her disclosure of difficulties leading to misbehaviour due to boredom.

3.7.9 Making use of learning from the study/dissemination of the findings

An important ethical consideration must be how the learning from the study will be used. Efforts will be made to share the research findings with participants and their school communities and counselling service in the first instance. Following the research project participants will learn the impact of the research on planning and conducting future group work programmes in school. A summary of the project findings will be accessible on the websites of participating schools.

My experience of working in a team of school counsellors shows that whilst some counsellors feel sufficiently confident and willing to accrue the necessary knowledge and training to conduct group work, others had retained a degree of reticence. In team discussions on this topic reasons for reserve related to pressures from time restrictions because of full case loads or lack of sufficient support structures. Steps will be taken, in collaboration with colleagues, to discuss and possibly develop a model of good practice for group work in schools using this study as a starting point.

A tentative approach to the CCYP division of BACP has been made with a proposal to forward findings of the study for their consideration and possible insertion of any useful material in a journal. Plans will be made to visit the management and counselling team of the counselling service to provide them with a copy of the study for information and discussion.

The researcher will personally meet the research participants in school to provide feedback and discuss implications for future group work. Participating schools will be provided with a copy of the study for information together with a summary of the findings for insertion on to the school's website.

3.8 Pilot Study (Appendix 1)

Carrying out research in the school setting for the first time, and being aware of the inevitable time and child access limitations, required that consideration be given to conducting a pilot study in preparation for the main study, as recommended by Polit et al (2001). Though pilot studies can be time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with unanticipated problems, Mason & Zuercher (1995) suggested that *"it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study"* (p. 11).

The main objective of the pilot was to inform a suitable research model that would be transferable to the participating schools with a view to evaluating the amount of time and resources necessary for conducting the research. Practical objectives included ascertaining the impact of the research on the wider school community of staff and parents, assessing the implications and suitability of data collection methods, effective use of resources and how to minimise demands on students' time.

The pilot study was formulated following sourcing and reading relevant literature and contributed significantly to the construction of a feasible research plan informing the selection of appropriate and practicable methods. Strengths and weaknesses in the chosen data collection methods were identified highlighting the necessity for making some essential adjustments. Additional benefits were that it helped to raise confidence to pursue the research and identified the need to conduct a more detailed review of the literature in order to complete the task of producing a final research proposal for presentation to the University's Review Panel.

An important ethical issue arose from discussing the pilot study at the Review Panel when ethical concerns were expressed about the use of a 'Big Brother' (Channel 4 TV's reality show) diary room as a method to collect data.

Searching reviews and studies revealed widespread concerns about standards in relation to the 'Big Brother' production linked to ethical codes of conduct such as responsibility and integrity (Van Zoonen & Aslama, 2006; Sparks, 2007). Criticisms involved 'authenticity' with accusations directed to the producers of duping audiences through editing, and contributing to a culture in which young people increasingly prefer achievement through fame rather than hard work or talent. To condone such concerns created a moral dilemma. In the interests of upholding ethical codes relating to harm, and being a responsible researcher, the decision not to include any references to 'Big Brother' was taken. However, the use of the diary room in the pilot study had proved a child-friendly environment for interviewing and was therefore retained.

Piloting provided insight into the limitations of the chosen methods to access data necessitating further research to find methods that were more engaging. The debriefing notes proved a successful method for collecting data and were therefore retained.

The diary room task also proved useful but required modification. Participants were able to fully grasp and identify with the diary room concept. It was as though the diary room gave them permission to articulate their thoughts and feelings. However, what the participants did express was limited in some cases to one word only responses and did not provide sufficient information to convey their whole experience. The impact of the 'absent researcher' became evident in lack of stimulation for tapping into experience resulting in less data being generated than had been anticipated. As a result two data collection changes were made: the use of personal journals as a method for recording experience was introduced to generate personal data. The semi-structured interview questionnaires would be formulated from data emerging from debriefing notes and journals and an interviewer would be present in the diary room to use reflective responses and stimulate greater discussion.

The feelings faces method proved unreliable and impractical. Selecting and colouring in the A4 sized feelings faces consumed too much time and observations revealed that selection did not always come from experience but, for example, from copying the behaviour of other participants.

One student coloured in every face because he/she enjoyed colouring-in. As a consequence it was decided that pre-selected feelings faces would be incorporated into the personal journal as small ‘emoticon’ faces to be circled.

The Goodman Strengths and Difficulties questionnaire proved overly time-consuming to complete ranging from 5 – 15 minutes depending on the individual reducing group work time considerably and was considered impractical in that sense. Problems were also experienced in assimilating SDQ data with the qualitative data being more suited to measuring outcomes than exploring experience. Though the SDQ was not incorporated into the methodology of this study participants were nevertheless required to complete the SDQ pre and post group work to adhere to evaluation and recording practices of the counselling service.

The project did not appear to be too disruptive to students, school staff or families and was feasible from that point of view. A benefit from conducting the pilot was that parents and school staff showed genuine interest in the group work and viewed the research positively. The more the research was discussed the greater the interest and support.

The next chapter describes the research design and takes the reader through the research procedures from implementation of the group work to the collection of the data, and data analysis procedures following the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen phenomenological method (Moustakas, 1994).

3.9 The Research Design and Procedures

3.9.1 Introduction

The qualitative design of this phenomenological study consisted of child-friendly data collection methods of writing, drawing, observation, and talking that allow for differences in individuals that take into account ability and preference.

The criteria for the choice of methods was based on the premise of providing maximum opportunity for answering the research questions at the same time as being relative to young people and motivating (Kirby, 2004; Fielding & McGregor, 2005). Using a variety of methods to collect data is more likely to ensure a more effective and in-depth exploration of children's experiences.

The aim of the chosen research techniques was to gain an understanding of the experience of the participants with minimal influence from an adult's perspective. Naturalistic data collection methods were adopted to enable the students to participate in the group work without an obvious awareness of being researched, thus reducing researcher influence on group interactions and self-expression. Phenomenological study of group work requires group members to reflect upon what has happened in the group soon afterwards to have any meaning or lasting benefit Yalom (1995). Methods for reflection were therefore adopted. The design was also informed by the view of Bentz & Shapiro (1998) that phenomenology is used to obtain knowledge about how individuals think and feel in the most direct ways finding out what goes on within a person in attempt to get to and describe lived experience in a language as free from the constructs of intellect and society as possible.

Employing a variety of methods to gather data seeks to achieve a degree of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2008) allowing for a richer and more reliable depiction than can be obtained from just one source. In-keeping with the phenomenological tradition, the research methods focussed more on generating meaning(s) and less on measuring outcomes and are characterised by a child-friendly semi-participatory approach with impetus for adopting qualitative methods to generate understandings of what it is like for a young person to be a participant in support work outside of the routine school curriculum. Creswell (1998) conveyed the principle upon which the design of this study was based: "*Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, report detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting*" (p. 15).

Davis' (1998) remark "*A consensus has developed around the belief that the ethics, tools and roles employed in qualitative children's research should empower children*" (p. 329) reflected the underpinning of the research design approach seeing children as agents of change rather than that of 'adults know best' (Danby & Farrell, 2004).

3.9.2 Summary of the research design

Personal journals for recording experience, feelings faces to reflect felt emotions, debriefing notes, and semi-structured interviews for capturing expressions of experience, were chosen to gather data.

The initial data was gathered during the course of the group work as follows:

participants were provided with personal journals for entering their thoughts and feelings at the end of each session using their chosen methods, i.e. words, drawings, symbols, thought bubbles, pictures, etc;

the journal pages contained feelings faces depicting commonly felt emotions for participants to circle to reflect their feelings, providing additional data;

debriefing notes, based on the observations of the facilitators, were recorded at the end of each group work session.

Further data was gathered from interviewing participants using semi-structured questionnaires which had been produced from the data from the debriefing notes and personal journals.

A phenomenological horizontalization method (Moustakas, 1994) was applied to analyse the data from the interview transcripts towards a synthesis of meaning of the lived experience of those participating in school-based counsellor-led group work.

3.9.3 Application of ethics to the procedures

In conducting this child-centred research, great attention was paid to ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004 and the BACP Ethical Framework, 2007) including gaining informed consent at every stage of the process and the importance of the obligation to ensure that priority be given to the welfare of the research participants. A strategy for immediate follow-up was drawn up to address any arising concerns. Prior to participant recruitment, this study was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Manchester and was subsequently adhered to throughout the research process. Potential participants were provided with a form of consent (Appendix 5) and information leaflet (Appendix 4) that provided information about the research process. Great care was taken to convey verbally that confidentiality of the participants would be preserved; identifying information was changed or transposed. Participants were given opportunities to withdraw from any part of the research process.

The researcher is a BACP (British Association of Counselling & Psychotherapy) accredited counsellor. The researcher and group facilitators are in the employment of Children's Services in the North East of England and have been screened by the CRB (Criminal Record Bureau). Line management and supervision for the facilitation of the group work was provided by the school counselling service's co-ordinator. Each group had a leader and co-facilitator.

3.9.4 Group work implementation and structure

Counsellors based in secondary schools subscribing to the counselling service offered head teachers an invitation for SEAL based group work to be conducted with students in school to develop the research. Three schools took up the invitation and were given a choice of SEAL theme for work with a small group of students from Year 7, 8 or 9. Coincidentally, each of the three schools chose Theme 1 'Learning to be together' (empathy and social skills) for Y8 students. A group work plan incorporating SEAL materials/resources was drawn up in liaison with the counselling service's management and co-ordinator, as well as senior members of the teaching staff responsible for social inclusion and SEAL implementation.

The students were invited to attend a preliminary meeting with the group facilitators and introduced to the main topics to be covered during the group sessions. Students were then invited to ask questions and express their interest to voluntarily join the group. Programme descriptions including a consent form were circulated to the students to take home and review/discuss with parents.

The first task of the group was to establish a safe and functional environment guided by three credible sources of safe group work practice: Bluestein (2001), Faupel, Herrick & Sharp (1998), and NSPCC (2008). Setting boundaries and a positive context were major considerations for establishing safety for the group work. This was achieved by discussion and collaboratively drawing up a group agreement (set of standards) based on expectations and participation. Standards included equality for all, confidentiality, respecting differing opinions, permitting each person to talk without interruption, and the choice to 'pass' (abstain) if feeling uncomfortable about making a contribution.

The structure of the sessions ensured that there was a distinction between the beginning, middle and end (Culley & Bond, 2004, p. 14). Each one began with facilitators and students sitting together in a circle to provide opportunity for 'checking in', making contact and introducing the day's activities. The middle part of the session was to actively engage in SEAL activities. The end of the session involved making entries in personal journals and returning to the circle to 'check out'. Group sessions were interspersed with short ice-breaker activities to provide opportunity for social interaction and boosting energy levels and, with Punch (2002) in mind, to add an element of fun.

The pace of the work was determined by the use of a time-table for purposes of keeping on target to enable optimal coverage of the SEAL materials but also by the pace of the students. A flexible approach was adopted to allow time for discussion, expression of thoughts and feelings and reflection, when necessary.

The Goodman self-report SDQ was completed by students as a mandatory part of the counselling service's evaluation procedures prior to commencement of the group work and on completion of the group work. However, this information was not included in the study as it is considered to be more of a quantitative rather than qualitative dataset.

The final group work session was extended by 30 minutes to allow for the completion of paperwork, presentation of certificates by the head teacher of the school, and for a celebration of the of the work in party mode including music, 'nibbles' and soft drinks.

3.9.5 Application of safety and boundaries

The group work took place in a properly controlled therapeutic context created within a framework of explicit and specific co-created boundaries and child/person-centred approach based on the counsellor's 'Rogerian' orientation. Primary consideration was given to safety, both emotionally and physically, throughout the group work with referral to validated sources for guidance including: Jane Bluestein (2001) '*Creating Emotionally Safe Schools*', NSPCC (2008) '*SCYP Practice Guidance: Group work*' and Faupel, Herrick & Sharp (1998) '*Anger management: a practical guide*'. Bluestein asserted that boundaries are tools, based on mutual consideration and respect, for building cooperation in relationships with the purpose of expressing limits and communicating appropriate conditions for safe work together. Also, that boundaries create less stress with fewer power struggles than rules and demands (which are typically win-lose and often focus on punishments or negative outcomes for non-compliance). She defined five characteristics of boundaries: 'clarity' (specific and clearly communicated); 'win-win' (creating ways for both parties to get what they want); 'proactivity' (expressing a problem in advance as a method of prevention); 'positivity' (focus on positive outcomes of co-operation rather than threats); 'follow through' (communicates that you mean what you say and you say what you mean).

Faupel, Herrick & Sharp focussed on the existence of essential preconditions of the student's own sense of responsibility and motivation and the need for explicit ground rules to be drawn up to include: attendance on a voluntary basis with student's electing by adherence/non-adherence to the rules to either remain or return to class; each participant should aim to be positive; no-one should do anything to hurt or upset another group member (including wicked looks, negative comments or put-downs); the assertion by the group facilitators that taking turns and listening promote learning so interruptions are discouraged and taking turns praised.

The NSPCC group work guidelines emphasised encouraging clarity for group participants and joint ownership of the group work process with the formulation of an agreement covering, as a minimum, respectful language and behaviour, confidentiality, valuing each other, and the process to be followed in cases of disagreements.

3.9.6 Overview of SEAL resource Theme 1 'Learning to be together'

Theme 1 focussed primarily on the social and emotional aspect of learning social skills with a secondary focus on empathy. It was designed to promote the skills of interpersonal relations that are required for pupils to be successful across all aspects of school life. Many of the learning opportunities in this theme required pupils to work together, either in pairs or small groups to provide the opportunity for them to practise the skills. Empathy was an important aspect of the theme.

Topics for working together included:

Declaration of Human Rights (resource 1.1.1)

The activity was used to develop a Declaration of Human Rights for a class in school with the aim of helping students to learn and stay happy at school. (Appendix 11d)

Characteristics of friends (resource 1.2.1)

This learning opportunity related to various characteristics of friends: listener, receiver, forgiver, mediator, giver, fixer and the respecter. Exploration and discussion took place followed by presentations. (Appendix 11e)

Avatar characters (resource 1.3.1)

The Avatar activity related to designing and developing avatars with different difficult life experiences and sent to a desert island. Group members worked together to reach a better understanding of people and why they behave the way they do. (Appendix 11f)

Disclosure cards (resource 1.8.1): A learning opportunity involving discussion of disclosure cards that describe emotionally difficult situations. (Appendix 11g)

3.9.7 Collection of data: observation, journals and interviews

3.9.7.1 Introduction

Patton (2005) outlined three data collection methods involved in qualitative research: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observations; written documents. All three methods were incorporated into the design of this study. Compatible with the phenomenological paradigm on which this study is based, the debriefing notes of the group facilitators and participants' journals, completed at the end of the group work sessions, formed the primary sources of data. Immersion into that data was an important part of the phenomenological process beginning with the first set of debriefing notes which provided opportunity to reflect on observations of how the participants were adjusting to and responding to their new experiences.

Combining the debriefing notes together with the journal entries provided a method to triangulate the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008) necessary for clarifying some of the journal entries and generating themes that started to inform the phenomenon.

The themes contributed to the development of a semi-structured questionnaire to be used to interview participants. The data emerging from the interviews helped to clarify the meaning of vocabulary, imagery and selection of feelings collected from the journals, and provided a level of corroboration of the interpretation of the observational notes from debriefing group work sessions. The intention was to define the meanings that may be encrypted in the data and get closer to the phenomenon of the experience of the participants.

The following provides the rationale for and description of each of the data collection methods employed:

3.9.7.2 Observation

Silverman (2009) regarded observation to be “*fundamental to understanding another culture*” (p. 123) and useful in the preliminary stages of research, e.g. prior to framing a questionnaire. Strongly associated with ethnographic study in naturalistic settings, observation as a research method received affirmation following major Nobel Prize awarded studies conducted on animal behaviour in the 1970’s by Tinbergen, Lorenz, & Von Frisch. Observation can provide important information about the meaning or significance of what has been observed according to Kazdin (2009) and was therefore considered to be suitable for incorporation into the methodology for this research. The aim was to gain an insight into the behaviour of participants in order to access detailed accounts of actions, gestures, and the interpersonal interactions during each group work session.

Guidance for making effective observations was taken from Yalom (1995) who stressed the importance of observing non-verbal communication, i.e. how quickly group members enter or leave the room, how posture shifts and how gestures may tell more about the here-and-now experiences of group members than verbalizations.

Though not intended to be a substitute for detailed analytical report, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggested that debriefing notes used together with other data can inform and help in the development of processing research data. They can also act to give importance to the interpretation of actions and the contexts in which they occur (Greig & Taylor, 1999). Offering a qualitative approach to collecting data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and a useful method of discussing the group work, it was decided to incorporate the use of debriefing notes into the methodology to record observations. The debriefing took place immediately following each session when observations were recorded by the facilitators for the purpose of capturing verbal, non-verbal and behavioural information and to reflect on practice, while still fresh in the memory (Yalom).

3.9.7.3 Self-expression journal with feelings faces

Journaling in its various forms is a means for recording personal thoughts, daily experiences, and evolving insights offering opportunity for allowing a freedom of expression that may be inhibited in a group setting (Hiemstra, 2001). The purpose of using a journal is to encourage reflective thinking in participants obtainable by summarising the contents of the sessions via words, images, drawings etc. and to facilitate expression of thoughts and feelings.

Feelings faces are a long established effective resource used by counsellors when working with children and young people to encourage the recognition and articulation of emotions openly and appropriately. The work of Paul Ekman (Goleman, 2003) led him to believe that expressions on the face offer a direct window on a person's emotions. Recent work in the field of neuroscience by Lieberman (2007) showed that the amygdala (associated with emotional process) was less active when an individual labels a feeling, another region of the brain was more active: the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (associated with thinking in words about emotional experiences).

Self-completion journals were provided for students for entering their thoughts and feelings at the end of each group session. Based on the positive findings of Ekman and Lieberman the use of feelings faces, having proved successful in the Pilot Study, presented a valuable means of tapping into experience.

The function of the journals served a double purpose for participants: opportunity for self-expression, including identifying and labelling their emotions; for the recording of information to represent their experience of group work sessions. 14 emotions were selected on the basis that they were amongst the most familiar and commonly felt 'frustrated', 'embarrassed', 'mad', 'nervous', 'happy', 'proud', 'sad', 'loved', 'lonely', 'scared', 'tense/stressed' 'relaxed' were selected. The images of feelings faces were incorporated into the journal as a visual aid on every page to be circled by students to reflect their emotions. Students were made aware that they may choose as few or as many of the feelings they were experiencing. In addition, a blank face was added for participants to depict any other emotion they were feeling for the purpose of free personal expression. Permission was given to personalise the journals and assurances of confidentiality of content was given. It was made clear to the participants that the journals would be used in helping with research, that they would be copied for purposes of the study only, and that ownership would ultimately be theirs if wanted or shredded once the information had been processed.

3.9.7.4 Individual interviews

De Marrais (2004) defined the purpose of phenomenological interviews: "*to attain a first-person description of some specified domain of experience*" (p. 57). They offer a method to access people's experiences and inner perceptions and are therefore widely used in qualitative research (McLeod, 2011); unstructured and semi-structured interviews being the most suitable for such purposes. Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) discussed the dimensions of the qualitative research interview seeing it as having unique potential for accessing and describing the 'life world', that it provides opportunity to interpret vocalization, facial expression and bodily gestures, and that knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between two people.

Interviews have the advantage that many children and young people like them and respond in a cooperative, sincere way. They can yield quality, accurate data and can be enhanced by interviewing skills (Borland et al 2001; Hill et al 1996).

Conversational interviews with open questions offer a less threatening technique than direct questioning enhancing communicative competence because content and direction is controlled by the interviewee (Christenson, 2004).

Unstructured interviewing is strongly associated with phenomenological principles because they begin from the premise of unformed theories and proffer spontaneous generation of material (Patton, 2002) and in that sense would have been the preferred method. However, it became apparent during the pilot study, owing to limited responses to interview questions from participants, that semi-structured questionnaires would be the more feasible option.

In this study, individual students were engaged in informal semi-structured interviews to obtain an understanding of their experience of participating in counsellor-led group work (Appendix 8). This one-to-one approach provided a more detailed exploration of the meanings for the 8 participants who elected to engage in this part of the study. An interview schedule was used, with each interview lasting around 15 minutes. An invitation was extended to participants to choose their interviewer from peers and facilitators. Three opted to be interviewed by a peer with the remaining five opting for one or other of the facilitators.

Open questions were used for interviewing, research having found that they provide the fullest answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview questions were composed to obtain the most holistic world view of the participants based on a personal dataset gathered from their journals and the debriefing notes with the intention of keeping as faithful as possible to the phenomenological method. Participants had access to their personal journal throughout the interview process for reference and reflection and to act as a prompt.

The approach of the interviewer was based on the grounds that the researcher becomes the learner and the participant, the one who has had the experience, the expert; an approach similar to that of the Rogerian counselling relationship whereby the client is seen as the expert on their own life and the counsellor comes from a place of not knowing (Rogers, 1951).

The interviewing approach was also non-directive, based on Rogers' (1945) qualitative research interview method that allows participant to express themselves freely in the company of an accepting and empathic researcher. In the Rogerian tradition, active listening skills were employed to enable the interviewees to be more open to their experience. The Ethical Framework was kept in mind when interviewing and validating responses were used, rather than probing, to ensure fidelity to the framework values of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice.

The interviews were digitally recorded for transcription for the data analysis process. In an effort to make the interviews child-friendly and potentially fun, they took place in a specially designed 'diary room' based on the popular Channel 4 television programme '*Big Brother*'. The room was decorated accordingly and contained a huge inflatable armchair with cushions. Although the video diary is entering the arena of research especially when it involves young people, being a medium that they can easily identify with, caution was taken to clarify the purpose of utilising this idea into the research process. Careful discussion took place with participants prior to the interviews to help them to understand that the researcher was interested only in providing a youth-friendly location for the interviews. Following lively discussion with the participants, the idea provided motivation and was viewed as a "*good idea*" and "*fun*". Though there is limited information available relating to this research method references were found in studies by Gibson (2005), Jones & McNamara (2004), and Noyes (2004).

The phenomenological analysis of the data is explained next.

3.9.8 Data Analysis

3.9.8.1 Introduction

Creswell (2009) stressed the importance of rigorous analysis of the data in a phenomenological study and sets out the necessary steps for this stage informed by Moustakas' (1994) empirical phenomenological methods: extract significant statements (horizons); identify the meaning from the statements; cluster the meanings into themes; provide exhaustive descriptions of phenomenon.

Moustakas discussed two models of data analysis (with certain modifications) suggested by van Kaam (1959, 1966) or Colaizzi (1973), Keen (1975), and Stevick (1971). The methodology for this study was based on the Colaizzi-Keen-Stevick model that uses a systematic approach to analysing data about lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). The underlying concept in phenomenological data analysis is to immerse oneself in the data, engage with it reflectively, and generate a rich description that will provide an understanding of the deeper essential structures embedded in that particular experience for a particular individual (Thorne, 2000). This approach is widely used in social and human sciences and offers greater potential to hear the voice of the participant.

Miles & Huberman (2002) explained that deciding what things mean (noticing regularities and patterns, etc.) starts early in the research process and strongly recommended that researchers make notes at the outset of collecting the data for qualitative analysis. An important part of this process was to maintain an open mind to the data and not to draw conclusions bearing in mind that ‘final’ conclusions may not appear until the data analysis process has been completed. Creswell (2007) referred to this characteristic of qualitative research as an emergent strategy and different to having a ‘tightly prescribed’ (p. 39) plan. An emergent approach was employed and applied to the earliest collected data from this piece of research.

Efforts to overcome the potential for bias in this study centred on the ‘transcendental’ approach of Moustakas (2004) and ‘objective reporting’ described by Denzin & Lincoln (2008).

3.9.8.2 Validity

Objectivity

A challenge during the data analysis process related to epoché because of previously being involved in group work with students and acquiring knowledge from feedback from the teachers and students. In the interests of trustworthiness and to minimise the issue of bias the interview questions were developed to be open-ended and based on information from the student’s journals and observations reported in the debriefing notes. Monitoring for bias was an item for discussion in counselling supervision.

Triangulation:

A degree of data triangulation (Denzin, 1978) was afforded, using the debriefing notes to check and validate categories emerging from the interview transcripts, with a view to ultimately elucidate the themes and essences and gain the most comprehensive and accurate depiction of the experience of the participants in accordance with Van Kaam (1966).

Interpretive Validity

The extent to which the meaning of what has been described is accurately represented is referred to by Kazdin (2009) as ‘interpretive validity’. In an effort to ensure that the descriptive material was being adequately understood and to reduce possible misinterpretation the following steps were taken: (a) the researcher/group work leader, together with the group co-facilitator, took time to debrief immediately following each group work sessions noting participants’ language, behaviour and body language, and changes from one session to another wherein a consensus was reached and noted about meaning; (b) the task to formulate meaning during the data analysis process was aided by an experienced counselling colleague familiar with research to provide an interobserver reliability check so that the data could be observed from a fresh perspective using an empathic approach from an “outsider” vantage point. The process involved each person independently formulating meaning units from the horizons then coming together to discuss until reaching a satisfactory degree of consistency for attaining the most authentic interpretations.

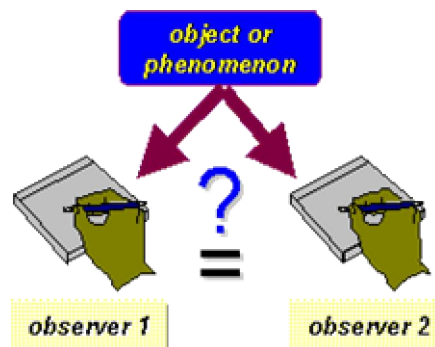


Figure 4: ‘Inter-observer reliability’ taken from Trochim (2006)

Participant verification

Feeding findings back to participants as a method of validation is considered to be venerable practice in qualitative research (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Therefore, a good deal of deliberation took place about applying this step to the data analysis process. The decision not to return findings to participants was taken based on the following considerations. The first consideration was concerned with practicality: the time required to regain access to participants would have been difficult to obtain because of school schedules.

The second point related to respect for the research subjects and maintaining integrity when considering their feelings. The final stage in the life of a group is separation or termination, a stage when members have to cope with feelings about 'ending' the group work. Therefore, returning group work material to participants may have the potential to adversely interfere with their process of 'closure' and, possibly, exploitative.

Thirdly, informed by the perspective presented by Merleau-Ponty (1964) that "*Reflection on the meaning or essence of what we live through is neutral to the distinction between internal and external experience*" (p. 65), certainty about the trustworthiness of the method of feeding back is debatable. The findings from the research were considered to hold validity because they were based on the meanings derived from direct experience involving a rigorous process of analysis. Presenting the findings to participants would have expected them to confirm the *meaning* of what they lived through rather than what they are living through, raising the question: "*Do they understand the meaning in relation to the experience?*" Fielding & Fielding (1986) argue that "*there is no reason to assume that respondents have privileged status on their on their actions*" (p. 43) and that obtaining feedback should be treated as another source of data.

Corroboration

Though self-evaluation forms were completed by participants as an integral part of the SEAL group work, they were not included in the data analysis process (see Appendices 11a and 11b). The forms did, however, provide a secondary source of information for corroborating the findings.

3.9.8.3 Preliminary analysis of data

The pilot study had demonstrated difficulty for Y8 students to provide in-depth answers at interview. In efforts to obtain a more holistic insight into the world view of the participants than interviews might yield the data collection process included gathering feelings, images and written journal entries.

In accordance with the recommendations of Huberman & Miles (2002) for analysis to begin at the outset of the research, the process began at the pre group work meeting of potential participants when their responses, noted afterwards, provided the initial data that would help in understanding their experience of being invited to attend the group. At the same time I was mindful to ‘bracket’ any preconceived ideas. Debriefing and supervision notes formed part of the research journal kept throughout the process of data collection and data analysis.

The next step was to identify the horizons from the data (‘naïve’ data) gathered from the debriefing notes and journal entries. Every expression relevant to the experience, having been treated as having equal value, was noted and preliminary groupings made. Careful attention was paid to this part of the process to avoid interpreting participants’ material and register the information with evidentiary value only. The groupings helped to formulate a semi-structured questionnaire. Data from the questionnaires was intended to provide more detailed descriptions of the experience to “*illuminate*” (p. 98) the underlying meanings of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

3.9.8.4 Transcripts of interviews

A written transcription was made of each digitally recorded interview in-keeping with Colaizzi’s phenomenological methods of data analysis. Each recording was listened to at least twice and the transcripts read several times to get a window on the understanding of how the participants experienced participating in the group work. Through the individual personalities similarities of their lived experiences began to transpire.

It was an emotional personal experience to hear how eager the interviewees were to tell their inner experience and to witness their excitement of being part of something that evidently provided autonomy and enjoyment. Initial annotations were made on the transcripts which were then re-read to eliminate vague expressions.

3.9.8.5 Extracting significant statements

In accordance with the methods of horizontalisation (Moustakas, 1994) significant statements were extracted from the interview transcripts and personal journals representing the invariant constituents of what was experienced. The statements were then organised into charts in relation to core elements of the experience: feelings; thoughts; counsellor; images; social aspects; self-concept; self-expression; being in the group; being in other group work in school. Reference was made to Konu's (2002) 'Conceptual model of well-being in schools' for categorising the material under the headings: Means for Self-fulfilment; Social Relations; Group Conditions.

3.9.8.6 Formulating meanings

The formulation of meanings from the significant statements forms the basis to develop the structural description of how something (in this case, the counsellor-led group work) was experienced (Moustakas). Placing the journals, the original transcripts (without annotation) and organisational charts all around me so that everything could be seen at one time, then rigorously checking my perceptions of the meanings against the debriefing notes, made the process a more holistic one. From immersion and reflection in this way the meanings began to present themselves. The meanings were entered onto individual pieces of notepaper.

3.9.8.7 Theme clusters

The next stage of data analysis involves clustering the formulated meanings. This stage was carried out by reading through the meanings followed by a period of concentrating on them and, once again, setting them against the original transcripts until certain themes emerged.

Each piece of notepaper containing a meaning was placed under its most relative theme. This procedure required returning to the original transcripts to ensure appropriate context.

Further writing and reflection, conducted with reference to textual qualities, during this final stage resulted in a textural description (a union of the units) to convey what each participant experienced. Structural qualities of the experience were then listed and structural themes developed using the process of imaginative variation to produce a structural description (deriving from the units how the phenomenon was experienced).

3.9.8.8 Uncovering the phenomena

Within the themes emerging from the data analysis steps taken so far, the essence of experience was beginning to transform into a cumulative experience of the whole group of participants. This stage reflects Husserl's idea that phenomenology seeks out the essential quality of experience for the larger number through identifying and studying the subjective experience of each individual. Further validation was sought by applying imaginative variation for the second time to extract the essential experiential qualities from the themes to provide descriptions of the experience. Once the descriptions had been integrated, a synthesis of the essential characteristics of the experience of the participants transpired. The phenomena are presented in Chapter 6 (6.2) and the essence described.

The following chapter sets out the findings from analysing the data. It became apparent during the process of analysis that the emerging horizons fitted well with Konu & Lintonen's conceptual model of well-being in schools. The model was therefore employed to help to categorise the material.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Using a qualitative phenomenological method to explore the world view of the student participating in counsellor-led group work proved to be fruitful in accessing direct experience. Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen data analysis methods (Moustakas, 1994) provided an effective process for discovering the essence of the experience of the participants.

This chapter presents the findings produced from interpreting the data from the debriefing notes, self-report personal journals and semi-structured interviews. Excerpts from the journals and actual interviews are included to illustrate how the participants were responding to their environment.

Because the group work was conducted in sequence, as if a journey, the findings are presented in that fashion to help the reader follow the storyline of the participants. The participants' initial reaction to being invited to participate in the SEAL based group work is described to convey the beginning of their experience. The initial data are presented in radial diagram format, followed by the meaning units of each of the core themes (horizons). The meaning units are listed at the base of each radial diagram followed by the essential meaning of the core themes.

4.2 Initial Data Analysis

4.2.1 Reaction of students at being invited to participate in group work

From the initial debriefing notes it was apparent that the participants had mixed feelings about being invited to take part in the group work. The foremost response was a general idea that they had been targeted to be corrected because of their specific learning difficulties. Indeed, two students from the non-participating school communicated their disapproval by objecting that they had been earmarked for the group work and opted out.

One student's initial response to the invitation saw it in terms of a possible punishment for his behaviour with a change of heart once he had actually experienced the group work, no longer seeing it as a threat.

“To be honest when I first got the letter to come here I wasn't happy about it because I thought well I don't know why. I haven't done anything to deserve it but when I got to know people I loved it and I felt good”

Three students conveyed their selection as being a good thing, commenting respectively:

“I never thought I'd be picked for anything like this like. It's mint”

“I never get picked for anything”

“Em it was a pleasure because I didn't think I'd get the opportunity to do it. I felt happy”

A student who had previously participated in group work to be supported during transition from primary to secondary school communicated a positive self-concept in being selected, saying:

“I must have been good to be allowed to come back”

A small percentage of the students showed indifference to their selection with the prevailing attitude that getting out of lessons was worth anything. However, for one or two others this was expressed as a secondary consideration.

The debriefing notes recorded a high of amount of animated bodily and facial gestures with hands in the air to ask questions conveying a mixture of needing to know and curiosity. The majority of students readily accepted their invitations. In the debriefing notes I recorded how inspiring it was to see students making personal choices and expressing themselves individually. It was easy to respect and, indeed, admire their reactions whether they opted in or out of participating. Whatever the impact on the research project the most important point is it felt good to be part of something that enabled freedom of choice and empowerment for young people.

The initial findings, or statements/expressions of experience (figures 5 – 12), are set out showing an amalgamation of the horizons that emerged out of the debriefing notes, journals and interviews.

The horizons are presented with the use of radial diagrams to show the relationship of the core elements of the experience, categorised according to Konu & Lintonen’s ‘model of well-being in schools’, under the headings ‘means for self-fulfilment’: feelings, images, self-expression, self-concept; ‘social relationships’: counsellor/group facilitators, social aspects; ‘group conditions’: being in the group, being in other groups in school. Though the model included a ‘health status’ section, no data emerged in relation to this category and was therefore irrelevant this study.

4.2.2 MEANS FOR SELF-FULFILMENT

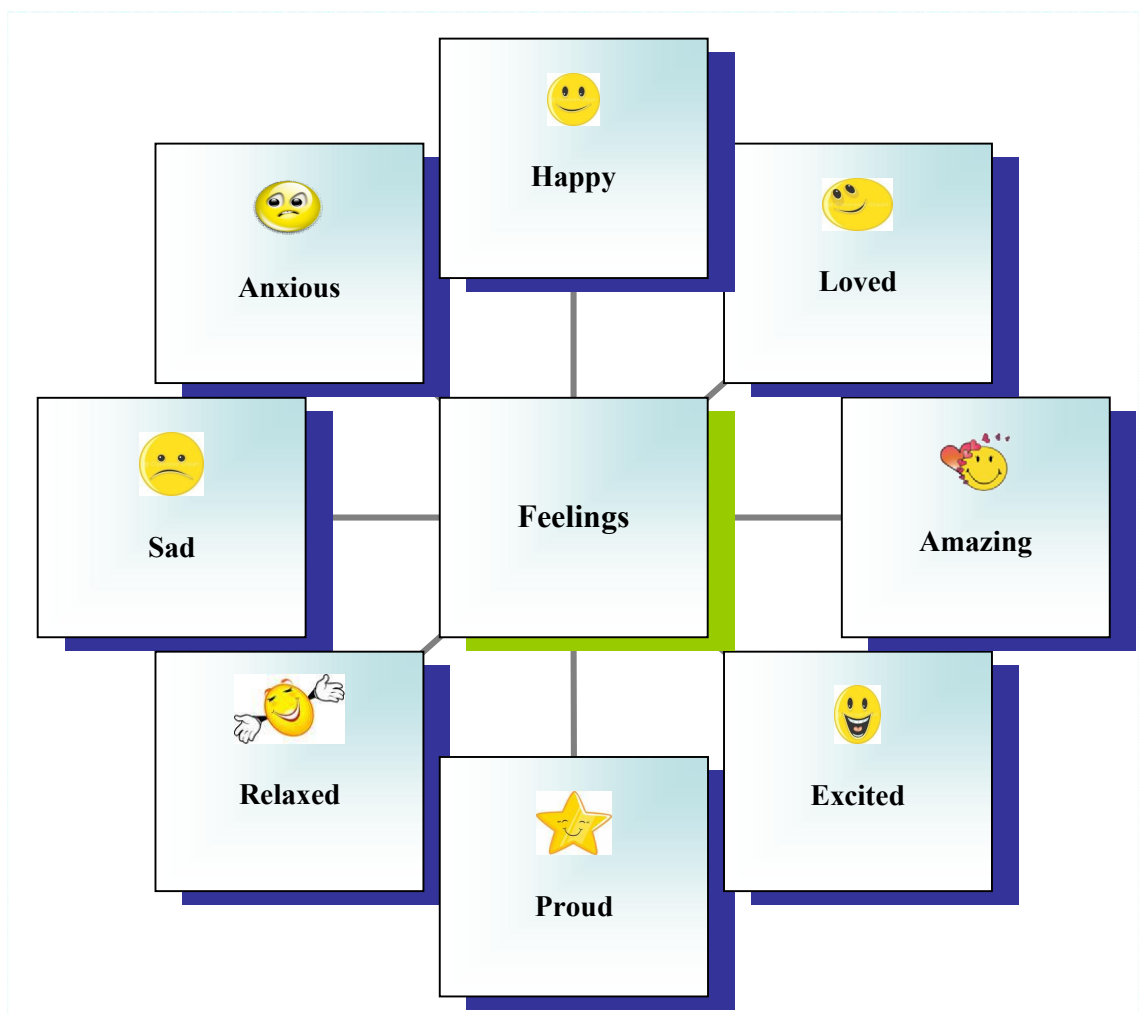


Figure 5: Radial diagram showing feelings experienced by participants as recorded in their journals (horizons)

(No participant circled the feelings faces for ‘angry’, ‘anxious’, ‘embarrassed’, ‘frustrated’, ‘lonely’, ‘tense/stressed’)

4.2.2.1 Formulation of meaning from feelings experienced by the participants

The following table presents the meaning units for feelings experienced throughout the group work derived from the feelings faces (shown in figure 5) that had been circled in participants' personal journals and verified at interview. Feelings emerging at interview are contained in the second section of the table. Because of the volume of information it was decided to use tabulation format to provide the clearest picture.

The feelings expressed convey an experience that raised anxiety for some, felt scary for two participants but mixed feelings of excited and nervousness for others at the beginning. The experience of the environment changed with feelings of happy, relaxed and amazing being expressed showing heightened pleasure and that trust and safety had been established. The group work helped participants to develop a self-concept that was 'proud' and 'special'. Attachment was experienced in a number of participants who used the word 'sad' in relation to the ending of the group work, expressing a wish that it does not end and for sessions to be longer.

Verbatim quotations from the interview transcripts have been included. Repetitive remarks are not included.

Note: for the purposes of anonymity students were allocated with a number

Feeling (from journal)	Meanings
Amazing (circled 4 times)	Being part of something more than OK. Inspirational.
Excited (circled 12 times)	Pleasure from enjoying activities and being in welcoming environment. Having increased eagerness/liveliness. Sense of achievement: <i>“I was excited doing the group work”</i> (Student 6) <i>“It means like excited. Can’t wait to come and do the games and talk and that. Finding things out and talking”</i> (Student 7) <i>“Excited that all the work was done”</i> (Student 7)
Happy (circled 21 times)	Self-fulfilment. Enjoying company of others. <i>“It was a really good and a happy experience”</i> (Student 5) <i>“The group is happy and its easy to do things and that makes you feel happy”</i> (Student 2) <i>“I liked the group because it because it was happy”</i> (Student 1)
Loved (circled 3 times)	Being in warm and caring environment.
Nervous (circled twice)	Not knowing: <i>“I felt nervous ‘cos I didn’t know what we were doing at first”</i> (Student 8) <i>“It was funny at first you felt nervous but when you got into it you felt OK”</i> (Student 7)
Proud (circled 6 times)	A sense of achievement and being fulfilled.
Relaxed (circled 10 times)	Being in a safe place. Able to be self. <i>“It’s more relaxing when I’m here (in group work) because there’s just a few of us and everyone’s nice. It’s different to classes I like sitting in a circle and moving about.”</i> (Student 6)
Sad (circled twice)	Students preferring to attend a “good” lesson. Did not want to return to “normal” lessons: <i>“Because I wanted to do it all the time and it was a really good lesson”</i> (Student 3) <i>“I didn’t want to go back to your normal lessons and that”</i> (Student 4)

Feeling (from interview)	Meanings
Disappointed/ Dissatisfied	<p>Wanting the group to continue. A sense of loss:</p> <p><i>“I felt a bit disappointed when it finished because I really liked it”</i> (Student 6)</p> <p><i>“I felt a bit unsatisfied because I want it (the group) to go on. I liked being in that room”</i> (Student 5)</p>
Excited	<p>Eagerly anticipating the group work:</p> <p><i>“Excited - can’t wait to come and do the games and talk and that. Finding things out and talking”</i> (Student 7)</p>
Sad	<p>Attachment to the group:</p> <p><i>“ I feel sad when I know the group isn’t here any more”</i> (Student 1)</p> <p><i>“Sad because we had to go back to lessons and I wanted to stay here”</i> (Student 2)</p>
Scared	<p>Student valued attending the group work:</p> <p><i>“If you break one of the rules you get kicked out of the club. I was a bit scared in case I break one of them”</i> (Student 7)</p> <p>Entering into the unknown:</p> <p><i>“I was a bit scared at first but then like it was good though - it was fun”</i> (Student 2)</p>
Special	<p>Different self-concept of being special. Must be a special person if worthy of receiving help:</p> <p><i>“I felt quite special and I don’t know I just felt special”</i> <i>“Treated like you were special and you got help. (Names of facilitators) listened when you talked about...”</i> (Student 4)</p>
<i>“Feeling like when its sunny”</i>	Warm environment.

Table 1: Feelings: meanings

4.2.2.2 Journal imagery

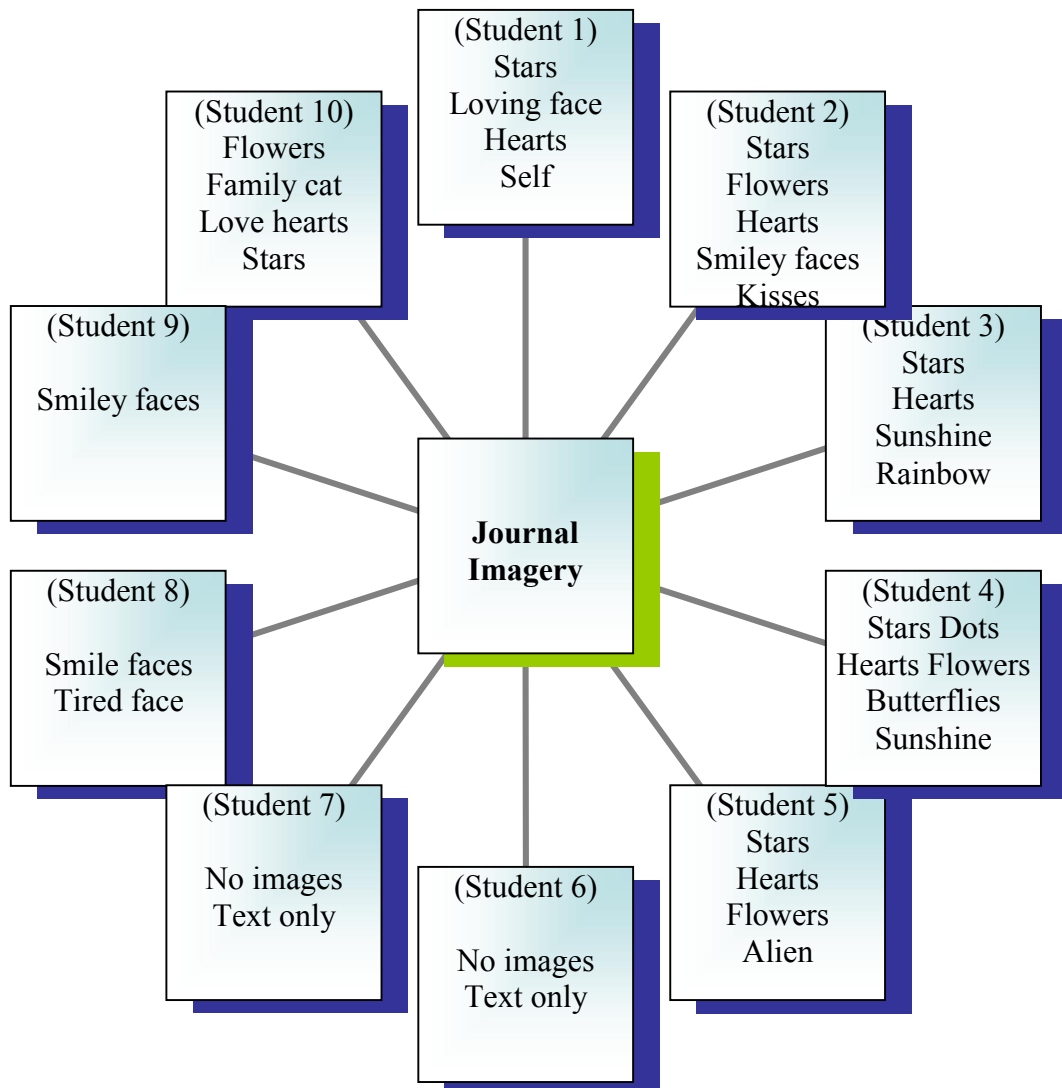


Figure 6: Radial diagram showing the images recorded in participants' journals reflecting experience (horizons)

Meaning of images drawn in journals

- Group as happy place to be
- Group as warm place
- Group as loving place
- Group as place where person can be relaxed
- Something unknown
- Stimulating and fun

4.2.2.3 Essential meaning of journal images

The images in the journals changed according to how the group sessions were being experienced. The first pages of the journals contained more words than images. One student drew an alien and the following reply was given when asked about the meaning at interview:

“It meant like something weird, it was different and so it just come to my mind and I drew it – not like classes” (Student 5)

One of the entries was of dots and though not clarified at interview, after discussion with a counselling colleague who assisted with interpreting the meaning units, a tentative conclusion was drawn that they represented a relaxed state because the dots were spaced evenly over the page. When I checked the debriefing notes I found that the dots were entered into the journal following the session that included a relaxation activity.

A student drew a cat surrounded by stars in their journal. The debriefing notes recorded that the student had shared the loss of the family pet cat in a group session. The meaning for the student was to be able to express grief and locate the loss in a circle of stars in a personal journal.

The overwhelming meaning represented by the images of stars, rainbows, hearts, smiley faces and sunshine was that the group was a safe, warm and happy place to be corroborated at interview in the following statements:

“In my journal there was lots of lovely hearts, kisses, smiley faces and flowers and things that – symbols that represent things like happy and just happy” (Student 4)

“In my journal I put stars, hearts and sunshine and butterflies because they liked showed us I was happy all the time” (Student 3)

“I put like butterflies and smiley faces in my journal because it was like feelings. Butterflies you’ve got like butterflies in your stomach and smiley faces and just faces for different feelings – love heart feelings and like just anything really – it just felt good like if something felt good or if something felt good” (Student 2)

4.2.2.4 Self-expression

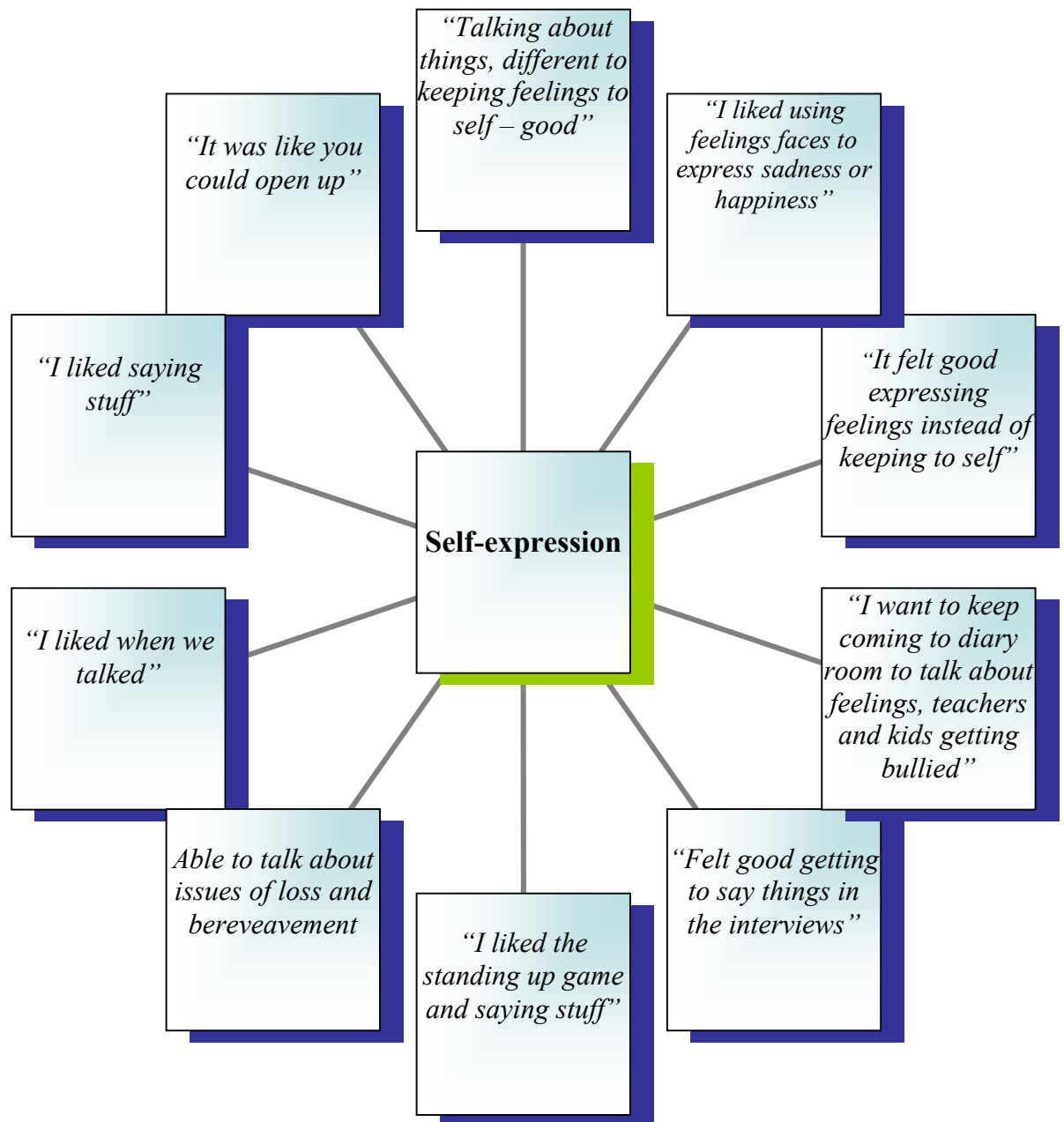


Figure 7: Radial diagram showing participants' experience of self-expression (horizons)

Meaning for students of self-expression

Increase in awareness that expressing self can make a person feel good

Safe place to let things out including sensitive issues

Conditions existed to enable to take risks and open up

Freedom to express self in different forms

4.2.2.5 Essential meaning of self-expression in group work

Self-expression was one of the most meaningful aspects of the group work. Students looked forward to entering their thoughts and feelings into their journals at the end of the group sessions. The journal meant having privacy and safety to externalise not just group work material but also personal material from other aspects of their lives. Self-expression had an impact on students of “*feeling good*” and to enabling them to “*open up*” and share information. It meant a sense of freedom to one student:

“I was very happy because I thought I would be able to tell everybody about my feelings. I felt good because then I could express my feelings instead of just keeping them to myself” (Student 3)

“You felt free to say about your feelings, it was OK and everyone talked about what they felt and you felt the same” (Student 5)

“You feel happy expressing your feelings in the journal” (Student 5)

4.2.2.6 Self-concept

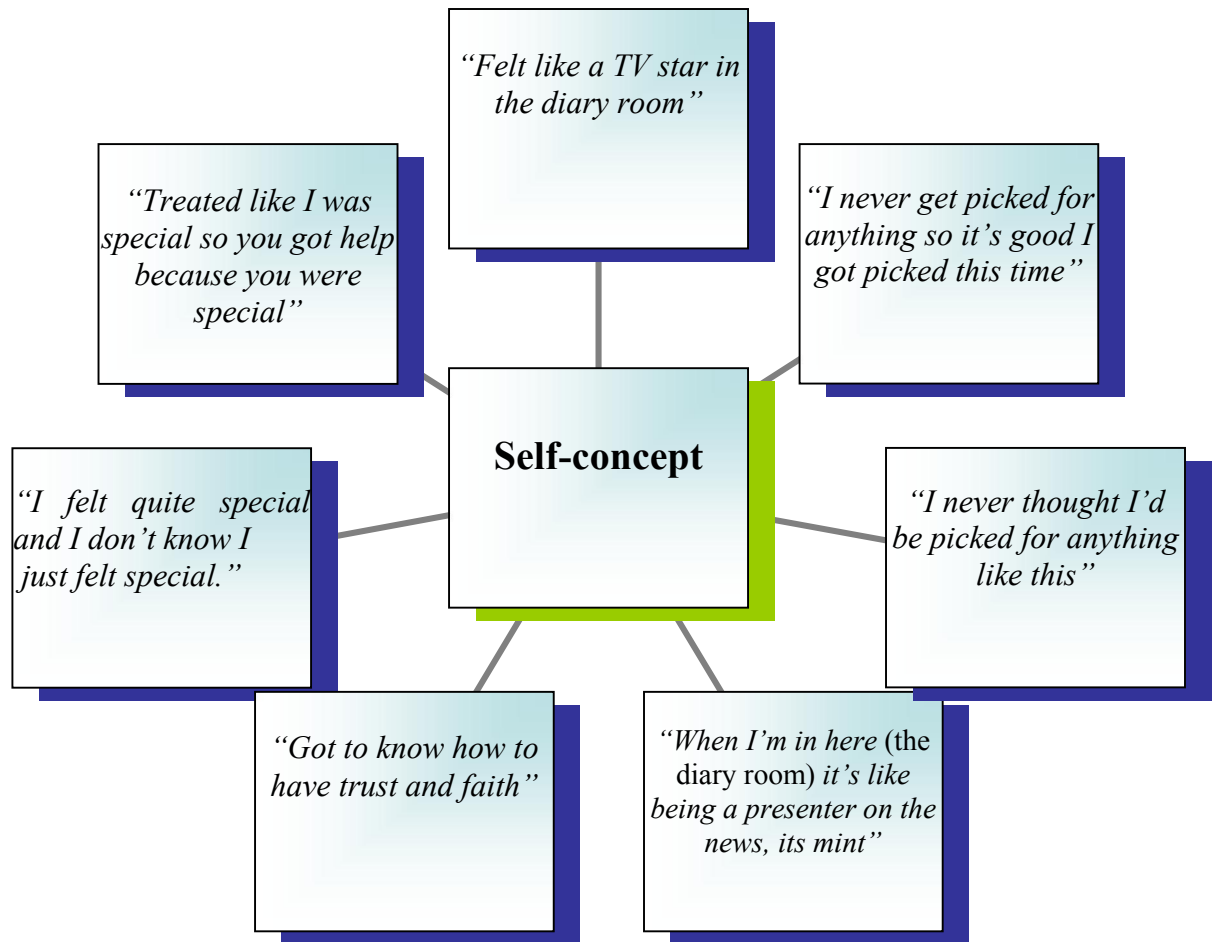


Figure 8: Radial diagram showing participants' experience of self-concept (horizons)

Meaning of how participants saw themselves during the group work

Being targeted as someone who needs help

Worthy of being included in the group work

Change from not being worthy "*I never get picked for anything*" to being worthy because of being picked

Self-concept of being 'special'

Learned to have faith and trust as a result of positive relationships

Change from seeing others differently to seeing self the same as others

4.2.2.7 Essential meaning of self-concept throughout the group work

Being 'normal' to one student was represented by having friends in the group. The meaning for the student was an ability to have faith and trust in others. This meaning was developed from making friends in which the ball passing activity was instrumental. As a result he/she felt like an OK person.

Interviewer:

"Say all the things you liked best about being in the group?"

Interviewee response:

"They treated us like I was a normal person and it was better because the more friends I had in here I got to know how like how to have trust, faith and we used the ball"

Interviewer:

"Being in the group helped you to feel normal? I'm wondering what that means for you?"

Interviewee response:

"Like (pause) you were normal - like an OK person because you had friends"

4.2.3 SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

4.2.3.1 Counsellor/co-facilitators

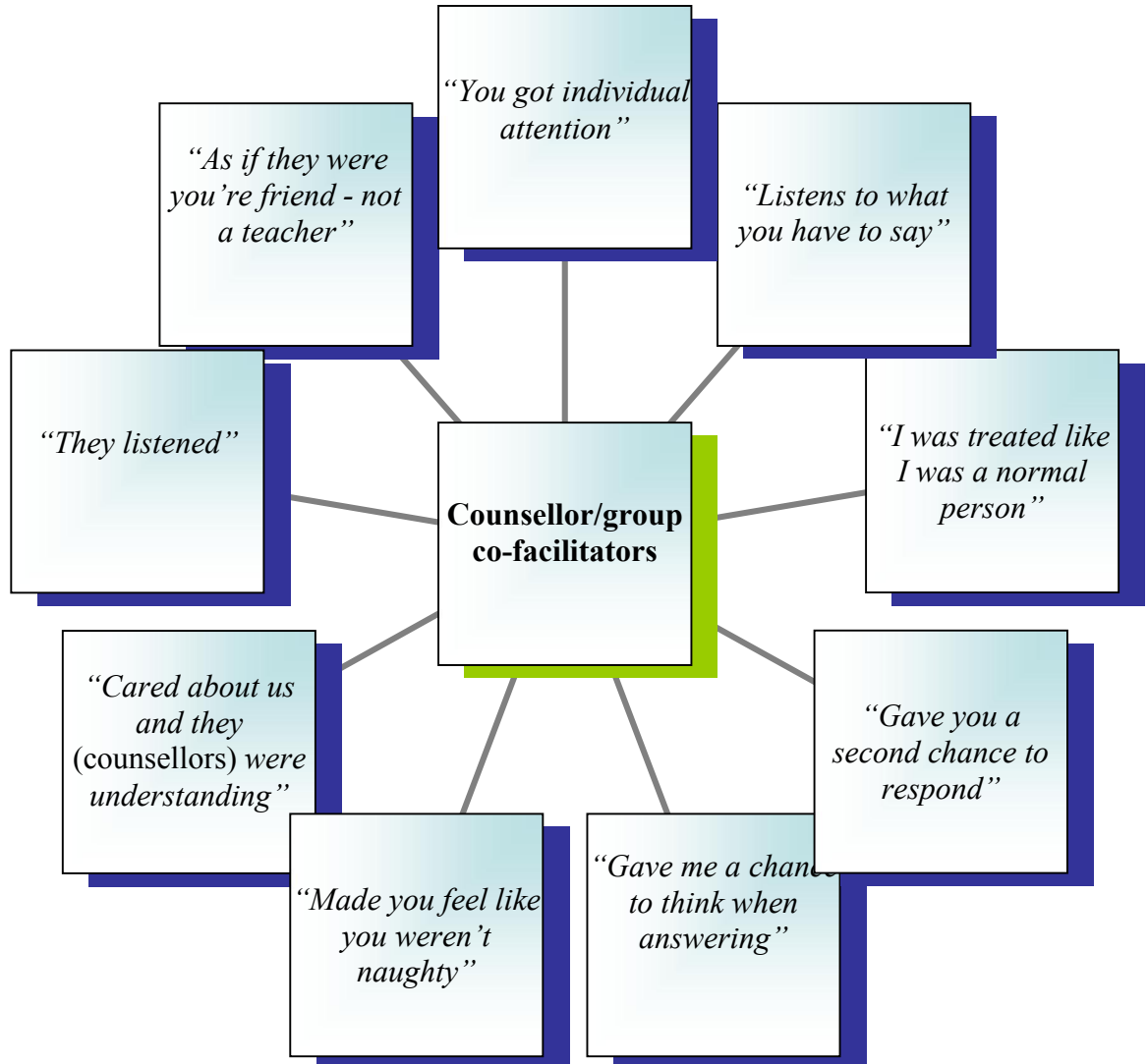


Figure 9: Radial diagram showing participants' experience of counsellor/group facilitators (horizons)

Meaning in respect of counsellor and co-facilitators

Cared for and supported with difficulties

Able to relax in company of adults

Positive child/adult relationship

Worthy of being listened to and taking time over

None threatening

4.2.3.2 Essential meaning of relationship with counsellor/group co-facilitators

The data revealed students' perceptions of the group facilitators as providing individual attention, listening, caring and understanding, and none threatening. As a result the meaning the students was that they were able to relax and enjoy the activities. Being allowed to talk to one another was significant because it meant that students could satisfy their curiosity and build relationships. The second most significant meaning was that the students experienced a sense of self-worth because the facilitators listened to them and provided individual attention. Some of the statements relating to the group facilitators are given below:

Interviewer:

Talk about anything you found difficult about being in the group?

Interviewee response:

"Nothing was difficult because it felt OK all the time. Maybe sometimes when you didn't know what to do but you could ask (name) or (name) to help" (Student 1)

Other comments:

"Made you feel like you weren't naughty" (Student 8)

"You could talk and no-one shouted at you and (name) and (name) listened to what you said and it was mint" (Student 8)

"Treated like you were special and you got help. (name) and (name) listened when you talked about (...)" (Student 4)

4.2.3.3 Social Aspects of the group work

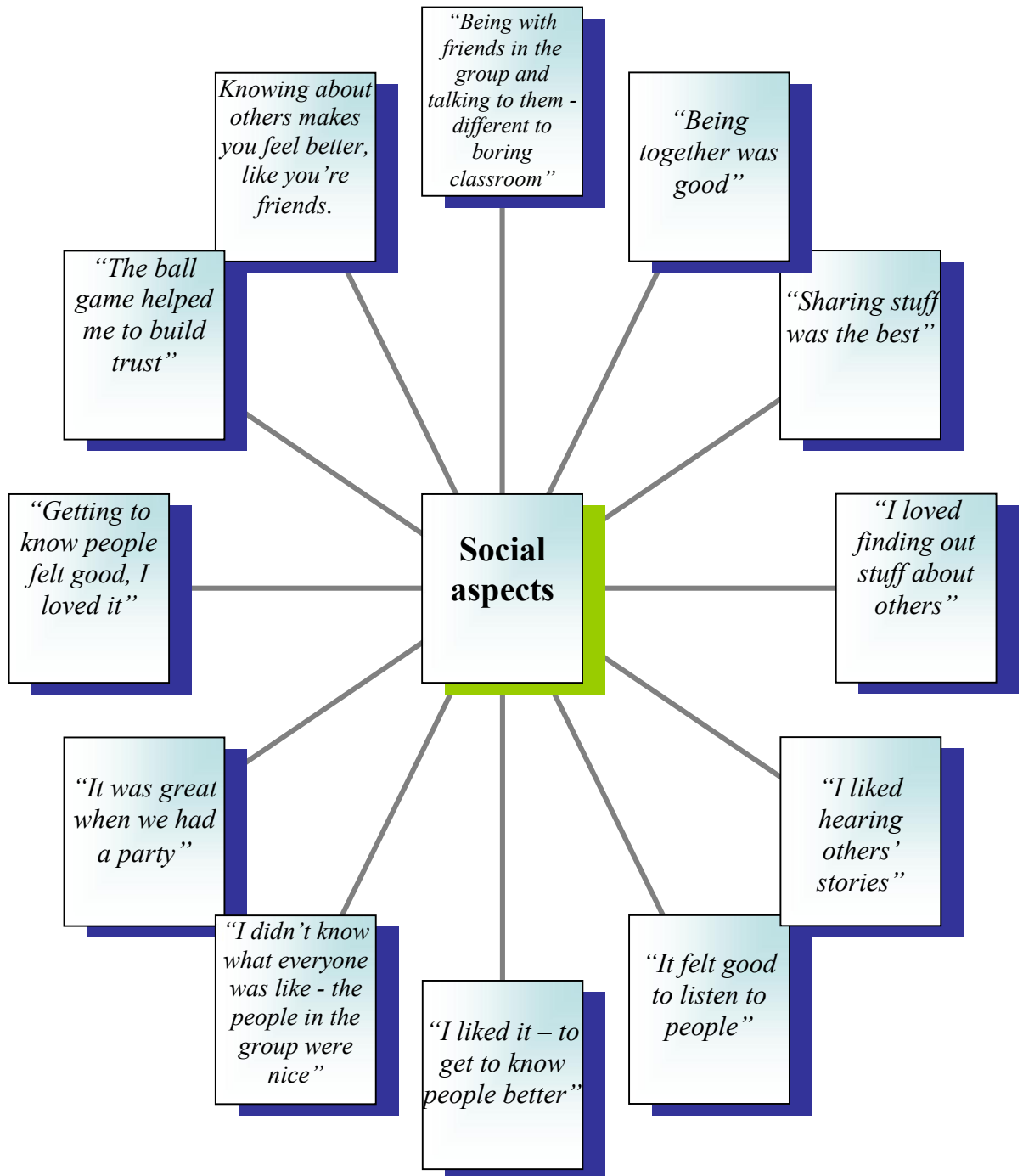


Figure 10: Radial diagram showing participants' experience of the social aspects of the group work (horizons)

Meanings of social aspects of the group work

Found and enjoyed social interaction

Developed social learning

Knowledge of others helped self-concept

Being connected on more equal terms

Togetherness provided stimulation and warmth

4.2.3.4 Essential meaning of the social aspects of the group

The social aspects of participating in the group work had the most significant meaning for the students. The students enjoyed being together in an environment that enabled them to have discussions and really get to know one another. As a result it meant that they could find themselves from finding out about others. It gave them a sense of togetherness and being on equal terms as a consequence of learning about the experiences of others. Verbatim reports from interviews communicate the social meanings:

“I enjoyed it. It was the best cos you got to talk and learned loads of stuff”

“You made friends and everyone joined in and talked”

“I knew the people before but didn’t know they were my friends”

“We could talk and we did fun stuff, like the games”

(Student 6)

“Everyone was the same and I wanted to be in the group, you didn’t know how they felt but everyone was cool and now you know them, they’re your friends”

“Yeah, everyone was nice to you” (Student 7)

4.2.4 GROUP CONDITIONS

4.2.4.1 Being in the group

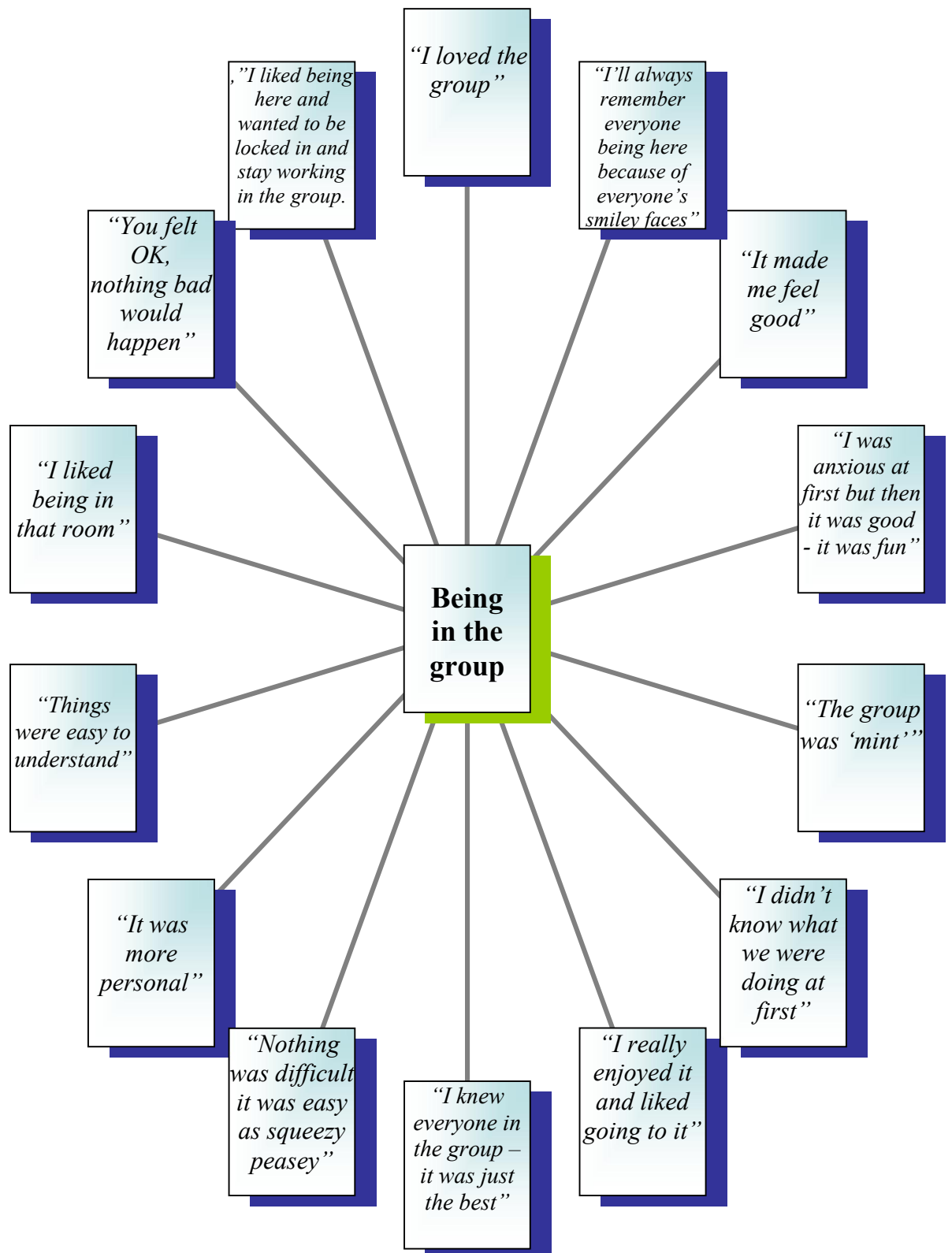


Figure 11: Radial diagram showing participants' experience of being in the group (horizons)

Meaning of participating the group work

Uncertain at the beginning because of not knowing and dubious attitude towards being selected

Treated with positive regard, shown patience, not judged or criticised

Felt safe

Wanted to be there

Better than ordinary ("*mint*", "*just the best*", "*loved it*", "*amazing*", "*Krakalakin*")

Happy experience ("*felt good*")

Individual attention

Able to engage and cope ("*easy as squeezy peasey*", "*easy to understand*", "*got help*")

Happy memories (remembering "*everyone's smiley faces*")

4.2.4.2 Essential meaning of being in the group

The counsellor 'facilitated' group work was meaningful to students because they were able to manage the work and felt supported in case of difficulty. Initially, for some students, the group work meant an opportunity not to attend regular lessons, as noted in the debriefing notes:

"Its mint – I don't have to go to Maths" (Student 9)

It was a place that enabled them to feel relaxed and express their thoughts and feelings. They experienced a safe, warm environment where positive relationships with both adults and peers were built sufficiently so as to enable risk taking when sharing information. The group was a place which excited students and could be fun, and something to look forward to. As a result the group work was seen through a happy lens and worth attending. On the other hand, the group work also meant a short-lived happy experience tinged with sadness and loss when it had to end. Student remarks about being in the group are set out below (remarks of students 2 and 5 have been omitted because they are stated elsewhere):

Interviewer

“What can you tell me about your experience of taking part in the group work?”

Interviewee response (Student 1)

“I liked it because it was happy. I liked the fun with the ball game that was the same but I liked all the stuff, doing different things, some was easy but some was a bit hard but OK because you got help to do it”

Interviewee response (Student 3)

“It was really good. I didn’t know what it was going to be and I liked it, liked being with (name) and (name) and writing in the journal, drawing and writing your feelings. I just wanted to stay for the rest of the day and didn’t want to go back to normal lessons. Everyone was nice”

Interviewee response (Student 4)

“It was mint, I liked being here and wanted to be locked in and stay working in the group”

Interviewee response (Student 6)

“I enjoyed it. It was the best ‘cos you got to talk and learned loads of stuff”

Interviewee response (Student 7)

“Mental. It was funny at first you felt nervous but when you got into it you felt OK. Can’t wait to come and do the games and talk and that”

Interviewee response (Student 8)

Yeah, it was good, better than going to the classes.

4.2.4.3 Being in other groups in school

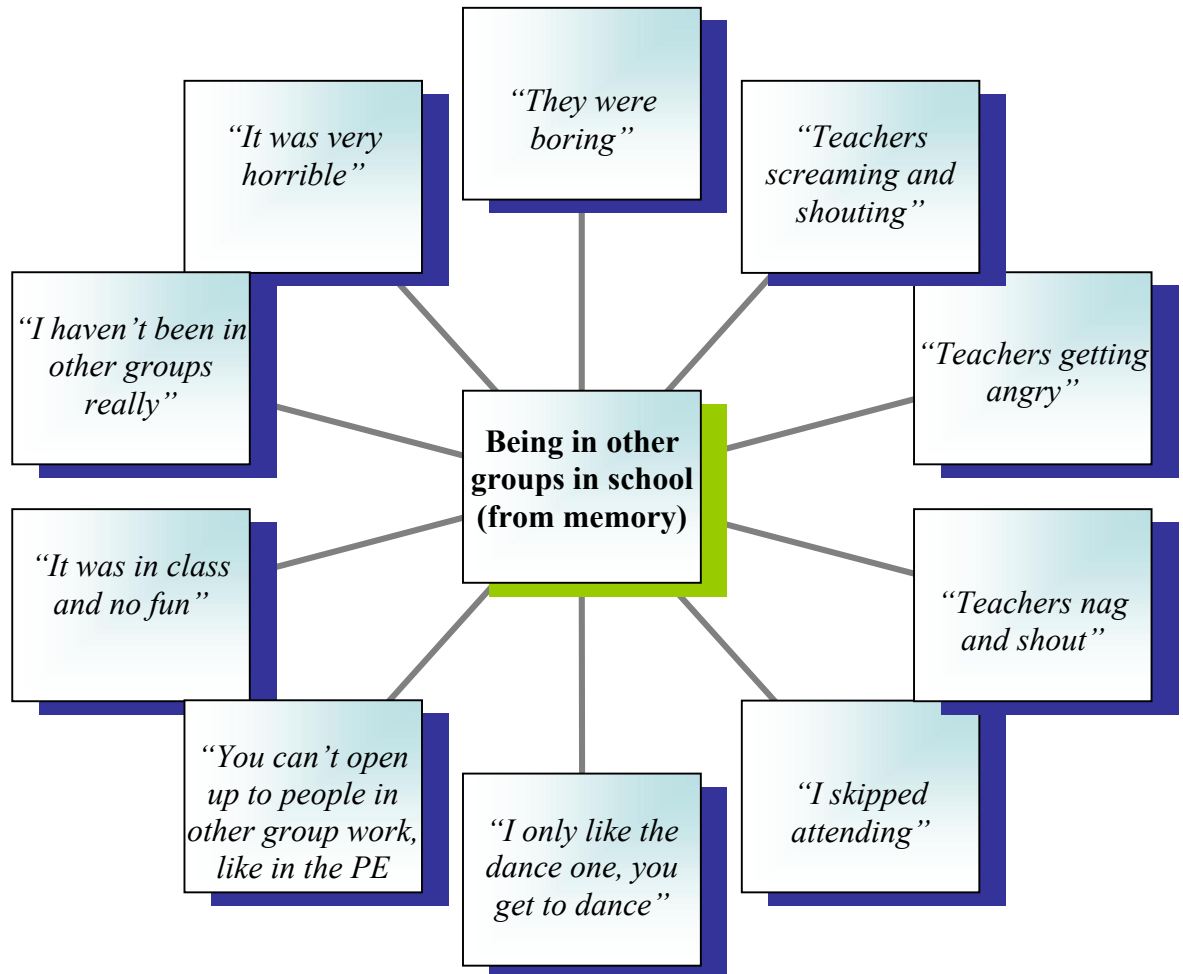


Figure 12: Participants' experience of being in other groups in school (horizons)

4.2.4.4 Meaning of participating in other groups in school

Did not want to be there

Boring experience and not engaging, except if activity is likeable as in dance group

Not self-fulfilling

Hostile environment

Seen as less sociable

No interpretation of students participating in other group work was made because it was not direct experience and expressed in retrospect. Neither had there been any direct observation by the researcher of the students in the group work mentioned and could not therefore be thoroughly validated.

4.3 Themes arising from meaning units

The themes are presented in tabulation format for purposes of easy reference:

Theme	What was experienced
Self-regulation	Group members easily adapted to change and the unknown and were able to choose whether to express thoughts and feelings privately in their journals or to share them with the group.
Enhanced Social skills	Students were able to increasingly develop and manage the group relationships which resulted in building a stronger network of friends. The debriefing notes showed evidence of enhanced social skills accumulated over the sessions. In session seven (school 2) students showed an increase in respect for one another being more inclusive and checking out with one another “ <i>Is it OK?</i> ” This pattern of behaviour was mirrored in the group from school 1 by session 6 when it was noted that checking out had also become apparent. The SEAL evaluation form showed that 9 out of 10 students strongly agreed that they had offered each other encouragement, 10 out of 10 strongly agreed they had listened to each other and 9 out of 10 strongly agreed that the group worked well together.
Strong feeling of belonging	A spirit of belonging was created as a group dynamic in which each participant felt important. It was as if students had a sense of ‘we’re all in this together’.
Sense of autonomy	Students began to organise themselves and make individual and joint decisions. Enjoyed being given choices; enjoyed sense of freedom, moving around the room during activities; were able to appreciate and take responsibility for adhering to the group agreement; organised the diary room interviews and made decisions about who should interview whom. Meaning for the students included being empowered to make choices and trusted to be responsible; taking a step towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 1971).

<p>Being heard</p>	<p>Observations from the debriefing notes showed many instances of students expressing appreciation of being listened to:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“It feels good to be heard”</i></p> <p>One of the most striking references to being ‘listened to’ emerged at interview when the meaning of being listened to for one student was that he/she was actually a human being:</p> <p><u>Interviewer:</u> <i>“In one of the group sessions you talked about being treated like a human being, please say more about that if you can”</i></p> <p><u>Interviewee response:</u> <i>“You felt like a human being, you could talk and no-one shouted at you and (name of facilitator) and (name of co-facilitator) listened to what you said and it was mint”</i></p>
<p>Positive adult/child relationships</p>	<p>Being in a relationship with adults based on positive regard and in whose company it was possible to feel relaxed. Feeling understood and able to easily ask for help. Being acknowledged, validated and supported within safe boundaries. Having fun in the presence of and with adults.</p>
<p>Increased self-esteem</p>	<p>Debriefing notes recorded a degree of hesitancy to contribute verbally in the beginning sessions meaning that trust and safety was not immediately present. By the final session it was noted that each and every student volunteered a contribution and shared personal experiences, showing that trust had been established and students felt safer.</p> <p>The SEAL self-evaluation sheets showed that 9 out of 10 students strongly agreed that they had ‘good ideas’.</p>
<p>Opportunity to reflect on experiences</p>	<p>Three main opportunities for students to reflect on their experience were making entries in their personal journals, completing SEAL self-evaluation forms and at interview. Self-discovery and sense of accomplishment were the central meanings. Evidence that the students highly valued both experiences is apparent in the following statements:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I like to write things about what I’ve done in the journal and because I could talk about them to everyone”</i> (Student 6)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“I could think and talk”</i> (Student 7)</p>
<p>Preference to work in small group than regular classes</p>	<p>A different experience to regular class work. Group not seen as ‘normal’ lesson but as something other. A place worth being in. More opportunity for discussion and finding out.</p>

4.4 SEAL self-evaluation forms

Each of the 10 students opted to complete the SEAL self-evaluation resource sheet 1.5.1 – ‘About Me and My Group’ which is divided into two sections: ‘About *me* in *my* group’ and ‘About *our* group’ (Appendices 11a and 11b). Since a phenomenological study is not concerned with measurement the data from the evaluation sheets has not been presented as part of the analysis material but to provide an indication of the outcome of the group work for participants. Where appropriate, the information has been referred to for corroborating findings.

When engaged in completing the evaluation sheets the participants displayed eagerness and excitable pleasure which was a surprise since form filling can sometimes be regarded as a tedious task. However, their increase in self-esteem was palpable and great importance was placed on them. When discussing this observation in debriefing it was concluded that the evaluation form was a witness to a sense of achievement and accomplishment participants were experiencing as a result of completing the group work and acquiring new skills.

4.5 Summary of the findings

In this chapter I presented the data as it emerged from following data collection and data analysis procedures using phenomenological design methods, including the use of imaginative variation. The units of meanings were set out, followed by the themes arising out of the meanings which together generated a description of the essence of experience of participating in counsellor-led group work. The emerging themes include sense of self, self-expression, positive relationships, enjoying the experience, fun and relaxing environment, sense of achievement, enhanced social skills, increased self-esteem, feeling safe, preferring the group work to regular school lessons, having space to think, listen, reflect and talk free from ‘learning’ pressures, and valuing the experience of being heard.

In the following chapter further analysis of the data is achieved through a composite textural description of the participants’ experience to illustrate what happened in the group work and a composite structural description to illustrate how it happened.

CHAPTER 5

Composite Textural and Structural Descriptions

The following composite and textural (what was experienced) and structural (how it was experienced) descriptions were created as part of the analysis process to first horizontalize the data and arrive at the invariant constituents, or general themes, which emerged from the findings. The descriptions represent the essence of experience of the group as a whole.

5.1 Composite textural description

The beginning experience of the group work involved mixed feelings amongst participants. Some displayed anxiety experienced as a “*nervous*” feeling, shown in facial expression and body language, and recorded in journals. For one student the group represented something alien. The prospect of getting out of regular classes caused feelings of “*happy*” and “*excited*” for a couple of students and a perception of having been ‘chosen’ induced the same feelings in others. These initial experiences accord with the ‘forming’ stage of the Tuckman (1965) model of group development.

As the sessions progressed, initial reservations faded as participants began to experience the group as a safe place. Students found the SEAL materials enjoyable and achievable and regarded the alternative structure of working including sitting in a circle, moving around the room to communicate with each other, and the ice-breaker/warm up activities as “*fun*”. Initial apprehensive barriers lowered, resulting in greater engagement in the group work process and more open and frequent contributions. Participants recorded feelings of ‘happy’, ‘loved’, ‘relaxed’, ‘excited’, and ‘proud’. During this phase of the group work students began to interrelate with increased ease and make more solid connections with one another. The ‘us’ and ‘them’ obstacle that existed for some at the beginning gradually diminished with both the group facilitators and each other in a ‘we’re all in this together’ kind of way.

To complete given tasks required having to co-operate with each other. They listened to each other and showed consideration in their responses. Participants conveyed that being together and finding out about each other was an aspect of group work they valued providing a sense of belonging. They were eager to attend and intervened zealously to ensure the presence of group members who were delayed at the start of sessions, conveying the value for them of being together and group cohesion.

Participants were easily able to recognise their feelings which were assimilated into their recorded lived experience, entered into journals, as they responded to the environment and conditions that existed in the group work. Although the majority of feelings were positive, a feeling of 'sad' was expressed by some students; revealed in interview to be related to not wanting the group work to end and the realization that it was not possible to extend the group sessions. Opportunity to express thoughts and feelings in a journal and in the 'diary room' was communicated by participants to be a highly important aspect of the group work experience. Testimony of this came from the debriefing notes which recorded observations of vigour and energy shown by the students at the time of making entries in their journals at the end of the group sessions and that they appeared happy and autonomous throughout the interviewing process. Every student who participated in the interviews, without exception, expressed pleasure at being involved in this activity and actually said so.

Therapy was experienced by a small number of students who were able to find resolution for issues relating to loss and friendship problems.

At the end of the group work participants saw themselves as worthy, more similar to other students, able to achieve, and, for some, "*special*".

5.2 Composite structural description

The textural elements of experience related to the quality of the conditions that prevailed throughout the work, being able to express thoughts and feelings, and a more positive sense of self that emerged as a result.

The mixed feelings at the beginning of the group work originated from students not knowing what to expect and encountering an unfamiliar working arrangement with unfamiliar people in one case and an unfamiliar person in the other. The apprehension that arose for some students came from perceiving themselves to have been ‘targeted’, aware that their behaviour had been causing problems.

Participants began the group work with hesitancy and lack of confidence, keeping their thoughts and feelings to themselves other than those expressed in their journals. The social climate established by the facilitators took account of the students’ apprehension and gave focus to assisting members in personal and group development and task competency.

The person-centred facilitation of the group, informed by Rogers’ core conditions, enabled sufficient trust and safety to be established for growth of confidence and fuller participation. Being shown unconditional positive regard, receiving empathic responses to discussion about bereavement and sensitive family/personal issues, and the congruent modelling of honest responses, enabled participants to appreciate they were worthy of being listened to without judgement or criticism. The initial association of the group facilitators as people employed to deal with their inadequacies disappeared with the realisation that these adults were prepared to listen and hear what they had to say. Not being shouted at or put under pressure made it a different and more positive group experience than other groups they had participated in school. The only pressure experienced by a participant was a fear of not being permitted to attend the group because of breaking the group contract. Those who were initially hesitant about expressing opinions and feelings really came out of their shells and openly and willingly discussed their own ideas and experiences with other students in the presence of adults, showing that trust had been established.

The structure of the group work proved to be instrumental in making the experience a positive one. When a person is accepted into a group and everyone sits in a circle together with equal status there is a sense of oneness. Psychologically, that person’s self-worth is heightened and can therefore have long lasting social benefits.

By experiencing sharing of thoughts and feelings in the safety of the circle participants learned how to listen and be sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others. They gained insights from exchanges of information and ownership of ideas. The ice-breaker games and movement around the room helped participants to feel relaxed conveyed in smiles and laughter, resulting in more naturally effective communication.

Therapeutic value was possible in some cases as a result of experiencing the group as safe enough to express surfacing thoughts and feelings. In each case participants were listened to, their experiences validated and group members sensitively reminded about the importance of keeping personal information confidential.

A more positive self-concept developed out of positive adult and peer relationships involving acceptance and being given an opportunity in the form of group work. Being worthy of attention, taken seriously and working with adults who were interested in their perspectives and experiences were significant factors. An increase in self-esteem resulted from having tasks that were achievable and fun.

The final step of the data analysis process was to merge the textural and structural descriptions to create a synthesis (Moustakas, 1994) which conveys the essential essence, or what has been discovered, of the experience of the students participating in the group work. In the following chapter, the core themes, or clusters of meaning, representing the phenomenon, are discussed in relation to the literature review.

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This study showed how Y8 students engaged in small group work with a school counsellor to be supported in social and emotional aspects of learning. As a result of applying phenomenological research methods to explore their lived experience of the group work, to find out whether such an intervention was in their best interests, an understanding was gained about school and family facets of their lives. The findings conveyed that, whilst the schools' learning support systems were well co-ordinated, students' personal emotional difficulties were not being fully apprehended. Some of the students were conveying these difficulties through behaviour; language they were using to express themselves in the only way available to them. Despite the fact that the group work was task orientated, it provided a healthy outlet for students to communicate and deal with sadness of loss, inability to cope with being shouted at, tension from conflict, and the isolation felt from being on the periphery of the social hub of school.

The group work proved to be a positive experience for the students who elected to attend because they felt happy, relaxed and fulfilled. The factors instrumental in this experience appeared to be the positive environmental conditions that existed in which the group tasks could be accomplished, personal issues addressed, and the facilitation of positive adult/child and peer relationships. Consequences of this experience were increased self-esteem, more positive concept of self and enhanced personal and social skills.

Set out below is a synthesis of the essential qualities that emerged from analysing the data of the experience of 10 Y8 students who participated in counsellor-led group work which is expressed as three core themes: positive school experience; improved self-concept; enjoyment from acquiring new skills.

6.2 Synthesis of textural and structural descriptions

In synthesising the descriptions of experience, it can be clearly seen that the resulting essential themes interrelate one to the other and cannot therefore be considered in isolation. When the variant aspects of data had been discarded the remaining essential essence of experience consisted of valuing freedom of expression, increased self-awareness, sense of belonging, sense of achievement, more positive self-concept, and resolution of personal issues. Fundamental contributors to the core experience included participants being listened to and heard and opportunity to hear and listen to others, i.e. words, feelings and emotional pain. Supplementary to this experience was that it happened in a supportive environment which felt safe.

6.2.1 Positive school experience

The participants in this study conveyed that their experience of participating in group work with the school counsellor was a positive experience. Significant qualities of this experience related to the group activities and the environmental conditions that existed in the sessions. The group was experienced as a “*sunny*” and safe place to be: “*I felt OK, nothing would happen*”. Enjoyment came from the opportunity to express thoughts and feelings in personal journals and in the diary room, the ice-breaker activities and games that provided freedom to flex their physical selves and build relationships with others in the process. Participants enjoyed being able to talk in the group about themselves and significant others, as well as hearing the experiences of other participants. They enjoyed the SEAL activities because they experienced them as fun, easy to understand and achievable.

The conditions enjoyed by participants’ were being given choices and trusted to make decisions, being permitted to participate at a personally chosen level and pace and not having adult imposed pressures such as being “*shouted*” or “*nagged*” at.

Students conveyed that they felt “*happy*”, “*relaxed*” and valued, so much so that they used the words “*amazing*” and “*loved*” to describe their experience. They opted to attend the group rather than attend their usual lessons and wanted the sessions to be longer. The group work proved to be such a positive experience that participants conveyed ‘sadness’ that sessions had to come to an end.

A positive experience was illustrated in images of hearts, sunshine, smiley faces, flowers, butterflies, stars and rainbows.

6.2.2 Improved self-concept

Participants experienced an increase in their self-worth, gained gradually over the course of the group work. Whilst some participants began from an appreciation of having been chosen, others showed apathy as if accepting the inevitability that the school had to make efforts to help them. Either way the indication was that they were feeling the negative effects of being marginalised, resulting in a negative effect on self-concept.

An increase in self-esteem came from a feeling of being worthy of being “*listened to*”. This provided a sense of feeling like a “*special*” person. Each student perceived themselves to be an important member of the group as a result of becoming an established member within an environment of equal opportunity and inclusiveness. Participants were empowered from being trusted to make responsible decisions about group standards and expectations. A sense of autonomy was gained when facilitators showed they had faith in the student’s ability to make choices and be responsible for making decisions independently or as part of the group in completing tasks. A sense of achievement occurred from completing group tasks because they were within their range of capability. Further achievement came from enhanced listening and empathy skills, and identifying and drawing on their own resources. A chance to reflect on progress via completion of the SEAL evaluation forms contributed to increased self-esteem because participants could actually comprehend the evidence of their effectiveness in the group both personally and as a group member.

6.2.3 Enjoyment from acquiring new skills

The acquisition of new skills was an experience that gave the participants a sense of pride as well as achievement. The SEAL activities of ‘Human Rights’ (Appendix 11d), ‘Avatar’ (Appendix 11e), ‘The ‘F’ Factor’ (Appendix 11f) and ‘Disclosure Cards’ (Appendix 11g) were relevant topics that connected with their world and proved easy for them to grasp and engage in, and therefore pleasurable. The structure of the group work, interspersed with games, ice-breakers and opportunities for movement, proved to be a welcome and “*fun*” change from regular classroom lessons and therefore experienced as enjoyable. Participants experienced a high level of success carrying out these activities due to the fact that the level of engagement was in their control because of the ‘right to pass’ group rule and equity of acknowledgement for any contribution, however small, shown by the facilitators.

The most significant source of enjoyment came from the inter-relational skills acquired. Without any instruction whatsoever, participants learned how to listen attentively to one another and valued learning about each other’s experiences. They felt they had made friends, experienced being ‘liked’, and formed a greater appreciation for the experiences of other group members from the knowledge that they also had difficulties. A sense of belonging was experienced. They enjoyed learning from others how they related to and coped with difficulties. Their improved social skills resulted in enhanced empathy and positive regard towards each other, as well as towards themselves. Feelings experienced included “*relaxed*”, “*proud*” and “*happy*”.

6.3 Research outcomes

The insights and understandings that emerged as a result of this study have tremendous potential value for use at personal, professional, and school-based levels. In particular, this study points to the following outcomes and implications:

Aspects of the school environment and family factors, not previously understood, were shown to have impeded the well-being and progress of some participants in this study. The school counsellor, working collaboratively with other school staff, was able to provide an essential intervention that identified and counteracted the negative effects.

Relationships mattered significantly to the well-being of the participants but the data showed that without listening to each other, which helped to form positive connections, relationships did not have sufficient meaning to be the inconvertible contributor to their subjective well-being.

Students have a great deal to convey to adults about their life experience of school.

Qualitative research can gather rich material about the lives of students in schools.

Group work can offer a unique opportunity for researching the lived experience of young people.

School counsellors have a role to play in upholding equity of educational opportunity and access for students by designing interventions that provide support when a threat to health has been identified.

School counsellors can positively impact on outcomes. Participants in this study indicated that the counsellors helped them to feel included and valued, resulting in a willingness to attend group work, conveying not only the positive impact caring adults had on them but also a negative impact from their perceptions of adults as uncaring.

School counsellor interventions can promote the development of personal and social skills and contribute to a more positive sense of self.

School counselling is a valuable resource that can produce developmentally appropriate interventions that nurture trusting adult and peer relationships. Such interventions could support greater inclusion and sense of belonging, reducing anxiety, and therefore increasing aptitude for learning.

The school-based counsellor is in an eminently suitable position to capitalise on possibilities for researching practice and formulating interventions based on evidence.

6.4 Results in relation to the research questions

This study was based on three overarching research questions which have been answered as a result of analysing the data:

6.4.1 How do I know the group work I facilitate in school is in the best interests of the child?

The benefits to the group seemed quite considerable. Every participant reported appreciation for being included and, in most cases, expressed a preference for the group work to continue. The predominant feelings expressed by participants as ‘happy’, ‘relaxed’ and ‘proud’, followed by ‘amazing’ and ‘loved’, provided the evidence.

The findings leave little doubt that students found the group work to be a positive experience because of the formation of satisfying relationships with peers and adults and the enabling conditions that existed. The positive social interaction of the group work helped to form meaningful relationships and according to other studies (Clement, 2010; The Good Childhood Report, 2009, Crivello et al, 2008; Shucksmith et al, 2006) would make life meaningful and therefore contribute to a sense of well-being. Environmental conditions were important elements of the participants’ experience for providing safety; a finding that concurs with findings from other school related well-being studies: Konu & Lintonen, 2006; O’Brien, 2008; Shucksmith, 2006.

Students experienced increased self-esteem because of achieving competency individually and in team work (they listened to others and took account of different views, formed collaborative working relationships, used skills, behaviour and personal qualities by managing group discussion and showing fairness and consideration to others). The group work led by a counsellor was experienced as different to other group work they had attended in school, finding it a more positive experience and something they wanted to attend.

Positive, supportive adult/student relationships provided a stronger sense of identity. Osterman (2000) suggested that from an experience of belonging and being accepted comes a sense of identity and increased motivation.

The conclusion to be drawn from the results of this study is that, for a short period of time, the group work intervention was in the best interests of the participants and that the facilitative, child-centred style employed by the counsellor was a contributory factor.

6.4.2 **What is the relevance of counsellor led group work for the student, the school and the practitioner?**

The group work contributed to the ECM healthy outcomes for the students in that they experienced positive well-being (**be healthy**), **stayed safe** - felt cared for, **enjoyed** and **achieved, attended, and made a positive contribution** by supporting other students and helping with research to inform practice. Additionally, school was perceived in a positive light by the students because it offered something they valued. Relevance is also highlighted in the subsequent section and other sections of the thesis. I therefore set out the relevance for the school and the practitioner.

For the practitioner

A consequence of researching group work in schools was opportunity for valuable lessons to be learned. Introducing and conducting group work can provide a useful channel for enriching and enhancing the work of the school counsellor.

I have learned more about the climate of the schools involved and have a reviewed concept of the school counsellor's role as being a vital agent in bringing about change in the school by way of feedback and contributing to the communications dimension of the school structure.

The findings from this research have shown that the school counsellor can contribute to the social emotional aspects of learning within the school system in terms of work with young people as well as school staff. Researching practice can be a richly rewarding experience in helping to integrate the role of the counsellor into the school community enhancing observational, recording, IT and interpersonal skills, as well as making themselves and their work known more widely.

School counsellors can play a critical role in improving the lives of those students whose limited or hindered social, emotional skills prevent them from leading fulfilling and successful student lives by providing appropriate interventions, not only in individual counselling sessions but also in small groups, and by working with teachers and other staff members to provide helpful interventions in the school at large.

For the school

- Students reported high levels of acquisition of social skills in the SEAL self-evaluation forms. The skills would be transferable to the school community.
- An insight into underlying issues that inhibit students and adversely affect their ability to integrate and learn well.
- Students experienced a reduction of anxiety as a result of resolving emotional issues.
- Increased emotional literacy would be transferable to learning.
- Effective use of the resources of the school counsellor.
- Positive contribution to collaborative working practices and 'whole school ethos'.

6.4.3 **How do I know whether this kind of work has therapeutic value?**

Clear evidence that therapy had taken place emerged from the debriefing notes and the interview transcripts. During the sessions involving the use of the SEAL 'Avatar' resource, despite the group facilitators demonstrating a variety of representations such as 'superman' etc., without exception students chose a family member to portray their Avatar. The activity promoted discussion about family members in relation to a 'higher being' to be looked up to and, inevitably, proved to be an emotionally evoking experience resulting in the sharing by students of heartfelt material including family loss and difficulties arising out of parental split. During this exercise one participant chose their great grandma as Avatar and was able to share their loving relationship and what she meant to him/her. A sense of deep loss was expressed when the student revealed she had died this year. The facilitators responded to appropriately validate the experience and feelings and sensed that this student and one other had received therapeutic experience. Confidentiality boundaries were reinforced to show acknowledgement of sensitive material, for safety reasons, and follow-up support was offered by providing the students concerned with self-help leaflets for loss and split families as well the option to attend 1:1 counselling.

The issue of loss re-emerged at interview, showing some resolution:

Interviewer:

"What do you have to say about coming to the 'Diary Room' to talk about the group work and is there anything else would you like to say?"

Interviewee response:

"Well yes, because when my great grandma died I like didn't really like it but she was in a lot of pain and the whole left side of her went numb"

Interviewer:

"You felt you could talk about the loss of your great grandma in the group?"

Interviewee response

"Yes and I just know that she's an angel now, she's my avatar"

For one participant the group had provided a trusting place to externalise a difficult loss issue which enabled him/her to experience “*trust and faith*”.

Being afforded the opportunity for freedom of thought and self-expression through open discussion, entering thoughts and feelings into their journals, being asked about their experience at interview and completing the 1.5.1 self-evaluation form, necessitated the students to tap into their own experience. This process of reflecting and drawing upon personal resources to make sense of experience goes hand in hand with increased self-awareness. As Rogers (1964) states:

“I believe that when the human being is inwardly free to choose whatever he deeply values, he tends to value those objects, experiences and goals which make for his own survival, growth and development of others” (pp. 160-167)

Schools represent an outlook that empowerment is outside of the self: gaining knowledge, attaining good grades, getting a good job, etc. It could be said that this mindset transfers to its students. Whereas, the therapeutic approach of the counsellor helps people to feel empowered in a self-efficacious way, i.e. to connect with the real self. The positive feelings students received from participating in the counsellor-led group work had less to do with gaining knowledge or reaching targets but more about being in an environment that was accepting and empowering. The students were able to see themselves more positively because they experienced an increase in their self-awareness. The corollary of the capacity to be more aware is increased inner stability and this may become a useful ally for the students to draw upon in challenging circumstances.

When the group work came to an end the students experienced a sense of loss, showing that it had been meaningful to them. I believe that the participants achieved a level of ‘inward freedom’ that helped them to realise their value, resulting in a level of personal growth.

It is evident that the students I worked with began with a self-concept that placed them on the periphery of school society. For the time in which they worked together in a group, without threat of being “*nagged at*” or “*shouted at*” and where conditions of positive regard existed, they experienced themselves as “*normal*” and treated like “*human beings*”. They saw their regular lessons as something ‘other’ and preferred to attend the group sessions rather than lessons, without realising that they were in fact in a lesson in the name of ‘group work’.

In essence, because the students experienced a sense of self-worth as a result of seeing themselves as worthy of being listened to, the students found personal freedom to be themselves and accepted as themselves instead of what is expected of them, and as such moved towards self-actualisation as described by Rogers (1959) and Maslow (1954).

6.5 Summary

Applying phenomenological methods to this research revealed not only the ‘what’ that contributed to the participants’ well-being but the ‘how’ and showed that group work facilitated by a school counsellor can be in the best interests of those involved. Gaining direct access to the experience of the participants enabled, what I consider to be, truthful accounts of experience. What was learned helped to identify important elements of what contributes to the well-being of this age group in the school setting, having implications for practice.

On the results of this study I cannot agree with the arguments put forward that education and therapy are incompatible, as voiced by Ecclestone (2009). I have learned to appreciate that the school, as well as being a place for formal education, is also the seat of social experience for the students. It is therefore a universal agent that has much potential for personal development and creative social growth, an apt basis for positively contributing to the well-being of students.

However, it is inconceivable to me, from my experience of working in schools and conducting this study, how teachers can possibly meet the demands of the social and emotional needs of students at the same time as meeting the demands of providing an academic education and ensuring high attainment levels. In this respect I accord with the view of Ecclestone; also with that of Baginsky (2004) that it is difficult for teachers to be counsellors. It has been my experience that teaching staff have shown invaluable skills in building social histories of their students and building up a picture of their needs, strengths and weaknesses, generally. This study leaves me no choice than to support of the idea that a therapeutic approach to the social emotional needs of students can effectively be assimilated into the school setting with effectual collaboration taking place between the school and mental health practitioners, i.e. teachers and counsellors working together as advocated by Simpson et al (2003).

Intentionality is an important aspect of phenomenological research and the findings of this research show clearly the intentions of the participants involved in this study. They wanted to fit in and enjoy being listened to and have the chance to listen to others and they wanted to belong. The intention of schooling, however, leans more towards meeting the challenges of and implementing new proposals, and succeeding academically. Evidently, there is a gap between the intentions of the architects of society and those of young people. To support students to achieve their intentions requires listening to what they have to say and to find suitable ways to respond.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter closes this thesis, ending with a reflexive account of being a researcher working with and studying young people in schools.

Setting up and facilitating group work in secondary schools to support the implementation of SEAL exerted a great deal of collaborative work and energy. Reflecting over the whole process involving discussions with management, colleagues and school staff; a considerable amount of administrative work; the preparation of the group work schemes and resources; the debriefing and follow-up; may raise the question of whether all of this effort made a sufficient difference and is it an effective use of counsellor time? Does a counsellor bring something sufficiently different to a school that is a necessary contribution to the well-being of its students?

My answer is that these questions have been answered by hearing from the students involved and reflection upon their lived experience. Whilst young people can communicate in surveys and similar methods of research what they need to feel well, they may not necessarily have the awareness to articulate what makes the difference for them to feel well. The phenomenological methods used in this study provided the means to delve deeper and reveal the essential qualities of the students' experience.

My thesis was that in the main adults decide what interventions should be made to address the well-being needs of students in schools which posed the question of whether they are necessarily in their best interests. In conducting small group work to implement SEAL materials to support the social and emotional needs of students, I felt impelled to find out the relevancy of the intervention in the interests of safe and ethical practice.

My position as a result of gaining insights through researching the group work is that social and emotional support using the medium of small groups and relevant material can

play an important part in contributing to the well-being of students. It highlighted that it is imperative to keep on listening to young people to find out what they are really experiencing so that problems can be identified and appropriate interventions determined. In order to do this properly a valuable approach seems to be the use of research methods that facilitate the capturing of the essence of experience that would be difficult to be captured using surveys and interviews. Finding meaningful and reliable results in the extremely complex arena of human experience is a multifaceted undertaking. When considering intervention choices for young people, perhaps the better informed approach would be one that integrates empirical evidence with evidence from best practice that is child-informed using qualitative methods.

As a result of this study I was able to answer my research questions and see the evidence of my contribution to the well-being of the students. My wish at the conclusion of this research project is that it will contribute as a model of good practice for school counsellors and the services and schools that employ them. I would also hope that it serves to encourage school counsellors to take a more diverse approach to their role and to embark upon research themselves to show the effectiveness of their work. Furthermore, despite arguments to the contrary, e.g. Ecclestone (2009), I feel confident that school is an appropriate setting to attend to the emotional aspects of young people's development and that small group work, facilitated by an appropriate adult, can contribute to the well-being of those students who are struggling because of emotionally challenging circumstances at home and school.

I shall endeavour to find a way for the findings of this research to be published in a relevant journal such as the BACP's CCYP to reach the audience it is intended for.

7.2 Limitations of this study

The study allowed an insight into the experience of a small number of students involved in group work in two schools. The sample included Y8 students (age thirteen to fourteen years) only and therefore cannot be generalised beyond this age group.

As the sample was taken from just two secondary schools in the North East of England it cannot be assumed that the results reflect the demographic differences of the UK's population of school children.

Accessibility to students was limited because of the school time-table offering a restricted window of opportunity for the research procedures. As a consequence it was important to access as much data as possible within the limited time framework available. It also meant that it was not possible to take data back to the participants as part of the analysis process. To try to access students beyond this point, after the end of the academic year and in the summer holiday period, raised an ethical issue because the students would have experienced 'closure' and made personal and developmental progress. To return data to participants after the summer holiday at the beginning of a new academic year presented another issue concerning reliability and validity because of the lapse of time involved.

This study reports positive outcomes from one source, the perspective of the child, and does not include the wider school community perspective of teaching staff or parents. Concerns are sometimes raised in research that whilst the views of children are desirable they tend to be less reliable based on the belief that they are incapable of logical thought, prone to manipulation by peers or adults and to lying and fantasising. On the other hand, however, it is argued that adults are often not reliable informants about children (Punch, 2002). Steps were taken to address this ambiguity throughout the research process including the use of multiple research methods and a variety of sources of information as a cross-reference to limit researcher interpretation.

7.3 Implications for practice

7.3.1 An imperative for school counsellors to work collaboratively

The work of the school counsellor, by virtue of its confidential nature and off timetable limited presence, can sometimes be an unseen contribution to school life.

There is vague allusion to the counsellor in school related literature such as ‘support for vulnerable students’ or ‘involvement of other agencies’ when referring to services employed to promote the personal development and well-being of students. The work of the school counsellor becomes prominent in cases of instigating ‘safeguarding’ procedures, time-table conflicts and instances of positive counselling outcomes, each of which can be defined as unique and distinct and therefore largely unobserved.

This study, in contrast, demonstrated the raising of awareness of the school community to the counsellor’s work. Organising and conducting group work inevitably becomes collaborative because of the need to open dialogue between counsellor and staff to establish a focus, to seek the necessary consents and large-scale intrusion into school systems. The counsellor’s presence became more visible, imparting knowledge and understanding of her role to rest of the school and placed that role on the school map.

The considerable amount of activity involved in group work necessitated the role of the counsellor to become so much more engaged with the school community than that of 1:1 only provision of counselling. Tasks requiring collaboration in conducting this research, for example, included: meetings with senior staff to negotiate the possibility and focus of the research; discussion with headteachers including making arrangements for them to present certificates to the students in the final session; involving the caretaker in the setting up of the diary room (during which much fun was had in the inflating/deflating the portable diary room chair); negotiating room availability with colleagues; recruiting the support of the administrative staff to provide invaluable help in locating students and providing/disseminating information; negotiating the provision by school of a group work co-facilitator; the transference to other aspects of school of information and skills learned in the group work by the co-facilitator; talking to parents in response to queries.

Working in partnership in this way depended on a sharing of responsibility, involving the allocation of resources, and presented a challenge to further develop professional and personal relationship skills that enable admittance to and understanding of school systems. A flexible and positive approach became a vital ally in negotiating time-tables, acquiring resources and keeping schedules on track.

Paisley and McMahon (2001) expressed a belief that school counselling programmes are increasingly anchored in proactive interventions requiring a collaborative approach; a point of view shared by Green & Keys (2001). I concur with their estimation and agree that the future of school counselling points in the direction of moving from traditional services to more indirect services with a collaborative approach to respond to the increasingly diverse nature of schools and offering greater possibilities for effective interventions.

A key component of successful working practices to support children and young people is that services and professionals combine their professional expertise, knowledge and skills (ECM/CWDC, 2007). During the group work I facilitated in schools it was a privilege to have as my co-facilitators a school nurse, a special needs co-ordinator, a member of the behaviour support team, a youth worker/music specialist, and a member of the anti-bullying team. Each one said how much they had valued being involved in the group work activities acknowledged as follows:

- Having a better understanding of the students because of learning more about their lives and behaviour
- Working from a more child centred perspective enabled the seeing and hearing of feelings, fears and difficulties of the students not previously so visible
- Group work as an effective helping process for both the facilitator and student because of increased knowledge, especially in relation to identifying and managing feelings
- An increase of self-awareness and self-esteem for one facilitator resulting in improved relationships with students, staff and others
- Transference of the child-centred perspective to other practice

Emerging out of this study is evidence of the effectiveness of professionals with differing qualities and expertise that can enhance practice by working together and sharing their skills. I certainly learned many things from every professional who contributed to the group work and use much of the learning in my work, such as how youth culture impacts on youth behaviour and how to relate to young people by taking into account their 'rules of engagement'.

Not only did joining services model good practice and positive adult/child relationships, it provided knowledge and skills that are transferable and contributed to the personal and professional development of the adults concerned.

7.3.2 SEL programme delivery

It was admirable to see teachers broadening their skill bases in the process of grappling with SEAL implementation during the time I conducted the group work. However, in the traverse of this piece of research the literature and the findings suggest that a gap exists between the skills of the teacher and those of the counsellor in facilitating social and emotional support programmes. Additionally, studies show lack of time and resources to enable teachers to cover every aspect of school life (Visser, 2004; Ransford et al, 2009). The students in this study responded positively to the facilitative style of the counsellor which was a sharp contrast to other stress laden group work they had attended in school.

The SEAL resources proved to be effective tools for skill building. The students enjoyed the ‘Learning to be together’ theme which enabled them to work together as well as independently. Students reported the activities as being “*easy*” illustrating that the material was mostly within their skill range. However, what seemed to make the difference to students engaging with the SEAL materials positively and with pleasure was the style of the group work that was interspersed with games, provided opportunity for moving around the room, the chance for discussion, and awareness that help was readily available for any difficulties. The group work model offers an ideal opportunity for encompassing such a style.

Despite great efforts on behalf of schools to accommodate the social emotional aspects of young peoples’ lives by employing preventative and remedial responses, the data showed evidence of children not being supported with emotional difficulties.

Examples included: that despite the fact that students had spent two years together in school, they knew very little about one another; two cases of students skipping group work because of an inability to cope with tense conditions; three students had been struggling with bereavement and loss issues; a long-standing relationship problem involving three friends had become emotionally debilitating for one student and was impacting on the happiness of the others who felt powerless to help.

Knowing the schools involved in this study and their responsible approach to the well-being of their students, I feel confident to say that the lack of support was not because of non response to the problems of students. Evidently the schools were pro-active in developing emotional support strategies for students including putting much energy into implementing SEAL, including counsellor-led group work, the subject of this study. They employed a school counsellor and other child support agencies such as anti-bullying and parent support advisers.

What does seem evident is that the schools had not been aware of the problems. It appears that there were barriers in the way sometimes of being able to actually see and hear the emotional struggles of the students. Another study would have to be conducted to find out what the barriers might have been.

In the case of this study it took the counsellor's skills with a phenomenological approach using sensory qualities of seeing and hearing to find out what was otherwise not known. Moreover, what might be the implications for the students of these unresolved issues and what might be the consequences of SEL based group work being conducted with a different approach where there are barriers to seeing and hearing children with the result that they are not supported in emerging loss and relationship issues? In adults without abilities to 'hear' the way in which children communicate, there is the chance for barriers to occur (Clark & Moss, 2001). A problem would exist, for example, in a situation where a group leader has a personal unresolved issue that arises for a child and there is no opportunity for discussion in supervision or other support mechanism. Whereas, counsellors are trained to listen and hear and are guided by a professional ethical framework which requires regular supervision to ensure safe and ethical practice for both client and practitioner.

These points are very relevant in terms of ethical, child-centred practice as outlined in policy and guidance (ECM, 2004; NICE) and other literature (Reid, 1996; Wood, 2007; Garcia et al, 2007; Lavis, 2009).

Consequently, there are implications for practice in who delivers SEL programmes and how they are delivered. The findings of this study show that Y8 students can be happy working in small groups to develop their social and emotional competencies as in evidence in their group work self-evaluations. What is crucial to the work being a positive or negative experience are the conditions and atmosphere under which it takes place. According to Rogers (1994), being ‘taught’ is very different to being ‘facilitated’ and this point is particularly relevant when learning is concerned with emotional material.

This study has validated the counsellor as an effective facilitator of social, emotional based group work and has validated the group work method for assisting students in need. The counsellor represented a different kind of adult to the students who was able to accept them as they are and facilitated their experience rather imposing external judgement.

The group facilitating technique lies within the capabilities of the perceptive school counsellor and offers an effective and efficient use of the counsellor as a school resource.

7.3.3 **Changing rhetoric to reality**

The rhetoric surrounding child emotional well-being as conceptually caring and grounded in health and safety, though prolific in the narrative, appears not to be so visibly evident in practice. The challenge of any new strategy, such as EMC and SEAL, is to turn it from rhetoric to reality. The findings from this study show that what is important to children and young people matches well with guidance, policy and what the literature says.

There have been calls for the government and commissioners to go beyond the rhetoric and to embed long-term financial and other support to tackle the challenge of young people's mental health (Garcia, 2007; Gilligan & Manby (2008). This study supports that theory. The literature highlighted inconsistency towards implementation of relative government initiatives, infidelity to the SEAL programme and insufficient resources in schools to be able to maintain them in any sustainable way.

7.4 Ideas for further research and recommendations

In this study it has been a privilege to consult and listen to the voice of the young person whose experience provided important messages that can be used to inform school and counsellor practice. However, Kirby et al (2003) indicated the need for a more sustained and consistence approach to consulting youth with a directive that if it is (consultation) to be meaningful to young people and effective in influencing change, participation needs to go beyond one-off or isolated programmes, and to be embedded in relationships and ways of working. If the school counselling profession is to flourish against a backdrop of fluctuating political trends and uphold its place in contributing to school social, emotional agenda then much more evidence of good practice from qualitative research, informed by young people, will be crucial. From a wider perspective, the well-being of children and young people also depends on a cohesive approach. As Clark & Moss (2005) pointed out, the well-being of children cannot be promoted in isolation, their needs to be met by primary carers and the environment in which they reside.

The following recommendations are given on the basis of the findings from this research:

- A need for group work in schools facilitated by experienced practitioners who are able to offer appropriate support with emotional issues and provide follow-up if necessary: the literature and this study show that small group work can provide a unique opportunity to enhance the social and emotional lives of students.
- A call for qualitative research to explore experience to gain deeper understandings of the child world.

- A call for school counsellors to research their practice for purposes of professional development and to show evidence of effective work with students in efforts to strengthen their profession.
- Increased opportunity for students to work in more socially interactive ways in schools, perhaps in small groups, with chances for sharing information and working together, to develop effective social inclusion.
- Professional interventions need to have an understanding of the importance of the social dynamics and social networks of young people.
- The school environment, as it relates to the social and emotional aspects of students' development, needs to be placed firmly on the school agenda for monitoring and evaluating purposes.

7.5 Contribution to research

This study adds to previous investigations of school-based mental health interventions. Whereas other studies have separated and decontextualized selected factors in their attempts to empirically explain student's experiences, this study employed a naturalistic approach that was perceptive to the participant's experience. Participants communicated their experience of taking part in counsellor-led group work. Themes and meanings emerged from participants' personal descriptions of their experiences. This study's qualitative approach provides a meaningful contribution to the body of research devoted to understanding the impact of counsellor-led interventions, such as group work, that support the social and emotional well-being of students in school.

7.6 Concluding remarks: reflexive account of undertaking research

I did not know at the outset of my research whether my exploration would find any relevance for the students of participating in group work facilitated by me. Having explored their life world throughout the group work has provided an understanding about what conditions need to exist for them to feel well.

In my aim to be a reflective and effective counselling practitioner, working in the best interests of the client, undertaking this research has helped me enormously in that vein. I believe that I have a greater awareness of how I impacted on the school life of the students through my research questions which goes some way to contributing to improving professional standards, based on research. Any initial personal reservations about my responsibilities regarding school versus child best interests lost their significance in the light of the findings which revealed that, despite the fact that the group work was based on key school objectives, participants benefited personally from the therapeutic qualities of the facilitative counselling approach applied to the group work. I was reassured that the group work was conducted within the BACP (2010) ethical framework, especially in relation to ‘autonomy’, ‘beneficence’ and ‘fidelity’ to counselling principles.

This research began with exploring my role in the group work to help students to learn social and emotional skills. However, as often happens in the work of the counsellor learning can be a two way thing. I learned to be humble when young people placed their trust in me with their innermost thoughts and feelings, aware they had given something precious and that something produces a feeling of humility. The students came to the group sessions willingly, placed their trust in my hands and looked to me for help. To lead groups in this way a person must be able to accept that they are responsible for the wellbeing of each and every individual involved and any problems that may arise.

I learned that I had forgotten the pleasure in small things that are newly experienced i.e. learning new skills. Not everything a counsellor learns comes from books. To work effectively and safely depends largely on drawing from experience, i.e. actively listening to each participant in verbal and non-verbal ways but to also listen to the self so that the most positive and appropriate responses can be made. Maslow (1971) uses the following words to express this concept:

“One cannot choose wisely for a life unless he dares to listen to himself, his own self, at each moment in life” (p. 41)

Being involved in this research has been a challenging experience resulting in personal and professional growth. It has provided an opportunity to re-explore the nature of philosophy, heighten my appreciation of humanistic values, expand my research skills and open up a world of child well-being related literature helping to close gaps in my knowledge. What posed a real challenge in the process of this research was the pace of change in the political landscape surrounding child well-being support.

What the findings revealed was that the students needed positive regard and a supportive environment to enable freedom of thought and expression of feelings. This finding fits with Watson et al's (2012) idea that in supporting children to be well, adults need to ensure they have sufficient space to understand their experience in their terms. Having achieved this position they were able to engage in the work of the group, with lowered barriers, and more able to develop positive relationships. Rogers (1964) refers to this as inner development and personal growth. Consequently, their experience included being happy, relaxed, feeling proud of their achievements, and having a sense of belonging. I cannot be anything but encouraged by the implications of the findings of this study for meeting professional and ethical standards in counselling practice and contributing to the well-being of the students involved.

However, this exploratory study has impacted in a way that is saddening to me when I witness much energy and investment to address the social and emotional needs of young people falling on, what I consider is, stony ground.

Despite all the rhetoric and implementation of relevant programmes which attempt to respond to the social and emotional aspects of young people's development in the school setting, there has been little legislation to properly reinforce it. Studies have consistently revealed the lack of fidelity to programmes or sustained implementation.

This study bears testimony to the fact that the mental well-being of children and young people is the subject of societal and political trends and speaks more for adult needs than it does for the needs of children. What might be the implications of one-off interventions of the kind conducted in this study?

Though it served to provide a relatively brief positive experience for the small number of students involved, including some therapeutic outcomes, the participants had been given a glimpse of what it can be like to be respected, accepted, feel proud and worthy, as well as resolve personal issues. What is unknown is the sustainability of this experience and how it will influence their expectations of school? I fail to see how practices that are limited in this way can adequately produce the required positive 'outcomes' intended to address the concerns of the future of society.

Conducting this research has reinforced my belief in the value of Rogers' core conditions and reminded me of their importance when working therapeutically with children in schools.

Finally, I feel there is a need to stress the significance for school counsellors to show evidence of the effectiveness of their interventions, especially in the face of strong opposition to therapy in the school setting such as Ecclestone & Hayes (2009). I feel it is imperative that any therapeutic or supportive intervention is validated and that there is a channel for an ongoing critique to review static theories of child development as espoused by Ecclestone (2009) and Flear (2003). The counselling profession has an invaluable contribution to make in this context.

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Pilot Study

*Finding appropriate methods for
researching the experience of young people
involved in group work in the school setting*

February 2009

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REFERENCES

**PILOT STUDY:
FINDING APPROPRIATE METHODS FOR RESEARCHING THE
EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN GROUP WORK IN THE
SCHOOL SETTING**

1. INTRODUCTION

Context

This paper reports on efforts to pilot research methods applied to a small scale school counselling project researching a young person's perspectives on their experience of being involved in group work in school. The pilot study was conducted to test certain research instruments for reliability and workability to assist in the development of an appropriate research design for a larger scale doctoral research project possibly involving a number of schools in County Durham.

Rationale for carrying out the research

An emerging priority for the education system in the UK has been for the development of emotional literacy and addressing the emotional health needs of young people in schools much in evidence in the Every Child Matters (ECM) Agenda for Change (DfES) aimed to contribute to 5 healthy outcomes for children (be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution, achieve economic well-being). Similar initiatives include SEAL (Social and emotional aspects of learning) (DfES, 2007) and the National Health Service's National Service Framework (NSF) for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (2004); an integral part of the ECM programme, aimed at improving the health of children and young people.

Secondary SEAL which focuses on five social outcomes: self-awareness, managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills serves to underpin effective learning, positive behaviour and good attendance, staff effectiveness, emotional health and well-being, and positive relationships was eagerly embraced by the school in this study to build on its existing emotional development systems to be integrated into everyday classroom learning. Once, implemented, the value of adding SEAL to lessons became evident in improved child/adult relationships whereby students were more able to articulate their needs and difficulties. Recognition of the need for extra support to supplement the integration of SEAL resulted in identifying pockets of students who might benefit from group work incorporating SEAL materials with particular emphasis on enhancing self-awareness and social skills building.

In a school setting one of the most effective counsellor approaches to meeting the needs of the students is to work collaboratively with school staff for the benefit of the school community. This approach requires an ongoing dialogue between the counsellor, senior school staff and the visiting external agency professionals to identify the appropriate use of resources including suitable interventions to be applied in a variety of cases.

Dialogue in this case centred on the limitation of available teaching staff time and the possibilities for locating this work in the school's student support services based on the awareness of ongoing group work facilitated by the school counsellor and that the students may benefit from those conditions normally associated with the person-centred approach of counselling of being listened to and heard and not judged (Rogers, 1959); contact with adults in a different kind of relationship and quality time to enable the expression, reflecting upon and exploration of their emotions within an environment of boundaries to facilitate safety and trust. It was agreed to pilot group work utilising the skills and experience of the school counsellor and the member of staff responsible for SEAL (assistant co-ordinator of special needs) who would co-facilitate.

1) Whether recruiting young people to participate in something they would probably have little comprehension of, including unknown implications, is in their best interests; a point that would ultimately need to be proven prior to becoming commonplace practice.

2) New initiatives for young people set outside the perimeters of the regular school curriculum call for validation to ensure justification and good practice.

In an effort to address these concerns it was decided to monitor and evaluate the progress of the group work. In line with Kirby (2004) who maintains that children should be given opportunity to communicate and participate in the decisions that affect them and be encouraged to express their views, ask questions and discuss their health worries, it was decided to conduct research to find out what is the experience of the participants aimed at giving the students a voice and to provide insights from their perspectives. A chance also to redress a topical concern that few studies concentrate on the views and experiences of the children and young people involved (Street, 2000).

Undertaking research with young people involves the issue of ethics, power and safety to mention a few. Serious considerations need to be raised to validate the necessity of such research, including the use of appropriate methods to ensure maximum benefit for the participants. In this context the purpose for this particular piece of research includes opportunities to:

- Enable young people to feel heard and valued;
- Give young people a say on school services;
- Inform the provision of services for young people in secondary schools;
- Demonstrate effective good practice and to promote developments in practice;
- Contribute to influencing social policy for the benefit of children;
- Contribute to the concept of promoting good childhood experiences for all children.

Rather than demonstrating student academic performance obtained using measurable outcomes for the purposes of accountability, a factor driving research by school counsellors (Campbell, 2005), this research project aims to be an exploratory phenomenological study.

Basis for conducting a pilot study

Focussing on the research question: '*Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham*' helps to contextualise the search for a suitable choice of method.

The objective of piloting at one school would help to produce a research model that would be transferable to other participating schools. The aims of the pilot study would be to:

- Evaluate the amount of time and resources necessary for conducting the research
- Ascertain the response to research involving students as well as the impact of the research on the wider school community of staff and parents
- Assess the implications and suitability of data collection methods

Pilot studies offer a preparatory phase for the researcher to identify areas of a projected research plan that may be inappropriate or ineffective and give opportunity to obtain data to review and provide a more suitable plan. In the field of research pilot studies are often referred to as feasibility studies which are "*small scale version(s) or trial run(s), done in preparation for the major study*" (p. 467) (Polit et al, 2001). Mason & Zuercher (1995) tell us that pilot studies can be "*time-consuming, frustrating, and fraught with unanticipated problems, but it is better to deal with them before investing a great deal of time, money, and effort in the full study*". Based on this premise the objectives of carrying out this pilot study were to:

- Bring to light any unanticipated problems
- Provide ideas and clues that may increase opportunity for applying methods best suited for clarity of findings
- Provide the chance to evaluate the usefulness of the data and make any necessary modifications to facilitate effective analysis
- Try out alternative measures and select those that are most likely to produce the clearest results in the final study
- Enable effective use of resources including making minimal demands on students' time.

2. EXPLORING DATA COLLECTION METHODS WHEN RESEARCHING EXPERIENCE

In research work with young people there are particular rudiments to be considered in adopting research methods to enable the most accurate recall of experience. Spencer and Flin (1993) make reference to age related tendencies in establishing what influences reliability of the data, i.e. that children tend to report the information they perceive as central and omit what they see as peripheral. Spencer and Flin suggest, however, that this is entirely congruent with the aims of research where one is attempting to discover and understand another's perception.

This study is one of human experience and is dependent upon expression of human nature which is in the realms of language and art.

It is acknowledged that direct access to the personal experience of the research subjects is impossible, so importance is attributed to language, the power of speech, narrative, and texts, as building blocks of reality (Ibáñez, 1994). From this point of view sourcing data collection methods supporting this particular approach would be suited to researching the experience of young people.

Research and practice which takes seriously children's perspectives on their everyday lives has become an important element of childhood studies as posited by Mayall (2002). Several studies emphasize that activities should be varied and enjoyable, and recognize the different ways children may choose to express themselves (Miller, 1997; Cousins, 1999; Clark & Moss, 2001; Clark, 2004).

Clark (2005) emphasises the importance of 'listening' to young people in research and asks the question "*How do you listen to the views and experiences of young children?*" pointing out that hesitancy to answer this question has perhaps been one of the reasons for fewer research studies being carried out into young children's perspectives. Clark defines listening as beginning with the understanding that listening is an active rather than a passive process and stresses the importance of stretching this definition to include the many different verbal and non-verbal ways young children choose to communicate such as the use of art-based methods using photographs, symbols and mapping backed up with interviews.

According to Darbyshire et al (2005) there has been a growing awareness that while quantitative, survey and experimental studies are necessary, they cannot by themselves provide sufficient information or the insight required to fully capture the nuanced complexity of children's experiences, valuing a multi-method approach to childhood research that is culturally, developmentally and contextually sensitive.

Children's perspectives are an important source of information about what engages them in learning and why (Smith et al, 2005), indicating that a prudent measure for the researcher working with young people would be to trial run methods for collecting data to find out what engages and what disengages young people.

The choice of data collection methods required careful consideration to ensure suitability for the participants bearing in mind age and stage of development, in particular they needed to be child friendly with emphasis on ease of engagement, be interesting and not too demanding. Being mindful of the views of Darbyshire, Smith et al, and Clark, the following methods were chosen to be tested for practical application and reliability.

- Feelings faces.
- A 'Big Brother' diary room style interview facilitated by a 'Big Brother Task' in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire.
- 'Goodman' Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires.
- Debriefing notes from group sessions

3. RECRUITING AND ENGAGING PARTICIPANTS

Group work has been a popular and effective counselling provision in the participating school over a period of around 5 years focussing on ‘anger management’ and ‘self-esteem’ development, being two specific issues for focus identified by staff to contribute to the promoting of emotional literacy throughout the school.

Building on the success of this well-established resource, senior school staff proposed a change in direction for the group work to accommodate the Government’s recent Secondary SEAL (Social Emotional Aspects for Learning) initiative.

Following discussion it was agreed that the School Counsellor and the Assistant Special Needs Co-ordinator produce a suitable programme for group work using SEAL resources to complement the SEAL support being conducted in the classroom of the Y7 ‘Shelter’ group consisting of 14 students made up of 6 males and 8 females. This particular group of students are identified as requiring extra learning support and though they have different form groups work in a ‘set’ for most of their lessons.

The procedure for recruitment was followed using the following steps:

Step 1: school staff identified an appropriate teaching group for group work;

Step 2: the Assistant Special Needs Co-ordinator discussed the group work with the students;

Step 3: the Counsellor (researcher) and Assistant Special Needs Co-ordinator, group facilitators, invited the students to a meeting where information was provided and the students invited to ask questions as well as given the opportunity to handle the resources to be used in the group work;

Step 4: the students decided whether or not to participate by a show of hands;

Step 5: the students were divided into two groups; half began the group work of 6 x 1 hour sessions over six weeks, the second half attended usual lessons. The groups changed over at the end of six weeks.

4. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The following research procedures were followed:

- Discussed the suitability of the research project in supervision at University to evaluate its ethical acceptability.
- Discussed suitability of the research project, including an evaluation of its ethical acceptability, with senior management of the Durham Schools’ Counselling and school management staff.
- Received agreement to proceed from Durham Schools’ Counselling Service and school management staff.
- Discussed selection of appropriate participants for SEAL group work with senior school management staff.
- Completed application to the University School Ethics Committee.

- Discussed the research with selected students (potential participants).
- Produced a Research Statement and consent letter for parents/guardians of participants and participants themselves.
- Conducted the group work integrating the pilot study research
- Carried out data analysis
- Evaluated research methods
- Fed back the research findings to research participants, school and Durham Schools' Counselling Service.

5. LOCATION/ENVIRONMENT OF RESEARCH

One of the most important tasks for the researcher is to create a climate in which young people can feel safe to express themselves freely. Awareness by the researcher of the importance of environmental factors and a perceived power differential between child and adult is crucial for providing the most congenial conditions. The evidence suggests that provided children and young people are immersed in a supportive and encouraging environment, they are likely to report their experience honestly.

The group work took place in the naturalistic setting of the school in the counselling room located in the student support services building which is a purpose-built confidential setting with minimal chance for interruption. The group work room has windows and is spacious to allow for movement, the décor and resources child friendly and drinking water is readily available. Students are familiar with this location from which there is access to learning support resources such as laptop computers, books, information leaflets and support services. Greene & Hill (2006) promote the choice of methods for researching young people that can capture the nature of children's lives as lived rather than rely on taking children out of their everyday lives into a professional's office or "lab".

6. ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS AND ADDRESSING ARISING ISSUES

Based on an awareness of the legal status of young people, their level of knowledge and experience of the world and their relative lack of independence/autonomy every effort was made during the study to address ethical issues, to respect their rights and to value their unique worth.

An inevitable and not inconsiderable concern of carrying out research in a school setting is that of the school system consisting of terms with holidays, time-tables, core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) and tests and examinations. An understanding by the researcher of the school structure with its rules, regulations and policies is crucial for access to staff and students as well as scheduling with minimal disruption.

A task of the researcher is to seek out appropriate research methods to accommodate the aforementioned issues and incorporate the work into the school systems. Contemplating the task creates a challenge, raising questions around the practical issues of time and resources and what are the methods that aptly take into account good ethical and safe practice.

Obtaining informed consent

Letters were sent to the parents/legal guardians of the students for consent enclosing a research information sheet including an invitation to contact the school, university or researcher to discuss further the research further if required.

- Consent to access to the participants was gained from the 'gatekeeper', the Social Inclusion Co-ordinator, throughout the research process. Consent from participants was gained directly from them.
- Consent was requested from parent/legal guardian of the students. Provision was made in the case of parents not consenting whereby the researcher and the school staff would take steps to support the student and ensure that they are not disadvantaged.
- Research participants were made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish, without detriment to them.
- Research participants were helped to understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and given the opportunity to reject the use of data-gathering devices i.e. a digital recorder.
- When making notes or recording for research purposes, the purpose for their use was at all times made clear to the participants.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was discussed with the students who were assured that appropriate measures would be taken to store the research data in a secure manner taking into account the Data Protection Act and that privacy and anonymity would be preserved by removing identifiers and the use of pseudonyms.

Child Protection

In accordance with 'Safeguarding Children and Young People' (Children Act, 2004) as well as school policy, it was made clear to research participants, using child friendly language, that research data given in confidence does not enjoy legal privilege and that disclosures of serious risk would need to be shared in the interests of safety.

Addressing the affects of research on participants and the school community

The possible impact of the research on participants and the school community were identified as loss of formal learning and personal or academic issues/vulnerabilities arising out of the group work and addressed as follows:

:

- a) Parents were formally requested to encourage the students to make-up any important work they may miss as a result of the group work/research study and teaching staff, having been consulted and informed about the research group, agreed to provide any necessary academic support that may be required.

- b) Time and resources to allow for follow-up counselling and teaching support were made available for participants. Follow-up counselling sessions were arranged for one student to provide support for anger management. Support in Mathematics lessons was also provided for the student as a response to his disclosure of difficulties leading to misbehaviour due to boredom.

Level of participation of young people in the research process

Empirical evidence suggests that if one appropriately engages children in the information-gathering process there is no reason why their perceptions and thoughts should not be regarded as competent (Birbeck, 2007). Birbeck reminds the researcher of the United Nations Rights of the Child mandates that children have a right to express themselves and participate in decisions that affect them.

The extent to which young people are to be involved in research depends largely on the approach of the researcher. The enthusiasm conveyed by Darbyshire et al (2005) when discussing researching the views and experiences of young children 'that we are engaging with one of the most important, exciting and challenging areas of contemporary childhood research and service provision for children' demonstrates a positive and encouraging approach and is close to the heart of this study.

Reporting all stages of the research experience

Van Teijlingen, E R and Hundley V (2001) argue that researchers have an ethical obligation to make the best use of their research experience by reporting issues arising from all parts of a study, including the pilot phase. The findings of the pilot study will therefore contribute the main study with the aim of adding value and enhancing experience.

7. SUMMARY OF THE DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PILOT

A mixed methodology approach employing quantitative and qualitative methodological devices was chosen to obtain data to research the experience of young people participating in group work in a secondary school setting to test suitability for educating personal experience. The methods used will be evaluated to discover strengths and difficulties and assess their suitability for a larger doctoral research project.

Main themes arising will be further researched to ascertain whether the methodology proved reliable for describing the subjective experience of participants involved in group work in school.

8. OVERVIEW OF THE DATA COLLECTION METHODS:

Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires

The Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, R, 1997) is a brief behavioural screening questionnaire that asks about 25 attributes, some positive and others negative. The 25 items are divided between 5 scales of 5 items each, generalizing scores for conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problems, and

pro-social behaviour; all but the last are summed to generate a total difficulties score. The SDQ is the chosen instrument of the Durham Schools' Counselling Service to evaluate the effectiveness of counselling and is already integrated into counselling practice. The expectation is that the SDQ, used pre and post the group work, will be a useful instrument to be incorporated into the research process having proved useful in triangulating data from a previous doctoral study of the effectiveness of the counselling service (Elliott, 2004).

It is suggested in theory that the length required for completing the SDQ is 5 minutes (Goodman, R., Meltzer, H., & Bailey, V, 1998). However, the completing of such a questionnaire in a group situation posed an unknown quantity in practical terms which would need to be put to the test.

'Big Brother' Diary Room

A diary room in the style of TV's Channel 4 programme '*Big Brother*' would be set up next door to the group work room in the Student Support Services building of the school. The idea has been adopted from a youth study carried out by Kaye Richards of the BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) Research Department which had proved to be so successful that Kaye commented "this is the first time I've had young people queuing up to take part in research". Though the original theme incorporated the use of video equipment we would need to adapt because of resource availability which does not include a video recorder. Instead the use of a digital recorder would be used to obtain data, i.e. the verbal responses of the students to the questions prompted by the '*Big Brother*' task.

The style of the '*Big Brother*' room would be created by decorating the entrance door, in keeping with the design used in the 'Big Brother House' diary room, using a glamorous 'Big Brother Diary Room' sign, the 'eye' logo and cushion effect tiles. The room would contain subdued lighting, again in keeping with that of the TV programme, and an oversized inflatable chair with fluffy scatter cushions. The room had been set up during the previous school term in advance of the pilot study for the purposes of engendering familiarity and gaining responses from staff and students. In addition to the students who constantly wanted to try it out, the chair attracted attention from teaching staff, the school caretaker, the senior educational psychologist, visiting agency staff and many students who, after some careful explaining, gave a resounding 'thumbs up' proving to be a popular choice of method.

A '*Big Brother*' task, a set of questions emerging from the feelings faces and debriefing notes, would be designed to be used as a prompt to enable the participants to recall their personal experience. The coloured-in feelings faces would be included with the questions in the 'task' envelope.

Feelings Faces

Feelings faces are a long established effective resource used by counsellors when working with children and young people to encourage the recognition and articulation of emotions openly. The work of Paul Ekman (Goleman, 2003) led him to believe that expressions on the face offer a direct window on a person's emotions.

Recent work in the field of neuroscience by Lieberman (2007) showed that the amygdala was less active when an individual labels a feeling, another region of the brain was more active: the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex. This region is located behind the forehead and eyes and has been associated with thinking in words about emotional experiences. Based on the findings of Ekman and Lieberman, I decided to propose the use of feelings faces experimentally as a way of tapping in to experience.

Following discussion at supervision and with the group co-facilitator the feelings faces resource with the most universal appeal offering twelve commonly felt emotions of 'frustrated', 'embarrassed', 'mad', 'nervous', 'happy', 'proud', 'sad', 'loved', 'lonely', 'scared', 'tense/stressed' 'relaxed' was selected as a data collection method. In addition a blank face would be provided for anybody wishing to draw features on to it to show and label a different emotion for the purpose free personal expression. Students would be invited to colour-in those faces reflecting their felt emotions at the beginning of the group work in the first session and then again at the end of the last session when the group work had finished.

Students would be invited to choose as few or as many of the feelings they were experiencing at the beginning of the group session and to colour them in, repeating the exercise at the end of the group session. This provides a two-fold opportunity for students 1) to identify and label their emotions, and b) to provide information to represent what they may have been experiencing at the time.

Each student would be provided with a folder for filing any work from the group, including the feelings faces. It would be made clear to the students that the folder was to be used in helping with the research but ownership would ultimately be theirs to be available to them or shredded once the information had been processed for research purposes.

Debriefing notes of group sessions

Undertaken promptly, debriefing offers an opportunity for reflecting upon practice; though not intended to be a substitute for detailed analytical report, debriefing notes used together with other data can inform and help in the development of processing data (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Immediately following each group session, while fresh in the memory, the facilitators debriefed and recorded their observations. Debriefing offers a qualitative approach to collecting data "*which gives importance to the interpretation of actions and the contexts in which they occur*" (Greig & Taylor, 1999). Yalom (1995) reinforced this stance when he stresses the importance of observing non-verbal communication in group work i.e. how quickly group members enter or leave the room and how posture shifts and gestures may tell more about the here-and-now experiences of group members than verbalizations. Clark & Moss (2001) advocate debriefing to help inform other participatory methods used in research which will in turn enable participants to play a more direct role in the interpretation of their actions.

Debriefing served three purposes:

- 1) To capture verbal, non-verbal and behavioural information to add to the data.
- 2) To identify any weaknesses and strengths of the sessions, to inform practice, with particular reference to safety and effectiveness, and to make any necessary adjustments.
- 3) To provide the opportunity for the group facilitators to reflect on and discuss any personal material arising out of the group work requiring attention.

9. FINDINGS

Impact of the research on the students and wider school community

There was much support in school amongst staff for the group work including the research. My expectations that there would be many questions did not materialise. Staff were more than happy to hear about the research and showed more curiosity about the '*Big Brother*' diary room than any other aspect. That the school provided a 'gatekeeper', a long standing and respected member of the senior management team, adopted an open door attitude, and made little or no demands on staff, facilitated minimal impediment.

Parents willingly agreed to give the necessary consents for students to participate in the research with the exception of parent who contacted the school for further clarification, with the result that consent was given following a discussion with the counsellor about the selection process.

A minor impact arising out of the research was that of the attraction of the '*Big Brother*' diary room and in particular the chair. Students wanted to try it out and used strong arguments such as 'fairness' to elicit acquiescence from staff. Indeed, when the chair was removed to a different room to address this problem, a group of students pursued its location and made appointments under false pretences with the visiting member of staff residing there to get to try out the chair! Deflating and packing away the chair solved the problem. However, the chair became a popular choice at the school's Fun Day when it was resurrected for an activity in the '*Big Brother*' theme once again.

Time and resources necessary for conducting the research

The time and resources required for conducting the research were more extensive than originally anticipated. Difficulties were experienced in allocation of sufficient time for completing the Goodman questionnaires, management of time for colouring of the feelings faces, administering the consents including non-return and a necessary re-run of the diary room because of student absence the first time around. It became clear that the time frames for administering the research would need to be reconsidered. The group work had been detrimentally affected because of time, allocated for covering the SEAL material, being used on data collection necessitating an extension of the group work by two sessions.

Implications and suitability of data collection methods

The implications and suitability of the data collection methods were found to be variable. Piloting gave clear indications of strengths and weaknesses. A major strength was that the methods proved to be eminently suited to the age, stage of development and engagement of the students. The most positive outcome was that of the suitability of the ‘*Big Brother*’ diary room which proved to be a safe and valued environment for generating data as well as being fun. The debriefing notes were intrinsically worthwhile and acted as a triangulation agent to add understanding and depth to the relatively small amount of digitally recorded data from the diary room. A major weakness resulted from the ‘feelings faces’ which, as well as being overly time consuming, provided a disappointing amount of data and could not be relied upon owing to showing too much variability. The Goodman SDQ posed problems relating to assimilation and more suited to measuring outcomes than exploring experience.

Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires

The suggested time of 5 minutes for completion of the questionnaire proved unrealistic in practice. The time to complete them varied according to the individual. In some cases 5 minutes was indeed sufficient but in others the SDQ took as much as 15 minutes to complete stemming from problems associated with reading difficulties, distraction, not understanding some of the vocabulary and general disinterest, necessitating individual assistance from the group facilitators to ensure their completion.

Evidently the groundwork part of any evaluation process to be included in the final research design would need to be conducted in advance of the commencement of the group work, perhaps during a preliminary meeting. Although scoring of the SDQs was undertaken indicating positive outcomes, particularly under the pro-social heading, it proved difficult to assimilate the results with the other data. It did not, therefore, seem a prudent use of time to conduct further analysis. Further research would be carried out to ascertain a substitute method that would possibly produce more descriptive indicators of change perhaps arising out of one of the emerging themes.

Feelings Faces

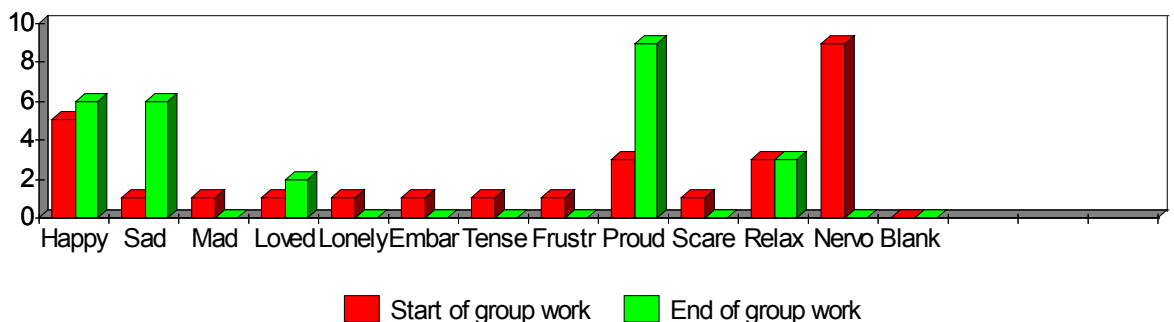
Whilst serving the purpose of self expression and raising emotional awareness, the following points show the weaknesses found in the use of the feelings faces:

- They did not convey intensity of emotion, a point identified by one of the students when commenting “*I want to colour in ‘nervous’ but I was a little nervous not very nervous*”.
- Insufficient stimulus in the diary room to provide opportunity for verbal expansion.
- Data from the feelings faces showed too much variability for the data to make sense or be relied upon, for example, one student coloured in all the faces. When prompted “*You needed to colour in all twelve feelings to let us know what you were experiencing?*” The answer came: “*I like to colour-in*”.
- There were two instances of students copying from their peers rather than expressing their own emotions (an observation taken from the debriefing notes).

- The images of the faces had been copied on to A4 paper which proved to be too large to be coloured-in in a short space of time. One student took nearly 5 minutes to painstakingly colour-in one picture, whilst another took approximately 10 minutes to colour-in every picture.

As can be seen from the following chart showing the data collected from the ‘feelings faces’ there is a high level of ‘nervous’ feelings being experienced by the students at the beginning of the group work, compared to no expressions of ‘nervous’ feelings on completion of the group work.

Data captured from Feelings Faces



None of the students selected the optional ‘feelings face’ (without an emotion). This could indicate reasons of: being too occupied with the identified emotions faces; being insufficiently relaxed to give time to consider an alternative feeling; an indication of literacy difficulties; or, indeed, some other unidentified indication. In lieu of a suitable definition this aspect of the data was considered to be unreliable. There was a definite hardcore of selected emotions: Nervous, Happy, Sad, Relaxed, Proud and Loved. Other emotions, mainly negative, not selected were: Frustrated, Tense/Stressed, Embarrassed, Lonely, Mad and Scared, with the exception of the above-mentioned student who elected to colour-in *every* face.

There was an obvious indication from the data on the completion of the group work of a considerable increase in the selection by students of feelings faces portraying the positive emotions of ‘Happy’ in six cases, ‘Loved’ in two cases, ‘Proud’ in nine cases, and ‘Relaxed’ in three cases. The ‘Sad’ emotion was selected in six cases.

The overall findings of the ‘feelings faces’ indicate a positive experience for the students participating in group work with the predominant feeling being ‘proud’.

Debriefing notes of group sessions

Debriefing notes by the group facilitators were written up at the end of each session to be used as part of the data. The notes provided a springboard for new insights which made a significant contribution to the digitally recorded responses from the diary room enhancing the analyzability of the data.

Data from the debriefing included:

- Reliability on one another in times of uncertainty observed in verbal and bodily (facial expression) communication i.e. whispering to each other to clarify what was expected of them or copying from a peer rather than using their own initiative.
- A gradual build of confidence in individuals
- A growing camaraderie in the group
- Expression of disappointment when activities were time limited
- Expression of disappointment when sessions ended
- Having to make a choice between the group or a favoured lesson i.e. physical education for some students

'Big Brother' diary room task

On completion of the group work the diary room was set up and the students were invited to visit the diary room and talk about the group work using the '*Big Brother*' task, a semi-structured questionnaire based on data from the debriefing notes and the feelings faces, designed to gather further data about their experience. The interviews were digitally recorded.

The students understood the concept of 'The Big Brother' diary room and engaged happily in this activity.

BIG BROTHER TASK

Please see the 'feelings faces' you chose to colour-in at the beginning of the group work and those you chose at the end of the group work. These are for you to look at to help you remember how you may have felt at those two times.

Please read the task questions and say something about each one if you can. Your answers will be listened to by the digital recorder. What you say remains confidential but will be used as part of the research as we already discussed. You do not have to answer the questions if you do not wish. You may answer as many or as few of them as you wish. When you are ready to leave, please place the 'Big Brother' task envelope on the table and return to the counselling room to show you have finished. Thank you".

QUESTIONS

- 1) At the beginning of the group work most students chose the feeling face that said 'nervous'. Please say what the students meant by 'nervous'.
- 2) Why might some students choose the 'happy' face at the beginning?
- 3) At the end of the group work most students chose the feeling face that said 'proud'. Please say what the students meant by 'proud'.
- 4) Some students chose the feeling 'sad' at the end of group work. Why do you think they chose this feeling?
- 5) Students said they wanted the group work to go on. What did you want?
- 6) How difficult was it to give up your school lessons to attend the group work?
- 7) Have your relations with other students in the group changed since the group work started?
- 8) If so, what is different now?
- 9) What did you think about being chosen to do some group work?
- 10) What did you like most about the group work?
- 11) What did you like least about the group work?
- 12) How will the work you did in the group help you in the future?
- 13) Anything else you would like to say?

Verbatim responses from diary room task/questionnaire	
Question 1)	<i>“feel strange”; “not sure what to do”; “don’t know”; “feel it in the stomach”</i>
Question 2)	<i>“happy to be here”; “like it”; “feel OK”; “just happy” “its OK”; “they might like it”</i>
Question 3)	<i>“learned a lot of things”; “feel proud”; “don’t know” “you know when you feel proud, you feel good” “proud of it”; “they know more at the end”</i>
Question 4)	<i>“they feel sad because they want to keep coming to the group”; “they’re sad its ended” “they won’t see Gwen (counsellor) and Ellena (Assistant SENCO) at the group” “don’t know”; “sad, you know when they pull a face”</i>
Question 5)	<i>“Yeah!”; “I wish I could come all the time”; “You could lock us in”; “We could stay all day” “We could come every week”</i>
Question 6)	<i>“don’t mind, I like the group, you get to do good things” “I like games but it was better coming to do group work” “I don’t care”; “better than school”</i>
Question 7)	<i>“We know each other better”; “Don’t know”; “Yes, a bit”</i>
Question 8)	<i>“(Name) is my best friend”; “We get on the bus” “I didn’t like (name) but she’s OK” “She wants attention but she’s got better”</i>
Question 9)	<i>“I don’t know, really” “It’s good”; “I liked it” “Is it because we live at (name of village)?” “It was scary, but now it’s alright” “’Cos we’re thick”</i>
Question 10)	<i>“The positive attitude ball”; “I liked all of it” “Playing the games”; “Not going to lessons”; “Gwen & Ellena”</i>
Question 11)	<i>“It’s OK”; “Don’t know”; “Nothing, really”</i>
Question 12)	<i>“I feel proud”; “To be more confident”; “To do group work” “Doing positive stuff”</i>
Question 13)	None of the students responded

The students understood the task questions but the task did not generate a great deal of data, some answers resulting in “*I don’t know*” or similar responses. This may have been because of lack of guidance or stimulus. The data could have been enhanced by the presence of another person to follow-up and prompt more meaningful answers. Adjustments worthy of consideration would be to develop this concept by either using the diary room for group debriefing by the students following each group session or by conducting a group interview/task at the end of the group work programme. Research methods texts advocate peer debriefing as a process to enhance the credibility or validity of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The table below provides examples of what students experienced (deduced from verbatim responses) as a result of the group work and with the help of the observations from the debriefing notes what the experiences may have meant for them.

Experience of group participants	What this may mean
Initial sense of insecurity and not knowing at the beginning of the group work (see question 1)	Looked to peers for reassurance, engendering reliance on and seeking support from one another.
Improved relationships with peers in the group (see questions 7, 8 & 12)	Feeling connected to others, having a sense of purpose; learning to accept individual differences; greater tolerance of behaviour in others
Observation by participants of improvements in the behaviour of others (see questions 3 & 8)	Seeing different aspects of each other's personalities arising from opportunity to listen to one another.
Preference of group work to school lessons for some participants (see questions 4, 5, 6 & 10)	An opportunity to do something different from regular school work; having a choice; being empowered
Perceived increase in confidence (see question 12)	Boost to self-esteem, sense of success in ability to perform tasks, becoming increasingly comfortable with self and others, being able to accept a compliment
Sense of stigmatisation (see question 9)	Being measured and judged by others because of the area in which they live
Sense of being perceived as "thick" (see question 9)	A negative view of self as a result of being labelled, low self-esteem; comparing self to others
Group work perceived as positive (see questions 3, 6, 10 & 12)	Learning the meaning of 'positive'. Gaining the skill of identifying what is positive.
Sense of achievement (see questions 3 & 12)	Having done something well and feeling important.
Positive adult relationships (see questions 4 & 10)	Being in a relationship with adults based on positive regard in a safe environment with confidentiality

Table 2: Meanings of group experience

This particular study did not provide opportunity to seek clarification of the findings from participants diminishing validity. However, the data provides strong indications of what the students experienced from taking part in group work in school. There was evidence of an initial raised awareness of a negative sense of self experienced by some students because they had been identified as requiring extra support. Also, students showed an increase in happiness at the end of the group work compared to when it began.

The information from the debriefing notes provided a degree of triangulation to support and expand the data offering nuggets of meaning. Applying one set of data to the other inferred the acquisition and development of social skills, i.e. paying attention to others, working in a team, formulating safe boundaries for working with others provided a sense of achievement and purpose. A chance to 'escape' the rigours of the classroom proved to be a positive and empowering experience. The opportunity of being in a different kind of relationship with adults in school including being on first name terms and working alongside adults instead of following instructions was experienced as receiving positive regard and feeling encouraged. The predominant feelings of 'proud' and 'happy' experienced by the students conveyed a sense of achievement associated with having done something well and feeling important. A surprise arising out of the research was the experiencing of a feeling of 'love' by two students. Love in this instance may typically be associated with a state being, as energy rather than an emotion, usually experienced as a result being accepted unconditionally without judgement.

10. DISCUSSION

The project did not appear to be too disruptive to the students or have a significant impact on school staff or systems. This pilot study has thus demonstrated that researching group work with students in school is feasible with promising indications that the proposed research study may be transferable to other schools. The experience for students participating in group work in school proved to be a positive one.

The main problem emerging from conducting the pilot study related to data collection methods. Whilst appearing suitable in theory, the 'feelings faces', for example, proved unsuitable in practice for producing reliable data for the purposes of analysis. The impact of the 'absent researcher' in relation to the diary room resulted in generating less data than had been anticipated. Whilst the diary room provided a suitable model for incorporation into the research process, further consideration will need to be given to conducting it in a way that provides rich data.

A problem I had not anticipated relates to difficulties that can transpire because of lack of knowledge and skills in the use of technical equipment and the amount of time that can be absorbed, leading to lack of continuity, when a single system that has been depended upon breaks down.. A lesson for future improved success in research management is that solid preparation is required including assessment of suitable time frameworks, contingency plans in cases of systems falling prey to the unexpected, and back up technical support and instruments.

An unexpected benefit resulting from disappointing data collection methods led to further research and discussion with colleagues providing a challenge for improving creativity in seeking information i.e. contacting other researchers and generating enthusiasm and input from other professionals.

This has produced ideas for different methods and offers of practical help and assistance in trialling methods, providing a useful aid in the formulation of a final research plan.

Piloting has provided a greater understanding of suitable methods for engaging young people. There was a definite indication from the students of which activities they related well to and those they just complied with, i.e. they were able to fully grasp and identify with the diary room concept accepting the activity with zeal but showed conformity in carrying out the 'feelings faces' task. This highlighted important insights for selecting suitable methods including the efficacy for young people of being able to identify with the task. The students needed to be able to make sense of any given task and possess a degree of competency in carrying it out for it to be sufficiently engaging and motivational. Combining 'child-friendliness' and proven reliability will be the priority for selecting data collection methods for the next stage of research.

11. CONCLUSION

Following some initial personal reservations including anxiety relating to possible wasted time and resources it has been found that conducting a pilot study for research was in reality a useful and valuable experience.

Many of the objectives embarked upon at the beginning of the study have been realised providing an appreciation of those methods that work and those which do not. Strengths and weaknesses in the chosen data collection methods have been identified bringing to light the necessity for making radical adjustments.

This study allowed an insight into the experience of the involvement in group work of a small number of students in one school. To be given clear indications that counsellor led group work in school has supported young people in their journey through academic development and engendering in them a sense of pride through achievement is an enriching experience for all concerned. This has provided confidence to undertake researching a larger sample to include students involved in group work in other schools and serving to increase representation of young people as well as an opportunity to add dimension to the data.

The pilot study determined that testing research methods is an indispensable stage and a much needed trial for putting together a research plan that may provide the greatest opportunity for useful and reliable data analysis and findings for contributing to the research question. This new learning has informed the selection of appropriate and practicable methods maximising the feasibility of conducting the proposed larger-scale study with a suitable research design for presentation to the University's Review Panel.

REFERENCES (omitted to reduce volume)

APPENDIX 2

(Name of counselling service)

(date)

Name of Head of School

School Name

Address of School

Dear (name of Head)

Thank you for agreeing to students participating in SEAL based group work in school. I feel sure that they will benefit from increasing self-awareness, motivation and empathy; enhancing social skills, and managing feelings as a result of this learning opportunity.

The group work provides an excellent opportunity for research. As you are aware, there is currently great emphasis on listening to what young people have to say including the importance of contributing to decision making processes in their lives. In-keeping with this point of view students involved in group work can provide important insight into the appropriateness of the use of group work in school.

I am conducting research on the *'Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham'* under the supervision of Dr Clare Lennie, B.Sc (hons), PGCE (FE), MA, PhD, Lecturer in Counselling and Educational Psychology, School of Education, University of Manchester (tel: 0161 275 3466). The local education authority has given approval to invite schools to consider taking part in this research. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Education, University of Manchester. The aim of the study is to determine how young people experience group work and whether it provides sufficient benefits to justify future use of such programmes. The research will contribute to the production of a Doctorate in Counselling thesis. It is anticipated that the research findings will inform future practice of schools, Durham Schools' Counselling Service and school-based counsellors. A mixed methodology will be applied to the research and data will be collected in the following ways:

- from debriefing notes recorded by the group facilitators immediately following each group session;
- students will be required to complete pre and post intervention Goodman Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires to measure outcomes (copy enclosed);
- students will be invited to enter information into a journal about how they experienced each group session using words and/or drawings (copy enclosed);

- On completion of the group work a diary room will be set up where participants will be invited to talk about how they experienced taking part in the group work. Questionnaires ('Diary Room' task) based on information from the journals and debriefing notes will be used as prompts for peer-led interviews to help clarify and validate that data, and discover further insights into their experience. The interviews will be on a voluntary basis.

All information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence and neither the school nor the individual students will be identifiable in any reports that are written. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The role of the school is voluntary and the Head teacher may decide to withdraw the school's participation at any time without penalty. If a learner requires support as a result of their participation in the study steps can be taken to accommodate this.

The potential benefits to research participants include:

- giving young people a say on school services;
- experience of positive adult relationships;
- informing the provision of services for young people in secondary schools;
- demonstrating effective good practice and to promote developments in practice;
- contribute to influence social policy for the benefit of children;
- contribute to the concept of promoting good childhood experiences for all children.

Once I have received your consent to approach students to participate in the study, I will

- arrange for informed consent to be obtained from participants' parents
- arrange a time with your school for data collection to take place
- obtain informed consent from participants

Attached for your information are copies of the Parent Information and Consent Form and also the Participant Information Statement and Consent Form.

If you would like to confirm that your school to participate in this research, please complete and return the attached form in the envelope provided.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Proud
School based Counsellor (Name of counselling service)

‘Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham’

Head Teacher Consent Form

(Name of School)

I give consent for you to approach students in Y8 involved in the SEAL based group work.

I have read the Project Information Statement explaining the purpose of the research project and understand that:

- The role of the school is voluntary
- I may decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty
- Y8 students taking part in the group work will be invited to participate and that permission will be sought from them and also from their parents.
- Only learners who consent and whose parents consent will participate in the project
- All information obtained will be treated in strictest confidence.
- The students’ names will not be used and individual students will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- The school will not be identifiable in any written reports about the study.
- Participants may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- A report of the findings will be made available to the school.
- I may seek further information on the project from Dr Clare Lennie on 0161 275 3466.

Signed _____ (Head of School)

Date _____

RESEARCH PROJECT: *Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham*

INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS



What is research?

Research is about gathering information and finding out

- The school counsellor is finding out about group work in schools
- This is a chance for students to tell us their thoughts and feelings about this work

The group work you are doing in school is a great opportunity for you to tell us what it was like for you: your experience. What you say will help teachers and counsellors find out if it is a good idea to continue to run this kind of group in school or give us useful ideas for doing things differently.

We would like to invite you to help us with this research. Your parents/carers have been provided with research information for you discuss with them and the information below will help you to make your decision.

Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

The research will be conducted by *Gwen Proud* (school counsellor) of (Name of counselling service)

Why is research being carried out?

Gwen, the counsellor, is studying at Manchester University and this research will help her with these studies to find out helpful and none helpful ways of working with students in schools. The information she finds out will be useful for schools and other counsellors to know.

What would you be asked to do if you decide to take part?

You will be invited to enter information into a journal at the end of each group session to say what it was like (your experience) using words and/or drawings. Gwen will tell you how this works and give you the chance to ask questions about it. When the group work is finished a diary room will be set up where you will be invited to talk about what it was like for you to take part in the group work using the journal and a diary room task (a questionnaire) to help you remember. The questions will ask things like what you most enjoyed, found difficult, would have changed, anything new you have learned. What you talk about will be recorded on a recording machine so that Gwen can use the information as part of her studies.

Gwen and (name of co-facilitator) will be nearby to help you sort out any problems if you need it.

What will happen to the information?

After Gwen has finished her studies all the information will be shredded. You can keep your personal journal if you wish.

Keeping information confidential

The information will be treated in the strictest confidence and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the counselling room. Gwen will be careful not to use names so that any person reading Gwen's study will not be able to detect who the students are.

What happens if you do not wish to take part or if you have a change of mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in the research. Your parents or teachers can help you with this if you need it. If you would like to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form and you may keep this information to remind you. You can also feel free to say you do not want to continue to take part in the research at any time without giving a reason. We will respect your decision.

How long will the diary room interview take and where will it happen?

The diary room interview will take between 20 and 30 minutes. It will take place in the room where you attended the group.

Contact for further information

You can speak to Gwen, school counsellor, (Name) the Assistant Head, or your Form Tutor if you would like to know more about the research.

(NAME OF COUNSELLING SERVICE)

(NAME AND ADDRESS OF SCHOOL)

Consent Form for Participants Taking Part in Research Project

Title of Research Project: *Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham*

Name of Researcher: Gwen Proud, MA, (name of counselling service), School-based Counsellor at (name of school).

Participant

My parent/person with parental responsibility and the researcher (Gwen, school counsellor) have discussed the research Information Sheet with me and given me the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent to participate in the research project. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without disadvantage to myself.

Signed:

Date:

Family Name (block letters):

Other Name(s) (block letters):

Researcher

I, the researcher, confirm that I have discussed with the participant the contents of the information sheet.

Signed:

Date:

RESEARCH PROJECT: *Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham*

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/PERSON WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The group work your son/daughter is participating in could provide an excellent opportunity for researching their experience. There is presently great emphasis on listening to what young people have to say and that their views contribute to important decision making processes in their lives. In keeping with this point of view your sons/daughters can provide important insight into the relevance and appropriateness of the use of group work in school.

We would like to invite your son/daughter to take part in a research study. This will be integrated into the group work. The information below is to help you to decide whether or not you wish your son/daughter to take part. Please take time to read it and discuss it with others if you wish.

Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

The research will be conducted by Gwen Proud (the school-based counsellor), (name of counselling service), in consultation with school staff and the management of the (name of counselling service) at every stage.

Title of the Research

'Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham'

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of the research is to access the views of students involved in group work in schools. This will help to determine how they experience group work and whether it provides sufficient benefits to justify future use of such programmes. The research will contribute to a Counselling Doctorate study being conducted by Gwen Proud at Manchester University. Researching and evaluating such work will inform future practice of the school, (name of counselling service) and school-based counsellors.

Why your son/daughter has been chosen?

Your son/daughter has been chosen because he/she has received school and parental consent to participate in group work in school. Their views are valued and will contribute to future decision making.

What would your son/daughter be asked to do if he/she took part?

Your son/daughter will be invited to enter information into a journal about how they experienced each group session using words and/or drawings. On completion of the group work a diary room will be set up where your son/daughter will be invited to talk about how they experienced taking part in the group work using the journal information as a prompt. A second prompt will be a 'Diary Room' task i.e. a questionnaire designed to find out what the students most enjoyed, found difficult, would have changed, any perceived benefits i.e. new learning and how this may help them for the future. What is said will be digitally recorded and the subject of analysis.

It is understood that discussing emotions may sometimes trigger uncomfortable feelings. Should this situation arise there will be the provision by the counsellor and school staff for immediate support and follow-up, as appropriate.

What will happen to the data?

The data will be treated in the strictest confidence, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1989 and will be stored in a locked cabinet in the Student Support Services building in school. Once the data has been analysed and the findings written up in the formulation of a thesis the information will be shredded.

Maintaining confidentiality

As well as secure storage of the data, all references to participants in the research will be anonymous, i.e. names will not be used and gender will be transposed to avoid identification.

What happens if you do not wish your son/daughter to take part or if you and/or your son/daughter have a change of mind?

It is up to you and your son/daughter to decide whether or not to take part. If your son/daughter does decide to take part you will be asked to sign a form of consent and you may keep this information for reference. If your son/daughter does decide to take part he/she will be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to them. Your son/daughter will be supported in all cases.

How long will the study take?

The study will be for the duration of the group work i.e. 8 x 1 hour group work sessions and the 'diary room' interview of between 20 and 30 minutes.

Location for the study

The group work, including research tasks, will take place in the Student Support Services building at school.

Outcome of the study

The outcome of the research will help to provide information about the suitability of counsellor-led group work in schools and the development of a model of good practice to contribute to developing support services for students in schools.

Criminal Records Check

The researcher, Gwen Proud, has undergone a recent Criminal Record Bureau check in accordance with the Government's *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education* (2006). Please feel free to consult the school regarding this matter.

Contact for further information

Gwen Proud, researcher: (Name of school and contact details)

(Name of member of staff), Social Inclusion Co-ordinator/Assistant Head: (School name and contact details)

Dr Clare Lennie, Lecturer in Counselling and Educational Psychology: The University of Manchester, tel: 0161 275 3466

(NAME OF COUNSELLING SERVICE)

(NAME AND ADDRESS OF SCHOOL)

**CONSENT FROM
For Parents/Person with Parental Responsibility of Participants Taking Part in the
Research Project**

Title of Research Project: *Experience of young people participating in group work in secondary schools in County Durham*

Name of Researcher: Gwen Proud, MA, (Name of counselling service), School-based Counsellor at (Name of School).

Parent/Person with parental responsibility of Participant

Please read this, discuss the contents of the enclosed Information Sheet with you son/daughter, and if you are happy to proceed, sign below.

The researcher has given me my own copy of the Information Sheet which I have read and understood. The information sheet explains the nature of the research and what my son/daughter would be asked to do as a participant. I understand that the study is to contribute to a research project towards a professional Doctorate in Counselling and that information provided by my son/daughter will be safeguarded unless subject to any legal requirements. She has discussed the contents of the information sheet with my son/daughter and has given him/her and myself the opportunity to ask questions about it. I have discussed it with my son/daughter.

I give my consent for my son/daughter to take part as a participant in this research and I understand that my son/daughter is free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without detriment to him/her and will be supported in their decision.

Signed:

Date:

Family Name (block letters):

Other Name(s) (block letters):

Relationship to Participant (block letters)

APPENDIX 8

SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE (DIARY ROOM INTERVIEWS)

QUESTION 1

What can you tell me about your experience of taking part in the group work?

QUESTION 2

What did it feel like when you were asked to take part in the group? What did you think and what did you feel?

QUESTION 3

How different was being in the group with (names of facilitators) and (name) to being in other groups in school?

QUESTION 4

Say all the things you liked best about being in the group?

QUESTION 5

Talk about anything you found difficult about being in the group?

QUESTION 6

How did you feel once the group work had finished?

QUESTION 7

What would you say if you were asked to join a similar group again?

QUESTION 8

What do you have to say about coming to the 'Diary Room' to talk about the group work and is there anything else would you like to say?

QUESTION 9 (Individual question relating to personal journal entries)

You drew stars, hearts, and loving face in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 1)

You drew stars, flowers, hearts, smiley faces and kisses in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 2)

You drew stars, hearts, sunshine and butterflies and a rainbow in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 3)

You drew lots of coloured hearts, stars, dots, hearts, flowers, butterflies and sunshine in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 4)

You drew stars, hearts, flowers and a picture of what looks like an alien in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 5)

You talked about feeling relaxed and it being a big change to be out of lessons in your journal. Can you talk about what these mean? (Student 6)

In your journal you wrote the word 'excited' on most pages. Can you say what that means for you? (Student 7)

In your journal you wrote the words 'mint all da time' and 'krakalakin'. Can you say what that means for you? (Student 8)



*My
Group Work
Journal*



Name _____

MY GROUP WORK JOURNAL

Keeping a journal is creating a record about what we are doing as it happens. A journal can include:

WORDS or WRITING



STORIES



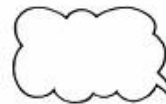
DRAWINGS



DOODLES



THOUGHTS



POEMS



What are you feeling right now? Please circle one or more faces



amazing



angry



anxious



embarrassed



excited



frustrated



happy



lonely



loved



nervous



proud



relaxed



sad



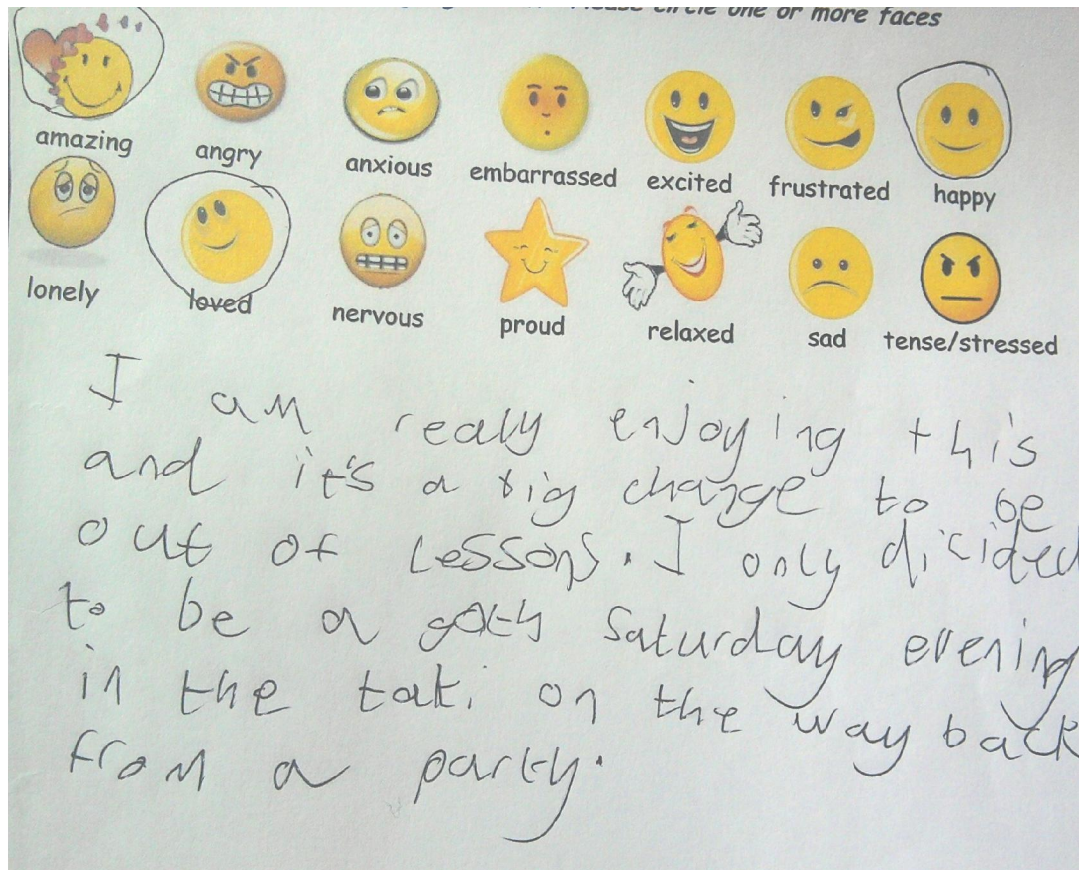
tense/stressed



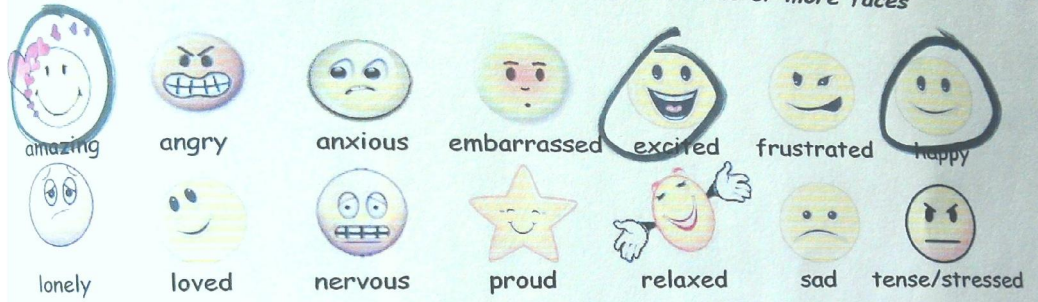
The End



Pages from Participants' Personal Journals
(one from each journal, chosen for variety)

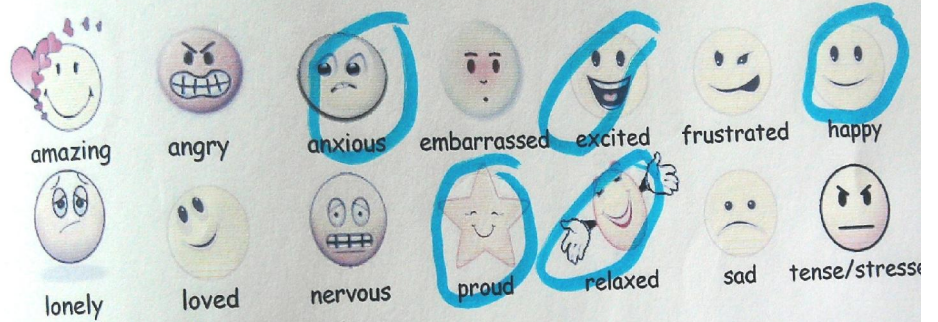


What are you feeling right now? Please circle one or more faces

















This was Krakalax
good

What are you feeling right now? Please circle one or more faces










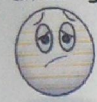





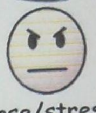
HP

What are you feeling right now? Please circle one or more faces

 amazing	 angry	 anxious	 embarrassed	 excited	 frustrated	 happy
 lonely	 loved	 nervous	 proud	 relaxed	 sad	 tense/stressed



What are you feeling right now? Please circle one or more faces

 amazing	 angry	 anxious	 embarrassed	 excited	 frustrated	 happy
 lonely	 loved	 nervous	 proud	 relaxed	 sad	 tense/stress

it was gud





I feel like we
express our feelings and
we learned more about
each other!

cool



very
good

M.i.N.T

!First Session!

Happy because
it was good
days



out in
the open

No more
about people



!Second week!

To day we had a very good day
because we could share aware
feelings and aware amoshoris
every body joined in and took
part!



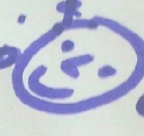
out in
the open

alive

cool
mint

good happ

I feel happy to day

I feel happy becos
to be in  the group.



It was excited
and fun!



APPENDIX 11a

SEAL group work evaluation resource sheet 1.5.1 (About me and my group) (School 1)

About me in my group	Fully disagree	Partly disagree	Not sure	Partly agree	Fully Agree
I built on the ideas of the other people in the group				2	3
I had good ideas					5
I explained my ideas to the group			1		4
I listened to the other people in the group					5
I encouraged other people in the group			1	1	3
I gave quality feedback to other people in the group				1	4
I listened to feedback and learned from it					5
About our group					
I think our group worked well together				1	4
Our group built on each others' ideas					5
We explained our ideas clearly				1	4
We listened to each other					5
We encouraged each other					5
We gave quality feedback to each other			1	1	3

APPENDIX 11b

SEAL group work evaluation resource sheet 1.5.1 (About me and my group) (School 2)

About me in my group	Fully disagree	Partly disagree	Not sure	Partly agree	Fully Agree
I built on the ideas of the other people in the group				3	2
I had good ideas			1		4
I explained my ideas to the group			1	1	3
I listened to the other people in the group			1		4
I encouraged other people in the group			2	1	2
I gave quality feedback to other people in the group				1	4
I listened to feedback and learned from it				1	4
About our group					
I think our group worked well together					5
Our group built on each others' ideas				1	4
We explained our ideas clearly					5
We listened to each other					5
We encouraged each other				2	3
We gave quality feedback to each other				1	4

SEAL GROUP WORK – SESSION FIVE

Year 8 Theme 1- Learning to be together

Round: Invite group to take turns to say something about friendship skills (5 minutes)

Warm up: Pass positive attitude statement ball to one another. Do or say what is stated at the place where the right thumb lands when catching the ball. (5 minutes)

(Examples of ball statements: ‘act like you just won the lottery’; ‘walk like a duck’; ‘say something about a person you admire’; ‘sing a song’; ‘do a high five’; etc.)

SEAL learning opportunity 3: Just who do you think you are?

Overall learning outcome

34. I can listen empathically to others, and have a range of strategies for responding effectively in ways that can help others feel better.

45. I can achieve an appropriate level of independence from others, charting and following my own course while maintaining positive relationships with others.

Year 8 learning outcomes

- I can understand how groups change and can modify my behaviour in the light of this.
- I can listen to others, giving them my full attention, and know some things to say or do to make people feel good about themselves.

Resources: Resource sheet 1.3.1 – Avatar characters

Preparation

Ask each person to bring in an item that reflects their strengths – something that can be worn or carried such as an article of clothing. Supplement this with some items or props belonging to facilitators.

Starter/introduction

Students to explain to a partner why they chose their item and its significance.

Each person 'tries on' another person's item and considers the questions:

- How does your outward appearance change?
- How does this make you change the way you feel about yourself?
- How might others in the group view you in these 'new clothes'?
- Does this identity give you permission to act in another way? How?

Explore with the pupils what they have learned from this.

Relate the discussions to society in general and the expectations we have of groups of people on the street, for example, 'hoodies' or 'goths', and so on. Use pictures of a variety of people to extend this aspect.

Activity

Introduce the pictures of the avatar characters (SEAL resource sheet 1.3.1). Students to work individually and to identify a discussion partner so that they can share initial ideas when they are ready. Explain that their task is to choose three of the characters that stand out. Invite students to annotate/label their chosen character to show the skills and qualities they think the character might have. The role of the discussion partner will be someone to share initial ideas and then to question their partner to help clarify, develop and extend their thinking.

Questions they might use include:

- Why do you think this?
- What evidence do you have that that might be the case?
- Is that your experience?

Discuss with the students how they might become an effective discussion partner. Review the skills of active listening with the students and ask them to identify some of the encouragers and road blocks to effective listening.

Mini-plenary

Pose the following questions to the group for discussion and thinking:

- What do we learn from this?
- How does the way we look influence how we are seen by others?
- How do our expectations influence what it is we do and the interactions that we have?
- How good a listener was your discussion partner?
- Did they help you to improve your ideas?

Activity (continued)

Explain to students they will be creating their own avatar to represent themselves in a 'new virtual world'. Invite them to draw their avatar or use one of the characters on Resource sheet 1.3.1. Before they start invite group members to explore what their virtual world might be like. Work in groups and take it in turns to explain why they have chosen that particular avatar to represent them.

Plenary

Pose the following questions to the group for discussion and thinking:

- How/why did you choose your avatar – does it fit with your personality or is it someone completely different?
- What have you learned about how you see yourself and how others see you?
- Could you create an avatar that would be successful in different ways? For example, get on with older people, influence peers and so on.

Journal – students to make entries about their experience of the group work today.
(5 minutes)

Ending round – Say in one sentence what you will be doing differently as a result of thinking about your avatar?

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Resource sheet 1.1.2 – The Declaration of Human Rights challenge

The Declaration of Human Rights was first written in 1948 after the Second World War, just after a time when many people were denied some of the most basic human rights.



It is your challenge to develop our class Declaration of Human Rights. The purpose will be so that all members of the school can learn and be happy at school. Your Declaration should have no more than ten Articles. You will need to be able to justify why you have included these. When you have agreed the Articles you want, you will need to agree a set of responsibilities. These responsibilities should make it clear how all members of the class will make sure that the human rights are kept to.



When you have completed the challenge you will have:

- all contributed and feel valued by the group;
- created something that you all feel good about;
- used words and something visual to explain your Declaration of Human Rights and Responsibilities;
- made sure that everyone can justify why the Declaration is the way it is.

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Resource sheet 1.4.1 – The avatar challenge

Your challenge is to work together to reach a better understanding of people and why they behave the way they do.

Your first task will be to introduce your avatar character to the group, explaining their qualities in full. Make sure that you include something about their family, their religion, background, and so on.

Life in the avatar world is not easy and each of the avatars has experienced at least one difficulty. As a group, identify six difficulties that you think someone might experience as a young child. Distribute these randomly to the avatars (you will have to decide how to do this fairly, for example, drawing lots, with a dice, picking out of a hat).

In the avatar world there is a virtual reality TV show. If successful, the avatar group will be sent to a desert island where they will have to survive together and they will be set a series of physical and mental challenges.

Your presentation should include:

- a name for your avatar group;
- something to show the strengths of each of the avatars and why they will be useful;
- something memorable or eye-catching that will make the presentation stand out from the other presentations;
- something that explains how they have overcome their challenges.

It is your task to prepare a presentation to the TV show panel (the rest of your group). Make sure that everyone has a role and is fully involved.

You will have 40 minutes to complete the challenge and two minutes for the presentation.

Resource sheet 1.2.1 –The ‘F’ factor

The receiver

The receiver is a good friend. If you want to feel good about yourself because of your generosity or because you have helped someone, the receiver is perfect. They are so grateful and so happy when they are helped. So many people these days don't even say thank you. The receiver does just enough to make you feel that you are useful without making you feel a mug.

In your presentation you must agree how you would show that you are a good receiver of compliments, help and gifts.

The listener

The listener thinks that the key to a good friend is listening and showing that they are listening. They use all those clever tricks and at the same time to make you feel as if you are the most important person in the world and that your troubles are of real importance to them. They really show they care! This listening just helps those problems go away and if not the solutions just seem to come to you.

In your presentation you must explain the way you actively listen, using your face, your body and what you say.

The forgiver

With a forgiver as a friend, no matter what you do, you know they will be there for you. If you embarrass them, cheat and lie to them or just ignore them, they stay loyal to you. They never complain. They are there for the tough times as well as the good times.

In your presentation you must explain how you manage to forgive and how you can do this without getting angry or frustrated.

The mediator

When you have a group of friends, things often go wrong – people fall out and this makes trouble for you all. The mediator helps you sort things out. They are the perfect peaceful problem solver – helping you solve the problem without doing it for you.

In your presentation you must show how you can mediate when two people are feeling really angry or hard done by and leave both parties feeling satisfied.

The fixer

You've got a problem and don't know what to do. The fixer will always be there for you. They really do fix things, leaving you to get on with the rest of your life. No problem or task is too big for the fixer to deal with.

In your presentation you should provide some examples of how you might fix things for others. You might include solving problems, helping with a task that is too difficult or just giving advice.

The giver

The giver is a great friend; they are always giving you things and make you feel that it is just no bother. They would give you the coat off their back if you complained of the cold. They never make you feel guilty for accepting things. If you want anything, they will be there with it.

In your presentation you must explain how giving makes you feel and how you make others feel good about all your kindness.

The respecter

The good thing about the respecter is that they show that they value you and recognise that sometimes you will need their help but at other times it will be the other way round. They never take over and sort things out but are there just to give you that extra push – explaining that you really can do it. The way they say it makes you believe in yourself.

In your presentation you should explain how you actually can show that sort of respect.

Resource sheet 1.8.1 – Disclosure cards

Being worried because they saw their mum kissing another man	Not sleeping because they are worried about global warming	Unable to do their work because they find it too difficult
Their parents being in debt and unable to pay the mortgage	Mum lost job in the shop because they were accused of stealing	Accepted into extension maths classes
Going to France on holiday	Feeling bad because they haven't been to see their Granny in hospital	Brother broke arm in a car accident when they were driving without permission
Fancy someone new	Been asked out by someone who is two years older	Their dog had to be 'put down' because it bit the postman
Took someone's phone home by mistake and kept it	Watched someone being bullied and didn't help or even tell anyone	Got into the under-12s football team
Got a pet cat for Christmas		