

The University of Sheffield

Thesis

Anne-Marie McBlain

**THE APPLICATION OF PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY TO A PEER
SUPERVISION GROUP FOR HEAD TEACHERS**

Edd (Educational Psychology)

July 2009

VOLUME 1

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ABSTRACT

This study follows a pilot study in the researcher's own authority where a peer supervision group had been set up to help a group of Head teachers who were reporting high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction including issues around: increasing demands to meet Local Authority targets; managing staff; increased administrative roles; dealing with pupils and their families who were experiencing complex socio-economic issues and increased feelings of isolation leading some of them to consider resigning.

The current study, which was carried out by invitation in a neighbouring authority set out to: (1) To see if a process of group supervision would improve the lives of the Head teachers in that authority by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties and (2) To investigate some of the possible complex intra and interpersonal issues that may have contributed to any distress that participants brought to the group, or that occurred within it.

The concepts of consultation, supervision and solution-focussed psychology were adapted to a group context as a means of generating practical solutions to problems and providing an effective container for the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by a group of Head teachers. Following an initial training day where the theoretical principles and group procedures were discussed, 11 participants volunteered to become part of a peer supervision group. Following a number of group sessions the 11 participants were interviewed using a psychoanalytic narrative 'Free Association Interview' method. Group members were also asked to rate their experiences in the group sessions. The interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and arranged into nine common categories.

The transcripts were then analysed using an interpretive categorical content analysis method and the psychodynamic concepts of splitting, transference, parataxic distortion, projective identification, alienation, *Gestalt*; the defended subject; anxieties and defences were applied to the data.

The main findings from the questionnaire data indicated that in general the peer support group sessions were regarded as: useful, a good use of time, something that participants would be prepared to set time aside for; a reasonably high priority and having a positive knock on effect for colleagues, pupils and parents in their school communities.

The interview data indicated that the group was seen to help to contain anxiety-provoking feelings and provided a positive way forward for the Head teachers. It proved to be collaborative and reflexive and maximized individual group members' own resources to work more effectively. Through the group the Heads were able to: explore and learn through practical, experiential and theoretical elements of their own professional practice and that of their peers; were able to discuss potentially controversial or disturbing issues; and enhance their ability to manage their own schools. More specifically the reported benefits for individuals of being in the group were: normalization of issues; improved problem-solving skills; reassurance and affirmation; the experienced benefits of altruism; educative or formative elements; improved listening and problem-solving skills and increased trust, openness and communication. In addition the emotional Health of the Head teachers was reported to have improved and their levels of perceived stress were reduced. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is not possible to replicate the group and have any assurance that the same effects would be experienced by different individuals, it can be seen that for the individuals involved in this group, their experiences of being in the group may be generalised to other situations and contexts.

The results obtained in this study may be interpreted to imply that the peer supervision group set out what it hoped to achieve in that it;

1. Improved the lives of some of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties.
2. Suggested that complex intra and interpersonal issues may have contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

(i) The Pilot Study

As an Educational Psychologist working for Local Authority I am responsible for delivering an educational psychology service to around 20 mainstream schools in addition to a number of specialist provisions such as pupil referral units, special schools and early years settings. The mainstream schools are arranged into 'clusters' or 'patches' based around high schools and their respective feeder primary schools. The service that I provide is mainly delivered via a consultative model working at the systemic level, although I am required to work at the small group and individual level where necessary and appropriate, often within a multi-agency environment.

At that time I had worked on this particular patch for approximately four years and had established a good rapport with the Head teachers in the different schools. Additionally the Heads in the cluster had a healthy working relationship between them selves and were familiar with issues in their shared locality. Although they did not go out of their way to overtly work together they appeared to work co-operatively where appropriate and they seemed to have respect for one another and there did not appear to be any open mistrust, animosity or hostility between them. However, some Heads were closer to one another than others were. Similarly, I believed that my own relationship with the Head teachers was positive and mutually respectful. Despite the fact that the Head teachers were very different from each other in their personalities and styles, over time we had established a way of working where common values and ideals had been developed and I believed there were elements of trust and mutual respect between myself and the individual Head teachers who I felt that I had come to know at least in part in the time that I had worked with them. Similarly I believed that the Head teachers had come to know me and even on issues where we disagreed, we were able to maintain a positive working relationship.

During routine planning meetings with the head teachers from one of my 'patches', I felt that they had become the forum for offloading a multitude of problems and apparently high levels of work-related stress and anxiety. The issues mentioned included: increasing demands on Head teachers in meeting targets; managing staff; increased administrative roles and dealing with pupils and their families who were experiencing complex socio-economic issues. I sensed that a number of the Head

teachers were feeling very isolated and becoming overwhelmed with these greater demands, indeed leading some of them to seriously consider resigning. To quote one individual:

"There are pressures to perform – like getting one hundred percent of children to level 4 – how do you do this when you have SEN children? There are also stresses around the new Ofsted framework – not really reflecting the true nature of the school only looking at the results. I'm now 50 and have been teaching for 30 years. I've been a Head for 12 years and now I've had enough – it's time for change because of pressures like Ofsted and test results and all the other things".

(A Head teacher from my own 'patch' who spoke to me during a routine planning meeting).

Although I could not definitively state that all the Heads were equally competent, I had no reason to believe that any were incompetent and I asked myself how could things have become so bad and stressful for a Head teacher with so much experience? This Head teacher was not alone; other primary school Head teachers articulated similar feelings and several were considering resigning from the job altogether. As an Educational Psychologist I could not offer any obvious solutions to the specific issues of the Heads and I became aware of an increasing level of anxiety within myself when listening to them speak about their difficulties. In what will be referred to as the pilot study, I used peer supervision in a group context for the Head teachers to address these issues.

As my primary motivation for doing this work came from a desire to alleviate both the distress of the Head teachers in the pilot study and my own discomfort experienced as a consequence of exposure to this, the methodology that was adopted at that time was somewhat raw and unplanned, emerging from an application of interventions of which I had some prior knowledge and experience. These included consultation, supervision and solution-focused psychology. Therefore, the outcomes and implications of this work in addition to its relative success took me completely by surprise.

In a questionnaire following the pilot study participant ratings indicated that the group sessions had: been a good use of time; had a normalising effect; decreased feelings of isolation, been empowering and confidence boosting and had increased and developed

the self esteem and problem-solving skills of those who took part. Wider benefits included the development of greater trust and openness between schools. In particular the structured nature of the process and the establishment of confidentiality and supportive relationships were rated as being very effective. The pilot study Head teachers indicated that the process was of potential benefit to other staff, the wider school and community and may offer support to the teaching profession as a whole. The pilot study also suggested that Educational Psychologists (EPs) are well placed to act as applied psychologists working in the community with local authority workers placing them in a school improvement role rather than the traditional special educational needs role.

Following the success of this study the Head teachers who had been involved in the pilot group sessions contacted the *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) and an article featuring the peer supervision groups was published in September 2006. Following the publication of this article I was contacted by an officer from a neighbouring Local Authority who requested that I carry out a similar process with Head teachers within their authority as they were having great difficulty in recruiting and retaining Heads. Through reflecting on the pilot study process a number of questions emerged from my observations and reflections. These were:

1. Why did some Head teachers believe that they had problems when others did not, despite having very similar situations, experience and contexts?
2. Why did some Head teachers access available sources of support and advice without a second thought whereas others shunned them treating them with suspicion and resentment?
3. Despite most Head teachers appearing to be equally capable of handling the variety of issues, dilemmas and difficulties that arise in schools, and most having had experience of doing so, why did some appear to lack confidence in their own competence and become defensive when discussing decisions they had made?

In addition to these questions I observed that:

4. The personal stresses experienced by the Head teachers often appeared to be the result of real or imagined fears of: being viewed as incompetent by others and by themselves; being perceived as unjust or unfair; being judged as uncaring and ruthless or being seen as weak and lacking leadership abilities.

5. Most of the Head teachers had experienced a range of similar problems over time and rarely were their difficulties unique or novel. From my perspective most were equally competent in dealing with them appropriately.
6. I was struck by a common theme of isolation - all had common fears but each had different issues at a particular time.

(ii) The Current Study

When planning to repeat this intervention for a local authority where I was not employed, I considered where I would place myself within the research. Whilst working within my home authority I felt myself to be very much a part of the process even though I deliberately removed myself from the group sessions. As mentioned previously, my motivation for doing this work initially was to alleviate the distress of individuals known to me, reduce my own discomfort at their plight and make my interactions with them more manageable. Therefore I was actively seeking a pragmatic solution to a problem and my approach to the knowledge generated by the intervention was to find 'truths' and identify 'facts' and 'solutions'. However, in the current study where the participants and their situations were unknown to me I felt more removed and less under pressure to directly 'solve' problems and find answers. My focus therefore shifted from a fact-seeking/problem-solving position to an interpretive/constructionist standpoint where information could emerge from the process and interpretations and constructions of and around this information might form hypotheses and offer deeper insights into the nature and origins of the issues under discussion and how they might be approached. Therefore in the current study the approach to the knowledge generated is not to present concrete facts and figures about individuals and their situations and how these might be changed or 'helped', but rather to put forward and explore hypotheses and ideas about possible inter and intra-personal processes, systems and experiences which might account for some of the difficulties encountered by the participants and which might suggest ways of approaching them.

As an Educational Psychologist I often find myself working with people who are experiencing stress or difficult circumstances that are placing high demands on their emotional and mental resources. In order to manage these anxieties and uncertainties I looked to Bion's (1970) concept of containment which suggests that the explanations or even the presence of professionals can serve as effective 'containers' for the situations in which individuals find themselves. This metaphor is obviously connected to the

theoretical model employed yet it is very apt as I realised that I alone had not the skills, experience or resources to manage the distress and difficulties experienced by the Head teachers and I believed that the ability to contain may have been present within the group itself and that my contribution was to provide a mechanism that would enable the individuals involved to pool and exploit their shared skills and experience in order to contain each others' distress and possibly provide practical solutions to their difficulties.

When speaking to the Head teachers involved in the pilot study it was clear that although their problems were often of a practical nature, they also had emotional intra- and inter-personal elements which could not be dealt with easily by practical means alone. Through the application of the psychodynamic concepts of splitting, transference, parataxic distortion, projective identification, alienation, and anxieties and defences (a glossary of terms has been placed after the conclusions chapter and before the references to assist the reader with some less familiar psychoanalytic and psychological concepts and theories), it can be seen how it is possible that some of the difficulties reported by the Head teachers may have arisen through both inter and intra personal conflicts. These in turn may also have potential effects on the establishment and maintenance of power and authority in a school, its ethos and its Head teacher's leadership qualities. The psychoanalytic concept of the container offers a useful model for the planning of an intervention strategy to alleviate some of the difficulties described. The use of consultation, supervision and solution-focused processes in a group context offer theoretical underpinnings in the design of such an intervention. Therefore, the reason for doing this work was two-fold;

1. To see if a process of group supervision would improve the lives of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties.
2. To interpret some of the complex intra and interpersonal issues that contributed to the distress that participants brought to the group, or that occurred within it.

In pursuing this second goal I was aware that I must acknowledge the complexity of the emotional lives and unconscious processes of those I was studying. For this reason I chose to adopt a psychoanalytic approach in the collection and analysis of interview data from participants using techniques derived from the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2000).

In this study the concepts of consultation and supervision are used in a group context to provide a means to generate helpful practical solutions for problems and an effective container for the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by a group of Head teachers. In

Chapter 2 – The Literature Search, the advantages and disadvantages of group work are explored along with an overview of the psychodynamic theory and how it may be applied to individuals, groups and institutions. The psychoanalytic concept of the container is put forward as a useful model for the planning of an intervention strategy to alleviate some of the difficulties described by the Head teachers. The use of consultation, supervision and solution-focused processes are also discussed as they offer theoretical underpinnings in the design of such an intervention.

In Chapter 3 – Methodology, details outlining how the peer supervision group was established are described and discussed. The apparent mismatch between psychoanalytic theory and some elements of the methodology – in particular my absence from the peer support group is intentional and is accounted for. There is an account of the interview process that was conducted with participants following a number of group sessions. There are also details of the psychoanalytic approach that was used to collect the interview data including details of the Narrative ‘Free Association Interview’ method (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:152) that influenced this work. Similarly the methods used to transcribed and analyse the interview data using an interpretive approach based around categorical content analysis (Reissman, 1993), that emphasises the *Gestalts* (Wertheimer, Koffka and Kohler, 1912 -1935) and the defended subjects contained within the interview texts are included. The ethical considerations that were taken into account in the study are also discussed as are the objectivity, reliability and generalisability of the data produced.

In Chapter 4 - the Findings and Discussion section, the material resulting from the interviews with the participants in the peer supervision group are presented within categories that are identified as follows:

- i. Difficulties experienced by the Head teachers
- ii. Experiences of being in the group
- iii. Individual benefits
- iv. Wider benefits
- v. Barriers and limitations

- vi. Ongoing success and survival of the group
- vii. Working in pairs
- viii. Role of the EP
- ix. Additional Comments

This section offers an analysis of some of the interview material using the psychoanalytic approach outlined in the methodology section to suggest complex intra and interpersonal issues that may have contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned.

Chapter 5 covers the limitations of the study which includes a critique of: the psychodynamic perspective used; the reliability and validity of the paradigm including its assumptions; the research strategies; selection of the participants; decisions made in collecting the data, conducting the interviews, analysing the data and interpreting the findings; the participatory role of the researcher in the inquiry; and the generalisability of the results obtained in the study will also be considered. A brief critique of the group process considers: its limitations; issues around attendance and group structure. Suggestions for further work in this area include: work with different types of groups, methods of evaluating the group and the use of alternative paradigms. The role of the Educational Psychologist in facilitating work of this nature is also discussed along with suggestions for the EP's role in promoting containment within individuals and schools where the EP can work as an Applied Psychologist. The discussion will conclude with a summary of the main findings and implications of the study.

Chapter 6 Conclusions – summarizes the main findings of the study by first listing: the common concerns of Head teachers around current or past situations and suggests that the differential factor is the manner of dealing with these problems and the Head teachers' personal attitudes towards and perceptions of these difficulties and their willingness or otherwise to engage with possible sources of support. The conclusions also show that the group was seen as a 'container' for some of the difficult feelings felt by the participants and provided a positive way forward. It proved to be a collaborative exercise that provided an opportunity for the group members to reflect on different aspects of their work with peers acting in a supervising role, with a view to continuing the learning process. The use of psychoanalysis in this study as a means to explore the experiences of the Head teachers and seek out their personal attitudes towards and perceptions of their difficulties is also discussed.

(iii) The Personal Contribution of the Researcher

Having started my working life as a research scientist for a large pharmaceutical company I had little idea of the concepts of psychodynamic theory. In retrospect, although my outlook at that time was almost exclusively positivist and empirical I had first hand experience of some of the effects of the conscious and unconscious processes that psychodynamic theory suggests take place within and between individuals and in large organizations, and of the defensive strategies that occur as a means of managing the anxieties that emerge from certain kinds of work. As a teacher in a mainstream secondary school I saw how the same processes and defences were put in place in a different context and in particular the effects on myself and my colleagues of being managed by a Head teacher whose apparently defensive behaviour may have been interpreted as that described as 'paranoid-schizoid' and which made it very difficult to function in the system. This particular individual would not tolerate any form of criticism, no matter how constructive or necessary this was, and individuals within and outside the school would be routinely scape-goated to account for deficiencies in the organization and management practices of the school. Later, as the Head of a department in the same school I had first hand experience of some of the issues around leadership and projective identification described in this study as colleagues who were struggling to work within such a highly defended system offloaded some of their anxieties on to me. Similarly other roles within Mental Health services, the Prison Service and Special Educational Needs Teaching have acquainted me with similar strategies and systems adopted by those who work within these services including myself.

As an Educational Psychologist with seven years experience I am aware that my previous experiences in industry and in teaching have influenced my appraisal and judgement of some of the contexts and individuals that I encounter in my current professional life. Throughout my working day I am conscious of experiencing feelings such as: anger, anxiety, compassion, outrage, indignation, frustration, fear and sorrow as well as joy, excitement, contentment, fulfilment and achievement as I encounter different individuals and situations in my job. I have come to recognise that these feelings are often triggered by conscious and unconscious memories of previous encounters both in my professional life and my private life. Through my awareness of psychodynamic constructs such as transference, counter-transference, projection and

splitting I am sometimes able to reflect on my experiences and trace the origins of my reactions to different individuals and situations. Similarly I have used this insight in the current study to reflect on my interpretations and analyses of the participants' interview responses and thereby place myself within the methodology. Whilst the limited amount of time I spent with the research participants placed constraints on the extent to which transference and counter-transference material could be fostered and examined as part of the research, it was acknowledged that my encounters with the participants were different from those that would occur if a different researcher were to conduct the interviews; if different theoretical perspectives were adopted or if the social context shifted. It is therefore acknowledged that any psychoanalytic findings in my interpretations of the interview transcripts can only be provisional, constrained by the conditions under which they were produced.

(iv) The Psychodynamic Perspective

This study has used a psychodynamic perspective in the gathering of interview data and its subsequent interpretation. Throughout the thesis the words 'psychodynamic' and 'psychoanalytic' are often used interchangeably, however, the distinction between the two terms must be made explicit. The theories of Sigmund Freud were *psychoanalytic*, whereas the term *psychodynamic* refers to both his theories and those of his followers. Psychodynamic counselling or psychotherapy evolved from psychoanalytic theory, however it tends to focus on more immediate problems, be more practically based and shorter term than psychoanalytic therapy. Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank and Melanie Klein are all widely recognised for further developing the concept and application of psychodynamics.

Psychodynamic work focuses on unconscious thought processes which manifest themselves in an individual's behaviour. The approach seeks to increase an individual's self-awareness and understanding of how the past has influenced present thoughts and behaviours, by exploring their unconscious patterns. With help from another (a therapist in a clinical setting, the researcher in this study) individuals are encouraged to explore unresolved issues and conflicts, and to talk about important people and relationships in their life.

It is important to note that any form of psychodynamic work must be carefully set up, structured and managed as it involves conversations with a listener who should have sufficient knowledge and understanding of psychodynamic theory to help the

consultee make sense of, and try to change, things that are troubling them. It is something that the consultant and the consultee both take an active working part in, and both parties must be aware of the potentially anxiety-provoking material that may emerge and the contribution that both parties bring to the interview encounter. Therefore the use of psychodynamic techniques must be carefully set up and structured to manage the interview encounter and the resulting emotions and material that may emerge from it and to discourage the 'organic growth' of such ideas in an unstructured manner by those who do not have sufficient understanding of the aims and caveats of the paradigm.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE SEARCH

Introduction

When I initially encountered the difficulties of the Head teachers in the pilot study my immediate priority was to alleviate both their distress and my own discomfort as a consequence of exposure to this. I felt that I should step back from a situation that I could not immediately resolve or 'contain' for my own emotional and professional survival. In taking a step back I was able to consider the issues reported, a possible intervention process, the responses of the individuals involved and the reasons for doing this type of work.

Therefore, it was necessary to find a process that would improve the lives of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties. In addition I hoped to elucidate some of the complex intra and interpersonal issues that contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned. For this reason I chose to adopt a psychoanalytic approach.

The Literature Search sets out to explore some of the challenges experienced by the Head teachers in the study using descriptions of specific areas of concern reported by the Head teachers, in the pilot study. These are followed by a consideration of issues such as the establishment and maintenance of power and authority and their influence on a school's ethos and the Head teacher's leadership qualities. Throughout this study I have included quotations from the pilot study Head teachers to illustrate points that are being made and to strengthen my arguments for making certain decisions or taking certain points of action.

Psychodynamic theory is used to consider some of the above by first providing a general rationale for the use of this paradigm followed by a description of Object-Relations Theory and the psychodynamic concepts of: splitting, transference, parataxic distortion, projective identification, alienation, and anxieties and defences and how these concepts are considered at the level of the individual, the institution and wider society. (A glossary of terms has been placed before the introduction to assist the reader with some less familiar psychoanalytic and psychological concepts and theories). There then follows a description of the psychoanalytic concept of the container and processes which might facilitate the containing function of a peer support group for Head teachers

including the use of consultation, supervision and solution-focused approaches.

There is a dependence on a number of key individuals such as: Klein, Obholzer, Zagier-Roberts, Stokes, Halton, Bion and Billington whose work proved to be inspirational for this study in that they clearly describe, deconstruct and conceptualise specific situations and contexts that were most relevant and applicable to the scenarios and issues that arose during this and the pilot study.

The Literature Search is set out in five sections as follows:

- 1. The Challenges Faced by Head teachers** – this section explores the possible sources of the stress described by the Head teachers in the study; issues around authority and power and the importance of the school ethos in managing stress.
- 2. The Psychodynamic Approach** – this section offers a rationale for using Psychodynamic theory in the study and it introduces a number of psychodynamic concepts such as: Object-Relations Theory, Splitting, Transference, Parataxic distortion, Projective identification, Alienation, Projective identification, Anxieties and Defences and the paranoid-schizoid and depressive defence positions
- 3. Psychodynamics in the Workplace** – this third section explores how some of the concepts and mechanisms described in the previous section manifest themselves in the workplace and
- 4. Containment** – the fourth section of the Literature Search introduces the psychodynamic concept of containment and looks at a number of processes and mechanisms that can help to promote the containing ability of an organization. These include: Consultation, Supervision and Solution Focused Approaches. The containment section begins with ideas around the ‘traditional’ EP territory of consultancy and the realisation that when working with people whose emotions are in a heightened state there is a need to do more than help them solve practical problems as their anxieties and uncertainties must also be managed. Although it is acknowledged that an EP would not usually adopt a psychoanalytic approach in day to day working, Bion’s (1970) concept of containment suggests that the explanations or even the presence of professionals can serve as effective containers for the situations in which individuals find themselves. However, realising that I

alone had not the skills, experience or resources to manage the distress and difficulties experienced by the Head teachers, the concept of group supervision is put forward to provide a mechanism that would enable the individuals involved to pool and exploit their shared skills and experience in order to contain each others' distress and possibly provide practical solutions to their difficulties.

5. Group Work- the final section of the Literature Search explores the advantages and disadvantages of groups, and, as this study is predominantly influenced by a psychodynamic perspective there is a focus on the psychodynamics of groups such as object relations and containment and in particular the contribution made by Bion (1961) and how his theories have influenced the methodology including the overt and covert aims of groups and Basic Assumption Theory. Specifically the apparent mismatch between psychoanalytic theory and some elements of the methodology – in particular my absence from the peer support groups is accounted for by the ideas of Bion (1961), which enabled me to avoid dependency issues built around group leaders. This section also contains a brief overview of different types of support groups for professionals.

1. The Challenges Faced by Head teachers

i) Sources of Stress

The Head teachers in the pilot study stated that their difficulties included: meeting targets; managing staff; increased administrative roles and dealing with pupils and their families who were experiencing complex socio-economic issues in addition to feelings of isolation and becoming overwhelmed by a multitude of responsibilities and challenges.

A lack of pastoral care for workers is a major contributory factor in stress and the ethos of an organisation can contribute to the well-being of its staff (Lodge *et al.* 1992). Goleman (1998) suggests six primary ways in which organisations demoralise and demotivate employees including: work overload; lack of autonomy; poor rewards; loss of belonging; unfairness; and value conflicts. These factors were articulated by the Head teachers in many of the schools that I visited in the pilot study. However, as difficulties experienced by some were being effectively managed by others I began to consider other factors that might account for the distress and difficulties being experienced. It

became apparent that some of the distress may have been a consequence of intra and interpersonal relationships.

Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell and Loue (1992:90) argue that:

'Teachers' own feelings are considerably influenced and drawn into the range of human problems they encounter in children, and in the complex 'boiler house' of relationships they find themselves working in it is insufficient to search for solutions in child or organizational terms – at the expense of failing to acknowledge the needs of teachers'.

Wood and Collins (1985), describe the overwhelming responsibility teachers often feel for problems they can do little to change. Paradoxically, confronting such feelings can have an empowering effect as a step on the way to effective and satisfying interventions. Teachers regularly comment that they value the support from teacher colleagues as well as other professionals such as Educational Psychologists. Support from these sources includes reduction in feelings of isolation through the recognition that others may share similar problems; the opportunity to draw on expertise of others; time to reflect on a problem, and in gaining new perspectives they can begin to plan alternative approaches. An assumption may be made that the feelings of teachers may be extrapolated to the feelings of Head teachers also.

ii) Authority and Power

Many writers have offered perspectives on power and authority including: Marx; Dahl, (1957); Bachrach and Baratz, (1962); Pitkin, (1972); Lukes, (1974 and 2005); Weber (1978); Connolly, (1983); Hobbes, (1985); Foucault, (1977, 1978, 1980 and 1983); Wartenberg, (1990); Habermas (1994); and Morriss (2002). However, a psychodynamic perspective of power and authority will be put forward here as it is on this framework that the study is focused.

Where 'authority' refers to the right to make an ultimate decision, often binding on others, it could be said that in order to be an effective leader, a Head teacher requires a great degree of authority to monitor the functioning of the school against the benchmark of its primary task which is to educate children. Where 'power' may be seen to as the ability to act upon others or upon an organisational structure Head teachers must

also have sufficient power to initiate and implement changes as required by changes in social, political or institutional circumstances. A system of accountability and a mechanism for the delegation of authority is also required in order to delegate aspects of the primary task to individual members of staff or departments/teams within the structure of the school, and to call them to account for the nature of their functioning in relation to the overall task (Obholzer, 1994).

Where 'authority' can be seen to be derived both from a system of delegation and one's role in that system, and is exercised on its behalf, 'power' may also be seen as an attribute of a person in addition to their role, and it can arise from both internal and external sources. Authority without power leads to a weakened, demoralised management and power without authority leads to an authoritarian regime. A well-run, on-task organisation requires a balance of these two factors (Obholzer, 1994).

In addition to the formal systems that lay down the terms of office and structures for delegating authority to Head teachers in schools, there are also conscious and unconscious internal components which may affect the delegation of this authority. The concept of management may be accepted by staff who despite sanctioning the authority of the role of Head teacher, may not accept a specific individual in this role. The withholding of authority from below by a lack of sanctioning, means that full authority cannot be obtained, and there is an increased risk of undermining and sabotage (Obholzer, 1994). Conversely, a Head teacher may mis-use their power and authority to undermine or pressurise their staff.

In an authoritative regime the persons managing authority are in touch with the origins, sanctioning and limitations of their authority. By contrast in an authoritarian regime, those in charge are cut off from the roots of their authority and the processes of sanction, and are driven by an omnipotent inner world process where they attempt to deal with this unrecognised shortcoming by increased use of power (Obholzer, 1994).

Externally power comes from what an individual controls such as: money, privileges, job references, promotion; his or her social and political connections and from the sanctions one can impose on others. Internally power comes from an individual's knowledge and experience, strength of personality and state of mind regarding their role. Perceived power or powerlessness counts more than the actual and both depend on the inner world connectedness of the individual; how powerful they feel influences how

they present themselves to others. (Obholzer, 1994).

Whilst not discounting relational and social interactionist standpoints, a sense of powerlessness may sometimes be considered as a state of mind related to problems with taking up authority. At times there may be an interplay between this state of mind and an actual lack of external resources that could otherwise be used to bolster power. However, an individual in a state of demoralisation or depression may well have adequate external resources to effect some change, but feels unable to do so on account of an undermining state of mind. In this case power is projected, perceived as located as outside the self, leaving the individual with a sense of powerlessness. By contrast, someone who attracts projected power is much more likely to take, and to be allowed to take, a leadership role. The nature of the projections will affect whether the person is hated and feared, or loved and admired (Grubb Institute, 1991).

Ideally, authority, power, and responsibility should be equally matched in an organisation such as a school. Responsibility for outcomes involves being accountable to someone, either in the organisation or else in one's own mind as part of an inner world value system. A sense of responsibility without having adequate authority and power to achieve outcomes often leads to work-related stress and eventually burn-out (Obholzer, 1994). The pilot study Head teachers' complaints about there being too few resources, expectations being too high, failure to recognise successes achieved indicated that their sense of authority and power had been undermined and only their sense of responsibility remained.

In the same way that individuals must attend to underlying personal, marital, or familial difficulties to avoid disaster, I felt that through a greater awareness of their underlying anxieties the Head teachers in the pilot study would be able to manage themselves and their schools in such a way as to make improved use of both psychological and physical resources.

iii) Ethos

Rutter et al. (1979) and Mortimore et al. (1988) suggested a set of elements that comprise the 'ethos' of a school including such things as: the extent to which there are commonly held values, policies and practices and the extent to which staff share a common language and understanding. In a positive environment staff often show a

willingness to work beyond closely defined roles and Head teachers are enormously influential in establishing the particular culture, atmosphere and ethos of their schools, (Gamman (2003). However, the Head teachers in the pilot study made it clear that they frequently felt very isolated and believed that other staff in the school were unaware of the nature of the responsibilities and accountabilities of the head teacher in a school and as a consequence, were often unable to offer practical or emotional support.

2. The Psychodynamic Approach

(i) Distinguishing Between the Terms 'Psychodynamic' and 'Psychoanalytic'

The terms 'psychodynamic' and 'psychoanalytic' are often confused. The theories of Sigmund Freud were *psychoanalytic*, whereas the term *psychodynamic* refers to both his theories and those of his followers. Freud's psychoanalysis is both a theory and a therapy and makes the assumptions that:

- Our behaviour and feelings are powerfully affected by unconscious motives; our behaviour and feelings as adults (including psychological problems) are rooted in our childhood experiences;
- All behaviour has a cause (usually unconscious), even slips of the tongue. Therefore all behaviour is determined;
- Personality is made up of three parts (i.e. tripartite). The id, ego and super-ego; Behaviour is motivated by two instinctual drives: Eros (the sex drive & life instinct) and Thanatos (the aggressive drive & death instinct). Both these drives come from the "id";
- Parts of the unconscious mind (the id and superego) are in constant conflict with the conscious part of the mind (the ego);
- Personality is shaped as the drives are modified by different conflicts at different times in childhood (during psychosexual development).

Psychoanalysis is based on the idea that a great deal of an individual's behaviour and thoughts are not within their conscious control. Psychoanalysis attempts to help clients develop insight into deep-rooted problems that are often thought to stem from childhood. Psychoanalysis is based on the principle that our childhood experiences have created our current behaviour patterns and thinking process. These thoughts and feelings can become repressed and may manifest themselves as depression or other negative symptoms. By talking freely about thoughts entering their mind, the client reveals

unconscious thoughts and memories that the analyst will seek to interpret and make sense of. Deeply buried memories and experiences are often expressed during this time and the opportunity to share these thoughts and feelings can help clients to work through these problems. These thoughts can be analysed through free associations (the client says whatever comes to mind during the session, without censoring their thoughts), dreams and fantasies, which all allow the analyst to clarify the client's unconscious thoughts.

Clients are encouraged to "transfer" feelings they have toward important people in their life onto the analyst in a process called "transference". Success of psychoanalysis often depends on both analyst and client and how they work together. Psychoanalysis is an intensive process and usually clients attend four or five sessions a week for several years. The regular sessions provide a setting to explore these unconscious patterns, and try to make sense of them. Psychoanalysis is mostly used by clients suffering high levels of distress, and can be arduous for both client and analyst. However, if successful, the therapy can be life-changing.

Psychoanalytic therapy is based upon psychoanalysis but is less intensive, with clients only attending between one and three sessions a week. Psychoanalytic therapy is often beneficial for individuals who want to understand more about themselves. It is particularly helpful for those who feel their difficulties have affected them for a long period of time and need relieving of mental and emotional distress. Together, the therapist and the client try to understand the inner life of the client through deep exploration. Uncovering an individual's unconscious needs and thoughts may help them to understand how past experiences have affected them, and how they can work through these to live a more fulfilling life.

Psychodynamic counselling or psychotherapy evolved from psychoanalytic theory, however it tends to focus on more immediate problems, be more practically based and shorter term than psychoanalytic therapy. Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Otto Rank and Melanie Klein are all widely recognised for further developing the concept and application of psychodynamics. Psychodynamic therapy focuses on unconscious thought processes which manifest themselves in a client's behaviour. The approach seeks to increase a client's self-awareness and understanding of how the past has influenced present thoughts and behaviours, by exploring their unconscious patterns.

Clients are encouraged to explore unresolved issues and conflicts, and to talk about

important people and relationships in their life. Transference (when clients transfer feelings they have toward important people in their life onto the therapist) is encouraged during sessions. Compared to psychoanalytic therapy, psychodynamic therapy seeks to provide a quicker solution for more immediate problems.

(ii) Reasons for Adopting a Psychodynamic Approach

The psychodynamic perspective would not be regarded as an obvious choice for an Educational Psychologist to adopt when working within my own Local Authority Educational Psychology Service (EPS) where more systemic and solution-focused consultative approaches are favoured.

Psychodynamic frameworks and systemic frameworks are not mutually exclusive as both approaches seek to explore meaning behind behaviour. The founding premise of systemic thinking (Miller and Rice, 1967) is that behaviour acquires meaning only when understood in context. The systemic concept of 'punctuation' refers to the point at which a sequence is interrupted in order to give it a certain meaning – what is deemed to cause what depends upon the way 'reality' is punctuated. The concepts of the 'open' and 'closed' systems have resonances with the psychodynamic concepts of defences and anxieties and the 'schizoid-paranoid' and 'depressive' positions. Likewise the systemic idea of 'homeostasis' whereby a state of steady equilibrium is maintained and whereby feedback can trigger the system's 'regulators' which maintain the status quo and change maybe experienced as a threat to the known, leading to a resistance to change has parallels with psychodynamic structures and concepts. For this reason it is useful to consider psychodynamic frameworks and systemic frameworks in relation to each other.

However, the decision to use a psychodynamic perspective emerged as I reflected on my personal feelings of anxiety, uselessness and despair as I could only listen to the problems of the different Head teachers, unable to solve their difficulties as I lacked their skills, training and experience in the particular role of Head teacher. I was also aware that in some way I was 'picking up' their distress and 'sensed' their feelings of isolation, bewilderment, unfairness and in some cases guilt and I felt obliged to 'contain' this distress and prevent it from overcoming and destroying those in which it had its origins. My initial practical solution was to get the Heads together to problem-solve the practical issues for each other. However, reflecting on the intensity of feeling amongst the Head teachers and my emotional responses to their distress I looked to

psychodynamic theory for guidance.

As an Educational Psychologist I am frequently invited into situations on account of some concern or anxiety and I often work with people whose emotions are in a heightened state. However, attempts to articulate their sources of distress and to formulate solutions are often obscured or hindered by the effects of emotion on cognitive processes. Such experiences resonate with Freud's (1900) concept of the 'unconscious' where thoughts and feelings exist within individuals which they may not be aware of. This concept has gradually permeated mainstream psychology and popular culture.

Artists, musicians and writers, however, have long known the complexity of human experience and have formed creative alliances with the recipients of their labours, their audiences. The models of human complexity and experience represented in such art forms have often seemed more satisfying, convincing and perhaps more complete than those produced by psychology. There is a need to develop an imaginative rationale for understanding.

(Billington, 2002:7)

The nature and functions of language and assumptions around the reliability of word meaning have also been questioned (Chomsky, 1986; Wittgenstein, 1953). Distinguishing between the 'signifier' (the concrete life of the word itself) and the 'signified' (Those possible meanings that live inside and beyond the word), Lacan (1977), suggests that as language develops within a web of feelings and thinking, all cannot be captured within the words themselves and therefore communication via language is less than exact, (Billington, 1995, 2000). Similarly Vygotsky, (1986), argued that: 'word meaning has been lost in the ocean of all other aspects of consciousness...contemporary psychology has nothing to say about the specific ideas regarding word meaning' (Vygotsky, 1986, p.5). However, it should be noted that as Vygotsky died in 1934, his discussions of 'contemporary psychology' refer to the 1920's and 1930's.

Billig (2006:541) states that whilst other psychological paradigms such as the cognitive approach demand that what people say and think are taken seriously, they can be *'Too reasonable, too bland to cope with the strangeness of some human behaviour'*. In defence of Freudian theory, in particular with regard to the development of such ideas

as repression Billig argues:

To learn to speak appropriately, we must acquire the skills and disciplines of 'polite' speech. But in teaching a child politeness, we inevitably create the temptations of forbidden rudeness. These temptations must be routinely driven from conscious awareness. Luckily, language, which demands the necessity of repression, also provides the means: just as we learn how to change the topics of conversation, so we learn the rhetorical tricks to change the topics of our own internal, silent thoughts. Thus...language is fundamentally both expressive and repressive.

Billig (2006:541)

Billington (2000) observes that:

Whilst psychodynamic approaches have long since known of the interconnectivity of our emotional and cognitive worlds and unconscious processes such as 'trauma', 'bereavement' and 'attachment' have been integrated into contemporary culture via mainstream psychology, there has been a reluctance to admit to their psychoanalytic theoretical origins or make psychological assessments using an explicit psychoanalytic methodology exclusively acceptable.

(Billington, 2000:88).

Some critics of Freudian psychoanalysis question the methods of data collection or lack of data whilst others dislike the techniques that psychoanalysts use to assist their patients. Free association, according to Grünbaum (1986), is "not a valid method of accessing the patients' repressed actual memories because there is no way of ensuring that the analyst is capable of distinguishing between the patients' actual memories and imagined memories constructed due to the influence of the analyst's leading questions" (Grünbaum (1986:226). The ability of therapists to strongly influence patients' memories has been supported in numerous studies. Loftus (1993a, 1993b, 1995) has also shown in many studies that memories are often reconstructed and that the therapist aids in the construction process through such avenues as dream interpretation and hypnosis. The question of whether dreams are a reliable source of information has also been refuted by most in the field

Others condemn psychoanalysis as not being scientific because it is impossible to test, lacks predictions, and has no "interpretive rules," it contradicts many of the

fundamental tenets of science. Popper (1986), insists that psychoanalysis cannot be considered a science because it is not falsifiable. Popper claims that psychoanalysis' *"so-called predictions are not predictions of overt behavior but of hidden psychological states. This is why they are so untestable"* (Popper, 1986:254). Popper (1986) asserts that psychoanalysis has often maintained that every individual is neurotic to some degree due to the fact that everyone has suffered and repressed a trauma at one point or another in his or her life (1986:255). However, this concept of ubiquitous repression is impossible to test because there is no overt behavioral method of doing so (Popper, 1986: 254).

Similarly others such as Colby, (1960), argue that if certain childhood experiences, such as abuse or molestation, produce certain outcomes or states of neurosis, one should be able to predict that if children experience abuse, for instance, they will become characterized by certain personality traits. In addition, this concept would theoretically work in reverse. For instance, if individuals are observed in a particular neurotic state, one should be able to predict that they had this or that childhood experience. However, neither of these predictions can be made with any accuracy (Colby, 1960:55).

Additional critics insist that psychoanalysis is not a science because of the lack of interpretive rules or regulations. Colby (1960) contends that *"there are no clear, intersubjectively shared lines of reasoning between theories and observations"* (Colby 1960:54). For instance, one psychoanalyst will observe one phenomenon and interpret it one way, whereas another psychoanalyst will observe the same phenomenon and interpret it in a completely different way that is contradictory to the first psychoanalyst's interpretation (Colby, 1960: 54). Colby concludes that if analysts themselves cannot concur that a certain observation is an example of a certain theory, then the regulations that govern psychoanalytic interpretation are undependable ((1960: 55).

Eysenck (1986) maintains:

I have always taken it for granted that the obvious failure of Freudian therapy to significantly improve on spontaneous remission or placebo treatment is the clearest proof we have of the inadequacy of Freudian theory, closely followed by the success of alternative methods of treatment, such as behavior therapy.

(Eysenck (1986:236)

Whilst critics, such as Popper (1986), insist that Freud's theories cannot be falsified and therefore are not scientific, Eysenck claims that because Freud's theories can be

falsified, they are scientific. Grünbaum (1986) concurs with Eysenck that Freud's theory is falsifiable and therefore scientific, but he goes one step further and claims that Freud's theory of psychoanalysis has been proven wrong and is simply bad science.

Other critics cite the inadequacies in Freud's theory to explain behaviors in our modern culture as Freud's theory was only applicable in his own era. The lack of investigation into female emotional and sexual development is another contention as Freud concentrated on male development, as he was part of a male dominated era. The demographic scope of investigation of psychoanalysis is apparent when measured against modern standards.

However, Frosh (2006) states that since the development of a serious attitude towards qualitative research and since the growth of discursive and narrative approaches, academic psychology is now much more respectful of some concerns shared by psychoanalysis. These include for example, how to collect and interpret meaningful data about personal experience, how to employ the subjectivity of an investigator in the service of research, and how to address the limits of people's capacity to tell a story about themselves (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005; Wetherell, 2005; Emerson & Frosh, 2004).

For its part, psychoanalysis has become more self-critical with regard to its evidential basis, more aware of social and cultural issues, and much more sophisticated in its exploration of its own psychological assumptions and therapeutic processes (eg. Fonagy, Target, Cottrell, Phillips & Kurtz, 2002; Frosh, 2006).

Frosh observes that in his own field of psychosocial studies, the stringent focus on the 'psychological' and 'social' self as intergrated rather than opposed entities, raises questions about how identities are forged out of identification and encounters with others.

These are questions of representation, recognition, fantasy, agency and desire that are enriched by engagement with psychoanalytic thought.

(Frosh, 2006:453).

Billington (2000) argues that from its origins as a model for articulating human, intra-

relational experience, psychoanalysis has developed to consider the significance of human, *inter-relations*. Although mainstream psychology has adopted unconscious processes such as 'trauma', 'bereavement' and 'attachment' there has been a reluctance to fully accept their psychoanalytic theoretical origins and applications to contemporary psychological practice (Billington, 2000:88).

Parker (1997), states that:

We live in a psychoanalytic culture, and it is as much a pre-condition for Psychology that it expresses and legitimizes psychoanalytic thought as it expels and refuses home to psychoanalytic theorists.

(Parker, 1997:159)

In the debate around the validity of the psychodynamic approach, neuropsychology initially appears to offer little more than models of a compartmentalised brain, where the (individual) mind is isolated from others in an asocial world. However, Solms (2006) argues that unlike every other bodily organ the brain cannot be reduced to mechanisms alone; it cannot be adequately described as just a machine.

In my view, the defining characteristic, the distinguishing feature of the brain is that – unlike the liver, lung or stomach – it possesses subjectivity; ie. the capacity to feel what it is like to be a brain. Moreover, it has the capacity to communicate that feeling to other minds; the human brain can speak and tell us what it feels like to be what it is. These capacities provide us with an absolutely unique perspective on nature. And perhaps most important of all: the mind has agency. Unlike any other machine, it is master of its own house, an intentional being in the world possessed of that ineffable quality we call 'free will'. Any science of the brain which ignores these facts will be ignoring the most essential distinguishing features of its object of study.

(Solms, 2006:538)

Indeed, in his research into the brain mechanisms of dreaming Solms (1995, 1997, 2000); has shown by using psychoanalytic methods, that some complex neuropsychiatric phenomena such as anosognosia and confabulation cannot be understood in terms of memory *deficits* alone; in confabulation disinhibited motivational factors are at work which positively distort memory construction in a

wishful direction (Fotopoulou *et al.*, 2004; Kaplan-Solms, 2000). Likewise, anosognosia seems at least in part to involve *'the repression phenomena that form the cornerstone of classical psychoanalytical theory'* (Ramachandran, 1994). The role of psychodynamic factors here too, was initially demonstrated using psychoanalytic methods (Kaplan-Solms and Solms, 2000) and later confirmed experimentally (Turnbull *et al.*, 2005). Solms and a growing number of like-minded colleagues has since established a new inter-disciplinary area called neuro-psychoanalysis, the aim of which is to introduce the psyche into neuropsychology – to demonstrate that the brain cannot possibly be understood if the subjective aspects of its nature is neglected or even ignored (see www.neuro-psa.org).

Damasio (2004) argues that there is indeed a place for both physical neuroscience and philosophy, *'Where inter-connectivity and artistic creativity work alongside psychology'* (Damasio, 2004:7). Damasio's claims of *'an abyss between knowledge and experience that cannot be bridged scientifically'* (Damasio, 2000:307-8),

Align emotion and related reactions of the body's feelings with the mind...bodily emotions become the kind of thoughts we call feelings...[that] provide a privileged view into mind and body, [which are] the overtly disparate manifestations of a single and seemingly interwoven human organism.

(Billington, 006:11).

The psychoanalytic focus on the process of emotional engagement with work is supported by the thinking of cognitive-behavioural theorist Safran (1996):

Emotions provide action disposition information. They provide information about the readiness of the biological system to act in certain ways. Cognition provides information about the environment but emotion provides information about the self in interaction with the environment. For example, anger provides information regarding the readiness of the system to protect itself in an aggressive fashion.... Psychological problems often arise from a failure to fully process adaptive emotional experience. Emotion can provide people with the conviction that a certain course of action is right for them and with the motivation to pursue that course of action.

(Safran, 1996:124).

The connections between learning and feeling and the impacts of success and failure are

also familiar. Bion (1970), conceptualised processes for both learning and not learning within webs of sense perception and emotional possibilities which either permit or disallow communication to occur, either within ourselves or with the social other (see also Billington, 2000, 2006).

Some traditional processes used in the social sciences can be seen to favour a hierarchy of knowledge increase the discrepancies between knowledge and experience (Foucault, 1972). These methods often use unified concepts and biological, physiological and, increasingly, genetic, causes as explanations for human social behaviour without any explanatory weight given to psychological, sociological, cultural explanations and use generalised statements to make assertions that make no reference to previous historical variation and are highly problematic when even a few levels of specification are introduced. Many of these processes have been overcome to some degree by research methods and practices which permit further detection of the void between experience and explanations of that experience. Lacan's (1977) model of discourse analysis (see also Hollway, 1989) provides a theoretical resource in understanding that all our accounts will be problematic in their claims to truth. This is not the same as saying that there is no absolute truth. Just that it cannot be easily known (Billington, 2000).

Frosh (2006) states that:

In some ways psychoanalysis is the most ordered, conservative of disciplines, with its formal attire, closely monitored boundaries and hierarchical structures of authority; in other ways it is the most seditious, the most explosive, with its claim that desire occupies a prime space in all our psychic lives. The tension here reflects another tension, this time between the scientific, 'colonising' aspect of Freud and his more expressive openness to irrationality: what this teaches is how the truth of the human subject always thankfully, seems just to slip away; that as we speak of it in order to control it, there is a spark of resistance generated, a little irony that makes a stain on our nice, pure theories. Much of the creativity of Freud and psychoanalysis lies in this encounter between order and disorder, between the wish to control through knowledge and the impulse to celebrate the subversion perpetrated by unconscious life.

My own opinion is that as psychoanalysis has withstood the test of time so well one

might suggest that at least parts of the theory have validity. In addition, the legacy that Freud left behind is tremendous, and his theories have furthered the field of psychology in an infinite number of ways. As it was evident that the nature of some the Head teachers' difficulties was more about human relationships and interactions and the effects of these on themselves than systemic or practical issues I believe that a psychodynamic approach to consider their distress is valid. I therefore adapted object relations theory to guide my thoughts around the possible sources of distress and possible solutions to alleviate these. Object relations theory was applied to the individual, the institution and society in order to postulate the origins of mechanisms that would account for the range of dilemmas and difficulties experienced by the Head teachers. I hoped that psychoanalytic theory would supply a framework and methodology through which subject positions could be explored without necessarily having to make assumptions about the stability of selfhood and that psychoanalytic interpretive strategies might be able to throw light on some of the psychological processes, or perhaps the conscious and unconscious 'reasons', behind a specific individual's investment in any rhetorical or discursive position.

(iii) Object-Relations Theory

In object relations theory (Klein, 1946) there is an emphasis on primitive defence mechanisms such as splitting, projective identification, transference, omnipotent denial, projection and introjection as these are the fundamental mental resources to protect the endangered self and the threatened objects from the fantasized imminent destruction.

'Object-relations are the subject's mode of relation to the world – the entire complex outcomes of a particular organization of the personality, of an apprehension of objects that is to some extent or other phantasised, and of certain special types of defence'

(Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988:277).

"Object relations theory presents us with the confounding observation that people live simultaneously in an external and an internal world, and that the relationship between the two ranges from the most fluid intermingling to the most rigid separation'.

Ganzarain, 1989:10)

'Object-relations' psychoanalysis argues that our identities emerge from a series of introjections and projections in a process whereby we are constantly *taking 'objects' in*, and *'putting' outside* ourselves. In this way we can lose parts of ourselves ('good' and 'bad') as we place them in other people and 'objects' through introjection.

'I have often expressed the view that object-relations exist from the beginning of life ...that the relation to the first object implies its introjection and projection, and thus from the beginning object-relations are moulded by an interaction between internal and external objects and situations'

(Klein [1946], 1988:2)

(iv) Alienation and Projective identification

Sullivan contends that the personality is almost entirely the product of interaction with other significant human beings. The need to be closely related to others is as basic as any other biological need and is necessary for survival. In the quest for security the developing child tends to cultivate and emphasise traits and aspects of the self that meet with approval and tends to suppress or deny those that meet with disapproval. Eventually the individual develops a concept of the self based on these perceived appraisals of significant others.

The self may be said to be made up of reflected appraisals. If these were chiefly derogatory, as in the case of an unwanted child who was never loved, of a child who has fallen into the hands of foster parents who have no real interest in him as a child; as I say, if the self-dynamism is made up of experience which is chiefly derogatory, it will facilitate hostile, disparaging appraisals of other people and it will entertain disparaging and hostile appraisals of itself.

(Mullahy, 1967:21)

Positive peer relationships and self-esteem are inseparable concepts (Grunebaum and Solomon, 1987). The process of constructing self-regard on the basis of reflected appraisals read in the eyes of important others continues, through adolescence and into old age as the need for meaningful relatedness is ongoing (Leszcz, 1997).

A number of the Head teachers in the pilot study stated that they no longer felt connected to their job and that their role had changed out of all recognition from the one

they had taken on initially. Hinshelwood,(1983), explored connections between 'alienation' as a psychological process and Kleinian concepts of projective identification,

Marx described an unmistakable and very concrete form of projective identification...he called it 'alienation. Alienation is a psychological process that inserts man [sic] into particular relationships with his social environment. Projective identification is the primitive forerunner of all social relationships.

(Hinshelwood, 1983, pp. 221-224)

Billington (2000) argues (after Hinshelwood) that:

The concept of 'alienation' too suggests processes in which people can lose part of themselves, both through their labours and also within the products of their labours (and simultaneously become poorer, perhaps economically and psychologically). The concept of alienation also suggests processes in which people may have to 'take in' unwanted material products of others.

(Billington, 2000:92)

'Alienation' and 'projective identification' attempt to describe those processes in which we form our (social) identity. They may also suggest the ways in which people can begin to question the nature of their own identities. (Billington, 2000: 92). Billington argues that in the contemporary economic world 'opportunities' and advertising offer a constant barrage of *something* other than ourselves which can challenge and confuse our identities. Rather than clinging to ourselves, the process of alienation leads us to look to various introjects which permeate our culture. The concept of the 'normal' or 'abnormal' human being is one such introject that is encouraged by psychology. Billington (2000) argues that 'we are all affected by this discursive introject, and we can become mesmerised by its ability to permeate many cultural discourses, thus affecting the continual flow and exchange of both 'good' and 'bad' objects'.

Through our creation of more and more material objects through industrial production, we have more and more opportunities to both lose more parts of ourselves and also to gain more parts of others in the continual processes of projection and introjection. Such material products are designed to affect our symbolic lives and we are thus forming our personalities in a process of mass projective identification, which Hinshelwood argues

is alienation, 'We can postulate that capitalist society brings out in the individual personality, the potential for excessive projective identification (alienation). In turn projective identification spurs on the form of capitalist society (Hinshelwood, (1983).

The connection between projective identification and alienation that Hinshelwood describes casts doubt upon the origins and nature of individual, psychopathologised pathologies (Billington, 2000:94). Billington suggests that in a world of efficiency savings, productivity and league tables, humans are more and more treated as tools in a machine-like system. Competition pervades into every area of life and this, in turn, allows no escape from the omnipresence of market forces. Marx (1844) claimed that capitalism turns everything into a commodity - and thus people are turned into objects as their humanity yields to the impersonal workings of the day-to-day routine.

(v) Anxieties and Defences

Many of the Head teachers in the pilot study reported that they frequently had feelings of anxiety about their work. Obholzer, (1994), states that there are three layers of anxiety. These are: primitive anxieties; anxieties arising out of the nature of the work and personal anxieties. Primitive anxieties are universal in mankind and stem from anything that threatens to isolate us including such things as: redundancy, retirement, migration and institutional change. Anxieties arising from the nature of work often leads to the unconscious organisation of work to avoid the primary task and defend members of the institution against anxiety. Work-generated anxiety often resonates with both primitive anxiety and with personal anxiety which is the anxiety we feel when something triggers off elements of past experience, both conscious and unconscious. (Obholzer,1994).

Early in childhood, splitting and projection are the predominant defences for avoiding pain and anxiety (Halton, 2004). Klein,(1946), referred to this as the *paranoid-schizoid position* ('paranoid' referring to badness experienced as coming from outside oneself, and 'schizoid' referring to splitting). This is a normal stage of development, occurring in early childhood and recurrent throughout life. Through play, normal maturation or psychoanalytic treatment, previously separated feelings such as love and hate, hope and despair, sadness and joy, acceptance and rejection can eventually be brought together into a more integrated whole. This stage of integration Klein called the *depressive position*, because it requires the giving up of self-idealisation which engenders feelings

of guilt, concern and sadness. These feelings give rise to a desire to make reparation for injuries caused through previous hatred and aggression and may stimulate work and creativity. This desire to make reparation is one of the factors which can lead an individual into becoming a 'helping' professional. (Halton,1994)

The shift from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive one is unstable. Whenever anxieties increase, defensive processes are activated and there is a tendency to return to splitting. This oscillation, with pressure to shift away from the depressive position, means there is repeated loss of the capacity to face painful reality, guilt and concern (Obholzer, 1994).

Paranoid defences involve denial and projection of aggression so that it is experienced as coming from outside oneself in the form of persecutors. Manic defences are directed at denying that damage has occurred, and involve omnipotent fantasies about magical repair. Unlike genuine reparation, which requires the ability to face that damage has been done and cannot be undone, manic reparation must be total, so that no anxiety, grief or guilt need be experienced. Manic reparation tends to be impractical and ineffective; when it fails, individuals may use obsessional defences, the ritualistic repetition of certain acts, as a further effort to control and master anxiety, especially about their aggressive impulses (Klein, 1959; Segal, 1986).

It is only possible to think coherently and solve problems when depressive anxieties - and hence 'reality' - can be tolerated. The use of the term 'reality' in this context could be considered as problematic as it has already been acknowledged that although it is not possible to say that there is no absolute truth, it cannot be easily known (Billington, 2000). The use of the word 'reality' in the context above therefore refers to something which can be known to some degree and knowledge of this may be determined through a shift from the paranoid-schizoid position to the depressive one.

When paranoid anxieties dominate, the links between reality and consciousness, thought and memory are attacked and eliminated and there is no effort made to seek out the root cause of a problem. In this state problems cannot even be stated, let alone solved (Bion,1967). By contrast in the depressive position, one is able to seek to know and learn from experience in order to solve problems and allow realistic and practical reparative activities to be used in preference to the omnipotent fantasies, obsessional rituals and paranoid blaming of the paranoid position (Zagier Roberts, 1994).

Winnicott (1947) stressed that the capacity to tolerate hate (or uncaring), 'without doing anything about it' depends on one's being completely aware of it. Otherwise, he warned, one is at risk of falling back on masochism. Alternatively, hate (uncaring) — will be split off and projected, impacting negatively on the capacity to offer good-enough care. 'Permission' from within ourselves and from the environment - to acknowledge and own the uncaring elements in ourselves and our 'caring' institutions is crucial, both for individual well-being, and for the provision of effective services (Zagier Roberts, 1994).

3. Psychodynamics in the Workplace

(i) Valency

Many of the Head teachers in the pilot study stated that they had been drawn to do the teaching profession because they felt a need to: 'put something back into society'; 'make the opportunities they had available to all children'; 'help those less fortunate escape a life of drudgery through education'; and 'provide social justice for all'. The reasons why individuals choose the work they do and the elements that provide satisfaction are largely unconscious and related to complicated emotional needs as to work in a particular setting offers opportunities to work through their own unresolved issues (Main 1968). Bion (1961) referred to this phenomenon as *valency*. As described above, many people are drawn to the caring or helping professions because they have a need to put something right. This arises from guilt or concern, and aims to heal emotional wounds including one's own, and those of the damaged figures of one's internal world. By helping others it can be expressed in a socially acceptable way. While reparative wishes are healthy, problems can arise when there is a compulsive quality (Dartington, 1994).

Unlike other professions, in work such as teaching reparative activities are carried out in direct relation to other human beings. The job situation may closely resemble early life situations that a staff member may still be processing unconsciously, and which drew them to that type of work. As a teacher's personality, skills and personal resources are felt to be the primary tool for producing benefit for their pupils, professions such as teaching are regarded as 'vocations' requiring special qualities. Skills, training and 'experience' may be used defensively to keep anxieties about personal adequacy for the

job at bay, but often the personal attributes of teachers are regarded as the instruments of change. By offering themselves as such instruments, workers unconsciously hope to confirm that they have sufficient internal goodness to repair damage in others. Whilst this may conform to both individual and organisational ideals, it may also be the source of much anxiety (Zagier Roberts, 1994).

(ii) Defences against Anxiety

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Teachers like others working in the helping professions are often inadequately prepared to deal with the effects of suffering or distress in others and the corresponding anxiety in themselves (Obholzer, 1994). As colleagues may be experiencing similar emotions they cannot contain them for each other and this may lead to further distress which may be expressed in a range of behaviours such as as illness, absenteeism, high staff turnover, low morale and poor timekeeping (Speck, 1994). Staff in schools, including those in the pilot study and this study, regularly observe that they are having to cope with pupils who have increasingly more complex and difficult social, emotional and behavioural issues and describe the negative impacts of this on their own well-being.

In an attempt to defend themselves from the anxieties of others individuals may adopt a task-centred approach. For example, religious ministers may use rituals and prayers to avoid interpersonal contact just as some doctors utilise medical procedures and examination processes in a similar way (Speck, 1994). Pathological defences can also develop where individuals unconsciously erect a 'shell' around themselves which serves to deflect and anaesthetise emotion. If this defence strategy becomes permanent the individual can no longer be fully responsive to their emotional environment and they may present a threat to their charges and colleagues through cruelty or indifference. Pathological defences that develop gradually may go unnoticed and terms such as stoicism may be used to describe the milder effects of pathological defences. However, in more extreme cases manic denial utilises psychotic processes that attempt to obliterate despair by manufacturing excitement. In such manic states of mind people are oblivious to both pain and danger and can therefore present a real danger to society itself (Dartington, 1994).

Possible links between choice of occupation and personal history may result in staff with similar internal needs and tendencies matching certain kinds of defences. This may give rise to collective defences against the anxieties stirred up by their work which can

seriously impede the task performance. Where there is a 'good fit' between the personal and the institutional defence systems, neither will be challenged; reality-testing does not take place, and the defensive process continues (Obholzer, 1994). In this way, institutions, like individuals, can develop defences against difficult emotions which are too threatening or too painful to acknowledge (Halton, 1994). Obholzer and Zagier Roberts (1994:129) write:

We at times behave as if unconscious processes only occur in the smaller configurations of mankind, as if understanding of the institutional functioning process is not necessary before we embark on change.

Anxiety arising from the nature of the work often resonates both with the primitive anxiety and with personal anxiety resulting in work being organised to defend members of an institution from anxiety rather than in pursuit of the primary task. Appropriate defences in response to painful or unbearable situations involve attempts to protect oneself from stress in order that the primary task is preserved (Dartington, 1994). In contrast, where pathological defences are used reality is denied and unbearable situations are allowed to continue as if they were perfectly acceptable, when in fact they need to be challenged in order to preserve both the workers and the work-task. This is done unconsciously, and the defensive function of the structure of the institution usually goes unrecognised (Obholzer, 1994).

Difficult emotions may be a response to external threats such as government policy or social change; they may arise from internal conflicts between management and employees or between groups and departments in competition for resources. (Halton, 1994). Excessive workloads are a conscious source of stress, but other anxieties are unconscious, kept out of awareness not only by personal defences but also by collective ones. These anxieties are stirred up by the nature of the work itself, and the defences to which they give rise can exacerbate stress rather than alleviate it (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994). Menzies Lyth (1959), first drew attention to the mechanisms used by organisations to defend individuals against the anxiety of work which would otherwise be experienced as psychologically stressful and damaging. It is likely that these 'solutions' themselves become problematic. A body of psychoanalytic literature exists about how institutions manage such difficulties and changes (Shearman, (2003). Menzies (1970), used the concept of splitting, projective identification and denial to describe institutional change in a nursing service in a general hospital. Bion (1961)

attempted to make links between psychoanalysis and systemic theories using Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical theories regarding the individual and his own regarding groups and organisational processes and practices, especially those related to "open systems theory" of organisations (Miller and Rice, 1967).

Whilst pupil behaviour is undoubtedly a contributory factor in staff stress, the greater public accountability and scrutiny of educational practice increases the daily pressures upon teachers especially as the profession no longer engenders the respect it formerly held. Teachers can feel persecuted on all sides by children who act out in the classroom, and by the political climate where league tables and a prescriptive curriculum, encourage competitiveness and exclusion, whilst at the same time promoting inclusion of all.

Adults have their own tolerance levels, triggers, expectations and relationships with young people. Past experience may give rise to feelings that inhibit the acceptance of change in legislation, teaching practice or the way in which children are treated. Frustrations and anger that cannot be placed before the originators of these feelings can find their way into the classroom and be expressed there, damaging working relationships with pupils. In this way teachers' assessment of pupils, classroom interactions, choice of behavioural interventions, preferences for educational theory and even their decisions about the teaching and learning of all curriculum content areas in school may be shaped by transference and counter-transference, (Steel, 2001).

Zagier Roberts, (1994), states that institutional defences may come in the form of structures and practices, ways of arranging tasks, rules and procedures which serve primarily to defend staff from anxiety rather than to promote task performance. These generally come in the form of automatic assumptions, rules and procedures which are experienced subjectively as innocuous habits, but when challenged they are defended and maintained despite the fact that no one is able to articulate the reason for them. These no-go areas of institutional life are usually those in which the most anxiety is generated (Dartington, 1994).

(iii) Splitting and Denial

Obholzer, (1994), claims that splitting and denial are among the most commonly used defence mechanisms in institutions. Examples of this may be seen in the interactions

between a school and parents where parental disturbance is cited as a major source of difficulty whether in communicating with the parents, or when the child is in trouble. Splitting up competence among the disciplines within the school is another common occurrence. For example it is often assumed that specific individuals in a school such as the pastoral leaders will lead specific initiatives concerned with behaviour. A splitting process shows staff insisting on regarding issues around behaviour as 'pastoral issue only' areas. The result is that many years of experience of other members of staff in how to deal with a variety of behavioural issues may be lost. Although this split enables subject/class teachers to avoid anxiety-provoking areas in the lives of their pupils and their families, it is the day-to-day teachers who may be best able to help these pupils and their parents. Whilst such a splitting process protects some members of staff, it interferes with the overall work of the institution.

Newcomers to institutions are often moulded to the institutional way of doing things, including joining into the particular institutional defences. Using this process some individuals can lose their capacity to 'see' things from an outsider's perspective, and in so doing may also lose their capacity for critical thought and questioning. The more 'reality' is denied, the less effective the systems become and the greater the consequences for those involved in them (Obholzer, 1994).

Splitting and projection are frequently used in the context of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' or between groups within the institution itself. The differences between these groups may be subject to a range of emotions including: denigration, competition, hatred, prejudice, paranoia where individual members of these different groups may be stereotyped. As there is less scope for projection of this kind when there is frequent contact between the groups, contact and meetings may be avoided unconsciously in order to preserve self-idealisation based on these projections. In this way the institution may become immersed in a paranoid-schizoid projection system (Halton, 1994).

Splitting between school staff and outside agencies may typically include complaints about the lack of reports sent back to the school and the need for better communication with these agencies who are 'doing nothing'. These beliefs may be maintained despite the experience of the staff that when they *do* get reports, they generally describe them as being of little value, adding minimally to what they already know. They may also express indignation when outside agencies involved with the pupils do not seek their opinion (Obholzer, 1994). In a similar way, feelings of dislike or rejection towards

pupils can be better managed by projecting them on to other groups or outside agencies, who can then be criticised. 'The projection of such feelings of badness outside the self helps to produce a state of illusory goodness and self-idealisation and simplifies complex issues and often produces a rigid culture in which growth is inhibited' (Halton, 2004).

Another manifestation of the splitting process may be seen where certain staff members come to represent different and possibly conflicting, emotional aspects of the psychological state of the whole school community (Halton, 2004). For example, subject staff may come to represent the academic, achievement side of school life whilst pastoral staff represent the 'emotional' or disciplinary side of pupils. Attainment versus inclusion, discipline versus compassion. These projective processes provide relief from the anxieties which can arise from trying to contain conflicting needs and conflicting emotions. It is hard to contain compassion and anxiety simultaneously, or to experience the wish for independence and the need for limits at the same time. The splitting and projection of these conflicting emotions into different members of the staff group is an inevitable part of institutional process. (Halton, 2004)

(iv) Projective Identification

Whilst psychoanalysis argues that the behaviour of an individual is influenced by unconscious factors, the psychoanalytic view of institutional functioning regards an individual's personal unconscious as playing only a subsidiary role (Halton, 1994). However, the steady increase in adult 'bullying' in the workplace (Adams and Crawford, 1992), and other forms of scape-goating of certain individuals in organisations, who are subjected to intolerable pressures and often driven out in one way or another may illustrate how it is often easier to ascribe a staff member's behaviour to personal problems than it is to discover the link with institutional dynamics (Stokes, 1994).

These links can be made through *projective identification* where one group on behalf of another group, or one individual on behalf of the other members of a group, may absorb all the negative emotions of the group. The angry member may then be put before management by the group, or a depressed member may be unconsciously manoeuvred into breaking down and leaving. Not only does the individual express or carry something for the group, but they may also be used to export something which the rest

of the group then need not feel in themselves (Bion, 1961). In the same way a group may carry something for another group or for the institution as a whole, (Halton, 2004). Such individuals are often at the boundary with the outside world and/or are the most vulnerable or least competent individual who is selected to voice the dilemma. Others are able to dissociate themselves easily from the spokesperson and to treat their behaviour as a personal problem (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994).

In the context of this study the isolation of the Head teachers and their sole responsibility for the perceived success or failure of their schools and for the contentment of their staff, pupils, and wider school communities identifies them as potentially vulnerable to this kind of experience. Alternatively, through their own lack of insight into their school's defence processes they may be the source of such feelings amongst those they lead.

It is possible to assess the functioning state of an organisation by monitoring measures such as splitting, denial and projective identification, and how – just as for individuals – a containing intervention can shift the functioning towards the depressive end of the spectrum. For staff to function to the best of their ability, they must have an external and internal framework that allows for a sense of security that serves as a base from which to explore personal and institutional issues (Obholzer, 1994). However, Head teachers may struggle with this as they cannot always discuss difficulties with their peers as this may be inappropriate or appear as weakness. They may also be reluctant to talk to Local Authority advisors and other sources of external support for fear of judgment, criticism and lacking leadership and control.

The Tavistock psychoanalytic approach to organisational consultancy involves gaining an understanding of the primary task of the organisation with an appreciation of the psychoanalytic challenge presented by the work. Through shared discovery of the meaning, and especially the emotional significance of activity in the workplace, it is thought that staff will gain a better understanding of the organisation's process and the options for change (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994).

According to the psychodynamic paradigm, as members of society we all use various unconscious defensive mechanisms, including the creation of and delegation to social systems to keep our anxieties concerning such issues as inequality, sickness and disorder repressed. These include public services such as: Health, Prisons, Police,

Education and Social Services (Obholzer, 1994). The sense of responsibility for the bringing up, teaching, learning and development of children to a standard where they are able to survive and prosper in society is projected onto teachers, schools, local and government education departments relinquishing 'us' of the responsibility. An alternative view may be that teachers take the lead and parents follow this. Whilst those who work within this system welcome the challenges and authority that comes with the job, they often find the responsibility terrifying, particularly when expectations cannot be met. It is hoped unconsciously that the education system will equip all children equally to meet all of life's challenges, in reality, this hope is unrealistic (Obholzer, 1994). As society becomes increasingly pluralistic, the primary task of many established public sector institutions, including education, requires re-negotiation. Existing authority structures are continuously being challenged, creating considerable additional stress and confusion for the members of these institutions as they attempt to adopt and modify their working practices to take account of these changes (Stokes, 1994).

4. Containment

If painful, anxiety-provoking feelings can be tolerated long enough to reflect on them and contain the anxieties they stir up, it may be possible to bring about change (Halton, 1994). At times when we cannot do this, Bion (1967) claims that another person or group may act as the 'container'. Generally, as an infant develops, feelings of disintegration are transitory. Their reintegration is effected by the primary carer, who mentally processes the infant's raw emotions and returns them to the infant in a digested form. This process is referred to by Bion (1961) as 'maternal reverie', a process in which the mother performs a containing function for the baby. Therefore in psychoanalytic theory, the term "container" is primarily associated with the concept of "projective identification".

Nutkevitch (1998:5) sums up containment as follows:

One can state schematically that "to contain" and "containment" are concepts that describe the capacity of any entity to keep within itself parts that arouse anxiety. An individual in an organisation, group, system and an entire organisation are all entities which may have inside them anxiety laden and unbearable parts, or into which anxiety-provoking parts can be projected. Like any object at the receiving end of projective identification, these entities can either keep and contain

these unbearable parts or get rid of them by projecting them into a sub-entry inside them

(a sub-group or sub-system) or into an external entity.

Nutkevitch (1998)

(i) The School as a Container

The process of mother-infant relations may be reconstructed in the school situation where the school acts as the container. Some schools have systems in process to make them capable of containing difficult elements whilst other schools without this capacity may 'act out' in the counter transference. With the development of the inter-subjective approach in psychoanalysis (Berman, 1997), the container can no longer be regarded as an empty container. For example, the reactions of a school to pupils with challenging behaviour in many cases is not only the results of the problem pupil's identification, but rather a mixture of projected parts of the pupil and denied and split off parts of the school who do not recognise the weaknesses and inadequacy of their systems.

Much of the sense of constraint in organisations is produced because each individual member projects parts of the self that they do not want to be aware of into more distant parts of the organisation. These not only provide a focus for blame for the frustrations and conflicts inherent in working in the organisation, but also 'lock' individuals and groups into unconscious roles (Stokes, 1994). Looking at various defensive patterns whether between institutions and their environment or inter-institutional, or inter-personal – it is possible to see how a style of work that is essentially and consistently defensive is bad not only for the work but also for individual workers. To be constantly out of touch with many aspects of psychic reality at work puts individuals at risk of being out of touch with themselves as a result of a combination of work defences and personal vulnerabilities. The pattern can influence the behaviour of children and their reactions to stress, and therefore perpetuate itself. The chances of developing stress-related diseases are also increased as Obholzer (1994) states: 'We therefore come to the end of the road – an unhealthy mind in an unhealthy body in an unhealthy organisation'.

(ii) Factors That Prevent Containment

The containing function of large public sector institutions has been obscured by the increasing over-emphasis on cost-effectiveness. Changes in organisational structure, functioning and priority, has brought about an increase in interpersonal tension and personal stress within sub-groups inside organisations as well as between workers and management. This is even more apparent in public sector organisations such as health, education, social, civil and police services, than in commercial ones (Stokes, 1994). One result of these changes is that difficulties that were previously managed by projection up and down hierarchical levels, or between established departments and units, may be forced down to the interpersonal level between members of an organisation (Stokes, 1994). For instance, there is a noticeable increase in 'bullying' in organisations (Adams and Crawford, 1992) and other forms of scape-goating of certain individuals within organisations who are then subjected to intolerable pressures and are often driven out in one way or another. When institutions do not acknowledge their function as containers and are not aware of the anxieties projected into them, they will create a structure that will function in modes that constitute a defence against these anxieties. This situation will impair not only the work itself, but also the psychic and physical health of workers and their families Obholzer (1994).

Nutkevitch (1998), observes that:

The stormier the container is, the more serious the organisation's pathology is, the worse the relations within the organisation's management are, the harder the task of containment is for the manager with his personality make-up, the more important it is to build and maintain the 'safety net', which becomes critical for the containment of the container. The more there are good enough containers in the organisation, at all levels – management, department, team, working group – the more efficiently it will function. The members of the organisation will thus be more efficient, creative and satisfied with their jobs.

Nutkevitch(1998:11)

(iii) Processes to Promote Containment

Factors to promote what Obholzer (1994), calls “the containing function of an organisation” include: 1) an ongoing discussion in relation to the organisations’ primary task; 2) a clear structure of the authority, including who decides what the primary task is; 3) open communication between the parts of the organisation including a forum to discuss to what is taking place in the organisation, or between it and other systems and organisations; 4) regular meetings in which teams speak about their feelings and their work-related difficulties; and 5) special support for managers.

For the container to have the best chance of containing and metabolising the anxieties projected into it, it needs to be in a depressive position having the capacity to face both external and psychic reality. For organisations such as schools this requires not only agreement about the primary task, but also an awareness of the nature of the anxieties projected into them, rather than defensively blocking them out. In order for a system to work according to these principles, a structured system for dialogue between the various component parts is necessary. This depends on all concerned being in touch with the difficulties of the task, and their relative powerlessness in radically altering the pattern of life and of society. There is thus a need for the ongoing containment of institutional anxieties to safeguard depressive functioning (Obholzer, 1994).

Bion (1977), assigns a decisive role in the containment process to the entity with authority in the organisation, in schools this is the Head teacher. For management systems to constitute a ‘reliable container’ they must clarify the primary task of the organisation and plan and define roles in a manner consistent with the primary task (Stokes, 1994). In taking responsibility for the containment of their schools it is almost inevitable that Head teachers will experience some degree of stress. A major contributory factor in the management of stress is the power that an individual has to change themselves. Steel (2001), claims that this may be achieved through the management of feelings, thoughts, behaviour and pressure; balancing lifestyles; developing a greater personal awareness and acknowledging individual reactions to situations. Kelly (1991) and much of Ravenette’s (1997) work emphasises the importance of understanding the constructs and meanings of the individuals within an organisation where the productive level of analysis is not the pursuit of some sort of objective ‘truth’, but rather with the differing constructions that people make of the events that they are experiencing (Stoker, 2000). By unlearning defensive habits of

conversation and learning to articulate the hidden feelings and thoughts that lie at the root of resentment and confusion, individuals are better informed and empowered to communicate and work more effectively (Steel, 2001).

When I initially encountered the difficulties of the Head teachers in the pilot study my immediate priority was to alleviate both their distress and my own discomfort experienced as a consequence of exposure to this. The methodology that was adopted at that time emerged from an application of interventions of which I had some prior knowledge and experience. These included consultation, supervision and solution-focused psychology.

(iv) Consultation

One of the long established practices of EPs has been that of enabling teachers and others to deepen their skills in understanding and managing 'traditional' problems (and newer ones too) through a process of consultation. Nutkevitch (1998:5) defines the key role of consultation as that of assisting an organisation to create a "holding organizational environment", borrowing the term "holding environment" from Winnicott (1960). In this context the EP acts as a consultant helping the school to devise systems and procedures to enable them to contain challenging situations and individuals.

Wagner (2000) recommends that EPs using the consultation based approach, should make use of symbolic interactionism; systems thinking; personal construct psychology; and social constructionism at both the level of the individual and the organization if they are to be effective. These paradigms should be used at both the level of the individual and the organisation. Brown *et al.* (1979, in West and Idol, 1987) describe consultation as: 'A process based upon equal relationships, characterised by mutual trust and open communication, joint approaches to problem identification, the pooling of personal resources to identify and select strategies that will have some probability of solving the problem that has been identified, and shared responsibility in the implementation and evaluation of the program or strategy that has been initiated'. Meyers *et al.* (1979:63) suggest that consultation is:

A technique that at minimum, always has the following six characteristics: it is a helping, problem-solving process, occurring voluntarily between a professional

help-giver and a help-seeker where the help-giver and the help-seeker share in solving the problem. The goal is to help solve a current work problem of the help-seeker who profits from the relationship in such a way that future problems may be handled more sensitively and skilfully.

(Meyers *et al.* 1979:63, in West and Idol, 1987)

Hanko (1985, in Stringer 1992:88), states: '*....there are as many interpretations of the term consultation as there are contexts in which it is useful "to consider jointly" and to "take counsel"*'. West and Idol (1987) identify at least 10 different models including a few more variations of these basic models. Similarly, Stringer *et al.* state that:

It is possible to understand and practise consultation in a way which fits best with oneself: one's own beliefs and values, learning and experiences, preferred theoretical models, views of professional practice, and ones' own view vision for future growth'.

(Stringer *et al.* 1992:87-96)

I decided that a group consultation process was the way forward as I was familiar with and had previous experience of group work with both adults and children. In addition, Wagner (2000), questions issues around power and control within a consultation and challenges the language of consultation (eg. consultant/consultee) and promotes the giving of 'the expertise to the non-expert' (Draper, 1997). This sanctioned my view of the Headteachers as skilled professionals rather than tutees and my aim was to set up a reciprocal process of dialogue that would be enskilling, rather than unidirectional and deskilling and where the solution or 'truth' remained within the group members. I intended that each member of the group would act as both consultant and consultee in order to maximise their skills, experience and resources and meet each others needs.

As I had neither the time nor the resources to give each individual Head teacher a consultation session that would focus on issues and difficulties which would have been beyond my remit, I decided that my time would be most profitably spent in facilitating some form of group consultation for the Head teachers.

(v) Supervision

Supervision is a concept that is widely accepted and valued in the social service and

nursing sectors e.g. intensive care nurses (Lantz and Severinsson, 2001), mental health nurse lecturers (Claveirole and Mathers, 2003), mental health professionals working with child sexual abuse (Day, Thurlow and Wolliscroft, 2003), student nurses (Aston and Molassiotis, 2003), and complimentary therapists (Isbell, 2003) and evidence suggests that the educational field could benefit from adopting it (Steel, 2001).

Various forms of apprenticeship have existed in different societies for a long time. In ancient China, Africa and Europe (feudal and otherwise), for example, there are numerous examples of people new to a craft or activity having to reveal their work to, and explore it with those recognized as skilled and wise. This process of being attached to an expert, of 'learning through doing' allows the novice to gain knowledge, skill and commitment. It also enables them to enter into a particular 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Supervision can be found in the growth of charitable social agencies in Europe and North America during the nineteenth century. (See, for example, the discussion of Maude Stanley, *Girls' clubs and district visiting* and Ellen Ranyard's, *Bible Women and informal education*). The person assigning cases, organizing work and taking decisions on behalf of the agency was basically an 'overseer' - and hence the growing use of the term 'supervisor'. Traditionally, part of the overseer's job was to ensure that work was done well and to a standard (Petes, 1967: 170). In addition to being an administrative task the overseers also had to be teachers and innovators. In these early forms - and especially in the work of the Charity Organization Society in the USA and UK - the present functions and approaches of supervision were signalled.

As thinking and practice around casework became more sophisticated, especially through the work of pioneers such as Mary Richmond (1899; 1917; 1922), and demands for more paid workers grew, so supervision became more of an identified process. Also, the hierarchical position of the supervisor (or paid agent) was revealed. While the 'paid agent' acted as supervisor to the volunteer visitor, the paid agent 'supervisor' was himself supervised by the district committee, which had ultimate authority for case decisions. The paid agent supervisor was then in a middle-management position, as is true of many supervisors today - supervising the direct service worker but themselves under the authority of the agency administrators. (Kadushin 1992:6). It is this hierarchical and managerial idea of supervision that tends to permeate much of the literature found in the helping professions.

Hawkins and Shohet (1989) consider that supervision in the helping professions is about allowing emotions to be recognised within a safe setting where they can be acknowledged, accepted, reflected upon, survived and learned from. The supervisor aims to provide an 'emotional container' for the adult (who in turn provides an emotional container for the young person or another colleague). Therefore supervision can provide the opportunity for perceptions to be re-directed and objectivity restored. This is powerful in changing staff perceptions, lowering defences and promoting the acceptance of alternative views (Greenhalgh, 1994).

Supervision is a recognised mechanism for dealing with stress or difficult circumstances that are placing high demands on their emotional and mental resources through a collaborative and reflective discussion with a trusted co-worker. It is common practice for psychologists themselves to engage in supervision as a means of combating stress. It is reported to be one of the top-ten professional activities engaged in by American Clinical Psychologists and accounts for 11% of their time (Robiner, 1997). Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a slow but steady increase in the number of Educational Psychology services having peer supervision as an element of EP activity. Increasingly it is recognised as a mechanism for ensuring high quality service for clients and as a protective mechanism for an individual's emotional and mental well-being. It features as one of the areas considered by the working group for Quality Standards for Educational Psychology Services (DECP, 2006). Positive outcomes for supervisees have been cited by other authors and include:

- preventing feelings of isolation between workers who do similar jobs
- helping workers manage change
- helping workers deal with heavy workloads
- enhancing communication between co-workers
- sharing of skills and knowledge
- helping workers understand their role better
- helping workers feel more confident about their own abilities
- improving levels of job satisfaction
- offering important networking and professional development opportunities.

(Claveirole and Mathers, 2003; Aston and Molassiotis, 2003; Isbell, 2003; Counselmann and Weber, 2004; Baggerly and Osborn, 2006). Other perceived potential benefits of supervision are also reported. It can lead to increased reflectivity of work (Lantz and Severinsson, 2001). There is an increased ability of professionals

to work autonomously with more educative supervision leading to less need for management supervision (Zorga, 1997). It is reported to lead to improved ability of the supervisee to relate to clients (Lantz and Severinsson, 2001).

Dawson (1926) stated the functions of supervision in the following terms:

Administrative - the promotion and maintenance of good standards of work, co-ordination of practice with policies of administration, the assurance of an efficient and smooth-running office;

Educational - the educational development of each individual worker on the staff in a manner calculated to evoke her fully to realize her possibilities of usefulness; and

Supportive - the maintenance of harmonious working relationships, the cultivation of esprit de corps.

(Dawson 1926: 293).

Kadushin (1992) tightens up on Dawson's formulation and presents his understanding of the three elements in terms of the primary problem and the primary goal. In administrative supervision the primary problem is concerned with the correct, effective and appropriate implementation of agency policies and procedures. The primary goal is to ensure adherence to policy and procedure (Kadushin 1992: 20). The supervisor has been given authority by the agency to oversee the work of the supervisee. This carries the responsibility:

... both to ensure that agency policy is implemented - which implies a controlling function - and a parallel responsibility to enable supervisees to work to the best of their ability.

(Brown and Bourne 1995: 10)

It also entails a responsibility not to lose touch with the rationale for the agency - '*to provide a first-class service for people who need it (or in some cases are required to have it, in order that they or others may be protected from harm)*' (op cit.).

In educational supervision the primary problem for Kadushin (1990: 20) is worker ignorance and/or ineptitude regarding the knowledge, attitude and skills required to do the job. The primary goal is to dispel ignorance and upgrade skill. The classic process involved with this task is to encourage reflection on, and exploration of the work.

Supervisees may be helped to: understand the client better; become more aware of their own reactions and responses to the client; understand the dynamics of how they and their client are interacting; look at how they intervened and the consequences of their interventions; explore other ways of working with this and other similar client situations (Hawkins and Shohet 1989: 42).

In supportive supervision the primary problem is worker morale and job satisfaction. The primary goal is to improve morale and job satisfaction (Kadushin 1992: 20). Workers are seen as facing a variety of job-related stresses which, unless they have help to deal with them, could seriously affect their work and lead to a less than satisfactory service to clients. For the worker there is ultimately the problem of 'burnout'.

Kadushin argues that educative and administrative forms of supervision focus on instrumental needs, whereas supportive supervision is concerned with expressive needs (ibid.: 292).

[T]he supervisor seeks to prevent the development of potentially stressful situations, removes the worker from stress, reduces stress impinging on the worker, and helps her adjust to stress. The supervisor is available and approachable, communicates confidence in the worker, provides perspective, excuses failure when appropriate, sanctions and shares responsibility for different decisions, provides opportunities for independent functioning and for probable success in task achievement.

(Kadushin 1992: 292)

Smith, (1996, 2005), argues that this way of representing the functions of supervision regards the supervisees in deficit. They are lacking in certain ways - and it is the job of the supervisor to help them put things right. The problem is that supervisors can easily slip into acting *on*, or upon behalf of, supervisees. Kadushin is primarily concerned with organizational or managerial supervision where supervisor-managers have responsibility to the organization or agency for the actions of their staff and so such a deficit orientation may not be surprising. However, Smith (1996) argues for a different approach to management - one that stresses conversation and a concern for fostering an environment in which workers can take responsibility for their own actions. Smith does not think that this criticism undermines Kadushin's model, i.e. the splitting into administrative, educative and supportive functions, but it does provide caveats to its

use.

Smith (1996, 2005) argues that at one level having a concern for the management and development of the worker (i.e. looking to administrative and educational supervision) is support in itself and is where the various functions could be seen as overlapping or feeding into each other; on the other hand, separating out 'support' does have the virtue of making explicit the need to have a concern for the emotions of supervisees. It is in this area that the real danger of slippage into a counselling framework appears. The person of the supervisee becomes the *main* focus rather than the work. By incorporating support into the model it is at least able to frame the concern for the person of the supervisee within the larger concern for the service to the client.

Smith (1996, 2005) argues that by approaching Kadushin's model from a managerial perspective, especially where are concerns with the operation of teams, there might be the temptation to add in mediation as a function (Richards et al 1990 in Brown and Bourne 1995: 9). This may result in issues around the naming of the separate functions. For example, is it helpful to separate administration from management, would management be a better overall title and so on? Smith (1996, 2005) also raises the question of how tied this model is to managerial supervision. Proctor (1987) uses the same basic split but uses different terms - formative (education), normative (administration) and restorative (support). This has the virtue of lifting the administrative category out of line-management and thus, allowing the model to be approached from a 'non-managerial' standpoint. Despite these questions, the Kadushin framework remains helpful. By naming the categories in this way Kadushin and others are able to highlight a number of key issues and tensions around the performance of supervision.

Hawkins and Shohet (1989) list 10 different foci and then categorise them in relation to Kadushin's three elements (Educative, Supportive, Managerial). The primary foci of supervision (after Hawkins and Shohet 1989) are:

1. To provide a regular space for the supervisees to reflect upon the *content* and *process* of their work – Educational;
2. To develop understanding and skills within the work – Educational;
3. To receive information and another perspective concerning one's work -

Educational/Supportive;

4. To receive both content and process feedback - Educational/Supportive;
5. To be validated and supported both as a person and as a worker – Supportive;
6. To ensure that as a person and as a worker one is not left to carry unnecessarily difficulties, problems and projections alone – Supportive;
7. To have space to explore and express personal distress, restimulation, transference or counter-transference that may be brought up by the work - Administrative;
8. To plan and utilize their *personal* and *professional* resources better – Administrative;
9. To be pro-active rather than re-active – Administrative;
10. To ensure quality of work - Administrative/Supportive

Hawkins and Shohet (1989: 43) suggest that foci one and two could be seen as educational; foci three and four as educational/supportive; foci five and six as supportive; foci seven to nine as administrative/supportive and ten as administrative/supportive.

Hawkins and Shohet describe 'consultancy supervision' as that in which the supervisee is responsible for consulting with their supervisor "who is neither their trainer/nor manager, on those issues they wish to explore" (op cit, pp 45). This is the model that has influenced this study it but requires clarification to distinguish this form of 'non-managerial supervision - sometimes described as consultant (e.g. Brown 1984) or professional supervision in the literature from supervision used in a managerial context. The most common distinction between non-managerial supervision and managerial supervision is that the manager's first point of reference has to be the interest of the organisation or agency (it is on their authority that they are acting), while the non-managerial supervisor looks to the development of the worker. Sometimes this is reduced to the difference between administrative and educational supervision. Kadushin (1992) argues that management supervision involves all three categories (administrative, educational & supportive), whilst Smith (1996, 2005) suggests that both 'managerial' and 'non-managerial' supervisors share larger responsibilities - to the client group and to other professionals; and that both look to the development of the worker.

The origins of what is currently referred to as supervision in the human services lie in the development of social work and casework and may account for some of the confusion around supposed differences between 'non-managerial supervision and managerial supervision. Many of the ideas and practices that are used in attempts to meet the needs of clients owe much to the emergence of psychoanalysis and counselling. In the case of the former, practice, supervision, teaching and personal analysis have formed the central elements of training since the 1920s. Similar elements can be seen in current approaches to training individuals working in the helping professions. Student or trainee supervision can be contrasted with practitioner supervision. The latter is addressed to established workers. Some writers, such as Page and Wosket (1994: 2), claim that there are many differences between the focus in supervision of students or trainees, and that of established practitioners. The former are more likely to be concerned with issues of technique, boundary, understanding the material clients' bring, and dealing with personal feelings of anxiety. 'The experienced practitioner is more likely to be concerned with teasing out relationship dynamics, choosing intervention options and perhaps dealing with feelings of frustration and boredom towards clients' (op cit.).

The demand for 'practitioner supervision' in counselling can be seen as a key factor in the spread of non-managerial or consultant supervision. By the early 1950s, with the 'coming of age' of the profession, there was a substantial growth 'in the proportion of practitioners with significant experience'. Many of these valued, 'having a fellow practitioner to act in a consultative capacity' (Page and Wosket 1994: 2). This linking of consultant supervision with the development of counselling is significant. The form that supervision takes may well mirror or adopt ways of working from the host profession. Thus, a counsellor supervisor may draw heavily on the theory and practice of a counselling model and apply this to supervision. A psycho-dynamic supervisor would interpret the material being presented and use an awareness of the relationship dynamics between himself and the counsellor in supervision as a means of supervising. A client-centred supervisor would be concerned to communicate the core conditions of acceptance, respect and genuineness to her supervisee. (Page and Wosket 1994: 4). This may account for some of the confusion around many of the arguments and questions around supervision. Contrasts between managerial and consultant supervision inevitably focus on the managerial element yet those involved may well be drawing on very different models and sets of understandings. The debate may be between a psycho-dynamic and a task orientation!

The drawing upon psycho-dynamic and counselling perspectives can also add to the common slippage from supervision into therapy. Smith (1996, 2005) cautions that whilst it may be appropriate for supervisors to change the focus of a session from 'supervision' to 'counselling' where the situation demands it - there are dangers. Firstly there may be an unconscious shift into a different framework; and even where the shift is conscious, it may not be appropriate. That is to say the supervisory boundaries should be held. There can also be confusion between *shifting* the frame of reference and *drawing upon* insights from a particular field. It may be that to properly approach a question that has arisen in a workers' practice their emotional and psychological lives must be attended to.

In the context of this study, psycho-dynamic insights have been drawn upon to work with supervisees to enhance the quality of their interactions with those they encounter in their working lives. This does not entail moving beyond a supervisor's frame of reference. The focus remains on the enhancement of practice. However, if the primary concern were no longer the work, but the well-being of the supervisees, this would be a different situation. If the Head teachers in the group were to become the primary focus (rather than their work), there would have been a significant shift - moving into the realm of counselling. This is not the purpose of what is described as supervision in this study. The fundamental concern of the form of supervision used in this study lies with the quality of service offered by the supervisees (Headteachers) to their clients (pupils, parents, colleagues etc.).

Kadushin (1992: 23) states in relation to managerial supervision, *'The supervisor's ultimate objective is to deliver to agency clients the best possible service, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in accordance with agency policies and procedures'*. The same applies to consultant or non-managerial supervision:

The responsibility of the supervisor to protect the interests of the client emerges as a central component of trainee supervision. Attention to client welfare is equally important... in practitioner supervision.

(Page and Wosket 1994: 9).

The British Association of Counselling makes the point unambiguously: *'The primary purpose of supervision is to protect the best interests of the client'* (BAC 1987, quoted by Hawkins and Shohet 1987: 41). Change in supervisees is fostered for a purpose - the enhancement of the service they provide for their clients. However, in considering this

we also have to take into account what may be in the interests of the community as a whole.

There are considerable dangers in seeing private troubles merely as troubles - and not as public issues (and vice versa). *There is always the danger that we 'slip past structure to focus on isolated situations..., a tendency for problems to be considered as the problems of individuals'* (Mills 1943: 534). Therefore for practitioners and supervisors there must be a balance between the needs and wishes of the individual with considerations of those of others in the community. There will be times when what may be identified as being in the interest of the supervisee seriously affects the rights and lives of others.

Therefore supervisors may be required to remind supervisees of the requirement to consider the extent to which a course of action they are pursuing leads to human flourishing, promotes equality or whether they are 'distributing public resources (whether they be counselling, care or money) according to certain criteria based variously on rights, desert and need' (Banks 1995: 44)? In a similar fashion they must reflect on their own actions as supervisors.

Whilst individuals have their own ideas, as members of a community of practice they need also to consider the views of others. That is to say they need to appeal to collective wisdom. Within professional groupings a key part of call here is a code of ethics (Banks 1995: 67 - 93). Smith (1996, 2005) states that while managerial supervisors, as members of a profession or community of practice, have a duty to consider the appropriate standards and codes, the main way that they do this is via the policies and practices of the agency. On the other hand, while non-managerial or consultant supervisors may be contracted by the supervisee, their authority comes from their membership of the community of practice. Their concern for the service offered to their clients is fed through a set of shared understandings concerning what constitutes 'good practice'. In other words, at certain points in the supervision process they may be required to represent what constitutes acceptable behaviour or good practice. Proctor (1987) redefined Kadushin's administrative category as 'normative' and if this were adjusted Kadushin's (1992: 20) definition would read something like the following: *The primary problem in administrative supervision is concerned with the quality of the supervisee's practice in respect of professional standard and ethics. The primary goal is to ensure adherence to these standards.* This was the case for the participants who acted as supervisors and supervisees in the current study. As professional supervisors acting on behalf of the community of practice of which they are members they shared a

concern with the quality of service offered and the needs of the wider community.

Following Smith's (1996, 2005) claim that so called 'non-managerial' supervisors have an administrative responsibility, it was understood that the participants in this study had a responsibility to act if a supervisee presented a genuine danger to those they managed rather than if they appeared to fail to live up to the established standards. Had this been an issue group members would have had the opportunity to discourage the supervisee from practice, or if absolutely necessary to report matters to the appropriate professional body.

Therefore there are also questions concerning power relationships within supervision. Potential issues arise from position in agency hierarchies; and the extent to which dynamics around gender, 'race', age and class (for example) intersect with the roles of supervisor and supervisee (see, for example, Brown and Bourne 1995: 32 - 49). Turner (1996) explores some issues and problems around this area. Smith (1996, 2005), argues that because one person may be seen as more powerful (perhaps in the sense that they occupy a particular position, or are experts in their field) the other party should not be regarded as powerless. Secondly, it is not possible to eliminate power differentials in supervision. Some writers have argued strongly for more dialogical approaches to supervision in order to 'flatten' unequal relations and to allow interaction across 'difference' (e.g. Waite 1995). Yet even in such forms there are power relationships - e.g. the supervisor is responsible to the community of practice. However, this need not be a one-way relationship. Here it is useful to think of supervisees also as members of the professional community (Waite 1995: 137 - 141). Both supervisors and supervisees have a responsibility to participate appropriately in the professional community of which they are a part.

Therefore the question of authority must be considered. In the context of managerial supervision the authority of the supervisor can mean that the supervisor has some sort of right or entitlement to act in relation to the supervisee. Managers occupy a certain position in the agency and with this is associated the ability to direct the labours of their staff. There are various formal and informal 'rules' within which this may take place. Some activities may be seen as legitimate, others as not. To operate, the actions of supervisors must be seen as legitimate - by the supervisee and by significant others.

In the context of this study the supervisors in the group were required to have a mentoring role. Rather than having an instructional or managerial role their task was to

enable the supervisee to reflect on practice and to develop new understandings and ways of working. Specifically the aim of the supervisors was not act to undermine supervisees' ability and commitment to take responsibility for exploring their own practice.

The role of being a head teacher requires a high degree of expertise and experience. Peer supervision allows the transmission of professional knowledge, values and skills from the other group members (Zorga, 1997; Crespi, 1997; Isbell, 2003; Aston and Molassiotis, 2003). It enables the supervisee to learn about their individual strengths through the reflections of the supervision group (Zorga, 1997; Nash, 1999). It develops congruence between educational and pedagogic theory and practice (Isbell, 2003), and enhances and evaluates professional competencies (Robiner et al, 1997).

As Head teachers frequently report facing conflict in their work and significant emotional stress occasioned by the nature of their work supervision is able to provide space to reflect on the issues that arise from work (Isbell, 2003) and help them to integrate what they are doing, feeling and thinking (Zorga, 1997). It provides valuable support after stressful situations (Aston and Molassiotis, 2003) and leads to increase in feelings of competence and feelings of being able to cope with difficult types of work (Day, Turlow and Wooliscroft, 2003; Lantz and Severinsson, 2001). Supervision allows validation of the supervisee as a person as well as a worker.

Supervision can also provide a mechanism for the individual to monitor the quality of professional services (Robiner et al, 1997). Although this might be thought of as the responsibility of a line manager, it also falls to the supervisor to ensure that work is of an appropriate ethical standard. In the case of Head teachers, there are many outsider influences that act as judges on their work (e.g. Ofsted, Local Authority officers, local press, parent pressure groups etc) but it is up to Head teachers to make decisions about what really happens in their schools and to set priorities. The supervision group provides an opportunity to compare notes with other Head teachers facing similar challenges. Encouraging pro-active thinking and planning about the work helps to ensure the quality of the work undertaken and allows the supervisee to develop high quality practice (Aston and Molassiotis, 2003)

This list of established outcomes for peer supervision looked as if it might deal with some of the issues raised by the Head teachers with whom I was working and

influenced my decision to consider Peer Supervision as an intervention strategy in both the pilot study and this study as it leads to the aims for the outcome of supervision. I was in a fortunate position in that a system of peer supervision had recently been established within my own Educational Psychology Service. This has been in place for several years and when peer supervision system was introduced into the service, four different models that could be used with EPs were evaluated (Squires and Williams, 2003). It seemed that I might be able to extend this approach to help this small group of Head teachers who were experiencing high stress levels.

Stringer *et al.* (1992), use a model of consultation deriving much of their rationale from Mental Health Consultation and systemic theory and practice. The origins of mental health consultation lie in the work of Caplan (1970). Aubrey (1988), and Figg and Stoker (1990) both summarize this approach and describe their application of it in their practice as EPs. It is also on one of the approaches that the Tavistock Institute has drawn on in their advanced course in professional consultation, and it is the approach that strongly influenced Hanko (1985).

I considered supervision to be a collaborative exercise providing an opportunity for the supervisee to reflect on different aspects of their work with peers acting in a supervisory role, with a view to continuing the learning process. Supervision aims to focus on maximising the supervisee's own resources to work more effectively. This should:

1. Give Head teachers the opportunities to explore and learn from practical, experiential and theoretical elements of their own professional practice and that of other group members (Educative function)
2. Provide an opportunity for discussion of potentially controversial issues, or those with uncertain ethical connotations (Supportive and Managerial functions). For the Head teachers the opportunity to do this outside of their school environment was considered to be very important.
3. Enhance the quality of the Head teachers ability to manage their own schools (Managerial function) by using supervision as a way of exploring practical solutions that could then be tried through what has been termed 'practical experimentation' (Zorga, Dekleva and Kobolt, 2001).
4. Maintain and improve the emotional health of the Head teachers and reduce their levels of perceived stress (Supportive function)

I decided that a group consultation process was the way forward for both the pilot study and this study as I was familiar with and had previous experience of group work with both adults and children.

(vi) Solution-Focussed Psychology

Many Educational Psychologists, myself included, are familiar with Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) approaches to problem-solving through the work of Rhodes and Ajmal (1995), Berg (1996, 2001, 2005), and deShazer, (1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, 2004). I believed that the theoretical underpinnings of this approach might help to structure a short term goal-focused consultative approach focussing on helping individuals change their immediate situations by constructing solutions. I felt that the Head teachers would benefit more from articulating what the impact of positive changes would be like on their lives more than constantly discussing, comparing and reinforcing their issues. I also hoped to promote the idea that things were not as hopeless as they seemed and that the Heads had the capacity to change how they viewed a situation and that often the solutions to problems were already present either in their own lives or in the experience of others in the group which could help to form the basis for ongoing positive change. I looked to SFBT as a means of bringing small successes to the awareness of the Heads and helping them to repeat any successful things they had done when a particular problem was not there or was less severe. By creating hope and expectation, I hoped that solutions would be more practical, realistic and focussed on the future rather than dwelling on the past. The intention of setting goals was to keep the process focused and to allow the strengths and resources of all of the individuals in the group to become concentrated and maximised in order to help each other to recognise how to use their own and each others' resources to bring about positive change. As time was a critical factor also I hoped that a SFBT approach would offer a means of finding the most effective solutions in the most time efficient manner possible.

The lack of a diagnostic structure in solution-focused brief therapy creates problems for the measurement of its efficacy. Most studies rely on client or referrer report and have little 'objective' validity. However, this is premised on the validity of DSM categories and as has been discussed before it is very difficult to define 'objectivity'. Moreover, a study on the treatment of recidivists after prison discharge (Lindfors and Magnusson, 1997) has shown significant effectiveness. A major international research initiative, using accepted 'scientific' measures as well as new, more solution focused measures,

was coordinated on behalf of the European Brief Therapy Association by MacDonald (2005). This study supports the findings of earlier studies that solution-focused brief therapy has a significant part to play among the many treatment possibilities afforded by modern psychiatry. Other studies which demonstrate the effectiveness of SFBT include those conducted by Green *et al*, (2006) and Gingerich, and Eisengart, (1999) who reviewed 15 controlled studies of solution focused brief therapy which employed 'objective' measures of outcome and concluded that 13 of these showed the approach achieved successful client outcomes.

The use of solution-focussed theory in the peer support groups to avoid causal problem seeking appears to directly contradict the psychoanalytic theory used to analyse the Head teachers' comments following the group sessions. However, whilst the group sessions were intended to solve the immediate concerns of the Headteachers, the analysis of the interview data was intended to look beyond the immediate into the origins of the difficulties and to provide information that may inform further work. In this way the two methodologies can work in sympathy with each other.

5. Group Work

(i) Advantages of Groups

Apart from the practicalities of not being able to offer individual support to the Head teachers, a number of features and advantages of group work influenced my decision to use this method. When I was confronted with the difficulties expressed by the original pilot study Head teachers in my own patch, the following quote struck a cord and inspired me to consider using group work as a way forward.

Why have we humans been so successful as a species? We are not strong like tigers, big like elephants, protectively coloured like lizards, or swift like gazelles. We are intelligent, but an intelligent human being alone in the forest would not survive for long. What has really made us such successful animals is our ability to apply our intelligence to co-operating with others to accomplish group goals. From the primitive hunting group to the corporate boardroom, it is those of us who can solve problems while working with others who succeed.....

(Slavin, 1985:5)

Evidence from studies of non-human primates, primitive human cultures and contemporary society have shown that human beings have always lived in groups and have engaged in strong and enduring relationships among members and that the need to belong is a potent, elemental, and pervasive drive (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Without deep, positive, reciprocal interpersonal bonds, neither individual nor species survival would be possible (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005)

The rate for nearly every major cause of death is significantly higher for the lonely, the single, the divorced, and the widowed (Syme, 1985; Hartog, Audy and Cohen, 1980; Lynch, 1977). Social isolation is as much a risk factor for early mortality as physical factors such as smoking and obesity (House, Landis and Umberson, 1988). (pg 20). Conversely: social connection and integration have a positive impact on the course of serious illnesses such as cancer and AIDS (Maunsell, Brisson and Deschenes (1995); Price *et al.* (2001); Leserman *et al.* (2000)).

(ii) Attachment

The human need to belong even from our earliest moments is evidenced by the concept of attachment. Bowlby (1980) concluded from his studies of the early mother-child relationship, not only that attachment behaviour is necessary for survival but also that it is genetically in-built. If mother and infant are separated, both experience marked anxiety attendant with their search for the lost object. If the separation is prolonged, the consequences for the infant will be significant. Winnicott similarly noted "There is no such thing as a baby. There exists a mother-infant pair" (Winnicott, 1952). I felt that this concept had resonances with Bion's (1961) 'maternal reverie'.

Mitchell (1988:4), claims that we live in a '*Relational matrix.....The person is comprehensible only within this tapestry of relationships, past and present*' (Mitchell, 1988:4). Membership, acceptance and approval are of the utmost importance in an individual's developmental sequence. A sense of belonging to the group raises self-esteem and meets members' dependency needs but in ways that also foster responsibility and autonomy, as each member contributes to the group's welfare and internalizes the atmosphere of the cohesive group. (Frank (1957); Braaten, (1991).

(iii) The Therapeutic Effects of Groups

Yalom and Leszcz, (2005) claim that within a therapy group the most common secret is a deep conviction of basic inadequacy – a feeling that one is basically incompetent that one bluff's one's way through life. Next in frequency is a deep sense of interpersonal alienation. Invariably, individuals experience deep concern about their sense of worth and their ability to relate to others. These concerns were specifically relevant to the concerns and emotions expressed by the Head teachers in the pilot study group who spoke of isolation and doubts about their own competence.

Research has demonstrated clearly that group therapy is a highly effective form of psychotherapy and that it is at least equal to individual psychotherapy in its power to provide meaningful benefit (McRoberts *et al.* 1998; Tillitski (1990); Burlingame *et al.* (2004); Vinogradov and Yalom (1989). McDermut *et al.* (2001); Luborsky *et al.* (1993); Lambert and Bergin (1994)). Furthermore there is evidence that certain clients may obtain greater benefit from group therapy than from other approaches, particularly clients dealing with stigma or social isolation and those seeking new coping skills (McFarlane *et al.* (1996); Galanter and Brook (2001); Fawzy *et al.* 1996)).

The numerous advantages to group work have been well documented by various authors and include how groups can: promote change (Rose and Edleson, 1987); parallel the wider social environment and encourage members to generalise skills learned in the group outside of it; address common needs; provide an opportunity for sharing of emotional experiences, experiment with new skills and behaviours (Berkovitz, 1987); enable members to become more self aware rather than reactive to a hostile environment; change behaviour through vicarious learning, and cultivate a sense of belonging (Fiedler, 1967; LeCroy and Rose, 1986). Therapeutic groups are often made up of individuals who are at different points along a continuum between coping and despair. When common factors between individuals emerge previous feelings of uniqueness can be a powerful source of relief. (Yalom and Leszcz, 1995:7).

Stringer *et al.* (1992) report that teachers in staff consultation groups in schools value being able to discuss problems without interruptions, in an atmosphere of trust and concern, and where 'status was left at the door'. They also valued the sense of community the groups developed, the reduction of feelings of isolation, and the 'support for staff under stress; support in practical and psychological ways'. The Head teachers

who attended the pilot sessions said that the wide range of experience in the group provided many different angles to a problem and raised the possibility of more solutions. Hearing others with the same problem had a normalising effect and helped individuals feel less isolated and incompetent. The fact that the sessions provided a positive response to solving problems rather than just expressing concern in an unfocussed way was welcomed by the Head teachers and encouraged a more positive outlook.

“It helped us realise that there are ways through these situations that don't mean going away and banging your head against a brick wall - just that short spell has made us a better group – it has made us all more forward looking.”

(Head teacher 11, speaking about the group sessions)

The importance of human interaction in therapeutic change is emphasised by Yalom (1995:1), who refers to ‘therapeutic factors’ resulting from such interactions. These are listed below:

1. Instillation of hope
2. Universality
3. Imparting information
4. Altruism
5. The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group
6. Development of socialising techniques
7. Imitative behaviour
8. Interpersonal learning
9. Group cohesiveness
10. Catharsis
11. Existential factors

Therefore, the members of a group can be extremely helpful to one another in a group therapeutic process as well as deriving benefit for themselves. This support may come in the form of : reassurance, suggestions, insight, and sharing similar problems with one another. Sometimes they assist by simply having been present and allowing their fellow members to grow as a result of a facilitative, sustaining relationship.

Furthermore, clients may model themselves on aspects of the other group members

(Borgers, 1983), by watching one another tackle problems. This may be particularly potent in homogenous groups that focus on shared problems (Kuipers *et al.* 1997).

(Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:18)

(iv) Interpersonal Benefits

In addition to the obvious benefits of groups listed, the deeply felt human experience in the group may be of great value to individuals in a group (Rogers, 1966). Even when there is no obvious change in behaviour or other outward sign, group members may still experience a more human, richer part of themselves. This may initially serve only as an internal reference point, having no obvious external signs, at least for a long period of time, and as a consequence be difficult to evaluate, (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). Rogers (1966), argues that the intimacy developed in a group may be seen as a “Counterforce in a technologically driven culture”, that in all ways, socially, professionally, residentially, recreationally – inexorably dehumanises relationships. In a world in which traditional boundaries that maintain relationships are increasingly permeable and transient, there is a greater need than ever for group belonging and group identity (Schlatchet, 2000). Evidence for these effects came from one of the Head teachers in the pilot study who commented on the feelings of warmth and support that she had felt directed towards her as she shared her concern with the group. She described how the intensity of these feelings had made her feel very emotional yet more empowered and confident.

Leszcz and Malat (2001) describe the therapy group as an unnatural place for natural experiences where members may have multiple opportunities for reflection and understanding. For individuals lacking intimate relationships, the group often represents the first opportunity for accurate interpersonal feedback including how they may be contributing to their own difficulties. The Head teachers in the pilot study reported that the sessions had helped them develop problem-solving skills and encouraged different ways of thinking though issues and approaching difficulties. Some Head teachers commented that by contributing to the group their own self esteem and confidence had increased and some reported noting observed changes in themselves and in other Heads.

(v) Neurobiological Benefits

Further evidence for the benefits of group work comes from contemporary neurobiological research which demonstrates that forms of active coping such as:

engaging in life, speaking openly, and providing mutual support activate important neural circuits in the brain that help regulate the body's stress reactions (Le Doux, 1999; Rutter, 2002; Damasio 2004; Linden, 2007; Zeki 2009).

Connections from the emotional systems to the cognitive systems are stronger than connections from the cognitive system to the emotional system. Cognitive science is really a science of only part of the mind...it leaves emotion out. And minds without emotion are not really minds at all...

(Le Doux, 1999:19 & 25).

The direct pathway allows us to begin to respond to potentially dangerous stimuli before we fully know what the stimulus is.

(Le Doux, 1999:164)

Therefore, the use of active coping strategies to deal with traumatic or challenging events instead of withdrawing in demoralised avoidance, is significantly more effective in reducing stress (Ledoux and Gorman, 2001). In this way goals may change from wanting relief from anxiety or depression to wanting to learn to communicate with others and to be more trusting and honest with others, (Yalom and Leszcz 2005:23). The goal shift from the relief of suffering to change in interpersonal functioning is an essential early step in the dynamic therapeutic process.

(vi) The Benefits of Altruism

Group therapy is unique in being the only therapy that offers individuals the opportunity to be of benefit to others. The value of altruism is recognised in a variety of contexts including primitive and religious cultures. People need to feel they are needed and useful (Yalom and Leszcz , 2005:14). This role versatility, requires group members to shift between roles of help receivers and help providers and they learn that they have obligations to those from whom they wish to receive care (Holmes and Kivlighan, 2000).

However, it is not uncommon for new members to a group to fail to appreciate the healing impact of other members initially, resisting the suggestion of group work as they question "How can the blind lead the blind?" or "What can I possibly get from others who are as confused as I am? We'll end up pulling one another down". This was

clearly demonstrated by several individuals in the pilot study. Those that did not attend the group sessions expressed a worry that the sessions might be stressful resulting in them having more emotional weight to carry. As one head teacher said, "*I'm afraid it would become negative and people would get a sense of unburdening themselves*". Another commented, "*I'm too emotional to be able to be able to offer support to others. I also don't feel that I've got enough experience to offer.*" Yalom and Leszcz (2005) argue that an individual who avoids getting help from other group members is really saying, "I have nothing of value to offer anyone". However, as the Head teachers in the pilot study described their intense feelings of warmth and reassurance brought about by mutual support in the group, I believed that Heads in the new group would have a similar experience.

Similarly for group members who may have become immersed in their own problems in a rigidly defined mind-set from which they cannot see beyond, becoming absorbed in someone (or something) outside themselves and by forgetting their own situation, such individuals may find a way forward through a new sense of purpose, (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

Yalom and Leszcz, (2005:15), describe insight as a further positive aspect of the group therapy process. This may be gained on at least three different levels that are appropriate in this context:

1. Clients may gain a more objective perspective on their interpersonal presentation. They may for the first time learn how they are seen by other people.
2. Clients may gain some understanding into their more complex interactional patterns of behaviour.
3. Group members may learn why they do what they do to and with other people.

(vii) The Psychodynamics of Groups

Within the psychodynamic concept of Object-Relations theory the infant uses the mother as a transactional object to assist in the process of separation and individuation, leading to the achievement of the True Object Stage through separation, individuation and establishment of object constancy (Winnicott, 1974; Foulkes',1975; Trafimow and Patack, 1982; Ballas, 1987). The group in the nurturing sense may also act as as a transactional object by enhancing the work of Early Object Stage leading to the

achievement of the True Object Stage through separation individuation and establishment of object constancy (Hoffer, 1955; Mahler, 1975; Trafimow and Pattack, 1982)

In contrast to the phenomenon of group as a nurturant 'good mother', the phenomena of 'bad mother group' has also been discussed (Durkin, 1964, Glatzer, 1969, Ganzarain, 1989). Such a group is perceived as over-demanding, non-reciprocal, intrusive and devouring. Private and secret affairs are seen to be enquired into with hostile curiosity and members feel threatened with the loss of their individuality.

Successful support groups may provide a means of removing or reducing the risks posed to workers by the projective identification processes inevitable when working in close contact with distressed, disaffected or needy people. By sharing difficult work situations, members of the group will not only be communicating information, but will also be conveying states of mind which may be very uncomfortable or even painful. As the recipient of the projected distress, and by acting as a 'container', the group might be able to bear what the individual member cannot, and, by articulating thoughts that they have found unthinkable, contribute to developing in them a capacity to think and hold on to anxiety themselves (Projective Identification), (Obholzer, 1994). Through exploring their work experiences in this way, group members can come to recognise counter-productive defences, question practices previously taken for granted and feel less isolated. By empowering individuals to speak, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of their institution, they may begin to change threatening conditions as the anxiety can be contained, and what needs to be talked about can be named, and some degree of effectiveness may be recovered. Even when this does not happen, it is possible to regain some inner sense of having the power to affect ones' own experience, rather than being a silenced victim (Obholzer, 1994).

(viii) The Containing Function of Groups

The structured containing environment of the group enables members to take time to get to know each other and become familiar with each other's issues and contexts in a safe, task-orientated setting. The Head teachers in the group can have the freedom and confidence to think and articulate their own thoughts, as opposed to following the institutional defensive 'party line'. Empathy is a critical element as group members are less likely to criticise or blame each other if they are sensitive to one another's internal

experiences and underlying intentions (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:42).

This containing function of the group was experienced by the pilot study Head teachers who felt that their attendance at session had benefited their schools as a whole and may offer support to the profession as a whole. As one participant stated:

“This has been helpful to the whole school. If I had gone under with stress it would have not been good for the school. Peer supervision has provided a way to get rid of stress without putting it onto the staff....This is not just a way of supporting current Head teachers it is also a way of promoting Head teachership in a time when people are unwilling to take on the role due to the high levels of stress.”

The pilot study had demonstrated the value of having a ‘task-orientated’ group, with a strong structure and an ethos of encouraging open discussion of personal feelings connected with the work-role. It was my intention to develop a means of providing consultation within a group that could facilitate themselves.

(ix) The Disadvantages of Peer Support groups

In their work with school staff support groups Stringer *et al.* (1992) report that participants listed a lack of time available to school staff for group work as a major drawback to this kind of work. In particular co-ordinating a time that is convenient for all those who wish to take part is especially difficult. However, in some instances this particular difficulty was overcome by some Head teachers allocating directed time to such activities.

Other negative comments in Stringer *et al.*'s work (1992) included that by having a set time for meetings makes problems appear to be contrived and it is not possible to deal with problems more immediately. Teachers in small schools commented that as they were a small staff they had many opportunities to discuss concerns together. In this respect setting up groups in small schools may be a more difficult task as the perceived need to meet as a formal support group may be less. Strict confidentiality rules may lead to some suspicion by senior management concerning the nature of the group. Groups can run the risk of appearing divisive or “activist” if senior managers are not involved in some way. Welcoming managers to groups may dispel some of these concerns.

In the work of Stringer *et al.* (1992), with staff consultation groups in schools, a group leader or facilitator used a problem-solving framework both to support the individual with a problem or concern and to encourage other group members to do so. However, due to a range of factors including a lack of time, I intentionally removed myself, following the initial training session. Furthermore, as the intention was to provide a secure and confidential environment to enable group members to be uninhibited and open in their discussions, I believed that my presence as an 'outsider' both in terms of my role as an EP and having been engaged by the Local Authority to carry out this work may have put me under suspicion and may have compromised the security of group members, especially as I was not to remain a member in the future. In addition, as the intention was to develop a self-serving group the members needed time to establish themselves and become competent in facilitating their own group. By removing myself from being present at the groups I could also avoid issues described by Bion, (1961), and others where dependency issues are built around a group leader or facilitator. This accounts in part for the apparent mismatch between psychoanalytic theory and some elements of the methodology such as my absence from the peer support groups .

(x) Bion and Groups

Bion (1961) became aware in his work with groups that he was being made to feel the emotions which the individual or group was finding too painful to bear. Bion applied Kleinian concepts to groups and demonstrated how groups regress to early stages of mental functioning whereby psychotic anxieties and primitive defences are reactivated. The therapeutic group may resemble a family in many aspects; there are authority/parental figures, peer/sibling figures, deep personal revelations, strong emotions, and deep intimacy as well as hostile, competitive feelings. Where a leader is present the members often interact with the leader and other members in modes reminiscent of the way they once interacted with parents and siblings (Grotjohn, 1972). In the setting of a group, there can occur, four-fold transferences to: (i) Group workers, (ii) group members; (iii) the group as a whole and (iv) the out group. The reparative processes of group work may lead to the establishment of positive transferences, equalisation of relationships and synthesis of different parts.

"As internal objects are projected onto other individuals in the group, in an attempt to force them into assuming desired roles, they are also projected onto the group entity".

Through exploring their work experiences, members can come to recognise counter-productive defences, question practices previously taken for granted and feel less isolated.

(xi) Group Leaders

Freud (1920) argued that the members of a group, particularly large groups such as crowds at political rallies, follow their leader because they personify certain ideals of their own (Stokes, 1994). Whilst the leader shows the group how to clarify and act on its goals, the members of a group can become pathologically dependent or easily swayed one way or another by their idealisation or denigration of the leader. Some members become helplessly dependent on the leader, whom they instil with unrealistic knowledge and power whilst others defy the leader, regarding them as infantilising and controlling. Whilst some group members may be wary of the leader others compete with other participants for attention and caring from the leader. Some members of the group become envious when the leader's attention is focussed on others; others search for allies among the other members in order to bring down the leader. Conversely, some group members appear to neglect their own interests in an apparent selfless effort to appease the leader and the other members. (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:15).

Regardless of the personal style or skill of group leaders, the group members come, to experience some degree of hostility and resentment towards them as they inevitably do not fulfil members' fantasised expectations (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:15). If the group members suppress their feelings of disappointment or anger, the leader is not criticised or challenged and these essential processes of healthy group life do not take place. In place of the leader a convenient scapegoat such as another member or some institution like 'The Government' or 'The Authority' may be attacked. Irritation within themselves or within the group as a whole may be experienced and norms that discourage open expression of feelings may be established. Such behaviour may be a signal that aggression is being displaced away from its more rightful source – often the leader (Scheidlinger, 1982).

(xii) Overt and Covert Aims of Groups

Bolton and Zagier Roberts, (1994), claim that different groups have *overt* aims which are conscious and public; *covert* aims which are known to at least some of the participants, but not acknowledged; and *unconscious* aims, which remain unknown (Colman, 1975). The overt aim of any support group is to provide a space for staff to discuss difficult feelings in order to regain a sense of direction and purpose whilst the covert aim may be to have time away from the demands of the work and the feelings it stirs up. Criticisms from outside the group make it more difficult to risk having any disagreements within the group and so these may be avoided (Obholzer, 1994). As an outsider to the profession, Local Authority and the area, my presence in the group may have inhibited individuals who struggled to share, their most difficult feelings which may have involved guilt or shame, lest these further erode their already shaky self-esteem. In this way the degree of isolation may have increased and disabled the group from actually thinking about their work.

'In the same way in which the fear of an external authority can make us afraid to speak, the fear of an internal authority can make us afraid to think'

(Segal, 1977:219)

As the success of group supervision relies on the building of trust and positive relationships which occurs over time the intention was to provide a secure and confidential environment to enable group members to be uninhibited and open in their discussions. I believed that my presence as an 'outsider' both in terms of my role as an EP and having been engaged by the Local Authority to carry out this work may have put me under suspicion and may have compromised the security of group members, especially as I was not to remain a member in the future.

According to Bion (1961), every group has two groups within it: the 'Work-Group' and the 'Basic Assumption Group'. In work-group mentality, members are intent on carrying out a specifiable task and want to assess their effectiveness in doing it. In basic assumption mentality, the group's behaviour is directed at attempting to meet the unconscious needs of its members by reducing anxiety and internal conflicts. How groups do this varies. Bion (1967), distinguished three basic assumptions, each giving rise to a particular complex of feelings, thoughts and behaviour: *basic assumption dependency*, *basic assumption fight-flight* and *basic assumption pairing*. Basic

assumptions are anonymous and no one wants to own them (Trist 1985).

Basic assumption dependency (baD) - The leader is expected to look after, protect, sustain and make the members of the group feel good, without facing them with the demands of the group's real purpose. In so doing the growth and development of the group is inhibited (see glossary).

Basic assumption fight-flight (baF) - The assumption here is that there is an 'enemy', which should either be attacked or fled from. However, as Bion puts it, the group is prepared to do either indifferently. Members look to the leader to devise some appropriate action; their task is merely to follow (see glossary).

Basic assumption pairing (baP) - BaP is based on the collective and unconscious belief that, whatever the actual problems and needs of the group, a future event will solve them. The group behaves as if pairing or coupling between two members within the group, or perhaps between the leader of the group and some external person, will bring about salvation.

When under the influence of a basic assumption, a group appears to be intently set on meeting as if for some ill-defined purpose and group members appear to lose both their critical faculties and individual abilities. In this state of mind, the group seems to lose awareness of the passing of time, and apparently trivial matters are discussed as if they were matters of life or death, which is how they may well feel to the members of the group, since the underlying anxieties are about psychological survival. On the other hand, there is little capacity to bear frustration, and quick solutions are favoured. In both cases, members have lost their capacity to stay in touch with reality and its demands. Other external realities are also ignored or denied. For example instead of seeking information the group closes itself off from the outside world and retreats into paranoia. An inquiring attitude becomes impossible and new ideas or solutions are not considered as these may question long-established assumptions, and involve unfamiliar and unpredictable elements and as such are regarded as too terrifying to consider. At the prospect of any change, the group is gripped by panic, and the struggle for understanding is avoided. All this prevents both adaptive processes and development (Turquet, 1974). Effective work, which involves tolerating frustration, facing reality, recognising differences among group members and learning from experience, will be seriously impeded.

(xiii) The Sophisticated use of Basic Assumption Mentality

Bion (1961) also refers to the *sophisticated use of basic assumption mentality*, suggesting that a group may utilise the basic assumption mentalities in a sophisticated way, by mobilizing the emotions of one basic assumption in the constructive pursuit of the primary task. Eg. baD in a hospital ward engenders trust, baF in the army overcomes personal safety, baP in a therapeutic setting provides a background sense of hope to sustain inevitable setbacks in treatment. Eg. baD – school; baF – EPS; BaP – social worker/CAMHS

When there are difficulties in carrying out the task for which the team is in existence there can be a breakdown in the sophisticated use of the various basic assumptions, and instead *aberrant* forms of each emerge. Aberrant baP produces a *culture of collusion*, supporting pairs of members in avoiding truth rather than seeking it. There is attention to the group's mission but not to the means of achieving it. Aberrant baD gives rise to a *culture of subordination* where authority derives entirely from position in the hierarchy, requiring unquestioning obedience. Aberrant baF results in a *culture of paranoia and aggressive competitiveness*, where the group is preoccupied not only by an external enemy but also by 'the enemy within'. Rules and regulations proliferate to control both the internal and the external 'bad objects'. Here it is the means which are explicit and the ends which are vague.

In a group taken over by basic assumption mentality, the formation and continuance of the group becomes an end in itself. Leaders and members of groups dominated by basic assumption activity are likely to lose their ability to think and act effectively: continuance of the group becomes an end in itself, as members become more absorbed with their relationship to the group than with their work task. The functioning of teams can be promoted by the sophisticated use of a basic assumption in the service of work, or impeded and distracted by their inappropriate or aberrant use.

A disregard, even hatred of external reality is typical of the basic assumption mode of group functioning, where the task pursued by a group is more to do with meeting members' internal needs than the work-task for which it was called into being. It is associated with an absence of scientific curiosity about the group's effectiveness, an inability to think, learn from experience, or adapt to change, and it is most likely to

dominate when there is anxiety about survival (Bion, 1961).

Ezriel's (1950, 1952) approach was similar to Bion's, in many ways. He saw the group members relating to the group leader in one way (the Required Relationship) in order to avoid or avert another mode (the Avoided Relationship) which in fantasy was felt to carry some bad consequence (the Calamity) usually in the form of the destruction of the group leader or the fear of the group worker counterattacking or abandoning the group.

Members of such groups are content in that they are relieved of anxiety and responsibility, but at the same time, they are discontented as their skills, individuality and capacity for rational thought are sacrificed, as are the satisfactions that come from working effectively. As a result, the members of such groups tend to feel continually in conflict about staying or leaving, somehow never able to make up their minds which they wish to do for any length of time. Since the group now contains split-off and projected capacities of its members, leaving would be experienced as losing those disowned parts. In work group mentality, on the other hand members are able to mobilize their capacity for co-operation and to value the different contributions each can make. They choose to follow a leader in order to achieve the group's task, rather than doing so in an automatic way determined by their personal needs.

If a support group is being used to process 'toxins' which are products of inadequate management, organisational structures and support systems group leaders may find that they are working at making bearable what should not be borne. They must also be aware that that these same 'toxins' can 'get into' them too; they will need support systems of their own to contain their own anxieties and help them make sense of their experiences. Therefore I was aware of the need to protect myself and remain apart from group and to ensure that the Head teachers were aware of these factors in their working lives so that they might influence them.

(xiv) Support Groups for Professionals

The idea of support groups for professionals is not new. The Elton Committee's Report (1989) highlighted the crucial importance to teachers of peer support. It went so far as recommending that every school should have a staff support group. There are numerous accounts of support groups: for Head teachers (Gupta, 1985; Kearney and Turner, 1989); for teachers with special needs responsibility in mainstream schools (Hanko,

1989, 1990; Tempest *et al.* 1987); for teachers in special schools (Gersch and Rawkins, 1987; for EPs (Maggs, 1982, 1987); and for student psychiatric nurses (Golding, 1987). These accounts illustrate a rich diversity in origins, aims, procedures and theoretical origins.

Gupta (1985), in highlighting the particular needs of Head teachers describes a support group in which the EP acts as facilitator. From a tightly structured discussion group, the group moved towards one in which the participants introduced and shared their individual concerns.

Kearney and Turner (1989) promoted peer support for Head teachers in the context of a training workshop specifically focussed on stress management. Although led by the EPs, the approach sought to generate from participants themselves factors influencing occupational stress, as well as its management.

Graden *et al.* (1985) outline an approach which is a variant of the Warnock stages of assessment, utilising a consultation process in its earliest stages. Tempest *et al.* (1987) established small groups of special needs teachers drawn from several schools. They received training from EPs in the use of a problem clarification model followed by regular meetings with support service teachers and EPs to raise concerns, share in problem solving and formulate decisions about future action. Interventions and approaches that share a focus on 'Development through people' use various approaches to staff support groups (eg. Gersch and Rawkins, 1987; Gill and Monsen, 1996; Hanko, 1995).

Hanko in her work with teachers from many different settings owes much to the model of mental health consultation as described by Caplan (1970). Through adopting a non-prescriptive style she worked to establish the autonomy of the individual and the group. Hanko's (1999), group work draws on a psychodynamic background and has provided opportunities for teachers to acknowledge and legitimise their sometimes strong feelings and help each other with possible ways through discussion of real-life cases.

Stringer *et al.* (1992) describe a project in which a group of EPs employed techniques deriving from the Milan school of family therapy with whole-school, or self-selecting groups of staff. Because the approaches emphasise the strong emotions aroused by some professionally challenging pupils, they have the potential to move a staff group towards

operating as a special 'reference group' (Nias, 1985).

Summary

Through the application of the psychodynamic concepts of splitting, transference, parataxic distortion, projective identification, alienation, and anxieties and defences it can be seen that it is possible to see how some of the difficulties reported by the Head teachers may have arisen through both inter and intra personal conflicts and the potential effects of these on the establishment and maintenance of power and authority in a school, its ethos and its Head teacher's leadership qualities. Similarly, the psychoanalytic concept of the container offers a useful model for the planning of an intervention strategy to alleviate some of the difficulties described. The use of consultation, supervision and solution-focused processes offer theoretical underpinnings in the design of such an intervention.

Whilst the rationale for using group work has been discussed extensively within this chapter the following chapter describes the specific detail of the group established in the current study.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The Literature Search argues that through the application of the psychodynamic concepts of splitting, transference, parataxic distortion, projective identification, alienation, and anxieties and defences, it is possible to see how some of the difficulties reported by the Head teachers may have arisen through both inter and intra personal conflicts and the potential effects of these on: the establishment and maintenance of power and authority in a school; its ethos; and its Head teacher's leadership qualities. Similarly, the psychoanalytic concept of the container offers a useful model for the planning of an intervention strategy to alleviate some of the difficulties described. The use of consultation, supervision and solution-focused processes offer theoretical underpinnings in the design of such an intervention.

The reason for doing this work was two-fold; (1) To see if this process would improve the lives of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties; and (2) To interpret some of the complex intra and interpersonal issues that contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned. In pursuing this second goal I was aware that I must acknowledge the complexity of the emotional lives and unconscious processes of those I was studying. For this reason I chose to adopt a psychoanalytic approach in the collection and analysis of data as I hoped the sophistication of its ideas about emotional investment and fantasy, might offer the 'thickening' or 'enrichment' of interpretive understanding (Frosh, 1999), brought to bear on the personal narratives, arising out of the interviews that were planned. I hoped that psychoanalytic theory would supply a framework and methodology through which subject positions could be explored without necessarily having to make assumptions about the stability of selfhood and that psychoanalytic interpretive strategies might be able to throw light on some of the psychological processes, or perhaps the conscious and unconscious 'reasons', behind a specific individual's investment in any rhetorical or discursive position. The intention was to gain a more complete (because more individualised as well as emotion-inflected) interpretive re-description of interview material (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007).

(i) Main Methods Used

- Elements of consultation and supervision were used to design a peer supervision group to provide both practical solutions for problems and an effective container for the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by a group of Head teachers.
- An initial training day was used to explain the background to this work, my experiences in my own authority of this pilot study group and the psychological underpinnings and theory behind this type of work. The session was also used to demonstrate the peer supervision group process.
- Following a number of group sessions the 11 participants were interviewed. A psychoanalytic approach was used to collect the interview data in using a narrative 'Free Association Interview' method. Six questions deriving from a similar theoretical structure to that devised by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) were used as prompts in the interviews. Group members were also asked to rate their experiences to provide a measure of perceived usefulness of the group sessions. The answers to these questions also served as feedback to the Local Authority. These questions were asked verbally and any additional comments made at the time were also recorded.
- All of the 11 interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed in order to be analysed. The transcribed material of each interviewee was arranged into nine common categories as follows: (i) Difficulties experienced by the Head teachers; (ii) Experiences of being in the group; (iii) Individual benefits; (iv) Wider Benefits; (v) Barriers and limitations; (vi) Ongoing success and survival of the Group; (vii) Working in pairs; (viii) Role of the Educational Psychologist (ix) Additional comments.
- The transcripts corresponding to each of these broad categories were kept as intact as possible for interpretation.
 - The transcripts were then analysed using an interpretive approach based around content analysis where particular attention was given to the *Gestalts* and the defended subjects contained within the interview texts. Ethical considerations were taken into account and there was a discussion around the objectivity, reliability and generalisability of the data produced.

(ii) The Psychodynamic Perspective

Concerns around the use of psychoanalysis include: the static nature of its concepts and structures separate from social relations (Wetherell, 2003); its focus on 'inner-psychological and individually demarcated reality' which reproduces individual/social dualism (Sondergaard, (2002:448), and its positioning of people by the theoretical structures used to understand them (Parker, 2005). Whilst these reservations have relevance I believed that the use of triangulation gave me a way of assuring the validity of research results. By using a variety of research methods and approaches (interviews, questionnaire data and my own field notes) I hoped to overcome some of the weaknesses and biases which can arise from the use of only one of these methods. The unstructured interview format allowed me to identify key issues and appropriate terms which I then used as a basis for deeper analysis and comparison with field notes, questionnaire data and the responses from the individual participants. By comparing the different perspectives, together with my own perspective, I could obtain some degree of a shared social context on which to consider the individual responses.

The dependence of psychoanalysis on biographical and interpersonal information in order to ground interpretations makes the application of psychoanalytic ideas in the non-clinical research setting difficult and may compromise its appropriateness in the analysis of the interview material. Other theoretical approaches such as a systems approach (Agazarian, 1989; Alderfer, 1976; 1977; 1980; Brown, 1980; Hartman and Gibbard, 1974; Hirschhorn, 1988; Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1992; Miller & Rice, 1967; Yan & Louis, 1999), may highlight difficulties in the systems used in individual schools, the local authority, the local community and other agencies, however, this approach used in isolation would not account for interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that may be contributing to the problems. Similarly cognitive behavioural, personal construct and solution focused approaches may help individuals derive answers to their problems but would not necessarily meet their emotional needs and would be difficult to achieve in a group session. However, it was the belief that the amalgamation of a supportive group alongside a solution-focussed process would allow individuals to express emotions which could be contained within an empathetic group whilst at the same time looking for a way forward to alleviate the situation.

The rationale for using group work was discussed extensively within Literature Search

and so the following account describes the specific detail of the group in the current study. It has been divided into four sections: 1. The Head teachers peer supervision group; 2. Data Collection; and 3. Data Analysis/Interpretation and 4. Procedures.

The Head teachers' Peer Supervision Group section describes how the group was established and facilitated and how the group session format was developed and established. There is also a description of some of the ethical issues involved in doing this work.

The Data Collection procedures and rationale used in this study are described and discussed in the fourth section. There is an overview of the rationale behind the narrative and psychoanalytic methods influential in the process used to interview group members. There is a specific focus on the 'Free Association Interview' Method and the concepts of *Gestalt* and the Defended Subject. Again there are references to the ethical considerations that were taken during the interview process.

Data Analysis/Interpretation of the Data is described in the final section in addition to a rationale for and a description of the processes used to analyse and interpret the data there is discussion around the validity of such interpretive methods. Furthermore a rationale is offered to define the concepts of objectivity, reliability and generalisability used in the study.

The Procedures section describes in detail the specific procedures and processes that were involved in: the Peer Supervision Group, collection of the data in the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the data collected.

2. The Head teachers' Peer Supervision Group

(i) Establishing and Facilitating the Group

Although I was aware that individuals from a range of other professions could offer a wide range of experience and expertise that may have been applied to some of the difficulties experienced by the Head teachers I decided to limit the group exclusively to Head teachers as the presence of participants from other agencies may have been counter-productive. One of the difficulties in making a team out of different professions is that each profession operates through the deliberate harnessing of different

sophisticated forms of the basic assumptions in order to further the task (Bion, 1961). Difficulties in carrying out the task for which the team is in existence can lead to a breakdown in the sophisticated use of the various basic assumptions, and instead what Bion refers to as the *aberrant* forms of each emerge. The conflict experienced when individuals from different agencies meet is a consequence of the different emotional motivations involved in each profession. Fights for supremacy in a multi-disciplinary team may be inevitable as there is a psychological clash between the sophisticated use of the three basic assumptions. Each carries with it a different set of values and a different set of views about the nature of the problem, its cure, what constitutes progress, and whether this is best achieved by a relationship between professional and client involving dependency, fight-flight or pairing.

The group of Head teachers in the pilot study had already established a co-operative network where they shared ideas, training and information with each other. This group met every half term in a local pub to discuss common issues and had a local focus. The venue had been chosen to provide complete removal from a school environment where there were constant sources of distraction. The meetings supplemented the 'official' countywide meetings for Head teachers. This provided an opportunity for me to suggest that they form a peer support group. Like the pilot study, group membership in this study was entirely voluntary. However, unlike the pilot group, the Head teachers were invited to attend the initial session having been contacted by a Recruitment Strategy Officer from their home Local Authority. All Head teachers in the Authority had been sent a letter advertising the initial launch day in a nearby hotel. Staff were invited to attend this session and a follow-up session for a small fee to cover costs. Therefore some individuals knew each other from working in the same cluster groups but others were unknown. There was some difficulty in the recruitment process as the invitations had been sent out at very short notice at a particularly busy time of year, close to the end of the summer term and the phrasing of the letter, not having been written by myself or the EP working with me from the local authority, was not altogether clear. However, despite these drawbacks eleven individuals, 6 men and 5 women attended the launch session.

(ii) Establishing Group Cohesiveness

As cohesiveness is a significant factor in successful group therapy outcome where members are reported to be accepting of one another, supportive and inclined to form meaningful relationships in the group (Rasmussen and Zander, 1954), it was essential to promote cohesiveness from the outset. Groups with a greater sense of solidarity, value the group more highly; defend it against internal and external threats; have a higher rate of attendance; are more stable and experience less turnover and the group standards are defended much more than in groups with less cohesion. (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). Members of a cohesive group feel warmth and comfort in the group and a sense of belongingness; they value the group and feel in turn that they are valued, accepted and supported by other members (Bloch and Crouch, 1985). It has also been shown that the members of a cohesive group, in contrast to the members of a non-cohesive group, will: try harder to influence other group members (Goldstein *et al.* 1966); be more open to influence by the other members (Cartwright and Zander, 1968); be more willing to listen to others (Back, 1951) and more accepting of others (Rasmussen and Zander, 1954); experience greater security and relief from tension in the group (Seashore, 1954); participate more readily in meetings (Rasmussen and Zander, 1954); self-disclose more (Kirschener *et al.* 1978); protect the group norms and exert more pressure on individuals deviating from the norms (Schacter, 1951; Zander and Havelin, 1968; Rich, 1968); be less susceptible to disruption as a group when a member terminates membership Goldstein *et al.* (1966); Schacter, 1951); and experience greater ownership of the group therapy enterprise (Fuerher and Keys, 1988).

Cohesiveness favours self-disclosure, risk taking, and the constructive expression of conflict in the group – phenomena that facilitate successful therapy. Cohesive groups have norms that encourage open expression of disagreement or conflict alongside support. In fact, unless hostility can be openly expressed, persistent, covert hostile attitudes may hamper the development of cohesiveness and effective interpersonal learning. Unexpressed hostility smoulders within, only to seep out in many indirect ways, none of which facilitates the group therapeutic process (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). Cohesive groups are able to embrace conflict and to derive constructive benefit from it. (Yalom and Leszcz 2005).

Group cohesiveness is also a precondition for other therapeutic factors to function optimally. (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). There is experimental evidence that cohesiveness

in group therapy encourages the members to participate in a process of reflection and personal exploration (Truax, 1961). The more the group matters to the person, and the more that person subscribes to the group values, the more he or she will be inclined to value and agree with the group judgement (Miller, 1983). The relationship between cohesiveness and maintenance of membership has implications for the total group. Not only do the least cohesive members terminate membership and fail to benefit from therapy but non-cohesive groups with high member turnover prove to be less therapeutic for the remaining members as well. Clients who drop out challenge the group's sense of worth and effectiveness (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

As the members of this newly formed group naturally identified themselves predominantly in terms of their own schools, there was potentially a problem with members experiencing difficulty between the conflicting demands and interests of their own school and those of the group. In some cases this can make it very difficult for the group to work effectively as members with loyalties to different home-groups are more likely to be competitive and reluctant to share resources or knowledge. It was hoped that, as the work of the group took on greater meaning and importance the members would gradually invest more and more in the group, building up a shared value-system, as well as personal relationships among members.

However, participants in the pilot study reported that their schools had become even more open to each other than they had been previously and this could stop potential tensions developing. Several said that they were now working on projects and tasks together such as classroom observations, professional development, school prospectuses and job descriptions and that they felt more comfortable in seeking support from others in the group. *'Even if I could not air a problem in the group I now feel that I could contact the others and still get support'*. As greater cohesion is particularly likely to happen when the group work is done outside or away from the home-group (Obholzer 1994), the venue for the launch sessions was a hotel rather than any of the schools involved.

As group cohesiveness fluctuates greatly during the course of the group (Kivlighan and Mullison, (1988); Braaten (1990)), it was essential to engage the new group members quickly to ensure that they were bonded sufficiently to handle the more challenging work to come later in the group's development, as more conflict and discomfort emerged (Kivlighan and Lilly (1997); Castronguay, Pincus, Agras & Hines (1998)). It

was necessary to provide conditions of safety, respect and tolerance, so that anxiety and insecurity could be contained and examined productively within a bounded space where participants could begin to tolerate bringing more of their feelings than they were used to doing in their other work activities, in an atmosphere which encouraged openness and self-examination.

(iii) Other Factors to Establish the Success of the Group

Feedback following staff consultation groups led by Stringer *et al.* (1992) revealed that participants highlighted four main factors which contributed to the successful establishment of their groups. These included: an enthusiastic, skilful and well respected facilitator; value and support by management; 'involvement', 'interest' and 'caring' from group members who are 'willing and able to commit themselves to the group'; and a 'need for mutual support in a difficult teaching environment'. Other practical issues such as a suitable room, with refreshments and privacy were also regarded as essential. It was therefore important to 'set the scene' in as inviting and dynamic way as possible. A local hotel was used to provide a pleasant setting away from the members' schools. The room that was chosen was light and airy with appropriate seating and resources and refreshments were provided throughout the day. As the establishment of the group had the full support of the Local Authority in that they had instigated it, it was felt that the first condition of the above factors had been met. As the new group members had come to the introductory session voluntarily it could also be said that at least part of the second condition had also been achieved. Similarly there was clearly a mutual need for support as the Head teachers had responded to the invitation based on this as a primary concern. What was left was to ensure that those that came were interested enough to become involved in the group and cared enough for themselves and their colleagues that they would be willing to commit to meeting up regularly to discuss their difficulties.

(iv) The Initial Training Session

I decided to use a presentation at the start of the launch day in order to explain the background to this work, my experiences in my own authority of this pilot study group and the psychological underpinnings and theory behind this type of work. I interspersed formal presentations with experiential exercises and discussions of situations and difficulties experienced by the participants. The idea of a psychoeducational component

approach to group work offering instruction about the nature of difficulties is not new, Maxwell Jones in the 1940's, lectured to his patient's three hours a week about the nervous system's structure, function, and relevance to psychiatric symptoms and disability. Similarly, Marsh writing in the 1930's organised classes for his patients, complete with lectures, homework, and grades (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

Psychoeducation about the impact of negative emotions on relationships is much more effective when participants examine, in a direct way, how these emotions are affecting their own lives and their relationships. The same information presented in an intellectualised and detached manner is far less valuable (Beardslee, Wright, Rothberg, Salt and Versage, 1996; Yalom and Leszcz, 2005). Therefore, the content of my presentations included: references to my own experiences, current news items to illustrate and emphasise points graphically, the application of psychodynamic models to everyday situations and exercises to illustrate containment (See appendices I and II).

(v) Designing the Peer Supervision Process

From the outset it was very important to have a structure for the group sessions. I was aware that where there is no structure or focus, meetings may be unconsciously disorganised, so that members can avoid facing their disagreements or anxiety provoking topics. It was essential to direct discussions away from other events that may be used defensively to share acceptable feelings whilst avoiding other, less acceptable feelings and to avoid repetitive and aimless discussions or blood-letting sessions where feelings are expressed in an un-thought-out and destructive way. Had these situations been permitted there was a danger that attendance would become erratic, members would begin to drift in late or let themselves be called out early, and many of those present would say little or nothing (Obholzer, 1994). It was therefore necessary to devise a process that would direct and guide group members constructively in a task-centred approach to achieve the primary task of the group.

My initial response to the distressed Head teachers had been to offer help and give advice. As I quickly became aware that I couldn't do this personally I looked around for others who could in the form of other Head teachers. Initially, I considered a process where members stated their difficulties and others in the group advised them on what they might do. However, research has shown that the process of giving advice rather than the content of the advice, is beneficial as it implies and conveys mutual interest and caring, however, it is rare that specific advice will directly benefit any individual group

member and it may reflect a resistance to more intimate engagement in which the group members attempt to manage relationships rather than to connect (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:12). Researchers who studied a behaviour shaping group of male sex offenders noted that advice was common and was useful to different members to different extents. The least effective form of advice was a direct suggestion; most effective was a series of alternative suggestions about how to achieve a desired goal (Flowers, 1979).

Yalom and Leszcz (2005), state that advice-giving or advice-seeking behaviour may be an indicator in understanding interpersonal pathology. For example, a group member who continuously seeks advice and suggestions from others, only to reject them and cause frustration may be known as the 'help-rejecting complainer' or the 'Yes.....but' client. (Frank *et al.* 1952; Peters and Grunebaum, 1977; Berne, 1964). Similarly individuals may repeatedly seek suggestions about a problem that either is insoluble or has already been solved. Some seek and take advice avidly from others, yet never reciprocate to others who are in equal need of support. Group members intent on preserving a high-status role in the group may never ask for anything for themselves; some are effusive in their gratitude; whilst others never acknowledge what they have gained publicly (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

Therefore, what was required was a means of group members being facilitated in fully defining their difficulties, gaining an insight into the nature of these and how their own behaviour and/or beliefs might contribute to them. Alexander (1946) insisted that intellectual insight alone is insufficient to bring about therapeutic change: there must be an emotional component and systematic reality testing. This was referred to as the "*corrective emotional experience*", where an individual is exposed to previously unbearable emotional situations under more favourable circumstances in order to undergo a corrective emotional experience suitable to repair the traumatic influence of the previous experience (Alexander and French, 1946).

Psychoanalytic theory is changing as a result of new understanding of memory. Indeed more contemporary research shows that change both at the behavioural level and at the deeper level of internalised images of past relationships occurs through relevant here-and-now relational experiences that challenge an individual's erroneous or dysfunctional beliefs rather than through interpretation and insight (Fonagy, Moran, Edgumbe, Kennedy and Target (1993)).

The recovery of past experience may be helpful, but the understanding of current ways of being with the other is the key to change. For this, both self and other representations may need to alter and this can only be done effectively in the here and now.

(Fonagy, Kachele, Krause, Jones, Perron & Lopez, (1999)).

When the process is successful clients express more emotion, recall more personally relevant and formative experiences, are more confident and have a greater sense of self (Fretter, Bucci, Broitman, Silberschatz and Curtis (1994).

Yalom and Leszcz, (2005), agree that both emotional and cognitive components are required to bring about change in behaviour or beliefs and to make sense of evoked emotions. *"We must experience something strongly but we must also, through our faculty of reason, understand the implications of that emotional experience"*. (Yalom and Leszcz 2005:30). Yalom and Leszcz (2005:29), summarise the components of the corrective emotional experience in group work as follows:

1. A strong expression of emotion, which is interpersonally directed and constitutes a risk taken by the client.
2. A group supportive enough to permit this risk taking.
3. Reality testing, which allows the individual to examine the incident with the aid of consensual validation from the other members.
4. A recognition of the inappropriateness of certain interpersonal feelings and behaviour or of the inappropriateness of avoiding certain interpersonal behaviour.
5. The ultimate facilitation of the individual's ability to interact with others more deeply and honestly.

(Yalom (2005:29)

These elements help to frame the experience and make sense of the emotions evoked in a group.

(vi) The Structure of the Group Sessions

(See 'Procedures section later in this chapter for specific details of session).

The Head teachers who had attended the pilot study sessions said that the structured

nature of the process and the establishment of confidentiality and supportive relationships had helped the group to reach conclusions more effectively as well as providing emotional and practical support.

It was far better than I expected. The structured approach gave us what we needed – a way of getting stuff off your chest as well as getting lots of useful suggestions. I did get upset when I was talking about the problem to the group but I didn't mind that.

(Head teacher from the pilot study in an interview following the first group session)

Solution-focused thinking (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995), can help to provide questions to structure consultation sessions in order to open up the complexity of the situation in a manner consistent with a social constructionist approach which sees behaviour as shaped by social context, and by issues of power and knowledge. Rather than looking for the origins of apparent differences *within* individuals or groups, this approach focuses instead on the ways in which differences are 'produced' in a social context and as a result of social processes. Whilst essentialists view difference as a 'something' that resides inside people and influences the ways they interact, those adopting a more social model regard difference as a *process* by which people are 'differentiated', or constructed as different. The relationships of power between those involved in an interactional context are also considered as a factor in the production of 'difference'.

The process used was loosely based on Stringer *et al's*. (1992), model of consultation which derived much of its rationale from Mental Health Consultation and systemic theory and practice. The origins of mental health consultation lie in the work of Caplan (1970). Aubrey (1988), and Figg and Stoker (1990), summarise this approach and describe their application of it in their practice as EPs. It is also one of the approaches that the Tavistock Clinic has drawn on in their advanced course in professional consultation, and it is the approach that strongly influenced Hanko (1985, 1990).

Following the second training day participants were required to meet up and engage in a peer supervision session with one other group member between the initial group session and the second group session.

The process used in the group aimed to utilise the inter-personal skills of consultation

and drew on the other elements of theory and practice that had influenced me to adopt this approach. It used frequent references to the supervisee to check that the group was understanding the concern, gave the supervisee appropriate help, and clarified those aspects of the concern that the supervisee could take responsibility for doing something about. The Head teachers who had attended the pilot sessions said that not only had the structured nature of the process and the establishment of confidentiality and supportive relationships been very effective but the inclusion of a chairperson to manage the proceedings and to observe time limits had helped the group to reach conclusions more effectively as well as providing emotional and practical support.

(vii) Ethical Considerations

Efforts were made to provide adequate information to prospective group members to enable them to make informed choices about their participation. Information as to the nature and goals of the group, the procedures that were to be used along with the rights of members to decline certain activities were provided (see Appendix VII - Participant Information Sheet –and Appendix VIII - Participant Consent Form). The limitations of confidentiality, and how active participation in the group may have an effect on them personally were made as clearly and as fully as possible. Endeavour was also made to make members fully aware of their responsibilities as group participants. Although no physical or psychological harm of any description was anticipated, prospective group members were made aware of potential sources of harm such as: the risks of unleashing emotions; group members being subjected to scape-goating, group pressure, breaches of confidence, inappropriate reassurance, and hostile confrontation. The possibility that the group process might even precipitate a crisis in a member's life or of a person entering the group feeling relatively comfortable and leaving feeling vulnerable and defenceless were also considered as were the effects on group members' outside lives. The possibility that participants may be left, at the conclusion of the group, in no better condition than when they began to group, even feeling less equipped than ever to cope with the demands of daily life were discussed with participants during the initial session and ways to avoid these dangers were considered. Whilst these were potential real risks they were minimal and every effort was made to reduce them.

The possibility of group members becoming upset or distressed when discussing their issues in the group or in recounting their experiences of the group later in the follow-up interview was also stated. In anticipation of this occurring, the reassuring and

therapeutic effects of talking about an upsetting event in a safe context claimed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000), were discussed. As Hollway and Jefferson question whether it is necessarily harmful to experience being upset or distressed the emphasis was shifted away from ethical principles which treat distress and harm as equivalent problems by theorising the relational context in which distress may be experienced. That combination of harm and distress which tends towards an ethical principle that participants should be left unchanged by their experience of the research, is claimed as impossible by Hollway and Jefferson (2000).

Prior to starting the sessions the participants were made aware of the potential risk of psychological exposure if, whilst discussing their issue(s), they may experience overwhelming emotional sensations as a possible consequence of their sharing their issues with the group. In the event of this situation occurring the participant would have been able to leave the group and would have been able to access support from other members of the group. As the purpose of the group sessions was to find solutions and ways forward with difficulties it is unlikely that a participant would be left unsupported or feeling helpless. All members of the group will be made aware of the need to support each other emotionally.

Anxiety created as a result of listening to the problems of others in a group was also a potential risk. However, as the purpose of the group was to find solutions to and suggest ways forward with problems, any anxieties created by the discussions should have been minimal. Members were alerted to the possibility of personal issues emerging as a result of being in group. Had this occurred the arrangements as described above would have been applied. Had any individual been found to breach the agreed confidentiality boundaries leading to personal or professional embarrassment or exposure they would have been asked to leave the group immediately. Prior to starting each session the group members were reminded of the need for absolute confidentiality, the consequences to those who breach this and the consequences for those whose confidentiality may be broken. If any group members had been concerned about any of the above, further individual sessions would have been offered. Whilst these were potential risks they were minimal and every effort was made to reduce the chances of them arising.

Because the decision to consent is a continuing, emotional awareness that characterises every interaction (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), it cannot be reduced to a conscious, cognitive process. Therefore a central criterion of guarding against harm as opposed to

informed consent was adopted where the emphasis was placed on the responsibility of the researcher to create a safe context, in which issues of honesty, sympathy and respect were central.

3. Data Collection

The intention of this study was to explore why the Head teachers were experiencing the personal stresses and range of problems that they reported when they all appeared to be equally competent in dealing with them appropriately. I also wished to find out if the peer support process had improved the lives of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties. In addition I hoped to elucidate some of the complex intra and interpersonal issues that contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned. In order to carry out these tasks it was necessary to carry out interviews with participants to discover their experiences and elicit answers to questions. However, when attempting to examine such complex, multi-faceted and unquantifiable factors such as attitudes, beliefs and individual experiences, existing approaches to research seemed unsatisfactory.

In addition I hoped to explore:

1. If some Head teachers had specific problems when others appeared not to have, despite having apparently very similar situations, experience and contexts;
2. If some Head teachers accessed available sources of support and advice whereas others dismissed apparently them treating them with suspicion and resentment; and,
3. Despite most Head teachers appearing to be equally capable of and experienced in handling the variety of issues, dilemmas and difficulties that arose in their schools, why did many the Head teachers appear to lack confidence in their own competence and become defensive when discussing decisions they had made?

(i) Narrative Interview Methods and Psychoanalysis

This study used a Free- Association Narrative method of data collection. When research participants are asked to talk about themselves and their lives, they invariably use a *narrative* mode of organisation, that is, give accounts that take on a story structure. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews particularly encourage a narrative mode of discourse. The psychodynamic perspective recognises the crucial role played by narrative. Freud saw how the stories that clients brought to therapy could reveal the hidden depths of personality. He stressed the subtle detection of what was 'not narrated', as well as the connections with cultural stories or meta-stories. Adler, discussed the importance of the life scenario and life-scripts, and Jung put his own emphasis upon narrative in the form of symbol and myth (Hiles and Cermak 2007).

Narratives dominate human discourse and are foundational to the cultural processes that organise and structure human action and experience. They offer a sense-making process that enable human experiences to be seen as socially positioned and culturally grounded and part of a shared version of reality, which can easily reproduce itself. Moreover, narratives are not merely accounts of experience recording facts and events, they are performative, offering frames for human action. They offer pragmatic and persuasive responses to deal with life's events. Narrative is fundamental to our understanding of the human mind and offers the means for constructing meaning out of the chaos of lived experience (Hiles and Cermak, 2007; 150). Spence (1982) argues that it was Freud who made us aware of the persuasive power of a coherent narrative:

'There seems no doubt but that a well constructed story possesses a kind of narrative truth that is real and immediate and carries an important significance for the process of therapeutic change',

(Spence,1982:2).

Schafer's concept of truth is close to Spence's conception:

It is especially important to emphasize that narrative is not an alternative to truth or reality, rather, it is the mode in which, inevitably, truth and reality are presented. We have only versions of the true and the real. Narratively unmediated, definitive access to truth and reality cannot be demonstrated. In this respect, therefore, there can be no absolute foundation on which observer or thinker stands; each must choose his or her narrative.

(Schafer, 1992:14-15)

Billington (2000 and 2006), links narratives to the work of Educational Psychologists arguing that psychoanalysis conceptualises discourse as a site where the internal world of psychic reality is expressed and revealed. Individuals are 'unconsciously impelled' to express themselves in particular ways, resulting in discernable patterns that will differ from individual to individual.

In the context of psychoanalytical therapy Casement (2006) suggests that psychoanalysis can help some patients where other approaches, specifically Cognitive Behavioural therapy do not.

CBT therapists are often giving their clients strategies for coping, which may be helpful to some, but there are many patients who need something much more than this. ...Patients who have come to be known as 'false-self' (Winnicott, 1955)...have come to feel that they have to satisfy significant Others in their lives by being good, by being compliant, by not being themselves. These patients, may seem to thrive upon being given advice, being offered strategies for coping. But all of this may only add up to their problems about being real, in not daring to confront others, not daring to be as they feel. ...Some traumatised patients for whom the principle trauma has been internal [may not benefit from other types of therapy] This can happen when a breakdown in relationship has been associated with a sense that a significant Other has not been able to bear the intensity of a patient's feelings and/or neediness, or indeed their own aliveness, most particularly during childhood (cf. Bion, 1967). As a result, patients may feel that they have to protect any significant Other from whatever is now thought to be too much for anyone. These patients if they are to get beyond this compulsion to protect their significant Others from all that is most alive in themselves, need eventually to be able to bring all that has been most dreaded in themselves into an ongoing, present-day relationship, as with an analyst or therapist. They then need to be able to discover that this therapeutic Other is able to survive, without collapse or retaliation, all that had seemed to be dangerous, even lethal, if it wasn't kept away from a significant Other. Only then and very gradually, may they begin to realise that they can allow themselves to be more alive, more free to engage others intimately, not having to remain fearful of their anger of their hate, their dependence on others or their own aliveness (Winnicott, 1971).Much takes place in therapy that lies beyond any matter of learning strategies for coping. There is much also that lies

beyond words: beyond what a patient is able to speak about, and beyond what a therapist is addressing with their own words.

(Casement 2006:405)

Although the narrative interview method used in this study was not used in a 'therapeutic' context – some of the same principles still apply. A psychoanalytic reading of a transcript of a discourse goes 'behind' the text as the positions that individuals construct through their talk are taken to be indicative of anxieties, defences and particular ways of relating that develop in infancy and recur throughout their lives (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007:110). However, Wetherell (2003) argues that the deep psychological properties or structures that psychoanalysis is interested in are separated from social relations and therefore represented as static, confined to early development without any exploration of their possible transformation through subsequent and ongoing social relations and practices. Similarly, Sondergaard, (2002:448), argues that using psychoanalysis reproduces the individual/social dualism because of its strong focus on 'inner-psychological and individually demarcated reality'. Billig, (1997) distinguishes between the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious, with its insistence on the materiality of an underlying domain of expressive meaning, and 'discursive unconscious' which understands the unconscious as a domain of prohibited speech. Billig points out that conversational devices have defensive functions: the centrality of politeness and the accomplishment of morality in and through conversation necessarily implies that the temptation of rudeness or immorality is repressed. For Billig, this repressive aspect is a point of fruitful contact between psychoanalysis and discursive psychology. He argues that discursive psychology needs to pay attention to the absences as well as well as the presences in dialogue whilst psychoanalysis, rather than viewing repression as individual in operation, needs to perceive it as socially produced in overt interpersonal activity (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007:111).

Although the reliability and validity of eliciting narratives as a research method have been questioned, Kvale (1999) argues that the standard psychoanalytic interview is an interesting model for a narrative style conversation in which the research participant is encouraged to talk freely and thoughtfully about her or his experience. In using traditional structured and semi-structured interview techniques, the interviewer sets the agenda, *'Selecting the theme and topics; by ordering the questions and by wording questions in his or her language'* (Bauer, 1996:2), and therefore remains in control of

the information produced. By contrast, a narrative approach allows the agenda to be open to development and change, depending on the narrator's experiences. Interviews can be seen as a mutual exchange of views (Kvale, 1996) and as a site for the co-production of narratives (Silverman, 2001). Mischler (1986a) argues that interviews should be studied as speech events, and that narratives simply reflect one of the crucial means of knowledge production that goes on in our everyday lives.

(ii) The Position of the Researcher

This method also draws attention to the position of the researcher. Psychoanalytic understanding depends on the subjective exploration of one person by another; by implication, this means that something different will occur whenever different analysts work, or when different theoretical perspectives dominate, or when social contexts shift. Hence any psychoanalytic finding can only be provisional, constrained by the conditions under which it has been produced. (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007:115). The task of the interviewer shifts from one of eliciting the interviewee's 'real' views to creating the conditions under which a thoughtful conversation can take place - a 'shared understanding' model (Franklin, 1997).

Speaking about the therapeutic context Casement (2006) states that:

Much takes place in therapy that lies beyond any matter of learning strategies for coping. There is much also that lies beyond words: beyond what a patient is able to speak about and beyond what a therapist is addressing with their own words. If we are not going to fail our patients we often need to tune into the deeper significance of this – in symptoms, in behaviour, in avoidance, in tone of voice, in body language and manner. We need to monitor each party in the therapeutic relationship for the communication that lies beyond words. For it is here that we can discover how extensively some patients are affected by what they perceive in their therapists, whether the therapist is willing and able to stay with the deepest distress in their minds or whether the therapist is behaving in ways that are seen as avoidance of that.

Casement (2006:405)

Therefore, an understanding of the determining characteristics of the interchange between 'researcher' and 'researched' – including what the researcher brings to it – is crucial for evaluating the significance of any research 'findings' (Frosh, and Saville

Young, (2007). Whilst psychoanalysis has a range of sophisticated concepts available to it, this very sophistication makes the issues more problematic. The researcher's gender, class and 'race' positions may well be relevant and it may be important to declare them as a way to increase the transparency and richness of the data produced. However, even where researchers have been scrupulous in laying out the ways in which they might have promoted certain 'responses' or narratives from their research participants, the most they are able to do is declare their conscious intentions and include material such as full transcripts to a reader to form their own impression of the researcher's own active contribution. Psychoanalysis suggests that this declaration of relatively explicit aspects of the researcher's persona will never be complete enough to understand what her or his contribution to the research might be – let alone, to comprehend the nuances of the interpretive strategy employed in the data analysis. There are likely to be complex, unconscious processes interacting with the research work, encouraging some ways of going about things, inhibiting others. Psychoanalysis might even suggest that the only way to fully explore a researcher's investment in a particular piece of work would be through a dialogic encounter involving the possibility of interpretation of the researcher's activity and checking out the impact of this interpretation on her or his understanding and future conduct (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007: 112-113).

However, the unconscious inter-subjective dynamics between patient and analyst is increasingly regarded as a central means of understanding and helping patients undergoing psychoanalytical therapy. While this is not appropriate for every methodology nor every subject area in social science, the same principle applies wherever the nature of the research requires an understanding of the meanings through which research subjects communicate information to researchers. Psychoanalytic approaches to research reflect this view:

The psychoanalytic exploration of field work pays particular attention tohow unconscious processes structure relations between researcher, subject and the data gathered.

(Hunt, 1989:9).

In this study the researcher did not spend enough time with the research participants for the deeply emotional relationships found in psychoanalysis to develop, and this placed constraints on the extent to which transference and counter-transference material could be fostered and examined as part of the research. However, biographical similarities

between the researcher and the interviewee were noted and points of identification bridging class, educational and work differences enabled the researcher to be a more informed listener. In accordance with psychodynamic theory that both researcher and interviewee are anxious defended subjects, both maintaining defences against anxiety, and both subject to projections and introjections of ideas and feelings coming from each other, it is acknowledged that some of the data obtained in this study was co-produced out of subtle and largely unconscious dynamics (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). For this reason the information of the researcher's impressions and feelings in and around the interview, were noted in order to understand the dynamics of the research relationship. By placing myself within the methodology in this way whilst carrying out the interviews I was also able to maintain an emotional link with the data produced.

(iii) The 'Free Association Interview' Method

Hollway and Jefferson's (2000) adaption of the biographical-narrative method into the 'Free Association Interview' was very influential in this study. Hollway and Jefferson argue that psychoanalysis tells us that we (researchers and the researched) are not transparent to ourselves, that our conscious and unconscious mind may well be in conflict, that anxiety and its related defences are part of the human condition. The biographical-narrative method is based on the principle of free association, in order to produce data that did not reproduce the standard rational intentional and rather coherent subject.

The free-association narrative interview method is based on the premise that the meanings underlying interviewees' elicited narratives are best accessed via links based on spontaneous association, rather than whatever consistency can be found in the told narrative. This is a radically different conception of meaning because free associations follow an emotional rather than a cognitively derived logic. Once we follow that logic, the result is a fuller picture than would otherwise have emerged, offering richer and deeper insights into a person's unique meanings.

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:152),

Therefore, what matters is the emotional sense of the story, not its cognitive logic, because this emotional sense is what points to a person's subjective meaning-making. Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that whilst stories are not necessarily transparent and truthful accounts, storytelling stays closer to actual life events than methods that

elicit explanations.

Narrations are rich in indexical ['concrete events in time and place'] statements.

(Bauer,1996:2).

The complex emotional and intellectual forces that influence the conduct of our enquiry.....are at once the source of our insight and our folly.

(Berg and Smith,1988:31).

Therefore narrative free association was encouraged during the interview to limit the guidance of the interviewer, but also as will be seen later, during the analysis of the interview transcript to guide the process of initial and subsequent coding towards emotionally significant issues.

(iv) Gestalt and the Defended Subject

As psychoanalysis suggests that unconscious dynamics are a product of attempts to avoid or master anxiety, the concept of a 'defended subject' shows how subjects invest in discourses that offer positions which provide protection against anxiety. Similarly, anxieties and attempts to defend against them may be considered using the theoretical principles of *Gestalt* (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts (Wertheimer, Koffka and Kohler, 1912 -1935)) to suggest an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life.

In attempting to access the concerns of an individual which would otherwise remain invisible to more traditional methods, Hollway and Jefferson (2000), integrated the biographical-interpretative method developed by Rosenthal and Bar-On, (1992); Schutze, (1992); Rosenthal, (1993). This method was used to elicit the Gestalts (or hidden agendas) from respondents' accounts, particularly when dealing with potentially difficult subject matter, through following their concerns (Rosenthal, 1990).

Conflict, suffering and threats to self operate on the psyche in ways that affect peoples' positioning and investment in certain discourses rather than others.....threats to the self create anxiety and indeed this is a fundamental proposition in psychanalytic theory, where anxiety is viewed as being inherent in the human condition.

By asking the interviewee whatever comes to mind, narratives structured according to unconscious as opposed to conscious logic are elicited; that is, the associations follow pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions. The similarities between the principle of respecting the narrator's *Gestalt* and the psychoanalytic method of free association are clear.

Three of Hollway and Jefferson's principles to facilitate the production of the interviewee's meaning frame or *Gestalt* were used. These involved the use of open-ended questions; the eliciting of stories and the avoidance of 'why' questions. The fourth principle used by Hollway and Jefferson follow up using the respondents' ordering and phrasing was not carried out due to time constraints. The researcher endeavored to remain close to the interviewees' own experiences, assisted by framing the questions along the lines of 'what experience have you had of....?', 'what words might you use to describe...?', 'How do you feel about?'. The interview opened with a 'what' question (what was your experience of the group sessions that you attended?).

The application of Freud's (1895) concepts of free association and the whole method of psychoanalytic interpretation to empirical research is not straightforward as they were developed in a clinical setting. However, psychoanalysis serves as a reminder of all the idiosyncratic ways in which unconsciously researchers project their own issues onto participants both in the face-to-face relationship and in data analysis. It also offers ways to help bring these to awareness so that they can serve as a resource and are less likely to compromise the research. It enables the researcher to become more aware of difference between what belongs to the researcher. Therefore the interviewing technique set out to assist participants to say more about their opinions and experiences (to assist the emergence of *Gestalts*) without offering interpretations, judgments or otherwise imposing the interviewer's own relevancies which would thus destroy the interviewee's *Gestalt*. Therefore, a number of prompt questions were devised to be used when interviewing the Head teachers who had taken part in the group in order to enable the interviewer to encourage respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, thereby addressing richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty (Morrison, 1993). (See 'Procedures' section later in this chapter for specific details of interview procedure). Time constraints and the limited

availability of the majority of the respondents made it impossible to adopt the double interview technique used by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). This technique is useful in seeking further evidence to test out emergent hunches and provisional hypotheses, and give respondents a chance to reflect and challenge, amend or clarify points that they made earlier. It was also not possible to obtain an outsider and an insider perspective through triangulation as the interviewer was working alone. However, triangulation was achieved through the comparison of the different subjectivities of the respondents.

In carrying out this research it was acknowledged that the respondents could not be totally known, especially not in the course of one hour long interview. The 'whole' was all that was accumulated relating to a particular person who took part in the research. As well as the transcript from the interviews, the memories of the meetings with the people, the notes taken after each meeting, and what was said about the respondents by others was also available. On these principles, an understanding of the 'whole text' was sought.

(v) Ethical Considerations

Prior to the individual interviews following the group work, the respondents were not forewarned about the possibility of discussing intimate issues, as they may have been reluctant to take part, which was not in the interests of the research. However, the researcher ensured that the conduct of the interview went a long way to guard against the experience being a negative event and if the interviewees did not feel positive about the relationship with the researcher, they were able to limit what they disclosed. In framing the introductory information in a fairly general manner, it was possible to be led by the interests of the research, with no apparent reasons why it should be contrary to the interests of the participants (see Appendix VII – Research Ethics Application Form, Appendix VIII Participant Information Sheet and Appendix IX - Participant Consent Form). It was clear, non-technical and open enough for them to engage with in ways that interested them. Although the questions were not asked in such a way to generate the opinions, explanations or attitudes of the interviewees, as this may have compromised their free associations, the formulation was very open and expressly did not specify what ideas the researcher wanted to test out. With regard to the issues around informed consent, it was impossible to inform participants in advance, in ways that would be meaningful about the experience of this kind of interview. It was only through the experience of the interview itself that the participants came to realise what

telling their stories about their experiences to the researcher could entail.

Acknowledging the guidance of the British Sociological Association that states:

Potential informants and research participants, especially those possessing a combination of attributes which make them readily identifiable, may need to be reminded that it can be difficult to disguise their identity without introducing an unacceptably large measure of distortion into the data.

(British Sociological Association (BSA), 1996:12)

No audiotapes were made available and all identifying details such as names and locations were erased from the study in order to protect anonymity.

Humanistic and feminist critiques of the potential for research to exploit participants (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2004; Goodley and Parker, 2000) call for the products of research to be fed back into the group or community from which the data derived. However the practical difficulties that this may have entailed called for compromise. Once the data had been analysed and the main points had been identified, a report was written and sent to the participants for their approval prior to being sent to the sponsoring authority. To protect identities and maintain confidentiality the results of the study were written up in a different format for different audiences. For the purposes of the University, where the participants would be unknown, a fuller version, including extracts from interviews was included. However, the version made available to the Local Authority officers who requested this study included only a summary of the findings, salient points and suggestions for improvement and development. This version did not include any contentious material that might have lead to or added to the damage or deterioration of relationships between any of the different parties. Comments and suggestions were noted in a very general format so as to flag up points of interest, concern and areas for improvement and or development and so to facilitate relationships.

3. Data Analysis/Interpretation

(i) In Search of 'Reality'

The human sciences are characterised by the impossibility of any search for absolute knowledge, because of the meaning-making or 'reflexive' nature of human psychology

itself. The ways in which people construe themselves owes a lot to influential psychological theories, particularly psychoanalytic and biomedical ones. People's routine uses of psychoanalytically derived notions such as 'sexual repression' or 'trauma' or 'acting out' as explanations of their own or others' behaviour are examples. Conversely, psychological theories draw strength from the 'common sense' assumptions and ways of understanding experience prevalent in the culture.

The distinction between the real and that which represents the real as its sign or symbol is as hard define.

The representative can never be the full measure of the real and to perceive or believe that it is so is to be trapped into a realm of fantasy objects, the little representatives of a lost-real that Lacan (1977) labelled as object petit a. If the representative as copy is not the 'original', the 'real', the 'author', the life force, then it is the dead. Again, there is something missing no matter how apparently identical the copy is seen to be with the original. There is a lack which is irrecoverable and any attempt to do so is a fantasy and the fantasy object is again Lacan's object petit a.

(Schostak 2002:8)

'Critical realism' refers to an attempt within social science to argue for the material presence of the social and natural world outside of our knowledge of it. It attempts to demonstrate deeper structures and relations that are not directly observable but lie behind the surface of social reality. Bhaskar (1998) sets out the basic principle of a realist philosophy of science as the belief that perception gives us access to things and experimental activity access to structures that exist independently of us. In contrast to 'critical realism', *Naïve realism* regards reality as impacting directly upon the human mind, without any reflection on the part of the human knower. The resulting knowledge is directly determined by an objective reality within the world. Alternatively, *Postmodern antirealism* sees the human mind freely constructing its ideas without any reference to an alleged external world. *Critical realism* retains reality in the human mind and attempts to express and accommodate that reality as best it can with the tools at its disposal – such as mathematical formulae, mental models or concepts such as those found in psychoanalytic theory. In contrast to postmodernism, critical realism affirms that there is a reality, which may be known, and which we are under a moral and intellectual obligation to investigate and represent as best as we can. Against certain types of modernism, critical realism affirms that the human knower is involved in

the process of knowing, thus raising immediately the possibility of the use of 'constructions' – such as analogies, models, and more specifically social constructs – as suitably adapted means for representing what is encountered.

Therefore the use of a psychoanalytical framework in this study could be regarded as an attempt to represent the 'real' experiences of the participants using the specific structures and concepts of psychoanalytic theory. The importance of the active involvement of the knower was stressed by James (1878), who drew attention to the fact that the knowing agent received knowledge actively, not passively:

The knower is an actor, and co-efficient of the truth on the one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth which he helps to create. Mental interests, hypotheses, postulates, so far as they are bases for human action – action which to a great extent transforms the world – help to make the truth which they declare.

(James, 1878: 96).

For James the knower is involved in the process of knowing, and that this involvement must somehow be expressed within a realist perspective on the world.

However, Schostak asks:

What is the 'real'? Are we just playing with words? Or is 'playing with words' the structure of the 'real' for engagement with, construction of, and management of 'realities'?

Schostak (2002:2)

Schostak (2002) argues that that the symbolic processes underpinning the social are creative of worlds and that there are as many symbolic worlds as imagination can conceive. The problem is in the intricate manner in which the social and the natural fuse in social action.

Contemporary living spaces 'emerge' without any overall conscious planning or control at either global or local levels and become the frame within which critical intellectual activity emerges as a dialogic opening onto multiple ways through which life becomes organised. Therefore drawing out of ways of seeing, thinking about, and experiencing the complexity and the dynamic qualities of the global-local framings of social life may be considered as nothing more than the

educational project of those who wish to create philosophies, natural scientific explanations and political, economic, social and psychological scientific accounts of the realities that are under emergence.

Schostak (2002:2)

Carruth (1995) states that the very act of articulating or representing something can do violence to its 'truth'.

At the extreme, how can one find the words to express the experience of a trauma, to express the experiences of those who lived through concentration camps, genocides or massive natural disasters that have devastated whole communities? What theory can 'explain' what is felt? What measure can encompass it? What expertise can overcome it? In the case of a trauma, it is not that something that is said has to be listened to. Rather it is that something as yet is unsaid. Its expression is most likely to be a cry or a soundless utterance. Here, no accommodation to what exists can be made. No meaning can be addressed that founds itself on the prevailing patterns of social and discursive order. It is here that some neologism arises by which to recognise and affirm, providing an eye for that which cannot be fully said. In the 'real' of the trauma there is an intrication of experience, fact, value, representation and action where any unpicking of the complex in order to produce something that can be said to be 'neutral' and manipulable for experimental or management purposes is a further act of violence.

(Schostak 2002: 210)

Schostak (2002) regards the 'real' as being the powers of the individual in the world. It is drawn from an exploration of the 'I' as creative source and the 'me' as a social framework for knowing and expressing the 'self'.

The 'I' is unrepresentable rather like a shadow that is sensed but always gone before it can be seen. It is the eye that sees but in seeing cannot see itself. It is the cry that has no sound, it is the affirmation of being that cannot be proclaimed.

(Schostak 2002:8)

Schostak (1999) explores it as the 'cr/eye of the witness'.

As soon as the unsayable is represented in words, the power to express, be heard and engage with others is bought at a cost: the cost of a loss of the Truth of the 'cr/eye' in becoming the verifiable 'truth' of an expression. The self is thus split between the cr/eye and the 'me' that engages strategically with the Other. It is the essentially split, estranged, alienated self of Lacan's psychoanalytic clinic. It is the divided self that is a subject in and subjected to language and is only a subject as mediated by language. The 'me' as a representative of the 'cr/eye' or of the whole process through which a self emerges as a socially 'see-able', nameable entity enables both agency and repression, that is, the freedom to express and the slavery of being trapped within the framework of the expression that is able to be measured, controlled and placed under surveillance.

Schostak (2002:8)

Schostak (2002) suggests that critical realism should be combined with pragmatism to form what Johnson and Duberley (2000:148) call a '*pragmatic-critical realism*' to allow subject-object transactions to be established. Pragmatism in this context should be taken to mean that:

Social constructions are bounded by the tolerance of external reality, which exists independently of our cognitive processes.

(Johnson and Duberley 2000:157)

Pragmatic critical realism is therefore founded on the premise that the ontological debate is refocused from epistemology (the theory of knowledge) to ontology (the theory of being). It highlights the belief that the ontological "*realm must exist independently of our knowledge of it*" (Joseph 1998:2). In other words there exists a mind independent reality which cannot be studied or understood in the same way as natural phenomenon. It requires a high level of theory and abstraction (Wikgren 2005: Edwards 2006:3). Margolis (1986:282) adds that the world of knowledge is not dependent on the cognitive creations of individuals. In other words:

What reality is and how we have conceived it are different questions since many things are beyond our conceptual and linguistic capacities.... things that cannot be measured or observed via our senses may be still real.

(Johnson and Duberley 2000:152).

One such example may be where an individual might believe in the concept of God however understanding what or who God is could be beyond our conceptual and linguistic ability, nevertheless this does not mean that God does not exist in reality. It is argued that this approach is:

A synthesis, which emerges from, and attempts to transcend, positivism's thesis of a foundational-absolute stance and postmodernism's antithesis of chaotic relativism.

(Johnson and Duberley 2000:152).

Brown, Slater and Spencer (2002) argue that critical realism uses a process of "abstraction and retroduction" which helps to identify the 'real' causal phenomena which is hidden beneath the surface and perhaps obscured from view or interpretation. It attempts to uncover information which using other epistemological approaches and methodologies would perhaps remain unknown. Therefore critical realists argue that although data gathered from different epistemological foundations may identify some knowledge and understanding of social structures, mechanisms or relationships they fail to access the areas which exist independently of our knowledge of them. Critical realism therefore attempts to go beyond the "surface phenomena and disclose 'deep' social structures" (Brown, Slater and Spencer 2002). Thus critical realism has been developed from the 'post-Kuhnian' critique of positivism (Bhaskar 1986:36) which argues that the *truth must be more than the outputs of a language game yet it cannot be absolute* (Johnson and Duberley 2000:51).

A key point in adopting a pragmatic critical realist approach is that:

Although language shapes all forms of science it does not mean that nothing exists beyond language. Reality intervenes and puts limits upon the viability of our descriptions and explanations.

(Johnson and Duberley 2000:162).

Polanyi (1964:16) even suggests that as individuals we "*know more than we can tell*" therefore to expand this tacit knowledge must consist of customs, practices and cultures that cannot be accessed and understood by all in all historical periods. Joseph (1998:9) adds that pragmatic critical realism is able to 'break free' of the analytical constraints placed on knowledge by arguing that what we know to be 'fact' is not all there is to

know. It leaves the possibility that there is knowledge which is beyond the ability to conceive, understand or transfer in any particular historical period, cultural background etc. He states that many social science researchers confuse ontology with epistemology which undermines their understanding of the area and reduces the credibility of the theories which emerge from this.

Therefore from this perspective it is assumed that external casual regularities exist and that individual behaviour in everyday life is determined by how people make sense of them and react to them. It is added that knowledge is gained from an independent reality, which is accessed by individuals through their ability to reflect upon actions taken and 'learn' from the experiences, in the sense that workplaces are shaped by how people react and respond in specific circumstances (Korczynski 2002).

This study attempts to track the relationship between the participants' ambiguous representations and their experiences through the use of psychoanalytical concepts and theory. The inner world of the research subjects cannot be understood without knowledge of their experiences in the world. Their experiences of the world cannot be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner world allows them to experience the outer world. The research subject, therefore, cannot be known except through another subject; in this case the researcher. Hollway and Jefferson, (2000), build their justification for their theoretical, methodological and ethical implications for research on the concept of 'psychosocial' subjects. These same concepts influenced the methods used in this study.

(ii) The Process

(See 'Procedures' section later in this chapter for specific outline of data analysis procedure)

As a psychoanalytic approach had been used to collect the interview data in order to *Acknowledge the complexity of the emotional lives and unconscious processes*, (Billington, 2000), of the participants, an interpretive approach to the data produced was adopted. Billington (2000), defends the validity of psychoanalytical methods of analyzing interview data arguing that more empirical techniques can decontextualise complex and varied human experiences, isolating them as discrete incidents removed from their contextual references and thus fail to reflect the rich variety of the

experience.

Any claims to accuracy made by a particular theory or representation can too easily become as individual photographs, attempting to 'freeze' individualized moments and experiences in time and space..... [these] frozen, atomized 'photographs', mistaking pictures of individual characteristics, contextually isolated, for life itself..... in failing to acknowledge processes and by choosing instead the category, we deny the vitality of human experience. The models of experience which psychology creates tend to exacerbate this atomisation by pursuing concepts of concretised human differences. It is in such ways that we lose sight of, lose the feel of, and also lose touch with both the movement and also the sameness of people, attempting to 'freeze the frame', we construct snapshots which unerringly omit an 'other', and effectively restrict the possibility of change which may obey more natural, dynamic laws of movement.

(Billington, 2000:90)

The interviewing process produced a range of narratives, reflections, details of practices and speculations relevant to the participants, stemming from initial questions about their experiences in the peer support group. In addition participants were asked to rate a number of statements, as well as answer a limited number of specific questions which came at the end.

(iii) Objectivity

In using psychoanalytic methodology as part of understanding a psychosocial subject, Hollway and Jefferson (2000), argue that it is possible to broaden the reach of interpretation. However, this approach to interpretation must be reconciled with the scientific method which is not unproblematic as the principle of unconscious intersubjectivity generates huge doubts about the validity of the knowledge generated.

In recent years psychoanalysis has become very hesitant about the idea that it can be used to uncover anything 'real' or 'truthful' about a person. However, it has been recognised that psychoanalytic formulations are worked out in the context of particular individuals struggling to relate one another. This also means that as this context shifts as the relationship changes, so psychoanalytic understanding of what is happening might also have to shift dramatically. Spence (1987:91) comments:

No interpretation is sacred. If context is boundless and ever-expanding, the grounds for reaching a conclusion about this or that meaning are forever shifting. An archive can be constructed, but its contents will always be open to interpretation and elaboration.

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) argue that:

Psychoanalysis has largely conceded that interpretation is an art and not a science and therefore psychoanalysts have been prepared to theorise issues like intuition, use of the analyst's subjectivity, the role of emotion in thinking and the use of unconscious dynamics as a tool for knowledge. At the same time, analysts have grappled with the issue of how not to impose false or bad interpretations on their patients. This has resulted in tolerance for paradox and uncertainty which can usefully be borrowed.

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:78)

Hollway (2006), asks are we left with relativism if objectivity is rejected? She uses psychoanalytic concepts of objectivity (for example Winnicott's notion of subjective objects and omnipotence as an intrapsychic obstacle to accepting reality) to try to develop a post-positivist concept of objectivity.

(iv) Subjectivity

Psychoanalytic understanding depends on the subjective exploration of one person by another; by implication, this means that something different will occur whenever different analysts work, or when different theoretical perspectives dominate, or when social contexts shift. Hence any psychoanalytic finding can only be provisional, constrained by the conditions under which it has been produced, (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007). However, given all the interlacing subjectivities, the problem that emerges is how to interpret their meaning in a reasonably convincing way. In rejecting traditional interview techniques that merely report the responses of interviewee's, Hollway and Jefferson (2000) challenge the idea of there being a single rationale of a subject. They argue that traditional quantitative researchers assume that their participants always tell the truth, have great self-awareness and self knowledge and are always willing and able to 'tell' this to the interviewer who is usually a complete

stranger.

Is everything told to be believed? If not how will truth and untruth be distinguished? Even if we believe everything told, has everything relevant really been told and how is this defined and how would one know?. What assumptions can be made about the effect of people's motivations and memory on what they tell? What assumptions can be made about the effect of the interviewer on the answers given? Does sex, race, age and so on make a difference? How will the interviewees' answers be analysed to make overall sense of them, especially when their accounts are littered with contradictions and inconsistencies?

(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:1)

In day to day dealings with each other, unless we are totally naïve, we rarely take the accounts of one another merely at face value. There is clearly a need to investigate the less clear-cut, more confused and contradictory relationship that each individual has to knowing and telling about themselves. Through their methodological techniques Hollway and Jefferson (2000:3), encourage the researcher to “*question, disagree, bring in counter-examples, interpret, and notice hidden agendas*”.

Clough (2000:62), reminds us that:

The research act of 'listening to voice' must always involve the (broadly defined) process of both mediation and translation.

Scwaber (quoted in Aron, 1996:29), insists that another person's subjectivity can only be known through ones own, he continues with an argument for ‘*vigilantly guarding against the imposition of the analyst's point of view*’. While acknowledging that ‘*actual neutrality is a fiction*’, he does not conclude that neutrality should be abandoned, [but rather] ‘*the less possible it is to be neutral in fact, the more crucial it is to strive towards it*’. (Scwaber quoted in Aron, 1996:29).

[The researcher's feelings] *tell us about how a researcher comes to produce such an account and opens it to the possibility of different readings of the same material. It tells us that the process of reading itself is not all in the text, but is produced out of a complex interaction between reader and text. But perhaps it tells us more than*

this: as a researcher, I am no more, no different from the subjects of my research.

(Walkerdine, 1997:67).

Whatever interpretations the research findings offer, they necessarily must be a joint product of both the participant, as data supplier and the researcher as data analyser. This is inescapable, and is a simple fact of life for any qualitative researcher. However, it is worth noting that this matter is no different to our everyday meaning-making eg. Interpreting each other's behaviour. So, if we do get by in our everyday encounters, then why cannot we find suitable criteria for 'getting by' in our research? However this problem cannot be dismissed and to date no one has set out these criteria once and for all (Hiles and Cermak 2007:161).

The data provided many unconnected elements that came – bottom-up style, but the missing links gave 'form' to the accounts. These missing links were made through: the collation and interpretation of information provided by the text; free association – linking pieces of information; shared cultural assumptions of the interviewee and the researcher; sociological knowledge of class connotations and gender differences; and psychoanalytic knowledge such as expression of unconscious thoughts or feelings. As mentioned previously, whilst free association was used during the interviews to limit the guidance of the interviewer, it was also used during analysis of the interview transcripts to guide the choice of initial and subsequent coding towards emotionally significant issues.

(v) Generalisability

The study design was based around gaining an insight into the specific experiences of the participants in this study and not on the basis of what numbers would be adequate to make generalisable claims about Head teachers' difficulties and their experiences of being in a peer support group. However, there was a comparative element to the design which required a means to look at similarities and differences between different perspectives. All the information available was used to ask if and how the opinions, causes, experiences and solutions to Head teachers' difficulties varied and if and how their experiences of and reactions to the peer support group varied, in the small sample used.

(vi) Reliability

The definition of reliability refers to consistency, stability and repeatability of results (Brink, 1991, Cited in Madill et al, 2000). However, this definition assumes that meanings can be controlled and made identical in successive applications of a question. Hollway and Jefferson (2000), maintain that as meanings are unique as well as shared this definition is therefore an invalid criterion. Contrary to the view of positivist science, the situations that were analysed in this study are not replicable. Meanings are not just unique to the person involved (although more or less shared as well); they are also unique to a relational encounter (though, again paradoxically, partly consistent over time as well). However, whilst meanings begin by being totally unique, they are clarified and become capable of wider generalization through being discussed and evaluated.

(vii) The Constraints of Psychoanalytic Structures Used for Analysis

The reflexivity argument has a number of implications in relation to the employment of psychoanalysis in qualitative research. For Parker (2005) it focuses and limits the possibilities of psychoanalysis itself, understood as a compelling narrative that is culturally specific and even functional. Research, therefore, is not a process of uncovering (even relative) 'truths' about people, but rather exposes the ways in which people are positioned by the theoretical structures used (by them as well as by researchers) to understand them. (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007)

What psychoanalytic research can do, then is to turn psychoanalytic knowledge around against itself so we understand better the way that psychoanalytic ideas have themselves encouraged us to look for things deep inside us as the causes of social problems. Psychoanalytic subjectivity – our sense of ourselves as having hidden childhood desires and destructive wishes – is the perfect complement to economic exploitation in capitalist society, for both succeed in making the victims blame themselves.

(Parker, 2005:105)

Parker draws attention to the impact of psychoanalysis' emphasis on how knowledge (specifically of the patient) is mediated through the person – the subjectivity - of the knower (analyst): that is, knowing the other requires knowing the impact of the other on

(or 'in') the self, and being able to reflect on this in a way that openly recognises both the pre-existing investment of the knower/researcher in the material, and what is added to this by the specific concerns of the other. Parker (2005:117) comments on how this produces a reassessment of conventional research ideas on subjectivity as a problem.

Subjectivity is viewed by psychoanalysts, as with much qualitative research, not as a problem but as a resource (and topic). To draw upon one's own subjectivity in the research process does not mean that one is not being 'objective', but that one actually comes closer to a truer account. In psychoanalytic terms, the 'investment' the researcher has in the material they are studying plays a major role in the interest that will eventually accrue from the research.

(Parker, 2005:105)

This is a conventional point in relation to psychoanalytic infant observation, where it is held that knowledge of the child can *only* be obtained through registering the observer's emotional response to what s/he sees (Waddell, 1988): coded more broadly as 'countertransference' it is also a feature of all contemporary psychoanalytic practice, especially that influenced by Kleinian and British School of Psychoanalysis (see glossary) thinking. Hence Hollway and Jefferson's (2005) assertion that in their psychoanalytically influenced qualitative work, they can ground their interpretive claims through what they refer to as an analysis of the 'countertransference'. Referring to their case study of 'Vince', they claim that information is generated through comparing the different responses the two researchers had to the participant himself, (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007). Indeed the main defence of evidence generated using interpretative methods come from Hollway and Jefferson (2000), who claim that the principles of interpretative data analysis may be tested in that they may be applied to different data, by different researchers who can assess their utility casting light on narrative accounts. Their reliability can be checked (though never guaranteed) if, when the interpretations and analyses of one researcher are studied by others, they are 'recognised', that is, the sense that is made out of them can be shared through the subjectivity of others, including the reader. This does not rule out the possibility of alternative explanations, but these too can be against the available data.

(viii) Legitimising Interpretations

Given, as most qualitative researchers and many psychoanalysts would allow, that

meaning is not fixed but is constructed in specific situations and usually through particular intersubjective encounters, then alternative interpretations of any text are likely to be viable and may even be equally persuasive. Under such conditions what are the constraints operating on interpretation, what is allowable and what is not? For Hollway and Jefferson (2005:150), the warrant for psychoanalytic interpretation in the clinical situation is reasonably clear: it 'emerges in the therapeutic relationship'. However, the qualitative researcher is in a different position from the psychoanalyst who interprets 'into' the session and can observe the patient's response, whilst the researcher must save her or his interpretation for later (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000:77), and is so faced with what might be called 'dead' text. Outside the psychoanalytic situation, therefore the warrant for interpretation is more flimsy than within it: Hollway and Jefferson (2005:151) propose that this warrant includes 'the researcher's multiply informed (hermeneutic) interpretations of interview claims in the context of everything that is known about the person' and in particular that it is legitimate to read through the surface of the text to the life that is 'assumed' to be beyond (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007)

(ix) Accuracy of Interpretations

The question is therefore, how confident can researchers be in the accuracy of their particular speculations about the significance of the free associations and emotional markers that they observe? Hollway and Jefferson (2000:80) fall back on some idea of the recognisability of their interpretations. However whilst an interpretation may be agreed upon by various people all looking at something from the same perspective, this does not mean that it is right. This is part of Wetherell's (2005:171) objection to Hollway and Jefferson's procedure which has the consequence of a certain kind of story almost has to emerge, as the psychoanalytic frame used by Hollway and Jefferson funnels the research participant's talk, leading inescapably to a reading that revolves around the pre-ordained notion of the defended subject. This critique is taken further by Parker (2005:108), who warns against the Free Association Narrative Interview procedure on the grounds that it is individualising, essentialising, pathologising and disempowering; the key complaint is that it is organised around a pre-set discourse that imposes an expert account on the research participant in a typical 'researcher knows best' set of moves (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007).

In response to the problem of validation of truth claims, both psychoanalysis and

qualitative psychology have at least partially embraced a hermeneutic position arguing that whilst causal, explanatory truths about people may not be available, meaning-imbued 'narrative truths' are. The model for this in the first instance is the reading of literary texts: the richer the text, the more alternative and even contradictory meanings might be pulled out of it. As previously cited, Spence (1982) argues that well constructed stories offer narrative truths that are real, immediate and convincing because of their capacity to evoke and structure experiences, to offer coherence where there is fragmentation, to articulate half-understood meanings, to throw light on obscurity and they carry an important significance for the process of therapeutic change.

While the search for narrative truth is not arbitrary it is difficult: not only is there a strong element of relativity brought into the situation by the variety of different narratives which might be available at any one time, but also as the context for interpretation shifts – as culture changes, for example, so do the narratives which take hold and which hold conviction (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007).

Habermas (1968), suggests that the final arbiter of analytic correctness should be the interviewee. Analytic insights he argues:

Possess validity for the analyst only after they have been accepted as knowledge by the analys and himself. For the empirical accuracy of general Interpretations depends not on controlled observation and the subsequent communication among investigators but rather on the accomplishment of self-reflection and subsequent communication between the investigator and his 'object'.

Habermas (1968:261)

(x) Links between the Interviewees and the Analysis

Habermas accepts as psychoanalytic the idea that symbolic structures of intention and meaning are causal in human relations, and from there proposes that psychoanalytic knowledge is validated by its capacity to demonstrate, in practice, the impact of its interventions in these structures. From the point of view of the interviewee, an interpretation is 'emancipatory' in linking the subject with his or her split-off meanings: 'The interpretation of a case is corroborated only by the successful *continuation of a self-formative process*, that is, by the completion of self-reflection, and not in any unmistakable way by what the patient says or how he *behaves*'. (Habermas

(1968:266). Emancipation is expressed in a kind of becoming –real in the session, as the patient recognises the meanings generated dialogically and takes them in so that they have causal impact, promoting an enrichment of felt experience and a process of self-reflection (Frosh, and Saville Young (2007:116 -117).

It can be argued that the dependence of psychoanalysis on biographical and interpersonal information in order to ground interpretations means that it is not very appropriate for the analysis of interview material, which, whilst it may be rich in details concerning attitudes and thoughts, is relatively sparse in relation to background features and fantasies. This suggests that for psychoanalytic procedures to be appropriate, more focused ways of gathering personal biographical material will need to be incorporated into qualitative psychological studies and that these should not be merely ‘factual’ but should privilege respondents’ in-depth accounts of their own perceptions of their experience. More broadly, the usual methods of ‘testing’ psychoanalytic interpretations rely on close observation (at various levels) of the interviewee’s response to the research interview itself, it is hard to see a way around this.

(xi) Uncertainty

Parallels between psychoanalysis and textual analysis have been drawn focussing on ideas that meaning is the production of effects rather than the naming of truths, and hence that the interpretive process is a matter of ‘local’ readings of a spoken or authored ‘text’ (Friedman, 2000). Psychoanalysis, however, is not satisfied with generating particular meanings; it also has an interpretive task that is bound up with the unravelling of unconscious conflicts. Here, a distinction worked on by Ricoeur (1974), between a ‘hermeneutics of understanding’ and a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ is important, the latter being of the mode characteristic of psychoanalysis, with its reluctance to accept what the patient has to say at face value. Friedman (2000: 234-5) comments that, ‘analysis is primarily intent on reading what the patient does not want to read, and also to some extent, the analyst’s profession requires that he or she read against the analyst’s own inclination’. Asserting the validity of a psychoanalytic concept thus requires *both* recognition of the way psychological ‘reality’ is impossible to pin down, because it fluctuates and is reconstructed continually as it is enacted and produced in different contexts: *and* an appreciation that some ‘readings’ of the unconscious are more forceful than others, and can be observed to be so because of their resonance in the participants, their capacity to communicate experience more richly, and their productivity in relation

to further associations and deepening of emotional states. Outside the context of the consulting room, this can be applied in the same way as arguments about literary interpretations are applied: what way of understanding generates most material, what pushes thinking on, what 'thickens' the story that can be told about how psychological phenomena might work? None of this is completely satisfactory; psychoanalytic interpretation is always wavering and uncertain even when it can be tested against the patient's response and even more so when it cannot; but this can be turned into a strength if one can maintain the stance of uncertainty and tentativeness within a context of cautious checking against the emotional tone of the research participant's talk and of the researcher's reactions.

Frosh and Saville Young (2007) argue both for the productivity of the application of psychoanalysis to qualitative material and for its problems, and have asserted that the use of psychoanalytic understanding must be tentative, rooted both in biographical information and in a dynamic contact with research participants that allows space for emotional connectedness and the observation and thoughtful reflection on the relationship that arises. As with other forms of qualitative research, analysis of textual material must be rigorous and cautious, employing psychoanalytic concepts but grounding them in clearly observable textual moves – however open these might be to alternative readings as well. No interpretation is sacred, there is no full and absolute truth; but some are more reasonable and persuasive than others on theoretical grounds but also in terms of their logic and productivity, the implications and conclusions to which they lead.

(xii) The Contribution of Field Notes to Analytic Interpretation

There are limits to accessing relational dynamics and unconscious processes in a research context, however fine-grained the analysis. While the interview can elicit actual events in a participant's past, the research context does not afford the luxury of evoking their unconscious correlates over an extended period of time (as in therapeutic situations). Instead, we have to look for patterns in participants' linguistic repertoires and their way of relating that resonate with the hypothesis of Frosh and Saville Young (2007). Gee (1991) offers an analysis of the way a text is put together, the use of intonations, stresses and the rhythmic patterning of words, in an attempt to focus on the subjective and personal meaning making of the narrator and to resist ascriptivism, the tendency for interpreters to appropriate the narrator's meaning, making it into their own.

Gee's poetic approach, 'helps to privilege the teller's experience and assumptions "from the inside" of their own language-use' (Emerson and Frosh, 2004:46). The use of field notes in analysing case studies enable 'counter-transference' feelings to enrich the analytic interpretation by demanding coherence between the analytic account and experience of the interview that produced the text. Particular aspects of the researcher's experience of the interview moved the analysis forward while others closed it down. Nevertheless, field notes are prone to all the linguistic manoeuvres of a self-analysis, and thinking about ways in which this material could be more systematically recorded and sensitively utilised is an important task for psychoanalytic approaches to qualitative research.

(xiii) Maintaining the Social and Cultural Contexts of the Interviews

Using psychoanalysis in qualitative studies therefore involves conceptualising individuals as embedded in social and cultural contexts with socially acceptable and powerful ways of being, but also individually orientated to these contexts, uniquely invested in discourse in different ways influenced by conscious and unconscious wishes. Such an approach requires thinking about narratives as dynamic processes mediated by, but not reducible to, personal biographies, relational events, linguistic repertoires and subjective experiences. (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007)

Whilst attempting to assist in the production of the respondent's voice and not to assume the stance of interpreter, implying 'knowing better than they do', it was necessary to give sufficient attention to both detail and contradictions. Any similarities between the researcher and respondent were noted and included in the interpretation. Likewise the different subjectivities between respondents were used as a means of triangulating on the data interpreted.

The limitations and the superficiality of much of the data collected in addition to the highly subjective and sometimes speculative nature of the analyses must be acknowledged. The analysis was taken only as far as evidence permitted and aimed to "acknowledge puzzlement where evidence was lacking" and admit not to the creation of 'truths' about interviewees, but "accounts which are methodologically, empirically and theoretically convincing"(Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The data was therefore approached openly and even-handedly, making only such judgements as could be supported by evidence, and not ignoring evidence when it suited. It also involved the

researcher acknowledging her responses to the data. In the words of Hollway and Jefferson (1998), the researcher, put herself 'alongside them [the respondents], attempting to use what self-knowledge [she] possessed and the difficulties [she] was familiar with, to assist [her] to understand their inconsistencies, confusions and anxieties'.

Therefore, during each interview I noted my thoughts and emotions concerning the individuals and contexts concerned with the study and took account of the dynamics as they occurred. These notes were then used in the interpretation process.

4. Procedures

(i) Group Supervision Procedure

Prior to beginning the session ground rules were agreed and established and the need for complete confidentiality was emphasised. After a welcome and a reminder about ground rules, the session began by the members stating what they aim to give to the session (for example, to practice different kinds of questions; to attend carefully so as to be able to give helpful summaries; to give feedback about the progress of a concern previously shared; and what they hoped to get from the session (for example, help with a concern, feedback from the group about a particular aspect of their contribution). This round aimed to orientate the group to a different activity, usually at the end of a busy, tiring school day and help them reflect on their commitment to the group.

- During the initial session I took the role of Chair and responsibility for timekeeping and for managing the group and task processes. Throughout the group session, I ensured that only one person spoke at a time.
- A volunteer was asked to act as the supervisee and to share a problem or issue. Spontaneity was emphasised (rotas for presenting a concern, or someone sharing a concern because a third party thought they should were discouraged).
- The supervisee was asked to describe their issue in their own words as clearly as they could without interruption. Had more than one person wanted to work on a concern then some estimation of 'priority' would have indicated which concern the group would have worked on.
- Members of the supervising group then took it in turns to ask the supervisee a question about the issue for the purposes of clarification. At this stage, no other

comments or responses were allowed. It was essential to ensure that the group members did not rush immediately into wanting to provide solutions and advice. Once each member of the group had asked a question and received a response, I then summarised the discussion and the supervisee checked that the problem was accurately defined. If there was still a lack of clarity then further questions could be asked in this phase.

- In the next phase there was an exploration of possible solutions. The EP asked the group to make individual suggestions or offer possible solutions. The supervisee did not make any response to these suggestions until each member of the group had shared a solution.
- The supervisee was then asked to select suggestions that had potential value and explain why some solutions were inappropriate or impractical. Further structured discussion followed allowing the supervisee to explore the viable solutions offered.
- Frequently the exploration itself provided the answers the supervisee was looking for, and as such was a good example of the process of 'interventive interviewing' as described by Tomm (1987).
- As the main part of the session neared its end, the supervisee was asked to summarize for the group where they had got to and what they are able to do next. The supervisee was then asked to agree to carry out three actions to resolve their issue. The supervisee then agreed to carry out the three actions to resolve their issue.
- Following the initial session each supervisee was asked to attend a second group supervision session.
- Following on from the initial group session a second training day was arranged for the group where paired sessions were discussed. The participants were given a handout (see appendix III) outlining how to structure a paired peer supervision session and were asked to randomly select pairs by drawing names out of a hat.

(ii) The Interviews

Six questions deriving from a similar theoretical structure to that devised by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) were used as prompts in the interviews.

1. What was your experience of the group sessions that you attended?
2. Tell me about any barriers or limitations that you experienced.

3. What words might you use to describe the usefulness of the group ?
4. What experience have you had of working in a pair?
5. What is your experience of any other form(s) of support outside the group?
6. How do you feel about the survival of the group?

Throughout the interviews relevant comments of other participants, either from the current study or the pilot study were quoted to stimulate discussion and to record the counter-transferences of the other participants to the comments made by previous interviewees.

Care was taken not to introduce ideas that had not already been discussed by the current interviewee, rather they were encouraged to expand on their thoughts by using the comments of previous interviewees.

Having asked the question, the interviewer did not intervene until the interviewee had finished speaking. Free associations were encouraged to pick up on incoherences such as; contradictions, elisions, avoidances in order to provide the key to each person's *Gestalt* and their unique meanings and concerns which would probably not be visible using a more traditional method. Group members were also asked to rate their experiences to provide a measure of perceived usefulness of the group sessions. The answers to these questions also served as feedback to the Local Authority. These questions were asked verbally and any additional comments made at the time were also recorded.

On a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being the least and 10 being the most please rate the following questions

1. How useful has the peer support group been to you?
2. Do you think the peer support group is a good use of your time?
3. Would you be prepared to set time aside in the future for this type of exercise?
4. How would you prioritise work of this nature?
5. How has or could the peer support group be of benefit to colleagues in your school?
6. How has or could the peer support group be of benefit to pupils in your school?
7. How has/could the peer support group be of benefit to parents of pupils in your school?

All of the 11 interviews were recorded digitally and then transcribed in order to be analysed.

(iii) Analysis of the Data

The interviews were transcribed from the digital audio recordings. The transcribed material of each interviewee was arranged into nine common categories, based on the judgement of the researcher – using all of the information that had been collected. The purpose of this collation into categories was to provide a means of comparing individual opinions and experiences across these categories. The categories were part of the analysis, not prior to it and they emerged using a process of categorical content analysis. The categorical-content approach to narrative analysis broke the text down into relatively self-contained areas of content, and submitted them each to thematic analysis. Lieblich *et al.* (1998:112-14) outline the four stages that were involved in this approach:

1. Formulation of a research question which enables the selection of a subtext that becomes the focus of analysis;
2. Definition of the subcategories/themes running through the text, these emerged from the text in a grounded theory manner rather than being predefined by theory;
3. The units of analysis, ie. utterances, phrases, episodes were then assigned to these categories; and
4. Conclusions were drawn from the results.

(Lieblich *et al.*, 1998:112-14)

However, the more the categories were subdivided in order to be sensitive to differences, the more these risked fragmentation, thus threatening the whole that gave them their meaning. Therefore the nine broad categories were maintained and the information from each respondent was collated into each of the corresponding nine categories and the differing perspectives of each respondent were triangulated. These relations were more important conceptually than each account on its own. The nine categories evolved through which to process the participants' responses were:

- ii. Difficulties experienced by the Head teachers
- iii. Experiences of being in the group
- iv. Individual benefits
- v. Wider benefits

- vi. Barriers and limitations
- vii. Ongoing success and survival of the group
- viii. Working in pairs
- ix. Role of the Educational Psychologist
- x. Additional comments

The transcripts corresponding to each of these broad categories were kept as intact as possible for interpretation rather than being fragmented coded statements in order to maintain their context. Wertheimer's primary law of 'place in context' (that significance is a function of position in a wider framework), addresses the problem of decontextualisation of text which is inherent in code and retrieve methods. Wertheimer emphasised that 'parts are defined by their relation to the system as a whole in which they are functioning' (Murphy and Kovach, 1972). Coffey and Atkinson argue that:

Strategies that are dependent on coding the data and using the codes to retrieve analytically significant segments of data[are] a common starting point for researchers...The fragmentation of data implied in the coding strategy often leads researchers to overlook the form of their data.

(Coffey and Atkinson, 1996:22)

Gee (1991), argues that analysing the structure of a text is an important part of the interpretation in that it points to a set of what he calls 'interpretive questions' while at the same time also constraining the answers that are given.

(iv) Grounded Theory

Grounded theory studies in psychology may offer a means of stimulating fresh ideas and challenging past truths. In addition to offering coding strategies and data management, grounded theory can give access to people's concerns and experience and a sensitivity to felt meanings by raising the analytic level of initial coding practices. Through grounded theory researchers have tools to treat data analytically in ways that enable individuals' new ways of understanding their experience. By creating increasingly more theoretical memos the analytic process is advanced and can spark reflexivity about it. Engaging in theoretical sampling to sharpen abstract categories and to dig deeper into the phenomena can also give clarity and precision. The potential of grounded theory's constant comparative method might prove to be an alternative

approach in studies of this nature that aim to construct persuasive critical analyses to effect change. In recent years interest has emerged in social science internationally in developing principled and practical forms of 'methodological combining', (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2000; Todd, Nerlich, McKeown and Clarke, 2004; Henwood and Lang, 2005; Moran-Ellis, 2006). Therefore, future studies of this nature may consider using a grounded theory approach alongside a psychodynamic methodology to analyse data produced during interviews.

Summary

In recognising the need to provide both a means to generate helpful practical solutions for problems and an effective container for the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by the Head teachers in this study, elements of consultation and supervision were used to design a peer supervision group for them. Following a number of group sessions the 11 participants were interviewed. A psychoanalytic approach was used to collect the interview data in order to acknowledge the complexity of the emotional lives and unconscious processes of the participants, using a narrative 'Free Association Interview' method. The interviews were transcribed and the transcripts were analysed using an interpretive approach that was based around content analysis where particular attention was given to the *Gestalts* and the defended subjects contained within the interview texts. Ethical considerations were taken into account and there was a discussion around the objectivity, reliability and generalisability of the data produced. Using psychoanalysis in this way helped to conceptualise individuals as embedded in social and cultural contexts but also individually orientated to these contexts, uniquely invested in discourse in different ways influenced by conscious and unconscious wishes. The narratives that were produced in the interviews were regarded as dynamic processes mediated by, but not reducible to, personal biographies, relational events, linguistic repertoires and subjective experiences.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

1. Introduction

In this section the findings of the interviews with the participants following both the original training day session and two further group sessions which the group organized themselves without me present will be presented along with the results of the questionnaires that were completed by the 11 participants on the initial and follow-up training days (see appendices IV and V). Transcripts of the interviews are available in the form of a CD in a sleeve attached to the back inside cover of this thesis. Extracts of representative texts are included in this chapter to illustrate the points that are made.

The interview transcripts were divided into categories that were identified, using the method described in the methodology as follows and extracts from the interview data were assigned to each category respectively:

- i. Difficulties experienced by the Head teachers
- ii. Experiences of being in the group
- iii. Individual benefits
- iv. Wider benefits
- v. Barriers and limitations
- vi. Ongoing success and survival of the group
- vii. Group Versus Paired Working
- viii. Role of the Educational Psychologist
- ix. Additional comments

In this section the findings of the interviews with the participants in the peer supervision group were presented. The findings were presented as descriptive accounts of the views of the participants and include extracts of representative texts to illustrate the points that are made. There was also an attempt to interpret and comment on these findings.

2. Main Findings

(i) The Questionnaire Data

The results of the questionnaires that were completed by all 11 participants on the initial and follow-up training days were collated and can be seen as appendices 4 and 5.

At the end of the initial training day the participants were asked to rate a number of statements between 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree).

- 100% of those who attended stated that they strongly agreed that the day had been a useful experience;
- All those who attended strongly agreed that the day had been a good use of their time;
- All of those who took part agreed strongly that they would recommend the process to other Head teachers and that they day had met their expectations;
- 50% of those who attended the session gave a rating of 1 for the statement that the day had been well structured with a good balance of activities. The remaining 50% gave a rating of 2;
- 50% of those who attended gave a rating of 1 for the statement that the presentations were clearly delivered and the content was useful. 33% gave a rating of 2. 17% gave a rating of 3 for the same statement;
- 83% gave a rating of 1 to the statement that the group supervision sessions were supportive and helpful. 17% gave a rating of 2.
- 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this work should be developed to become an integral part of Headship.
- 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this method and structure of working was useful and supportive.
- 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this process would be helpful to other groups eg. Deputy Heads, SENCOs, NQTs.

During the interviews the participants were asked to rate a number of statements regarding the group sessions they had taken part in following the initial training day. This time they were asked to rate between 1 and 10, where 1 was the least possible and 10 was the most. The results were as follows:

- Six participants gave a rating of 9 for the question 'How useful has the group

been to you?' whilst three gave a score of 8. Scores of 7 and 3 were given by the two remaining participants respectively.

- Three participants gave a rating of 10 for the question 'Has the group been a good use of your time?' whilst six gave a rating of 9. Scores of 8 and 5 were given by the two remaining participants respectively.
- Seven participants gave a rating of 10 for the question: 'Would you be prepared to set time aside for this type of work in the future?' whilst three gave a rating of 9. The remaining participant gave a rating of 5.
- Two participants gave a rating of 10 for the question: 'How would you prioritise this type of work?' whilst two gave a rating of 9. Six participants gave a rating of 8 and one participant gave a rating of 5.
- Two participants gave a rating of 9 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to your colleagues in school of you attending the group?' Six participants gave a rating of 8 and three participants gave a rating of 7.
- Three participants gave a rating of 9, three gave a rating of 8 and three gave a rating of 7 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to pupils in your school of you attending the group?'. The remaining two participants gave ratings of 6 and 5 respectively.
- Six participants gave a rating of 8 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to parents of pupils in your school of you attending the group?'. Seven participants gave a rating of 7 and the remaining two participants gave ratings of 6 and 2 respectively.

The above responses indicate that in general the peer support group sessions were regarded as: useful, a good use of time, something that participants would be prepared to set time aside for; a reasonably high priority and having a positive knock on effect for colleagues, pupils and parents in their school communities.

(ii) The Interview Data

The nine categories that emerged from the participants' responses were:

- i. Difficulties Experienced by Head teachers** included: feelings of isolation; specific difficulties relating to small primary schools; experiencing conflicting views with and between their own staff; having responsibility for the lives and careers of others; taking on the anxiety of others; time pressures; exclusions;

conflicting interests and rivalry with other schools; leadership issues; feelings of fatigue and anxiety; difficulties in maintaining a work/life balance; difficult relationships with key figures such as Governors, other Head teachers, Local Authority Officers; a mismatch between the perceived needs of the pupils and meeting the targets of the Local Authority; feelings of alienation from the job; a belief that the current levels of support are inadequate and pressures to keep abreast of current knowledge .

- ii. **Experiences of Being in the Group** included: a belief that it was different from anything experienced previously or already established. The majority of participants felt that the structured process was very important to the success of the group and the members spoke of the feelings of personal warmth, support and affirmation that they experienced by being in the group.
- iii. **The Individual Benefits** experienced by those who took part in the group included: the normalising effects that the group had on difficulties shared; how it had improved the listening and problem solving skills of those that took part; how it promoted altruism, openness and communication between the group members and they appreciated being able to come out of the 'Head teacher' Role. Participants also reported that the group had assisted them to engage with already established networks more confidently and efficiently and that in all the group had been a good use of time.
- iv. **The Wider Benefits** of the group reported by the participants included: the positive effects for their own schools and for the whole teaching profession; the potential of the process to be used with other groups; reports that schools had become more open to each other; the improved problem-solving skills gained from being in the group which were transferable to their own school situation; the improved problem-solving skills had improved their capacity to deal with the difficulties of others; having a greater awareness of others with similar problems identified them as a resource to consult with; attendance at the group had increased awareness of the vulnerability of others; how the group had helped to establish links between schools; the experience of being in the group had an influence on some participants' own careers as they considered going into this kind of work in the future and that having experienced the group process they were more prepared to analyse their own situation more critically and realistically.

- v. **The Barriers and Limitations** to working in this way were identified by the participants as: failure to maintain the rigid format and structure of the group process can result in an unproductive session; reluctance by some group members to take up the role of Chair/Co-ordinator/Facilitator can place pressure on those who have already taken on this role to maintain this task; time pressures can limit a participant's attendance at the group and demonstrates the need to formally set specific time aside for the group sessions; some participants had a fear of introducing their own issues and had a sense of personal vulnerability whilst others experienced feelings of responsibility to find a solution for another's difficulty; missing a session can make re-engagement difficult as it threatens group cohesiveness; some of the advantages of the group are difficult to define which could make it hard to justify it to others; lack of experience of some other group members can limit the effects of the process; the topics discussed do not always have relevance to some participants' own contexts; there is a possibility of 'difficult' individuals attending the group and potentially causing conflict of disruption; participants' may feel fatigued at certain times of the term which may limit their capacity to contribute to the group; where there is a conflict of interests between schools it may add a strain to the process; there is a danger of the group going 'stale' after a time; the possibility of confidentiality breaches is a risk and as the majority of Head teachers who attend the group are from primary school The difficulties which are specific to secondary Head teachers may not be adequately addressed.
- vi. **Factors which might promote the ongoing success and survival of the group** included: a belief in the efficacy of the group and commitment from it's members; members having shared goals, culture and knowledge of the locality; the personal qualities of the individual group members; the group being exclusively for Head teachers; the initial training sessions; the clear structure of the sessions; the presence of the Chair and having a facilitator to administrate and publicise the group; preparing for the sessions properly by selecting and agreeing the problems, issues or topics to be discussed and the structure of the meeting beforehand; having the support of the Local Authority; the proactive promotion of the group to other Heads and supporting them in the group; maintaining the momentum of the sessions; being organised and maintaining effective communication between group members; for members to have the discipline to attend group sessions; intermittent

refresher' sessions may be from the Educational Psychology Service and a means of ongoing evaluation .

- vii. Paired versus Group Work:** The six participants who had experienced working in both paired and group sessions stated that paired work is useful for in-between group sessions; there is a role for group and paired sessions; the paired sessions are more informal and easier to arrange and maintain; having a structure to keep to even in the paired sessions encouraged the use of more searching questions.
- viii. The Role of the Educational Psychologist -** in this work was seen by all of those interviewed to have been very positive. The relationship with the local Educational Psychologist was already established and was clearly excellent with all of the Heads. In this work the Educational Psychologists were able to work as applied psychologists.
- ix. Additional Comments** made by those who took part were: that it was good to know that the pressure that Heads are under is being acknowledged; experience counts and can help others; the nature of Head teachers is that they are natural listeners and communicators; there is a need to support new Head; and there is a possible role for retired Head teachers to mentor current Heads. The possibility of developing some form of E-Mail Support within the group was also suggested.

3. The Questionnaire Data

The results of the questionnaires that were completed by all 11 participants on the initial and follow-up training days were collated and can be seen as appendices 4 and 5.

Although an assessment of the 'quality' of the training day was not a research objective I felt that it was important to get some feedback on it to inform future work. At the end of the initial training day the participants were asked to rate a number of statements between 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree). 100% of those who attended stated that they strongly agreed that the day had been a useful experience. Similarly all those who attended strongly agreed that the day had been a good use of their time. All of those who took part agreed strongly that they would recommend the process to other Head teachers and that they day had met their expectations. 50% of those who attended the session gave a rating of 1 for the statement that the day had been well structured

with a good balance of activities. The remaining 50% gave a rating of 2. 50% of those who attended gave a rating of 1 for the statement that the presentations were clearly delivered and the content was useful, whilst 33% gave a rating of 2 and 17% gave a rating of 3 for the same statement. 83% gave a rating of 1 to the statement that the group supervision sessions were supportive and helpful whilst the remaining 17% gave a rating of 2. 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this work should be developed to become an integral part of Headship. 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this method and structure of working was useful and supportive. Finally 100% of the participants gave a rating of 1 for the statement that this process would be helpful to other groups eg. Deputy Heads, SENCOs, NQTs.

During the interviews the participants were asked to rate a number of statements regarding the group sessions they had taken part in following the initial training day. This time they were asked to rate between 1 and 10, where 1 was the least possible and 10 was the most. The results were as follows:

Six participants gave a rating of 9 for the question 'How useful has the group been to you?' whilst three gave a score of 8. Scores of 7 and 3 were given by the two remaining participants respectively. These scores indicate that the group sessions were very useful to the majority of the participants. The individual who gave the score of 3 stated that as they had not presented a problem and none of the problems presented by other people had any relevance to them directly the groups had not been to date as useful as they perhaps could be. Therefore, despite the low score the potential that the group process offers was acknowledged.

Three participants gave a rating of 10 for the question 'Has the group been a good use of your time?' whilst six gave a rating of 9. Scores of 8 and 5 were given by the two remaining participants respectively. Again the majority of respondents felt that the group sessions had been a good use of their time. The lowest score was given by the same respondent who gave the previous question a low score and this may reflect their feeling that the content of the sessions had had no direct relevance to them to date but that there was potential in the method.

Seven participants gave a rating of 10 for the question: 'Would you be prepared to set time aside for this type of work in the future?' whilst three gave a rating of 9. The remaining participant gave a rating of 5. The vast majority of the respondents stated

strongly that they would be prepared to set time aside for this type of work in the future whilst one was less convinced. The individual who gave the lowest score was the same one who gave low scores for the previous questions for similar reasons.

Two participants gave a rating of 10 for the question: 'How would you prioritise this type of work?' whilst two gave a rating of 9. Six participants gave a rating of 8 and one participant gave a rating of 5. Therefore most of the participants felt that they would prioritise this type of work, two of them very strongly making the case for it. Again the respondent who gave the lowest score was the same individual who had given low scores in the previous questions for similar reasons.

Two participants gave a rating of 9 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to your colleagues in school of you attending the group?' Six participants gave a rating of 8 and three participants gave a rating of 7. Most of the participants could see that their attendance at the group had positive implications for their colleagues in their schools. Those who gave lower scores may have failed to recognise how the stresses and strains that come with the role of the Head teacher might have a direct impact on their management style and their competence in handling others. This may have implications for working with Heads who fail to make this connection.

Three participants gave a rating of 9, three gave a rating of 8 and three gave a rating of 7 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to pupils in your school of you attending the group?'. The remaining two participants gave ratings of 6 and 5 respectively. Most of the Heads recognised that their attendance at the peer support group might have a positive effect on the pupils in their school. However, as with those who may not have seen how their attendance at the sessions might affect the staff in their schools some may not be as convinced of these benefits as others clearly are. This again has implications for working with Head teachers in schools.

Six participants gave a rating of 8 for the question: 'What are the direct/indirect benefits to parents of pupils in your school of you attending the group?'. Seven participants gave a rating of 7 and the remaining two participants gave ratings of 6 and 2 respectively. As the perceived relationship with the Head teacher becomes more removed the scores given by the respondents are seen to reduce. Whilst most of the respondents recognised that their attendance at the group sessions might have some positive effects on the parents of the pupils in their schools the scores were lower than the previous two

questions. This is somewhat surprising as although the parents of the pupils are not in such direct contact with the Head teachers on a daily basis, it is often issues around parents that cause Head teachers the greatest amount of stress.

The above responses indicate that in general the peer support group sessions were regarded as: useful, a good use of time, something that participants would be prepared to set time aside for; a reasonably high priority and having a positive knock on effect for colleagues, pupils and parents in their school communities.

4. The Interview Data

The interview data provided accounts from which inferences could be made about observations that some Head teachers appeared to have problems whilst others did not, despite having very similar situations, experience and contexts. They also offered suggestions that might account for the reasons why some Head teachers appeared to access available sources of support and advice readily whilst others appeared to be more reluctant to engage with them. The findings could also be interpreted as indicating that despite most Head teachers appearing to be equally capable of handling the variety of issues, dilemmas and difficulties that arose in their schools, and most having had experience of doing so, they all lacked confidence in their own competence and some became defensive when discussing decisions they had made.

My observations about the Head teachers were also strengthened by the findings from the interview data in that the personal stresses expressed by them could be attributed to real or imagined fears of: being viewed as incompetent by others and by themselves; being perceived as unjust or unfair; being judged as uncaring and ruthless or being seen as weak and lacking leadership abilities. All of the Head teachers had experienced a range of problems involving financial, personnel, disciplinary, interpersonal and personal issues over time and rarely were their difficulties unique or novel. In general they were equally competent in dealing with them appropriately. There was a common theme of isolation - all had common fears but each had different issues at that time. The comments from the Head teachers highlighted that existing structures in the local authority did not provide enough emotional support and left the Heads feeling isolated, overwhelmed and unsure about procedures and skills that they needed to work effectively. The Educational Psychology Service was able to address this issue by drawing upon expertise of working in a therapeutic way and on experience of

participating in and running peer supervision.

In general, the peer support sessions were described very positively by all who attended and the consensus was that they provided the type and quality of support that was required. The fact that there were a higher proportion of positive statements to negative statements about this process is a strong indicator that the peer supervision groups were of value to the Head teachers involved. The group format provided the educative and normative functions of peer supervision. Each person contributed to the range of expertise and experience needed to address the problems raised. This meant that there was a shared understanding of the particular role of the Head teacher. Initially there is a need to encourage group members who fear they have little to offer a group in terms of experience, skill or personality to take part in order to listen to the contribution of the other members of the group. Counsellmann and Weber (2004) highlight the importance of a group in peer supervision as a mechanism for conveying a therapeutic effect. At its simplest level it allows the normalisation of problems so that individual Head teachers see that 'it is not just them' and that other Head teachers are facing similar difficulties and challenges.

The supportive function of peer supervision has featured highly in Head teachers comments. The sessions allowed them to see that others shared the same issues as themselves and this helped them to keep problems in proportion. This has served to meet common needs such as; decrease feelings of isolation, promoting self-confidence, and development of feelings of self-efficacy as problem-solving skills increase. Working with others in the group has helped to establish cooperative relationships between individuals based on shared concerns or situations. The group also provides an individual with reflection and this promotes self-appraisal to help with development of identity and self-esteem (Counsellmann and Weber, 2004).

The success of the group supervision relies on the building of trust and positive relationships. This occurs over time and means that each successive session is likely to have more impact as supportive relationships develop. The apparent 'opening up' of more withdrawn individuals was testament to the level of trust and mutual respect established by the group:

"It depends upon how you feel about the colleagues who are there, and I feel about the colleagues that were there, I trust them, and I feel that they were

listening, there were quite a few colleagues there who are quite experienced so when they come up with recommendations often they are based on their own experience in their own practice. I feel that if I had a burning issue I could go to a meeting and talk about it. By nature I'm not a person who shares my problems with a range of people, I'm someone who gets on the phone and would chat one to one, but I felt that if I had an issue I could use that as an arena where I could air a problem. I actually feel from how people have behaved that they feel the same".

(Head teacher 5 from current study)

Zorga et al (2001) point out that in group peer supervision the roles of supervisor and supervisee rotate around the group. This is an important part of the process of developing trust and means that the Head teachers should be encouraged to act as 'Chair', even if they feel uncomfortable with this unfamiliar role. The results of the study suggested that the peer supervision group improved the working lives of the Head teachers concerned by allaying some of their fears and providing some practical ways forward with their difficulties. In addition, the study provided some valuable data from which some of the complex intra and interpersonal issues that contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned could be inferred (see appendix IX). The following findings and discussion section focuses on each of the categories identified from the questionnaire and interview data and offers an analysis of some of this material using a psychoanalytic approach and framework.

The interviews that followed the group sessions were transcribed from the digital audio recordings and the transcripts from each interviewee were arranged into nine common categories, using the method described in the methodology, using all of the information that had been collected. This was to provide a means of comparing individual opinions and experiences across the categories which had emerged from the data using a process of categorical content analysis which broke the text down into relatively self-contained areas. The nine categories were maintained as much as possible to avoid the risk of fragmenting the narratives and, thus threatening the whole that gave them their meaning. Once the information from each respondent was collated into each of the corresponding nine categories, the differing perspectives of each respondent was triangulated.

The nine categories that emerged from the participants' responses were:

- i. Difficulties Experienced by the Head teachers
 - ii. Experiences of Being in the Group
 - iii. Individual Benefits
 - iv. The Wider Benefits
 - v. Barriers and Limitations
 - vi. The Ongoing Success and Survival of the Group
 - vii. Paired Versus Group Work
 - viii. The Role of the Educational Psychologist
 - ix. Additional Comments

i. Difficulties Experienced by Head teachers

The findings of the interview data gave weight to one of my observations at the outset of this study that most of the Head teachers appeared to have experienced a similar range of problems over time and their difficulties were rarely unique or novel. Although they appeared to be competent in dealing with these difficulties appropriately, they frequently doubted their own decisions and solutions, whilst maintaining an air of authority and control to those around them. Where some Heads appeared to have problems that others did not share, the interviews revealed that all of the Heads were experiencing similar issues but often it was their attitude to these and their relationships with those around them that dictated whether the problems were manageable or otherwise. Often a lack confidence in their own competence and decisions resulted in defensive behaviour which made them feel even more isolated than they were already. Often the personal stresses experienced by the Head teachers were the result of imagined fears of: being viewed as incompetent by others and by themselves; being perceived as unjust or unfair; being judged as uncaring and ruthless or being seen as weak and lacking leadership abilities. These factors in particular were the cause of a great deal of anxiety amongst those who took part.

The findings demonstrated how the supervision group's educative function allowed problems to be discussed and explored. Examples of the issues raised included: Staffing issues such as incompetence, team efficiency, incompatibility of personalities, responsibility points and staff structuring. Administrative issues such as Self Evaluation Forms (SEF), School Profiles, Ofsted, Performance management, responsibilities for buildings and maintenance and Procedural issues such as disciplinary and exclusion procedures. Other issues such as dealing with parents and maintaining school standards

in general.

Isolation

The isolation felt by the majority of the Head teachers was felt by them to be exacerbated by other staff in the school apparently unaware of the nature of the responsibilities and accountabilities of the Head teacher and, as a consequence, are often unable to offer practical or emotional support:

No, you can't even hardly confide in anybody, and the other teachers in the school don't understand what processes you have to go through..

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study).

On occasions, this level of isolation made them feel emotionally overwhelmed and they were unable to show this to other staff members, the Senior Management Team, Governors or Local Authority Officers as there was a fear that their loyalties and allegiances may have been compromised:

I haven't been a Head for that long, when you first go into Headship you comfort yourself with, 'I haven't been a Head for long so I'm still learning' but then you get to a point where you think I have got some major problems and I don't have anywhere to turn, I've seen some Heads in some horrendous positions, where they haven't known where to turn – a colleague in my previous cluster was verbally abused by a man, and I watched the whole thing – he was on his own because his Chair of Governors didn't know what to do, whether to support the parent or support the Head, the local authority wasn't really interested because the person doing the abusing was a councillor!

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study).

In addition, fear of showing weakness or vulnerability which may be interpreted as a lack of competence or poor leadership was also apparent:

I don't know if sometimes I talk too openly to staff about things, and with being an internal appointment I've never known any different, I've been here since I was 21 - should you show as a Head any sign of weakness?, any sign of indecision? or should you always be the font of all knowledge?, does that give people

confidence? or do they like to see a human being who makes mistakes? I still don't know that I've got it right.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Some Heads said they were able to call upon others from within the school community and/or the local community to give them limited support:

I think within school I use one of the people on the senior management team, the Bursar, and I do use her quite a lot to talk to about things because she has a different perspective, because she's not a teacher - people talk to her in a different way and she can bring issues to me that people are worried about and don't want to say to me directly, or I can just talk things through with her and I find that useful.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

However, as some of the issues were about staff members in the school it would have been inappropriate and unprofessional to discuss these matters with their own staff or colleagues in other schools:

I find friends who work in other schools helpful, but if they're local to the area I can't necessarily give them all the details, I can't mention names for instance, but it can be reassuring to think somebody will say "well nobody would bother with that at our place", or something and you think "oh well, at least I've not..." you look for little signs of reassurance.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Having described to me a particularly difficult issue that had been a problem over the past year one Head teacher stated:

I didn't feel I could share that until now, I'm talking to you now in a way that I haven't all year really. The hardest part of the job is the management of people and their emotions as you can't share it with anyone.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Feelings of isolation and powerlessness may in some cases may be a consequence of the powerless state of mind described by Obholzer (1994), interacting with an actual lack of

external resources that could otherwise be used to promote a sense of power. Alternatively, it could be that whilst a number of the Head teachers in this study have adequate external resources to reinforce their sense of power, they may be in such a state of demoralization or depression that they feel they have no power. Power may be perceived as located as outside of themselves, leaving them with a sense of powerlessness. As these feelings of isolation were a common feature amongst the Heads it could be that these feelings are a consequence of their responsibility to maintain high standards of achievement through the management and direction of colleagues who may or may not be co-operative. It is not difficult to see how the discomfort the Heads are experiencing may be because they are unwitting recipients of the projections, described by Klein (1946), of those around them, making them react in such a way that their own feelings are affected as they unconsciously identify with these projected feelings. Such feelings may be exacerbated in a number of ways where conflict exists between the members of senior management teams. Under different circumstances these individuals, might offer a source of support and counsel, but when in conflict they become the objects of distress and controversy and render them unsuitable as confidants.

Taking Responsibility for Others

Many of the Head teachers interviewed stated that whilst they were generally comfortable in making decisions about routine issues that did not directly effect people's lives, they all expressed their anxieties around having to deal with the potential or real effects of their actions on the lives of other people, even when they were justified in taking certain actions. These actions may be in the form of redundancies, changing staff responsibilities or competency and disciplinary procedures. This was evidently a major source of stress for some Heads, especially in secondary schools with a large staff where such dilemmas manifest themselves more frequently.

Anxieties around having to deal with the potential or real effects of their actions on the lives of other people, even when such actions are justified, may imply a lack of a sense of power felt by Heads and even unwillingness on the part of their staff to sanction their authority. These actions include: making decisions regarding redundancies, changing staff responsibilities or initiating competency and disciplinary procedures, all of which are well within the remit of a Head teacher and if managed judiciously should not be seen as anything other than responsible management if effected within an authoritative regime. However, the unease of the Head teachers when required to work in these areas

may indicate lack of a sense of authority. As the Head teachers derive their authority from their role in their school and exercise authority on its behalf, it is understood that they have the right to make ultimate decisions, often affecting others. However, if the majority of the school staff do not accept a specific individual's role as Head teacher and authority is withheld from below the fear of undermining or sabotage may affect their sense of authority (Obholzer, 1994).

Alternatively, the difficulties may be around the concept of perceived power. As a sense of power arises from both internal and external sources where external sources that could otherwise promote a sense power are not evident or are undermined, the Head teachers might feel a sense of powerlessness. Despite the existence of a range of seemingly adequate external resources, several of the Head teachers made comments that indicated that their internal state of mind might be undermining their sense of power when dealing with the difficulties or issues of other people. It could be that some of the situations the Heads may encounter when taking responsibility for others involve specific situations which may closely resemble early life situations that they have experienced and which they are still processing unconsciously. Alternatively the Head may be inadequately prepared to deal with the effects of suffering or distress in others and the corresponding anxiety in themselves (Speck, 1994). The Heads may have experienced such similar feelings to their colleagues that they cannot perform a containing function for them and this may lead to further distress for all.

Taking on the Emotions of Others Around Them

The majority of those interviewed described how they frequently become the depository for other people's anxieties and negative emotions and how this had a negative impact on their own mental state. They described how anxieties are passed on to them as an apparent growing anxiety which, according to the Heads appears to be becoming prevalent in society as a whole permeates their school communities via parents, pupils, the Local Authority, the media and the Government. They also described their efforts to hang on to their own principles and values despite these pressures. The diverse range of individuals who interact with Head teachers was described and how, due to the nature of this work, the needs and emotions of the Head teachers themselves become secondary. A reluctance to burden others with their own difficulties, whilst routinely having to take on the worries of others was also expressed. As a consequence of these pressures one interviewee described how minor events can be the final incident for a Head teacher

who, having had to contain their own anxieties and those of others, is finally toppled by a relatively minor negative inter-personal interaction.

Projective identification from members of their staff may be another reason for unease amongst Head teachers. Alternatively, depending on the state of mind of a particular Head teacher, these assumed perceptions of others may be real or imagined. For example, an individual with a negative self-image may, through selective inattention or projection, incorrectly perceives that others around them are critical and hostile. When they feel especially vulnerable because of a difficult decision they have made, a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' may ensue if the individual, anticipating criticism and hostility, unwittingly behaves in a manner that eventually cause those around them to become, in effect, critical and hostile. In this way, parataxical distortions of interpersonal beliefs can be seen to express themselves in behaviours that have a predictable impact on others, (Kiesler, 1996:22).

From discussions with the Head teachers in this study it would seem that often the emotions and preferences of the Heads themselves go by the wayside in their efforts to do right by those around them. Such compromises may lead to an undermining in their authority, either actual or imagined. Depending on their knowledge, experience, strength of personality and state of mind regarding their role, their internal senses of power and authority can be affected and may influence how they present themselves to others. If the Head is generally demoralised, depressed or unsupported they may experience more distress than individuals who attract projected power who have no difficulty in taking up or being granted a leadership role. The nature of the projections may affect whether the Head teacher is hated and feared, or loved and admired. A sense of responsibility without having adequate authority and power to achieve outcomes often leads to work-related stress and eventual burn-out.

Further reasons for the discomfort experienced by Heads when they are required to make decisions which have negative consequences for those around them may be the consequences of taking up a depressive position in order to perform the primary task of their institution more effectively. Rather than adopting paranoid-schizoid defences involving denial and omnipotent fantasies in order to eliminate anxiety, grief and guilt for all concerned, the Head teacher taking up a depressive stance is required to relinquish self-idealisation subsequently resulting in feelings of guilt, concern and sadness, (Bion, 1967). Maintaining a depressive stance may prove difficult for some

Heads who have a tendency to return to defensive processes such as splitting, whenever anxieties increase, resulting in repeated loss of the capacity to face painful reality, guilt and concern, (Obholzer, 1994).

In some cases it could be that through projective identification the Head teachers are absorbing all the anger, depression or guilt from their staff/governors/parents/pupils/Local Authority. This would make them, vulnerable to being manipulated into acting as a scape-goat for any or all of these groups, or even unconsciously manoeuvred into breaking down and leaving. It can be all too easy for others to dissociate themselves from such a scape-goat and to treat their behaviour as a personal problem (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994). In this way the Head teacher is in danger of not only expressing or carrying something for a specific staff/parent/governor/pupil/Local Authority group, but may be used to export something which the rest of a specified group then need not feel in themselves. Similarly a school community may carry something for another group, such as the Local Authority (Halton, 2004). Like staff in other professions that predominantly engage with people, Head teachers, are often inadequately prepared to deal with the effects of suffering or distress in others and the corresponding anxiety in themselves (Obholzer, 1994). If the emotions they are experiencing are so similar to those with whom they are dealing, one interpretation of this situation may be that they are unlikely to be able to contain them adequately leading to further distress for all.

The Head teachers' perceptions of how the increasing anxieties of society may be passed on to them, permeating their school communities via parents, pupils, the Local Authority, the media and the Government resonates with Obholzer's (1994) claims that society's use of various public services such as the Education Services as unconscious defensive mechanisms in an attempt to repress their anxieties around child care, behavioural issues, crime rates, morality and the future of the country can have a major adverse impact on those who work within the system. The traditional role of public sector institutions such as schools as containers for fundamental human anxieties (Obholzer, 1994), may have fuelled unconscious, and unrealistic expectations of the Education system that all children will be equally well-equipped to meet all of life's challenges.

The Head teachers in the study described their efforts to hang on to their own principles, values and ways of working despite these pressures. Whilst this task-centred approach

adopted by some Heads may have been of some use in defending them from the anxieties of others (Speck, 1994), they are vulnerable to the development of pathological psychic defences (Dartington, 1994). This is apparent in reluctance of some Heads to burden others with their own difficulties, whilst routinely having to take on the worries of others. Whilst this may be considered as commendable stoicism, it may also indicate the development of a defensive psychic shell which may compromise their capacity to be fully responsive to their emotional environment. However, due to reports from the interviewees that relatively minor events or a negative inter-personal interaction can be the final straw for them when they have been unable to process or contain their own anxieties and those of others, it is likely that the Heads in this study are still sensitive to their own anxieties and those of others, yet unable to process them fully. It may be that such work-generated anxiety is resonating with both their primitive and personal anxieties, triggering conscious and unconscious elements of past experience (Obholzer, 1994).

Managing the Effects of Transference

Several of the Head teachers reported staff who have difficulties with behaviour management of pupils. The heads recognised that individual members of their staff had differing levels of tolerance, triggers, expectations and relationships with pupils. Others reported that some staff were particularly resistant to acceptance of change in legislation, teaching practice or the way in which children are treated. This may have been due to past experiences of these staff members whose negative emotions are expressed inappropriately in the classroom and damage working relationships with pupils. In this way transference and counter-transference can be seen to affect teachers' assessment of pupils, classroom interactions, choice of behavioural interventions, predilections for educational theory and even their decisions about the teaching and learning of all curriculum content areas in school (Steel, 2001).

In the same way parents have their own conscious and unconscious sources of distress regarding issues around, health, poverty, marital break-down, domestic violence and housing. Frequently, such issues manifest themselves to the Head teachers as complaints, confrontations, and additionally in the case of staff members, illness, absenteeism, resignations, low morale, poor timekeeping and general incompetence (Speck, 1994), and behaviours such as these seen in both parents and staff members were described by Head teachers in the peer supervision group. In the spirit of this

study, it goes without saying that a degree of distress may be experienced if a Head teacher or any other member of staff is faced with a difficulty or situation that has commonalities with an early life situation that they experienced and may still be processing unconsciously. Similarly, a degree of distress may be the consequence of constructing their self-regard on the basis of reflected appraisals from others around them, which may not always be positive, depending on their own experiences and state of mind. If Head teachers do not take specifically requested courses of action or do take action in an unfavourable way, even though these decisions are taken in the best interests of the school, they are liable to be appraised in a critical way. Head teachers, by merit of their prominent position, are extremely vulnerable to being the focus of interpersonal psychic phenomena. Due to the unconscious transference of attitudes and feelings from past relationships onto the Head teachers they are often the recipients of the negative projections of others such that their feelings may become affected as they unconsciously identify with the feelings projected (Klein, 1946). This projective identification may alter their state of mind in the countertransference. In some instances, Heads may act out the countertransference deriving from the projected feelings and thereby inflame an already difficult situation.

Managing Conflicts of Interests

A number of participants reported that exclusions are a main source of concern for them in their roles as Head teacher as they lead to a sense of failure when having tried everything to support a child and prevent them from being excluded, they have to let them go as the Head must ultimately think of the needs of the wider school. One interviewee described the efforts she had made to avoid excluding one particular pupil and how she used the group sessions to discuss this issue:

Yes, I presented a problem to ___ at the County Offices meeting, then I presented a problem at ___'s meeting, it was about an exclusion, another child, it was the first exclusion I had experienced as a head, I'd been here 5 years and had 3 exclusions in 3 months which is really difficult, I've tried at all costs to avoid that by putting lots of systems in and trying to avoid it – one was a physical attack on a supervisor and abusive language to a class teacher all in 24 hours, it was just so difficult to deal with because I kept putting it off, not wanting to make that first exclusion – can we avoid it, can we do this? But, he did attack a lady supervisor, you have to take action don't you? The supervisor was very emotional, very upset,

crying, this child hit her in the face, hit her on the back of the neck, on the shoulder.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

Common threads between issues around managing the anxieties of others, making decisions that affect the lives of others and feelings of isolation are all manifest in the issue of exclusion. As a prominent figure seated between the school community and the child and their family or carers the Head teacher is extremely vulnerable to the negative transferences and projections of all those involved. They may experience a range of complex, contradicting and contrasting emotions. If a Head feels they are obliged to be supportive of their staff, but like many others, entered the teaching profession due to their own altruistic inclinations, they may have great empathy with the plight of the excluded child and their family/carers. Conversely they may feel great support for their staff who may have battled against the odds to maintain a challenging pupil in school with little support from parents. These conflicting claims on their support may lead them to experience the distress and anger felt by staff in dealing with the child, and similarly the rejection and frustration of the child through projective identification. They may be the subject of transferences from the pupil or their parents who perceive them as any one of a number of heartless, unsympathetic and unreasonable characters from the past. However, if the Head takes the side of the child, they may well be the subject of the negative projections and transferences from the school staff who may regard them as weak, unsupportive and lacking leadership qualities. Furthermore, the opinions and reactions of support services and Local Authority officers must also be considered. Where a Head teacher goes ahead with an exclusion they may be perceived as draconian and non-inclusive by the support services but supportive and a good leader by their staff.

The reasons given by the Head teachers for some of the difficult emotions experienced by those in their school communities may have been in response to external threats such as government policy or social change. Alternatively, they arose from internal conflicts between members of the management team and staff or between individuals, groups and departments in competition for resources. Excessive workloads were identified as a conscious source of stress. Other unconscious and unidentified sources of anxiety may have been kept out of awareness by both personal and collective defenses (Obholzer, 1994). Other work has been done on this by Kyriacou and Dunham

Rivalry and Competition

Another cause for concern was falling roles and schools feeling that they are in competition with each other. Concern that these issues might affect working relationships with other schools in the future was expressed. The resulting feelings of defensiveness and protectiveness about their own schools can be very isolating:

We are in an area where school rolls are falling so there are spare places in all those schools, and parents use that, in a sense, to move schools more easily than they might have done otherwise. You are always worried about numbers and the fact that your children might leave to go to another school, or other children come from other schools to yours.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Concerns were expressed about how these issues might affect working relationships with other schools in the future:

One thing that strikes me, and it's an issue for all schools, is falling numbers, we are all very keen to attract children to our schools and although we don't wish to poach from elsewhere, we feel strongly that we have to support our own place in our staffing ratios, I don't know if that would influence how a cluster will behave in the future because it is obviously something that has been happening in many areas over a period of time but it is something that is now hitting this particular cluster, and I don't know whether that would influence issues.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

A newly appointed Head teacher [who only managed to come to the initial training session in the hotel] described her feelings of defensiveness and protectiveness about her school and how this can be very isolating:

Yes it is a lonely job, and I think the thing is you are self-protective of your school so even when you are speaking to other Heads you don't necessarily give the full picture, you might discuss one small issue but you're always dealing with the full picture, aren't you? It would be good having somebody else who has the full picture.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Despite working within a climate where competition and rivalry are prevalent and perhaps even encouraged, there were few obvious signs of splitting and projection although there was a sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' within the individual schools (Halton, 1994), there was no evidence of the emotions which often accompany these defences such as: denigration, hatred, prejudice or paranoia, although there was an element of competition regarding school roles. As many of the schools had already established links and maintained reasonable contact with each other, there was less scope for projection of this kind. However, where the Heads admitted that they had stopped attending cluster meetings and other 'corporate' meetings there is a possibility that some may have been avoiding these unconsciously in order to preserve some degree of self-idealisation and use denial to protect them from anxiety provoking discussions. Where this did occur there was a danger that their schools were at risk of becoming stuck in a paranoid-schizoid projection system.

Although the members of the newly formed group naturally identified themselves predominantly in terms of their own schools, there was no problem of members experiencing difficulty between the conflicting demands and interests of their own school and those of the group. It was apparent that the group members had invested a lot of personal resource in the group and were keen to share resources and knowledge as well as building up a shared value-system and personal relationships among members.

Difficult Interpersonal Relationships

Difficulties were expressed by a number of Head teachers who reported that where they had other members of their senior management teams who have different points of view from each other, decision-making became more difficult as they can feel that they were being pulled between the different views or standpoints of the other individuals (see appendix VI quote 7).

Many of the Head teachers interviewed described a variety of difficult interpersonal relationships between themselves and other individuals such as: members of staff, parents, Local Authority officers and Governors:

Usually when the Heads can't cope any more it's because that [interpersonal relationships and trust or respect] has been fractured.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Where individuals had generally positive relationships there was an acknowledgment of how difficult and different their job would be if they were otherwise and there was recognition that this was the case for others. Other comments highlighted the lack of praise, positive regard and acknowledgment of success from the Local Authority, the Governors and others in the school community. In some cases there was wariness of such relationships.

One Head described his awkward relationship with the governing body and senior management team in his school:

Certainly I've found that the governing body for instance is not the area where one can reveal difficult issues in a way that makes oneself vulnerable, I think that one's own senior colleagues as well feel very much more focussed on looking for improvement, that you're the person who inevitably carries the can at the end of the day.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Another Head commented on the lack of praise, positive regard and acknowledgment of success from the governors and others in the school:

Because a lot of Governors meetings are about things that have not exactly gone wrong, or saying "this policy is nearly right" and I think as almost your employers they forget to say "by the way, everything seems to be going really well, thank you very much" and if they don't say it there's nobody else, you don't get a stream of staff coming through your door saying you're doing really well, so that I think that's something Heads can do for each other, to affirm what each other is achieving, that can be really positive as well.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

In contrast other interviewees described their relationships with their governors in a more positive light whilst acknowledging the difficulties experienced by others:

I know that [relationship with governors] varies from school to school and the sort of Governors you've got, but I've always been extremely fortunate in that I've had

the same Chair of Governors through my time in school and that's fantastic because he's very knowledgeable, he's firmly got the school's agenda at heart, he doesn't come with a hidden agenda, his children were here and have now moved to _____, but he's got a passion to support school improvement which is why he became a school governor. He has been for about 10 years now. He is very supportive and has a lot of experience. He is Head of PR with the County so knows what's going in with the LA, that does help. The Parent Governors have come on board, and I have been very fortunate that they want to help support the school and take it forward.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

Whilst regarding her relationship with the governors as supportive and positive, one interviewee explained that had this not been the case, a negative relationship with governors would have been an added concern:

I also knew at various points through the year that the Governing Body could have questioned me about what is happening but fortunately because of how they've worked with this school over a period of time and how I've always informed the Governors as to how we are doing and they are always welcome in school. If that hadn't existed, that would have been an extra pressure coming from a Governing Body

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Even where a relationship had yet to become fully established, one head appeared wary of the governing body:

I've got a new Chair of Governors who was a Head, I'm building up a relationship with her where I'm hoping that she is going to be quite supportive, but still feel that you've got to tread very carefully with your Chair of Governors.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

The level of support received by Heads appeared to depend on the nature of the relationships with others in the system, including other Head teachers:

I've known, since 4 years into my Headship, that Heads are at the top of little pyramids, and who to go to when you are at the top of the pyramid when you need

to talk, there's a limited number of people, and I remember saying it to a Personnel Officer of the Authority 'who do we go to?' and the answer was you go to your Link Advisor – and there are issues there, I don't have as big issues as other Heads do about that, nevertheless, realised that at the top of that pyramid it seemed to me the place to go to is somewhere on the same level, in other words, other Heads.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Whilst there was evidence of a well established network amongst a number of the group members where interpersonal relationships were very positive:

Networking with other colleaguesif anything arises in school, I will phone a variety of people up and ask their advice, there are probably as many as 5 people I would confidently phone up”, officially 'created' networks seemed to be less successful: “There is also a programme called Head for the Future, for Head teachers that have done 3 years or more looking at professional development, so there are networks like that, although I find those a bit isolated. It is your own network that you create isn't it. The ____ cluster is a very strong network and you get to know people through that.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

There was a clear need to offer support to newly appointed Heads who were not part of the established network:

Obviously we're known to each other, and as a group of Heads we've grown and developed. Possibly, ____'s been a Head in this area longer than the rest of us, ____ came just after I started my first Headship, ____ and I were appointed at the same time, ____ came in the last 5 years, so we've grown together as a group in terms of our experience, expertise, courses we've attended and we meet at residential. We do meet termly anyway, are quite pro-active, and we do email or call each other – “have you got that, have you seen the new policy that's come out...I've got this disabled equality whatsit to do and I'm thinking I must ring someone

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

The cluster meetings we have are fairly formal, and there's issues to discuss, so

there's never enough social time, there's no social time in actual fact, so I think sometimes it's that chat network that's more important but we simply don't have it. I don't really know anybody yet and it's hard to approach people that you don't know.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Whilst describing his relative isolation, one interviewee articulated his gradual understanding of the system whereby the level of support received depends on the nature of the relationships with others in the system, including other Head teachers.

These relationships and concern for others not part of the 'establishment' demonstrated the considerable goodwill amongst those in the group. Positive relationships with Local Authority officers were recognised as being extremely helpful to Head teachers, but it was recognised by those who enjoyed such relationships, that where this was not the case difficulties can arise. The factors that determined whether a particular Head had a positive or negative relationship with Local Authority officers were not immediately obvious.

Where relationships were positive one might suggest that the Head teachers had adopted the depressive position and were seeking to know and learn from experience in order to solve their problems and allow realistic and practical reparative activities to be used. In contrast, those who were in conflict with local authority officers could be seen to be exhibiting paranoid-schizoid behaviour relying on omnipotent fantasies, obsessional rituals and paranoid blaming. However, one Head in particular who had experienced negative interactions with Local Authority officers emphasised that it was she who had sought advice for a recognised problem in her school but had been met with insufficient and inconsistent advice from Local Authority Advisory Officers and, much to her surprise and distress had become the subject of a punitive investigation. Issues around perceived power and authority come to the forefront again in such accounts. Whilst the claims may be factual there is also a possibility that they are a reflection of the mindset of the individuals who make them. As has been described previously, where a Head is feeling generally negative and demoralised, their sense of power and authority may be compromised and through selective inattention or projection, they may incorrectly perceive others to be critical. If they then go on to behave in a manner that eventually causes others to become critical in reality, they may be left feeling completely out of control and this may bring them to breaking point.

Alternatively, a Head teacher who is under pressure and not coping may employ paranoid defences such as denial and projection of aggression so that it is experienced as coming from outside oneself in the form of persecutors. These defences then enable the individual to deny the true extent of a difficulty, and allow them to fantasise about repairing the situation in a manner that ensures that they experience no anxiety, grief or guilt. Their endeavours to repair the situation are likely to be impractical and ineffective, and may involve the use of obsessional defences, such as the ritualistic repetition of certain acts, as a further effort to control and master their anxiety, (Klein, 1959 and Segal, 1986). However, the negative defensive behaviour described above may be equally applied to others that engage with the Head teachers. Staff in their schools may feel persecuted by children who act out in the classroom, and by the political climate, which offers a unifying discourse, where league tables and a prescriptive curriculum, encourage competitiveness and exclusion, whilst at the same time promoting inclusion of all. They may feel unsupported by the Head who appears to want more and more from them yet offers very little in the way of support or sympathy for personal failings. Similarly, Local Authority Officers under pressure to improve standards and reach targets set by government bodies may use the Head teacher as a scape-goat for their negative feelings and anxieties around their work. The isolation of Head teachers and their sole responsibility for the perceived success or failure of their schools and for the contentment of their staff, pupils, and wider school communities identifies them as potentially vulnerable to this kind of experience. In addition, the degree of experience that an advisor has was seen to be important, especially to newly appointed Heads who did not feel confident if they had to 'muddle through' with a Local Authority Officer who was as equally unfamiliar with procedures as they were. Again such limitations leave the way open for a multitude of transferences and projections as individuals struggle to carry out their roles under pressure to perform.

The accounts of some interviewees who felt that they were obliged to adopt a 'Head teacher persona' may be indicative of their efforts to master their anxiety by hiding behind this symbolic role to avoid difficult interpersonal contact. The relief when this is relaxed may reflect the degree of suppressed anxiety being released. The perceptible vulnerability of group members as they come out of their 'Head teacher' role adds weight to this argument as others can observe the frailty of their colleagues behind their mask of authority. The individuals who were interviewed in this study seemed to have a genuine wish for solutions to their issues. Indeed by agreeing to take part in this study

they demonstrated an ability to face the anxieties caused by the issues in their schools.

Relationships with the Local Authority

In discussing their relationships with Local Authority Officers there was a wide range of responses. Positive relationships with Local Authority officers were recognised as very helpful to Head teachers, but where this is not the case it was acknowledged that difficulties can arise:

I've had 3 link advisors, important characters for Head teachers, they have changed their roles over the 11 years I have been a Head. They were much more advisors than inspectors when they started, now they are much more inspectors than advisors but I don't have any issues with that, this is a personal thing I'm beginning to realise, other people see that as a real threat, and won't have the link advisor as the performance management person – I do, it makes sense, they know me, they know my school, I've nothing to hide, but that's the way that I've worked with the link advisor, it's a case of what you see is what you get and they are coming to help. It all comes down to relationships again, for me a visit by a link advisor is going to be challenging, particularly when we are setting targets, but I don't see it as a threat, I'm not bothered about it, they come in, they have the same interests as me – raising standards and getting the best quality of education for the children in my school, they are welcome. So I think I'm better off than other Heads that I know well and good people, who don't see their link advisor like that, if they haven't got a quality professional person coming in on a regular basis to give support, affirm and challenge – I have, they haven't. They have got somebody coming in who are for ever setting targets in the airy fairy zone, they know they are not going to meet them and down they go, their self esteem drifts and it's just a problem for them, but I don't see it like that. I've heard about other link advisors and actually I've got a link advisor now who I've heard horrendous things about, she's not liked in schools – she's welcome any time in my school, she's given us such a lot, she's challenging and it's raised standards, but she's so supportive. I don't know what they see in her, I see something that they don't

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Whilst one response from an interviewee was specific in her praise:

The QVD Advisor - I found he was very supportive pre-Ofsted, he has been on board 2 or 3 years now, and his reports have been very accurate, so found him good.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

another described how insufficient and inconsistent advice from Local Authority Advisory Officers had left them with limited options of where to go with their problem for support:

Having someone from the LEA to acknowledge the problem would have helped because you wouldn't then feel on your own, because you've actually voiced it aloud. All I could do was go home and chunter to my husband, who isn't in education at all, and it probably would have helped if I could say it.....I did speak to [the EP]. I felt disbelief in the reaction of the LEA in terms of the QDD process, I felt there was conflict in the QDD process between what one QDD advisor had said the previous year, to what was being said to me was in the QDD process last year, so that doesn't lie easy with me because I'm fair-minded and I want a fair system, where that didn't seem a fair system

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

This lack of support from Local Authority Officers came as a shock to the same individual who, having recognised an area of weakness in their school had sought help from the Local Authority only to become the subject of a punitive investigation:

And the thing was, I didn't expect to have it, I didn't expect that knee-jerk reaction because what I did expect, during the Summer Term when I asked what can I do to improve my team results, I expected someone to come in and say, right, you've acknowledged that's the issue, it's shown in your SEF, let's see what we can do, we can do the learning wall, we can do the layered targets – it was really exciting and I would have gone with that because that's the type of person I am. It was something that felt more imposed than being part of that rich conversation dialogue because it's quality development dialogue – it didn't feel that way at all

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

A new Head explained that she thought it was important for advisors from the Local

Authority to be experienced in order to offer the degree of support required to newly appointed Heads:

For me personally, it's not the same situation for a lot of people. My advisor is new to the Authority and it would be more supportive for me to have someone coming in with loads of experience, rather than muddling through it together so I think it would be more supportive if new Heads were latched into experience rather than new people moving forward together, in my personal experience.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

A number of Head teachers stated that they believed that the Local Authority had become oblivious to the changing needs and issues within society, maintaining a preoccupation with targets:

I think the target-setting process [is an additional pressure], the number of 'special needs' we now have in schools - at one time we wouldn't have even been aware of. I'm not talking about here but many schools also have behavioural difficulties - society is changing and the Authority do not recognise this and give us the support we need. I've been in the profession since 1974 and when I started my post in [inner city] I had J4's and it was the 11+ class and it didn't feel as pressurised as it does now with targets, even though at that point in time you either went that way towards a Grammar School or that way towards a Secondary Modern.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

A number of Heads perceived that the idea for the Head teachers' group came from outside the Local Authority rather than from within:

I think it is a shame that the LEA is not setting this [the group work] up because this is the human side.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The perceived changing nature of the Head teacher's role from the one originally taken up by the group members made them feel alienated from their job and in some cases undermined their motivation to continue. Conversely, in some cases negative experiences had made Heads stronger and had reinforced their beliefs about what is

important to them about education and how they might use the experience to help others. One interviewee in particular described events at her school which made her question her role as Head:

When the idea of target-setting first came in we didn't like the idea because we thought children are not a commodity and target-setting is more suitable to a production line. I see the point of setting a challenge in the way that you work and challenges for children because they thrive on that, and providing you can say this is the child's starting point, this is them at the intermediate stage, and this is where they are now, and this is what they need to do next – that is a healthy education journey. So as a Head of 8 years and a teacher of 34 years it is awful to be having that type of conversation, when I first entered the profession for a long time it was healthy but for the last 5 years it has become a game I don't think many people like to play that sort of game because it's children we are handling. We've slipped in recent international league tables so all the time it's a negative, and that's not the true picture of what's really happening in our schools, what's happening in this place is an enjoyment of education, they enjoy reading, they enjoy being read to, they enjoy writing – it doesn't mean they don't have difficulties but they are engaged. They are motivated, the staff are motivated, and they have been all the way through, so in 8 years I have seen that progression, and the building up of a very strong team and that's what gives me the joy of the job. We've recently had a learning walk, and we had the focus of more able children, and [the governors] looked at particular aspects. One was to look at the tasks that the children were doing, and as a member of the Learning Team we are talking to identified children and their response to the activity, and we came back and had a rich dialogue – that is a measure of what this school's about and how we tick. So to have an LEA that are trying to find a problem or making it seem as though something is hidden is awful when you are so open, and I want to work with everybody, including the LEA, and I had worked successfully with the LEA up to the point of having test results that were poor.

I think it was awful that I had to question my role as Head within the school and I was made to consider, had I failed the children in my care because their test results were so down? You can't do anything about it because the Authority could have been right, maybe I was the wrong person at this point in time to take the school forward, so I questioned the very essence of my style of Headship, my

teaching ability, my ability to pull the staff together in terms of support for the class teacher in here, I questioned everything as part of that process, and there was a point at which I said perhaps I shouldn't be here. It's like exposing the inner core of your being, and this is what drives people out of a job isn't it, because that bit is the bit that is exposed, I couldn't have done that, but now I could.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Despite the negative experience, the Head teacher went on to describe how she had been made stronger by it and how it had reinforced her beliefs about what is important to her about education and how she might use the experience to help others:

Yes I could [help someone with a similar problem now], and I could do it without being judgemental, I feel yes, the LEA were wrong but I have my reasons for that, but in that process I've learned a lot about really matters in a school when things go wrong. I know things that matter most, top of that is teamwork, communication and most importantly, making the children feel they have a valuable contribution to how things are in the workings of the school, you came in and they were organising themselves, they would come to me, for example, if they have an idea for a club, and they sort themselves out, they have little registers, and that is what it's about.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The general consensus was that existing structures in the Local Authority did not provide enough emotional support and left the Head teachers feeling isolated, overwhelmed and unsure about procedures and skills that they needed to work effectively. There were overwhelming requests for more structured support from the Local Authority which should ideally adopt a more supervisory role. The apparent lack of day-to-day support from the Local Authority was interpreted as an unwillingness to become involved in difficult issues in schools, and an expectation that they will be managed and resolved by the Heads themselves without any external intervention. Indeed there were further overwhelming expressions of desire for the Local Authority to be more supportive from all of the Head teachers interviewed. In particular the perceived lack of structured support from the Local Authority was a cause for concern:

The fact that we've all got the same level of responsibility, and in Education

there's no obvious place to go up above you – one of the things I've been amazed about is the lack of any sort of controlled supervision, I started exactly 2 years ago as a new Head, knowing nothing about Headship and nobody asks me anything, I've got this whole organisation to run and I find it absolutely scary it times, when people walk through my office door and ask me a question, and out of my mouth comes an answer and I have no idea where it comes from, you can make personnel decisions, staffing decisions and curriculum decisions and there's no-one there. The relationship with the Governors is not the same, as when I was a Deputy, then I had a Head, and I would come and say "I'm doing this, do you want me to do it like this?" or "I'm not sure how to do this.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Another Head teacher was specific in his calls for a more supervisory role to be taken by the Local Authority:

If I was having a wish list of support it is that support at a County level was more proactive in terms of taking an active role and taking care of you and realising that you are saying you've uncovered this need for support that wasn't perceived, and I actually think somebody should be perceiving that need and providing it – we have behaviour support people in school, counsellors in school, all of which have to have weekly supervision – nobody says to that to Head teachers and yet the number of problems that come washing across you, sometimes really complex, child protection and stuff, and yet there's no real supervision for that at all, I would like to see something more proactive around the personnel things. I say to people I was a Maths teacher, I was trained to teach maths but no-one has trained me on personnel law and yes, I can read all the policies, but am I supposed to take all this in by osmosis? There are people on the phone, but I've been here 2 years and there isn't a system where someone at personnel might think "we've got a new Head there, these are the sort of pitfalls that Heads may get in to, we'd best go and chat to him about this" – doesn't seem to be proactive, seems to be 'crisis.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Even where support was supplied, some individuals believed that it was not appropriate to their needs:

When I applied for this job they initially refused to interview me because I hadn't

got my NPQH, I had to get onto the course before I could get an interview, none of that is that sort of level of support, but that was all about all the projects we were doing about education for the future, imagining where we will be in 20 years time, all of which has its value but nothing to do with running a school on a day to day basis! That's actually what's hard, along with future planning because you are making curriculum decisions, but day to day there's lots of other things that are much harder and perhaps you have to have a system where I can go when there's a problem but you always feel you have failed at that point, when you pick up the phone and say "I have a problem" I wish there was something a little more proactive really.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

With appropriate support from the Local Authority the Head teachers believe they are more than capable of dealing with difficult issues. Claims that the Local Authority themselves are under pressure by the Government who are more concerned with meeting targets than engaging with the real challenges faced in education can lead to Head teachers becoming disempowered and disaffected as statistics and scores can become de-contextualised, de-humanised and detached and from the people and situations they affect as they pass up the chain of responsibility from school to government:

It was an inhuman response to a set of results, and that was borne on fear from the LEA who perhaps hadn't met their targets, so it goes all the way up from us setting our targets to the LEA looking at those, to the LEA passing those to the Government and then our performance.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

A number of participants described how the Local Authority failed to acknowledge their successes, only focussing on failure which left staff demoralised and likely to resign:

When Head teachers go under they have gone in on themselves and they are reacting, backs against the wall and don't know what to do next, so they say 'I can't do it anymore' but they can, they have the ability and it should be the LA that supports them, but they haven't got the time because they have the Government breathing down their necks in terms of targets, so instead of the Government looking at the problem of not meeting our educational targets, they

should be looking at that process rather than carrying on with more of it.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

I've seen it elsewhere, where a school has been under the microscope of the LEA, I've seen staff leave the profession. It didn't need that to happen at all, it needed people to say you're actually doing well and you could do this, this would help you, not 'look at those results, what's happening in your school?'. It's like exposing the inner core of your being, and this is what drives people out of a job isn't it, because that bit is the bit that is exposed, I couldn't have done that [told the other Head teachers about the problem], but now I could in the group.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

One interviewee described how their personal resilience had lead them through an ordeal which began as an enthusiastic and conscientious approach to becoming a Head teacher but ended as an exercise of personal survival as they were required to prove themselves to the Local Authority who allegedly focused on finding fault rather than offering support:

We are in this business to make children feel positive about their input, their ideas so that they become independent beings and can move on to the secondary sector confident. We've recently had a learning walk, and we had the focus of more able children, and the governors looked at particular aspects. One was to look at the tasks that the children were doing, and as a member of the Learning Team we are talking to identified children and their response to the activity, and we came back and had a rich dialogue – that is a measure of what this school's about and how we tick. So to have an LEA that are trying to find a problem or making it seem as though something is hidden is awful when you are so open, and I want to work with everybody, including the LEA, and I had worked successfully with the LEA up to the point of having test results that were poor. They would not look at it in context. We had 11 children, of the 11, 2 had statements, 1 child had joined the cohort in March to do the test in May, and that child came from Northern Ireland so wasn't part and parcel of the education system here, and even though I felt it was cohort-specific we had 54% of that cohort with special needs in varying degrees, I did say it was cohort-specific but I was slammed down – I had to look at leadership, leading maths teacher, teaching and learning in the school – things that I felt very secure about, I was being told to examine again. I think it was

awful that I had to question my role as Head within the school and I was made to consider, had I failed the children in my care because their test results were so down? You can't do anything about it because the Authority could have been right, maybe I was the wrong person at this point in time to take the school forward, so I questioned the very essence of my style of Headship, my teaching ability, my ability to pull the staff together in terms of support for the class teacher in here, I questioned everything as part of that process, and there was a point at which I said perhaps I shouldn't be here

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The same individual reflected on how they had been made to question their own competence as a Head teacher. Surprisingly, and perhaps ironically, in some cases OfSTED, a government institution, was seen as a more accurate judge of a school's functioning than the Local Authority Officers:

It [recognition for achievements and acknowledgement of problems] came via Ofsted, that was the final part for me, I knew we were going to be Ofsted over the year and we were inspected just before the summer holiday. That person came in and we had the hour conversation on the phone, during that conversation he said, whatever it was I said to him, had changed the complexity of the inspection, so when he came in he said he didn't want to see any pieces of paper, he wanted to be pointed in the right direction, well, where I wanted to put him was with the children because that's what makes this place special.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

It was perceived that the direct human contact and shared understanding of issues in context that Ofsted inspectors are able to gain during an inspection make them able to evaluate and judge the situation objectively but still in context, resulting in a more balanced account. However, the resilience of some Heads was evident in their descriptions of how negative emotions and personal strife combined with an overwhelming belief in their school had proved to be their saving grace in getting them through a range of difficulties:

I look back now and think what got through me through the year was disbelief and anger because of what I could see in this place, what made this place special, I wasn't allowed to show, because I had to look at specific areas and they were

areas associated with the target-setting process and obviously the test, so we had to teach more to a test, even though in my heart of hearts I didn't believe that that was providing a broad and balanced curriculum so in that process I learned a lot about myself. I think I'd felt that I had proved myself, most of all to myself, I came to this school as an Acting Head and I wasn't sure whether it was for me or not and it was a fantastic experience, and I think for many young Heads that go into this type of post, to be an Acting Head you find out if you like it and can do it. I set myself targets in that first year of being here and then at the end of that process I thought I would apply and got the Headship. The nature of me is to work hard, and if that wasn't acknowledged by the LEA because there were difficulties, I had to prove to the LEA that in actual fact they were wrong, so I don't think anyone else could have helped me through that process – it was my learning curve. I'd be more than willing to share the experience of that with other people, should they find themselves in that type of situation

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

There were also suggestions that current administrative support from the local authority could be better managed, coordinated and organised to make things easier for Heads to comply:

It would be nice to have say somebody in the authority that managed everything that was coming out to Heads, for everybody not just for me because I'm new. That actually, this, this and this has been asked this half term, so we'll plan this, this and this next half term, rather than every department wanting their bit when they're ready.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

In addition to managing difficulties within the school there are additional pressures such as an expectation to keep abreast of innovations and current issues requiring Heads to read up and go on courses which all takes time.

Expressed beliefs that the Local Authority had become oblivious to the changing needs and issues within society, give weight to the argument that public sector institutions such as schools, in addition to their primary task of educating children are also expected to provide a reliable and stable container for the nation's anxieties about falling standards of attainment and behaviour. However, an over-emphasis on cost-

effectiveness, targets and raising standards renders the richer, less measurable and wider ranging measures of success perceived by school staff obsolete. In addition, due to the ever increasing plurality of society, it may be necessary to re-negotiate the primary task of institutions such as schools. Another potential source of stress, frustration and confusion may be due to the continuously changing structures and priorities of institutions of authority such as Government and Local Authorities, as staff attempt to adopt and modify their working practices to take account of these changes (Stokes, 1994).

Alienation

The perceived changing nature of the Head teacher's role described by a number of those interviewed in the study lead some to feel alienated from the job they originally took up. As has been discussed, self-esteem and regard are often constructed on the basis of reflected appraisals received from influential others such as Government and Local Authority figures (Leszcz, 1997, Grunebaum and Solomon, 1987). The industrialisation of processes such as education can lead to the loss individuals' sense of self as they gain more and more of the ideas and values of such others via processes of projection and introjection. The interviewees believe that in the current climate where everything is measurable and testable, and turned into a league table, they have become more and more treated as tools in an automated, dehumanised system thus supporting Marx's (1844), point that in such a system everything becomes a commodity - and people become objects. Those that claimed that their job was no longer the one they signed up for and one that they no longer enjoyed, blamed the mismatch between what they were proud of and felt that they had achieved and what they were actually expected to achieve. They believed that there was no longer any appreciation of such things as positive and rich relationships with children and the wider communities and in some cases such feelings undermined their motivation to continue. Conversely, others who had similar negative experiences believed that these had made them stronger and had reinforced their beliefs about what is important to them about education and how they might use the experience to help others.

The apparent lack of day-to-day support and the belief that existing structures in the Local Authority were inadequate and often inappropriate for the emotional and practical needs of Head teachers was interpreted as an unwillingness to become involved in difficult issues in schools, and an expectation that they will be managed and resolved by

the Heads themselves without any external intervention. If such claims are correct, the effect of the Local Authority remaining distant and uninvolved is the removal of a sometimes vital hierarchical layer. In reducing hierarchical levels in this way difficulties that were previously managed by projection up and down hierarchical levels, or between established departments and units, may be forced down to the interpersonal level between school staff or between school staff and outside agencies and parents (Stokes, 1994). This may increase interpersonal tensions in schools and even result in certain individuals being made into a scape-goat, subjected to intolerable pressures and even being driven out (Adams and Crawford, 1992). As the individuals who experience this sort of treatment most frequently are very often at the boundary with the outside world, Head teachers are particularly vulnerable to these pressures.

Even where support was available, some individuals believed that it was not appropriate to their needs. All the more frustrating for the Head teachers who believed they were more than capable of dealing with difficult issues with appropriate support from the Local Authority. Could it be that the Local Authority had erected defences for themselves in the format that they offered support to school staff which serve primarily to defend their own staff from anxiety rather than fulfil the requirements of the task? (Zagier Roberts, 1994). It is also possible that Local Authority staff had devised a range of rules, criteria, procedures and formats for offering assistance which may have been initially accepted by school staff but when challenged by users groups such as school staff who do not find them helpful or appropriate they are defended and maintained despite the fact that no clear justification for retaining them could be found, (Dartington, 1994).

Splitting and Projection

The lack of appreciation of the Local Authority's support systems may also be due to school staff using splitting and projection as a defence for their own incompetence using the context of 'them' and 'us' or 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. A lack of contact between the two groups, allows greater scope for projection of this kind to flourish and therefore interpersonal contact with Local Authority staff and meetings with them may be avoided unconsciously in order to preserve self-idealisation based on these projections. Splitting between school staff and outside bodies such as Local Authority staff was evident in several cases from those who described conflict with the local authority who were seen to be uncaring, demanding and over-critical. However, efforts had obviously

been made to support a number of individuals who interpreted this as 'interfering' or 'criticism':

For me personally, it's not the same situation for a lot of people. My advisor is new to the Authority and it would be more supportive for me to have someone coming in with loads of experience, rather than muddling through it together so I think it would be more supportive if new Heads were latched into experience rather than new people moving forward together, in my personal experience.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

I think it is a shame that the LEA is not setting this [the group work] up because this is the human side.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Yes I could [help someone with a similar problem now], and I could do it without being judgemental, I feel yes, the LEA were wrong but I have my reasons for that, but in that process I've learned a lot about really matters in a school when things go wrong. I know things that matter most, top of that is teamwork, communication and most importantly, making the children feel they have a valuable contribution to how things are in the workings of the school, you came in and they were organising themselves, they would come to me, for example, if they have an idea for a club, and they sort themselves out, they have little registers, and that is what it's about.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

It was an inhuman response to a set of results, and that was borne on fear from the LEA who perhaps hadn't met their targets, so it goes all the way up from us setting our targets to the LEA looking at those, to the LEA passing those to the Government and then our performance.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

We are in this business to make children feel positive about their input, their ideas so that they become independent beings and can move on to the secondary sector confident. We've recently had a learning walk, and we had the focus of more able children, and the governors looked at particular aspects. One was to look at the tasks that the children were doing, and as a member of the Learning Team we are talking to identified children and their response to the activity, and we came back

and had a rich dialogue – that is a measure of what this school's about and how we tick. So to have an LEA that are trying to find a problem or making it seem as though something is hidden is awful when you are so open, and I want to work with everybody, including the LEA, and I had worked successfully with the LEA up to the point of having test results that were poor. They would not look at it in context. We had 11 children, of the 11, 2 had statements, 1 child had joined the cohort in March to do the test in May, and that child came from Northern Ireland so wasn't part and parcel of the education system here, and even though I felt it was cohort-specific we had 54% of that cohort with special needs in varying degrees, I did say it was cohort-specific but I was slammed down – I had to look at leadership, leading maths teacher, teaching and learning in the school – things that I felt very secure about, I was being told to examine again. I think it was awful that I had to question my role as Head within the school and I was made to consider, had I failed the children in my care because their test results were so down? You can't do anything about it because the Authority could have been right, maybe I was the wrong person at this point in time to take the school forward, so I questioned the very essence of my style of Headship, my teaching ability, my ability to pull the staff together in terms of support for the class teacher in here, I questioned everything as part of that process, and there was a point at which I said perhaps I shouldn't be here.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Conflicting Goals

There was some evidence that the school and the Authority had come to represent different emotional aspects of the psychological state of the community as described by Halton, (2004). For example, some Heads explained that their main concern was for the emotional wellbeing and development of their pupils whilst the Local Authority was represented as being only concerned with their attainment. These projective processes may have relieved anxieties which arose from trying to contain and meet the conflicting needs and emotions of the pupils in their care. The simultaneous achievement of high attainment and inclusion is difficult but through splitting and projection these conflicting emotions may be dispersed into different parts of the system. One Head teacher's account of how her positive perceptions of the wide and varied successes of her school were undermined by condemnations from a Local Authority that only focussed on a narrow and limited range of aspects including poor test results, possibly

the result of unavoidable and extraordinary circumstances, that were not taken into account, could at first glance be another example of the school's Head teacher adopting a paranoid-schizoid position to defend herself from the truth of her and her staff's incompetence. However, as an OfSTED inspector was seen as a more accurate judge of a school's functioning than the Local Authority Officers other explanations must be considered. The direct human contact offered by the OfSTED inspector permitted a shared understanding of the issues in context and enabled the inspector to gain an appreciation of the school's strengths, as well as its weaker features and therefore they were able to evaluate and judge the situation objectively in a more balanced manner. There is a possibility that the defensive processes described previously may have been exercised on the part of Local Authority officers who, being under pressure themselves to meet national government targets than with engaging with the real challenges faced in education, use splitting and projection as a means of denigrating school staff and idealising their own efforts. In endeavouring to improve obvious measurable indicators of success such as test scores, statistics and scores can become de-contextualised, de-humanised and detached from the people and situations they affect as they pass up the chain of responsibility from school to government. By failing to acknowledge successes and only focussing on failure the Local Authority may have contributed to the demoralisation, disaffection and disempowerment of Head teachers making them more likely to resign.

Another explanation could involve the experience of having had a close interpersonal interaction with the Head teacher in question. My own experience was to feel a great degree of anxiety as she told her story, unrelentingly and at length. I felt inadequate and exhausted as she poured out her account of multiple injustice and personal strife. I reflected that my feelings were perhaps a consequence of her projections and were possibly some of the same emotions she felt through being in the situation. Had I been an officer from the Local Authority, charged with supporting the Head to bring about improvement in her pupils' attainment and resolve her difficulties, it is likely that I would have felt overwhelmed and lacking in resource to offer assistance because of the sheer force of the emotion contained in her personal presentation. It is also possible that the Local Authority Officer unconsciously chose to avoid any further anxieties by erecting their own defences using splitting to denigrate the efforts of the Head teacher and her staff and projecting personal feelings of inadequacy and incompetence back onto her, making her solely responsible for the difficulties of her pupils. 'The projection of such feelings of badness outside the self helps to produce a state of illusory goodness

and self-idealisation and simplifies complex issues and often produces a rigid culture in which growth is inhibited', (Halton, 2004).

The resilience of some Heads, including the one mentioned above in their use of self belief combined with their unerring belief in their schools suggested that some Heads were indeed using defences, but of a more helpful variety. By acknowledging the weaknesses and difficulties in their schools the Head teachers assumed the *depressive position*. The ensuing feelings of guilt, concern and sadness derived from adopting the depressive position gave rise to a desire to put things right and consequently lead them to seek support and guidance from the Local Authority. The overwhelming requests for more structured and supervisory support from the Local Authority in addition to better management and coordination of administrative support in order to make things easier for the Heads to comply with tasks and instructions indicated their desire to improve their own performance and that of their staff. The abundance of creative suggestions to improve services and resolve difficulties offered by the Heads was further evidence of their resolve to develop and establish better practice. This proved to be a great motivating factor for some individuals and may account for the reason that some of the Heads took on the role in the first place.

Trying to Meet Unrealistic Expectations

As the Head teachers in the study declare and demonstrate that whilst they welcome the challenges and authority that comes with their job; they often find the responsibility onerous, particularly when expectations cannot be fully met for a variety of legitimate reasons. The sense of burdening responsibility on the participants in this study who believe they are under-resourced and ill-equipped to meet the stringent demands of the Local Authority was very apparent. The Head teachers in the study claimed that not only is there a great degree of stress generated in trying to meet the ever-increasing needs of challenging pupils and maintaining and raising standards of achievement, in addition, the greater public accountability and scrutiny of educational practice increases the daily pressures upon the profession especially as it no longer engenders the respect it formerly held. The unrealistic expectations of schools to overcome a multitude of social problems including poverty, underachievement and disruptive behaviour are recognised by Mortimore, (1997) and Bernstein, (1970), who argue that education and teachers alone cannot compensate for society and calls for joint inter-professional development at the initial training stage and as part of continuing professional

development for all professional groups.

Difficulties of Specific Settings

Most of the Head teachers interviewed regarded their schools as having particular reasons for being especially disadvantaged in comparison with others. This may have been on the grounds of location, population, socio-economic factors or lack of resources and/or personnel. However, the Secondary School Head and the Heads of smaller schools perceived their situations to be relatively even more challenging. The additional difficulties reported by the Heads of smaller primary schools demonstrate that to some degree the problems are around a lack of human resources in addition to material resources. One of the main problems was around there being fewer members of staff for the Head teacher to confide in. Others highlighted the apparent difficulties around recruitment of Heads for smaller schools:

That's right, there aren't people queuing up at the door to be Heads of small schools.... The other thing I would say is that I do think we are getting to the point of crisis in terms of Headship, particularly for small schools – if you talk to the authority you would probably find better information directly from them but in terms of the schools around here they have really struggled to recruit and are having to come up with more creative ways now of appointing Heads, so not appointing a teaching Head like myself, but maybe someone who's a Head part-time and a part-time teacher. I think schools are going to have to come up with much more creative solutions in terms of that. I do worry about small schools in particular but think its happening across the board, if I think about the number of people I've worked who are going on to Headship, its such a small proportion of the people who've got potential to do Headship but so many of those people just don't want anything to do with it".

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

In the same way that changes of organisational structure, functioning and priority, in large institutions can result in difficulties that were previously managed by projection up and down hierarchical levels, or between established departments and units, being forced down to the interpersonal level between members of an organisation (Stokes, 1994), as there are less people available in a small school, the intensity of the relationships between those involved may lead to an increase in interpersonal tension

and personal stress. This may manifest itself in a variety of ways such as sickness and absenteeism of staff or even as 'bullying' (Adams and Crawford, 1992) and other forms of scape-goating of certain individuals including the Head teacher. In addition, there are even fewer members of staff available for the Head teacher to confide in. This may explain further the difficulties around recruitment of Heads for smaller schools.

Alternatively, some teachers in small schools commented that as they had a small staff they had many opportunities to discuss concerns together and in this respect setting up groups in small schools may be a more difficult task as the perceived need to meet as a formal support group may be less. Conversely, the secondary Head teacher likened his role to that of a Chief Executive in a large company where there is no obvious person to turn to for advice whilst having to carry the burden of highly classified information and responsibility for an institution, its personnel and performance. In addition, the larger number of people making up the staff of a large secondary school made it more likely that the Head would encounter personnel, disciplinary and other contentious difficulties more frequently. These concerns resonate with the pressures of reducing hierarchical layers as outlined above.

Time Pressures

Most of the Head teachers interviewed stated that time pressures were one of their main difficulties. This was also one of the main difficulties they had with attending the group sessions. A number of individuals explained why time was particularly pressing for them. Apparently Heads of small primary schools were particularly time pressured. A Secondary Head teacher acknowledged the time pressures experienced by primary schools, especially small schools and contrasted it with his own commitments:

I know a lot of the small Primary Heads get so little time to themselves that it must be nice to be able to give them that little bit of breathing space where I feel incredibly busy but my teaching commitment isn't massive so I am in a bit more control of my own life than they are.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Others explained the need to know of events well in advance in order to be able to plan to attend them although even pre-prepared engagements can be changed due to changing priorities. Another head described how even pre-prepared engagements can be changed due to changing priorities:

I was supposed to be out 2 days last week. I went to a meeting on Wednesday but decided not to go out on the Friday because the school seemed bubbly and I thought my duty is always to be here. It's always easy to make that decision.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

A newly appointed Head teacher saw time as a particular problem for her as she was trying to take on a raft of new responsibilities and she had not yet established her personal timetable as well as being required to take time for induction activities which ate into the already overfull day.

These difficulties around available time are consistent with the findings of Stringer *et al.* (1992), and emphasise the requirement for events to be publicised well in advance in order for arrangements to be made to enable Heads to attend sessions was universal. As was the concern that although even pre-prepared engagements can be changed due to changing priorities.

Personal Stress and Lack of Support

Issues around recruitment and retention of Head teachers in relation to the stresses and strains of the role were highlighted by a number of interviewees who stated that fewer people are prepared to take on the role of Head teacher in the present climate where it is growing increasingly difficult to maintain a healthy work/life balance. A number of interviewees described how they are personally affected by the increasing stresses of the job. The need of the Head teacher to feel in control may be undermined in several ways. In particular, if a school has a difficulty for which they need support from the Local Authority, if this is instead perceived as a weakness by the Local Authority it may lead to the Head feeling completely out of control due and may bring them to breaking point:

It's that not knowing, and what we tend to like a breed of people, as Heads we like to feel in control, that doesn't mean to say that we are autocratic, it's very much a democracy here and that's the strength of the place.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The additional pressure of having to adopt a 'Head teacher persona' and the relief when this can be relaxed was also described. Furthermore, the perceptible vulnerability of

group members as they come out of their 'Head teacher' role is more apparent:

Teaching is all about acting anyway isn't it? You come in every morning and play the Head teacher with the kids and to some extent, the staff. I think that is one of the things, a bit like we are sitting here now and its totally confidential so you almost just physically go, "right, I'm going to be myself now, don't have to put an act on", and I'm aware later this afternoon I'm seeing a parent and I'll have to be back to being a Head teacher, and at Governors tonight – you know? So you do see people looking or seeming more vulnerable and it brings the odd concern out.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

The lack of a mechanism for limiting their workload and the efforts they have to make is generally accepted by Head teachers as an inevitable part of their job. However, the group sessions are recognised as a means of dissipating the stresses by talking them through and enabling individuals to consider a range of options to assist in their difficulties:

There is nobody from the LEA who will tell you to stop, and most Head teachers are programmed not to make a fuss when we have problems, and we do feel yes, we do have problems and they are here and now and we have to handle them, so this is a way of shifting that so it becomes aired within the cluster group area, and you could then come back, because you've talked about it and aired it, you come back ready to think yes, I can take those points on board.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Despite experiencing considerable levels of stress due to specific difficulties, the Heads frequently regard their own schools as a source of strength. One Head teacher graphically described the effects of the stress she experienced when trying to deal with a dispute with the Local Authority over a perceived fall in standards in her school. Throughout her difficulties she regarded her school as a source of strength:

I can now harness it [negative experience], it is now controllable, feelings are controllable aren't they whereas at one point I was waking up in the middle of the night, and that is scary, isn't it? At no other point during my career did I have periods of time when I wondered what was going to happen next, how much more

can I take – I didn't know what my breaking point was. That's life experience isn't it, for all of us, and therefore, it's that not knowing, and what we tend to like is a breed of people, as Heads we like to feel in control, that doesn't mean to say that we are autocratic, it's very much a democracy here and that's the strength of the place.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The additional difficulties of maintaining a healthy work/life balance was discussed by several Heads.

Due to the anxieties arising from the nature of their work resonating with both primitive and personal anxieties it may be that some of the Head teachers had unconsciously organised work in their schools to defend themselves and their staff from further anxiety (Dartington, 1994), through structures and practices, ways of arranging tasks, rules and procedures. As several participants discovered through discussions in the group, that although such strategies may appear to assist their staff in preserving their primary task of teaching children and enabling them to cope with stress, these defences may also be used to deny reality, and allow unbearable situations to continue as if they were perfectly acceptable, when in fact they should be challenged in order to preserve both the staff and the primary work-task, (Obholzer, 1994). Rather than promoting task performance these pathological defences primarily defend staff from anxiety (Zagier Roberts, 1994), and come in the form of automatic assumptions, rules and procedures which superficially appear to be innocuous habits, but when challenged cannot be rationalised. By attending the group sessions several Head teachers recognised the need to examine their current practices and re-think their strategies as a means of dissipating the stress and considering a range of options to assist in their difficulties.

ii. Experiences of Being in the Group

All of the peer support sessions including those on the initial training day and those that followed later were described very positively by all eleven Head teachers who attended and the general consensus was that they provided the type and quality of support that was required. The higher proportion of positive statements to negative statements about this process is a strong indicator that the peer supervision groups were of value to the Head teachers involved.

A number of Head teachers expressed their dissatisfaction with the meetings that had already been established for Head teachers in the area and said that the peer support group was quite different from anything experienced previously or already established (See appendix VI quote 46). Several heads highlighted the need for more opportunity to talk to other Heads and establish inter-personal relationships:

If I'm really honest, my previous experience of working with our cluster Heads and the other people who were there, I hadn't really gone with the way of working that the group had actually got, I'd been to a couple of meetings but I was always having to not go to another meeting to be there and it would end up a moaning and groaning session. I felt I'm getting nothing back from this, nobody else is really getting much back from it and so I haven't been to many of those meetings, but these meetings have a different feel to them.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Many of the positive attributes of a joint consultation process as described by Brown *et al.* (1979), Meyers *et al.* (1979), Hanco (1985), Stringer *et al.* (1992 and West and Idol (1987) were evident in that the process was: a helping, problem-solving process based upon equal relationships occurring voluntarily between help-givers and a help-seekers, characterised by mutual trust and open communication, utilising joint approaches for problem identification and the pooling of personal resources to identify and select strategies to resolve issues in such a way that future problems may be handled more sensitively and skilfully. There was also a shared responsibility in the implementation and evaluation of the program or strategy that was initiated. Similarly, Hawkins and Shohet's description of 'consultancy supervision' where the supervisee is responsible for consulting with their supervisor "who is neither their trainer/nor manager, on those issues they wish to explore" (op cit, pp 45), was also relevant. In particular the clear structure of the process using in the peer supervision group was seen as a particular strength.

Structure

Results from the questionnaires with the Head teachers who attended the sessions may be interpreted in a way that indicates that the structured nature of the process and the establishment of confidentiality and supportive relationships were very effective:

It is very focused on trying to find the solution, it's also focused on the idea that everybody has difficulties that they can't always overcome on their own so they need support from colleagues. If you reveal something to a colleague in a situation where everybody understands it's confidential, usually people follow those rules, I think they feel valued somewhat by having someone trusting them enough to reveal something to them. It increases their self-esteem and sense of value that others can talk to them in a very deep way. I think coming to that meeting I was coming from a background of there being certain problems in my school so I was very interested in a process that would enable me to solve problems, I felt it was very supportive, totally non-judgemental.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

The inclusion of a chairperson to manage the proceedings and to observe time limits helped the group to reach conclusions more effectively as well as providing emotional and practical support:

It concentrates the mind, and the Chair keeps everyone on track. The process is structured so everybody knows where they are going and what they are doing although the issues can be difficult at times, but everybody is clear about the steps, where they are coming from. Although sometimes that does need managing, so the bit about where the group are asking questions, I've seen it from both sides and it's really hard not to give solutions at that point – that needs to be tightened up and chaired. To be fair, we are quite good at that, W particularly works with us and when he's chaired it you can see him putting some peoples backs up but he will say we are not at that point of offering solutions, we are asking questions, so when you asked me why it's a useful process its because of the structure, and that old saying, two Heads are better than one, you get all these different solutions coming from different people, and they may not be the answer but looking at all of those together is a useful way forward. The group does work very supportively so you've got the structure there which is reassuring and then you've got this supportive group, people all in the same position, have been through similar problems.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

I think the idea of the chairperson in a circle didn't make comments, rather than trying to solve it and say "this is what I would do", and "that's my response" –

it's a very different response because when we ring each other (Heads) and say, "I've done this and it's backfired, and that's happened – what would you have done?" and I think the idea of the questioning to look at ways to initiate a response to make you look at it – that's been really helpful, a new approach for me that I have no experience of before.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

In particular the Head teachers seemed to appreciate that the sessions were focussed on finding solutions to difficulties rather than dwelling on them:

I've been at courses where you get a couple of cynical Heads just moaning about everything but here you have to contribute to the group dynamics and I find that very positive really, you are being supportive and being supported yourself by asking those questions, sometimes you get quite analytical about the situation. This one was about a child causing a lot of disruption, and the issue was whether or not to exclude, you could relate it to your own experiences.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

The group format provided the educative and normative functions of peer supervision. Each person contributed to the range of expertise and experience needed to address the problems raised. This meant that there was a shared understanding of the particular role of the Head teacher and the context of working in primary schools. Initially there is a need to encourage group members who fear they have little to offer a group in terms of experience, skill or personality to take part in order to listen to the contribution of the other members of the group. Counsellmann and Weber (2004) highlight the importance of a group in peer supervision as a mechanism for conveying a therapeutic effect. At its simplest level it allows the normalisation of problems so that individual Head teachers see that 'it is not just them' and that other Head teachers are facing similar difficulties and challenges.

The Supportive Effects of the Group

A number of Head teachers described feelings of how the group had been supportive and affirming for them. The intense feelings of warmth and support that some participants had felt directed towards them as they shared their concerns with the group made them feel very emotional yet more empowered and confident. Although these

emotional reactions had been a shock, it demonstrated how deeply they had been affected by the issues that they had shared and how much they valued being given permission and time to speak about their concerns. Specifically a number of participants reported that in addition to the feelings of supportive warmth, they felt that their actions and judgement had been affirmed during the session.

Initially some participants expressed fears that they were in danger of exposing their incompetence and/or trivial nature of their problems. However, having overcome these fears enough to describe their difficulties, the response of the group had been reassuring in letting those that had shared their problems know that they had done everything in their powers to resolve the situation and that the decisions that they had made were valid and that others in the group would have made similar choices. Having seen others handled with such positive regard by the group other participants indicated that they had been able to overcome their fears of ridicule and had been able to articulate their difficulties to the group.

The effectiveness of the structured nature of the process in the establishment of confidential and supportive relationships was consistent with Obholzer's (1994), view that such a structured containing environment enables members to take time to get to know each other and become familiar with each other's issues and contexts in a safe, task-orientated setting. Where the group remained 'task-orientated maintaining the structure and group ethos it encouraged open discussion of personal feelings which were connected with work-role' (Hornby 1983:49). The structure enabled staff to face rather than evade difficult issues, (Hornby (1983), and the sessions were not unconsciously disorganised by the members attempting to avoid facing their disagreements, as described by Obholzer (1994, 16, 157). As the structure facilitated a supportive and solution-focussed approach, group members were not rendered helpless, and where this structure was maintained the group remained focussed on the issues at hand rather than engaging in defensive discussions about other events in order to avoid unacceptable feelings. The group members clearly enjoyed the freedom to articulate their own thoughts, which enabled others in the group to become sensitive to their internal experiences and underlying intentions. Group members were not critical or blaming of each other, rather their tone was empathetic and supportive (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:42). The inclusion of a chairperson to manage the proceedings and to observe time limits helped the group to reach conclusions more effectively as well as providing emotional and practical support. In particular the Head teachers seemed to appreciate that the sessions were focused on finding solutions to difficulties rather than

dwelling on them.

iii. Individual Benefits

The supportive function of peer supervision has featured highly in Head teachers comments. The sessions allowed the Heads to see that others shared the same issues as themselves and this helped them to keep problems in proportion. This has served to meet common needs such as; decrease feelings of isolation, promoting self-confidence, and development of feelings of self-efficacy as problem-solving skills increase.

Working with others in the group has helped to establish cooperative relationships between individuals based on shared concerns or situations. The group also provides an individual with reflection and this promotes self-appraisal to help with development of identity and self-esteem (Counselmann and Weber, 2004).

Normalising Effects

The Head teachers in the group appeared to be genuinely surprised at the discovery that other Heads shared similar difficulties and issues as themselves:

Its amazing how much overlap there is with the problems and we actually met yesterday and that was one of the things we said, that hearing someone else working through something that you've got a similar issue with, that's really helpful.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Hearing others with the same problem had a normalising effect and helped individuals feel less isolated and incompetent:

One of the things which definitely helps is hearing directly from somebody that they've got the same problem that I've got, even down to the detail of saying 'I just can't get into the routine of checking my emails every day' and somehow, for some reason, that lifts me, not that it makes it any easier to keep tabs on the extranet/emails myself, but just knowing that this guy, 6 miles away, is in exactly the same position as me, that in itself is worth going for, and I think, and on behalf of other people who haven't had those feelings, to have those feelings and be able to recognise the links to what is it that's brought this feeling about, what

is it about this meeting that's different from area Heads meeting, or meeting somebody in a pub, you've got to experience it to be able to know the value.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Several participants described how as a consequence of being in the group they had learned that they were neither more able or less able than anybody else in the group and that their Head teacher colleagues were grappling with all the same pressures that they were and were trying to come up with the same kind of solutions that they were trying to find:

I think I've learnt that I'm neither more able or less able than anybody else in the group in that sense that I'm not, I've got a group of colleagues around me who are grappling with all the same pressures that I am, and are trying to come up with the same kind of solutions that I am trying to find. I've learned that there's a great strength to be gained from actually appearing weak in a sense, in that by revealing difficulties, you can actually gain a lot more from that position. I've learned that even when a problem arises, you don't actually have to take it on and solve it yourself.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

They also stated that there was a strength to be gained from actually appearing weak and that when a problem arises they realised they did not have to take it on and solve it by themselves.

Such feelings illustrate that just by being part of a group, members may experience a more human, richer part of themselves which may be of great value to them in it's own right (Rogers, 1966 in Yalom, I.D. & Leszcz, M. (2005:63)). As Rogers argues that the intimacy developed in a group may be seen as a "*Counterforce in a technologically driven culture that, in all ways – socially, professionally, residentially, recreationally – inexorably dehumanizes relationships*", (Rogers, 1966, in Yalom, I.D. & Leszcz, M. (2005: 63)), the experience of such intimacy may be of benefit to those who feel a degree of alienation from their role.

Improved Problem-Solving Skills

Another perceived benefit of sharing similar problems was that hearing about a problem

and being party to a discussion about its resolution forearms others who might face the same situation in the future and therefore any negative emotional impact of the situation may be reduced before it happens:

There was something said yesterday by somebody else and I thought "goodness me, I thought it was just me who felt like that", and I've been beating myself up for feeling like that about exactly the same thing and to hear someone else say it, it was really powerful to know that somebody else felt the same, and there was another Head there who was due to go through a similar experience shortly, so it meant if that then happens to them they are fore-armed now that other people have been in that situation, that its no-one's fault, but it's how you are going to deal with the feelings it creates.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

In particular, having a shared awareness, understanding and appreciation of the responsibilities and emotions associated with the Head teacher's role proved to be especially powerful:

So the thing I like is talking to people who are in that exact same position and when you even scratch the surface you realise they've all got exactly the same worries you have, that's so reassuring, because, although I love the job, at times it terrifies me! I think we all feel that sort of vulnerability. Even we work in different contexts such as the Primary context where they are having to make all the same sorts of decisions. They may only have half a dozen staff and I have 90 but it doesn't matter because all human life passes by in a way, perhaps at a slower pace in terms of the number of problems you get but they've all had maternity leaves, or disciplinary issues or inability to recruit or whatever and those sort of things may face me every year, or once every 5 years or whatever, especially the small schools.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

By listening to other Head teachers explore difficulties and express their ideas for resolving them, a less experienced head gained confidence in making and taking decisions to prioritise work and deciding what they wanted for their own schools rather than following the directives from the Local Authority 'by the book':

Some of the much more experienced Heads than I am have got that confidence to think, well I've been told to do that but I'm not going to do it because I don't believe in it, or I'm going to give that a very low priority although someone is telling me it should have a high one, and all the rest of it, and I think learning that sort of confidence and ability to make those decisions so talking to all those people on that level, you know they are all doing that and it really helps.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Even when the issues being discussed did not have a direct parallel with their own situation or circumstances the Heads felt that there was still value on being part of the discussion:

We tackled problems from a secondary Head's viewpoint and we also tackled a problem put forward by a Head of a large primary school and even though I don't identify particularly with secondary or large primary there was something that I could take away from the meeting.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The peer supervision group members also reported that the group process had a supportive or restorative function in that it helped them deal with the emotional aspects of working with people as they were provided with space to reflect on the issues that arise from their work (Isbell, 2003) and helped them integrate what they were doing, feeling and thinking (Zorga, 1997). It also provided valuable support after stressful situations (Aston and Molassiotis, 2003) and lead to feelings of competence and being able to cope with difficult types of work (Day, Turlow and Wooliscroft, 2003; Lantz and Severinsson, 2001). The group sessions also permitted validation of the supervisee as a person as well as a Head teacher. The reassurance and affirmation received from the group helped dispel feelings of guilt that may have been harboured for some time. Affirmation gained from the group that difficult situations had been handled to the best of their ability, in some ways had more value than any new suggestions or solutions offered to resolve it. By listening to others with similar issues to ones they had experienced in the past gave some group members comfort and reassurance that they had managed the problems appropriately and also they could now share their difficulties with the group in the future rather than attempting to manage them by themselves. Recognition of the value of their personal contribution to the process came from participants' own experience of managing very difficult situations in the past.

Therefore, although the solutions to a problem offered by the group may not always prove to be practically applicable, the sharing of the problem with the group is often beneficial.

Reassurance and Affirmation

The reassurance and affirmation received from the group helped dispel feelings of guilt that may have been harboured for some time. A number of Head teachers described feelings of how the group had been supportive and affirmative for them:

I feel very positive about them [the group sessions] because they are very supportive, in the atmosphere, there's just something about how the group is formed and realise the purpose of being there – I feel very affirmed not just by being there and people saying good things but by people sharing their problems and their difficulties because you feel very much supported by the fact that other people are having the same kind of problems you do and I felt positive about the experience.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

One Head teacher commented on the feelings of warmth and support that she had felt directed towards her as she shared her concern with the group. She described how the intensity of these feelings had made her feel very emotional yet more empowered and confident. Although her emotional reaction had been a shock, it showed her how deeply she had been affected by the issue that she had shared and how much she valued being given permission and time to speak about her concerns:

It was far better than I expected. The structured approach gave us what we needed – a way of getting stuff off your chest as well as getting lots of useful suggestions. I did get upset when I was talking about the problem to the group but I didn't mind that.

(Head teacher 11 interviewed in current study)

Specifically, a number of participants reported that in addition to the feelings of supportive warmth, they felt that their actions and judgment had been affirmed during the session:

That's what was so special about yesterday, I still felt at the end of the meeting affirmed. Specifically, not last night but the meeting before, a colleague came with an issue about exclusion and the tension, the 'shall I?, sha'nt I?', and what are the outcomes of it?, is it in the child's interests?, and all the other things that are built in there, within that specific one, there was, without it being said, there was affirmation for me in terms of "I've been through this, that's what I did, that's how I felt" when it happened to me, so it was really useful.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Initially some participants expressed fears that they were in danger of exposing their incompetence and/or trivial nature of their problems:

There is always the initial feeling of, is this too stupid to tell anyone about?, or is this going to deal me as incompetent or not able to handle something?

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Having overcome these fears enough to describe their difficulties, the response of the group had been reassuring in letting those that had shared their problems know that they had done everything in their powers to resolve the situation and that the decisions that they had made were valid and that others in the group would have made similar choices:

At first I felt really embarrassed, [when presenting an issue] the W___ group is quite well attended and most people were there, and you think, I'll be talking about something I feel I could have dealt with more effectively, maybe they're going to say "you could have avoided that" but that wasn't the response because obviously with the questioning you go round and at the end all the Heads said you did all you could, that was the decision really, wasn't it? You looked at other agencies, you looked at support from Ed Psych, Behaviour Support, parents, TA and everything we try to do as a school but in the end, physical attack is very serious, and staff don't come into school to be hit in the face and on the back of the neck, do they?

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

Another participant explained that having seen others handled with such positive regard by the group they were able to overcome their fears of ridicule and were able to articulate their difficulties:

You can feel a bit of a Charlie can't you? I think such is the confidence of the group, and the ability and experience of those in there, that they feel happy saying my question's been asked and can switch to another question.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

A number of Head teachers indicated that the reassurance and affirmation they had received from the group helped them deal with feelings of guilt that they had been harbouring for some time:

Well, it was reassuring, [to hear affirmation from others that I had done all that I could]. There have been many times I've had to exclude and all the time you feel very guilty, as a Head you feel its your fault, that you've missed something along the way and you could have avoided it, but when there's a physical outburst... So I came away thinking that I'd done all I could to try to avoid the exclusion and that was the message that I got from the other Heads where they asked the questions, I went round the circle and at the end I felt quite confident that I'd done everything I could to try to avoid it

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

One new Head teacher drew parallels with the current Head teachers group and the group she was attending for new Head teachers. She explained that the affirmation gained from the group that she had handled a difficult situation to the best of her ability, in some ways had more value than any new suggestions or solutions offered to resolve it, a view shared by the leader of the course she was attending:

I'm doing the New Visions course for new Heads and we did action learning on the last meeting, the person that was leading it did exactly the same and gave her issue, everybody asked questions about it, I think the group was too big to do it to be honest – but she still got a lot from it although it was from 9 years ago, was still affected by it. At the end of that she said, well that has all been supportive because you said to me that the things that I did and the actions that I took were a path that you would have done and I think that I, probably similar to her in finding the conclusion to it, the affirmation afterwards is more important to me rather than as I'm going along. You know when you walk away and think this is what happened, this is the conclusion to it and this person, say, has lost their job

– then I've affected that person hugely, was I right to do that? I think issues like that are very important for your own well-being.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

The comments of the course leader also indicated how past difficulties can remain and still cause difficult feelings for the individual involved even after many years.

Even when participants had not presented an issue themselves, a number of Head teachers stated that by listening to others with similar issues to ones they had experienced in the past gave them comfort and reassurance that they had managed the problems appropriately and also they could now share their difficulties with the group in the future rather than attempting to manage them by themselves:

I've listened through some fascinating issues, and two of the issues I've grappled with myself in the past, particularly the last one, and if I'd have listened to this person talking say two or three years ago – I'd exactly the same issue, and I battled with it by myself because when that kind of things kicks off in school you are by yourself – other people can say 'I'm supporting you' but because you are the Head teacher, you are battling by yourself. If I had been able to take my issue to these people I'd have felt better because I'd actually aired it within a group of experienced Head teachers.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

One Head teacher in particular recognised the value of his personal contribution to the process as it came from his own experience of a very difficult situation in the past and he recognised some of the mistakes he had made in the past and the need to handle things differently in the future:

The suggestion I made was from hard experience, and when I had the issue I was involved in, I don't think I made all the right calls on it, it ended up fine but I didn't make the right calls through the process, it was a very, very stressful time for me personally, and also for the class teacher as well. I had to get involved because I was the Head teacher, had I been in a group and listened to that 2 or 3 years ago, I would have handled it differently.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Despite the positive aspects of taking a problem to the group, the suggestions offered proved not to be practically applicable for one Head teacher although the sharing of the problem with the group had been beneficial:

The advice that they gave back – actually, was probably not practically useful. It was quite a complex issue anyway and from that meeting things moved very quickly, you find yourself in a new situation where advice given is no longer applicable because something else has happened by the next day which has pushed things on. It was nice to listen to what people have to say and how they would have dealt with it but I thought, well, I know that, so nothing additional came out of it.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Affirmation gained from the group that difficult situations had been handled to the best of their ability, in some ways had more value than any new suggestions or solutions offered to resolve it. By listening to others with similar issues to ones they had experienced in the past gave some group members comfort and reassurance that they had managed the problems appropriately and also they could now share their difficulties with the group in the future rather than attempting to manage them by themselves. Recognition of the value of their personal contribution to the process came from participants' own experience of managing very difficult situations in the past. Therefore, although the solutions to a problem offered by the group may not always prove to be practically applicable, the sharing of the problem with the group is often beneficial.

Benefits of Altruism

The ability to look at past mistakes and spare others from making similar errors or going through similar experiences appeared to be a motivating force within the group:

One of the things that would make this group work for me is knowing that may be somebody else is going to be in a similar position to where I was and I could help them avoid some of the same stresses that I went through.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Indeed some participants articulated how much they enjoyed being able to help others:

I don't know anybody who doesn't like to help somebody out. I feel great when somebody phones me up and I can give a suggestion, and they can say, 'I'll try that one', it's human nature, isn't it? It's quite nice to try to solve somebody else's problems when you are not tied up in your own, you can give it more dispassionate consideration.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

whilst others described how just being part of the group process made them feel better in themselves even though it was not their problem:

I find them [group sessions] very useful. Either - I haven't taken any more problems since the very first training session of my own to present to the group, but one of the interesting and exciting outcomes of the discussions is whoever raises something, whatever role I play as an individual in terms of listening, or getting more information, or even offering something - "have you tried this, this might be useful" - I find that I feel better about the whole thing myself even though it wasn't my problem.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The success of the group supervision relies on the building of trust and positive relationships. This occurs over time and means that each successive session is likely to have more impact as supportive relationships develop. The apparent 'opening up' of more withdrawn individuals was testament to the level of trust and mutual respect established by the group. Zorga et al (2001) point out that in group peer supervision the roles of supervisor and supervisee rotate around the group. This is an important part of the process of developing trust and means that the Head teachers should be encouraged to act as 'Chair', even if they feel uncomfortable with this unfamiliar role. The surprise of some participants at how open other people had been at the meetings was matched by accounts of those who claimed that the process had helped them overcome their initial reluctance to share difficult or sensitive issues and allowed them to become more open:

I think that the main launch session that we had for the whole day was incredible and I was surprised at how open people were willing to be, because there are obviously 2 secondary clusters there even though I was the only secondary Head there, and I thought to be in a group with people who really don't know each

other and to be so open I thought was really positive, and as a relatively new Head I really appreciate the system because I think it is quite lonely at times, and even though the Primary people are in a different context to me and facing in some cases different problems, in other ways they have the same levels of responsibility and therefore the same feelings as I have so its still very, very good to share things with them and also to get that other perspective as well from them, so I really enjoyed that.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

The above accounts are similar to the feelings described previously by Rogers (1966), concerning group members' experience of a more human, richer part of themselves through the intimacy of being in a group. As group members were required to shift between roles of help receivers and help providers they learned that they had obligations to those from whom they wished to receive care in the manner described by Holmes and Kivlighan, (2000). For those who may have become somewhat immersed in their own problems and as a consequence may have adopted a more rigid mind-set, their involvement in thinking about someone (or something) outside themselves and by forgetting their own situation, may have provided them with a new sense of purpose as described by Yalom and Leszcz (2005:15).

The experiences recounted by group members may have shared features with the corrective emotional experience described by Alexander (1946). As group members recounted the difficulties they were exposed to, emotions that had been previously unbearable were expressed and contained within the supportive and safe environment of the group. Group members were able to take risks in expressing these emotions, interpersonally to the group which proved to be supportive enough to permit this risk taking and allowed the individuals to examine and reality-check incidents with the aid of consensual validation from the other members. Ultimately the group facilitated individual group members' ability to frame their experiences and make sense of their emotions and behaviour.

Evidence for some degree of success in this process came in the statements from group members that they were able to express more emotion, recall more personally relevant and formative experiences, and were more confident in the manner described by Fretter, Bucci, Broitman, Silberschatz and Curtis (1994). Specifically a number of participants reported that in addition to the feelings of supportive warmth, they felt that their actions

and judgement had been clarified and affirmed during the session. In this way both emotional and cognitive components were available to bring about change in behaviour and beliefs and helped to make sense of the emotions evoked (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:31). The sense of belongingness, acceptance and approval engendered by the group helped to raise some members' self-esteem and met their dependency needs whilst giving them autonomy and a sense of responsibility as they individually contributed to the group's welfare and were able to experience the atmosphere of a cohesive group, (Frank (1957); Braaten (1991); (Yalom and Leszcz (2005:57).

Educative or Formative Function of the Group

The Group supervision sessions had an educative or formative function in that they enhanced the development of the group members' knowledge and skills and allowed the transmission of professional knowledge, values and skills from the other group members (Zorga, 1997; Crespi, 1997; Isbell, 2003; Aston and Molassiotis, 2003). Members learnt about their individual strengths through the reflections of the supervision group (Zorga, 1997; Nash, 1999), and through sharing theory and practice a sense of consistency was established (Isbell, 2003), and professional competencies were enhanced and evaluated (Robiner et al, 1997). Initially some participants expressed fears that they were in danger of exposing their incompetence and/or trivial nature of their problems. These feelings are consistent with those described by Yalom and Leszcz (2005:7), of basic inadequacy, interpersonal alienation, concerns about sense of worth and ability to relate to others commonly experienced by members of therapeutic groups. However, having overcome these fears enough to describe their difficulties, the responses of individuals in the group had been reassuring in letting those that had shared their problems know that they had done everything in their powers to resolve the situation and that the decisions that they had made were valid and that others in the group would have made similar choices.

For some isolated Head teachers the group sessions may have been the first opportunity for accurate interpersonal feedback on how they were managing a situation. (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:17). Maybe for the first time, some members had an opportunity to reflect and gain some understanding of their situation through the eyes of their peers. There was evidence that some Head teachers had been able to gain a degree of insight (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:15) into their own behaviour such as: how they are seen by other people; their more complex interactional patterns of behaviour and why they do what

they do to and with other people. Through exploring their work experiences, members came to recognise their defensive behaviour and questioned practices previously taken for granted. Individuals were empowered to speak, whether on their own behalf or on behalf of their institution. As their anxiety was contained, they were able to articulate what needed to be discussed. Some felt for the first time that it was possible to regain some inner sense of having the power to affect ones' own experience, rather than assuming a victim role in the manner described by Obholzer, (1994). Having seen others handled with such positive regard by the group more group members were able to overcome their fears of ridicule and were able to articulate their difficulties.

Improved Listening Skills

Group members commented that the rigid structure of the process had helped them listen to others and validated the time allowed when others were listening to them:

The group process has established an understanding, it's put in place tram-lines so that people have got a greater sense of keeping within those tram-lines, in terms of "this is my opportunity to speak and I'm going to be listened to", or "this is the time when I need to listen and not interrupt.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

In addition, the process had not only improved the quality of the listening skills but had also enabled participants to spend greater focused time listening to others, a situation that does not normally occur in the experiences of Head teachers:

I think it's the way it very overtly made you think about how you listened to other people and then what you do when you've done the listening and about asking questions to clarify before offering suggestions. I was only looking yesterday when each of us was talking - when one person was talking, that respect for listening to somebody for an extended period, which was quite something for Head teachers because they always want to chip in, but there was a long period where we were just listening to one person, whereas in other groups of Head teachers there is often a kind of free flow, things being batted backwards and forwards, at quite a speed and in those circumstances perhaps things aren't explored or listened to in so much depth, that is certainly one of the areas that helps us.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

The opportunity to voice concerns out loud to a receptive and sympathetic audience was greatly appreciated:

It's quite nice to offload it to be honest, I think you are very isolated in schools and there are not a lot of people to share things with, it was nice to explain what a difficulty was and know people were responding back to you about it.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

and the potential containing qualities offered by the process were inferred by one group member who described how a difficult situation she had experienced in the past might have been made bearable if she had been able to express her concerns:

Yes, it [if somebody else had acknowledged the difficulties] would have helped, because you wouldn't then feel on your own, because you've actually voiced them aloud.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Another participant expressed the benefits of containment more graphically:

It's like this morning, I rambled to you about we've done this and we've done that, and I think it's human nature isn't it, you offload and think if I talk about it it's going to help, I'll share it.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

The fact that the sessions provided a positive response to solving problems rather than just expressing concern in an unfocussed way was welcomed by the Head teachers and encouraged a more positive outlook:

That's one of the good things about it - it's not just about emoting willy-nilly, you've got a procedure to follow. It helped us realise that there are ways through these situations that don't mean going away and banging your head against a brick wall - just that short spell has made us a better group - it has made us all more forward looking.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Unlike most Head teachers' meetings the process allowed participants time to really listen to each other and group members reported that the ordered and methodical approach offered by the process allowed them to really take time to reflect on issues and consider their responses:

I thought people's responses were very measured which I was surprised at, I thought people would come back with things more quickly than they did so that shocked me, that people were very measured in the precision of the questions that they asked and the calmness in which that was done. I really liked that because then I thought this is not going to be a moaning session, this is an informative, supportive professional dialogue, so I think it worked really, really well.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

In particular the time taken to reflect on issues was appreciated:

I felt we had the time to get to the bottom of the problems which I think all the Heads appreciate, in a small school in particular everything happens very fast and sometimes you think that you're just responding quick without a time for reflection. I think the process gives you the chance to reflect within the actual time we had. I feel as though there is a lot of mileage in it.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Furthermore, participants reported that the process allowed the clarification and definition of problems to be scrutinised in such a way that enabled participants to understand the issues more fully and derive more effective and appropriate solutions:

Actually speaking an issue out loud, I didn't do that in the group myself, but listening to other people, you can hear how their reasoning's working after a while, actually I haven't thought about it like that, [clarifying the issue] and you can hear them refining the problem and coming up with a better definition of it so that you can then address it more effectively - people were talking about things without saying "I've got the answer to that", or "well I had that problem and this is what I did", it doesn't go down that route, it remained in the standing back and looking more objectively at things.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Moreover, the improved listening and problem-solving skills avoided glib and ill-thought out responses which might have done more harm than good:

Offering the suggestions is much better if it is directly related to that persons situation and not "oh yes, well that happened to me 2 years ago and what I did was..." , because you can't always transfer – "have you thought about, is it possible to", I think people are much more likely to think "oh yes, maybe I could", if it's "I did this, I did that" that can make a person feel worse.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Even though individuals felt that being part of the process caused some degree of anxiety due to fears about their ability to generate original questions and useful solutions, the overall benefits of the process were seen to outweigh these difficulties:

I think it [being one of the solution-givers] does make you think because as you go round the circle and someone says something, you say "I was going to say that", or "I was going to question that, what am I going to do now?" so the pressure is on as you go round the circle to think of something different or to think "I'm going to repeat that because I was going to say the same thing" so I think it does make you hone in on the problem and make you focus on what the issues are because if people have already dealt with it and its coming to you, you must think of something else. It does help to focus your mind on the issue.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

In some cases initial feelings and anxieties about being unable to make a valid contribution were replaced with an awareness of having been supported and accepted and this enabled participants to volunteer to offer an issue in the next round:

I thought initially it was a really informative way of sorting it out, the first one that we did, the first cycle, I actually felt under pressure when it was coming round to my turn to speak, but after we'd done the first one I thought everybody was very supportive in their questioning and there was a good outcome that came from it so that's why then I was happy to do the second one.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Improved Problem-Solving Skills

As a consequence of being in the group and taking part in the process, individuals reported that their problem-solving skills had improved and developed to a level which they could apply more effectively back in their own settings:

In some ways, even when it wasn't me who was the person who was taking part you identified with so many things that came into the discussion that it was actually quite helpful for you as part of the group, for your own role back at school. There was a transference of bits of thinking that we worked through, and realising that there are a number of possible ways through something, and it isn't always finding the right way but actually finding what you could do and then choosing from that, and I found that really useful.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Several participants described how being in the group had encouraged them to reflect on and critique their own practice when formulating questions and responses for the group process:

It makes you think about similar situations and the issue, it puts you on the spot as you are expected to actively contribute, and actively think about the questions you are asking to see if they would be of any help. I would say that actually, because I can look back at some of the decisions I have made, I've been a Head for 3 years, and some of them have been leaping in, knee-jerk without actually taking that time and distance from an issue, involving other people in it and getting other peoples opinions, perhaps taking a whole different approach next time.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

Hearing the views of others and the range of 'solutions' or approaches to difficulties was viewed as a contributory factor in the development of participants' own thinking skills:

That's where the group situation is probably better than the 1:1 situation, the fact that different people give different suggestions actually does make you think there isn't one straight answer to this, there are a number of things I could do. When you do the 1:1 if the other persons talking through something you are being taken

their way, aren't you? Which only gives you one possible way, but I didn't feel I had to take the suggestions that the other person was making, I very much felt that they were helping me to widen my thoughts.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

One Head teacher described how hearing a problem discussed by the different individuals in the group, each using their own thought processes, experience and perspectives, he was made aware of how the same issue might be viewed from very different perspectives which can help in finding a better solution:

I think I've learned the procedures, but I've learned how we are as people, and that this to me is a brilliant tool because not only is it effective and you get some good solutions out of it but it sits between 'there's this problem' and 'there's this answer', that's one extreme so that's kind of my left-brained way of seeing things, and the right-brained way of seeing things which is 'well, let's talk about the problem' that will help. Four or five worse case scenarios will come out and then what actually transpires is nothing like all the nightmares you've played out in your own mind. It's very clear that it does sit between two extremes and I find it's helpful to me because it's moving me away from that very left-brained way of seeing things but it's not frustrating in that it's completely the other end of the spectrum where we just talk about things and go round in circles. It's how we respond to whatever that thing is, so the more I engage with the process, the more I get out of it.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

He went on to explain the value of hearing a problem discussed by individuals from different perspectives independently:

I think partly we're all different and also from my background, I'm an engineer so try to look for definite answers, I talk lots of problems through with my wife at home, I'm sure a lot of people do that, and the difference between how she looks at problems and I look at problems is very different – I'm quite analytical, whereas my wife is in-training so it's a similar sort of field, and she likes to talk things over rather than coming up with solutions.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

in particular the sharing and awareness of different perspectives was especially helpful and would seem to have been used by individuals following the process in order to consider difficulties:

The thing that struck me when I walked away was, that was not to offload and moan, it's to seek a solution and I think I've used that a lot myself in my own situation – this is the problem, and instead of moaning about it, I've said this is the position, what's the solution, so I've done it more in my own head from the method.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

The wide range of experience in the group was also seen to be advantageous as it provided many different angles to problems and raised the possibility of more solutions. Being party to a discussion about a problem and its resolution forearms others who might face the same situation in the future and therefore any negative emotional impact of the situation may be reduced before it happens. The process was generally seen to have improved how the Head teachers related to each other in that it offered an organised, structured and focussed problem-solving system which built on an already established system:

The process has made, helped and bettered how we do things – in the past it's been said "we've done this, what do you think?" Or "that's happened, what's your advice?" This is certainly a better way of dealing with things.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

As a consequence of attending the group sessions one participant described how she had proactively sought out support earlier than she might have done previously and in so doing reduced her feelings of distress:

What actually happened was between the group sessions something cropped up that I was anxious about and wasn't sure who I could talk it through with, so I emailed ___ and just put 'Re. support, could do with having a few minutes either by email or over the phone or whatever', we actually did it over the phone in the end – he let me talk through what it was and then he asked me some questions, so it was the same sort of format but it was a fairly instant follow-up to me saying I could do with talking through this, and by the time we had finished I felt I was

making the problem seem bigger than it really is, what I've actually got to do is... and it helped me clarify how I was going to deal with that. I probably would not as easily have done this before, I would have probably waited until the problem was bigger, and then I might possibly have contacted ___ because we already did do a little bit of being there for each other anyway, but I thought of it earlier on in the process, as soon as I was aware that I was getting wound up about it.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Increased Trust, Openness and Communication

A number of participants described how despite their initial reluctance to share difficult or sensitive issues with the others in the group, the process helped them overcome these feelings and allowed them to become more open:

There is an intimidating element to it initially, you think am I going to share something, but I think as we're developing as a group, I think we feel more confident revealing things to each other that you wouldn't necessarily in another context, so I think the process does help that.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Indeed, such was the strength of the group, although some were not personally inclined to share difficulties with others, that they were now willing to share their problems:

I'm not the most forthcoming when it comes to sharing problems for a whole host of reasons, I would now feel confident in sharing a problem in a group, saying I don't know the answer. Over a real hard issue I wouldn't have any problem in saying I'm open to suggestions please. That admission hasn't always rested easily with me, not that I think I'm always right because over 16 years I've dropped some clangers but maybe those clangers wouldn't have been dropped if there had been a group like this one. Even within this kind of group you may not be talking about issues relevant to you at that time, but you may be listening to issues that you may come up against in the future.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Similarly, the process enabled previously difficult subjects to be discussed openly which improved and established positive relationships, openness and mutual support

amongst group members:

I felt very much that I got one or two of my colleagues from schools that are very, very close by and previously I think there has always been a bit of competition with these schools, whereas I feel now, having talked about it extensively with one teacher from a neighbouring school, and she was actually the person I paired up with at that training as well, you actually feel much more that you are two teachers in partnership working in different contexts, and that sharing problems or difficulties with each other is actually a very supportive thing for each other, it is not in any sense revealing yourself as a school not as good as another school, it's actually a process where you feel I could actually pick up a phone and ask that person for some advice if the situation arose, I do feel that I could ask for a 1:1 session, where we could explore something that I was concerned with. I don't think there was the understanding previously that I could do that, or that I would have felt very vulnerable doing that, because we are in an area where school rolls are falling so there are spare places in all those schools, and parents use that, in a sense, to move schools more easily than they might have done otherwise. You are always worried about numbers and the fact that your children might leave to go to another school, or other children come from other schools to yours, I think that's helped get over all those embarrassing areas, and that we feel very much more like colleagues, working together.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

The experience of being in the group and getting to know other members more intimately had changed some of views group members felt towards their fellow Head teachers and made them more relaxed around them:

Despite being Head here for 8 years, and I know that _____ has been for longer at _____, I'm finding out more about him professionally and my professional reaction to him in that process, which makes me feel more relaxed and therefore able to offer an opinion on ideas.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

It depends upon how you feel about the colleagues who are there, and I feel about the colleagues that were there, I trust them, and I feel that they were listening, there were quite a few colleagues there who are quite experienced so when they

come up with recommendations often they are based on their own experience in their own practice. I feel that if I had a burning issue I could go to a meeting and talk about it. By nature I'm not a person who shares my problems with a range of people, I'm someone who gets on the phone and would chat one to one, but I felt that if I had an issue I could use that as an arena where I could air a problem. I actually feel from how people have behaved that they feel the same.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Another effect of the safe and trusting atmosphere created by the group appears to enable members to go 'out of Head teacher role' and become 'themselves'. This also allows others to perceive their vulnerability more easily and perhaps makes group members more sensitive to when others are in distress than they had been previously:

Teaching is all about acting anyway isn't it? You come in every morning and play the Head teacher with the kids and to some extent, the staff. I think that is one of the things, a bit like we are sitting here now and its totally confidential so you almost just physically go, "right, I'm going to be myself now, don't have to put an act on", and I'm aware later this afternoon I'm seeing a parent and I'll have to be back to being a Head teacher, and at Governors tonight – you know? So you do see people looking or seeming more vulnerable and it brings the odd concern out.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Surprisingly these effects occurred in spite of Head teachers working in an extreme and ever-increasingly competitive environment where they are required, if not overtly encouraged to be competitive and single-minded with regard to their own schools:

If you think how the group works, it is actually quite surprising how it does work, we are more and more being lead down the route of competition with ourselves, and the fact that you've got Head teachers who can be a bit egotistical, and yet we've got this group who are Head teachers who are competitive but are prepared to support one another, and we have a secondary Head there who might have all sorts of perspectives about different schools, and all of that is put to one side so that we can support each other.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Another Head explained how being in the group and getting to know other members

more intimately had changed their view of them and made them more relaxed around them:

I'm finding out more about him professionally and my professional reaction to him in that process, which makes me feel more relaxed and therefore able to offer an opinion on ideas.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The reasons for this increased level of trust were based upon the positive personal interrelationships and understanding of others in the group. These were listed by participants as: being amongst people who could be trusted, had valuable experience, were respectful, and with whom a good relationship had become established:

It depends upon how you feel about the colleagues who are there, and I feel about the colleagues that were there, I trust them, and I feel that they were listening, there were quite a few colleagues there who are quite experienced so when they come up with recommendations often they are based on their own experience in their own practice. I feel that if I had a burning issue I could go to a meeting and talk about it. By nature I'm not a person who shares my problems with a range of people, I'm someone who gets on the phone and would chat one to one, but I felt that if I had an issue I could use that as an arena where I could air a problem. I actually feel from how people have behaved that they feel the same.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

For Secondary Head teachers there were distinct advantages in meeting outside the head secondary teachers group as the competitive element was removed:

It [presenting a problem to the group] was fine because I didn't feel vulnerable. In that particular context I was very confident about the confidentiality of the situation. I meet regularly with all the Secondary Heads in the area but you are still aware that you are in competition with them and so to some extent you feel that if you show too many chinks then in a way that's not as easy, and perhaps in the context that we meet it isn't as easy so I felt perfectly happy to do that.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Surprisingly the level of trust and positive regard was not always a result of being part

of a long established group. Whilst some individuals did know one another from working in local clusters together, others were not part of an established network but still had positive feelings about working with others in the group:

Initially I thought I'm not going to like this probably because I didn't know the people there, I'm a new Head, and some of them were very friendly with one another and knew one another, however I didn't feel restricted in any way by being a new head because I think they were quite open and welcoming, everybody valued you as a person, it wasn't 'you haven't been doing it for long so what do you know?' sort of thing, I don't think people are of that attitude.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

A newly appointed Head teacher's fears about being an outsider were quickly allayed. Likewise a Head teacher who had been unable to attend both initial training sessions and had only attended one of the independent meetings organised by the Head teachers quickly felt part of the process:

Having gone through the process now twice, it made me feel that I had something of value to say, whereas sometimes you would sit there very quietly with groups of professional people, in a sense this forces you to offer something so I understand the anxiety it places on you to respond, but the more you do it, the more that would lessen.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Overall the participants stated that they believed the group to be a good use of their time and having had positive effects on them personally, even when some of the effects had been intangible.

The increased level of openness experienced by the schools since the establishment of the group was seen to be a way of preventing potential tensions developing. As discussed previously, it is possible that the group had a 'containing' function, providing a 'de-toxifying' process for the members by bearing what they could not, and enabling them to contain and process the anxiety caused by projective identification and a range of other anxiety-provoking issues such as falling roles, targets and challenging behaviour which are often sources of tensions and rivalries between schools. (Obholzer, 1994: 6 and 70). Several Heads said that they were now working on projects and tasks

together such as classroom observations, professional development, school prospectuses and job descriptions and that they felt more comfortable in seeking support from others in the group. Specifically some felt more able to ask individuals they had met in the group about issues, even outside the group situation. In addition, it is also possible that the group enabled the members to assume a depressive position rather than maintain a paranoid-schizoid position where their only recourse was to omnipotent fantasies, obsessional rituals and the paranoid blaming of others. The group therefore enabled them to tolerate reality, state their problems accurately, think coherently and solve their problems constructively (Zagier Roberts, 1994). In the depressive position facilitated by the group, the members were able to seek to know and learn from the experience and resources of others in order to solve their problems and allow realistic and practical reparative activities to be considered.

The success of the group supervision sessions clearly relied on the building of trust and positive relationships. Whilst some of these relationships were already established in part, some were established during the sessions. The establishment of these positive relationships resulted in successive group sessions having greater impact as supportive relationships developed. The apparent 'opening up' of more withdrawn individuals was testament to the level of trust and mutual respect established by the group. In establishing and maintaining these levels of trust and openness in group members the group process may be related to object relations theory in that the group has acted as a transactional object assisting in the process of separation individuation and establishment of object constancy (Hoffer, 1955; Mahler, 1975; Trafimow and Patack, 1982).

Although some participants expressed a reluctance to take the role of Chair, Zorga et al (2001) point out that the rotation of the roles of supervisor and supervisee around the group in peer supervision is an important part of the process of developing trust and justifies the encouragement of all the Head teachers to act as 'Chair', even if they feel uncomfortable with this unfamiliar role. The surprise of some participants at how open other people had been at the meetings was matched by accounts of those who claimed that the process had helped them overcome their initial reluctance to share difficult or sensitive issues and allowed them to become more open. Indeed, such was the strength of the group, although some were not personally inclined to share difficulties with others, that they were now willing to share their problems. Several group members stated that the process had enabled previously difficult subjects be discussed openly

which improved and established positive relationships, openness and mutual support amongst group members. By sharing their difficult work situations, the supervisees communicated their possibly painful or uncomfortable states of mind, often the results of the projective identifications of others, to the group as well as giving them factual information. The group was therefore able to act as a 'container' providing a 'de-toxifying' process for individuals by bearing what they could not, and enabled them to contain and process the anxiety themselves. (Obholzer 1994:6 and70).

Surprisingly the level of trust and positive regard was not always a result of being part of a long established group. Whilst some individuals did know one another from working in local clusters together, others were not part of an established network but still had positive feelings about working with others in the group. A newly appointed Head teacher's fears about being an outsider were quickly allayed. Likewise a Head teacher who had been unable to attend both initial training sessions and had only attended one of the independent meetings organised by the Head teachers quickly felt part of the process.

It is possible that by engaging in forms of active coping such as: speaking openly, and providing mutual support the group members had activated the neural circuits in the brain concerned with the regulation of the body's stress reactions. Through the use of active coping strategies to deal with traumatic or challenging events, the effects of stress were significantly reduced (Ledoux and Gorman, 2001). In reducing stress levels in this way, it may be that individual group members changed from wanting to relieve their anxiety to wanting to learn to communicate with others and to be more trusting and honest with them (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:23). This shift from the relief of suffering to change in interpersonal functioning is indicative of an essential step in the early dynamic therapeutic process.

The reasons for this increased level of trust were based upon the positive personal interrelationships and understanding of others in the group. These were listed by participants as: being amongst people who: could be trusted; had valuable experience; were respectful, and with whom a good relationship had become established.

Surprisingly these effects occurred in spite of Head teachers working in an extreme and ever-increasingly competitive environment where they are required, if not overtly encouraged to be competitive and single-minded with regard to their own schools. For Secondary Head teachers there were distinct advantages in meeting outside the

Secondary Head teachers group as the competitive element was removed. Overall the participants stated that they believed the group to be a good use of their time and having had positive effects on them personally, even when some of the effects had been intangible.

The reported benefits for individuals as a result of being in the group such as: normalisation of issues; improved problem-solving skills; reassurance and affirmation; experienced benefits of altruism; the educative or formative functions of the group; improved listening skills; improved problem-solving skills; increased trust, openness and communication are an indication of how the effects of the group may be generalised. Whilst it is acknowledged that it is not possible to replicate the group and have any assurance that the same effects would be experienced by different individuals, it can be seen that for the individuals involved in this group, their experiences of being in the group may be generalised in other situations and contexts.

iv. Wider Benefits

All of the Head teachers who attended the sessions felt that the group would benefit their schools as a whole:

This has been helpful to the whole school. "If I had gone under with stress it would have not been good for the school. Peer supervision has provided a way to get rid of stress without putting it onto the staff." "This is not just a way of supporting current Head teachers it is also a way of promoting Head teachership in a time when people are unwilling to take on the role due to the high levels of stress.

(Head teacher 11 interviewed in current study)

and may offer support to the Head teachers' profession and to other groups such as new Head teachers; those Head teachers who had not taken part; SENCOs; deputy Head teachers and Newly Qualified Teachers:

I have already told other colleagues not present that the group was a very efficient, effective and confidential way of enlisting lots of help and support. Those are the things that Head teachers crave. I thought straight away that it could well

be applied in other contexts within layers of the education system in your own school's environment, if you have time to release people it would be a good thing for personnel in school to use as a release valve themselves, particularly good because it focuses on solutions rather than just grumbling and then we all go home.

(Head teacher 11 interviewed in current study)

The increased level of openness experienced by the school since the establishment of the group was seen to be a way of preventing potential tensions developing. Several Heads said that they were now working on projects and tasks together such as classroom observations, professional development, school prospectuses and job descriptions and that they felt more comfortable in seeking support from others in the group:

From the 2 or 3 I've been to, I often come away quite secure of the people sharing the same issues I'm sharing, or having the same problems I'm having as well, I think it's very positive and certainly, if I had a problem, I now feel I could share it in those meetings even though initially I'm not one for sharing things in a group situation.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Specifically some felt more able to ask individuals they had met in the group about issues, even outside the group situation:

Even if I could not air a problem in the group I now feel that I could contact the others and still get support. After the first meeting I met up with _____, and we were looking at whether it was personnel issues, or staffing, or parent, it was an opportunity to start it going and I think geographically _____ and I are obviously very close and I think I have the same close relationship at _____ and I could ring him. I feel there are 2 Heads there who have been part of this group that I could now certainly feel comfortable in ringing or making arrangements to meet up.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

For a newly appointed Head teacher, the initial meeting of the group enabled her to make contact with the Heads in the area:

Since the first meeting, quite a few of the people who were there, they are in our cluster, and I've latched into them for other things, so whilst I haven't been to the meetings, I've phoned different Heads from different schools and said 'Oh, I've forgot this' and they've helped me out back, so that's nice. For me that was a spin off from that meeting because I wouldn't have approached them, and because I haven't been able to make other meetings, I've been able to say, 'look I've got a problem with this', or can you help me out with this' and people have been fantastic back, so I've gained a lot of support even though I haven't been able to attend specific meetings. We have discussed the meeting in our cluster as well, we've said everyone's welcome to come along to it, and this is what we get from it, and everybody's been very positive about it so while I know that it is carrying on and we do flag it up each time we have a cluster meeting and give out new dates for it, so it's been good.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Others claimed that being in the group and getting to know other members more intimately had changed their view of them and made them more relaxed around them:

Despite being Head here for 8 years, and I know that _____ has been for longer at _____, I'm finding out more about him professionally and my professional reaction to him in that process, which makes me feel more relaxed and therefore able to offer an opinion on ideas.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Where a number of sources of support were established the peer supervision sessions provided an additional level of assistance for some participants:

If I have an issue that I'm specifically concerned about, we talk about it in the school. I can phone up a number of Heads, I don't often, but I feel confident in phoning up a number of Heads if I have an issue, and I think this group work is another layer on that – it complements what I've already got.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Possibilities for Other Groups

A Head teacher about to leave and take up a job elsewhere described how her experiences in the group had made her sensitive to the needs of others and had influenced her approach to dealing with listening and responding to others:

I'm very aware when I'm talking to the Head I'm taking over from in _____, yesterday he sent me an email and said can you give me a ring, there's a couple of things I need to share with you, it would have been very easy to pass judgement back on what's happening there at the moment but I thought no, that's not what this is about, he obviously feels he needs to talk this through and what I need to do is check that I understand the situation properly and help him to work through what's happening now.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

A consequence of hearing others with similar issues to their own may make them a useful resource for others in the future:

I'm very aware that if something cropped up today that related to an issue that somebody else had talked about, they might actually be the person that I'd want to ring and meet with.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Interviewees also indicated that group members were more likely to recognise when a colleague is in distress and make them more inclined to offer support following their attendance in the group:

I think in one case in particular, I've seen somebody that I feel a little concerned about, that to me seems much more vulnerable than I thought they were, have slight concerns about to what level they are coping at the moment, so I think you do see people in a different light because they have let their façade down. I think what you could do then is take account of that in your dealings with them so that, say you were frustrated at how they responded to something, I would have at the back of my mind, "yes, because of this, they are under quite a lot of stress and this is perhaps too much for them", you organise a lot of things in secondary

schools for the primary schools and they often forget to send you the names, but you think "all they've got to do is send me the names of the children, its not difficult!" you forgot what they are doing, just running to keep up with everything, so if you know someone that bit more or seen that side to them I think it can only be helpful, either if you ring an alarm bell – go into them and say "look, I'm really worried about you", or if you have the sort of relationship where you can ring them up one-to-one and say, "Ey up Fred, are you OK?" or take account of it in your day to day dealings with them.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Several of the Heads reported that the group sessions had helped to establish more meaningful links between members

I can honestly say that the cluster has developed professionally in the 8 years since I have been here, when I first came here it was very isolating, you don't know all the ins and outs so it was difficult and of course we have had a number of Heads who have left so it's then absorbing new Heads which I think we do very well and we are supportive. I don't know that I can put my finger on it [what has been learnt from being in the group], I suppose you could say we have learned that are capable of working in that way, having that more meaningful relationship rather than prime liaison meetings are sharing of ideas and information but not the same, so perhaps you could say that I've learned that.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

and for at least one Head teacher, the experience of being a part of the group made them aware of the need for this kind of work and made them consider working in this field in the future:

I'm becoming more aware of the idea of providing support for Head teachers happening in more and more places. It was interesting because after that first session, I was applying for jobs at that point, one of the jobs I applied for was a Head teacher support role in _____, I did get an interview for it but chose to stick with the Head teacher role that I got an interview for earlier in the week, but it made me think that this is a really valuable thing to be doing, and I can help transfer it to other people as well. I don't think I would have been able to make the application as well as I did without being a part of that group originally.

Several Head teachers suggested that the peer supervision process may offer support to the teaching profession as a whole as it was seen to have potential application to other groups such as: new Head teachers; those Head teachers who had not taken part; SENCos; deputy Head teachers and Newly Qualified Teachers.

Improved Problem- Solving Skills

Improved problem-solving skills and encouragement to adopt different ways of thinking though issues and approaching difficulties developed in the group sessions, had helped some participants to manage other issues more effectively in their own schools:

I think that one of the things that's transferred a little bit to my functioning particularly with the children, in some cases with members of staff, is that you'd get once a day when the children will have an 'argy-bargy' in the cloakroom and its always one of those stories where its difficult to sort out what's happened with whom and all the rest of it – I came up with the tactic where I said to them 'You get together the four people involved, and you decide what the truth is and what you want to get out of It', and they just want really to feel that they've been heard.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Some Head teachers commented that by contributing to the group their own self esteem and confidence had increased and some reported noting observed changes in themselves and in other Heads. A greater ability to stand back from the difficulties of others and not take them on personally was a wider benefit experienced by at least one participant:

I've felt that very much with parents [that he has to take on their troubles], I've always been a great listener to do with what parents have got to say, but it's a facet of my character that I've always thought "well, I must fix that", I've always wanted to make everybody happy, which is impossible isn't it?, part of that is trying to say "I'll fix that" and out pops promises you can't keep because you can't fix everything. I've been a little bit more thoughtful so that when they come to talk to me about something, to ask that question "where do you want to go with this one, what do you want to do?" sometimes they just want to say what they want to say and then they've finished with it, or that they've already thought of a

solution themselves and they wish to pursue so – that makes my job much easier, not to feel I have to grasp that straight away or else the school's going to fall down. It's much easier to drop back out of it for a bit and occasionally, if somebody's completely irate, ... I can think of one gentleman who was completely irate about something, there was the containment of thinking 'this isn't about me, this is about something that's happening in his life'. I just have to keep calm about it, and listen to it, but I'm not going to be swayed by anger in that sense or indeed get angry myself about it because it's just not worth it.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Other group members reported how the skills they had learnt in the group were transferable to their own school contexts and in their dealings with others who came to them with problems:

I felt that at that time, that that [the process] was transferring itself – diffusing if you like into how we work and how we've worked with each other since. So, I'd like to think that that has been part of the way that I interact with people, I could illustrate it with people who've walked into this office, and I've known that they need to talk and I need to listen and just let it go, and at the end just say, if anything, "is there anything else they you'd like to tell me" and just let them get it out. So just as a section of the technique being part of what we do, I'd like to say "yes", and specifically from the training that you gave us I hope that because it was a part of what we were already doing, it wouldn't be so easy to say, "Oh yes, there was this instance or there was that instance... .

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Rather than relying on interpretation and insight, the practical, 'here-and-now' relational experience of being in the group had allowed individuals' to challenge their own erroneous or dysfunctional beliefs. Group members were more able to analyse and gain an understanding of their own dysfunctional ways of responding to situations and replace these with more functional responses. In this way their self appraisals and those of others may have been altered and changes both in their behaviour and their internalised images of past events was able to occur in the positive manner described by Fonagy *et al.* ((1999), in Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:52).

The group format provided the educative and normative functions of peer supervision.

Each person contributed to the range of expertise and experience needed to address the problems raised. This meant that there was a shared understanding of the particular role of the Head teacher and the context of working in schools. Initially there was a need to encourage group members who feared they had little to offer a group in terms of experience, skill or personality to take part in order to listen to the contribution of the other members of the group. Therefore the group is an important mechanism for conveying a therapeutic effect in peer supervision (Counselmann and Weber, 2004), as it allows the normalisation of problems so that individual Head teachers see that 'it is not just them' and that other Head teachers are facing similar difficulties and challenges.

The educative or formative function of the peer supervision group was again evident in the members' accounts that described the development of their knowledge and skills through the sharing of professional knowledge, values and skills with the other group members (Zorga, 1997; Crespi, 1997; Isbell, 2003; Aston and Molassiotis, 2003). Through the reflections of the supervision group, members learnt about their individual strengths (Zorga, 1997; Nash, 1999), and were reassured of their professional competence (Robiner et al, 1997). The fact that the sessions provided a positive response to solving problems rather than just expressing concern in an unfocussed way was welcomed by the Head teachers and encouraged a more positive outlook. Unlike most Head teachers' meetings the process allowed participants time to really listen to each other and group members reported that the ordered and methodical approach offered by the process allowed them to really take time to reflect on issues and consider their responses. Furthermore, participants reported that the process allowed the clarification and definition of problems to be scrutinised in such a way that enabled participants to understand the issues more fully and derive more effective and appropriate solutions. Moreover, by taking time to define the problems methodically the improved listening and problem-solving skills avoided glib and ill-thought out responses which might have done more harm than good. Even though individuals felt that being part of the process caused some degree of anxiety due to fears about their ability to generate original questions and useful solutions, the overall benefits of the process were seen to outweigh these difficulties. In some cases initial feelings and anxieties about being unable to make a valid contribution were replaced with awareness of having been supported and accepted and this enabled participants to volunteer to offer an issue in the next round.

Making Contacts and Establishing Networks

For a newly appointed Head teacher, the initial meeting of the group had a further purpose in that it enabled her to make contact with the Heads in the area. Others already established in the group claimed that being in the group and getting to know other members more intimately had changed their view of them and made them more relaxed around them. Therefore, where a number of sources of support were already established, the peer supervision sessions in some cases provided an additional level of assistance.

Hearing the views of others and the range of 'solutions' or approaches to difficulties was viewed as a contributory factor in the development of participants' own thinking skills. In particular the sharing and awareness of different perspectives was especially helpful and would seem to have been used by individuals following the process in order to consider difficulties independently. There was also evidence that some group members felt that they had gained advantages through the modelling of aspects of some other group members (Borgers, 1983). They were able to learn from watching and listening to how each other tackle problems, particularly where the focus was on shared problems (Kuipers *et al.* 1997). Some Head teachers commented that by contributing to the group their own self esteem and confidence had increased and some reported noting observed changes in themselves and in other Heads.

Generalising and Adapting Skills

A greater ability to stand back from the difficulties of others and not take them on personally was a wider benefit experienced by at least one participant. Whilst other group members reported how the skills learnt in the group were transferable to their own school contexts and in their dealings with others who came to them with problems. A Head teacher about to leave and take up a job elsewhere described how her experiences in the group had made her sensitive to the needs of others and had influenced her approach to dealing with listening and responding to others:

I'm very aware when I'm talking to the Head I'm taking over from in _____, yesterday he sent me an email and said can you give me a ring, there's a couple of things I need to share with you, it would have been very easy to pass judgement back on what's happening there at the moment but I thought no, that's not what this is about, he obviously feels he needs to talk this through and what I need to do is check that I understand the situation properly and help him to work through

what's happening now.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

A consequence of hearing others with similar issues to their own may make them a useful resource for others in the future:

I'm very aware that if something cropped up today that related to an issue that somebody else had talked about, they might actually be the person that I'd want to ring and meet with.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Attendance at the group increased awareness of the vulnerability of others and as a consequence group members felt that they were more likely to recognise when a colleague is in distress in the future and make them more inclined to offer support:

I think in one case in particular, I've seen somebody that I feel a little concerned about, that to me seems much more vulnerable than I thought they were, have slight concerns about to what level they are coping at the moment, so I think you do see people in a different light because they have let their façade down. I think what you could do then is take account of that in your dealings with them so that, say you were frustrated at how they responded to something, I would have at the back of my mind, "yes, because of this, they are under quite a lot of stress and this is perhaps too much for them", you organise a lot of things in secondary schools for the primary schools and they often forget to send you the names, but you think "all they've got to do is send me the names of the children, its not difficult!" you forgot what they are doing, just running to keep up with everything, so if you know someone that bit more or seen that side to them I think it can only be helpful, either if you ring an alarm bell – go into them and say "look, I'm really worried about you", or if you have the sort of relationship where you can ring them up one-to-one and say, "Ey up Fred, are you OK?" or take account of it in your day to day dealings with them.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Several of the Heads reported that the group sessions had helped to establish more meaningful links between members:

I can honestly say that the cluster has developed professionally in the 8 years since I have been here, when I first came here it was very isolating, you don't know all the ins and outs so it was difficult and of course we have had a number of Heads who have left so it's then absorbing new Heads which I think we do very well and we are supportive. I don't know that I can put my finger on it [what has been learnt from being in the group], I suppose you could say we have learned that are capable of working in that way, having that more meaningful relationship rather than prime liaison meetings are sharing of ideas and information but not the same, so perhaps you could say that I've learned that.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

and for at least one Head teacher, the experience of being a part of the group made them aware of the need for this kind of work and made them consider working in this field in the future:

I'm becoming more aware of the idea of providing support for Head teachers happening in more and more places. It was interesting because after that first session, I was applying for jobs at that point, one of the jobs I applied for was a Head teacher support role in _____, I did get an interview for it but chose to stick with the Head teacher role that I got an interview for earlier in the week, but it made me think that this is a really valuable thing to be doing, and I can help transfer it to other people as well. I don't think I would have been able to make the application as well as I did without being a part of that group originally.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

The psychoeducational effects of the group may also have helped some group members to consider the impact of negative emotions on their own relationships and those of others in a more effective manner, having directly examined how these emotions can affect their own lives and their relationships. Had they not examined these issues within the group, individuals may have reverted to inappropriate or dysfunctional handling of such emotions (Beardslee, Wright, Rothberg, Salt and Versage, 1996). Indeed, for at least one participant, the experience of being a part of the group, had made them so aware of the effects of negative emotions on others and the need for ways to mitigate these, made them consider working in this field in the future.

Awareness of the difficulties of others was shown to help both the individual with the

problem directly and others in the group indirectly. Direct support for those with a difficulty came in the form of support, reassurance, suggestions, and insight. However, as a consequence of sharing their issues they became a potentially useful resource for others with similar concerns in the future.

Increased Reflexivity

Experience of taking part in the group sessions had made some participants more prepared to reflect on their own practice and to relate it's effects to other training they had received in order to improve the running of their school through consultation with, and development of, other members of staff:

I would say that actually, [because of the group experience] I can now look back at some of the decisions I have made, I've been a Head for 3 years, and some of them have been leaping in, knee-jerk without actually taking that time and distance from an issue, involving other people in it and getting other peoples opinions, perhaps taking a whole different approach next time. Yes, it's interesting, because it's made me think about a _____shire Small Schools Conference where there was a speaker, John Burnham-West, talking about in a school how to sustain leadership, I've realised I can't do this on my own. I've got 2 full-time teachers and 3 teaching assistants. He had this model, if you want to sustain in your own capacity to be a leader, how capable people were and how engaged they were with what they were doing, you could measure your members of staff – say _____, our Deputy Senior teacher, she's very capable and completely engaged with everything, very enthusiastic, similarly with _____, very experienced, extremely capable. The TAs are all very capable. He said in some schools you have a teacher that's not really very capable and completely switched off so she would be down there, or this teacher that is really capable, been here for years but completely un-engaged as well, then the enthusiastic people but not that capable – so as a Head where do you concentrate your energies? A sustainable school has lots of different levels of leadership, who'll actually have people up here, so that's what you want to concentrate your time on. If I was in a large school and had one or two of these people I wouldn't want to waste time getting them from there to there, I'd look at the other people and make them more capable through professional development. So these people can help me, and I'm at this stage when I will actually go to _____ and _____ to gauge their opinion

on things, it's very important to do that.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

This may be further evidence of the greater inclination to adopt a more depressive position on the part of group members who might previously have taken up more paranoid defensive states of mind. It may also be due to the improved cognitive skills and greater awareness of the emotional aspects of adversity experienced by those who had attended the group.

Whilst the more obvious advantages of being in the group were readily and clearly articulated by group members, a number of participants stated that the deeper benefits of the sessions were almost intangible and the benefit was in experience rather than the outcomes. Indeed some interviewees appeared almost dismissive of engaging in a discussion about evaluation of the sessions and suggested that the only way to see if new groups would work was to set them up and see.

v. Barriers and Limitations

Despite careful planning at the start of the programme a number of pitfalls associated with using group supervision became apparent in interviews with group members. From the outset it was very important to have a structure for the group sessions in order to avoid unconscious disorganisation of the group by members who wish to avoid facing anxieties and disagreement, (Obholzer, 1994). A clear structure helped to build trust and gave participants greater freedom to ask more probing questions, make more frank observations and offer more radical suggestions than they would have done in another, less structured forum. To make up for the absence of a group leader the maintenance of such a structure required a high level of commitment from group members to the process. The structure was established in this study by running a group sessions led by an EP before asking Head teachers to take on this role or to use the process in paired sessions. In order to prevent diversions and disintegration of the process, sessions were required to follow a pre-arranged structure where the chair maintains the essential steps and procedures. Each of the sessions was designed to have focused on providing a positive and pragmatic approach to problems within a supportive and trusting context.

Lack of Structure

Where the process was not strictly adhered to there were mixed feelings where some members enjoyed the consequent discussion whilst others were dissatisfied. Participants described a meeting which had not strictly adhered to the process as 'a *whinging session*' whilst others in the group found the same meeting to have been helpful and rewarding:

The meeting that I went to at ____ School the other day, we didn't share a specific problem so it was more of a general discussion, some talked about the things they'd talked about with you [I had interviewed a number of Head teachers at this point], people you had already seen, some people talked about the general pressures on them and support they got from a group situation like that, and we also discussed the principles of what we were doing and there was a lot of support for that, again that was a mixed cluster, some from the ____ clusters, and some from ours, so yes, it was good.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Specifically those who enjoyed the session saw it as a review of the process and an analysis of what worked about the process. They also saw it as a way of planning sessions for the future:

We did say yesterday, we were talking about the process and how it was going to work in the future and that sort of thing, we felt that we've changed the way we listen to each other and how we talk to each other so the moaning/groaning bit was diminished and there was a much more supportive feel. You know the way of working where you listen to the person tell their situation then you go round and ask questions, we were almost using a version of that but within the open discussion forum so everybody was giving other people time to express what their problem was and then they were asking another question to find out another bit of information and then we found that somebody was pulling it together and summing it up and feeding it back to us without us actually having set it up like that was what was actually happening, and I was very aware of that, we did say at the end how useful it had been.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

There was specific support and ideas given, perhaps it was almost an informal review of where we're up to and did we want to take it forward – that was

valuable. We've agreed a particular focus for the next meeting because one of the things we talked about a lot was relations with parents, difficulties with them and how to encourage them, so we've all said we'll come prepared with some issues surrounding parents and at least a couple of people will present those. I thought that was nice as well, to have a theme, because if we've all been thinking about that and it may be that someone else's problem helps us with ours anyway – I thought that was a positive.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

One participant explained that he felt that the process had developed from the initial format into something equally helpful, still maintaining elements of the original format but with the additional possibility of a structured open forum:

___ poured her heart out about the pressure she's under because of target-setting and of course everybody in the room was all exactly the same – no, not exactly the same because it was interesting what came out, but what went on then for what must have been half an hour was what an observer would see as an open discussion but all the elements that we've been taught were in there but mixed up, so that everybody had an opportunity to put their experience and agree. It felt like that when our advisor comes in and stuff like that, and let's not forget about what value Ofsted has in this, it was a very wide ranging discussion, it wasn't 100% whinging and that is a huge step forward because I believe that without the training we've had and the understanding that we have within the group, if we'd have sat down as 8 people cold, and that had been raised, it would have been different.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Conversely, other interviewees expressed their frustration about the events that occurred and were keen to re-establish a formal process and structure. One individual reluctant to take control for fear of appearing overbearing and controlling felt inclined to take over the process to get it back on track. However, he went on to describe some positive outcomes from the meeting in that the group agreed to have a focus for the next meeting:

I suppose I was just slightly disappointed but I wasn't running the meeting, it did turn into a moaning session. There were a couple of times during the meeting

when I nearly said "right, shall we....?" I suppose the main thing that stopped me, one of the things about my primaries is I don't always want to go in as the Secondary Head and say, "let's do this" because it's very easy and Primary staff will almost look up to you if you're not careful and see you as something different, and I've always fought against that, I don't like saying "this is what you need to do with your children so they're ready to come to us", its "how can we fit in with what you've done. I'm always a little bit reluctant and if I'd been in my own school I probably would have done, but because I was sitting in a colleague's staff room drinking their tea and eating their biscuits, to suddenly say "well I think we should..." I was just a bit reluctant but got close to it – perhaps I should have done!

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Another Head teacher who had been at the same session also explained his frustration about the events that occurred and was keen to re-establish a formal process and structure:

I was a bit frustrated after the last session, I said let's all come with at least one issue, then we can negotiate at the meeting which issue we discuss, but at least if we come with an issue, we are not just going to end up again just talking and moaning, the process itself is really worthwhile.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

One interpretation of the actions of those who enjoyed the session which had not strictly adhered to the process as the adoption of the depressive position as they could have been seen to be evaluating their current position in order to make it more relevant and efficient. However, as the overt aim of the group was to provide a space for staff to discuss specific issues in order to resolve their difficulties, there was a possibility that some group members had a covert aim. This may have been to avoid experiencing the negative feelings that may be engendered during the discussion of a specific problem or it may have been to spare the group the arduous task of working through a specific issue at a time when all concerned were very tired. Such behaviour may have been a consequence of some members adopting Bion's (1967) basic assumption mentality. It could have been that basic assumption pairing (baP) mentality was adopted by members of the group who regarded unspecified future events as a defence against the difficulties of the present. Discussions about certain topics may have been used defensively to share

acceptable, common feelings whilst avoiding other, less commonly shared, unacceptable feelings and the possibility of feelings of helplessness in the face of being able to do so little.

On one occasion there appeared to be an opportunistic unburdening of negative emotions by one individual who could not contain their emotions for themselves. Such behaviour may reflect Bion's (1967), basic assumption fight-flight (baF) mentality. It was apparent that an 'enemy' in the form of the Local Authority was identified by some in the group and the unstructured group discussion enabled those in conflict with or in fear of the Local Authority to rail against it and encourage others to devise retaliatory or avoidant action for them to follow. Although some sense of unity may have resulted, it may also have merely served to avoid facing the difficulties of the work of the group where some members of the group spent their time protesting angrily, without actually planning any specific action to deal with the perceived difficulties (Stokes, 1994). By not following the correct procedure, some individuals projected their negative feelings onto the other group members who experienced this as discomfort and anxiety and were unable to contain the feelings adequately. This may suggest the value of the psychodynamic approach for EPs working within systems where this type of phenomena might emerge.

Although a number of participants described how deviations from the prescribed process had developed from the initial format into something equally helpful, that retained elements of the original format with the additional possibility of a structured open forum, other interviewees expressed their frustration about the events that occurred. They described the discussions as repetitive and aimless, outpourings of negative emotion where feelings were expressed in an un-thought-out and destructive way and with little regard as to how the issues may be resolved, after the fashion described by Obholzer, (1994). These group members were keen to re-establish a formal process and structure and they hinted that if this was not achieved there was a danger that their attendance might become less frequent, or even non-existent (Obholzer, 1994). The reluctance of one individual to take control and to get the process back on track for fear of appearing overbearing and controlling, reflected the degree of frustration, anxiety and possible helplessness experienced by some group members who may have been unwitting recipients of the negative emotions of others expressed in an uncontrolled manner that did not facilitate containment.

Need for a Leader

The expectation and need for an official leader, not only to act as Chair but to administrate and organise the meetings for the other members came over clearly from several other interviewees. Several of those who participated stated that whilst it was essential to have a Chair to lead the sessions they were reluctant to take this role themselves as they felt their lack of competence and inexperience in the role may impede the support of a colleague:

I don't know that I would be confident at this moment to act as chair, I'm quite willing to listen and offer viewpoints, and also to ask for clarification but I don't feel that confident to be the Chair at this stage.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

However, others described how their initial reluctance to act as Chair was diminished having experienced being in the group:

I looked at 2 of the Heads and thought they were very confident, I don't want to be in their shoes, I couldn't chair anything yet, I feel too nervous but now that's changed. I haven't particularly got a problem, but I can actually be in a supportive role through that process.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The difficulties of deciding a process for who should take the role of the Chair were highlighted. Likewise concerns around the expectation that previously competent Chairs would automatically assume the role were voiced. One individual in particular who had taken up the role of Chair at several meetings expressed his concern that an expectation that he would always take that role had been set up. He explained that whilst he was prepared to administrate the organisation of the meetings he did not want to be the named Chair and he described the events that happened in the group when he ignored the cues to take up the role:

Now I'm very happy to [administrate the group] with a bit of a condition on it, because I felt that even though we've had 3 meetings, last night's meeting

confirmed that there is an expectation amongst the group that ___'s going to organise this, and if somebody brings a problem, eyes come towards me to chair it and I'm not comfortable with that, because I don't think it's right for the group, I'm happy to serve but don't think it's right that one person should always be taking that role, I'm happy to take the management role of letting people know, which I will do this morning, an email to say that the next meeting is at this school, at this time, this place. Last night's meeting I think is relevant to that issue because there were 7 or 8 of us, all very tired people at the end of term, and we've all got what's going on in the background in Christmas plays going and all the rest of the stuff at the end of term. What came out was, at one point, ___, who is the Head of the host school, looked at me, I was opposite her round the table, and I know she was effectively saying to me, are you going to start the meeting now, are you going to call us to order after the chit-chat that we've had at the start, but I didn't respond because I didn't want to say "You take it" but it's her school and I wanted her to have the opportunity to take the lead, but what happened then was that ___ called the group to order, if you like, and then she raised an issue but she didn't say we've started, but she started and the rest of the group didn't strictly keep, because nobody had said this is the beginning of the group session, but she started to speak.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The expectation and need for an official leader, not only to act as Chair but to administrate and organise the meetings for the other members came over clearly from several other interviewees:

I think often these groups have one or two driving forces, it needs somebody who perhaps is the prime mover, who is very committed to it, who is often the best person who will keep something going, has energy and willingness to talk to people, to ring someone up who hasn't come and make sure they're there.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Yes, because unless you do that [the facilitation/administration of the group] people won't get together, because everybody is busy, aren't they?

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

It needs a key person who's leading it, I know that's not the essence of it, but I

think I need to know when the next meeting so I can block the time, so that I'm available, but actually I don't know who to contact - yes, because there does need to be one person that you latch onto, maybe a well established Head who's willing to take it on and it isn't fair on one Head not to get that opportunity to participate if they're not told about it.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

However, there was also recognition that no-one was willing to take up the role of leader/ administrator and there was a suggestion that the role of facilitator might be taken up by the Educational Psychologist.

The reluctance of some group members to take on the role of Chair was accounted for by an apparent lack of competence and experience in the role which may have impeded the support of colleagues:

It is [quite stressful to support someone else] from the point of view that you feel quite responsible, because you feel that the other person is depending in the group to come up with things they can run with, and it isn't always going to be the case, the things that people suggest might suit them in their circumstances but might not suit the person they are talking through, so you can feel responsible, and also you feel that I've got to have something to suggest otherwise I might not be supporting this person in the way that I want to, particularly if you have other things in your own mind that you are already worrying about. To focus on someone else's issue at that point isn't easy, it's quite hard work, you have to clear your own mind of other things and stick to what it is you're talking about and sometimes you start to go off on different thoughts because somebody might mention something and you have to keep your train of thought back where it is but somebody saying at the end, "actually there are a couple of things I could run with..." the worries abate a little bit at that point because actually it has been powerful for them, it has given them something and even if it isn't the solution it has given options.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

However, such dependence on a leader figure, combined with reluctance to take on the role is reminiscent of Bion's (1967) Basic Assumption mentality, adopted by groups to meet the unconscious needs of its members through the reduction of anxiety and internal conflicts, in contrast to the behaviour of groups adopting the work-group

mentality where members are intent on carrying out a specifiable task and assessing their effectiveness in doing it. Specifically, basic assumption dependency (baD) may be apparent in the reluctance of the group members to take on the positions of Chair or administrator as the members of the group expect a leader to emerge who will look after, protect, and sustain the group without making the members face the anxieties of carrying out necessary offices. However, others described how their initial reluctance to act as Chair was diminished having experienced being in the group. There was a suggestion that the role of facilitator might be taken up by the Educational Psychologist.

Fears about Personal Exposure and Emotional Stress

A number of participants stated that they had been initially reluctant to share an issue with the group for a variety of reasons: One Head teacher described how she overcame her initial reluctance to share her problem:

I think there is still a bit of a reluctance, I know at [the last meeting], I had the problem, and at first no-one would say anything, you know how you do, everyone had rushed in for 9.30 and grabbed a coffee and all sat down, immediately [the Chair] said "shall we begin, make a start", there was a silence and at the back of my mind I had this exclusion issue thinking, I'd like to mention that but I'll not say anything because there may be a more burning issue, and they will all think 'we deal with that on a daily basis, get a grip woman', it was quiet for a few seconds and then I thought 'I've got to go with this because it's a real worry to me' so that's what we did!

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

whilst some felt that their issues were not serious enough:

The interesting thing was when the guy said has anyone got anything they'd like to discuss? There was a long pause because at the moment my school has the issue that we don't have a school uniform and I would like to introduce a school uniform and out of a questionnaire that came out at the end of last summer there was a small majority of parents who would like to see a school uniform so you've come further down the road, but it's an extremely emotive issue to some of the parents in the village who are extremely opposed to the idea, it's become an issue in my head – is it a battle worth fighting? Is it the gossip on the playground? Is it

worth destroying the ethos of the school over? So I was half wanting to take that myself but didn't know if it was serious enough. Next time I would actually address it, there are so many issues from different Heads but there are a lot of commonly-shared issues, so I think the uniform one may be something they've been through. Each school has its own set of parents, each school is unique. I probably would take the uniform problem to the group now actually, yes.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

or that their problems were too similar to issues that had already been discussed previously:

I have discussed a problem with the group, it went really well, the only thing that concerned me was that it was quite similar to one we had discussed at a previous session.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

A number of Heads expressed a worry that prior to attending the initial session they were concerned that the group work might be stressful and that they would have more emotional weight to carry. As one Head teacher said:

I was afraid it would become negative and people would get a sense of unburdening themselves.

(Head teacher 11 interviewed in current study)

Other fears expressed were concerns about confidences being broken or of being exposed as 'weak' or 'not up to the job'. The risks of personal exposure and being told what to do were explained by one participant who came to view the process as being very beneficial:

I think one of the problems with these sessions is that you feel a bit vulnerable, it's a bit risky and although it is worthwhile, and you want help, but you don't want to seem as though you want help – you want people to help you and come up with ideas, but at the same time you don't want people telling you how to do your job. It's such a useful tool, absolutely spot on in terms of coming up with possible solutions. But in all of that positivity there's these vulnerable feelings and anxieties.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Despite these concerns the interviewee stated that the process was of benefit and that others should overcome their anxieties in order to find solutions to their difficulties:

I'm struggling to criticise the process because I think it's so effective, there are those issues we talked about in terms of insecurities and anxieties but I think that it couldn't be any better unless people are going to overcome those anxieties, they are just not going to find the answers, are they?

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

One Head teacher stated how, by attending the group, she had overcome her reluctance to share difficult issues:

I was handling a situation last year as regards the LEA's perception of my school at the end of KS2 test results and I came to feel that in the end, over the year, I came to my own salvation with that one, but maybe if something now came up I would be confident to share with colleagues because I think that's the other side.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Reluctance to Share Problems

The fears of some group members that their issues were not serious enough or were too similar to issues that had already been discussed are consistent with the feelings of basic inadequacy, interpersonal alienation and concern about their sense of worth and ability to relate to others, described by Yalom and Leszcz (2005), as common concerns of those involved in therapeutic groups. Similarly, the worries of some participants prior to attending the sessions that they might be stressful and would give them additional emotional weight to carry, were fairly typical. Although some group members reported being upset or distressed as they recounted their concerns to the group, consistent with the claims of Hollway and Jefferson (2000), it proved that it was not necessarily harmful to experience such feelings, as they then went on to state that it was in fact reassuring and therapeutic to talk about an upsetting event in a safe context. Similarly there were no reports of group members being subjected to scapegoating, group pressure, breaches of confidence, inappropriate reassurance, or hostile confrontation. Likewise, there were no reports of the process resulting in the precipitation of a crisis in

a member's life, or of an individual entering a group session feeling relatively comfortable and leaving feeling vulnerable and defenceless. There were no reports of anxiety created as a result of listening to the problems of others in a group and there was no incidence of personal issues emerging as a result of being in group.

Because all of the interviewees stated that the process was of benefit and that others should overcome their anxieties in order to find solutions to their difficulties it might be assumed that the solution-focussed nature of the group sessions made it unlikely that a participant would become the victim of any of the above situations and be left unsupported or feeling helpless. The structured process may therefore have reduced personal vulnerability and psychological exposure. Again the containing qualities of the group process are apparent in that, as the recipient of the projected distress, and by acting as a 'container', the group was able to bear what the individual member could not, and, by articulating thoughts that they might have found unthinkable, contributed to developing in them a capacity to think and hold on to anxiety themselves, (Obholzer 1994).

Feelings of Responsibility towards Others in the Group

A number of participants reported that they had reservations about attending due to feelings of responsibility towards supporting others in the group and the anxieties around having to generate questions and offer solutions, particularly when they had their own issues to consider. One Head teacher told me that she had felt too emotional to be able to offer support to others whilst others did not feel that they had enough experience to offer. One participant inferred that some of the anxiety experienced may be because some problems do not always have an obvious solution:

The fact that some of the problems are really difficult, and you want answers to those problems, but perhaps sometimes there aren't clear cut answers.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Whilst a sense of belonging to the group can raise self-esteem and meet members' dependency needs, it may also foster responsibility and autonomy, as each member is required to contribute to the group's welfare (Frank, 1957; Braaten (1991). Such reluctance to engage in the difficulties of others and the lack of confidence in being able to offer solutions may also reflect the feelings of the group members who consider

themselves to be inadequately prepared to deal with the effects of suffering or distress in others and the corresponding anxiety in themselves (Obholzer, 1994). It could also suggest that they may be experiencing such similar feelings that they feel that they cannot contain them for each other (Speck, 1994). Some of the anxiety experienced may also have been because the solution to some problems were not obvious.

Advantages Difficult to Define

When discussing the advantages of attending the group, some participants stated that in some ways it was very difficult to define or indeed, justify what was actually being gained. They felt this might be a drawback if they were required to account for the time they spent in the group. The difficulties of explaining the merits of the group to other Heads who were being encouraged to attend the meetings, who might not regard this kind of work as a priority given the time pressures, were also expressed.

It is, it's not that you can put a manual together is it, and write down this is what we do?, its not like that, we get Heads who've got something to say – good practice, got their SATs results up, or doing well with the boys' attainment or got something going good with the governors project, it's easy to stand up and talk about, they could do a Powerpoint on that and talk about it but this isn't like that think carefully what you would stand up and say to fellow Head teachers. You don't know, even if you're committed to the group as a good thing and you think they'll [other Head teachers who have never been to the group] benefit from it, what do you say to them because its so intangible? The outcome I think is not entirely but largely dependent on quality and willingness of the people in the group so there's no guarantee that you are going to pop out with a kite mark at the top of your letterhead like you would do if you were going to do health promoting schools, its not like that – that stuff's not of value, I'm sure of that.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

One Head discussed how his attendance at meetings might be viewed as indulgent by others who do not understand the benefits of attendance:

Its very much perceived as a luxury, it could be perceived like that in the minds of many people - somebody might think well, you are going off to a lovely, warm chat group as it were, support group - isn't that a bit of a luxury when the

school's budget is under pressure?

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Another Head teacher explained that sometimes in trying to evaluate outcomes of the success of the group, the effect of it could be lost:

So let's look at the issue we talked about at _____, we could talk at the next meeting about how effective it was on the Head teacher with the junior school whose issue it was. I think sometimes we need to be careful with outcomes, sometimes it just gets you going through the processes of articulating the issue that you've got, of listening to the experience of the other people – that's worthwhile in itself because what it often does is start thought processes going and when you're in a school all the time and not rubbing shoulders with other Head teachers, I think the benefit is the fact that you are rubbing shoulders with other Head teachers and listening to other Head teachers whereas when you are in a school it's a lonely profession and if things start going wrong you really are by yourself. I think this group particularly is beneficial because you are not by yourself, you have no need to be on occasions, you can get in and articulate what the issues are.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

This may be a factor when trying to recruit new members to the group. The experience of the other Head teachers in the group was something that was clearly valued by the members. However, a newly appointed Head did not feel unwelcome due to her relative lack of experience.

Rogers (1966), regards this deeply felt human experience in the group to be of great value to the individual even when there are no obvious changes in their behaviour or other outward signs other than their experience of a more human, richer part of themselves. In addition, Rogers' (1966), and Schlatchet's, (2000), claims that the intimacy developed in a group is essential as a counterforce in a culture that undermines human relationships may initially serve only as internal reference points for those involved, having no obvious external signs, at least for some time, and as a consequence be difficult to evaluate.

Time Pressures and Other Commitments

In order for the group to survive and prosper, interviewees stated that there was a requirement for regular attendance from the members and regular communication:

I think probably the regularity, you need to constantly stay on it, I feel because I couldn't make the last 2 I'll find it more difficult latching into the next one because from my point of view I'll think well, they all managed to make that meeting, I've had no feedback from that meeting so know nothing about it, so me then walking back in 6 months later, even though I had been invited to them all, I'll be thinking have they got a bond that I'm breaking into? So that's quite an issue really, in terms of how you get information back from the meeting, well you don't, because it's confidential, so you don't know what's gone on and get less connected, don't you?.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

In common with the findings of Stringer *et al.* (1992), time pressures and teaching commitments were seen as a main barrier to regular attendance at the group:

It is a problem because I know at one of the meetings something came up, and it's very easy in those circumstances to think, "right, well I actually won't go to that, because if I don't go, its not like I'm going to miss vital information that I will need in 3 weeks' time. But I think the more we meet, the more we see commitment from each other, the more those kind of excuses will disappear, but I do agree that for people who haven't come at all, and for people who might want to join the group but haven't come it's probably quite a difficult thing to do – how do you reach those people?

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Despite arranging dates for meetings well in advance, other events can compromise members' attendance at the sessions if they were called upon to deal with unexpected crises. Concerns that time constraints would have an impact on attendance at the group were articulated by several interviewees:

My other worry is attendance, because I know how hard it is for people to get to these sessions, and when you are trying to fix a date, you know how it is, you've got 6 or 8 people there, trying to find 1 date that everyone can make is difficult, and even then things crop up, so a commitment from the group to keep it going and keep attending I think is really important. That worries me because if I think of all the other things I've been involved in – NPQH had a sort of support group, but people were basically just too busy to keep it going.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

However, by arranging the: location, venue and time of day well in advance the chance of members attending is increased:

It's the time you can give to it, we look at when everyone can meet and put in our diaries as soon as we can, and it can be sometimes can't it because when you get nearer to it you think well, actually, I've got a church inspection so don't really want to be out that morning, the key thing is we've looked at time, I think the last one we allocated 9.30 to 11.00, we said, look, lets get the early morning rush over, allocated that mid-morning time and get back for lunch. That could sometimes be perceived to be a barrier, when you've got to be somewhere for 1pm, something happens at lunchtime and you can't leave. So timings can be a barrier for people in certain circumstances. We've tried to overcome that by saying what works for us and when are people happiest to come out because we are all travelling within 4 or 5 miles, so it's keeping it local, so having a trip say to ____, can be perceived to be a barrier. The venue and timings can be a problem, so you need to overcome that. And also make sure that it is in schools – it's been at County, at the Hotel, at ____ Juniors and now going to be at ____.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

Time constraints were also seen to be especially constricting for Head teachers of smaller school who have teaching commitments:

The only prevention is time from my point of view. ____ has just emailed to say the next meeting is at such and such a primary school on such and such a date, and looking at that week, I'm out of school already 3 times so can I afford to go, because I teach as well you see. It would be OK for someone like ____ in a big school – I'd say time is the big restrictive thing. It's balancing out what the

priorities are, but to survive Headship you've got to get out of school at least once a week, get out – I've got perfectly capable staff who wouldn't miss me for an afternoon. The only thing restricted me is prioritising what's important, even if I haven't got a problem to present it's beneficial to go.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

Newly appointed Head teachers also felt under more pressure than others:

Time is the main one, I think for me, say in a couple of years' time, when I haven't got the same pressures of just taking over a new school, then that would be more that I would seek to do down the line because I've got more time to do it but at the moment everything is pushing. I think everybody is trying to pour so much into you as a new Head in terms of 'the authority want this', you've got the New Visions course, and the first year of Headship courses, and there's all those things you didn't have when you were a Deputy, and also I'm a teaching Head, so there's a limit.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Time constraints were also seen to be potentially off putting to Head teachers who had not been involved previously and were invited to attend:

I think one of the difficulties people would have initially is the time commitment, that is the crucial factor – weighing that up against other competing pressures, in one sense we are trying to persuade them that this is very good for them or for us, to come to such a group, would actually benefit us, the tack to take might be to do with a phrase which governors are meant to take account of – lets be mindful of the Head teachers' work/life commitment and indeed are meant to be mindful of stress, aren't they? I forget what the regulations are now to do with that. Another carrot is always if as an authority to get a sum of money in so that one's compensated in some way for coming out of school to a social meeting, that sounds mercenary, but it's not in actual fact, particularly for Heads of small schools who might well need to get someone in to cover them.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Despite the time constraints the meetings were seen to have value as a means of networking and engaging with other Heads on a level that is more valuable than the

standard meetings where again time was a limiting factor:

Yes but its an opportunity [when built up a rapport with the other Heads to share more difficult things with them]. The cluster meetings we have are fairly formal, and there's issues to discuss, so there's never enough social time, there's no social time in actual fact, so I think sometimes it's that chat network that's more important but we simply don't have it.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Whilst contact and familiarity with the issues of the Primary Sector were a real priority to the Secondary Head teacher, built up over his career, he expressed his concern that the group may cease to be relevant for him in time. Although attempting to prioritise this work he admitted that he was struggling to maintain this and had recently had to ask others to accompany him to meetings as a safeguard if he could not continue to attend meetings and events. Others in the group suggested that sometimes the issues being discussed had little relevance to their own settings.

Concerns of this nature inevitably have an impact on group cohesiveness as the more the group has relevance to an individual, the more that person is likely to remain within the group (Miller, 1983). Like the experiences of the newly appointed Head teacher who felt that the group worked well despite her sense of distance from it, the secondary school head may also feel a growing distinction between his dwindling sense of belonging and his appraisal of how well the entire group is working, (MacKenzie and Tschuschke (1993). These fears were articulated by several group members following the 'atypical' session that did not follow the usual structure. The relationship between cohesiveness and maintenance of membership has implications for the total group. Not only do members who terminate their membership fail to benefit from the group sessions but where there is a high turnover of members, the group sessions prove to be less effective for the remaining members as well. Clients who drop out may also challenge the group's sense of worth and effectiveness (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:70).

It was generally agreed that dates for sessions should be organised well in advance and an efficient means of communicating information about sessions should be established between those taking part and should include those who have failed to attend.

Group Dynamics and Cohesiveness

The possibility of 'difficult' individuals attending the group and affecting its functioning was raised by several participants however, the process used in the group sessions was believed to be strong enough to manage challenging individuals who might join the group:

If you're not willing to listen to suggestions from other people, or consider suggestions from other people, its down to good dynamics, how groups work. If there are inexperienced people on it who won't work to the process that wouldn't be a good thing, but over all.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

I think a stroppy character, if they were in a group for whatever reason, would best make a contribution and get the most out of it if the structure was rigid, that's my opinion, that's justification for introducing, developing and maintaining the process. It's all about people and its all about characters and perspectives, approaches to it. If someone was stroppy, then it would finish up as a vigilante group, it would degenerate to that, and I think people, it would be all too easy to slip into that slimy pit.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The negative effects of fatigue on the performance of the group were also mentioned:

The last one did end up as a discussion, but to be honest with you, we were all absolutely shattered.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

In general the group members believed that group relations could be managed as there was sufficient sanctioning of authority, both from within and from outside the group and the primary task of the group did not conflict with the aims and priorities of the members' home-groups. Early cohesion and engagement of the group members was apparent and assisted in establishing a context in which quite challenging work where more conflict and discomfort emerged, could be achieved (Kivlighan and Lilly (1997); Castronguay *et al.* (1998)). However, potential fluctuation in group cohesiveness was apparent as some participants were unhappy about the lack of structure or change in format of the sessions where they felt the changes in focus might not be for them.

(Kivlighan and Mullison, (1988); Braaten (1990)). Some individuals felt that the group was working well despite the fact that they did not feel that they fully belonged, as in the case of the newly appointed Head teacher who had been unable to attend several sessions (MacKenzie and Tschuschke, 1993).

The group believed that cohesiveness would be maintained as long as it remained important enough to its members for them to invest sufficient commitment to attend the group and individual members felt that they had a specific contribution to make. However, as group cohesiveness also requires self-disclosure, risk taking, and the constructive expression of conflict, there was a recognition that there was a need to develop ways that could contain and process open expressions of hostility to prevent persistent or covert hostile attitudes undermining the group's cohesiveness and effective interpersonal learning. Group members expressed their concerns that if feelings of hostility or conflict were not expressed they were in danger of emerging in a number of indirect ways which may go on to damage the therapeutic process of the group (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:70). Group members felt that the group process enabled them to contain and accommodate open expressions of disagreement and /or conflict and provided support and a way forward.

The increasing levels of fatigue and the corresponding negative effects on the lives of the Head teachers was mentioned by several interviewees. A number of Head teachers also mentioned how this may have a negative impact on their performance in the peer supervision group. Just as the effects of fatigue may result in individuals using unconscious defences in their own schools to enable them to cope with stress, there is a potential risk that these will also be used within and by the group. Defences may be used by the group which serve primarily to defend group members from anxiety rather than to promote task performance (Zagier Roberts, 1994). As in the case of individual schools, this defensive function of the structure of the group may go unrecognised.

Rivalry and Competition

Where rivalry existed between schools it was thought that this sort of group may not work:

The only one that strikes me, and it's an issue for all schools, is falling numbers, we are all very keen to attract children to our schools and although we don't wish

to poach from elsewhere, we feel strongly that we have to support our own place in our staffing ratios, I don't know if that would influence how a cluster will behave in the future because it is obviously something that has been happening in many areas over a period of time but it is something that is now hitting this particular cluster, and I don't know whether that would influence issues.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

and it was established that there is a need to keep the group 'fresh', outward looking and motivated:

The limitations I've always found when I've used this method with solutions within school for pupil-centred problems is that after a while people have their stock of suggestions which often you've already tried so it can get stale, and I've actually found solution circles work better with external people. Now at the moment all these people are external to my potential problem so that may continue to work, certainly within school. Years ago I went on a Behaviour 360 Conference that [Local Authority] did and we were all like, "yes, this is the way forward, this is really good", and exactly the structured half-hour meeting, and who talks when etc. etc. and it worked really well, and came back it never worked quite the same way at school because people tend to think about the '[own school]' strategies and so are not suggesting things from the outside.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Concerns about potential breaches of confidentiality were also expressed although none had occurred to date:

The thing that would bomb it completely I think was if we ever felt that something we'd said had been relayed in an inappropriate way, but that isn't something that worries me just factually, if I ever felt that had happened then I think that would wreck it, if you felt there was a 'leak' in the system if you like.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

As the members of any newly formed group naturally identify themselves predominantly in terms of their own agencies, there is potentially a problem with members experiencing difficulty between the conflicting demands and interests of their own school and those of the group. In some cases this can make it very difficult for the

group to work effectively as members with loyalties to different home-groups are more likely to be competitive and reluctant to share resources or knowledge. However, as in the case of the group in this study, as the work of the group took on greater meaning and importance the members appeared to invest more and more in the group, building up a shared value-system, as well as personal relationships among members.

Although the members of the current group apparently did not display any of the negative defences that accompany feelings of rivalry such as splitting or projection and had a well established co-operative network it was recognised that other groups may not be so fortunate. It could be that those Heads that are prepared to become involved in peer support groups are naturally prone to assume a depressive position, whilst others who have not joined remain in a paranoid defensive position. Therefore there is a possibility that it may prove difficult to recruit Head teachers to the group who are affected by feelings of rivalry and competition as they may deliberately avoid such meetings in order to preserve some degree of self-idealisation and use denial to protect them from anxiety provoking discussions, in the same way the Heads in the group do when they admitted avoiding cluster and other corporate meetings that caused them anxiety. As a consequence they may be more vulnerable to becoming stuck in a paranoid-schizoid projection system.

Experience

The experience of the other Head teachers in the group was something that was clearly valued by the members. However, a newly appointed Head did not feel unwelcome due to her relative lack of experience. In accepting newcomers in such a positive way the group demonstrates an open and inclusive approach where all are valued. However, another perspective suggests that the established group members may use the group unconsciously as a means of moulding the newcomers into their established ways of doing things, including participating in their established institutional defences. The danger that such individuals will lose their capacity to remain detached and to 'see' things from an outsider's perspective, may eventually challenge the group's capacity to retain critical thought and questioning, (Obholzer, 1994).

Fears that the Group May Become Stale

There were fears that the group might become 'stale' over time and the need to keep the

group 'fresh', outward looking and motivated are understandable. However, these concerns may indicate the inevitability of the group changing and developing as it's members become more skilled due to the intended effects of supervision which aim to: develop supervisees' knowledge and skills (Zorga, 1997; Crespi, 1997; Isbell, 2003; Aston and Molassiotis, 2003); allow reflection of the main content and process of their work; enable them to learn about their individual strengths (Zorga, 1997; Nash, 1999); develop congruence between educational and pedagogic theory and practice (Isbell, 2003), enhance and evaluate professional competencies (Robiner et al, 1997); help supervisees deal with the emotional aspects of working with people; encourage proactive thinking and planning about their work and allow them to develop high quality practice.

As the ongoing effects of supervision aim to promote: increased ability to work autonomously with more educative supervision: less need for management supervision (Zorga, 1997) and improved ability of the supervisee to relate to clients (Lantz and Severinsson, 2001), it is unlikely that the needs of the group will remain constant and other aspects of supervision may come to the forefront as more pertinent aims such as: the provision of space to reflect on the issues that arise from work (Isbell, 2003); help for supervisees to integrate what they are doing, feeling and thinking (Zorga, 1997); providing support after stressful situations (Aston and Molassiotis, 2003) and providing a mechanism for the individuals to monitor the quality of professional services (Robiner et al, 1997).

Whatever future modifications and developments in the format the group may adopt in the future, the end result should still aim to: increase feelings of competence; being able to cope with difficult types of work (Day, Turlow and Wooliscroft, 2003; Lantz and Severinsson, 2001); allow validation of the supervisee as a person as well as a worker and provide an opportunity to compare notes with other Head teachers facing similar challenges. These changing needs suggest that some form of on-going evaluation process might be incorporated into the group in order to monitor the changing needs of the members and their perceptions of it's relevance to them in order to maintain cohesiveness of the group. Suggestions for a facilitator such as an EP who could offer 'refresher' sessions to stimulate interest in the group as the initial training session had done may also be considered.

Confidentiality Breaches

Concerns about potential breaches of confidentiality referred to the possibility of members breaking the confidence of those within the group leading to personal or professional embarrassment or exposure. Whilst every effort was made to ensure against this happening by starting each session with a reminder of the need for absolute confidentiality and the consequences to those who breach this and for those whose confidentiality is broken, there could be no guarantee that this will not occur in the future. Therefore, contingency for this occurring should be made and may use the provision outlined in the ethics section as a guide.

Other areas of conflict arising out of the strict confidentiality rules employed by the group were not seen as an issue for the group in this study. As the Heads in the group had been invited to form the group by their own senior line managers in the Local Authority, there was no suggestion of the group acting in a divisive or "activist" manner. However, as two of the Local Authority Officers who initiated this work were present during the initial training sessions, some group members may feel compromised if the officers attended other sessions as they may feel that they could not speak freely about concerns regarding the Local Authority. Similarly other groups, such as those for staff within schools, such difficulties may arise if Head teachers do not remain aware of their own sensitivities around confidentiality and the need to speak freely in a safe environment.

vi. Ongoing Success and Survival of the Group

Commitment and Cohesion of Group Members

The participants indicated that the ongoing success of the group was dependent on the commitment of current members and a shared sense of belief in what the group is trying to achieve:

I am picturing other Heads – I don't think that a group would work unless there was a genuine willingness to make it work. If it was just 'painting by numbers' it's not going to happen, so I think that's the reason that we are meeting again, and there is no question about that, it was a case of when we meet again, I think that's there because we all understand and value what we're doing.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Commitment was seen to be encouraged by participants knowing that others might share the same issues:

One of the things that would make this group work for me is knowing that may be somebody else is going to be in a similar position to where I was and I would want to be able to help them .

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

A shared understanding of goals, culture and knowledge of the locality along with a focus on looking for positives rather than negatives were seen to be essential elements for the ongoing success and survival of the group:

I find philosophically within our cluster there are a lot of people who I find it easy to get along with, we seem to have similar aims, similar views about education, what we want for our school. I know when I go to County Heads meetings, I've found I'm the most uncomfortable and I'm still very new at it really, but there are a lot of people there who say they don't agree with that philosophy, and I wouldn't I don't think feel comfortable sharing some of my issues with them, although they might have a very different perspective which might be very interesting I guess, so perhaps I should be able to do that, but I think that I would worry that they see me as weak for looking at it in that way or something like that if they didn't agree with what I was trying to achieve here. The key thing for me is the group itself. I think I can see it not working as well in different contexts, so some thought about whether you have people from the same cluster, or people from different clusters, it's not an easy one to answer because I wasn't sure how it was going to work, but it's proved to be successful.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

When considering factors that contributed to the success of the group several interviewees suggested that it could have been due to the co-operative network already established between some Heads in the area:

We have a good foundation that this could build on, I wonder if it would have been as successful had we not that good relationship.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

The group clearly mattered to the individual members, and they all appeared to subscribe to the group values and in the main agreed with group judgements (Miller, 1983). These factors suggest that the group was cohesive and the members recognised that this relationship between cohesiveness, maintenance of membership and its implications for the total group must remain prominent in order to keep the group alive. There were fears that should individual members lose their sense of cohesiveness they might terminate their membership and not only would they fail to benefit from the group but the therapeutic effects of the group would be reduced for the remaining members and may challenge the whole group's sense of worth and effectiveness (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:70).

Personality Types of Group Members

When considering factors that contributed to the success of the group several interviewees suggested that it could have been due to the co-operative network already established between some Heads in the area and their specific personal qualities to specific qualities of the people who attended it:

The outcome I think is not entirely but largely dependent on quality and willingness of the people in the group .

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

One participant was specific in his appreciation of others in the group, emphasising the respect they had for his colleagues. In particular, their honesty, respect, discretion and experience:

The success of the group is down to people being honest with themselves and honest about what they're doing. If you have somebody in a group who has a high opinion of himself, automatically you have got the backs up of the rest of the people in the group, it's definitely down to the quality of the people, their discretion and their experience. The process alone could not do this it's the quality of the people.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

However, as individuals who were not familiar with others in the group also

experienced a positive feeling of common values and needs:

I felt that we were very lucky, I felt very comfortable straight away with the people who I didn't know, the people from the ____ cluster who were on our table when we were doing the problem-sharing, and I haven't seen them since. They came again the other day and seemed very keen to make it work, they felt the need for it as well".

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

As you know, I've moved from another school, and I've thought about whether this group would work with the cluster I was in before, and I think it would work with some of those people but not all of them, we worked well as a cluster, but there is something about the group of people we're meeting with now – there are no hidden agendas, they're a very open, supportive group of people. There doesn't seem to be any politics amongst this group.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

There must have been other factors as well. These may have included: shared difficulties, the range of experience, the level of confidentiality:

Wonderful Head teachers, and their handling and battling with common issues being thrown on us i.e. performance management, target setting, Ofsted. All the members of the group I knew beforehand, a high percentage of them are experienced Head teachers who have been in their schools for reasonable lengths of time, all had good Ofsted reports, all work with the authority, and they are all knowledgeable about what they do in their own different ways – one of the things that makes the group work. We trust each other so much that we know we're not going to go away and talk behind each others backs. For example yesterday, I took another teacher home and what had gone in the meeting wasn't even discussed. You've got the experience, the knowledge and the trust of the other people, knowing that if you have got an issue, it won't be talked about behind your back. Remember, in that group there is a lot of Head teachers with a vast amount of hand-on experience gained over years and years.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

and appreciation of working within that particular local cluster all expressed by group members:

A lot of it is to do with the people, I think that politics is a good word for it because some people have a hidden agenda, they want to prove a point, they're not looking at the problem, it's more about them or their power or position in the group, we don't really have people like that – if I can illustrate that by talking about _____, the Secondary Head. He just seems so much on a level with us, he seems like a colleague. I've worked in other clusters where the secondary Head has seemed so out of touch with primary schools in terms of their empathy. He's a really nice bloke, there isn't this distance, I've worked with some secondary Heads and you have this thing going on 'I don't know what's going on in your school, but you don't know what's going on in mine', building barriers rather than breaking them down. _____'s not like that at all and I think the success of the group is down to that. I'd love him to keep part of the group, I worry that if we just get into a whinging sessions, our whinges are different to his, and he may drop out – I fear we are going to lose him.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Others similarly stated their appreciation of working within the local cluster and their respect for the secondary school and its Head:

I don't think it would work for us, actually [to form group from individuals from the outside areas], I think we have a great deal of respect for _____ School and particularly for _____ as Head, we all work closely together with the curriculum, and I think it feels comfortable so we are in that segment of education supporting _____ School.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

There is also a possibility that those who responded to the invitation to attend the Head teachers' group shared commonalities in terms of personality, outlook on life, past experience and approach to difficulties. Bion's (1961) concept of valency may be relevant here in that there could be possible links between the Head teachers' choice of occupation and their personal histories resulting in individuals with similar internal needs and tendencies matching certain kinds of defences which give rise to collective

defences against similar anxieties that are stirred up by the nature of their work.

As the majority of those interviewed were in favour of keeping the group exclusively for Head teachers who had shared issues and a common understanding of the difficulties faced by Heads and all stated that this was one of the group's main strengths.. The exclusivity factor must be taken into account as a factor that contributes towards the group's cohesiveness. The secondary Head teacher's doubts regarding the success of a group set up specifically for secondary Heads:

I don't know, that's an interesting thought, I don't know whether you would get the level of commitment, whether people are just so busy, whether they would make the effort to go unless they wanted to, to present. I think that within our federation, which is 11 schools in the ____, because the Heads meet regularly anyway, but it's more talking about curriculum management and organisational issues. I think if we were in that situation we probably would, because we share a lot about issues in school in general so it wouldn't be a massive step to take it one stage further.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

may be further indication of the cohesiveness of the current group, which the other secondary Heads are not a part of. Alternatively, the secondary Head teacher may have sensed that the common factors experienced by the primary Heads would not be shared by their secondary colleagues as he himself expressed some doubts about the relevance of some aspects of the group to his situation. This raises the possibility that a group set up specifically for secondary Heads might be successful. The desire to keep the group exclusively for Heads is further evidence of some of the therapeutic factors offered by groups, in particular, the addressing of common needs and the normalising effects that help individuals to feel less isolated and incompetent.

The Initial Training Session

A number of participants felt that the initial training session helped the group to become established (see appendix I). In particular the rigour of the process helped to keep subsequent meetings structured:

The training day in the hotel helped as I'd never been through anything like that

before, and because you were being watched, that was an added pressure. It was a training session, wasn't it? I found it very useful, the advantage was that you were shown what to do and how rigid you have to be, how rigid about when somebody's explaining something, you don't chip in, which I chipped in and got told off for! It's getting used to the process. If I hadn't been to that training session we wouldn't be where we are, would we? This group wouldn't have formed and wouldn't have worked as it does. When I was up at _____, the Head teacher chaired it exactly as you did in the hotel.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

The theoretical elements of the training day were also thought to have had an impact on the success of the group:

I think the theory that we did has helped, we've tried our best to do that, it certainly struck a chord with me, I haven't actually talked that much with other colleagues about the background/theory of the process but I know from yesterday we dwelt on the process a little bit, because somebody was reporting back that they met with you [in the process of carrying out the interviews], I know the feeling that this was a very positive process came through very strongly.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

The success of the initial training session demonstrated the positive effects of a psycho-educational approach where the impacts of negative emotions on individuals and relationships could be graphically related to the lives of the group members through a combination of experiential exercises and theoretical models. This gave weight to arguments for both cognitive and emotional elements in such training.

The Structure of the Process

The general consensus was that much of the success of the group could be attributed to the rigid structure of the process: *"The positive structure, [is the reason for the group's success] it's a forum for you to seek a route for any advice you might need"*. On an occasion when the group engaged in a less structured approach more general discussion had occurred where all of the group members had expressed their concerns using a structured process adapted from the original process rather than having one individual describing an issue:

I do believe the right starting point is not to demonstrate what happened last night, which I think was special, it wouldn't necessarily happen again, but the right starting point is a formal 2 minutes for this, so many minutes for that, rather than people just talking as and when. You didn't put timings with your training, that's the original training, but so many minutes, very very strict helps. What happened last night when people started to talk felt strange, not wrong, but it felt strange, but it enabled people to put in what they could and get out what they could so it justified it. Head teachers don't like being told what to do, we are not good at that, we are managers at the top of little Pyramids and so to choose to do that without a structure – I don't think so. I think the only way is to be able to justify the structure – teach it, model it, experience it, then the group member would recognise within themselves there's something in this that I could benefit from and even help somebody else, a fellow colleague, so either way there's justification for saying to themselves as an individual, 'I'm in'.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The positive effects of the modified process and its capacity to enable group members to engage in a reflective discussion about their own experience and practice were expressed:

___ poured her heart out about the pressure she's under because of target-setting and of course everybody in the room was all exactly the same – no, not exactly the same because it was interesting what came out, but what went on then for what must have been half an hour was what an observer would see as an open discussion but all the elements that we've been taught were in there but mixed up, so that everybody had an opportunity to put their experience and agree, feel like that when our advisor comes in and stuff like that, and let's not forget about what value Ofsted has in this, it was a very wide ranging discussion, it wasn't 100% whinging and that is a huge step forward because I believe that without the training we've had and the understanding that we have within the group, if we'd have sat down as 8 people cold, and that had been raised, it would have been different.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The idea of a pre-agreed focus of concern for the group where group members only

brought issues relating to that particular topic was discussed and agreed as a way forward:

You have a kind of focus, and I suppose that might draw people back each time to think well I would like to hear other people's experiences of parents and give them my advice, share my situation. That's a way of having some kind of selected focus for future meetings.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

This may indicate that the group has the capacity to develop a process to fit its needs more appropriately in the future. The positive effects of the modified process and its capacity to enable group members to engage in a reflective discussion about their own experience and practice perhaps reflected the changing needs of the group as they became more competent in their skills and knowledge through attending previous sessions. The idea of a pre-agreed focus of concern for the group where group members only brought issues relating to a specified topic was further evidence of the group evolving to meet the needs of its members. However, the concerns of those who did not regard the changes as being positive must also be taken into account and some form of on-going internal evaluative process must be considered in order to gauge group members' feelings and prevent cohesiveness being eroded.

The Need for a Facilitator

High amongst the suggestions for ways to promote the survival of the group was the requirement for a facilitator for the group who could maintain communication and publicity about meetings and make sure that meetings were set up forward:

I think often these groups have one or two driving forces, it needs somebody who perhaps is the prime mover, who is very committed to it, who is often the best person who will keep something going, has energy and willingness to talk to people, to ring someone up who hasn't come and make sure they're there. If you wanted to expand that, best to start with a new group of people, perhaps initially working with somebody experienced who could help the situation expand.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

In particular the need for publicity about the meetings well in advance in order to be

able to secure the time to go to the meetings was essential:

It needs a key person who's leading it, I know that's not the essence of it, but I think I need to know when the next meeting so I can block the time, so that I'm available, but actually I don't know who to contact.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Indeed the danger of the group failing due to a variety of other school-based pressures was articulated by a number of interviewees:

I do feel that it's working, but I worry that if we are left to our own devices for whatever reason, other things will force it out, as they do in school, you can have some brilliant ideas in school but they just get quashed by all the mundane stuff that comes in and washes over it.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Similarly, another expressed the same fears and reiterated the need for external facilitation:

Yes, because unless you do that [the facilitation/administration of the group] people won't get together, because everybody is busy, aren't they?

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

Several group members wanted the facilitator to be distinct from the group and the EP was seen as the ideal candidate for such a role:

Yes [it could be role for the EP], or a well established Head who's willing to take it on. There does need to be one person that you latch onto, and it isn't fair on one Head not to get that opportunity to participate.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

In terms of facilitation, one of the ways this group works is because of objectivity, not personal, not politics, so to have someone like [the EP] who is objective to the management of the group might be quite good.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

It was suggested that the EP may offer 'refresher' sessions to stimulate interest in the group as the initial training session had done. In addition, focusing on looking for positives rather than negatives were seen to essential elements for the ongoing success and survival of the group. The need for a more structured approach to selecting problems or issues which would be more relevant to more members in the group than when individuals bring their individual concerns. The potential 'evolution' of the group was explained by one interviewee who explained how the group itself might be the driving force for change:

I think each group's got to find its own way of how it makes it work, we talked yesterday that it might be helpful if we came with a thought in mind about what we would want to talk about if we were the person who was going to share a problem so that we didn't all sit there and "oh now, let's talk about..." if everybody went armed with something they could talk about if they were going to be in that position and from the discussion we had we picked up things to do with working with parents which is an emotive issue for everybody and one or two people have expressed difficulties they've encountered recently so the suggestion was let's make that the focus for next time and we will come ready to discuss somebody's issue with parents because we've all got issues with parents that we'd like to deal with so it will be helpful for everybody, because we've set a context for it. So that's our development of how to work isn't it? I think that's what's important because if it was like a straight jacket – "you've got to do this, you've got to do that" you feel constrained by it and you might think well actually what I'd rather have done was, whereas as it is we have made a group decision about how it's going to work.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Anxiety that the group might founder due to organisational deficits and a clear and relevant focus that would justify Head teachers' absence from the school was expressed:

It definitely needs a focus of the sort that we've put in place for the next one, doesn't necessarily need a theme, which we are going to try next time, it needs to be necessary – if you just say we are meeting every half-term and it becomes clear that people don't want to be presenting problems or there aren't the problems to present, then it will die a natural death, I'm sure. I'm worried that's purely an organisational thing because it doesn't have an outsider driving it, that people

will think, "I don't have anything to talk about this week so I won't go" or "I haven't got anything to talk about so I won't go this week" whereas with a solution circle, you have to go thinking most of time I'm going to be part of the solution not the presenter of the problem. It's got to have that feeling, that you come out either with some ideas of your own that you've been given, or feel that I've definitely contributed and it's definitely worth my time, because you can always think of a million reasons not to go out of school.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Clearly there is a need for some overall organisation and administration of the group and a possible role for the Educational Psychologist. Similarly, a fair means to select the Chair must be established in any further work. However, the possibility of over-dependence on a leader figure must be resisted as it may result in the group assuming a basic assumption mentality. To guard against this the group must maintain its sense of purpose and members must be encouraged to retain both their critical faculties and their individual abilities, (Stokes, 1994).

In addition to the need for a 'driving force' to facilitate and manage the group there were calls for a more structured approach to selecting problems or issues which would be relevant to a greater number of group members than when individuals bring their individual concerns. This again indicates that the group should develop and adapt its format to meet the changing needs of its members more appropriately. Having a clear structure helps to build trust and gives participants greater freedom to ask more probing questions, make more frank observations and offer more radical suggestions than they would have done in another, less structured forum. A clear structure and process in each session must be established and maintained if a work group mentality as opposed to a basic assumption mentality is to be sustained. The changing needs of the group as they became more competent in their skills and knowledge through attending previous sessions must be accounted for and reflected in any modifications of the structure. As the structure of the sessions clearly impacts on the relationship between group cohesiveness, the maintenance of membership and its implications for the group as a whole, any new structures must be agreed to by all in the group if it is to be kept alive. Whatever form of structure the group chooses to adopt it must retain its capacity to bear frustration and anxiety and take time to seek-out well reasoned solutions. In addition the group members must be encouraged to stay in touch with external realities and resist a retreat into paranoia. These objectives may be attained by fostering an inquiring attitude

and considering new ideas and solutions as these may question established assumptions, and introduce novel and unexpected elements. The group should also seek to understand any changes in its make-up or format. In this way adaptive processes and development are facilitated and effective work, which involves tolerating frustration, facing reality, recognising differences among group members and learning from experience, can be achieved (Turquet, 1974). Therefore the following points were imperative in the ongoing success and survival of the group:

- In the absence of a group leader there needs to be a clear structure to the session and it requires a high level of commitment from group members to the process. Commitment to the process should be established by running group sessions led by an experienced Chair before asking Head teachers to take on this role or to use the process in paired sessions.
- In order to prevent diversions and disintegration of the process, sessions should follow a pre-arranged structure where the Chair maintains the essential steps and procedures.
- Although it is not necessary for an external group leader to be present, a means of selecting a Chair for each session should be devised to avoid the same people being chosen and others not taking up the role at all.
- Each of the sessions should focus on providing a positive and pragmatic approach to problems within a supportive and trusting context.
- Some means of administrating the group should be developed to maintain communication and provide publicity about meetings to ensure that meetings are set up well in advance so that members are able to secure the time to go to the meetings.

Input from the Local Authority

When considering ways that might support the survival of the group a number of participants suggested ways that the Local Authority might help. One Head argued that as many Heads, especially those of small schools are restricted by time, they might be offered supply cover. In addition, the Governors should recognise the benefits of the Head teacher attending the group in recognition of the official policies on management of work/life balance:

In one sense we are trying to persuade them that this is very good for them or for

us, to come to such a group, would actually benefit us, the tack to take might be to do with a phrase which governors are meant to take account of – ‘lets be mindful of the Head teachers’ work/life commitment’ and indeed they are meant to be mindful of stress, aren’t they? I forget what the regulations are now to do with that. Another carrot is always if as an authority to get a sum of money in so that one’s compensated in some way for coming out of school to a social meeting, that sounds mercenary, but it’s not in actual fact, particularly for Heads of small schools who might well need to get someone in to cover them.

(Head teacher 10 interviewed in current study)

Added status from the Local Authority might maintain attendance and keep participants focussed. The use of official documentation might help increase the status of the group. However, the presence of Local Authority officers at previous meetings was questioned and again the need for a structure was reiterated:

By giving it some status, making sure that X amount of people turn up every time. First time I went I was the first one there and I thought ‘right’, then someone else turned up and I thought right, is this it then? You need the right amount of people to give it weight and importance that you can afford to take an afternoon off to go, for it to be beneficial, rather than just ‘we had a nice time and had a cup of tea and a moan’. I think you need some official documentation really then it’s nice to know you’re not just part of an informal network. We used to have our cluster meetings with the LEA advisor for our cluster, then decided we didn’t want LEA representing so frequently so we held our own cluster meetings, I remember us sitting down and saying right, what shall we do? What do you want to talk about? What do you want to get out of this? You do need that.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

Conversely, another Head teacher argued that one of the strengths of the group was the lack of Local Authority involvement and specifically the lack of resources from the Local Authority which could work against the survival and integrity of the group if they were to be removed:

The good thing is that nobody is suggesting that they are going to put any resources into the group and we have to go in our time, there’s no money there, so nobody can take it away, so in a way if a group of Heads decide we are going

to get together for an afternoon nobody can stop us so it's not like someone is saying "well if you don't meet 6 times a year you won't get your supply cover" and I think as a group, certainly our cluster, we are strong enough to say if we want this we will do it, and with our cluster meeting we didn't want the LEA people there so we stopped telling them when we were meeting because they were coming in to set the agenda, and we said we had been meeting for 20 years and don't need you setting the agenda, if you want to come and talk to us, come and ask but don't suddenly start running a meeting which has been running perfectly successfully.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Fears that Local Authority involvement may result in the group being taken over and its aims and purpose changed were also expressed:

Yes, I'm quite happy for the group to lead itself because if you bring in A N Other from the authority they will come in possibly with their own slant to the agenda and that is what we are trying to move from, so that we can run our own meetings and control our own agenda, talk about what we want to talk about. It also keeps it in-house. Certain things don't need to be going out of these four walls, or out of the many walls of the cluster group.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

No, you don't want that [the LEA to run it], a lot of the issues might be issues with the LEA – I haven't had any issues with the LEA yet, but I might.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

Others were anxious and even alarmed that they had been singled out by the Local Authority when they received the invitation to attend the initial training day, believing that the Local Authority felt that they were in need of support specifically.

The arguments favouring a lack of Local Authority involvement might indicate some degree of defensive behaviour. Specifically the lack of resources from the Local Authority for the group were regarded as a strength as if they had never been given they could not be removed. In addition, fears that Local Authority involvement may result in the group being taken over and its aims and purpose also reflected defensive feelings.

However, as the initiative for the group being established in the first place was taken by Local Authority officers who were trying to respond to the difficulties around retention and recruitment of Head teachers, such concerns and defensive behaviours may be unfounded. This defensive behaviour could indicate a need for time to be taken for improving relationships between Head teachers and Local Authority Officers by gaining a better understanding of each others' perspective. This need was further highlighted by the Head teacher who interpreted their invitation to the initial training meeting of the Head teachers' support group as if they had been singled out especially by the Local Authority as they were thought of as incompetent and in need of extra support, despite having no evidence to support this belief.

Recruitment and Support of New Members

Measures had been taken to involve new Heads and make them welcome and comfortable at group sessions as the group members were keen to promote the group to other Heads in the area:

It has always been the case that certainly, when a new Head came for the first time and we went round the group it was made plain – I think I've said it when I was explaining to him how it works before we actually did it - that when the baton came round to you, its alright to say "pass" and just not make a contribution.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The importance of maintaining the structured process with new members was also seen as a priority:

If an inexperienced Head came in he would have to be given a knowledge of how the group works and the processes they go through, so you're not just coming in to "tell you the problem, then..." I think it's that process that makes it work. There would have to be someone in the group to talk over the processes, I actually think it would work as long as they stuck to the rules, so they speak.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

At least one interviewee had already been actively promoting the group to good effect:

Oh yes, I'm a committee member for _____ Association of Small Schools so I've been talking a little bit about this when we last meet, _____ from _____ School

came and it was her first encounter, she wasn't quite sure about it for herself but we backed it up by talking about it at one of our normal cluster meetings, so _____ will come here next week and we will see how it develops. She thinks it's a good idea and has attended one meeting, so she's been to see how she feels about it.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

and there was also evidence of the group members gaining feedback from new members about their experiences of being in the group in order to inform the promotion and development of the group:

Another issue which was discussed very briefly last night, but nevertheless an important one, of how easy it is for people who haven't been part of a group, to come in. Not last night, but the meeting before, we had a Head who hadn't been to any of the meetings, had heard from other Heads that the group was there, was receiving emails because everybody on the one patches whether they had been attending the meetings or not were on the list, just so the invitation's there – and she came to our meeting, and we did say yesterday let's find out how she felt about it so I want to do that just to get information for ourselves as to how easy it is for somebody to come in and feel that 'there's something here for me', rather than 'this is a group who is going like a train and I don't really want to try and catch it.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

The concept of 'trial' sessions was put forward:

I think what you could do there [with reluctant Heads] is start working on a one-to-one basis, or get them in as an observer to see how the process works and see that it is not intimidating, and even people with 15-20 years experience are quite able to sit down and talk problems through and then visit other folks.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

and the need to be open about the nature of the group and not to lure people in under the guise of a social event was seen to be important. There was also evidence that the group is gaining credibility simply by word of mouth:

Well, whatever strategy [to recruit non-communicative Head teachers to the

group], if we were to identify or suggest a strategy that's got to be open and transparent, I'm sure of that, because its tempting to say, let's have a mince pie party or something and invite the Heads and slip it into the conversation – I don't think so!. We've had 2 Heads who've not been to any of the training, in the 2 clusters for this group who've been to meetings so actually they're the people to speak to, to find the answers, I don't know what they would say, just trying to think how they found out about it, one, ___ found out about it by word of mouth because she's friendly with one of the group, same size school so I know there's a friendship link, probably a chatty conversation and that would be the link and pluck up the courage for her to come along, because I did feel that when she came in, that she was coming into a group that was already established and I know how difficult that can be. The other one knew about the meeting because I'd e-mailed him and he just told me that he'd heard good things about it so he was going to come, so how he's heard I don't know, he's only going to hear by speaking to other Heads.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

One Head about to leave her post explained how she had already encouraged her replacement to attend the group and had also arranged for another Head to remind her nearer the time. She also expressed her confidence in the survival of the group:

I've already passed on the data for the next meeting to my Deputy who is going to be acting Head and said she must prioritise going to this meeting because its going to be really useful and supportive to you, you will get to work with the other Heads and see how they're actually doing the problem-solving, and Bill has said that he will ensure that he reminds her nearer the time and offer a lift etc. so she has somebody to go with. So yes, I do think that the group will continue, and I do think it will be a very powerful, useful group for people .

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Work-Group Mentality

The desire to stay in touch with external realities by maintaining contact with the outside world and the wish for the group to grow and prosper and was evident in the measures that had been taken by group members to involve new Heads and make them feel welcome and comfortable at group sessions. This indicated that the group had

retained a work-group mentality and wished to carrying out a specifiable task, take on board new ideas and solutions and assess their effectiveness in doing it. The maintenance of the group's structured process with new members was seen as a priority. This may have been a strategy to promote group cohesion or it may be interpreted as an example of ritualistic repetition of certain acts used to control and master anxieties. However the efforts to gain feedback from new members about their experiences of being in the group in order to inform its promotion and development indicated that group members retained an inquiring attitude and were open to questioning of established assumptions and practices. The suggestion of 'trial' sessions for new recruits and the need to be open about the nature of the group rather than luring people in under the guise of a social event were further evidence of members seeking to facilitate the group's adaptive processes and development and to understand changes in its make-up or format. (Turquet, 1974). Evidence that the group was gaining credibility simply by word of mouth was encouraging as were the proactive strategies to encourage new recruits to attend the meetings such as the Head about the leave her post who had already encouraged her replacement to attend the group and had also arranged for another Head to remind the new Head nearer the time.

Other Factors

Maintaining the momentum of regular meetings is a key factor in the survival of the group according to a number of interviewees:

The key thing to this is to keep the momentum, keep it going and don't get sidetracked. We've met 3 or 4 times now, we're quite confident about this process so we can let it go now, we can just have that contact with 1 person or 2 people, I don't think that would be the way to go with it personally, I think the key thing is to keep the group meetings going and then if you feel that you need to talk to 1 or 2 people close to you geographically where you could meet up either at lunchtime or after work or could just telephone, that would be supportive, but I do think the group meetings are important and need to continue.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

The need for effective and regular communication, and in particular some means of providing feedback from the meetings for absent members to remain 'bonded' with the group if they have to miss a session due to added pressures and events in their schools

as it is at those time they need the extra support:

I think probably the regularity, you need to constantly stay on it, I feel because I couldn't make the last 2 I'll find it more difficult latching into the next one because from my point of view I'll think well, they all managed to make that meeting, I've had no feedback from that meeting so know nothing about it, so me then walking back in 6 months later, even though I had been invited to them all, I'll be thinking have they got a bond that I'm breaking into? So that's quite an issue really, in terms of how you get information back from the meeting, well you don't, because it's confidential, so you don't know what's gone on and get less connected, don't you? It's just feeling hooked into it really more than anything, not that you want to know what's been discussed because invariably you don't.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

One participant suggested strategies for helping absent members to remain in contact with the group and acknowledged how this might happen due to added pressures and events in members' schools, and it's at those time they need the extra support. She explained that this already happens with the standard cluster meetings:

It's times like when you don't go along to the meeting that are the times when you have the most issues because you have chosen to stick with your issues and keep plodding on by yourself, maybe to have some sort of way the group can make contact with anyone who hasn't been there, not "why weren't you there", but "we though about you during our meeting", and make sure you don't lose anybody because I'm well aware the cluster group in its normal form, I don't always know when the next meeting is, because sometimes I get minutes, sometimes I don't, sometimes someone will ring round the week before and say when the meeting is – so to have a way of reaching out to anybody who is not there for whatever reason so that they do know when the next meeting is and they are still involved with the group would be good.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

The success and survival of the group depends heavily on the commitment and discipline of the members to attend the meeting regularly. One participant also expressed his feelings about the benefits of attending the meeting and reported that group appeared to be growing in popularity:

I think it can only be sustained if we set our minds to a regular meeting, and after yesterday's meeting the next meeting has been planned. There were twice as many people at the meeting yesterday than the time before, at a much busier time of year. We talked about lots of issues last night, it was lovely to get round a table and just talk without note-taking or agenda, everybody had something to say and at the end of it everybody felt better.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

Feedback from the interview data implies that in general members of the group are valued and their absence would have a negative impact on the cohesiveness and the functioning of the group. Therefore it is important that members are given every encouragement to attend groups. Furthermore, when planning groups these should be arranged at times, dates and places that are suitable for all those in the group to facilitate attendance. This process should also be able to account for time constraints which may prevent some members from attending. The Head teachers emphasised the importance of setting time aside on a formal basis. Dates for sessions should be agreed well in advance and an efficient means of communicating information about sessions should be established between those taking part and should include those who have failed to attend. Having a venue away from a school context in order to promote a more relaxed and trusting ambiance is also valuable. The commitment and discipline of the members to attend the meetings regularly was seen as a vital influence in the survival of the group and this is related to factors to promote group cohesiveness.

This approach is only effective for those who choose to take part and the reasons why those who chose not take part should be examined. Time and resources did not permit an investigation into these reasons in this particular study, however in the pilot study those who did not attend were asked what had prevented them from attending and then they were asked to speculate about the usefulness of peers supervision sessions using questions based on the main questionnaire. The non-attending Head teachers cited time pressures and teaching commitments as their main reason for not taking part in addition to concerns that the sessions might be stressful and that they would have more emotional weight to carry, and concerns about confidences being broken or of being exposed as 'weak' or 'not up to the job'.

vii. Groups versus paired models of supervision

Six of the Head teachers reported that they had worked in pairs face to face with other Heads whilst some explained had they had used other means such as the telephone or e-mail:

Yes, what actually happened with that was between the group sessions something cropped up that I was anxious about and wasn't sure who I could talk it through with, so I emailed _____ and just put re. support, could do with having a few minutes either by email or over the phone or whatever, we actually did it over the phone in the end – he let me talk through what it was and then he asked me some questions, so it was the same sort of format but it was a fairly instant follow-up to me saying I could do with talking through this, and by the time we had finished I felt I was making the problem seem bigger than it really is, what I've actually got to do is... and it helped me clarify how I was going to deal with That.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Others stated that they believed that the facility for working in pairs: “*Even by telephone or whatever if necessary, or perhaps meeting*”, was very beneficial in between group meetings, especially when a problem cropped up that required immediate attention:

I would have probably waited until the problem was bigger, and then I might possibly have contacted _____ because we already did do a little bit of being there for each other anyway, but I thought of it earlier on I the process, as soon as I was aware that I was getting wound up about it.

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

One Head teacher who had not had the opportunity to work in a pair said that although she had not had this experience she would now do that via somebody that she had met who she knows goes to the group. There was a general consensus that there was a need and a role for both forms of supervision. While paired sessions were seen as a means of allowing individuals to ‘mull over’ problems for longer, whole group sessions provide a range of support in a crisis. Group sessions were described as being of benefit because they provide a very diverse range of experiences, although it was noted that there may be different areas of interest within the group. A suggestion was made that perhaps smaller groups might form out of the main group reflecting interest or expertise if the

group became too large. Paired sessions were seen as being more informal and easier to arrange and maintain. However, all of the Head teachers said that they would be more inclined to commit to a group as it would be less easy to re-arrange than a paired session and therefore less easy to be relegated if something else cropped up. Paired work was felt to allow a deeper personal relationship to develop, but this was also seen as a drawback if the pair was incompatible.

The Head teachers said that both the group and paired work session structure allows an individual to ask more searching questions than they felt that they could in an informal discussion, especially when they were less familiar with the other person. The importance of structure was also highlighted in observations made of the group sessions. Where the process was not adhered to consistently, individuals engaged in dialogues that diverted the proceedings away from the central issues and sometimes delayed or obscured the clarification or resolution of the problem. This was particularly apparent when members of the group had different opinions or standpoints and were allowed to engage in discussion or disputes, using anecdotes to illustrate their points. However, when the chair maintained the process effectively the proceedings were more efficient in the resolution of an issue.

viii. Role of the Educational Psychologist

Educational psychologists involved in this project have acted as applied psychologists working in the community with local authority workers and this has resulted in improved job satisfaction and coping for the Head teachers concerned. In addition, to supporting Head teachers directly, EP involvement in this work has had a reported beneficial impact on their schools as it provides an outlet for Head teachers' difficulties and frustrations which may have otherwise been taken out on other individuals within the school. The problem-solving skills of Head teachers have improved leading to apparently better school management. By encouraging Head teachers to make time for themselves in proactively seeking support they should recognise the benefits for others to do likewise. Collaborative working between the participating Head teachers has extended beyond the group sessions with Head teachers reporting that the positive and cooperative relationships that were established between themselves and their schools were more keenly maintained and information and resources were more readily and efficiently shared. In this sense, it places psychologists in the school improvement role rather than the traditional special educational needs role.

The Skills and Expertise of the Educational Psychologist

The relationship with the Educational Psychologist who worked on the local patches was unanimously positive. Some Heads expressed their appreciation of the EP's personal qualities:

I think we all feel incredibly supported by ____, she's worked so well with the school, gives out lots of positive messages about what the school achieves. So you feel that you've got somebody in that incredibly supportive role, I think you find odd people like that who I feel, we talked about support systems earlier. ____ is someone I feel I could talk to easily about an issue, who I know would be supportive and it wouldn't go any further, my behaviour support teacher is exactly the same. I can go and talk to her and she's a bit of an outsider and I use her as a bit like a supervision sometimes – something like external input, whether it's validating what you're doing.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

Whilst acknowledging the personal qualities brought by the EP to their school, other interviewees also expressed an appreciation of the different skills that the EP can offer including her powers of persuasion:

I know for me with ____ being the Educational Psychologist here, I feel confident in the relationship that I have with her. For her to have that ability to see if that was happening in our neck of the woods and to use persuasion to pull that person in, or to flag up the difficulty to somebody else in that cluster group because it is done in confidence and therefore that's the one thing that we all respect because seeing how its going in education at the moment, I think there is a change in the LEA's remit in schools and how schools function, there are quite a lot of difficulties and I can see that one changing in the very near future, so it is not always going to be about the whole school, it is going to be very much target based and that I think is sad, so we do need somebody else that will come into schools, and it's the Educational Psychologists that are coming in on a regular basis throughout the year that perhaps can offer suggestion level for the person like the one you are mentioning who does need help – she won't get it from the

The Educational Psychology Service was seen to be able to address these issues by drawing upon expertise of working in both a solution focussed and a therapeutic way and on experience of participating in and running peer supervision sessions.

The importance of the relationship with the Local Educational Psychologist proved to be very important in both the pilot study and the current study. This is because trust is an integral factor in the success of the group and many of the participants had so varying degrees lost trust in those around them and in particular officers from the Local Authority. By maintaining a positive and trusting relationship with the Head teachers the EPs were able to convince the Head teachers to attend the group sessions. The potential for EPs to use their positions of trust 'outside' of the realms of the Local Authority is great. Such work might include: the promoting of containment within schools and relationships; assisting in the management of change; facilitating interagency working; eliciting the multiple meanings of individuals to facilitate understanding and co-operation; applying Solution Focussed approaches creatively and exploring the principles of Learning Organisations.

Managing Anxieties

In further work in this area the Educational Psychologist may have a key role in helping participants manage their feelings of personal vulnerability, reluctance to share issues and personal responsibility to find a solution for others' difficulties. This may be achieved prior to the establishment of the group perhaps during the initial training sessions where such feelings may be highlighted and ways of overcoming them may be discussed. The EP might offer support in the selection of group members prior to the setting up of a group. Similarly the Educational Psychologist may be important in managing any 'difficult' individuals who might attend a group and threaten its cohesiveness. This may be achieved through working one to one with individual group members or in a consultative capacity with the group as a whole. To avoid the possibility of the group going 'stale' the Educational Psychologist may be able to offer 'refresher' sessions that review what the group has discussed and highlight any positive elements which the members find difficult to express. The EP may be able to assist in the setting up of an evaluative process within the group and the material from this may

be presented at the refresher sessions to inform the group about the feelings and ongoing needs of its members. The Educational Psychologist may also be able to offer assistance in the event of any confidentiality breaches by discussing what has happened with those involved and helping the group to recover any elements of trust, security and cohesiveness that may have been lost. However for such work to be a success, Educational Psychologists would have to feel confident and have the skills to do this work and this may require training. In addition Educational Psychologists would have to believe that it is their role to carry out work of this nature.

Facilitating Change at the Individual and the Organisational Level

As both the pilot study and the current study demonstrated, despite great efforts to reach out to staff and involve them in systemic change some will remain resistant. In order to mediate the learning of those described by Meadows (1998:21), as 'unwilling conscripts, whose despair or lack of enthusiasm or disaffection makes them resist normal types of support?', a range of strategies is required. In integrating psychoanalytic and solution focussed approaches in their engagement with schools EPs should consider the different roles and functions they might adopt in addition to the range of techniques and approaches that might be adapted to assist them in bringing about change to facilitate the containment of staff, pupils and parents. Different methods and forms of interaction are necessary in order to facilitate change at the level of the individual and the organisation, which is a complex process involving, 'The ability to work with other people in their physical and psychological territory' Gillham (1999).

Apart from working in the way described in this study, the findings have shown that Educational Psychologists may also have a role in working with Head teachers and schools specifically on some of the issues that emerged from the interviews. EPs may be able to support Head teachers with their feelings of: isolation, responsibility, the effects of fatigue and anxiety; difficulty in maintaining a work/life balance; time pressures and personal alienation from the job, by establishing and facilitating further group work and promoting paired supervision sessions. Furthermore, group training and workshop sessions might also be considered.

Where there are specific difficulties relating to a particular issue or context such as the difficulties relating to small primary schools or Secondary Schools a group made up of individuals who share the same issues and contexts might be considered. Similarly

where Head teachers feel under pressure to meet the needs of their schools whilst trying to meet Local Authority Targets and under pressure to keep abreast of current knowledge a group session that focuses on these topics might be appropriate. In this situation the Educational Psychologist might have a number of possible roles such as: facilitator, Chair, trainer, or they may have contacts or ideas about guest speakers, consultants or relevant individuals from the Local Authority to invite along to such sessions.

The group sessions utilised the great resource of experience that Head teachers gain over the course of their careers. This may be extended and further developed if a role for retired Head teachers in supporting current Heads was recognised where Educational Psychologists could develop a process for this to happen and offer some means of facilitating such a scheme. Similarly the contribution of E-Mail and other forms of information technology may offer additional forms of support which the Educational Psychologist could utilise and develop. In this way the Educational Psychologist could assist schools in becoming more open to each other. By enabling Head teachers and their staff to improve their problem-solving skills in dealing with their own situations and those of others they will help individuals to have a greater awareness of others with similar problems and see them a resource to consult with. In this way good practice may be shared more readily and positive links may be established between institutions and individuals who may become more prepared to analyse their own situations more critically.

Multi-Agency Working

Whilst the difficulties associated with multi-agency groups have been explored earlier in this study such groups may offer a way forward in some instances. As all too often schools are expected to overcome problems of poverty, underachievement and disruptive behaviour, (Mortimore, 1997), Bernstein, (1970) argues that education and teachers alone cannot compensate for society and there is an urgent need for joint inter-professional development both at the initial training stage and as part of continuing professional development for all professional groups. However, if interagency partnership is to become reality there is a need for all staff at managerial and operational level in joint training to enable shared understanding of key areas to emerge. The process similar to that used in this study may have something to offer in this area of work and may be an area where Educational Psychologists have a significant role. It

may be that the different agencies could gain insights into the thoughts and experiences of those they interact with and gain a greater understanding of each others difficulties. In this way they may be able to work together to overcome the difficulties collectively. In this way the Educational Psychologist may directly or indirectly offer more appropriate support to Heads who feel that the current level of support is inadequate.

Facilitating Containment

Where Head teachers are experiencing difficulties such as: having conflicting views with their own staff; taking on the anxiety of others; exclusions; conflicting interests/rivalry with other schools; leadership issues; managing difficult relationships with Governors, other Head teachers and Local Authority Officers, it is essential that the concept of containment is promoted and the Educational Psychologist can do this in a variety of different ways.

Nutkevitch (1998:11), observes that:

The stormier the container is, the more serious the organisation's pathology is, the worse the relations within the organisation's management are, the harder the task of containment is for the manager with his personality make-up, the more important it is to build and maintain the 'safety net', which becomes critical for the containment of the container. The more there are good enough containers in the organisation, at all levels – management, department, team, working group – the more efficiently it will function. The members of the organisation will thus be more efficient, creative and satisfied with their jobs.

Therefore, an essential intervention strategy in an organisation such as a school is to establish and maintain organisational entities on all levels as 'good enough containers' and to assist in the management of the containers' boundaries. Educational Psychologists, potentially have considerable knowledge, skills and competencies (Stoker, 2000), and have an important part to play in working with schools to create and manage 'good enough containers' by integrating the psychoanalytic perspective with other approaches such as a solution-focussed approach (Stratford, 2000). The peer supervision group demonstrated its function in promoting "the containing function of [the] organisation[s]" (Obholzer, 1994), by enabling the Head teachers to assume a depressive position and gave them the capacity to face both external and psychic reality. The Head teachers were able to agree about their respective primary tasks and through

gaining an awareness of the nature of the anxieties projected into them, they could see how they, their staff and the school as a whole was acting as a container for these anxieties, rather than defensively blocking them out.

Whilst there are plenty of opportunities for EPs to work at a whole school level (Stoker, 2000), there is also scope for the sharing of perspectives, joint planning and review at the school/EP interface. Consultation with groups of staff may also elicit what might be useful strategies and changes (including INSET). The resulting proposal of activity may be agreed amongst all the school staff, (Baxter, 2000), and they may gain a better understanding of the organisation's process and the options for change (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994). There is clearly a need to look beyond the target setting culture to attend to the personal, professional and emotional needs of teachers and the pastoral needs of pupils (Leyden, 2002). Macready (1997), presents a constructionist rationale for consultation, suggesting that change may occur if people can become connected to their own meaning-making abilities and to the greater selection of meanings subsequently available to them. Miller (1996, 2003) investigated the phenomenon of the 'temporary overlapping boundary' in which a teacher, parent and EP are able to co-create new and different meanings from those available within school and family systems. These meanings then pave the way for effective collaborative working.

Solution-focussed thinking (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995) may help to provide questions to structure consultation sessions in order to open up the complexity of the situation in a manner consistent with a social constructionist approach. However, whilst Solution Focussed approaches fit with social constructionist principles, there are ontological differences with psychodynamics.

Whilst the psychodynamic perspective sees human functioning as based upon the interaction of drives and forces within the person, particularly unconscious between the different structures of the personality, the social constructionist perspective emphasises the role of language in human societies where action is preceded by understanding and an intention for a meaningful outcome. Furthermore, actions convey messages to other members of society and how we name things affects how we behave towards them. A name or a label, carries with it expectations. The existence of important biological or natural differences between people and certain shared biological drives are not denied - rather, it is the ways in which such differences and similarities are given meaning through processes of social construction which are important. The theoretical principles

underpinning dynamic assessment may be applied to the process of solution-focussed consultation (Hymer, Michel, and Todd (2002), facilitating a meeting of equals with distinct but complimentary roles and skills.

By working across individuals and organisations and from acknowledging that the psychology of any situation has to include the experience of multiple meanings and differing interpretations, EPs can recognise the significance of individual constructs and how they impinge on organisational behaviour (Stoker, 2000). This may provide an EP with an effective tool for change as the construction of meaning is based on dialogue with the different parties and by acknowledging the legitimacy of each person's own chosen personal meaning. The dialogue may then move beyond so-called objective fact to an analysis of how one construction of events impacts on another. The EP may therefore act as a co-researcher, using his/her own values and beliefs in the process, working with the children, parents and teachers in the pursuit not of 'truth' but of better understanding, (Stoker, 2000). A range of literature and techniques is available to EPs to assist them in the eliciting of multiple meanings and the use of these to help individuals to reconstruct their futures.

Understanding the Constructs and Meanings of the Individuals Within an Organization

Kelly (1991) and much of Ravenette's (1997) work emphasises the importance of understanding the constructs and meanings of the individuals within an organisation where the productive level of analysis is not the pursuit of some sort of objective 'truth', but rather with the differing constructions that people make of the events that they are experiencing (Stoker, 2000). Therefore in order to gain a shared discovery of the meaning, and especially the emotional significance of activity in the workplace, there is scope for working with staff members in schools to help to explore the experiences and perspectives of each member of staff, focussing on change and significant events and the roles and responsibilities of individuals.

There is also perhaps a need to be creative in finding new ways of using language to communicate the constructs of others and themselves, (Stoker, 2000). Bozic *et al.* (1998), state that: "*Almost every part of our work involves [EPs] in the creation, use and manipulation of discourse*", and describe five major areas of EP work into which discourse analysis might be integrated. Billington, (1996), urges EPs to consider the

importance of language, issues of meaning, knowledge and power within current practices and argues that discourse analysis can enable an analysis of language and permits the conceptualisation of connections between words themselves and what lies beyond them, lead to a possible critique of power (Billington, (2002). O'Brien and Miller (2005), apply a discourse-analytic approach to the language used by school staff during the process of consultation between teachers and EPs. Edwards and Potter (1992, 1993), further develop a model of discursive psychology to focus particularly on how factual reports are constructed and how events are described and explained. These methods have been used by Miller and O'Brien (2005) as a means of analysing discourses where 'solution-focused' questions (Rhodes and Ajmal, 1995), are used to construct an alternative version of events in an attempt to move towards the co-creation of a different and more optimistic account from which new and more effective solutions might arise.

Developing Personal Awareness

It has already been established that the power to change ones self remains the single contributory factor in the management of stress (Steel, 2001). Whilst there is some support from various agencies that assists practicing teachers to studying their emotional reactions to children, the Educational Psychologist could assist staff members to develop greater personal awareness and acknowledge their individual reactions to situations. By supporting staff in managing their feelings, thoughts and behaviour, the EP may be able to help staff manage pressure and balance their lifestyles more effectively. This may be achieved by helping staff to unlearn their defensive habits of conversation and in learning to articulate the hidden feelings and thoughts that may be the origins of their resentment and confusion so that they are better informed and empowered to communicate and work more effectively. In this way the contribution of therapy and psychoanalytic thinking could be better understood and utilised (Weiss, 2002).

Managing Change

As society becomes increasingly pluralistic, institutions such as schools are continuously being challenged, creating considerable additional stress and confusion for the members of these institutions as they attempt to adopt and modify their working practices to take account of these changes (Stokes, 1994). Managing change inevitably

requires managing the anxieties and resistance arising from the change process (Obholzer, 1994). Jennifer and Shaughnessy (2005), suggest that a school's readiness to change and implement interventions is dependent on the extent to which key elements will support the introduction of an intervention and whether staff and pupils are empowered to participate meaningfully in its development. These elements include: self-awareness and reflection; recognition of and responsiveness to difficulties; review and evaluation; clarity of rationale; degree of democracy including the participation of children; stability of culture; and location of locus of control, (Dusenbury *et al.* (1997); Roffey (2000); Sammons *et al.* (1995)). When working with schools EPs may take account of these factors when planning ways to engage with the school.

Identifying Barriers

Methods such as Feuerstein's Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD) may be used to identify barriers to change (termed 'deficient cognitive functions'), and the mechanisms or processes that could remove them (Feurestein *et al.* (1979); Feurestein *et al.*, (1988); Feurestein and Feurestein, (1991). This method can provide a helpful framework for structured process questions in a dynamic consultation model. Likewise the 'psychodynamic consultation' may be used as a strategy for helping teachers to discern and cope with transference and countertransference phenomena, (Weiss, 2002). The Tavistock psychoanalytic approach to organisational consultancy involves gaining an understanding of the primary task of the organisation with an appreciation of the psychoanalytic challenge presented by the work. Through shared discovery of the meaning, and especially the emotional significance of activity in the workplace, it is thought that staff will gain a better understanding of the organisation's process and the options for change (Obholzer and Roberts, 1994).

The pilot study gave rise to the current study as an exercise that provided a vital insight into the underlying psychodynamics behind the systemic procedures and principles adopted by the respective schools. This work challenged the role of the EP traditionally working with children and working systemically with schools. As Obholzer (1994), argues that it is possible to assess the functioning state of an organisation by monitoring measures such as splitting, denial and projective identification, and how – just as for individuals – a containing intervention can shift the functioning towards the depressive end of the spectrum, the EP may assist staff in schools to gain an external and internal framework that allows for a sense of security and serves as a base from which to explore

personal and institutional issues.

In addition to assisting in finding solutions to difficulties this study has shown how Educational Psychologists are well placed to draw attention to the real difficulties and concerns of those working on the frontline of the educational field. Whilst the study was able to bring forward and acknowledge some of the pressures that Heads are under it also raised questions around individuals bearing difficulties that they should not have to endure and of people perhaps being forced to work in unbearable conditions. Perhaps a future role of the Educational Psychologist could be to further investigate these concerns and find a way of articulating them to those with authority in a manner that could influence a better way of working for all. This has implications for Local Authorities in terms of their deliberations about how to deploy their Educational Psychology resources more effectively.

ix. Additional Comments

A number of participants stated that they were greatly encouraged that through the peer supervision sessions the difficulties facing Head teachers were being acknowledged:

Yes, it is interesting but I regarded it as very nice that somebody was actually saying that Heads have a lot of pressures, that they need looking after – very important. I have my staff, PPA time, as long as they're fine and you're the last person they think about, very positive actually.

(Head teacher 8 interviewed in current study)

It became apparent that the more experienced Head teachers were more enthusiastic about attending the group than the less experienced Heads. This may be because more experienced Heads feel less defensive around other Head teachers:

The more experienced you are – when you are a new Head you want to get everything right, the more experienced you are the more reassured you are in your position to share things with colleagues.

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

A less experienced Head described her feelings of defensiveness and protectiveness about her school and having little time to attend the meetings:

I think for me, say in a couple of years' time, when I haven't got the same pressures of just taking over a new school, then that [attending the group sessions] would be more that I would seek to do down the line because I've got more time to do it but at the moment everything is pushing.....I think the thing is you are self-protective of your school so even when you are speaking to other Heads you don't necessarily give the full picture, you might discuss one small issue but you're always dealing with the full picture, aren't you? It would be good having somebody else who has the full picture.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Head teachers were generally considered to be natural listeners and communicators due to their experience of coming up through the ranks of teaching. These features were also seen as reasons for the success of the group:

I think the nature of a lot of Heads is to be like the type of people they are. I don't think that we've just been really lucky to get a good group of people together in this area. I think the nature of the Head teacher to be where they are is the fact that they have listened and are able to communicate and are open to ideas and are supportive and it's the nature of your role as you've come up through the system.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Another participant spoke about other aspects of Head teachers such as their dislike of being told what to do:

"Head teachers don't like being told what to do, we are not good at that, we are managers at the top of little Pyramids".

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Acknowledgement of Head teachers' Difficulties

The participants' encouragement that the difficulties facing Head teachers were finally being acknowledged through the peer supervision sessions may be further evidence of their feelings of isolation, alienation and even desperation. The greater enthusiasm for the group shown by the more experienced Head teachers may be indicative of a greater

degree of defensive behaviour demonstrated by the less experienced Heads who may feel they have more to prove than the more secure experienced Heads who feel less defensive around other Head teachers:

The more experienced you are – when you are a new Head you want to get everything right, the more experienced you are the more reassured you are in your position to share things with colleagues”

(Head teacher 5 interviewed in current study)

I think for me, say in a couple of years' time, when I haven't got the same pressures of just taking over a new school, then that [attending the group sessions] would be more that I would seek to do down the line because I've got more time to do it but at the moment everything is pushing... ..I think the thing is you are self-protective of your school so even when you are speaking to other Heads you don't necessarily give the full picture, you might discuss one small issue but you're always dealing with the full picture, aren't you? It would be good having somebody else who has the full picture.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

The general belief amongst the participants that Head teachers were natural listeners and communicators due to their experience of coming up through the ranks of teaching may indicate a carefully defended position which does not take into account the very different natures of Head teachers as individuals:

I think the nature of a lot of Heads is to be like the type of people they are. I don't think that we've just been really lucky to get a good group of people together in this area. I think the nature of the Head teacher to be where they are is the fact that they have listened and are able to communicate and are open to ideas and are supportive and it's the nature of your role as you've come up through the system.

(Head teacher 9 interviewed in current study)

Again the idea of *valency* for a particular role may be a relevant factor.

Several participants mentioned the need to support newly appointed Head teachers and

those new to the role:

I had a conversation with a new nearby Head who's having difficulties in the school, we're all there, aren't we? I said just ring anytime, if there's anything I can do – had a similar arrangement with the previous Head but she moved on and they've appointed a first-time Head and obviously in a school with difficulties that's a challenge for any Headship. She would have been invited to this, wouldn't she?

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

The facilitation of new Heads who might be reluctant to come to a group meeting despite having been invited due to lack of familiarity and confidence in the others was also raised:

If I'd have realised she'd had a letter and hadn't turned up, you could ask someone else to contact her, couldn't you, and say – 'I'm going along, do you want me to give you a lift?' – I've done that with previous infant Heads, ___ is a new Head at the Infants and came to the school in September, so I think maybe that we can take more responsibility for that and make phone calls and say 'maybe you've missed it, maybe you didn't think you'd got time for it', like all these things.

(Head teacher 2 interviewed in current study)

Another participant emphasised the need for support for new Heads from the Local Authority and emphasised the pressures they are under:

I would hope the LEA would be very supportive of new Heads for a lengthy period of time because there is so much to learn in a short space of time, everybody expects, even the Governing body would expect, you to be up and running literally from the first day of your appointment and that is unrealistic.

(Head teacher 7 interviewed in current study)

Issues around recruitment and retention of Head teachers in relation to the stresses and strains of the role was highlighted by several individuals who saw the support group as offering a way forward around this difficulty:

I do think the authority needs to think about this because I think there is an issue in terms of Headship recruitment now and if we are going to make it more attractive then something like the systems we are putting in place here need to be considered.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

Furthermore, the need for more creative responses to problems around school issues was called for:

There has been so much research done, we ought to know better about what makes a good school, rather than let's have this initiative and that initiative, by now we ought to know what makes a good school.

(Head teacher 6 interviewed in current study)

A number of participants discussed the role that retired Head teachers might have in supporting current Heads:

I think I'm lucky that both the past 2 Heads are still living in _____, we are unusual to have 3 consecutive Heads that have lived in the town. Both are totally different people with different perspectives, one has a more general perspective about education where my previous boss has only been gone 2 years and so its easier still to talk about on-going issues so I find that useful, not anywhere near on a daily or weekly basis but just when the opportunity arises or when I've got a thing that I don't know what to do.

(Head teacher 3 interviewed in current study)

A suggestion that e-mail support might prove useful to some individuals was tempered with a need for personal contact:

I suppose one of the things I do is use email for contacting people, whether that would be a useful way of offering people support, because you can't always manage to meet up or get them on the end of the phone, but having an exchange of emails to get support may be quite useful. I do actually think hearing the other person's voice or seeing their facial reactions is important because it affirms what you are thinking and doing and can get a little bit remote if you can't do that. I think its that spontaneity of being able to pick up some support from somewhere

when you need it, not always having to wait until the next meeting, so I guess that's the link I have had with ____, whether people need to have a paired person who they can do that with, they might, like ____ and I, already have that .

(Head teacher 4 interviewed in current study)

Evaluating the Group

Whilst the more obvious advantages of being in the group were readily and clearly articulated by group members, a number of participants stated that the deeper benefits of the sessions were almost intangible and the benefit was in experience rather than the outcomes. Indeed some interviewees appeared almost dismissive to engage in a discussion about evaluation of the sessions:

It's possible to articulate the advantages of it, making judgments about the outcomes is something completely different. Let's look at the issue we talked about at ____, we could talk at the next meeting about how effective it was on the Head teacher with the junior school whose issue it was. I think sometimes we need to be careful with outcomes, sometimes it just gets you going through the processes of articulating the issue that you've got, of listening to the experience of the other people – that's worthwhile in itself because what it often does is start thought processes going and when you're in a school all the time and not rubbing shoulders with other Head teachers, I think the benefit is the fact that you are rubbing shoulders with other Head teachers and listening to other Head teachers whereas when you are in a school it's a lonely profession and if things start going wrong you really are by yourself. I think this group particularly is beneficial because you are not by yourself.

(Head teacher 1 interviewed in current study)

Discussions around using an evaluation system were met with comments that the only way to see if new groups would work was to set them up and see:

If we reviewed what's happened in our own group, we'd be saying whatever you did and whatever approaches you've made, it's worked, we've got a group and it's still meeting so I'm tempted to say that worked, so is there any reason why it shouldn't elsewhere? We don't know until we've tried that, so we'll try and think of an alternative way of establishing a group for all those other clusters where

The merits of evaluating the group and using the findings to develop and maintain the group were discussed along with fears that this might prove difficult, especially in evaluating the more intangible benefits of the group. It was clear that all of the group members felt that they had benefitted just from the experience of being in the group not just from the outcomes. It was clear that some individuals felt that the group was working well but they were not part of it (MacKenzie and Tschuschke (1993). This is consistent with the research that has shown that an individual's sense of belonging and their appraisal of how well the entire group is working can be quite different (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005:55). Factors that strengthen the group's sense of containment may be encouraged by holding group meetings on the same day and at the same time each week and ending the meetings on time. In this way group members would not necessarily feel that their emotions dictate the 'shape' and structure of the meetings, as well as its atmosphere and content, Obholzer, 1994).

There are a number of potential pitfalls in using group supervision and these can be addressed through careful planning at the start of the programme. Some of these have been highlighted already whilst others are outlined in the following chapter.

Summary

In this section both the questionnaire data and the findings of the interviews with the participants in the peer supervision group were presented. The questionnaire data indicated that in general the peer support group sessions were regarded as: useful, a good use of time, something that participants would be prepared to set time aside for; a reasonably high priority and having a positive knock on effect for colleagues, pupils and parents in their school communities.

The findings of the interview data were presented as descriptive accounts of the views of the participants and include extracts of representative texts to illustrate the points that are made. There was also an attempt to interpret and comment on these findings.

The nine categories that emerged from the participants' responses were:

- i. Difficulties experienced by head teachers**
- ii. Experiences of being in the group**
- iii. The individual benefits**
- iv. The wider benefits**
- v. The barriers and limitations**
- vi. Factors which might promote the ongoing success and survival of the group**
- vii. Paired versus group work**
- viii. The role of the educational psychologist**
- ix. Additional comments**