

**“STUDENTS AS RESEARCHERS” –
THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF A
WHOLE-SCHOOL PUPIL VOICE PROJECT IN A
PRIMARY SEBD SCHOOL**

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Abstract

Children's and young people's rights to a voice have been enshrined in social care and health legislation for many years. However, their opportunity to have an active role in decision making in their education appears, until recently, to have been relatively lacking.

Students as Researchers (STARs) projects are whole-school initiatives where children are given opportunities to undertake student-led research. The benefits of such work have been well documented. Despite this, to date, there has been minimal published research into their use with pupils in specialist educational settings, in comparison with the greater body of research undertaken with their mainstream counterparts.

The present study investigated the way in which a STARs project could be implemented in a primary specialist provision for children with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) in a Local Authority in the South of England, and subsequently how those within the setting perceived it. A qualitative research design was adopted consisting of two parallel strands – the *Process of Implementation* and the *Evaluation* strand. The intervention was evaluated through the use of semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis was used to uncover key themes.

Findings from these interviews, examples of pupil work and observations reported in a reflective journal, suggested that the intervention was viewed positively by those involved. Themes which emerged from the interviews included perceived benefits and challenges of implementing the intervention, the future of the intervention at the school, development of skills, pupil competence and behaviour. The study has provided useful conclusions regarding implications for the practice of those working with pupils with SEBD, including educational psychologists.

**I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the
work presented in this thesis is my own.**

Signed:  _____

Anna Kate Silverman

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In order to protect the anonymity of all persons involved in the study, the school name and the names of all pupils and members of staff have been changed or omitted.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 11 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review | 16 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 16 |
| 2.2 Pupil voice – a historical perspective | 17 |
| 2.3 Seeking pupil voice – meaningful involvement vs a token gesture | 19 |
| 2.4 Why seek pupil voice? A psychological perspective | 21 |
| 2.5 Listening to pupils with SEBD | 23 |
| 2.5.1 <i>SEBD – The terminology and statistics</i> | 23 |
| 2.5.2 – <i>Why seek the voices of pupils with SEBD?</i> | 25 |
| 2.5.3 – <i>Pupils with SEBD – School Ethos & Relationships</i> | 27 |
| 2.5.4 – <i>The psychological impact of attend specialist provision</i> | 28 |
| 2.6 Students as Researchers – an overview | 29 |
| 2.6.1 <i>Examples of STARs in mainstream provision</i> | 30 |
| 2.6.2 <i>An example of a STARs project in a specialist provision</i> | 33 |
| 2.7 Perceived benefits of implementing STARs projects | 34 |
| 2.8 Perceived challenges of implementing STARs projects | 35 |
| 2.9 Rationale and Research Questions | 38 |
| Chapter 3: Implementation of STARs project – The process | 40 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 40 |
| 3.2 Study Design and Assumptions | 42 |
| 3.3 Sample | 43 |
| 3.3.1 <i>The Context of St. Martin's School</i> | 43 |
| 3.3.2 <i>Myself as participant</i> | 46 |
| 3.4 Reflective journal | 47 |
| 3.5 Pre-intervention Computer Programme | 47 |
| 3.6 Procedure | 49 |
| 3.6.1 <i>Step 1 – Ensuring transparency and building rapport</i> | 49 |
| 3.6.2 <i>Step 2 – Initial individual meetings with pupils</i> | 50 |
| 3.6.3 <i>Step 3 – Recruitment of Student Researchers</i> | 51 |
| 3.6.4 <i>Step 4 - Training the Student Research Team</i> | 52 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 3.6.5 Step 5- <i>The focus groups</i> | 60 |
| 3.6.6 Step 6- <i>Pupils' analysis and feedback of data</i> | 62 |
| 3.7 Chapter summary | 63 |
| | |
| Chapter 4: The Evaluation Strategy | 64 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 64 |
| 4.2 Sample | 64 |
| 4.3 Evaluation Interviews | 65 |
| 4.4 Follow-Up interviews | 68 |
| 4.5 Procedure | 68 |
| 4.6 Ethical Considerations | 69 |
| 4.6.1 <i>Informed consent/assent</i> | 70 |
| 4.6.2 <i>Confidentiality</i> | 71 |
| 4.6.3 <i>Nature of the Pupil Population</i> | 72 |
| 4.6.4 <i>Power shift</i> | 72 |
| 4.6.5 <i>Data analysis</i> | 73 |
| 4.7 Reliability and Validity | 74 |
| 4.8 Analytic Approach | 77 |
| 4.9 Summary | 81 |
| | |
| Chapter 5: Implementation of STARs project – The Findings | 82 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 82 |
| 5.2 Pre-intervention Narrative of Pupils | 82 |
| 5.3 The Process of Implementation | 86 |
| 5.3.1 <i>The Training Sessions</i> | 86 |
| 5.3.2 <i>The Focus Groups</i> | 90 |
| 5.3.3 <i>Pupils' suggestions</i> | 95 |
| 5.3.4 <i>Analysis and feedback stage</i> | 96 |
| | |
| Chapter 6: Perceptions of pupils and members of staff | 104 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 104 |
| 6.2 The five Students as Researchers' experiences of taking part in the STARs project | 104 |
| 6.3 The experiences of four children participating in the focus | 107 |
| 6.4 The views of three members of staff towards to project | 109 |
| 6.5 The perceived impact of the STARs project by Student | |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Researchers two terms after its implementation | 113 |
| 6.6 Summary | 116 |
| Chapter 7: Discussion | 117 |
| 7.1 Introduction | 117 |
| 7.2 Summary of main findings in relation to my 2 research questions | 117 |
| 7.2.1 <i>How can a STARs project be implemented in an SEBD school?</i> | 117 |
| 7.2.2 <i>What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part?</i> | 121 |
| 7.2.2.1 <i>Views towards the project</i> | 121 |
| 7.2.2.2 <i>Development of skills</i> | 122 |
| 7.2.2.3 <i>Perceived value of the project</i> | 123 |
| 7.2.2.4 <i>Behaviour and Pupil Competence</i> | 124 |
| 7.2.2.5 <i>Perceived Strengths of the STARs intervention</i> | 125 |
| 7.2.2.6 <i>Perceived Barriers to/Challenges of STARs</i> | 126 |
| 7.2.2.7 <i>Future of STARs at St. Martin's School</i> | 127 |
| 7.2.2.8 <i>Follow-Up Interviews</i> | 128 |
| 7.3 Practicalities | 129 |
| 7.4 Methodological Strengths and Limitations of the Research | 131 |
| 7.4.2 <i>Characteristics of trustworthy qualitative research</i> | 134 |
| 7.4.2.1 <i>Creditability</i> | 134 |
| 7.4.2.2 <i>Transferability</i> | 136 |
| 7.4.2.3 <i>Dependability and Confirmability</i> | 136 |
| 7.5 Implications | 137 |
| 7.5.1 <i>Future Directions</i> | 137 |
| 7.5.2 <i>Implications for the practice of Educational Psychologists</i> | 139 |
| 7.5.2.1 <i>Individual Work</i> | 139 |
| 7.5.2.2 <i>Systemic work and Organisational Change</i> | 140 |
| Chapter 8: Concluding Comments | 143 |
| References | 144 |
| Appendices | 158 |

List of Tables, Figures and Appendices

Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 2.0: STARs topics covered at Sharnbrook Upper School | 32 |
| Table 3.0: Class groupings and attainments of pupils at St. Martin's | 46 |
| Table 3.1: Demographics of the six Student Researchers | 52 |
| Table 3.2: Schedule for classroom focus groups | 61 |
| Table 4.0: The four pupils selected for the evaluation interviews | 65 |
| Table 4.1: The five thematic analyses | 78 |
| Table 5.0: Summary of suggestions made by pupils during classroom focus groups | 96 |

Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 2.0: Hart's ladder of pupil participation (1997) | 20 |
| Figure 3.0: An overview of my Research Design | 41 |
| Figure 3.1: A copy of the <i>Training Session Plan</i> for Training Session 1 | 55 |
| Figure 5.0: Themes and sub-themes from the data generated in pre-intervention meetings | 84 |
| Figure 5.1: The five group rules developed by the Student Researchers | 87 |
| Figure 5.2: An example of Stephen advertising poster | 89 |
| Figure 5.3: An example of Rich's advertising poster | 89 |
| Figure 5.4: Abhay's poster advertising the Buddy Time focus group | 92 |
| Figure 5.5: An example of a pupil drawing from focus groups | 94 |
| Figure 5.6: An example of a pupil drawing from focus groups | 94 |
| Figure 5.7.1: One of Andrew's slides created for the feedback presentation | 98 |
| Figure 5.7.2: One of Fergus' slides created for the feedback presentation | 99 |

| | | |
|--|-------|-----|
| Figure 5.7.3: One of Stephen’s slides created for the feedback presentation | ..... | 101 |
| Figure 5.7.4: One of Abhay’s slides created for the feedback presentation | ..... | 102 |
| Figure 5.7.5: One of Rich’s slides created for the feedback Presentation | ..... | 103 |
| Figure 6.0: Four themes and sub-themes from the Student Researchers’ Evaluation Interviews | ..... | 105 |
| Figure 6.1: Four themes and sub-themes from the Evaluation Interviews with the children who participated in the focus groups | ..... | 107 |
| Figure 6.2: Themes and sub-themes from Evaluation Interviews with three members of staff | ..... | 110 |
| Figure 6.3: Themes and sub-themes from follow-up interviews with the three Student Researchers | ..... | 114 |

Appendices

| | | |
|---|-------|-----|
| Appendix 1: Parent Consent Forms | ..... | 158 |
| Appendix 2: Introducing the Project to pupils and Staff | ..... | 160 |
| Appendix 3: Scripts for Introducing the project and computer programme in individual sessions | ..... | 161 |
| Appendix 4: Interactive Computer Programme screenshots | ..... | 162 |
| Appendix 5: Training session plans 2-4 | ..... | 163 |
| Appendix 6: Ten skills developed by pupils in Training Session 2 | ..... | 166 |
| Appendix 7: Example of Resources from Training Session 3 | ..... | 167 |
| Appendix 8: Focus group schedules developed by the Secret 6 | ..... | 168 |
| Appendix 9: Interview schedule for Evaluation Interviews | ..... | 170 |
| Appendix 10: Transcript of Evaluation Interview with Rich | ..... | 174 |

“Students as Researchers” – The implementation and evaluation of a whole-school pupil voice project in a primary SEBD School

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

There has long been concern about the educational outcomes for children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD), given their often disrupted school experiences. Pupils with SEBD are often socially marginalised, rejected and neglected and can come from disadvantaged sub-cultural and socio-economic groups (Billington & Pomerantz, 2004).

It has been argued that pupils with SEBD present the greatest challenge to inclusive education (Vincent *et al.*, 2007). In total, there are approximately 150,000 school-aged children in the UK who are identified as having SEBD - around 13,000 of whom are educated in special schools (DCSF, 2009b). Due to these specialist placements, concerns have been raised over the financial implications that excluded pupils have for the government’s educational budget (Wise, 1998).

Vasagar (2011), in a recent article published in The Guardian, stated that the number of young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs) was at a record high in 2011 in the UK. A range of social, economic and personal factors increase the likelihood of a young person becoming NEET and over-represented groups in the UK population include young people who truant from or are excluded from school, young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disabilities and young offenders. In

2005, data indicated that amongst all 16 year olds nationally, 7 per cent were NEET. However, this rose to 11 per cent of 16 year olds from the lowest socio-economic groups, 13 per cent amongst those with a disability, 22 per cent amongst those excluded from school and 32 per cent amongst those who were persistent truants (Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, 2005). In spite of these statistics and a wide acknowledgement of the poor outcomes for this vulnerable, at-risk SEBD population, research into their educational experiences and their voices has been limited.

The social construction of childhood has contributed to the way in which children have historically been excluded from democratic processes, and has suggested the idea that adults are competent and children are not. If one of the primary goals of an individual's development is to reach a state of self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943), then the opportunity to participate in matters concerning oneself, is of great importance. Cullingford (1991, p6) described adults' lack of accessing pupil voice as 'an ancient sense of egotism' in the sense that adults know so much more than children and can express themselves more precisely. Consequently, the voices of children, particularly of children from marginalised, vulnerable groups, are very much underrepresented (Billington & Pomerantz, 2004).

I have long had an interest in the area of pupil voice. When working in the Behaviour and Inclusion Team at a specialist school for pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties prior to my Doctoral training, I set up a pupil voice project and was able to observe the value of this work. Whilst in my current position as a trainee educational psychologist in a large local authority, and having visited various specialist provisions in the area, I questioned the extent to which pupils' views were actively sought in some of the specialist SEBD settings. Through discussions with a senior educational psychologist,

my Local Authority team manager and the Behavioural Support team manager, I became confident that these thoughts were justified. From a psychological perspective, I was interested in pupils' sense of school belonging to these settings and how this affected academic motivation. I considered with my colleagues the way in which pupil voice projects could impact upon this and as a result of these discussions, I was keen to explore this idea further.

This research aimed to provide an argument for the significant need for educational professionals, parents and stakeholders, to better understand those children and young people who do not conform to, or who challenge authority, by providing them with meaningful opportunities for their voices to be heard. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the way in which a whole-school pupil voice project, namely a 'Students as Researchers' (STARs) project, could be put in place to access the views of pupils in a primary specialist setting for children with SEBD in a large Local Authority in the South of England. There are 519 special schools in England which provide for pupils with SEBD (DCSF, 2009a). Despite this figure and despite a large body of literature arguing the multiple benefits of STARs interventions, to date, there has been minimal published research into their use with the SEBD pupil population, in comparison with the greater body of research undertaken with their mainstream counterparts.

The rationale for and design of this study was inspired by my practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and from my experiences prior to the training programme. My professional work is heavily influenced by an interactionist systemic perspective and my professional stance is that the systems in an individual's life strongly impact upon and shape their development. The interactions between a number of overlapping

ecosystems, including family, school, peers and culture, all affect an individual significantly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An interactionist systemic perspective acknowledges the importance of a pupil's environment and relationships with others as paramount and cites problems within the systems around the child. By listening to voices of pupils and actively seeking their views, it is envisaged that adults can identify issues of importance, and consequently make changes in these systems. Cooper *et al.* (1994) stated that reality is constructed and mediated, in the sense that different aspects are highlighted according to ideas that individuals or groups had about it. Those who seek pupil voice can explore how children and young people interpret their world, interpret others and interpret their educational experiences.

The study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How can a STARs project be implemented in an SEBD school?
2. What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part in the STARs project?

A qualitative research design was adopted consisting of two parallel strands – the *Process of Implementation* (described in Chapter 3) and the *Evaluation* (described in Chapter 4). The former related to research question 1 and the latter related to research question 2. By designing the research in this way, where my input and facilitation of the project formed part of the methodology, I could consider firstly how to implement such a project in a specialist provision, but also evaluate this process through seeking the views of those involved. Having undertaken a thorough search of relevant literature, the process of which is outlined in the following chapter, I believe that this study is unique in that, to date, no published research found during this search, focused upon the

processes of implementing, and subsequently evaluating, a STARs project with pupils who do not attend a mainstream provision.

The following chapter reviews literature relating to pupil voice and specifically introduces STARs projects as an approach. Chapters Three and Four detail the methodological considerations of the research and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. Findings will be presented in Chapters Five and Six. Chapter Seven provides a discussion of these findings, as well as the implications for the professional role of the educational psychologist and for the wider context. Finally, I offer concluding comments in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

I have begun by introducing the topic of pupil voice from a historical perspective, reflecting on its journey over the past eighty years. I have then discussed the need to seek pupil voice from a psychological perspective, focusing on sense of school belonging. Key to my project was the pupil population selected for the research. Therefore, in this chapter, I have reviewed literature specifically associated with the needs of pupils with SEBD, their educational experiences and most significantly for this project, the concerns that their voices are not sought. I have discussed Students as Researchers projects and focused on previous implementations of this work. The perceived benefits, and indeed challenges, of accessing the voice of the pupil are then presented along with factors for successful implementation. Finally, I have introduced my research aims, rationale and research questions.

The review process involved successive searching and refining of relevant literature. The guidance of Aveyard (2007) was adhered to for the search strategy in that relevant literature was located by searching electronic databases, reference lists and hand searching key journals. The searches focused on work published within the last twenty years and the following electronic databases were searched (between April and September 2011): British Education Index, ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) and Swetswise. Search terms included terms from the fields of education and psychology and included synonyms and related concepts. These key search terms included: SEBD, pupil voice, students as researchers, pupil empowerment, sense of belonging and school connectedness. This process generated material which was predominantly from the United Kingdom.

2.2 Pupil voice – a historical and cultural perspective

In recent years, the view of what children in the UK can achieve and the respect they are entitled to as members of a Western democratic society has changed (Fielding & Bragg, 2003). Pupil voice is not a new concept. In the 1930s, Dent (1939) argued that children and young people have a personal interest in their education and a point of view which should be treated with respect. Children's and young people's rights to a voice have been enshrined in social care and health legislation for many years. However, their right to have a voice and an active role in decision making and planning in education has, until recently, been particularly lacking (Cruddas, 2001). There is now a variety of legal, political, economic and social drivers behind accessing children's perspectives. The main legal influence in the pupil voice movement came in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which marked a landmark in the development of rights of children. The Convention provided education policy writers with a framework of principles on which to focus. Articles 12, 13 and 23 stipulated that children have not only rights of provision and protection, but also those of participation – that is, rights to express their views, to be heard, and to take part in activities and decisions that affect their lives.

Existing literature on the pupil voice movement has focused on national contexts, dominated by accounts of North American and European pupil experiences. An individual's position in society, and indeed their right to be heard varies considerably across cultures, and one's position in society leads to different experiences (Frones, 1993). Lee (2005) highlighted the fact that the value that children have been granted varies cross-culturally, and can be linked by the sense that children are 'owned' by the adults in their communities. In the United Kingdom, perspectives on children's status

in society have shifted and in the wake of the United Nations Convention (UNICEF, 1989), there has been increased international attention placed on using pupil perspectives to develop educational processes (Kellett, 2004). In England and Wales, pupil voice was given further weight by the Children Act (1989) which stated that before making any decision with respect to a child whom they were looking after, or proposing to look after, a local authority should, so far as reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child or young person. Similar legislation exists in Scotland: the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, and Northern Ireland: the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, which acknowledged the obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights (Woolfson *et al.*, 2006).

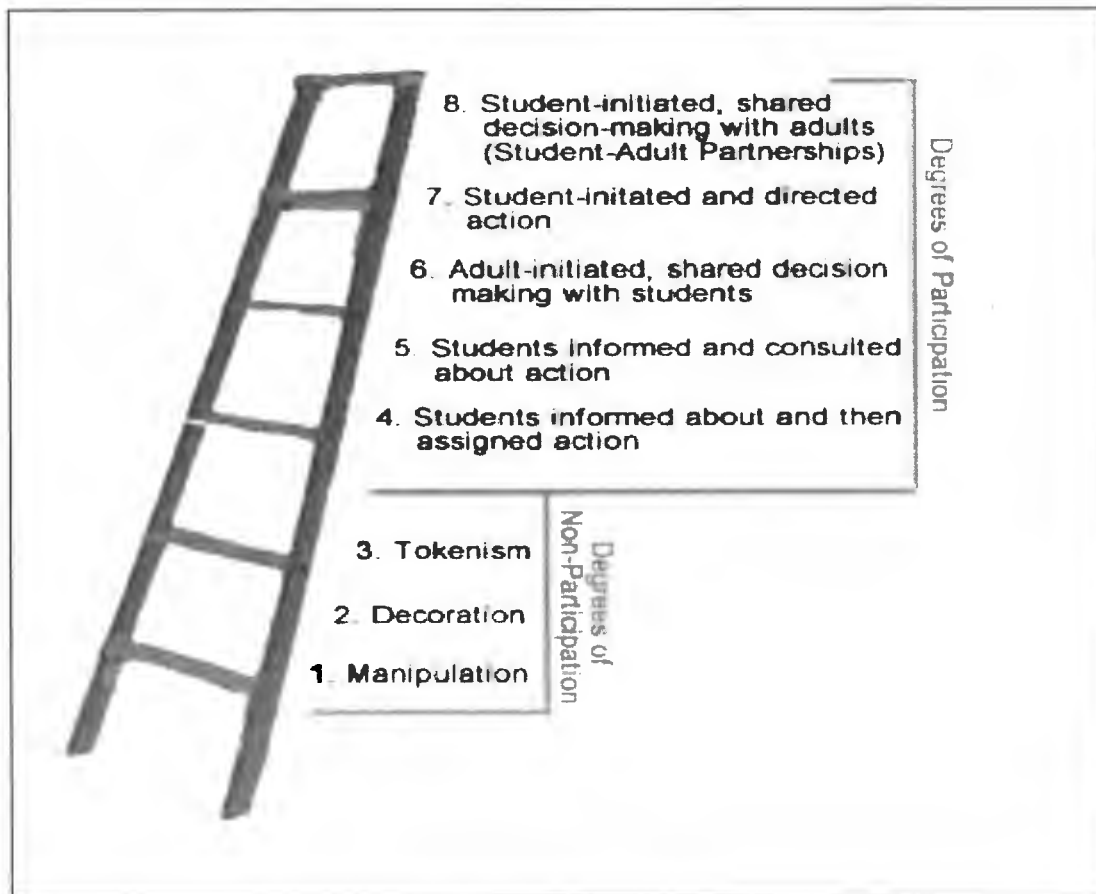
The SEN Code of Practice (DfEE, 2001) had a full chapter emphasizing the need for pupil participation. This chapter argued for the right of children with SEN to be involved in decision making and exercising choice (Cruddas, 2001). This view was reinforced in national frameworks for Personal, Social and Health Education and the programmes of study for National Curriculum Citizenship. Although the United Kingdom was criticised for its slow response to the directives outlined in the United Nations Convention, the government gradually adopted the key recommendations and established the post of Children's Commissioner to act as a voice of children and young people (Flutter, 2007). Some elements of student consultation and participation have begun to appear in education policy and guidance. For instance, the landmark Every Child Matters initiative (DES, 2003) placed an emphasis on the value of consulting children and young people and, similarly, Ofsted inspection guidelines required that schools took adequate steps to listen to pupils' views. Although there was no specific grade for pupil voice in the new inspection framework introduced in 2012, it was reported that inspectors will take account of it when evaluating the spiritual, moral,

social and cultural development of the pupils at a school (Ofsted, 2012).

2.3 Seeking the voice - meaningful involvement versus a token gesture

Birkett (2001) reported, in a newspaper survey of 15,000 school-aged children asked about their dream school, one the top five ideas included 'being listened to'. The microcosm society of school (Doddington *et al.*, 2000) has offered an ideal place to introduce principles associated with pupil voice yet few schools have looked for regular opportunities to encourage pupils to express their views in a meaningful way. Fletcher (2005, p4) argued that meaningful student involvement evolves from the process of engaging students as partners in 'every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy'. Hart (1997) developed a way of analysing involvement of young people, through a model called 'Hart's ladder'. The ladder was not designed to be applied to a whole school all at once; rather it aimed to assess individual activities or school projects. As illustrated in Figure 2.0, at one end of the ladder he placed 'manipulation, decoration and tokenism' and stated that examples of these forms were where pupils were used to carry adults' messages or where they seemed to have the appearance of a voice, but had been selected to promote a particular view. At the other end of the ladder, he placed more consultative and child-initiated activities.

Figure 2.0 - Hart's ladder of pupil participation (1997)



MacBeath and Mortimore (2001) reported that the most common opportunity for pupil voice work was through the 'School Council' but they had concerns about how it is used. They argued that pupils often viewed this as a token gesture and staff were often happy to let the School Council deal with matters that did not interfere with the school's core business of learning and teaching. It has been argued that most participatory research is generally adult-led, adult-designed and conceived from an adult perspective (Kellett, 2004), and opportunities for pupil empowerment were subsequently within existing structures, determined by adults (Wyness, 2006).

Sellman (2007) echoed these concerns highlighting the importance of being realistic about what student voice projects in schools could actually achieve and the nature of the voice(s) they represent. Furthermore, literature suggests that when student voice projects are planned in schools, they often reproduce models from the adult world (e.g. councils, focus groups, forums, etc) and use linguistic devices with similar origins (agendas, meeting notes, minutes, and actions and reports).

Rudduck *et al.* (1996) speculated as to why there seems to be a lack of meaningful pupil consultation in schools, arguing that the social maturity of young people significantly surpasses most schools' understanding of their capabilities, thus leading to educational practices and professional dispositions that do not fit actual realities of childhood and adolescence. They proposed that the deep structures of schooling that included beliefs about what a pupil was, must change. Kellett (2004) agreed that judgements about competence were among the principal barriers blocking the empowerment of children as active researchers.

2.4 Why seek pupil voice? - A psychological perspective

In order to truly understand the way in which an individual behaves, there is a need to accept subjectivity (Cooper *et al.*, 1994). Individuals place different interpretations on what happens in their lives according to how they interpret their world and construct their own realities. Cullingford (1991) stated that seeking the reality of another in research was without doubt a complex task. However, argued the author, language is the clearest and most revealing insight into an individual's mind. The *realities* of a situation are of less important than the individual's own *interpretation* or *perception* of it as it is these perceptions which serve as guides to behaviour.

According to Roller (1998) one of the strongest arguments for listening to children was embedded in Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory in which Kelly highlighted the importance of the way people perceived themselves and their environment. Ravenette (1977) developed techniques from these ideas, for use with children and young people. This work was based on the suggestion that understanding an individual involved understanding his/her constructions of the world and the underlying basis for those constructions. Roller (1998, p267) argued that an individual's own perceptions are unique – 'no one else has shared the same experiences, or attempted to make sense of the same events'. These hypotheses, stated Roller (1998), form an argument for listening to children: understanding cannot take place without ascertaining and listening to each individual's perspective.

When considering the rationale for seeking pupil voice, it is important to reflect upon how being listened to and valued can impact upon a pupil's psychological sense of belonging. Belongingness is a powerful psychological concept incorporating cognitive, social-emotional and behavioural experience within a connectedness to an environment, culture and to other individuals. It has long been viewed as a fundamental human need. In 1943, Maslow proposed a psychological hierarchy in which the need to belong was universal and operated after more fundamental or lower-order needs, such as hunger and security were fulfilled. Being accepted and included has been viewed to lead to a variety of positive emotions, such as happiness, elation, contentment and calm. Conversely, being rejected, excluded or ignored has been viewed to lead to negative feelings including anxiety, depression, jealousy and loneliness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

A sense of school belonging was defined by Hamm and Fairclough (2005) as a socially grounded experience, derived from interpersonal relationships with members of the school community. It was viewed to refer to pupils' perceptions that they are liked, respected, and valued by others (adults and peers) at their school. Sense of school belonging is now viewed as critical to a young person's adjustment as it meets their developmental need for relatedness (Osterman, 2000).

A sense of belonging to a school environment is now a recognised protective factor for child and adolescent health, education, and social well-being and it has been found to have strong links with academic motivation (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). Goodenow (1993) explored pupils' sense of belonging to their school community. She found significant relationships between pupils' beliefs about their sense of membership in school and their expectations for success. Research has suggested that a strong sense of belonging to a school can act as a buffer against absenteeism and certain negative or risk behaviours (Blum & Rinehart, 1997; McNeely, Nonemaker & Blum, 2002). Although school belonging is now widely accepted as important, how to promote it still remains poorly understood (Rowe & Stewart, 2009).

2.5 Listening to pupils with SEBD

The following section will introduce the pupil population targeted for this research project and through this, aims to provide a rationale as to why pupils with SEBD were selected for the research.

2.5.1 SEBD – The terminology and statistics

'SEBD' has been widely viewed as an imprecise umbrella term which has historically been difficult to define. It is however clear that many children and young people to

whom the term is applied have extremely complex and chronic difficulties, which place them at risk of school and wider social exclusion. U.K. government figures have suggested that SEBD is the second highest category of need behind moderate learning difficulties. Children identified with SEBD may attend mainstream provision, or will attend more specialist settings. In total, there are approximately 150,000 children in mainstream and special schools and units identified as having SEBD. Around 13,000 of these pupils are educated in special schools (DCSF, 2009b). During the academic year 2009/10, there were 5,020 permanent exclusions from state funded secondary schools, 620 from maintained primary schools and 100 from special schools. Pupils with a statement of SEN were approximately seven times more likely to receive a permanent exclusion than pupils with no SEN, and were nine times more likely to receive a fixed period exclusion (DfE, 2011).

The Revised SEN Code of Practice (DfEE, 2001) described these children's needs as 'persistent emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, which are not ameliorated by the management techniques usually employed in the school', prompting additional intervention i.e. 'School Action' (DfEE, 2001, paragraph 6.50-6.51). In paragraph 6:64 (p71), when setting out the rationale for 'School Action Plus', the revised Code refers to the pupil having 'emotional or behavioural difficulties which substantially and regularly interfere with their own learning or that of the class group, despite having an individual management programme.' The SEN Code of Practice (DfEE, 2001) described the possible profile of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties stating that the child could be observed to be withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lacking concentration, could have immature social skills or could present challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs. However, it

should be recognised that children described as having SEBD do not form a homogeneous group.

SEBD is now believed to arise from many interacting factors. There is no link between SEBD and any one social factor, but research shows that the prevalence of these difficulties varies according to sex, age, and health. Prevalence of children and young people with SEBD is likely to be greater in inner cities; in areas of social deprivation; in boys rather than girls, in children with other learning, health or developmental difficulties; in adolescents as opposed to younger children; and, amongst young children, those with delayed language development.

In recent years there has been a shift in the terminology - SEBD used to be referred to as 'EBD', which stood for Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties. This shift occurred as the UK government acknowledged the importance of the key *social* element and various arrangements of the letters have since been used (e.g. BESD). For example, the SEN Code of Practice (DfEE, 2001) referred to 'emotional, social and behavioural development'. According to Pritchard (2004) the rationale behind the change in terminology was both to move away from the term 'maladjusted' (Education Act 1981, DES) and to move this population of children within the scope of learning difficulties along with the other categories of disability.

2.5.2 Why seek the voices of pupils with SEBD?

Children and young people with SEBD are at risk from social exclusion, and are found to come from disadvantaged sub-cultural and socio-economic groups. It has been argued that it is therefore important that the content and processes of their educational

experiences enable them to avoid further marginalisation (Daniels and Cole, 2002). As Harper Lee (1960, p30) suggested in the novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, ‘you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view – until you climb into his skin and walk around in it’. By not seeking the subjective reality of children with SEBD, our ability to truly understand how best to respond to, and provide for these individuals, is impeded. Billington and Pomerantz (2004; p6) stated that there was something ‘deeply offensive to social justice in witnessing fellow human beings pushed out through overt or covert marginalisation, or sitting on the edge anticipating some form of social rejection’. The authors highlighted the need to look for solutions by consulting those who are marginalised in society, rather than confining conversations to those who are already overrepresented in terms of having their voices heard.

Clough (1998) described the need for research to turn up the volume on the depressed or inaudible voice and acknowledge its value. The national survey of SEBD schools, conducted in 1996 to 1997 (Cole *et al.*, 1998) revealed that frequent pupil involvement in planning their own learning was a successful approach to managing and motivating pupils with SEBD. The benefits of listening to pupils with SEBD are believed to be threefold: giving pupils value and respect; giving professionals more insight and an improved understanding of pupil behaviour; and providing pupils with support of a more therapeutic nature (Wise & Upton, 1998). Wise, (1998, p20), however, raised concerns that even if the voices of pupils with SEBD were sought, there was a danger that their perceptions would be considered to hold less value than children without SEBD owing to their ‘disturbed’ or ‘emotional’ state.

2.5.3 Pupils with SEBD - School ethos and relationships

Hilborne (2005) proposed that teachers, regardless of their beliefs about inclusive education, found meeting the needs of pupils with special needs in mainstream classrooms difficult without additional training and classroom support. The author added that increasing numbers of special needs are behaviour-related and despite this, teaching staff remain under increasing pressure to 'achieve academic results at all costs in a curriculum which makes few concessions to what one current television programmecalled 'the unteachables'. (Hilborne, 2005, p27)

The importance of relationships in the educational context has long been recognised. However, it is of particular importance to pupils who experience SEBD as positive adult-pupil relationships are believed to often act as protective and remedial factors (Cooper, 2006). Cooper (2008) found that trusting, mutually respectful and supportive relationships with adults in the SEBD special schools they attended were essential in helping them develop more positive self-images and, in turn, enabling them to understand their difficulties in self-regulation and academic engagement.

In order to help promote trusting, mutually respectful and supportive relationships, Cooper (2008) cited interventions including 'circle time' and 'nurture groups'. Cooper's paper, however, overlooked the value of pupil voice projects. Further research carried out by Cooper *et al.* (2000) revealed that a key issue for pupils with SEBD was the extent to which they felt themselves to be acknowledged and respected as human beings. The authors found that school regimes characterised by an impersonal approach when relating to pupils were linked with pupil disaffection, in contrast with regimes that pupils and staff experienced as being underpinned by values of respect, which were associated with positive challenges to disaffection and lower levels of

exclusion. Problematic relationships with staff and mistrust toward them were cited as the most common sources of difficulty for pupils excluded from their mainstream settings (Pomeroy, 2000; Sellman, 2009).

According to Cooper (2008), the process of creating reciprocal, respectful relationship involves the recognition of responsibilities and obligations on both sides – pupils and staff. Cooper (2008) argued many schools were far from even recognising the validity of these ideas, and were certainly not putting them in place. School ethos has also been viewed as a crucial factor in schools for pupils with SEBD in order to best promote pupil sense of belonging. Schools found to be most successful with pupils with SEBD were those which worked at being communities that were open, positive and diverse; not selective, exclusive or rejecting (Visser, Cole & Daniels, 2002).

2.5.4 The psychological impact of attending specialist provision

According to Norwich (2008), one of the arguments against special school provision is the stigma and devaluation associated with being sent to this type of provision. Considering the fragility of the self-concept in adolescence highlighted by many psychologists (Mainwaring & Hallam, 2010) it is surprising that there is, to date, limited research into the psychological impact of placement in SEBD settings on young people. Research into the self-concepts and identities of children and young people with SEBD is also limited.

Children with SEBD who move from mainstream to a more specialist setting may see the mainstream school's treatment of them as rejection from 'normal' society as they become separated from mainstream peers. Spiteri (2009) stated that the placement of children and young people in SEBD provision could impact on their self-talk and self-

perceptions and indeed they could perceive themselves as ‘different’ to those in mainstream. Having been rejected from their mainstream setting, Spiteri (2009, p240) argued that it is easy for these young people to classify students of mainstream schools as being unlike themselves, and for them to ‘thereby otherwise either themselves or other people as they draw up some form of conceptual distinction between the two’.

Sellman’s (2009) research findings mirrored those of Spiteri (2009) in that pupils indicated a perceived boundary between their provision and other ‘normal’ schools. Sellman (2009) reported how pupils in his targeted school for pupils with SEBD used derogatory terms to describe the school and those attending it. Pupils were reported to refer to their school as a ‘mad house’.

Despite limited investigation into pupils’ perception of why they are placed in a setting for pupils with SEBD, the research that has been published, has suggested that pupils often easily (and inaccurately) reproduce dominant voices of others in their lives, and state that their difficulties, for example ADHD, are solely innate biological conditions (Sellman, 2009). By following this medical model, pupils could be mis-educated into thinking that behaviours were beyond their control (i.e. an external as opposed to an internal locus of control) (e.g. Cooper and Shea 1999).

2.6 Students as researchers – an overview

In a Students as Researchers (STARs) project, adults actively listen to pupils’ views and support student-led research. It promotes partnerships whereby students work alongside adults to become ‘change agents’ of the school’s culture and norms.

STARs projects have developed in the UK over the last ten years and are increasingly used in mainstream schools. Projects rely on the fact that not only do pupils come to school to learn; but also that they can, and indeed must, be an integral part of the school's own learning. Soo Hoo (1993, p389) raised concerns how 'we [as educators] listen to outside experts to inform us, and, consequently, we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards, the students'. STARs projects acknowledge that adults are not necessarily ideally placed to ask questions that allow people to get to the root of key issues, or subsequently get honest answers from students about things that matter to them (Crane, 2001). Kellett *et al.*(2004) raised the need for adults in schools to hand over the initiative to students and empower them as active researchers.

In a STARs project, pupils are given the responsibility to devise and design the project on a topic of their choice, then deliver and share their research entirely from their own perspectives (Kellett *et al.*, 2004). Common areas researched during STARs projects have included: the school environment and organisation, school and curriculum policy and teaching and learning. While structured support from adults is still necessary, here, students have real opportunities to influence decisions about their school and it is these pupils who have control over all decisions relating to this research.

2.6.1 Examples of STARs in mainstream provision

Fielding and Bragg (2003, p8-10) presented examples of when STARs projects had been undertaken in mainstream schools with success and provided general recommendations of what should be considered when implementing a STARs project in a mainstream setting. Examples of projects concerned with teaching and learning included a group of student researchers in Year 8 exploring with their peers research

questions including ‘What makes a good lesson?; What makes a good teacher?; What are student’s views on grouping practices?’ Pupils devised questionnaires, interview schedules and observed lessons. Staff at the school recognised that they had underestimated the pupils in the research team and felt they were an ‘underused resource’. In another project concerned with teaching and learning, pupils in Year 9 in a mainstream school sought feedback from their peers about active learning methods in their school. In a third project, Fielding and Bragg (2003) reported how a group of 15 pupils in Year 10 were enabled to investigate the school’s Personal, Social, and Health Education provision. Fielding and Bragg (2003) also reported case studies in which STARs projects have been used by younger pupils. For example in two schools, pupils in Years 3-6 looked at school and curriculum policy and school organisation and environment. In the former project, pupils ran focus groups and conducted observations to investigate the effectiveness of the school’s peer-buddy system and in the latter, pupils in Years 5 and 6 carried out a project aimed at developing the school playground. Pupils were given a budget and liaised with peers to discuss possible improvements.

Areas of enquiry covered by STARs at Sharnbrook Upper School between 1996 and 2000 (Raymond, 2001) are presented in Table 2.0. Raymond (2001) argued the profound impact the projects have had on the way school staff engage with young people and also on wider processes of professional and organisational learning. She described how the project had led to a far more open and honest appreciation of the value of student feedback and had led to value being placed on how consulting pupils could impact on school improvement. She added that staff working in the *Students as Researchers* project felt that their own learning had been enhanced by working in such a different partnership with students.

Fielding and Bragg (2003) outlined the distinct stages of a STARs project – guidance which was noted to be particularly lacking in past literature. These stages included choosing topics to research, establishing staff roles, setting a time scale and distributing tasks amongst the pupils and finally analysing, celebrating and responding to data.

Table 2.0 - STARs Topics covered at Sharnbrook Upper School

| Academic Year | Topics covered |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1996/97 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student voice • The use of trainee teachers within the school • Profiling and assessment |
| 1997/98 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School meals • The tutorial programme • Careers awareness and guidance |
| 1998/99 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender differences • Social space for all year groups • Post 16 and GCSE choices |
| 1999/2000 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-curricular activities • Use of ICT • Industry links • What helps and hinders student learning? |

Critics of the STARs approach have questioned whether these sorts of projects can be seen as research, as they could be seen to trivialise professional researchers by implying that a child with minimal training can carry out the work. Some have argued that it is more appropriate to use the term ‘inquiry’ for students’ research. Fielding and Bragg (2003, p14) contested these arguments and stated that the term used is somewhat unimportant, provided that ‘the activity is handled with proper respect for the nature of evidence, the students think seriously about how findings... can lead to actions [and

that] young people's interest in and commitment to helping make schooling better is recognised and respected'.

The issue of analysing and sharing findings from STARs projects so that actual content and findings as well as process can have an influence is key to STARs projects (McGregor, 2005). Demonstrating that the research has been of value is crucial to the credibility and continuation of work in future years and therefore should be shared with a variety of people in the school, including school governors. In all pupil voice work, pupils need to be confident that what they say about issues that concern them is being taken seriously by staff.

2.6.2 An example of a STARs project in a specialist provision

My literature search revealed just one published study into the implementation of a STARs project in a specialist setting – the work of Sellman (2009). Sellman (2009) introduced a STARs project into a secondary SEBD school in the UK. In the study, a team of six pupils volunteered to form the research team and facilitated focus groups, consulting other students as part of their research. The project resulted in a final report that supported the process of policy review at the school. Sellman (2009) felt that this work was far more helpful than a comparable process undertaken by the staff.

In critiquing this study, it should be argued that Sellman (2009) appeared to overlook the importance of allowing pupils control in deciding topics to research, an aspect which has been widely acknowledged as being key to STARs projects. Rather, he suggested that the research team was specifically set up to evaluate the school's behaviour policy. Sellman also did not report how he sought to evaluate the project, something which I viewed to be as critical as the process itself. The STARs project in

the current study will therefore expand upon Sellman's work with these areas for development in mind.

2.7 Perceived benefits of implementing STARs projects

The perceived strengths of accessing pupil voice, and specifically implementing STARs projects, are recognised in the literature. Kellett (2010, p105) stated that the way in which children may approach such projects can be 'quintessentially different' from an adult's approach. She reported how pupils may ask questions which adults may not consider. They also have access to peer culture where adults are outsiders. The research agendas children prioritise, the research questions they frame and the way in which they collect data are also quintessentially different from adults.' Billington and Pomerantz, (2004) describe how seeking pupil voice can serve to raise self esteem, attainments, autonomy, self-control and self awareness. STARs projects avoid what Fielding and Bragg (2003, p40) refer to as 'performing poodle syndrome' – i.e. repeatedly using 'safe' pupils to impress. Rather, argued the authors, pupils selected for this work should represent a range of students with a range of strengths.

STARs projects are particularly beneficial in helping students to: develop a positive sense of self and agency; develop inquiring minds and speaking, listening and diplomatic skills; develop confidence, social competences and new relationships; reflect on their own learning; and be given a chance to be active and creative, feeling more included in the school's purposes (Fielding and Bragg, 2003; Rudduck and Fielding, 2003). Projects can lead to pupils having a sense of themselves as valued and respected as individuals and can help to reengage pupils who are at risk of disengaging (Rudduck and McIntyre, 2007; MacBeath *et al.*, 2003; Crane, 2001).

As well as the perceived benefits for pupils, there are considered to be positive effects for members of staff. Rudduck and Fielding (2003) argued that STARs projects give staff members a better insight into young people's capabilities and the opportunity to see the familiar from another angle. She finally added that schools can benefit as the project promotes a more partnership-oriented relationship between pupils and teachers and a more inclusive approach to self-evaluation.

2.8 Perceived challenges of implementing STARs projects

MacBeath *et al.* (2003) highlighted the potential challenges and issues associated with pupil voice work. They warned that pupils who are more articulate are more likely to shape the decisions of their peers and therefore have a greater chance of being heard by teachers – leaving others, ironically, feeling disempowered through work which was in fact designed to empower them. Fletcher (2005) pointed out that school staff themselves can act as barriers to meaningful student involvement. Personal attitudes, past experiences, and negative perceptions can all obstruct projects. He stated that encouraging staff to part with power is not easy, if only because the results are less predictable than in a situation where they have control. A common concern with pupil voice projects is that staff can feel anxious about hearing the views of pupils particularly if the messages from pupils cause them to reflect upon and critically analyse their practice (Hamill and Boyd, 2002).

Where pressures exist in schools to raise standards, for example through literacy and numeracy hours, pupil voice initiatives may not be viewed as a priority. Factors including SATs and Ofsted inspections influence the time and energy available for STARs projects and similar work.

Kellett (2004) acknowledged barriers which she felt prevented staff from viewing STARs projects as achievable in primary schools, stating that however adults interpret children's competence and value their expert knowledge, primary-aged children do not have the research skills to be able to design their own studies successfully. The author argued that a barrier to empowering children as researchers is not their lack of adult status but their lack of research skills.

Fielding and Bragg (2003) outlined key factors which they felt impacted on outcomes of STARs projects. Successful projects were considered to depend on the quality of the Student Researchers' training process. If schools underestimated the volume of work involved in supporting student researchers, it would negatively affect the outcome of the project. The authors added that success also depends on positive working relationships between facilitating adults and between members of the student research team.

Hamill and Boyd (2002) suggested that teachers often overtly or covertly resisted pupil empowerment programmes as they were apprehensive about conceding power and control to pupils. They argued that there was a fear that pupil voice projects with an SEBD pupil population could actually undermine teachers' authority and could fundamentally change the power relationships that exist within the school. The argument was that if an emphasis is placed on the pupil voice, there may be some risk that the teacher voice could be silenced. It is understandable that teachers are wary of pupil voice projects in these settings due to the nature of the school population and their needs.

When reviewing relevant literature it became apparent that not all of those conducting research into young people with SEBD advocate the use of a STARs approach. Indeed,

Conolly (2008) identified a number of what she believed to be key problems with participatory research. She felt that the required level of participation is not only impractical but can also be undesirable, particularly with excluded young people. She added that many of the young women with whom she had worked had an anti-work ethic, therefore she believed that being seen to take an active interest in this type of project would not be perceived by them as 'cool' and they would therefore not engage. She argued that such projects would require training pupils in research methods and in turn, these pupils would need to have the required cognitive skills and motivation to be trained. As mentioned previously, Students as Researchers projects are believed to reduce power differentials between pupils and staff. Conolly (2008) argued that training one group of pupils in research methods places them in a position of power over the other pupils they are researching.

Conolly (2008) raised important questions about the use of pupil voice projects with pupils with SEBD. It would be valuable to consider whether by foreseeing, reflecting upon and planning for some of the issues that she has raised, the impact of her perceived barriers would be minimised. These arguments were therefore kept in mind whilst I planned the methodology for the project and considered ethical issues. Conolly's work, which offered reasons as to why pupils may fail, led me to consider whether pupils are indeed underestimated and this would suggest why STARS projects may not have been attempted in the past. Having undertaken a search of past literature, I was interested to note the volume of literature which has proposed the *challenges* of seeking pupil voice in pupils who do not attend mainstream provision, in comparison with that which presents the *benefits*.

2.9 Rationale and Research Questions

As this chapter has suggested, pupil voice work has developed considerably since the 1930s and it is now viewed that meaningful involvement through initiatives such as STARs projects can have positive outcomes for children, staff members and schools.

Despite the outcomes of this work, few studies have explored the use of such projects in schools and alternative provision for pupils with SEBD. This was surprising considering the often complex needs and marginalisation of individuals who attend such provision. In fact as described in section 2.6.2, I discovered just one study into the implementation of a STARs project in a specialist setting for pupils with SEBD – the work of Sellman (2009).

The benefits of undertaking this research were therefore multi-layered. The research aimed to explore meaningful ways in which primary-aged pupils with SEBD could be given opportunities to share the reality of their world and importantly, how they could be involved in the planning and the implementation of a STARs intervention in their school. It aimed to explore their willingness and ability to set up and engage in the intervention. By undertaking this research, I hoped that the positive outcomes as seen in previous literature on STARs projects in mainstream settings could be experienced by those at a provision for pupils with SEBD.

The two research questions are as follows:

1. How can a STARs project be implemented in an SEBD school?
2. What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part in the STARs project?

The methodology used in this study will be presented in the following two chapters. By presenting it in such a way, I have aimed to separate the two distinct strands of this work. Chapter 3 (*“Implementation of STARs Project - The Process”*) will cover all areas which I needed to consider prior to, whilst and after undertaking the project and therefore relates to research question 1. Chapter Four (*“Evaluation Strategy”*) relates to research question 2 and describes the methodology used to evaluate the intervention.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLEMENTATION OF STARS PROJECT – THE PROCESS

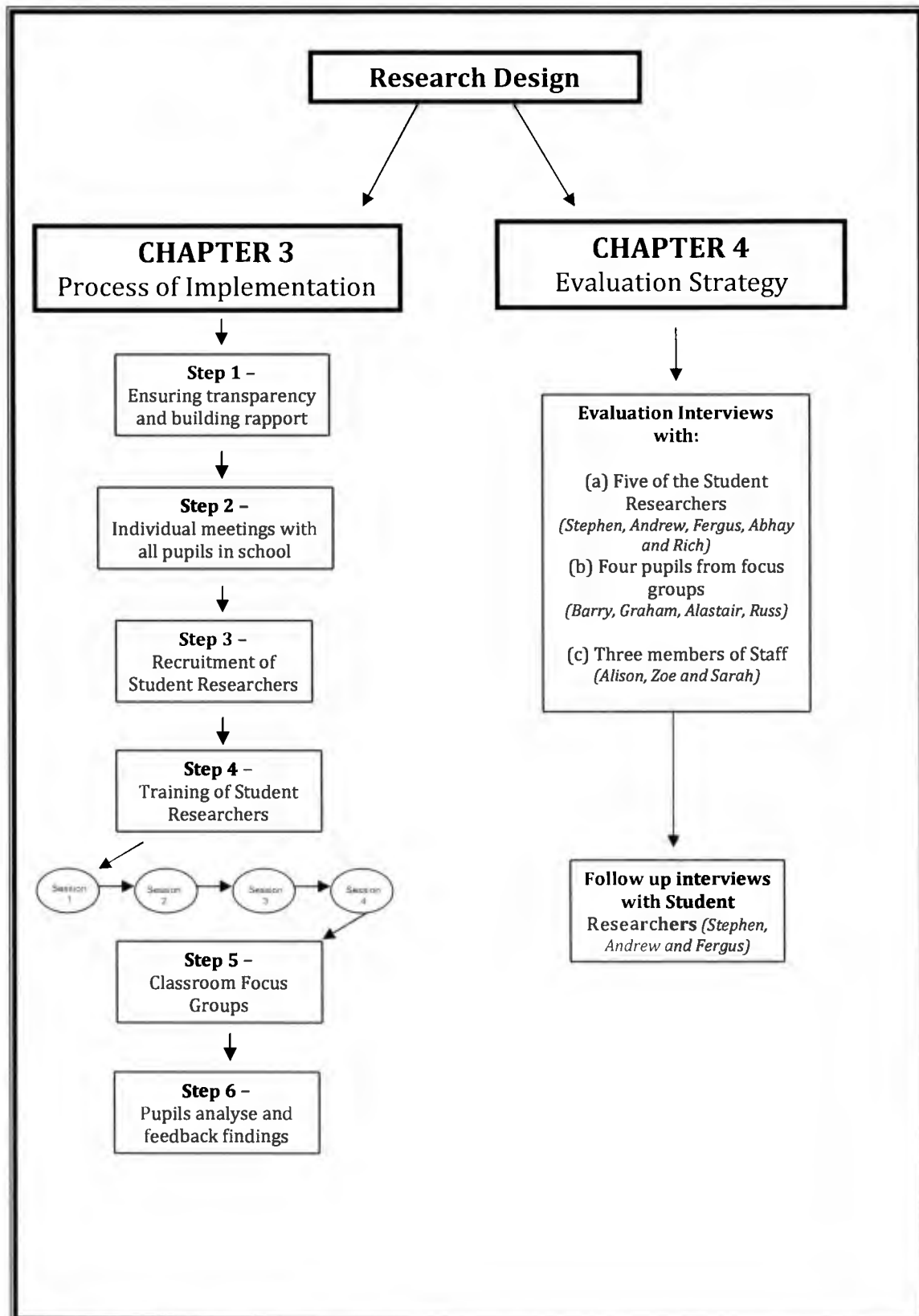
3.1 Introduction

I have taken the decision to present the research methodology in two separate chapters. A key aspect of my design was to explore how a STARS project could be put in place in the selected primary SEBD setting and to describe my role in facilitating this. Therefore, this chapter relates solely to the *Process of Implementation* of the STARS Intervention itself and thus links to my first research question: *How can a STARS project be implemented in an SEBD school?* It is in this chapter that I will describe in detail my six step approach from which I aimed to ensure successful implementation of the intervention. Details of my targeted school will be presented in this chapter along with a profile of the needs of those within it.

Chapter 4 relates to the methodology of how the intervention was evaluated and links with my second research question: *What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part in the STARS project?* This strand details my methodological approach to collecting evaluation data and the sample from which I collected these data.

My research design is presented in diagrammatic form in Figure 3.0 and has been divided into these two strands. I have illustrated, through this diagram, the content of Chapters 3 and 4 as described above. It should be noted here that due to the complex design of the project, some degree of overlap exists between the two chapters. For example, ethical issues will present themselves in both chapters and, therefore, a section will be allocated to them at the end of Chapter 4.

Figure 3.0 - An overview of my Research Design



3.2 Study Design and Assumptions

This study was exploratory in nature, used a small sample in one school and utilised a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. According to Creswell (2003, p182), qualitative research is viewed to be fundamentally interpretive in that the researcher runs data through a personal lens that exists in ‘a specific socio-political and historical moment’. The researcher will develop a description of an individual or setting, analyse data, identifying themes, and finally, interpret this data and draw conclusions about its meaning (Creswell, 2003). A key principle of qualitative research design is reflexivity – that is, the research is scrutinised throughout and the researcher continuously reviews his or her own role in the research and possible influences (Willig, 2001).

One of the most direct ways to explore children’s thinking is through their language (Wise, 1998). Social constructionists believe that we seek understanding of the world in which we live and develop subjective meanings of our experiences (Creswell, 2009), and these experiences are mediated historically, culturally and linguistically. That is, what an individual perceives and experiences is ‘never a direct reflection of environmental conditions, but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions’ (Willig, 2001, p7). By accessing an individual’s perceptions through their language, we can determine how they make sense of the world and how they experience events. A key assumption of the present study was therefore that individuals have their own versions of reality, and that their experiences are subjective. For qualitative researchers, the function of their research is to *construct* rather than to *describe* a version of reality (Yardley, 2000).

Those offering a critique of qualitative research, often argued that qualitative researchers fail to employ a representative sample to yield objective findings or outcomes which can be replicated (Yardley, 2000). Yardley (2000), however, went on to argue that by using a sample size large enough to be statistically representative, collected data cannot be analysed in any depth. Therefore, in this research, the small sample from one primary specialist school was selected specifically for its unique attributes and experiences which I had the opportunity to explore in detail. This setting is presented in following section.

3.3 Sample

3.3.1 The Context of St. Martin's School

St. Martin's School was identified for the study in January 2011. There were just four SEBD schools in the local authority area at the time of data collection, and St. Martin's School was selected using opportunity sampling. Thirty-four pupils were on role at the school at this time, and all thirty-four pupils were invited to be included in the study. St. Martin's School is a small specialist setting, for primary-aged pupils with SEBD. The head-teacher of the school reported in a written description of the school how members of staff try to give every pupil a 'fresh start in a caring, nurturing and supportive environment'. Pupils in all year groups follow the full National Curriculum. They join St. Martin's School at different times during their primary schooling and travel from all over the county. Approximately one half of pupils spend less than two years at St. Martin's School.

All pupils at St. Martin's School have a statement of SEN needs, primarily for their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties but also for other needs including specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder.

At the time of this study, ninety-seven percent of pupils at St. Martin's School were male. Pupil records indicated that 82 per cent of pupils in the sample were from a white British ethnic background, with 18 per cent recorded in the 'other ethnicity' category. Records showed that 37 per cent of pupils in the sample received free school meals.

The figures above suggest that the demographics of the pupils at St. Martin's School, and therefore in my sample, are not representative of all pupils at primary schools in Local Authority *X* with regards to gender. This figure is however consistent with a substantial body of literature which has suggested that boys tend to be over-represented relative to girls for many categories of SEN including SEBD (Lindsay *et al.*, 2006). Cole *et al* (1998) reported that there were ten to twelve times more boys than girls in English SEBD schools. With regards to ethnicity, the 2007 census revealed that 15 per cent of pupils in the district of 'Local Authority *X*' were from a background other than white British, which is just 3 per cent lower than the population of pupils at St. Martin's School. This figure is therefore not consistent with disproportionate representation of certain minority ethnic students, notably black Caribbean and black African pupils, in special schools discussed by Lindsay *et al.* (2006).

The figure of 37 per cent of pupils on free school meals was exactly twice the average national figure of 18.5 per cent but more consistent with the national figure for pupils in special schools from 2009 (32.1 per cent) (DCSF, 2009). This is consistent with Lindsay *et al.*'s reports that SEBD, MLD and SLD are 'strongly associated with measured socio-economic disadvantage' (Lindsay *et al.*, 2006, p28).

It should be noted here that a great body of literature has indicated that a large proportion of pupils with SEBD also have language difficulties. In fact, approximately 71 per cent of children identified with SEBD are found to experience significant language difficulties (Benner *et al.*, 2002). During an informal visit to the school prior to the project, whilst visiting classrooms, I noted that many pupils had expressive language skills which were below an age-appropriate level. When responding to questions, many pupils struggled with vocabulary, grammar and correct verb tenses. School records indicated that seven out of the thirty-four pupils in the school were receiving high levels of speech and language therapy at the time of the intervention. This information was significant as the project would have demands on language skills, and I therefore kept this information in mind when planning the sessions with pupils to ensure that they were accessible to all. I needed to consider my own use of language when working with children with receptive language difficulties e.g. by chunking information, by breaking down instructions, by using visual cues to support speech and by monitoring whether pupils had understood. I also needed to reflect upon how pupils could be supported to express their views.

At the time of the intervention, the school had a total of five classes split by age and then by ability. Typically there were no more than eight children in a class and there were generally between two and three adults. The attainments of pupils at the school ranged considerably both between pupils of similar ages and between classes. Attainments of pupils at St. Martin's were presented in the form of National Curriculum Levels in Table 3.0 along with details of the class groupings. The National Curriculum sets standards of achievement in each subject for pupils and has proposed expected levels at various stages. Levels range from 1 to 8. Pupils not yet working at Level 1, work from the P-scales. At the end of year 2 most pupils are expected to be at Level 2,

at the end of Year 4, most pupils are expected to be at Level 3 and at the end of Year 6, pupils are expected to achieve a Level 4.

Table 3.0 - Class groupings and attainments of pupils at St. Martin's

| Class Name | Description of class | Total number of pupils in class | Split by Year Group | Range Speaking & Listening skills in class (NC Levels) | Range of Reading skills in class (NC Levels) | Range of Writing skills in class (NC Levels) |
|------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| "Purple" | Key Stage 2 – Higher Ability | 8 | 5 x Year 5 pupils 3 x Year 6 pupils | 2b-4b | 2a-4b | 2a-3b |
| "Green" | Key Stage 2 – Lower Ability | 6 | 3 x Year 5 pupils 3 x Year 6 pupils | 1c-2a | P8-3c | P8-2b |
| "Gold" | Key Stage 2 – SpLD class | 6 | 3 x Year 5 pupils 1 x Year 6 pupils 1 x Year 4 pupils 1 x Year 7 pupils | 1b-2a | P8-3b | P8-2b |
| "Blue" | Key Stage 1 nurture class | 6 | 3 x Year 2 pupils 3 x Year 3 pupils | 1b-2b | P8-2c | P7-P8 |
| "Red" | Key Stage 1 class | 4 | 1 x Year 3 pupils 3 x Year 4 pupils | 1b-2a | 1b-3c | 1b-2a |

3.3.2 *Myself as a participant*

As the process of implementation formed a key part of the study's methodology, I have included myself as a participant due to my role in facilitating the STARs project. In my professional practice over the past seven years, I have had many experiences of working within SEBD schools, or with pupils identified as having SEBD in mainstream settings and in an inpatient hospital unit. As a constructionist researcher, I am able to reflect on how my own background, for example, my professional experiences and my personal and cultural beliefs, would impact upon how I approached the research and worked with the pupils at St. Martin's School. I recognised this and have endeavoured to be

transparent about the process. I have therefore chosen to make my experiences, thoughts and feelings visible through keeping a reflective journal (see Section 3.4).

3.4 Reflective journal

Ortlipp (2008) described how a reflective approach, with the use of journals is now a widely accepted method in qualitative research, and is an accepted practice from constructivist, feminist, interpretivist, and poststructuralist perspectives. Ortlipp (2008) provided detailed guidance as to how novice researchers, specifically doctoral students, can keep an account of their research and how they can use their reflections as a key part of the research process, guidance which she believes is particularly lacking until now in existing literature. The author described how this practice can make decisions, and the thinking and values behind those decisions, visible as well as to reflect upon their personal assumptions and goals, individual belief systems and subjectivities.

In my journal, I described the journey, the challenges faced and the changes made to the design and procedure over the course of the project. The reflective journal included entries about issues including group dynamics, the atmosphere when I arrived at the school for sessions and any other circumstances which might have affected the group during my sessions.

3.5 Pre-Intervention Computer program

I created a brief interactive computer-based program where pupils were prompted to describe their school to an animated alien on the screen which talked to them (see Screen shots in Appendix 4). These views were voice-recorded. The computer program was tailored to best meet the needs of pupils with literacy difficulties and visual/hearing impairments. Pupils were given the choice to participate and withdrawal

procedures were explained (see *Ethics* section 4.6). The primary purpose of this session was to access pupils' general views towards their school, and importantly, an opportunity for me to introduce the project to each pupil and begin to build rapport with each of them. Through these sessions, I was able to determine speech and language skills among pupils at St. Martin's and their initial level of interest towards the project. My rationale for using ICT in these sessions was to promote engagement – I was mindful that pupils at St. Martin's School had experienced many meetings with professionals over the years and I wanted pupils to engage and to feel relaxed. I discussed with teaching staff whether any pupils (exhibiting anxiety or behavioural issues) required a Teaching Assistant (TA) to join them for this activity. The use of ICT in the research project was well received by the school Head teacher who felt that the pupils at the school would engage well with this - the school had recently funded the development of a new ICT suite to which the pupils had responded well.

A secondary purpose of these sessions was to obtain information about pupil's sense of belonging to their school. Therefore, pupils were asked to complete rating scales during this session. It was hoped that these scales could be presented again after the project and therefore they could act as a pre- post- intervention measure. The work of Goodenow (1993) who developed her own scale for participants aged 12-19 years old, informed how I developed this measure. Each child sat with me for up to 15 minutes to complete the programme.

Having carried out the individual meetings and having examined the data collected through the use of the rating scales, it was evident that pupils viewed their school in an extremely positive light and responses indicated a strong sense of belonging from most

pupils prior to the intervention. For this reason, I changed my approach and altered my research design omitting this pre- and post- measure. I did however feel that the data collected regarding pupils' perceptions of their school provided me with insight into their educational experiences and I therefore I analysed this and have presented it in Chapter 5.

3.6 Procedure

In this section, I have described the six step process involved in selecting and preparing pupils to undertake a STARs project at their SEBD setting. Decisions were made based on a combination of guidance in past literature and my professional experiences of working with pupils within SEBD settings. I utilised Fielding and Bragg's (2003) general recommendations as a framework for planning my procedure. The reason for this was as follows – as described in Chapter 2, there is a lack of literature which has focused upon the stages which should be followed when implementing such an intervention and I was unable to find any guidance that presented the stages of implementation with as much clarity and detail as that proposed by these authors.

3.6.1 Step 1 – Ensuring transparency and building rapport

As discussed in section 2.8, past literature on STARs projects has highlighted the way in which staff anxieties and suspicions can act as significant barriers to implementation. With this in mind, a first step was to organise to meet with the staff team in March 2011 to be honest and transparent in my planning. This meeting allowed me to present an overview of the project and to approach issues/staff concerns which have been raised in literature in the form of a 'common concerns/frequently asked questions' section of the PowerPoint presentation. By doing this, I aimed to share the details of the study and it allowed members of staff to confront me either publicly or privately with any questions

or concerns about the project before it started. It was important for me to ensure that members of staff were 'on board' and happy to support me with the project. An example of some of the slides from this presentation can be found in Appendix 2.

Following this, I asked to join a whole school assembly in April to introduce the project to pupils. I sought guidance from the school's Head teacher as I had not observed an assembly at the school. The Head informed me that the use of visual stimuli e.g. a PowerPoint presentation would help to engage pupils and tap in to more than one sensori modality therefore I followed her advice. A copy of this presentation is located in Appendix 2. I again gave my audience opportunities to ask questions in order to seek clarification of any issues. After this assembly, I visited each of the five classes to spend the day working as a TA to meet pupils and begin to build trusting relationships. I felt that this was particularly important considering the social and emotional needs of the pupils in the project.

By undertaking this piece of work prior to the intervention, I could also immerse myself in school-life. This related to my overarching social constructivist research perspective - I believe language, social interaction and culture to be central to the meaning and function of all phenomena, and therefore as Yardley (2000) posited, an awareness of the setting, and those within it, is key.

3.6.2 Step 2 – Initial individual meetings with pupils

Individual meetings took place with all pupils in the school prior to the intervention. The rationale for undertaking these sessions and their content has been described in detail in Section 3.5.

3.6.3 Step 3 – Recruitment of Student Researchers

A team of student researchers was identified from Year 5 at St. Martin's School. These pupils would lead the STARs intervention. The rationale for choosing Year 5 was as follows: (a) if the project were to continue the following year, the current Year 5 pupils could train up pupils in the year below before they left; (b) it was not their transition year or exam year; (c) pupils aged at least 9 years old have been found to cope well with small-scale research projects (Kellett, 2005). I liaised closely with the Year 5 teaching staff and the head teacher in order to identify a group of six pupils who had the skills and literacy levels necessary to lead this project and who the staff felt would manage working closely with one another. A limitation of allowing adults to have some influence on the sample was that this may have in some way tainted the child-led nature of a STARs project. However, in order to ensure that the Research Team had the necessary academic and social skills to carry out this role, I took the decision to allow teaching staff to use their knowledge of the pupils in order to propose appropriate candidates. The six pupils were approached by their class teachers who asked them whether they wished to join the Student Research Team and were informed that this role was not mandatory.

Table 3.1 summarises the basic demographics of each of the pupils in the Research Team including their National Curriculum (NC) levels for Speaking and Listening, Reading and Writing at the time of the intervention. No further information is provided on participants to ensure that there is no risk of identification, and because this information is not relevant in order to address research questions.

Table 3.1 – Demographics of the six Student Researchers

| Pseudonym | Year Group | Speaking and Listening skills (NC Levels) | Reading skills (NC Levels) | Writing Skills (NC Levels) |
|------------------|-------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Stephen | 5 | 4c | 3a | 3b |
| Andrew | 5 | 2a | 3c | 2b |
| Fergus | 5 | 4b | 2b | 1b |
| Abhay | 5 | 2a | 2b | 1b |
| Rich | 5 | 2a | 4b | 3b |
| Chaz | 5 | 4b | 4c | 3c |

3.6.4 Step 4 - Training the Student Research Team

The selected Student Researchers attended four training sessions to prepare them for their role. A TA/familiar member of school staff was asked to attend during these meetings to support with behaviour management if necessary, and to ensure that pupils felt relaxed and comfortable. Although I had worked with each of the targeted pupils in my individual sessions and when working as a TA in their classrooms, I felt it crucial to liaise with class teachers to discuss their learning needs, including their literacy and speaking and listening levels. I discussed with staff any strategies employed in the classroom which were found to promote engagement in learning, for example the use of visual checklists and strategies for delivering instructions etc. I reflected with staff upon any issues or areas of need specific to each pupil which may have acted as a barrier to them participating effectively in the sessions, for example, any ‘history’ or current conflict between pupils in the group, any triggers which may have led to anxiety or aggression, and any verbal de-escalation techniques which were found to help diffuse

hostility or aggression for specific pupils. All of these conversations were summarised in my journal and were used to help shape the development of my training plans.

This information was also utilised when considering practical arrangements for the training sessions. Factors including room availability, size, seating arrangements and noise levels all influenced the decisions I made when selecting an appropriate work space for pupils. I was careful to reflect upon how the room choice would affect how the Student Researchers perceived their role.

Mindful of the word limits of this thesis, I have given an overview of all four training sessions in this section but have targeted Training Session 1 to present in greater detail. I have shared a copy of the Training Plan for this session below (Figure 3.1) and have presented all other Training Plans in Appendix 5.

As I have selected Training Session 1 to present in greater detail, the outcomes of this session will be presented with my findings in Chapter 5. A discussion of issues arising from Training Session 1, can be found in Chapter 7.

Training Session 1

I collected all six pupils from their classrooms and walked with them to the meeting room. As anticipated, pupils were excitable therefore in order to encourage appropriate behaviour and ensure a successful start to the first session, I asked pupils to line up outside the room and I shared behaviour expectations with them prior to entering the room. I firstly acknowledged their excitement (“I am happy to see that you are excited to begin the work and to go into the staff meeting room”), and secondly, shared my expectations (“However, I need to see sensible behaviour when you enter the room –

can anyone give me an example of sensible behaviour?”). Finally, I added to pupils’ examples and ensured that everyone had a clear understanding of behaviour expectations. This was a technique which I had observed during previous visits to the school when pupils returned from assemblies. I ensured that the member of staff selected to support the lesson was present in the room as the pupils entered, and I ensured that she was positioned in a seat located half-way round the table so that she was well positioned should pupils require support in managing their behaviour. Upon entering the classrooms, I provided pupils and the TA with a pen and a name sticker each and asked pupils to write their name on it and display it on their jumper. I did the same.

As I was aware that three weeks had passed since the whole school assembly, I began by asking pupils to remind one another of a basic definition of and the process of a STARs intervention using a ‘*What?, How? and Why?*’ game. For this game I asked pupils to volunteer one at a time to write one of these words on the board. Pupils were encouraged to support one another with spellings. I used these words to form a question to pose to the pupils e.g. “*OK, so Andrew has kindly chosen to write the word ‘What’ on the board, I am going to use your word Andrew, to ask you all my first question... what is a STARs project?*” Pupils were reminded of why they had been selected for the role and how they may go about fulfilling this role.

Group dynamics were encouraged at this early stage through the use of an introductory/ice breaker activity. For this task, pupils were required to start a sentence with the four words “My favourite thing is ...” and all other pupils were asked to listen and ask questions to gather more information. This activity was selected to promote

good speaking and listening skills, to encourage respect for one another and to practise turn-taking from the outset.

Figure 3.1 - A copy of the Training Session Plan for Training Session 1

| <u>Activity</u> | <u>Materials required</u> | <u>Duration</u> |
|---|---|------------------------|
| Introduction and project summary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Name Labels - Pens - Whiteboard markers - Whiteboard | 5 mins |
| <i>Icebreaker</i> – ‘Interesting Fact’ game Modelled by Anna first | N/A | 5 mins |
| <i>Group Rules</i> Children asked to volunteer group rules Two children asked to scribe. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Printed Template - Pens | 5 mins |
| <i>Team name</i> In order to foster a group identity and allow pupils to take ownership, pupils asked to vote on a team name | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A3 paper - Pens | 10 mins |
| <i>Poster making</i> Pupils to create posters to advertise their Research Team | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A3 paper - Colouring pens - Printed pictures - Glues - Scissors | 30 mins |

Pupils were asked to develop a list of Group Rules which all pupils would follow throughout the project. Pupils were prompted to take the lead in this activity. My facilitation was minimal as I wanted from the start of this project to give pupils a sense of ownership. I asked whether one pupil would be happy to put himself forward to take

on the role of the scribe and provided him with a colourful printed template upon which he could write his peers' suggestions.

Group identity was encouraged by prompting pupils to choose a name for their research team. Pupils were prompted to consider how to decide upon just one of the five names proposed. One boy suggested that they voted to ensure fairness. Pupils were encouraged to finish the session by designing posters to advertise their project. I purposely limited the materials for this activity in order to promote turn-taking, communication and negotiation skills and ultimately positive working relationships between peers.

Training Session 2

Pupils were welcomed back to the session. A checklist of what would be covered in the session was presented visually on the board and a volunteer was selected to read it out to the group. This was done to make the session more predictable for one pupil in particular who was reported to struggle with novel situations, to therefore reduce any anxieties, to share my expectations and was also used as a strategy to help maintain on-task behaviour. Tasks were ticked off once completed. As it had been a week since the previous meeting, pupils were encouraged to remind one another of the group rules and agree to abide by them. I asked them to reflect on the previous session using questions such as "can anyone tell me what went well for them in the last session?", "what was more difficult for them?", "how can we make it better this week?"

Pupils were required to complete two main activities during this session – considering their role and developing research topics to explore. In the former activity, pupils were asked to brainstorm the sorts of skills they would need to be a 'good classroom

detective'. One pupil volunteered to note down pupils' responses on behalf of the Student Researchers. All ten skills suggested by the Student Researchers have been presented in Appendix 6. As one pupil's suggestion alluded to respecting confidentiality, I took this opportunity to further discuss this ethical issue with the pupils. During the latter activity pupils were prompted to think about possible topics to explore with their peers. In order to ensure that this activity was accessible to all pupils, I prompted pupils to start by making a list of everything that was important to them at St. Martin's School. A contingency plan was put in place should the pupils have proposed to research (a) very personal or (b) very sensitive topics which would have had a negative impact on any pupils or adults at the school. If this was the case, I planned to intervene by asking pupils to reflect on the consequences of researching these topics and if need be, I would challenge these in order to protect the participants in their study.

During Training Session 2, the Student Researchers generated an extensive list of over fifteen possible topics to explore for their STARs intervention. Examples of these topics included: ICT equipment, relationships with other children, lunchtimes and the playground. As a total of four classroom focus groups had been agreed with the school Head, pupils were prompted to refine their list and select four topics to research. The pupils voted on the four topics about which they felt most passionate and which they thought were of most importance to children at St. Martin's School. The final four topics which pupils agreed upon were: *Buddy time*, *Lessons and Learning*, *Sports and Exercise* and *Reward time*. When asked about Reward Time, pupils informed me that they were rewarded each week with Golden Time and Choosing Time. '*Golden Time*' takes place each Friday. Pupils earn points for good behaviour and hard work throughout the week and if they meet their target, they can select from various desirable

activities such as cooking, gardening and skateboarding. Pupils informed me that they are given 'Choosing Time' within their classroom for approximately 10-15 minutes after completing their work.

The final task for Session 2 was for pupils to complete their posters – as noted in my reflective journal, this was something that pupils had viewed as a positive experience in the previous session so by leaving this activity to the end, I was able to provide pupils with an incentive to work through all other activities and be rewarded for their hard work.

Training Session 3

This session started with the same format as the previous session, then pupils were introduced to three methods of data collection. I considered various methods of data collection proposed by Robson (2002) to form part of my training, however I limited this to three methods of data collection: focus groups, questionnaires and interviews. My rationale for selecting these three methods was linked directly to the issue of time constraints - I had only been able to agree a total of four training sessions with the Head teacher and wanted to respect her wishes.

I shared with pupils a description of each method using visual prompts to help reinforce these ideas, then invited pupils to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of each method for their project (see examples of materials presented in Appendix 7). Focus groups were ultimately selected by the Student Researchers as an appropriate method of data collection. Pupils felt that focus groups would be most appropriate for the following two reasons (a) concern over the literacy levels of some of their peers and (b) the fact that individual interviews would be too time consuming. Pupils felt that

questionnaires would have been inappropriate as they may have discriminated against the many pupils at the school who struggle to read or who have other specific difficulties.

Towards the end of the session, pupils were then required to develop a list of questions for each focus group. In order to support pupils with this task, I asked them to begin the activity by brainstorming the sorts of words that one may use to start questions. Pupils came up with words such as 'what', 'how', and 'do' and wrote them on post-it notes.

Training Session 4

Pupils referred to their list of question starters to begin to develop a list of questions. I presented this in a form of a game – pupils were required to close their eyes, pick out one of the notes from the table and think of a question for one of the topics. The pupils were competing against one another to think of as many questions as possible for each of the four topics. These questions would be used during the focus groups to prompt discussions. Towards the end of the session, pupils designed posters to take to the focus groups to share with their classroom audience the four topics they would be exploring.

In line with recommendations by Krueger and Casey (2009), I ensured that Student Researchers undertook their distinct roles in facilitating each focus group. Examples of the focus group scripts devised by pupils can be found in Appendix 8. In addition, the Student Researchers were required to encourage their participants to answer the questions in a timely manner and encourage elaboration through the use of probes. We practised these roles in *Training Session 4* through the use of role-played focus groups in which I took on the role of pupils in the audience.

One issue raised as a criticism of using focus groups as a method of data collection is that the process needs to be well managed or there can be a risk that less articulate or less confident participants would not be heard, and extreme views may dominate and bias may be caused by this domination (Robson, 2002). With this in mind, I was keen to support the Student Researchers in considering how best to encourage the quieter pupils to share their thoughts. The Student Researchers felt that some pupils could use drawing to express themselves should they wish to, and pupils were given pens and paper in the focus groups to share their thoughts visually and then describe what they had drawn.

After session 4, with the pupils' consent, I shared the questions developed for each topic with staff at St. Martin's School. This was done to ensure that the questions were felt to be pitched at an appropriate level for pupils in each class. All members of staff were happy with the content of the focus groups as developed by the Student Researchers. However, as a result of a discussion with the teacher of the Key Stage 1 Nurture class, some questions were omitted or simplified to ensure that pupils could access them, to ensure that the language was pitched at the correct level, and to ensure that concentration would be maintained during the focus group.

3.6.5 Step 5- The focus groups

The Student Researchers ran three sessions with each class, over a three week time period during the summer term, each lasting up to 45 minutes. They split into two sub-teams so that they did not all have to attend every classroom session. To ensure clarity, the schedule for focus groups is outlined in Table 3.2.

I liaised with the school Head to identify possible times for these sessions to take place which would cause minimum disruption to the pupils and their learning. Dates and times were planned with school staff so that, if required, they could share the information with specific pupils who may have needed advanced notice of changes to

Table 3.2 - Schedule for classroom focus groups

| Date | Time | Student Researchers running the session | Classroom | Topic to be explored |
|-------------------------------|-------------|--|------------------|------------------------------------|
| 23 rd June 2011 | 9.30am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Gold | Buddy Time |
| | 10.00am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Purple | Buddy Time |
| | 10.30am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Green | Buddy Time |
| | 11.00 am | Abhay, Rich | Blue | Buddy Time |
| | 11.30 am | Abhay, Rich | Red | Buddy Time |
| 27 th June 2011 | 9.30am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Gold | Lessons and Learning |
| | 10.00am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Purple | Lessons and Learning |
| | 10.30am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Green | Lessons and Learning |
| | 11.00 am | Abhay, Rich | Blue | Lessons and Learning |
| | 11.30 am | Abhay Rich | Red | Lessons and Learning |
| 7 th July 2011 | 9.15am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Gold | Sport and Exercise and Reward Time |
| | 11.00am | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Purple | Sport and Exercise and Reward Time |
| | 1.00pm | Stephen, Andrew, Fergus | Green | Sport and Exercise and Reward Time |
| | 1.45pm | Abhay, Rich | Blue | Sport and Exercise and Reward Time |
| | 2.30pm | Abhay Rich | Red | Sport and Exercise and Reward Time |

their timetables. The classroom sessions focused on topics chosen by the Student Researchers. The sessions were led by the Student Researchers but were overlooked by the class teacher and/or myself. A discussion of the potential influence of teacher

presence during the focus groups can be found in Chapter 6. All research sessions were voice recorded for analysis.

3.6.6 Step 6 – Pupils’ analysis and feedback of data

I met with the Student Researchers briefly after the final focus group to discuss analysis and arrangements for feedback of data. I provided pupils with a detailed description and rationale for data analysis pitched at a level which I felt to be appropriate. For example, I asked them, “Do you think we should press delete on the voice recorder now the focus groups are all finished? What should we do then?” When asked to whom they would like to feed back data, the Student Researchers felt that their school Head should be given feedback and also all pupils at St. Martin’s School as they would have only experienced the focus groups in their own classes. I introduced to them the role and responsibility of their school governors and asked whether they felt it might be useful to share their findings with them too. The pupils felt that this would be a good idea.

When asked to consider how they might like to share the information, the Student Researchers were keen to present their work in the form of a PowerPoint presentation - in the same way that I had done in my initial assembly. As the pupils were not familiar with the PowerPoint program, I met with the Student Researchers individually to work through the data collected and think with them how they would best like to present their findings to others. The Student Researchers split the data between themselves to work on separate parts of the presentation – each opting for a preferred topic area and Fergus opting to introduce the work. Although conflicting with the child-led nature of STARS projects, time constraints prevented pupils transcribing voice recordings themselves - as

an experienced transcriber this task took me many days to complete. I sought pupil permission before transcribing their data and printed out transcripts for analysis during individual meetings with pupils. I lay out these transcripts and asked pupils to focus upon the main, most important themes/ideas they wished to focus upon and share with their audience. Pupils were given flexibility over how they could analyse and share this data. For instance, Abhay and Fergus chose a quantitative approach with which they were familiar through conducting surveys in Maths lessons, for example, they counted up pupils' preferred sports and exercises and positive views towards buddy time. Other boys preferred a more qualitative approach – for example, they included quotations from the transcripts in their presentation to share their peers voices with their audience.

The Student Researchers presented their project to the School Governors and Head teacher at the beginning of the autumn term (see Chapter 5 for examples of their work).

The school Head presented the issues raised by the pupils in a whole-school assembly and gave feedback to the pupils, stating which of the recommendations could be actioned.

3.7 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented my six step approach developed with the aim of promoting successful implementation of the STARs intervention at St. Martin's School. I have presented a detailed overview of the content of Training Session 1 and will follow this up by presenting the findings from and a discussion of this Training Session in Chapters 5 and 6, along with issues related to the focus groups and other aspects of the *Process of Implementation* strand. In the next chapter, I present the methodology associated with the *Evaluation* of the STARs project.

CHAPTER 4 – THE EVALUATION STRATEGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology of how the STARs intervention was evaluated. I will present the selected sample and the measures selected for the purpose of evaluation – semi-structured interviews. Towards the end of the chapter, I will present an account of ethical considerations, the issues around assessing the quality of this qualitative research project and finally, details of my analytic approach - thematic analysis.

4.2 Sample

The Student Researchers were involved in the evaluation of the project one week after the final focus group and also during the following Summer term as a follow-up (see Table 3.1 for pupil details). Additionally, in order to gain insight into how others at St. Martin's School perceived the intervention, five pupils who did not form part of the Student Research team and three members of staff were also involved in the evaluation phase.

Pupils who participated in all focus groups were considered for the evaluation interviews. I randomly selected these five pupils (one from each class) by manually assigning each child a number, then using a random number generator (a smartphone computer application) to select the five pupils. Pupils were given the choice to participate and withdrawal procedures were explained (see *Ethics* section 4.6). Four out

of the five selected pupils agreed to participate in the evaluation phase on the day of data collection. Information about these four pupils can be found in Table 4.0:

Table 4.0 – The four pupils selected for the evaluation interviews

| Pseudonym | Class | Time spent at St. Martin's School | Age | Year Group |
|------------------|--------------|--|------------|-------------------|
| Barry | Green | 2 years, 1 month | 10 | 5 |
| Graham | Purple | 1 year 4 months | 11 | 6 |
| Alastair | Red | 4 years, 5 months | 9 | 4 |
| Russ | Gold | 2 years, 11 months | 9 | 4 |

Although all members of staff were involved in discussions around the project, three particular members of staff took part in the evaluation phase. The inclusion criteria were that: (a) they had to have been working at the school for over 6 months and (b) they had to have attended at least 2 of the classroom focus groups and (c) they were able to participate on the planned date.

The staff members were:

- Alison - Teacher of the Gold class,
- Zoe - TA working in the Purple class and
- Sarah - TA working in the Red class.

4.3 Evaluation Interviews

There exists a large body of literature highlighting the many diverse methods of data collection for use in child-centred research (Coad & Lewis, 2004). Robson (2002) proposed four widely-used methods of data collection - questionnaires, interviews,

scales and observational methods - and each of these was considered when choosing an appropriate method for the evaluation phase. Questionnaires and scales were immediately discounted due to their demand on literacy skills which would have acted as a barrier for some pupils. Questionnaires would not have allowed me to ask for clarification or elaboration. Observations were not deemed a viable method of collecting data regarding participants' experiences of the project. Semi-structured interviews were selected for use for the evaluation strategy. My rationale for selecting individual interviews over focus groups for this evaluation phase was two-fold. Firstly, I had concerns that should I use focus groups, some views might predominate, other voices might be more difficult to hear and therefore bias would be caused. Secondly, I wanted participants to feel that their responses would be anonymous and that they would be more comfortable in sharing their true opinions.

As Bryman (2008) posited, the formulation of questions should not be so specific that alternative avenues of enquiry arising during the data collection process are impeded. The interview schedule was therefore developed as a list of predetermined questions but I was able to use it in a flexible manner and modify wording and order as appropriate. It was developed after having consulted past literature and this therefore shaped my schedule. I undertook the interviews in line with Robson's (2002) and Patton's (1990) advice for developing an interview schedule. When planning the schedule, I ensured that I included introductory comments, a statement of purpose, key questions, associated prompts and closing comments. Robson (2002) identified three main types of questions used in research interviews as 'closed, scale and open-ended'.

Research has indicated that many pupils in SEBD provision have speech and language skills which are less developed than their mainstream peers (Benner *et al.*, 2002). I

predicted that probe questions would be particularly useful during interviews with pupils who were more inclined initially to give only shorter answers. Patton (1990) identified three types of probes which I planned to use during my interviews if necessary – ‘detail-orientated probes’, ‘elaboration probes’ and ‘clarification probes’. The first type of probe would aim to add to the picture of what it was I was trying to understand. The second would aim to encourage the interviewee to tell me more and the third would allow me to gently ask for clarification.

When planning how to best structure my interviews, I kept in mind Patton’s (1990) guidance which included beginning the interview with non-controversial questions focusing on the interviewee’s experiences and behaviours. For example, I started interviews with questions such as “If you were telling a boy from another school what it was like to be a Student Researcher, what would you tell him?”, “When the Student Researchers came into your classroom, how did it make you feel?” I saved any potentially challenging questions such as “Why do you think this project has never been done in this school before?” until rapport had been established.

Interview questions explored pupils’ and staff members’ experiences of taking part in the project. The questions were designed to elicit information about perceived strengths, challenges faced and opportunities to reflect on the suitability of this STARS project in this provision. Participants were prompted to consider whether there was a need for such an intervention to be repeated in the future. The interview schedule was shared with colleagues from my university cohort and staff working at St. Martin’s School in order to ensure that all questions were pitched at an appropriate level.

The questions included in the interview schedule were structured around a number of topic headings which originated from the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 1 (see Appendix 9 for interview schedules). Topic areas varied between the three groups of interviewees as they had each had different roles in the project but included: pupil voice at St. Martin's School prior to the project, views towards the project and perceptions of the focus groups.

4.4 Follow-Up interviews

I returned to the school to explore the perceived impact of the project during the following term. I aimed to seek this information through the use of Follow-up Interviews with each of the Student Researchers. I felt that this was a key part of the project. As Sharpe (cited in Kellett, 2010, p121) suggested, when pupils 'cannot see where or how their research has contributed to change, apathy easily creeps in and will deter young people from carrying out new research projects'. Fielding and Bragg (2003) added that pupils work extremely hard at their research and it is often the possibility of affecting school practice which motivates them. February was chosen for this phase as it (a) allowed sufficient time to have passed so that the pupils could reflect on their experiences and the impact of the project, and (b) gave staff and pupils enough time to settle into their new classes. It should be noted here that although I had planned to interview all Student Researchers, due to issues presented in my Discussion Chapter (Section 7.3), only three Student Researchers were able to participate in follow up interviews.

4.5 Procedure

Evaluation and follow-up interviews took place either in the Staff meeting room or in the Food Tech room, depending on availability. Slots of up to one and a half hours per

interview were reserved but no interviews continued for more than one hour. During the follow-up stage, Fergus and Andrew expressed a strong preference to do their follow-up interviews together. They had worked well together during the project. I felt that it would be wise to agree to this as, by asking me, they may have been suggesting that they would feel more comfortable with this set-up and would share their views more openly. I liaised with the school Head in the weeks leading up to the follow-up interviews and asked that she informed the Student Researchers that I would be returning to undertake these interviews.

4.6 Ethical considerations

There have long been concerns about the ethical aspects of conducting research with children (Lewis & Newcomer, 2005). Ethical issues arise in all research but they are of particular relevance when studying vulnerable members of society (Flewitt, 2005). Throughout this project, I have reflected upon the ethical and legal dilemmas of undertaking research with young children with SEBD and my obligations as a researcher. During the initial stages, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Institute of Education, University of London. Harker (2002) in her paper, 'Including children in social research: practical, methodological and ethical considerations' and Lewis and Newcomer (2005), provided an overview of the factors considered pertinent when undertaking research with children and young people. I have therefore structured this section with these factors in mind.

All pupils at St. Martin's School were invited to take part in the research. The inclusion criteria were as follows (all of which had to be fulfilled):

- a) Parents/carers did not return opt-out slips when consent forms were sent

- b) Pupils themselves were willing to participate once they had been informed about the project.
- c) The pupils were present in class on the days which I visited for data collection.

4.6.1 Informed consent/assent

Conducting research *with* pupils, rather than *on* them, is a relatively new phenomenon and in the past, researchers have tended to rely on the consent of teachers and parents to gain access to children. I was careful to assess each child's capacity to understand and thus give informed assent to participate in my project by discussing their cognitive profile, their speech and language needs and their social and emotional skills with those who knew them best during the early stages of my work.

Firstly, parental consent was gained for all children participating in the project via opt-out letters sent out by the school Head (see consent forms in Appendix 1). Parents were given a deadline by which the opt-out slip needed to be returned to the school. They were informed that they could withdraw their child from the project at any time by contacting the school. As a result of a discussion with the school Head, I was confident that all parents would be able to access the consent letters sent home and there were no circumstances in which literacy levels or knowledge of the written English language would act as a barrier. I ensured that parents were given sufficient information about the project to help them make an informed decision, as recommended by Kent (1996), and therefore an information sheet formed part of the opt-out letter.

The assent of each individual child was also sought verbally at the beginning of the project. Coad and Lewis (2004) posited four aspects of informed assent, which I followed. They stated how the individual must be given (a) information about the

chance to participate, (b) information about their right to withdraw, (c) information about their role and (d) information about intended outcomes. Pupils were informed that if they wanted to participate in the project, it would give them an opportunity to talk about their experiences at St. Martin's School and to share their views about different topics as selected by their peers. Pupils were informed of their right to decline to participate altogether or to stop participating at any time during the project. All pupils were informed that they could either tell me, a member of staff or their parents if they no longer wanted to participate in the project at any stage and were reminded of this at different stages of the project. Pupils were also told about the need for sessions to be audio-recorded and were told how this data would be stored. I wanted to be confident that each child had understood this information, so I checked understanding by asking pupils three questions: *'What is the STARs project?'*, *'What are you going to be asked to do?'* and *'What can you do if you don't want to do it?'* I was confident that all children approached had understood the information I had shared with them.

After the intervention, and prior to undertaking evaluation interviews with the nine pupils and three members of staff, I ensured that I included in my interview schedule a statement of purpose, including what would be done with the data collected during the interview, a statement indicating confidentiality of the interview, a statement regarding note-taking that might take place during the interview and a request for permission to audio-record the interview.

4.6.2 Confidentiality

I was cautious to promise confidentiality within limits to my participants. As I do in my professional educational psychology practice, I informed participants, using child friendly language, that I would need to pass on any disclosed information which related

to child protection issues and all children were made aware of the limits to confidentiality or anonymity. For example, I told pupils, *“I am meeting with lots of children today - and afterwards, I will not tell anyone who said what – I will keep your names and your school name private. What do you think about this? However, if you tell me something which makes me feel that you or someone else is not safe, I will need to tell someone, what do you think about this? Is this fair? Do you have any questions?”* Participants were informed that all data collected was stored in locked cupboards and was made anonymous using pupil ID numbers. The real name of the school and the local authority was also removed from all documentation.

4.6.3 Nature of the Pupil Population

Great consideration was paid to the fact that I was working with a highly vulnerable population during the project and the ethics of undertaking a piece of research with these pupils was considered at length. Many of the pupils had experienced chaotic and difficult home lives, abrupt relationship endings with key individuals in their lives and had experienced rejection from mainstream schools. I reflected on my position as a new adult in their lives and the power that I held, and was highly sensitive to their needs. I understood the importance of generating warm positive working relationships with the pupils, whilst maintaining firm boundaries. I ensured that clear endings were planned and openly shared with pupils to ensure that pupils were given the opportunity to end working relationships effectively, as recommended by Coad and Lewis (2004).

I liaised with school staff briefly prior to meeting with the Student Researchers to ascertain any issues which might have occurred during the morning or earlier in the week which might have had an impact on their behaviour and/or participation in the

sessions. Pupils were informed that they could express a preference to opt out of sessions in these cases.

4.6.4 Power shift

When working with the Student Researchers, I discussed with them the importance of confidentiality and respect towards their peers. As Conolly (2008) suggested, the nature of the pupils' position as Student Researchers may appear to shift the power balance between them and their classmates and therefore I felt that it was important to acknowledge this as an issue with pupils and to deal with this issue sensitively so that this possible power imbalance did not cause friction in classrooms.

It was also important to be aware of, and indeed sensitive to, how members of staff may feel about efforts to empower pupils and how this may compete with any views of adults as authoritative figures for pupils who require firm limits on their behaviour. I met with staff prior to the intervention to address possible concerns (as discussed in Chapter 3).

4.6.5 Data analysis

In thematic analysis, Saldaña (2009, p29) discussed the need for researchers to be rigorously ethical -rigorously ethical with their participants by treating them respectfully during the interview phase itself, with their data and not ignoring or deleting text which is perceived as problematic and finally with their analyses by 'maintaining a sense of scholarly integrity and working hard toward the final outcomes'. With this in mind, I considered carefully my approach to the interviews including checking with children and adults that timings were convenient, using active listening

skills, responding to views respectfully. I also shared my transcripts, coding system and thematic maps with others (see Section 4.7).

4.6.6 Response to pupil recommendations

As researcher, I considered, at an early stage, the ethical implications of raising pupils' hopes for change within their school, and the possible resulting disappointment amongst pupils if these expectations were not met. During initial meetings with pupils, I initiated discussions regarding the possible outcomes of the project and the likelihood of recommendations being actioned by school staff. I wanted to ensure that pupils had a realistic understanding of what could be achieved by the project and indeed what factors might hinder their suggestions from being acted upon. For instance, we discussed financial constraints and practical issues which could prevent certain suggestions being implemented. During the early stages, I shared with the school Head teacher that the aim of STARs projects was not merely to put in place measures to *seek* pupil voice. The paramount aim was to *listen* to those voices and to *act upon them*. Therefore, prior to implementing the project, the Head teacher committed to attending a feedback assembly where she would respond to pupils' recommendations. The above measures were taken in order to avoid causing any disappointment or stress amongst pupils as a result of the project.

4.7 Reliability and Validity

It is now acknowledged that qualitative studies should be evaluated according to different criteria from those used in quantitative research and, in recent years, several schemes of criteria have been proposed as potential alternatives to reliability and validity (Bryman, 2008). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued against applying reliability and validity standards to qualitative research, as these criteria assume that a single

account of social reliability is feasible. The authors criticise this view that there are absolute truths about the social world that it is the role of the researcher to reveal. Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Yardley (2000) presented alternative ways in which qualitative researchers can assess the quality of their work, providing an alternative to reliability and validity. Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed four criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research, each of which have an equivalent criterion in quantitative research – credibility (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (which parallels reliability) and confirmability (with parallels objectivity). These have been utilised to assess the quality of my work as presented in my Discussion chapter (Chapter 7).

As a constructivist researcher, I acknowledge that my own background including my personal and cultural experiences would shape how I approach the study, how I interpret data and how the study is written up. I believe that it is important to recognise that despite attempting to represent the voice of the pupils in this project, I will however have final control over how that voice is interpreted and written up. Billington and Pomerantz (2004) believe that a radical step to address this issue would be to allow pupils to have some editorial control over what makes it into the write-up. In my discussion, I will raise any issues around researcher bias as reflectivity is believed to be a key characteristic of qualitative research.

Inter-rater reliability was not sought as it was not believed to be appropriate for qualitative research considering my social constructionist standpoint. As Denzin and Lincoln argued (1998), using a second researcher to code transcripts and check ‘validity’, would actually violate the process – I have a bank of knowledge from undertaking interviews and observing focus groups which another researcher would not

possess. It is therefore unrealistic to expect another individual to have the same insight (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Yardley (2000; p218) also questioned the use of inter-coder agreement in qualitative research stating that it is 'meaningless' as although researchers can be trained to code a transcript in the same way, this does not in fact exclude the element of subjectivity in the interpretation of the data – rather, it becomes an interpretation agreed by the two of them. For these reasons, rather than opting for a coder, I selected a peer debriefer and an external auditor as suggested by Creswell (2009) in order to enhance the overall validity of the project. Many writers have argued that peer debriefing enhances the trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Creswell 1998; Janesick 2004). Sharing my findings with my peer debriefer, enabled her to review and question aspects of my qualitative study and challenge me to justify decisions to include particular codes and themes. For example, when presented with my transcripts, coding and thematic maps for the teacher interviews, my peer debriefer challenged me to consider the addition of a main theme around the 'Future of STARS' rather than a sub-theme as she felt it had been under-emphasised.

Asking my external auditor to review my whole project, enabled him to provide me with an objective assessment and approach the project with a critical eye. He was able to examine the process and product of my research and challenged some of the decisions I made, including 'Why did you select interviews over other methods of data collection?', 'Why did you choose pupils from Year 5 for the Student Research Team?'

I checked transcripts to ensure they did not contain any obvious mistakes and ensured that I did not shift the meaning of the codes during the process of coding. I ensured

that I spent prolonged time in the setting. Creswell (2009) suggested that by doing this, a researcher develops a greater understanding of the phenomenon under study.

4.8 Analytic Approach

In Chapter 5, I will present and provide analysis of data generated during the *Process of Implementation* phase. These data included pupil art work – specifically, the Student Researchers’ advertising posters, visual aids designed by the Student Researchers, drawings from pupils in the focus groups and the PowerPoint slides designed by the Student Researchers. Data also included the reflections from my journal and my observations.

In Chapter 6, I have presented and analysed data collected from the interviews. Data were transcribed in full and were analysed using a Thematic Analysis. I took the decision not to undertake a thematic analysis of the findings from the focus groups for the following two reasons: firstly, this was not the primary focus of my research and secondly, as the ownership of data is thought to belong to the researcher (Coad & Lewis, 2004), I had questions about the ethical implications of analysing the Student Researchers’ data in my own research project.

Therefore, in total five separate thematic analyses were carried out in order to address my research questions as illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 – The five thematic analyses

| Thematic Analysis | Analysis of Data from: | Data source |
|-------------------|--|--------------------------|
| 1 | Rapport building meetings with all pupils | All pupils in the school |
| 2 | Evaluation interviews with Student Researchers | Student Researchers |
| 3 | Evaluation interviews with 4 pupils who experienced the focus groups | Four pupils |
| 4 | Evaluation interviews with members of staff | Three members of staff |
| 5 | Follow-up interviews six months on | Student Researchers |

The analysis of my data is from a social constructionist perspective because my interpretation is based on the meaning and experience of the social constructions of the pupils and school staff in my study. Various methods of data analysis were considered. Although methods such as thematic analysis, grounded theory and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) are all methodologically rather similar, the manner in which themes are managed can differ considerably from approach to approach (Spencer et al, 2003). They all aim to represent a view of reality by systematically working through data to identify topics that are assimilated into themes. However, thematic analysis was deemed to be more appropriate than other types of qualitative analysis such as Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). As an approach to analysis, IPA is a method which focuses on individual differences. The aim of the present study was to explore themes across the responses of the children and staff members involved in the project. IPA is well suited to interpretive and explanatory analyses whereas thematic analysis is more suitable for exploratory investigations, from which point research questions and hypotheses can be considered (Smith et al., 2009).

Thematic analysis is viewed as a method which identifies the ways in which events, realities, meanings and experiences are the consequences of various discourses operating within our society. It is viewed as a 'contextualist' technique, which acknowledges the ways in which we make meaning of experience, and, in turn, 'the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p81). Therefore, according to the authors, thematic analysis can be a method of data analysis which both reflects reality, and unpicks the surface of reality.

Thematic analysis offers a suitable approach to qualitative analysis in psychological research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The main reason for selecting this method of analysis was its flexibility - it allowed the development of a coding frame that fits the explorative nature of my research. Thematic analysis was also viewed as being appropriate as, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), not only is it a method which identifies, analyses and reports patterns (themes) within data, it goes further in that it 'interprets various aspects of the research topic' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 79). It is, according to the authors, a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in and beyond psychology.

According to Boyatzis (1998; p5), recognising a key moment (seeing it) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation. The author viewed thematic analysis as a process which moves the researcher through each of these phases of inquiry. He added that it 'opens doors' to researchers, enabling them to use various types of information in a systematic manner which can increase their 'accuracy or sensitivity in understanding and interpreting observations about people, situations, and organisations'.

I believe that the way in which I approached thematic analysis incorporated both an inductive and deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although I have developed research questions, I remained flexible in that I did not try to match my data to fit into fixed categories. Instead, I generated codes and subsequently themes from the data itself.

When selecting this method of data analysis I was keen to consider the possible obstacles to effective thematic analysis and the criticisms of this method. Boyatzis (1998; p13-15) identified the three major obstacles or threats as 'projection', 'sampling' and 'researcher's mood and style'. By reflecting on these possible barriers to effective analysis prior to undertaking my analysis, I was able to foresee any possible limitations to this method of analysis and take preventative action.

When analysing my data, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step approach to thematic analysis. As recommended by the authors, I firstly ensured that my transcriptions offered a verbatim account of all verbal utterances and were transcribed in a way which was true to their original nature. All transcripts were printed in a double-spaced format with large margins.

Initial codes were generated using a line-by-line analysis and I was able to work through the data systematically. I ensured that I identified as many codes as possible during this phase, and I ensured that I retained the context rather than isolating extracts of data - Bryman (2008) stressed the importance of this. Coding was done manually by making annotations. Data were sorted into tables and mind maps in order to allow me to think about relationships and generate appropriate main themes and sub-themes.

At this stage, I worked with my peer debriefer to review each of the themes, so that I was confident that findings within each theme were correctly placed. During this stage, themes were discarded. For example “*School Improvement*” which was originally a main theme was changed to a sub-theme as it was felt there was not enough evidence to place it as a main theme and it fit well within the “*Value of Consulting Pupils*” main theme. At this stage, new themes were also created - for example, the addition of the theme “*Future of STARS*” in the staff interviews.

Finally, themes were defined and named. Between two and four main themes were identified for each of my five analyses. Themes were generally rather broad and comprised up to five smaller sub-themes. Full details of these themes, sub-themes and their related codes are illustrated in thematic maps in Chapter 5. An example of an annotated transcript can be found in Appendix 10.

4.9 Summary

This chapter aimed to share my *Evaluation* strategy including the sample selected and the measures used. Ethical considerations were discussed, along with issues related to quality assurance and my proposed analytic approach. Over the next two chapters, I will report my findings in order to provide answers to my two research questions.

**CHAPTER 5 –
IMPLEMENTATION OF STARS PROJECT – THE FINDINGS**

5.1 Introduction

As with the methodology, I have divided my findings into two separate chapters to represent my two strands - the findings associated with *Implementation* strand (Chapter 5) and those associated with the *Evaluation* strand (Chapter 6). In this chapter, I have provided samples of pupil work and presented reflections from my journal to share my experiences of (a) facilitating the training sessions, (b) observing the focus groups and (c) supporting with the data analysis and feedback phase. In Chapter 6, I have presented my analyses of findings from the evaluation interviews with the Student Researchers, the pupils who experienced the focus groups and the members of staff. Finally, I have presented my analyses of findings from my follow-up interviews with the Student Researchers.

I begin by outlining the findings from the pre-intervention meetings with pupils.

5.2 Pre-intervention narrative of pupils

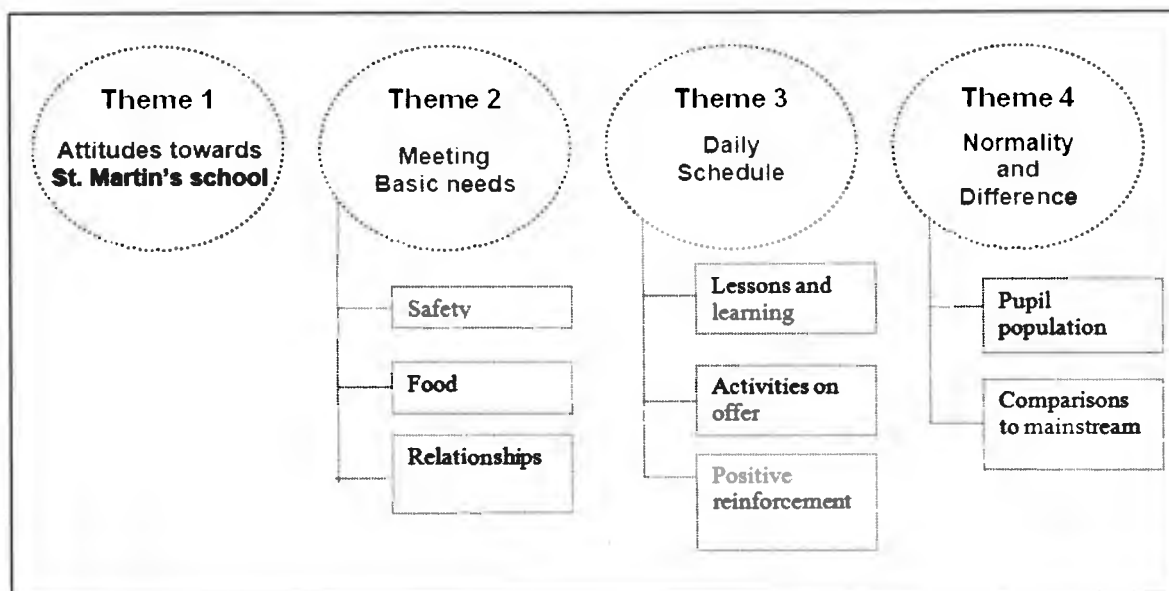
In order to set the scene and provide a general account of pupils' views about their school, I have analysed the data collected during the individual meetings with the twenty-eight pupils who were present on the day. It became apparent during these sessions that the overwhelming majority of pupils viewed their school in a positive light. Their responses to the rating scales suggested feelings of being valued, respected and listened to within their school – all factors which past literature has suggested relate to sense of school belonging.

As planned, these sessions also served as an opportunity for me to get to know the pupil population with whom I would be working, and begin to build rapport. During the sessions, the pupils showed interest in the project itself and many were able to recall why I was visiting the school. Some pupils made comments such as, “you’re that lady from the assembly” and “you’re doing that STARs thing”. I was able to use this time to remind pupils about the project and check their understanding of it by asking them, “so, can you remember what STARs means? Can you tell me what the six Year 5 boys are going to be doing?” The sessions provided me with an insight into the speaking and listening skills of the pupils in the school – it was quickly apparent that on a one-to-one basis, pupils’ attention could drift and some struggled to express themselves verbally. I was therefore able to use this information to prompt the Student Researchers whilst they were planning their classroom sessions, using questions such as “How do you think you can help the children to focus on the task/activity?”, “Do you think all children will be able to answer your questions – what can we do for the ones who find it more tricky?”

Four main themes were generated during the thematic analysis, along with related sub-themes. These are illustrated in the thematic map (Figure 5.0) and are then presented in more detail with corresponding quotations.

The four main themes – *attitudes towards St. Martin’s school*, *meeting basic needs*, *daily schedule* and *normality and difference* - all related to pupils’ experiences of their school. Themes 1 and 3 related to pupils’ descriptions of the school itself, whereas Themes 2 and 4 were positioned more with the psychological impact of attending the school.

Figure 5.0 – Themes and sub-themes from the data generated in pre-intervention meetings



Theme 1 – Attitudes towards St. Martin’s School

All but one of the pupils described St. Martin’s School in a positive way, using various adjectives including “brilliant”, “good” and “fun”. One child (Jason) stated that “St. Martin’s is calm, relaxing, cool, lovely and brilliant”. The one pupil who did not describe the school in a positive light stated “Erm, it can be boring most of the time”, although did not elaborate when prompted.

Theme 2 – Meeting basic needs

In their description of their school, twelve pupils referred to the way in which the school met their basic human needs for safety, food and relationships with others. Oscar stated that “if you ask an adult you can tell them if you’re not feeling safe... and they’ll try and sort it out the best as they can”. Johnny described how the adults “protected” him from “other children and that who are throwing chairs and stuff”. Archie described how “if you’re angry, people can help you, like, calm down, and you can like ask your

teachers to calm you down”. Five pupils (Jason, Kes, Tommy, Alfie and Stan) focused on how the school provided them with meals and snacks when asked to describe their school – Kes stated that “we get snacks and in the morning we have toast”.

Seven pupils spoke about their relationships with others and the attributes of others at St. Martin’s. Archie stated that “people are kind at St. Martin’s School; people would always help you if you like get lost”. Johnny described how he liked “the teachers cuz they’re really nice”. Just one pupil (Eddie) stated that he was unhappy with some of the adults at St. Martin’s, stating “We get golden time on Fridays and erm the TAs ruin it when it’s just them on their own they take advantage of us sometimes.” Finally, seven children spoke about their relationships with peers at St. Martin’s and how they enjoy “playing with friends”. Alessio described the challenges of attending a small provision – “the average number of children in each class is probably six – we’re quite a small school – I’d like the school to be more children cuz there’s not enough there’s only 40 children, so then I could associate with more children and get more friends and stuff”.

Theme 3 – Daily schedule

Many pupils gave examples of the types of activities that they enjoyed at St. Martin’s including “rounders and football”, “play-doh” and “watching DVDs”. Twelve pupils focused on their lessons. Jason stated that “the work is brilliant they push you to the limit ... not really hard and torture but all nice and lovely”. Two pupils (Sonny and Niall) described the work as “boring”. Thirteen pupils spoke about the school’s positive reinforcement system for behaviour management. Kes stated “if we be good we get choosing” and Alfie described how “we get choosing, we get golden time... we get gold card trolley.”

Theme 4 – Normality and Difference

When describing their school, some of the pupils' narrative focused on normality and also difference between them and their mainstream counterparts. Despite speaking about his school in a positive way, Oscar described how "St. Martin's is a *different* school to the *normal* school what people would go in, but it's still as good". Reece stated "you can get good enough and speak properly and write and learn how humans do". Alessio stated "St. Martin's is a school located in X and it's for children who have errrr, a bit ADHD and can't control their temper as good as normal children". Danny also described the school population - "It's a really good school because it's like special needs people like me".

5.3 The Process of Implementation

In this section, I have presented my experiences and observations from the training sessions, the focus groups and the data analysis and feedback sessions. I have presented and analysed examples of pupils' work and have used quotations from my journal.

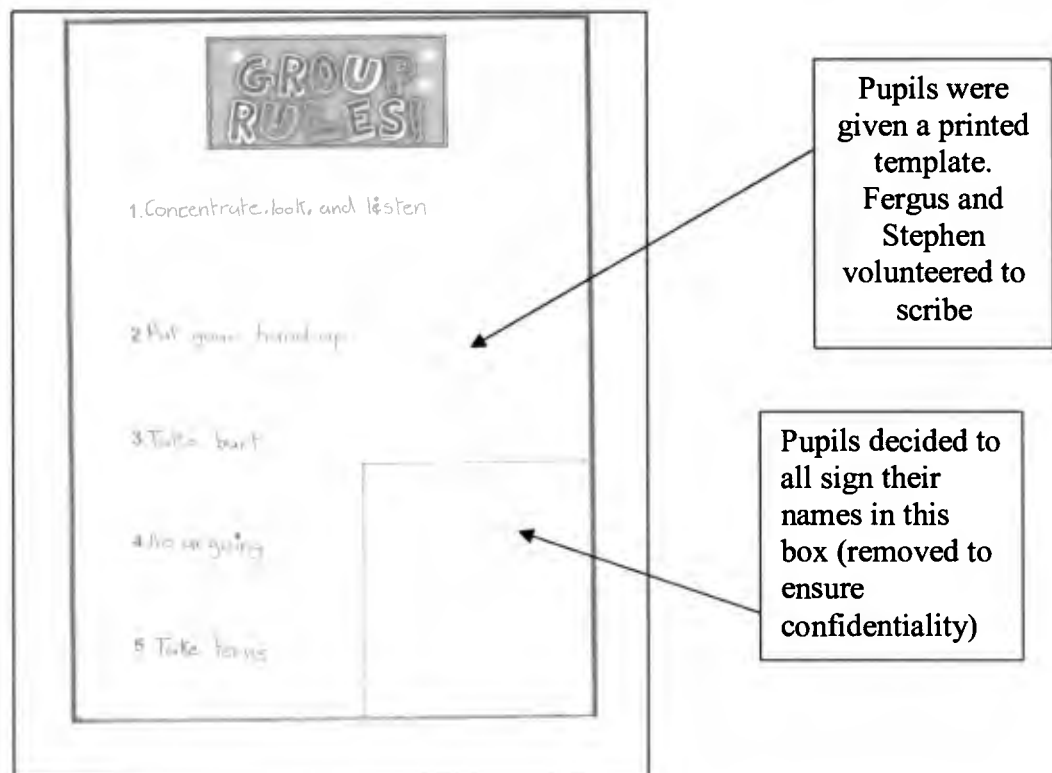
5.3.1 The Training Sessions

After undertaking each training session, I reflected upon the process and recorded my thoughts in my journal. In this section, I have again chosen to pay particular attention to Training Session 1. I have selected this training session as this was the session which I targeted in Chapter 3 to describe in the most detail. I will therefore also focus on this session in my Discussion Chapter.

Considering it was the first time that all six pupils had worked alongside one another, I felt that pupil behaviour and engagement was very positive. Upon arriving at the session, one pupil exclaimed '*this room is for important meetings*' and the pupils

appeared excited to be working in this room. In my journal, I noted how “as I had anticipated, opportunities to take on responsibilities, such as scribing and writing on the board, were well received by pupils and these worked well to help to motivate students and ensure that they remained on-task”. As described in Chapter 3, the first task that pupils were required to embark upon as a team was an activity to develop group rules. Pupils worked well together to develop five rules for the sessions. These are illustrated in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 – The five group rules developed by the Student Researchers



In my journal, I reported how Fergus nominated himself for the role of scribe and took this role ‘very seriously, approaching it in a sensible manner’ – he took care over his handwriting and if he felt he required support with spelling, he asked the group. On one occasion he asked, “How do you spell *concentrate*?” The Student Researchers helped him with this. This suggested to me that Fergus felt comfortable working with this

group of children, in that he was able to be open with them about challenges he faced and was able to seek support. The rules which were developed by the group suggested to me that the pupils understood how they would need to behave in order for the session to be successful. The mere fact that they agreed to participate in this activity, suggested that all of the Student Researchers were placing value upon good behaviour and felt that the development of rules was a necessary and worthwhile task. The fact that they all agreed that it would be a good idea to sign this rule sheet again suggested their perceived need for good behaviour. The rules themselves were linked to ideas of respect for one another, effective communication and effort and motivation. The way in which the pupils approached the task led me to feel that they were, from the start, taking ownership over the project and their role within it.

During the activity where pupils were required to vote on a team name, the Student Researchers provided various suggestions including “Cool Detectives” and “Dream Team”. They eventually decided on the “Secret Six” as they would act as detectives as in Enid Blyton’s series, *Secret Seven*. Again, the fact that pupils agreed to participate in this activity suggested they valued it. The name “Dream Team” may have suggested that the pupil who proposed it felt that the pupils would work well together.

During the first training session, Chaz was unable to manage his behaviour. I made attempts to support him with this, using strategies which I had observed being used in his classroom. For example, I asked him what he felt would help him to follow the Student Researchers’ 5 rules but he did not reply. I spoke to him privately whilst his peers continued with their work to reinforce my expectations. I used tactical ignoring strategies and distraction techniques and presented Chaz with choices to help him feel a sense of control. Despite this intervention, Chaz’s unsettled behaviour continued and

due to complaints from others about how his behaviour was impacting on their ability to concentrate, I took the opportunity to ask him to leave the meeting as he was preventing his peers from having a successful session. I described this process in my journal – “I informed Chaz that I would really like him to remain a member of the ‘Secret 6’ and therefore I would like him to return for the second session and approach the session more positively”. Through discussing Chaz’s behaviour with a TA after the session, it transpired that his behaviour had been very unsettled all week. In my journal, I reflected upon the importance of taking the time to meet with staff members prior to every session to discuss such issues.

The remaining five pupils worked hard to design posters to advertise their work (examples of which are labelled Figures 5.2 and 5.3). They worked well as a team to share limited materials and therefore followed their fifth rule – ‘take turns’.

Figure 5.2 and 5.3 – Examples of Stephen and Rich’s advertising posters, as created in Training Session 1



I was struck by the attention to detail which was apparent in both boys’ posters. The careful selection of colour choice, the neat colouring and the care taken whilst cutting

out and sticking on the images suggested to me that the boys viewed this as a worthwhile and engaging activity. The content of the posters i.e. the idea of the Secret Six as detectives, along with the '*The eyes are watching you*' slogan, led me to feel that pupils understood their brief and were showing imagination and creativity to ensure that others in the school would also understand what the STARs project represented.

I felt that there were various links to the importance of group identity in Rich's poster. He wrote out everyone's full names (covered to protect anonymity) and drew a picture of himself alongside the other five Student Researchers. The happy expressions drawn on all of their faces, I felt, indicated that Rich may have viewed the project in a positive way, and that he perceived his peers to be feeling the same.

Overall, I felt that the Student Researchers responded extremely well to the hands-on interactive nature of Training Session 1 and indeed all of the sessions. I felt that the high level of preparation to ensure they best met the pupils' cognitive, emotional and behavioural needs was likely to have contributed to their success.

5.3.2 The Focus Groups

Having had the opportunity to observe the classroom focus groups, I kept a record of my observations in my journal. The Student Researchers led the focus groups successfully and their audience engaged well. The majority of the pupils in the classrooms were interested in the pupils' project and were respectful towards the Student Researchers. During the first classroom session, pupils asked questions to the Research Team such as 'What is your main objective for doing this project?' and 'how can I join the Secret 6?' In response to the first question, one Student Researcher replied how the project would help to inform teacher practice and thus hopefully bring

about positive changes in St. Martins School. In response to the second question, Abhay simply responded “We were chosen for the job”. These interactions indicated that the Student Researchers could describe their role and the benefits of a STARs project. It also suggested that pupils in the classrooms were engaged in the project from the start, at least one of whom viewed the Student Researcher role as desirable. Although the interaction between Abhay and the pupil asking about the recruitment of Student Researchers was amicable, it again raised to me the issues around the power imbalance between children, inevitably created by the project, as described in Section 4.6.4. This interaction led me after the session to discuss with the Student Researchers how other pupils may feel about not being selected for the role and how they could best manage any future comments or questions.

The Student Researchers were supportive and respectful in the focus groups when one member of the team struggled with his reading. Without any prompts from me or any adults in the room, the boy standing closest to him whispered the word in his ear. The Student Researchers leading the focus groups were able to ignore unexpected distractions, such as unsettled behaviour from pupils, or people entering and exiting the room.

During the training sessions, the Student Researchers were keen to create posters advertising each of their four chosen topics. They used these posters as a resource in the focus groups, providing the pupils in the classroom with visual aids to support what was being said. I have presented Abhay’s poster as Figure 5.4. This was developed during an activity in Training Session 4 (I used white boxes to protect the pupil’s anonymity).

As with Stephen and Rich's 'Secret Six' posters, Abhay showed a great deal of care whilst colouring in and writing on his poster. I would hypothesise that the poster may have represented how Abhay felt towards Buddy Time - he described the smiling figure as himself and added the caption, "My buddy is the best buddy EVER!"

Figure 5.4 – Abhay's poster advertising the Buddy Time focus group



The Student Researchers began the session by walking along the line of pupils seated at their tables and showed them their art-work. The Student Researchers appeared proud of their work, and their audience looked on and appeared engaged.

On one occasion, when we entered the Purple classroom and pupils were unsettled, I intervened and made the decision to postpone the session. Upon entering the classroom it was clear that the atmosphere was very different to that of the last focus group. The teacher was out of the classroom as she had Planning, Preparation and Assessment time and the TA was leading the lesson. I wondered whether this had contributed to any unsettled behaviour. In my journal, I noted how I 'immediately realised that I had overlooked a crucial part of the training process – i.e. *'what do we do if the pupils in the*

classroom are not settled enough to participate in the focus groups?” The Student Researchers persevered and read out their introduction to the topic area and asked the first question even though pupils were not listening. Despite requests from the adults in the room for pupils to ‘show good listening’ and ‘show sensible behaviour’, the audience was not adhering to these instructions. It was for this reason that I intervened at this point. I had reservations about intervening considering the child-led nature of a STARs intervention. However, considering the preparation that the Student Researchers had done it felt uncomfortable and unfair to put them in such a situation. This experience allowed me to reflect upon the need to add a ‘troubleshooting’ activity to the training sessions, to prepare the Student Researchers to manage similar situations should they arise again.

After the first focus group (on Buddy Time), I undertook an additional training session with the Student Researchers helping them to consider how to encourage their participants to elaborate during focus groups and I introduced role plays to practise this skill. Despite this work, the Student Researchers struggled to remember the elaboration questions. In my journal, I recorded a strategy found to be effective in helping the pupils remember a key elaboration question. As described in the journal, “I remembered that the pupils’ school production was an adaptation of the Charles Dickens novel, *Oliver*. Therefore I asked pupils what was the famous line in their production. All pupils remembered it was ‘Please can I have some more’. They added the word ‘information’ onto this famous quote and used this to help remind them how to ask their participants to elaborate”.

Not only did the focus groups have a role in eliciting pupil views, but an unexpected outcome from the classroom focus groups for me, was the way in which the Student

Researchers spontaneously took on a peer-mentoring role. Although this did not necessarily fit in line with directions for facilitating focus groups, I viewed the interactions I observed to be positive in nature. For example, when asking the Blue class whether they thought it was fair that they did not receive golden time if they had not managed their behaviour over the course of the week, and pupils responded ‘no’, the older boys from the Student Researchers shared their own views on the matter - ‘I think it is fair as you didn’t earn it’. Rather than this turning into any form of conflict, the boys in the audience appeared to take these different views on board, nodding thoughtfully.

In order for participants with language needs to be included in the focus groups, the Student Researchers decided to give pupils the opportunity to express themselves through the use of art work. I have presented two examples of this work (see Figures 5.5 and 5.6). Upon completing their drawings, pupils from the focus groups described what they had drawn to a member of staff who annotated their picture

Figure 5.5 & 5.6 – Examples of pupil drawings from focus groups



Pupils were asked to draw what they like to do during Buddy Time.
“I like scooter time” *Alfie*



“Skateboarding with friends” *Stan*

I felt that these images, firstly, indicated that both pupils could select their preferred Buddy Time activity, and secondly, the happy faces in the pictures suggested to me that they viewed it positively. These two children were less vocal in the session than their peers, but as these images have shown, their ‘voices’ can be heard through other means.

5.3.3 Pupils’ Suggestions

The Student Researchers collected a high volume of data during their focus groups. Included in this was a range of recommendations which pupils had made. These are listed in Table 5.0. Pupils made recommendations relating to teacher practice and also to the equipment/experiences offered to them at St. Martin’s School. The data collected by the Student Researchers were analysed by them and will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

The quality of pupils’ suggestions and indeed their motivation to share their views so openly led me to believe that pupils in the focus groups were motivated to bring about changes to their school and were able to give examples of the changes they felt were necessary. Pupils had no prior warning regarding the selected topics, and despite this, they were successful in generating a list of what staff members perceived to be sensible suggestions during the focus groups (see comments made in staff interviews in Chapter 6).

Table 5.0 - Summary of suggestions made by pupils during classroom focus groups

| Focus group where recommendation was made | Class | Recommendation from child |
|---|--------|---|
| Buddy Time | Gold | Longer buddy |
| Lessons and Learning | Green | Teachers writing bigger on board |
| Lessons and Learning | Purple | More school trips - educational – like to the history museum |
| Lessons and Learning | Purple | Multi-mix to help with maths |
| Sports and Exercise | Blue | To have some fun time at the end of swimming (sometimes they don't leave time for it) |
| Reward Time | Blue | Chess in the classroom |
| Reward Time | Gold | Space hoppers for the playground |
| Sports and Exercise | Red | New ramp for outside |
| Lessons and learning | Green | Do harder work |

5.3.4 Analysis and Feedback stage

In my journal, I described how the use of PowerPoint, as requested by the pupils, seemed to increase pupil motivation. Pupils were observed to support one another during the presentations to the Head and governors. For example, more governors than had been anticipated arrived on the day of the presentation. One pupil (Andrew) became anxious and these anxieties led to him being unable to present his section. The rest of the boys organised between them who would cover his section and did so accordingly. I will now present slides created by the Student Researchers and will

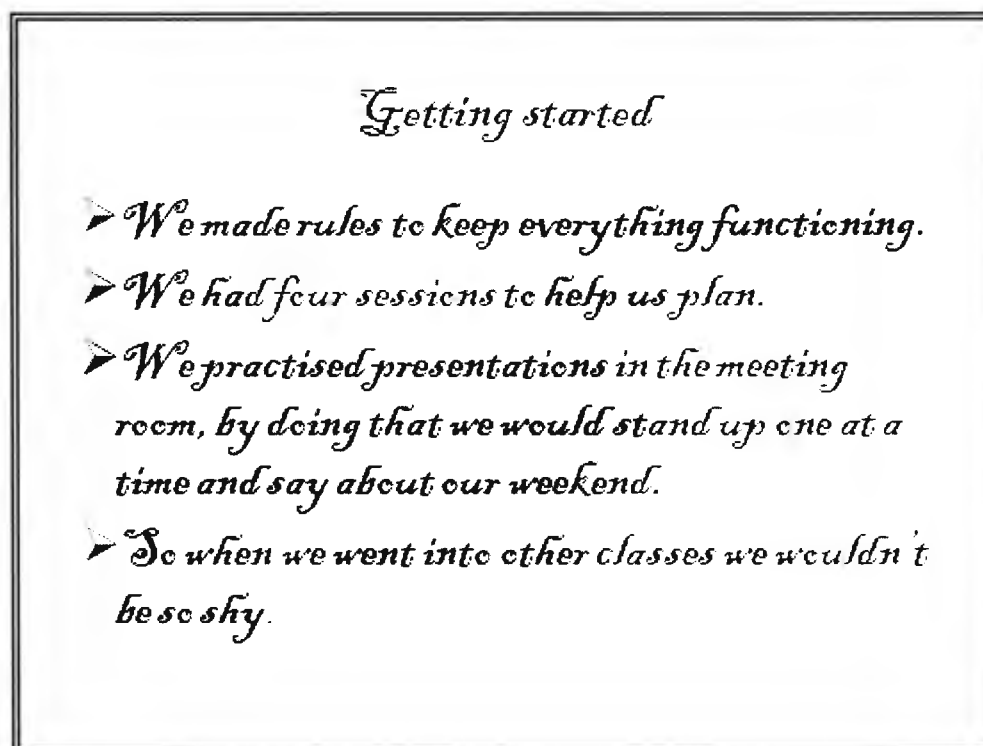
discuss their content and the way in which the pupils approached the analysis and feedback stage. As discussed in my methodology chapter, each pupil took one topic upon which to focus and present to the governors and school Head.

Andrew's contribution to the feedback presentation

Andrew put himself forward to begin the presentation by introducing the role of the Student Research Team and also the aims of the STARS project. I described, in my journal, how Andrew, at first, struggled to pick out the key ideas to present. I urged him to imagine that “there is someone sitting in that chair who knows *nothing* about what you did or who you are”. This prompt proved to be helpful for Andrew and he was able to present the main ideas using bullet points. For example, in his first slide, he described how as a team the Student Researchers ‘recorded people’s opinions on different subjects’ and did so because they ‘wanted to make the school a better place’. I was pleased to see how Andrew had referred to me and my role at the bottom of this first slide - ‘Anna helped us with the project’. This led me to believe that I was viewed by Andrew as an *assitant* rather than someone *leading* the project, or indeed a member of the Secret Six itself. I felt satisfied that the way in which I had supported the project had made Andrew feel that it had been pupil-led. A copy of Andrew’s second slide is presented as Figure 5.7.1.

Andrew considered carefully his font and colour scheme for his slides, which suggested to me that he cared about what others thought of his work and took pride in it. I was interested in Andrew’s focus on the issue of confidence in his two last bullet points. Andrew spoke about the development of these skills in further detail in his evaluation interviews and therefore this was likely to be a skill which Andrew perceived as important to this project.

Figure 5.7.1 – One of Andrew’s slides created for the feedback presentation



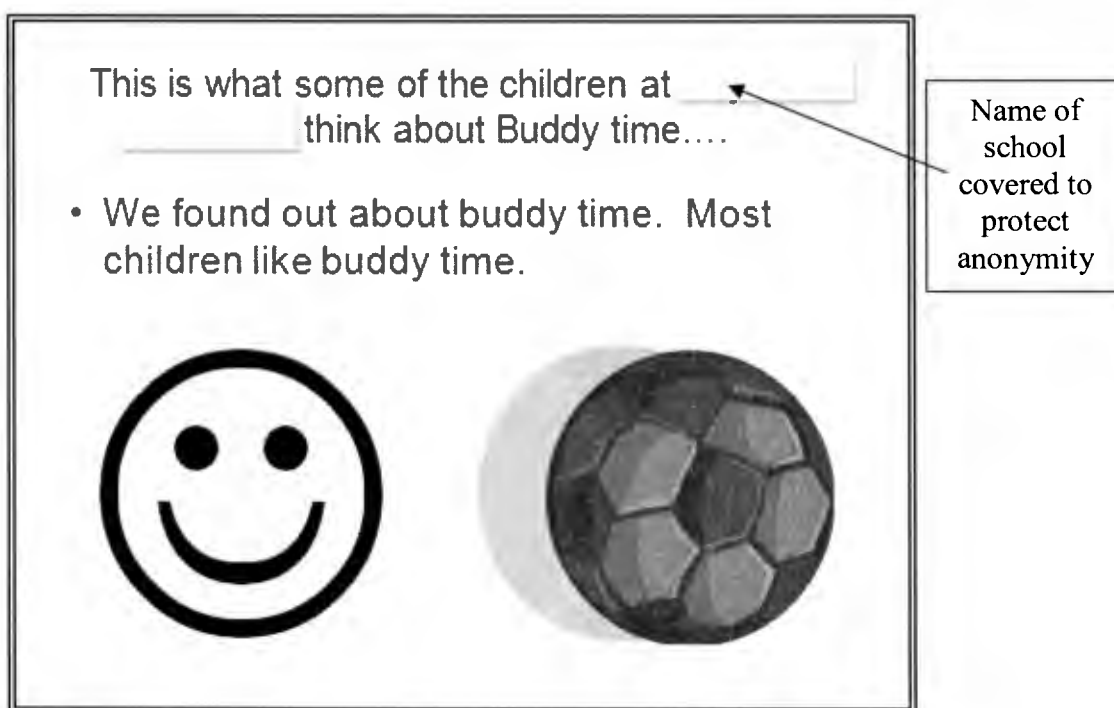
Fergus' contribution to the feedback presentation

Fergus took time to select his preferred colours and font for his slides and appeared to enjoy using the PowerPoint programme. He remembered the processes which I taught him, such as accessing images from 'clipart' and copying them onto his slides. In my journal, I described how he was rather 'competitive' when working on his slides and 'preoccupied with thoughts about how his work compared to that of his peers'. Fergus frequently asked questions such as, 'How many slides have the other boys done? Have I done the most?' I reflected upon whether an awareness that his literacy skills were not as advanced as his peers may have contributed to Fergus' desire to 'do the most'. I explained that the quantity of slides was not important and shared with Fergus that when I do presentations at work I prefer to use a limited number of slides as I believed

this to be more helpful for my audience. He appeared to accept this explanation and was able to move on.

It was during this one-to-one session that I reflected upon the working relationship that had developed between myself and Fergus. I had noted over the course of the project how Fergus' face tended to light up when he saw me arrive at St. Martin's School and would approach me and ask "Have I got you today?". He appeared to enjoy the time we spent together, often asking whether I would be staying for lunch. Therefore, as this one-to-one session was nearing the end of my involvement with Fergus, I began to prepare him for the final time we would work together (during the follow up interviews, after the Summer holidays) by talking him through this schedule. I felt this was necessary in view of the literature I had read (presented in Chapter 2) regarding experiences of pupils with SEBD, their relationships with adults at school, and their experiences of rejection and loss.

Figure 5.7.2 – One of Fergus' slides created for the feedback presentation



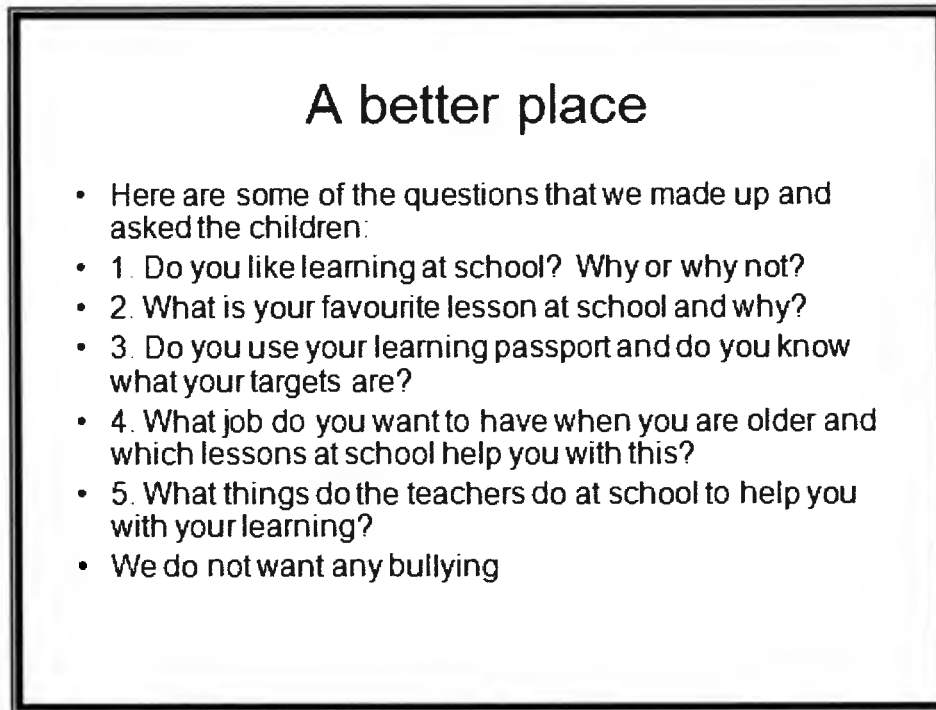
Fergus asked me to read out quotes from the pupils regarding their views towards Buddy time and then opted to *cut and paste* quotes on to his slides. The quotes informed the audience how the pupils perceived Buddy Time, including perceived benefits such as “When I’m having a hard time and getting irritated it’s kind of good for me because it puts me back on track” and ‘Buddy Time is to help you socialise with adults so you can be friendlier to them’. I wondered whether by presenting such quotes to the Head and governors, it would enable them to experience, what I noted in my journal to be ‘insightful conversations’ which took place in the focus groups. Fergus supported his comment about most pupils liking buddy time with quotes about how they would like more of it. For example, he presented how one boy said he’d change “The time - You only get 15 minutes”.

Stephen’s contribution to the feedback presentation

Stephen allocated himself the role of presenting the findings from the *Lessons and Learning* focus groups. He felt it important to list the questions that had been asked in the classrooms and then present pupils’ responses visually on subsequent slides written in speech bubbles. Stephen enjoyed using the PowerPoint programme and spent time formatting his work so that the speech bubbles were all presented as the same size and were positioned just how he wanted.

Stephen added the title ‘A better place’ to his first slide (see Figure 5.7.3). When I asked him why he had selected this title he replied ‘Well, that’s why we are doing this project, aint it? To make the school a better place?’. These comments were similar to those of Andrew and they suggested that the boys had focused on school improvement as the main aim for undertaking the project. Stephen finished his slide by adding the

Figure 5.7.3 –One of Stephen’s slides created for the feedback presentation



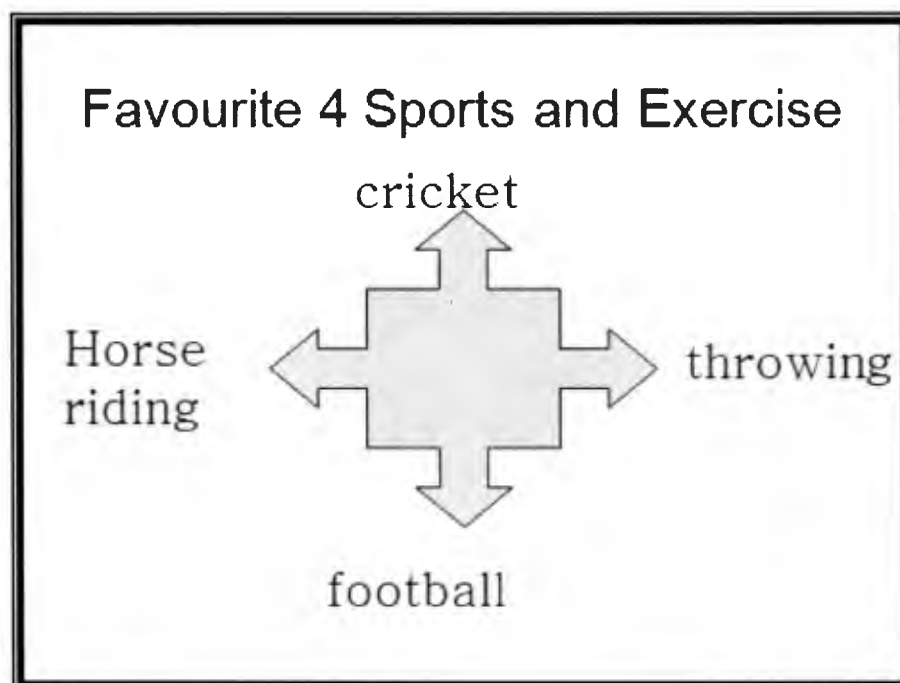
sentence, ‘We do not want any bullying’. I asked Stephen why he had added this to the bottom of the slide. He told me about an incident of bullying which he had witnessed in a lesson and therefore felt it necessary to add his own view to this slide. I respected his decision to leave this comment at the bottom of his slide as I did not feel it was appropriate to suggest otherwise as this would be conflicting with the pupil-led nature of STARs work.

Abhay’s contribution to the feedback presentation

Abhay took on two of the topics to feed back. He opted for a more quantitative approach to data analysis than his fellow Researchers. For example, I asked Abhay, ‘How can we find out what is the favourite sport of children at St. Martin’s?’, to which he responded, ‘I can count them up’. Abhay found that the pupils’ favourite four types of Sport and Exercise were cricket, throwing, football and horse riding and he presented these data in one of his slides (see Figure 5.7.4)

Abhay enjoyed using the *Custom Animation* option on PowerPoint and I reported in my journal how he made his slides ‘come to life’ by making the images spin and move. In another slide, Abhay summarised pupil views by reporting - ‘the children liked having golden time. Some children told us it helps them with their behaviour’.

Figure 5.7.4 –One of Abhay’s slides created for the feedback presentation



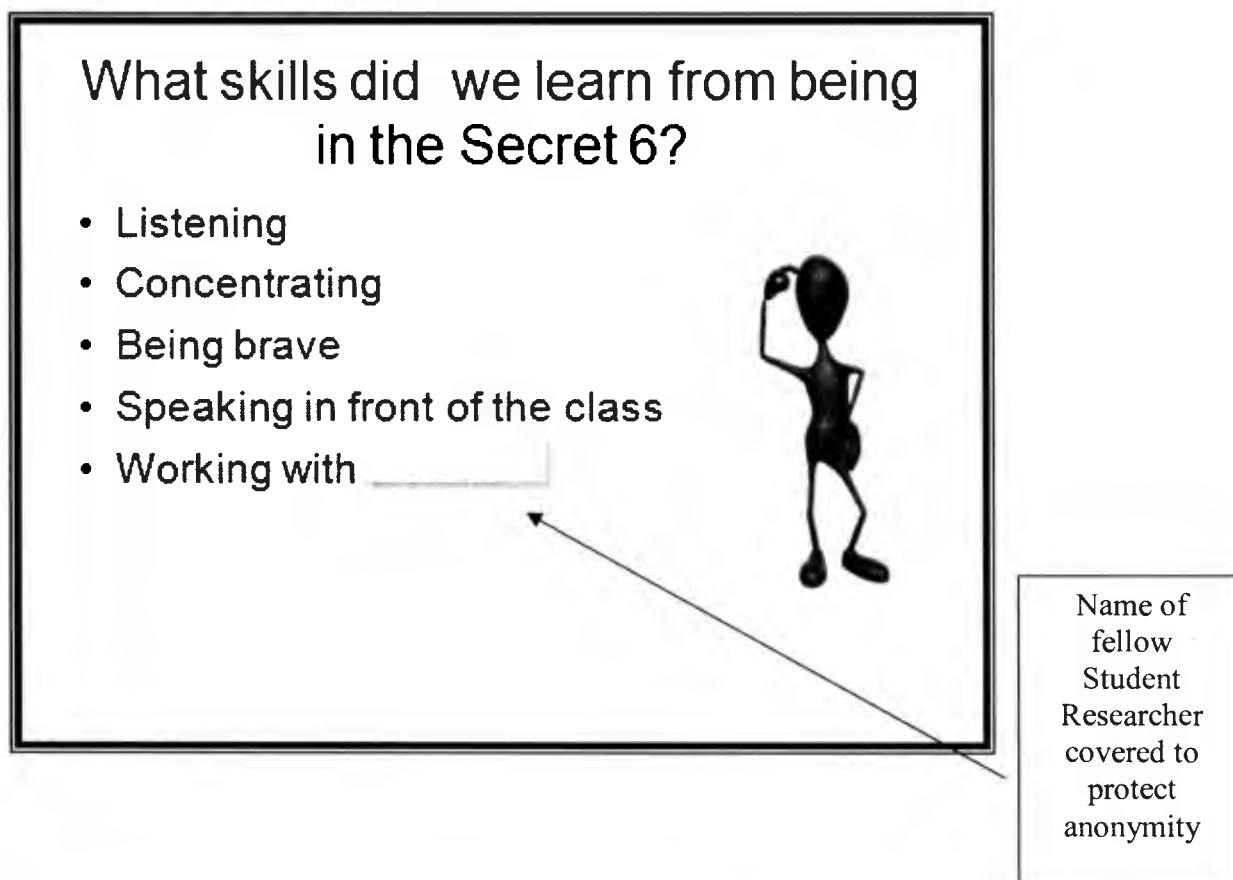
Rich’s contribution to the feedback presentation

Rich was the last to speak in the presentation and his role was to summarise the Student Researchers’ work and close the presentation. He was able to list the skills he felt that he and his fellow Researchers had developed (see Figure 5.7.5). The skills that Rich had focused upon, suggested to me that he placed importance on the development of confidence, task engagement and teamwork.

Rich transferred knowledge of other ICT programmes to assist him with PowerPoint, for example, he looked for the *Spell Checking* option to ensure that his work was

presented accurately. Rich, like all of his peers, appeared to enjoy the session and took pride in his work. Rich completed his part of the presentation by adding a slide focusing on how the project had made him feel. He summarised this in three bullet points – ‘happy’, ‘good’ and ‘shocked [to have been asked]’.

Figure 5.7.5 –One of Rich’s slides created for the feedback presentation



To summarise, the quality of the boys’ work, and their effort in and engagement with this activity, suggested to me that all five pupil’s perceived the need to analyse and share their findings with the adults, as important. I believed that the use of ICT was a key contributor to the success of these one-to-one sessions. The boys proudly announced to TAs walking through the dining room during the session, ‘I’m using PowerPoint!’ and seemed excited to have had access to this new programme.

CHAPTER 6 – PERCEPTIONS OF PUPILS AND MEMBERS OF STAFF

6.1 Introduction

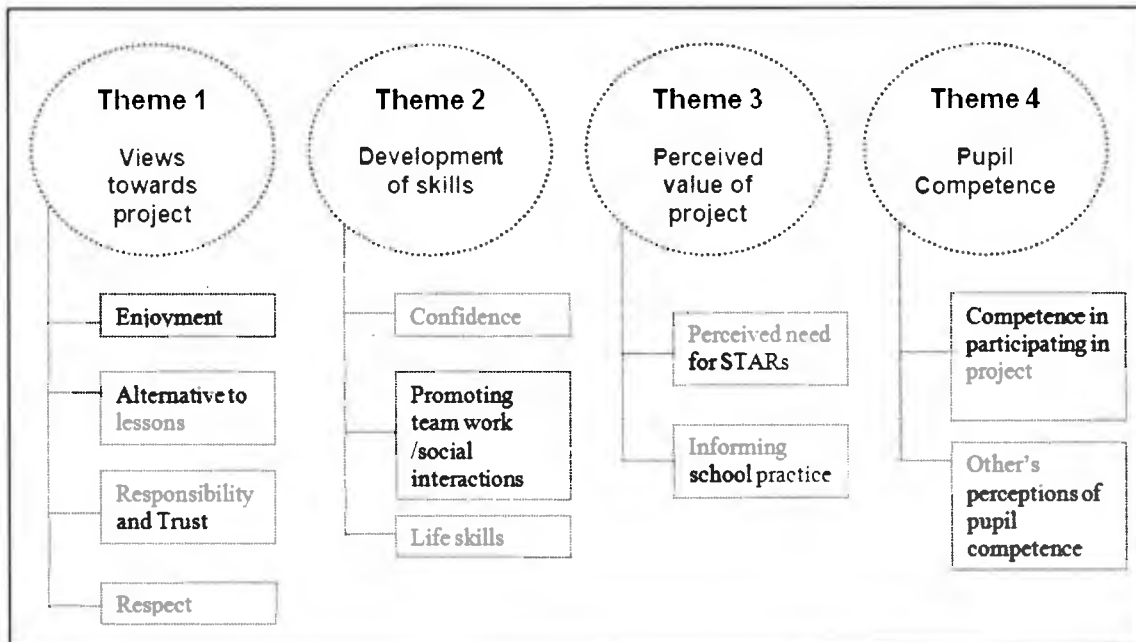
This section aims to address the following research question: *What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part in the STARs project?* It is split into four sections in order to share the findings from the evaluation interviews with Student Researchers (*section 6.2*), pupils who had participated in the classroom focus groups (*section 6.3*) and members of staff (*section 6.4*) and the follow-up interviews with three Student Researchers (*section 6.5*).

6.2 The five Students Researchers' experiences of taking part in the STARs project

Findings from the five Student Researchers' evaluation interviews were analysed, generating four main themes: *views towards project, development of skills, perceived value of project and pupil competence*. These themes, along with their corresponding sub-themes, are presented in Figure 6.0.

All five of the boys viewed the project as enjoyable experience and described it using adjectives such as “brilliant”, “magic”, “great”, “amazing” and “fun”. Fergus stated “it’s been absolutely fantastic” and Abhay added “it’s made me feel glad and happy”. Rich described how being given responsibility was a rare experience for him, stating “I never get picked for anything... when I heard I was picked, It was a complete shock... a good shock... I can just stop what I’m doing and go on and do something that’s more better”. Abhay also spoke of how he enjoyed the responsibility describing how he liked

Figure 6.0 –Four themes and sub-themes from the Student Researchers Evaluation Interviews



being given a “good trusting job”. Three of the pupils (Stephen, Abhay and Fergus) spoke about how good it felt to be respected. Stephen described with enthusiasm how “all the people in the classroom listened” whilst Abhay shared with me the difficulties he faced in classrooms, occasionally, when pupils were not respecting them – “sometimes they not listen [it was] annoying because we read them out and they didn’t listen”. Fergus added “like nobody was answering any questions, that was the hardest thing [how did that make you feel?] Sad and upset”.

- *Theme 2 – Development of skills*

All five pupils were able to reflect on the types of skills they felt they had developed through working on the project. All pupils focused on how the project had helped build their confidence. Abhay stated that “the new skills I’ve learnt is to ask questions more bravely and better”. Stephen and Andrew both felt the project had helped them with their “reading”. Rich felt that his listening skills had improved and stated “Well I’ve

been better at listening... I know that I am being better at listening, because usually my listening skills are just ear-blocked”.

Three pupils (Rich, Abhay and Fergus) spoke about the way in which the project had given them opportunities to work with new students and get to know other pupils better. Fergus described how he had “made some new friends, that [he] wasn’t friends with before”. Abhay described how the project had helped him develop life skills and made links between the skills required for the STARs project and the skills he would need for his desired career as a police officer.

- *Theme 3 – Perceived value of project*

All five pupils felt strongly that the project should be undertaken again in the future and described how the project could help inform school practice. Rich stated “if we have a Secret 6 this year then we might as well have a Secret 6 next year or we won’t know what people think about St. Martin’s ... how would you know if somebody wanted to change anything?” Fergus added “if you’re asking children’s opinions, you can get to know them better”. Stephen described how the project has taught him “lots of things what they would change and that ... we can tell someone and might be able to get it”. Andrew stated that the adults “wanna hear what we think about our school [without the project] they wouldn’t know what to do”.

- *Theme 4 – Pupil Competence*

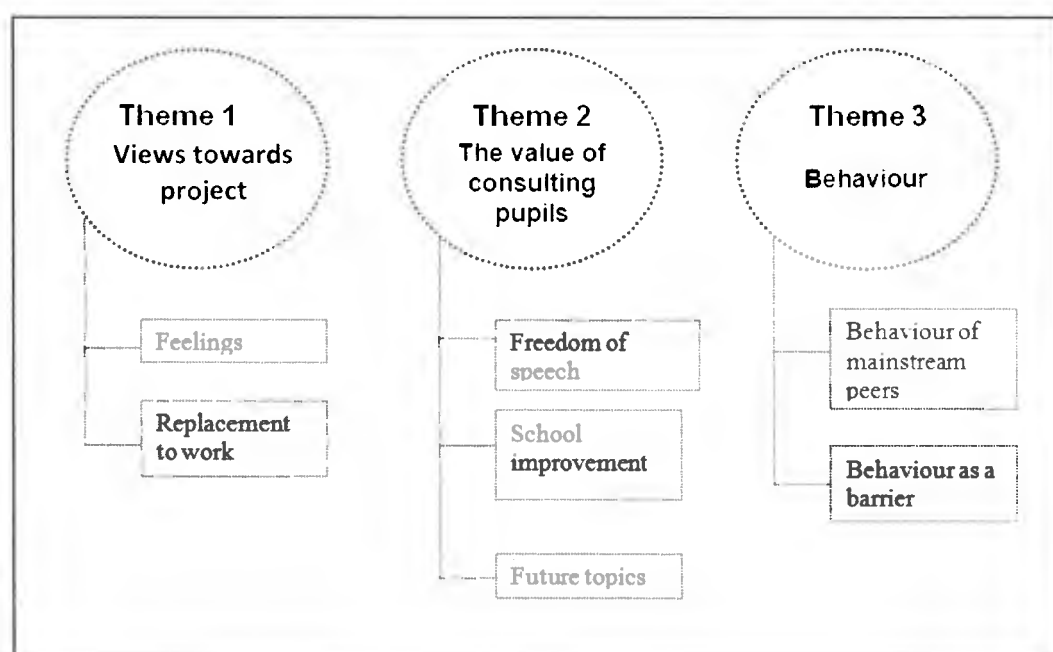
Four pupils (Fergus, Rich, Andrew and Abhay) reflected upon why they felt the project had not been implemented in their school before and they all described how behaviour and cognitive abilities may have been factors which could have impacted on decisions not to implement this project. Abhay shared his view that pupils at St. Martin’s had

“anger problems” and Fergus added “because if someone winds us up we are gonna retaliate and hit him and we’re gonna be angry”. When asked whether this had happened during the project, both boys smiled and said “no” and acknowledged that it’s shown that they “*can* ask questions without being silly”. Rich spoke about how adults might have underestimated pupils’ abilities stating “I think they think we aren’t smart enough” and Andrew told me “in mainstream, they’d know more about it but in these schools we won’t ... because they’ve probably been learning about it and we haven’t”.

6.3 The experiences of four children participating in the classroom focus groups

Findings from the evaluation interviews with four children who participated in the classroom focus groups were analysed, generating three main themes: *views towards project*, *the value of consulting pupils* and *behaviour*. These themes, along with their corresponding sub-themes, are presented in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 –Themes and sub-themes from Evaluation Interviews with children who participated in the classroom focus groups



- *Theme 1 – Views towards project*

All four of the pupils shared their positive feelings towards the project. Barry stated that the project was “a bit exciting because you could tell them what you like and hate about the school”. Russ described how “it felt good, it was fascinating, I wanted to know about the Secret 6 and all their questions and stuff”. Graham spoke about the way in which pupil views could help with school improvement stating “Let’s do it again, so we can get more changes into the school and make it better”. He did however add that he was unhappy and felt “a bit irritated” if the Student Researchers entered the classrooms and interrupted him if he was “doing something fun”. Barry, on the other hand, enjoyed this disruption stating “[it was alright] because it stops us from doing work”.

- *Theme 2 – Value of consulting pupils*

Three of the pupils (Barry, Graham and Russ) spoke at length about the need to consult pupils and their need to be involved in decision making. Graham described how pupil voice should be sought otherwise “the school will be up to them ... its not all up to them, its not their school, they just teach there ... it’s the children’s school”. Russ stated how “the children should have a say - a say about the school ...because as the adults get to have a say, it’s unfair on the children because they don’t have a say”. Graham spoke about what the adults could do with the information collected, suggesting “they can change bits of the school for other people ... because they care about us”. He emphasised the need for the Student Researchers to feed back pupils’ views to adults within the school. He stated “it is important, because it’s a waste of time, you recording it, if they’re not going to listen and then we’re wasting our voice”. Barry spoke about how the project had enabled pupils to have freedom to share their feelings towards the school – something which they might not have been able to do in

the past. He told me “some children are quite scared, telling them that ‘I hate this school’ and ‘I don’t like this or teachers and that...’”. Graham also spoke about honesty and being sensible stating that he had to be “a bit careful” because he “might have got in trouble for saying something a bit wrong”.

- *Theme 3-Behaviour*

Alastair, Barry and Graham all spoke about the way in which poor behaviour formed part of the identity of pupils at St. Martin’s and was a possible reason why such projects had not been attempted in the past. Alastair described the project “might wind us up” and Barry suggested that the reason why mainstream pupils are given more opportunities to undertake these projects is that those pupils are “probably a little more behaved... children might be horrible to the people who come in here”. When I asked whether this had happened during the STARs project, Barry replied “Probably not”.

6.4 The views of three members of staff towards to project

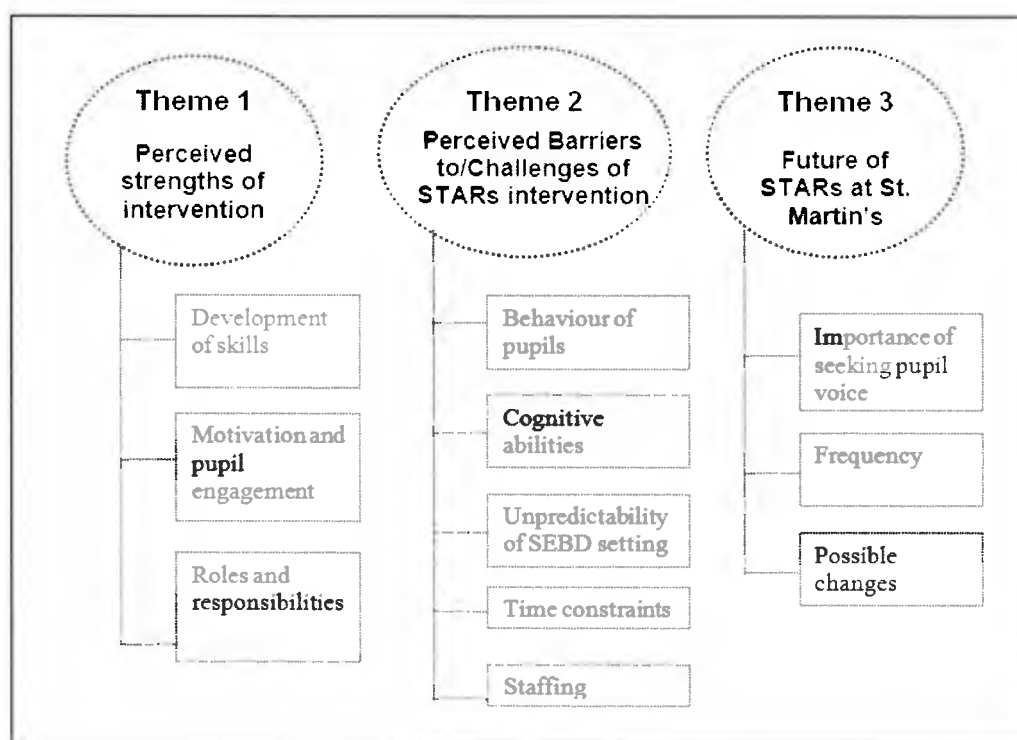
Findings from the evaluation interviews with three members of staff were analysed, generating three main themes: *perceived strengths of the evaluation, perceived strengths of the intervention, perceived barriers to/ challenges of STARs intervention, and future of STARs at St. Martin’s school*. These three themes (along with their corresponding sub-themes) are presented in Figure 6.2.

- *Theme 1 – Perceived strengths of STARs intervention*

All three members of staff were overwhelmingly positive about the project. They spoke about pupils’ enjoyment, motivation and interest in the project. Alison stated “they love it, they love it - everyone has enjoyed what they’ve done, especially the children”. Zoe

told me that “the kids who participated kept *wanting* to come back”. She added “he’s [Student Researcher] been really excited about the project, so when we meet each week he’ll give me ‘oh we’ve done this, or oh, we’ve done that”.

Figure 6.2 –Themes and sub-themes from Evaluation Interviews with three members of staff



Sarah described how the Student Researchers enjoyed the responsibility stating “they called themselves the Secret 6, and I think it made them feel quite special” and Alison described how the pupils would often talk about the project.

All three members of staff shared with me how they felt well prepared and didn’t feel that the project was disruptive to teaching: “It was absolutely fine, it wasn’t disruptive at all”, “I mean especially after the meeting you had with us all and explained it ... we

know the kind of thing you were working towards and what you wanted them to do.. so yeah I was happy”.

All three members of staff had noticed how the project supported the pupils in becoming more confident. Alison noticed how one of the Student Researchers “didn’t blush, he used to get quite embarrassed ... but the second time, [he was] very confident”. Sarah felt that at first “Stephen lacked confidence a bit sometimes ... Andrew got shy sometimes too but Rich seemed to do alright”. Sarah then described how as the project went on the Student Researchers were “more confident about asking questions and things, just generally their confidence just seemed better”. Zoe noticed the anxiety of pupils in the Student Research Team at first but stated “I think it gradually got better, they were very reluctant to ask the questions at first”.

Alison and Sarah were impressed with how the Student Researchers managed the role and responsibility. Alison described how she was “just really pleased ... to see how sensibly he dealt with that role... they were really professional”. Sarah felt that “It [good behaviour from pupils’ in classroom] was down to the way that the boys *were* at the front – how they conducted it – got the good response from the children ... the sensibleness of the way they [Student Researchers] were, made it even more successful”. Zoe described how she observed “Andrew improve” as the focus groups progressed. She added that she was “really impressed with Stephen and Rich”.

- *Theme 2 – Perceived barriers to/ challenges of STARs intervention*

All three members of staff spoke about the potential challenges of undertaking this type of project at St. Martin’s School. Behaviour of pupils was viewed as a key barrier. Zoe felt that “generally, unless you’re having a settled day in your class you can’t get

out to do it ...I think it just depends on what mood they're in". Zoe spoke about how pupils have not engaged in pupil voice projects in the past telling me "they were loath to give up one playtime a week in order to arrange an activity ... the actual practical giving up their own time to do anything didn't work".

Alison (teacher of the Gold class where many pupils have SpLD) spoke about how pupils' learning difficulties could impact on how well some pupils could share their views. She stated that it was difficult for pupils to "quickly come up with something, especially in this class where they're all dyslexic and see speech and language therapists". She added that in order to better support these pupils if the project was to be done again they could be given more "preparation so they get more out of each session". Staffing issues and levels of adult supervision required was also perceived as a challenge and something which may not be such an issue in mainstream settings. Zoe stated "I think perhaps in mainstream, if you were talking, say, three year 5 students, you could send three year 5 students round on their own".

Sarah stated that "sometimes, their answers were really stupid, but it is to be expected". She then suggested that perhaps pupils in the school had been underestimated in the past, stating "maybe they don't think that the kids in these sorts of settings can sort of handle it [this intervention] or that it is not something that they'd want to do, which I think it sort of a bit ridiculous you know".

- *Theme 3 – Future of STARs at St. Martin's*

All three members of staff hoped that the project could be implemented again in the future and spoke about the need to consult pupils. Alison stated that "taking pupils views, especially EBD children don't like to express how they feel – this is the perfect

opportunity for them to tell you what helps them, what makes it work for them... this is their chance to give their feedback and make the learning experience for them better and easier for us as staff cuz we know what they want". Sarah shared with me "well it's the kids who have to come to this school, and if they enjoy it ... it's them we want to come to school, so I think it's handy to have their opinions on what would make it more enjoyable and stuff". She added that "it made them feel quite special, and it would be nice if all of the children had a chance to be in that [the Student Research Team]".

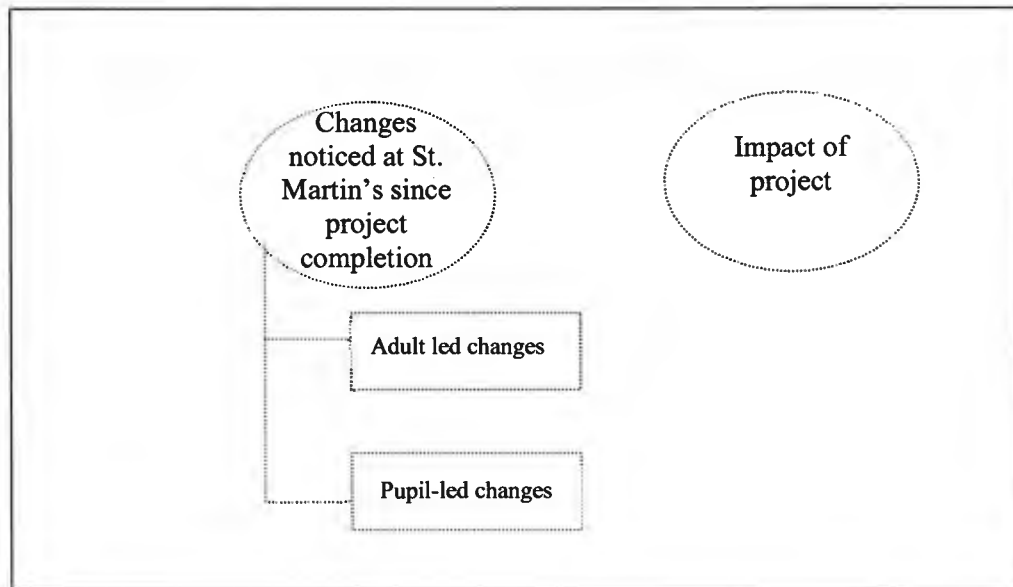
Alison considered the timing of a future project and spoke about the benefits of seeking pupil voice in the future during the first term – "If something comes up as something really strongly about by the children, if it's earlier in the year the better, cuz then we can maybe implement stuff". Zoe stated that the project "would be great as an ongoing thing ... I think you need to give it a go because there's no way you can say oh I don't want to do it because you don't know what it's about, and I think anything that gives these kind of children more independence, more speaking and listening skills, more life skills has got to be worth a try! ... you're bound to get at least one good thing out of it, even if it's just the majority of pupils enjoy school, then why wouldn't a Head teacher want to do that?!"

6.5. The perceived impact of the STARs project by Student Researchers two terms after its implementation

Finally, data from the follow-up interviews with Student Researchers two terms after the project's implementation were analysed, generating two main themes: *Changes*

noticed at St. Martin's since project completion and *impact of project* These two themes, along with their corresponding sub-themes, are presented in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3 Themes and sub-themes from follow-up interviews with three Student Researchers



▪ *Theme 1 – Changes noticed at St. Martin's since project completion*

All three of the Student Researchers interviewed were able to share with me changes that they had noticed since the feedback stage which they felt were directly linked with recommendations made by pupils during their project. Stephen spoke enthusiastically about a recent school trip he had been on, stating “Yeh, actually, we went on a boat” (pupils had suggested that they would enjoy more school trips) and felt that more pupils were now putting their hand up if they wanted their teacher to write in larger font on the board (again, something that had been discussed in focus groups). In his interview, Fergus told me, “I think some things have changed” and described how if he could not read text on the board he would now put his hand up and teachers now “put it on a little whiteboard” for him. Fergus and Andrew struggled to think of any other recommendations which had been actioned. They were however able to describe other

changes which had come about since the project. Andrew stated how “maths is different, maths is after play” and that the “calming down rooms are now gone”. Fergus described how the system for being given “gold cards” and working “off levels” had changed. However, when questioned about who had asked for these changes, both pupils stated “the teachers” and could acknowledge that these had not come about as a result of the STARs project.

An issue that all boys raised early on in the interview was the temporary removal of Buddy Time despite findings from the focus groups that pupils would in fact like to *increase* the length of time allocated to this activity and despite the school Head feeding back to pupils that she would consider lengthening it. Fergus described how “Buddy Time hasn’t changed – we are not getting buddy time because everyone is kicking off now. Two adults are leaving, my buddy has gone”. When asked how he felt about that he told me “Sad, because I don’t know who my buddy is”. Andrew added “I don’t know who my buddy is either”.

- *Theme 2 – Impact of project*

Despite limited changes noticed since the completion of the project, Fergus and Andrew remained optimistic about the STARs intervention on the whole. Fergus repeated his responses from the evaluation interviews stating that “It’s good” and Andrew felt that it was worth doing the project. Stephen, however, was less satisfied with the outcomes of the project. When asked to consider the impact of the project on a scale from 1-10, where 1 was the adults did not listen to the children’s views and 10 was they listened extensively to children’s views, Stephen replied “4” in a disappointed tone. When I asked him why he had chosen this rating, he replied “not much changed”. Due to issues which will be described further in Chapter 7, this

interview was terminated early and therefore I was unable to seek additional views from the boys.

6.6 Summary

In Chapters 5 and 6 I have presented the findings from my study. In Chapter 5, I have aimed to share my experiences of facilitating the training sessions, observing the focus groups and supporting with the data analysis and feedback phase. I also presented the findings from the information collected during the individual meetings with pupils.

In this chapter, I have aimed to share the findings from the evaluation interviews with Student Researchers, pupils who had participated in the classroom focus groups and members of staff and the follow-up interviews with three Student Researchers. Findings will now be discussed in following chapter, specifically, in relation to past literature.

CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

I will begin this chapter by addressing my two research questions. As with previous chapters, I will first approach the *Process of Implementation* strand which related to research question 1 and then the *Evaluation* strand which related to research question 2. I will consider the findings in the context of the existing literature and psychological research presented in Chapter 2.

The implications of the findings in relation to educational psychology will then be discussed, along with methodological strengths and limitations. Finally, I will suggest some possible avenues for further research.

7.2 Summary of main findings in relation to my two research questions

7.2.1 How can a STARs project be implemented in an SEBD school?

The process of implementation was a significant feature of this project. This process was very much exploratory and fluid in nature, led by past literature on STARs interventions in mainstream settings, along with my experiences of working in SEBD provisions prior to and during my educational psychology training.

The structure of this section was led by the six step implementation plan, as presented in Chapter 3 and findings will be discussed below in relation to each of these six steps.

Steps 1 & 2 - Ensuring transparency, building rapport and running the individual meetings

In view of previous literature which warned of the challenges of implementing this type of project in a specialist setting (Conolly, 2008; Fletcher, 2005; Hamill & Boyd, 2002), I allowed for a considerable amount of planning time at the early stages of the project to ensure that the intervention was given the best possible chance of success. As Fielding and Bragg (2003) posited, communication with others before, during and after the process was crucial in order to ensure transparency and build rapport. By engaging in dialogue with members of staff and pupils at these three stages, I aimed to follow Fielding and Bragg's (2003) advice.

Engaging others in the process from the start also allowed me to allay any anxieties and suspicions that staff may have had about the project, as recommended in past literature (Hamill & Boyd, 2002; Fletcher, 2005). During their evaluation interviews, staff members shared their positive experiences of the project and the preparation they had received, and this suggested to me that this aim had been fulfilled.

The individual sessions gave me an opportunity to assess potential interest, and therefore engagement, in the project, something which I believed to be important, considering Conolly's (2008, p7) warnings that pupils could view such a project as 'undesirable'. These sessions also, as predicted, served to give me an insight into pupils' speech and language needs – again something which I felt necessary having read literature regarding speech and language needs of pupils labelled with SEBD (Benner *et al.*, 2002).

Information collected during the individual sessions revealed pupils' positive views towards St. Martin's School and suggested that many pupils felt that the school was

successful in meeting their basic needs for food, security and belonging (Maslow, 1943). Findings suggested strongly that pupils viewed their relationships with the adults at St. Martin's School as important. I believed this to be particularly relevant considering literature presented in Chapter 2 which indicated how trusting, mutually respectful and supportive relationships with adults in SEBD special schools were essential in helping pupils to develop more positive self-images and promoting academic engagement (Cooper, 2008). I considered to what extent factors such as positive pupil-teacher relationships had contributed to the pupils' scores on the rating scales indicating a strong sense of belonging to their school. Past literature (Hamm & Fairclough, 2005) suggested this to be the case.

Steps 3 and 4 – The recruitment and training of Student Researchers

Fielding and Bragg (2003) highlighted the importance of positive working relationships between facilitating adults and members of the student research team and Soo Hoo (1993) spoke about the need to reduce status difference, so that the facilitator was not viewed as an adult leading the research. I viewed this advice with caution – whilst I was in agreement with the need for pupils to take ownership of the research themselves, due to the population of pupils I was cautious to ensure that those meeting with me were able to respect my authority and therefore manage their behaviour in order for them to access the training programme. Therefore a careful balance was struck.

Fielding and Bragg (2003) stated that successful projects depended upon the quality of the Student Researchers' training process in order to enable pupils to contribute to – and ultimately take charge of – the research. However, the authors' guidance was aimed at those implementing STARs projects in *mainstream* settings. The needs of pupils in SEBD settings are complex and multifaceted, and I was aware that, inevitably, the success of the project would be linked to how the Student Research Team experienced

the training process. With this in mind, I felt strongly that the training sessions would need to be differentiated in order to meet the unique cognitive, emotional and behavioural needs of those in the Student Research Team. The way in which pupils responded to Training Session 1, and indeed in all training sessions, would suggest that the content and delivery of these sessions was successful in meeting these needs. Further evidence of how pupils perceived the training programme has been discussed in Section 7.2.2

The opportunity for pupils to develop the identity of their work (Fielding & Bragg, 2003) through developing a team name and advertising it through posters, proved to be something which motivated pupils. The manner in which pupils engaged in the training process again conflicted with suggestions in past literature (Conolly, 2008) that this would act as a barrier to successful implementation.

Steps 5 and 6 - Classroom focus groups and pupils' analysis and feedback of findings.

Pupils' interest in and motivation to engage in the project remained evident during the focus groups and subsequent data analysis and feedback stage suggesting that the Student Researchers were not alone in perceiving the value of the project – those within the classrooms shared their motivation to engage. Following McGregor's (2005) recommendations, I considered the importance of this stage. McGregor (2005) raised the value of sharing the research with a variety of people in the school, including school governors and therefore I ensured I gave the Student Researchers this opportunity.

As Rudduck (2003) suggested, a key benefit of STARs projects for the pupils themselves was the promotion of social competences and the establishment of new relationships. I was able to observe many positive interactions between pupils during

the running of the focus groups and feedback presentation. As stated in my findings, the pupils' ability to work so effectively as a team during the focus groups and analysis and feedback stage, and the support they offered one another at times of need confirmed Rudduck's view. As previous literature (Kirby, 2001) has suggested, I would predict that the experience of participating in this project would help to initiate future collaboration, due to a shift in the pupil's perceptions and views of themselves as capable of successful teamwork.

7.2.2 What are pupils' and staff members' experiences of taking part in the STARs project?

Perspectives of Student Researchers and those who experienced the focus groups

Due to considerable overlap in the themes which emerged from the thematic analyses from data from the Student Researchers and from the pupils who experienced the classroom focus groups interviews, these themes from pupils will be discussed together in the following sections.

7.2.2.1 Views towards the project

Within the accounts of all of the Student Researchers, were suggestions that participating in the project and being included in school evaluation and development led to a variety of positive emotions. Pupils spoke about feelings of being valued and respected by others in their school community - something which Hamm and Fairclough (2005) argued was key to a sense of school belonging. Pupils spoke about the respect that they felt from being given responsibility and also how they felt respected by their peers who took them seriously and engaged enthusiastically during their classroom focus groups. Pupils' responses suggested a better understanding of how it felt to be listened to and respected by one's audience, and I reflected upon

whether this might have led to an increased sense of empathy and respect amongst the Student Researchers towards teaching staff.

Pupils' positive views towards the project were an interesting feature of my research as they conflicted with past literature (McGregor, 2005; Conolly, 2008) which predicted that pupils with SEBD might have reservations about participating in such projects. Conolly's (2008) view that excluded pupils' 'anti-work ethic' and negative attitudes to this type of work would act as a barrier to its implementation was not borne out by the present study. Conolly's (2008) concerns that pupils in SEBD provision might lack the motivation to be trained were again not supported by this study - rather pupils spoke in very positive terms about the training sessions and their behaviour and staff comments supported this. I predicted that the extensive groundwork as discussed in Section 5.1.1 was a key contributor to how well this intervention was received by pupils.

7.2.2.2 Development of skills

A strong feature of the pupils' accounts was the way in which the project enabled them to further develop various life skills. Their responses were very much consistent with Fielding and Bragg (2003) view's that STARs projects enabled pupils to learn new skills, and it was encouraging that pupils themselves could identify specific skills which they had developed. As Fielding and Bragg (2003) suggested, the project enabled pupils to develop a more positive sense of self - the comments of the Student Researchers revealed a shift in how they viewed their social and communication skills. Pupils' responses in this theme aligned with Fielding and Bragg's (2003) argument that focus groups undertaken during STARs projects, in which ideas were discussed freely, allowed participants to build on existing speaking, listening and diplomatic skills.

All pupils focused on improved confidence as an outcome of taking part in the project, something which I believed to be a vital feature of this project, considering the pupils' experiences of rejection from previous education provision and the resultant negative impact on their sense of self.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, considering the statistics which suggest that pupils with speech and language needs are over-represented in SEBD provisions in comparison with the wider population (Benner *et al.*, 2002), it was somewhat reassuring that many pupils in the project were able themselves to reflect on how they had developed skills in communicating successfully with peers during the project and spoke about how they were able to feel more confident about taking on these roles.

7.2.2.3 Perceived value of project

The need for their voices to be heard emerged as a key issue for many of the pupils interviewed from both groups and aligned with previous literature (MacBeath *et al.*, 2003; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Crane, 2001). Within this theme there emerged a sense amongst pupils that their views and those of their peers could and should lead to improvements in teachers' practices and the development of a shared responsibility for the quality of teaching at their school, as suggested by Rudduck and McIntyre (2007) and Fielding and Bragg, (2003). Pupils were able to recognise that they were an integral part of their school's evaluation and improvement and argued the need for power differentials to shift to give pupils more of a voice. Their responses suggested that they placed value upon the STARS project as it provided them with a medium for voices to be heard and gave them a unique new role as change agents in relation to their school's norms and practices. This was viewed as positive considering Cole *et al.*'s

(1998) proposal that frequent pupil involvement in planning their own learning was a successful approach to managing and motivating pupils with SEBD.

The feedback of information to adults emerged as a significant issue for some pupils during the interviews. This aligns with previous literature which has suggested that pupils needed to be confident that what they said was being taken seriously by staff (MacBeath *et al.*, 2003).

7.2.2.4 Behaviour and Pupil Competence

An interesting feature of my research was how it highlighted the perception of pupils at St. Martin's School regarding their own competences and their view of how others perceived them. The sub-heading for this section consists of two themes which have been presented together as I felt that they were very much linked with one another. The role of low expectations should not be overlooked as it is viewed as a key factor in why this project had not been previously attempted and may offer insights into school ethos at a more general level. Within many of the pupils' perceptions was a strong suggestion that adults have historically made judgements about their competence in carrying out STARs projects and these judgements have acted as barriers to the implementation of such projects in the past. Pupils felt that views of their competence in carrying out a STARs project were very much linked to their behaviour issues. What was concerning from the pupils' responses was that they appeared to have accepted this identity of a 'child with anger problems' and many spoke casually about how pupils at St. Martin's School would not manage this type of project due to their behaviour needs. This theme was sadly consistent with views presented in the literature (Kellett, 2004, Conolly, 2008). I believe however that the chance to discuss these issues during the interviews served as a key learning opportunity for pupils as they were able to reflect upon how

they had in fact succeeded with the project and could thus challenge the views they had held previously.

Pupils' responses appeared to be consistent with Spiteri's (2009) suggestion that the placement of children in SEBD provision could impact on their self-talk and self-perceptions and result in them perceiving themselves as 'different' to those in mainstream. Pupils in the present study showed evidence of how they classified students in mainstream schools as being unlike themselves and some pupils described their own difficulties in relation to these pupils, echoing findings from Sellman's (2009) study.

Staff members' perceptions

7.2.2.5. Perceived strengths of the STARs intervention

The members of staff interviewed were able to speak at length about the strengths of the project, the positives of seeking pupil voice and the benefits of STARs projects over other pupil voice work. Within the theme of '*Perceived Strengths*' emerged a discourse that the project had given them a better insight into pupils' true capabilities, aligning with previous literature (Rudduck, 2003). During the process of the interview itself, one member of staff reflected on her previous perceptions of the pupils and viewed them as 'ridiculous' now that she had witnessed how pupils had responded to the STARs intervention, suggesting issues of low expectations.

According to Rudduck and McIntyre (2007), pupil voice projects can lead to major improvements in teachers' practices. From comments made during the interviews, I was confident that the members of staff I spoke to during the evaluation interviews were accepting of this viewpoint and were eager to use pupil's views to inform their practice.

The level of training with pupils and information sharing with staff prior to the intervention permeated the responses of the adults interviewed at the evaluation stage. They shared their satisfaction with how well prepared the pupils were and how confident they felt as staff members as the intervention began.

One noticeable issue which had been raised in the literature (Hamill & Boyd, 2002) but which was absent from the staff members' reflections about the project was the issue of power shifts and possible anxiety which could arise amongst the staff team. None of the members of staff shared with me that they were wary, suspicious of, or anxious about the project. Again, I felt this could have been a reflection of the effort made at the early stages to be transparent and open to address any concerns that staff members might have had.

7.2.2.6 Perceived barriers to/ challenges of STARs intervention

Practical issues and levels of supervision emerged as pertinent issues for members of staff during the interviews and this was consistent with conclusions of past research (Conolly, 2008). Staff members raised doubts about how well the project could be replicated internally due to staffing issues and the unpredictable nature of their provision. Despite these concerns, all staff members were keen for the project to be repeated on an annual basis or every two years.

Responses from members of staff echoed the view of Kellett (2004) that judgements about competence were among the principal barriers blocking the empowerment of

children as active researchers. However, they were able to acknowledge that these views were unhelpful as the project had provided them with evidence to the contrary.

The learning needs and cognitive abilities of pupils were an issue for one particular member of staff due to the reality of the difficulties experienced by pupils in her class. She was however particularly proactive in suggesting how to minimise this barrier.

The issue of prioritising academic achievement over pupil voice projects was not raised as a barrier to implementation by members of staff, despite this being something that has been raised as a challenge in the literature (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). None of the members of staff felt that this was something that could not be incorporated into the curriculum, rather the barrier was perceived as one of staffing when behaviour of pupils was unsettled. The apathy of pupils undertaking the project was also not viewed as an issue. Conversely, staff spoke about their satisfaction at seeing how well the pupils took on the role and how enthusiastic and motivated they were about participating.

7.2.2.7 Future of STARs at St. Martin's School

Despite these challenges, all members of staff were extremely positive about the likelihood of the STARs intervention being repeated at St. Martin's School in the future. Not only did they highlight the value of seeking pupil voice, they also focused on ways in which they would go about repeating the project.

Summary of data from Evaluation Interviews

Although I have discussed the views of pupils and of members of staff in two separate sections for clarity, it is important to recognise the number of parallels and level of

overlap which exists between the views of pupils and members of staff. All three groups (the member of staff, the Student Researchers and the pupils who experienced the focus groups), spoke about the project in a positive manner and all groups identified firstly the development of skills in pupils and secondly the project's role in school improvement as clear benefits of a STARs intervention. With these benefits in mind, participants in all three of the groups felt that the project should be repeated in future years at St. Martin's School. Staff members and pupils shared their views about why they felt the project had not been put in place in the past – although members of staff also focused upon practical issues, they, along with the children, believed that low expectations of pupils' competences were a key factor.

7.2.2.8 Follow-up interviews

The findings from the follow-up interviews were very informative and suggested a shift in Student Researchers' perceptions of the value of STARs project. The pupils provided me with their views towards the project two terms on and views related to changes observed within St. Martin's School since the intervention was completed. It was interesting to learn that pupils were not convinced that many of their suggestions had been responded to since their feedback meeting and assembly. During the feedback assembly, the school Head had responded to the pupils' recommendations one by one and had told pupils 'this is something we can certainly try and do' for many of their suggestions. As Sharpe (2010) suggested, when pupils cannot see where or how their research has contributed to change, they might be deterred from carrying out future projects.

As discussed in the following section, I considered possible contextual factors which I believed may have contributed to the lack of change which arose from the project. This

led me to consider implications of this issue for future projects, and ways in which methodology could be adapted to avoid similar situations. In my literature search, I found no existing work which provided an explicit framework for supporting staff to reflect and act upon suggestions once the STARs intervention had been completed. This led me to consider the ways in which the project could be developed in order to examine how desired changes could be evaluated and how action plans could be created, implemented and monitored to promote the likelihood of post-STARs change. I have therefore discussed this issue in section 7.5.1, entitled Future Directions.

7.3 Practicalities

Due to the nature of St. Martin's School and the complex needs of pupils within it, a number of unanticipated practical and contextual issues emerged over the course of the project. Although it is acknowledged that those labelled with SEBD are not from a homogeneous group and therefore the challenges which arose at St. Martin's would not necessarily be common to all specialist provision, I have nevertheless presented these practical issues in this section, to provide examples of the types of challenges which arose and how I responded to them.

Behaviour management

Due to the fact that pupils were very aware of the hierarchical structure within the school staffing system, teachers from some classes felt that they would need to remain in the classrooms alongside TAs in order to ensure that behavioural expectations were upheld. This had not been an issue presented in previous literature - perhaps because pupils in mainstream schools would generally not require this level of behavioural support. At first, I reflected upon whether this desire to stay was actually associated with possible anxieties around what might be discussed in their absence (Hamill &

Boyd, 2002; Fletcher, 2005). However, having observed the deterioration in behaviour in one classroom when the teacher left the room briefly, I had fewer concerns about possible ulterior motives. Despite pupils sharing with me that they felt they could be honest with their responses, it would have been unwise to have ruled out any impact of staff member presence on pupil responses. In order to reduce any influence of this on the findings, teachers were asked to sit at the back of the classroom or in a corner out of eye line of those participating in the focus group. Future research should further consider how any bias could be minimised further.

Disruption within the school

The facilitation of the feedback interviews was a challenge due to changes within the school which were not anticipated whilst I was planning the project. During the time between the feedback stage and the follow-up interviews, it had been recommended to the Head teacher (by Ofsted) that the 'calming down' rooms should no longer be used and instead, staff were required to use physical restraint for pupils who were at risk of harming themselves, others or property. This had had an instant and profound impact on the atmosphere within the school and the behaviour of many pupils had deteriorated. Whilst undertaking the interviews there were many distractions (including pupils shouting and activating the fire alarms). The mood of the three Student Researchers was subdued during the feedback interviews and pupils were resistant in sharing with me why this was the case. Pupils approached the interviews with far less enthusiasm than in their previous evaluation interviews. It was difficult to ascertain what had specifically contributed to this but I considered possible factors such as the fact that class groupings had been changed due to unsettled behaviour, or indeed that this was the final meeting.

Attendance

Attendance rates at St. Martin's were generally rather variable and this had an impact on the delivery of the STARs intervention. On occasions, members of the Student Research Team were off school or on an 'in-school exclusion' and therefore missed a training session. Due to unforeseen circumstances two of the Student Researchers did not attend school during the week allocated to the feedback interviews. I approached the project with as great a degree of flexibility as possible and I considered altering my timeline to reschedule these interviews. However, due to issues described above, I felt it would be inappropriate to attempt to organise further meetings when the behaviour in the school was so unsettled.

This decision was also fuelled by the fact that I had become the link educational psychologist at the school since the project had begun. I therefore felt that I was in an uncomfortable position with a potential conflict of interests. I reflected upon how staff would perceive me visiting the school for my own research purposes when they would rather this time was used to support them with the severe behavioural challenges they were facing. I felt the need to be extremely sensitive to their needs at a difficult time in order to maintain a positive working relationship with the school which was important for my professional educational psychology practice.

7.4 Methodological Strengths and Limitations of the research

Overall, I considered my study to have achieved its initial aims, and provided answers to my two research questions. I was able to provide an insight into whether and how a STARs project could be implemented in a specialist setting for pupils with SEBD. As the project was multi-layered I was also able to provide an in-depth account of the experiences of those involved in the project and the issues participants believed to be

pertinent. Through the high level of planning and careful consideration of methodological issues, I was able to ensure that the intervention had the best possible chance of success and the needs of the pupils within the setting had been well considered. With regards to Hart's ladder, as described in section 2.3, this piece of research fits within the higher rungs of the ladder. Specifically, it is viewed to be *adult-initiated* but *child-directed*. As researcher, I introduced the STARs model to the pupils at St. Martin's school, but they were given the key role of designing, shaping and leading the entire project. Towards the end of the project, pupils fed their work back to the adults, and left them with the task of actioning pupil recommendations.

Robson (2002) defined a practitioner-researcher as an individual who worked in a particular field and at the same time carried out research relevant to that job. Robson argued that a limitation of this set-up was that the research was partly determined by the agenda of the professional setting. However, for this piece of work, I was given the freedom by my Local Authority to select a research topic which coincided with my own professional interests and in an area about which I felt strongly – I therefore hope that this passion is evident.

What constitutes "success"?

In this chapter I have described how my observations of pupils' motivation and willingness to engage in this project led me to argue its successful implementation. This was triangulated with data from interviews with pupils and staff members, highlighting their positive experiences of being involved in the project. It was not within the scope of this study to identify the outcomes of the pupils' input in terms of changes within the school. Issues discussed in the practicalities section above at the time of data collection, acted as a barrier to including such outcomes, as did time constraints. Further work in this area could therefore be expanded to include evaluation

of changes within the school at different levels following the completion of the intervention. Rather than solely focusing on pupils' experiences of participating in the project, the scope of future research could be extended by exploring (a) individual pupil's perceptions of subsequent changes within the school since the STARs project had been completed and (b) an assessment of the impact of the project on school ethos and attitudes at a classroom and organization level. Future researchers might wish to consult the School Head to determine, from her perspective, what aspects of the research had been "successful", and what evidence she had observed of this. Had the project inspired change in the long term and would this continue once the research had been completed? With the addition of this "outcomes phase", the six-step approach would become a seven-step approach.

Although, from my perspective, I believe the project was evidently successful, I would suggest that future work should seek to clarify with pupils, during *Step 1* of the research, their aims and goals using solution-focused questioning (Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995). This would fit with the child-led nature of the project and allow the researcher to ascertain pupil expectations at the pre-intervention phase. For example, the researcher could enquire what pupils consider success by asking "If we met again in six months when the project is finished, and you felt that it had been successful and worthwhile, what would this look like? What would be different? How would you know the project had been successful?" These questions could be repeated with adults in the school and answers could be then be reflected upon at the post-intervention stage. It is recommended that further work should therefore add this to Step 1

7.4.2 Characteristics of trustworthy qualitative research

Many critics of qualitative research struggle to accept its trustworthiness and therefore various frameworks have been developed over the years to ensure rigour (Shenton, 2004). In evaluating the present study, I have made judgements about it based on the work of Guba and Lincoln (1994), whose propositions have long been recognised to be fundamental in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. This section will be structured with the authors' four constructs in mind. These constructs have been highlighted more recently in Shenton's (2004) work entitled "*Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects*": creditability, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

7.4.2.1 Creditability

Creditability is believed to be one of the most important factors in ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. Shenton (2004) suggested that the following provisions should be made to promote confidence that phenomena have been recorded accurately. The author firstly highlighted the need for the researcher to be familiar with the culture and context of the research from an early stage. As discussed in my methodology chapter, I organised preliminary sessions which served to gain adequate understanding of the setting and those within it. I was careful to reflect upon not only how my own personal and cultural beliefs might have impacted on how I approached the work, but also how my previous experiences of working within other SEBD provisions might have affected this. Whilst immersing myself in the environment during the weeks prior to data collection, I was able to learn more about the socioeconomic and cultural issues within the setting, and the unique needs of the pupils attending. As Shenton (2004) warned, I struck a careful balance to ensure that staff did not feel that too many demands were being made during the early stages of my work.

As a social constructivist researcher, I was aware of how my background, personality and physical characteristics might have had an impact upon how I was perceived by those participating in my research and therefore upon the data I collected. It would have been unwise to have overlooked any impact that I, as facilitator undertaking the evaluation interviews might have had on interviewee responses. Demand characteristics, such as a desire to please me as facilitator, might have led to participants being potentially less inclined to speak negatively about the project and therefore this might have biased the data collected. As it would have been difficult to give this role to a neutral adult, it might have been helpful to provide questionnaires in which respondents could share their views anonymously. I would argue, however, that my observations and experiences, as reported in my journal, served to triangulate this data and provided additional evidence as to how those participating in the project viewed it.

Another strategy I followed to ensure creditability, as suggested by Shenton (2004) was the need for random sampling of participants in order to negate charges of researcher bias in the selection of participants. The potential for bias amongst my pupil sample was, I believe, limited due to my choice of sampling procedure. By using a random sampling method for my pupil interviews, I was able to ensure that any unknown influences were distributed evenly within the sample and that the sample was representative of the larger group. By randomly selecting pupils for the evaluation interviews and by using strict inclusion criteria for the Student Researchers, I sought to ensure that the sample was less at risk of potential bias from what Fielding and Bragg (2003, p40) called 'performing poodle syndrome' – i.e. schools favouring safe students in order to impress as a showpiece.

7.4.2.2 Transferability

As Shenton (2004) suggested, as the findings from a qualitative research project are specific to a small setting or small number of individuals, it is impossible to demonstrate that the findings are applicable to the wider population. Shenton (2004) argued that it was the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the setting was provided in order to enable the reader to make such a transfer – something which I believe was a strength of the present study.

In adopting a qualitative approach, I feel that my data may be viewed as more limited and explorative due to my small sample size within just one school. Therefore, the validity of any generalisations drawn from this study is clearly limited by this. However, I feel that by designing my project in this way I have been able to collect pupils' unique experiences and attributes in detail – something for which a larger sample size would not have allowed.

7.4.2.3 Dependability and Confirmability

In order to ensure dependability, I followed Shenton's (2004) recommendations and have ensured that all processes within the present study were reported in detail. In order to allow readers to develop a thorough understanding of the methods and their effectiveness, I have, as Shenton (2004) suggested:

- described in detail what was planned and executed on a strategic level;
- reported the operational detail of gathering data, and
- included a reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken

Shenton (2004) reported that the concept of confirmability was the qualitative researcher's comparable concern to objectivity. Therefore, steps should be taken in order to ensure, as far as possible, that the findings reported are the result of experiences and perceptions of the participants, rather than the preferences of the researcher. Throughout the report, I endeavoured to provide an 'audit trail' (Shenton, 2004, p72) so that decisions for favouring one approach and challenges of methods of data collection were all transparent.

7.5 Implications

7.5.1 Future directions

I feel that there are a number of valuable research topics which could follow on from the findings of the present study.

Firstly, I believe that it would be useful to replicate and expand upon this piece of research within different contexts. These contexts could differ in terms of *pupil age* - including alternative specialist settings such as secondary SEBD provisions – and in terms of *type of need* - e.g. schools for pupils with learning difficulties, or specialist bases attached to mainstream settings. As the SEBD population is not a homogeneous group, different challenges would undoubtedly exist in different settings. Therefore, further work is required to consider how this project could be developed in other settings for pupils identified as having SEBD. During a county-wide SEBD conference in October 2011, I was able to share the aims, rationale and methodology for the present study with members of staff from all SEBD provisions within the county. The project was received with enthusiasm and many members of staff were keen for this

study to be replicated in their schools. This project offered guidance for researchers and school staff planning to implement this type of intervention and this could be used as a framework for further studies.

In addition to this, it could be useful for future researchers to adopt more of a longitudinal approach when designing their research, by adding a follow-up element, to explore the sustainability of the project within the school, to examine how pupils could be supported in training up their peers to participate, and indeed to reflect on any possible changes in school ethos over time.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, future projects should consider ways in which pupil feedback can best be presented to staff in order to promote change and emphasise the importance of acting on pupils' recommendations, when appropriate – something which I believe limited the impact of the current study. I would therefore recommend that future work should explore and develop frameworks and mechanisms to support this.

Further research should explore some of the themes arising from the findings from the present study. These could include:

- Pupils' sense of themselves in relation to their mainstream counterparts and how this might differ between provisions and length of time out of mainstream education. The level of contact with and the impact of contact with pupils attending mainstream schooling within the community could be explored.
- The understanding of pupils with SEBD of their own academic, social and emotional needs and those of others in their provision.
- The nature of teacher-pupil relationships in SEBD settings, from the perspectives of pupils, staff members and parents.

- Meta-learning in SEBD settings – supporting pupils in learning how they learn best – what helps and hinders them.

7.5.2 Implications for the practice of educational psychologists

The current study aimed to highlight the importance of seeking, listening to and acting on the views of SEBD pupils. The project has considered ways in which professionals can access the views of the SEBD population, which I feel can in turn inform the practice of educational psychologists and other professionals.

In this section, I have provided my view as a practitioner, regarding how my colleagues in the field of educational psychology might utilise the findings from this research study to inform their practice. Educational psychologists are well placed to work at different levels (individual, systemic and organisational) within school settings. From an interactionist perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), I believe it is therefore clear that the findings of the present study could have various key implications for their practice.

7.5.2.1 Individual work

The present study has provided information about the way in which outside professionals can work successfully with this pupil population, as unfamiliar adults in their lives, and engage them during 1:1 and group meetings. It is easy to overlook the impact that frequent visits and assessments from various professionals can have on children's perception of themselves as different and this project raises implications for what professionals should consider prior to, during and after working with pupils.

The findings from this study support the view that pupils identified as having SEBD, have the competence to and are motivated to share their voice when adults are sensitive to how best to provide them with a medium to do so. It raises the need for educational psychologists, in their case work, to continue to understand how pupils with SEBD construe their world through the use of Personal Construct Psychology-focused activities. Although educational psychology training courses now prioritise and place value on the need to allow trainees to develop skills in accessing children's views of their world, from my own experiences of working with others in different educational psychology services, it has become apparent that these techniques are sometimes overlooked (and are replaced with more traditional methods of working with pupils such as through standardised assessment).

Pupils' perceptions of why they attend the SEBD setting may lead us to consider how best to speak about transfer to specialist settings, in order to address pupils' view of themselves as different from '*normal*' mainstream children.

7.5.2.2 Systemic work and Organisational Change

The issues raised by pupils and staff members in the present study can inform the practice of adults working with this pupil population. I believe that the themes explored in this piece of work are pertinent to the work of educational psychologists and can inform their own practice and that of the many other professionals who work within SEBD settings. Having worked in various specialist settings, I have been able to observe how these settings have utilised their educational psychology time – the majority of which is generally reserved for individual case work. As educational psychologists, we are in a prime position to work more systemically with adults in school settings to consider the way in which school ethos and adult behaviour and

language can have an impact on, amongst other things, pupil motivation, behaviour and their sense of self. We can work with schools to identify issues and engage in work with groups of teachers, for example, through INSET training sessions, to discuss these issues.

Educational psychologists are in a position to use their knowledge of interactionist psychology to support staff in reflecting upon how their own behaviour and school systems can (either explicitly or more implicitly) have an impact on pupils' negative self-talk and their sense of feeling underestimated. By raising this as an issue, educational psychologists can empower school staff to help shift pupil perceptions.

Some school staff might benefit from expanding their knowledge of psychological theories (such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) and Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic perspective (1979)) in order to enable them to reflect on possible functions of behaviour and the role of others within the child's system in providing appropriate support.

Due to the changing nature of service delivery within Local Authorities in the current climate, where many services are becoming traded and school settings have increased choice over how they spend their budgets, Educational Psychology Services are needing to reflect upon the wide range of services they can offer schools. The value of pupil voice projects should not be overlooked. This research project has provided practitioners with a detailed model of how a STARs project can be successfully implemented in a primary SEBD setting and this can therefore serve as a resource for further work. Comments made by members of staff during the evaluation interviews and when the project was presented at the county conference, suggest that they would

benefit from an external professional acting as a facilitator for the project in the way that I did in the present study.

CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As discussed throughout this study, the rationale for undertaking this project was clear considering (a) the complex needs of the marginalised population of individuals I targeted and (b) the lack of relevant published research. The study has contributed to academic literature by providing an insight firstly as to how a whole-school STARs project could be implemented in a setting for primary-aged pupils with SEBD, and secondly, how those within this setting perceived the project.

The study was believed to be the first piece of work to recognise the real potential for STARs interventions to be implemented successfully in specialist SEBD settings and has provided a detailed account of how this could be achieved. The study challenged previous beliefs in published literature, albeit often implicit views, that this is something which is best reserved for mainstream pupils. The findings from the project have provided valuable evidence that one should not underestimate the abilities and motivation of pupils outside of mainstream settings to share their views and participate with success in a STARs intervention. The study has provided implications for the practice of those working with pupils with SEBD and has proposed ways in which this could be developed.

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APPENDIX 1

Parent Consent forms

Parent Consent Form

Students as Researchers Project at [REDACTED] School

Consent Form for Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Anna Silverman and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working for Local Authority X Multi-Agency and Psychology Service. As part of my doctoral studies I am working with [REDACTED] School to implement a 'Students as Researchers' (STARS) pupil voice project at the school during the summer term.

The STARS project is a whole-school project which enables a team of pupils from [REDACTED] to identify aspects of their experience of being at school which they think are important and enables pupils to find out more about these issues by researching them. The student research team will conduct research in classrooms to elicit the views of all pupils in the school. Students are given a significant voice and are able to take a lead role in shaping and designing the research.

What Your Child Will Be Asked to Do

Your child will be given the opportunity to share any thoughts they have about their school during classroom discussions/activities. Pupil discussions will be voice recorded for analysis. Your child will also be asked to use an interactive computer-based questionnaire. This questionnaire is aimed at eliciting their views of their school. This should take no more than 10 minutes and your child can have a teaching assistant present when completing the questionnaire if they wish.

Confidentiality

There are no risks expected for students participating in this research project.

Any information collected will be kept strictly confidential. All information will be kept in locked files. I will remove all names from all the information we get (except this consent form). An ID number will be assigned to your child. Your child's name will never be mentioned in any publications resulting from this study.

Your Child's Right to Withdraw from the Project

Your child's participation is entirely voluntary and s/he can decide to stop participating at any time during the project. S/he will be told that if s/he wants to stop participating, s/he should tell a parent, member of staff or myself

Questions

If you have questions about the research at any time, please email asilverman@ioe.ac.uk.

This is an opt-out consent form therefore if you do NOT want your child to participate in this project please sign below and return this form to the School Office by 23rd May.

I do NOT want my child to participate in the STARS project described above.

Name of Child

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian Date

Parent Consent Form

Students as Researchers Project at [redacted] School

Consent Form for Parents of Student Researchers

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Anna Silverman and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist working for Local Authority X Multi-Agency and Psychology Service. As part of my doctoral studies I am working with [redacted] School to implement a ‘Students as Researchers’ (STARS) pupil voice project at the school during the summer term.

The STARS project is a whole-school project which enables a team of pupils from [redacted] to identify aspects of their experience of being at school which they think are important and enables pupils to find out more about these issues by researching them. The student research team will conduct research in classrooms to elicit the views of all pupils in the school. Students are given a significant voice and are able to take a lead role in shaping and designing the research.

Your child has been selected by staff at St. Martin’s School to form part of the Student Research Team along with five other pupils in their year group.

What Your Child Will Be Asked to Do

You child will be asked to attend 4 training sessions (each lasting 30-45 minutes) during the school day where I will train them in basic research methods e.g. designing questionnaires, running interviews etc. Your child will also be asked to pilot my computer-based questionnaire which is aimed at eliciting their views of their school. Finally your child will enter the classrooms in pairs to discuss chosen topics and conduct research with their peers. Pupil discussions will be voice recorded for analysis.

Confidentiality

There are no risks expected for students participating in this research project

Any information collected will be kept strictly confidential. All information will be kept in locked files. I will remove all names from all the information we get (except this consent form). An ID number will be assigned to your child. Your child’s name will never be mentioned in any publications resulting from this study.

Your Child’s Right to Withdraw from the Project

Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary and s/he can decide to stop participating at any time during the project. S/he will be told that if s/he wants to stop participating, s/he should tell a parent, member of staff or myself

Questions

If you have questions about the research at any time, please email asilverman@ioe.ac.uk.

This is an opt-out consent form therefore if you do NOT want your child to participate in this project please sign below and return this form to the School Office by 23rd May.

I do NOT want my child to participate in the STARS project described above.

Name of Child

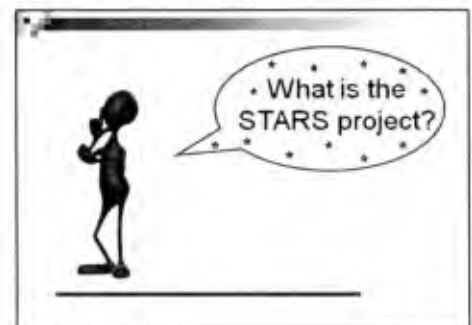
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

APPENDIX 2

Introducing the Project to pupils and staff

A selection of screenshots from PowerPoint presentations for school assembly



A selection of screenshots from PowerPoint presentations for staff meeting

A PowerPoint slide with a dark background and white text. The title 'Who I am?' is at the top left. Below it is a list of bullet points, each preceded by a white star. The list includes: 'Trainee Educational Psychologist', 'County Council based in Apsley', 'Studying for a Doctorate in Child, Adolescent and Educational Psychology at Institute of Education, University of London', 'Doctoral Thesis', and 'Variety of previous experience in schools'. There is a small logo in the top right corner.

- ★ Trainee Educational Psychologist
- ★ County Council based in Apsley
- ★ Studying for a Doctorate in Child, Adolescent and Educational Psychology at Institute of Education, University of London
- ★ Doctoral Thesis
- ★ Variety of previous experience in schools

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the Student Researchers choose to explore?

Will this disrupt our lessons?

What will I as a teacher need to do?

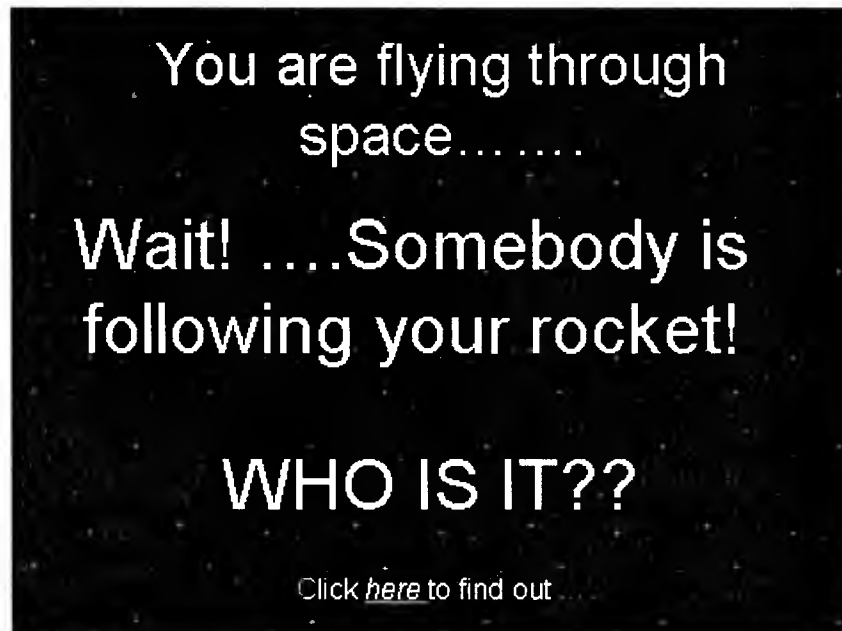
APPENDIX 3

Scripts for introducing the project and computer programme in individual sessions

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Individual sessions with all pupils</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introductions - Remind pupil of aims of project - Describe reason for inviting pupil to session - Introduce the voice recorder and confidentiality - Withdrawal information - Any questions? - Pupil assent - Begin the computer programme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>“My name is Anna and I work with lots of schools in X”.</i> - <i>“Have you seen me at your school before?”</i> - <i>“Were you in the assembly?”</i> - <i>“Can you remember what I talked about in the assembly? What did I talk about?”</i> <i>“Can you now tell me what you think the project is about?”</i> <i>“Today, I wanted to find out from you if you want to be part of this project. It is your choice. I’m going to give you a bit more information first before you make your decision. OK?”</i> <i>“If you want to do the computer programme and work with the student researchers we are asking that you are recording using this voice recorder – have you seen one of these before? Take a look at it. It is so that I can remember what you have said and can write about it to tell other people about the STARS project at St. Martins. I won’t write down your name so no-one will know who says what.”</i> <i>“If you do say you want to do this computer programme and be part of the project, you can change your mind <u>at any point</u> by telling your parent, a teacher or me, and you don’t have to do it anymore – this is fine.”</i> <i>“Now that you’ve heard about the project – what do you think about being part of it?”</i> |
|---|---|---|

APPENDIX 4

Interactive Computer Programme Screen Shots



APPENDIX 5 –

Training session plans 2-4

| <u>Session 2</u> | | |
|---|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| Task | Duration | Materials |
| <i>Welcome back, reflections</i> on last session | 5 minutes | n/a |
| <i>Reminder of Group Rules</i> <i>Pupils asked to recall a rule each</i> | 5 mins | Printed Template |
| <i>What skills do I need to make a good Classroom Detective?</i> | 15 mins | Resource A Pens |
| <i>Discussing topics</i> – What is important to us at St. Martins? | 15 minutes | Post it notes Pens |
| Research methods discussion Introduce three different methods | 20 minutes | Resource B |
| <i>Drawing – Finishing off last week's posters</i> | 10 minutes | Posters, <i>Art materials</i> |

Session 3

| Task | Duration | Materials |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Welcome back, reflections</i> | 10 mins | N/A |
| <i>Reminder of Group Rules</i> <i>pupils asked to recall</i> <i>a rule each</i> | 5 mins | Printed template |
| <i>Topic vote</i> – Pupils vote for the four most important topics which they would like to take to the classrooms | 20 minutes | Whiteboard Pens |
| <i>Developing questions</i> – How do we create questions? Pupils offer ways in which one could start a question. These words are written on large piece of paper in the centre of the table. | 15 minutes | Flipchart paper, pens |
| <i>Making posters</i> Pupils create posters on each of the four topics to take to the classrooms | 15 minutes | A4 paper Art materials |

Session 4

| Task | Duration | Materials |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Welcome back, reflections</i> | 10 mins | n/a |
| <i>Reminder of Group Rules</i> <i>Pupils asked to recall a rule each</i> | 5 mins | Printed Template |
| <i>Generating Question Game</i> Write pupils' names on board. Go through each of the four topics – one at a time. Have the question starters from Session 3 on the table in front of pupils to help scaffold. Each time a pupil comes up with a question, write it on a post-it note for all to see, and stick it on the board next to the child's name. | 30 minutes | Post-it notes Board Pens Pens |

Role Plays

Prior to each classroom session, use role-plays to help pupils rehearse and practice skills. Help them develop skills in asking their audience to elaborate on their answers.

Introduce some speaking and listening games – e.g. one pupil stands up and tells the audience about their weekend – the other pupils all wait with their hands raised and ask questions – including asking the presenter to elaborate

APPENDIX 6

Ten skills developed by pupils in Training Session 2

We decided on the TOP TEN SKILLS we would need to be a member of the Secret Six:

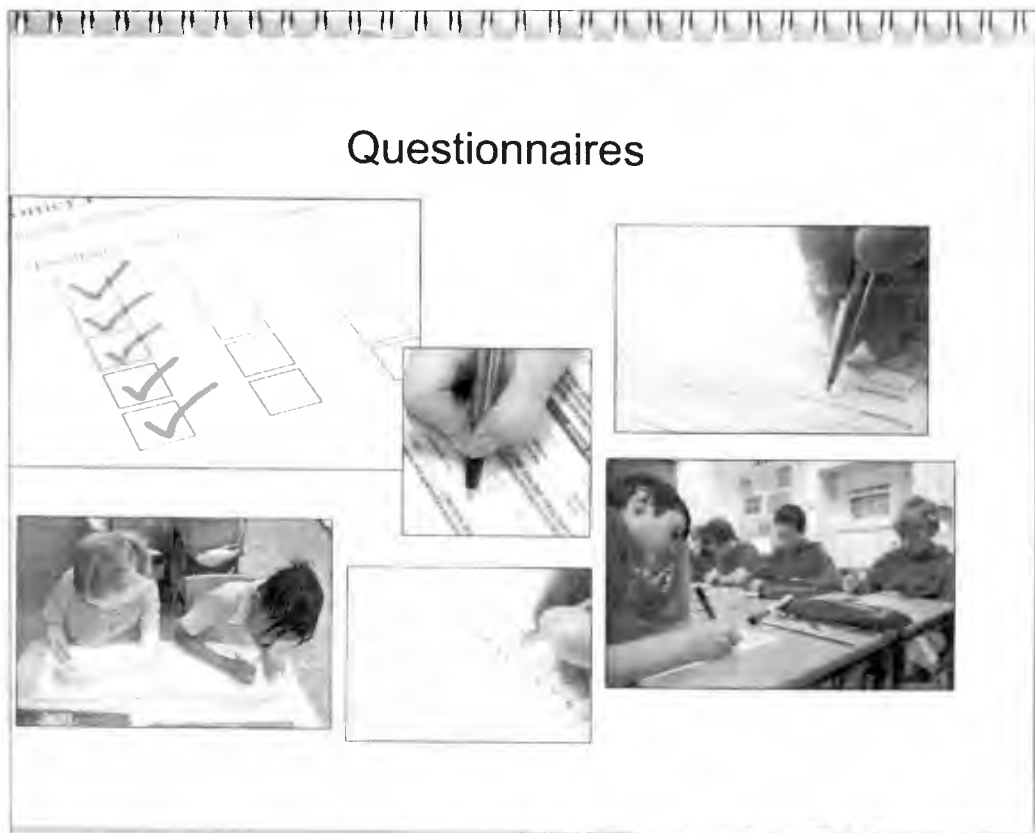
1. To be brave – standing up in front of a class.
2. Respectful - listen to everyone's views and don't laugh at people.
3. Listening skills to listen to what the children say (we can bring voice recorders).
4. Confidential – don't go and tell everyone something that a child has said.
5. Don't tell the children everything – listen to what THEY have to say.
6. We need to show good behaviour – be sensible
7. Good memory - Remember to bring our equipment – note pad and voice recorders.
8. Be able to make notes.
9. Explore the entire place – make sure EVERYONE gets to say something.
10. Don't talk over people.

APPENDIX 7

Example of Resources of Training Session 2

**Should the Secret 6 use
Questionnaires?**

Yes because No because



APPENDIX 8

Focus Group schedules – developed by Secret 6

Hi everybody. My name is X, this is X and this is X.

We called ourselves the 'SECRET 6'.

We are 6 classroom detectives.

Here are some posters that we have made.

We want to find out what children think about X School so we have made up lots of questions for you.

We have made up some rules. The rules are:

1. Please focus on what we are saying
2. Please take turns to talk
3. Please put your hand up if you want to speak
4. Please be kind and respect people's answers
5. Please listen carefully to our questions

We have a Secret 6 voice recorder to record what you say so please speak loudly

We will go through the questions SLOWLY to make sure all of you have a chance to answer

Before we start, does any one have any questions?

Buddy Time Questions

- Why do you think we have buddy time here at St. Martin's?
- Do you have buddy time on your own or with another child? Which do you prefer?
- What do you like to play with at buddy time?
- When is your buddy time? Do you like having it at this time?
- How important is buddy time to you?
- Is buddy time helpful to you?
- Would you change anything about buddy time?
- Do you use buddy time to talk about your worries? Does this help?

Lessons and Learning Questions

- Do you like learning at St. Martin's? Why or why not?
- What is your favourite lesson at St. Martin's and why?
- Do you use your learning passport and do you know what your targets are?
- What job do you want to have when you are older and which lessons at St. Martin's help you with this?
- What things do the teachers do at St. Martin's to help you with your learning?
- Are there any things that teachers DON'T do but you would like them to do, to help you with your learning?
- What would you like to change about your lessons at St. Martin's?
- What equipment in your classrooms (pencils, paper, smart board) in your classes help you the most with your learning?

Sports and Exercise Questions

- How do you feel about the sports we do at St. Martin's?
- What sports do you like doing the most?
- Do you know what the sports council is?
- Would you like to see more sports equipment at St. Martin's? What would you want?
- Where do you go if you want to exercise?
- Do you prefer team sports or sports where you play on your own?
- Do you enjoy Rounder's? Why? Why not?
- Do you do any sports OUTSIDE of school which you don't do here?
- Would you like to change

Reward Time Questions

- How do you feel about golden time at St. Martin's?
- Why do you think we have Golden time at St. Martin's?
- How do you feel if you do not get Golden Time?
- What is your favourite thing to do during Golden Time
- What is your favourite thing to do during Choosing Time?
- Do you enjoy choosing time?
- What do you think about the choice of activities we have for golden time?
- Would you change anything about choosing time?
- Would you change anything about golden time? Do you think this could happen?
- Do you prefer to play by yourself during choosing time or with someone else?
- Some children like playing board games for choosing time. What do you think about the board games at St. Martin's?

APPENDIX 9

Interview schedule for Evaluation interviews with members of Secret 6

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script – see column to right - Reason for meeting - Length of time of interview - Introduction to Voice recorder - Withdrawal information - Confidentiality information - Any questions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>So, as you know I am Anna and I work with lots of schools in X.</i> - <i>Can you remember why I said I wanted to see you today?</i> - <i>Yes, I want to find out from you a little bit about what you thought about the Secret 6 project and what it has been like to be in the Secret 6.</i> - <i>So first I want to tell you a little bit about this interview</i> |
| Questions | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If there was a boy sitting in this seat here who didn't know anything about the Secret 6 project what would you tell him? ➤ How did it make you feel being in the Secret 6? ➤ Could you tell the boy about the whole process, the whole job – what do you do? ➤ What would you say to a Head teacher who was thinking of doing this project in his/her school? ➤ What has been the best thing about being in the Secret 6? ➤ What has been the hardest thing about being in the Secret 6? ➤ What have you learnt from being in the Secret 6? ➤ If you could do the project again, what would you change? ➤ Why do you think this project hasn't been done before at 'St. Martins' school? ➤ Do you think it would matter if your Head teacher said "actually no, we're not gonna do this project again in the school next year, there's gonna be no more Secret Six". Do you think that would matter? Do you think it would make any difference? | | |
| Thank you and Endings Provide information about the feedback stage | | |

Interview schedule for Evaluation interviews with pupils attending the classroom focus groups

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script – see column to right - Reason for meeting - Length of time of interview - Introduction to Voice recorder - Withdrawal information - Confidentiality information - Any questions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>So, as you know I am Anna and I work with lots of schools in X.</i> - <i>Did anyone tell you why you were coming to see me today?</i> - <i>Yes, I want to find out from you a little bit about what you thought about the Secret 6 project and what it has been like to work with the Secret 6.</i> - <i>So first I want to tell you a little bit about this interview</i> |
| Questions | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Can you remind me which members of the Secret 6 came into your class each week? ➤ Why did they come into your class do you think? ➤ So when they came into your class to ask you questions about what you thought about your school - how did that make you feel? ➤ When the boys were asking you asking you questions, what did you think about that? How did you find that experience? ➤ Why do you think they did that? Is this important or not? ➤ How did it make you feel? ➤ What do you think about the topics that the boys chose? ➤ If the Head was deciding whether to do this again next year, this project again, what would you say to her? Why? ➤ Why do you think this project hasn't been done before in this school? ➤ Tell me what you think about a feedback meeting where the Secret 6 share what the children have said in the classroom sessions? Do you think we need this or not? Why, why not? | |
| <p>Thank you and Endings Provide information about the feedback stage</p> | |

Interview schedules for Evaluation interviews with members of staff

| | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Script – see column to right - Reason for meeting - Length of time of interview - Introduction to Voice recorder - Withdrawal information - Confidentiality information - Any questions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>So, as you know I am Anna and I work with lots of schools in X.</i> - <i>Do you have an idea of what this interview is about?</i> - <i>Yes, it's to get a sense of what you thought about the STARs project.</i> - <i>First I want to tell you a little bit about this interview</i> |
| <p>Questions</p> | |
| <p>Could you tell me about the pupil voice work which was already at the school before the STARs project?</p> <p>When I came into your classroom for the first time, how prepared did you feel for the project? How confident were you that you knew what was going on?</p> <p>What did you think about the information given to you beforehand?</p> <p>Did you know what the project was about?</p> <p>What were your impressions of how the Secret 6 managed the role?</p> <p>Did you notice any changes as the process went on?</p> <p>What were your thoughts about how the pupils in the classroom received the focus groups?</p> <p>What did you think about the number of focus groups?</p> <p>What are your thoughts on the topics that the boys chose?</p> <p>What do you believe are, if any, the strengths of such an intervention?</p> <p>What do you believe are, if any, the challenges of such an intervention?</p> <p>How do you think the pupils could best feed back their findings?</p> <p>What are your thoughts about the possible future of STARs projects at St. Martins?</p> <p>Why do you think the project has not been done at St. Martin's before?</p> <p>What would you say to a Head teacher of a similar provision when speaking about STARs projects?</p> | |
| <p>Thank you and Endings Provide information about the feedback stage</p> | |

Interview schedules for Follow-up interviews with member of Secret 6

| | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Script – see column to right- Reason for meeting- Length of time of interview- Re-introduction to Voice recorder- Withdrawal information- Confidentiality information- Any questions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>So, as you know I am Anna and I work with lots of schools in X.</i>- <i>Do you have an idea of what this interview is about?</i>- <i>Yes, it's find out whether anything has changes since we finished the Secret 6 project.</i>- <i>First I want to tell you a little bit about this interview</i> |
| Questions | |
| <p>Can you tell me about the assembly at the beginning of the year where you sat at the front with Ms X?</p> <p>Tell me what you thought about that assembly. Was it a good idea? A bad idea? Why?</p> <p>Can you remember some of the things the children suggested during the classroom settings? What were they?</p> <p>So, since I last saw you, what do you think has changed at St. Martin's?</p> <p>Do you think the adults have listened to what the children said or not?</p> | |
| <p>Thank you and Endings Remind pupils that they may see me in the school working with other pupils but not on a STARs project</p> | |

APPENDIX 10-

1 Transcript of Evaluation Interview with Rich

2
3 A - Introductions and ethics (as per script)

4
5 A - So, this is an interview with Rich, who is a member of the Secret Six. I want to
6 find out a little bit about what he's thought, about being a member of the Secret Six,
7 and this whole project. What he thinks about having the Secret Six project in a school.
8 Okay, so first of all Rich, pretend somebody from a different school is sitting here. If
9 you were telling that person, about what it's like to be a member of the Secret Six,
10 what would you say? Can you describe the whole process to him?

11
12 R - Well, I think, that it's not what - it's what you think it is. It's only the taking part
13 that always counts.

14
15 A - Okay, and have you enjoyed taking part in it?

16
17 R - Yes, and this is a very good enjoyment for me. *enjoyable project*

18
19 A - Has it? The Secret Six has been a good enjoyment for you? Why's that?

20
21 R - Because I never get picked for anything. *responsibility & trust.*
22 *roles within school*

23 A - Oh, so this has been good that you've been picked for it? How did it make you
24 feel when you were picked?

25
26 R - When I got heard that I was picked, it was a complete shock. *responsibility + trust.*

27 A - It was a shock? Okay, and how did it make you feel, inside?

28 R - Shocked as well.

29 A - Shocked? Was it a good shock or a bad shock?

30 R - Good *viewed responsibility positively*

35

36 A – It was a good shock?

37

38 R – I never get picked for anything, as I've already said.

39

given responsibility

40 A – Okay, what's been the best thing about being a member of the Secret Six?

41

42 R – Well, the best thing, well, I'm not quite sure.

43

44 A – Have a little think back, to all the sessions we've had, in the classrooms, in the
45 meeting rooms. What's been really good?

46

47 R – Getting away from assembly

48

alternative to lessons

49 A – Ah, missing assembly? Okay, so you've had a special time in the meeting room?

50

51 R – Yeah

52

53 A – Okay, what's the hardest thing been?

54

55 R – The hardest...

56

57 A – Yeah, what's the hardest thing? Have a think and then I'll ask you. Okay what's
58 the hardest thing been?

59

60 R – Huh?

61

62 A – What's the hardest thing been?

63

64 R – The hardest thing.... Is.....

65

66 A – The most difficult thing, about being in the Secret Six?

67

68 R – Well, the most difficult thing sometimes is just staying awake...

*engagement
hardness?
motivation.*

69

70 A - Staying awake? Have you been a bit tired sometime s?

71

72 R - Oh yes, most of the time motivation + engagement

73

74 A - Okay, well some of the sessions are quite long aren't they, in the classrooms?

75

76 R - Yeah, and there's some classrooms who have not got a clue what we're talking
77 about.

78

79 A - Really? Why do you say that?

80

81 R - Take my class for instance. Well, last time, they didn't have a clue.

82

83 A - Do you think they didn't have a clue? Or do you think their behaviour just wasn't
84 good enough?

85

86 R - Both... On the second time, everyone was swearing a part from me.

87

88 A - I don't think they were swearing, but they were being silly weren't they?

89

90 R - They were, swearing... behaviour issues

91

92 A - Were they? Okay...

93

94 R - When Judith just leaves the room, they just start swearing...

95

96 A - Yeah, so it was harder when the teacher wasn't in there?

97

98 R - Yeah - challenges

99

100 A - Okay, next question for you, have a little think, how did it make you feel as a
101 person, being in the Secret Six?

102

103 R – Excited

104

105 A – Ah, why do you say excited?

106

107 R – Because, I can just stop what I'm doing and go on to do something that's more
108 better.

*enjoyable
role / project*

109

110 A – More better? Okay, and why is it more better than what you're doing?

111

112 R – Well, what I was doing sometimes puzzling, and sometimes there's an electric
113 shock in my mind.

difficulties in lessons?

114

115 A – Oh, thank you for describing that to me. But you don't get that during Secret Six
116 time?

117

118 R – No

119

120 A – Why do you think it's not puzzling to you, being in the Secret Six?

121

122 R – Puzzling?

123

124 A – Yeah, why do you think it's not puzzling?

125

126 R – All that you have to do is read out questions...

*communication
roles + responsibilities
skills required*

127

128 A – Is that all you have to do?

29

30 R – Well, you also have to listen and look at them...

*roles + responsibilities
skills required*

31

32 A – Yeah, that's important.

33

34 R – Yeah, because if you don't look at them then you're not paying attention

35

136 A - Yeah, and how would the children feel if you're not looking at them, when you're
137 answering the questions?

138
139 R - They'd feel upset

*empathy
skills required*

140
141 A - Ok. When you're talking to someone, you want them to be looking at you. So
142 what new skills have you learnt Rich? What new skills have you learnt from being in
143 the Secret Six? Or what have you got better at from being in the Secret Six?

144
145 R - Well, I've been better at listening

skills developed

146
147 A - Yeah. Why do you think that?

148
149 R - I know that I'm being better at listening, because usually my listening skills are
150 just ear-blocked.

skills developed

*difficulties
in lessons*

151
152 A - Oh really, you don't listen as much usually, but you've been better? What's
153 helped you with your listening skills?

154
155 R - Well, the Secret Six, you know? The rules... I don't break any rules.

*behaviour
expectations*

156
157 A - And you came up with the rules didn't you?

158
159 R - Yeah

160
161 A - Anything else that's improved since you've been in the Secret Six, anything that
162 it's helped you with?

163
164 R - Keeping on looking, sometimes I look, when I look when I look at people, my
165 eyes just close straight away.

skills developed

communication

*difficulties in
lessons*

166
167 A - Do you think it's important to have projects like this in a school or not?

168
169 R - Well, yes I think it's very important.

*value importance of STARS.
The need for STARS*

70
71
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100

A - Why?

R - Well because, if this wasn't important, then you wouldn't even be here.

role of facilitator

A - I wouldn't be here? But what if say, Miss D said "Ooh I don't know whether to have Secret Six next year, is it useful, is it not?" What would you say to her?

R - I'd say "Miss D, but if we have a Secret Six this year then we might as well have a Secret Six or we won't know what people think about the school!"

The need for STARS

A - Is there anything else you'd say to her?

R - How would you know if somebody wanted to change anything?

pupil voice
The need for STARS
seeking pupil voice
School improvement

A - Okay, I've got two more questions - if you could do this whole project again, how would you change it? I always ask change questions, don't I? How could we make it better?

R - Well... how could we make this better. This one is hard.

A - Yeah it is a hard one isn't it? What do you think? Is there anything you'd change?

R - Is there anything that I'd change... Well, I'd change the people that are in the Secret Six.

responsibility
improving the project

A - Oh, why do you say that?

R - Because, I know people that are well behaved.

behaviour
improving the project

A - So you think it would be nice for other people to be in the Secret Six, who are showing good behaviour?

R - Yes and, I think we should have like one from each classroom.

size
improving the project

204

205 A - Oh interesting, why do you say that?

206

207 R - Because, if you don't have one from each classroom . I mean, you'd have to give
208 the little people a chance in the Secret Six and there's only five classrooms.

209 *responsibility + inst.* *size*

210 A - Yeah, so you could have one from each classroom?

211

212 R - Yes, and two from S's because she doesn't have much.

213 *improving the project*

214 A - Yeah they're only a small class in there, aren't they? And I was going to say,
215 because in lots of mainstream schools, they have projects like this, but in specialist,
216 smaller settings like this, they don't really do that. Why do you think this is?

217

218 R - Well I think they think we aren't smart enough! Well, most schools.
219 *competence* *others' perceptions of our needs*

220 A - They don't think you're smart enough, why do you think they think that?

221

222 R - Because you're only in year 1 or 2. Well, on their first lesson they learn how to
223 read.

224

225 A - Yeah, some people in this school can read, can't they? What else do they need to
226 be able to do, to be in the Secret Six?

227

228 R - Well, the little, S's people have to be brave!
229 *confidence* *skills required*

230 A - Ok, you have to be brave, that's a skill you need. What would you say to a
231 Headteacher, of a school just like this, who says "Hmm I'm not sure whether we're
232 going to have a Secret Six in our school." What would you say to them?

233 R - Well, I... I think that the Secret Six could be good. Are we talking about before I
234 even know about this?

The need for STARS

237 A – Yeah, if they’ve never had a Secret Six before... but they’re like “hmmm I don’t
238 know whether the children will be able to do it” – what would you say?

240 R – Just tell me all the information that I need, and I’ll tell you if I’m good for the job.
241 *communication* *responsibility*
Trust

242 A – Brilliant, my last questions are about working in a group, because at first, we
243 worked in a group of six, all Secret Six of us. Then we went down to five, because of
244 problems with one of the boys that we were working with, and then we’ve split, into
245 two groups, so you’ve been working in a smaller group. How’ve you found those
246 different sized groups?

248 R – Very difficult *Team work / challenges*

250 A – Ooh tell me a bit more...

252 R – It’s quite difficult sometimes...

254 A – Why?

256 R – You know when there’s people that annoy you really much, and they just never
257 leave you alone? And I think that’s why.... What was the question again?

258 *Teamwork, challenges*

259 A – What do you think about the size of the group? Did you prefer when there were
260 six people, or when you were in a smaller group of three people?

262 R – Well, I’d rather when there was three.
263 *size / teamwork*

264 A – Did you? Why do you say that?

266 R – Hold on, you said five...

268 A – Yeah five or six, because the first session we had six didn’t we? How did you
269 find...

270

271 R – And then the second session, we have five.

272

273 A – Yep.

274

275 R – Because B was off...

276

277 A – Yeah, and then recently, when you've been going in to the classrooms you've
278 been doing it in three's haven't you?

279

280 R – Can I just ask you one thing?

281

282 A – Yeah go on...

283

284 R – Has R got out of the Secret Six?

285

286 A – Yeah, he didn't make it. Do you think that was fair for us to ask him to leave or
287 not?

288

289 R – Yes

290

291 A – Why?

292

293 R- I mean, whenever Judith just leaves the room, he swears 24/7.

294

295 A – Really, okay? So you preferred it in groups of three? If someone was going to do
296 this project again, how many people do you think they should have in the Secret Six
297 to make it work really well?

298

299 R – Well, I'd also change the name

00

01 A – Yeah well imagine it wasn't called the Secret Six, it was called another name,
02 we'll make up a name. How many people do you think you should have in the team?
03 What do you think a good number would be?

04

*consequences of behavior?
group identity?*

behavior

improving the project

305 R – Well, I'd say a good number.... Ten?
306 *size*

307 A – Ten? Wow that's a big number, why do you say ten?
308

309 R – Because it's a fair...
310

311 A – It's fair? Why do you say it's fair?
312

313 R – Because there's only five classrooms, and if you have ten that you need. Then,
314 you could just have two from each classroom.

315 *developing/improving the project*

316 A – Brilliant you've done the math! Well we've just finished, is there anything else
317 you'd like to add that you haven't said yet about the Secret Six? Any final thoughts?
318

319 R – Am I allowed to hold this? [voice recorder]
320

321 A – Yep, if you're very quick. Any final thoughts about the Secret Six?
322

323 R – As I said I'd change the name all together, I'd change the name to the Secret
324 Students.

325 *improving the page of*

326 A – What a lovely way to finish.
327

328 R – I mean, we're Secret and we're just students.
329