

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO PUPILS' VIEWS ON
UNDERACHIEVEMENT AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SCHOOL
IMPROVEMENT**

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SUMMARY

This study draws together the strands of pupil voice and school improvement, with the aim of investigating some of the underlying causes of underachievement at key stage 3 from a pupil perspective. Recommendations are therefore made about raising achievement in secondary schools which are vulnerable to the failure to reach floor targets (minimum standards for A-C pass rates at GCSE).

A sample of staff views were also sought in order to consider similarities and differences in the ways that adults and pupils in the case study school accounted for underachievement and suggested solutions to overcome these barriers.

The research uses an action research and case study approach in its design, a focus group method for gathering data and finally, a grounded theory methodology for the analysis of data. It is the use of grounded theory that is central to this study as this leads to a proposed theory of underachievement.

The research questions around underachievement are answered and, in addition, a theory of underachievement is constructed from the data. The implications of this theory of underachievement, putting pupil identity and relationships at the centre, is discussed in relation to issues for the DfES, the LEA, the school and for teacher training. In addition, a cycle of underachievement is described and suggestions are made as to how this cycle might be broken.

As we move forward towards a climate where "Every Child Matters", the findings here are important in the spirit of putting the young person at the centre and creating a climate of positive outcomes, where the school is the platform on which to build enjoyment and achievement for all our young people.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

It is the responsibility of psychological services working in education to plan their service delivery in the light of the national and local context and, I would argue, to be flexible in the way that services are delivered in order to be responsive to identified need.

Over the last two to three decades the changes to the national educational context have been significant and change is still happening apace. The 1980s saw the introduction of a national curriculum and with it, in the 1990's, national testing. This led to much debate around league tables and the conflict between these and the inclusion agenda. The introduction of OFSTED and the emphasis on school improvement, bringing with it intervention in schools which were categorised as being in serious weakness and special measures, has put particular pressure upon schools to raise achievement. In this same period the government of the day has given greater emphasis to school autonomy and the "power" of the LEA has become lessened. National strategies have been introduced to help raise standards and throughout this period the debate around behaviour and how to improve it has been ongoing.

Most recently we have seen the introduction of the concept that "Every Child Matters" (ECM), (DfES, 2003) enshrined in a new Children Act (2004), the extended schools agenda to deliver on ECM and a new report from a group of practitioners (DfES, 2005a) on School Behaviour and Discipline, to name but some components of the Government's Five Year Strategy (DfES, 2004a). Finally, we have the most recent White Paper (DfES, 2005b), which was not published at the time that this research was planned or carried out but which now has implications for the findings.

Such rapid change, and the above list is not exhaustive, has put tremendous pressure on all schools, but for schools that lack the capacity for effective change and improvement, the pressures are even greater. Within this context, planning to deliver an effective and modern psychological service is also a great challenge.

Context of the research

The Leeds Psychology and Assessment Service (PAS) devotes several days each year in planning for the following year or years and at this time local and national agendas are taken into account. The Local Authority Education Development Plan (EDP), the wider City Council Plan and current DfES and other national agendas guide planning. Service delivery is arranged so that 20% of service time can be given to research and development areas which operate on a 2 year cycle, after which time the need for, and impact of, that area is reviewed. Priority 3 in the EDP is Secondary and post 16 education with some of the key objectives being:

- Standards at key stage 3
- Standards at key stage 4
- Schools causing concern
- Under-performing departments

In planning for 2003-2004 the school improvement agenda was taken into account as part of the planning process and the social and educational problem of underachievement was considered. Seven secondary schools were not meeting the then floor target, set by the DfES which, at that time, was 20% A-C grade passes at GCSE, and a further eight were considered to be vulnerable to floor targets, in danger of not reaching the 20% pass rate target. Philosophically, we had moved to a position in Leeds where school improvement was considered to be everybody's responsibility and not simply the job of certain services, for example the Advisory Services.

Time had been spent as a whole Service developing a set of shared core values, which became enshrined in a mission statement, "Promoting inclusion efficiently, creatively and through the application of psychology". It was felt by the management of the PAS that a response to this problem of underachievement was in line with our own aim of promoting inclusion and should therefore be built into the team plan for the next 2 years. Because many of the schools that are vulnerable to floor targets might also be causing concern for other reasons, the Service would also be

contributing to the needs of Schools Causing Concern through this and through another of the Research and Development (R&D) teams.

Aims of the PAS R&D project

An objective was written into the team Plan as follows:

“1.1 School Improvement Objective: To increase the capacity of schools to manage the inclusion of, and promote the development of, pupils who experience barriers to achievement and to support schools in tackling underachievement.”

The work of the Raising Achievement R&D team was only one of the strands that would contribute to this objective. The team came into being in September 2003, with the following aims:

- To contribute to the Education Leeds raising achievement agenda
- To work with underachieving schools to raise achievement
- To consult with underachieving pupils in focus groups and to identify preferred conditions of learning
- To identify the conditions of learning most prevalent in identified subject areas within the target school
- To identify changes that could be made in conditions of learning to improve the achievement of this group
- To feedback research findings to the school and to support them in developing an action plan.

The team would use an action research model, defined here as:

“The simultaneous activities of undertaking social science research, involving participants in the process, and addressing a social problem”. (Hogg and Vaughan, 1998, p216)

The aim of this researcher was to ensure that work carried out for the purpose of this thesis was real in the sense that a separate study was not set up to accommodate the needs of the doctoral programme nor of the university in general, but to demonstrate that the day to day work of educational psychologist was fertile ground for learning and theorising, and that academic study should offer real knowledge and benefits to organisations such as schools. Managing the two sets of needs was often a challenge in itself; however “real world research” (Robson, 2002) must be just that, grounded firmly in the real world of education and designed to meet the challenges faced by those in the field.

This study focuses on one school as a “case study”, and that school is described in the next chapter. The aims of this study are therefore entirely consistent with the original aims of the R&D team. Because this case study was selected for more rigorous doctoral research, then it was possible to carry out a more detailed analysis of results, which led to theorising the findings from the school in question.

Pupil voice

Within the more general area of the “underachieving school” would be underachieving pupils and underachieving subject areas, both of which could be identified from centrally held data. The voice of the child, or young person, was a key construct here. We have been urged since the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), the Children Act 1989 and now with “Every Child Matters” (DfES, 2003) to seek and take into account the views of children, and for this we read pupil and young person equally. The OFSTED framework (2003) has also placed much greater emphasis on schools to “seek, value and act” upon the views of pupils in all areas of school life and so, one would assume, there would be even greater impetus for schools to actively pursue this sometimes neglected area.

Action research

Because, in an action research model, we would be involving participants in the process it would have a greater chance of bringing about change, as Buchanan et al (1985) point out that social science research in itself can be a trigger for change.

“We study people and feed back our findings to those we have studied. Those people may or may not disagree with what has been said about them. But whatever the outcome, the act of being studied makes people more aware and sensitive to those aspects of themselves that have been the subject of scrutiny. Increased self-awareness can lead to changes in values, attitudes and behaviour.”
(Buchanan et al, 1985, p418)

The participants in this case would be the Raising Achievement R&D team, the schools involved and the teachers and pupils in those schools.

Using focus groups

Using focus groups in this context would allow for the voice of pupils to be heard but would also allow the researchers the opportunity to observe the processes and interactions at work within the groups. Focus groups are defined as:

“A research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher”. (Morgan, 1997, p6)

The focus group interview can provide rich and highly illuminating insights into the motives underlying behaviour. Listening to views on a focused topic in a group discussion setting can also illuminate where there is dissent or a convergence of opinion that may not readily emerge otherwise. In this way the focus group can act as a kind of thermometer in an organisation.

In the study that follows the author will review relevant literature on raising achievement, school effectiveness and school improvement, bringing about change in organisations and the role of pupil contributions to these processes. The methodologies used will be described and reasons given for the choices of methodology employed. The findings from focus groups at one case study site will be revealed and the interpretations of those findings will be outlined. Finally, there

will be a detailed discussion of the implications of those findings for models of underachievement, the school, the LEA and the national agenda for school improvement.

The emphasis of this particular work, both for the LEA and for this thesis, was upon the secondary phase of education and those pupils who could make a difference to schools' targets i.e. those that narrowly miss achieving A-Cs at GCSE, but who might have been predicted at the end of the primary phase to have achieved these higher grades. The study aims to explore insights into what happens at key stage 3 to those pupils so that they do not achieve their potential. To this end, members of the cohort selected were all in year 10 at the case study high school (14-15 years old).

For this reason, the study does not encompass underachievement at the primary phase of education, nor does it focus upon those pupils with special educational needs (SEN), where expectations for GCSE outcomes might be different. This is not to say that those strands in themselves do not have major importance, but that they are beyond the scope of this study.

CHAPTER 2: THE CASE STUDY SCHOOL

The case study school is located in a northern post-industrial city that has undergone much growth and restoration in recent years, and has been Europe's fastest growing city. With the expansion of service industries, good rail links to the capital, a thriving night life and two large and popular universities it has been described as a twin track city. Not all areas of the city have enjoyed this restoration or have benefited from its economic growth. The case study school lies within such an area.

An understanding of the context of this school is important in light of the research findings and the issues around school improvement and social mix which are raised in the literature review and addressed again in the discussion chapter. What follows is a picture of the demographics of this inner city high school, taken from current Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) information. Selection of the cohort of pupils is taken from 2003 year 9 SAT results, and the pupils were interviewed the following year when they were in year 10. The overall demographic picture of the school did not change significantly between 2003 and 2005 and so a general view can be gained from what follows.

Demographic indicators

The following provides a brief summary of some of the key demographic indicators for the current pupil population at the case study high school (CSHS). Analyses are based on data gathered through the January 2005 PLASC.

Key Points:

- The rate of eligibility for Free School Meals (FSM) at the CSHS is almost three times as high as the mean rate for all of the city's secondary schools. This level of FSM eligibility places the CSHS in the highest 'benchmark' group in terms of social deprivation currently used by OFSTED and DfES.
- The percentage of pupils for whom English is not their first language is almost 5 times higher than the equivalent figure for the city as a whole. The

CSHS has the third highest proportion of pupils with English as an additional language compared to all the city's secondary schools.

- Although the recorded number of pupils on roll at the CSHS who are in Public Care is low, the percentage figure is still almost five times the equivalent figure for the city. It should be noted that figures relating to Children in Public Care can fluctuate during the year and the snap-shot obtained through the Census may not remain an accurate reflection of the school throughout the year.
- The proportion of pupils of black or minority ethnic (BME) heritage at the CSHS is over four times higher than the equivalent figure for the city. The CSHS has the third highest proportion of BME pupils compared to all the city's secondary schools.
- The proportion of pupils with identified special needs at the CSHS is very high compared to the city's equivalent figures, although the proportion of stated pupils is not as extreme as the proportion who are at School Action Plus.

1. Table 1: Pupils Receiving Free School Meals

	Total number on roll	Percentage Receiving Free School Meals
The CSHS	488	50.61
All City Secondary Schools	48102	17.58

2. **Table 2: Pupil First Language**

	Total number on roll	Percentage Not English
The CSHS	488	40.98
All City Secondary Schools	48102	8.37

3. **Table 3: Pupils in Public Care**

	Total on Roll	Percentage in care
The CSHS	488	3.28
All City Secondary Schools	48102	0.68

4. **Table 4: Ethnicity**

	Total	Percentage Black and Minority Ethnic	Percentage white	Percentage Unknown
The CSHS	488	58.81	40.16	1.02
All City Secondary Schools	48102	13.73	85.05	1.22

5. **Table 5: Pupils Special Educational Needs Status**

	Total number on Roll	Percentage None	Percentage School Action	Percentage School Action Plus	Percentage Statemented
The CSHS	488	70.08	16.19	9.02	4.71
All City Secondary Schools	48102	86.41	8.32	2.73	2.54

(These figures reasonably reflect the demographic picture in 2003)

Index of deprivation

Table 6: Residence in Deprived communities

Percentages of pupils resident in deprived communities, where deprived communities are determined according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004.

	% of pupils resident in the 10% most deprived SOAs* in the country	% of pupils resident in the 20% most deprived SOAs* in the country
The CSHS	55.5%	72.5%
All city secondary schools	25.3%	37.3%

* Note: Super Output Area

Using the index of deprivation based upon "super output areas" this school takes more than half of its cohort from the 10% most deprived areas in the country and more than 70% of its pupils from the 20% most deprived areas in the country.

(Super output areas are sub-groups within wards that are broken down for statistical purposes)

Core subjects: results at 2003

The number on roll in 2003 was 483.
Attendance rate for 2003 was 85.8%
Unauthorised absence rate was 5.04%

Table 7: GCSE Outcomes in English

Type of Data	
Entries per hundred	79.7
% Achieving A*- C	13.6
A*-C in 2002	23.2
A*-C in 2001	28.4
Value added	- 0.8
Net subject residual	- 0.9

2003 saw a deterioration in results from 2001 and 2002. Value added was poor in this curriculum area.

Table 8: GCSE Outcomes in Maths

Type of Data	
Entries per hundred	70.3
% Achieving A*- C	3.8
A*-C in 2002	19.0
A*-C in 2001	24.6
Value added	-1.6
Net subject residual	-1.06

2003 saw a very significant deterioration in results from 2001 and 2002. Lack of value added is highly significant in this area of the curriculum.

Table 9: GCSE Outcomes in Science

Type of Data	
Entries per hundred	81.1
% Achieving A*- C	11.7
A*-C in 2002	16.4
A*-C in 2001	28.1
Value added	-0.7
Net subject residual	0.16

2003 saw deterioration in results from 2001 and 2002. Value added was poor in this curriculum area.

A residual score allows for a judgement to be made about one set of results as compared to general achievement in the same school.

A "normal" value added score is 0.00

PANDA report 2004

The performance and assessment (PANDA) report for the school in 2004, which is the latest available report, shows the school's rating on certain measures as compared with schools nationally and similar schools nationally. However, the similarities are only reflected in free school meals data and attainment and prior attainment data. The modelling used in the PANDA is not sophisticated and sensitive to all of the combined factors shown in the PLASC and in the data on deprivation taken from the super output areas. Ratings are given from A* to E*, where A* is very high and E* is very low.

In comparison with similar schools (FSM) the school rated E in 2004 on GCSE and equivalent qualifications on each measure. In 2003 the rating was E*. At KS3

results were only available for 2003 and the ratings were E for English and maths and D for science.

Choice of Cohort for the Study

To identify a cohort of underachieving pupils key stage 3 results at 2003 were examined. In measuring value added, average point scores at key stage 2 are used to give a predicted score at key stage 3. Taking the predicted average point score and comparing it with the actual results at key stage 3 we were able to identify a cohort of pupils (ranked) who did less well than might have been expected of them given their results at the end of key stage 2. The pupils identified were those who had achieved level 4's or above at key stage 2, so that pupils with special educational needs were not included. From the possible cohort of underachievers, groups were selected to give a balance of gender and ethnicity. The school's opinion was also taken into account regarding suitability for this activity e.g. the school eliminated pupils who had not attended school for a long period. Using SATs results to identify underachievement could be viewed as problematic in itself, given that many secondary schools do not recognise key stage 2 results as reliable measures of attainment, and use their own baseline measures in year 7. However, the school view of this particular cohort as underachieving was discussed and checked with staff and agreement was reached. This process yielded a group of pupils who might reasonably have been expected to achieve A-Cs at GCSE.

From a year group of 81 key stage 2 and 3 data was available for 73 pupils. Of these, 32 were identified as underachieving according to our criteria.

Total pupils identified	32
Female	20
Male	12
Total interviewed	17
Female	10
Male	7

Table 10: Ethnicity in possible cohort of underachievers (32 pupils)

Ethnicity	
White British	17
Asian other/Pakistani	6
Black Caribbean	2
Mixed white/black African	1
Mixed white/black Caribbean	3
Black African	1
Mixed white/Asian	1

(One pupil, not interviewed, had no ethnicity coding noted)

Table 11: Ethnicity in focus group cohort (17 pupils)

Ethnicity	
White British	7
Asian other/Pakistani	2
Black Caribbean	2
Mixed white/black African	1
Mixed white/black Caribbean	3
Black African	1
Mixed white/Asian	1

Summary

Given that free school meals are used as a reliable indicator of social deprivation in many LEAs it can be concluded that this school was vulnerable to issues of social mix, which will be expanded upon in the literature review. The index of deprivation demonstrates that more than half the pupils come from the 10% most deprived areas in the country. Added to this were other factors; a high level of pupils from BME backgrounds, pupils whose first language is not English, pupils with SEN and pupils in public care, therefore the school had many barriers to learning to

overcome. The PANDA data, which should allow for comparison with similar schools, is not a sophisticated enough model to take into account all of the above factors when making benchmark comparisons.

Attendance rates are significantly lower than those expected by the DfES and attendance would be a factor that would impact upon results. Results at GCSE (A*-C) in core curriculum areas were all below the floor targets of 20% in the year 2003 when our cohort were in year 9. Results had fallen in all areas year on year since 2001. Of the cohort identified by our criteria as underachieving, 62% were female (only 46% of the year group were female) and 53% were of white British backgrounds where English was the first language of the home. This sample of pupils can be seen as reasonably typical, in terms of ethnicity, of the school as a whole.

This contextual information needs to be kept in mind when reading this thesis.

The school at this time was not on the schools causing concern list held by the LEA but had been visited by HMI and concerns had been expressed.

The next chapter examines a range of literature pertinent to the question of underachievement. One key area in the literature review is the question of social mix, and this is highly relevant to the case study school and its context. Issues of school improvement will also be examined and, again, the context of this school is closely linked to its capacity for improvement. Gender/biological issues and psychological explanations of underachievement are also examined but these two strands do not stand alone from the social and economic context of the school, its pupils and its community.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

When exploring issues relating to pupil underachievement, and the way that this is reported, it is important to consider the different models by which we account for this phenomenon. An analysis of the literature would suggest that explanations of underachievement fall into four main categories. These are:

- **School effectiveness and school improvement**

The notion that schools can make a difference also allows that schools can be blamed for not making a difference. When pupils underachieve, therefore, it is the school that has failed to add value and which will come under scrutiny. The pressure to raise achievement in order to meet targets and therefore raise standards became greater with the advent of notions of school improvement being linked to targets, where parental choice means that pupils can drift away from those schools seen not to be improving at an appropriate rate. Pupil achievement is therefore central to school improvement.

- **Psychological (psycho-social)**

Psychologists have looked for explanations of pupil underachievement in the research on motivation, locus of control, self-efficacy and ego-identity. Ideas about affiliation to social groups also play a part here.

- **Socio-economic**

Sociologists look to ideas about social class and socio-economic status to account for educational underachievement. The idea of social mix in schools is discussed, a lack of which has been brought about in part by the school improvement agenda with its emphasis upon parental choice to drive up standards, leading to a drift away from inner city schools by those in a better position to make such choices. It is argued by some sociologists that school effectiveness research has served to remove socio-economic status from the debate about educational standards.

- Biological/ gender

Ideas about biology and gender are also presented in the debate about underachievement. There has been much focus in recent years on the underachievement of boys with some biological explanations including shorter attention span and less facility with language being put forward, as well as gender related ideas about “laddishness” and masculinity. These strands also play a part in the differences in socialisation between boys and girls.

The review that follows will offer specific references in these four areas and will examine the various theories in more detail.

School effectiveness/school improvement perspectives

There is no common definition of school effectiveness, however Mortimore *et al* (1988) illustrated that it was the intent of school effectiveness researchers to demonstrate that schools do make a difference. The underlying belief being that all children can learn. It is further defined as follows:

“An effective school is one in which pupils progress further than might be expected from consideration of its intake”. (Mortimore, 1991, p 9)

This definition is closely linked with ideas of value added, derived by looking at statistical predictions of what might be expected of pupils.

The central focus of all the school effectiveness research is that schools do make a difference. The body of research accumulated (e.g. Rutter *et al*, 1979; Reynolds, 1976; Mortimore *et al*, 1988; Mortimore, 1991; Sammons *et al* 1995) shows that, whilst ability and family backgrounds are major determinants of achievement levels, schools in similar social circumstances can achieve different levels of educational progress.

Whilst much of the research focuses upon basic skills some also highlights differences in social/affective outcomes of attendance, attitudes and behaviour

(Reynolds 1976, Rutter et al 1979, Mortimore et al 1988). Perhaps the seminal work in this area was undertaken by Rutter et al (1979) who found that:

“The differences between schools in outcome were systematically related to their characteristics as social institutions”. (Rutter et al, p178)

Such characteristics included academic emphasis, teacher actions in lessons, availability of incentives/rewards, good conditions for pupils and the extent to which pupils were asked to take responsibility. However, they also found that pupil outcomes were also affected by intake and that the cumulative effects of social factors were greater than any other effect. The outcomes were found to be worse for all pupils where the balance of intake was strongly skewed towards the “less able”.

Rutter et al also recognised the damaging effects of scholastic failure on feelings of self-worth with the almost inevitable corollary of loss of confidence and self esteem, boredom, apathy or possible antagonism to the educational system embodied by the school itself. Such failure is often compensated for by the increased importance of status within the peer group, in some cases the formation of delinquent peer groups, opposed to what school stands for. The importance of social mix in schools was therefore seen as of great importance to positive outcomes.

The importance of the school as a social institution is also highlighted and better academic success was achieved where homework was set and marked regularly, where teachers expressed high expectations whilst, on the other hand, poor outcomes were associated with higher levels of punishment. The characteristics of the school as a social institution were found to be significantly associated with outcome differences between schools, open to modification by staff rather than fixed by external constraints.

“To an appreciable extent children’s behaviour and attitudes are shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the qualities of the school as a social institution”.
(Rutter et al, p179)

Factors associated with effectiveness are not simply the converse of those associated with ineffectiveness and there is no deterministic view in the research of what works, every school being unique. Reynolds and Teddlie (2000) advocate the

need to study schools that are dysfunctional and they create a medical metaphor for studying sick patients rather than studying those that are well. They argue that it has been the dominant paradigm in school effectiveness research to propose the adoption of characteristics of effective schools in those that are less effective. They claim that access to “sick schools” (Reynolds and Teddlie, 2000, p340) has always been difficult, combined with the fact that studying such schools could give the education system an even poorer public image. Ineffective schools tend to isolate themselves, it is reasoned, from potential sources of criticism from the outside world. We do not necessarily, therefore, understand the processes by which effective schools become effective over time and many of the interpersonal issues involved in effective and ineffective schools are missed. By imposing the goals of effectiveness on ineffective schools we can simply be setting unattainable goals for them.

Although the issues around school effectiveness are complex, in terms of tackling underachievement the school is an easier and more manageable place to start than with the social factors that create educational underachievement. For politicians it may be seen as a quicker win than focusing upon social inequalities. For Local Authorities, trying to even out school social mix is also extremely challenging. Therefore from many quarters the focus is upon the school becoming more effective, implying that low levels of achievement (as measured against floor targets) are due to features of ineffectiveness found within the school itself.

Chubb (1988), in writing about a programme of reforms in the US to bring about school improvement, states that:

“Schools are institutions, complex organisations composed of interdependent parts, governed by well established rules and norms of behaviour, and adapted for stability”. (Chubb, p29)

Any measures aimed at improving them need to recognise this. A simplistic focus on driving up standards through testing and monitoring teacher performance would be inadequate to raise the achievement of all pupils. He noted that the differences between high performing and low performing schools lay within the student bodies i.e. the nature of the intake, linked to socio-economic status of parents, and the

organisation and ethos of the school itself, with strong leadership being a key factor. Certain characteristics of effective schools have been identified.

Table 12: Factors for Effective schools

ELEVEN FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS	
1. Professional leadership	Firm and purposeful A participative approach The leading professional
2. Shared vision and goals	Unity of purpose Consistency of practice Collegiality and collaboration
3. A learning environment	An orderly atmosphere An attractive working environment
4. Concentration on teaching and learning	Maximum of learning time Academic emphasis Focus on achievement
5. Purposeful teaching	Efficient organisation Clarity of purpose Structured lessons Adaptive practice
6. High expectations	High expectations all round Communicating expectations Providing intellectual challenge
7. Positive Reinforcement	Clear and fair discipline Feedback
8. Monitoring progress	Monitoring pupil performance Evaluating school performance
9. Pupil rights and responsibilities	Raising pupil self-esteem Positions of responsibility Control of work
10. Home-school partnership	Parental involvement in their children's learning
11. A learning organisation	School-based staff development

(Sammons et al, 1995, p11)

Since the early 1990's there has been a coming together between school effectiveness research and school improvement agendas (Stoll and Riley, 1999) but in both areas there has been a lack of classroom level research. Some studies have considered subject departments in secondary schools but mostly research has focused upon the school as a whole organisation. There have been many criticisms of the research in both areas. Firstly, that assumptions are made about the purpose of schooling and what constitutes effective education. Secondly, educational performance becomes defined by a narrow set of criteria, for example the results of Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs), reflecting public policy. Thirdly, that there has been a lack of recognition of the impact of social and economic context on learning and the impact of policy changes on schools located in disadvantaged areas. Taking account of factors is not the same as contextualised analysis of school effects. Finally, according to Stoll and Riley (1999, p28) the damaging discourse of school failure is cited. It offers "apparent scientific legitimisation" to those who wish to blame underachievement on failing schools and failing teachers. Again, it is easier from a political standpoint, to cite schools as responsible for failure than to examine and address the underlying inequalities in society, which are much more entrenched, associated with social class and ethnicity.

School Improvement

Stoll and Fink (1996) maintain that school improvement has evolved separately but simultaneously to school effectiveness. The International School Improvement project defined it as:

"...a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively". (van Velzen, 1985, p48)

The emphasis here is upon management, planning and continuity as well as teaching and learning, with a focus upon outcomes.

School improvement, a more practitioner oriented field according to Stoll and Riley, is a relatively new concept; first coming to the fore in the 1980's with a focus on

teacher as researcher and school self-review, and in the 1990's coming together with the school effectiveness movement. Central features in school improvement are the OFSTED inspection system, the national curriculum and national testing. School performance is now in the public domain and schools compete against their neighbours in the league tables. The notion of value added has become more widely recognised but was previously absent in published results, which offered a decontextualised view, thus having a significant and damaging impact on many schools struggling at the bottom of those tables.

By 1997 340 schools had failed the OFSTED process and required special measures (2% of primary and secondary but 7% of special schools). Some of these schools were closed, one taken over by a government approved association, 40 were subsequently taken out of special measures and described as improving and 18 were targeted for radical action.

In the document "Excellence in Schools" (DfEE, 1998) schools were required to set improvement targets and to introduce literacy and numeracy hours in primary schools, later followed by the key stage three strategy. The role of the LEA was to offer support and advice to schools and provide performance data so that schools could set their own improvement targets. Secondary schools were encouraged to set pupils by ability. The NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Head teachers) was introduced as a requirement prior to appointment as a head teacher, as well as national standards for teachers.

OFSTED (1994) described schools in the context of school improvement as high consensus and low consensus, the features of the former were a spirit of continuous improvement, no-one ever stopped learning to teach, the school was moving and there was a view that everything was possible. In the low consensus schools the opposite applied: teachers transferred their frustrations to pupils, there was an atmosphere of aloof complacency, the school was stuck and staff took days off to free themselves from the situation in which they found themselves.

Schools that had a capacity for deep coping were found to have the following characteristics and factors in evidence:

- Vision building and sharing
- Rolling planning
- Substantial restaffing
- Increasing control over the environment
- Empowering people
- Redesigning the school organisation.

(Fullan, 1991, p 350)

The LEA was given a leadership role and required to draw up a development plan, which should indicate how the LEA works with schools. There was a significant increase in research and development activities carried out jointly between academic institutions and the LEA.

Reynolds *et al* (1998) studied 12 secondary schools demonstrating either improvement or decline and carried out a wide range of interviews and classroom observations. They found that the most rapidly improving schools showed greater evidence of strategic thinking.

Joyce *et al* (1999) describe improvement as an evolutionary state and as such, part of the ordinary process of operating in the school. They argue that all schools should be learning communities. Improvement is a democratic process, where synergistic environments foster enquiry, rather than a bureaucratic process. The school should be an information rich community with staff development as an embedded feature of the work place. Teams of problem solvers are advocated within this kind of community. In this model, the school is the centre of enquiry and it is strongly underpinned by action research methodology.

This view seems to contrast with the starker notions of improvement centring on performance management, which can create an atmosphere whereby failure is not tolerated. The use of data can inform the process of improvement or can encourage a rigid, target driven mind-set which breeds feelings of inadequacy and reduces capacity to improve.

The third age of school improvement

This phrase is coined by Reynolds et al (2001) in their review of research and practice in school improvement. They describe an enhanced focus upon pupil outcomes, on learning level and the instructional behaviour of teachers, on the creation of an infrastructure to enable the knowledge base (e.g. the utilisation of best practice and research findings), upon the importance of capacity building through staff development and medium term strategic planning. Further they advocate the adoption of a mixed methodological orientation, where both qualitative and quantitative data is used to measure educational quality at class and school level that focuses upon outcomes and experiences for different groups of pupils.

Another feature of this “third age” (Reynolds et al, 2001,p1) is the increased emphasis on reliability and fidelity in programme implementation across the whole organisation. They emphasise the importance of cultural change to embed and sustain school improvement and striking the balance between vision building and adapting structures to support the vision. There is increased effort to ensure that improvement programmes relate to practitioners through training and coaching, and through development programmes.

Overall they conclude that:

“ Improvement is a sustained upward trend in effectiveness”.
(Reynolds et al.,p2)

They go on to itemise the features of schools, which have succeeded against the odds. These include:

- A clear leadership stance, embodied in its leadership team.
- A vision of success couched in academic terms and including a view on how to improve.
- Careful use of targets.
- Improvement of the physical environment.
- Common expectations about behaviour and success.
- Investment in good relations with parents and the community.

The internal preconditions for successful improvement are outlined as follows:

- Transformational leadership, offering the possibility of change.
- School wide emphasis on teaching and learning.
- Commitment to staff development and training.
- Use of performance data to guide decisions, targets and tactics.
- Teamwork, both within staff groups and with stakeholders (involvement of teachers, pupils, parents in decision making).

Recovery is described as a two-stage process, and included in the two stages is the need to acknowledge at stage 1 that every individual has a contribution to make. At stage 2 they highlight helping the school to identify core issues through data richness, gaining staff commitment through working with staff that are unwilling or unable to change and the need for a firm and consistent policy on behaviour, both around the school and in the classroom.

The focus on classrooms remains limited and there is a lack of classroom level research in evidence. However, there is a growing focus on pupils, and their perceptions have been examined by Ruddock *et al* (1996) Ruddock *et al* (1997), Beresford (1997) and Turner (2004). Ruddock *et al* suggest that many failing schools would have been turned round if an agenda had been taken from pupils and used as a basis for planned change. The OFSTED framework (2003, p118) considers how well the school “seeks, values and acts on pupils’ views” and schools will be asked to provide evidence of this process.

A sociological perspective- the political context

Thrupp (1999) poses an important critique of the school effectiveness research and literature, and by association, the school improvement literature as this is built upon school effectiveness principles. He postulates that research is never neutral and is shaped by political agendas and prevailing climate. School effectiveness research (SER) had its origins in the 1960s when matters of equal opportunity were to the fore, through the 1970s when it was believed that schools had little effect on life

chances. However, in the 1980s , with the “rise of the right” (Thrupp, p13), he claims that issues of social class were marginalized with some re-emergence in the 1990s since when there has been more interest in matters of school mix.

Politically SER was attractive in giving explanations for underachievement because, if we believe that schools do make a difference, then they can be equally blamed for not making a difference, quite independent of issues of social class or socio-economic status. SER has therefore been criticised for lacking a critical perspective and operating in a socially decontextualised way.

Mac an Ghail (1996) points to the decentring of social class in SER as reflecting the wider issue of the erasure of social class in sociology, linking this to the rise in post-modern theorising which emphasises social complexity and ideas of difference.

The new right, it is argued, used SER to reposition schools as autonomous, self-improving agencies, so holding schools directly responsible for their outcomes. Such theories became a political tool in the 1990s where particular schools were castigated for being less effective. Hatcher (1996) also criticises SER writers as having:

“Nothing to say about... the interactions between pupil cultures and the official culture of the school, at the centre of which is the curriculum.”
(Hatcher, p37)

Thrupp (1999, p20) draws together some of the criticisms of SER that sees it as separating school improvement from social background and other external factors and so “educationally and politically dangerous”, “feel good fiction”, the “antithesis of empowerment” and “political entrepreneurship”. The main thrust of these arguments is that intake or mix has an important and significant impact on what schools can achieve and has been largely ignored by SER. Where mix is acknowledged, he argues, (Rutter *et al*, 1979) it is framed as a mix of ability rather than a mix reflecting socio-economic status. Rutter *et al* did acknowledge that balance of intake would be an important variable in school effectiveness and families' occupational groups were taken into account as one variable in the log-linear modelling approach to data analysis in the study. They found that both ability and social mix were weakly but

significantly correlated with academic attainment but found no correlation between process variables and balance of intake. Ethos explained for them the many between school differences in academic attainment. Thrupp argues that these conclusions are inadequate and that a more balanced treatment of ethos and social mix of intake was warranted. He argues that balance of intake was such an important variable that it would be plausible that it was this, rather than school ethos, that was influencing school outcomes. He goes on to argue that the "privileging" (Thrupp, 1999, p23) of school climate or ethos over social class mix was a general feature of the development of SER during this period. However, he does acknowledge that school mix effects are numerous small effects which come close to Rutter et al's (1979) notion of ethos, but still claims that this notion of ethos or climate was disconnected in the research from social class context. Rutter et al found that outcomes were influenced by factors beyond the teacher's immediate control i.e. academic balance of intake and that exam success was linked to a substantial nucleus of pupils of at least average intellectual ability. However, they found the effect of balance to be most marked with respect to delinquency.

Those writing from a sociological perspective also acknowledge the impact of the sum of these factors.

"The composition of a school's intake can have a substantial effect on pupils' outcomes over and above the effects associated with pupils' individual ability and social class" (Williams, 1992, p41)

In schools where the mix leans heavily towards low socio-economic status (SES) it is argued that there is much greater effort needed to improve teacher morale, encourage students to learn and raise levels of parental involvement. Marketing of schools and parental preference have further disadvantaged some schools (Gerwitz et al, 1995) with a drift away leaving an even more skewed mix. Such a quasi-market militates against those pupils who seem to have little to offer in terms of boosting the school's position in the league tables and run counter to policies that support inclusion. They propose that education markets are governed by self-interest and that such a market is a social, economic and political phenomenon. The market solution reflects a paradigm shift in the economics of educational policy and social policy generally, heralding the deconstruction of collective responsibility as enshrined in the post-war welfare state.

“Certain general trends, patterns and changes are evident across local markets (where there is competition across schools), in particular, trends related to school organization and provision, and patterns of advantage and disadvantage, as related to social class”. (Gerwitz et al, p4)

The new white paper (DfES, 2005b) “Higher Standards, Better Schools for All”, states that standards must keep rising and that:

“A child’s educational achievements are still too strongly linked to their parents’ social and economic background-a key barrier to social mobility. (DfES, 2005b, p2)

It could be argued that some of the solutions offered in this white paper will only serve to compound the social and economic background effect by creating more schools that fail because of a growing division in social mix between schools. Giving schools greater control over their admissions policies will not necessarily create a more comprehensive intake but can have quite the opposite effect. Closing failing schools, most likely to be in the inner cities, will deny the principle of local schools for local communities. The white paper also compounds the discourse of failure in their desire to tackle what it terms failure and underperformance.

In research carried out in New Zealand, Thrupp (1999) found that student cultures reflected the characteristics of the dominant student group in the school. He puts forward the concept of “critical mass” (p125). Where there were too many less able (sic) students in a school the curriculum and teaching was dumbed down and where too many pupils were more able then the curriculum was too demanding and the less able minority were ignored. However, in this research, concepts of ability are linked to SES.

In schools where there were a large number of pupils with lower SES then the school had a larger social welfare role and daily routines were much more difficult to carry out and maintain. Imposing the school’s value systems on these pupils was reported as feeling like an uphill struggle.

The best mix was seen to be where the lower SES students constituted a significant group who could not be ignored but where the majority of students were middle class. The middle class pupils were seen to bring cultural capital to a school and influence the culture of the school in a positive way that encouraged learning and achievement.

“ Schools develop processes that reflect their SES mix. Solidly middle class schools have strongly supportive student cultures that allow them to teach an academic, exam-based curriculum and to organise and manage themselves relatively smoothly. Working class schools will, in general, be quite the opposite. Consequently, working class students who attend a working class school may often fail not only because of their own background but also because they are attending working class schools which cannot offer middle class types of resources and processes necessary for academic success. Conversely working class students who attend a middle class school are more likely to succeed because they are exposed, despite their individual class background, to the contextual benefits of a middle class school mix.” (Thrupp, 1999, p126)

He goes on to argue that the most numerous groups of students will determine the teacher's approach to the curriculum.

“Pupil power is..group power. A pupil's strength [in the classroom] is directly related to the number of classmates who share the same definition of the situation” (Delamont, 1983, p77)

The result can be a dominant counter school or at least anti-academic culture manifested most visibly in disruptive behaviour.

Disaffection

Pearce and Hillman (1998) point to the statistical links between truancy, exclusion, non-participation and low attainment, as well as to criminal behaviour and anti-social activities. The problem of disaffection is often located at a number of levels, socio-economic, institutional and individual. The term disaffection is in itself controversial as it implies that it is something that happens as a result of individual attitudes and decisions and has been strongly linked to youth unemployment. Tackling disaffection commonly relies upon tangible indicators such as exclusion and attendance data.

Pearce and Hillman argue that the act of exclusion is directed in most cases towards meeting the needs of the school rather than those of the individual concerned. Exclusions guidance can be vague and not based upon well – established sets of criteria. They point out that in 1998 exclusions had risen year on year since the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act, giving the following institutional factors as a major cause of the increase:

- League tables
- Resource incentive
- Institutional divisions between schools
- Constraints of the national curriculum giving less flexibility to teachers to address the needs of pupils who are struggling
- National targets for education and training which ignore the lowest achievers
- Lower tolerance levels amongst teachers and the policy position of the teacher unions.

According to Pearce and Hillman (1998) in the majority of secondary schools exclusions peak at age 14 years (year 9) and those most at risk are:

- Boys
- African/Caribbean pupils
- Young people from lower socio-economic groups
- Young people with disturbed or disrupted family circumstances
- Looked after young people
- Young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

OFSTED (1996) found schools' practice with regard to exclusions to be varied to an unacceptable degree.

Truancy can be seen as a form of voluntary exclusion with pupils choosing to absent themselves from school, a clear expression of disaffection. The reasons pupils cited most frequently for absconding from lessons were:

- Peer pressure
- Family condoning time off to help with domestic pressures
- Instability caused by frequent school change
- Bullying

(O'Keefe, 1994, p 21)

The steepest rise in truancy is in years 10 and 11 amongst boys, a factor that is linked to socio-economic status with large numbers of truants not attaining any GCSE's. It is quite clear that if pupils do not attend school then achievement is seriously compromised.

Pupils viewed the curriculum as the 3rd most important cause of truancy and disruptive behaviour. They felt that it lacked relevance, stimulus and variety (Kinder *et al*, 1996). Boredom was seen as a prominent factor here. They also found literacy and numeracy skills to be highly correlated with exam performance, with poor language skills as an additional barrier for boys. The transition from primary to secondary education was also found to have an impact.

Social class and social mix

Bernstein's code theory has been a feature of educational debate since the 1960's and according to Bernstein (1996) has been much misinterpreted and trivialised as a deficit model of working class language. Models of competence have derived from and influenced psychological, linguistic, anthropological and sociological fields of research and theory. Bernstein approaches the issue of codes from a sociological perspective and has spent the decades since the original research on elaborated and restricted codes was published building a theory of pedagogy and symbolic control. He questions the "acoustic of the school" (Bernstein, p 7) and asks questions about whose voice is heard and who is hailed by the voice? He puts forward the issue of rights, the right to inclusion and the right to individual enhancement, and postulates that, whilst the school appears neutral and pretends (sic) not to create the same hierarchies as are found in society, groups who do not receive their rights in school are the very same groups who do not receive their rights in society. The theory would suggest that the school legitimises inequalities

between social groups by deriving them (the groups) based upon attainment. Pupils are grouped often according to attainment (e.g. SATs results) and failure in attainment is attributed to inborn faculties, cognitive and affective, or to cultural deficits reflected by the family. Schools produce hierarchies based upon success and failure that are highly divisive, which the school disconnects from ineffective teaching, external hierarchies and power relations between certain social groups.

“With such failure and personal damage there is resistance and alienation on the one hand and reinforced peer group loyalties and class solidarities on the other”. (Bernstein, p 11)

Bernstein goes on to propose social class as a regulator of the distribution of students to privileging discourses and institutions. In this shifting of view since the early research into codes Bernstein has explored:

“How power relations are transformed into discourse and discourse into power relations”. (Bernstein, 1996, p 12)

Bernstein has been influenced in the development of his theory by Durkheim’s work on the nature of symbolic control.

“Theory (is)...transformed into a more general account of social structuring, pedagogic discourse and the shaping of its various practices as relays of a society’s distribution of power and principles of control”. (Bernstein, p 92)

In Bernstein’s view the school is an agent of social control that exerts this control not through language per se, but via discourses about ability and the success and failure of certain groups. The result of this discourse is to consolidate certain peer group relationships and class grouping which may be viewed overall as counter the school culture. Blame is attributed by the school in this model to biology and to families. The possibility of ineffective teaching is ruled out here. Discourses around schools and education are powerful but are not static. Discourses can shift over time in order to take account of changes brought about by policy and current ways of thinking. The discourses brought about by the school improvement movement have been significant in this regard, and discourses about success and failure have been particularly to the fore. The discourse of failure will not only impact upon the school

and school staff but also upon the pupils who attend such schools and the families and communities which surround them.

Thrupp's view (1999) is that ineffective schools are made ineffective by an imbalance of social mix and that schools are blamed politically for ineffectiveness, the implication being that there is a counter school culture at work that needs to be balanced by a pro-school culture and the cultural capital that the middle classes might bring to the context. Both draw our attention to the issue of social class and the powerful impact that this has upon the school and pupils in the school.

Wilby (2005) writes in the TES about a report from the Sutton Trust, which suggests that equal opportunities have declined in the past 40 years rather than improved. Despite expansion in the number of university places available, young people from the poorest fifth of the population still only have a one in ten chance of getting a degree. Because university education is now more commonplace, however, access to many more careers has become contingent upon graduate status and so this portion of the population is even more disadvantaged than previously. Rather than education being the key to equal opportunity Wilby suggests that it has become a barrier. He goes on to argue that comprehensive education in itself is not to blame for this state of affairs, as other countries in Europe with fully comprehensive systems have higher social mobility. However, these schools have a high degree of social mixing and it is worth making the link to the economic stability of these countries. He concludes that:

“... for compulsory education, the biggest priority should be to create, in each school, a mix of abilities and home backgrounds that comes as close as possible to the mix of the general population.” (Wilby, p23)

Psychological explanations of achievement

“The many aims, intentions, wants, drives, wishes, hopes and desires that comprise the motivational forces in a young person's life do not all work in the same direction”. (Howe, 1999, p111)

Many of the motivations of children and young people lie outside of the teacher's control, for example, the need for approval is not only confined to the approval that

the young person needs from the teacher which may diminish with age, but is subject to a host of other forces. The need for peer approval seems to become greater with age and the majority of adolescents find this to be a compelling driving force. Better to risk the disapproval of teachers and parents than to lose one's place in the peer group.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1987) there are other more basic needs that should be met before the need to know and understand, although success in school tasks may satisfy the need for self-esteem, love and belonging. Mature and independent learners tend to have high levels of intrinsic motivation and in some cases external rewards can interfere with this. Balance is key here, as most people need both but to the right degree. Early experiences affect achievement motivation and parental support can be critical here.

Ausubel (1968) highlighted three components of achievement motivation:

1 Cognitive drive: the motivational effect of the level of interest in a task or individual's need for competence. Cognitive drive is task oriented with motivation intrinsic to the task itself.

2 Ego-enhancing component: This refers to feelings about status, self-esteem, adequacy and the experiencing of success. This can be linked to high marks, praise and rewards. This area is dependent on the feedback of others and so does not contribute to self-control or independence as a learner.

3 Affiliative components: This is directed towards the approval of others. Winning the admiration of peers may have positive or negative effects on achievement. The need for acceptance by peers may be incompatible with study behaviour.

The need for teacher attention, as mentioned earlier, is less strong in older pupils and so behaviour modification strategies may be less effective although many school behaviour policies rely on this model. In adolescence the approval and

attention of peers is at least as important as teacher approval. The question should therefore be posed as to whether the majority of school behaviour and discipline policies at high school level are too simplistic in their over reliance on a behaviourist model?

Achievement can be influenced by how much control pupils feel over the learning process. Seligman (1975) described the concept of learned helplessness. As a result of someone feeling that they do not have control over what happens to them they become unresponsive, passive, learn poorly and fail to display "normal" social behaviours. Rotter (1975) proposed that those with an internal locus of control believed that events depended on their own behaviour or personal characteristics. Studies showed that those with an internal locus of control tended to have parents who were supportive and affectionate and who were generous with their praise. Those people, as a result, were more persistent, attended to task more and rehearsed and introduced appropriate learning strategies.

Locus of control is correlated with school achievement (Bar-Tal et al, 1980, Stipeck and Weisz, 1981) but achievement can affect perceived locus of control. Locus of control can be both internal and external in one person depending upon attributions of success and failure. Those with high self-esteem may believe that they were responsible for any success in learning but that someone or something else was responsible for failure.

Bar-Tal et al examined the relationship between locus of control, academic achievement, anxiety and level of aspiration. They suggest that perception of locus of control is an important personality variable, which predicts academic success at school. Anxiety is positively correlated with an external orientation and is also related to level of aspiration. There is a socio-economic influence and those of lower SES tend to have external locus of control. Those with internal locus of control had higher academic achievement overall, less anxiety and higher levels of aspiration. A sense of control over the environment was related to academic achievement and was especially meaningful amongst minority (black and Asian origin) groups. Despite the links found in their study they also highlight the numerous variables at work in achievement e.g. history of reinforcement, availability of good models and

positive self-image. For those with an external locus of control, blame for failure could be individual or at a systems level. Either they perceived that they had bad luck as an individual or that the whole system was to blame for their perceived failure. Such theories must be treated with caution where there are numerous variables at work and the links to ethnicity and socio-economic status must be taken into account when hypothesising around issues of underachievement.

Research tends to suggest a correlational link between locus of control and achievement rather than a causal link. Some studies have suggested that locus of control is determined by success or failure (Messer, 1972) rather than vice versa. The kinds of measures used in studies, whether specific (i.e. focused upon achievement) or general, have been seen as a factor, but Stipeck and Weisz found evidence of a relationship regardless of the type of scale used.

McKenna (2002) found that girls' locus of control became more internal between years 3 and 10, whilst boys' locus of control became increasingly external. It was hypothesised that changes began to take place around year 7 and may be connected to issues of transition. Girls were felt to cope better with an increase in the numbers of teachers at secondary level (less likely to provide the constant encouragement needed by boys for motivation) and, at this age, boys were more likely to receive negative feedback from peers for academic success. Levels of female and male maturity could also be influential in terms of age factors, with boys catching up in the 6th form. We are cautioned that time of year can affect the responses in studies of locus of control (effects after exam results) and that some previous studies were made at a time when girls did less well in educational outcomes. As the balance has now changed, conclusions drawn at that time would be less relevant today in issues of gender difference.

De Charms (1976) used the terms pawn and origin to describe attributional style. Teachers could alter children's perceptions about themselves and how they attributed success or failure by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own actions.

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) is a person's belief that they have the power to succeed. A pupil with low self-efficacy will avoid challenge and miss out on opportunities because they fear failure. All of these factors contribute to maintaining self-esteem as, if constantly failing in school, it is more comfortable to identify this as being beyond their control. Being inactive, according to Howe (1999) induces less shame than the implications of low ability.

Galloway et al (1998) carried out research into motivation during the transition from year 6 to year 7 using a variety of scales. The pupils' view of primary education was recorded retrospectively and we are cautioned that they may have had a rather rosy view of the school setting that they had recently left behind. They identified positive relationships with staff, a co-operative learning climate and greater autonomy in the classroom as factors associated with motivation. Transition saw more concerns with protecting their sense of self worth and an increase in work avoidance, particularly in the area of maths. There also seemed to be a decline in adaptive forms of motivation, associated more strongly with their response to changes in curriculum and school organisation than with developmental changes associated with adolescence. However, great weight is given to the age of adolescence by Erikson (1963) and the importance at this time in developing a clear identity and integrating all former identities.

Erikson believed in the eight ages of man, namely:

- Basic trust versus basic mistrust
- Autonomy versus shame and doubt
- Initiative versus guilt
- Industry versus inferiority
- Identity versus role confusion
- Intimacy versus isolation
- Generativity versus stagnation
- Ego integrity versus despair

He asserts that:

“Adolescence is the age of the final establishment of a dominant positive ego identity. It is then that a future within reach becomes part of the conscious life plan.” (Erikson, p 306)

The adolescent has reached the fifth stage of identity versus role confusion, where they become more concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared to what they feel they are. In this context the adolescent can “appoint adversaries” who are often “well meaning people” (Erikson, p306) such as parents and teachers. At this point an integration must take place between all the previous childhood identities and libido, aptitude and opportunities offered in social roles. The risk of role confusion can be high and, according to Erikson, the inability to settle on an occupational identity disturbs individual young people.

**“What the regressing and growing, rebelling and maturing youth are now primarily concerned with is who and what they are in the eyes of a wider circle of significant people as compared with what they themselves have come to feel they are; and how to connect the dreams, idiosyncrasies, roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational and sexual prototypes of the day.”
(Erikson, 1963, p 307)**

Farrell (1990) describes the student self which competes with many other selves. In a study of at risk high school students in the US he found them to be subject most often to social pressure (not arising from school), school pressure and boredom in school. Farrell uses an Eriksonian model of ego identity to highlight the different tensions between the:

- Career self
- Sexual self
- Self amongst peers
- Family self
- Self as parent
- Student self

The self is created in interpersonal relationships. Adolescents are trying to create a particular type of self, although all of the competing selves must be integrated into a balanced whole. In adolescents, it is proposed, the primary self is "self as my work".

At this time how something is taught is more important than what is taught (Farrell) and students rate classes as interesting where a positive relationship with the teacher is established. Being non-judgemental is an important indicator in developing a student/ teacher relationship.

According to Farrell in order to meet the needs of the career self, teachers must be able to link the world of education to the world of work. In order to do this effectively there need to be process changes as well as content changes to curriculum.

Biology and gender

Underachievement has been widely written of as a gender issue where, at certain times in history, girls have done less well than boys or boys have done less well than girls (Jackson, 2002; Head, 1999; Connell, 1989; Epstein et al, 1998).

Biological explanations tend to be linked to gender in the literature (Bleach, 1998).

Typical differences seem to be that girls learn language earlier and that there are variations in spatial visualisation, which are traceable to hormones, chromosomes and brain laterality. Chromosomes may be responsible for boys being less aware of the feelings of others than are girls and therefore, they find it harder to learn social skills (Bleach).

According to Bleach there are close links drawn between the brain and gender and how individuals think. Areas of the brain related to language seem to be better developed in girls and women and language development is closely associated with the development of social skills. By the age of eleven girls are usually progressing better in reading, verbal and non-verbal tests, they demonstrate greater maturity and are more likely to be on task and setting high standards for themselves.

The two genders present with different traits in relation to schoolwork (Bleach) with girls, it is suggested, tending to be more compliant in motivational style. In adolescence they are more likely to be found at home in the evening chatting to friends or doing homework than are boys. They spend more time on reflection, analysis, discussion and the expression of feelings in their schoolwork. Concentration span is longer with an average of 13 minutes.

Boys, on the other hand, tend to do things quickly, prefer short-term tasks, take less care with their work and be less attentive in class with an average concentration span of 4 to 5 minutes. This leads to a greater need for interaction with and attention from the teacher. Boys are more reluctant to do extra work and read less than girls. They emphasise laddish traits like having a laugh and see studying as unmanly. There is, according to Bleach, a second rank of boys who comply less overtly to the macho stereotype which may involve disruption, vandalism, bullying and the harassment of girls, but who cannot subscribe either to a work ethic which may lead them to be branded as swots or even gay.

Image is extremely important to boys in school, and they need to be viewed as reluctant to engage in schoolwork. They resist teacher authority in the classroom and engage in effort minimising strategies. Laddishness at school can be seen as a reaction to educational failure. Laddishness, not always the preserve of the male, is viewed by Jackson (2002) as a self-worth protection strategy, and uses self-worth theory (Covington, 1992) to account for and understand laddish behaviours as a means of protecting oneself against a perception of lack of ability or femininity. Jackson points to the fact that, although laddishness began as a working class concept, it spans all social class groupings, but postulates that social class is probably the most influential factor in attainment at school. The relationship between these factors is not straightforward.

Masculinities are actively constructed in social settings and being a lad means displaying characteristic associated with what Connell (1995) describes as hegemonic masculinity (the ways in which approved modes of being male are produced, supported, contested and resisted). Boys define these masculinities against other masculinities, which include gay masculinities, where academic work

is seen as feminine (or gay). Therefore, lads must avoid academic work. Jackson goes on to argue that academic ability in western society is inextricably linked to feelings of self-worth and so feelings of failure are associated with shame, anxiety and withdrawal. Pupils are therefore motivated to avoid failure and protect self-worth.

“The prevailing laddish, philistine ethos, which characterises the male peer group, may be the biggest challenge to the teacher”. (Head, 1999, p 81)

In curriculum areas some subjects have been more traditionally male such as maths, science and the old traditional areas of wood and metal work. P.E. is described by Head as a key site for aggression and violence, not only in the lesson itself but also in and around the changing rooms.

Boys will follow different paths to adopt different forms of masculinity.

“The reaction of the “failed” is likely to be a claim to other sources of power, even other definitions of masculinity. Sporting success, physical aggression, sexual conquest may do”. (Connell, 1989, p295)

Epstein et al (1998) point to three types of discourse around male underachievement, which are masculinist in style.

- **“Poor boys” – boys as victims with blame attached to women teachers, mothers and feminists for their underachievement and behaviour.**
- **The “failing schools” discourse – schools fail the boys who attend them, arguments that are firmly linked to the school effectiveness and school improvement movements. These models, it is claimed, are under-theorised in relation to issues of inequalities (gender, class, race).**
- **“Boys will be boys” discourse – Usually biologically based, it shares some of the characteristics of the “poor boys” discourse. It posits an unchanging “boyiness” e.g. aggression, fighting, delayed maturity but sets poor achievement as extrinsic to boys themselves.**

Not all boys underachieve and it is suggested that socio-cultural factors play an important part, the phenomenon being strongly classed and racialised. Class and the educational level of parents are the strongest predictors of success in school exams.

“League tables provide an accurate demographic map of England and Wales, with the poorest and most depressed LEAs coming lowest in the league and the wealthiest, most middle class LEAs winning the prizes”. (Epstein et al, p11)

They argue that, through a feminist perspective, the education of both boys and girls can be improved and the current dominant discourses can be challenged.

Skelton (2001) proposes that the prevalent discourse in education since the mid 1990s has been school effectiveness and school improvement, with an emphasis upon standards. At the same time, the dominant discourse around genders and education has been one of performance and achievement, with an emphasis upon male disadvantage.

Concerns about boys' underachievement emerged from the marketisation of schooling, and especially from school inspections and the effectiveness and improvement movements themselves. It is argued that equal opportunities policies have to work alongside educational reform.

“Sometimes, the two sets of policies appeared to be working in harmony, for instance, the emphasis on examination attainment may well have encouraged middle-class girls whose values were already attuned to academic achievement. On the other hand, the focus on measurable outcomes and the neglect of classroom processes meant that many aspects of patriarchal culture continue unchallenged.” (Salisbury and Riddell, 2000, p14)

Skelton (2001) argues that failing boys has captured media attention in a way that girls, ethnic minorities and social class equity never have. However, Skelton would agree with Epstein et al (1998) that not all boys are underachieving and that underachievement is generally classed and racialised. This is not new, as education has always been classed and gendered. Voices in the literature that focus upon

boys' underachievement appear to Skelton to be largely atheoretical and do not include the perspectives of boys themselves.

An increased emphasis in British schools upon standards has led to a greater tendency for pupils to define themselves and their intelligence in relations to grades. It is hypothesised that the introduction of national testing has led to a fear of failure being prevalent in the British education system. The defensive strategies employed; procrastination, intentional withdrawal of effort and rejection of academic work, avoiding the appearance of working and promoting the appearance of effortless achievement, disruptive behaviour, all serve to reinforce hegemonic masculinities. It is further postulated that boys are more competitive than girls and so more likely to protect themselves from failure and therefore reject academic work in favour of more traditional masculine pursuits, such as sports, physical aggression or sexual conquest. It is also argued that, culturally, effortless achievement is a sign of true intellect and so it is important, even if motivated to achieve, to be seen to be applying minimal effort.

Finally, Jackson (2002) argues that disruptive behaviour has many functions:

- Increasing status within the peer group
- Deflecting attention from poor academic performance
- Attributing lack of achievement to not paying attention rather than lack of ability
- Sabotaging the performance of class mates

Where boys are viewed as highly competitive they would rather not enter the race at all, or sabotage others so that, if they can't win, others can't win either.

Theories of masculinity are one strand that informs the underachievement and gender debate but self-worth protection theory, according to Covington (1992), can be applied to girls equally. He suggests that competition triggers such defensive behaviour and that education should promote positive reasons for learning and the desire to learn. These strategies would benefit both sexes and would also challenge hegemonic masculinities.

OFSTED in a joint report with the Equal Opportunities Commission (1996) define effectiveness in the following way:

“An effective school is one where pupils' achievement is all that might be reasonably expected given the composition of its intake, and where the quality of education provided meets the needs of all groups within the pupil population”. (OFSTED and EOC, p10)

They found that about one in five secondary schools was weak in meeting the needs of one sex or the other. They highlight the features of successful schools as being to do with effective teaching in an orderly environment and point out that where these conditions do not apply then girls' progress suffers more than that of boys. Current findings are that girls do better than boys on measures such as GCSE A-Cs, but where conditions are poor, as described above, then they do not do as well. Girls are disadvantaged more than boys by a disorderly environment where behaviour is problematic and teaching is ineffective.

They also found that some schools were less effective at building a rapport with boys and, where this was the case, boys were less successful. This finding underlines the importance of relationship building in schools with both sexes, though boys are particularly highlighted in this report.

MacDonald *et al* (1999) caution, however, about the danger of generalising about sex differences from aggregated data and drawing conclusions that may be unhelpful or untrue at an individual pupil level. This would seem to highlight a need for investigation of the issues of underachievement at the individual level, importantly, seeking the views of those of both genders. Pickering (1997) found that teachers did not recognise the importance of involving pupils in school development planning where they would contribute useful insights about their own learning. The actual process of eliciting views, it was felt, would provide benefits in terms of self-esteem and taking responsibility for learning. Giving pupils a voice was seen in itself as a strategy of raising achievement.

Whitelaw et al (2000) also caution against seeing the grouping of boys and girls as unproblematic in the research. Generalisation based upon these groupings, it is argued, can provide a starting point at school level but they also point to the need to elicit pupil views and perspectives at the individual level, although gender is only one of a range of factors that impacts upon achievement.

“Literature suggests that gender, alongside ‘race’, class, disability, sexuality and age, has a substantial effect on the ways in which children negotiate their personal positions in the relationship between academic achievement, school cultures and home/peer culture”.
(Whitelaw et al, p 97)

Given the complexity of the context then, any quick fix strategies based upon generalisations should be guarded against and the views of pupils themselves in developing strategies should be given greater emphasis. They argue that girls should not be seen as more compliant at school but as more skilful perhaps in negotiating the demands and expectations of academic and social life, of adults and of peers.

According to Head (1999) boys are more likely to be identified as having SEN; they are certainly more highly represented in settings for pupils with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD), and are more likely to display anti-learning behaviour. Girls are more likely to enjoy reading and sharing books with friends. Literacy may be viewed in the home as “Mother’s work” (sic) therefore compounding a stereotype (dad’s work may be linked to ICT and maths). Girls’ writing tends to be more reflective and expressive whilst boys’ writing is more episodic and factual. Boys may prefer non-fiction and information books. Within the home, boys tend to communicate less, spending more time on computer games than they do on discourse.

Other gender difference explanations fall into the socialisation strand. Bleach (1998) points to the break down of the “male as breadwinner” role, because there is less work available and divorce is more prevalent men can be seen as dispensable in some families and communities and the father can be relegated to the role of occasional caller. On the other hand, over-employment is also a problem where fathers become weekend parents because of long and unsociable hours at work.

Added to this, primary school teachers are more often female and there is a lack of male role models in primary education.

The role of the male in modern society has changed and employment prospects for certain groups in certain economic and geographical areas are more precarious. Traditional male jobs such as mining, engineering, building and manufacturing are diminishing and careers are now open to women that were previously denied. In some communities being a “new man” is seen as a sign of weakness.

Changes to examination systems are also cited in the area of boy’s underachievement as girls do better at continuous assessment, which became a key component of the GCSE exam. Boys tend to do better in traditional exams that do not require effort to be sustained throughout the course.

Head (1999) links issues of achievement in boys closely with behaviour. He draws upon biological/psychological explanations and points to the attachment research undertaken by Bowlby (1958) where personal history leads to a process of social reproduction. Certain social processes mean that girls are more likely to be talked to and kept close to the primary caregiver whilst boys are encouraged to be adventurous and gain autonomy. In adolescence the onset of puberty means that there is a stage where a young person is neither child nor adult and the boundaries between the two are blurred. An identity must be developed (second individuation) which will prepare the young person for a career. The young person is largely defined by others and there is limited scope at this stage for self-definition and in some cases this can mean a time of storm and stress.

Adolescents need to establish independence and status and boys are often allowed more freedom at home because they are seen to be less at risk than a girl would be. Head (1999) cites this as a reason why girls tend to be kept close and therefore complete homework more thoroughly and more often.

Changes in society, the disappearance of organisations such as youth clubs and scouts, mean that young people have little opportunity to meet with other adults outside of home and school and so spend more time with peers than with adults.

This can lead to the possibility of more exposure to negative influences and the lessening of opportunity to acquire positive adult role models.

In single sex male groups there exists a poverty of discourse and a hierarchy emerges which may encourage some to develop the court jester role as a way of establishing an identity other than by strength or sporting prowess. When the sense of identity is gained by the exclusion of others then the group may become a gang. Discourse is less reflexive than in female groups and boys talk less about career plans and so they may be more likely to lack any sense of agency.

Truancy and exclusions impact inevitably on academic achievement and boys are more likely to be identified by schools as having learning problems. Learning styles can be seen as having personality as well as cognitive components, and are fundamentally a preference for a particular way of thinking. Boys and girls approach schoolwork differently and boys cannot be seen to be taking school too seriously. Girls have a different approach to planning and organising their work and are more likely to bring the right equipment to lessons and to complete homework.

SUMMARY

The main areas cited in this literature review as explanations of underachievement fell into four main areas; school effectiveness/school improvement, sociological, psychological and gender/biological explanations. Although dealt with separately in this chapter, the issues are interwoven and complex. However, there are some recurring themes that run throughout and are linked in important ways to the findings of this research and the later discussion of those findings.

Rutter et al (1979) identified the issue of social mix as an issue in its impact on outcomes and found the cumulative effect of social factors to be greater than any other single effect. They also pointed to the damaging effects of academic failure on self-worth. Self-worth protection strategies are also highlighted in terms of producing in some part "laddish" behaviours (Jackson, 2002) and the development of a more external locus of control, in turn linked to poor academic attainment.

Another emerging theme is that of blame. The Government is thought to blame schools themselves for failure (Sammons et al, 1995), thus writing out issues of social class and social mix, teachers can blame families, biology and pupils themselves (Bernstein, 1996) and pupils can blame the system (Bar-Tal et al, 1980) for their so called academic failure. The school improvement movement itself, with the emphasis upon testing and league tables, can create a climate where all feel that they are failing and this will impact strongly on pupils and school staff alike. The struggle for schools that are dealing with a strong SES imbalance, the issue of critical mass, is acknowledged in some of the literature (Thrupp, 1999).

Orderly Behaviour is one measure of an effective school (Sammons et al) and girls do less well where the climate is less orderly (OFSTED and EOC, 1996). Behaviour policies, classically built upon the principles of behaviour modification can be viewed as too simplistic with little emphasis in this model on building relationships. The issue of identity is also raised and can be seen as being created in interpersonal relationships (Farrell, 1990). At the same time OFSTED and the EOC highlight the fact that some schools do less well in building rapport with boys than do others. If building relationships is central to building positive and integrated identities then the focus of a behaviour policy should be around building relationships.

Transition is seen as a key time in changes to locus of control (McKenna, 2002), boys becoming more external ergo, less successful academically, heightened issues of protecting self-worth through laddishness, and at a time when identity needs to be established in a positive way through relationships.

The view that schools improve through being data rich, including qualitative data, and through fostering enquiry (Joyce et al, 1999) underpins an action research model, which was used in this study. Others point to the importance of pupil voice in school improvement (Ruddock et al, 1996, 1997; Beresford, 1997; Turner, 2004) and the potential for pupils to help turn around failing schools. This study uses the pupil voice as the primary data source and attempts, from those voices, to build a theory of underachievement, which takes into account the themes raised in the literature.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Purposes and Aims of the Research

The purpose of the Raising Achievement Research and Development group, as previously stated, was to help schools to help themselves by working with them to answer questions about underachievement. Having helped the school to collect and analyse data, the research team would support the school in developing an action plan.

The team would use an action research model, defined as:

“The simultaneous activities of undertaking social science research, involving participants in the process, and addressing a social problem”. (Hogg and Vaughan, 1998, p216)

The research group would help to meet the aim of the Local Authority Education Development Plan (EDP) to have “Good schools, Improving schools, Inclusive schools”. The case study high school was one of a number of high schools that were not meeting the prescribed floor targets of 20% A-C's at GCSE level.

Consulting with children was high on the agenda nationally and locally and had been emphasised in the revised OFSTED framework (2003), where schools were to consider how well the school “seeks, values and acts on pupils' views”. Seeking pupils' views is seen as one of the gateways to personalised learning and is a key strand of the DfES' Five Year Strategy (2004a, ch 1, 34). It seemed, therefore, that asking pupils about their own underachievement through focus groups would give important insights into this important issue.

Specific aims of the group, already stated in the introduction to this thesis, were as follows:

- To contribute to the Education Leeds raising achievement agenda
- To work with underachieving schools to raise achievement

- To consult with underachieving pupils in focus groups and to identify preferred conditions of learning
- To identify the conditions of learning most prevalent in identified subject areas within the target school
- To identify changes that could be made in conditions of learning to improve the achievement of this group
- To feedback research findings to the school and to support them in developing an action plan.

More specifically, the revised research questions, listed below, would help to shape the selection of appropriate research methods and tools.

- What barriers to achievement are identified and what are the two groups' (pupils and staff) perceptions of those barriers?
- What are pupils' perceptions of what helps them to learn?
- What are adults' perceptions of what helps pupils to learn?

In this chapter, the methodologies used will be described and reasons given for the choices of methodology employed.

Action research

According to Eden and Huxham (1996) action research:

“..demands an integral involvement by the researcher in an intent to change the organisation”. (Eden and Huxham, p 539)

It is also a methodology that demands “valuing theory” (Eden and Huxham, p539) through elaborating on theory and by concern with a system of emergent theory. Theory can therefore be built from the particular to the general in a series of small steps and such theory development must be of general value if disseminated to a wider audience than just the system being researched. The process of exploration of the data must be capable of being explained to others, the history and context of

the exploration must be taken as critical to the interpretation of data and opportunities for triangulation should be explored and reported.

Robson (2002) suggests that action research methodology is distinguishable in terms of its purpose, which is to influence or change that which is a focus of the research and is aligned with the emancipatory purpose of research. To this end, improvement and involvement are central features. Firstly, the improvement of practice, secondly the improvement of understanding of a practice by its practitioners and thirdly, improvement of the situation in which the practice takes place. He further emphasises that collaboration is central to the action research process.

Lewin (1946) first used the term

“action research” to describe a way of learning about organisations and trying to change them. It has been widely used as an approach in educational settings and its protagonists claim that:

“...Practitioners are more likely to make better decisions and engage in more effective practices if they are active participants in educational research”. (Robson, p216).

However, the approach in educational settings has also been criticised by Adelman (1989) as inward looking, ahistorical and of poor quality. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) criticise its atheoretical posture and a denial of the need for systematic methods in the educational development of the paradigm.

On the other hand, Lewin proposes that it is a tool for bringing about democracy and is an embodiment of democratic principles in research, and therefore is a means of fighting oppression and social injustice. There is, therefore, a strong political agenda for those using this methodology if the researcher truly understands the implications of the paradigm. Underachievement can be seen as a keen social injustice brought about in part by the socio-economic circumstances of the school, its pupils and families, and therefore closely associated with social class and social exclusion.

It therefore fits best with a flexible, qualitative design rather than a fixed quantitative design and so the researcher loses some power of decision making over some aspects of the design. In this paradigm the researcher is seen as an “instrument” and “collaborator and facilitator” in the process. Because the research has wider ownership than the researcher alone the whole project team is an important part of the process, as are one’s professional colleagues.

Action research is further described as:

“ ...a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants..in social..situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of a) their social or educational practices b) their understanding of these practices c) the situations and institutions in which these practices are carried out.” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)

Wellington (2000) claims that some descriptions of action research processes are “far too complicated to be of real value” and at heart involve a spiral of cycles involving planning, activity, observing /evaluating, reflecting and re-planning.

Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) describe a “self -reflective spiral” in action research, which entails a process of:

- planning a change
- acting and observing the process and consequences of the change
- reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then
- re-planning and so forth

(Kemmis and Wilkinson, p 22)

Because this process is repeated, it is illustrated as a spiral. However they acknowledge that in reality the process may not be a neat spiral and the stages may overlap; initial plans may become obsolete “in the light of learning from experience”.

If the researcher questions whether they are “doing” action research or not then it is important to look at the intention behind it. If it is done with the intention to change the system then it is almost certainly action research.

“Action research involves intervening in a situation and later evaluating that intervention”. (Wellington, 2000, p 21)

It is encapsulated as a social problem-solving or enlightenment model.

The flexibility inherent in this approach also fits well with the flexibility of case study design and so the two often go hand in hand.

In this study the impetus was to use action research to bring about some changes in the organisation (Eden and Huxham, 1996), which would lead to improvement through better practice and increased understanding around the issues connected with underachievement. Underachievement is undoubtedly linked to social injustice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Bernstein, 1996; Thrupp, 1999; Epstein et al, 1998; Wilby, 2005)) and therefore must be one of the principles underpinning this research.

The Case Study

“ A case study is a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event”. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p58)

According to Wellington the single unit is both the strength, because it can give detailed intensive knowledge about a single case, and the weakness of this methodology, a weakness because of the problematic nature of generalisation from a single unit.

Brogden and Bicklen describe three categories of case study, the historical, the observational and the life history whilst Stenhouse (1985) points to two traditions, the historical and the ethnographic. Stake (1995) describes the intrinsic case study and the instrumental case study. In the former a better understanding of a particular case is gained whilst the latter is used to gain insight into a particular issue or to clarify a hypothesis with the aim of developing our understanding and knowledge. A case study may involve observations, discussions, interviews, visits to different sites and the study of written records and documentation.

Ruddock (1985) and also Stenhouse (1978) define case data as all the material collected, whilst case records are described as a lightly edited, ordered, indexed public version of the data. A case study is:

“The product of the field worker’s reflective engagement with an individual case record”. (Ruddock, p 103)

Therefore, case records are not theorized but case studies are. The strengths are that they have the possibility to be illuminating and insightful, accessible and engaging, can lead to subsequent research, disseminable, vivid and of value in teaching (Wellington, 2000). The disadvantages can be that they are not generalisable, not representative, not typical, not replicable and not repeatable. However, multiple case studies can be used cumulatively to produce generalisations. And, according to Mitchell (1983), case study research can be used to “explore” generalisations.

According to Robson (2002) case study methodology is a flexible design research strategy that involves the development of detailed knowledge about a single case or a small number of cases, where details of design emerge during data collection and analysis. Rigorous case study pays attention to matters of design, data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting.

“Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomena within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.”
(Robson, p178)

The central defining characteristic of a case study is the concentration on a particular case studied in its own right with an emphasis on context or setting. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to the case study “site” because a case always occurs in a specified social or physical setting.

Bromley (1986) argues that the individual case study is the “bedrock of scientific investigation”. The study of organisations is just one kind of case study. A case study can be exploratory or confirmatory and this will influence the degree of structure or flexibility allowed for in the design. Whilst it is felt that some pre-

structuring might be necessary the design should nonetheless be flexible enough for important features to emerge.

Within the case study design two methods of data collection were used, focus groups were run with pupils and individual interviews with a sample of school staff. Focus groups were important in exploring the attitudes, values and beliefs of pupils in this case study on the focused topic of underachievement and raising achievement. Whilst it was an efficient method for gathering many and diverse viewpoints it was also important in terms of process in that behaviours and views would emerge as part of the discussion and group dynamic that may not do so in a series of individual interviews. The interactions within the groups themselves added a context that would otherwise be missed.

Focus groups were used as a prime data source because of the possibilities they would offer to explore processes at work in the school and more specifically amongst groups of underachieving pupils. Other methods such as questionnaires or even individual semi-structured interviews would not have tapped into the kinds of interactions and group dynamic that are at work during a focused group discussion. The dynamics in themselves can reflect the wider dynamic at work in the organisation and staff interviews were held following analysis of the focus group data in order to help better understand these processes. In addition, it was felt that staff attitudes and beliefs around underachievement were also of great importance but the gathering of this data did not lend it self as well to the focus group method.

The main data source was therefore what emerged from the pupils as part of a focus group and the staff interviews were used as a supplementary data source.

Focus groups

Morgan (1997) highlights a need to define a typology of group interview, which would distinguish focus groups from other kinds of interview. He suggests that it be:

“A research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher”. (Morgan, 1997, p 6)

So, focus groups are a form of group interview, which combines question and answer with discussion. It is on a specific topic, hence the word "focus", and involves an open-ended group discussion guided by the researcher. Groups are usually of around eight to twelve people and can be homogeneous or heterogeneous. However, it is possible to find different groupings within one study.

Focus groups are commonly used in conjunction with other methods, for example observation and individual interviews. They can be used to develop a more structured instrument or to amplify the findings of a survey. The person running the focus group is referred to as a moderator or facilitator and Robson (2002) notes that this is a role that calls for considerable skills. The moderator must generate an interest in discussion about a topic but must not lead the group. The group must not act as a support group and is not therapeutic. Often a second researcher is needed in a focus group setting both to take field notes and also to give feedback to the moderator about keeping the group on track.

The term focus group is often used interchangeably with group interview. Both share some of the features of individual interviews, ranging from highly structured through semi-structured to unstructured. Most versions of group interview also have aspects of discussion as well as interview. In group interviews general topics and sometimes specific questions can be posed but not in a traditional question and answer interview format. The traditional question and answer approach often used in individual interviews would eliminate the group interaction aspect that is such a feature of the group interview.

Why use focus groups?

Interviews range from structured, which are the least flexible, to unstructured, the most flexible. The latter are sometimes called depth interviews because, as is evident from the name, this type of interview is most appropriate when seeking depth of opinion on a topic. As in earlier market research work, it is often more psychological motivations and underlying causes that are being explored. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews are also sometimes known as "qualitative research interviews". These can be divided into respondent interviews and informant

interviews. Informant interviews are characterised by being non-directive with a focus on the interviewee's perceptions. They may appear unstructured but in reality do have an underlying structure. Whilst structured interviews concern themselves with facts or behaviour the unstructured interview more often taps into beliefs and attitudes.

The semi-structured group interview, and if focused on a particular topic this can be described as a focus group interview, can provide rich and highly illuminating insights into the motives underlying behaviour. In these interviews the use of language is key but non-verbal behaviour can also give valuable insights. In this scenario the focus group interview is a kind of conversation with the interviewer using open rather than closed questions. However, the interview is not non-directive as in a Rogerian or Piagetian sense. The interviewer/ moderator does keep the group focused on the topic and probes for depth of response.

Focus group interviews allow peoples' views and feelings to emerge but give the interviewer some control over the general direction of the discussion. Focus groups also have the potential to raise consciousness on certain issues and to empower the group participants as in an emancipatory research approach.

As well as being a favourable method when more in depth information is required about complex issues it is a highly efficient way of generating quite large amounts of data efficiently. Running two one hour focus groups can reveal the views of sixteen or more informants in two hours whilst it may take sixteen hours to explore the same questions with each individual. The ideas generated in a group can spark off the thinking of others and produce a greater wealth and depth of data. A group setting can also feel more comfortable to certain individuals and on certain topics where it would be less comfortable to express an individual view in a one to one setting. Listening to views on a focused topic in a group discussion setting can also illuminate where there is dissent or a convergence of opinion that may not readily emerge in an individual interview. In this way the focus group can act as a kind of thermometer in an organisation. It is recognised, however, that individual interviews can also offer real depth of information and, in certain circumstances, can be used

to greater effect. It is important, therefore, to consider which method fits best with the aims and context of the research undertaken.

The issue of consulting with children has become very topical and there is a particular dearth of this type of informant in the School Improvement literature (Turner, 2002). Running a project using focus groups can raise many issues, not least of which are ethical considerations. The question is raised by Vaughn *et al*, (1996), that if parents and teachers have given their consent for young people at school to be the subject of research then how free are they to dissent? Children, they point out, lack social power in this situation. Children should be treated with the same respect in research that we would extend to adults. The basic principal adhered to by many leading professional bodies is the one of “do no harm” to the participant. In this context informed consent is very important and should be obtained in a way that is age or developmentally appropriate and does not put the young person under stress. (see consideration of ethical issues , this chapter, part 2)

Gamman (2002) identifies some of the issues to be considered when using focus groups in schools.

- The power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee.

There is very often a power imbalance between adults and children in favour of the adult. Focus groups can allow for more flexibility where pupils can take control of the agenda. They may be more concerned in responding to each other than with pleasing the adult.

- The high degree of consensus between group members

Social psychology has identified the phenomena of “groupthink” which is described as:

“A mode of thinking in highly cohesive groups in which the desire to reach unanimous agreement overrides the motivation to adopt proper rational decision - making procedures”. (Hogg and Vaughan, 1998, p644)

Focus groups can therefore lead to a polarisation of views or over-conformity to the group. Gamman (2002) points out that this can be used as a form of “social defence” against the moderator who may be seen as, and probably is, an outsider.

- The issue of personal experience

When there are issues under discussion of a sensitive or highly personal nature then focus groups may not be appropriate. For instance, if the question under discussion is bullying, then some young people may not feel comfortable either revealing or discussing these experiences in a group setting.

- The issue of group identity

The group may become cohesive at the expense of a “rejection figure” who may be the moderator or facilitator. The object of scorn, derision or ostracism may vary but may skew the responses of the group.

Another issue for focus groups may be the phenomena of “social loafing”. In groups above a certain size some individuals may not feel it necessary to make a contribution and will rely on other members of the group to respond to all questions and probes. This would not happen in an individual interview where it would be the responsibility of each individual to respond in some way.

Miller and Glassner (1997) particularly caution us in the study of adolescents pointing out that the meaning systems of adolescents are different from those of adults. Age, as well as gender and class, are of “critical importance” in establishing research relationships. This would be true of any interview situation but may come into sharper focus in a group setting.

At a practical level, the numbers of questions asked of a group would be less than in individual interviews so that one would sacrifice some breadth to gain greater depth of information.

The interview process needs to be well managed so that the quieter or less articulate are heard, so that some views do not dominate and so that everyone’s contribution is respected. Although the moderator does not necessarily need to be

highly trained they would require certain interpersonal skills that would enable them to “draw out” others. Talking “just enough” can be difficult to judge.

Confidentiality can be a problem in a group and views expressed may be repeated outside of the group. Whilst confidentiality can be requested it cannot be enforced except by mutual agreement.

Robson (2002) points out that results from focus groups cannot be generalised or held up as representative of a wider population.

Data analysis: Grounded Theory

The aim of grounded theory is to generate a theory to explain what is central to the data. It is a strategy for both doing research and a style of data analysis. Although mostly seen as a qualitative methodology it can also be used when gathering and analysing quantitative data. The methodology has its origins in the field of sociology and was created by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's. Glaser, working at Columbia University, emphasised empirical research within the development of theory and identified a need to keep making comparisons between data or the constant comparative method. Strauss, working at the University of Chicago, was influenced by interactionist and pragmatist writings. Although Glaser and Strauss (1967) discovered grounded theory together, the two ultimately went their separate ways and placed a different emphasis on how the methodology should be used and developed as highlighted above.

Interviews are the most common data collection method when using this approach, although observations and documents can also be used making a good fit when using a case study methodology. As in a case study methodology the sampling is purposive and the aim is not to achieve statistical generalisability but the final theory should be of interest and relevance beyond the site of the original study.

Grounded theory:

“Seeks to generate a theory which relates to the particular situation forming the focus of the study”. (Robson, 2002, p190)

The theory is grounded in data drawn from actions, interactions and processes. Concepts and hypotheses from the field can then be used to generate theory, through the researcher’s analysis of transcripts for example. Because interactions and processes are so central to this form of analysis then focus groups are an excellent source of data as they enable the researchers to draw upon these in a way that individual interviews do not. Observation of the processes at work in a group form part of the analysis of the data in grounded theory, in other words, the analysis goes beyond merely examining the language presented in the transcript. It is influenced by the dynamic of the group. Individual interviews offer only the insight of an interaction between interviewer and interviewee, which is less illuminative around issues like consensus and group dynamics. The idea that this type of research could have relevance to both academic audiences, if theoretical constructs emerge, and non-academic audiences (the school or the LEA) also makes it highly appropriate when doing action research.

It is important to note that it is possible to design a study that incorporates some aspects of grounded theory whilst ignoring others (Robson). Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to the methodology that they describe as:

“...items on a smorgasbord table from which they (the reader) can choose, reject, and ignore according to their own ‘tastes’.” (Strauss and Corbin, p 8)

Broadly speaking grounded theory as a method of analysis should move from description to conceptual ordering to theorising, although it is pointed out that conceptual ordering can be an end point in itself. Whilst some ethnographic accounts depict themes, the themes are not always connected to form an integrated theoretical scheme.

“Developing theory is a process of conceiving /intuiting ideas and formulating them into a logical, systematic and explanatory scheme”. (Strauss and Corbin, p 21)

In its original form grounded theory was regarded by Glaser (1992) as an empirical, positivist method whereby theory emerged from data and where there was minimal

imposition of the researcher on the emerging concepts. A different view was developed then by Strauss and Strauss and Corbin whereby a more prescriptive approach led to the “discovery” of theory from data, that data did not simply emerge but the creative role of the researcher was recognised in the process of developing theory, thus leaning towards a more interactionist perspective. Finally, a third model was put forward in the 1990’s by Chamaz (1995) who, from a social constructionist perspective, believed that categories and theories neither emerged nor were discovered but were socially constructed.

Other key ideas in the Strauss and Corbin model (1998) are that analysis is the interplay between researcher and data and that at the heart of theorizing lies an interplay between induction and deduction. It is this idea of interplay that moves away from the original grounded theory, based in a more positivist view of the world, towards a post-modern approach, which recognises the role of the researcher in interpretation and deduction. Strauss’s standpoint, which had moved on from the original more positivist view, was somewhat similar to Cezanne’s (Appignanesi and Garratt, 1999) who did not scrap realism but revised it to include uncertainty in our perception of the world. In this movement from modern to post-modern Cezanne believed that representation had to account for the effect of interaction between seeing and the object. Therefore it was not the reality but the perceiving of it that became the focus.

This said, “waving the red flag” is a notion that Strauss and Corbin cite as being important in recognising when biases and assumptions are intruding into the analysis. These can belong either to the researcher or those being researched, the respondents. It is important to always remember that the “conceptual baggage” that the researcher brings is likely to influence what is seen. The theoretical sensitivity of the researcher is valued in this approach as part of the process of developing theory. Another concept is “going native”, when the researcher accepts the assumptions and beliefs of the respondents without question. However, it is clear that in this interactionist view of the world that it is not possible for the researcher to be completely neutral.

A social constructionist view of grounded theory is offered by Chamaz (1995), which is at divergence from Glaser's view (1992) when he attempts to develop a "reflexive" grounded theory. This recognises that categories are constructed by the researcher during the research process and do not simply "emerge" from the data. However, Willig (2001) argues that:

" A social constructionist perspective would have to theorize the role of language in the construction of categories which, in turn, would mean engaging with the notion of 'discourse'. Such an engagement, however, may transform the method to such an extent that it ceases to be (a version of) grounded theory". (Willig, p 46)

She goes on to question the suitability of this methodology in psychological research as it was originally intended to study social processes from "the bottom up" and when applied to the nature of experience rather than social processes it is reduced to a technique of systematic categorization. She argues that grounded theory should be reserved for the study of social psychological processes.

So, from a social constructionist viewpoint the researcher is more than a "witness" and actively constructs a particular understanding of the phenomena and so research does not capture "social reality" but is itself a social construction of reality. From this standpoint then, all theory is social construction. It has been argued that the grounded theory methodology advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998) is so far removed from that originally conceived by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that it is a different method and should be called something different. Given that this has not been the case and both are referred to as grounded theory the following paragraphs briefly outline the methods used and advocated by Strauss and Corbin.

The method

Open coding is about the discovery of concepts.

" . To uncover, name, and develop concepts, we must open up the text and expose the thoughts, ideas, and meanings contained therein", (Strauss and Corbin, p 102)

A concept, or labelled phenomena, is the building block of theory. Concepts are grouped together as categories and reassembled through statements of relationships between categories. These statements are referred to as hypotheses. Open coding can be done line-by-line, as whole sentence or paragraph or from perusing the whole document and asking the question "what's going on here?"

Axial coding is the second stage and is:

"The process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed axial because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions". (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p 123)

The purpose here is to reassemble data that were fractured during open coding; categories are related to their subcategories to form more precise and complete explanations about the phenomena. As well as relating categories to sub-categories this stage of coding also relates the major categories to each other. Analysis here is at two levels;

1 the actual words used

2 our conceptualisation of these

At this stage we must ask questions of the why, when, where, how variety.

"The paradigm" is an organisational scheme that can be used to help our emerging connections. It is an:

"Analytic tool devised to help analysts integrate structure with process". (Strauss and Corbin, p 123)

The paradigm is comprised of conditions (causal, intervening, contextual), actions/interactions (strategic, routines, alignments) and consequences. "Relational statements" are made which form hypotheses about how the concepts relate.

At this stage there is a key interplay between induction (what emerges from the data) and deduction (our interpretation of what is going on based in the data but interpreted through our view of the world and knowledge of the context).

“We are deducing what is going on based on data but also based on our reading of that data along with our assumptions about the nature of life, the literature that we carry in our heads, and the discussions that we have with colleagues, (this is how science is born)”. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p 137)

Selective coding, the third stage, is “the process of integrating and refining the theory”. This involves an interaction between analyst and data and through this integration, the data becomes theory.

At this stage, findings should be presented as a set of inter-related concepts and not simply as themes. Relational statements are abstracted from the data by the analyst. During this process is “discovery of the central category” or core category. The core category should “capture the story”, explain what the research is about, and subsumes all other categories. The techniques used in order to move through this final stage can be the actual writing of a story or by the use of diagrams. From here the theory is refined by reviewing the scheme for internal consistency and logic.

Glaser (1992) thought Strauss and Corbin too prescriptive in their approach to grounded theory resulting in something that was:

“Fractured, detailed, cumbersome and over self-conscious”.
(Glaser, p 60)

The researcher must therefore choose between the two different methods, both called grounded theory, but both stemming from two, possibly three, different philosophical standpoints.

Summary of the different methodologies employed

One of the goals of this research was to focus upon the pupil voice in respect of the social injustice that is academic underachievement. Although wider social processes are taken into account it was certainly the intention to bring about some change in the organisation, that being the school in question.

The type of study lent itself well to an action research methodology, which is intended to influence change and has a strong political agenda, a means of fighting social injustice. In this case, the injustice being academic underachievement. It involves the process of valuing and elaborating upon theory, which is seen as emergent as the process develops. In questioning whether a piece of research is action research or not it hinges upon the intention to bring about change rather than the adherence to a particular model.

A case study methodology is complementary to this in that it yields detailed, intensive knowledge about that case study site. The case study here is “instrumental” or “exploratory” in that it is an investigation into the phenomenon of underachievement. This methodology has been termed the “bedrock” of scientific investigation.

Focus group methodology can be a powerful way of gaining insights into group dynamics and insights about both content and process can be elicited using this type of interview. Informant interviews of this kind allow for exploration of perceptions and psychological processes, as well as being an efficient way of collecting data. However, in this type of group the outcomes can be influenced by power imbalances or a high degree of consensus within the group. Added to this, the facilitator may become a rejection figure in the research relationship. There may also be sensitivities around sharing information about personal experience, such as bullying.

In a grounded theory approach to data analysis, although there are different descriptions as to what the method actually is, the aim is to generate theory. This methodology works well when analysing focus group data because it is able to draw upon actions and interactions within the groups. There are three stages to the analysis; open coding, axial coding and selective coding, and working through this process involves an interplay between the researcher and the data, which must be acknowledged. The categories that emerge can be viewed as having been socially constructed.

For the purposes of this study, Strauss and Corbins' (1998) model and method are adopted as it lends itself to an interactionist perspective, taking into account group interactions (as in focus groups) and also the interaction of the researcher with the data, and the creative role of the researcher in constructing a theory which is grounded in the data.

PART 2: CONSIDERATION OF ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical issues for this research were considered in light of the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct for Psychologists (BPS, 1993). These are in accord with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004).

The BPS Code of Conduct sets out minimum standards with which psychologists are required to comply. There is detailed guidance on research with human participants and members of the Society must take account of these guidelines. In setting up this research, members of the group were all either qualified educational psychologists or assistant educational psychologists and ethical considerations were at the forefront of discussions. The society states that:

"they (psychologists)...shall ensure that research is carried out in keeping with the highest standards of scientific integrity. Taking account of their obligations under the law they shall hold the interest and welfare of those in receipt of their services to be paramount at all times and ensure that the interests of participants in research are safeguarded" (BPS, p 2)

The research group endeavoured to maintain this standard at all times and felt a particular obligation in a study where the focus was upon the views of young people, to represent these views in the most rigorous way possible.

The main areas for consideration are set out below under the three sub-headings.

Informed consent

The valid consent of participants is required when carrying out investigations or interventions, and researchers are urged to take “all reasonable steps” to ensure that the participant have understood the nature of the investigation, and the possible consequences. Particular note should be taken when including those with learning disabilities that the principle of “valid consent” is upheld. The rights of participants to withdraw from the research are also recognised.

In this study the school in question was fully informed of the aims of the research, the proposed methodology and issues of confidentiality for the school were discussed. The findings would not be shared with others in the LEA unless the school gave consent for this to happen. This was done through letter, meetings and the formal setting up of an agreement signed by both parties, school and researchers (appendix B).

At the next level, once a cohort of pupils was identified, letters of consent were supplied for the school to send to parents and to the pupils themselves (appendix A). The letter explained in appropriate language the aims of the research. There was then further discussion between pupils and school staff before the pupils met with the researchers. At the point where they met the researchers the project was again described and pupils were assured that they were not obliged to participate in the group discussion or to remain in the room if they wished to leave. Although all members of the groups had been identified as underachieving, none had an identified learning disability.

The researchers fully explained the outcomes arising from the groups, and information sharing was explained. This researcher also informed participants, both pupil and staff, that findings would be written up for the purpose of research and possibly published in the future.

Confidentiality and anonymity

Psychologists are required to preserve the confidentiality of information acquired through professional practice and research, and to protect the privacy of individuals and organisations. Their identity cannot be revealed without their expressed permission.

Confidentiality in this case was to operate at several levels, the first being that assured to the school. Because of the nature of the investigation any findings revealed might be seen as sensitive and further validation of the school's "underachievement" in the area of pupil progress. The tension for the group was that a request made by our employer (the LEA) about our work and our findings, may be seen as legitimate. The question of how far we could guarantee the school confidentiality was therefore a difficult one. The research group certainly felt that this was not a decision that could be taken within the group. Discussions were then held with the principal educational psychologist (PEP) about the nature of the guarantee that could be given to the school. In turn, the PEP felt that he must obtain clarity on this issue from senior managers in the organisation. Ultimately an agreement was reached and the group was able to offer the school the assurance that no findings could be shared that identified them, without their expressed consent. The group were able to share generalised findings around a group of schools but not those that would be identifiable to one school. The school agreed to participate under these circumstances. Indeed, when findings were fed back to the school's senior managers they were asked if the findings could be shared with one of the key stage 3 strategy consultants, who could support them in further work. They did not give consent for this sharing to take place and kept the information given to them "in house".

Pupils were also guaranteed confidentiality in that remarks made in the group would not be traceable to any individual or indeed any group. Of three groups interviewed it was not possible for the school to know what each group had said, or what any one pupil had said. All findings were fed back anonymously. Pupils were fully aware that findings overall would be fed back to school staff and that their ideas and

comments would be written up in this research and possibly published at a later date.

At the next level, the groups themselves were asked, and agreed, to respect confidentiality within the group and not to repeat outside of the group what had been shared during interviews.

Protecting participants

A difficult issue arose around a potential child protection concern. Several pupils in one group described and named a particular teacher as physically handling them in an inappropriate manner. After discussion within the research team it was felt that the best course of action was to feed this back to the school and ask them to look into the teacher's behaviour. This was done by the researcher at a meeting with a senior member of staff of the school. The BPS (1963) states that:

“In exceptional circumstances, where there is sufficient evidence to raise serious concern about the safety or interests of recipients of services...take such steps as are judged necessary to inform appropriate third parties after first consulting an experienced and disinterested colleague...” (BPS, p4)

Under these circumstances the appropriate third party was deemed to be the school and the experienced and disinterested colleague was another member of the research team who was not involved with that school.

Participants were also protected in the keeping of records. Information held on computer regarding this research did not involve pupil names but numbered the groups interviewed, likewise with audiotapes kept. This data could not be traced back to named pupils. Pupils and the school in question gave their consent to audiotape being used in the interview setting and used to create written transcripts. The original lists of pupils used to identify a cohort were supplied by the LEA's performance management information team and were stored internally in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Any other information has been rendered anonymous and the school that is the subject of this study is simply described as the “case study high school”.

In summary, all members of the research team were familiar with the Code of Conduct and adhered to the guidance in the Code. Difficult ethical issues were discussed fully with the appropriate parties. Confidentiality was guaranteed to participants and due care was taken in the storing of records. Every effort was made to ensure that consent was fully informed and given by representatives of the school, by pupils and by their parents. All parties understood that, as well as a research project for the school, the information given would be used as part of a thesis for the University of Sheffield and that there was every possibility that further published work may emerge from this research. In addition findings were fed back to pupils in order to establish whether they thought that their views had been fairly represented. The same offer was made to staff that were interviewed.

PART 3: PROCEDURES

As explained in the introduction to this thesis, the research was a response to the socio-educational problem of underachievement, the focus being initially upon schools that were not meeting floor targets. At this time the DfES floor target was 20% A-Cs at GCSE. Such results were of particular concern to the Local Authority as one of the major goals of the EDP was “closing the gap”, a goal that was proving difficult to achieve despite, in some cases, quite extensive support. Schools that were not reaching floor targets were, not surprisingly, in some of the more economically deprived areas of the city. The first steps involved:

- Writing to potential target schools to try to engage them in the research project
- Exploring data around “underachieving schools” to try to gain a better understanding of the profile of the schools that were, in a broad sense, not meeting floor targets.

Exploring data

The research team worked with the Performance Management Information Team (PMIT) in the education department in order to look at data across some possible target schools. From here it was possible to consider raw results, aspects of value added and subject residuals. Most of the schools that were vulnerable in terms of not meeting floor targets had difficulties in the core subjects of English, maths and science but often exhibited more difficulty in one or more of these areas.

Engaging schools

A letter was sent to six high schools briefly explaining the purposes of the project and why they had been selected for invitation to take part. The letter (see appendix A) was followed up by a phone call from one of the research team, the purpose of which was to set up a meeting with key staff members in order to give a more detailed explanation of the project and to reach some agreement about the school and the research teams engagement with one another. In each case the discussions were held with a senior member of staff.

Once schools had agreed to engage with the project then the PMIT were able to provide more detailed data. The research team asked for the following:

The identification of a cohort of pupils for each school which had achieved broadly speaking "average results" at the end of key stage 2 based upon SATs scores but who had not achieved the results predicted for them at key stage 3 based, again, upon SATs scores. The discrepancy was described in terms of average points scores and pupils were ranked from those with the greatest discrepancy to those with the least. A list of around 30 pupils was generated for each of the schools in the project. Year 10 pupils were the focus as they had most recently undergone national curriculum assessment at KS3.

Setting up the study

At the initial visit to the school a contract was agreed (see appendix B), which outlined the commitment required from each side and the predicted timelines involved. The elements included were:

- Rationale and overview (aims, methodology, parental and pupil consent, benefits to the school)
- Mutual expectations
- Key actions and timelines
- Confidentiality
- Consultation with parents
- Reporting back procedures
- Signed agreement

It was intended that the outcomes of the research would necessarily lead to an action plan that would be supported by the research team. It was shared with and understood by the schools that the purpose of the project would be to influence change i.e. help to identify barriers to achievement and processes that lead to underachievement, and to understand practice that had a bearing on achievement.

On a subsequent visit the cohort of potential pupils was discussed and the schools were asked to identify two focus groups of year 10 pupils from the list provided based upon certain principles which would reflect a mixed group by gender and ethnicity. A focus group can be between 8 and 12 pupils in size, but did vary quite considerably, and there are no hard and fast rules regarding what is viable. The school eliminated pupils from the list who, in their experience, attended school very infrequently or who were potentially very challenging / disruptive. The perspectives of the pupils who were eliminated would no doubt have been illuminating also, but they did not lend themselves to an exploration of issues as part of a group. Further research may consider the views of such "hard to reach" (Golden *et al*, 2004) pupils.

Schools were given guidance about the setting up and running of focus groups and some key principles were agreed in advance. Letters of permission were provided

to the schools to seek both parental and pupils' permission to take part in the project (Appendix A). Both letters were carefully worded to avoid labelling those pupils as "underachievers", but rather to seek their views as to why some pupils may not be doing as well as in school they might. It was agreed that after the first tranche of data gathering with the pupil focus groups that this would be followed up with either staff interviews or classroom observations, or both, in order to provide some triangulation of the evidence.

Importantly, it was agreed that this was not a comparative study in the sense of having comparison groups to establish the effect of variables, and that each school would engage and shape the project in a way that was most helpful and illuminating to their own setting. The contexts of the schools, although similar in terms of underachievement, would be unique in other ways. In essence, each school would be an individual case study site with a separate research pairing to link into the school. This research project gives an account of one of those schools.

Setting up the focus groups

A booklet was produced for the benefit of the researchers (see Appendix C) and for the schools, which contained the key elements of:

- What is a focus group?
- Some benefits of focus groups
- Running a project using focus groups
- Consent
- Role of moderator/ facilitator
- Conducting the interviews / facilities
- Confidentiality

This was discussed in advance to try to avoid, as far as possible, any pitfalls that might emerge on the day.

Running the groups

In this particular school, but common across the project, two researchers met with the groups that had been finally selected by the school. From a sample of possible underachievers of 32 pupils, seventeen actually took part in the focus group interviews. Roles for the researchers were agreed in advance and one researcher was to act as facilitator whilst the other took field notes and made observations. The room was set up with a tape recorder and pupils sat around a table.

Interview questions were designed to explore the key research questions around teaching and learning, support, motivation, barriers to achievement, and overcoming barriers to achievement. (see Appendix D)

Before the interview:

- Each pupil was given a name label and asked to introduce themselves
- The researchers introduced themselves
- An overview of the aims of the research were given
- Understanding was checked, as was consent
- Ground rules were discussed
- Confidentiality was emphasised
- It was explained that the interview would be taped and transcribed and that notes would be taken
- Feedback would be given to key school staff but anonymity was assured

The interviews

Group 1

In the first group were 7 girls and 2 boys, 9 pupils in total. Although the aim had been for a mixed group on the day the pupils who attended were predominantly female. Out of a total pool of 13 pupils 4 boys were absent, which led to some gender imbalance. Some girls were more vocal in discussion although other girls had little to say. One boy did not contribute any thoughts to the discussion. The

deputy head teacher later described him as “the cock of the school”. There was some challenging behaviour, which had to be addressed through referring back to group rules, and there was a strong sense to both researchers that peer group image was of very high importance here. It is possible that some pupils did not wish to be seen co-operating or taking the task too seriously. The most confident did express their views quite strongly.

Group2

The second group consisted of 5 boys and 2 girls. One other girl was absent on that day. Out of a possible pool of 11 pupils only 7 were present and this gave a gender imbalance in favour of the boys. During this group it became apparent that the girls would not speak out in front of the boys. The boys were most vocal, behaviour needed to be challenged, and they were particularly disrespectful towards the girls in the group. It was clearly a very uncomfortable experience for the girls. The group was stopped and the girls were given the option to leave and come back at a later date (in reality 2 days later) to be given the opportunity to respond to the questions, which they chose to do.

Group 3

Group 3 arose out of the behaviours described in group 2 and comprised the two girls who had chosen to leave group 2, plus another girl who had been absent on that day. The same questions were put to the 3 girls as were put to the other groups. All the girls responded to the questions to a greater or lesser extent.

A total of 17 pupils participated with 7 boys and 10 girls taking part. The tapes were transcribed by administrative staff and were later checked against the original tape recordings and corrected. In the meantime, field notes were used to give early information of possible concepts. The two researchers considered these independently and then together. There was broad agreement about the concepts discovered; minor differences were reconciled by discussion.

The focus groups had been challenging in a number of different ways, as outlined above. Overall, however, both a variety and depth of view had been elicited, which seemed to the researchers to be a fair reflection of the views of the group members. Different voices had been heard, including male and female voices. What enriched the data for the researchers were the insights that had been gained into group processes and some of the processes at work in the school, by witnessing at first hand some of the dynamics at work. From this point of view the groups seemed to offer a microcosm of life in the case study high school.

Analysing the transcripts: Open coding

- 1 Each line of each transcript was numbered for ease of reference.
- 2 Concepts were identified and formed the basis of a table (see Appendix E).
- 3 The line reference for the concept was added to the table and built upon each time that concept was referenced in the transcript.
- 4 This procedure was repeated for the second group but the table for group one was used as a starting point with new concepts being added as necessary.
- 5 This process was repeated for the third group.
- 6 A new table was then created which comprised of the composite concepts and references for all three groups. References were colour coded for identification so that it was possible to see which references had been identified from which group.

Having put all of the concepts together it was possible to see which ones were most frequently referred to by the groups. The concepts were then taken apart and rearranged in different configurations in order to consider relationships between the concepts, possible ways of clustering the concepts into categories and identifying the most predominant of these.

Having identified some key categories these were presented for the school to consider. The relationships were shown between the key categories through the process of axial coding.

Discussion with school and further planning of action research

Findings from this stage of the research were fed back to a senior member of staff with a view to identifying the next steps in the process. Steps suggested by the researchers were:

- Give more detailed feedback to SMT on the areas, or some of the areas, outlined.
- Interview teachers around similar areas
- Lesson observations
- Action plan drawn up with the school.

A number of questions accompanied each step.

The school decided that they would like more detailed feedback on key categories i.e. quotes from transcripts to expand on what the pupils were actually saying. They also wanted to go ahead with staff interviews.

They did not want to go ahead with lesson observation at this point. The reasons given were that the senior and middle management of the school were embarking upon extensive lesson observations of teaching and learning at this time in preparation for an HMI visit, which was a follow up to an OFSTED inspection. The school was not at this point in special measures but had gone into serious weaknesses and there was a lot of anxiety amongst staff and high levels of staff absence. It was felt that the timing would be wrong for lesson observation.

The school was not ready at this stage to formulate an action plan as it was felt that a staff view would be an important source of data and that time could be made available to collect a sample of staff views.

On a subsequent visit it was agreed that staff would be given individual interviews and that they would be asked broadly the same questions as had been asked of the pupils but framed appropriately. A cohort of staff was to be selected by the school with a range of gender, experience, age and roles in the school. It was important at

this point to have a flexible research design, one that could be influenced by the school and adapted to their needs and current perceptions.

Staff interviews

Five members of staff were interviewed, 4 on one morning, returning to interview a teacher 2 days later who had had a timetable commitment.

A set of open questions was used (see Appendix D) similar to the questions asked of the pupils. The purpose of the interviews was explained to each person and their permission sought to take field notes and also to tape record the interview. The group was comprised as follows:

1. Teacher of science, female, white UK, second year of teaching
2. Learning Support Assistant, female, Asian origin, first year in the role
3. Behaviour Support Worker, male, mixed race, first year in the role
4. Learning mentor, female, African/ Caribbean origin, 4 years in the role at this school
5. Teacher of history and also head of year, male, white UK origin, 3rd year of teaching, 2nd in this school

Administrative staff transcribed tapes and transcripts were checked for accuracy against the tapes. The transcripts were analysed question-by-question and concepts were identified (Appendix F). Concepts were grouped into categories and chunks of text from the transcripts were selected to illustrate each of the categories for each question.

A model or paradigm was drawn up (Diagram 2 in results chapter) to illustrate the interconnectedness of the key categories with each other, and with their underlying concepts. (Axial coding)

Stage 3: selective coding

Before reaching this stage it was possible to answer the research questions that had been posed, although these had been modified throughout the process (see chapter on research questions). It was agreed with the school that findings would be presented and checked with the pupils concerned, presented and checked with the staff concerned and then presented to the school's senior management team for further consideration. The check back with staff did not happen because of organisational issues within the school. However, we were assured that the staff involved were happy for the next stage, feedback to senior managers, to happen without this step.

However, because a grounded theory approach was being used it was the final part of the process for the researcher to try to find the core category and to integrate all of the findings into a framework or theory which would explain the process of underachievement in this case study.

The outcomes of this process can be seen in the results chapter (diagrams 3,4,5). These were reached by a process of writing the story for each group, using the paradigms of impact constructed at the stage of axial coding and experimenting with different visual and iconic representations of the data and the inter-relationships between the key categories. At this stage, the researcher is also drawing upon previous research and literature, both consciously and sub-consciously and the experience of the research process, as well as the "hard" data produced.

Position of the researcher

In the grounded theory model adopted for this study there is a recognition that the researcher will interact with the data and will bring to bear their knowledge of the literature around a given topic, their own previous experiences and the experiences of the processes at work when gathering data. The process involves both induction and deduction and therefore the researcher does not take on a "neutral" stance, if this were ever possible. Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) when writing about the study of practice propose a reflexive-dialectical relationship between the traditional

dichotomies of individual versus social and objective versus subjective modes of thinking and researching. The objective, or externally given, is interpreted internally and subjectively, and the individuals studied are influenced by history and the “web” of social interactions between people.

Being, therefore, a reflexive practitioner involves acknowledging these positions and recognising the influences determining our practice. This is equally applied to the practitioner-researcher. In this study it is taken as a legitimate stance and the process of constructing theory in this approach is from a reflexive-dialectical perspective but, importantly, is grounded in data.

Summary

A project of this sort involves quite detailed preparation and planning, some of which may involve other departments of the LEA. In this case another team was involved in providing data that enabled the project team to identify a cohort of underachieving pupils.

Engaging schools in the process has its own challenges. Whilst it might be assumed that schools would welcome the opportunity to bring in a team of researchers and engage in a process that would help to enlighten them as to pupils’ views on a very significant issue, this was not always the case. Some schools felt that they could not engage at all because of the pressures of other agendas, one school was very suspicious as to the team’s real motives and the ones that did express an interest in engaging were often quite difficult to communicate with over the course of the research.

Careful preparation and planning meant that we provided a clear contract with time lines and although the research team could keep to the timeline, difficulties in communicating with the schools meant that sometimes these were thrown out to a considerable extent.

The analysis of transcripts from focus groups is time consuming and should not be underestimated. Transcripts that are prepared by another administrative team still have to be checked, another time consuming task.

The nature of action research means that the researcher must be entirely flexible in changing some of the original questions and aims in order to better meet the needs of the school in question. The relationship seems a fragile one and, schools under stress because of issues around standards, behaviour and attendance must be treated with sensitivity in order not to place them under additional pressure from a process that has been put in place to support them.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS FROM GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter the results of the full grounded theory analysis are presented, without reference to the original research questions that had prompted the investigation. After this “grounded theory” chapter, the research questions will be addressed using data from the full analysis, but concentrating on finding answers to the research questions themselves. This excludes any consideration of new theoretical frameworks or concepts arising from the grounded theory analysis, which occurs in the current chapter.

In reporting the results of this research it is important that certain issues be addressed and acknowledged. Wellington (2000) points out that one of the objectives of educational research is to give others “a platform” but in doing this it must be accepted that some “difficult choices” must be made and that every write up is “finite”.

In using a grounded theory approach it is important that the researcher acknowledges, if Strauss and Corbin’s model (1998) is to be adopted, that the researcher interacts with the data and that concepts do not simply emerge but are created by this interplay between data and researcher. To take this a step further, Chamaz (1995) suggests that the concepts that are presented are constructed as part of the process.

The researcher must therefore accept that previous knowledge, experience and even biases will influence the progress of the analytical process.

“All knowledge claims are inextricably tied to the satisfaction of human purposes and desires, an ahistorical, asocial, “neutral”, “objective” stance on the part of the researcher is illusory”. (Bines et al, 1998, p 67)

Barton (1998) suggests that a self-critical stance should be taken towards the research process in asking key questions about how concepts are defined within a project and whose interests such definitions serve.

Clough (1998) discusses the issues of "voice" in research, voice as a function of power or powerlessness and voice as a medium of narrative expression. He suggests that the task for research can be one of "turning up the volume" on the depressed or inaudible voice but also raises a more political and complex notion of voice around the questions of who is listening to whom and why and in whose interests? Voice, according to Barton, implies participating in decision making that will have a real impact upon lives.

Issues around listening to voice are problematic and the researcher must question his or her own stance, motives and constructs.

"The research act of listening to voice must always involve the (broadly defined) processes of both mediation and translation".
(Clough, p129)

In this chapter, although trying to represent the voice of the pupil, the researcher has the final say as to what appears in print and how the voice is ultimately represented and this demonstrates the power of the adult professional over the pupil. To recognise this is only a small step in redressing the power imbalance that exists in society between adults and children, between professionals and non-professionals, between those who have a legitimate voice and those who do not.

I have also tried to achieve some balance between the voice of the pupil, the primary data source, and the voice of the adult member of school staff who, it might be assumed, would already have a voice within the organisation. Because of the social complexity of the school as an organisation it has been necessary during the exposition of the process of analysis and in the presentation of results to try to represent the interplay between the two most obvious sets of voices, whilst recognising that my own voice, the voice of the researcher, will also be heard here.

Focus group interviews with pupils- summary of results

Three sets of focus group interviews were available for analysis. Tapes were made into transcripts. Each line of the transcript was given a number for reference.

Stage 1 Open Coding

Open coding is described as:

“The analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data”. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p101)

Using this approach, the process can be described as coding but what results from the activity of coding are concepts. The first stage of analysis was to identify such concepts from the transcripts (see Appendix E).

The numbers of concepts discovered were as follows:

Group 1 = 23 concepts

Group 2 = 20 concepts

Group 3 = 21 concepts

A total of 64 concepts were discovered but overlap between the groups was allowed for and so when a composite was made from all 3 groups there were a total of 33 different concepts.

These were then ranked in order of frequency of reference and grouped into categories in order to facilitate the move to the next stage.

The initial concepts were grouped and 18 categories were identified + 9 labelled as “other” because of the small numbers of responses in these groups. (See Appendix F)

Stage 2 Axial coding

Axial coding is described as:

“The process of relating categories to their subcategories, termed “axial” because coding occurs around the axis of a category, linking categories at the level of properties and dimensions”. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 123)

Transcripts were revisited and categories were explored in terms of their relationships with each other, and within the context of the transcripts, in order to explore relationships between them.

The categories were grouped in order to find key categories, which were:

- Teaching and Learning = 135 responses
- Relationships with peers = 33 responses
- Relationships with adults = 110 responses
- Climate/environment = 73 responses

Making relational statements between the categories enables the construction of a paradigm, which is:

“An analytic tool devised to help analysts integrate structure with process”. (Strauss and Corbin, p 123)

Stage 3 Selective Coding

“The process of integrating and refining the theory”. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p143)

The relationship between the key categories is examined to reach a central or core category.

By outlining this process of coding it would be easy to mislead the reader into imagining that grounded theory analysis was a linear method, which it is possible to work through in an orderly, step by step fashion. In reality the processes at work,

both overt and less overt, form a much more complex loop of procedures, where data at different stages is visited and revisited in the “method of constant comparison”. Indeed, the researcher is further urged to see the method as a smorgasbord table (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) where items can be chosen, rejected or ignored. It is important then that the reader, as well as the researcher, does not become too constrained by the stages of coding as described above but tries to envision the entire process as a journey which moves one from data to theory in all its complexity without the researcher ever being able to account to the last detail as to how they arrive at the final destination.

Detailed presentation of results

Open coding

Data from the three groups at this stage of analysis was treated separately because of the differences between the groups in terms of gender mix and dynamics within the group. The concepts from all three groups were then amalgamated before moving on to the next stage of identifying key categories.

Group 1-numerical frequency of occurrence of concepts

Group one was imbalanced in terms of gender in that it contained more girls than boys and the boys who were present were not very vocal. Twenty-three concepts were identified from this group (see Appendix E) with the greatest focus being on the issue of support. Concepts were ranked from most to least frequently mentioned. The most frequently mentioned of these were:

- Support
- Teaching style
- Teacher behaviour
- Learning style
- Sense of purpose/understanding
- Fairness

- Classroom environment
- Discipline and behaviour

The concept of “support” was relatively large and so it was necessary to break it down into the kinds of areas mentioned by the group.

Table 13: Types of support references by pupils in group 1

Type of support	References
Teacher support	18
Parent/ family	7
Peers	3
Self + other	4
Mentor	1
Private tutor	1

Of the references made to teacher support 6 were about needing more help from teachers and 6 about lack of teacher support/ attention. Therefore 6 were positive comments about receiving support from teachers. All other mentions of support (parent, family, peers) were positive.

Group 2 -numerical frequency of occurrence of concepts

This group began as a mixed group, although predominantly male, but became entirely male as the group went on as the girls left part way through. The girls made little or no contribution to this group.

The frequency of occurrence of concepts was analysed (see appendix 1) and the most frequently mentioned concepts are as follows:

- Motivation
- Support
- Quality of teaching
- Discipline and behaviour
- Learning style
- Distractions/concentration
- Facilities/toilets

Table 14: Types of support referenced by pupils in group 2

Again, the concept of support was broken down further into:

Type of support	References
Learning Support Assistant (LSA)	6
Teacher support	5
Mentor	4
Peers	2
Tutor	1
Self	1
Parent/family	0

Five references were about a lack of teacher/ staff support and four were about needing more teacher/LSA support. One comment was about LSAs needing to know the subject area that they were working in. Comments about peer support were positive.

Group 3 -numerical frequency of occurrence of concepts

This was a small, all girls group that had been taken out of group 2. Again, the frequency of response (see Appendix E) was analysed and the most often occurring concepts were:

- Motivation
- Teacher behaviour
- Support
- Teacher/pupil interactions/relationships
- Teasing/bullying/intimidation
- Discipline and behaviour
- Peer relationships

Table 15: Types of support referenced by pupils in group 3

Support, again, was a significant concept, which had to be broken down.

Type of support	References
Teacher support	6
Learning support assistant (LSA)	4
Peers	2
Self	2

Comments about peer support were positive whilst four comments were about lack of teacher/ LSA support and two were about needing more support.

All groups- numerical frequency of occurrence of emergent concepts

When the responses from all 3 groups were put together there were 33 concepts (see Appendix E). The most frequently mentioned of these when all groups were taken into considerations were:

- Support
- Motivation
- Teacher behaviour
- Discipline and behaviour
- Learning style
- Quality of teaching
- Teaching style
- Teacher/pupil interactions/relationships
- Fairness
- Perception of teachers/school
- Distractions/concentration
- Facilities/toilets
- Purpose/understanding
- Classroom environment
- Teasing/bullying

Table 16: Types of support referenced by pupils – all groups

The concept of support was broken down as follows:

Frequency of reference by type of support	
Not getting enough/needing more teacher support	21
Teacher support	8
Parent/family support	7
Peer support	7
Self	6
LSA support	5
Don't get enough/need more LSA support	5
Mentor support	4
Private tutor	3
Don't need help	2
Don't get enough/need more mentor support	1

Grouping concepts into categories

By examining the concepts discovered, of which there were 33, and their frequency of reference as well as the more detailed breakdown of the concept of "support", sixteen categories emerged at the stage of open coding which were as follows:

- Teaching style/ quality of teaching
- Learning style
- Challenge/ lack of
- Challenge/too great
- Motivation/goals
- Adult Support
- Interactions with adults
- Teacher behaviour
- Fairness
- Attention/being listened to
- Teasing/intimidation
- Peer support
- Peers as negative influence
- Discipline and behaviour
- Classroom environment
- Distractions/concentration

Some of the initial concepts had been grouped under these categories e.g. perceptions of teachers and school, boredom, peer relationships, whilst others were discarded because they were not common to more than one group or were mentioned in passing with little follow up from the group, or were expressed as a minority view in the group. Examples of these would be facilities, uniform, sexism, racism, group size, school day, distance travelled to school and tiredness.

This first level of analysis led to some categories being identified, with concepts being grouped within them. This process was carried out in several ways.

1 By ranking the frequency of responses as shown above.

2 By cutting up the emergent concepts and physically arranging and re-arranging them in groupings until a clearer picture began to emerge of the linkages between them.

3 By revisiting the transcripts and making a summary for each group so that due emphasis was given to what the pupils actually said rather than relying entirely on the “fractured” concepts that were discovered. A process was therefore undertaken of reassembling the data and asking questions of that data of the how, why, when and what variety. This stage facilitated the movement between the open coding process and the axial coding process as it served the purpose not only of helping to group the categories together in a meaningful way but also to begin to explain the relationship between the categories.

Similarities and differences between groups

For all groups support was a frequently mentioned concept which, when broken down further, was about a perceived lack of support or unfairness in the way support was allocated. On the positive side some pupils pointed to peer support and parental support as beneficial.

Issues relating to motivation, including sense of purpose, were also frequently mentioned by all groups in the course of interviews. Discipline and behaviour were most frequently mentioned by group 2 which became a “boys group” part way through the interview, as was distractions in the classroom. These issues were also raised by the other groups but did not feature quite so frequently.

Issues around teacher/pupil relationships and teacher behaviour were most frequently mentioned in groups 1 and 3, which seemed to reflect a more female voice. Teacher behaviour was also a concept in group 2 but was ranked 7th in frequency of mention below quality of teaching, which was a frequently mentioned concern.

Only in group 3 (all female) was teasing and bullying openly discussed and this rated highly (ranked 4th) for this group. It is clear, however, that concepts such as these do not stand alone and were linked to the teacher / pupil relationship concept.

Axial coding: developing and relating categories to each other

Group 1

After looking at the numerical frequency of responses by concept for each group it was important to move to the next stage by a process of not simply moving around and grouping concepts, but of revisiting the whole interview transcript for each group so that the sense of the “whole” was not fragmented, thus reducing the essence of meaning which the groups conveyed. As part of this process the researcher made notes on “ the story” that was being told and illustrated these key issues with direct quotations. This entire process of fragmentation and reconstruction allowed the transition from concepts to categories to take place with as much integrity as possible. The process was followed for all three groups.

It seemed that some pupils don't attend classes because they're bored or they don't see the point of what they are doing.

Pupil - 'Cos I come to school but I'm never in school. I always go out, I come to school but then I skive."

LT - Right and what are the reasons that your not here when your not here?

Pupil - 'Cos I hate this school.

LT - Right, tell us a little bit more about that. What is it you hate?

Pupil – It's just boring.

LT – Something's boring about it?

Pupil – I feel that, when I'm in class I feel like I'm not learning owt.

Other pupils don't understand the work and they feel that some teachers don't explain things properly, and that they don't get the support they need because the teachers are helping others. Teachers and support staff, in the pupils' view, help the clever or hardworking pupils or those with SEN.

Pupil - 'Cos the teachers are all young and we've always got different, new teachers and they just walk around the class room and they don't tell you

what to do and they're not very strict. The young ones anyway. Some teachers are. There's lots of strict rules, just not in class.

Pupil - You could just be sat there and that's how you get in trouble. You're just sat there and you don't know what you're doing, you ask the teacher and they just don't listen to you.

Pupil - No but the teachers they're always around other pupils in your class like and you're shouting your teacher and they're always around the teacher's pet. They're getting it so you're not getting attention because the teacher's pet's getting it.

LT - Can we not focus on one particular person but can we say what kinds of pupils teachers give most attention to?

Pupil - The ones that are already on the second book in class.

Pupil - The ones that have got two exercise books and stuff like that.

LT - They're doing better and so they get more help?

Pupil - It's basically who they want to help.

LT - How do they make the choices?

Pupil - They're trying to say they don't want to help the second class.

Whilst pupils are distracted by behaviour of their peers teachers also get distracted from helping them because of the behaviour of some.

Pupil - Could be the teacher sometimes (who helps). It depends what kind of mood they're in. Most of the time the teacher's always yelling at somebody because you get naughty people in the class and they always mess about.

Pupil-There's always something distracting you.

Pupil - There's something going on everyday.

Pupil - In the corridor maybe.

Pupil - There's this girl she always comes to my class going 'Come outside Mr whatever wants you,' and he doesn't even want me. And we'll go to this

classroom and she'll go 'We're not really going there we just, y'know.' And I'll be like, well what was the point?

Some pupils work best when it's quiet and when the teacher is more relaxed.

LT - But if you're in a lesson when you can work, what are the teachers like?

Pupil - Chilled out.

LT - The teachers are chilled out, they're more relaxed. What is the classroom like?

Pupil - Quiet.

Pupil – Teachers need to fix up, need to chill out, to be chilled when you come to school and not be struck up.

On the issue of fairness, some pupils felt that some teachers wind them up and they then go to the next lesson angry, and then get into trouble again. Teachers, they assert, won't let them argue their point.

Pupil - When you're arguing, when they're shouting at you and you're trying to prove your point, and they're not letting you prove your point, they don't want to hear it.

Pupil - They think that just because they're teachers, they think they're more than teachers, they think they're police, you can't argue with them.

Pupils felt that they needed more help from teachers to understand the work by explaining more and giving them attention and guidance. Support comes from a wide variety of sources such as parents, teachers, friends and mentors, or by helping themselves.

Some pupils felt that they needed to be given more work whilst some like working at their own pace, doing research and using computers. Some pupils work best when it's quiet, others like some chatter. Some felt that staff should split friends up

Group 2

Pupils feel that they have too many supply teachers, or teachers who do not know the subject. Feelings were evident that their teachers were not as good as the teachers in others schools, ("They have better teachers and a better building"), and they felt that the quality of teaching was poor. Bottom sets especially, they thought, did not get qualified teachers. Good teachers, to them, explain more than once. Pupils are bored by the copying work that they are given to do.

On the quality of teaching:

Pupil – They're not fully qualified. Mr X - he teaches maths but he doesn't teach it.

Pupil - He just has us copy examples.

Pupil - He gives us a piece of paper and tells us to copy examples.

Pupil - I don't like writing a lot really.

LT - So writing's not good. Anybody else agree with that? That writing isn't...

Pupil - All we do is copy off the board.

Pupil - And my hand starts to hurt.

LT - So copying and writing you're not too keen on at all.

Pupil - It's not that I don't like writing it's that I don't like copying.

On the subject of understanding:

LT - What do you think helps you to learn can you think of...?

Pupil - Decent teachers.

LT - Tell me what you mean by decent teachers.

Pupil - That they explain it good enough.

LT - Ok, so a decent teacher means they explain it well to you.

Pupil - Explain it more than once.

Pupils in this group liked practical lessons and didn't like writing and copying. PE is a special favourite and they have good self-esteem about this. It's seems OK to be good at PE.

LT - What types of lessons do you like best?

Pupil - PE, graphics, that's it.

LT - We've got quite a few people who like PE then. The four of you, do you like PE?

Pupil - Everyone likes PE.

LT - Everybody in the whole school?

Pupil - Yeah.

LT - Why do you like PE?

Pupil - 'Cos it's good.

Pupil - 'Cos we enjoy it.

Pupil - 'Cos we're all talented at sports.

Pupil - Practical. Like in science. We never do practicals.

LT - So is that good, when you do practicals?

Pupil - Yeah, yeah.

Pupil – So you can see how it works. When you just copy it you don't understand it properly.

On the subject of motivation they had this to say:

Pupil - We don't get rewards, we get...

Pupil - Punished

Pupil - Let me give you an example. When do you do something bad they send it first class stamp to your house, when you do something good they send it third class stamp to your house, with a rubbish letter.

LT - Do you get a letter home when you've done something good?

Pupil - Yeah.

Pupil – When you're bad they send it first class stamp. Two first class stamps.

Only one boy had a real career goal.

On the subject of behaviour they felt that “bad” people get in the way of learning, they distract, throw things, talk, make noise, name call (geek) and come into the room off the corridors, disrupting lessons.

LT - Ok. What gets in the way of you working or learning?

What does distract you?

Pupil - Bad people.

LT - So what do people do to distract you?

Pupil - Just talk.

Pupil - Throw things at you.

Pupil - Constantly make noise.

Pupil - Flick boogies at you.

Pupil - And they call me geek.

Pupil - Lots of people from the corridors, they come in.

Pupil - They open the doors.

Pupil - When they're running about and makin' noise as well.

Some of the group prefer a quiet environment in the classroom whilst others like music playing, some like working in groups and some alone. Friends seem to be selected from those pupils who work at the same level.

LT - I was going to ask you how you like to work. How do you like to work in lessons?

Several Pupils - Quiet environment.

Pupil- In groups as well.

LT - So it needs to be quiet. Do you mean really, really silent where nobody's allowed to talk?

Pupil - No, but just quiet.

LT - So music can help you to work. Are there any other things that help you to work, you work best in a group or you work best on your own?

Pupil- Group.

LT-You said in a group. Does it matter who you're in a group with?

Pupil - Yeah. Somebody you can relate to.

LT - OK. Is it better if a teacher chooses the group?

Pupil - No, we choose it.

LT - So who would you choose? What kind of people?

Pupil - People at our level.

Pupil - Our friends.

Many pupils wanted better facilities and equipment, for example, access to the Internet, better toilets, more up to date textbooks, more use of technology and software.

Pupil - We need a bigger school and better teachers.

LT - But what do you need to do?

Pupil - New toilets. And toilet paper.

Pupil - Better facilities and equipment.

Pupil - Better equipment.

LT - What kind of equipment?

Pupil - School equipment.

Pupil - Sports.

Pupil - Text books.

Pupil - Up to date ones.

Pupil - Chairs and tables.

LT - Do you feel that your textbooks are not up to date?

Pupil - Some of them have got other people's names in and stuff.

Phenomena around self-esteem and sense of self as a learner, feelings of inadequacy seemed to be apparent in these concepts. Pupils seemed to have an external locus of control and there was little response when asked what they could do about achievement. Some did think, however, that they could concentrate more. Learning style was a key concept for boys but also the idea of staying within, and not mixing outside of, your own social/academic group.

Group 3

School was depicted by this group as a social organisation with complex sets of relationships where:

Some teachers are unfair and shout:

Pupil - Because Mr F always shouts at us and he makes us copy things down.

LT - Is that an issue with you and not getting on with the teacher or is it about copying things down?

Pupil: Getting on with the teacher.

Pupil - Copying down.

Pupils need more help with work:

LT- Are there any things that would help you?

Pupil - If the teachers were more supportive.

LT - Tell me what that supportive would look like? In what way could they be more supportive to you?

Pupil - Like notice that people are saying things to you and helping you with your work more and being more kinder.

Teachers, they feel, don't stop them from being teased and intimidated (boys name call and tease but girls intimidate them), and don't intervene because they're scared of some pupils themselves:

LT - So when you are there what gets in the way?

Pupil - The boys.

LT - Boys? What is it the boys do that gets in the way?

Pupils: Teasing, calling you names.

LT: Are they teasing you? (All of us) Do they tease the girls generally? (Yeah)

Pupil - Especially me.

Pupil - Some of the girls intimidate you.

LT - Some of the girls. So there are some girls who also behave like the boys.

What do the girls do?

Pupil - Just start on you, like two of them.

Pupil - Depends what side you get on them, some of them are all right.

LT - Are they intimidating in lessons or out of lessons?

Pupil - Out of lessons sometimes.

Pupil - Both.

LT - When the boys are behaving badly in lessons and, girls are being intimidating what do the teachers do?

Pupil - Nothing they just stand there watching.

Pupil - They're scared of them.

On the issue of support they felt that friends support but LSAs stick with pupils with SEN and "don't do their job properly". The perception was that it depended upon the adult's mood whether they help these pupils or not.

Pupil - I've got loads of friends.

LT - Have you?

Pupil - Yeah.

LT - So when you are with them, you mean just if they're in the same room as you or do you have to be able to work with them?

Pupil - Yeah. 'Cos they help you as well don't they?

Pupil - 'Cos in subjects as well they help you.

LT: Do any of you have teaching assistants in here?

Pupil - Sometimes in some lessons. They help you, depends what subject it's in. They help those with special needs.

LT - So if you've got people with special needs in the lessons, the teaching assistants help them?

Pupils: They help you. Depends what teacher it is.

LT: Tell me why they wouldn't help you; you said it depends what teacher it is?

Pupil: They just stay with one person and don't do their job properly.

LT: You said it depends what teacher it is; do you mean it depends what teaching assistant? They'd just stay with one person and wouldn't help you?

Pupil – Yeah, and what mood they're in.

The group had clear ideas about the quality of teaching and learning. They felt that supply teachers were not proper teachers, that work needs to be at the right level and that too much teacher talk and copying are boring. Lessons need to be fun, creative, practical and involve ICT. They described some pupils as going to time out to get out of lessons (boredom). There is a clear connection here between quality of teaching and how boredom leads to misbehaviour as an escape mechanism.

LT - Maths and textiles you are doing well. Why?

Pupil - 'Cos we always have proper teachers.

LT - So when you've got proper teachers you feel you are doing well in those areas. Are there any areas where you feel you're not doing as well?

Pupil - Science.

LT - Why do you think that?

Pupil – We're always getting supply teachers.

LT: What kind of things could help you do better at school or achieve better results?

Pupil: To have proper teachers instead of supplies.

LT: So to have permanent teachers instead of supply teachers?

Pupil: Yeah

Pupil - To have easier work

Pupil: And hard work

Pupil: They give us stuff what we've already done.

Some key categories begin to be identified here around the quality of teaching and its link to misbehaviour. The pupils in this group certainly express a view that supply

teachers are not “proper” teachers, and this would be linked to a lack of respect for those teachers, which affects the relationship, and therefore behaviour. The group clearly felt that lessons should be more creative and more fun to be in.

Relationships between this group and teachers would seem to be affected by the perception that teachers are not protecting them, making them feel safe, because they are too scared of some pupils to intervene, even though they must know what is happening.

On the concept of support the group felt that they did not get enough and that, therefore, support staff were not doing their jobs. It seemed here that pupils may need to understand the role of LSA and also have appropriate strategies to access support when they need it. Pupils saw peer support positively.

Identifying key categories

Support

Support came from a variety of sources but the greatest emphasis was placed on teacher support or lack of it, followed by support from other non-teaching school staff such as mentors and learning support assistants. Some pupils talked about a perceived lack of attention or attention going to either those pupils with special educational needs or those who were doing well in school. This highlighted a sense of unfairness that was felt although not overtly stated.

Underlying this issue of support, therefore, was an issue about relationships between pupils and the adults who teach and support them.

Some pupils mentioned getting support from parents and family and support from peers was mentioned on several occasions.

Relationships with adults

Support, or lack of it was one of the key concepts in the issue of relationships. Teacher behaviour, the negative behaviours exhibited by teachers towards pupils

was also put into this area. Fairness, attention and listening to pupils were some of the concepts that could be grouped under this key category.

Teaching and Learning

This was identified as a key category and incorporated such concepts as teaching style, learning style, lack of challenge, too much challenge, lack of understanding of subject, control over learning, motivation and goals. This area is also linked to the key concept of support, as pupils needed support in order to understand the subject but did not feel that they always got it.

Relationships with peers

This key category had relevance for all groups and was sometimes highlighted as a positive; your friends can offer support with your work and understanding of a subject. More often peers were cited as a distraction and therefore a negative influence. Worse than this was the issue of teasing and intimidation that was raised particularly by one group of girls. This group felt that they were not protected from this behaviour by teachers who were too scared to intervene and allowed this to go on. This in turn impacts upon the pupil/ teacher relationship.

Climate/environment and ethos

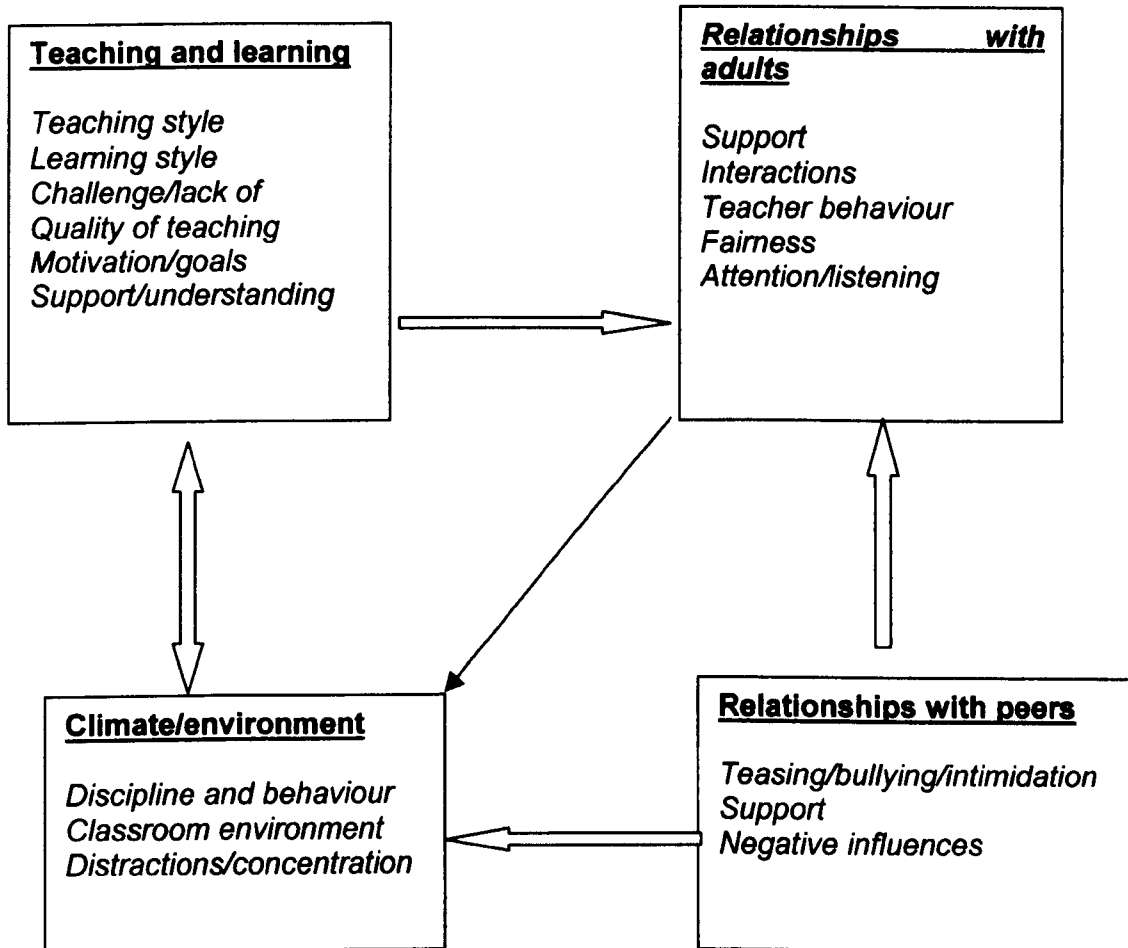
This key category captured issues that were raised about discipline and behaviour, classroom environment and distractions and concentration.

It could be argued that support does not stand alone as a category and could be subsumed under the two categories of relationships with adults and teaching and learning. It is clear that all of the key categories are interlinked and that there are indications of the complex nature of the school as a social organisation.

When attempting to separate illustrative quotes from transcripts under headings it became clear that the same piece of dialogue, for example, could illustrate support, interactions, teacher behaviour and attention/ being listened to. This demonstrated

that the different categories interact with each other, shown below in diagram 1, as well as interacting with the researcher when trying to make sense of those categories in looking beyond the transcript data, beyond the words, for the underlying processes. It is through a process of continual refinement, of telling and re-telling the stories at work here and through iconic representation that a central category can be discovered. The diagram below seeks to illustrate the connectivity between categories and the clustering of categories into key categories at the first two levels of the process.

Diagram1: Relating categories to key categories (pupils)



Key

Italic type- level 1 categories

Bold type- level 2 key categories

NB Arrows denote "impacts upon" and represents a pupil view as opposed to the researcher's view of impact

The diagram represents two levels of grounded theory coding, as concepts become categories through an open coding process, from categories key categories are identified and are linked through axial coding.

STAFF INTERVIEWS

Introduction

Before moving onto the next stage of selective coding it was important to consider the data collected from staff, teaching and non-teaching, for the purpose of triangulation. Although the primary data source was the pupil focus group data the secondary source is also highly illuminative in terms of the commonality with the pupil view and the key differences that were illustrated.

Staff were selected by the school as being a representative sample. They covered the areas of teacher (core subject), teacher (pastoral), learning mentor, behaviour support worker and teaching assistant. The researcher had originally asked for six but this had proved difficult for the school to release staff given the difficulty they had with high levels of teacher absence. The five staff interviewed were each asked the same questions as the pupils, but about the pupils, and the data went through a process of open coding, question by question.

Results from staff interviews

A line-by-line analysis of each interview brought up a set of initial concepts (see Appendix E) for each question. Responses in the staff interviews tended to adhere more closely to the question structure, but in some cases responses to an earlier question were more appropriate answers to a later question and this was taken into account at the second level of coding. The second level was reached by grouping the concepts according to similarity, with a coding framework in mind from the pupil interview data. Linkages were then made between the categories and key categories by going back to the original interviews, in order to maintain the integrity of intended meaning that could be lost in the process of coding. At the first level of coding the following numbers of concepts were found in the data:

Level 1

Table 17: Concepts arising from staff interviews by question

Question	Numbers of concepts
1	5
2	7
3	12
4	7
5	7
6	12
7	19
8	18

Eighty-seven concepts were discovered when coding the staff interviews, but when overlap and repetition were taken into account there were sixty-four *different* concepts at this first level of coding.

A number of categories were identified for each question from the initial set of concepts. This was done initially question by question with illustrative comments from staff so that the concepts did not become victim to reductionism when considering an overall paradigm.

It was clear that some of the categories were in common with those arising from the pupil focus groups but, also, that there were significant differences.

Key categories/staff

At the next level of coding (axial) relationships were drawn in terms of "impact" between the key categories. These are later described in diagrammatic form (diagram 2).

- Behaviour

- Teaching and Learning
- Outside influences/Background/neighbourhood
- Ethos
- Motivation/goals
- Confidence

Both groups put a lot of emphasis upon teaching and learning. Behaviour was a concern for pupils and this was subsumed under ethos for them. For staff it seemed to stand alone as a category because of the links that they made about behaviour impacting upon teaching and learning. Pupils did not raise outside influences in any negative way and where it was mentioned briefly it was to say that families helped with work. Ethos was a common category to both groups. Staff emphasised the importance of a positive atmosphere, praise and a work ethic and also the impact that the peer group could have on willingness to be seen working or to ask for help, whilst pupils were concerned with the "right working environment", behaviour and discipline. Comments were also made by pupils about lack of rewards. Motivation and goals was a key category for staff. Pupils talked about what motivated them in terms of teaching style e.g. lessons that are fun, practical lessons and those lessons where working with friends was allowed.

Behaviour- staff comments

Staff raised some key issues about behaviour in the school. Managing behaviour was seen as a distraction for the teacher, which would impact upon the quality of teaching in the classroom. The overall impact of staff absence was noted and this affected the general atmosphere around school, allowing "hot spots" to exist in terms of movement around school and an atmosphere of indiscipline which would spill over into lessons.

Staff readily acknowledged the importance of pupil image amongst their peers. It is neither acceptable to be seen to be doing well nor to have difficulty in learning. Both of these may lead to non-engagement in the lesson and, at its most extreme,

creating reasons to escape from the lesson by using misbehaviour as a mechanism to this end.

“One of the main problems is that the teachers are spending a lot of time in the classroom dealing with behaviour and that, obviously then it becomes very difficult to concentrate on actually raising achievement, which is what we should be doing in class. You spend more time managing behaviour than managing the work that you are actually doing”. *(Teacher/pastoral + humanities)*

“Certain students can be very confrontational, just basic things like jackets and coats, and not chewing. Some of the students use that as a way out of the lesson, it’s a very small amount, but if they become confrontational then that will remove them from the lesson”.
(Teacher/pastoral + humanities)

“Another problem can be staff absence. You can tell the difference around school when there is a number of staff absent for whatever reason and there is a lot of supply on, the atmosphere around school is different. There are little pockets of areas where the students know there is not anyone around. It can become very difficult, usually it can be very difficult to settle them down at the beginning, all the movement at the end (of lessons), and obviously breaks and dinners. That has quite a large effect on their movement in school”. *(Teacher/pastoral + humanities)*

“Issues with other kids - look at kids who achieve more, they cover up so not to be teacher’s pet. This opens the door to bullying”. *(Behaviour Support Worker)*

Outside Influences- staff comments

Outside influences were generally viewed in a negative way by staff, with home and parents not seen as supportive of their child's education.

"So whereas in primary school the parent would sit down, help them with their homework and their understanding, when they come to the high school that has gone out of the window, the kids do not get that influence at home. The children get more responsibilities at home i.e. looking after siblings, more cleaning etc. They are rushing their homework, or sometimes they are too tired, they come to school in the morning bad tempered and not ready to work because they have not gone to bed early enough". (*Learning Mentor*)

Motivation/goals- staff comments

Broader, societal issues were acknowledged that are particular to that area of the city, lack of suitable jobs and the lack of "good" role models in the community. More specifically staff pointed to the competitive nature of the pupils as a motivational force and the idea of assessment, not only as a competitive element but also as ensuring that pupils know where they are and how they're doing in relation to school work. Staff enthusiasm was seen as an important factor in motivating pupils in a subject area.

"Some are from disadvantaged backgrounds - no good role models out of school. Some boys can't see the point and there are no jobs". (*Behaviour Support worker*)

"Some are baited by friends 'you can't do that' etc, so they try to prove their friends wrong. They also have competitions, quite a few pupils find that enjoyable". (*Teaching Assistant*)

“The enthusiasm of the staff, if the staff are enthusiastic about their work, about their teaching, it is infectious and the pupils go the same way”. (*Learning Mentor*)

“I couldn’t get over the contradiction between in the lessons with a lot of noise, because it was a test and they wanted to do well they were quiet. So they see themselves doing well and they want to be rewarded for progression”. (*Teacher/pastoral+humanities*)

“A child will come to you and ask a question, you can sit down, you have the time to sit down and plan the child’s career path, what the child needs to do. You take them on a journey through their lives, “if you want to do that, that is what you need to get, and if you can’t get that, come and see us and we will help you”. You have to meet them half way, you can have private lessons after school, can sit down and go over their work, get their course work done and that. “If you want to do it you can, but it’s not our life, you have to say that you really want it”. (*Learning mentor*)

Ethos- staff comments

Getting the classroom ethos right was seen as a balance between managing behaviour and setting out expectations regarding standards of work.

“For me it has been getting that sort of culture that within this lesson you will be expected..., there are certain standards that you have got to meet. Not just behaviours but work as well, the work ethic within the classroom”. (*Teacher/pastoral+humanities*)

Confidence-staff comments

Staff recognised the key issues for pupils around their image within the peer group and its impact upon learning and accessing support. It is seen as unacceptable, in

simple terms, to be either too bright or not bright enough. Pupils tread a fine line in trying to cover up either their enthusiasm for learning or their difficulty in understanding.

“Some of the older children do not want to do any work, they think it is ‘cool’ to get sent out of the class rather than work. They also do this to avoid the work when they do not understand it, if you then offer them help they do not accept it”. (*Teaching assistant*)

“They feel peer pressure, it brings them down. They are scared to answer questions, especially the girls as they are getting ridiculed by the boys, the girls get embarrassed”. (*Learning mentor*)

“Learning needs to be more personalised. Individual learning would overcome difference in academic levels - affect confidence. Confidence is important”. (*Learning mentor*)

“When they go out of class to do tests they will then ask for help because their friends are not around, so they do want to achieve, but in the classroom they do not want to ask for help”. (*Teaching assistant*)

Teaching and learning- staff comments

Staff views around teaching and learning centred around two areas; preferred learning styles of the pupils and issues of confidence, both teacher and pupil. It was readily understood that many pupils prefer practical lessons where they are actively involved and where time spent listening is limited.

The reticence of pupils to engage in question and answer type lessons may be related to lack of confidence in being able to give a correct response and opening themselves up to being wrong publicly, on the other hand, being right and being

seen as a “geek”. Teacher confidence also plays a part here as a lack of confidence may lead to the planning of lessons that feel “safe” and may therefore be rather more dull than where teachers are prepared to take a risk in planning something interesting and participative.

“They like the practical side, rather than writing, they’re not very interested in written work”. (*Teacher/core subject*)

“More creative things like art, food technology, practical lessons rather than written work, I do not think they are interested in written work at all”. (*Teaching assistant*)

“They don’t like Science - they like PE - they’re actively involved - they enjoy music but don’t like taking part. They find English boring and can’t see the point. They like drama and get a chance to shine as an individual and get attention”. (*Learning mentor*)

“A lot of kids can’t be bothered with English, maths, history and geography, they are not very good at communicating with adults and they hate to get anything wrong. With question and answers, they will not give you the answers in case they get it wrong, they think they might say it in the wrong way or the wrong manner so it’s understanding that”. (*Learning mentor*)

“I think a lot of staff, especially that are new to school, or new to teaching will probably have issues regarding their (own) confidence and their ability, which has a massive effect on what you are prepared to do in the classroom”. (*Teacher/pastoral+humanities*)

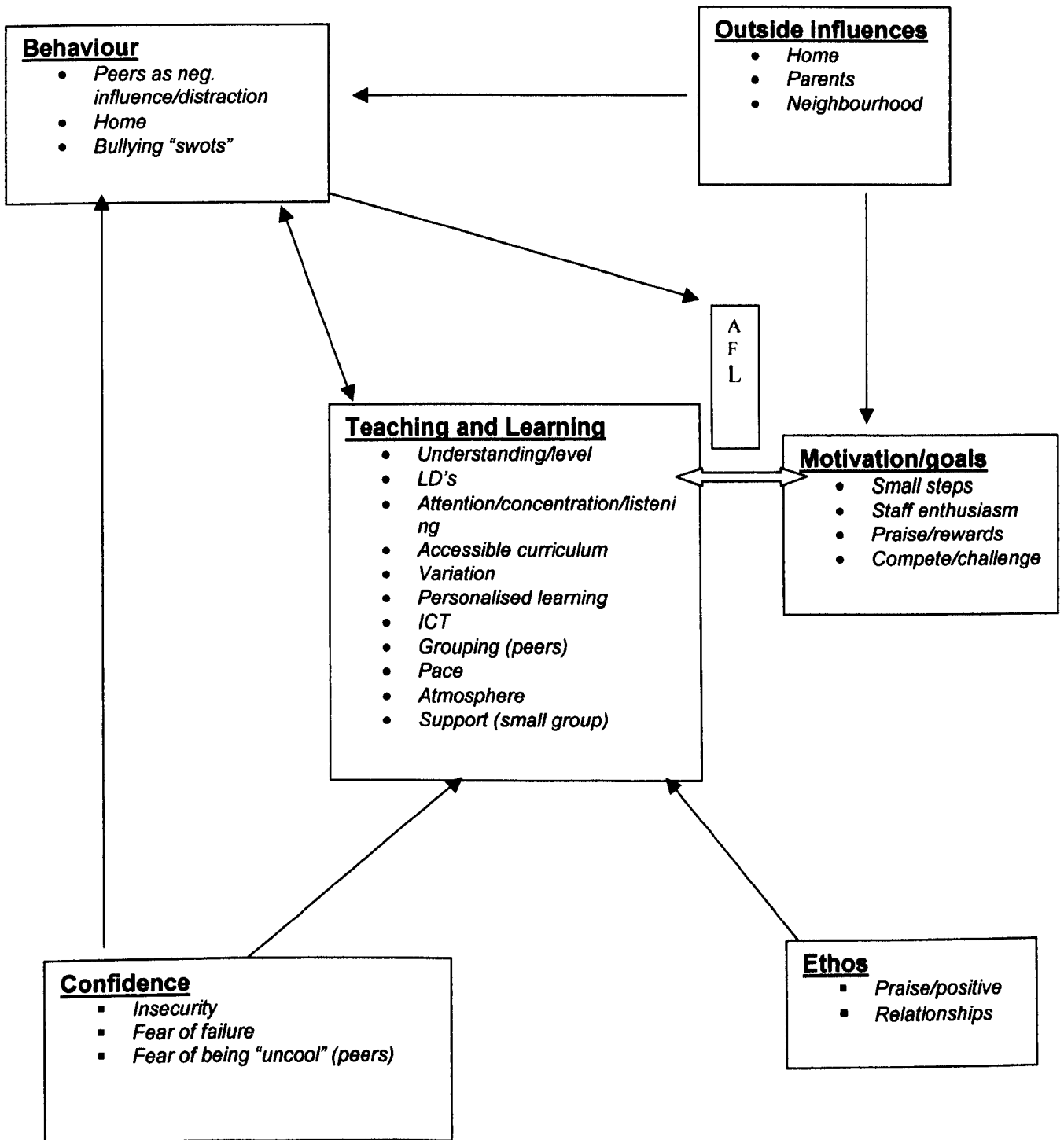
“Every lesson cannot accommodate everyone’s different style of learning, but I think as long as you try and accommodate that through a particular topic so over time you cover them. That’s the idea of the scheme of work, that at the end of the day there are different examples of learning”. (*Teacher/pastoral+humanities*)

"I think in our school the kids like short, quick explanations so you can move quickly onto something else, they don't like to listen for an hour. A lot of them like to work in noise. A lot of them come from noisy homes - siblings etc TV Radio. You could actually put music in the class as some background noise, kids will talk they can't help it".
(Learning mentor)

The relationship between key categories

The diagram that follows is an attempt to draw together the key categories and to demonstrate the inter-related nature of the categories in terms of impact. For example, outside influences are seen to impact upon both behaviour and motivation. Behaviour impacts upon the quality of teaching and learning but at the same time, the quality of teaching and learning impacts upon pupils' behaviour. Challenging behaviour also prevents time being given to the kind of assessment for learning which would help pupils to see where they are in the learning process and so to become more motivated. The lines and relationships are complex but some attempt to illustrate this is important before moving on to the level 3 selective coding process where core categories are identified at a more abstract level. This stage can therefore be seen as constructing a paradigm from a staff perspective.

Diagram 2: Inter-relationship between key categories from staff



NB Arrows denote "impacts upon" and represents a staff view as distinct from the researcher's view

AFL = Assessment for Learning

Key

Italic type – level 1 categories

Bold type – level 2 key categories

Key recommendations (staff)

The final interview question for staff was to ask them, "What kinds of things could help this group of pupils (underachievers) do better at school?" The responses to this question were analysed and grouped into categories in order to feed back to the school and ultimately, to inform action planning. Responses to other questions were also taken into account if staff made what could be described as a recommendation during the course of the interview. The following is a bullet pointed summary of those recommendations as presented to the school's senior management team. These abbreviated points will feature in aspects of the discussion in a following chapter.

Curriculum

- Greater accessibility
- Project based approach
- Visual learning
- Individualised/personalised learning

Support

- Withdrawal and small group support (literacy and E2L)
- Support to check understanding and to raise confidence in learning
- Study support after school

Goals

- Planning a career path
- Giving a sense of purpose
- Assessment and feedback (AfL)
- Planning small steps for progress

Self esteem/confidence

- Find key strengths
- Personalise the interest
- Give sense of achievement /pride in learning

Parental involvement

- Increased positive engagement from parents/carers

Transition from KS2 to KS 3

- Focus on transition activities/ summer school

In general these recommendations covered a wide range of issues, many of them recognised and established as key issues for secondary education. There was no mention from the staff interviewed of seeking the views of pupils or of the use of peer group support in any formalised way. In this, responses were quite traditional.

DIFFERENCES IN VIEW BETWEEN STAFF AND PUPILS

In some cases the staff and pupils' view broadly coincided. This was the case with many aspects of teaching and learning, classroom ethos and to some extent peer group influence. It was also of interest to note where pupils raised concerns that were not alluded to by staff and vice versa.

Pupils' concerns over relationships with adults.

The issue of lack of support was a significant concern to pupils and there were grounds for saying that this was a relationship issue because it was perceived as unfair or equating to a lack of attention or even protection from teachers and support staff. For staff, pupils did not access support because of peer group influences (too embarrassed to ask for help or concerned about being seen as too academic).

LT- Are there any things that would help you?

Pupil - If the teachers were more supportive.

LT - Tell me what that supportive would look like? In what way could they be more supportive to you?

Pupil - Like notice that people are saying things to you and helping you with your work more and being more kinder.

Pupils' concerns regarding fairness

Although an important issue for pupils, staff did not perceive their behaviour or the behaviour of other adults as unfair, although they did recognise that pupils may deliberately get into trouble to avoid being "exposed" when work was too difficult.

Pupil - You could just be sat there and that's how you get in trouble. You're just sat there and you don't know what you're doing, you ask the teacher and they just don't listen to you.

Pupils' view that peer influence can be positive/supportive

Some staff acknowledged peers (mainly girls) as a source of support for pupils but perceived staff as giving pupils most support with their work, whereas pupils viewed peers as a key source of support.

Pupil - I've got loads of friends.

LT - Have you?

Pupil - Yeah.

LT - So when you are with them, you mean just if they're in the same room as you or do you have to be able to work with them?

Pupil - Yeah. 'Cos they help you as well don't they?

Pupil - 'Cos in subjects as well they help you.

Adults' view about home background as negative/unsupportive influence

Whilst a staff view emerged that pupils did not get the support they needed at this age from home, some pupils mentioned home as a source of support in their work.

"So whereas in primary school the parent would sit down, help them with their homework and their understanding, when they come to the high school that has gone out of the window, the kids do not get that influence at home. The children get more responsibilities at home i.e. looking after siblings, more cleaning etc. They are rushing their homework, or sometimes they are too tired, they come to school in the morning bad tempered and not ready to work because they have not gone to bed early enough". (Learning Mentor)

Adults' view that learning difficulties/lack of understanding play a part

Whilst some staff believed that pupils would not ask for or accept support because of protecting their "self-image", pupils felt that support was withheld from them because it was focused on other pupils (those with SEN or those who were "brighter" or more hard working)

"Some of the older children do not want to do any work, they think it is 'cool' to get sent out of the class rather than work. They also do this to avoid the work when they do not understand it, if you then offer them help they do not accept it". (Teaching Assistant)

Adults' view that lack of confidence plays a part

Confidence was raised by staff as a factor for both pupils and staff, whilst this was not an area that pupils ever touched upon.

"Learning needs to be more personalised. Individual learning would overcome difference in academic levels - affects confidence. Confidence is important". (Learning Mentor)

"I think a lot of staff, especially that are new to school, or new to teaching will probably have issues regarding their (own) confidence and their ability, which has a massive effect on what you are prepared to do in the classroom". (Teacher/ pastoral+humanities)

Stage 3-Selective coding: bringing together the two paradigms

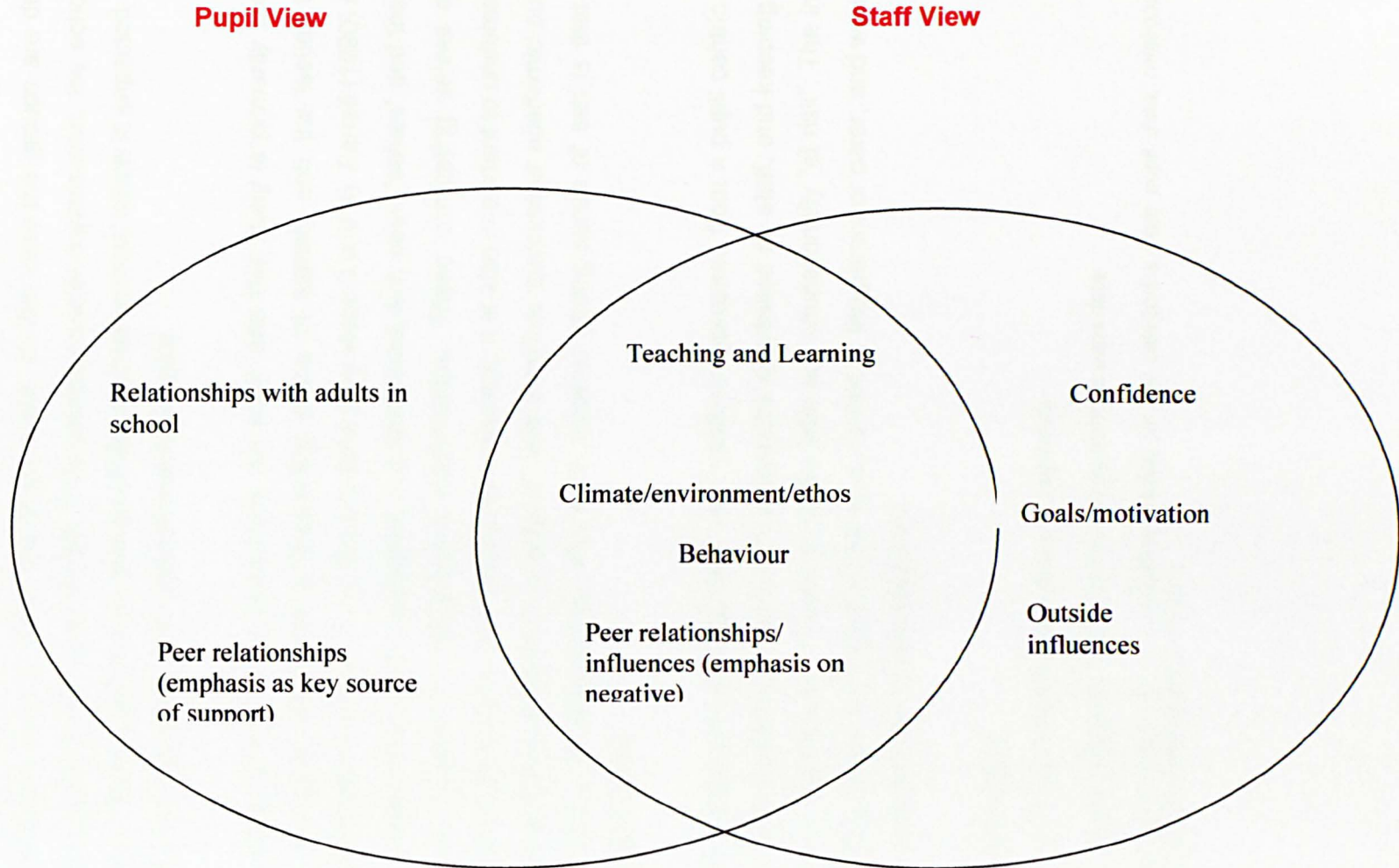
In order to move to the next stage of coding, selective coding, which is "the process of integrating and refining theory", it was necessary to examine in some detail the two models or paradigms that were constructed at the stage of axial coding. In the

“method of constant comparison”, it is necessary to revisit many times the categories that have been identified and their relationships to each other.

Central to this study is the pupil view but having said this, it is important to recognise that the pupil view and the staff view are inextricably linked and it is an important key to this process to be clear about where the views coincide and where they do not. A matrix in the next chapter (Diagram 6) goes some way to summarising similarities and differences around the broad categories identified. These similarities and differences lie at the heart of this study and, it could be hypothesised, that it is the degree of overlap between the views of key groups in the organisation which impact upon its outcomes both in terms of academic achievement and its functioning as a social organisation.

In order to reach this third stage of analysis the data as described in the two preceding paradigms (diagrams 1 & 2) was again fragmented and compared across the groups and this was done both physically and visually, by moving data around and by experimenting with different iconic representations of that data. At the first stage of selective coding a Venn diagram was produced which expresses similarities and differences and the degree to which views coincide.

Diagram 3: Overlap and separateness in pupil and staff view of key factors in achievement and underachievement



The impact lines representing the view of the world of the school of the two groups, pupils and staff, which were clearly shown at the second stage of axial coding, demonstrate the complexity inherent in the nature of this investigation and go some way to demonstrating that the school is a complex social organisation, with different communities existing within the organisation. In this case the groups are described quite crudely as pupils and staff. This complex social organisation, the school, is in turn set within a community and an environmental context, which is impacted upon by policy and legislation, both educational and social.

At the centre of this complexity is the pupil, and this study is primarily concerned with the pupil view, with a developing sense of identity and the issues that are fundamental to him or her at this key time (key stage 3 and 4). Farrell (1990) refers to the student "self" which competes in adolescence with other "selves" and the view of self as created in interpersonal relationships. These competing selves must be integrated in order to be a "successful" student. It is also important to understand that in adolescence interest in a subject, and therefore successful academic outcomes, are related to relationships with staff. Another strong sense of self is that of "self amongst peers".

The following "key categories" are therefore expressed from a pupil centric point of view whilst incorporating the key categories expressed by staff, and keeping in mind some of the literature related to pupils who are educationally "at risk". The important voice that is not presented in this study is that of the parent or carer, and would be an important area for further research.

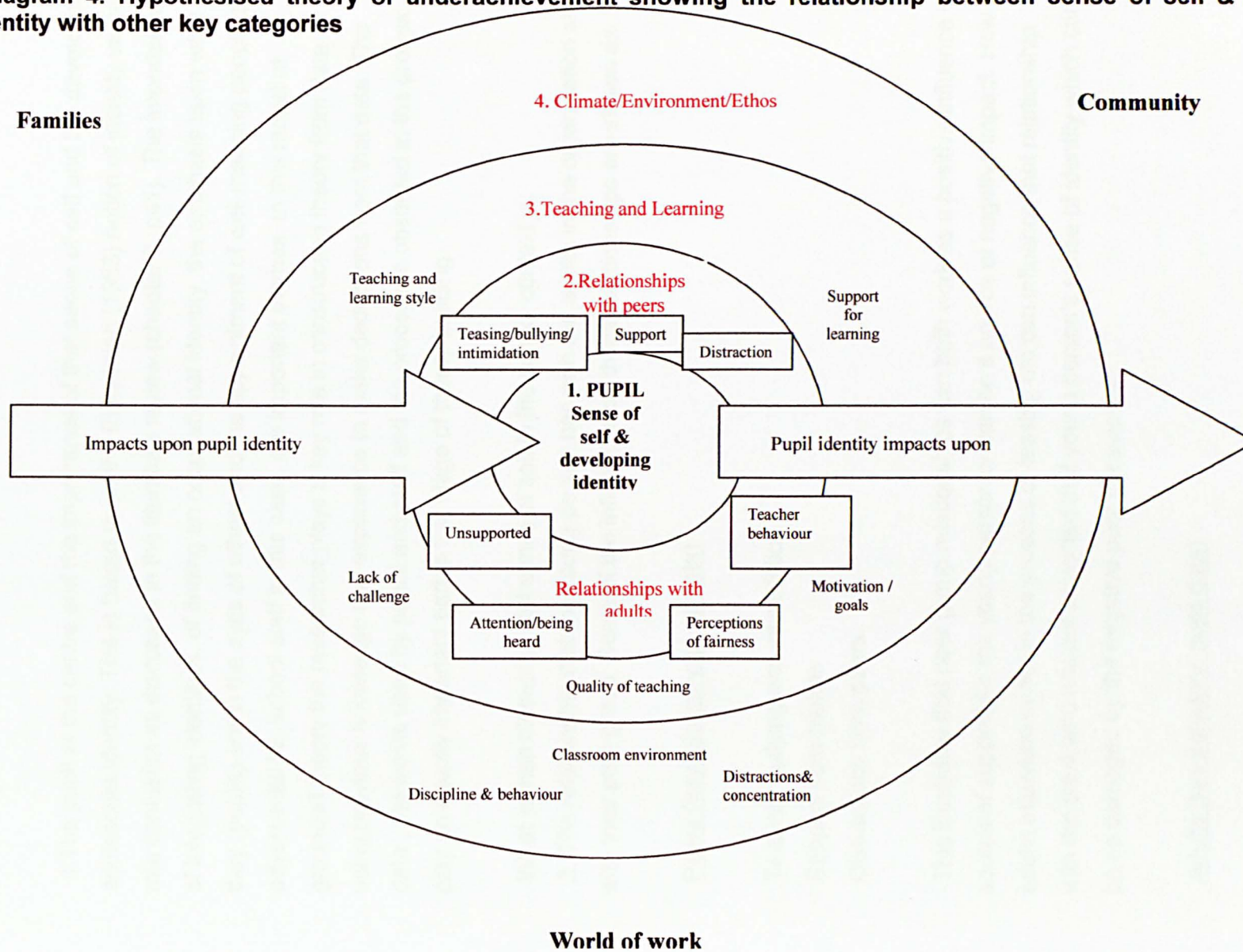
Key to diagram 4

Red type= key categories emerging from pupil data

Black type= categories relating to key categories from pupil data

Black type in text box = categories relating to key categories from pupil data, relationships with adults and relationships with peers

Diagram 4: Hypothesised theory of underachievement showing the relationship between sense of self & developing identity with other key categories



This diagram shows:

1. The pupil at the centre and the importance of that sense of self and the developing adolescent identity. This is based upon the Eriksonian (1963) notion of identity versus role confusion as discussed in the literature review (chapter 3, p41). The importance of integrating identities, of finding an occupational identity, the emphasis upon *what* they (pupils) are in the eyes of others and the appointment of well meaning people as adversaries i.e. school staff in this case, are important themes. In this model of grounded theory the researcher plays a key role in constructing theory from data using previous knowledge and experience to make deductions from that data. The data, the words used by pupils and staff and the processes observed in the groups, play an equally important part in this stage of theory building.

What is then closest to that sense of self in the school context is:

2. The relationship that the young person has with the adults in the organisation and with their peer group. Some of the influences on those relationships are shown as:

Peers (key category: pupil data)

Teasing/ bullying and intimidation

Support from friends

Distractions from peers.

This illustrates that peer group relationships can both work as a positive influence or source of support for the young person or can be a source of negative impact. How adults intervene or not in the process of teasing etc can influence that relationship with the adult who has not protected that young person's sense of identity which can be so damaged by the negative peer behaviours.

Adults (key category: pupil data)

Unsupported

Fairness

Teacher behaviour

Attention/being heard

Relationships with adults were strongly influenced by a feeling of being unsupported and unfairness in the way that support was allocated, i.e. to those with very apparent special educational needs, or those who were already achieving academically. Lack of fairness was also associated with the pupil view that adults did not let them have their say in an argument and that sometimes the adults' behaviour towards them was unfair. Support was an important concept which underpinned the key category of relationships as it impacted upon learning, not being supported to understand the curriculum, and more subtle forms of support where a pupil might feel bullied and intimidated and yet did not see the adult as intervening to keep them safe in this situation, more importantly, preserving their sense of self and identity by not allowing it to be damaged by the behaviour of peers.

The issue of identity and relationships seem to be at the core of the organisation but do not stand in isolation from:

3. Teaching and learning,

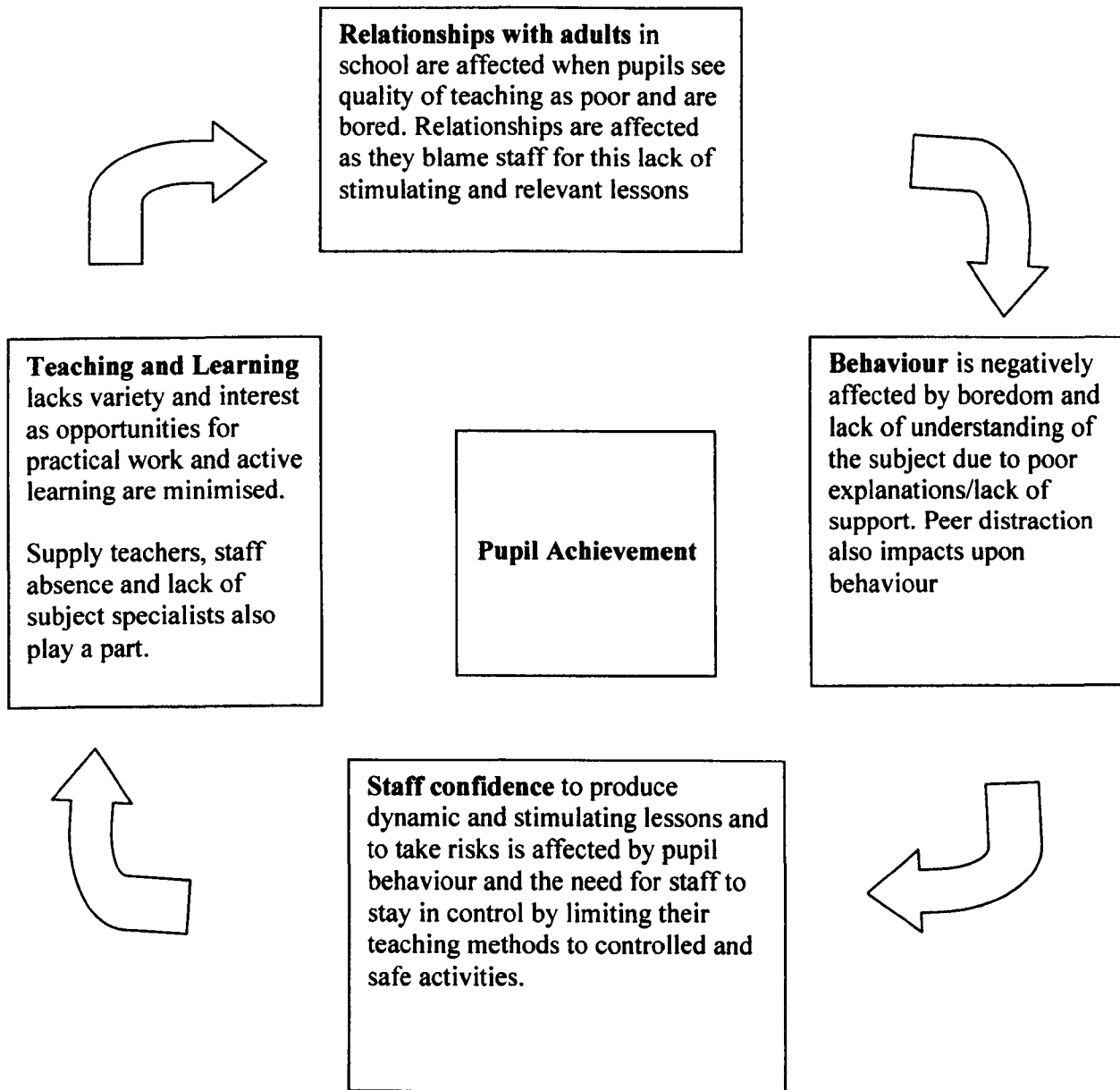
4. School and classroom climate/ environment and ethos.

All of these sit within the wider influence of the family; the community as a whole and the world of work, which begins to come into sharper focus as leaving school looms larger.

The large arrows in the diagram illustrate that impact is two-way and that the influences on pupil identity, all of those things within and outside of the circles, are also impacted upon by the pupil, and therefore affected by the kind of identity that is developed during this adolescent period. The emerging adult will have a bearing upon the community, the family and the world of work in which he or she operates.

This complex social situation, which lies at the heart of achievement, can also be expressed as a cycle of underachievement, as illustrated in diagram 5.

Diagram 5: Hypothesised cycle of underachievement



Summary of results

It is acknowledged that in the process of grounded theory the researcher is not a neutral observer and cannot take an ahistorical stance. At each stage one is not only influenced by what one already knows in terms of previous research and literature but by one's own experience of the research process. Having facilitated the focus groups and interviewed staff at first hand there is an awareness of the degree of feeling that is invested in what has been said which is difficult to capture in the written word. At the same time, the researcher tries to remain true to the data and allow the concepts to be discovered without manipulation.

Choices have to be made about how to "unpick" particular concepts like support, which might seem on the surface to be quite straightforward but with exploration reflect more of a statement about the nature and quality of relationships at work between those who support and those who are supported. Whilst support itself could be a key category this researcher felt that it was better expressed in the context of peer and adult relationships. Using such data to work towards a theory of underachievement then is dependent upon the mediation and translation of the researcher. One way of overcoming part of the difficulty here was to feedback results to the original groups and ask them to reflect upon whether the outcomes seemed to reflect what they were trying to say overall.

What is compelling about the grounded theory method of analysis is the attention that one must inevitably pay to the inter-relationship between concepts, categories and key categories through a constant process of fragmenting and reconstructing data. It seems that other, more straightforward, methods may not be able to capture the complexity of the social organisation and the relationships within it in quite such a way. What is fundamental to this piece of research is the emotional interplay at work within the school, between staff confidence and pupil confidence, between the differences in adults' perceptions of support and pupils' perceptions of support and all of the other assumptions and perceptions at work, and the integration of these two sets of views.

The pupil's sense of self and developing identity, at this stage of school life, is central to other processes (diagram 4). What seems closest in terms of importance to that development is the relationships that are forged and negotiated with a) peers and b) adults within the organisation.

In turn, what rests upon these key processes are teaching and learning and the entire climate and ethos of the school as a social organisation. The arrows in diagram 4 illustrate how all of these influences, as well as family and community, act upon the pupil's sense of self but, equally, how the pupil's developing sense of self acts upon relationships, teaching and learning, ethos and externally upon family, community and ultimately the world of work.

Underachievement can also be conceptualised as a cycle with key components, which act upon each other, and the important notion of staff confidence is brought into play here. Implications of these results and those in the research questions chapter will be addressed in the discussion.

CHAPTER 6: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

This chapter presents the answers to a set of modified research questions, the answers being extracted from the data presented in the previous chapter. However, the illustrative quotes have been omitted from this version because they have already been referred to earlier. Answering the research questions was seen as a necessary step in this study as, within an action research model, it was necessary to feedback findings to staff and pupils at the case study site in order to enable them to use this information in the development of the organisation through action planning.

The following three research questions were addressed in relation to underachieving pupils at key stage 3 using the two sets of interview data:

- What barriers to achievement are identified and what are the two groups perceptions of those barriers?
- What are pupils' perceptions of what helps them to learn?
- What are adults' perceptions of what helps pupils to learn?

In an action research model it is accepted that research question can be reviewed and changed according to the needs of the organisation that is the subject of the research, and the emerging process. The three research questions above form the core of the questions that were present from the outset but were reduced and reviewed from the original list because of factors at work at the time. An impending HMI visit to the school was one such significant factor that led senior staff not to allow classroom observations to take place at this time, therefore the process and the questions were modified.

In reality, the pupils were very able to describe barriers to achievement and so the specific question of what helped them to learn could be addressed by inferring the opposite of the identified barrier, although they did identify particular ways in which

they preferred to work they were not as prolific with solutions, overcoming barriers, as were the adults.

Both groups, pupil and adult, were able to identify multiple barriers to achievement and able to articulate what the range of difficulties seemed to be. Within this area the views of adults and pupils often overlapped but significant differences were also identified between the groups.

Research question: What barriers to achievement are identified and what are the two groups perceptions of these barriers?

Teaching and learning

Pupil perspective-issues identified

Some of the pupils in this study felt that the quality of teaching that they received was not of the same quality as in other schools, and that other schools not only had better teachers but also had better facilities. It was also felt that support staff did not always know the subject area that they were designated to.

Relevance of the subject being taught was also raised as an issue, either they could not see the point of what was being taught or they felt that this area had been covered by them previously at primary level and did not understand why it was being revisited.

Boredom was an issue with too much teacher talk and too much copying being cited by some as a barrier. On the other hand it was felt that better explanations by teachers would help them to understand the topic better, so lack of adequate explanation was cited as a barrier but also ties in to their ideas about quality of teaching.

Staff perspective-issues identified

The staff interviewed felt that staff absence was an issue that affected the quality of teaching and learning and the high rate of supply teaching within the school was an issue in continuity of learning, interest level of lessons, the amount of challenge being offered and issues such as marking not being done.

They also cited the issue of overall relevance of a subject area or the issue of education not being seen as relevant to the pupils' lifestyles with connections not being made with goals for the future.

A view was expressed that teachers found it hard to take risks and plan exciting lessons with lots of activity because of levels of staff confidence. Some of this was due to behaviour in the school and staff needing to feel that they were keeping control of the lesson. The slow pace of some lessons was seen to mismatch between what the pupils needed and what was actually delivered.

Relationships with adults

Pupil perspective-issues identified

Pupils raised the issue of support and how they felt that they did not get enough support from staff. This, in turn, tied into feeling of fairness and unfairness. There was a strong perception in one group that support was directed mainly to those pupils who did well at school (the teacher's pet) or pupils with special needs. For this group who were neither, they felt that their learning needs were largely unmet. They felt that some teachers did not give them adequate explanations in terms of what they needed to do in a lesson.

Responses from all of the groups suggest that they felt that they needed more support from teachers and support staff.

Staff perspective-issues identified

Relationships between staff and pupils were not raised directly as an issue by staff. However, the communication skills of pupils and so the way they related to staff was

raised as an issue. It was felt by one member of staff that the pupils were not skilled at communicating their needs and therefore would misbehave rather than use appropriate channels to ask for support.

Relationships with peers

Pupil perspective-issues identified

Pupils often saw peers as a source of support and several expressed a view that they liked to work with their friends in class. For some, friends were synonymous with those pupils working at the same level but if a friend needed help in class they would give it. Peers were mentioned equally with family as a source of support.

Others gave the view that friends ought to be split in lessons because they could be a source of distraction. The behaviour of other pupils in class was a negative influence and the girls particularly cited the behaviour of boys.

Teasing and name calling by boys was an issue for some girls but they also said that girls would intimidate them too. There was a mixed view about whether this was bullying or not. One of the boys, who wanted to work for GCSEs, revealed that other pupils often called him a "geek".

The influence of friends was raised when they would try to get another pupil to truant from school or from a lesson.

Staff perspective-issues identified

Staff mainly saw peers as a negative influence and did not see peers as a source of support. Peers were a source of distraction and older pupils could be a poor example to younger pupils. It was felt that, within the peer culture, it was not "cool" to ask for support.

For the more able pupils staff felt that they were unable to display their ability because this would put them at risk of bullying. It was felt that pupils were reluctant to ask for support in class because peers were around but out of class, in a small

group, it was acceptable to ask. This was due to not wanting to expose lack of understanding or of ability.

Climate/environment

Pupil perspective-issues identified

Pupils felt that there was not a relaxed enough atmospheres in some lessons and that teachers needed to “chill out “ more. They also perceived a lack of praise and positive rewards and felt that greater emphasis was put upon punishment.

Some pupils talked about “bad people” getting in the way of learning and by that they meant those pupils who misbehave in class. They also complained about people coming in from the corridors and running around making a noise.

Staff perspective-issues identified

Staff pointed to the general atmosphere of the school being affected by staff absence and the high level of supply teaching.

They also recognised that there were a number of pupils in each year group that disrupt lessons on a daily basis and that, for pupils who were in those lessons that the distraction would be constant.

Research Question: What are pupils’ perceptions of what helps them to learn?

Teaching and Learning

The pupils describe teachers who explain things well, guide them along rather than just writing things on the board, and favour a step-by-step approach. This is not the same as a lot of teacher talk but rather the teacher giving structured guidance.

Another example was cited where the group was small and the pupils were able to sit round the teacher whilst he explained things to them “to a T”.

Many pupils cited practical lessons as their favourites and there was clearly a greater sense of engagement for things like PE, IT, drama and art. Demonstration, as in science, was seen as helpful when it occurred. Pupils felt that having some "fun" in the lessons helped them to learn. There was a clear view that they would only work if the work was enjoyable. Some pupils felt that doing a lot of writing, although not copying, helped them to learn but recognised that others in the group did not agree with this. In "course work" there seemed to be a lot of variety where different methods of learning could take place and to some extent the pupils could do their own research and work more independently. Some pupils felt that they needed to be given more work than they currently had.

Relationships with adults

Support is a key issue here with pupils feeling that they get some support from various sources, teachers, support staff and parents and peers. Mentors are also mentioned as a source of support that helps learning. Pupils felt that more support in lessons would help them to learn but this support would be "qualified" in that the teacher would be qualified in that curriculum area and that the support staff would also know about the subject matter. There was also an implication that support should be given in a more even and fair way.

Relationships with peers

Peers could be a useful source of support and some favoured working in groups although this was not a universal view. Pupils preferred to choose their own groups and work with other pupils who they could "relate" to. For some this meant working with pupils at the same learning level as themselves.

Climate/ environment

Some pupils felt that a quiet, tidy classroom helped them to learn. There was some difference in view as to whether it was better to have a degree of talking, that there was a balance between too much talk and no talk at all. Listening and concentration were seen as important to learning. It was sometimes seen to be an advantage

where a teacher made the pupil sit on their own whilst other views favoured working with friends or in groups.

There was a view that teachers spent a lot of time on disciplinary issues (always yelling at someone) and that some classes were not strict enough. Although they felt that in school as a whole there were lots of rules, this did not apply to some lessons. This was particularly attributed to young or new teachers. Some pupils felt that they did better when there was a more relaxed (calm) atmosphere in the class, when the teacher was “chilled out”.

Some pupils felt that they would be motivated by more rewards in school. Stickers and tickets to football matches were both mentioned as tangible rewards.

Research question: what are staff perceptions of what helps pupils to learn?

Teaching and Learning

Objectives and expectations should be clear so that pupils can see the relevance and the direction of learning.

Some staff felt that teaching styles that were most likely to be successful were a “hands on” approach, lessons that were fun, presentations that were visual or graphic in some way. Likewise the involvement of the pupils in the process was seen as key, and to engage them explanations should be “quick fire” and not too long.

The importance of varying the learning style was acknowledged as it was not always possible to arrange for paired or group work and even if it were, this would not always favour all pupils. Getting a spread of styles across a topic was one solution to trying to suit all pupils.

Staff needed to ensure that pupils had understood the learning and that small group support could be helpful to some, especially those with learning/key skills difficulties, and those pupils with English as a second language.

Staff recognised that pupils often liked to work in groups as this was supportive for some pupils and gave them confidence that they did not feel when working alone. Pupils working at their own level was also seen to be important and this to be followed through with individualised support.

Motivation/goals

It was felt that some pupils responded well to competition and challenge and that often pupils responded well in a test situation. Partly, this was a competitive factor, wanting to do better than peers or to prove peers wrong, and sometimes it was viewed as pupils needing to know where they were at in the learning process. A test could help them to know what they had achieved and what they needed to do next. The idea of “assessment for learning”, although this actual terminology was not used, was a factor. Teachers having time to give pupils clear feedback was seen as a component for success.

Pupils were seen as more motivated where work was relevant to them. At the same time they needed to enjoy what they were doing and staff enthusiasm for the subject was a key factor in motivating pupils.

Having a long term career or life goal was seen to be important by one member of staff who felt that working through a long term plan could be an important source of motivation, making the link to the relevance of school learning with life after school.

Relationships with adults

Staff felt that support came from a range of sources. Parental support was seen as something which would be important but wasn't always available. Pupils would be helped in learning if appropriate space were made available at home to do homework.

A mentoring relationship where someone had time to sit down in a one to one and explore a pupil's abilities and interests would be useful to many pupils.

Relationships with peers

One member of staff recognised the value of using peer support and felt that having pupils explain things to each other could be helpful in certain situations. Two others recognised that peers did offer each other some support, usually girls.

Climate environment/ethos

Staff saw that a positive atmosphere where pupils were praised and rewarded for their efforts would help the learning process. The importance of knowing the group was emphasised in that not all pupils wanted to be rewarded or acknowledged in the same way.

An atmosphere of learning and a work ethic in the classroom was also seen as most likely to bring about success. Removing disruptive influences from the lessons was likely to bring this about as was being clear about the standard of work expected.

One member of staff felt that, because these pupils often came from homes where noise was the norm, they worked better in a slightly noisy atmosphere. Talking should be accepted to some degree and background noise such as music may help learning.

Summary

Although in this section I have tried to address the modified research questions, by using a grounded theory approach concepts were discovered and categories constructed which were beyond the coding frame of the original questions, and so other categories are present in the final model and have been explored in the previous results chapter.

Both sets of results will be discussed in the next chapter and will be presented as two separate sections, but there will necessarily be some coincidence between the two sections in terms of implications.

Finally, in this chapter a matrix is presented (diagram 6), which illustrates and summarises the key categories for staff and pupils, the barriers to achievement identified by each group and the solutions that may overcome those barriers.

Diagram 6: A comparison of staff and pupil views according to key categories

KEY CATEGORIES	PUPIL BARRIERS	PUPIL SOLUTIONS	STAFF BARRIERS	STAFF SOLUTIONS
TEACHING AND LEARNING (INCLUDES MOTIVATION)	Quality of teaching+ supply teaching Lack of relevance Boredom Lack of understanding	All staff to "know" subject Make it relevant Less copying/less talk More fun More practical aspect to lesson Clearer explanations More work More independent work	Staff absence Lack of confidence/staff Lack of relevance Pace too slow	Teacher enthusiasm for subject Clear long term goals/planning Clear short term goals/feedback Explanation short and to the point Clear objectives More graphic/practical work Variation of teaching style across a topic
PEER RELATIONSHIPS/SUPPORT	Can be distraction/negative influence Can tease/ name call/ intimidate Classroom behaviour of some groups	Can be a source of support Groups can work if self selected/right level Split friends up in some circumstances Staff should intervene in behaviour	Peers as a source of distraction Older pupils poor role models to younger pupils Uncool to ask for support	Use peer group as source of competition and challenge Use peer support in learning- groups/pairs to explain work to each other
ADULT RELATIONSHIPS/ SUPPORT	Lack of staff support for some (unfairness) Lack of adequate explanation Not feeling heard Being "wound up" by staff	More staff time and attention Support staff to be "qualified". Clearer explanations Listening to point of view Time to cool down	Communication skills of pupils- can't ask for support (Self esteem and peer group image)	Finding ways of offering support e.g. small groups/mentoring
CLIMATE/ENVIRONMENT (INCLUDES BEHAVIOUR)	Stressful atmosphere Disruption/noise Lack of praise/rewards	Teachers to be more relaxed/less yelling More emphasis on rewards than punishment Better discipline/clearer boundaries	Staff absence Pupil disruption	More praise/rewards but know the group Create work ethic through expectations Create atmosphere of learning Remove disruptive influence Create a range of different environments (noise/quiet/music/talk)

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

SECTION 1: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The implications of the answers to the research questions will be addressed primarily, structured under the key categories as shown in the matrix (diagram 6) in the research questions chapter. They are addressed in this way for clarity for the reader. Implications for the school will be addressed firstly, as the action research model suggests that it is the organisation under study that needs to take action from the findings. The key areas will therefore be taken as:

- Teaching and Learning, including motivation
- Peer relationships/ support
- Adult relationships/support
- Climate/Environment, including behaviour

Teaching and Learning

Pupil solutions – summary of findings

Pupils felt clearly that there should be more practical aspects to lessons with less copying and more “fun” in learning. All staff should know the subject area, this included support staff. Explanations should be clear and some pupils would welcome more work whilst others wanted to work more independently.

Staff solutions – summary of findings

The pupils having long term goals was felt to be important and planning towards these goals would support motivation. Each lesson should have clear objectives, explanations should be short and to the point and work should incorporate more practical or graphical presentations. Across a topic, the teaching style should be varied to suit all learners. It was also felt to be important that teachers demonstrate and convey their enthusiasm for their subject area.

Implications for action at school level

- Improving the quality of teaching and learning
- Knowing the pupils
- Involving pupils
- Setting goals

Improving the quality of teaching and learning

Observation can lie at the heart of improving quality and this can be done through senior management doing structured observations, peer observations and external observation. At its most formal this is done by HMI and OFSTED but within an LEA there will be a number of services or teams who can offer this facility. Perhaps the most relevant at this third key stage will be the national strategy consultants who are trained and armed with a raft of DfES material (DfES, 2005c) on effective teaching and learning. Peer systems can include modelling of good quality lessons, particularly for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and coaching. Video material can play a useful part here and allows staff to see themselves teach. This kind of system will only flourish in an organisation where staff trust each other and are confident that feedback will be constructive and not overly critical. Such an ethos will only be built through effective leadership and management and a collaborative approach to school improvement where staff feel both involved and empowered.

The key stage 3 National Strategy or, as it will be known, the Secondary Strategy, sets out clear guidance for quality teaching and learning. This structure does not equate to too much teacher talk but does involve having clear lesson objectives and skilled question and answer sessions, as well as a plenary to review and reinforce learning.

One of the things that it may be important to do, but which the research team were not able to carry out, is to observe lessons to establish the balance of presentation and work between practical, visual and kinaesthetic methods as opposed to more passive listening, copying and writing methods. It would also be interesting for the

school to explore the variation across subject areas in terms of teaching style. Whilst some curriculum areas clearly lend themselves to practical work, PE and art for example, others can be made active and practical through creative teaching strategies. It would be a debate for all curriculum areas to agree what was the “correct” balance in terms of active and passive learning and for staff to self-evaluate against this standard.

The pupils’ view that some staff are not qualified in the subject area and that they do not, therefore, get the quality of teaching that they deserve, is harder to address. Given the situation of the school recruitment can be difficult and staff turnover and staff absence can be high; the school may need the support of the LEA to begin to address some of these issues and working in collaboration with other schools gives opportunities to explore staffing issues creatively. There may also be national issues about recruitment of staff to schools, which need to be addressed at the highest level. However, the pupils’ perception of their own value in this can be helped by an open and honest discussion with them about some of these difficulties. The pupils included in this issue the non-teaching staff that support them in lessons. At a time when non-teaching staff are taking on greater responsibility in schools through work force reform there will be professional development issues for schools, and national remodelling will give such staff opportunities to gain formal qualifications such as National Vocational Qualifications. In-house training in subject areas may be one important way that the school can increase specific levels of knowledge in non-teaching staff who might become more curriculum based.

Setting goals

Motivation of pupils is one of the keys to successful teaching and learning and pupils are helped through the key stages if they have clear goals at each point. Goal setting is something that can be done with peers, family, tutors and learning mentors where they are available. Indeed some external agencies, such as Connexions, are there for this very purpose. If a long-term goal can be established then steps to success can also be established with the pupil understanding who needs to be

involved in order to support them at each stage. Reaching goals involves knowing where you are in the journey of learning and clear feedback is needed to help pupils to know, not only where they are now but also what is the next step they need to take. Schools would be well advised to formalise this process and the roll out of “Assessment for Learning” will support the process, although it may not establish the longer-term goals.

Assessment for Learning is described as one of the “gateways” to personalised learning (Hargreaves, 2004) and as having commonalities with one of the other gateways, the student voice. Hargreaves describes the six main themes that are shared by the two gateways as:

- Engagement
- Responsibility
- Meta-cognitive skills
- Relationships with staff
- Social skills
- Participation

(Hargreaves, p6-7)

Some of these will be addressed under different headings within this chapter. For this purpose assessment for learning is defined as:

“ A process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go, and how best to get there”. (Hargreaves, p 22)

Feedback must be acted upon and used by the learner in order for it to be “assessment for learning”. Without action it is simply feedback. Hargreaves goes on to describe how much of what has traditionally been the professional property of the teacher (learning objectives and outcomes), is transferred to the student. It is described as a complex joint activity between student and teacher which does not only take place at the end of a piece of learning but is prospective and is much more about feed forward than feedback.

Knowing pupils

Staff highlighted the importance of knowing the pupils well enough to know what their goals and interests are, their strengths and areas for development and the more subtle understanding of what pupils find rewarding and how they receive praise and rewards in the school setting. As well as this, teachers need to understand the preferred and most successful learning styles of the pupils they teach. Given the current structure of secondary education and the school day this is indeed a challenge for the teacher who will meet many classes and hundreds of pupils during the course of a week. The question is then for the school how to know your pupils? In what ways can this knowledge be built upon so that the pupil voice can be heard and each individual has a unique profile that is recognised?

Personalised learning advocates that private conversations are held between teacher and student but that small group conversations are also held for those that may feel intimidated by a one to one conversation. Above all, a climate must exist in the school where pupils feel that their voice is heard on all aspects of school life, and acted upon wherever feasible. When views are not acted upon it is reasonable to expect that pupils receive feedback as to why not, for example, budgetary constraints. Time has to be set aside for these conversations and hence the implications for structuring the school day. Other ways of getting pupil feedback can be found, however. Given the numbers of staff in a high school who come across a pupil during the course of a week, a term and a year the sum total of potential cumulative knowledge must be great but is seldom realised. Building a pupil profile, with the pupil as the main contributor can be illuminating if used well by the school community, and Individual Learning Plans, another strand of Personalised Learning may be way forward here. Parents can contribute to this process and the form tutor has a key role in the collation of such information in order to build a picture of a whole class. There are clear implications here for the time allocated to roles such as form and year tutor, and in the current climate of workforce reform these may be teaching or non-teaching staff. There are also implications for the structuring of the school day so that it might be possible to minimise the breadth of contacts that

students have with a range of staff, whilst allowing time for more in-depth contact with a reduced range of adults.

Overall, if we place a high value on relationships as a significant factor in raising achievement and reducing disaffection, then a climate must be created where relationships can flourish. Especially for younger students, making the transition from primary school to high school can be extremely difficult in terms of losing one or two strong relationships with key adults and replacing them with contact with possibly 12 subject teachers, a form tutor, head of year and other pastoral staff (e.g. Learning mentors). Whilst many pupils have learned to cope with this range, the prognosis for building relationships of any quality is poor. Thus, it is argued that a reduction in the numbers of teachers teaching one group and an opportunity for a key link with one member of a pastoral team would give relationship building in the early years of secondary education a fighting chance. For some pupils, this could be a turning point in terms of achievement.

Involving pupils

Some schools have gone down the road of introducing software that will gather the views of pupils on many aspects of school life and student councils exist in many schools across the country. However, the input of pupils into their own learning is often more “off limits” than making decisions about social activities, what colour to paint the school dining room and aspects of school uniform. And so, the argument would be that, if a school really wants to know how pupils learn best, firstly ask the pupils themselves but also use the cumulative knowledge held by many different members of staff about “what works”.

Holding focus groups such as was done in this research can be a regular feature of school life and questionnaires can be fairly straightforward to administer to take the temperature of an organisation from time to time on different aspects of the organisation e.g. behaviour or bullying. Analysing focus group data can be time consuming and not cost effective for schools but they can be supported in this by services such as educational psychology, or a less formal approach to data

gathering can be used. For example, results of “brainstorming” around a topic can be written up on a flip chart and categorised in consultation with the group. It is now necessary for schools to demonstrate how they are seeking pupils’ views and this is one effective approach. However, the most important aspect of student voice is acting upon what has been said so that the exercise does not become tokenistic. OFSTED will seek information from schools about how they are seeking the pupils’ views and schools will need to demonstrate not only that they gather views, but that they act upon them. This should include all aspects of school life, especially teaching and learning which, it can be argued, is the main activity of the organisation, and which should be “co-constructed”.

Pomerantz (2004) described a project where “able underachievers” in a Derbyshire high school were involved in a student teacher day, a day on which students planned and taught lessons in a way that they would wish to be taught. This clearly had an impact upon teacher and pupil. The teacher will see examples of what pupils feel is good practice and what would work for them, the pupil on the other hand will gain insights into the challenges of teaching and the work that goes into careful planning and preparation, and making lessons active and engaging.

Neither pupils nor staff raised concerns about the content of the curriculum. Making what was taught relevant and presenting the curriculum in an interesting and stimulating way were of importance to both groups though. Relationships, the medium through which the curriculum is taught, were found to be of greater importance to pupils in this study than *what* the teacher teaches.

Peer relationships/support

Pupil solutions – summary of findings

Pupils felt that their peers could be a source of support in learning and that groups can work well together if they are allowed to self select. In some circumstances, where friends could be a distraction, they felt that the teacher should take responsibility for splitting up groupings. They were clear that staff should intervene

in situations where there was misbehaviour in the classroom, especially where this involved name-calling, bullying and intimidation of pupils by peers.

Staff solutions – summary of findings

Staff felt that peers were often a useful source of competition and challenge for each other but equally peer support could work when appropriate pairings or groupings are used.

Implications for action at school level

- Peer support for learning
- Peer support systems in school life
- Eradicating bullying and intimidation

Peer support for learning

Peers are a very strong influence in adolescence, probably more so than at any other time in a person's life. Harnessing this influence to a positive end must be seen as productive when we so readily acknowledge counterproductive peer influences. Peer groupings can be formal or informal and it may be more helpful at times to formalise these groupings than to let them emerge. This does not mean that the teacher must always be in charge of arranging groupings within the classroom, and some of the pupils in this study expressed a desire to select their own learning groups based on friendship. They argue that their friends are often those working at the same level as them and, if they were not, they would readily support those who had more difficulty in learning. Given the pressures on staff to provide adequate levels of support, this is one way of ensuring that everyone gets what they need when they need it. If staff are willing to let pupils select their own groupings they might wish to use something like a sociogram in order to assist the process, and to ensure that all are included in some way. A sociogram is a tool whereby people can express preferences for whom they would like to work with or

engage with in some way, which can be completed confidentially but the information can be used to inform groupings.

Peer tutoring is one way of formalising this support and can be done around certain topics or activities such as thinking skills or reading and writing. Formalised peer tutoring (PT) methods originated with paired reading (Morgan, 1986) and developed to its use latterly as a PT method for thinking skills, (McInstery & Topping, 2003), as well as in more traditional areas such as writing (Medcalf et al, 2004). The spin offs from such programmes are found to be social as well as academic and of benefit to tutor and tutee alike. PT can be used with age peers or across the age range so that older pupils support younger.

Peer support systems in school life

Buddy systems and peer mediation systems have also been widely used in areas of school life to increase prosocial behaviour and emotional well-being amongst children and young people. Paterson et al (1996) document the outcomes of an "Anti-bullying campaign" where pupils were trained in the basic components of counselling in order to provide support to pupils who had been bullied. Peer mediation (Cowie and Sharp, 1996) is another widely used approach where pupils are trained in the skills of mediation in order to avert conflict and reconcile pupils with differences. Buddy systems are often set up to aid transition from primary to secondary school, where older pupils are trained to ease the transition process for new year 7 pupils.

Eradicating bullying and intimidation

Pupils in this study identified name-calling, teasing and intimidation as a barrier to learning (see matrix, chapter 6)

According to Reid et al (2004) bullying has been defined as:

“The systematic abuse of power which repeatedly and deliberately harms others. Bullying may be perpetrated either individually or in groups and involves a negative interaction in which a dominant individual (a bully) repeatedly exhibits behaviour intended to cause distress to a less dominant individual (a victim). (Reid et al, 2004, p 241)

Bullying can be direct and physical or direct and verbal, the latter including name calling and taunting. It can also be indirect, excluding someone from a group or spreading rumours about them for example. It is argued that intention and context are important determinants of what bullying is and is not. Discrepancies have been found in several studies about the rate of teacher intervention in bullying and in one study for example (Craig and Pepler, 1997) adult supervisors were found to only have intervened in 4% of playground bullying conflicts. Teachers have been found to underestimate the extent of the problem and it is suggested by Reid et al that they may not recognise the full extent of bullying behaviours that are more widely recognised in the research. Boulton (1997) found that 25% of teachers did not classify name calling as bullying. Where there is a difference in perception between what adults classify as bullying and what pupils classify as bullying it is the view of the pupil that should be paramount if they are the “victims”. If we feel that we have been bullied then we most probably have been. However, the whole issue around what is and is not bullying is one that should be discussed openly between all members of the school community so that a shared view can be established.

The implication for this study is that the level of awareness of teachers and pupils should be raised regarding defining bullying behaviour where some forms of bullying are not being recognised or dealt with. This begins with an effective anti-bullying policy that involves all parties in its development and opens up the opportunity for debate. Alongside such policies must be support systems for those who feel themselves to be victims, whether these systems involve peers or adults. An anti-bullying policy sits closely alongside a positive behaviour policy and bullying is less likely to flourish in situations where there are clear boundaries around adult and pupil behaviour.

Adult relationships/support

Pupil solutions – summary of findings

Pupils indicated a need for more staff time and attention and wanted clearer explanations in lessons. They want to know that support staff are “qualified” in the area that they support. In conflict situations they want to feel that they have been listened to and to be given time to “cool down” when they are feeling upset or angry.

Staff solutions – summary of findings

Adults felt that support needed to be offered in more subtle ways to some pupils as they find it difficult to access support in a classroom. Adults felt that this could lead to labelling either as having learning difficulties or being too eager to learn (Teacher’s pet, geek etc)

Implications for action at school level

- Support arrangements
- Conflict resolution

One of the issues for pupils was about how support was allocated. It is usual in most schools for support to be allocated, often by a SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator), without ever making explicit to pupils who is to be supported and why, and how to access support when it is needed. It may be that for some pupils at this age in-class support is difficult to access whilst treading the fine line between being labelled as having learning difficulties or being labelled a “geek”. The school might need to review how support is allocated and produce new models of support. Many schools provide breakfast clubs, homework clubs and other forms of support outside of the classroom. This is a prime area for pupil consultation in looking at the best ways to access support for them. If in-class support is accessible to all then how do pupils indicate that they need this support without being stigmatised? Perhaps there is a need to provide some support to all in a one to one setting on a rotational basis (individual tutorials) so that it is something that one receives by right, regardless of ability. Pupils did not understand how mentors had been allocated and again,

perhaps the provision of support should be made more overt, who gets it and why and whether it is an entitlement for all on request are all questions that need to be answered. Assessment for Learning, as mentioned earlier, and peer support systems may address some of these delicate issues.

The issue of whether support staff know the subject is, again, worthy of review. In some secondary schools it is common to allocate staff to departments or curriculum areas, where they will build up subject knowledge over time and staff can be allocated according to their strengths. This may have implications for the professional development and training needs of support staff. The issue of fairness was one that affected the relationship between pupil and staff and an open system understood by all should address some of the concerns raised by pupils.

As previously mentioned, the opportunity to get to know pupils and for pupils to get to know staff is vital in building relationships. As well as finding out some of the things in the pupil's "profile" more structural issues can help to build relationships after transition. Previously in many areas of the country middle schools existed which bridged the gap at KS2 and KS3 between primary and secondary models of organisation. In some schools a "middle school model" is adopted, sometimes only for certain groups, on transition to high school. The groupings allow for pupils to get to know one teacher well as they had previously done during their primary education, and for one member of staff to know them well whilst they are able to sample for part of the week the more specialist diet on offer in the high school.

Climate/environment (includes behaviour)

Pupil solutions – summary of findings

Pupils felt that teachers should be more relaxed and "yell" less. Discipline and boundaries should be clear and there should be more emphasis on rewards than punishment.

Staff solutions – summary of findings

Staff also felt that there should be more emphasis upon rewards and praise but that this should be done judiciously and therefore it was important to know the group. Where one pupil might welcome public praise and acknowledgment, another might not as it would label them as a “geek” or as teacher’s pet. A work ethic should be created through clear expectations that are appropriately pitched for the group. Disruptive influences should be removed where necessary and a range of environments should be created depending upon the activity. Sometimes it was appropriate to have a quiet classroom whilst at other times some noise, or some music, is acceptable.

Implications for action at school level

Areas for action can be summarised as;

- Support and counselling for staff to deal with stress
- Management of conflict
- Review of behaviour policy (monitor balance of praise/rewards to correction and consequences)
- Review of classroom ethos

Support and counselling for staff to deal with stress

OFSTED (1994) described schools in the context of school improvement as “high consensus” and “low consensus”, the features of the former were a spirit of continuous improvement, no-one ever stopped learning to teach, the school was moving and there was a view that everything was possible. According to Blandford, (2000), in a learning organisation opportunities are provided to learn how to learn (see this chapter “Improving the quality of teaching and learning”) and members of an effective school will see themselves as part of a learning organisation in which staff are valued. In fact, professional development is a prerequisite of an effective school. Stoll and Fink (1996) take the view that the school as a learning organisation is inextricably linked to school improvement. Teachers who demonstrate that they

are learning will encourage learning in their pupils. Those that wish to improve are characterised by four attitudes:

“They accepted that it was possible to improve, were ready to be self critical, and to recognize better practice than their own within the school and elsewhere, and they were willing to learn what had to be learned in order to be able to do what was needed or had to be done.”
(Nias *et al*, 1992, p73)

Stoll and Fink (1996) not only point out the link between teacher development and pupil development, but also between leaders as learners and staff development. School leaders must also demonstrate that they are willing and able to learn to encourage other staff to do the same.

In low consensus schools the opposite applied: teachers transferred their frustrations to pupils, there was an atmosphere of “aloof complacency”, the school was stuck and staff took days off to “free themselves” from the situation in which they found themselves. Managing teacher/staff stress is an important feature in improvement as staff absence only serves to increase the problems inherent in employing large numbers of supply staff. Limits on staff cover recently introduced through Work Force Reform means that schools with high rates of staff absence are likely to become increasingly unstable. This has implications that were drawn out by both of the groups in this study, pupil and staff.

There have been experimental systems where a counselling service has been put into place in a school for staff who are experiencing high levels of stress. These are not common and have sometimes been run as a project by a support service, typically an LEA Psychological Service. Some investment in this type of work can be cost effective when counted against the cost of staff absence and supply cover. The quick and efficient induction of supply and temporary staff is also vital to the smooth running of the school where absence is an inevitable part of daily life. It is worth a school investing in producing a well-summarised guide for supply staff that covers the main components of the school's behaviour and bullying policies, as well as

other key information. This is to deal with the effects of stress rather than the causes.

Review of behaviour policy

High levels of staff stress are often caused by poor discipline and this brings us back to a clear and coherent policy on behaviour and the putting of policy into practice consistently across the school. Many high schools now adopt the KS3 Behaviour and Attendance auditing tool in order to look more closely at these issues. Education Leeds, through the Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP), developed a comprehensive on-line audit, which is available to all of its schools. The key components of the audit are:

- Whole school principles and policies
- Classroom and/or departmental practices
- Staff support
- Individual pupil strategies
- Pupil support systems.

In addition, there is a thread that runs through the levels above on “monitoring, evaluation and problem solving systems”. (Galvin, 2002, p10)

Such an audit can be undertaken in its entirety but can also be implemented in sections according to the level being addressed.

Management of conflict

Pupils point to the management of conflict, which leaves them feeling stressed and getting into further trouble in the following lesson because they have not had time to “cool off”. Management of conflict takes a great deal of awareness and skill and may not be something that all staff are able to do naturally. It may be that more formal training or coaching is required to examine how conflict escalates and can therefore be de-escalated. Formalised systems such as “Team Teach” can address these

issues but the importance of verbal skills in interactions cannot be over-emphasised.

The approach aims to enable services (including schools) to:

“Develop acceptable and authorised responses to disruptive, disturbing, angry and aggressive behaviours in a manner that maintains positive relationships and provides safety for all”.

www.team-teach.co.uk

Systems based on Restorative Justice become a way of life in an organisation and should impact upon the entire school ethos if adopted. Restorative Justice was originally founded as a way of bringing together offenders with victims but has been widened beyond actual offending to look at ways of managing conflict in schools. It is defined as:

“ A systematic response to wrongdoing that emphasises healing the wounds of victims, offenders and communities caused or revealed by criminal behaviour”. www.restorativejustice.org

Restorative approaches in the educational setting include such activities as peer mediation and circle time (healing circles) and stresses relationships over and above rules. According to the organisation “Transforming Conflict” (www.transformingconflict.org) there are profound implications for school communities and they are strongly linked to citizenship. Restorative approaches are founded on philosophy and ethos, involve key skills such as active listening and problem-solving, and entail key processes. These processes can be light touch, such as restorative enquiry and corridor conferences through to community conferencing, setting up circle time activities and mediation systems. Restorative pedagogy is also advocated where teachers model the values and skills necessary for restoration. Wachtel (1999) describes a restorative practices continuum, which has at one end “affective statements” and at the other the formal conference. The term “restorative practices” is used to describe any response to “wrongdoing” which is both supportive and limit setting. Therefore, restoration does not have to be a system incorporating many formalised procedures but is intrinsic to the ethos of the establishment and must be seen within the whole context of the school behaviour policy and approach to discipline. Like our criminal justice system, schools often

adopt a punitive approach with the ultimate punishment being exclusion from school. It is a major philosophical shift to embrace a restorative approach but one that puts the person and the relationship at the centre rather than the concept of punishment or consequences. This connects very directly with school ethos.

Review of classroom ethos

Ethos and climate are words that are very familiar to those in the education system and even more so the adults in schools. These terms are harder to define and could seem rather nebulous in the context of self-review. For the components of ethos and climate I have gone to the "Leeds Quality Standards Framework" (2003), which is a school self-evaluation tool available to all schools within the LEA. Perspective 1 of this toolkit is "Climate, Inclusion and Ethos" and whilst some schools will never need to go beyond the 1st layer of self-review some will need to examine their practices more closely at layer 2 and even further to layer 3 (an in-depth appraisal and intervention). The key aspects of the Climate, Inclusion and Ethos perspective are:

1. School ethos, aims and values
2. Equalities
3. Inclusivity, admissions and special support
4. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
5. Learning environment
6. Child protection and welfare of pupils
7. Relationships within school
8. Pupil participation
9. Partnership with parents
10. Relationships with the wider school community

Key aspects in the context of this research to explore further would be 5,7,8 and 9.

Learning environment provides key statements in order to review this aspect of school life including physical environment, resources for learning, *staff and pupil relationships*, removing barriers to learning and *support for learning*. At least two of

these coincide with key categories emerging from the research. Statements that describe a “very good” school in terms of staff and pupil relationships are:

“All staff and pupils are fully committed to working together to create a positive learning environment. All staff have a shared commitment to respect and value the contribution of all pupils” (1.5.4.1)

The quality of relationships between staff and pupils is one that ensures a positive climate and learning environment and the importance of high standards”. (1.5.4.2)

Pupils have respect for each other’s needs and work to support their learning at all times”. (1.5.4.3)

Similar statements are given in terms of pupil relationships, pupil relationships with adults, staff relationships, staff retention and continuing professional development, which are all seen as key components of the relationships aspect.

Knowing what a “good school” should look like is not always as helpful to a school that is underachieving and has all of the difficulties of social mix to address.

Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) discuss the difficulty of simply advocating the features of effective schools without knowing how these schools became effective over time and missing the interpersonal issues involved. Thrupp (1999) points out that in schools where the mix is strongly skewed towards those pupils with lower socio-economic status much greater effort is needed to improve teacher morale, encourage students to learn and raise levels of parental involvement. Where the school has a large “social welfare” role daily routines are much more difficult to carry out and maintain and there is a sense of an “uphill struggle”. It is therefore easier and less effortful for some schools to meet the criteria of being a “very good” school, whilst for others it will demand an almost impossible level of sustained effort. As in learning, perhaps differentiation is the key here. There is an issue here for the deployment of staff in a support role within an LEA, e.g. advisory staff, educational psychologists, and whether these should be focused on those schools with the greatest need. Increasingly, formulas are worked out based upon indicators such as free school meals, academic results, attendance and exclusions when creating service level

agreements and focusing support. Intervention in inverse proportion to success is the guiding principle in most LEAs as outlined in the Code of Practice, LEA School Relations (DfEE, 2001).

However, work on relationships is recognised and included in the key stage 3 national strategy for behaviour and attendance. For example in the Core day 2 training (DfES, 2004b) the following aims are outlined for the unit on “Developing staff skills to support pupils” (page 53)

- To help participants understand the influence of staff behaviour on staff-pupil relationships and attendance
- To identify and develop staff skills for building and maintaining effective relationships both inside and outside the classroom
- To identify and improve staff skills in managing interventions while maintaining lesson pace and pupil engagement.

The same training pack also contains a unit on creating a positive whole school climate. Although the ideas contained within are not new e.g. the use of praise to encourage positive behaviour and attendance, the intentions are certainly focused in the right direction in trying to take school staff through a process together in order to explore these very important issues. It is also encouraging that new materials planned for the National Programme for School Leaders in Behaviour and Attendance (Standards Site, DfES) contain such aspects as “Incorporating Restorative Approaches” in a unit on Violence Reduction (as yet unpublished).

The recently published National Strategy materials (DfES, 2005d) for core day 4 Behaviour and Attendance training emphasise the importance of developing emotional health and well being in our schools.

“Involvement of the school community in ensuring that the school’s values, principles and beliefs are reflected in policy is a good indicator of an emotionally healthy school. For example, each aspect of the behaviour and attendance policy can reflect the school’s ethos,

matching the collective values, principles and beliefs of the school as a whole. " (DfES, 2005d, p4)

Importantly, one of the columns that links ethos to high expectations is "parent/carer, staff and pupil support systems". Support for pupils and staff have been touched upon already in this discussion and the role of parents and carers, and how they are supported, is perhaps a key area for further research.

Section 1 summary

This first section of the discussion has directly addressed the research questions and picks up on the key categories that were shared by staff and pupils, and the various solutions to underachievement proposed by both of these groups. Possible actions proposed have overlapped in places, which is a strong argument for exploring further those actions that would address more than one of the key categories. How a school would prioritise these actions would depend somewhat on what was already in the school's development plan and what other key services or bodies might have proposed, for example, a recent HMI inspection, quality assurance staff from the LEA's School Improvement Service and senior managers of the school itself.

It is also important to identify further support in carrying out these key actions. For example, those actions that draw upon the key stage 3 strategy could be supported by a strategy consultant or a behaviour audit might be supported by a team of educational psychologists as part of their role. What is vital is, having consulted with pupils, that action is taken based upon their views and that these actions can be balanced by the views of staff that took part in the research. These are direct questions for the school at the centre of this case study to answer. The extent to which they do this would reflect the seriousness with which they seek the views of pupils and the extent to which the ethos and climate of the school makes clear that the views' of pupils are not only welcomed but are acted upon in the interests of raising achievement specifically and school improvement generally.

SECTION 2:IMPLICATIONS OF ISSUES RAISED THROUGH GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS

In the first section of this discussion the issues are focused upon what arose from the research questions, the answers to which are of direct relevance to the school and, without over-simplifying those issues, many could be addressed as part of a school based action plan.

What follows in section 2, this section, is a discussion of issues that arose from the grounded theory analysis which draws a picture of the school as a complex social organisation, positioned within a community, and influenced by forces both psychological and sociological. The discussion will clearly draw upon the related literature, including the school improvement literature, to underpin the discussion, however, the model of underachievement constructed by this research is entirely original and in the true spirit of the grounded theory approach has been constructed from the data whilst acknowledging the key role that the researcher plays in this construction.

The core category: pupil sense of self and developing identity

Based on the work of Erikson (1963) on ego development, Farrell (1990) proposed a series of competing “selves” which the adolescent must integrate in order to be an effective student. These are:

- Self in the family
- Sexual self
- Self as loyal friend
- Self in a peer group
- Self as a student
- Self as my work (career), and for some
- Self as a parent

Erikson (1963) believed that ego is a central principle of organisation within the individual, the growth of which must be integrated with the structure of social institutions. Farrell (1990) suggests that in adolescence the primary self is "self as my work" but that many adolescents are able to delay consideration of this self until after adolescence by going into higher education.

It is argued that for many pupils "myself as my work" is less of a reality because of the area in which they live (high unemployment, lack of role models), lack of career aspirations and the inability to make a link between the secondary school curriculum and the world of work. This is not necessarily to argue for a more vocational curriculum but to demand that relevance is made explicit by clear demonstrations of linkages to usefulness in life after school and the wider world. At this time "self in a peer group" and "self as loyal friend" may be far more influential than the other selves and may lead the adolescent towards a counter school culture where the academic world is of little immediate importance to their lives.

Sullivan (1953) proposed that, "self is a system created in our interpersonal relationships" and so, at this time in particular, the nature of the students relationships with peers, school staff and family are highly influential as to which selves gain primacy or whether all of these competing selves become integrated, so that what emerges is a "successful" student who is able to achieve their potential.

Billington (2005) highlights for us the schism that there has been historically and traditionally between children's feelings, thinking and learning and how this has been underpinned by a mechanistic understanding of cognition and learning. He proposes that, not only are feeling and thinking inseparable, but that feeling and thinking "in relation to another" are also inseparable and that this requires a gestalt in the way that we (professionals engaged with children and young people) think about their learning, and the barriers to learning that arise. If the "very means of thinking" lie within the domain of interpersonal relations then there are significant conclusions to be drawn about the way in which the education system pathologises those who "fail" or underachieve in the mechanistic systems that prevail, such as SATs, leading to stigmatisation and social exclusion. The model arising from the

grounded theory analysis (diagram 4 in results chapter) shows the pupil's sense of identity at the centre with relationships as the next circle as we move outwards. The third tier shows teaching and learning and then climate/ethos and environment. It is apparent from this that the first two key circles are affective in nature and it is only then that teaching and learning comes into play. However, the arrows that lead inwards and outwards demonstrate the complex interactive nature of all the components of those circles. Feeling, thinking and learning become fully integrated where there is a positive climate and ethos in the organisation, which is the school. If we adopt this model then it is clear that thinking and learning are essentially social and emotional activities and that relationships between peers and between young people and the adults in the organisation are key to the process of learning.

Alongside this picture of emerging identities is the notion of moral development (Kolhberg, 1981). The typical adolescent, having developed stage 1 (rewards v punishments) and stage 2 (self-interest) will be developing at the "conventional" stages (stages 3 &4) shared values and personal image, and societal values. At stage 3 the development of shared values may be with peers or with school staff. Many adolescents are able to tread a tightrope where they take on board value systems that are slightly at odds with each other but can still "fit in" with a peer group and achieve at school. This is somewhat dependent then on the dominant culture of the school and the value systems and relationships at work in the home. Stage 4 of moral development is to do with societal values and the realisation and acceptance that there is a system that breaks down if people lie or don't keep to rules.

One would expect in adolescent development that, if stage 3 can incorporate some of the values of school staff and if the values of the home are also pro-school, and further that stage 4 brings with it the realisation that in any organisation people must be honest and follow rules, then the school to all intents and purposes will run smoothly. Pupils should then learn effectively, given that these pupils are integrating their "selves " successfully by token of positive interpersonal relationships and a sense of "myself as my work", when the relevance of the curriculum to a working life is made clear.

Establishing shared meanings

The issue of shared values is to do with the construction of meaning and is an important element in this study when we consider diagram 3 in the Results Chapter, the overlap and separateness of pupil and staff view of key factors in achievement and underachievement. It would seem from here that there are significant differences in the key categories in the study, which equate to the very areas that create our sense of self.

Frederick Erickson (1986) asks:

“What are the conditions of meaning that students and teachers create together, as some students appear to learn and others don't... How is it that it can make sense to students to learn in one situation and not in another? How are these meaning systems created and sustained in daily interactions?” (Erickson, p 127)

This highlights for us the importance of developing shared meanings and therefore, it could be argued, the shared value systems so important at this crucial stage of moral development, based upon daily interactions which we can translate into interpersonal relationships, the building blocks of identity or sense of self. In a climate where pupils are not succeeding in school or where they cannot see its relevance, or where relationships are not positive, then values may be constructed with peers which may be frowned upon by school. Farrell (1990) argues that students cannot value the opinions of those who do not give them positive reinforcement and will value those who do. He points out that values cannot be imposed but must be co-constructed. The issue of rewards and positive reinforcement was one raised by pupils in this study and also by staff, and so these pupils may have had stronger affiliations to their peer groups who do reinforce them in some way.

Farrell also makes the point that schools are not just a physical space but also a mental space where meaning systems, what we might call the culture of the school, are constructed but not necessarily co-constructed by the key groups, staff and pupils.

"The two groups obviously share part of an everyday reality, but there may be no overlap whatsoever in the mental spaces of school that constitute part of their circles of reality". (Farrell, 1990, p 147)

The issue of social mix

I would now like to move the discussion to the issues raised by Thrupp (1999) around social mix. School effectiveness research, it is maintained, gives explanations for underachievement that are about "blaming schools" for not making a difference for, if it can be demonstrated that schools can make a difference then they are clearly doing something wrong if they can't. This body of knowledge and the School Improvement Movement, it is argued, are socially decontextualised with "the new right" holding schools directly accountable for their outcomes with little or nothing to say about the interactions between student culture, the culture of the community and the official culture of the school. As described earlier in this section the culture of the school has to be co-constructed and cannot be imposed by one group upon another and, for some schools, this imposition has become an "uphill struggle". Marketing and league tables have led to further imbalance in social mix (Gerwitz *et al*, 1995) and the cultural capital brought to some schools by the middle classes is missing from others, thus creating a very different kind of pupil culture where the "self as my work" and "self as student" are not integrated with the "self in peer group" or "self as loyal friend".

In diagram 4 in the results chapter we can trace the inter-related nature of these categories and, where the climate and ethos is not balanced, how this impacts, because the arrows are two-way, on the sense of self at the centre, or the core category. Farrell, in his research, identified students who were from the same socio-economic background as his "drop out " students but attended an elite high school in the same city. The difference he drew from their pro-school attitude was that these students had a peer group support system that constantly validated their belief in education. This "elite" school had therefore developed a culture where staff and students shared values and had a similarly constructed reality. As hypothesised earlier in the results chapter, perhaps the schools with the most successful outcomes have a greater degree of overlap between staff and pupils (see diagram

3) than did the groups in this current study, who had areas of similarity on some important issues but also had significant areas of difference.

The cycle of underachievement

The cycle of underachievement (diagram 5 in the results chapter), illustrated how staff confidence is a key factor which impacts upon the quality of teaching and learning and this impacts in turn upon the quality of relationships between pupils and adults within the organisation resulting in negative behaviour, lack of understanding and boredom, which result in underachievement of pupils. So, the question posed here is how far does the teacher "sense of self" play a part in this cycle and what is it to be a teacher in a high school?

"Ourselves as our work" is an important part of the identity of the majority of adults and is not only the preserve of the adolescent. There is a strong interplay between the "who am I?" and the "what am I?" in our identity formation and this is something that will evolve as we go through our careers. Embarking on being a teacher, it is likely that a person of whatever age will have an image in mind of what this will entail and what kind of teacher they will be. This will be influenced and moulded throughout training, teaching practices and into the first year or years of teaching. For those that choose a career in secondary education they may see themselves as the teacher of a subject rather than as a teacher of students (Farrell,1990). The "symbolic universe" of the teacher may be quite different from that of the student and the disparagement of students may arise as a defence mechanism when the teacher self (myself as a teacher of a subject) is undermined and threatened by unresponsive or even hostile students. To be part of a "failing school" is damaging to the teacher identity (I am a good teacher) but is equally damaging, it could be argued, to the student identity (I go to a failing school therefore I am a failure). Pupils in this study gave evidence that they thought that their school was inferior to a school a couple of miles away because that school had "better" teachers and a better (newer) building. There is a body of work around teachers lives which would be relevant to this question but is not possible to explore in any depth here. However, it should be acknowledged that there is more to teaching than skills and

competencies, and that teachers bring from outside of the classroom what can be termed as professional knowledge.

Reference was made in the first section of this chapter to OFSTED's (1994) view that in "low consensus" schools teachers transferred their frustrations to pupils, there was an atmosphere of "aloof complacency", the school was stuck and staff took days off to "free themselves" from the situation in which they found themselves. The issue of overlap is worth highlighting again here. In the OFSTED report the low consensus was between staff, however, this is pertinent to the concept of overlap as shown in diagram 3 of the results chapter where there might be low consensus between pupils and staff, as well as between staff. The issue of transferring frustrations is also important here and could be equated with a process of blaming that emerges when identities are threatened. Therefore, the teachers blame the pupils whilst the pupils blame the teachers for lack of achievement, on an organisational scale, resulting in the school failing to meet floor targets and therefore at risk of failing i.e. becoming a school causing concern, being put into serious weaknesses or at worst, special measures. This categorisation does not bring about greater consensus for the most part but can lead to further fragmentation and deconstruction of shared values. Stoll and Riley (1999) point to the "damaging discourse of school failure" but it should be recognised that this discourse not only damages the adults in the organisation but the pupils also, although this categorisation is frequently done in the name of improving the quality of their education.

The integrated theory of underachievement

The key points of this thesis are illustrated in diagram 4 with the pupil identity at the centre; achieving this in itself being a complex feat of integrating the various competing selves that adolescents have to deal with. The successful completion of this process is contingent upon relationships with adults and peers and upon demonstrating relevance in school life through the teaching and learning process. Shared values and moral development underpin the outer circle of climate, ethos and environment, environment not only as a shared physical space but also as a

shared mental space. Although for the purposes of this study the world of work, families and community are outside of the circle of the school they are crucial to the whole process of education and the integration of the school as a social organisation within its surroundings and are exactly what it prepares students for.

The mutual connectedness between school and society and the current movement to give schools more autonomy and to place them, as extended schools, at the very centre of the "Change for Children" agenda (Children Act 2004) focuses us even more sharply upon this ebb and flow of values and meaning, and the reality that we are constructing.

"Richly connected to its social milieu, tightly clasped by tradition and yet the medium of modern ideas and artefacts, the school floats paradoxically in its ocean of social forces. It is a cradle of social stability and the harbinger of cultural change." (Joyce et al, 1999, p5)

The importance of positive relationships, a sense of purpose (relevance) and personal identity is effectively summed up by a headteacher writing recently in the publication, "SecEd".

"The reality is that adolescents are not only endlessly (boringly?) rebellious, but they also yearn for acceptance, success and acknowledgement. The boredom they affect is rapidly shed when the content of the curriculum, the charisma of the teacher or the buzz of the positive relationships inspires them to see a purpose which fulfils their own needs. The facile symbols of rebellion are jettisoned when, personal identity having being satisfactorily achieved, adult relationships are assumed without the props of fashion or raucous "style". And it was ever thus." (Wood, 2005, p5)

Implications for the DfES

One of the key issues raised in the literature review and in this discussion is that of social mix. In areas such as the one where the case study school is located the comprehensive school is no longer truly comprehensive and has become very skewed in its intake towards the lower socio-economic end of the continuum, with all

of the pressures which that puts upon the school to achieve given DfES targets for attainment and attendance. The problems of mix are heightened by the drift of more “aspirational “ families to other “outer schools” where they perceive, through the publication of league tables, that their children will have greater educational opportunity. It was indeed an aim of previous governments to allow schools such as this to “wither on the vine” through parental preference. However, it has not been the case that schools in this situation have closed as the pressure on numbers has increased in the “outer” schools, so the school places are needed and they have remained open but with a changed population. The result of this policy combined with the pressures of the school improvement agenda have given some schools almost insurmountable difficulties to deal with. The result is failing schools and demoralised staff and pupils who see themselves as part of this cycle of failure.

In sharp contrast to the impact of previous agendas is the policy of the government of the day to urge schools to collaborate with each other and to put schools at the heart of the community through such programmes as extended schools, pivotal to delivering Children’s Services and the outcomes of Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003). Asking schools to now collaborate with each other suggests that there must be a climate of trust between schools, something that was previously damaged by the encouragement to compete for pupil places. Putting schools at the heart of the community means that every community, including the inner cities, are entitled to have a neighbourhood school. This does not sit easily with the previous agenda allowing schools to wither on the vine through lack of parental choice.

The DfES would, of course, argue that it is not they who publish league tables but the media. This is true, but the climate that allowed such things to flourish was created by the government of the day in the early 1990’s and made explicit in the 1993 Education Act where the model of setting up national curriculum assessment was to “drive up standards”. Latterly, such publication has been tempered by including measures of “value added” to the tables. It could be argued that such indexing is not very accessible to the majority of parents who scan the league tables when trying to make decisions about applying for school places.

This research would also call into question some of the notions about value added. This is calculated in mathematical terms for example looking at SAT results at the end of the primary phase (Key Stage 2) and then comparing them with results in the high school at the end of key stage 3. There is much debate in secondary schools about the validity of key stage 2 results and this information is often disregarded in favour of their own systems of assessment. What is clear from this research is that there are many issues that face those educating adolescents that do not face those working in primary schools. This is not to detract from the wonderful work done in many primary schools in building relationships with pupils, the cornerstone of learning and positive behaviours.

In contrast the high school is faced with challenges around a developing adolescent identity and the more complex stage of moral development that adolescents are at when they have moved beyond the early "rewards and punishment" phase that younger children have developed. Much of what is conveyed around good practice in terms of managing behaviour in high schools is embedded in this rather simplistic notion of rewards and consequences, whereas the stage of moral development for adolescents is around shared values and personal image. The implications for value added are therefore that, given the complexity of adolescent development, making comparisons between achievement at KS2 and KS 3 are not valid, particularly in schools where the social mix means that peer identity becomes the dominant influence for the majority. So lack of value added may be only tenuously linked to the quality of teaching and learning on offer.

The overall implications for the government of the day and the DfES are around the alignment of values and the translation of those values into policy that is not contradictory around the standards agenda and the social inclusion agenda. The very difficult issue of social mix in schools needs to be grasped if we are to uphold the ideal of comprehensive education. However, it may be inevitable that there will always be competition for what are seen to be the "best" resources, competition that may be unfairly weighted towards the middle classes who have greater economic and social power in order to widen choice.

Implications for the LEA

It is equally of importance for the LEA to grasp the thorny issues around social mix, school improvement and the standards agenda. It is clear that LEAs would be greatly helped in this by changes in national policy. However, the LEA is part of a wider city or borough or county council that also has policies about housing and location of families. LEAs have been influenced in the development of their EDP (Education Development Plan) by their council plan and in many cases the EDP, to become the Children Plan, will partially emerge from the wider plan in terms of priorities. It is important though that this is not seen as a "top down" process but that there is an equal influence of the EDP on the council plan. A single plan will enable local policy to be developed that will go some way to address the issues of social mix if the LA and the Council work collaboratively and have a will to influence such change.

Inner city schools can be supported by the LEA in being made more attractive and more marketable by being able to offer modern buildings via PFI builds (Private Funding Initiatives) and programmes such as Building Schools for the Future (BSF), good facilities and through positive marketing and publicity. Recruitment and retention of staff can also be an issue in such schools, which exacerbates existing problems, and the LEA can also support in this process. Where capacity is an issue for schools the LEA can often facilitate a positive collaboration with a school which does have capacity to share staff, such as advanced skills teachers and senior managers, at key times.

It is also important that the LEA fully understands and acknowledges the issues facing schools causing concern and supports them appropriately whilst avoiding the discourses around school failure. This is a real challenge to the LEA when they are locked into a national culture around OFSTED and the standards agenda.

It is traditional in many LEAs to separate behaviour and attendance structures from school improvement structures at a strategic level. In light of the complex model given here (diagram 4 in results chapter) it is questionable as to whether behaviour

and attendance should be a separate strand or whether this model would suggest a restructuring of LEAs in a more integrated manner, Movement is being made in this direction through the establishment of Local Authorities which will deliver on Children's Services. This is a key opportunity to rethink traditional structures within the education sector of such an authority.

Implications for the school

This chapter has outlined in some detail some very direct and practical implications for the school as a result of these findings. These can be summarised as:

- Improving teaching and learning
- Getting to know and sharing knowledge of pupils
- Involving pupils in all aspects of school life
- Setting clear goals with pupils
- Using peer support for learning and in other aspects of school life
- Examining processes that help eradicate bullying
- Reviewing support arrangements
- Looking at systems for conflict resolution
- Establishing systems for staff support
- Reviewing behaviour policy
- Reviewing classroom ethos

From the more complex findings arising from the grounded theory analysis there are further implications for the school in establishing a shared view between pupils and staff thus leading to establishing shared values and promoting those values. Diagram 3 (results chapter) shows that there are common themes between pupils and staff in this study, and these are teaching and learning, climate/environment/ethos, behaviour and peer relationships as a negative influence. The theory arising from this analysis is that a greater shared view would help to establish shared values, so crucial to the success of the school as a social and learning organisation. So, the question arises; how can staff begin to understand pupils' perspectives on relationships with adults and the potential of

positive peer influences, and how can pupils appreciate some of the issues around the impact of staff confidence on teaching and learning, the importance of establishing goals for self-motivation and the factors outside of school that affect their learning?

The process of examining views of both groups for the researcher has been enlightening and decisions had to be made during the process about the meaning of certain statements, and about what key categories (or themes) could be inducted and deducted from the data. From a restorative justice perspective (see this chapter, section 1), the process of examining views in this way, as a joint exercise between staff and pupils, could be about a much greater shared understanding of the issues on both sides. This kind of dialogue, in my experience, rarely if ever takes place in schools in any kind of formalised or structured way. Collaborative exercises between staff and pupils can help to establish a set of shared values, rather than one group imposing a set of values on another. This also opens up the possibility of involving parents in such a process so that values are truly established between staff, pupils and families.

Having established a set of shared values then it is important to keep those values alive and to refer to them frequently, and to ensure that those values are active in shaping policy and any decisions that are made about the life of the school. Wood (2005) states:

“ If ever there was a time when schools should be re-asserting simple, common values it is now. In our community school...we start by asserting that we value learning. That is our purpose as an institution. We value respect for self and others, so that we can learn together. We value co-operation because we can achieve more together than we do separately. We value courtesy as a sign of our mutual respect. We value fairness, justice and tolerance, which create equal opportunities and reinforce respect. We value truth and honesty, the keys to trustful relationships. We value kindness, compassion and generosity because we are all made better by giving and receiving these virtues. We not only proclaim these values- from every notice board, in every classroom- but we teach them and we do our best to live them.” (Wood, p 5)

What is so refreshing about the statement made above is the emphasis on values rather than the trend that has grown in education of asserting a set of rules as part of a behaviour policy, often developed by staff and imposed on pupils, and sometimes written only by one person or a small group. Values have so much more potential to underpin discussion and decision-making and influence the way we live and learn than do a simple set of rules. Unfortunately, the latter has become received wisdom in the world of behaviour management over the last decades.

Diagram 5 in the results chapter expresses a cycle of underachievement, cycle suggesting the need to break and disrupt unhelpful patterns that have been established. The diagram puts pupil achievement at the centre, with the key components being:

- Relationships with adults
- Behaviour
- Staff confidence
- Teaching and learning

It has been traditional in education, where schools are causing concern, to intervene in teaching and learning or behaviour or both. This cycle suggests that there are two other aspects that must be examined in the process of breaking a negative cycle with regard to underachievement. Specific suggestions have been made earlier in this discussion about improving staff/pupil relationships and about increasing teacher confidence and, it could be argued from this research that schools, with the support of their LEA, should consider improving each aspect of the cycle simultaneously in order to bring about improvement. This would also be an area for further research.

Implications for teacher training

The Teacher Training Agency (TTA), named the Training and Development agency (TDA) from 1/9/05, set out in its guidance the professional standards for qualified teacher status (TTA, 2003). The main strands in this guidance are:

- Professional values and practice
- Knowledge and understanding
- Teaching

Each strand consists of a set of outcome statements that must be achieved in order to attain qualified teacher status. The introduction to the document alludes to the importance of “knowing how children learn and develop”. It is also set out that the minimum standards here are the beginning of professional development as a teacher and not an end point. Outcome statements are made about treating pupils with consistency, respect and consideration (S 1.2) and demonstrating and promoting positive values, attitudes and behaviour (S 1.3). Further references are made in this document about knowing a range of strategies to promote good behaviour (S 2.7), building successful relationships (S 3.3.1) and establishing a clear framework for classroom discipline (S 3.3.9). All of these outcomes, along with others about employing interactive teaching methods and promoting active and independent learning (S 3.3.3) are highly pertinent to this study. One of the key statements in relation to the theory outlined in the results chapter (diagram 4) is the following:

“Understand how pupils’ learning can be affected by their physical, intellectual, linguistic, social, cultural and emotional development”
(TTA, 2003, p9)

It has been suggested through this research that an understanding of adolescent development and of building relationships with adolescents, and understanding their relationships, is key to learning, behaviour and achievement.

It has long been the case that university graduates would follow a one-year course of postgraduate study (PGCE), which would then qualify them to teach, the emphasis being upon the subject knowledge that they had gained through their first degree. A standard PGCE course is of around 40 weeks duration in total with a recommended 24 weeks spent in schools for those following courses in secondary education. It is therefore a challenge for training establishments to put together a

programme of study for PGCE students that will give them the crucial knowledge and understanding to carry out the role of working with developing adolescents, and to develop the confidence that plays such a crucial part in the “Cycle of underachievement” (diagram 5, results chapter).

In well-run secondary schools with a truly comprehensive balance of pupils, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) will undoubtedly have opportunities to develop and hone their skills and learn from experienced colleagues. In more challenging schools there may be fewer role models to learn from and less capacity to actively engage in this learning process. Indeed, such a school is less likely to be a learning organisation for any of its staff, and so opportunities for NQTs to positively influence longer serving staff may also be lost. However, even in the best run schools, professional development is unlikely to incorporate the kinds of learning that might be needed to truly understand the developing adolescent identity. Outcome descriptors are just that, and there is no route map to describe how that learning is to be achieved. “Knowing how children learn and develop” may require more than learning on the job, even with an experienced mentor who is an excellent teacher.

Teacher training will strongly influence the quality of teaching in our schools. The challenge for a one year post graduate training route is great in order to prepare teachers for teaching at key stage 3, arguably the most challenging stage of education and certainly the one where we see achievement and motivation drop off, and behaviour become more challenging.

In a recent report OFSTED suggests that LEAs should:

“Build on initial teacher training in order to provide long-term programmes of professional development in child and adolescent development and on the application of behaviour management strategies”. (OFSTED, 2005, p4)

For NQTs it may not be a case of building upon initial teacher training but of learning about adolescent development for the first time, and if the LEA does not then provide this, it may never be addressed.

The impact of a lack of this vital element in initial teacher training could be profound, in that it will affect the building of relationships, the quality of teaching and learning (teacher confidence), behaviour, the ethos of the school and ultimately the life chances of the young people in question. The TTA (now TDA) should consider whether 40 weeks is an adequate period to learn the important and skilful job of teaching and what the essential elements of a teaching programme should be for those planning to teach at key stage 3.

Now on offer are other employment-based ways into teaching but there is no suggestion that these would provide more of the kind of theoretical knowledge of adolescent and child development than would other routes.

Implications for the work of educational psychologists

Billington (2005) has clearly articulated a view that professional practice must reflect the synergistic nature of feeling, thinking and learning. There are therefore new models to be drawn in the way that the profession supports schools, not only in considering individuals but also in looking at overall systems. For example, the way that educational psychologists support schools in developing behaviour policies and putting them into practice must necessarily take into account a complex set of human interactions that go on within a school, and that have not always been taken into account in the simplistic “rules, praise, ignore or consequences” models that were widely promoted following the Elton Report (1989).

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well positioned in their work with secondary schools to promote a model of adolescent development, which takes account of all aspects of feeling, thinking and learning. EPs have long promoted models of early childhood development, which have been helpful to parents, carers and those working in the early years sector, but there has been a dearth of work that equally illuminates adolescent development.

Leading from here, EPs are also well positioned to promote activities in secondary schools that emphasise the importance of shared values and meanings between

young people and adults in the school, as these are central to enjoying and achieving in the world of education.

Some of the vehicles for such work may lie in supporting schools in action research, including seeking pupils' views through focus groups and other research mechanisms; in promoting restorative approaches in schools that value the emotional world of the individual and, at the simplest level, these can be initiatives such as circle time and peer mediation. The latter two are certainly not new to the work of EPs but may be part of an audit of what we already do which underpins the values of a profession that values equally feeling, thinking and learning, and that recognises the need for a gestalt in the approach we take.

Section 2 summary

In this section there has been a discussion of the central importance of adolescent identity and development to the educational process at key stage 3. Another central idea is the construction of shared meaning and shared values and the potential for a "restorative approach" to be used as a school improvement tool to create "meaning systems". The inter-related nature of thinking, learning and feeling must underpin educational practices.

In conjunction with this, social mix is identified as a key issue that conflicts with the standards agenda, as well as potential conflicts between collaboration and competition. The damaging effects of league tables on the comprehensive ideal and validity of notions of value added are also critically examined.

Sense of self is not only the preserve of the adolescent but is also a part of the emotional and psychological world of the teacher. The current model of teacher training for PGCE students embeds the sense of self as a teacher of a subject rather than a teacher of students and, it can be argued, sends newly qualified teachers into a world that they are not equipped to deal with. Behaviour is a major issue in the recruitment and retention of teachers but, paradoxically, the key issues around behaviour, and this does not mean that only behaviour management

strategies are important here, are not given due emphasis during training. Therefore, a cycle is built in by inadequate preparation, which demonstrates a lack of understanding at national level about the real and complex issues surrounding behaviour.

SECTION THREE: CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

Action research

In any action research study involving a school, especially those causing concern at some level, it is important to know whether they have the capacity to work with you on the research and to see it through to the end, as well as having the capacity to act upon the research findings. Building upon previous experience of action research with schools causing concern the research team felt that it was important to:

- Engage with a member of the senior management team in the school, a person with appropriate influence and status to help drive the project forward
- To provide a clear time line for the project
- To have a written contract which would be agreed and signed by both parties, the school and the research team

These principles were all adhered to in the research schools, which formed the overall project, and in the school that is the focus of this research. Despite this seeming clarity there are still difficulties when living with real world research, especially when engaging with schools that are under extreme pressure and where there are other competing agendas. One of the particular difficulties in this case was the involvement of HMI in the school, quite heavy involvement from other services within the LEA (e.g. Advisory Services) whose intervention would be viewed as statutory (Standards and Framework Act, 1998) and external consultancy from a team of management consultants through the school's "compact initiative". It might,

therefore, bear further reflection as to the conditions under which schools might find themselves able to commit to such an enterprise and, ironically, it may be schools that least need such research who are best able to engage. The issue of capacity and pressure upon staff from external visits and internal staff observations was to reshape the initial agreement and the pressure upon the particular member of the senior management team nominated as our link was always high but at times tremendous.

The original aim of supporting schools vulnerable to floor targets was a worthy one, and schools undoubtedly need to explore the views of pupils in these circumstances but the question arises as to whether they are able to make best use of research findings. In another project school they were able to use the findings from the research and consider how these related to other recommendations made by HMI, Advisers and other bodies and draw up an action plan which drew upon all of these sources. The project team were able to pass on findings to key stage 3 strategy consultants in order that actions could be followed through during the current and subsequent academic year. In the case study school the situation was rather different, as it was about to federate with another high school under an Executive Headteacher. The Senior Management Team of the case study school felt that they could not take action until they had consulted with Governors and with the incoming Headteacher.

A research log was kept and this has helped in reflections upon the research process. One visit in September 2004 to feedback to the Deputy Headteacher on transcript data from the pupil focus groups is recorded as follows:

“Most of the hour was spent listening to X talk about the state of the school and forthcoming HMI visit. It felt that staff are very demoralised and expecting to be put into serious weaknesses. Anecdotes about extreme behaviours that are dealt with and the x (name of area) culture that surrounds the school (“Mafia”). A feeling of unfairness in the way they (the school) are judged- the drift out to x school – the impossible targets set (floor targets go up from 20% to 25% in 2006). This took away from feelings of success about an increase in A-C’s this year.

Despite all of this he (the deputy) still wanted to continue with the project and we talked about a balance of staff for interviews".
(Extract from Research Journal, 15 September 2004)

The gaps between agreeing an action and action being taken by the school were often long, but it felt impossible at times to put this senior manager under any more pressure given the tremendous complexity of the situation and the stresses and emotions involved. Despite delays and the frustration of trying to move forward, the school in the person of the Deputy did always eventually do what they said they would do. Where this impacted upon the original project was in rewriting the research questions, limiting the scope of the project and in extending the timeline, so that supporting any subsequent action plan would be difficult, as it would be beyond the life of the project.

It is absolutely critical then, when embarking upon such a piece of research, that the researcher/s are able to live with a fluid and sometimes frustrating situation and that the research will not be "perfect" from a methodological perspective and that action research must by its very nature be a flexible model. The issue about using work from one's own professional life (i.e. as a Senior Educational Psychologist following a service plan) is that the speed of action that needs to be taken and the sequence of actions might not be the ideal in research terms. Living with a lack of strict order is a necessary part of the research process in the "real world" of education.

Engaging pupils and parents

The original research design, although always intended to use pupils as a primary data source, had touched upon gathering the views of parents, initially through the permission letters that were sent out. Both pupils and parents, it was intended, would receive a letter explaining the aims of the research and asking them on the reply slip to indicate whether they thought that they/ their son or daughter, could do better at school than they were doing (see Appendix A). The letters were given as a model for the school to use with the hope of getting back the reply slips a) to confirm that pupils were fully informed and consenting to taking part b) to ensure that parents gave permission and to quickly survey their view in order to decide whether

to follow up on this strand, perhaps through a parent focus group. Having embarked upon the project it was doubtful whether the letters had been used and no reply slips were forthcoming. This was not a major obstacle but would have been helpful in supplying additional information. This opens up the question as to how far, when trying to engage schools in such a project, we as researchers are able to keep control over events as they unfold, especially around the area of communication with others. The nominated contact from inside the organisation acts as gatekeeper to information and researchers cannot insist on things being done in a particular way. Occasionally, there is a degree of discomfort in the method and approaches that the school takes and the approach that the researchers would wish to take. However, we only enter the case study site and access pupils, staff and information whilst permission is given and to be too insistent would perhaps jeopardise the project. However, care has to be taken at the same time not to compromise principles and values.

Using focus groups

Miller and Glassner (1997) caution around the use of focus groups with adolescents in particular as there may be different dynamics at work than in an adult group. Many of the issues drawn out in this research around identity, "myself as a member of a peer group", may influence what is said and what is left unsaid. They assert that age, class and gender can be of critical importance when establishing research relationships. In this case all of these factors may have had an effect at some time during the interviews. The use of other young people as interviewers is one option, teaching pupils to be researchers or, making an effort to build a relationship before commencing the group interviews is another issue for consideration. However, in the real world the time that can be expected to be taken from lessons for year 10 pupils has to be limited, and building a relationship is not always possible whilst building rapport can be. One must also guard against over conformity to the group or group identity where the facilitator becomes a "rejection figure" in order for the group to become more cohesive.

In the case of these groups, pupils were more challenging to interview than had previously been experienced with other secondary age pupils in other schools. Referring again to the research journal it was noted:

“ A real feeling of the importance of peer group image here. I felt that some pupils did not want to be seen to be cooperating or taking it seriously”. (Group 1, research journal, Summer 2004)

“ All three groups seemed constrained by peer group influence-very powerful across groups. Is image the most important thing? Conforming to group norms? Difficulty in being seen to cooperate with adults and take it seriously?” (All groups, research journal, summer 2004)

One of the other issues that was noted through the journal was that of pupils giving opinions. Whereas, in past experience, where the topic had focussed upon behaviour, pupils seemed to have strongly held views to offer, in this case pupils seemed to be less able to reflect upon what helped them to learn and upon possible barriers to achievement. It is likely that these pupils were not accustomed to being asked for their views about school life or given the space to do so. When they were given the opportunity, it took a higher level of skill and effort to elicit ideas from them. This was not the case in other project schools. It may be that the phrasing of questions was too difficult or too abstract for these groups of pupils. They were rephrased many times during the interview and certain questions (See Appendix D) may have seemed repetitious to them if the question touched upon a different aspect of the same topic.

The integrity of the results, however, was checked back with these groups some time later. After all the analysis was done, the researcher met again with pupils from the three groups. The girls asked to be seen as a separate group. Some pupils were missing but a sample of the original pupils met together again to reflect on the findings. All of the pupils agreed with the way that their views had been reflected. One boy commented that he thought the issue of racism should have had greater emphasis but he was the only pupil who felt this to be the case (it had only been mentioned once in the original interviews). The pupils had the opportunity to see the

summary of staff views and disagreed with some, notably that staff felt it was difficult for some pupils to ask for support. Some pupils did not agree with this point. Some pupils did not agree with the staff view that older pupils can present poor role models in the school to younger pupils (themselves now being the older pupils).

It is impossible to say whether the findings from the focus groups would have been replicated in individual interviews or whether one or the other approach would have given more authentic results. It is hoped that, given the opportunity to reflect back on what they had said in year 10 from a position of greater maturity and on the verge of leaving compulsory education, that they were giving an honest and authentic view when they said that what they had said previously (during the group interviews) still held true for them.

Gender may have been an issue in these findings but the data gathered was, on the whole, from mixed groups who did not raise gender related issues except for the "girls group" who raised the issue of intimidation and bullying. There may have been some bearing here upon gendered relationships but the girls also raised intimidation by other girls. Gender was not a distinguishing feature around the subject of this study, although the literature relating to gender and underachievement is reviewed.

Staff interviews

Whereas the focus group method used with pupils had been intended to illuminate processes and to glean a unified pupil view of underachievement this had not been the intention when gathering the views of staff. Originally, the intention had been to unpick the differences in approach between subject departments and this was not suited to a focus group approach. Ultimately, because of the changes made to the research design as the project progressed, the school felt it useful to gather a different sample of staff views, which would represent the full range of staff in the school rather than teaching staff only. The final sample of staff, although small, was more representative of the pastoral view and had moved away from the original curriculum focus.

Ultimately, there emerged a quite coherent view from the staff interviewed but this may not necessarily have been the case. Even with hindsight, the use of a focus group with this cohort of staff may not have allowed for some individual's views to emerge given differences in experience and status within the school.

Observation

Observations, if they had been carried out, would have added to the overall picture as regards teaching and learning but may not have added to other aspects of the research. An initial observation schedule would not have been sensitive enough to pick up on issues of identity and relationships that emerged from the grounded theory analysis, and may have taken the research in a different direction. What can be learned from this experience is that there is potential for more research to be done, with tools specifically designed for the purpose, and with the findings of this research as a basis for further questioning and observation.

Size of sample

The views of seventeen pupils were sought in all out of a possible cohort of identified underachievers in the year group of thirty-two. The final numbers seen represented more than 50% of the possible cohort and reflected the broader school mix. In a school with only 488 pupils on roll, the sample was therefore approximately 17% of the year group. It was not the intention of the project to gather pupil views across the age ranges in the school, although this might be a focus for further investigation. In this case it was the clear intention to focus upon the population who had just "underachieved" at key stage 3 and whose results would directly impact upon the schools GCSE results.

As this research was a case study of this particular school the findings are directly relevant to this setting and context. However, the findings from pupils were broadly similar to other schools in the wider project as regards pupils' views of

underachievement. Likewise, when action research is undertaken it is difficult to generalise the findings of the research, which may be specific to one organisation. A wider picture of the issues can be added by reviewing the literature in a given area.

What can be drawn from a sample of pupils in one case study school are possible implications for similar schools in similar circumstances, and the implications for the wider educational community at all levels as to why such schools do fail to meet targets. Pupils' views help to illuminate the issues and, where they are carefully counter balanced with staff views, should be taken seriously.

The strength of qualitative research such as this is in the ability to create and emphasise meaning of potential relevance for the whole school, other schools in similar circumstances, the LEA and other bodies.

Girls seemed to be over-represented in the group of possible underachievers. It was not the intention of this research to focus upon gender issues, but these cannot be ignored. OFSTED and EOC (1996) found that, where schools were disorganised in term of behaviour management, girls did less well i.e. they were more adversely affected by this kind of climate. This issue would be worthy of future research and group or individual interviews could be held in order to explore the views of girls on this topic.

Summary of critical evaluation

Agreements made when embarking upon a piece of action research with a school may change, even when written down. Any discussion, from an interactionist perspective, is a mutual construction of meaning that takes place at that time but those meanings may be differently perceived in the future. Having written something down does not necessarily mean that what is on the paper is true in any objective sense, or that it will be adhered to. Human interaction would determine that other meanings might be constructed in the future.

Schools that could most benefit from research findings about their own organisations may have the least capacity to carry out and act upon such findings. It is an important part of the school improvement process that schools are given capacity to do so. Action research should be high on the agenda of any LEA.

For researchers carrying out action research, it is important to be able to be flexible and to live with a certain amount of fluidity in the situation. It can therefore be a “messy method” of research, and some researchers may find that other approaches suit them better.

Using focus groups in schools can have tremendous benefits (see methodology chapter) but the researcher must also be aware of potential pitfalls and must weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. Where the peer group culture of the school is particularly strong the facilitator may become a rejection figure at the expense of group cohesion. On the other hand, observing the dynamic of the focus group under these circumstances can illuminate issues of peer group identity that might not otherwise emerge.

The ability of young people to offer views and opinions in these kinds of groups is not so much dependent upon how articulate they might be, as even those who struggle most to express themselves can convey a strongly held view, even if it is in less than perfect English. What might be a more important factor is whether pupils as a matter of course, throughout their school lives, are encouraged to express views on these matters.

However, doing so is dependent on whether they have had the opportunity to reflect on such important issues as raising achievement, to share these reflections with others and to make them public.

The effects of this research upon my own professional development are many. Through reviewing the literature, I am able to be more critical of the notions underpinning school improvement, specifically areas such as value added, and I

have been able to consider the important influence of the issue of social mix and cultural capital in education.

As a psychologist I have felt that there are some important areas to revisit in our thinking as a profession around secondary education and the importance of ideas developed around the developing identity of the adolescent and their moral development. These areas should be influential in how we think about developing behaviour policies for example, and some of the current thinking in this area should be challenged. Next to this is the fundamental importance of relationships in the learning process and we should take opportunities to explore areas such as restorative justice in order to promote positive relationships in schools.

Using grounded theory in this study has not been an easy option and there is a difficult and complicated process to be gone through which is both time consuming and demanding. However, the learning from this and the satisfaction gained from developing theory has been invaluable to the process of becoming a reflexive practitioner.

CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS TO THE STUDY

The research journey began by trying to answer some questions about how pupils, who might be described as underachieving, saw the key issues in that underachievement, leading to what some of their solutions might be, that is what would make things better and help them to achieve to their full potential. Pupils' views were the primary data source and a grounded theory analysis was carried out using data from focus groups in the case study school. Staff views were then also sampled and were considered in the light of the coding framework that had been established from the pupil data. This enabled a set of answers to be produced to the research questions, which had been modified to meet the needs of the school.

The context of the case study school is also important in that it reflected high levels of challenge through lack of social mix, high levels of ethnic diversity and high levels of special educational need. Added to this, formal levels of school performance, as represented by SAT and GCSE results, showed the school to be vulnerable to not meeting floor targets (20% A-Cs at GCSE). The issue of social mix is seen as a key issue when describing the processes at work that lead to underachievement.

Two models were produced, one which demonstrated pupils' views of underachievement, the key categories and the links between them, and a second model which demonstrated the key categories in relation to underachievement for staff, and the links between them in terms of impact (see diagrams 1 and 2 in results chapter). These were established during the first two levels of grounded theory analysis, those of open coding and axial coding. At the next level the two models were brought together and an integrated theory of achievement and underachievement was produced, using both sets of data. The new models that were produced (see diagrams 3,4, 5) demonstrate the complexity of the school as a social organisation. It is greatly important that the views of pupils are taken into account and acted upon in this setting, but it is equally important that we acknowledge that it is not only the pupil view that forms the culture of the organisation, and that a combination of views and values act together and impact

upon each other, and that it is this which ultimately leads to either positive or negative outcomes.

In light of this, it was important to consider how far the views of pupils and staff coincided in this case study. There was indeed some commonality of view around what were the key categories, although barriers may have been accounted for in different ways (see diagram 6, research questions chapter). Key areas of overlap were; teaching and learning, climate/environment/ethos, behaviour and peer relationships in so far that they could be a negative influence on pupil achievement, and sometimes supportive (girls more so). However, some differences were also identified between the two groups in what they regard as key issues. The pupils had a more negative view of relationships with staff and put more emphasis on relationships with peers as a positive influence if they were allowed to work co-operatively. They would be inclined to turn to peers for help where they had a difficulty in understanding schoolwork. Staff, however, had a view that pupil confidence, lack of goals and poor motivation played a part in underachievement, as well as outside influences from home (home as unsupportive) and the community, where pupils were thought to lack positive role models. It is hypothesised that these key differences reflect some of the differences in the value systems at work in the school, and that it is important in a community that is to work together for positive outcomes that values are shared to a greater rather than lesser extent. The values and culture of the school are not only influenced by staff; pupils bring a culture to the school which may be at odds with that of the value system which might traditionally be seen as dominant. If the pupils can be seen as reflecting the values of their communities, their ethnic cultures and their peer culture, then it is indeed a highly complex set of beliefs, thoughts and feelings which are meeting with traditional school values around learning, behaviour and relationships. Activities that explore values and help to establish common values could be seen as valuable tools for school improvement. In high achieving schools it might then be hypothesised that the communities share a greater set of values, and that this is instrumental to success as defined by achievement outcomes such as SATs and GCSEs.

Adolescence is seen as a key time when the young person is negotiating a set of selves which may be competing, and which are formed through relationships with others. As Billington (2005) points out, thinking and feeling cannot be separated from learning and it is therefore the whole, integrated self that is able to learn most effectively (Erikson, 1963, and Farrell, 1990). The adolescent must try to integrate the different and sometimes, it seems, conflicting selves and it is here that the dominant culture of the organisation can be crucial in determining achievement in its traditional sense. For a young person at this stage of development the issues of relevance are highly significant and they must be able to have a vision of themselves in the future and draw links between that vision and the curriculum that they are offered. As they try to establish shared values and a personal image that integrates all of the other selves and incorporates societal values, the issue of shared meanings is brought sharply into focus. Erickson (1986) questions the conditions of meaning that students and teachers create together that allow some students to learn and prevents others from learning. Shared meanings, which can be read as shared values, are created in the dominant discourses of the school but also more widely through the community and through the media. One discourse is that of the "failing school" and this has a powerful impact upon pupils and staff alike.

The issue of social mix is key here. Where the dominant peer group of the school does not validate a belief in education then self as student and career self (Farrell 1990) can become less valid and the competing selves do not become integrated. The current systems which are purported to allow for parental preference by publishing decontextualised information about schools' results has led to a high degree of imbalance of social mix in some schools, and so has created a divided culture within those schools where the pupils take on board more strongly the self among peers and self as loyal friend, and where staff and pupils do not for the greater part share the same mental space or conditions of meaning (Erickson, 1986). Given the very different stages of development that the young person experiences between primary and secondary education it would call into question notions of value added, especially where the social mix of the school is highly skewed.

The pupil sense of self and developing identity is therefore at the core of achievement and this fragile identity is created and integrated through relationships with others. The diagram (diagram 4) in the results chapter shows that relationships with peers and relationships with adults are crucial in this development and that other subsidiary concepts are also at work within the key categories; feelings of being supported or unsupported, being listened to and given due attention, the behaviour of teachers towards the young person and the behaviour of their peer group towards them in terms of teasing, bullying, intimidation, as well as the kinds of distraction that peers provide, which can be highly unsupportive. When identity is integrated and relationships are attended to then the issues of teaching and learning can be addressed. What is important to consider is the kind of teaching styles that give variety, pace and stimulus, the support that is given in the learning process, the right amount of challenge, the amount of control that the young person feels they have over their own learning and the motivation and goals that are established. All of these key categories come together to create a climate or ethos, which can support positive behaviour and good discipline. The circles themselves represent a layered approach to seeing the school as a social organisation. It is also clear that the school does not operate in isolation but exists in a community, in a world where work patterns and opportunities shift and where families either play or do not play an important part in all of those facets which contribute to achievement or underachievement.

This diagram should not be read, however, in a linear way but should be seen as a set of mutually dependent, interlocking concepts and categories, where each interacts upon the others. Understanding that the arrows are two way is crucial to reading and understanding the whole picture as adolescent identity development impacts upon relationships, teaching and learning, ethos and climate and upon community, family and the world of work that is ultimately available. Likewise, what is on offer from the community and the world of work, the values and support that the family transmits, the ethos of the school, the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of relationships in evidence will all impact enormously on the adolescent sense of self and developing identity. The young person needs to manage and integrate all of the forces at work in this complex world, which is the school, and the

community beyond the school gates. I would argue that how this is managed is greatly influenced by the social mix at work in the school and how far the school can establish shared values and meanings across its communities.

The implications for the school and for the Local Authority have been addressed in some detail in the discussion chapter. At the end of the project findings were fed back to the Senior Management Team of the case study school and implications for the school were shared with that team. As the school were on the brink of federating with another school, they decided to take the findings to their Governors. Further support and information was offered on request. The following school year the researcher met with the new executive head teacher to give a summary of the research findings and to reiterate the offer of support. The school could use these findings strategically to inform their school improvement action plan and Self-Evaluation Form, and for the purposes of staff development.

Findings have also been shared with the Team Leader for the Psychology and Assessment Service and with the Chief Executive, and their views have been sought on how the findings might be used strategically. The issue of social mix would have significant implications for other areas of the City Council and for the Pupil Admissions Section, who would need to consider reviewing boundaries and policies. The Local Authority might also wish to consider the information when implementing school improvement processes for schools in similar circumstances to the case study high school, and for the development of those officers of the LA concerned with school improvement and raising achievement.

Where “Every Child Matters” (ECM) we should see positive outcomes. Linking to diagram 4 the developing sense of identity, if negotiated successfully, should have as an outcome a healthy individual in the sense of being emotionally and mentally healthy, but perhaps we cannot disassociate physical health from this when we appreciate the interconnectedness of mind and body. The second layer, that of relationships, where they are positive should bring about outcomes that support feelings of safety e.g. being safe from bullying and intimidation, and should at the same time contribute to good emotional health. Teaching and learning, when

successfully established, should allow all young people to enjoy school life and achieve to their full potential. Where a positive ethos exists in a school then making a positive contribution to school life and to the community will be more likely to be achieved. What lies outside of the immediate circles of the school is an environment where young people will be expected to achieve economic well being, in the community and in the world of work. This will be more likely if the relevance of school life can be clearly demonstrated, so that young people achieve to their full potential. If every child and young person really does matter then they should matter regardless of postcode, or “super output area”, and they should not have a better chance of achieving each of these outcomes if they live in one part of the city or another, or attend one school or another. The very issues which underpin school improvement currently, and the need to drive up standards, may actively work against these positive outcomes as schools “fail” to raise standards and “fail” to add value because of issues of social mix that this very drive to raise standards has created.

Finally, It is suggested that there is a cycle of underachievement at work (diagram 5), which needs to be broken in order to raise achievement. Here, staff confidence is an important aspect of school life, the lack of which will impact significantly upon the quality of teaching and learning. Where pupils perceive that teaching and learning is of poor quality or if the process fails to engage them, then the quality of relationships will suffer, leading to a deterioration in behaviour due to boredom, lack of understanding and consequent distractions from peers. Poor behaviour in turn undermines staff confidence and so the diet of lessons becomes “safe”, and therefore less stimulating, and the cycle is propagated. It can be argued that this cycle needs to be broken, not at one point but at all points in order to have real impact. Often, a school will start with a review of behaviour policy or, more likely in the current climate, an overhaul of teaching and learning. Whilst these are necessary as part of the process, the issues of confidence and relationships can easily be ignored or become secondary to teaching and learning. A school improvement process which works on all four aspects simultaneously, whilst taking into account the factors that support successful change, will be more likely to bring about success and drive up standards than will the publication of league tables.

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Appendix A: Letters to schools, pupils and parents

1 Letter sent to potential target schools

Please reply to:
Leeds Educational Psychology
Service
Name:
Tel No.
Fax:
Minicom:
Email:

5 February 2004

Dear

I am writing on behalf of a team of five educational psychologists within the Psychology and Assessment Service who will be focusing part of their work over the next 2 years on raising achievement. The team will be able to offer research and development time which is over and above your usual school allocation from this Service.

The focus for this project will be to identify groups of pupils through examination of data who may have underachieved at key stage 3 according to your predictions for them. We would want to elicit the views of these pupils on why they may have underperformed in school and to support the school in implementing actions based upon the findings. The project team would also talk to school staff about conditions of learning and may also be able to offer to observe selected groups of pupils. Parents would be consulted as part of the process.

During the first year of the project, data would be gathered and we would provide written and verbal feedback via a series of meetings with key staff, and of course, with the pupils themselves. We would expect that actions would arise from the research findings and, during the first part of the second year, we would support the school in implementing and evaluating any actions taken.

We feel that the benefits for schools would be to have an opportunity to look at the reasons why pupils underachieve and the teaching and learning styles associated with successful learning, and also to consider the impact of peer group influences on attainment.

We hope that this letter will give a sufficient outline of the proposal for you to express an interest in pursuing this further. One of the project team will contact you shortly in order to arrange a follow up meeting if you would like to know more. We hope that you will give us the opportunity for further discussion and to answer any queries that you may have.

Yours sincerely

Lynn Turner

Senior Educational Psychologist

2 Model letter for schools to use with pupils (optional)

Date _____

Dear _____

You have been chosen to take part in an important project, which will look at how well pupils are doing in school. We are interested in your views about why some pupils don't do as well as they could.

If you agree to take part you will be asked some questions by a team of people from outside of the school. Your views will be important in helping to raise achievement for all pupils in this school.

Please sign the slip below and return it to.....(name).... as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

(Staff name)

Pupil reply slip: Raising achievement.

I agree to talk about how pupils can do better in school. Yes / No

Please tick **either**:

I think that I could do better in school.

Or:

I think that I am doing as well as I can do in school.

Signed _____ Date _____

Form _____

3 Model letter for schools to send to parents (optional)

Date

Dear Parent

As a school, we are constantly concerned with improvement and how our pupils can do better. Although, as adults, we have views about what helps children to learn and do well at school, it is also important to ask pupils for their views on important matters such as achievement and underachievement.

The Education Leeds Psychology and Assessment Service are working with the school on this project and we would like your permission to seek the views of your child. We would also be interested in your view of whether your child is working to his or her full potential or whether you think that he/ she could do better.

We would therefore be very grateful if you could complete the slip below and return it to school as soon as possible.

Yours faithfully

Headteacher (or other)

Reply slip: Raising Achievement. Please tick **either**:

I believe that my child is doing as well as he/she can do at school.

Or:

I believe that my child could do better at school.

I agree for my child to be asked about his/her views on achievement. Yes / No

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name of child _____ Form: _____

Education Leeds



Research & Development Area: Raising Achievement

Psychology and Assessment Service team:

Name of school:

School team:

Date of initial meeting:

Raising Achievement

Welcome! Thank you for the interest you have expressed in this research work. The following information is intended to provide a framework to the work we would like to undertake in your school.

The sections below are designed to act as a prompt to guide us through our meeting today. After the meeting, this document will be re-drafted, incorporating any changes/relevant information and will act as an agreement between the two parties for participation and co-operation.

Rationale and Brief overview

Aims

- To contribute to the Education Leeds raising achievement agenda.
- To work with schools to raise achievement as measured by GCSE A-C results.
- To consult with groups of underachievers and to identify preferred teaching / learning styles and motivations.
- To identify the prevalent teaching / learning styles in identified subject areas within the school.
- To identify changes that could be made in teaching and learning styles to improve the achievement of pupils across the key stages.
- To feedback research findings to the school and support implementation of an action plan.

Methodology

The focus for this action research will be to identify groups of pupils through examination of data who may have underachieved at key stage 3 according to predictions. The team will elicit the views of these pupils on why they may have

under-performed in school and will support the school in implementing actions based upon the findings.

The team would also gather information from school staff about teaching and learning and will also be able to offer to observe selected groups of pupils.

Methods of gathering data would include:

- Interviews with young people either individually or in groups
- Individual interviews or questionnaires for staff on teaching styles
- Lesson observations with a focus on teaching styles

Parental consent

Pupils who would be involved would need to have parental permission to take part. The team will provide a draft letter for use by the school.

Benefits to schools

The benefits for schools would be to:

- Have an opportunity to look at the reasons why pupils underachieve.
- Consider the conditions associated with successful learning.
- Consider the impact of peer group influences on achievement/underachievement.
- Benefit from being data rich in this area and of having the support of the PAS team in analysing data and planning action arising from the findings.

Consulting with children about school improvement issues is a focus for the new OFSTED framework and therefore would be of great value when providing information for inspection.

For the pupils, being consulted about school improvement issues will be empowering if the findings are a trigger for action.

Mutual expectations:

General:

- Provide a School Visit Summary record after each visit detailing agreed actions.
- Give adequate notice if appointments have to be re-arranged.
- Provide appropriate accommodation for work to be carried out.

- Ensure key staff are available for communication.

Key Actions and Time lines
(dates to be arranged with individual schools)

Term	Key Action	Date:
Spring Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arrange initial meetings ▪ Meetings to be held in schools ▪ Project planning ▪ Follow up actions to be planned ▪ Follow up meetings with key school staff ▪ Pupil interviews / work in schools. ▪ Initial exploration of data 	

<p>Summer Term (1st half)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial feedback to schools ▪ Follow up actions / further data collection (looking at conditions of learning apparent in the school, possibly through observation and to consult with staff on this issue ▪ Further analysis of data 	
<p>Summer Term (2nd half)</p>	<p>Suggested Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Formal write up (school specific) ▪ Share findings with schools, pupils and parents. ▪ Written and oral report to PAS ▪ Planning of Year 2 R and D work. 	

Confidentiality

All of the research finding will be fed back to the School's SMT/ Leadership Team in the first place (see reporting back below). Any research findings which were to be shared outside of the school would be anonymous and would not be attributable to the school unless prior agreement had been reached.

Any enquiries made to the PAS Team about the findings from the research would be referred to the key person within the school. If any concerns arise during the course of the research we would discuss them with key staff in the school in the first place.

We would seek to encourage schools to share good practice with each other where this was identified.

Consultation with Parents

An explanation of the research proposal is included in the letter asking for parents permission for their children to participate.

The team will consult with individual schools regarding appropriate methods of consultation and communication with parents.

Reporting back procedures

Written/verbal feedback regarding the research will be provided to each of the following groups:

- School: Senior Management team
Key staff involved in research
Whole school staff

- Pupils
- Parents
- Psychology and Assessment Service

The method for delivering feedback will be negotiated with the school.

Agreement

Areas discussed:

Rationale and Brief overview:

- Aims
- Methodology
- Parental consent
- Benefits to school

Mutual expectations:

- Key Actions and Time lines
- Confidentiality
- Consultation with Parents

- Reporting back procedures

School:

We have discussed the above areas and understand the implications for our participation in this research work.

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

R & D team:

Signed: _____

Signed: _____

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

(NB This booklet was compiled by other members of the R&D team and not directly by the researcher)

Appendix C: Guidance booklet for project team on running focus groups

What is a focus group?

“A research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher”.

(Morgan, 1997, p 6)

Focus groups are a form of group interview, which combines question and answer with discussion. It is on a specific topic, hence the word “focus”, and involves an open ended group discussion guided by the researcher. Groups are usually of around eight to twelve people and can be homogeneous or heterogeneous. However, it is possible to find different groupings within one study.

Focus groups are commonly used in conjunction with other methods, for example observation and individual interviews. They can be used to develop a more structured instrument or to amplify the findings of a survey.

The term focus group is often used interchangeably with group interview. Both share some of the features of individual interviews, ranging from highly structured through semi-structured to unstructured. Most versions of group interview also have aspects of discussion as well as interview. In group interviews general topics and sometimes specific questions can be posed but not in a traditional question and answer interview format. The traditional question and answer approach often used in individual interviews would eliminate the group interaction aspect that is such a feature of the group interview.

The unstructured group interview, (if focused on a particular topic this can be described as a focus group interview), can provide rich and highly illuminating insights into the motives underlying behaviour. In these interviews the use of language is key but non-verbal behaviour can also give valuable insights. In this scenario the focus group interview is a kind of conversation with the interviewer using open rather than closed questions. The interviewer/ moderator keeps the group focused on the topic and probes for depth of response.

Some benefits of Focus Groups

Focus group interviews allow peoples' views and feelings to emerge but give the interviewer some control over the general direction of the discussion. Focus groups also have the potential to raise consciousness on certain issues and to empower the group participants.

As well as being a favourable method when more in depth information is required about complex issues it is a highly efficient way of generating quite large amounts of data efficiently. Running two one hour focus groups can reveal the views of sixteen or more informants in two hours whilst it would take sixteen hours to explore the same questions with each individual. The ideas generated in a group can spark off

the thinking of others and produce a greater wealth and depth of data. A group setting can also feel more comfortable to certain individuals and on certain topics where it would be less comfortable to express an individual view in a one to one setting.

Listening to views on a focused topic in a group discussion setting can also illuminate where there is dissent or a convergence of opinion that may not readily emerge in an individual interview. In this way the focus group can act as a kind of thermometer in an organisation.

Focus groups are one way of generating a wealth of data. Such data can be collected in the form of field notes that are later written up more fully or by the use of audiotape, which must later be transcribed. It is also useful to keep a contact summary sheet that contains the reflections of the researcher after contact with the informants or group and this should be written no more than one day after the contact. This should then be discussed with another researcher within the same project if possible.

Running a project using focus groups

Vaughn et al, 1996, suggest nine possible steps in conducting focus group interviews in action research, which are:

1. Delineate the general purpose
2. Designate a moderator
3. Refine the research goals
4. Select the participants
5. Determine the number of focus group interviews
6. Arrange for the focus group facility
7. Develop an interview guide
8. Conduct the focus group interview
9. Analyse the focus group data

The basis for selecting the participants should be decided upon, as groupings can be homogeneous or heterogeneous.

There is no clear guidance on how many focus group interviews are felt to be useful. It is recommended by Vaughn et al, that interviews be conducted until the moderator begins to be able to predict the responses of the participants.

Consent

In this context informed consent is very important and should be obtained in a way that is age or developmentally appropriate and does not put the young person under stress.

Role of the moderator or facilitator

The person running the focus group is referred to as a moderator or facilitator and Robson (2002) notes that this is a role that calls for considerable skills. The moderator must generate an interest in discussion about a topic but must not lead the group. Often a second researcher is needed in a focus group setting both to *take field notes and also to give feedback to the moderator about keeping the group on track.*

A moderator or facilitator must be a person in this case skilled at interacting with young people and able to develop a rapport with them and build trust. Not least of the considerations in some school settings is one of behaviour management. The facilitator must be able to strike a balance between maintaining order in the group and not being too authoritarian and thus curtailing discussion and creating unease. There is sometimes a question in schools about a member of the school staff being present in the group. It may occur that the researchers are not asked if this is desirable and it is assumed that an adult from within the organisation can be present. This should be discussed in advance with the school staff as problems can arise during the group.

Holstein and Gubrium (1997) discuss active interviewing where it is recognised that the interviewer is part of the activity of constructing reality during the interview. This is different from the traditional stance, which stresses the impartiality of the interviewer, who is seen rather as a conduit of knowledge. They claim that:

“Understanding how the meaning making process unfolds in the interview is as critical as apprehending what is substantively asked and conveyed”

(Holstein and Gubrium, p114)

Conducting the interviews

Facilities need to be identified on the site where interviews can be conducted that are comfortable for the participants. It is preferable that the place chosen is quiet and free from interruptions.

An interview guide should be developed which is specific enough to guide the moderator but general enough to allow for flexibility in the interview process. Unforeseen topics and issues may be raised in the group that had not been envisaged but may still be of real interest to the research. Above all the questions generated should be aimed at answering the specified research questions. These questions may be modified over time and the course of several interviews but remain the guiding principle. The interview guide is not a script and does not need to be strictly adhered to. Because of this degree of latitude it might be argued that

keeping to one moderator might provide some kind of "internal validity" in the project.

The moderator should explain clearly to the group what the interview is for; this should be a reiteration of what they have already been told when asked to take part. When running groups of this kind it is important to establish some ground rules before starting. The tape recorder can be a useful reminder not to talk at the same time as others so that the end result will be clear. Issues of confidentiality should also be discussed. On ending a session the participants should be invited to make any final comments and thanked for their contribution.

The interview process needs to be well managed so that the quieter or less articulate are heard, so that some views do not dominate and so that everyone's contribution is respected. Although the moderator does not necessarily need to be highly trained they would require certain interpersonal skills which would enable them to "draw out" others. Talking "just enough" can be difficult to judge.

Facilities

In running the actual session, the room should be set up and the equipment tested before the participants arrive. Again, if working in a school setting this may not be assumed and should be made explicit to the responsible member of school staff.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality can be a problem in a group and views expressed may be repeated outside of the group. Whilst confidentiality can be requested it cannot be enforced except by mutual agreement.

L Turner Feb. 2004

Appendix D: Interview questions, pupils and staff

Focus group questions for pupils: Raising Achievement

- Are you doing as well as you could be at school? If not then why not?
- What kinds of lessons do you like best?
- What helps you to learn?
- How do you like to work?
- Who helps you most with your work? (Teacher, staff, friend, parent)
- What makes you feel enthusiastic about/ involved in your schoolwork?
- What gets in the way of working/learning?
- What kinds of things could help you to do better at school (achieve better results)?

Interview Questions for Teachers: Raising Achievement

Based on original questions given to pupils

- 1 Are pupils doing as well as they can be in this school? If not, then why not?
- 2 What kinds of lessons do these pupils like best?
- 3 What helps them to learn?
- 4 How do they like to work?
- 5 Who do you think helps them most with their work? (Teacher/staff/friend/parent)
- 6 What makes pupils enthusiastic/involved with their schoolwork?
- 7 What gets in the way of learning?
- 8 What kinds of things could help them to do better at school/achieve better results?

Appendix E: Coding process and concepts arising from focus group interviews

1 First stage of coding process by group

Group 1

Code 26 Apr 2004	Ref (line numbers)
Attendance/Truancy	21, 959
Boredom	65,107, 803, 825
Perception of teachers/school	73,102, 213, 300, 770, 825, 1032
Discipline, and Behaviour	76, 250, 261, 447, 453, 546, 840, 938
Support (parent, teacher and peer)	74,84, 168, 175, 185, 188, 320, 321,404, 634, 646, 649, 653, 662, 672, 680, 686, 708, 712, 729, 733, 739, 751, 782, 981, 1001, 1015, 1019, 1050, 1058
Quality of teaching	78
Teaching style	111,119, 156, 322, 327, 333, 408, 536, 540, 667, 691, 695, 736, 899, 913
Learning style	126,150, 154, 159,369, 378, 398, 420, 424, 431, 441, 536, 699, 704
Motivation	144, 796, 807, 811, 815, 819, 1009
Listening	176, 404, 474, 478, 623
Fairness	190, 206, 209, 213, 229, 231, 466, 473, 609
Attention	190, 229, 231, 1019
Self esteem	239, 241, 829
Purpose/understanding	265,273,275,277,289,291, 852, 858, 860, 868, 893, 902
Lack challenge	338,343, 362
Teacher behaviour	457, 460, 478, 482, 515, 553, 560, 566, 570, 574, 578, 591, 591, 736, 1044
Classroom environment	487, 492, 494, 496, 498, 500, 504, 527, 531,
Teacher & Pupil interaction / relationship	550, 563, 592, 608, 613, 621, 997
Homework	786
Negative Peer influence	930, 934, 954, 963, 40, 1032, 1040
Distractions	948, 950
Academic challenge	1005
Group size	913

Group 2

Code 27 Apr 2004	Ref (line numbers)
Attendance/Truancy	
Boredom	87, 371,
Perception of teachers/school	832,836,842, 909,913,915,924,982,
Discipline, and Behaviour	172,177, 628,630, 651,659,669,673,675,677,679,681,689,691,693,
Support (parent, teacher, self and peer)	464,483,491,493,507,512,533,537,548, 712,726, 854,861,866,870,876,882,887,892,
Quality of teaching	9,72,74,78,136,151,155,165,728,736,798,800,808,81 0,812,817,822,830,909,
Teaching style	81,83,292,298,346,350,
Learning style	288,307,313,333,338, 361,367,391,430,435,443,445,453,457,464
goals	574,579,585,590,594,
Motivation	102,108,110,112,241,243,247,249,253,258, 288, 298,307, 401,405,574,579,616,626, 636,651,659
Listening	
Facilities(&toilets)	913, 915,922,939,946,952,956,960,962,964,968,1003,
Fairness	630,638,649, 1005,1016,1018.
Attention	
Self esteem	270,275, 359,
Purpose/understanding	
Lack challenge	
Teacher behaviour	37,39,44,48,149,1012,1014
Classroom environment	389, 396,398,
Teacher & Pupil interaction / relationship	
Homework	
Negative Peer influence	
Distractions/concentration	669,673,675,677,679,681,689,691,693,698, 702,765, 907,
Academic challenge	
Group size	
Racism	22
Distance from school	770, 774,782,778,793,
School day/tiredness	738,741,749, 767, 850,
Sexism	163,168
Control over learning	439, 568,

Group 3

Code 6 may 2004	Ref (line numbers)
Attendance/Truancy	
Boredom	590, 609,615,
Perception of teachers/school	657,662

Discipline, and Behaviour	111,125,130,389, 565,588,590,594,596,
Support (parent, teacher, self and peer)	193,195,233,237,258,264,272,278,284,289,513,518,625
Quality of teaching	24,34, 106,485,508,
Teaching style	82,90,615,629,
Learning style	176,621
goals	
Motivation	596, 146,150,154,158,160,169,296,301,313,596,600,605,635 ,645,655,666
Listening	
Facilities(&toilets)	
Uniform	528
Fairness	351,528,542,
Attention	
Self esteem	
Purpose/understanding	
Lack challenge	491,505
Teacher behaviour	43,48,82,289,306,335,340,342,344,353,361,447,449,453,
Classroom environment	
Teacher & Pupil interaction / relationship	60,82,88,289,329,423,449,453,476,480,518, 423, 476,
Homework	242,246,251,253,
Peer relationships	413,417,429,436, 468,476, 565,176
Teasing, bullying, intimidation	393, 409, 417, 429,434, 440,442, 457,459,463,
Negative Peer influence	389
Distractions/concentration	548,557
Academic challenge	489,493
Group size	
Racism	
Distance from school	
School day/tiredness	
Sexism	
Control over learning	557

NB All girls group

4 Composite of all groups

Composite Codes –all 3 groups	Ref (line numbers)
Attendance/Truancy	21, 959
Boredom	65,107, 803, 825, 87, 371, 590, 609,615,
Perception of teachers/school	73,102, 213, 300, 770, 825, 1032, 832,836,842, 909,913,915,924,982, 657,662
Discipline, and Behaviour	76, 250, 261, 447, 453, 546, 840, 938, 172,177, 628,630, 651,659,669,673,675,677,679,681,689,691,693, 111,125,130,389, 565,588,590,594,596,
Support (parent, teacher, self and peer)	74,84, 168, 175, 185, 188, 320, 321,404, 634, 646, 649, 653, 662, 672, 680, 686, 708, 712, 729, 733, 739, 751, 782, 981, 1001, 1015, 1019, 1050, 1058, 464,483,491,493,507,512,533,537,548, 712,726, 854,861,866,870,876,882,887,892, 193,195,233,237,258,264,272,278,284,289,513,518,625,
Quality of teaching	78,9,72,74,78,136,151,155,165,728,736,798,800,808,810,812,817,822,830 ,909, 24,34, 106,485,508,
Teaching style	111,119, 156, 322, 327, 333, 408, 536, 540, 667, 691, 695, 736, 899, 913, 81,83,292,298,346,350, 82,90,615,629,
Learning style	126,150, 154, 159,369, 378, 398, 420, 424, 431, 441, 536, 699, 704, 288,307,313,333,338, 361,367,391,430,435,443,445,453,457,464, 176,621 . 574,579,585,590,594,
goals	
Motivation	144, 796, 807, 811, 815, 819, 1009, 102,108,110,112,241,243,247,249,253,258, 288, 298,307, 401,405,574,579,616,626, 636,651,659 596, 146, 150, 154, 158, 160, 169,296,301,313,596,600,605,635,645,655,666
Listening	176, 404, 474, 478, 623
Facilities(&toilets)	913, 915,922,939,946,952,956,960,962,964,968,1003, , 528
Uniform	
Fairness	190, 206, 209, 213, 229, 231, 466, 473, 609, 630,638,649, 1005,1016,1018, 351,528,542,
Attention	190, 229, 231, 1019,
Self esteem	239, 241, 829, 270,275, 359,
Purpose/understanding	265,273,275,277,289,291, 852, 858, 860, 868, 893, 902,
Lack challenge	338,343, 362, 491,505
Teacher behaviour	457, 460, 478, 482, 515, 553, 560, 566, 570, 574, 578, 591, 591, 736, 1044, 37,39,44,48,149,1012,1014, 43,48,82,289,306,335,340,342,344,353,361,447,449,453,
Classroom environment	487, 492, 494, 496, 498, 500, 504, 527, 531, 389, 396,398,
Teacher & Pupil interaction / relationship	550, 563, 592, 608, 613, 621, 997, 60,82,88,289,329,423,449,453,476,480,518, 423, 476
Homework	786, 242,246,251,253,
Peer relationships	413,417,429,436, 468,476, 565,176
Teasing, bullying, intimidation	393, 409, 417, 429,434, 440,442, 457,459,463,
Negative Peer influence	930, 934, 954, 963, 40, 1032, 1040, 389
Distractions/concentration	948, 950, 669,673,675,677,679,681,689,691,693,698, 702,765, 907, 548,557
Academic challenge	1005, 489,493
Group size	913
Racism	22
Distance from school	770, 774,782,778,793,
School day/tiredness	738,741,749, 767, 850,
Sexism	163,168
Control over learning	439, 568, 557

5 Ranked frequency of responses from focus groups

Concepts arising from group 1

Rank	Group 1 concepts	Frequency
1	Support (parent/teacher/peer)	30
2	Teaching style	15
	Teacher behaviour	15
3	Learning style	14
4	Sense of purpose/understanding	12
5	Fairness	9
	Classroom environment	9
6	Discipline and behaviour	8
7	Perception of teachers/ school	7
	Motivation	7
	Teacher/ pupil interaction/ relationships	7
	Negative peer influence	7
8	Being listened to	5
9	Boredom	4
10	Attention (not enough)	4
11	Lack of challenge	3
	Self -esteem	3
12	Attendance/truancy	2
	Distractions	2
13	Quality of teaching	1
	Homework	1
	Group size	1
	Academic challenge	1

Concepts arising from group 2

Rank	Group 2 concepts	Frequency of reference
1	Motivation	22
2	Support/parent/teacher/peer	19
	Quality of teaching	19
3	Discipline and behaviour	15
	Learning style	15
4	Distractions/ concentration	13
5	Facilities /toilets	12
6	Perception of teachers/school	8
7	Teacher behaviour	7
8	Teaching style	6
	Fairness	6
9	Distance from school	5
	School day/tiredness	5
	Goals/ motivation	5
10	Self-esteem	3
	Classroom environment	3
11	Boredom	2
	Sexism	2
	Control over learning	2
12	Racism	1

Concepts arising from group 3

Ranking	Group 3 concepts	Frequency of comment
1	Motivation	17
2	Teacher behaviour	14
3	Support /parent/teacher/self/peer	13
	Teacher/ pupil interaction/relationships	13
4	Teasing/bullying/intimidation	10
5	Discipline/behaviour	9
6	Peer relationships	8
7	Quality of teaching	5
8	Homework	4
	Teaching style	4
9	Boredom	3
	Fairness	3
10	Perception of teachers/ school	2
	Learning style	2
	Lack of challenge	2
	Distractions/concentration	2
	Academic challenge	2
11	Control over learning	1
	Negative peer influence	1
	Uniform	1

Composite of concepts arising from all groups

Ranking	Concepts- all groups	Frequency or references
1	Support (teacher/parent/peer/self)	62
2	Motivation	46
3	Teacher behaviour	31
4	Discipline and behaviour	32
5	Learning style	31
6	Quality of teaching	25
	Teaching style	25
7	Teacher/pupil interaction/relationships	20
8	Fairness	18
9	Perception of teachers/ school	17
	Distractions/ concentration	17
10	Facilities& toilets	12
	Purpose/understanding	12
	Classroom environment	12
11	Teasing/ bullying	10
12	Boredom	9
13	Peer relationships	8
	Negative peer influence	8
14	Self esteem	6
15	Goals	5
	Lack of challenge	5
	Being listened to	5
	Homework	5
	Distance from school	5
	School day/tiredness	5
16	Attention (getting)	4
17	Academic challenge	3
	Control over learning	3
18	Sexism	2
	Attendance/truancy	2
19	Uniform	1
	Group size	1
	Racism	1

Appendix F: Concepts arising from staff interviews by question

1. Are pupils doing as well as they can be in this school? If not, then why not?

- Home/parents
- Neighbourhood
- Peers
- Behaviour
- Motivation

(5 concepts)

2. What kinds of lessons do these pupils (those that underachieve) like best?

- Writing (not)
- Length of task
- Group work
- Varied routines
- Performance (by teacher)
- Take risks (teacher)
- Fear of consequences/teacher confidence

(7 concepts)

3. What helps them (underachievers) to learn?

- Praise (know the group)
- Atmosphere / work ethic
- Objectives/clear expectations
- Teaching style:
 - Hands on
 - Visual
 - Fun
 - Involvement
 - Short explanations
- Understanding (check)
- Support
- Learning style:
 - Competition
 - Challenge

(12 concepts)

4. How do they (underachieving pupils) like to work?

- Group work

- Paired work
- Sitting with friend/peer
- Work at own level
- Varied style
- Short explanations
- Noise (some)

(7 concepts)

5. Who do you think helps them (underachieving pupils) most with their work?

- Teacher
- Peers (girls)
- Support Staff / mentor
- Parents:
 - not helping
 - depends on age
 - lack of space at home
 - lack of encouragement

(7 concepts)

6. What makes these pupils enthusiastic about/ involved with their schoolwork?

- Relevance
- Enjoyment
- Out of routine
- Feedback
- Practical work
- Immediacy
- ICT
- Staff enthusiasm
- Praise
- Rewards
- Competition
- Challenge

(12 concepts)

7. What gets in the way of learning?

- Peer influence
- Home
- Tiredness
- Example (older pupils)
- Teacher attention to behaviour
- Literacy
- Language

- Fear of failure
- Attention span
- Slow pace of class
- Lack of understanding
- Image (“coolness”)
- Concentration and listening
- Work avoidance
- Supply staff
- Continuity of learning (staff absence)
- Dull lessons
- Less challenge
- Lack of marking

(19 concepts)

8. What kinds of things could help them (underachievers) to do better at school / achieve better results?

- Access to curriculum
- Project approach
- Visual learning
- Individualised/personalised learning
- Small group withdrawal
- Support staff
- Relationships
- Study support
- Planning career path
- Sense of purpose
- Assessment and feedback
- Small steps
- Find strengths/talents
- Find interests
- Clear boundaries /expectation
- Seeing consequences (for misbehaviour)
- Parental involvement
- Transition (well planned)

(18 concepts)

87 concepts identified in total before overlap was considered between questions.