

UNIVERSITY OF DERBY

A THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**BERA** = British Educational Research Association

**CACE** = Central Advisory Council for Education

**CEDAW** = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

**CRC** = Convention on the Rights of the Child

**DCMS** = Department for Culture, Media and Sport

**DCSF** = Department for Children, Schools and Families

**DES** = Department of Education and Science

**DfE** = Department for Education

**DfEE** = Department for Education and Employment

**DfES** = Department of Education and Skills

**DH** = Department of Health

**EOC** = Equal Opportunities Commission

**FSM** = Free School Meals

**ICESCR** = International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

**KS1** = Key Stage One

**KS2** = Key Stage Two

**NACCCE** = National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education

**NASSPE** = National Association for Single-Sex Public Education

**NASC** = Norwich Area Schools Consortium

**NFER** – National Foundation for Educational Research

**NICCY** = Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

**OECD** = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OFSTED** = Office for Standards in Education

**PISA** = Programme for International Pupil Assessment

**SAT** = Standardised Attainment Tests

**SEAL** = Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

**SEN** = Special Educational Needs

**UDHR** = Universal Declaration of Human Rights

**UNCRC** = United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

**UNESCO** = United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

## **Statement of Intellectual Ownership**

This thesis, entitled *A Therapeutic Intervention in a Primary School*, has been written by Lynne C. Greenhough and except where it is stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree.

## **Abstract**

### A Therapeutic Intervention in a Primary School

Lynne Greenhough

As a consequence of interrogating pupil progress data, the primary school in this study identified apparent inequalities in the rates of progress in Reading and Mathematics made by male and female pupils in Key Stage Two cohorts.

To address this school improvement issue, the Key Stage Two pupils and the staff who worked with them, were surveyed in order to establish a starting point for action. The surveys indicated that low-achieving female pupils in the school perceived themselves, and were perceived by staff as having low levels of self-esteem and confidence, which were impacting upon their ability to access the learning and impeding their educational progress.

A search of the literature on barriers to learning and the range of approaches and initiatives which have been employed to address these, alongside a consultation process with female pupils through a focus group, resulted in identification of the need for the provision of an intervention which would address the issue.

Outcomes from an internally-provided school intervention pilot programme resulted in the adoption of a participatory action-research model which allowed the pupils to contribute to the design, implementation and evaluation of a single-sex therapeutic intervention, facilitated by a drama practitioner. Through the use of drama and mask techniques the practitioner provided a safe, non-judgemental environment which enabled participants to feel accepted, to express their feelings, to lead activities, to take risks and to develop a wider friendship circle.

The intervention was widely commended, with staff and parents/carers reporting a perceived increase in levels of confidence, expanded friendship circles and stronger peer relationships and improved active engagement in learning in the mixed-gender classroom environment.

Qualitative data, in the form of individual video evaluations of the intervention indicated the learning which had resulted from participation, most strongly evidenced by the positive comments elicited from the participants both in terms of the techniques employed in the intervention and the outcomes achieved: "...At first you're the one underneath the mask... Then the mask becomes you... The masks helped me feel more confident ...When we did the mask it was like a confidence builder – made you speak your mind and gave you the words to

express your feelings better – like if your excited or happy you had the words to say that...this project helped all our group...'cos we've learned to be more confident in ourselves and I just feel a lot better..."

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## The Context of this Work-Based Project

The primary school in this study is located in an ex-mining community in an area of the East Midlands which is ranked within the top 20% most deprived Local Super Output Areas on the English Indices of Deprivation, 2015, with all the attendant factors of disadvantage including income deprivation, low levels of employment, high incidence of long-term poor health and low levels of education in the adult population. The school has an uptake of Free School Meals (FSM) of approximately 45%: whilst high FSM uptake is generally considered to be one of the most reliable indicators of disadvantage, many researchers (Cassen and Kingdon 2007) recognise that FSM eligibility alone is an imperfect measure: family income may be only just above that required to be eligible for FSM and poor job security, poor housing and lack of local amenities, including public transport and cultural opportunities, compounded by a range of vulnerable family circumstances, impact upon the lived experience of many more of the pupils who attend the school than the FSM figure suggests.

At the time of this study, the school was broadly representative of children in the geographical area with 170 pupils on roll, of both genders, ranging from 5 through to 11 years old. The catchment has been largely white British until, in the last decade, there has been a steady influx of Eastern European families into the locality, though this has not as yet greatly impacted upon the intake at this particular school.

Cohorts of pupils generally enter the school's Reception Class from a range of local nursery and pre-school provisions, with low levels of core subject skills, but they leave the school at the end of their primary phase with Key Stage Two SAT results which are generally broadly in line with the national average. Cohorts each consist of one Year Group or class of pupils, with class sizes varying from year to year, of between 20 and 30 pupils.

The school has a history of intensive involvement with creative and therapeutic programmes and initiatives. At the start of this study, findings from assessment data indicated that Key Stage Two female pupils were making slower progress than their male peers: stakeholder perceptions about female pupils' barriers to learning gave rise to efforts to address these perceived barriers by offering participation in a single-sex intervention programme.

This action research study seeks to describe and to evaluate the impact upon the female pupils who participated in the intervention programme, and to draw conclusions which can inform further practice in the primary school improvement process.

## Chapter One: Introduction

For almost 40 years, first as a primary school teacher and later as a head teacher in the South East of England and the Midlands, my experience has always been in schools in areas of high deprivation, where economic and cultural disadvantages impact upon the learning outcomes, educational achievement and life opportunities of children and young people and where school improvement initiatives attempt to address inequalities and improve life chances for all pupils. Although schools cannot wholly compensate for the inequalities in society (Bernstein 1970; Halsey 1977; Giroux 1983; Ravitch 2010; Parsons 2013), teachers must be agents for social change: education can either facilitate the integration into and conformity to an existing system, or it can become a 'practice of freedom' (Friere 1972) – a means by which ways are found to expose inequalities in our society and to participate in the rectification of these so that our society is transformed: for me this remains the responsibility of every pedagogue; 'education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness, and ... the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction' (Dewey 1897: Article Five).

Whilst there have been decades of intense political and pedagogic focus upon the under-achievement and lack of engagement of disadvantaged boys which continues to the present day (Willis 1977; Mac an Ghail 1994 ; Ofsted 1996; Younger, Warrington, Gray, Ruddock, McLellan, Bearne, Kershner and Bricheno 2005), interrogation of progress data indicated that from a low baseline on entering the school's Reception class and then a gradual acceleration of progress through Key Stage One, aided by a range of behaviour support interventions for identified pupils, many of the boys in the school in this study were making expected or better progress in Reading and Maths through Key Stage Two. Furthermore, informally collected views, such as those shared in daily staffroom discussions about the boys, indicated that many of them were perceived as 'bright but challenging' by teaching and support staff, exhibiting confidence both in the classroom and on the playground. In contrast to this, female pupils – and those in one cohort in particular - had made, and were continuing to make over time, less than expected progress in Reading and Maths (Appendix A); these pupils were perceived by teaching and support staff as largely under-achieving, and as lacking in confidence as learners, exhibiting 'low self-esteem'. The staff (both male and female) perceived the girls as being 'dominated' by the behaviour of their male peers in the classroom and on the playground.

It is widely claimed that school and work place environments can act as institutions which perpetuate inequality for girls and women and the staff perceptions resonated with findings from much of the feminist research conducted around girls' underachievement and school experiences (Skelton and Francis 2003; Francis 2005; Jackson 2006) as well as with the *Programme for International Pupil Assessment (PISA)* (2012) which indicated that whilst performance internationally is roughly equal, girls and boys have very different strengths and weaknesses. The PISA data reflected very different levels of confidence between girls and boys: the report showed boys to be more confident in their abilities particularly in science and this was accompanied by a higher level of willingness to invest energy into learning a subject. The PISA report noted that some countries are very successful at moderating gender differences, for example girls in East Asia out-perform boys almost anywhere else in the world. Schleicher (2014) argues that the development of a stronger sense of self-belief and confidence among girls would address the difference in performance at the top end of the skill distributions and would impact upon future career options and choices; Schleicher sees confidence as an important predictor of high achievement.

There have been numerous studies which have explored sexual politics and inequality in women's emotional and domestic lives (Mullender & Morley 1994; Sternberg, Baradaran, Abbott, Lamb and Guterman 2006) and which have shown how disadvantage and challenging home circumstances can affect children's self-esteem. In the school in this study it seemed that there were aspects of the girls' lived experiences both in and out of school which were impacting upon and therefore impeding their access to the education which was being offered. Giroux argued that as 'public intellectuals', teachers must work to transform schools into:

public spheres of citizens who are able to exercise power over their own lives and especially over the conditions of knowledge acquisition. Central to any such reform effort is the recognition that democracy is not a set of formal rules of participation, but the lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority.

(Giroux 1994: 241)

Through a search of the literature as described, as the head teacher in the role of researcher, I have sought insight into the barriers to learning which have been identified over time for disadvantaged pupils in the United Kingdom and the ideological approaches which have most recently been adopted to address these, in order to find an appropriate provision which might answer to the school's improvement issue. My search has resulted in involving these pupils in

participatory action research which explores the impact of the provision of a therapeutic intervention, with the aim of addressing some of their perceived barriers to learning, enabling an empowerment for the female pupils in my school.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

This literature review focuses on the numerous and intertwined barriers to learning which have been identified and debated by researchers from a range of disciplines, and goes on to explore some of the approaches and initiatives which have been employed in order to address these. The search begins with an overview of some of the gender differences which have been postulated to date in the area of brain-based research and a consideration of the influences of nature and nurture upon a child's ability to learn. This leads into an examination of studies into the effectiveness of single-sex educational provision. An examination of feminist approaches to gender inequality and concepts of inequalities of educational opportunity is interlinked with an exploration of the effects of social class, cultural capital and self-efficacy. The relationship between learner motivation and teacher expectation is explored. The historical impact of class and gender debates on education policy and practice is outlined in order to contextualise how creative approaches to teaching and learning, including ways to elicit pupil voice, have been designed to remove barriers to learning for groups of children and young people in order to improve educational outcomes. The impact of creative initiatives, social and emotional interventions and 'drama in education' approaches to address under-achievement and remove barriers to learning are discussed. The review concludes with an examination of a therapeutic approach now being offered more generally in schools, in line with the well-being agenda and the recent emphasis on improving pupil well-being as a route to increasing educational attainment.

### **2.1 Exploring Barriers to Learning**

#### **2.1.1 Nature and Nurture**

Whilst it can be argued that both boys and girls experience advantage and disadvantage in the education system, some researchers claim that 'many of these outcomes are due... to our lack of understanding of brain difference' (Gurian 2001: 54). During the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the present day, scientific investigation into brain structures and hormonal systems have opened a debate as to the differences between the male and female brain and the impact that these might have upon the way that boys and girls learn. There are numerous studies indicating that boys' and girls' brains are fundamentally different: they differ in size (Amen 2013), they are composed and develop differently (Gur 1999 and 2003; Gurian 2001); differing hormone levels affect sensitivity to sight and sound (Makrides, Neumann and Gibson 2001) and brain

development (Lombardo, Ashwin, Auyeung, Chakrabarti, Lai, Taylor, Hackett, Bullmore and Baron-Cohen 2012), which in turn influences behaviours (Moir and Jessel 1992), responses to objects and people (Baron-Cohen 2003), the acquisition of language (Kansaku and Kitazawa 2001) and subsequent communication skills. Brain circuitry differences between genders (Ingallhalikar, Smith, Parker, Sattertwaite, Elliott, Ruparel, Hakonarson, Gur, Gur and Verma 2013), affects the ability to perform mental tasks (Hines, Ahmed & Hughes 2003) and research with animals has suggested that gender may even affect toy preferences of the young (Alexander and Hines 2002; Hassett, Siebert, and Wallen 2008; Williams and Pleil, 2008).

For many researchers, these identified differences are considered small and ‘even if there are biological propensities, many girls, for example, make poor eye contact and play with cars and vice versa for boys’ (Music 2011:138), yet the range of scientific findings about gender brain differences are legitimate considerations which may be brought to bear in seeking to understand the differences in how children learn. Gurian (2001) summarises the many developmental, structural, hormonal, functional, and processing differences that research has claimed to uncover over time in terms of developmental chronology: girls’ brains mature earlier and they acquire their complex verbal skills much earlier than boys; they take in more sensory data – they hear and smell better and are better at controlling their impulsive behaviours; they have better verbal abilities and rely heavily on verbal communication; girls try to manage social bonds through alliances rather than through establishing a pecking order; girls process more emotive information than boys. Researchers have also discovered differences in the development of the amygdala region of the brain, which have been found to be critical to the expression of emotional and social behaviors, as well as differences in regard to natural substances in the brain which may affect how boys and girls play (Krebs-Kraft, Hill, Hillard and McCarthy 2010).

It would seem from this body of brain-based research that girls may have some considerable physiological advantages in terms of aspects of academic learning, but conversely, a number of studies indicate that at birth there are more similarities than differences between the male and female brain and many researchers reject the concept of the wholly ‘male’ and ‘female’ brain (McCarthy 2001; Eliot 2009). Rather, the brain is here perceived as ‘mosaic’. For example, Pinker (2002) concludes that differences between the genders are few, but that there are extremes, so that males can present as both the lower- and higher- achieving gender from a particular perspective. Baron-Cohen’s (2003) study demonstrates the possibility that an individual can have a more ‘male’ or ‘female’ brain, regardless of gender.

Researchers have explored the ways in which the development of the brain can be affected rapidly by the child's experiences from birth. Scientists describe the brain as 'malleable' and plastic: put simply, some researchers have argued that the very small differences identified in the male and female brain at birth become amplified over time due to the societal reinforcement of gender stereotypes (Eliot 2009; Rivers and Barnett 2011; Rippon 2014) and that whilst children are aware of their biological sex from an early age, they acquire the notion that gender is fixed, rather than fluid at around five or six years of age, when they begin to understand that certain gender behaviours are societally expected to be present. One study claims that some baby boys are more emotionally expressive at birth than some baby girls but that this dissipates as they develop due to societal expectations and what Pollack (1998) calls 'The Boy Code-everything's just fine'.

The impact of early experiences upon male and female children and differences between the ways in which boys and girls are raised and treated has also been widely explored: for example, it has been claimed that mothers tend to work harder to imitate and respond to their sons than to their daughters (Trevarthen, Kokkinaki and Fiamenghi, 1999); boys are more active than girls from earliest infancy and they are more likely to engage in and to be engaged by fathers in, outdoor play, rough play, and activities that cover large areas of physical space (Eaton and Enns, 1986; Lindsey, Mize, and Pettit 1997); and that boys and girls gravitate to gender groups for play and interaction (Maccoby 1998). Thus gender differences may be formed by our responses to children from birth, derived from the way society's systems are organised, for example parenting styles, the role models experienced by the child, and the macro- and micro-cultural influences which are brought to bear. Gender can be seen as having been constructed through the social messages which girls and boys absorb about their roles. Judith Butler (1997) contends that we 'do gender' and that we continually perceive and perpetuate the concepts of 'proper boy' and 'proper girl' in our families, communities and institutions; heterosexuality is part of everyday experience in the worlds of primary school children, with schools themselves facilitating the production and reproduction of children's sexual and gender relations (Renold 2000, 2005), for example via the social messages which girls and boys absorb about their roles.

### **2.1.2 Feminism and the Gender Debate**

It seems pertinent to this study to acknowledge the role played particularly by second-wave feminism in identifying and seeking to address issues of gender inequality, socio-construction and role perpetuation: for many feminist writers, the relationship between genders and gender differences remains fundamental to understanding and explaining the social world

A feminist ontology includes multiple constructions...A feminist epistemology prioritises women's experience as the basis of knowledge of a social phenomenon and focuses on experiences, feelings and emotions that are held in common.

(Matthews and Ross 2010: 34)

There is a long history of rights discourse on gender equality beginning with Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 through to the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education in 1960 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1966 to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and later the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. The focus of attention which feminists have given over time to the particular issues for girls has had huge significance in developing our understanding and expanding our perceptions about gender inequality.

From the mid-1950s onwards, gender became increasingly seen as primarily a social construction. Skelton and Francis (2009) describe the understanding of gender for second wave feminists as a socio-cultural construction with the identification of the concept of 'sex-role theory', whereby society's education system was perceived to be organised around a 'hidden curriculum' wherein male interests dominated the curriculum and the classroom (Stanworth 1983; Kelly 1985), resulting in lower confidence and expectations which in turn contributed to girls' educational failure (Whyte, Deem, Kant and Cruikshank 1985; Clarricoates 1987; Davies 1989; Thorne 1993). The ways in which schools are institutions which perpetuate or transform this has been much explored, with writers focusing upon girls and schooling and those interventions aimed at enabling girls and women to have equal access to and outcomes of educational opportunity (Weiner 1985; Arnot 1991) from the 1970s onwards and particularly following the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 in United Kingdom.

The different threads of feminism have periodically sought to explain and address gender inequality in differing ways. Liberal feminism sought to allow females equality of opportunity within the existing societal systems, so that girls and women would have access to and outcomes of educational opportunity equal to that already accessible to men and boys. The move to a comprehensive education system in UK enabled increasing Government policy and strategies to be put into place over this period in order to address inequality in gender and ethnicity, through the development of equal opportunities policies. Spender (1982) argued that it was men's knowledge and understandings of the world that were taught in schools. Arnot (1991) describes an 'equal rights in education' perspective wherein efforts were made to address female lack of equality of opportunity in education via a myriad of projects including changes to gender-biased texts, gender-first teaching styles, the attempts to provide unbiased careers' advice and to provide 'girl- friendly' schools which offered non-traditional role models. However even into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, studies such as those published in France and reported by Baudino (cited in Subrahmanian 2007: 65) noted the under-representation of women in teaching materials, where roles were reduced to the social roles of mothers and wives, despite two decades of policy concern about gender bias in textbooks.

Radical feminists pointed to the male monopolization of culture and knowledge, including within the school curriculum and how their interests dictate the curriculum and the teaching strategies deployed (Spender 1982; Howe 1997; Younger, Warrington and Williams 1999). Boys are seen to monopolise the classroom in terms of space and securing resources (Karsten 2003) and studies indicate that in the classroom, boys dominate the learning environment (Whyte 1986; Davies 1989; Thorne 1993; Younger *et al.* 1999): they 'call out'; their behaviours are more disruptive and they experience more negative interaction with teachers as a result of these behaviours (Smyth 2010). Girls fare less well in mixed-gender schools at subjects seen as, or considered to be 'male' subjects (Reay 1998, 2001; Skelton and Francis 2009) and are, for example, less interested in maths than boys, and under-represented in science (O'Brien 2003). Further studies claim that boys are more boisterous, and assertive; that girls present as less confident (Whyte 1983) and become less competitive when boys are present (Salomone 2003) and that they score significantly lower than boys for those aspects of well-being associated with perceptions of competence, showing higher levels of anxiety (McLellan, Galton, Steward and Page 2012).

### 2.1.3. Single-sex Education

Brain-based research has recently been a driving force in the single-sex education movement, where parents and educators have sought to compensate for the gender learning differences which some of the research discussed here has claimed to identify. Whilst it has continued to exist in many private educational provisions, single-sex education has been out of favour in the UK for some decades, but more recently the arguments about the differences between male and female brains have led to a resurgence of interest in teaching boys and girls separately, most particularly in the USA, where federal regulations were eased in 2006 to allow more single-sex provision. In the United States of America, proponents of single-sex education, such as the National Association for Single Sex Public Education, claim that educational progress and attainment are enhanced when teachers use techniques which are geared towards the gender of their pupils; that different physical classroom environments can be provided which optimise learning for the genders - for example in terms of the room temperature considered to be preferable for boys and girls; an additional consideration for some parents and carers is that the opposite sex can be considered to be a distraction to learning once pupils reach a certain age.

For some proponents of single-sex schooling, stereotypes are considered more likely to be negatively reinforced in co-educational classrooms and girls - and boys - would feel more confident and free to follow their interests and compete on a more equal footing in a single-sex environment. This may seem a pertinent claim in terms of the issues raised in this study; certainly, for the female pupils in this school, some of their concerns about their barriers to learning were perceived as linked to the mixed-gender environment in which they were being taught. At the time of the study it was not possible to trial an academic, single-sex model in the school and indeed the Department of Education document *The Equality Act 2010 and Schools* (2014) specifies the consideration which must be given to all single-sex provisions in mainstream schools. In hindsight, the arts-based therapeutic intervention employed by the school in this study could be defined as a positive action initiative specifically to help girls; the single-sex intervention could be justified in that the school considered itself in a position 'to be able to show that this was a proportionate way of dealing with a specific disadvantage experienced by {girls} and connected to their gender' (DfE 2104: 3.19), given the range of interventions already being offered to the boys in the class. The Department for Education and Skills document *Gender and education: the evidence on pupils in England* (2007) stated that pupils' own responses to single sex grouping is mixed, citing case studies which reported that girls seemed to gain less benefit than boys from single-sex teaching (Sukhnandan, Lee and

Kelleher 2000), whilst Younger *et al.* in the Department for Education Skills document *Raising boys' achievement* (2005) reported pupils observed in single-sex teaching sessions seemed more at ease and engaged but that this might be considered simply an issue of high quality teaching and effective teaching styles. Citing Riordan (2002), the Department for Education and Skills concluded:

It is doubtful whether single sex classes within a co-educational school could be expected to have a major impact, especially as mixing or separating the sexes in school does not appear to have any consistent effects.

(DES 2007:116)

Critics of single-sex education (Rivers and Barnett 2011) argue that good teachers are adept at adapting their teaching styles to meet the needs of all the learners in a classroom, and that differences in learner styles are along a continuum, as opposed to being gender based. They contend that a mixed-sex learning environment prepares pupils better for the real world, which requires men and women to function side by side. Further, there is research to suggest that both boys and girls do better when there are more girls in the class, with less disruption to teaching and learning and more satisfactory relationships for teacher and taught (Schlosser 2008). Smyth's (2010) analysis of a wide range of studies into the comparative achievement of male and female pupils in single-sex and co-educational schools identifies considerable variation between and within the countries examined and the conclusions reached. Smyth points to the need for a consideration of the varying national contexts and the ways in which gender is constructed if any comparison of single-sex and co-educational provision is to be meaningful.

#### **2.1.4 Social Class, Cultural Capital and Self-Efficacy**

Despite the widely held perception that boys dominate the classroom environment, over time girls have been shown to have at first begun and then to surpass boys in terms of educational attainment. Skelton and Francis (2009) qualified this when they drew attention to an analysis of national primary school Key Stage Two results of Standard Attainment Tests, which evidenced continued inequalities in performance for some groups of female pupils: in particular, girls identified as white working-class were still not doing as well as either girls or boys identified as white middle-class, even within English - a so-called 'feminine' subject. For Skelton and Francis, the achievement of middle class girls was presented as representative of all girls; they

see this as ‘insidiously hiding’ the under-achievement of many working class girls (Skelton and Francis 2009: 40).

Some feminists (Anyon, Walkerdine, cited in Etherington 2008) have questioned and redefined identity politics and the concept of fixed gender roles, arguing that the sociological theory of gender has changed since the 1970s, and the concept of differentiated gender identity is closely connected to concepts of social class, ethnicity and sexuality (Arnot 2002). Following Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which was influenced by Marxist theory, for some feminists, capitalism became identified as the principle cause of female oppression; it was claimed that poverty was preventing many girls from taking up educational opportunities, and that schools were reproducing and perpetuating class and gender divisions. Indeed the impact of social class can be seen to continue to sustain inequalities and relative poverty as much in disadvantaged areas in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain as it has done in the past: the Social Exclusion Task Force report *Reaching Out: Think Family* (2008) stated that the community within which a young person grows up can be said to determine their future opportunities and the life choices they make; many studies demonstrate that white British people are ‘divided by social class in ways that seriously affect children and young peoples’ life chances and orientation to the world, including the world of work’ (Evans 2010:29). Parsons (2013), in examining the links between ethnicity, gender, deprivation and low educational attainment, calls for the recognition that inequalities in attainment and achievement are rooted in social and economic factors outside the school, which are created and sustained by ‘elitist’ structures.

Indeed, much of the literature exploring gender disparity in educational achievement indicates that there are far greater disparities between the achievement and attainment of different socio-economic and ethnic groups than between male and female pupils. The DES report *Gender and Education* (2007) noted that gender was not the strongest predictor of attainment, and that by Key Stage Four the gap in attainment was much wider between those who were and were not eligible for Free School Meals, with both white British boys and white British girls who were in receipt of FSM doing ‘significantly less well’ than the national average. The report acknowledged gender as one predictor of attainment, but that ‘the social class gap has greater explanatory power’ (DES 2007: 5).

The Rowntree Foundation Report *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion* (2007) describes how the relationship between poverty and low achievement at school is part of a wider cycle in which family disadvantage is passed on from one generation to the next, wherein the economic

status of the family and the child's social and cultural background inform her self-perception. Social class can be viewed as a combination of material wealth, economic position, social status and cultural knowledge and skills (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1988,). Cultural capital, gained within the family environment and through education, leads to increased knowledge and skills, along with qualifications such as degrees and other credentials. Social capital takes the form of membership of and involvement in elite social networks or moving within social groups which are well- connected and influential. It follows that for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, and girls in particular, choices are often limited by social constraints (Mirza 1992; Pang 1999). Far from being institutions of equality of opportunity for all, our current school systems advantages those who hold the appropriate cultural and social capital, and 'the education system plays a key role in the cultural reproduction of social inequalities' (Giddens 2013: 882).

Nevertheless, gender continues as a thread in the social class debate: a significant finding in studies (Subrahmanian 2007) is that women from lower socio-economic groups often exclude themselves from opportunities that are on offer, and that active encouragement is often necessary to support them in challenging internalised social norms that place informal barriers on their participation. Subrahmanian postulates that the causes of childhood poverty and educational deprivation could be said to be generally reproduced inter-generationally: educated parents are more likely to invest in their children's education and educated mothers are more likely to value education for their daughters and ensure that their daughters attend school. Concepts of parental aspiration, expectations and 'partnership working' between home and school can be problematic: since the publication of the Government White Paper *Higher Standards, Better Schools For All* (2005b) feminists have been at the forefront of attacking 'deficit' approaches which locate blame for underachievement with working-class parents and carers. Many parents from disadvantaged backgrounds struggle to sustain positive partnerships with their children's school partly because of their own feelings of self-worth. Some parents retain painful memories of their own experiences of school (Reay and Ball 1998), and this can influence their approach to education and affect their ability to interact in partnership with the school and the staff. Further, some staff members in schools respond differently to parents and carers who were perceived to be from different classes (Reay 1998). Gilles' (2006) study demonstrated how middle class mothers experience their relationships with school staff as positive, whereas working class relationships are often centred around challenging perceived injustices against a background of stress and low self - worth.

Social Cognitivists contend that the higher the socio-economic status of the family, the higher the parents' academic aspirations for their children, the greater their children's pro-social behaviour; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara and Pastorelli (2001) found that parental efficacy can affect children's psychosocial outcomes: a mother's family efficacy was implicated in children's positive or negative social behaviours and a father's self-efficacy beliefs were likely to affect or enhance children's affective regulation. For Bandura (1997), personal efficacy is a core belief in oneself which is the foundation of human motivation, well-being and accomplishment: belief in one's efficacy is a key personal resource which has impact upon how well a person motivates themselves. Bandura contended that parents with strong self-efficacy become strong advocates for their children in interactions and social situations which then have important impact on their children during the formative period of their life. Aspiring parents act in ways that build upon and enhance their children's social integration and academic success by supporting the development of their self-efficacy, in turn raising their aspirations and the success of their scholastic achievements. By contrast, those who have low self-efficacy have less resilience in the face of adversity or disappointment: 'people of low efficacy are easily convinced of the futility of effort in the face of difficulties' (Bandura 1997: 4).

Thus, a child's sense of self can either be enhanced or lowered by the behaviours and/or feedback given by the parents, who have a vital part to play in what the child becomes. Studies show that parental anxieties around learning affect their children's achievement (Maloney, Ramirez, Gunderson, Levin and Beilock 2015) and that by conveying beliefs about their children's abilities, for example, in mathematics (Eccles and Jacobs 1996), parents serve as important socializers of competence beliefs and communicate those beliefs through explicit statements about their child's ability and long term expectations for their future, by encouraging or discouraging types of learning.

The Executive Summary of the Commonwealth Secretariat's report on *Gender in Primary and Secondary Education* (2007) identified girls' education as a vital element of human development and social change: the report asserted that in order to tackle inequality of outcomes for children, a fundamental link must be acknowledged between reforming education systems as a whole and improving education for girls, as together this is the route to breaking the cycles of poverty and deprivation; educational provision must become more informed with regard to gender-awareness and attention must be paid to gender inequality within the school environment and the curriculum and policy makers should:

address the more strategic questions of the connections between education and wider development, and the relationships between men and women in a rapidly changing world...First, advocacy for education as a whole is necessary for the promotion of girls' education to be sustained. Investment in programmes for girls' education needs to be matched by overall improvements in education systems,

(Commonwealth Secretariat 2007: introduction)

The report clearly acknowledged the role of women as mothers in terms of agency for social change; since children's early developmental processes and experiences are so central to their life chances later, self-efficacy approaches must be employed to overcome the 'self-doubt' of parents - particularly mothers - so that gender disparities in adult life might be reduced through the provision of opportunities to instil a sense of self-efficacy in female **and** male pupils during their time in school.

Self-efficacy, that is, the sense of being able to deal effectively with a task, has significant impact upon ability to learn. Cleary (cited in Pajares and Urdan 2005) describes how students with low self-efficacy attribute failure to uncontrollable factors, thereby increasing feelings of despair and helplessness. Seifert observes that for students to develop into 'healthy, adaptive and constructive individuals, it is imperative to foster feelings of competence and control' (Seifert 2004: 147). Zimmerman (2002) contends that when students believe they can perform a task they become more engaged in the activity, work harder and sustain high levels of effort even when obstacles are encountered, so that 'self-efficacy influences motivation through goal setting' (Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup 2008: 402). In the classroom context, motivation and engagement are crucial components for learning to take place.

### **2.1.5 Motivation and Teacher Expectation**

Studies into learner motivation and engagement in school take into account a range of factors pertaining to the needs, goals, interests, emotions and self-perceptions of the learner (Maslow 1954, Reeve and Deci 1996, Deci and Ryan 2002). Drivers include a love of what they (the pupils) are studying; a desire to please; a desire to succeed; competition; the end objective ; achieving or demonstrating competency; avoidance of negative consequences; self-image; peer pressure and the facilitation of self-directed learning. Social aspects of school rated very positively in the findings from Berry's report *Spice Briefing: Pupil Motivation*, to the Education Committee of the Scottish Parliament (2005), with positive relationships with teachers being

one student yardstick of the quality of teaching. Students who felt accepted in school were more likely to have a positive orientation towards school and the teachers and their work in class (Solomon and Rogers 2001). Despite considerable debate about methodological flaws in Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) original research, there is general acceptance amongst researchers and educators that teacher expectation has some degree of influence on outcomes for pupils. Pupils' perceived characteristics: social class, ethnicity, diagnostic labels and differences between teacher/pupil backgrounds have all been found to effect teacher expectation. Rubie-Davies (2009) cites studies which indicated that teachers criticised low achievers more frequently and praised high achievers more frequently for their successes even if these occurred less frequently, as well as studies by Rist (1970), Jussim, Smith, Madon and Palumbo (1998) and Stinnett, Bull, Koonce and Aldridge (2001), where perceived student social standing and diagnostic labels are shown to have particular impact upon teacher expectation of pupil performance. Brophy (1998) observed that the extent to which teacher expectation affected learning outcomes was to some degree dependent upon the teacher's own characteristics and that where the teacher was prone to discriminating to a greater extent in her interactions with high and low achievers, then the expectation effect was greater than in other cases. There is similarly a body of literature related to teacher expectation and interaction with regard to gender, with Howe (1997) identifying these traits even in pre-school provision, Page and Rosenthal (1990) finding that teachers altered the pace and content of lessons depending upon which gender they were teaching and whether the input was Maths or English based, and Qing (1999) finding that teachers have higher expectations of boys in Maths and girls in Reading. Arnot, Gray, James and Ruddock (1998) identified a male 'public' learning strategy compared to a female 'private' learning strategy, with boys making more contributions and receiving a greater share of teacher time. However, a Department of Education and Skills paper *Gender and education: the evidence on pupils in England* states that 'there is no evidence that these different pupil-teacher interactions result directly in differential educational achievement' (DES 2007:106).

Given the level of agreement of the staff in this study, regarding their perceptions about the girls' low self-esteem and how this was impacting upon their ability to engage with the learning, it must be acknowledged that teacher perception has a degree of relevance to the concerns raised about girls' barriers to learning. However, issues of teacher- pupil interaction and teacher expectation in relation to the pupils in this study are extremely complex: the pupils are taught a range of subjects and supported by a number of different qualified teachers and teaching assistants of both genders, including some staff members who themselves originate from the

local community. In addition, the staff had, of necessity in order to support pupils, an in-depth knowledge about many of the pupils' family circumstances and this will have impacted upon their perceptions of these pupils and the differences in the ways in which boys and girls were behaving and engaging in their classrooms. A study by Duffield, Allan, Turner and Morris (2000) highlighted the importance pupils placed upon being listened to and concluded that teaching should focus upon learning rather than performance and standards of achievement. Zamorski and Haydn (2000) found that sport and other opportunities, and 'feeling safe' also featured as positive factors of school for the pupils. Thus the curriculum, the learning environment, teaching and learning styles and the student-teacher relationship have all been found to have significant effects upon engagement and motivation.

Researchers have identified a number of external factors which impact upon motivation: for example, socio-economic position and domestic circumstances (Kinder, Kendall and Howarth 1999) have been found to determine the degree of parent-partnership working which takes place. Activities engaged in outside-of- school and links with the learning community contribute to the engagement of pupils, along with a culture of celebration within the school and achievement and contribution to the community, regardless of whether that achievement is accomplished in or out of school. All these factors impact upon an individual's intrinsic motivation, which is generally defined as being bound up with pursuing one's own agenda: the only necessary reward is that spontaneous interest and enjoyment that one experiences as one does the activity of choice. Brewster and Fager (2000, cited in Berry 2005) found that intrinsically motivated pupils are more likely to have confidence in their ability to learn new things; they may persist longer with tasks and retain information for longer periods. Pintrinch and Schunk (2002, cited in Woolfolk *et al.* 2008) showed that the more interesting passages in a text are more likely to be remembered by the reader. If motivation depends upon our interests and emotions, then we are much more likely to learn and to remember when we have a personal and emotional response to what we are offered. Enjoyment and a sense of value in the mastery of tasks can enhance motivation, although:

Motivation does not equate with fun. In considering pupil motivation it is important that ... {children learn that} life can be boring, unpleasant, dangerous or scary, and it is important that children learn how to cope with these.

(Education Committee of the Scottish Parliament 2005: introduction)

Intrinsic motivation theory suggests that when the learner can make the choice, then the work is more likely to be seen to be of importance, even when it is not fun. Any number of underlying variables can impact upon our levels of motivation and any division between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is too simple; indeed many researchers into motivation conclude that in reality we can be motivated by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Covington and Mueller 2001; McLean 2003).

Conversely, lack of motivation to learn can lead to disaffection, especially where culture gaps, differing agendas, a dislike for certain types of discipline regimes or a lack of a sense of ownership are present, and can result in struggles with authority and about identity occurring in classrooms (Norwich Area Schools Consortium 2000). As Brophy explains: ‘the concept of student motivation is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits, which may or may not be the ones desired by their teachers’ (2004: 4).

In the 1990s, there had been a growing body of evidence of disaffection and low attainment, particularly at that time amongst boys. In research from the Keele database of schools (1994), Barber (cited in the report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education 1999), wrote that up to 70% of secondary school pupils counted the minutes to the end of lessons and that 30 - 40 % thought that school was boring and would rather not go; school exclusions were at their peak. The Government White Paper *Excellence in Schools* (1997) had argued that one of the major problems in education, causing disaffection and poor attendance, was the low expectations of young peoples’ abilities and that it was essential to raise morale, motivation and self- esteem in schools. Some researchers claim that much of the culture of schooling reflects the behaviourist view of motivation, with its grading systems and awards (Brophy 2004) and that whilst research evidence suggested that intrinsic motivation is more beneficial to the learning process than extrinsic motivation, ‘education has relied too heavily on influencing extrinsic elements’ (Berry, 2005: 5). Pupil disaffection has been attributed by some to a lack of intrinsic pupil motivation and an instrumentalist view of education, whereby learning has been defined as merely the mastery of those specific techniques required to achieve a satisfactory level of performance in order to pass exams:

The increased emphasis on a *performance* rather than on a *learning* culture in our schools... has led to a drastic dip in pupil attitudes, a lowering of morale among teachers, an impoverished curriculum and a restricted pedagogy. Even the limited gains

in so called ‘basics’ (*contested by other recent research studies*) seem to have peaked in recent years.

(Galton 2007: Introduction - original italics)

Studies have demonstrated a range of avoidance strategies which pupils adopt when given tasks because either they do not value the activity itself or because of fear of failing and looking foolish. Solomon and Rogers’ study (2001), with disaffected students in Pupil Referral Units concluded that what was offered in terms of curriculum was less significant than what they identified as a deficiency of motivational and coping strategies. Disaffection is often characterised by severe levels of challenging behaviour including the disruption of lessons, the inhibition of learning for other students, and even violence towards peers and staff leading to exclusion. Most pertinent to the concerns of the school staff in this study, Oakley, Wind, Jones, Joseph and Bethel (2002) explored the ‘quietly disaffected’ –(RHINOs – really here in name only) - those who did not noticeably disrupt lessons in any overt way, but whom teachers considered were invisible as learners, and who had little engagement with what they were offered in school.

## **2.2 Removing Barriers to Learning: a Consideration of Recent Approaches**

### **2.2.1 An Historical Perspective**

Seltzer and Bentley (1999) suggest that the idea of teaching for creativity began notionally in 1976 with a speech at Ruskin College, Oxford, by the then Prime Minister James Callaghan, in which he referred to the debate around creativity and its legitimate links to the child-centred approach championed in the report of the Central Advisory Council for Education *Children and their Primary Schools* (The Plowden Report) (1967). The shift in the ideological approach to education over decades evolved from an increasing political understanding of a need to adapt to the pace of change in the world; this resulted in the subsequent call for the promotion of such qualities as creativity, adaptability and for schools to promote intrinsic motivation, skills, aptitudes and self- esteem within the school environment. Through the 1980s a series of changes in the structure of education programmes and expectations upon teachers took place, including the introduction of the National Curriculum. As a result, schools were encouraged to become involved in a range of programmes and initiatives which introduced creative approaches into the classroom in order to address barriers to learning. Creative approaches to teaching and learning, including strategies designed to elicit the views of learners, increasingly became vehicles for

whole school improvement from the late 1990s up until the election of the coalition government in 2010.

However, when in 1997, “education, education, education” became a top priority for Blair’s New Labour, with an increased standardisation of the curriculum along with greater financial autonomy for schools, some educationalists claimed that schools became less creative places, as the Government’s objectives were to make the nation’s education system more effective, in order to secure higher employment, and maintain economic performance. Galton (2007: 17) describes the continued centralisation of the curriculum and prescriptive practices, testing and the standards agenda as manifesting itself in a ‘one size fits all’ approach to teaching and learning. In response to the political ideology of that time, educationalists sought to evolve new approaches to teaching and learning which would be seen to be attempting to retain the rigour of the standards agenda, but which would also allow for the voice and views of the learner, and a creative approach to the school curriculum, particularly in the primary school.

In *All our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education* creativity is defined as ‘Imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value’ (NACCCE 1999:29). Although the report talks of the vital roles of achievement and inspection in raising standards it clearly states that these should support and not inhibit creative and cultural education, and that there is a need for balance in the curriculum. This was in contrast to the approach in the report commissioned by the Conservative government in 1992 - the ‘*Three Wise Men*’ report of Alexander, Rose and Whitehead - which advocated an increase in more direct teaching. Indeed, in his Foreword to the NACCCE document, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, David Blunkett wrote that ‘Creative and Cultural education can help raise national standards by boosting a child’s confidence and self- esteem’.

Joubert (cited in Craft, Jeffrey and Leibling 2001) argues that the Government response to the NACCCE report in 1999 was disappointing; that the government itself was unclear about the term ‘creativity’ and did not address the majority of the recommendations made. However, the NACCCE report did argue for a different approach to learning and teaching in order to better prepare the nation’s young people for their future, with schools beginning to seek ways to improve standards of attainment through an increasingly personalised and creative approach to teaching and learning (Middlewood, Parker and Beere 2005). The notion of ownership, along with authenticity and the opportunity to engage in exciting tasks which have some connection to real-life problems which learners may meet outside the classroom - aspects of educational

engagement which have been cited in many of the studies on disaffection - became recognised keys to enhancing both motivation and attainment.

*Excellence and Enjoyment: A Strategy for Primary Schools* (DES 2003a) was claimed to set a vision for primary education, building upon what had already been achieved in terms of high standards through the vehicle of a rich, varied and exciting curriculum. This was interpreted in many schools as an opportunity to introduce more creative activities into the classroom. Compton (2007) sees this as a return to a cross-curricular approach which emphasised the connections between different subjects and which encouraged children to recognise these links and to think for themselves. *Excellence and Enjoyment* prompted a focus upon creativity and a different approach to teaching and learning, and a call to foster in students qualities of self-determination and direction; innovation; action; development and risk-taking. Craft (2001: 48) in attempting to define some characteristics of high creators, identified: making time to reflect in a variety of ways; picking out what one is good at and really pushing at that; and putting ‘the spin... on things which do not work out’. For Craft, creative people neither ignore nor are put off by failure but instead they possess qualities of ‘possibility’ thinking; they are imaginative and pose questions.

These concepts were compatible with Gardner’s (1983) multiple intelligences, incorporating the adoption of the notion of using a range of teaching and learning styles and encouraging ‘social’ as well as private learning, as well as with emotional intelligence (Golman 1995) , and ‘learning how to learn’:

the successful student is resourceful, and he’s also patient. He’ll try something one way, and if he doesn’t get it, O.K., he’ll try it this way, and if that doesn’t work, he’ll try it another. But the unsuccessful student has neither the resourcefulness to think many ways nor the patience to hang on....The good student, possibly because he’s not so worried, possibly because he has this style of thinking, is able to look objectively at his own work- to stand back from it and look for inconsistency and see the mistakes. *“This can’t be right if this is right. So, let’s see what’s wrong here”*.

(Holt 1989: 155 original italics)

*Excellence and Enjoyment* led to a re-examination by practitioners of how and what they were delivering to learners in schools, as well as by those who supported the practitioners’ training and professional development. Encouragement to think creatively about teaching and learning

led to a questioning of the current perspectives and practices. Lucas (cited in Craft *et al.* 2001) conceived of creativity as having four characteristics: seeing, thinking, inventing and questioning and identified some of the necessary elements which enable this, including: being respectful rather than dismissive; encouraging active, not passive learning; supporting individual interests rather than standardized curricular; engaging many learning styles, not one; encouraging and exploring emotional responses; posing questions rather than statements; offering ambiguity rather than certainties; offering many patterns rather than a standardized model. Thus, there was a move towards a more learner-led and creative approach to pedagogy, and a move away from a pedagogy based upon knowledge of facts to one which would be more skills- based.

The key challenge is to shift the focus away from what people '*should know*' and on to what they should be able '*to do*' with their knowledge. This is essential to developing creative ability.

(Seltzer and Bentley 1999: 25 - original italics)

NACCCE advocated that there should be a move away from a solely teacher-led pedagogy, and that other partners, in the form of artists and 'creatives' could work alongside teachers, so that they would enhance pupil learning in order that creativity could be fostered. Schools were encouraged to welcome in these creative partners as a form of continuing professional development in terms of how to teach creatively and for creativity, as well as for enrichment to the curriculum. Even for those schools who fully embraced the concept of teaching for creativity, who began to review what was taught, and how, there were still yet additional obstacles to change; those communities of high socio-economic disadvantage, who suffered from high unemployment and low aspiration found it hard to address the creativity agenda. In their study into pupils in Education Action Zones, Whitehead and Clough (2004) suggested that there was a clear need for pupils to be included as stakeholders, helping to shape the implementation of policy and become part of the solution to disaffection. The vast majority of approaches to teaching for creativity advocated the empowerment of the student, and ownership of learning so that teachers became facilitators, rather than instructors, and schools should focus upon 'pupil voice' in order to improve provision for learners.

### 2.2.2 Pupil Voice: Learning from the Learners

Fielding has contended that learning:

is becoming a legitimate focus of enquiry from the standpoint of students as well as teacher... students' voices are arguing for a move away from the curriculum as delivery to curriculum as the joint making of meaning.

(Fielding, cited in Kinchin 2004: 301)

Particularly throughout the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there have been many studies into the effective elicitation of authentic pupil voice. Bragg, Manchester and Faulkner (2009) have examined the impact upon pupil's roles in school governance and in the co-construction of meaning which has resulted from the development of pupil voice via the vehicle of such initiatives as Creative Partnerships. It is useful to place the concept of pupil voice in a political context: the 1989 Children Act coincided with the UK ratification of United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, where Article 12 focuses upon the right of the child to freely express his or her own views, and for these to be heard and be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. Although Article 12 was embraced by the UK government, which is therefore legally obliged to give full effect to it, there is what some regard as a mismatch between the UK's international commitment and what is happening in practice; the Article has been claimed to be 'commonly misunderstood' by educational policy and decision makers, who have displayed a lack of awareness of the provision and the scope of the Article and who have employed phrases which diminished the impact of the provision of this fundamental non-negotiable human right enshrined in international law (Lundy 2007).

The publication of the Green paper *Every Child Matters* (DES 2003b) following the General election of 2001 and followed by the Children Act 2004, encouraged a much increased level of participation by children and young people in the design and delivery of services, and provided for the establishment of the Office of the Children's Commissioner, giving children and young people a voice in public life. The Green Paper *Youth Matters* (DfES 2005d), the National Healthy Schools Standard and the revised 2005 Ofsted framework for inspection, each placed an expectation upon schools that they would systematically seek the views of young people, including on matters to do with the quality of teaching and learning. There was a focus on

consultation and participation in terms of pupils and their positioning as consumers of education, with pupil voice being encouraged, although arguably mainly for the potential benefits it could give to schools (Flutter and Rudduck 2004; Whitty and Wisby 2007).

Information from the Department of Health guidance *Promoting children and young people's participation through the National Healthy School Standard* (2004) describes how participation develops personal and social efficacy, but also that it

can support children emotionally and socially by building their knowledge, personal and social skills and a positive attitude to citizenship and decision-making. It can promote achievement because of the positive impact it has on teaching and learning.

(DH 2004: 15)

A Department for Education and Skills consultation document *Working together: Giving children and young people a say* (2004: 3) describes participation as:

opening up opportunities for decision-making with children and young people as partners engaging in dialogue, conflict resolution, negotiation and compromise – all important life skills. Children's and young people's personal development and our democracy will benefit from their learning about sharing power, as well as taking and sharing responsibility.

(DfES 2004: 3)

Data collected from a range of bodies and agencies, including data collected from 1064 schoolchildren for a study conducted on behalf of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young people (NICCY) *Children's Rights in Northern Ireland* (2004) identified areas where children's rights were not being given due attention and weight and concluded that children's views were neither sought nor listened to effectively, and that opportunities to participate and engage with adults were only 'minimalist (and) tokenistic' (Lundy 2007: 929), with children being accorded little dignity or respect, and afforded opportunities only to have their say in the mundane and trivial. Resulting recommendations included the need to raise adult awareness and the need for training of those working in the education sector of the legally binding obligation of Article 12. Todd's study (2007) into participation and consultation across a range of services for children and young people, including, education, health, social care and voluntary bodies highlights the importance of pupil involvement as support for the development of inclusivity in education, and participation as a vital tool for improvement in social inequalities.

There are several possible reasons why children's voice continues to be regarded as challenging by adults, particularly in the school setting, and a range of studies have demonstrated both the dilemma and potential ways to address this. In the first place, it may be that adults in schools are either sceptical that children have the capacity for proper involvement in decision making; age and capacity are the most commonly cited reasons for excluding a child from decision-making, although the parents'/carers' dominant role and lack of training for professionals is also cited: an 'assumption of a monopoly of expertise infuses' all our practice (Todd 2007: 121). There are of course clear links between children's voice and the safeguarding agenda and this further underlines the child's right to be heard. For McLellan *et al.* (2012: viii), pupil voice can be considered as a crucial aspect 'in promoting wellbeing and helping pupils to function effectively both personally and socially' in the schools they researched for their Creative Partnerships report. Research into pupil voice indicates that children as young as seven can conceptualise learning and are able to articulate learning strategies and the processes they use (McCallum, Hargreaves and Gipps. 2000); there is evidence that under the appropriate conditions even very young children can give their views authentically (Cox and Robinson-Pant 2005). Bragg (2007) used a case study approach during a two year period in which Peacock, then a deputy head teacher, attempted to develop pupil voice in a primary school in order to explore more participative models of education and to identify strategies that help teachers to consult pupils about teaching and learning. In place of the rather traditional role in which the school's teachers saw themselves, as champions and protectors of these vulnerable and passive children, there was a shift into seeing the pupils as constructive and critical partners in a process of change: the pupils were empowered and given real-life opportunities to make differences.

The study concludes that these young children felt consulted and their views taken seriously and acted upon. The success of their participation in an initial project led on to involving the children in setting targets for the school development plan, and increasingly being part of very real and serious decision-making about the school. The success of the project depended upon the leading adult 'structuring the processes by which meaningful contributions can be obtained from all, and finding techniques to build successfully on what children do implicitly know' (Bragg: 2007: 512). Bragg gives examples of the trust and collegiality as much between teacher and learner within the school, as between teacher and teacher.

Another obstacle to joint making of meaning is in the potential for adults to become concerned that too much power will undermine adult authority and destabilise the school environment. Flutter writes of two studies into pupil voice: one study culminated in a project-based learning

activity styled on pupil suggestions which resulting in improved attainment (Flutter 2007a) and a second project where pupils were trained in research techniques, and discussion and data gathering, producing an outline model of a 'good lesson' (Flutter 2007b). Flutter considered that such studies demonstrated that listening and responding to what pupils say about their experiences as learners can be a very powerful tool in helping teachers to investigate and improve their own practice. In both case studies teachers' final responses were positive; such studies go some way to alleviating teacher concerns of fears about undermining of teacher authority or overthrowing of school systems that such student participation might engender.

School Councils have for some time been the preferred way for schools to engage pupils in school improvement. Taylor and Johnson's report *School councils: Their role in citizenship and personal and social education* for the National Foundation for Educational Research (2002) cites the government's ongoing commitment to the citizenship agenda at that time which gave explicit mention to school councils in The Department of Education and Employment document *Schools building on success* (2001) and the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (1999/2000), noting that school councils promoted the social development of pupils: through the vehicle of the school council pupils were encouraged to take responsibility, to help with tasks and to fundraise for charity (2001:29). However, subsequent research by Whitty and Wisby (2007) indicated that the schools they studied required more support and guidance in order to facilitate effective pupil voice; school councils which had primarily been developed to supplement the citizenship curriculum were often used in a relatively narrow and mechanical way, rather than as a means of changing school ethos and that 'research revealed the often restricted remit for pupil voice...few schools included in our research saw pupil voice as a means of *empowering* pupils in relation to their rights' (Whitty and Wisby 2007: 311).

Noyes (2005) argues that many researchers confuse the concepts of consultation and participation - where pupil voice is listened to and used as tool for student-led, desired change - with that of 'performativity', where pupil voice research is primarily used as a vehicle to improve measured outcomes. Cullingford (2007: 136) writes that 'young children's styles of learning are the same as those employed by creative artists' but that pupils are very rarely asked what they really think, and that solicitation of their views always tends to be about the formalities of the school experience and further that their contribution to the debate is rarely attended to. Similarly, in Whitty and Wisby's study (2007), some professionals showed caution in seeing the development of pupil voice as positive: the areas where teachers feel comfortable in giving pupils a voice may be limited, as may the areas where pupils feel comfortable having a

voice and again, there may be some groups of pupils who are given less opportunity to share their views. Therefore, there are some hidden restrictions to the possibilities for pupils to achieve change in their schools and there is the danger that where there is potential to challenge the status quo, adult support for pupil voice might decrease.

Kinchin (2004:309) claims that any effective development of an authentic constructive teaching approach must be undertaken in dialogue with students if it is to match their learning needs. McIntyre, Pedder and Ruddock (2005) studied the use that the teachers made of the ideas that pupils offered to them about classroom teaching and learning. The teachers were then invited to reflect upon the suggestions and encouraged to think about changes they could make to their practice in response to the pupil ideas they judged worthwhile and manageable. The researchers divided their ultimate findings into two groups: those that teachers would be pleased to hear – the ‘comfortable findings’ and those which are more likely to give teachers pause for thought. The researchers concluded that whilst pupils were able to demonstrate awareness of how they and their peers prefer to learn and what motivates them, their teachers’ use of pupils’ ideas remains in its infancy. In addition, the nature of the teacher responses to pupils’ suggestions, and most especially where teachers queried whether the pupil accounts of the classroom were valid realities, has vast implications for the concept of consultation. McIntyre *et al.* also observed that ‘however good pupil’s ideas might be, it is the teachers’ responsiveness to them that is ultimately important’ (2005: 151) and that ‘relatively few pupil suggestions which were not already part of the teachers’ repertoires were accepted and used straightforwardly’ (2005: 159).

This would all seem to suggest that initial goodwill dissipates when authentic children’s voice challenges the dominant thinking, or generates controversy or costs money. At such times adults can give compelling reasons for not giving children’s views weight. Successful consultation requires a willingness of teachers and pupils to change the balance of their relationships and to learn to become serious and trustworthy partners in the classroom. Lundy (2007) contends that teachers’ attention needs to be re-drawn to their legal obligation with regard to children’s voice: education should increase a person’s capacity to enjoy all other rights.

The issue for the primary school lies perhaps less in the will and rather more in the means to elicit the authentic views and voice of the children: in any exploration about consultation and participation there must be a recognition of the difficulties inherent in accessing authentic pupil voice and listening to what may be hard to hear. Ravet found that where the classroom presents certain challenges, teachers’ attempts to deal with disengagement behaviours ‘failed to take

pupil points of view into account and were based upon an uncritical acceptance of teacher interpretations and expectations' (2007: 235). Ravet's study was designed to explore how the pupils' realities supported or challenged their teachers' construction and to enable the pupils to participate with the research in ways which would be more than tokenistic and superficial: primary pupils need support to make sense of researcher questions and to find their voice and express their self-perceptions, particularly if they are further hampered by home circumstance and other wider social influences. Ravet's study used one-to-one, informal, semi-structured interviews set within a familiar and safe social context. Because of the children's varying cognitive and linguistic abilities, a range of materials and resources were available which allowed for story formats, drawing activities and picture stimuli to also be the vehicles for sharing views. Perhaps most successfully, in terms of response from the children themselves, was the use of classroom video footage which enabled pupils to describe, explain and evaluate their learning and behaviour and that of their classmates in the footage. The researcher found this medium particularly effective for its capacity to engage and to sustain pupil interest over periods of time. Some pupils were able to describe and to begin to reflect upon their behaviours and even to begin to understand others' perceptions of those behaviours. The study provides a useful insight into effective participatory techniques that can be deployed in order to empower those pupils who are most disenfranchised and still silenced, despite adult insistence on a willingness to hear what they have to say.

The studies cited here demonstrate that empowering students and giving young people a voice has continued to be problematic. The ideas gathered from pupils need not only to be more genuinely reflected upon by the adults who support them, but the vehicles used to elicit their views also need to be less talk-based, and reflect the views of all pupils and not only, as is often the case, the articulate, higher achievers (McIntyre *et al.* 2005).

What is clear from research into pupil voice is that studies into pupil disaffection closely correlate in terms of what pupils say will improve their experience of school: they prefer lessons that are less teacher-led and appreciate interactive teaching which gives them ownership of their learning. They also want more opportunities to collaborate with peers (McIntyre *et al.* 2005) and a move from the curriculum as delivery to curriculum as joint making of meaning. School action research can demonstrate how listening to pupils' voices can change teachers and learners, and teaching and learning relationships: Harrington, Gillam, Andrews and Day's study (2006) describes an exercise in school action research which demonstrates how listening to pupils' voices changed teachers and learners, and teaching and learning relationships. Such studies

provide a persuasive argument for a collaborative approach to teaching and learning, with pupils empowered to give their views and to become contributors to school improvement processes. However, this requires that pupils have an understanding of, and can articulate clearly their needs, feelings and wishes; which in turn necessitates that those pupils who for whatever reason, find it difficult to voice their views are supported in developing the skills with which to do so.

## **2.2. 3 The Impact of Initiatives**

### **2.2.3.1 Creative Partnerships**

In 2002, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DMCS) had set up Creative Partnerships to give young people in disadvantaged areas across England the opportunity to develop their creativity and ambition by building partnerships between schools and creative organisations, businesses and individuals. The initiative aimed to bring cohesion between education, creative and cultural sectors, initially in areas of England where significant deprivation was known to exist. Creative Partnerships aimed to establish a place for creativity in the curriculum, in school and beyond the classroom; its' focus was upon the aspiration and performance of young people, on developing creativity in young people and a creative approach to all aspects of the curriculum.

In the context of the increased curriculum flexibility encouraged in *Excellence and Enjoyment in Primary Schools* (2003a) and in its partner publication, *14-19 Education and Skills* (2005), Ofsted published *Creative Partnerships: Initiative and Impact*, in 2006. Positive outcomes for pupils emerged in terms of good attitudes to learning, self-confidence, good behaviour, co-operation, enthusiasm and pride, with strong evidence of team working and an ability to show enterprise and handle change. Pupils demonstrated an ability to manage personal stress, and awareness for the safety of self and others. They also evidenced an ability to improvise, take risks, show resilience and collaborate with others. Learners were described as mostly able to respond to the sometimes ambitious approaches in the projects by meeting or exceeding expectations, and often responding in unexpected ways. The relevance of the learning was a consistently good feature of the projects and pupils were driven to learn when working for a purpose which involved meeting deadlines, satisfying a real need or playing a role that others depended upon. Ofsted considered that these outcomes were all likely to contribute to pupils' future well-being, and saw them as consistent with the 5 objectives of *Every Child Matters* (2003b); involvement in creative activities were seen to have given pupils high aspiration for the

future, and a minimised fear of failure; pupils were keen to ask questions and offer answers confidently because no one was assuming the role of expert; everyone's expertise contributed to the learning.

The shift away from a classroom focus upon proscribed knowledge and a climate where an 'everyone is an expert' approach to teaching and learning is encouraged and adopted, has been seen by some as problematic: Furedi (2010) has warned that such an approach results in a belief in learners that the past has nothing more to offer. From this point of view, as a consequence of using education as the tool of social-policy makers, instead of engaging pupils in learning arising from experiences other than their own, the education process becomes de-stabilised and 'gimmicky', equated with only what is relevant to the learners' lives (Young 2008), rather than with knowledge, intellect and the richness of an 'intergenerational dynamic'. The authority of the teacher, based upon knowledge of a given subject, becomes undermined in the shift to the role of mentor or facilitator, and the nature of pedagogy is changed. In addition, some educationalists have been less than comfortable with a policy wherein cultural activities have been used to support, rather than innovate and change the continued study of a statutory curriculum. The Creative Partnerships initiative was described as being in danger of being no more than 'a further item added to the shopping trolley, a treat and pick-me-up for the teachers and the children' (Hall and Thomson 2007: 319).

In order to demonstrate the rigour of a more creative approach to teaching and learning, there were attempts to evidence the impact of the Creative Partnerships initiative upon academic outcomes. Enjoyment in learning was clearly evident throughout the schools surveyed, but whilst some schools offered evidence to suggest a correlation between pupils' involvement in Creative Partnerships and improved achievement more widely in such areas as writing, speaking and listening, numeracy and ICT, Ofsted found that this was largely anecdotal. There were some observations of activity that was insufficiently demanding of the children which went unchallenged. The report charged schools to more rigorously track the progress of individuals and groups through creative projects and activities, and to find ways to evaluate how far Creative Partnerships allowed pupils to discover and deepen their own creativity. Moreover, Ofsted found that in some teacher-led creative activities, avoidance of risk, mainly because of a fear of failure, continued to overshadow learning, and pupils used a range of tactics to elicit the answer the teacher sought, rather than to feel confident to explore the question posed. In contrast, when pupils worked alongside artists and creative partners, they were engaged in discovery and dialogue and had a greater sense of ownership and enjoyment of tasks. This

seemed to suggest that it was the **nature of that style of pedagogy** which seeks to foster creativity, rather than the content of any curriculum offered, which determined the degree of engagement, motivation and ownership of learning in the learner. Leach (cited in Craft *et al.* 2001: 181) observed that educational settings which value and employ creative approaches to teaching and learning ‘also view learning either implicitly or explicitly - as a social process’ It follows that schools which value creativity were also likely to place focus upon the social aspects of education.

### **2.2.3.2 Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning**

In 2003, following the death of Victoria Climbié, the government published the green paper *Every Child Matters*. In 2004, the Children Act became law and the policy shift resulted in a ‘concentrated holistic emphasis on pupils in schools, who were affected by social and emotional conditions as well as cognitive or pedagogical dimensions’ (Garner 2013: 1). This legislation was the legal underpinning for the Government’s approach to the well-being of children and young people from birth to nineteen years, by providing support to all children in order that they:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

Initiatives were conceived in order to address some of the barriers which schools faced in pursuit of these five goals for all children, whatever their background or circumstances. Based on the report *What works in Developing Children’s Social and Emotional Competence and Well-being* (Weare and Gray 2003), a Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot was funded by the DfES and piloted in 25 Local Authorities in the United Kingdom, with the aim of improving these two key school improvement issues by providing schools with high quality professional development and to develop and trial models and resources. *The Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning* (SEAL) programme was one of four strands within this pilot and took the form of a universal element providing curriculum work intended for use with all pupils across the identified pilot schools, focusing upon social and emotional aspects of learning. In keeping with the concept of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983) and emotional literacy (Golman 1995), the

SEAL programme provided teachers with materials and resources aimed at effecting positive behaviour and learning by promoting self-awareness, management of feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills.

Within an evaluation of the impact of the Primary Behaviour and Attendance Pilot on improvement of behaviour and attendance (Hallam, Rhami and Shaw 2006), Hallam (2009) carried out an evaluation of the SEAL programme as part of the larger study of the initiative, and included a larger sample (N- 172) than the original 25 schools, as some of the Local Authorities had chosen to include all of their schools in the programme, rather than only those identified for the pilot. However, differences in implementation of the initiative across schools led to somewhat problematic interpretation of the data, since the study found that schools varied in their approach to the programme in the amount of training staff received, which then impacted upon effective delivery of the programme. Furthermore, in some schools the programme was offered only to those identified cohorts whereas in other schools it was offered to all pupils in the school. Some schools delivered the programme as intermittent, 'stand -alone' lessons, whereas some schools incorporated the resources and materials into regular cross curricular lessons. Finally, some schools had already embraced a social and emotional educational approach which, the researcher considered, may have impacted more positively upon both their willingness and ability to deliver the programme. For Hallam, Key Stage Two pupil questionnaire responses prior to the implementation of the SEAL programme suggested that 'school ethos and /or the catchment area from which the school draw their intake play a role in a range of social behaviour and attitudes exhibited by children' ( Hallam 2009: 326).

Hallam found that the data in regard to the pupil perspective of the outcomes of the programme was mixed: there were no clear discernible changes in attitudes over time for Key Stage One pupils, and those changes in attitude for Key Stage Two pupils were small. The pupils' growing maturity as they progressed through school overlapped with age-related changes, rendering it difficult to determine the impact of the SEAL programme alone. There were however, statistically significant gender differences in all categories before and after the programme, except in relation to self-esteem and motivation. The girls were consistently more positive in their responses at Key Stage One and in relation to all categories except self- esteem and motivation, and social skills and relationships at Key Stage Two. An evaluation of SEAL by Humphrey, Lendrum and Wigelsworth (2010), obtained mixed results overall which were similarly explained by the variations in implementation. The pupil-level outcome data indicated that SEAL had failed to impact significantly upon 'pupils' social and emotional skills, general

mental health difficulties, pro-social behaviour or behaviour problems' (cited in Garner 2013: 3).

Further critique of the social and emotional aspects approach stems from a suspicion around the concept of 'therapeutic education'. For Ecclestone and Hayes, SEAL-related activity 'erodes the idea of humans as conscious agents who realise their potential for individual and social change through projects to transform themselves and their world' (2008:136), whilst Craig (2007) contends that the interventionist approach of the SEAL programme encourages introspection in young children which would be better replaced with a safer, healthier, positive psychology.

However, whilst in terms of school-level outcomes some studies failed to identify significant positive impact, school climate data did suggest increases in pupils' feelings of autonomy and there was some indication of positive changes, for example in the areas of interpersonal skills and relationships. Bannerjee, (2010), found that the connections between the social and emotional ethos of the schools, better behaviour, attendance and attainment, remained significant after controlling for variations which were due to socio-economic status. A Department for Education document *The National Strategies 1997-2011. A Brief Summary of the Impact and Effectiveness of the National Strategies* (2011) further claimed that there was evidence that programmes to promote social and emotional skills resulted in gains in academic results and more effective learning, whereas Hallam noted that head teachers and teachers were 'cautious' in their assessment of the impact of the SEAL programme on academic outcomes (2009:322). However, in Hallam's study, eleven out of thirteen head teachers who completed a rating scale section of the study agreed that the programme had raised children's confidence, whilst slightly lower numbers agreed that it had improved pupils' social and communication skills. Interview data indicated that staff believed that they gained a better understanding of behaviour and the social and emotional aspects of learning, so that they felt more confident in interacting with and supporting pupils with behaviour issues and that the children seemed calmer in lessons, their concentration was increased and that because behaviour issues arose less frequently, teachers were better able to focus on the job of teaching, so that learning was enhanced. Hallam found some evidence to suggest that the programme had increased pupils' ability to control emotions such as anger, improved their ability to make friends and resolve conflict and increased pupil self-esteem. In addition, a large majority of the teaching and support staff agreed that the programme had promoted the emotional well-being of children.

### 2.2.3.3 Drama in Education

As is demonstrated in this exploration of a range of potential barriers to learning, schools that have wished to effect practices which better empower pupils, provide vehicles for pupil voice and increase self-efficacy, have often sought ways to achieve this aim through the arts. Bragg *et al.* (2009) found that work with artists improved pupil relationships and that it enabled pupils to share their feelings. Ofsted produced *Expecting the Unexpected: Developing Creativity in primary and secondary schools* (2003) which was followed by The Department for Culture, Media and Sport report *Nurturing Creativity in Young People* (2006a), and, the Office for Standards in Education report *Creative Partnerships: Initiative and Impact*. (2006), with each document claiming that creative practices, including drama, were beneficial in terms of motivating pupils to learn and encouraging them to collaborate. Indeed, even earlier, in *Drama from 5 to 16*, the Department of Education and Science had given powerful reasons for including drama in the curriculum: ‘By testing and, where possible, resolving human predicaments, drama helps pupils to face intellectual, physical, social and emotional challenges’ (DfES 1989:1).

Rose’s *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* (DfE 2009) urged for more weight to be given to drama and that it should be placed centrally along with art, music and dance, within the proposed new area of learning entitled ‘Understanding the Arts’. Although the recommendations of Rose were not taken up by the Coalition Government in 2010, drama remains part of the Speaking and Listening Programme of Study within the revised National Curriculum and the Ofsted inspection report *Learning: Creative Approaches that Raise Standard* (2010) found that in schools where there was good teaching there was no conflict between the National Curriculum, national standards in the core subjects and creative approaches to teaching and learning. In *English programmes of study: Key Stages 1 and 2 National Curriculum in England*, the Department for Education states that:

All pupils should be enabled to participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama. Pupils should be able to adopt, create and sustain a range of roles, responding appropriately to others in role.

(DfE 2013: 14).

Over decades, the ‘drama in education’ approach has been advocated as a learning tool to support children in developing their creativity, imagination and social skills. (Slade 1954;

Vygotsky 1978; Heathcote and Bolton 1994; Mosely 1996; Baldwin 2004; Neelands 2009). The approach is claimed to lead to an authentic pupil voice and to enable students to learn resilience, team work and problem-solving of a high quality, giving them the potential to understand their situations and to perceive new possibilities, hence empowering them to better fulfil their potential. In *Learning, Playing and Interacting. Good practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage*, the Department for Children, Schools and Families had stated that

In taking on a role a child sees how it feels to have another point of view, learns that the world looks different to different people....this awareness of being a thinker and a learner is one of the strongest supports for successful learning.

(DCSF 2009: 39)

whilst Ofsted (2010) in *Learning: Creative Approaches that Raise Standards*, stated that role play encouraged pupils to explore ideas, practise empathy, make decisions and build confidence.

Guided by the search of the literature, when the female pupils in the school involved in this study requested a provision which was “fun”, would help them to “learn better around the boys” and was “just for the girls”, it was within this aspect of arts that a vehicle was sought. It was hoped that this would help the school to discover how the girls’ attitudes to learning might be impacting upon their progress and to identify ways in which teaching within the school might then be tailored or adapted to better meet these pupils’ needs. Cornwall and Walter (2006) suggest that a learning environment that is inspirational, motivational, enjoyable and inclusive can be deemed as therapeutic and it was precisely such an experience which it was hoped would result from participation in the intervention which the school sought to provide.

### **2.3 Therapeutic Education**

When Prime Minister David Cameron launched the National Well-being Project in 2010, results of surveys of children’s happiness had prompted a focus upon their mental health with one of the researchers involved in the study quote as saying ‘ there is something going on in the UK and it seems to be focused on self-esteem and confidence’ (Bradshaw 2016). When the authors of a commissioned Final Report to Creativity, Culture and Education (McLellan *et al.* 2012) were tasked in part to explore how Creative Partnerships projects had affected student well-being they adopted the Department of Health (2009) definition of well-being as ‘a positive state of mind and body, feeling able to cope, with a sense of connection with people, communities

and the wider environment'. They also drew upon the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan, which identifies people's innate needs in terms of competence, autonomy and relatedness and which the authors considered to be the qualities which equally underpinned the central aim of the Creative Partnerships programme. The study involved 20 primary and 20 secondary schools, with those schools which had been involved in Creative Partnerships being matched in terms of size, attainment and catchment with school that had not been involved in the project. The study found that schools involved in the Creative Partnership initiative tended to view a creative way of learning as consistent with promoting well-being and that pupils functioned better when they felt better about themselves. The authors concluded that 'Creative Partnerships works, or similar initiatives, do have the potential to make a positive impact on student well-being' (2012: 188).

However, since the demise of the National Strategies and a Government which has increasingly emphasised the importance of a National Curriculum that outlines 'core knowledge in the traditional subjects disciplines' (DfE 2010: 42), a future government-directed delivery of social and emotional aspects of education seems unlikely; although former Prime Minister Cameron placed focus on the happiness and well-being agenda, this contrasted sharply with the views of former Secretary of State Michael Gove, who following a recent review of the Ofsted framework, tasked inspectors to:

'...concentrate on what matters and forget the peripherals' This seems to represent a consensus ministerial view since, on another occasion the Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, has dismissed social and emotional learning as 'ghastly' and likely to distract from 'the core subjects of academic education'.

(McLellan *et al.* 2012: 171)

In contrast, Schleicher (PISA 2014) called for parents, educators and employers to continue to find ways to address social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning, thus opening young children's minds to their abilities and guaranteeing their present future well-being whilst Garner (2013:1) contends that there is a 'generic relevance' in promoting the continued development of social and emotional aspects of learning, maintaining that in spite of the critical viewpoints expressed by some, there remains a substantial body of research-based evidence to indicate the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils in order to enable them to be more effective and confident learners.

In the United Kingdom in the 1960s and 1970s, Irene Caspari's work led to the establishment of a 'Forum for the Advancement of Educational Therapy'. Caspari held that children might learn more effectively when academic programmes ran alongside work which tapped into therapeutic work on feelings and expression. It is important to distinguish that 'therapeutic' is used here not as in the sense of for, or contributing to the cure of a disease, but rather meaning 'to contribute to general, especially mental, well-being' (Cornwall and Walter 2006: 72). Proponents of therapeutic education claim that it maintains and raises self-esteem and self-awareness through its' promotion of increased social and emotional literacy; it encompasses the concepts of nurture, growth and development in that teaching starts from where the learner is, giving her responsibility and the confidence to engage with others and the curriculum.

Drama therapy is the intentional use of drama and/or theatre processes to achieve therapeutic goals; it is described as active and experiential; proponents of the approach, (Lindkvist 1964; Emunah 1994; Croombs 2008; Rousseau, Benoit, Gauthier, Lacroix, Alain, Rojas, Moran and Bourassa 2007) claim that it provides the context for participants to tell their stories, set goals and solve problems, express feelings, or achieve catharsis and that through drama, the depth and breadth of inner experience can be actively explored and interpersonal relationship skills can be enhanced. Participants can expand their repertoire of dramatic roles to find that their own life roles have been strengthened. Leaders in socio-drama and psychodrama approaches advocate working in role in groups to focus upon sociological problems; the work of Moreno (1889-1974), and Fuerstein (1980) for example, has led the way for drama therapy practitioners who wish to support participants to behave in different ways within fiction, aiding understanding of the actions, intentions and emotions of others through conceptual reasoning, and such approaches have supported groups of adults and young people across the globe. As early as in 1999, the NACCCE report found that such interventions can have an impact on self-esteem and on overall achievement.

There are many studies that demonstrate issues around children's and young people's emotional health, particularly over the last decade (Collishaw, Maughan, Goodman and Pickles 2004; Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan and Pickles 2010; Schepman, Collishaw, Gardner, Maughan, Scott and Pickles 2011; Childline, 2014), although studies have compared data using differing measures of wellbeing and with differing sample populations and so trends regarding mental and emotional health in young people are difficult to establish.

Drama therapy has become increasingly widely used most particularly over some time in secondary phase, though more recently also in the primary phase, to help individuals or targeted groups of disaffected pupils (Quibell 2010) and to help reintegrate students at risk of exclusion back into the mainstream classroom (Christiansen 2010); another study documents how drama therapy significantly decreased pupils' loneliness and social dissatisfaction scores (Anari 2009). Thus, drama therapy has usually been focused upon meeting the needs of young people with specific issues to address, but is now seen as a useful approach for a range of wider school improvement issues (McLellan *et al.* 2012); whole school interventions have been increasingly used with the intention of supporting pupils' emotional and social development (Karkou and Sanderson 2006) with the result that teachers reported that students were actively engaged that they appeared more confident and more able to communicate with others (Karkou and Glasman, cited in Bannerjee 2007).

Certain conditions are seen to be necessary to the therapeutic drama approach in order for it to be effective: group drama therapy sessions take place in a venue of an adequate size for the drama-based activities, in an area where there are clear physical boundaries and where interruptions are minimised and in a non-threatening social setting which stimulates spontaneity and participation. The age range and gender criteria of the participants reflect the objectives of the group. Jennings (1990) outlines the component parts of a drama therapy session as: check in; warm up; main development; closure; de-role; relaxation - although this formula varies to some degree from practitioner to practitioner. Several sessions are accepted as necessary to build adequate rapport between therapist and child. It is also common practice for drama therapy practitioners to use the mask as a tool in their practice:

Mask work can be very powerful both in the theatre and therapeutically...masks are one way of assisting ... greater focus on the theme, image or character. A mask enables the transformation from a person's everyday self to a character.

(Jennings 1990: 108)

The active participation required in each session, a focus on the creative process rather than on outcomes and the development of a non-judgemental atmosphere in which creativity can flourish (Malchiodi 2008) enable the participants to 'find a voice' which may have been otherwise inhibited. Perhaps most pertinently to this study, drama therapists claim that role-playing - and acting out issues and problems - is more effective than talking (Landy 1993). McFarlane describes the initial steps:

Firstly a group may be set up to explore a particular issue which is felt the children have in common and which is preventing them from benefiting from their education...such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence.

(McFarlane 2005: 95)

Nevertheless, the use of therapeutic interventions can be controversial. It has been argued that currently therapeutic ideas dominate social thought and policies, offering a diminished view of human potential and that a ‘therapeutic climate’ in schools is anti-educational: it fosters dependence, as well as promoting activities requiring the disclosure of one’s emotions to others; using therapeutic approaches in schools leads to a practice which allows for the way that children feel taking precedence over what they learn and that this is exposing children to a ‘dangerous’ practice of teaching them what and how to feel (Ecclestone and Hayes 2009), as opposed to guiding them to an understanding of life through active engagement with the world about them. Emotional education is seen as well-intended, but actually disempowering in outcome for pupils (Furedi 2004) and arguments are made for a less interventionist approach (Craig 2007). In addition, some writers warn against attitudes of discipline protectiveness and preciousness towards therapeutic expertise whilst others insist that only trained therapists should deal with emotional issues of this nature (Webb, Stewart, Bunting and Regan 2012).

In the case of this study, in the context of a school improvement issue, the focus on the use of a therapeutic intervention, using trained practitioners who understand the context of the school and the nature of the enquiry, was not implemented in order to publicly address the emotional problems of individual pupils, but - and this is most particularly relevant for school improvement in an area of disadvantage - was aimed at developing and finding ways to provide a climate for learning where students could develop self-esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging and ‘school connectedness’ (McLaughlin and Clarke 2010), so that they are given the very best opportunities to learn. For McLellan *et al.*, this climate includes ‘a curriculum which affords choice {and} provides opportunities for self-direction...will enhance intrinsic motivation and promote feelings of autonomy and self-efficacy’ (2012: 8).

The view of the Coalition Government, as outlined by Nick Gibb in the Policy Exchange document *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (2012) was that society’s inequalities can be most effectively tackled by providing children and young people with an educational experience which fosters the authority of sound subject knowledge and intellectual rigour. However, whilst such considerations are necessary, they are not sufficient: as this literature review has attempted

to discuss, there is a fundamental danger in schools being driven by a purely standards agenda which leads them to ignore approaches which aim to build ‘a strong social and emotional foundation on which both academic and personal success ultimately depend’ (Webb *et al.* 2012). The school leaders in this study adhered to the view that pupils have the capacity to influence decision-making and that given a voice they can ‘act as a catalyst in bringing about changes in teaching’ (McLellan *et al.* 2012: 2); thus, an effective way of implementing an intervention might be to encourage the pupils to become involved as ‘co-researchers’, assisting in the ongoing design and evaluation of an intervention. Cheminais (2012) identifies a number of benefits to be gained by pupils’ involvement in action research: participants gain a sense of pride and satisfaction in solving a problem or making a change or an improvement that benefits their peers; they develop useful life skills and increase their communication skills; they learn how to become reflective, critical thinkers; they become better able to work with a range of partners and they gain greater self-confidence because they feel respected, listened to and taken seriously by teachers and other adults. This is an approach which is in line with Vygotsky’s concept of social constructivism, wherein adults and children generate new practices and problem solutions together.

In the Ofsted Report *Learning: Creative Approaches that Raise Standards*, the authors note that in the 44 schools inspected, the most effective teachers made use of creative approaches where

emphasis was placed on developing skills, especially problem-solving and communication and skills. Role play was used to explore ideas, to encourage empathy and speculation, to practise working in teams and making decisions and to build confidence.

(Ofsted 2010: 37)

It was in this spirit that the provision for the participants in this study was conceived and implemented.

## **2.4 Summary**

Through a search of the literature as described here, research into a range of barriers to learning for pupils in schools have been identified and explored, and the impact of approaches which have been implemented to address these barriers has been examined. The findings from the wide range of brain-based research upon the differences between genders and the impact of these

differences upon how boys and girls learn, is complex and contested; physiological and chemical differences are not in themselves sufficient to enable firm conclusions about gender differences in learning to be drawn at the present time. Findings from research into how boys and girls are nurtured, indicates that girls and boys are generally nurtured differently and that this continues to affect how they view themselves and others, how and what they learn and how and what they are taught. Because communities and learning environments vary enormously, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of single-sex provisions: studies conclude that quality-first teaching and relationships seem to contribute best to the achievement of learners. It is clear from the literature that there is wide agreement that social class and the parents' or carers' self-efficacy impact upon the child's self-efficacy and that this in turn affects a child's capacity to access educational opportunity. There are a wide range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors to consider in relation to learner motivation and these are closely interlinked with student-teacher relationships and with teacher expectation and perceptions of learners' abilities, which in turn can be affected by what the teachers know or believe about aspects of the pupils' lives. Co-construction of learning through the elicitation of pupil voice continues to be problematic: adults continue to need to be more prepared to hear and to take on board what children are saying in relation to how they learn best, but more appropriate vehicles need to continue to be sought which enable young people's views to be heard so that barriers to learning can be more effectively addressed. The search of the literature has also brought to attention the effectiveness of certain data collection tools used in research with children and young people, which merit consideration in the methodology design of this action research. Evaluations of creative and social and emotional approaches to learning suggest that these approaches have some impact upon learner confidence, engagement and motivation to learn. However, there is less evidence of the impact of such approaches on pupil attainment in the short term. Whilst acknowledging misgivings about a devaluation of knowledge and subject disciplines and the controversy around the social and emotional aspects of learning and the well-being agenda, the researcher has explored the advantages to be had in the context of the suitability of a creative, therapeutic approach for the pupils in this study.

## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology**

This chapter outlines the methodology employed to address the aims of the research. The rationale for the focus of the research is explained; the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings which led to the choice of an action research model are discussed and the fluid and evolving nature of the research design is described. The ethical considerations, with regard to my dual role as head teacher and researcher are explored, as are issues of informed consent in relation to child- participants and to the informed consent of their parents and carers. The mixed-method collection of quantitative and qualitative data is described from the outset of the pilot through to the main phases of the research. Some considerations of reflexivity and generalizability particular to this study are explored. Significant consideration is given to the main qualitative data collection tool, with regard to ethical practice and validation exercises.

### **3.1 Rationale**

As part of the recognised and established school improvement processes, it is expected regular practice to interrogate attainment data during the academic year in order to identify areas for concern and focus which can then be addressed, usually by employing some form of intervention programme for identified pupils and later evaluating the impact. For the school in this study, progress is a key identifier for participation in the intervention, rather than attainment, since this is a small primary school where numbers on roll are lower than the national average, and where each small cohort is arguably unique in terms of differing though usually high levels of Special and additional Educational Need, rendering comparison of attainment measures across cohorts unreliable. Interrogation of the progress data which gave rise this study indicated that many female pupils and particularly those in two of the four Key Stage 2 cohorts were making slower progress since their Key Stage 1 assessments than their male peers (Appendix A). Informal staffroom discussions about these Key Stage 2 cohorts had highlighted staff perceptions around differences in male and female pupils' attitudes to learning, engagement and motivation so that, in the light of the progress data, and what had been learned from a search of the literature, an initial Research Question was formulated:

RQ 1: What can our female pupils tell us about their barriers to learning?

### 3.2 Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

In the school in this study, it was the school leaders' view that what had been identified in the first instance was a potential gender inequality in progress rates and so a way was sought to examine and to address this. Of action research McNiff and Whitehead, write that it 'is based on certain principles - the need for justice and democracy, the right of all people to speak and be heard' (McNiff and Whithead 2002).

The identification of a problem and an exploration of possible interventions or solutions, thereafter evaluating the impact of these and learning from the actions sits within the range of naturalistic models of action research with their emphasis on personal experiences and interpretation and where theories are developed from specific observations and enquiry is inductive. Following Lewin (1946), then Corey and others in the U.S.A, Lawrence Stenhouse's work in the UK, *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development* (1975) demonstrated the usefulness of action research for studying the theory and practice of teaching and the curriculum. Stenhouse saw action research by practitioners as a crucial tool for the development of effective curriculum development. At its' essence, action research is an approach commonly used for improving conditions, to bring about change in specific contexts (Parkin 2009); for Kemmis, action research is emancipatory, and a 'practical expression of the aspiration' (Kemmis 1993: 2) to improve the educational world. Reason and Bradbury claim that 'the primary purpose of action research is to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives' (2001: 2). Stringer (2004) sees this form of enquiry as one where researchers engage in activities in order to acquire information which has practical application to the solution of specific problems, rather than for the purposes of discovering new facts or revising accepted theories.

Markless suggests that many approaches to teachers' professional development rest on the supposition that there is a body of accumulated knowledge, which is developed by academics, that 'teachers are required to accept and may draw on as and when they need, to improve their practice' (Markless 2003: 147). She sees this as a sterile and controlling approach to educational improvement, disempowering teachers and presenting obstacles to professional development. Similarly, McNiff notes that action research carried out by teachers is regularly portrayed as of much less importance than research undertaken by researchers who 'propose certain hypotheses which are then implemented by others within practical situations. Theory comes before practice. The form of theory is propositional' (McNiff 1992: 14).

McNiff claims that action research enables teachers to develop their understanding of their own practice and to turn this into a form of research, and that it challenges the notion that teachers need only be 'passive consumers' of the published findings of traditional, academic research.

The type of enquiry conducted by the action researcher is driven by the pursuit of meanings and interpretations which are socially constructed: as opposed to the positivist approach which demands logical or scientific support for beliefs, action research exemplifies a post-modernist approach to epistemology in which emerging beliefs and the construction of reality occurs through interpretations of the participants' experiences and communications. The types of data collected are generally subjective, so that the insights generated are of a unique nature. It follows that it is important that action researchers describe their work in rich contextual detail since 'the contributions arising from action research and any generalisations are different from other forms of research' (Koshy, Koshy and Waterman 2011: 11), so that

the validity of the concepts, models and results it generates depends not so much on scientific tests of truth as on their utility in helping practitioners to act more effectively, skilfully and intelligently.

(McKernan in Lea *et al.* 2003: 147)

Proponents of action research see strengths in the collaborative nature of the model whereby participants' perceptions are sought and incorporated, and in the recognition of the subjectivity of the researcher. However, the belief that our subjective structuring of experience constitutes knowledge introduces a relativism which may impede the rigour of any research project. Hayes sees danger in 'the set of ideas that results in an easy acceptance of alternative 'knowledges' or 'truths'' (Lea *et al.* 2003: 153). Hayes regards action research not as theoretical scientific research, but as a form of 'quite ordinary' professional investigation into practice, but that nevertheless, despite its 'false objectivity' such a methodology may provide a bridge to more rigorous methodologies by highlighting issues or problems which in their turn can lead to serious academic study.

Todd (1997) has argued that action research does not require participants to be professional researchers, but that practitioners can become increasingly reflective and develop their research skills by doing the research, sharing their learning and being open to critical scrutiny. Koshy *et al.* (2010) observe that action research findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute. Nevertheless it can be argued that findings from small-scale, practice-

based investigations can lead to fresh insights that are of genuine value to others. Similarly, Altrichter, Posch and Somekh (1993), claim that whilst action research generated solutions may not be applicable to other contexts, they can be made accessible to others as hypotheses to be tested. Waterman, Tillen, Dickson and deKonig (2001: 4) further postulate that different types of knowledge may be produced by action research including 'practical and propositional', and that theory may be generated and refined and its general application explored through cycles of the action research process.

In their exploration of a range of Health and Social Care action research projects, Koshy *et al.* conclude that the ultimate objective of the research enquiry is 'the production of a greater understanding in order to produce practical principles and strategies for the improvement of (a) system' (Koshy *et al.* 2011: 23). At its most rigorous, then, action research *can* and *should* make a contribution to educational theory and this outcome must surely be the ultimate aim of any research-based school project.

### **3.3 Research Design**

The strength of action research could be claimed to lie in its focus on generating solutions to practical problems (Meyer 2000). It involves action, evaluation and critical reflection and changes in practice based on the evidence gathered, which are then implemented. It is useful to identify some underlying principles of action research: these include

- Participatory character (Carl and Kemmis, 1986: 164). Because of the participative and collaborative nature of this form of enquiry, there is opportunity to empower participants through engagement with the research process, by developing reflections based upon interpretations made by those participants and the subsequent development or implementation activities.
- Democratic impulse. For Meyer (2000) this means that the researcher works as a facilitator of change, consulting with participants not only on the action process but also on how it will be evaluated. Throughout the research process the findings are fed back to participants for validation. In this way action research requires that participants are seen as equals.
- Simultaneous contribution to social science (knowledge) and social change (practice). Advocates of action research argue that practitioners have to rely on their intuition and experience since knowledge - for example the findings from scientific research - often do

not seem to fit with the uniqueness of the situation. Action research is regarded as one way of dealing with this because it draws on the practitioners' situations and experiences and can therefore generate findings that are meaningful to them (McNiff 1992).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2000: 595) state that action research involves a spiral of self-reflective cycles of:

- Planning a change
- Acting and observing the process and consequences of the change
- Reflecting on these processes and consequences and then re-planning
- Acting and observing
- Reflecting

Figure 3.1 illustrates the spiral model of action research proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart.

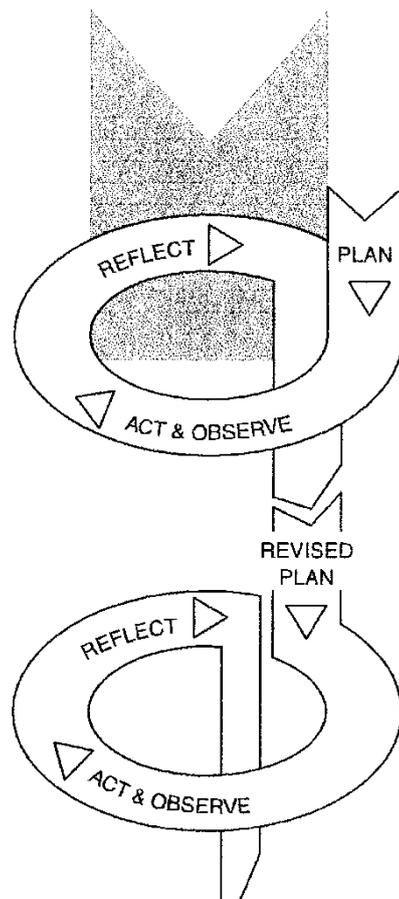


Figure 3.1: to illustrate the spiral model of action research proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000)

Models employed by others, such as Elliot (1991) share features of Kemmis and McTaggart's model, but include the step of identifying a general idea with reconnaissance or fact-finding. Kemmis and McTaggart do not advocate that the spiral model should be used as a neat rigid structure: sometimes the stages might overlap and plans will change in the light of new learning from the experience of the action research process itself. This model gives the participants the opportunity to revisit the phenomenon at a deeper level each time so as to ultimately gain a greater overall understanding. The concept of action research as a cyclical process, which takes shape as knowledge, emerges can also be found in O'Leary's work (2004). O'Leary sees action research as an experiential learning approach, where methods are continually refined and data is re-examined and interpreted in the light of newer understandings over time. One potential disadvantage of the spiral model is that the process can take a considerable time to complete. However, advocates of spiral models contend that an excessive compliance to any one particular model, or following stages or cycles too rigidly can adversely affect the unique opportunities for new learning that may arise; over the lifetime of a study a range of data-gathering instruments can be employed and data can be interrogated periodically so that the model

may be translated into modifications, adjustment, directional changes, redefinitions, as necessary, so as to bring about lasting benefit to the ongoing process itself rather to some future occasion.

(Cohen and Manion 1994: 192)

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

As the head teacher of the school in this study, I was in a unique position to be able to legitimately act as observer and recorder of a range of classroom and extra-curricular activities across the school at any given time, as this falls within the remit of the role. Similarly, head teachers are regularly able to take opportunities to elicit the views of all stakeholders on a range of aspects of school life for the purpose of whole school improvement; indeed, such mechanisms as surveys, questionnaires and interviews are recognised and encouraged by Ofsted and the Department of Education as legitimate strategic tools of the head teacher when driving forward school improvement. All the stakeholders in this study were and are, familiar with me in my professional role as head teacher. Although they were well-accustomed to mechanisms of school improvement enquiry, I fully recognised from the outset that a dual position as researcher and as head teacher in this school gave rise to a number of ethical considerations. Because the research design relied heavily upon data generated through activities with children, and because of my

own professional familiarity with the participants and setting, it was of the utmost importance that this study be designed with rigour and due regard to validity, reliability and ethical considerations. The British Educational Research Association guidelines with regard to a respect for persons, knowledge, democratic values and for the quality of educational research were closely adhered to: a principled methodology must always in the first instance ensure non-maleficence, from the outset of the research design, and the researcher must be clear about how the outcomes of any research ‘might usefully be translated into tangible benefits’ (O’Reilly, Ronzoni and Dogra 2013: 41). In the case of all respondents to the questionnaires, all responses were anonymous unless the respondent themselves chose to make themselves known. Participants must have autonomy in that they should make active decisions regarding their participation, but in school research this is underscored by an acknowledgement of the vulnerability of children and young people due to their immaturity and their lack of economic and political power in contrast to the adults involved:

our primary obligation is always to the people we study, not to our project or to a larger discipline. The lives and stories that we hear and study are given to us under a promise, that promise being that we protect those who have shared them with us.

(Denzin 1989:83)

### **3.4.1 Issues of Informed Consent**

Participants in research should be treated justly and equitably and the intention of the research question must be overt so that participants appreciate that certain interpretations of actions and value judgements will be made. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) clearly states children’s rights to express their views on all matters that affect them. Pupils were informed about the study and its intentions in an age- appropriate way (Fine and Sandstrom, 1998), and the researcher was mindful that

children cannot be treated just like adults as research subject. Because their capabilities, perspectives and needs are different, children approach the research context uniquely and encounter a different constellation of research risks and benefits from their participation.

(Thompson *et al.* 1998, cited in Mackey and Gass 2005: 33)

Participation in all elements of this study was voluntary. The participant pupils and their parents and carers were assured of the participants’ right to refuse to take part or to withdraw from all

aspects of the research (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight 1996), and this was reiterated during the pilot by myself and also later in the main project by the artist- practitioner at the outset of each phase of the project and in every session. O’Kane (2001, cited in Mukhergi and Albon 2010: 50) suggests that participatory research methods may allow children more ownership over their research and that this can mean they are more motivated to participate. Rights of privacy and confidentiality were assured throughout and mechanisms were put in place to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, including anonymization of individual pupils and groups to avoid ease of association and to ensure continued anonymity in wider dissemination of findings as the project progressed. All data collected has been stored securely at all times and shared only where it has been appropriate and ethical to do so. The informed consent of parents and carers was also sought at the outset of both the pilot and subsequently the main study. However, the participants’ age and immaturity gave rise to further considerations; in addition to ensuring informed consent from all stakeholders at the outset of each phase of the project,

in exploratory or investigative research the notion of ‘informed’ is problematic, as the precise course to be taken by the research is unpredictable. Explaining to young children the nature and consequences of research can make the term ‘informed’ seem even more inappropriate.

(Flewitt 2005: 4)

For Flewitt, ‘provisional consent’ is a more fitting description, where participants agree to a broadly outlined framework of the research which is then built upon and negotiated as ‘ongoing consent’ which cannot be assumed but must be freshly established as the research progresses and is dependent upon the collaborative and trusting relationships between researcher, practitioner and participants.

### **3.5 Initial Data Collection Methods**

It was envisaged that in order to evaluate the impact of an intervention which would be focused upon changes in attitude to learning and school, both quantitative and qualitative methods might be employed to be complementary, and analysed in combination. It is important in action research, where mixed-methods are employed, that results from one data set are checked against the results from others, so that there is cross-verification of data from a range of sources; in this

way, triangulation can assist the researcher in avoiding intrinsic bias and can help to provide a balanced and detailed view (Altrichter *et al.* 2008), aiding the validity of any conclusions drawn, which might then be used to inform further practice and provision in the school.

Thus, whilst quantitative data was available at each stage of the research in this study, the nature of the therapeutic intervention sessions produced a range of rich, qualitative data which was employed to triangulate findings and aid validation of the conclusions drawn.

### **3.5.1 The Pupil Survey**

It was the usual practice of the school to distribute an annual survey to pupils, in the form of a simple scaled questionnaire, as a means of gaining their views on how the school's provision could be improved. Whilst the questionnaire has been one of the most 'used and abused means of collecting information', (Anderson 1998: 170) for research purposes, it is arguably a useful tool as a starting point in gauging the views of participants and so for these pupils this was a familiar activity which could quickly produce some initial quantitative data on which to base the research design. Koshy suggests that 'Using a questionnaire will provide you with a simple means to collect information on student attitudes, before any intervention takes place' (Koshy 2010: 83).

The questionnaire (Appendix B) was adapted from that which has been used annually by the school over the last five years as a tool to elicit pupil views in order to inform school improvement priorities. Modified previously with his permission (Appendix C) from those used extensively by Galton (see also Galton 2000, 2007) in his studies over a prolonged period on pupil attitudes to learning and student well-being, Galton's questionnaires have been developed over time and in a recent study developed and adapted yet again through consultation with existing wellbeing and motivation instruments and models including:

the New Economic Foundation's (2009) model of wellbeing that focuses on four key areas of personal feelings...and...{drawing upon } the five Every Child Matters outcomes defines in the Children's Act (2004)... self-determination theory... (Deci and Ryan 1985) ... the Academic Self – Regulation Scale (Ryan and Connell 1989), Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Baard, Deci *et al.* 2004) and the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory (Ryan, Koestner *et al.* 1991).

(McLellan *et al.* 2012: 26)

The statements in the questionnaire were historically designed to inform whole school improvement planning, but in terms of this study, because female pupil progress had been identified as a priority issue for school improvement, the questionnaire was specifically designed and analysed to provide a snapshot of gender differences in attitudes to learning, in order to explore the initial Research Question and to attempt to measure any changes in attitude which might be detected at the end of the pilot and the main project.

Table 3.1 shows three aspects of pupils' presentation as learners which I determined in consultation with teaching and support staff during informal staffroom discussions; staff opinions were that pupils who made the most of the opportunities offered to them at the school were those who were most able to build and sustain positive peer relationships; they demonstrated a confident and relaxed attitude around the school site, they showed enthusiasm and seemed to enjoy what they were learning and they liked to 'give new things a go'; they knew that they were 'good at things' and had an aspirational outlook. By contrast, perceptions were that some of the pupils, and particularly some female pupils in some cohorts, seemed often fearful or withdrawn within social groupings; they struggled in their peer relationships. In the classroom these pupils seemed to lack enthusiasm and engagement in the learning and they appeared unwilling to take risks and 'have a go' when new learning experiences were introduced. From these informal comments, I composed 12 statements, modelled on some of the Interpersonal, Life Satisfaction and Perceived Competence statements taken from a recent study (McLellan, Galton *et al.* 2012), which I hoped would reflect as closely as possible those characteristics which the staff had identified as indicative of a pupil's well-being and attitude to learning in the classroom and their perceived barriers to learning.

This simple 3-point scaled questionnaire was devised to ensure the inclusion of all children, taking into account their ages and the low literacy levels and attention span of some pupils in the identified cohorts and formatted so that there were opportunities for open comments, providing in addition the potential for the collection of some qualitative data.

**3.1: Table to show Aspects, Contributory Items and Statements as used in the Pupil Attitude Survey.**

(Modelled upon the Student Well-being Questionnaire, McLellan *et al.* 2012).

Aspect	Contributory items	Statement in the Survey
Interpersonal	Feeling close to people Feeling safe Feeling part of things Feeling appreciated	1. I feel relaxed in my classroom 8. I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I'm not sure 9. I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom 10. I feel comfortable with most of my classmates
Life Satisfaction	Feeling things are fun Feeling there's lots to look forward to Feeling enthusiastic	2. I try hard with my work 3. What we learn is interesting 4. What we learn is fun 12. I feel that I will do well in future and have a good job
Perceived Competence	Feeling capable of coping with challenges Feeling confident Feeling Successful	6. I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher 7. I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions 11. I feel that I am capable of doing better 5. What we learn is easy (reversed)

All male and female pupils in the cohorts were invited to participate in the survey. The procedure used followed the same procedure by which the school's survey is annually introduced and completed. All male and female pupils in the cohorts in which progress data had raised the concerns described, and who were present in school on the day, were issued with the questionnaire. I introduced the questionnaire and its aims verbally to the pupils within their classrooms in the presence of the class teachers and support staff. Pupils were encouraged to ask any questions they had about the questionnaire or the use to which it might be put. All pupils

were assured that confidentiality would be maintained, that they could complete the questionnaire anonymously and that there was ‘no right or wrong answer’. Pupils were asked to ensure that the responses were their own, authentic opinions (i.e. not to copy their friends’ responses). I read each of the 12 questions to the pupils in order to overcome the low levels of literacy of some of the pupils. The questionnaires were completed in around 15 minutes in each classroom and were then gathered up for analysis. The survey provided quantitative data in the form of a numerical tally of the scaled responses, and richer qualitative data from the open comment section which identified some specifically female pupil concerns.

### **3.5.2. The Staff Survey**

In order to triangulate views and opinions of stakeholders, a differing perspective was sought from a validator group: baseline data was collected through a survey of a purposive sample of those seven staff members who were based every day and throughout the week in the classrooms. These staff members had the greatest regular opportunity to work with and observe pupils on a daily basis; they were invited to complete an anonymous 4-point scaled questionnaire in order to explore their perceptions about the girls’ learning and with additional space for individual comment (Appendix D).

For ease of comparison, the statements used in the staff questionnaire were designed to closely match those in the pupil survey. This questionnaire was designed to be quick and simple to complete in order that staff were not over burdened with yet another additional task in a very demanding workplace - it was hoped that this would encourage a good level of response! In order to avoid the potential prejudicing of staff responses, given my role as head teacher within the school, respondent validation took the form of a short whole staff discussion about perceptions of our female pupils’ barriers to learning to which all staff present contributed, incorporated into a usual weekly staff meeting agenda and reported back to me by the Deputy head teacher. The staff responses to the 12 questions posed in the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively.

Throughout the study, these pupil and staff surveys were repeated so that data from the various stages of the study could be collected and analysed, enabling comparison of data sets from which conclusions were drawn which further informed the action research. Whilst acknowledging a danger of regression in repeating the surveys, I considered that this was

outweighed by the advantages of using a questionnaire format which was familiar for the pupils and staff, easy for staff to find time to respond to and that the opportunities afforded for open comment might provide some useful comparative data in the form of detailed indications of change in perception from respondents over time.

Using data in this cyclical way is in line with Whitehead's model (cited in McNiff 2002), where the researcher comes upon information which highlights an issue that it seems important to investigate, considers the kinds of evidence that might be gathered which confirms that it is worthy of investigation; actions are then explored, chosen and undertaken in order to impact upon the situation; the evidence which is gathered is judged on how fairly and accurately it demonstrates that impact and finally, the learning from the research informs further practice. Employing the outcomes of questionnaires in order to establish a baseline from which to develop school improvement must be treated with caution. Citing Cluskey, McNiff observes that questionnaires can be misleading and respondents unreliable: 'Issuing a questionnaire is a political act because questionnaires are not neutral. They can influence their respondents and alert them to ideas they had not thought about before.' (McNiff, J. *et al.* 2003: 121).

Yin (cited in Tellis 1997) suggests that multiple sources of evidence can be a way to ensure construct validity: quantitative and qualitative data can be analysed in combination to enable triangulation, in order to add to the reliability and validity of the research. Thus, in addition to the qualitative data provided by the 'open comments' sections of the pupil and staff questionnaires, a focus group was arranged in order to generate qualitative data through discussion between participants supported by the researcher as facilitator. Creswell talks of the benefits of a mixed model with its possibility of the quantitative and qualitative data being 'merged into one large database or the results used side by side to reinforce each other' (Creswell 2007: 14) and (citing Tashakkori and Teddle 1998), describes situations where results from one method can help to identify questions to ask using another method.

### **3.5.3 The Pupil Focus Group**

Focus groups can be used as a form of method triangulation along with, for example, quantitative or qualitative questionnaires and single interviews. Matthews and Ross see the focus group as an appropriate method of data collection to use 'when the researcher is gathering

qualitative data about people's experiences, ideas and understandings and has an interest in why they experience the social world in this way' (Matthews and Ross 2010: 236).

Matthew and Ross describe as 'exploration' that form of focus group which is used to discover what participants think is important about an issue and the nature of the language and concepts which they use in their discussions. Gibson (2012) writes that consideration must be given to the cognitive, linguistic, and psychological differences between adults and children when conducting focus groups with young children: the activity took place in the school's 'yurt', which pupils generally identify with comfortable, fun and creative activities. In my role as the researcher, I led the group, but the smaller groups were facilitated by teaching and support staff well-known to the pupils.

Research generally suggests that focus groups are most effective when there are between 5 and 13 participants (Matthews and Ross 2010): in the case of this study, the three oldest cohorts of female pupils were all invited to participate, resulting in a larger than usual focus group of 29 participants: it was considered by the teaching and support staff that as a group these most mature primary female pupils might provide the fullest and most inclusive view of the nature of the issue being explored and be the most able to support each other to articulate what they perceived as barriers to learning for female pupils across the school. In small, mixed cohort groupings, the female pupils were encouraged to discuss the question:

What things make it hard to learn in the classroom?

Each group was facilitated by a member of the staff and their views collected on 'Post-Its' which were then shared with the larger group (Appendix E).

### **3. 6 Qualitative Data Analysis Tools**

The responses to the open comments section of the questionnaire offered rich qualitative data for analysis, as did the female pupils' 'Post-Its' responses and the opinions, views and suggestions which I had noted during the focus group, and so a range of qualitative data analysis tools was explored.

The Template Analysis method (Cassell and Symon (eds.) 2004) which emerged during the 1990s has some similarity to Grounded Theory approach but is arguably more fitting to a smaller scale study (King 2008), and provides the researcher with a more tangible starting point than the more 'bottom up', Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Although in the Thematic Analysis approach, analysis of data usually starts with some themes which are strongly expected to be relevant, they can be modified, sub themes can be created, or themes

even dispensed with on the basis of further interrogation. Thus, in order to interrogate the data, a template analysis approach to thematic coding of the word frequency and vocabulary used in staff and pupil independent personal comments was applied and qualitative data software was then employed to quantify and to aid visualisation of the emergent themes (Appendix F). These two sets of preliminary data gave rise to emergent themes indicative of the nature of the pupils' perceived barriers to learning and suggestive of possible solutions:

- Gender: Difficulties in accessing the learning were faced by female pupils, particularly in gender in-balanced cohorts. A single-sex intervention might address this issue.
- Self-efficacy: The self-perceptions of female pupils, matched by the perceptions of the staff, indicated that they felt that they were not fully able to access and engage in the learning. A creative or therapeutic intervention might address this issue.

The context of the school, the issues which had been raised and an examination of the literature treating creative and therapeutic school improvement approaches in regard to these emergent themes led to the formulation of a further research question:

RQ2: What is the impact of a therapeutic approach to supporting female pupils in overcoming perceived barriers to learning?

Further, as with all school provisions and interventions, the actions undertaken must be evaluated and reflected upon in terms of the outcomes:

RQ3: What can be learned in relation to whole school improvement?

### **3.7 The Pilot Intervention**

A pilot study involving a purposive sample of pupils simultaneously allowed for the researcher to design and to trial and modify quantitative and qualitative data tools for the subsequent larger-scale project, whilst at the same time providing a data set which could be used to measure the impact of the therapeutic arts activities employed during the intervention. The nature of the pilot therapeutic intervention sessions produced a range of quantitative and qualitative data sets which informed the design of the main study.

Initial identification of a purposive sample for the pilot study was via the school's Teacher Assessment grids: these provided quantitative data which could be used numerically and graphically to give a clear evidence of a pupil's rates of progress at the outset of the intervention. Following re-interrogation of this quantitative progress data, one cohort was identified as a target cohort for the intervention pilot. From this cohort, a purposive sample of six female pupils was identified and invited to take part in a pilot activity.

Data analysis identified these pupils as having made slower progress than their peers of both genders in all Key Stage Two cohorts over the previous school year and within the current school year to date. These pupils were also perceived by staff as being less confident in the classroom than their peers. None of the selected pupils had an identified additional or Special Educational Need. The pupils were invited to a preliminary meeting where the concept of the intervention programme was outlined, opportunity was offered to ask questions and their participation in the pilot invited.

As many factors may influence the individual's understanding of the research at the outset of any project it can be useful to check out what potential participants think your role or job is and what they think is going to happen (consenting to participate does not always mean that the information about the project has been fully understood or has removed anxieties).

(O'Reilly *et al.* 2013: 21)

Because this research would involve young children as participants, the concept of informed consent was treated with the greatest care from the outset. During meetings with them prior to the pilot intervention, in accordance with the recognised guidelines 'within an ethic of respect for persons' (British Educational Research Association, Ethical Guidelines 1) it was explained to the pupils that the project would be about seeking to improve the quality of their education by finding ways to maximise their opportunities to give voice to their needs as learners, through involvement in creative and drama activities. The pupils were verbally assured of their autonomy; it was made clear to them that they could decline involvement, and that they had a right to withdraw from activities at any given time. It was explained to them that their inclination to consider participation in the research would be gauged by their willingness to take home a consent letter to parents/carers to inform them of the aims and intentions of the study (Appendix G) and to gain their permission for their children to participate. The return of the signed parental consent form by each pupil would be taken to indicate that the pupils themselves

were willing to take part in at least the first session of the intervention programme. Failure to return the form would not be followed up - it would be accepted that this was an indication that the pupil did not wish to take part. All the consent forms were returned promptly.

The intervention offered during the Pilot Study comprised a series of 8 sessions each lasting 45 minutes and timed so as not to detract from the pupils' curriculum work. The sessions were led by one of the school's Learning Mentors. They incorporated mask making, role play and drama activities, as well as discussions about barriers to learning, leading to planning and trialling strategies which the pupils could continue to use to build their confidence and to support each other to do so within the classroom environment. The pilot study provided the opportunity for the six pilot participants to help to steer the intervention according to that which they perceived might effectively address their own needs.

As the original pupil questionnaires had been completed anonymously, the questionnaire was re-distributed to the pilot group at the outset of the intervention and again anonymously completed, in order to re-establish a base-line measure of the groups' responses in relation to their attitudes in the classroom, their motivation and engagement in learning, their perceived confidence amongst peers and their independence as learners. This was triangulated against questionnaire responses from a validator group in the form of those four staff members who were based daily and throughout the week in the participants' classroom. The quantitative data from the scaled questionnaires was triangulated against qualitative data in the form of the opportunities provided for open comment on both the participant and staff questionnaires. These data collection exercises were repeated at the close of the intervention, with the addition of a rating response exercise for the six participants as an evaluation in the final session of the intervention.

A range of data was therefore available at the end of the pilot:

- outset pupil questionnaires to measure participant perceptions of themselves as learners, repeated at the end of the pilot to provide comparative and quantifiable data to inform conclusions.
- outset staff questionnaires measuring perceptions of staff about the participants' attitudes as learners, repeated at the end of the pilot to provide comparative and quantifiable data to inform conclusions.

- Outset qualitative data in the form of open comments of participants and staff, repeated at the end of the pilot.
- A rated response from the six participants in order that data about the impact of the intervention might be further triangulated.

Interim learning from the data was supported by illustrative photos taken by participants and my accompanying notes on those parts of the sessions which I had observed. The pilot intervention was planned to be open, fluid and exploratory - it was designed to afford the participants the opportunity to contribute to its' design and in so doing, to contribute to the intervention provided in the main study: in this way, the route which the main intervention programme later took was determined to some degree by the participants' views as well as the outcomes of a pilot study, with a strong continuing element throughout the project of participant involvement in the design, implementation and evaluation of the work, making it as truly democratic and participatory as the maturity of these young pupils would allow and within an ethical framework.

### **3.8 The Main Intervention**

The intervention was planned to take place over two years in two phases, using two cohorts of female pupils in each phase. The intervention sessions were offered over an 8 week period in each of two consecutive academic years. Cohen *et al.* (2002: 96), suggest as an example of research in a small primary school, a sample size requirement of between 80% and 100%. In the case of this research design, this was possible and manageable. Over the two years of this study, all female pupils in the two oldest cohorts of Key Stage 2 pupils, and then, in the second year, all female pupils in the subsequent two oldest cohorts of Key Stage 2 pupils were invited, all consented, were all given permission from parent or carer and subsequently took part in the study.

The intervention sessions took place once weekly, during time in the school week which was generally used for 'pupil-directed' activities across the school, and over a lunch break, again so that the pupils' academic studies were not adversely impacted upon. Prior to the commencement of each phase, the intervention was outlined to the participant cohorts at a joint meeting, and the pupils were invited to ask questions about the activities and the use to which the data would be put. It was made clear to all the participants that involvement in the intervention was not compulsory, and that pupils could choose not to attend all/any session if they so wished.

Participants' informed consent was obtained in the same way as in the pilot study and parents'/carers' informed consent was fully obtained (Appendix G). The continued approval of the Governing Body of the school was sought and agreed (Appendix H).

### **3.9 Considerations**

#### **3.9.1 Reflexivity**

to be reflexive means that the researcher should reflect on the way in which the research is carried out and think about how the process of doing research in itself can shape the outcomes.

(Hardy *et al.* cited in O'Reilly *et al.* 2013: 19)

Interrogation of the data collected from pilot project, including the participant surveys pre- and post-project and my own field notes led to a consideration of issues of reflexivity and how this would impact upon my observation and documenting of the sessions and my recording and interpretation of the qualitative data throughout the main study. Bernstein (1974) argued that the processes one uses in order to interpret and define a situation are in themselves products of the circumstances in which one is placed; the power of the researcher to impose her own definitions and interpretations of situations upon participants in a qualitative study should never be underestimated.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) regard reflexivity as one useful component for establishing confirmability, which they consider to be one of the pre-requisites of the trustworthiness of findings, essential to qualitative research projects. Patton (2002) regards the objectivity of the researcher as a criterion for establishing the credibility of findings: acknowledging researcher subjectivity and treating reflexivity as a means of providing opportunities in order to understand how the researcher's own experiences and understandings of the world affect the research process, can enhance the quality of qualitative research.

As the researcher it was necessary for me to closely monitor the extent of my own interactions with the participants and to reflect upon my reactions to events as they unfolded. Morrow claims that qualitative researchers must address a number of issues in order to accomplish the goal of managing subjectivity, including making their implicit assumptions and biases overt to themselves and others and refers to 'owning one's perspective' (2005: 254), which she defines

as disclosing one's personal, theoretical, and methodological orientations, values, and assumptions that could affect the research.

Reinharz's work (2010) illustrates how she sees self-reflection as integral to the qualitative research process; she describes a tripartite division, wherein the researcher self, the personal self and the situational self take form as the research progresses, contributing to both the experience of the researcher in the field as well as to the phenomenon being studied.

As the researcher, it was necessary for me to consider how I might be perceived by pupils and staff in the dual role of the head teacher and how that perception on the part of the pupils in particular, might influence their participation. From the outset of the pilot, I had been integrally involved in the study; the role of head teacher in the school posed a dilemma with regard to the role of researcher-observer: whilst children and staff were well-used to being observed in classrooms as part of the head teacher's professional role, the role of researcher-observer was new.

Reinharz comments on creating an identity as a researcher in the eyes of those being observed and the constant negotiation that occurs as the researcher struggles to establish autonomy and to the difficulties of the researcher to "handle the responsibilities" of other roles and selves whilst also doing field work" (2010: 66). The Primary School Headteacher necessarily takes the lead in the myriad functions of the learning community on a day-to-day basis, for example with regard to Child Protection, pupil and staff conduct and discipline, stakeholder relationships, health and safety, budgetary and legal matters to name but a few. My other required duties as Head of the school had to be carefully balanced against the role of researcher throughout the study.

In regard to my own perceptions of the pupils involved in the research, both individually and as a group, there were aspects such as respondent bias and the power relationship between head teacher and pupils, with the accompanying social expectations and dynamics to take into account. Despite my role as head teacher of the school at all other times, it was vital to ensure that I maintained the role of researcher when observing the behaviour and responses of participant pupils to the intervention, both during and outside of the sessions.

Crucially, I had also to acknowledge that my own background, my personal and career history and my pedagogical and indeed my epistemological stance provided the backdrop against which I was experiencing the phenomenon (Patton 2002a; Reinharz 2010). As the senior leader of a school which had for a decade immersed itself in creative and therapeutic approaches to

teaching and learning in order to address inequality and improve outcomes for pupils, I had witnessed positive impacts which myself and my colleagues had attributed to such approaches upon pupils in past projects: I had an undoubted investment in the intervention and its' anticipated outcomes.

These considerations would all affect the research process and the findings and so it was considered vital to minimise the possible impact upon the study.

It was anticipated that this dual role of the researcher and head teacher would occasion some involvement as a participant in some conversations and interactions during the project sessions on a practical level, as it would be unnatural not to do so in other circumstances; for example, if during a discussion a question was posed to which only a school leader could respond, such as clarification to or modification of timetabling or premises matters. Additionally, it was not planned to limit the number of visits into the sessions for observation purposes as it was felt that 'saturation' would increase the likelihood of the reliability of the data and the possibility of emerging theories to be identified (Morse *et al.* 2002). Nevertheless, a means had to be found of registering and delineating the levels of my involvement for ethical reasons, as well as for reasons of validity of data.

A protocol for involvement was negotiated and agreed upon between myself and the practitioner at the planning meetings before the project began, so that there was a shared understanding (Appendix I). It was agreed that I would act entirely as an observer and recorder of events whenever present during the sessions, beyond which I would not participate save for if a situation arose ( such as a disclosure during a discussion or activity) where my role as Designated Safeguarding Lead in the school necessarily took precedence.

The relationship between myself as researcher and the participants would be kept as far as possible in balance in that I would participate in the practical time-keeping of the activities and ensure safe use of the premises, but that any involvement in the discussions and any decision-making by the group during the sessions would occur only if I was specifically invited with the full agreement of the group to do so.

This enabled me to be present at any time during the sessions and to take detailed field notes of activities and the participants' responses to these, yet to be distanced from the participants in a way which increased the objectivity of the research and also therefore the possibility of increasing the validity and reliability of any findings over time.

The practice of reflective conversations with the practitioner and her trainee at the close of each phase of the study and the joint viewing of the participants' video evaluations, as well as affording a means of triangulation, enabled me to gauge my own perceptions against those of the two practitioners, and provided a check for my own reflexivity.

### **3.9.2 Validity**

At the request of the practitioner, it was agreed that her work with the pupils would be supported by a trainee practitioner who had been placed under her tutelage at the time, so that the participants would have a higher level of adult support during the intervention programme. It was felt by both the artist-practitioner and I that the presence and involvement of a second professional could add validity to any conclusions drawn.

One aspect of the research design was that in each phase of the intervention, the participants in this study helped to evaluate each session, by taking photographs and videoing parts of each session and through a plenary at the close of each session led by the practitioner. In addition, in keeping with the participatory, 'ownership' model of the action research, when the participants requested an extra evaluation tool, this was encouraged. At the end of the second phase of the intervention, each girl spent considerable time making a 'scrapbook' of their memories of the sessions, using the photographs taken throughout this phase of the project, and inserting their own comments and reflections alongside their individually chosen images. Permission was gained from each participant for me to see these and to record comments, before the participants took them home to share with parents and carers, giving me an additional data set which had not been available from the project with the first group.

### **3.9.3 Reliability**

Silverman (2005) suggests that when using a qualitative methodological approach, reliability involves attempting to ensure that the same researcher shows consistency over time. For Guba and Lincoln (cited in Tronchim, 2006) in place of reliability, the concept of dependability requires that the researcher accounts fully for the way in which any changes in the setting have affected the research. Although the second year of the intervention followed the format of the first year of the intervention in terms of the main data gathering tools, there were some differences between the two phases which must be noted: for example, the two participant cohorts in the second phase of the intervention were younger than in the first phase so that the programme of intervention activities required a certain level of modification. In addition, in line

with the action research model, it was agreed that the project would be organic in that there would be a draft format for sessions, but that weekly evaluations of the girls' responses to the work and their contributions would dictate the course that each session and the project overall would take. It was acknowledged that these considerations may impact to some degree upon the reliability of the findings.

### **3.10 Capturing the Qualitative Data: the Video Evaluations**

With the artist-practitioner, I spent some time exploring data collection tools prior to the start of the main study. Numerous researchers acknowledge the limitations of reliability when using questionnaires with children (Cluskey 1996; Borgers and Hox 2000) and indeed, issues of reliability were identified in the pilot data, particularly in terms of seeming inconsistencies in the quantitative and qualitative data sets from the pupil questionnaires. It was hoped that the participants' responses both during and at the conclusion of the intervention sessions would produce rich qualitative data which would inform an accurate evaluation of the impact of the provision of the intervention and enable the collection of the authentic voice of the participants.

You can use the same or different, data-gathering methods that you used before. Perhaps you used surveys and interviews to gather your first set of data, now you might want to use audio or video tape recordings which will capture not only people's words but also their expressions and body language.

(McNiff, J: 2002)

The post-pilot pupil and staff questionnaires had provided some quantifiable data about the impact of the intervention, but enabling the participants in the main study to evaluate the project in a way which would result in richer, qualitative data was at first challenging: the advantages and disadvantages of structured, semi-structured and open-ended interviews, conducted either by the researcher or by an independent interviewer were all explored. There were a number of disadvantages which had to be considered in the school context (Koshy 2010: 88):

- Interviewing may not always be a suitable method to use with children who are not confident speakers and those with language problems.
- The interviewer's presence may make interviewees nervous and bias any responses.
- Tape recorders may intimidate some students.
- Children may tell you what they think you want to hear.

Noyes (2004) cites research (Kvale 1996; Dingwall 1997) which documents difficulties when using interviewing of children; the presence of the researcher can limit contributions, partly due to the unequal status of researcher and participant. It was considered that given the researcher's dual role, and taking issues of power and hierarchy into account, it could be difficult for participants to be fully open and honest about their views on the project in an interview with the head teacher. The involvement of an independent interviewer was considered, as this could allow for increased objectivity and avoid bias and subjectivity where the researcher was known to school, though a disadvantage would be that some pupils would undoubtedly be shy to communicate and the interviewer's unfamiliarity with both the intervention programme and with individual pupils might limit the opportunities to really explore what they were trying to express.

The researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experience will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives.

(Green and Hill 2005: 3)

It was decided that video entries would be employed as a one-off evaluation by each of the participants at the end of the intervention, should they be willing to do so. Cohen *et al.* describe how audio-visual recording has 'the capacity for completeness of analysis and comprehensiveness of material' (2002: 313), and how it can reduce the risk of misinterpretation and bias by the researcher. Use of video to record classroom interaction has been well-documented since the 1980s: Noyes cites McConnell 1985; Goldman-Segall 1995 and Pirie 1996 (cited in Noyes 2004: 197). Noyes used video diaries, which the participants recognised due to their familiarity with the 'Big Brother' television programme, as complementary to other methods such as participant observation and interviewing in mapping of what he calls the 'learning landscape'. Employing this instrument for the purposes of research with children and young people necessitates that they understand the format and process so that it is ethical, in that it is:

used primarily for the individual to talk about him/herself rather than as a forum for talking about others, unless of course one needed to talk about others in order to describe one's own experiences...it was considered to be both private and very public. The issue of privacy was seen as very important. ...in addition 'sensitive' information or any form of disclosure that

required referral would need to be treated very sensitively.

(Noyes, A. 2004: 197)

Shortly after the final session, each participant involved in the intervention was invited to film her views of the set of sessions privately, in a 'Big Brother Diary' way. In order to focus the participants on comments about the research project, the use of standardised semi-structured questions was considered, the advantages here being that questions can be determined in advance, addressing any anticipated difficulty with the questions, and reducing the possibility of confusion when gathering the views of young people. However, there are also disadvantages in this method, in that questions can be misinterpreted or can be considered leading.

To overcome these considerations, participants were given the option to use an open-ended prompt sheet to help them to focus their thoughts (Appendix J). Although this had the advantage of focusing the girls' thoughts so that their reflections were very pertinent to the study, it did not allow for the possibility of exploring their answers, as, in keeping with the notion of the 'privacy' of the entries, I was not present in the 'video diary' room during the recordings. Familiarity with all the participants and their personal circumstances provided me with an awareness of those participants for which inclusion for observation/recording/filming may not have been personally appropriate on particular occasions. In this instance, my role as head teacher could arguably be considered as fortuitous, since two pupils did express a disinclination to talk to the video camera and asked for me to be present for support; in this case the prompt sheet was employed as a set of straightforward interview questions.

Transcripts of the video evaluations were then produced, with all names and references to other participants and other stakeholders anonymised in the transcripts before qualitative data software was employed. The video evaluations were then coded for deeper analysis. The interrogation of all verbal contributions was carried out using the Template Analysis thematic coding approach and a transcript convention (adapted from Mackey and Gass 2005: 224) was employed for non-verbal communication, including denoting whenever referral to the prompt sheet was made by the contributor (Appendix K). The video evaluations were revisited repeatedly in order to drill down and to better interrogate the data and more reliably inform the conclusions to be drawn. For ease of working with the qualitative data analysis software employed throughout the study, the terms 'theme', 'code' and 'node' can be considered interchangeable for the purpose of analysis and drawing conclusions from the findings.

To gauge staff views of the impact of the intervention, as a validator group, those staff members still employed at the school who had originally completed questionnaires at the outset of the research and who still worked with the participant pupils, were issued with post-phase questionnaires for comparison with their perceptions at the start of the research project.

In addition, a 3-point scaled questionnaire with an open-comment opportunity for fuller response was sent home to parents and carers via the participants (Appendix L) to gauge their views of their daughters' responses to the intervention and the perceived benefits or otherwise of their child's involvement.

Information was also sent to parents and carers at the completion of the research, outlining again the nature of the data gathered and its intended use, together with an invitation to contact the head teacher/researcher to arrange an appointment to view their child's video evaluation, and those transcripts and photographs pertaining to their child, if they so wished (Appendix M).

### **3.11 Revisiting Ethics: 'ongoing provisional consent'**

The planned employment of photographs and video clips as data collection instruments necessitated revisiting ethical considerations. It is of course the head teacher's role to collect, collate and to share with other stakeholders a range of information about teaching, learning and attainment. The long term objective of this study was to explore an aspect of educational provision in order that outcomes might inform the school's pedagogy through an improved understanding of how to better support pupils and to enable them to find a more audible, authentic 'voice', which may then over time become a vehicle by which their learning experience could become improved for them and for pupils in the future.

However, the head teacher's role notwithstanding, respectfulness to participants necessitated that confidentiality and privacy was assured at all times. Therefore, apart from the use of the attainment data which is in the public domain as described, all participants were given access to, and encouraged to comment on the instruments employed and to voice whether they were comfortable with the video clips and photographs of sessions, and the video evaluations. Field notes and transcripts of parts of sessions necessarily included details of interactions between pupils and between pupils and practitioners and these were all anonymised.

Assurances were re-iterated about confidentiality, and anonymity in regard to dissemination of the data. Stakeholders were assured that they would be made aware and their agreement sought as appropriate, for findings to be disseminated more widely, to educational bodies, publications

etc., where data was not already in the public domain, as and when this might be required.

Permission was therefore gained over the duration of the study from each participant to:

- use comments, photographs and video clips taken by participants and the researcher
- share the video evaluations with the practitioner and the trainee, and an inter-rater
- later, to use comments from the respondent validation interviews

Pupils were also given the opportunity to determine a vehicle by which to celebrate and share their work on and learning from the project with others; the first and second phase groups of participants each chose a different vehicle by which to do so.

### **3.12. Validation Exercises**

Pupils' individual private thoughts and feelings as they appeared in the video evaluations provided much of the rich data from the study in terms of the conclusions drawn about the impact of the project. For this reason, all pupil participants were given opportunities to register any discrepancies between my interpretation of events and their own through the vehicle of respondent validation interviews. As an attempt to ensure objective interpretation and to gain a deeper understanding of the girls' views as expressed via the video evaluation entries, with their consent a set of respondent validation interviews took place later; I subsequently viewed the recordings with each individual pupil, using a set of fixed questions. This enabled me to check interpretations with the participants in order to agree meanings. Hughes (2001) suggests that validity in qualitative research relates to the extent that the research provides an authentic account of the participants' voices. Through the use of respondent validation interviews, I was able to check interpretation of the rich, in-depth, qualitative data from the video evaluations, and particularly in regard to the most significant emergent themes which had been identified concerning pupils' views of the value of the project and about their relationship with the practitioners.

Because the coding of the data in this study involved deciding how to classify and categorise language-based data incorporated into a Template Analysis process, it was decided to introduce a further reliability tool into the analysis of the qualitative data through an inter-rater process. After participant consent had been obtained (Appendix N), the video evaluations and, in the second year of the project, the pupils' scrapbooks were shared with the artist-practitioner and her trainee, so that they could also glean these participants' thoughts and feelings. This also afforded some validation of my thematic coding as well as enabling the practitioners' own views

about their responses to the project, to inform their own future work. A reflective discussion then took place between myself, the practitioner and the trainee at the end of the project, following their own data gathering processes and viewing of the video evaluations, so that the learning from the study could be discussed and shared, and emergent themes agreed upon, thus aiding triangulation and in an effort to further secure validity (Appendix O).

Armstrong *et al.* (1997) argue that whilst inter-rater reliability is recognised in quantitative research and can be considered a way of ensuring rigour, its' applicability to qualitative research is less clear. Mackey and Gass advise involving at least one other inter-rater:

as a measure of whether two or more raters judge the same set of data in the same way. If there is strong reliability, one can then assume with reasonable confidence that raters are judging the same set of data as representing the same phenomenon.

(Mackey and Gass 2005:129)

Thus, after seeking consent from the participants (Appendix N), the video evaluations were shown to an independent, professional, children's counsellor who is attached to the school and works with pupils across the school but who was not involved in the intervention programme in any way. This independent colleague was tasked to identify emergent themes and to comment upon these, which were in turn triangulated against the themes identified by both practitioners and researcher.

### **3.13 Summary**

This chapter has outlined how, in order to determine the initial Research Question I began with a collection and analysis of quantitative data, supported by qualitative data in the form of open comments, from pupil and staff questionnaires, which were issued to both the participants and a staff validator group. The data was triangulated against qualitative data collected from a pupil Focus Group, in order to ensure validity. Having conducted a search of the literature, a cyclical participatory action research model was employed; it was hoped that the participants would be enabled to collaborate in the design, implementation, modification and evaluation of a pilot intervention and then at each subsequent stage of the proposed intervention. The data sets from the pilot intervention pupil and staff questionnaires highlighted some inconsistencies in their responses, which raised issues of regression and reliability. In line with a mixed-method approach, there was an introduction of additional qualitative data collection tools - and most

significantly the use of participant video evaluations - as the action research evolved. Collection of participant and stakeholder views was repeated and the responses analysed, additional validator and inter-rater methods were employed and ethical considerations were regularly revisited, giving due regard to the age and maturity of the participants and the dual role of the researcher, throughout the period of the intervention.

The research design attempted to address issues of validity and reliability through the regular triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sets. Issues of generalizability must be considered, since there must be recognition of the fluidity in the methodology described here, in that in one small study in one school, the research design was partially shaped by the participants themselves, and modified in accordance with the ages of, and the views expressed by the participants.

## **Chapter Four: Research Findings and Analysis**

This chapter describes and analyses the range of data sets collected during the action research study, beginning with data collected from the pupil and staff surveys, which led to the formation of the initial research question, in order to improve the school's provision for Key Stage Two female pupils:

RQ 1: What can our female pupils tell us about their barriers to learning?

The qualitative data produced from the surveys and from a subsequent Focus Group discussion, was additionally examined using a qualitative analysis software tool; the comparative quantitative and qualitative data sets together informed the decision to explore via the main study, the provision and impact of a therapeutic intervention, for the entire group of female pupils. This led to the formulation of a further research question:

RQ2: What is the impact of a therapeutic approach to supporting female pupils in overcoming perceived barriers to learning?

Mixed-method data collection tools were used throughout the main study, producing qualitative data from evaluative participant video recordings and structured respondent validation interviews, supplemented by notes and images from photo-diaries to which the researcher, practitioners and participants had all contributed. Data drawn from staff validator groups and from parent/carer responses to questionnaires contributed to the triangulation exercises. Validation of emergent themes was further informed by reflective responses to participants' engagement by the practitioners, along with reflective responses to the video evaluations by an external inter-rater, focused upon independently identified themes, at the close of the study.

Finally, in line with the researcher's role as head teacher, an additional research question was framed:

RQ3: What can be learned in relation to whole school improvement?

### **4.1. Pupil Attitude: Gender Variations**

The Pre-Intervention Pupil Attitude Survey (Appendix B) took the form of a questionnaire which was distributed to 93 of the 97 pupils in four cohorts at the end of the academic year (4

male pupils being absent on the day). Table 4.1 shows the comparative numbers of male and female pupils in these cohorts.

Table 4.1: To show the pupil numbers and cohorts to whom the questionnaires were distributed.

Cohort (one per Year group)	Total number of pupils	Male Pupils		Female Pupils	
		Number	%	Number	%
All year groups	97	58	60	39	40
A	19	10	53	9	47
B	30	20	67	10	33
C	23	13	57	10	43
D	25	15	60	10	40

The completed questionnaires were collected and the raw scores collated and analysed in order to gain an insight into pupil views and attitudes to learning which could be used to inform subsequent school improvement actions and, more specifically to provide a snapshot of gender differences in attitudes to learning, in order to explore the initial Research Question.

#### 4.1.1 The Pupil Survey:

The responses from all pupils were analysed, and compared, including those open comments which had been made, in order to identify emergent issues and thereby to inform the choice of any subsequent intervention programmes employed to address the issues. Responses to the statement scores were converted into percentages to overcome the variations between numbers of male and female pupils in the individual cohorts. Appendix P shows the comparative male and female responses to the Pupil Attitude Survey in each of the four cohorts surveyed.

The analysis of the survey responses revealed some significant variations in gender response in different cohorts and in regard to the ‘Perceived Competence’, ‘Life Satisfaction’ and ‘Interpersonal’ aspects of the questionnaire.

The pupils’ responses to questions which reflected the ‘Perceived Competence’ aspects of attitude to learning were collated and indicated that:

In response to statement Five: **‘What we learn is hard’**, fewer girls than boys in every cohort agreed with this statement.

In response to statement Six: **‘I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher’**, fewer girls than boys in every cohort agreed with this statement, with the most marked difference being In Cohorts B and D. In all cohorts, more girls than boys responded with ‘sometimes/ not sure’

In response to statement Seven: **‘I put my hand up when the teacher asks a question’**, fewer girls than boys in every cohort agreed with this statement, except for Cohort C, where more girls responded positively to the statement.

In response to statement Eleven: **‘I feel that I am capable of doing better’**, fewer girls than boys in Cohort A and Cohort B agreed with this statement, whilst in cohort D there was little gender difference and in Cohort C more girls than boys agreed with the statement.

These responses indicate that whilst the girls did not find the work hard, which was in contrast to the informal views of the staff who worked with them, they felt less comfortable than the boys about offering answers to teachers’ questions, particularly in the cohorts with the most challenging male pupil behaviour, which was in keeping with the staff observations in the classroom.

The pupils’ responses to questions which reflected the ‘Life Satisfaction’ aspects of attitude to learning were collated and indicated that:

In response to statement Two: **‘I try hard with my work’**, more girls than boys agreed in every cohort.

In response to statement Three: **‘What we learn is interesting’**, fewer girls than boys agreed with this statement in Cohorts A and B, or they responded with ‘sometimes/not sure’, whilst more girls agreed in Cohort C and there was no gender difference in Cohort D.

In response to statement Four: **‘What we learn is fun’**, fewer girls than boys in every cohort responded positively this statement, or they responded with ‘sometimes/not sure’.

In response to statement Twelve: **‘I feel that I will do well in future and have a good job’**: there was little gender difference in the responses of any cohort.

Thus, the pupils' responses to questions which reflected the 'Life Satisfaction' aspects of attitude to learning seemed to indicate that, whilst girls felt that they tried hard with their work, fewer of them than of the boys felt it was fun; the girls in the older cohorts felt their work was less interesting, or was interesting less of the time. This may be because in the two oldest cohorts, it is usual in primary schools to begin to focus upon the more formal aspects of work in preparation for the Year 6 SATs, and many of the boys with challenging behaviours in the school in this study seemed to learn - and to behave in the classroom - best, when they were provided with formal routines and structures and firm boundaries; whereas for the female pupils, a less structured, more creative learning environment might enable them to take a more active part in the learning. The response to statement Twelve indicated that fewer pupils in the youngest cohort agreed that they would do well in future, but this may correspond to their age, in that they were not yet at a stage of maturity where such life prospects are necessarily being considered.

The pupils' responses to questions which reflected the 'Interpersonal' aspects of attitude to learning indicated that:

In response to statement One: '**I feel relaxed in my classroom**', significantly fewer girls than boys agreed in Cohort B, and other girls responded with 'sometimes/not sure', whilst in Cohort C, fewer boys responded positively, There was little gender difference in the responses from the other two cohorts.

In response to statement Eight: '**I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I'm not sure**', fewer girls than boys in every cohort agreed with this statement, or responded with 'sometimes/not sure', except for the girls in Cohort C, who responded more positively than the boys.

In response to statement Nine: '**I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom**', fewer girls than boys in every cohort agreed with this statement or responded with 'sometimes/not sure'.

In response to statement Ten: '**I feel comfortable with most of my classmates**', fewer girls than boys in Cohort A and Cohort C agreed with this statement, or responded with 'sometimes/not sure', whilst in Cohort B there were no significant gender difference in positive response and in Cohort D more girls than boys agreed with the statement.

These responses seemed to indicate that in particular, in the most 'boy heavy' cohort, girls felt less able to relax and to contribute actively to the learning. The most common, most marked

difference in response between genders within all cohorts was to statement Nine, ‘I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom’, where significantly fewer girls in each cohort responded positively to the statement.

In summary, in terms of variation between cohorts, in Cohort A, apart from more male pupils expressing that the work was hard, their responses to the statements demonstrated generally much more positive attitudes to learning than their female peers, with almost all the positive statement scores being higher than those of their female counterparts.

This was echoed in the responses of Cohort B, where although fewer boys than girls described themselves as “trying hard” with their work, almost all the positive statement scores were higher than those of their female counterparts.

Cohort C provided a much more mixed and variable picture. More boys thought the work fun although hard, whereas more girls said that they felt relaxed in the classroom, that they tried hard, that the work was interesting and that they were capable of doing better. Although fewer girls than boys felt comfortable with their classmates, being asked questions by the teacher and speaking out in the classroom, their responses indicated that they were more positive than the boys about putting up their hand and taking risks with their learning.

In Cohort D there was also some variance; more girls said they tried hard and that they felt comfortable in the class, but fewer thought the work was fun. In keeping with the female pupils in Cohorts A and B, fewer girls felt OK about being asked questions by the teacher, putting their hand up, taking a risk or speaking out in the classroom.

Clearly, a myriad of factors will have contributed to the pupils’ responses so that this data set must be interrogated with a certain amount of caution, given the variance of the cohort profiles:

- The differing ages and levels of maturity of pupils in the cohorts which completed the questionnaires.
- The differing numbers of pupils in each of the cohorts.
- The differing male: female pupil ratios.
- The variance in the cohort profiles in terms of ability, special needs and pupil premium eligibility.
- Cohort dynamics.
- The gender of the teaching and support staff in each of the individual classes.

As one example of this, the largest discrepancy between the survey statement scores of male and female pupils in any one cohort was in that of Cohort B, where only 30% of girls compared to

80% of boys agreed that they felt ‘relaxed in the classroom’. In this particular cohort, there were twice as many male pupils as there were female pupils, with a high level of support required in that classroom for those boys with challenging behaviour, whereas the responses to the survey statements of the female pupils in Cohort C, where the male: female ratio was more balanced and where there were no significant behaviour concerns within the cohort, were generally much more positive.

On the survey forms there was an additional space headed ‘Anything else you want to say?’ providing students with the opportunity to make additional personal comments. Only a few of the male pupils took this opportunity, and where they did, these tended to be positive comments about break times spent with friends or suggestions which addressed their requirements for more time to be given to practical and sports activities. The female pupils’ comments, however were more numerous and provided a wealth of qualitative data which correlated with their responses to the questions in the survey and to the observations of the staff who worked with them in the classrooms (Appendix Q):

Comments signifying concerns around mixed-gender learning included:

‘Can you please split the boys and the girls because the boys talk and we don’t get much done’.

‘I don’t feel comfortable with the boys’.

‘The boys don’t let us play football; they said “the girls are in our way”’.

‘I think that all the girls should have more girls in our classroom’.

Comments signifying a lack of confidence as a learner included:

‘I am sometimes not sure I am capable of doing better’.

‘I need more confidence but I am working on getting more confidence’.

‘Why am I not confident? I need to stop worrying’.

‘When I answer questions and it’s wrong voices in my head are laughing’.

‘I think I need to get sort of more confidence’.

‘I feel stressed in the classroom in Literacy, topics, sport’.

‘I need help with my Maths because I struggle and sometimes {should?} put my hand up more’.

‘Sometimes I feel a little bit worried when we read something out’.

‘I think I need some more confidence at school’.

#### 4.1.2 The Staff Survey

In order to triangulate the pupils' perceptions of their attitudes to learning with the perceptions of the adults who knew them best, those seven staff most closely involved with the cohorts in the study were also asked to complete questionnaires in order to inform the researcher of their perceptions of pupils' attitudes to learning. The statements used were designed to closely match those in the pupil survey. The results of the survey indicated some variance in the perceptions of attitude of male and female pupils as perceived by those staff members who worked with them on a daily basis (Appendix R): the quantitative data set suggested that male pupils were perceived as more often relaxed in the classroom. Whilst some staff perceived some boys and girls as always finding the work difficult, more boys were perceived as sometimes finding the work more difficult and they appeared to put effort into their work less often. Whereas all the boys were seen to put up their hands to offer answers to the teacher, fewer girls were seen to do this. Girls were perceived as less often interested in their learning or enjoying what they were learning; in comparison boys were perceived as much more confident in taking risks with their learning and in speaking out in the classroom and somewhat more likely to be achieving as much as they were estimated to be capable of. They appeared more confident in the presence and company of their peers.

The staff survey also provided an opportunity for additional comments and these generally indicated perceived differences with regard to the two gender groups, providing a further, qualitative data set to triangulate against that collected from the pupil survey.

The statements complementing the pupil statements on 'Perceived Competence' resulted in additional comments from staff members indicating that female staff felt that whilst they did not necessarily find the work too difficult ( statement Five), the girls' lack of confidence in their own abilities led to them requiring a greater level of teacher and teaching assistant support than the boys, with one commenting upon a perceived 'learned helplessness' of some pupils of both genders and another mentioning 'apathy'. The staff further commented that girls were often reluctant to volunteer answers to questions posed, that they needed encouragement to do so (statement Six) and that they appeared to worry about what their peers might say; they needed reassurance to 'perform' in front of their male peers, and that they seemed to worry that they might 'get things wrong' (statement Seven). Furthermore, the girls were perceived by some staff members as not 'stretching or pushing themselves' (statement Eleven) and another commented that 'most need help with their confidence'. It was also felt that boys 'overshadowed' the girls in

the classroom due to the challenging behaviours of some of these male pupils, which corresponds with the girls' own views and resonates with much of the feminist research into gender and classroom behaviours as discussed earlier.

The statements complementing the pupil statements on 'Life Satisfaction' gave a more positive picture of the female learners, although opinions differed. Some staff observed that the girls were conscientious and generally took more care over the presentation of their work, whilst others commented that 'the girls will tend to sit back and let the boys lead in the classroom setting' and that they did just enough to 'get by' (statement Two) Staff members responded that for many pupils, the degree of interest in what they were learning (statement Three) was dependent upon the nature of the activity, with topics related to pupils' own interests and practical activities being better received. Of course, this is likely to be the case for pupils of either gender in the primary classroom, however there was perceived gender bias, with staff citing that girls enjoyed 'art, craft, cookery'. Staff commented that girls appeared to enjoy their learning if they felt confident within the situation (statement Four), and that they 'tend to worry about their learning and this hinders enjoyment'. One male member of staff observed that opportunities for practical activities in one classroom were sometimes constrained because of male pupil behaviour.

To statement Twelve: '**They appear to want to do well and succeed in life**', staff comments were lengthy and reflective, with contrasting positive and negative observations about the aspirations of these female pupils. Some staff identified a positive attitude and a sense of ambition, whilst others saw a 'lack the drive and motivation to do it. Most seem to give the impression that they have no control over what they do and how they can achieve it'. There were comments by male and female staff indicating that they regarded some girls as very 'passive' in the classroom and this was often attributed to a perception of the dominance of male pupils in the learning environment: 'they are used to the boys having the attention in class so therefore they will passively wait'. One member of staff, who was willing to be identified in his questionnaire, used the open comment section of the questionnaire to describe how he had trialled some single-sex P.E. lessons very successfully:

In P.E. the girls always struggle in mixed gender sessions. Boys tend to dominate attention and games and girls always take a big step back and rarely participate to a reasonable standard. All-girl sessions in yr. 5 and 6 proved highly successful and popular

in the past and maybe should be tried again and with all KS2 classes so progress is high throughout the school and not just in the last 2 years of school life

(Appendix S)

Although one less experienced male member of staff commented that he had not ‘witnessed any girls feeling uncomfortable in the classroom’, the statements complementing the pupil statements on ‘Interpersonal’ aspects resulted in additional comments from staff members indicating that staff felt that pupils were ‘over-relaxed- they sit back and seem passive’ (statement One); that they needed more reassurance than the boys, that they seemed overshadowed, dominated and even ‘appear intimidated by the more dominant personalities’ (statement Ten) and again, that they had to fight to get attention due to boys’ behaviour issues. Staff commented that girls appeared shy and unwilling to participate, needing adult encouragement and support to take a lead (statement Eight) and being afraid of ‘being laughed at’ (statement Nine).

#### **4.1.3 The Focus Group**

As a result of the indicated differences in the learning experience of boys and girls, a Focus Group was organised to further explore the apparent issues. The Focus group took the form of a conference for the 29 female pupils in the three oldest cohorts in the school. An introductory question triggered the discussion

What things make it hard to learn in the classroom?

The pupils then considered this question in randomly self-chosen smaller groups each of between 3 and 5 pupils, each facilitated by a member of the school staff. Views were collected on ‘Post-Its’ which were then shared with the larger group (Appendix E). The scribes for each of the small discussion groups produced 45 individual ‘Post-Its’; broadly, responses could be grouped into three major themes: learning behaviours, confidence levels of learners in the classroom, and gender-based concerns.

There were also 16 ‘Post-Its’ references indicating considerable concern about the behaviour of some students in the classrooms, in terms of their domination of the learning environment.

‘It’s not fair when people shout out.’

‘People think they are right.’

‘People interrupting lessons!’

‘People talk on my table.’

‘When you are going to say the answer and the other person says it’.

The facilitators of the groups reported that these comments could generally be regarded to convey the irritation of the female students in regard to the domination of the learning environment of their male peers, most particularly in the male-heavy cohorts.

Six of the ‘Post-Its’ made reference to female students’ awareness of their own level of confidence in the learning environment:

‘I am not confident and I am shy.’

‘Because people laugh.’

‘I talk a little bit and I am not comfortable to put my hand up’.

Only one student wrote ‘I am more confident when I work with a boy’, whilst a further sixteen ‘Post-Its’ indicated that many of the girls would appreciate at least some level of gender-based activity or single-sex learning:

‘For people to work in boy and girl (groups).’

‘For boys to have half the class and girls to have the other.’

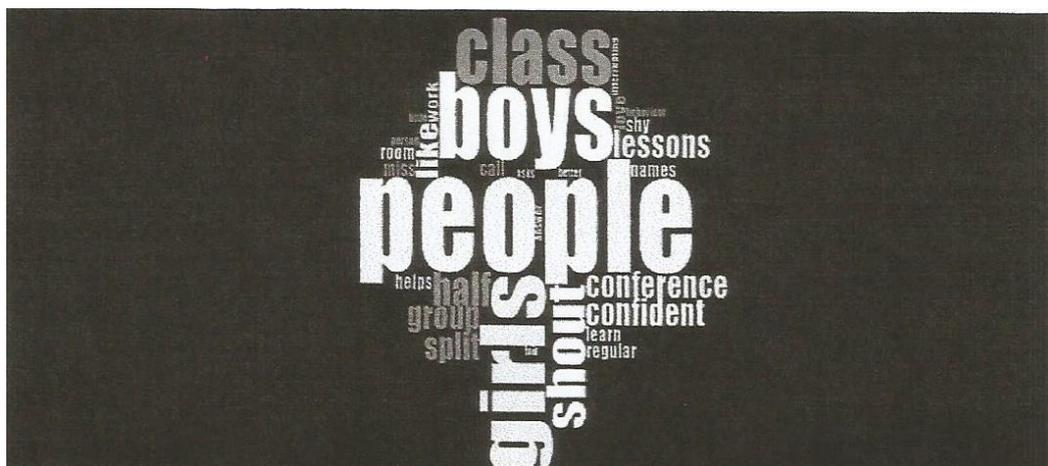
‘To have split classes like boys’ class, girls’ class.’

‘Boys’ lessons and girls’ lessons.’

‘To have a boys’ conference and a girls’ conference.’

The ‘Post-Its’ were then collated using an IT tool in order to determine the frequency with which common theme stem words occurred. Figure 4.1 shows the themes which emerged from the analysis of the ‘Post-Its’, with the most frequently occurring word-themes shown in larger and bolder text.

Figure 4.1 to show Focus Group emergent themes.



The pupil survey, the staff survey and the pupil focus group together provided an insight into the degree to which the education of female pupils in the school - in some cohorts in particular and seemingly due partly at least to some challenging behaviours of male learners - was perceived as being hampered. The school was already acting to address some of the male learners' barriers to learning by accessing the Local Authority's Special Educational Needs and Behaviour Support Services, but there was a concern that for the female pupils, additional steps needed to be taken, to help them to develop the confidence and resilience to enable them to overcome the barriers which they perceived were preventing them from fully accessing and engaging in learning. Although it was not possible to re-organise the school in the short term to enable any real degree of single-sex teaching in the core subjects, it was possible to attempt to address the issue via extra-curricular provision, which might go some way to supporting the girls to develop that confidence and resilience which was considered lacking. During the Focus Group and subsequent discussion with the female pupils, creative activities, drama and role play were specified as particularly favoured vehicles for learning, possibly as a result of their earlier experiences when the school had been a 'Change School' as part of the Creative Partnerships Initiative. A search of the relevant literature had highlighted the potential benefits of therapeutic and creative arts interventions in terms of building self-esteem and resilience, and so the two further Research Questions were posed:

RQ2: What is the impact of a therapeutic approach to supporting female pupils in overcoming perceived barriers to learning?

RQ3: What can be learned in relation to whole school improvement?

## **4.2 The Pilot Intervention**

With their fully informed consent, and that of their parents and carers (Appendix G), a pilot group was identified: this comprised of a purposive sample of six female pupils from one cohort whose progress in Reading and Mathematics had been slower in the previous academic year and in the current academic year to date, than their male and female peers, and who were perceived by staff as generally less confident learners in the classroom environment. Governing Body permission was obtained (Appendix H) and a pilot intervention programme was planned, to be led by one of the school's own Learning Mentors, whilst an arts practitioner was sought and commissioned for the main intervention programme.

### **4.2.1 The Pre-Pilot Surveys**

As the original pupil surveys had been completed by pupils anonymously, individual responses could not be identified and so a duplicate survey was distributed to these six pupils; to produce a base-line by which to measure change in attitude pre- and post-pilot. The pre-pilot data (Appendix T) highlighted some issues of reliability in regard to the pupil survey as the data gathering tool: the pilot group participant responses to the survey seemed to indicate that they generally felt more positive about their learning experience than either the original pupil and staff surveys or the Focus Group discussions had suggested, with three of the six pupils claiming that they felt relaxed in the classroom and comfortable to take a risk, although only one pupil responded positively to the statement 'I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom'. This repeated use of the questionnaire in order to detect changes in attitude and opinions raised some concerns with regard to my methodology. Barnett, van der Pols and Dobson (2004) warn that regression can occur in any measurement and in any data: a subject might to change category without any true change in their underlying response. However, in this study, the number of participants and therefore the data sets generated would be small and could be continually triangulated against other, qualitative data sets, such as respondent validations, researcher field notes and validator reflections. Nesselroade, Stilger and Baltes observe that

students of behavioral change should not think of regression toward the mean as a univocal phenomenon with straightforward, unalterable effects. Rather, our examination reveals that if one is to anticipate and take into account the effects of regression in analysing and evaluating change data... Designs can be arranged to deal more effectively

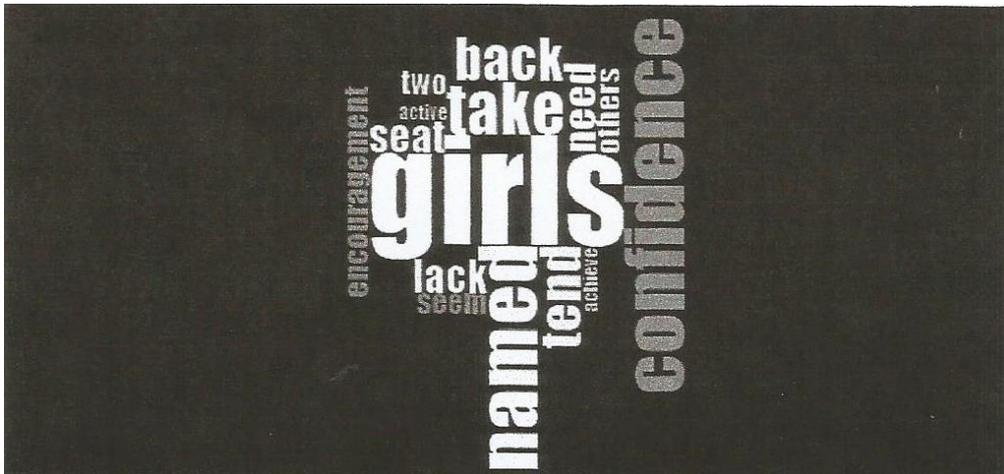
with the confounding of substantive change by expected regression effects, if the underlying model can be specified and the lengths of the observation sequences adjusted

(Nesselroade, Stilger and Baltes 1980)

The space provided for open comment at the end of the questionnaire produced additional evidence with regard to the barriers for learning previously identified: the girls reported that they were not confident to share ideas and opinions, and they commented upon the dominance of peers and the perceived impact upon their learning.

For triangulation purposes, the four (female) staff who worked most closely with this small group of identified girls each completed a second Perception of Attitudes questionnaire (Appendix U). Staff comments closely correlated with their comments in the original survey: these particular pupils were perceived as having the ability and desire to do well but that they were lacking in confidence, struggling with the work, needing a high level of support and encouragement to share their ideas and opinions and seeming to be ‘intimidated by male dominance’. As with the Focus Group ‘Post-Its’, the staff open comments were collated and interrogated using an IT tool. Figure 4.2 shows the resulting detection of emerging themes.

Figure 4.2: to show emergent themes from staff questionnaire open comments.



Thus, data from the staff survey indicated that these staff members perceived significant barriers to learning for these six identified pupils which was consistent with the school’s progress data and in line with the qualitative data collected from the open comments from the original pupil surveys as well as the during the Focus Group. The pilot intervention comprised a set of 8 once weekly sessions over the lunch time and into the first part of the school afternoon when other

pupils were also accessing enrichment activities. The pilot participants had the opportunity to meet and work with the Learning Mentor in order to access art activities and to use drama strategies to play out and be supported to solve scenarios which they had found challenging in school or outside. As the researcher, I attended some parts of these sessions and collected a further qualitative data set of field notes and photographs.

#### **4.2.2. The Impact of the Pilot Intervention**

At the conclusion of the Pilot intervention, a resulting range of comparative data was available in the form of pupil and staff post-Pilot intervention surveys. The pupil questionnaires were distributed again to the pilot group at the conclusion of the intervention and the results analysed (Appendix V). The pupil responses varied in the indication they gave of changes in attitude to learning:

For the statements for Perceived Competence, there was no change in their perception of their own capabilities (statement Eleven), though there was a change indicating that work was seen as less hard (statement Five). There was an increase in positivity in response to statement Six: **‘I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher’** and statement Seven: **‘I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions’**.

For the statements for Life Satisfaction, there was no change in how hard they felt they tried with their work (statement Two), or their perception of their future life chances (statement Twelve), but there was increased positivity in regard to statement Three: **‘What we learn is interesting’** and statement Four: **‘What we learn is fun’**.

For the statements concerning Interpersonal aspects of the survey, there was no change in how comfortable the girls felt with classmates (statement Ten), but there was a more positive response to **‘I feel relaxed in my classroom’** (statement One), **‘I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I am not sure’** (statement Eight) and **‘I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom’** (statement Nine).

The participants did not take up the opportunity to make further comments at the end of the questionnaire, but this may have been because an evaluation session had taken place at the end of the pilot intervention where they were given the opportunity to make comments on ‘Post-Its’ about what they had found beneficial (Appendix W).

‘The sessions have helped’.

‘Talking about stuff/talking to each other/helped a bit for me’.

‘Talking about “strong women”.’

‘The masks and talking about it’.

‘Creative stuff makes me confident’.

During the evaluation exercise they had also been asked to rate their level of confidence on a scale of 1-10. Two girls indicated high levels of confidence, two gave a score of 5/10 and two felt a small change in confidence as a consequence of the pilot intervention.

Similarly, staff members were each asked to complete a post-pilot questionnaire to gauge their perception of changes in pupils’ attitudes to learning (Appendix X). The end-of-pilot staff survey comments indicated to some degree a perceived change in girls’ attitudes in the classroom. These comments included that the girls seemed more able to ‘take an active part’ and appeared happier in the classroom, with some members of the participant group perceived as more confident, putting in ‘100% effort’ and being more able to take a risk with their learning. However, these positive observations on the effects of the pilot activities were qualified: most of the girls still needed a degree of support and encouragement to share ideas and opinions; some were still perceived as lacking in confidence in the mixed-gender learning environment and in their friendship groups.

Thus, the pupil survey data indicated that there had been some positive alterations in these female pupils’ view of themselves as learners and there was a degree of corroboration about changes in these pupils’ attitudes within the staff surveys. In both the girls’ responses to the post-pilot survey and those of the staff, it was the qualitative data gleaned from the open comments about the impact of the pilot intervention, supported by their comments in informal discussion throughout and at the end of the pilot, regarding their enjoyment of the creative arts aspects, discussion and drama strategies, which had provided the clearest indications of the effects and limitations of the intervention. Whilst these findings suggested that it would be worthwhile to extend the intervention programme to the wider Key Stage Two female pupil group, the limitations of the use of the questionnaires in terms of reliability and the limited scope for the collection of richer, more detailed qualitative data sets, led to a modification of the research design of the main study, incorporating a consideration of other data collection tools. The search of the literature had highlighted studies (Noyes 2004; Ravet 2007), where the use of video recording had enabled young people to articulate their experiences and feelings. Video

recording was therefore agreed upon as the major data collection tool in the main intervention by the researcher and the arts practitioner, who drew up the intervention programme. Throughout the intervention programme, the female pupils were regularly invited to contribute ideas for its' design, implementation and modification and were encouraged to keep a photo journal to contribute to the evaluation process.

### 4.3 The Main Intervention

The intervention took place over a period of two academic years, with the first two cohorts of female pupils accessing the first phase of the intervention programme in the first academic year, and the further two cohorts accessing the second phase of the intervention programme during the following academic year, with each phase running over an 8 week period. Table 4.2 shows the numbers of participant in the main intervention.

Table 4.2: to show the number of female participants in the main intervention.

Academic year	Cohort	No of female pupils in the year group	No of female pupils involved in the study
1	A	8	8
1	B	10	10
2	C	10	10
2	D	9	9

The research design employed a mixed-method of data collection: the intervention produced a large amount of rich, qualitative data in that after each phase of the intervention the participants involved were invited to privately record a reflective video evaluation of their experiences during the project, analysis of which was triangulated against their responses to a structured respondent validation interview with the researcher. The analysis of this data and the eventual conclusions drawn were further informed by the participants' photographic journal of the intervention sessions and my own notes on those parts of the sessions which were observed. In addition, with the participants' permission and with ethical considerations always uppermost, in

the company of the practitioner and the trainee, I used the participants' evaluations as a basis for a reflective discussion about the programme of activities and the impact of the intervention. In this way, learning from the action research was used to inform each subsequent next stage of the intervention and to modify the research design where appropriate. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show the range of qualitative data available for analysis, including the duration of the video recordings made by each participant.

**Table 4.3: to show the range of qualitative data sources employed in Phase One of the intervention.**

<b>Phase of inter-vention</b>	<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Video evalu-ation</b>	<b>Video timing</b>	<b>Transcription of video</b>	<b>Respondent validation</b>	<b>Scrap book</b>	<b>Practitioner reflection</b>
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Cohort A</b>						
	<b>A1</b>	✓	<b>1.17</b>	✓	<b>Unavailable to take part</b>	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A2</b>		<b>1.03</b>	✓	<b>Unavailable to take part</b>	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A3</b>	✓	<b>1.40</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A4</b>	✓	<b>1.24</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A5</b>	✓	<b>2.43</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A6</b>	✓	<b>1.00</b>	✓	<b>Unavailable to take part</b>	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A7</b>	✓	<b>0.46</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>A8</b>	✓	<b>1.02</b>	✓	<b>Unavailable to take part</b>	<b>n/a</b>	✓
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Cohort B</b>						
	<b>B1</b>	✓	<b>3.30</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B2</b>	✓	<b>1.31</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B3</b>	✓	<b>2.13</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B4</b>	✓	<b>1.43</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B5</b>	✓	<b>2.35</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B6</b>	✓	<b>1.18</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B7</b>	✓	<b>1.56</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B8</b>	✓	<b>2.23</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B9</b>	✓	<b>1.10</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓
	<b>B10</b>	✓	<b>1.38</b>	✓	✓	<b>n/a</b>	✓

**Table 4.4: to show the range of qualitative data sources employed in Phase Two of the intervention.**

Phase of the intervention	Cohort	Video evaluation	Video timing	Transcription of video	Respondent validation	Scrap book	Practitioner reflection
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Cohort C</b>						
	C1	✓	4.04	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C2	✓	4.42		Unavailable to take part	✓	✓
	C3	✓	2.22	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C4	(interviewed)	1.30	(transcription of interview)	✓	✓	✓
	C5	✓	2.46	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C6	✓	1.26	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C7	✓	4.04	✓	Unavailable to take part	✓	✓
	C8	✓	2.17	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C9	✓	9.03	✓	✓	✓	✓
	C10	✓	1.25	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>Cohort D</b>						
	D1	✓	16.17	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D2	✓	0.57	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D3	✓	4.01	✓	Unavailable to take part	✓	✓
	D4	(interviewed)	1.37	(transcription of interview)	✓	✓	✓
	D5	✓	1.24	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D6	✓	1.39	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D7	✓	5.34	✓	✓	✓	✓
	D8	✓	9.22	✓	Unavailable to take part	✓	✓
	D9	✓	3.37	✓	✓	✓	✓

### **4.3.1 Pupils' Video Evaluations: Emergent Themes**

The impact of the intervention programme as perceived by the pupils themselves was assessed by transcribing, collating and analysing the qualitative data gathered from the girls' reflective video recordings, produced at the end of the phase of the project in which they participated.

In order to gain some structure within the video evaluations, pupils were offered the use of a prompt sheet based upon a simple 'open question' structure (Appendix J), to which they could refer if they wished during their private recordings. The prompt sheet was designed to help the girls to focus their thoughts on their feelings at the beginning, during and at the end of the project without providing any lead regarding content. Every participant did choose to take the prompt sheet into the recording room and the majority did refer to the sheet as they spoke, though some of those who were most articulate relied on the prompt sheet less heavily and tended to speak at greater length. Two pupils were uncomfortable about making the video recording alone and requested an interview in place of this; in these cases I acted as the interviewer, using the prompt sheet questions and video recording the girls' responses with their permission.

After each phase of the intervention, following initial viewing by myself and the practitioner, the participants were invited to view their video evaluation recordings with me; in this way respondent validation interviews took place and the participants' answers were transcribed. The interviews were simply structured with open questions which echoed those on the prompt sheet, in order to further validate emergent themes:

- **What did you feel before the project started?**
- **What did you like about the project?**
- **What did you dislike about the project?**
- **Did you feel the project was of any help to you?**
- **Did you feel the project was of any help to other people?**
- **Did you discuss the project at all with people at home?**
- **Do you think it would help any other people in schools? How?**

In Phase One of the project, fewer Cohort A participants were able to take part in the respondent validation exercise as they had moved on to secondary phase schooling before the validation exercise could take place, and some participants were therefore uncontactable. This was not the case for Cohorts B, C and D, as all participants in all three remaining cohorts who were still

pupils at the school and present during the period when these took place, were invited to take part in their respective respondent validation exercises.

Two additional questions were formulated for the respondent validation interviews, to enable me to explore issues around the validity and reliability of the use of the prompt sheet and about video recording as a data collection tool: hence, participants were asked:

- **Did you use the prompt sheet?**

Of the 26 transcriptions of the responses to this question, all participants but one said that they had referred to the sheet to some extent, and particularly the younger girls said that it had helped them ‘a bit’, ‘to think about it’, ‘to concentrate on things to say’:

D1: “...The prompt sheet helped me remember different things and how I felt.”

D7: “...The prompt sheet...helped me to know what to talk about.”

D9: “...The prompt sheet helped me think.”

The comments from older participants indicated that it was unlikely that the prompt sheet had introduced a bias into their responses:

C6: “...I knew what I was going to say but it was helpful if we got stuck.”

C5: “...The prompt sheet helped but didn’t direct me what to say.”

A3: “...The prompt sheet helped, it gave me ideas – but not of what to say – of things to talk about ...If you didn’t have a sheet some people might have felt stuck.”

Many of the participants had stated informally to me before filming that they were ‘excited’ and ‘nervous’ about taking part in the process. The participants were invited to say as little or as much as they wished: some participants found it much more difficult than others to make their recordings, so that the duration of the video evaluations varied from as little as less than a minute long for two participants, to some as long as 9 minutes and one recording of over 16 minutes. I was keen to ascertain whether the use of this data collection tool had hampered the participants in any way in their ability to articulate their experience of the intervention. Hence, participants were asked:

- **Was it difficult or easy to talk to the camera, or would you have preferred a face to face interview with the researcher?**

Two participants stated that they had no preference and would have been happy with either filming or an interview. 18 participants across the cohorts said that they had found this at least somewhat awkward and that they would have preferred a straightforward interview. There was no discernible correspondence between the age and maturity of the participant and the degree of awkwardness experienced by participants from the youngest and the oldest cohorts:

D5: "...The camera was difficult – it would be easier face to face."

D1: "...The camera was hard – weird - pointing at me... I would have been able to be honest in an interview."

A4: "...I would have preferred to do an interview rather than a video – I wasn't keen on talking to the camera."

I extended this question in an effort to further ensure the reliability of findings from the video diary data set:

### **Could you have been honest in a face to face situation?**

Some participants answered this with apparent confidence:

A3: "...It was quite hard to talk to the camera – I would have preferred an interview – I don't think it would have been hard to be honest – I would have been able to say what I think."

However, seven participants were of the view that whilst they had found making the recording difficult, they would have found it more problematic to be honest about their views in an interview with me:

A5: "...It was hard to sit in front of the camera but I think it was more honest than an interview."

It may be that this perceived ability to be honest with the interviewer was dependent upon the level of confidence of individual personalities and the differing degree of closeness in the relationship between researcher as head teacher and each individual participant.

The video evaluations were transcribed using a Sample Transcription Convention model (Mackey and Gass 2005) (Appendix K) and coded using a template analysis model (King 2008).

The respondent validation interview responses were coded in the same way to further inform the analysis. Data analysis began with identification of broad emergent themes based upon their comments about:

- Participant feelings about the intervention.
- Participant recall of the intervention sessions.
- Participant views about the impact of the intervention.

The data was then increasingly drilled down so that further sub themes emerged:

- Participant recall and feelings at the outset of the intervention.
- Participant recall and feelings about the varying activities which took place during the intervention.
- Participant views about the relationship with the practitioner and trained practitioner.
- Participant views on the impact of the intervention upon self and upon others in their group.
- Parental/carer views and participants' reports of their views of the intervention.
- Participant recall and feelings at the cessation of the intervention.
- Participant views on the benefits of the intervention to the wider community.

These sub themes have been rated as of a level of significance as indicated by the number of sources commenting upon them, along with the corresponding number of references made to that sub theme, as identified using a qualitative analysis software tool. Table 4.5 shows the sub themes in order of significance.

Table 4.5: to show sub-themes identified from video evaluations and respondent validations in order of significance.

Sub Themes	Source	Reference
*Feelings at Outset	54	64
Confidence	52	109
*Enjoyment	52	83
Friendships	45	96
Masks	45	55
*Recommendation	45	55
Relationship with practitioner	35	63
Helpful to others	35	40
*Negative comment	34	40
Apprehension	31	37
Change of attitude	28	41
*Helpful to self	28	38
Games	28	37
Talked at home	21	21
Repeat project	19	22
Gender	17	22
Report to parent (positive)	16	16
Feelings at cessation	12	18
*Emotions	11	13
Drama	10	11
Scrapbooks	8	9
Feelings of safety	7	10
Sustainability of impact	7	8
Discussion	6	9
No right or wrong	6	7
Leading	5	5
Activities	5	5
Freeze Frames	4	5
Singing and dancing	4	5
'The Bubble'	4	5
Working agreement	1	1

\*. An asterisk indicates those sub themes for which a prompt was offered.

Thus, that the greatest number of sources- 54- is for the sub theme of 'Feelings at Outset, is explained in that every participant chose to begin their evaluation by glancing at the prompt sheet and addressing the first question:

**'What did you think/how did you feel when you were asked to take part in the Girls' Group?'**

The participants then went on in varying degrees to become more fluent in their subsequent contributions. 'Confidence' as a sub theme, with 52 sources and 109 references, has been treated as the most highly significant sub theme in the analysis of the data, since this has the second greatest number of sources and the highest number of references and was an entirely unprompted sub theme which emerged purely when the evaluations were interrogated. The sub theme of 'Enjoyment', with 52 sources and 83 references, and the two sub themes 'negative comments', with 34 sources and 40 references and 'emotions' with 11 sources and 13 references were likely in the first instance to have been prompted by the prompt sheet question

**'What did you like/dislike about the sessions?'**

The remaining sub themes asterisked as appearing on the prompt sheet relate to two further open questions. The first

**'Do you think the project helped you in any way? If so, how?'**

may be considered as related to the sub theme of 'Helpful to self' with 28 sources and 38 references. Similarly the prompt sheet question:

**'Do you think a similar project could help others in other classes or schools?'**

is likely to have contributed to responses under the sub theme 'recommendation', with 45 sources and 55 references, as well as the sub theme 'helpful to others', with 35 sources and 40 references.

Broadly, the qualitative data was interrogated first by placing it into the following four categories containing related sub themes which I had identified and triangulated with the reflections of the practitioner and trainee, and the external inter-rater (Appendix Y)

1. Pupil feelings and perceptions at the outset of the intervention, including expressions of anxiety, excitement, anticipation, early levels of confidence and concerns around social grouping and dynamics. This consistent with the inter-rater's comments:

*'...There is evidence of pre-start trepidation and... initial nervousness... but also excitement...'*

2. The effectiveness of the intervention activities, including setting the rules, leading and playing the games, masks and drama work, team work, discussion/reflection time, and the scrapbooks which the participants decided to develop in the second phase of the project. The inter-rater noted that:

*'...The games and the mask work is commented on throughout...'*

3. The relationships between participants and between the participants and the practitioner and trainees, including the quality of these relationships, and perceived alterations in these relationships during the period of the intervention, as well as how relationships impacted upon the outcomes of the intervention. This is consistent with the inter-rater's comments:

*'...There is a recognition and appreciation of... supportive relationships and the enabling to share and express feelings...there is a sense of being accepted...extended/ expanded friendship groups...'*

4. The impact of the intervention as identified by the pupils upon themselves, including any perceived changes in themselves, their views on the generalizability of impact and any recommendations for further practice for peers in the school and more widely. This is consistent with the inter-rater's comments:

*'...These participants speak of improved confidence...improved relationships with peers...the project helped others in their group ...it could help other classes...'*

In addition, there were a total of 40 negative references from 34 data sources, indicating that the majority of the participants had made at least one negative comment during their video evaluations; there are no discernible commonalities as these comments occur uniquely for individual participants and as such they have been treated within exploration of the other significant sub themes.

#### 4.3.1.1 Perceptions at the Outset of the Intervention

The prompt sheet encouraged pupils to focus upon their feelings at the outset of the project in the first instance:

**‘What did you think /how did you feel when you were asked to take part in Girls’ Group?’**

Every participant used this as their starting point in their video evaluations, with 64 references made, in 54 sources of data, as to how participants felt when the intervention began, including 31 sources which make 37 references in all to feelings of apprehension (as well as two negative references from two participants who initially complained that the intervention took place in the school’s yurt, which took some time to warm up on colder days).

B10: “...I thought it’d be quite scary to do it and I was shy and quite worried but at the same time excited.”

C6: “... Well- we started our first Girls’ Group ... I felt a bit worried ... well... when we started our first session I felt quite apprehensive,”

A3: “...a bit nervous but excited ‘cos it seemed different.”

It is apparent from the girl’s videos and the subsequent validating interviews that a number of these responses about feelings at the outset of the project re-iterated the view of the staff that pupils lacked confidence, with many girls, including those from the oldest cohort, confiding to the camera and in the subsequent validation interviews that they felt ‘shy at the start’:

A1: “...at first I were quite shy and nervous.”

Feelings of nervousness seemed particularly prevalent for the two groups of girls in the second phase of the project, each of these groups being a year younger than their Phase 1 counterparts:

D 2: “...I enjoyed doing Girls’ Group but at first I ... felt a bit - er ... shy ...”

The participants saw themselves as entering what appeared to them to be a new social mix and nervousness was expressed particularly strongly by the youngest cohort of girls in the second Phase of the project, for whom working with older girls from other classes seemed to equate with working with strangers, in an unusual situation which might prove problematic for them. This caused a degree of trepidation:

D1: "... I thought about taking part in Girls' Group ...I didn't really like it at... I disliked the first session because I was ... apprehensive about the ... girls inside the group... I heard stories about the (Cohort C girls), that everyone would be teasing ... I didn't know anybody at the start ... I was worried about people picking on me ... saying "oh- you're in Girls' Group- you're a weirdo - you're a dork"..."

D3: "... at first I felt like nervous because ... I didn't really know all the (Cohort C female pupils)..."

D8: "...when you work with people that you don't really know it's a bit nervous ... it feels a bit ... nerve-wracking 'cos you like ... don't know how it's going to end up on your first day."

It could be assumed that in a small primary school with a very local catchment, the majority of pupils would be acquainted with each other - or even in many cases related – and this was certainly an assumption which I had made and which was implied by the personal data about pupils which the school held. Nevertheless, for these female pupils, relationships between cohorts were clearly less common, even on a school site where all the pupil social spaces were shared. If each cohort of girls saw themselves as a singular group, rather than as a members of a larger gendered group, it could be that relationship opportunities appeared limited, and those that existed were viewed as fragile, impacting upon the girls' confidence, particularly in male-heavy cohorts:

B5: "...At first I was worried about the project- that it might change everything and that it might change other people."

In addition to the concerns about working with less familiar peers, there was a sense of apprehension and nervousness about what the project would entail, and this seemed common across the cohorts in both phases of the project:

A3: "...when I was asked to be involved I felt quite afraid ... 'cos I didn't know what you were gonna do or anything."

A common concern expressed was that that they might be asked to do things with which they were unfamiliar and which they might "get wrong". This corresponds with the staff observations that in the learning environment these female pupils displayed anxiety and were not easily encouraged to take risk:

B1: "...I was a bit worried that it was something different and I wouldn't do it right".

B 7: "...the first thing that comes into my mind is that I'm excited but worried that I'm not gonna do it right ...I was bit shy and not confident about what we was going to do".

Thus the participants demonstrated a range of emotions about this intervention at its' outset: anticipation, excitement and curiosity about taking part in something new and different; their comments indicated that they each had their individual expectations and thoughts about what the project had to offer.

Some girls expressed a genuine enthusiasm for the opportunity to be involved:

C1: "...Well, when I went to Girls' Group it was kinda exciting and I felt ... really...strange when I walked into ... to meet J. and M. (practitioners) 'cos it was my first time and when (the researcher) asked me if I wanted to part of Girls' Group I said yes ... I felt excited and felt like I wanted to just get in there and get stuck in with the work."

A4: "...When we first got to be asked to be in this project I kinda felt like ... "what was this? What was it meant to do?" I just wondered what it was for... so I thought I'd try it ...I just went along with it and I quite enjoyed it?"

C10: "...I thought it was really, really exciting when I first got a letter about it. I thought that ...it was gonna be really, really good."

For some participants there was a sense of curiosity:

D5: "...Er... when I was asked to go to Girls' Group I felt very interested about it because I thought "what are we going to do there? - or is it going to be fun or not?" I wondered what we would do."

There were also some participants who had been keen at the start but who began to feel unsure when the sessions commenced because of the nature of the activities, to which they were unused and unfamiliar, perhaps because these demanded of them a more social, active mode of learning and taking part than they tended to exhibit in the classroom:

A5: "...I wasn't sure about it but it sounded good ... When I first got asked to the project I was like ... yeah... I want to do this, I really want to do this and when I walked in to find what we was going to do I thought I'm not sure I want to do this anymore."

At the start of both phases of the project, a small minority of the girls expressed their doubts about the merits of the project, its' relevance and whether it would prove valuable to them personally:

A7: "...I had no issues with the boys so I didn't feel the project was for me at first. I didn't really think the Girls' Group was going to be for me because well...em... I don't really have many problems ...er ... sometimes I fall out with my friends and that's it but we always figure it out between ourselves."

The participant who made one of the most lengthy and extremely positive recording at the end of the intervention was perhaps the most negative at the outset of her involvement in the project:

D1: "...I didn't like it at the start – I thought it was pointless..."

In particular, one participant with Special Educational Needs was very forthcoming about her reservations; at the start of the intervention she found the unfamiliar routines and activities extremely challenging.

D4: "...Er ... I was sad at the first ... I didn't want to do it...I didn't want to... join the group... I didn't want to ... want to ... lunch in the yurt... I was bored."

However, as the intervention progressed, she continued to choose not to withdraw, was well supported by her peers, became increasingly engaged over the course of the phase of the intervention in which she was taking part, and was positive about the intervention in her eventual recorded evaluation. Cohort D, the youngest cohort of participants did reference boredom at the start of the intervention more frequently than the other cohorts. The inter-rater comments that '*...initial nervousness is deeper for this group than the others and is often expressed as some initial boredom which seems to dissipate as the project progresses...*'

For those girls who felt the apprehension, as they began to work with others, their fears tended to be allayed; once they had met with the practitioner and had taken part in games and other activities, their apprehension began to dissipate, they began to form relationships and to enjoy the sessions

D3: "...at first I felt worried... really worried at first ... but ...but then I got some friends in (Cohort C). I still felt that at first ...shy and nervous and stuff but then ... we did a game."

D8: "... well I was really excited at the beginning of Girls' Group but I found it a bit ... nervous but I got used to it in the past couple of weeks."

All the participants continued to consent to take part and not one withdrew during the course of the either phase of the project, although it was made clear to them on a weekly basis by the practitioner that they had the choice to withdraw from any part of the session. For the majority

of girls in both phases of the project, there was a positivity about being involved in a project which was just for the girls, with many of them affirming that they were “pleased” and “happy” to be invited to take part. The inter-rater notes:

*‘...There was an underlying sense of being “chosen” or “special” ...’*

In order to overcome the apprehension that these young pupils might feel in becoming involved in this novel intervention, the practitioner was keen to enable the girls to feel safe and engaged with the intervention and to enable them take the lead from the outset; she facilitated working agreements which were drawn up by girls during the first sessions of both phases of the project. The wording of the two agreements over the two phases of the intervention( Appendix Z) were very similar and provide insight into the girls’ ideal social and learning environment ,

- Teamwork
- Working together
- Including everyone’s ideas
- Encouraging
- Need to be able to get along
- Say sorry if you need to
- Treat others people as you would wish to be treated
- Don’t leave anyone out
- Listen to each other – don’t talk when other people are talking
- Don’t interfere in other people’s business
- People can be/wear whatever they want
- Don’t back chat your friends
- Give them a chance/space to share their ideas/feelings
- Have confidence in yourself

The practitioner was keen to ask the girls how they thought they might create an environment conducive to people being able to “have confidence in themselves” to which they replied that being able to share ideas, to “give everyone a chance – don’t take over”, that everyone’s ideas should be accepted – “no right or wrong” and that the activities should be “fun”. In line with this directive from the pupils, the practitioner and her trainee used weekly warm –up activities, such

as games, to help the girls to relax and come together as a working group. The inter-rater noted the participants' references to what might be defined as '*a sense of safe community*'.

#### **4.3.1.2 The Activities**

Data sources reference a range of activities which have been treated as subthemes:

- The Games
- The Masks and Drama
- Discussion and Reflection

##### **4.3.1.2.1 The Games**

An open question on the prompt sheet:

**‘What did you like/dislike about the sessions?’**

elicited 37 references from 28 data sources made about the games which were played at the start of each session.

The practitioner established from the first session of Phase One of the project that these sessions were to be co-led, that pupils would have as much say in the processes, pathways and the outcomes of the work as did the adults. As such, the girls were invited to draw up a list of warm-up games with which they were familiar and were invited to volunteer to take a turn in leading the warm-up game at the start of each session. The practitioner asked how it felt to be the leader. The girls responded with “fun and scary” – with ten of the nineteen girls present in the first phase of the project agreeing with one comment that it was “scariest than rock climbing”. When asked what else made them feel similarly, they identified acting in the school Panto, showing other people their work and doing presentations to the class. Taking a turn in leading the games was seen by the vast majority of the girls a very positive experience:

C2: “...when we first got there ... we played like games and things ... and then ... we got a big sheet of paper and we wrote down the games to play so people ... so people would like ...take part in a game,...and ... I think, I felt... I was happy that we got to play games and things.”

C9: “...when we first met J. and M. (practitioners) it was fun because you got to go like in the yurt, play some games and then you got ... people got to lead some games... so it was fun”.

It may be that, given the domination of some male peers in the classrooms – of which all the staff in the school recognised and attempted to address on every occasion, that even then, and more so in undirected times on the school playground, these female pupils were finding few opportunities to take the lead in learning and in social situations. For many of the girls who were considered by staff to be less assertive in the classroom, leading their games appeared to give these girls in particular a real sense of achievement:

D3: "...I thought it were... fun ...because we did all these games and stuff and ... me and (Cohort D pupil) ... we did a game and ....everyone liked it and everyone knew the game."

The sense of ownership and empowerment which the girls were able to gain from this opportunity for experience of taking a leadership role was evident in many of the evaluations:

D1: "...I also liked how we did the games ... we each chose to pick our favourite game and wrote it down on a list ...and everybody chose a game ...everybody played their game... it was really fun ....."

C10: "...we played lots of fun and games but you can... just do whatever you want, whatever you feel like ... and ... if you don't want to play a game you don't have to do to and it's really good."

For a few of the girls, the games were a less positive part of the experience of the project. One participant found it challenging to work in an unfamiliar social mix for much of the time, although, since the practitioner quickly recognised that this was an issue for this individual, such occasions were limited as far as possible to accommodate her difficulty.

C5: "...J. and M. (practitioners) were very good because they tried to fit everybody's games in and nobody was left out."

C7 "... I liked how J. and M. (practitioners) helped... all of us to think of games and ... games and activities to do... not just .... M. (trainee) doing a game what we all don't want ... or J. (practitioner) doing a game."

The less well-developed leadership skills of participants in particular during the second phase of the project occasionally led to negativity. Some of the younger girls struggled to lead their chosen game without a high level of support from the practitioner, and their early efforts tended to frustrate some of their peers in the first instance, although again, the practitioner always addressed the difficulties and the games were eventually led successfully ( Appendix AA).

D2: "...I disliked some of the games – they were a bit silly".

D9: "...The games made me a bit sad sometimes – I didn't know what to do and it gets confusing and I was bored."

For some pupils, despite the practitioner's regular reassurance that anyone could withdraw from any activity at any time, it seems that friends' feelings were given priority over their own –

C1 "...I didn't really want to play all the games – I took part to make sure that other girls were happy and so they would take part in my games."

Nonetheless this warm-up process also seemed to pave the way for many of the pupils to be more open to taking risk when they became involved in the more challenging activities

A4: "...the games were good – they made me feel more confident to do things in front of all the other girls."

C7: "... I felt a bit confused what we were about and then when I got into it ... I ... I had to ... when I got into the games I felt happy and proud of myself for joining in."

#### **4.3.1.2.2 The Masks and Drama**

As the sessions progressed, in both phases of the project, the practitioner led the girls through an introduction to masks, using masks (Appendix BB) , making masks (Appendix DD) and developing their performance skills. During the video evaluations and subsequent respondent validation interviews there were several negative references to being required to "get up in front of people", though these statements can all be considered in the light of the same participants expressing how such exercises had increased their confidence by the end of the intervention. One participant did not enjoy the 'Freeze frames' exercise because it necessitated staying very still for longer periods than she liked, whilst another did not enjoy using the masks, although she enjoyed the other activities, including the drama without masks, which she engaged in very fully and willingly. One participant disliked the 'mirroring game' facilitated by the practitioner (Appendix CC), as the group in which she was working found it very challenging to work successfully as a team on this occasion, so that it proved a negative experience for the participant concerned. A further participant struggled with her peers' reactions to the very creative mask she had made, but learned to overcome her concerns about her individuality:

A4: "... When people commented on my masks I didn't want them to, but now I think it's OK to be weird – I want my mask to be weird now – I was more worried about being different than I am now."

Overall, using and making the masks were almost universally responded to very positively by girls in both phases of the projects, with 45 sources of data containing 55 references to mask activities. The inter-rater also noted the significance of the mask work: ‘...*The masks seem to have had the greatest impact as method...*’, this is consistent with the participants’ comments:

B3: “...and ...what I liked about it ...was that I... that we could make more masks and work with other people that I didn’t know...and I felt really confident doing it ...we made masks ... some of us made two and I liked it...and I felt confident being with all the (Cohort A pupils) and my class.”

There are numerous references in the video evaluations and subsequent validation interviews to the enjoyment of this aspect of the project, that they were “fun” and “exciting”. For some girls, it was the creative processes which were the most enjoyable aspect of using masks, having access to some perhaps less familiar craft materials, and the process of evaluating and improving upon the design, whilst for others this process was more problematic:

C2: “...every time when we made the masks I felt a little ...bit ...stuck... because I didn’t really know how to make my mask and then... (Cohort D pupil) ... was on my table and she (gave me an idea but) it kind of got a bit...stuck because it was the next Friday and I found that everything had fallen to pieces ... so I had to do it again,”

For some of the girls, there was positive evaluation of the team work, of sharing the creative process with a chosen peer and of the closer relationships which resulted from this, such as when two participants created masked characters for a subsequent tableau:

A7: “... “I liked the friendship activities me and A8. (Cohort A pupil) made matching masks. We stayed best friends for ages after we made those ‘Blobs’ (mask characters).”

For many of the girls, the use of the masks thereafter to work together in small groups with pupils with whom they were less familiar, enabled them to form new friendships. For one participant, it was an opportunity to work with a pupil from her own class whose interest and friendships were generally in contrast to her own, so that apparently there was usually very little interaction between them even in the classroom:

C9: “... When we did our masks ... it was fun ...me and (Cohort C pupil) were “angry” so we got to do this dance ... kind of ... you had to stomp your feet and then you had to like do a pose ... like you were on a catwalk ....playing games, leading games, making masks is fun. You can

do drama – be angry- stomp and pose – have lunch with people who you’ve never met so that was exciting.”

The pupil with Special Needs, who had originally been very negative about becoming involved in the project, was very positive about these experiences:

Researcher: “What was so good about... when you were doing the acting?”

D4: “funny, exciting!”

For many of the girls, the subsequent activities using the masks, including forming tableaux and sharing in the creation of “play-lets” which were then performed to the larger group again provided a sense of achievement (Appendix EE):

A3: “...I enjoyed the creative mask making and showing other people what you’d done – I liked the tableaux and the drama and all the different bits”

The girls responded to the masks and began to understand their usefulness as a tool for exploring and developing a better understanding of feelings:

A3: “...The things I liked in the group was when we had to make masks was so people could show what emotions you did.”

D5: “...I liked when we was dancing with our masks about our feelings and making masks ‘cos it was really fun...I liked that we got to make masks and show how you felt.”

Many of the girls’ responses appear to suggest their awareness of a sense of what might be achieved through involvement in the project; there were some very reflective comments from these young pupils, indicating a developing understanding of the use of the mask as a vehicle for exploring feelings and for facilitating change (Appendix FF) :

B4: “...J. was very important and helped us to understand our feelings- the masks helped: made my feelings happier – one of my masks was happy. When you wore the masks it made you feel like a totally different person.”

B5: “...At first you’re the one underneath the mask... Then the mask becomes you... The masks helped me feel more confident ...When we did the mask it was like a confidence builder – made you speak your mind and gave you the words to express your feelings better – like if your excited or happy you had the words to say that.”

A5: "...With the mask you didn't have to be yourself – you could be someone else so you could show your feelings."

C6: "...I liked lots of the different games and all the activities – I liked making the masks best and it's really improved my confidence."

A4: "...The masks and the games...it made me feel more confident...the mask doesn't show the shy side it opens out your personality - it can show parts of yourself wearing a mask... that you couldn't show without it."

This range of positive evaluations of the mask work indicates that, regardless of age and maturity, participants in all cohorts perceived that they benefitted from the mask activities.

#### **4.3.1.2.3 Discussion and Reflection**

At intervals between games, drama and mask making activities and during plenaries, the practitioner provided the girls with opportunities during every session to converse together either as a larger group or in pairs or smaller, mixed cohort groups, on any subject which had either arisen from the sessions or during their week in school. For those participants who tended as personalities to be more active and less introspective, discussion and reflection time was less positively received:

C8: "... I liked playing all the games and leading the games and stuff but I didn't exactly like ... I didn't like all the talking – I prefer the doing – erm - doing ... I didn't like doing ... that much talking because I just like ... doing it instead of talking about it."

There were only a very few references to the discussion and reflection sessions in the video evaluations. However, the photo-journal of the intervention and the researcher's notes demonstrate that once rules, routines and relationships had been established, at many points in the sessions in both phases of the intervention, pupils engaged in and indeed began to initiate opportunities to reflect. As their relationship with the practitioner developed over time, some girls sought increased opportunities for these discussion times, either in groups with the practitioner facilitating, or with partners, or for some individually with the practitioner or her trainee.

A7: "...The partner work helped... because you got to discuss in that group – some people find it hard to discuss your feelings and the group helped them."

One pupil at first found the discussion times frustrating, but over time began to re-evaluate the benefits of the practitioner's approach:

D1: "...at the start it got a bit boring that we was talking about the same thing over and over again but then I realised that we didn't talk about the same thing over and over again – we were talking about different things..."

Some of the generally less vocal members of the group appreciated the opportunity to "talk about things you wouldn't normally talk about", in what they very quickly came to regard as a safe space.

B10: "...The artist was helping – we were all more confident to do what we think and say what we think- talking in the group, interacting with other people and having fun, games....Talking about things you wouldn't talk about- what's happening in your life- sometimes it was embarrassing – sad – helped me to realise not to be afraid."

#### **4.3.1.3 The Relationship with the Practitioner**

The data sources reference two major areas for interrogation: relationships with the practitioner and the trainee, and relationships between participants. Relationships are also recognised as key theme by the inter-rater. From 35 sources there were 63 positive references made regarding the practitioner and trainee practitioner; they were adept and skilled at building positive relationships very rapidly with the girls in both phases of the project.

C1: "...It was exciting – it was strange when I walked in the first time to meet J. and M. (practitioners) – I was apprehensive about what might happen."

B2: "... getting to know J. (practitioner) I was shy and not shy- we had a chat from the start."

B5: "...J. (practitioner) was like a friend to us – the way J. was with us did it."

That the practitioner was seen to treat every pupil with a respect and regard was evident in the very positive and warm comments in every one of the girls' video evaluations: the girls thought that both the practitioner and her trainee were "great", that they were "fun", that they were "helpful", "kind" and "the best teachers in the world". The attachment formed was particularly strong for the youngest participants, Cohort D. such that one described the practitioners as "so amazing and so pretty and so beautiful" that they wished they were "the school's head teacher"!

The inter-rater noted that:

*‘...there is a recognition and appreciation of a supportiveness and belonging and non-judgemental relationship they have with the adults...’*

The practitioner is described by several of the girls as ‘like a friend’, ‘caring’, and someone who could ‘listen to what you’re saying, try to help you with your problems’. Some girls considered that getting to know the practitioner and her trainee were the most valuable part of the project:

D1: “...and I’d like to say that J. (practitioner) and M. (trainee) was really was there for us if we was down – and she - they really helped us. J. (practitioner) and M. (trainee) were just there all the time. ... I really do miss J. (practitioner) and M. (trainee) because they were - they was a fun part about Girls’ Group as well – that’s what I liked about Girls’ Group – getting to know J. and M.”

D7: “...I think J. (practitioner) and M. (trainee) are pretty amazing for what they’ve done ....that’s just the best gift in the world...I never met someone as kind... as nice... they think everyone’s special and they’re really special too.”

There was a general recognition of the expertise of the practitioner in the design of the intervention – ‘it was all planned out’ - and an appreciation of the facilitation skills of both the practitioner and the trainee practitioner throughout both phases of the project which are very evident in the girls’ video evaluations:

D9: “...J. and M. (practitioners) were kind and helped you a lot if you felt sad, and when we did the masks. They are the best teachers.”

C3: “...J. and M. (practitioners) are really encouraging – she says nice things and she believes in what you say. When friendships go downhill J. (practitioner) builds my confidence - I cope better with it.”

Some participants began to identify and articulate what they perceived to be some of the main messages about resilience which the practitioners strove to define and cultivate on a weekly basis

C3: “...J. and M. (practitioners) showed you can join in – you don’t have to do what you don’t want to do...I think that ... well J. and M. (practitioners) were really nice. J. is always a leader who ... she’s really ... encouraging - she doesn’t say...“ Oh, no, you aren’t doing any more” ... she says nice things like “oh yeah, you can play” ... she believes in what you say... she doesn’t make fun of you.”

D7: "... J. and M. showed that everyone's special in their own ways."

The girls' appreciation expressed in their view that in the sessions there was "no right or wrong" and their recognition of a full acceptance implicit in the practitioners' ways of working with them:

D6: "...What you do at school – it's got to be right ...when you get something wrong in class you do it again, but in Girls' Group you can just do it - anything and try... I really liked it when we did ...did the masks 'cos there was no right or wrong,".

D7: "...I really, really did like Girls' Group because you ... because you weren't ... there weren't no right or wrong answers, and it was just about you ... no one ...one else could tell you what to do, they just wanted you to be honest."

There was evidence that the participants appreciated the degree of autonomy the intervention afforded them in terms of their level of engagement and involvement in both the sessions and the range of activities:

C10: "... we played lots of fun and games but you can ... just do whatever you want, whatever you feel like ... and ... if you don't want to play a game you don't have to do to and it's really good."

A5: "... I thought "what if we get pushed to do something we don't want to do?" But instead ... we didn't ... get pushed."

One of the activities which was mentioned positively in many of the evaluations was the 'working lunch'. This was treated as 'down time' by the practitioner, so that pupils could either socialise with each other, or join their male classmates outside on the playground (- this was usually the choice for one participant who was a skilled footballer). The practitioner also made herself available for any individual or group of the girls to chat with her on an informal level, so that relationships could be deepened. Many of the girls expressed very positive feelings about the relationship with the practitioner in terms of outcomes for themselves and indicated that they recognised the support which they had been given during the intervention:

B8: "...and I want to say that Girls' Group really helped me...and ... it took my mind off things at home".

D8: "... I think that J. and M. (practitioners) have been really ... supportive ... especially to me ..."

The inter-rater comments upon the

*'...particularly close and important relationship with the practitioners ...'*

demonstrated by the Cohort D participants; the adults do indeed seem to have been of key significance to this youngest group of participants, but the building of a close relationship with the practitioner and her trainee appears to have been for a majority of the participants from all cohorts, one of the most treasured aspects of the girls' experience throughout the project.

#### **4.3.1.4 On the Cessation of the Intervention**

C9: "...I liked the masks, drama, scenes, acting if front of other people got easier. I wanted to do it again – it was sad on our last day."

The 18 references from 12 data sources from the video evaluations evidence feelings of disappointment when the intervention comes to an end, with 22 references from 19 sources of a wish to continue or repeat the experience; the inter-rater refers to these expressions as:

*'...a sense of regret...'* and most particularly in the case of Cohort D *"...a strong sense of loss or sadness...'*

Many of the participants expressed that they were "sad it's over", and indicate that feelings of negativity at the outset of the intervention have changed considerably by the end of the provision:

D1: "...when I first started it ... it just didn't feel right to me but after I felt excited. I felt disappointment ...disappointed ... that the Girls' Group had to end ... that the Girls' Group had come to finish ... because I really liked Girls' Group and I thought it'd go on for a long time."

Even though one participant had claimed that at the outset she had felt that the intervention was not something which would be of particular benefit to her, by the end of the project she commented that she "...would have probably kept on with it..." (A 7) , given the opportunity to do so. This changed perception of the intervention was echoed by the pupil with Special Educational Needs, who had been so vocal in her negative feelings at the outset:

Researcher: "What about at the end?"

D4: "I was a bit sad."

Researcher: "Why?"

D4: "The group was finished!"

#### **4.4 On the Impact of the Intervention**

The inter-rater notes that:

*'...These participants speak of a perceived growth.. improved confidence... for themselves and for others...brave where shy before, asking and input in class...the project seems to have widened their experiences/awareness of others...'*

28 sources of data provide 38 references demonstrating that participants viewed the intervention helpful to them personally: "...It took my mind off things that are happening bad at home – having fun." (B8) and many could identify concrete examples of changes which they personally felt had taken place:

B10: "...At first I thought it would be scary, I was shy, worried, excited. The (Cohort A pupils) commenting on what you think and stuff made me a bit wary - having that group helped."

Some participants had found it challenging from the outset to work with peers who they did not know well. One participant who had struggled throughout the sessions with the unfamiliar social mix observed that those aspects of the intervention which they had found most difficult had their justifications and benefits:

D8: "...but what I didn't like... about - Girls' Group is that sometimes you have to work with people that ... you don't really like ... but ... that's how you get comfortable with people... I think that the project helped us."

##### **4.4.1 Participants' Views on Gender Issues**

Gender had been a significant theme in the data from the original pupil surveys. In the video evaluations, 17 sources referenced gender a total of 22 times:

A5: "... (the project) helped you get away from the boys – in a mixed class I sometimes felt anxious – they can be annoying and shout out so you don't get a chance to say anything."

C6: "... Standing up in front of people is easier just with girls."

B9: "...I wasn't very confident so it helped me build it up a bit more acting in front of people - because it's just the girls it's easier to do it."

Participants gave a number of concrete examples of the changes they felt they had experienced as a result of this single-sex intervention. There was evidence in the video evaluations of the interpersonal skills gained during the intervention; these were seen as transferable into the mixed-gender learning environment so that relationships with their male peers were seen to have improved. The participants reported feeling more able to 'get involved' with boys (B1) and to play with them (B7) and that they felt more confident about asking and answering questions in a mixed sex learning environment.

B3: "... I wasn't confident around the boys – I'm more confident now – before I didn't put my hand up – the boys still put their hands up first but I still put my hand up now".

Some participant reflected on the benefits that having separate activities had also brought to the boys in their class. One reported that conflicts between the boys in her class seemed to have decreased:

D1: "...and I just think that it's because they've been spending time together as well as the girls have been spending time together."

Another of the participants felt that the boys in their classes could benefit from a similar intervention:

C10: "...A boys' group would be a good idea: they could relate to each other in different ways than in play-fighting...and I bet the boys would enjoy it as well if they did a boys' group for boys and then they could help boys bond confidence with girls."

#### **4.4.2 Participants' Perceptions of Impact on Confidence Levels**

A4: "...the project ... this project helped all our group... 'cos we've learned ...to be more confident in ourselves and I just feel a lot better."

The sub theme of confidence is indicated as being of by far the greatest significance in the data from the video evaluations, with 109 references from 52 sources. One girl commented upon her growth in confidence, explaining that after the intervention she had gone on to play the lead part in the school's Key Stage 2 Christmas pantomime, with audiences of over 300 for each of the main performances. There are numerous references to confidence across both phases of the intervention project, with participants reporting feeling "more confident", less shy, "stronger"

and “braver” as a result of their involvement in the project. There were also many concrete examples of how participants felt they had changed and grown during the course of the intervention; they felt more able to “speak their minds”, more able to stand up and speak (A3) or “join in” (C5), or to perform in front of a group:

B8: “...The project helped me – I was not very confident before but now I’m a bit more confident – I went red in front of people - the role play - but I got over that by working in the group. I can go in front of the class – feel more confident in front of everyone – getting to know (cohort A pupils)... I talked to J. (practitioner) – if I got worried about something, she said that I could do it.”

Others talked about how they now felt more able to raise their hands and answer questions without becoming anxious that their answer might be incorrect (C9). There were claims that their increased confidence had enabled them to be better able to stand up to bullying (C3) and it had also enabled them to ‘bond’ with female peers (C8), to share their thoughts and feelings more easily (A5) and to build and sustain friendships:

D1: “...I do think the project helped me because I can now... I can now talk to girls ...I can now be friends with the girls and I’m not scared to ask them to play with me or do stuff like that with me.”

There was an indication that several participants felt that the mask activities in particular had enabled this change and growth in confidence:

B5: “...When we did the mask it was like a confidence builder – made you speak your mind and gave you the words to express your feelings better”

A4: “...The masks and the games were good – they made me feel more confident to do things in front of all the other girls.”

C6 “... I liked lots of the different games and all the activities – I liked making the masks best and it’s really improved my confidence”.

For the oldest cohort of pupils involved in the project, there was an implication that participants felt that the impact of the intervention would in some way support their imminent transition to secondary school.

A4: “... People were supportive – the Girls’ Group made it so we could gain confidence – it was a nice thing to do when we go up to secondary school – it supported you to feel more

confident.”

Some participants commented upon what they perceived to be the longer term, sustainable impact of the intervention:

B5: “...Before Girls’ Group I used not to put my hand up but after I put my hand up all the time....I think I’ve still got that confidence after a long time.”

#### **4.4.3 Participants’ Views on Impact upon Peers**

C6: “...at first I thought people in my class couldn’t improve their confidence but when we started doing it and at the end of it they’ve really improved and got even more confident.”

In 35 sources of data with positive 40 references participants expressed the view that the intervention had been beneficial to other participants; peers had “tried things” which were unfamiliar, it had helped them to “build their confidence”, to be “brave” (B7), to “put their hands up” in class and “read aloud” (C6) and it had enabled them to share their feelings (A5) and to learn how to support each other:

B10: “ now I’d say we’re all more confident to do what we think and say what we think, talking in a group, interacting with people having fun and games ... and everything was very good nothing was bad or not helpful ‘cos everything was helpful and it ... I’d say it would help other people... I think most of the...girls got really confident when they’ve done it ...We wrote on a paper how to make yourself more confident and shared them – tips from other people were helpful.”

Many participants offered concrete examples of peers who they perceived had been specifically helped and changed through involvement in the intervention:

D2: “...it was good for (named pupil) – she normally sits back.”

B5: “...(named pupil) used to be quiet, now she speaks up – me and (named pupil) used not to say hardly anything but after we spoke a lot more in class and to other people – (named pupil) speaks a lot more and she’s grown more confident.”

A7: “... I think it helped (named pupil). – she was shy – now she’s come out of her shell a bit and loosened up and realised that’s just how boys are rather than take it personally...It helped the other girls in friendship terms – (2 named pupils) got close. ... (named pupil) – she was

really shy- the closer you are in that group you felt like you was closer with everyone, everyone was pretty fine.”

#### **4.4.4 Participants’ Views on the Impact upon Peer Relationships**

The data included 96 references from 54 sources of data on the sub theme of friendship, indicating significance of the intervention upon relationships between peers. Some girls spoke particularly positively about the opportunity to widen their social circle to include girls from other classes: this was in sharp contrast to the feelings of trepidation they had shared about the outset of the intervention, when they had voiced their apprehensions about working with pupils from cohorts other than their own:

B4: “...I liked spending time with other classes and getting to know different classes- getting to know them and spending time with the other girls.”

A5: “...You got to interact with people you wouldn’t normally.”

A1: “... I liked it because we worked with (a different cohort) and we didn’t usually work with (the different cohort).”

D1: “...I do think the project helped me because ... I really liked how ...well... everybody worked together...I ... started ... being friends with (Cohort C girls) ...we’ve all made friends - we’ve all really got to know each other ... some of them have been my friends since Girls’ Group.”

Some participants talked of forming new relationships stemming from the involvement in the project, or of having reformed relationships with girls in the year above them, which they had not enjoyed since their pre-school days when they had attended the various nursery provisions which feed the school:

C6: “...I enjoyed it - got to make more friends and mixed.”

D7: “...I got to know old friends like (named Cohort C pupils).”

For pupils who were newer to the school, having transferred from elsewhere, the intervention seemed to have enabled them to settle in and make new friends quickly:

C10: “...Bonding... learning to bond with other children ...- it helped me to make friendships – I was shy before now I’m confident in class and at Girls’ Group we’ve been learning about how... to take part in friendships... some people got me a bit confident and supported me...”

C8: "...The project did help me – it helped me bond more with the girls – I'm playing with them more - it would help others if they are shy to make friends."

There was an acknowledgement that involvement in the intervention had improved relationships, with participants expressing the view that the intervention had helped to form relationships between the cohorts and helped groups of girls to socialise more positively at break and lunch times, in a wider group (B8) which then impacted upon their learning environment:

C10: "...The girls in Cohort C and D enjoyed it – we talked a lot – it helped to make friends in Cohort D – (at first) when some (Cohort D pupils) lead the games they only chose (Cohort D pupils)."

D1: "...The project helped me talk and play with girls: made me realise I can get to know anybody."

C1: "... I think it helped some people with their friendships – they get on better in class."

The participants were very reflective about friendships and emotions both in their video evaluations and in their respondent validation interviews. There were some negative comments where participants recalled feeling upset about 'being left out' and 'tearful and emotional' when peers partnered up for the various drama exercises and games, though there was also recall of incidents during sessions which had been a challenge but which participants felt had been resolved positively and which they had learned from: ,

A5: "...You felt angry and sad when people said things and you knew they were talking about you – when they discussed – I had to go away and think about it ...Before you were scared to share your thoughts and feelings ...After I felt I could do it.... In some ways I was happy and excited and in some ways I was upset and angry at people for what they said and everything and then the group – it helped me get my feelings out and I know that there would always be someone there to help me."

The inter-rater noted that:

*'...there is evidence of...expanded...extended...wider and more supportive friendship groups, improved relationships with peers.....there is a recognition and appreciation of a supportiveness from and towards others...'*

Participants commented on the support they felt they gave and received from others in the group:

A5: "... You can talk to people about YOUR feelings instead of it being one big problem, you feel like you can put your hand up."

C5: "...I was nervous and worried, then some people took care of me and got me confident. (named Cohort C pupil) and (named Cohort C pupil) reassured me and included me."

D1: "...and I was supportive of - to all the other girls because if they ever had a problem we all ...sat down and listened to the problem - that was really good as well...we all have really good now ...because we've all made friends we've all really got to know each other ...we all started playing with each other regularly ... and after Girls' Group I started to make friends outside of school as well."

#### **4.4.5 Views of Parents and Carers**

At the end of each Phase of the project, a 3-scale questionnaire was sent to the participants' parents and carers (Appendix L) in order to gauge their perceptions of the impact of the intervention. 51 %, or 19 of the 37 questionnaires were completed and returned to the school over the two phases of the project. This was a higher percentage of responses than were usually received by the school when information about the families' views on school improvement issues was sought. Table 4.6 shows the findings

Table 4.6: to show parent and carer views of the impact of the intervention.

	A lot		A little		Not at all	
My daughter has talked about the project at home	8	42%	10	53%	1	5%
	I agree		not sure		-I disagree	
My daughter tells me she has she seems to have enjoyed the project	18	95%	1	5%	0	-
I feel the project has been beneficial to my daughter	13	68%	6	10%	0	-

As with all previous surveys used in the study, opportunity was provided for parents and carers to make their comments. Apart from one parent whose daughter had not discussed the project at home, all parents and carers who responded to the survey said that they had heard about the intervention from their daughters. One parent qualified her views on the benefits of the intervention by writing that she felt ‘that it opened up bonding but also caused a lot of friction between the girls’, otherwise all the responses were positive to a greater or lesser degree. Parents and carers reported that their daughters had enjoyed the project, that it had given them more confidence in their own abilities and as part of a team. One parent reported noticing a change in her daughter and her friendship group in ‘the way they are with themselves and others around them and more confidence’. Another stated that the pupil had ‘made more friends and gained confidence in talking to (pupils in another cohort)’ and yet another that her daughter ‘looked

forward to it every Friday. She is sad it has come to an end. She said it helped her to mix better with her friends’.

During the respondent validation interviews, with questions closely aligned to the original video prompt sheet questions, participants were asked if they had talked to their parents and carers at home about their experiences; their responses conveyed that they had relayed the activities and their thoughts and feelings about the intervention to varying degrees, and some shared parents’ and carers’ responses with the researcher:

B3: “...I talked to my mum about it – she thought it was great. Mum felt I was a bit happier that time”.

C3: “...Mum said that people at home felt it had boosted my confidence.”

C9: “...My mum said it sounded good – it kind of made me a bit more confident to approach other people”.

C10: “...My mum said it helped me to talk to friends and tell them things – my mum said she would like to do it!”

#### **4.4.6 Views of School Staff**

A post-Phase One questionnaire was distributed to the each of three remaining staff members who had completed the original survey who still worked with the Phase One cohorts of participants, and their perceptions at the end of Phase One of the intervention were compared their perceptions at the outset of the research (Appendix GG). This small data set consisted of one staff member less than in the original survey. In summary, although only one member of staff made open comment on the questionnaire, writing : ‘Girls do have a good positive attitude around the setting and in their work... they want to do well’ the questionnaires indicated that the respondents perceived that a number of positive changes in female pupils’ attitudes had taken place since the outset of the intervention, particularly in relation to increases in participants’ effort and enjoyment in their work, the frequency with which they asked questions and offered answers and their apparent confidence within the classroom environment and in their social interactions with peers. This was consistent with the reflections of practitioner and trainee about the impact of the intervention on individual pupils and most strongly borne out by the pupils’ own evaluations.

A post- Phase Two Staff Survey was distributed to five of the staff members who had completed the original survey, who were still employed at the school and who now worked with the Phase Two cohorts of participants, and their perceptions at the end of Phase Two of the intervention were compared their perceptions at the outset of the research (Appendix HH). These staff members contributed further rich data in the form of the open comments they made. In their responses to the ‘Perceived Competence’ statements on the survey, staff commented that the female pupils who had participated in the study seemed to find the work less difficult (statement Five) and that ‘they seem to just get on with their work and there is rarely a problem.’ They reported an increase in girls’ offering answers and asking questions (statement Six), stating that ‘they no longer seem intimidated by the boys and are able to challenge them easily.’ They also reported that the girls appeared more confident about taking a risk with their learning (statement Seven) and that ‘if they are interested in the subject they will put maximum effort in to achieve their goal’.

In response to the ‘Life Satisfaction’ aspects of the questionnaire, there was an indication that some staff members perceived some girls as putting less effort into their work than previously, although conversely, one member of staff commented: ‘the girls in this Year group are a lot more focused and the quality of their work shows (this)’ ( statement Two). However, staff members stated that the girls were mostly interested in their learning (statement Three) and that they appeared to enjoy their learning, seeming more confident and taking a more active part (statement Four) ‘To statement Twelve: **‘They appear to want to do well and succeed in life’**, staff comments included the following observations:

- I have seen improvement in most of the girls – they are encouraged in class by the female members of the team. Some girls (3 names) have improved 100%.’
- They want to do well and are eager to please, confidence restricts their achievement.
- Most of the girls have a goal in sight of what they would like to achieve and do when they are older.

In response to the ‘Interpersonal’ aspects of the questionnaire, teaching and support staff responded that female pupils seemed ‘a lot more relaxed (this year) than they did in (last year)- they are a lot more confident’ (statement One). Staff further reported that the girls spoke confidently to adults and that they were able to challenge the boys. To statement Ten: **‘They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates’**, staff commented that ‘on a personal level’ some seemed comfortable although that there were still ‘a few boys they seem

intimidated by'. However, a recent change in the dynamics in this cohort, due to the arrival of an additional challenging male pupil who had moved into the locality, could account for this observation.

Although the views of the staff seem to correspond closely to the views of the participants involved in the study and with the views of parents and carers suggesting that the intervention had considerable impact, it must be remembered that these young pupils were maturing and changing throughout the course of the research project, and this must be taken into account when considering the conclusions which can be drawn.

#### **4.5 Summary**

The original action research question was explored through interrogation of data collected from the survey which produced quantitative measures of indicators of pupil well-being and attitudes to learning. The triangulation of this data with a staff survey of perceptions of pupils' attitudes allowed for the identification of areas for improvement in the school's educational provision for an identified group of underperforming female pupils.

The data sets collected indicated that girls more often identified themselves, and were more often perceived by staff, as less likely to put their up hand to answer questions and less often interested in their learning or enjoying what they were learning; in comparison male pupils were perceived as more often relaxed in the classroom and more confident in the presence and company of their peers, much more confident in taking risks with their learning and in speaking out in the classroom. In summary, the data highlighted a concern that the female pupils lacked the confidence and resilience to fully engage in and access the learning in the classroom environment.

The pilot intervention undertaken centred around drama and arts activities; the subsequent repeat pupil and staff surveys administered at the conclusion of the pilot intervention indicated that there had been some positive alterations in the participants' views of themselves as learners and some indication of perception of positive changes in these pupils' attitudes within the staff surveys; these findings resulted in the subsequent provision of a therapeutic intervention programme to the wider group of female Key Stage 2 pupils in two phases over two years, in an attempt to measure the impact of the therapeutic approach.

Using mixed-method data collection tools, the main study produced quantitative and qualitative data from a range of sources enabling the researcher to triangulate data and to gauge the

reliability and validity of any subsequent interpretation of the findings. Deeper analysis of the qualitative data provided in the pupils' evaluative participant video recordings and structured respondent validation interviews produced emergent themes and sub-themes which strongly indicated alterations in pupils' perceptions of themselves: broadly, these themes have been identified as:

- Largely apprehensive and negative feelings of the participants at the outset of the intervention, subsequent positive alterations in attitude as the intervention progressed and feelings of sadness and disappointment at the cessation of the intervention.
- The views of the participants about the effectiveness of the various activities offered by the practitioner as the intervention progressed, what the participants perceived about the changes in self-perception and that of their peers and what they began to understand about how this had been facilitated.
- The importance of the participants' relationship with the practitioner and trainee to the perceived success of the intervention and the positive changes which were brought about in relationships between participants.
- The participants' evaluations of the impact of the intervention on themselves and their peers; most particularly, their perception that their confidence levels and that of their peers had significantly increased, improving their ability to access the learning.

Validator data sets at the close of each phase of the intervention were triangulated with the pupils' evaluations of the impact of the intervention: participants' reports of how their families viewed the intervention, the views expressed by parents and carers and internal and external validation exercises, including practitioner reflections and the inter-rater's independent thematic interpretation of the participant's video evaluations at the close of the intervention programme, supported the overall findings of the positive impact of the intervention.

## Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter explores the findings from this action research with reference to the research questions. Firstly, Research Question One is re-visited, through an examination of the findings from the outset staff and pupil surveys and the Focus Group, from which were identified the perceived barriers to learning of the school's female pupils, including those who participated in the pilot intervention. The challenges in defining the central issues and identifying ways to overcome the perceived barriers, reflected the complexities which had emerged during the search of the literature: in particular gender, social class and home background, and the impact of these upon self – efficacy and motivation (Bandura 1997; Francis, 2000; Jackson, 2006; Jackson, Paechter and Renold, 2010), alongside consideration of classroom environment, parental and teacher expectations and a range of educational initiatives which have sought to address the underachievement of pupils in schools (Arnot et al 1998; Berry 2005; Hallam 2009; McLellan et al 2012).

The learning from the outcomes of the pilot intervention and subsequent main phases of the intervention programme as perceived by the participants, the staff, parents and carers and the artist-practitioner is then discussed in response to Research Question Two.

Within the context of a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the study, I have reflected upon the internal validity of the study and in particular, with regard to the potential limitations of the data collection tools and the data analysis approach which was employed.

In conclusion, my response to Research Question Three examines the impact of the therapeutic intervention and how far these reflect findings from wider, related studies. The outcomes of the intervention reflect the learning from a range of studies into student voice and pupil participation over the last two decades (Brewtser and Fraser 2000; Zamorski and Haydn 2000; Duffield et al 2000; Brophy 2004; Flutter and Ruddock 2004; Bannerjee 2010).

I consider how my findings have been shared to date and further potential for dissemination, and in my role as head teacher in the school, what I have learned from the action research which may be of value in terms of future whole school improvement.

## 5.1 Female Pupils' Barriers to Learning

The preliminary, quantitative, base-line data, from which the research questions were generated, was gathered through surveying the Key Stage Two pupils and those members of staff who worked with them on a regular basis. The pupil questionnaires had the advantage that they were in a format with which the pupils were familiar, in order that any confusion about how to complete them would be minimised (Wilson and McLean 1994; Fink 2002). The closed statements in both the staff and pupil the questionnaires limited the opportunities for full response, but the provision made for further comment afforded qualitative data with which to triangulate these quantitative data sets (Oppenheim 1992). The preliminary data in the form of male and female pupil responses to the survey statements at the outset of the project showed variance in the responses of the different cohorts: in the two oldest cohorts in the study, Cohorts A and B, female pupils generally demonstrated much less positive attitudes to learning than their male peers, with almost all the positive statement scores being lower than those of their male counterparts. Cohort C male and female pupil responses provided an inverse picture and in Cohort D there was some inconsistency in the positive and negative response patterns. These differences in response can be explained by a number of factors; the variance in the cohort profiles in terms of ability, special needs, pupil premium eligibility, and cohort dynamics are all factors which will have affected the data sets. Just as importantly, the responses of pupils, both male and female, will have been determined by their own unique 'lived experience' (Weber 1947; Ellis and Flaherty 1992) and the extent to which they recognised and could articulate issues which affected their learning. There are further considerations to which particular attention should be paid when drawing conclusions from this data set:

- the differing ages and levels of maturity of pupils in the cohorts- for example: the pupils in Cohort D were between 3 and 4 years younger than their Cohort A counterparts at the time of the outset survey, and it may be that they were not yet at a level of maturity to recognise or articulate with such clarity the gender and confidence issues which the female pupils in Cohort A and B were identifying (Alderson and Morrow 2004; Green and Hill 2005; Gibson 2012).
- the differing numbers of pupils in each of the cohorts and the differing male: female pupil ratios - for example, the largest discrepancy between the survey statement scores of male and female pupils in any one cohort was in Cohort B, where there were twice as many male pupils as there were female pupils, with a high level of support required in

that classroom for those boys with challenging behaviour. In contrast, the responses to the survey statements of the female pupils in Cohort C were generally more positive. In this cohort the male: female ratio was more balanced and there were no significant behaviour concerns within the cohort, indicating the possibility that behaviour issues and gender dynamics were impacting upon some cohorts more than others (Clarricoates 1987; Cruddas and Haddock 2003).

The opportunities taken to make open comment on the pupil surveys provided some qualitative data with which to triangulate the quantitative data from the questionnaires; here, references to gender and confidence levels across the cohorts gave a further indication of female pupil concerns, for example: 'I think I need some more confidence at school' and the request 'Can you please split the boys and the girls because the boys talk and we don't get much done'.

Similarly, the focus group, with the introductory question: 'What things make it hard to learn in the classroom?' produced a qualitative data set of responses indicating that the female pupils were experiencing difficulties in regard to their confidence levels as learners in the classroom, and gender-based concerns, such as 'I am not confident and I am shy' and several requests 'for people to work in boy and girl (groups)'.

The school leaders commenced an exploration of creative approaches to school improvement in order to 'promote an environment and practice that encourage learning behaviour and learning relationships and in turn supports participation, engagement and access to learning' (Cornwall and Walter 2006: 1). The initial response of the school was to plan a set of extra-curricular sessions by way of a pilot intervention for a purposive sample of female pupils, with the intention that the delivery of creative and therapeutic activities might provide insight into the potential of a larger scale intervention programme.

The data from the pre-pilot pupil survey, administered to those six pupils who had been identified and who had agreed to participate in the pilot intervention, highlighted issues of reliability such as have been extensively explored by those concerned with the validity of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Fuchs 2008; Creswell 2009): in this study, one aspect of this issue of reliability was in regard to the pupil survey as a data gathering tool, in that the pilot group participant responses to the survey seemed to indicate that they generally felt more positive about their learning experience than either the original pupil and staff surveys or the Focus Group discussions suggested. Nevertheless, the space

provided for open comment at the end of the questionnaires provided further evidence for the issues previously identified.

In regard to the staff survey data sets, although it is not a focus of *this* study, research indicating ways in which the gender of the teaching and support staff impact upon a pupil's classroom experience (Weiner 1985; Arnot 1991; Gurian 2001; Skelton and Francis 2009.), as well as the range of age and teaching experience among the staff group surveyed, would account for some of their differing responses and perceptions. Although there was some variance between male and female staff responses to some of the pre-intervention programme staff survey questions, there was a level of agreement in the responses about the barriers to learning they perceived for female pupils in the classrooms. The challenging and dominating behaviours of male pupils in some cohorts was considered a barrier for the female pupils in these cohorts and they were perceived as less engaged and relaxed in the learning environment, appearing to worry about their learning and voluntarily offering answers less often; in comparison boys were perceived as much more confident in taking risks with their learning and more confident in the presence and company of their peers.

The pilot intervention was provided internally by one of the school's trained learning mentors prior to the commissioning of the artist –practitioner for the main phases of the intervention. The pupil responses to the post-pilot survey statements varied in the indication they gave of changes in attitude to learning. However, scores had increased in positivity in response to the statements: **'I feel relaxed in my classroom'**, **'What we learn is interesting'** **'What we learn is fun'**, **'I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher'** **'I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions'**, **'I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I am not sure'**, and **'I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom'**.

The pupils' enjoyment of the creative arts aspects of the intervention was observable throughout the intervention sessions, and their open comments post-pilot intervention suggested that they attributed an increase in confidence to engagement with these activities and to opportunities for discussion and drama strategies; their 'Post-Its' evaluative comments, triangulated against their rating of their post-pilot levels of confidence, suggested that the pilot intervention participants had found the intervention to some degree effective in raising their levels of confidence as learners, for example: 'The sessions have helped' and 'creative stuff makes me confident'. There was a degree of corroboration about changes in these pupils' attitudes within the post-pilot staff survey, where the open comments indicated a perceived change in girls' attitudes in the classroom: 'they seem more able to take an active part', although the effects of the pilot

activities were qualified by further comments and observations indicating that this short intervention was not seen as having been wholly effective. The pilot intervention was however, a school-facilitated programme, and was therefore necessarily less intensive and focused than the main intervention programme, which was designed and facilitated by the commissioned, qualified artist – practitioner with experience in drama therapy.

## **5.2 The Impact of the Intervention Programme**

The pupils' video evaluations provided rich data on the impact of a range of aspects of the intervention. These included the apprehensive feelings of the participants at the outset of the intervention and their subsequent positive alterations in attitude as the intervention progressed, the participants' views of the effectiveness of the various activities offered by the practitioner in terms of positive improvements in themselves and their relationships with peers and the appreciation of the quality and nature of the relationship between the practitioner, the trainee and the participants.

In describing their feelings at the outset of the intervention, the video evaluations demonstrated the participants' expressions of anxiety and anticipation, low levels of confidence and concerns around social groupings and peer relationships. As the school's head teacher, I was bemused to find that in this small school with its' small cohorts and 'family' ethos, pupils should regard peers in other cohorts as strangers about whom to be anxious, given the many cross-cohort and enrichment events that had taken place regularly in the school over a number of years. The pupils' anxieties correlated with long-held staff concerns in relation to the vulnerability they had identified in the presentation of some pupils, which research has shown can impact upon how pupils generally engage socially and within the learning environment (Bandura 1997; Cruddas and Haddock 2005; Francis and Skelton 2005; Gilles 2006; Etherington 2008; Jackson, Paechter and Renold 2010; Noble and McGrath 2012).

The two participant cohorts in the second phase of the intervention were younger female pupils; in particular Cohort D, the youngest cohort of participants, struggled to settle into the activities at the beginning of the intervention. There was acknowledgment by both myself and the practitioner early on in this second phase that the therapeutic practice and the programme of intervention activities required a certain level of modification for a participant set with a younger age profile. This ultimately impacts upon any claim to generalizability of the findings, although comparability and transferability (Lincoln and Guba 1985) can result from the rich description provided in a naturalistic study (Schofield 1993). The artist-practitioner reflected on

this modification to the programme in regard to the level of mask work which the participants' were able to access:

“... um... yeah...um...it's been very different the second time to the first time and I think we've talked about that in an ongoing way – the difference in age and maturity and also when we were working with the Cohort A- they're looking at moving on and that maturity comes with looking to going to secondary school- so it was different and I think that ...- some of the challenges were that we- I don't think we went as deep with the mask work (in the second phase)- we worked a lot more on the dynamics of the group and we worked together on how to be team and how to be friends whereas with the Phase 1 cohorts we actually could delve a little bit deeper ...”

(Appendix O)

Enabling the participants to take a lead in the design of the intervention programme produced a clear vision of what the inter-rater defined as '*a sense of safe community*': the 'working agreements' which participants were tasked to devise at the start of each phase of the intervention were markedly similar in that they described teamwork, mutual respect, inclusion and acceptance of differences. This safe space (Christensen 2010) enabled some participants to develop a new assertiveness, so that they could take a lead in a way which they had felt unable to do in their daily classroom environments:

A4: “...the games were good – they made me feel more confident to do things in front of all the other girls.”

Again, in the second phase of the intervention, with the two younger cohorts of participants, their less well-developed leadership skills occasionally led to difficulties between participants and the necessity for a greater level of adult direction. The artist-practitioner reflected:

“... we respond to what's in the room so what was needed with this (Phase Two) group was a lot on how to be together, how to listen to each other, how to give everybody a voice...er...respecting differences, making yourself heard ...”

(Appendix O)

In terms of the effectiveness of the activities provided in the intervention programme, the masks appeared to have been regarded as very effective by all except one of the participants. Many of the video evaluations, which at first describe the negative feelings at the outset of the

intervention when being required to 'get up in front of people', later demonstrate a developing understanding of how the practitioner encouraged the participants to use the mask as a vehicle for personal change ( Jennings 1990, 2010) :

B5: "...At first you're the one underneath the mask... Then the mask becomes you... The masks helped me feel more confident ... When we did the mask it was like a confidence builder – made you speak your mind and gave you the words to express your feelings better – like if you're excited or happy you had the words to say that."

Relationships are also recognised as a key theme throughout the phases of the intervention, as recognised by the inter-rater and evidenced by the number of sources and references in the template analysis of the qualitative data. During the period of each phase of the intervention, the participants and the artist-practitioner and the trainee built a strong positive relationship (Noble and McGrath 2012). This was characterised by the respect with which the participants perceived they were treated by the practitioner, the enjoyment of the sessions, which they regarded as being well-planned and thought out, and what the inter-rater describes as the '*non-judgemental*' approach of the practitioner and the trainee.

D7: "...I really, really did like Girls' Group because you ... because you weren't ... there weren't no right or wrong answers, and it was just about you ... no one ... one else could tell you what to do, they just wanted you to be honest."

Again, this is particularly pertinent in the case of Cohort D – the youngest Cohort to access the intervention. The inter-rater comments upon the expressed closeness of the relationship with the practitioner, as being of key significance to these participants, this was evidenced in their video evaluations, with almost a sense of loss when the programme finally came to an end. The close-of-intervention celebration model chosen by Cohorts C and D was of a very personal and emotional nature: they had taken considerable numbers of photographs during the sessions, and they requested that some of these be printed in order that they could make individual 'scrapbook'- type diaries which they could keep to remind them of their experiences. The photographs represented various activities, such as the games, mask making and wearing, drama, play-lets and tableaux. The girls tended to choose those photographs which contained images of themselves and interacting with others in favoured activities.

C9: "...I liked the diaries ... you got to put your best friends in - that was nice, exciting."

The vast majority of the girls also chose images of the practitioners as they facilitated the activities. These diaries were individually annotated by the participants with notes and comments, with one participant writing a poem about the practitioners. The girls gave permission for me to see their scrapbooks before they were taken home; these very personal items strongly referenced their friendships and their relationship with the practitioner and trainee; creation of these scrapbooks became an end in itself for many of the participants and was referred to as one of their most treasured memories of the experience.

D7: "... when we were doing our scrapbooks I just kept writing and writing and writing ... 'cos there was one thing that really stood out to me and I'm pleased that we got to spend more time than anybody else and Girls' Group is very special to me."

The sub theme of confidence is indicated as being of by far the greatest significance in the analysis of the qualitative data from the video evaluations and although 'confidence' as a concept was not addressed within the structured questions on the video evaluation prompt sheet, there are numerous references to increased confidence in the video evaluations, respondent validation interviews, and validator group comments across both phases of the intervention project.

C9: "...It has built my confidence in class to put my hand up and stuff- I wouldn't be scared – I was a bit nervous before – I wouldn't be nervous if I got something wrong- the project helped me a lot".

In terms of reflexivity, it may be that increased confidence was regarded by all stakeholders, including by myself in the role of head teacher seeking a school improvement outcome, as a key anticipated outcome of the intervention, and so became in some way perceived by all stakeholders as intrinsic to the aims of the intervention. Malterud contends that a researcher's pre-conceptions are not the same as bias, so long as she has acknowledged that

the researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of the investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusion.

(Malterud 2001:483)

The practitioner re-defined the concept of 'confidence' in her reflections:

“...I think that shows in what the girls have said ...is that they all... they're all saying – um- ...– that there was a difference in confidence and that they could be heard and that they felt that they – that they - can now – that they're friends with more people, that they can put their hands up and offer ideas, stand up for themselves more, so I think that – I think that's generally the theme: that there is an increase in – erm- in robustness in way- the confidence is the word they use but I think that a lot of them are more robust and that they have a more – a stronger sense of “this is me” and “this is what I'll do...” and “this is how I work with others” and also some of them really putting themselves in other peoples' shoes...”

(Appendix O)

The qualitative data from the video evaluations and respondent validation interviews indicated the significance of the intervention upon relationships between peers, including affording participants the opportunity to widen their social circle, helping participants to form new friendships cross-cohort, and helping pupils who had newly transferred from other schools to build friendships.

A1: “... I liked it because we worked with (a different cohort) and we didn't usually work with (the different cohort).”

This is in marked contrast to the initial apprehensions many of the participants had displayed about working with unfamiliar peers at the commencement of the intervention sessions.

As gender had been a significant theme in the data from the original pupil surveys, the qualitative data was also analysed to detect changes in the participants' attitudes to their male peers in the classroom. There are numerous references to the positive impact of the intervention in terms of first developing a confidence in the company of female peers, and then transferring this to mixed-gender situations, with participants able to give examples of ways in which they were now building relationships with male peers in the classroom and on the playground:

B3: “... I wasn't confident around the boys – I'm more confident now – before I didn't put my hand up – the boys still put their hands up first but I still put my hand up now”.

In addition participants could also describe how the intervention had impacted upon their female peers: peer confidence was perceived to have increased in the classroom and on the playground and friendships had improved.

When asked if they would recommend involvement in such an intervention to others, participant response was entirely positive and the benefits of participation were clearly articulated: it could help if someone was shy, it could help develop new friendships and it could help increase confidence. Their comments included acknowledgement of the feelings of apprehension that other participants might experience at the outset, but emphasised the lack of coercion and the degree of autonomy that they felt had been their own experience:

B8: "...I would encourage younger children – say that it would help you in class more. You don't get forced to do anything – you just do what you think you can do..."

C6: "... I would encourage someone - there's nothing to be afraid of and it helps you improve your confidence."

A5: "... It should go wider around England - our videos could tell people what it could do for you – it could boost your confidence if you got left out or were intimidated by boys' behaviour."

Mason (2002: 246) suggests that triangulation is a process of obtaining several perspectives or viewpoints, thus finding 'various means of confirmation' as a way of establishing validity in regard to the conclusions drawn from a qualitative data set. The quantitative and qualitative data sets which were collected from a staff validator group survey of their perceptions of pupils' attitudes to learning at the close of each phase of the intervention indicated perceived changes in attitudes which were consistent with the reflections of practitioner and trainee about the impact of the intervention on individual pupils (Appendices GG and HH), with one Phase Two staff member writing: 'I have seen improvement in most of the girls... Some girls ... have improved 100%.'

These data sets were triangulated against the qualitative data set from the participants' video evaluations and respondent validation interviews, which included participants' reports of how their families viewed the intervention. Hopkins (2002:133) describes this as

contrasting the perceptions of one actor in a specific situation against other actors in the same situation. By doing so, an initial observation or perception is fleshed out and gives a degree of authenticity.

In addition, the inter-rater's independent identification of significant themes from the video evaluations closely correlated with those identified by other contributors. Those parents and carers who took the opportunity to respond to the post-intervention survey were largely positive in their views about the impact of the intervention, so supporting the overall findings, most particularly with regard to what was generally perceived as increased confidence, which in its' turn had impacted upon peer relationships and attitudes towards learning.

### **5.3 Reflections on Validity**

Lincoln and Guba propose alternative criteria for judging 'the soundness' of qualitative research (cited in Trochim; 2006): in the place of internal validity, the results must be established as believable, or credible from the perspective of the participant in the research. The triangulation of the data sets would seem to indicate that participants and validator groups in both phases of the intervention were in considerable agreement regarding the impact of the intervention, but this must be qualified: Lincoln and Guba's concept of dependability (in place of reliability) requires that the researcher accounts fully for the way in which any changes in the setting have affected the research. It has been attempted here to honestly outline and justify the methodological modifications which were made over the course of the study, including changes to the intervention programme in order to match the activities to the perceived maturity of the different cohorts of participants.

More significantly, following from the findings from the pilot intervention, whilst both the pupil and staff questionnaires had provided some base-line data sets which had so far shaped the action research questions, in line with the organic nature of the action research model, a richer qualitative data set than those produced to date was sought in order to evaluate whether the main phases of the intervention could address the learners' identified issues. Changes were made to the main data collection tool: the use of private video recordings sought to produce authentic views and attitudes about the impact of the intervention, Although many of the participants indicated that they found the camera somewhat "difficult" to talk to and that they would have preferred and would have felt more comfortable with a face-to- face interview with the researcher, some admitted that it would have been harder for them to give their views honestly, given the dual role of the researcher/head teacher. The subsequent respondent validation interviews afforded me the opportunity to check and triangulate the views shared in the video evaluations. All the participants had used the prompt sheet to guide them at the start of the

filming and I used the respondent validation interviews to check that the prompt sheet had not influenced the nature of their contributions; the participant's comment quoted here reflects the tenet of the responses of most participants when asked the question:

A3: "...The prompt sheet helped, it gave me ideas – but not of what to say – of things to talk about- if you didn't have a sheet some people might have felt stuck".

I also used the respondent interviews to verify my understanding of the views given in the video recordings. However, the subsequent analysis of the data collected from both the video evaluations and the respondent interviews contained a degree of subjectivity and interpretation which must be reflected upon.

### **5.3.1 Reflections on the Data Analysis Tool**

'Interpretive researchers begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them' (Cohen et al 2007: 23). My aim was to develop a rich, clear description and an understanding of the participants' experiences of the intervention offered; this required that I utilise a means of interrogating the qualitative data from the video evaluations and respondent validation interviews in line with an interpretive, naturalistic approach (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). A grounded theory approach offers a means of developing a set of systematic and specific procedures for conducting qualitative research using inductive strategies for analysing data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). A strength of grounded theory is that it offers specific strategies for handling the qualitative data so that the researcher can check, refine, and develop ideas and intuitions about findings as the data is collected (Brand and Anderson 1999). The template analysis approach which I determined to employ in this study bears close similarities to grounded theory, though it normally starts with some predefined codes intended to help guide the analysis. King (2004) advocates adopting one of several positions at the outset: the analyst may begin by pre-defining codes; she may work from a priori codes based on the theoretical position of the research; she may develop codes after some initial exploration of the data, or she may postulate some initial codes (possibly derived from the interview questions) and refine these subsequent to each exploration of the data. During interrogation of the qualitative data I sought to identify recurrent ideas or elements which could then be tagged with codes, grouped into concepts, and then again into categories which would begin to make the meanings of the participants explicit: in this way the learning emerges directly from the data. I experienced some limitations in the approach: working from a set of a priori codes drawn from those high frequency words gathered from the open comments on the surveys and from the participants'

Focus Group may have narrowed the scope of the interrogation of the data at the outset, risking researcher bias and overlooking broader issues or other equally important themes which could have been explored. One way of addressing this in subsequent studies might be to adopt a method of exploring the qualitative data sets in greater depth on a case by case basis through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach. Like grounded theory, IPA is a bottom-up approach, producing questions from the data collected. However, the two have been frequently contrasted; Smith (1996) claims that that IPA is the more scientific approach because it is the most systematic. Having its' roots in psychology, it acknowledges links with symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992) with its concern for how meanings are constructed by individuals within both a social and a personal world (Smith and Osborn 2007) and the aim is to illustrate and inform themes by firmly anchoring findings in direct quotes from participant accounts (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009).

Willig (2001) contends that IPA differs from grounded theory in its particular suitability for understanding personal experiences as opposed to social processes; the researcher attempts to interpret how the participants make sense of their experience ( Smith et al 2009) and plays a central role in the understanding the experience of the participant. IPA produces detailed analysis of a case either as an end in itself or before moving to similarly detailed analyses of other cases; it 'stresses the interpretative and hermeneutic elements, seeking to capture examples of convergence and divergence, rather than focusing solely on commonalities', (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty and Hendry 2011: 22), whereas grounded theory tends to use larger sample numbers to substantiate theory. One consideration in relation to this study was that the ideal sample size requirement for an IPA approach places constraints upon the research design in terms of numbers of participants: Smith et al (2009) suggest limiting the sample to between three and six participants for those newer to IPA, and no more than fifteen participants for those who are better-versed in the approach; reducing participant numbers allows for a 'sufficient in-depth engagement...but also allows a detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence'(Smith and Osborn, 2007: 57).

A further consideration was how well an IPA approach sits with the use of video evaluations and respondent validation interviews as data collection tools with young children. Exploring a range of data collection methods across a range of studies in the health profession, Brocki and Wearden (2006) conclude that IPA offers sufficient flexibility to allow for diverse methods of collection so long as researchers acknowledge and discuss the limitations and disadvantages of the tools they use. However, Smith and Osborn (2007) contend that the semi-structured form of

interviewing is the one which best allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions can be modified in the light of the participants' responses, so that the researcher is able to probe interesting and important areas which may arise, though

little guidance is given as to the extent to which the interviewer should interpret what is being said as the interview proceeds, and the extent to which these interpretations should be shared with the interviewee

(Brocki and Weardon 2006: 11)

Smith and Osborn (2007) advise that the semi-structured interviews should be of considerable length and that participant interviewee should be allowed a strong role in determining the interview process, but they do acknowledge that there are some instances where this might not be appropriate, such as in research where young children are the participants. Since the interpretative aspect of the IPA approach relies on the participant being able to verbalise their experiences, the approach might most profitably be used in a study such as this, with those young participants who are most able to articulate their thoughts and who give the fuller video evaluations or respondent validation interviews; the success of an IPA approach on this smaller purposive sample would be dependent upon the age and maturity of the participants and their ability to articulate their views in a more in-depth way.

Furthermore, the IPA approach is evolutionary and establishing a frequency of concepts in order to identify themes is seen as less important than 'saturation'; Smith *et al.* (1999) comment on the cyclical or iterative nature of analysis, in which passages are analysed repeatedly in the light of insights obtained from other sources. This seems to me to be a process which could theoretically continue ad infinitum: Smith has contended that IPA starts with, but should go beyond, a standard thematic analysis (Willig 2001: 69), allowing more freedom and creativity to the researcher as analyst, but I would argue that whilst a narrowing of the scope of findings is one risk of the template analysis approach, an IPA approach might present the risk of drawing the focus away from the young participants' original meanings, so still hindering the validity of the findings.

### **5.3.2 Reflections on External Validity**

In regard the external validity of this study, generalizability and replicability are problematic in that this is one study in one unique setting at one given time; in line with the epistemological beliefs of the researcher, the model was deliberately conceived to be evolving, and emancipatory, and the researcher's own values are closely intertwined with its' execution and interpretation. If findings from this action research are to be used to inform practice or support change in schools on a wider scale, the extent to which findings from it can be generalised depends heavily upon how similar it is to any other case explored in the same context. Bell (2005:11) refers to Bassey's term of 'relatability', rather than 'generalizability' in such circumstances. Markless, citing Patton, challenges the assumption that there must be a lack of generalizability and transferability in qualitative action research model investigations, but argues that it is 'reasonable to expect' that ideas emerging from action research projects might 'strike chords and offer insights' into issues which other professionals are encountering (Lea *et al.* 2003:149).

### **5.4 Conclusions and Implications for Whole School Improvement**

As the head teacher in the school where this action research took place, my response to Research Question Three should perhaps first be framed in terms of the impact of the intervention programme upon standards of attainment. However, over the life of this action research project there was - as is usual for this school and others in the local cluster - a degree of pupil mobility, both into the school and away from the school, so that comparisons of cohort start and end attainment are not secure enough to provide an accurate determination of the impact of the intervention. The majority of those female pupils who had participated in the pilot and in the main phases of the intervention programme and who remained at the school made good or better progress throughout the remainder of their time in Key Stage Two, but any accelerated progress could not fairly be attributed entirely or indeed partially to their participation in the intervention, since there were numerous variables to take into account in terms of their own increased maturity over time, changes to the curriculum and changes in the staff attached to their cohort.

Further, perhaps more significant factors are linked to changes in the participants' own home/life circumstances: the Rowntree Foundation (2007) reported that only a small percentage of variation in individuals' performance is accounted for by schools' quality and that most variation is explained by other factors, underlining the need to look at the range of young peoples' experiences, inside and outside school. However, over the course of this research

project, I have been able to evaluate the impact of the intervention and to form some conclusions which I hope will be of some value to colleagues seeking to improve outcomes for pupils in their schools.

At the close of this intervention programme there was, as has been shown, agreement between the participants and the staff and parent/carer validator groups that confidence had been significantly impacted upon, with resulting improvements in attitude to and engagement in learning. What is clear is that in the short term, every one of the participants involved in the study felt that they had gained from involvement in the intervention, and that for many of them, their perceived improved confidence had enabled them to form and retain better peer relationships, including with the boys in their class so that they were experiencing a more positive learning environment and were more able to access and engage in their education. This was supported by the views of the staff.

These changes in pupil attitude and levels of confidence had arguably been achieved by providing the participants with a safe, single-sex space where the non-judgemental relationship provided by the artist-practitioner and her trainee, and the drama and mask work, enabled participants to practice and develop personal skills including autonomy, leadership, self-reflection and conflict resolution, which they perceived as being transferable into the mixed-sex environment. What is less clear is how far the positive effects of the intervention will be sustained as they continue on their school journey; the findings from this research point to routes of further investigation. In the first place, the impact of the intervention as perceived by the participants and other stakeholders would seem to suggest that a longitudinal study, complementing other recent studies (McLellan *et al.* 2012), particularly in relation to the participants' perceptions of any sustainable effects of their experience, could result in some important learning for school improvement:

B5 "...Before Girls' Group I used not to put my hand up but after I put my hand up all the time. I think I've still got that confidence after a long time."

Monitoring the perceived changes in the dispositions of cohorts of pupils – particularly those pupils who are in their final year in the primary phase - on regular occasions during an academic year and even perhaps on into their secondary phase transition year, might enable us to ascertain whether the provision of a creative and /or therapeutic intervention for pupils in areas of disadvantage is one that leads to accelerated progress and higher standards of attainment over time as a consequence of improvements in emotional well-being.

The action research was conceived as a way to address barriers to learning specifically for a group of female pupils whose slower rates of academic progress were of concern to the school, a concern reflective of a body of research around disadvantaged female learners ( DES 2007; Skelton and Francis 2009; Evans 2010). Nevertheless, it is the case that there is a similarly large body of research which highlights the barriers to learning which impact upon disadvantaged male pupils (Mac an Ghail 1994; Epstein, Elwood, Hey and Maw 1998; Jackson 2002 and 2003; Van Houtte 2004; Younger et al 2005) . The staff survey indicated that boys and girls behave differently in the classrooms, but this could be attributed less to differing levels of confidence than to the different vulnerabilities of individual boys and girls and how these impact upon the ways in which they respond to their learning environments.

In terms of the outset pupils' views extrapolated from data produced in the pupil survey, the basic questionnaire format, adapted from one used by other researchers, was deliberately simple in design, with a three-part Likert scaling and whilst the method of delivery sought to overcome any literacy difficulties so that it was accessible to all pupils in this particular school, many researchers write of the difficulties inherent in using questionnaires – and again particularly with young children (Noyes, 2004; Kellet, 2005 ) – the accuracy of the picture presented by the responses is hard to gauge. Interrogation of the base-line qualitative data, and particularly that of the open comments sections of the pupil questionnaires, in conjunction with comments made during the Focus Group, indicated that female pupils considered that their perceived low confidence levels hindered their engagement in the learning particularly in cohorts where there was a significantly larger male component. However, the large majority of the girls tended to use the open comments to give their views in addition to answering the questions, whereas very few boys did so; this does not necessarily indicate that the boys have fewer concerns about their learning, simply that they did not share them in the given format.

A more modified child-friendly format of the base-line survey (such has been used and modified by Galton in his many studies) may elicit a richer outset picture of the issues in question; similarly, a future study might benefit from providing opportunity for a boys' Focus Group, or mixed focus groups through purposive sampling by age and/or ability, so that the male pupils' views can be more accurately compared and contrasted with those of their female peers, in order that the most appropriate target audience is found for future therapeutic interventions.

In Phase Two of the delivery of the intervention it was necessary to modify the activities offered due to the younger ages and level of maturity of the participants, with some groundwork around

relationships required before the younger cohorts could access the in-depth leadership and resilience building aspects of the drama-therapy. This indicates that there is a need to recognise that the maturity levels of future target groups will impact upon the reach and effectiveness of any intervention, and that the design of any programme should be carefully tailored to the participant group. Since the boys' interest in the intervention - as presented during the Phase One cohort whole-school Assembly - indicated a potential avenue to explore, continuation of the intervention might usefully be offered to a mixed group of the oldest cohort of pupils, so that the 'robustness' referred to by the practitioner could be developed and employed by the young people as they transfer to secondary phase.

The action research described here has challenged my own thinking in terms of what has been revealed about the learning environment through listening to and working with the participant pupils. There is a need for need for teachers and head teachers to make more efforts to explore the reality experienced by students in education settings, since

The meanings they attach to their experiences are not necessarily the meanings that teachers or parents would ascribe; the subcultures that children inhabit in classrooms and schools are not always visible or accessible to adults.

(Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000: 61)

What I have learned from my pupils during this research project, and in particular in terms of their views regarding what helps them to learn effectively, will be taken fully into consideration within my school's future improvement plans. It seems to me crucial that we involve pupils as fully as possible in the co-construction of their educational experience if they are to develop into fully rounded adult citizens with agency. Vygotsky (1962) contended that what a child does today in co-operation with others who support her, she will be able to do independently tomorrow. To facilitate this, in the first place schools need to provide pupils with opportunities to make positive relationships which boost their confidence and a sense of self so that they can fully engage with the learning environment; the importance which pupils placed upon the positive relationships with the practitioners in this study demonstrates this:

C5: "...I'd tell other people it's a nice group to help with friendships, nice teachers who help you- gives you more courage to do things and make friends and I've still got that."

C3: "...J. and M. (practitioners) showed you can join in – you don't have to do what you don't want to do".

Schools should ensure that they provide a range of opportunities for pupils to engage in both single- and mixed-sex learning to enable them to practice their personal and social skills in a 'safe' way:

C3: "...It helped my confidence – I didn't like getting up in front of people but benefitted from it - it helped me because I am shy and nervous about putting my hand up in front of boys – they laugh if I'm wrong....After the project I played {the lead part} in the panto".

B9: "... I wasn't very confident so it helped me build it up a bit more acting in front of people - because it's just the girls it's easier to do it".

The outcomes of intervention programme indicate that therapeutic techniques have a place in mainstream school provision. The drama therapy activities employed by the practitioner in this study were beneficial tools which provided insights into pupils' lived experiences and ways to elicit authentic pupil voice, so that their learning experiences could be delivered in a way that was more meaningful to them:

The outcomes of the intervention highlight that it is as important to provide programmes to support the development of self-efficacy for the least disruptive of pupils as it is to provide interventions for those with the most challenging behaviours:

D7: "...J. and M. showed that everyone's special in their own ways."

B5: "...Then I felt more confident ...I got a bond with more people...I could understand more about friendship...I can put my hand up now and do anything...The masks helped me feel more confident...".

There is a body of research examining ways in which students have been supported to become agents of change in education (Fielding 2001; Kellet 2005; McIntyre et al 2005) and demonstrating that many of the natural learning behaviours of children can be interpreted as research skills (Murray 2013). My aim was that the participant pupils in this study should be enabled to see themselves as co-researchers, since they were seeking a vehicle to improve their own educational experience. The feedback given by the pilot participants provided a model which the artist-practitioner used to inform her planning for the main intervention. Similarly, the 'working agreements' drawn up by the groups in both phases of the intervention constituted the rules by which all sessions operated. Throughout the intervention, the artist-practitioner was guided by the participants in all the modifications she made to the timetable and activities.

Finally, Cheminais (2012) identifies the many benefits to be gained by pupils who participate in and who are enabled to evaluate the impact of the action research in which they take part: at the closure of each phase of this study, the participants themselves chose how they would disseminate to others what they felt they had learned.

### **5.5 Disseminating the Learning**

In keeping with my aim that the participant pupils should be co-researchers in this study, I have encouraged them to take opportunities to disseminate their learning to others. When the intervention drew to a close, the participant pupils in Phase Two were invited to hold a meeting with some girls from a younger cohort whose class teacher felt would benefit from a similar intervention at a later date. The girls in this study were able to outline the intervention, to talk about the activities and to answer their younger peers' questions about what they perceived had been the impact of the experiences offered. At the close of each Phase of the intervention, the participants were encouraged to discuss ways in which their experience might be celebrated and their learning shared

In Phase One, on their own initiative, Cohort A and B determined to give a presentation in a Key Stage Two pupil Assembly: they planned this with support from the practitioner and two Cohort B girls volunteered to take the lead. Each girl presented the mask she had made during the intervention, explaining how these had been used as a vehicle to become more confident amongst others, and talking briefly about what she had gained from the project. The group then invited questions from the floor. The pupils, and particularly the Cohort A and B boys showed keen interest and asked questions about what the girls had done and learned. At the end of the presentation, participants expressed that they felt proud that they had taken part in the presentation. The head teacher was later approached by a group of boys, who asked if a 'boys' group' could be designed next time! This corresponds again with what the inter-rater identified in some of the video evaluations as the participants' sense of being '*chosen*' or '*special*' as having significance for these young children.

The participant pupils in Phase Two were able to take home their scrapbooks, with photos and thoughts about the intervention, and reported showing these to parents and carers. In addition, some parents and carers of participant pupils in both Phases took the opportunity to learn more about the intervention: as is usually the case at the school, their preferred vehicle was informal face-to-face discussion. Over time, in conversations on the playground and at parent/carer

‘student progress’ consultation meetings there were a number of unsolicited favourable comments about the changes in confidence and positivity about school which had been witnessed and anecdotally these views seem to have been shared to a degree with the wider parent/carer population, as the intervention has been mentioned positively in conversation with myself and other staff members.

Discussions about the learning from the intervention as the research progressed took place during weekly school staff meetings. In particular, over the course of the two phases of the intervention, awareness of classroom and whole-school dynamics and relationships were brought into closer focus; staff members’ awareness of strategies which incorporate greater opportunities to listen and respond to pupils’ authentic ‘voice’ have begun to result in identifying and taking increased opportunities to strengthen and widen positive relationships. The school is also planning to explore appropriate ways to provide a range of single-sex and mixed-sex learning, as well as re-visiting ways to provide a better balance- within the constraints of the current curriculum – of structured, formal learning and those creative practices which seem to have built a greater empathy and resilience in the participant pupils.

In my role as a head teacher I have shared information and made presentation as this action research has progressed: the Governing Body of the school has received regular reports on the progress of the action research, and has been provided not only by the school’s assessment co-ordinator with information in regard to the impact of a range of intervention upon potential improvements in academic outcomes for participant pupils, but in addition, those members of the governing body who have first -hand knowledge of the participant pupils, whether as a family member or as a staff member, have been able to lend their views to the discussion of the impact of the intervention on the participant pupils’ social and emotional well-being.

The impact upon school outcomes of research by teachers is widely recognised (Kershner 1999; Robinson, Hohepah and Lloyd 2009; Scott and McNeish 2013). An outline of the aims and scope of the action research has been shared informally with primary and secondary head teachers from other schools at locality meetings and at a local Teaching School Alliance where whole school improvement initiatives are discussed. As a result, an outline of the aims and scope of the action research and a discussion of the findings is scheduled to be shared at Continuing Professional Development event as part of a drive to promote action research in local schools, and the final draft of the thesis will be shared increasingly widely with groups of

colleagues at school improvement meetings and training sessions for head teacher colleagues from this point

Pope and Mays define (1995) the goal of qualitative research as aiding understanding of social phenomena by focusing upon the experiences and views of the participants. It is hoped that the data collection tools employed, the scope and analysis of the data and the opportunities taken for triangulation will contribute to the degree of internal validity of the findings, so that they will be of value and use to others in the teaching profession and beyond.

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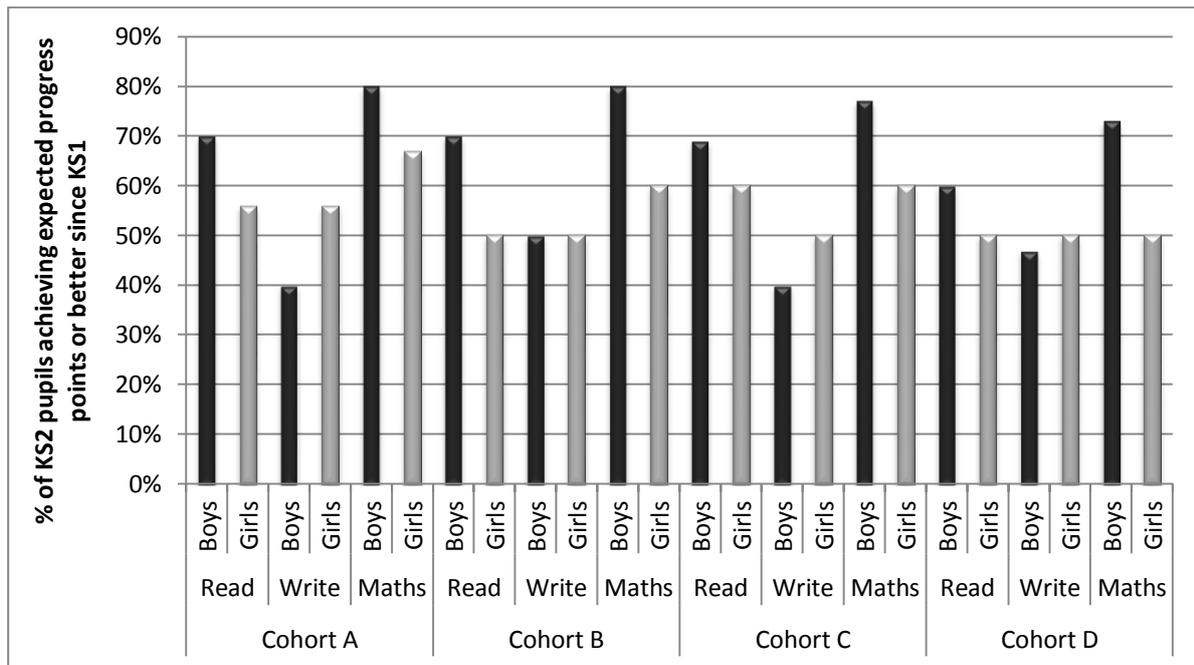
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**APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**Graph to show percentage of KS2 pupils achieving expected progress points or better since KS1**



## APPENDIX B

Pupil questionnaire used in the survey about attitudes to learning

		I agree 	Sometimes /not sure 	I do not agree 
Q1	I feel relaxed in my classroom			
Q2	I try hard with my work			
Q3	What we learn is interesting			
Q4	What we learn is fun			
Q5	What we learn is hard			
Q6	I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher			
Q7	I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions			
Q8	I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I am not sure			
Q9	I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom			
Q10	I feel comfortable with most of my classmates			
Q11	I feel that I am capable of doing better			
Q12	I feel that I will do well in future and have a good job			
Anything else you want to say ?				

Thank you for your help!

## APPENDIX C

Permission to modify and adapt the pupil questionnaire devised by

Professor Maurice Galton

Email permissions obtained from Professor Maurice Galton

Subj: **Re: Lynne Greenhough MAEd**  
Date: 19/02/2008 11:22:57 GMT Standard Time  
From: [REDACTED]  
To: [REDACTED]

Dear Lynne,

I am quite happy to have you use the questionnaire in the modified form.

As to action research and case study. Both are small scale and can have the investigator as a participant. The main difference is the purpose. In action research you are going to take results, as they emerge, and with the staff decide on a further course of action as a result of reviewing the findings. You will then evaluate the effect of this action. In most cases this cycle is repeated.

In a case study you would collect the data and present it without necessarily seeking to take action as a result. It would also tend to be more concerned with explanation rather than looking for solutions.

I hope this helps. John Elliott is the best person to read on action research.

Maurice

>Dear Maurice

>

> I attach a draft pupil survey which we would like to use with pupils for  
> research at [REDACTED]. You will see that it owes a huge amount to the  
> one you used at [REDACTED] and I would of course attribute the original to  
> yourself and colleagues and explain the adaptations as part of my  
> methodology - would you have any objections? I am now beginning to work  
> on my independent study and am focussing upon how changes made in a  
> school curriculum can impact on pupils' perceptions of themselves as  
> learners. My supervisor is keen that I should be clear about whether my

## APPENDIX D

### Staff questionnaire about pupil attitudes to learning

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Comments
Q1. Female pupils seem relaxed in the classroom				
Q2. They appear to put effort into their work				
Q3. They appear interested in what they are learning				
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning				
Q5. They appear to find the work difficult				
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions				
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning				
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers				
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom				
Q10. They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates				
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of				
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life				

## APPENDIX E

### Samples of Focus Group 'Post-Its'

I talk a little bit  
and not confident to  
put my hand up

~~I~~  
I think that people  
talk

I am more confident  
when I work with  
a boy

Talking to adults  
in school could help.

I'm not too confident with  
the boys in the class

because I am shy

I am not confident  
and I am shy.

People who shout out  
to go out of the room.

if people shout out  
have 2 warnings  
to have a quiet time  
when you shout out.

Probably have split  
classes!

a girls group helps!

boys group girls group

To have the girls  
learn in one room and boys  
in another

have split classes  
like boys class  
girls class

boys lesson's and girls  
lesson's.

for boys to have  
half of the class and  
girls to have the other

## APPENDIX F:

Tables to show top word frequency weightings from staff and pupil open comments

Table i: to show top word frequency weightings from open comments section of staff survey

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
girls	5	11	13.25	girl, girls
confidence	10	6	7.23	confidence, confident
named	5	6	7.23	named
take	4	5	6.02	take
back	4	4	4.82	back
tend	4	4	4.82	tend
lack	4	3	3.61	lack
need	4	3	3.61	need
seat	4	3	3.61	seat
encouragement	13	2	2.41	encouragement
others	6	2	2.41	others
seem	4	2	2.41	seem
two	3	2	2.41	two
achieve	7	1	1.20	achieve
active	6	1	1.20	active

Table ii: to show top word frequency weighting from girls' Focus Group 'Post-Its'

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
people	6	17	16.50	people
boys	4	13	12.62	boys, boys'
girls	5	12	11.65	girls, girls'
shout	5	7	6.80	shout, shouting
half	4	5	4.85	half
confident	9	4	3.88	confident
group	5	4	3.88	group
lessons	7	4	3.88	lesson, lessons
like	4	4	3.88	like
split	5	4	3.88	split
call	4	2	1.94	call
helps	5	2	1.94	helps
learn	5	2	1.94	learn, learning
love	4	2	1.94	love
names	5	2	1.94	names
shy	3	2	1.94	shy
work	4	2	1.94	work
answer	6	1	0.97	answer
asks	4	1	0.97	asks
behaviour	9	1	0.97	behaviour
better	6	1	0.97	better
fair	4	1	0.97	fair
interrupting	12	1	0.97	interrupting
person	6	1	0.97	person
quiet	5	1	0.97	quiet
separate	8	1	0.97	separate
together	8	1	0.97	together
trouble	7	1	0.97	trouble
working	8	1	0.97	working

## APPENDIX G

### Exemplar parent/carer information letter and consent form



**Primary School**

'Be the best you can be.'

Headteacher: Mrs. Lynne Greenhough ( M.A.Ed, B.Ed.Hons.)

[Redacted]

Dear parent/carer of .....

Your child has been invited to participate in some research which we are undertaking at Brookfield in order to find out what helps pupils to learn best. This will include lunchtime sessions once weekly with [Redacted] discussing ways to help them, and some sessions with artists and practitioners to explore different ways of learning . Your child will not miss any of their usual lessons. The research will eventually be published ( using no names) and you will be contacted again should we wish for consent to use any images from the project, such as photographs of your child taking part in activities. Your child has agreed to take part, with your consent, and can withdraw from the activities offered at any point.

Please sign and return the consent form below so that we can begin the project. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require any further information.

Thank you for your continued support.

Lynne Greenhough

.....

I consent to my child .....( name of child)

taking part in the project.

Signed .....( parent/carer) date .....



## APPENDIX I

### Protocol agreed by the researcher and the practitioner

#### Researcher /Practitioner Protocol

- The headteacher/ researcher would be responsible for collecting the girls and escorting them safely to the yurt, where the sessions were to take place.
- The headteacher/ researcher would be the “timekeeper” for the sake of practicalities, so that the sessions ran in keeping with whole school sessions; this allowed the girls the opportunity to re-join the main school during the mid- morning and lunch breaks if they so wished.
- If any serious health and safety issue occurred, the headteacher/researcher would immediately step into role as the school’s Designated Senior Person for safeguarding and deal with the situation as necessary .
- The headteacher/researcher would only participate in discussion, management of the group or decision-making about any aspect of the session etc. if involvement was specifically sought by the group /practitioner .
- Other than the above, the headteacher/researcher would act only and purely as the observer/recorder of events. It was not planned in the research design to limit the number of observations.

L.C. Greenidge

J. Sumner

## APPENDIX J

### Video evaluation recording prompt sheet

Girls' Group Video Dairy

Here are some things you might like to think about when you film your views about the project :

What did you think/ how did you feel when you were asked to take part in the girls' group ?

What did you like/ dislike about the sessions?

Do you think the project helped you in any way – if so, how ?

Do you think a similar project could others in other classes or schools ?

Anything else you would like to say?

Some words which might help you :

happy

sad

brave

pleased

interested

curious

friendly

bored

shy

nervous

worried

useful

confident

supportive

excited

disappointed

strong

## APPENDIX K

### Sample Transcription Conventions used to transcribe the video evaluations (from Mackey and Gass 2005: 224)

*Spelling:* Normal spelling is used for the NNSs and, with a few exceptions ("y'cl" for "you'd"; "c'n" for "can") for the NS.

*Intonation/Punctuation:* Utterances do not begin with capital letters; normal punctuation conventions are not followed; instead, intonation (usually at the end of a clause or a phrase) is indicated as follows:

At the end of a word, phrase, or clause

- ? Rising intonation
  - . Falling intonation
  - , "Nonfinal intonation" (usually a slight rise)
- No punctuation at clause end indicates transcriber uncertainty

*Other:*

( ? ) or ( ) Incomprehensible word or phrase

(all right) A word or phrase within parentheses indicates that the transcriber is not certain that s/he has heard the word or phrase correctly

{ Indicates overlapping speech; it begins at the point at which the overlap occurs

= Means that the utterance on one line continues without pause where the = next = sign picks it up (latches)

y- A dot within parentheses indicates a brief pause

((laugh)) Nonlinguistic occurrences such as laughter, sighs, that are not essential to the analysis are enclosed within double parentheses

CAPITALS Capital letters are used for nonverbal information important to the analysis (e.g., nods, gestures, shifts in posture or position)

LH Left hand

RH Right hand

NOD Refers to one nod

NODS Refers to more than one nod

NODS- Refers to nodding accompanying speech, with hyphens indicating how long nodding (or other behavior) continues

HS Refers to one head shake

HSs Refers to more than one head shake;

HSs— Refers to head shakes accompanying speech, with hyphens indicating how long the head shaking continues

*Note:* If a nod or head shake does not accompany speech, it is indicated before or after the speech that it precedes or follows; if it accompanies speech, it is represented on a separate line beneath the speech it accompanies. Other nonverbal information is positioned below the speech with which it co-occurs.

# APPENDIX L

## Parents' and carers' questionnaire



**Girls' Friday University Research Project  
Parents' and Carers' Questionnaire**

**My daughter has talked about the project at home .**

**A lot**

**a little**

**not at all**

**Please feel free to add your comments.....**

.....

**My daughter tells me she has/ seems to have enjoyed the project**

**Agree**

**not sure**

**disagree**

**Please feel free to add your comments**

.....

.....

**I feel the project has been beneficial to my daughter**

**Agree**

**not sure**

**disagree**

**Please feel free to comment**

**If you agree, please can you say why ?**

.....

.....

**Thank you for your help with this questionnaire.**

## APPENDIX M

Letter of invitation to parents and carers



**[Redacted] Primary School**  
**[Redacted]**

**'Be the best you can be.'**

**Headteacher: Mrs. Lynne Greenhough ( M.A.Ed, B.Ed.Hons.)**

Dear parent/carer of .....

The Girls Group project in which your child participated has now been completed and what we did together is being written up so that eventually what we learned can be published . We have use a range of different ways of finding out your child child's views about the project, including questionnaires, video diaries, and interviews. All the girls have seen their videos and commented upon them, and their comments, and photographs of the mask sessions, all anonymised, may eventually be used in the publication.

You are very welcome to contact me via the school office and I will arrange a time for you to come into school if you would like to see the videos, transcripts and photographs, or have any further questions about the materials intended for use.

I enclose a short questionnaire which I would be very grateful if you would complete and return, so that I can hear your views about your child's involvement in the project.

Thank you for your continued support.

Lynne Greenhough

**APPENDIX N**

Pupils' data sharing consent letter



‘Be The Best You Can Be’



Dear .....

I would like to talk to you about the views and opinions that you shared about the Girls’ Group with [redacted] [redacted] and [redacted] to see what we have all learned together. It would be very helpful if you would agree to let these people see your video evaluation and your photographs of the Girls’ Group sessions.

Please sign your name below if you agree to this, or come and speak to me, if you have anything you would like to ask me about. I am also going to send a letter to your parents/carer so that they can come into school to see your video and photos if they wish to. If you have any questions or worries about this, please come to see me.

Mrs Greenhough

## APPENDIX O

### Extracts from Practitioners' reflections

Researcher: just really to ask you...you've seen all the girls' videos...an overview of everything that you've seen and done so far in regard to – I mean- can you sum up how you feel the project has worked? ...um...what you feel the children have gained from it, what the pitfalls were and – for you Practitioner - working with two different groups, what the differences were.

Practitioner: um...yeah, um...it's been very different the second time to the first time and I think we've talked about that in an ongoing way – the difference in age and maturity and also when we were working with the [REDACTED] they're looking at moving on and that maturity comes with looking to going to secondary school – so it was different and I think that we- some of the challenges were that we – I don't think we went as deep with the mask work ( in the second project) - we worked a lot more on the dynamics of the group and that we worked together on how to be a team and how to be friends whereas with the [REDACTED] ( project 1) we actually could delve a little bit deeper into the emotions of it- which we didn't get to with this ( second) group but- saying that-we...we are...we respond to what's in the room so what was needed with this [REDACTED] ( second) group was a lot on how to be together, how to listen to each other, how to give everybody a voice ...er... respecting differences, making yourself heard- and I think that shows in what the girls have said....is that they all.. they're all saying – um- apart from [REDACTED] - that there was a difference in confidence and that they could be heard and that they felt that they- that they- can now-that they're friends with more people, that they can put their hands up and offer ideas, stand up for themselves more, so I think that- I think that's generally the theme: that there is an increase in – erm- in – robustness in a way- the confidence is the word they use but I think that a lot of them are more robust and that they have a more- a stronger sense of “ this is me” and “ this is what I'll do” and “ this is how I work with others” and also some of them really putting themselves in other people's shoes.

Trainee: mm... there was a lot of that wasn't there?

Practitioner: yeah... thinking about how the work helped other people

APPENDIX O continued

Trainee: and how it could help other schools and other – yeah...mm...groups – some of them even mentioned – I think two of the girls mentioned about boys getting involved in something similar- how they could benefit from having that kind of bonding session as well- it was nice – the word “ bonding “ was used a lot.

Practitioner: it was...

Trainee: and helping to reform old friendships

Practitioner: yes...

Trainee: after being separated probably- is it? – by classes and em...

Researcher: yes, I think- quite honestly- one of the biggest... surprises... for me- has been – from what these girls have said, that – we think of ourselves- as- we’re quite a small school- we’re very “ family” ethos

Practitioner & Trainee: mmm...

Researcher: all the children- a lot of the children are related through extended family when they come in here and yet our ■■■ girls and the ■■■ girls didn’t really know each other – they only vaguely knew each other from perhaps in Nursery when they used to – to play. We do quite a lot of mixed activities but they clearly didn’t know each other and were not- there were only 20 of them – 2 cohorts of children – and I was really surprised at that and I had always assumed that everybody at ■■■ knows everybody

Practitioner: mm....

Researcher: now it’s probably true that all of the staff know all of the children and know about them, but the children clearly don’t know each other as well as I thought.

Practitioner: mm., and that – yes, I suppose they’re in class where there’s structure, lots of structure going on and then at playtime they might work...play...with..

Researcher: peers- special friends?

Practitioner: so actually having a group where all that comes apart and you – here you are – here you – you can’t get it wrong – you can be yourself- and it’s quite exposing...so, yeah... it’s really changed their relationships...

APPENDIX O continued

Practitioner: and its funny, it's like – knowing people as well as even, as maybe staff, you might see somebody in a certain place- at each time- at the same time each day so you might just know the from that- you might know who they are and what they do at midday – but you don't know them – and what they do later and how many kids they've got?

Trainee & Researcher: mm...

Practitioner: and we don't know them – er –properly – mm... it's interesting- it's that warmth that comes and that compassion and empathy that comes from knowing somebody

Trainee & Researcher: mm...

Practitioner: all those little details- emotional life that makes us all the same...mm...so it doesn't really matter which street you live on or what class you're in, or- you- you know- you find...

Trainee & Researcher: mm...

Practitioner: making those connections through our feelings...mmm...

Trainee: it's that shared experience, isn't it, that they all had, of being ...part of that – of being part of the group and –

Practitioner: and that takes time! You need time to make that happen... 'cos we're – we- we are working in routines and just to stop that routine and structure and to give space and time, you know and those – that more...er...subtle...you know- “blurring”...“blurring” work to happen...but to hear their individual feedback is incredible...for us that they might – aspire to or warm to or – what do we offer that they don't receive elsewhere?...and – you know-we don't judge them, listen, that what they say matters

Trainee: there's no right or wrong...they mentioned a few times that it's great that there's no right or wrong

Researcher: I think the “right and wrong” – obviously in class they're encouraged to take risks and they're always told- you know- “have a go”.....

APPENDIX O continued

Researcher: .....”there may be no right or wrong answer to this, even in Maths” - you know- “explore the ideas”, so I don’t think it’s about academia – I think the “right or wrong” concept is about the expectations about how you behave.

Practitioner & Trainee: yes

Researcher: ‘cos clearly, in that environment with yourselves, there won’t be the same expectation- in terms of the “████████ Standards of behaviour” and “how to be a Super Student” ...and a lot of things they know we expect of them- they could actually let that go a bit and just – as you say- show parts of themselves that they perhaps don’t- aren’t able to show...

Trainee: and I think what you were saying about relationships as well- I think – the scrapbooks are evidence of that as well

Practitioner: yes, ‘cos it’s all about that, isn’t it? - it’s about friendships and connections

Trainee & Researcher: yes...

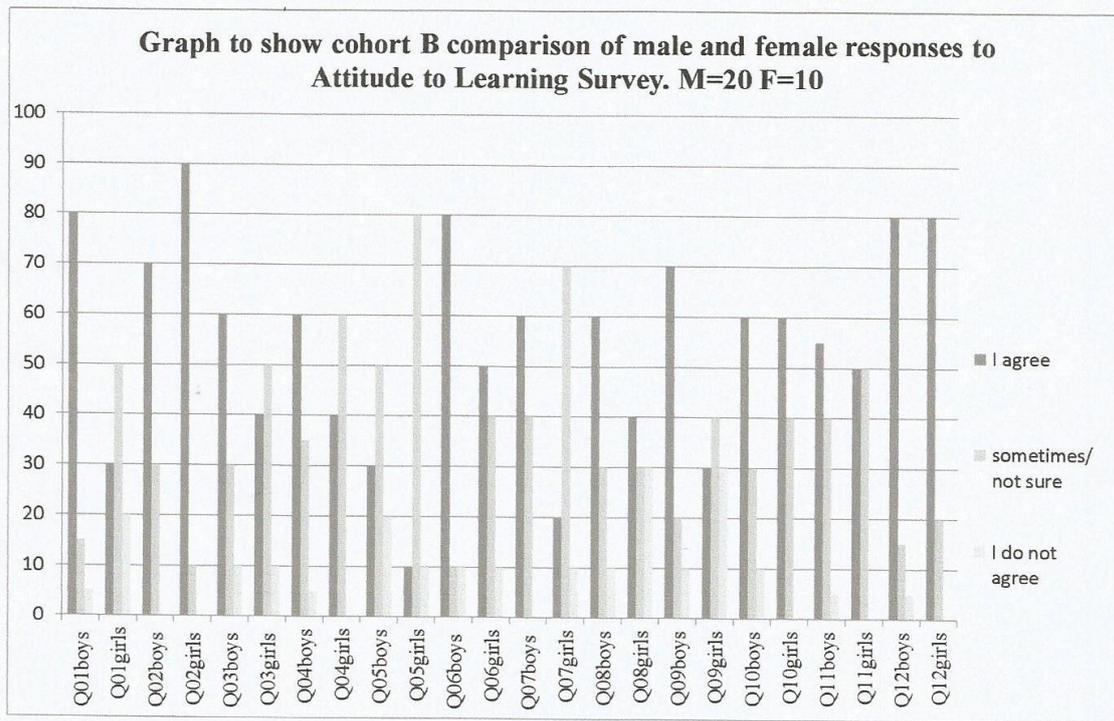
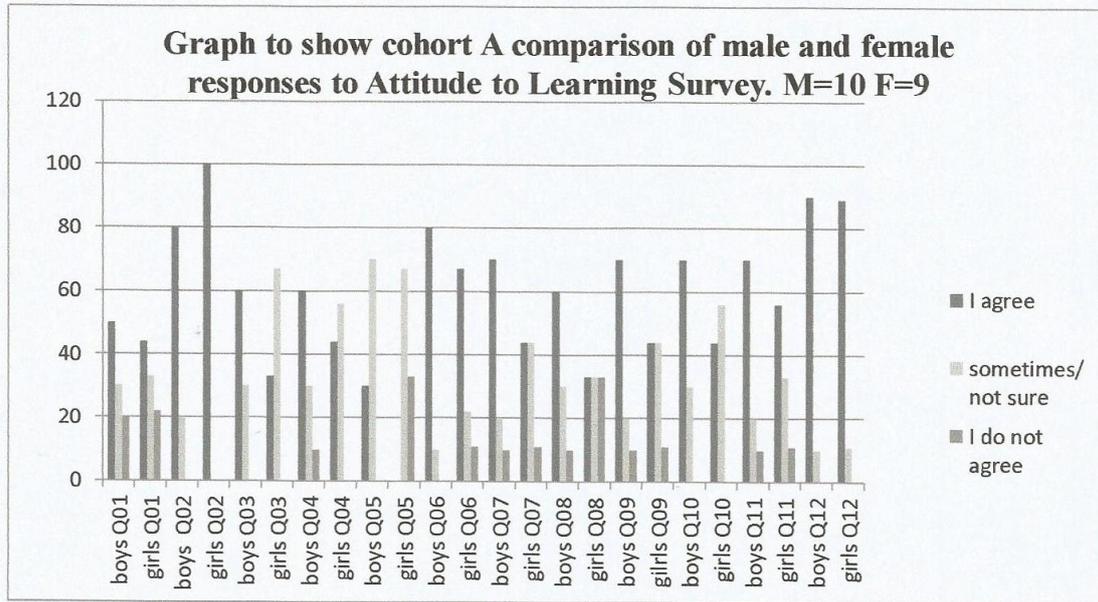
Practitioner: yes, they are saying: “this is my friend- I’ve got a friend. We’re friends”

Trainee: yeah

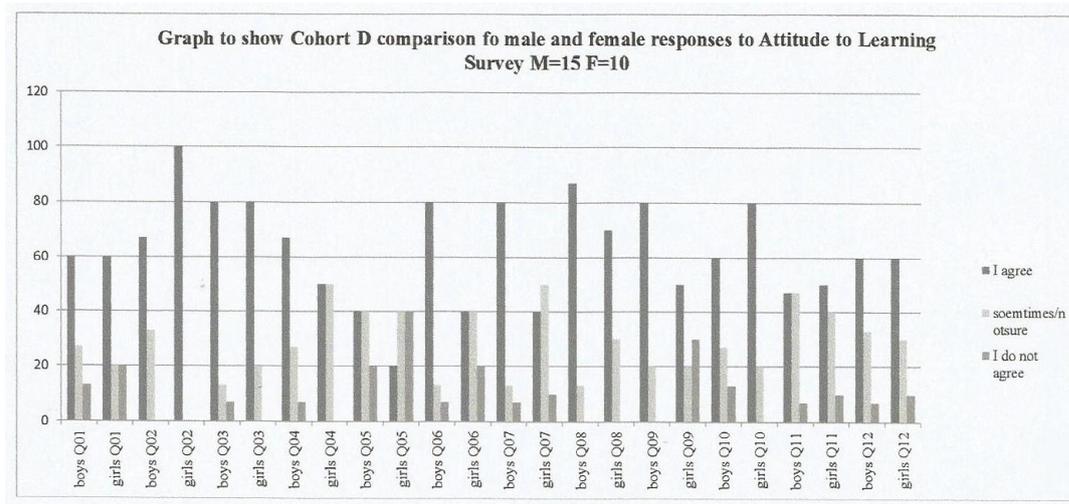
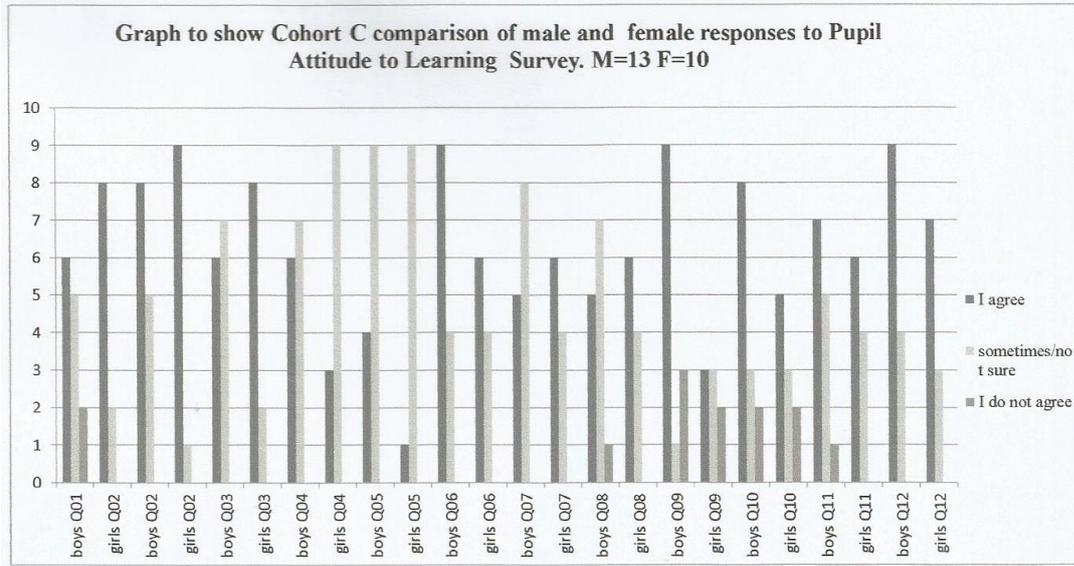
Practitioner: Identity is formed around friendships ...

## APPENDIX P

Graphs to show cohort results from the outset pupil survey



## APPENDIX P Continued



## APPENDIX Q

### Summary of open comments taken from girls' returned questionnaires

#### Girls' Questionnaire about Attitudes to Learning : Additional Comments

##### Anything Else You Want To Say ?

###### Cohort A

- I could do better with my writing
- I need more confidence but I am working on getting more confidence.
- I think we should have harder work and challenges.
- I think I could do better in hand writing.
- I am uncomfortable with who I sit with.
- In the classroom when we are working I can't stop thinking about my brother 'cos he's in the army.
- Why am I not confident? I need to stop worrying.
- When I answer questions and it's wrong voices in my head are laughing.

###### Cohort B

- Sometimes I fall out with my friends but I am still confident.
- The boys stop me learning by talking
- I feel really confident with my work.
- I don't feel comfortable with the boys
- I am sometimes not sure I am capable of doing better.
- I think I need some more confidence at school.
- Can you please split the boys and the girls because the boys talk and we don't get much done.
- The boys don't let us play football; they said" the girls are in our way".
- In the classroom I think that all the girls should have more girls in our classroom.

## APPENDIX Q Continued

### Cohort C

- I always have someone to play with – I never feel lonely
- I feel worried about my friendships going the wrong way
- Sometimes I feel a bit worried when we have to read something out
- I am lonely every day
- I think we should have extra lessons for Maths and English if you want it.
- I feel insecure when people bully me and go into class and dinner ladies tell you to stop tit tattling. Sometimes I feel like some people gang up on me .
- The teachers shouldn't single you out.
- I am still a bit worried about me friendships but I am working on it
- Sometimes my friends don't like me when they go off and make other people don't like me so I feel like I don't want to come to school.
- I am happy with school.
- In [REDACTED] ( school) I am very happy and positive with people.

### Cohort D

- I need some help with net books. I need some help with times tables for Maths.
- I need help with my maths because I struggle and sometimes ( should) put my hand up more.
- I like being here- it's fun and easy to get along.
- I feel stressed in the classroom in Literacy, topic and sports.
- My teachers help a lot and when I struggle the teachers explain to me and help. Most importantly my friends and my best friend X.. helps me and that makes me feel relaxed. I love learning about Maths and history. I love learning at this school and I never want to go.
- I feel that I am not learning as much as I would like in Numeracy.
- Sometimes I feel we get easy spellings. I have one best friend X... and she always helps me outside and that makes me happy to be in this school.
- Sometimes I would like to sit on my own because I think I don't get on sometimes and I think I would get more confidence

## APPENDIX R

Table to show results of staff survey at the outset of research period

<b>Outset Questionnaire</b> <b>7 staff – 2 male 4 female</b> <b>(+ 1 male x 2)</b>	Always		Sometimes		Rarely	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Q1. Pupils seem relaxed in the classroom	5	3	2	4	1	1
Q2. They appear to put effort into their work	3	4	5	4	0	0
Q3. They appear interested in what they are learning	4	2	4	6	0	0
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning	4	1	4	7	0	0
Q5. They appear to find the work difficult	2	2	6	4	0	2
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions	8	2	0	4	0	2
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning	6	0	2	2	0	6
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers	6	0	2	5	0	3
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom	7	0	1	5	0	3
Q.10 They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates	5	3	3	4	0	1
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of (7 answers given only)	2	0	5	6	0	1
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life (7 answers given only)	3	3	4	2	0	2

## APPENDIX S

Staff member's comments taken from the staff questionnaire

Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life

always sometimes rarely never

comments:

In P.E girls always struggle  
in mixed gender sessions.

Boys tend to dominate attention  
and games and girls  
always take a big step back  
and very rarely participate to  
a reasonable standard.

Ice girls P.E sessions in Yrs 5 to 6  
proved highly successful and  
popular ~~and~~ in the past and  
maybe should be tried again  
and with all KS2 classes so  
progress is high throughout the  
school and not just in  
last 2 years off school life

Thank you for your help

## APPENDIX T

### Results of pilot Girls' Group survey about learning

		I agree 	Sometimes /not sure 	I do not agree 
Q1	I feel relaxed in my classroom	3	3	0
Q2	I try hard with my work	4	2	0
Q3	What we learn is interesting	2	4	0
Q4	What we learn is fun	1	5	0
Q5	What we learn is hard	1	5	0
Q6	I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher	2	4	0
Q7	I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions	1	5	0
Q8	I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I am not sure	3	3	0
Q9	I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom	1	3	2
Q10	I feel comfortable with most of my classmates	5	1	0
Q11	I feel that I am capable of doing better	2	4	0
Q12	I feel that I will do well in future and have a good job	4	1	1
Anything else you want to say? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People on my table disturb me when I am working.</li> <li>• I sometimes feel not very confident and I don't put my hand up a lot because people are loud.</li> <li>• Sometimes I feel confident and sometimes I get disrupted.</li> <li>• Sometimes I feel like people are in my face and sometimes I feel unsure of questions.</li> <li>• People disrupt me when I am learning.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">Thank you for your help!</p>				

## APPENDIX U

### Results of pre-pilot staff questionnaire

<b>Pilot outset 4 staff – all female</b>	<b>Alwa ys</b>	<b>Some times</b>	<b>Rarel y</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Q1. Female pupils seem relaxed in the classroom	2	2		The boys tend to be more forthright and the girls tend to sit back Three of the identified girls (named) seem intimidated by male dominance
Q2. They appear to put effort into their work	1	3		Two girls (named) lack in confidence two (named girls) seem to be “somewhere else” and when the lesson has been delivered they don’t have a clue what they are doing - Other two (named) give 100% effort.
Q3. They appear interested in what they are learning	2	2		
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning	1	3		They seem happy to get on with what is asked of them - two (named girls) always
Q5. They appear to find the work difficult	0	4	0	3(named girls) lack in confidence with some aspects of the work and therefore struggle. 4(named girls) after some support for a few minutes usually grasp the concept and work brilliantly. Others need more support to build their confidence
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions	0	4	0	Boys dominate the classroom and are more forthright – girls tend to take a back seat. 1(named girl) is always keen to take an active part, 1(named) is improving and becoming more confident to take a risk, Others need encouragement.
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning	0	1	3	The girls need lots of encouragement to share their thoughts, ideas and opinions.
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers	0	2	2	( 1 girl named as always confident)
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom	0	2	2	Boys dominate the classroom and are more forthright – girls tend to take a back seat.
Q.10 They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates	1	3	0	Some find it strange to work with a small minority of others in the class.
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of	0	4	0	With more confidence they could achieve more.
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life	1	3	0	The girls appear to want to do well but lack some confidence, I feel this is because we are a largely male dominating class and the boys have very strong characters and opinions.

## APPENDIX V

### Post-pilot participants' survey results

		I agree 	Sometimes /not sure 	I do not agree 
Q1	I feel relaxed in my classroom	4	2	0
Q2	I try hard with my work	4	2	0
Q3	What we learn is interesting	3	3	0
Q4	What we learn is fun	3	3	0
Q5	What we learn is hard	1	4	1
Q6	I feel OK about being asked questions by my teacher	3	3	0
Q7	I put my hand up when the teacher asks us questions	3	3	0
Q8	I feel OK about taking a risk with my answer if I am not sure	4	2	0
Q9	I feel OK about speaking out in the classroom	3	3	0
Q10	I feel comfortable with most of my classmates	5	1	0
Q11	I feel that I am capable of doing better	2	4	0
Q12	I feel that I will do well in future and have a good job	4	1	1
Anything else you want to say? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I feel a lot more confident/ a little more confident</li> <li>• The sessions have helped/ helped a bit for me</li> <li>• Talking about stuff/talking to each other/talking about strong women/wise women</li> <li>• The masks and talking about it</li> <li>• Creative stuff makes me confident</li> </ul> Thank you for your help!				

APPENDIX W

Girl's post-pilot 'Post-Its' comments

①  
I feel a lot more  
confident

the things up  
by ovira

②

10  
10

The sessions have  
helped a bit for me.

😊 🙌 ⑤  
10

I am in the middle  
by ovira 11

10  
10

I feel a little  
more confident

10  
10

I feel a little bit  
more confident but  
not a lot!

to do more art things

The masks and  
talking about  
it

talking about stuff

Talking about stuff.

②

creative stuff ~~helps~~ make  
me more confident

by ovira

It helped by doing  
the wooden mask for  
me.

Getting doing more  
creative things to  
look at in class

for them to under  
stand what there doing  
and stand proud.

I thort I like doing  
@thrtwing

~~thout~~  
was women  
(wise?) ④

## APPENDIX X

### Staff responses to the post-pilot questionnaire

<b>Pilot end 4 staff – all female</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Q1. Female pupils seem relaxed in the classroom	3	1	0	They seem a bit more able to stand up for themselves 1 girl still seems intimidated by male dominance
Q2.They appear to put effort into their work	2	2	0	Two girls still lack in confidence Two give 100% effort.
Q3.They appear interested in what they are learning	2	2	0	
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning	3	1	0	They seem happy to get on with their learning
Q5.They appear to find the work difficult	2	2	0	After some support they can usually grasp the concept and work independently .I needs more support to build their confidence
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions	2	2	0	They seem more able to take an active part, 1(named) is becoming much more confident to take a risk.
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning	1	3	0	The girls still need lots of encouragement to share their ideas and put their hand up
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers	2	2	0	More confident , mostly
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom	2	2	0	Boys still dominate but two seem to take a back seat less than before
Q.10 They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates	2	2	0	Some find it hard to work with anyone who is not their special friend.
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of	0	4	0	
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life	2	2	0	They appear to want to do well and work hard but lack still some confidence,

## APPENDIX Y

### External inter-rater reflections

#### **Cohort A Project 1**

These participants speak of improved confidence: “I am braver, I can ask in class”.

They comment that the project helped others join their group and that it would help other classes in other schools.

There is evidence of pre-start trepidation and initial nerves, but also excitement.

They speak of the supportive relationships, and the enabling to share and to express feelings.

There is a sense of regret that the project’s ends and a sense of safe community.

The videos where participants state that they “didn’t need it” seem worried and very short.

The masks seem to have had the greatest impact as a method.

#### **Cohort B Project 1**

The views expressed are similar to the Cohort A views.

There is a sense of being accepted.

There is a sense of growing confidence: brave where shy before, asking and input in class.

Initial nerves are mentioned.

They state that the project has helped others.

There is evidence that it has expanded friendship groups.

Again, they feel it could help other in other classes in other schools.

#### **Cohort C Project 2**

There are many similarities to the views in project 1 in these evaluations.

There is talk of initial nervousness and excitement.

There is a sense of loss at the end of the project.

They state a growing confidence for themselves and for others in class.

## APPENDIX Y Continued

### **Cohort D Project 2**

They state a growing confidence for themselves and for others in class and outside of school including improved relationships with peers.

They talk of extended friendship groups.

There is a recognition and appreciation of ‘supportiveness’ and belonging and the non-judgemental relationship they have with the adults .

The ending of the project has brought a strong sense of loss or sadness.

The games and the mask work is commented upon throughout.

This group is more emotional:

The initial nervousness is deeper for this group than the others, and is often expressed as some initial boredom at the outset which seems to dissipate as the project progresses.

The end of the project seemed more affecting.

The project seemed to have widened their experiences/ awareness of and about others.

The adults (practitioners) seemed key to this group.

### **Summary:**

Overall main themes seemed to be:

Confidence

Wider and more supportive friendship groups

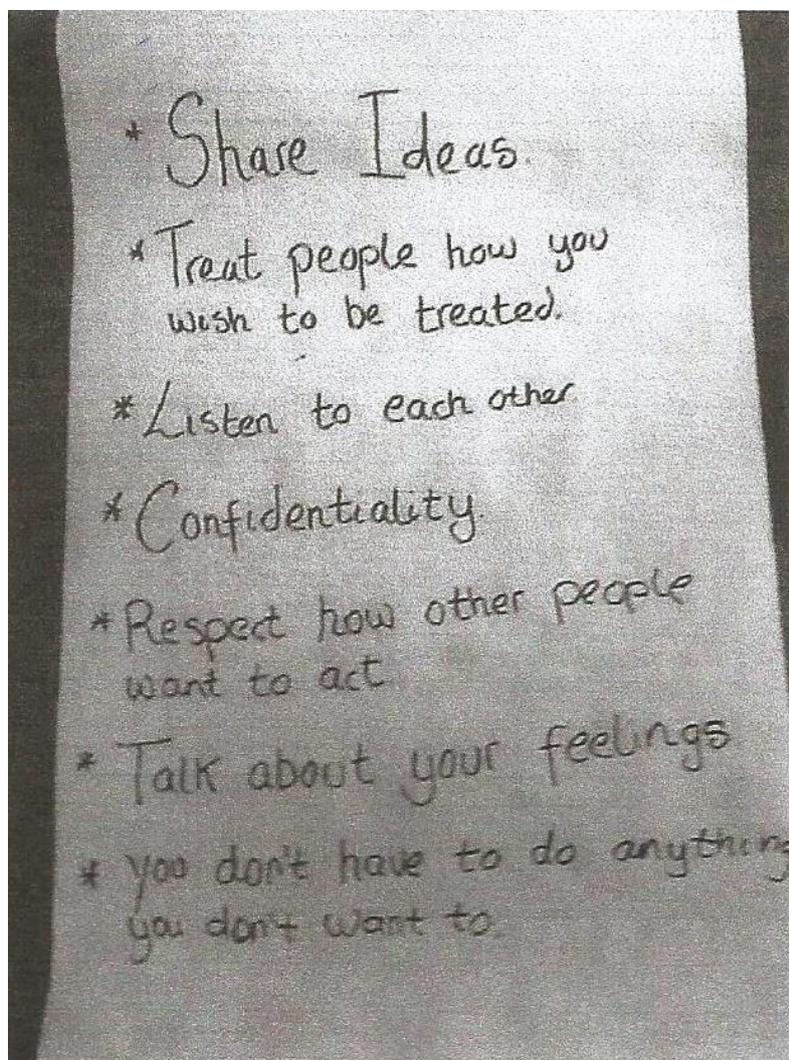
There was an underlying sense of being “chosen” or “special” as an unusual occurrence- “girls don’t normally get to do things”.

There was evidence of dysfunctional friendship groups.

The Cohort D group seemed to be more affected and emotional – they also mention changes in confidence in class less frequently overall.

## APPENDIX Z

### Exemplar Girls' Group working agreement



## APPENDIX AA

### Researcher's field notes: leading the games

J. (practitioner) has planned to bring in the younger Cohort D group to begin work earlier than Cohort C, so that they can practise leading a game.

The Cohort D girls seem happy to enter the yurt and are greeted by J. (practitioner) and the trainee. J. (practitioner) revisits the agreement with them and reiterates that they will not be made to do anything they feel uncomfortable about. She asks them what they can do if they don't feel OK.

D2: you shouldn't be afraid to say, 'cos no one makes you – there is no right or wrong.

J. (practitioner) says they can sit out from the game and maybe a friend, herself or the trainee could support them to feel OK about re-joining the activity. She qualifies this by saying that it is OK to sit out if you feel genuinely uncomfortable, but not if you just feel grumpy because it isn't your game which has been chosen to play. What could you do in that situation?

D7: you could think of a different game to suggest.

All the girls agree with this. They revisit the list of games they wanted to play/lead and it is clarified who will lead each. There is some disagreement and difficulty in negotiating this – some people don't want others to help them etc. / keep changing their minds about who they are happy to work with and which games. The practitioners spend some minutes facilitating the discussion so that eventually a consensus is reached and D5 and D9's game is chosen;

The girls struggle to explain the rules and there is some disagreement about what the rules consist of; J. (practitioner) has to re-iterate several times that as D5 and D9 are leading, then it is their version that had to be played.



There is an unsuccessful attempt at the game and the girls have to be called together so that various misunderstandings about the rules can be sorted out.

## APPENDIX AA continued

The game leaders became quite frustrated that people are not listening and are not adhering to the rules whilst other girls complain that their explanations and instructions are confusing.

D6: perhaps if we have some music playing, we will all be quieter so we can hear what's going on.

This is agreed, and the trainee helps D6 select some music. D5 and D9 go through the rules again. A second attempt is made to play the game, which is more successful. The girls are called together in a circle

J. (practitioner): What worked well?

D5: it helped to have music as people listened better while they played.

J. (practitioner): What didn't work so well? What was difficult?

D1: It was hard to get across how the game worked.

D3: it was confusing about who you 'tig' and whether they 'stay on'.

D5: It wasn't clear who had been 'tigged' because they didn't always keep to the rules

J. (practitioner): If you didn't enjoy the game and sat out, what might have helped you join in?

D4: it would be better to play the game normal like we're used to.

D5: It was hard to get people's attention.

J. (practitioner): You need to make sure that everyone is included and to make suggestions so that everyone can join in the game and the game goes more clearly. It is important that things sometimes don't go well – we can learn from times like this.

J. (practitioner) encourages the girls to work in pairs in a mirroring activity. The girls take to this much more easily than playing/leading the game as a larger group.

The Cohort C girls arrive in the yurt and are invited to model how to lead a game. Two Cohort C girls lead a game of 'wizard-tig'. They choose another Cohort C peer to help them demonstrate. The rules are clarified by the leaders and agreed by the group. The game is agreed to be a walking game so that a SEN pupil who has a mobility impairment can more easily join in. The game goes well and is seemingly enjoyed by all those who take part.

APPENDIX AA continued



J. (practitioner) calls them together: What worked well?

D2: Everyone stuck to the rules

D4: It was fun

J. (practitioner): we learned a lot from the first games because we had difficulties and people broke the rules. This time it was much more successful and everyone had fun.

Finally, it is D1 and D8's turn to lead a game. They explain the 'Doctor, Doctor' game where everyone gets tangled up and the Doctor has to untangle them J. (practitioner): reminds them to listen to the explanation, and encourages demonstrations. They agree to try the game.



Once the girls get the idea they play it several times – they seem to really enjoy this game.

J. (practitioner): calls the girls together and congratulates D1 and D8.

J. (practitioner): What did you like about the game?

C1: The massive tangle!

APPENDIX AA continued

D1: We had to work as a team.

D6: It was a challenge to work it out.

D5: I liked it because you had to go under everyone's leg!

J. (practitioner) explains that those girls who had wanted to lead a game and who still have not done so would get their chance either later today or next week.

## APPENDIX BB

Researcher's field notes: learning to work with the masks

J. (practitioner): with a mask you can't use so much of your face, you have to use the movement of your body.

The girls sit in a large circle with the practitioner and the trainee. The practitioner puts on a mask and conveys sadness in her physical stance. The girls respond immediately:

“aaah”-

“I'll play with you”.

The practitioner distributes the masks and talks through the basic rules of using the masks:

J. (practitioner): When working with the mask treat it as if it is treasure. When we put on the mask we make it an important ceremony: without chatting -with respect. Put on your mask slowly and in a special way: Look at your masks, both inside and outside. Feel the mask and think about it.



J. (practitioner): When you feel ready to become the mask, put it on carefully. Once it is on you **BECOME** the mask. The masks **EMBODY** their emotions – what do I mean by that?

A3: You put on the mask and transform yourself into that emotion.

APPENDIX BB continued



J. (practitioner): Look around the room - find some other masks that you think go with yours – go to those people. Take it in turns to look at each other’s masks and think about the physical movements which might convey your mask’s emotion. If your mask could move, how would it move? Use special movements. Find your shape and hold it.



J. (practitioner): Retain the magic of the mask. Now take off your mask and put it in front of you. Next week we will work in our groups using our masks. The mask wearer becomes the actor, the group becomes the director.

The practitioner explains the activities which will take place over the next few weeks. The session draws to a close.

## Appendix CC

### Researcher's field notes: the mirroring exercises

The practitioner introduces a mirroring exercise.

J. (practitioner): We are learning how to communicate with each other when we are working with the mask. We need to use a lot of expression with our bodies to communicate our feelings. We will use music and ideas about emotions to help us.

The girls pair up – mainly with a close friend. They negotiate a leader and a follower and mirror and attempt to each other's movements for several minute. Some pairs have more success at this than others. There is some giggling from some pairs, whilst other pairs take the exercise more seriously.



J. (practitioner): Find a partner to work with you that you don't usually work with. Take turns to lead. Become very slow so you can't tell who is leading. Find a girl from the other class and copy their shape, become their partner.

Some girls find this very difficult, as they find it hard to retain focus on their lead partner and not to try to take over. One or two groups become quite giggly and some of their members become frustrated with this and "sit out" in protest that their peers are not taking the exercise seriously.

## APPENDIX CC continued



J. (practitioner) calls the girls together. Each half of the group demonstrate to the other half – the girls are challenged to guess who was taking the lead in each pair – this is sometimes guessed correctly but not always.

J. (practitioner): What makes mirroring work well?

B6: thinking what your partner can do, helping them, doing it a bit slower.

J. (practitioner): How does it feel to work with a person you're not used to?

Girls offer a range of responses: relaxing, calm, weird, difficult

B6: It's something we're not used to; there were moments when I didn't know what to do.

A8: It was hard if you're going too fast or there are moves that are difficult.

B1: Every Friday (girls' group) I get worried that we're going to do something I don't like to do and I worry about working with new people.

J. re-reads through the agreement re-iterating no one would be forced to do anything they don't want to

J. (practitioner): Who feels a bit like B1?

About half the girls agree – mainly Cohort B and a few Cohort A girls.

B5: It's about bonding with the girls.

J. (practitioner): What if you don't want to do something but you are too scared to say?

APPENDIX CC continued

A1: You need to say – this group can help you build your confidence.

A5: It's about encouraging, not forcing.

J: (practitioner): It is as important to try to be aware about how people are feeling – yourself and others; it is as important to look carefully at how people communicate with their bodies as it is to listen carefully to what others say. During the session you have been talking to and working with different people, not just your friends– why is it important to do that?

A7: We need to be able to work with others at secondary school – you can't just be with your friends.

A5: It's about learning how other people feel and understanding them..

A3: It rises *{raises?}* our confidence and helps us to communicate.

## APPENDIX DD

### Researcher's field notes: the mask-making sessions



#### Session 1:

First J. (practitioner) shows the girls some home-made masks. She is modelling a bright yellow mask and asks the girls to describe any emotions it conveys to them. The girls offer a range of emotions:

B5: It's happy, feeling OK

A2: It's like she's feeling sunny.

J. (practitioner) models a blue mask.

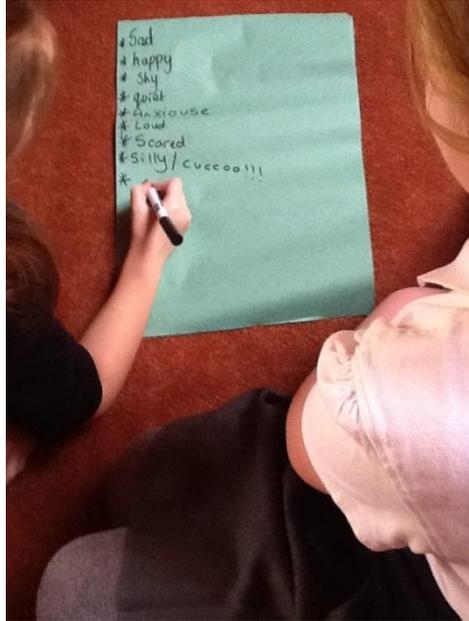
B1: I think she's 'tearing up' {crying?}

A3: ...in a very low mood.

J. (practitioner) models a range of masks and invites suggestions about the emotions they convey. She talks about the concept of the "abstract" and the use of colour and shape to evoke the emotions.

## APPENDIX DD continued

The girls work in groups to identify a range of emotions:



J: (practitioner): The next task after lunch is for everyone to produce a mask evoking a different emotion. Have a look at the emotions lists word banks you have drawn up. Think about the emotion you want to convey, and what resources you might use to show that emotion most effectively.

(A range of paint, collage etc. materials and resources is made available).

In groups the girls work together planning their masks. Many of them are struggling to decide on the emotion they wish to represent and on the resources to choose. Some are looking to friends for ideas; some are using ideas from the ones the practitioner has demonstrated. Some girls are complaining that they are 'stuck' and can't think of what to do. B3 is angry that a peer is 'copying' her idea.

Session Two:

The girls have need tasked to make a second mask in contrast to or to complement their first. The girls work and talk in a very relaxed fashion in their groups.

APPENDIX DD continued



J. (practitioner): How did you feel making the masks the first time and how little help did you need this time?

B1: It was amazing.

A2: Last time we kept asking for help.

A6: This time we just got on with it.

B2: I didn't need much help – they are all better than before.

J. (practitioner): so your skills are developing?

B7: You weren't afraid to change your ideas.

The practitioner facilitates a discussion about managing your feelings when you make mistakes.

B4: I found it easier.

B3: My confidence was more.

J. (practitioner): some of the second masks have been inspired by other people's first masks- that's a compliment if it's happened to you.

B1: This time I have faith in myself.

## APPENDIX EE

### Researcher's field notes: the drama activities

The practitioner begins the exercise by revisiting the activity of emotion freeze frames. C6 reminds the group about freeze frames at the practitioner's request. The girls are grouped into mixed cohorts so that they are not working with friends.

J. (practitioner): in your groups, choose the masks you are going to use. We are going to make freeze frames demonstrating the emotions you feel your masks convey. Your task is to make three freeze frames- one of each of your three chosen emotions.

The girls work on their emotion freeze frames for a time, there is varying degree of success amongst the mixed groups. C8 is finding it very hard as she wants to lead but the others in her group will not let take charge. D4 is being "mothered" by the Cohort C girls in her group who are treating her like a doll- lifting, carrying her about – she seems quite happy with this. After ten minutes of working, the groups are called together

J. (practitioner): Each group is going to display their freeze frames set to the other groups. Our task is to accurately identify the emotions portrayed. Which group wants to show first?

A8's group ask to go first – C8 is very purposeful and takes the lead. The group tableaux convey 'powerful', 'puzzled', 'lonely', very successfully.

J. (practitioner): How did we show the emotions?

C1: We used our experiences.

D5: We used our body.



The practitioner explains that the next task is to produce short plays.

APPENDIX EE continued

Paper and pens are given out and instructions for drafting:

J. (practitioner): Divide paper into a grid of 6:

Box 1: decide in your groups what /who the main character will be

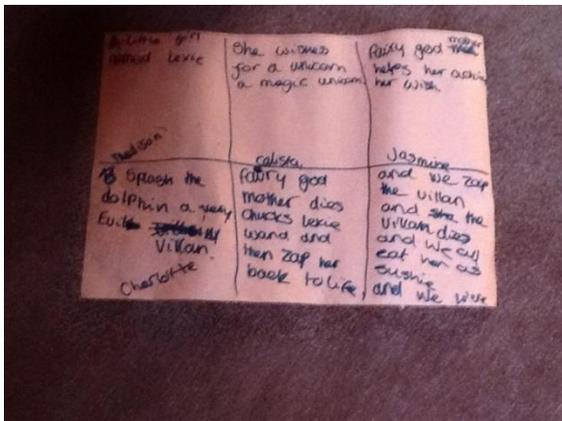
Box 2: your character's wish/dream

Box 3: who or what will enable your character to achieve their dream

Box 4: who or what will stop your main character achieving their dream

Box 5: what is the struggle?

Box 6: what's the ending ?



J. (practitioner): In your group what do you need to do to work well together?

The girls respond:

Let everyone speak

Don't interrupt

Be kind

Give everyone a turn to be leader

Help people when they're a bit stuck

Be patient

If you don't agree, do it a different way

Don't force other people to do it

Take turns – let each person do it

## APPENDIX EE continued

Using their drafts, the girls set about creating their 'plays' with varying degrees of success at working together. The girls are rehearsing very animatedly – lots of movement and noise. The practitioner and trainee move amongst the groups and approach where negotiations might be needed between sets of girls- some are finding it hard at times to tolerate each other's ideas, Some groups complain that some members of their group are not working well together, others that their ideas are clashing and that they are 'stuck' After some facilitation and persuasion by the trainee, D8 eventually works with the others in her group, having 'fallen out' with them and removed herself. C7 has had a difficult morning socially at break and is struggling in her group; generally though, the atmosphere feels positive. Some groups want to use multiple chairs and other props. The practitioner gives them a challenge- they may use up to two chairs and nothing else – she gives them some examples of how to help their audience to "imagine" furniture, scenery etc. They can use your two chairs in lots of different ways. The girls seem unsure about this and try to negotiate more: 'but how can you do... without...?' but the practitioner is firm: they can use two chairs and the imagination of the audience.

D1: That's all you need

After 20 minutes, the practitioner calls all together to sit and chat about progress so far. The girls are praised by the practitioner for 'coming round' and getting on with it.

J.(practitioner): We've had a brilliant morning with lots of positives and good focus what we need is an attitude of "yes" that means : let's try it, Ok, maybe, let's see, let's have a look - Otherwise a group can get stuck. Is there a group who feels they are doing really well with it?

C8's group volunteer to act out the first two of their scenes.

J. (practitioner): Are we agreed that that went really well so far?

There is general assent.

J. (practitioner): Well done in your work today. Discuss in your pairs: what have you done well today, what was challenging or difficult? Think of one thing you are going to do to move your group on.

D5: I think people should –

J. (practitioner):( stops her) For next time I want each of you to think about what YOU can do to move your group on and improve your work together. What has worked well by the end of the session?

D1: Because we all paid attention to each other.

APPENDIX EE continued

D8: We were listening to each other.

D3: We were helping each other.

D5: We all listened to each other and shared our ideas and it was fun!

## APPENDIX FF

### Researcher's field notes: learning resilience

B 3: I've enjoyed being just with the girls.

J (practitioner) Why is that different/better?

B9: I feel more confident – they don't laugh at you. We get on better.

B6: If you put your hand up in class to answer a question and you get it wrong they *{the boys in the class}* laugh at you. It feels horrible. They're not all like that {many girls are nodding in agreement} but it stops us from trying.

J. (practitioner): How do the drama and the masks help?

B10: You make it yourself and no one can tell you how to do it.

B5: I don't feel that confident in class when you're being watched and always being around the boys- when I forgot what the answer was and everybody turned to look at me.

J. (practitioner): We're going to do an experiment- (to B5) find a mask that looks upset.

Two girls are willing to loan B5 their masks.

J. (practitioner): What are the rules when we put on a mask?

Girls offer:

You have to 'go into the zone'

Its special

You don't touch the front

Put yourself in in other people's shoes

It's about emotions

J. (practitioner): Hands up if you've ever felt a little bit upset (all hands go up)

B5 puts on the mask and strikes a pose.

J. (practitioner): Who will be (B5's) voice to say what has happened and how she is feeling?

B7 describes B5's feelings of sadness.

Other girls pretend to be the ones laughing and making fun of her.

APPENDIX FF continued



J. (practitioner): She needs help, she needs confidence, come and be her friends' voices and help her.

Girls offer:

Just ignore them

Don't worry everyone gets something wrong

Think of things you know you do well- even better than they can

J. (practitioner): How does it feel now?

B5: Better now I've got some help from people who have got out of it.

J. (practitioner): If your character was choosing a different mask now what might you wear?

B5 chooses three happy /supportive masks to represent the way she was helped.

## APPENDIX GG

### End of Phase One intervention staff survey results

<b>End of Phase 1</b> <b>3 staff : 1 male 2</b> <b>female</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>Usually</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Q1. Female pupils seem relaxed in the classroom	1 2				
Q2. They appear to put effort into their work	2	1			
Q3. They appear interested in what they are learning		1 1	1		
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning	1	1	1		
Q5. They appear to find the work difficult			1	1 1	
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions	2	1			
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning	1 1	1			
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers	1 1	1			
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom	1 1	1			
Q.10 They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates	1 1	1			
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of	1	1 1			
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life	1 2				Girls do have a good positive attitude around the setting and in their work They want to do well

## APPENDIX HH

### End of Phase Two intervention staff survey results

<b>End of Phase 2 5 staff : 1 male 4 female</b>	<b>Alw ays</b>	<b>Usu ally</b>	<b>Someti mes</b>	<b>Rarel y</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Q1. Female pupils seem relaxed in the classroom	1 2		2		The girls seem a lot more relaxed in ■■■■■ than they did in ■■■■■.- they are a lot more confident.
Q2. They appear to put effort into their work	1	1	3		The girls In ■■■■■ are mainly focused and the quality of their work shows through.
Q3.They appear interested in what they are learning		1	4		Mostly, depending if they find the subject interesting to them
Q4. They appear to enjoy what they are learning	1	1	3		The girls have become more confident and take more of an active part now by answering and asking questions
Q5. They appear to find the work difficult			1	1 3	They seem to just get on with their work and there is rarely a problem.
Q6. They put their hands up to answer questions	1	1	3		They no longer seem intimidated by the boys and are able to challenge them easily.
Q7. They appear confident about taking a risk with their learning	1 1		3	✓	Their confidence is very admirable. Great to see how they have come out of their shells. They realise that taking a risk is good and it doesn't matter if they are wrong.
Q8. They appear confident in front of their peers	1 1		3		They rarely seem to have a problem talking to adults,
Q9. They appear confident in speaking out in the classroom	1		4		No problems ! Great to see them challenging the boys for a change .
Q.10 They appear comfortable with the majority of their classmates	1		4		Mostly they do but there are a few boys that they seem to be intimidated by
Q11. They are achieving as much as they are capable of		1	4		If they are interested in the subject they will put maximum effort in to achieve their goal.
Q12. They appear to want to do well and succeed in life	1 2		2		I have seen improvement in most of the girls- they are encouraged in class by female members of the team Some girls ( 3 named) have improved 100% They want to do well and are eager to please, confidence restricts their achievement Most of the girls have a goal in sight of what they would like to do when they are older.

## **APPENDIX II**

To evidence request and confirmation of Ethical Approval