

**The University of Sheffield**

**Thesis**

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

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## **CHAPTER 5 – LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the limitations of the study including 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. There is also a brief critique of the group process including its limitations in only being useful to those who choose to take part; issues around attendance and the structure of the group. The discussion then considers further work that might be done following this research. This includes work with different types of groups and methods of evaluating the group and alternative paradigms that might be explored. The role of the Educational Psychologist in facilitating work of this nature is discussed along with suggestions for the promotion of containment within individuals and schools where the EP can work as an Applied Psychologist. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main findings and implications of the study.

### **2. The Current Study**

#### ***(i) The Psychodynamic Perspective.***

By adopting a psychoanalytical approach I attempted to consider the complexity of the emotional lives of the Head teachers through the use of theoretical structures and relations that are not directly observable but lie behind the surface of social 'reality'. As one intention was to explore why some Head teachers appeared to have difficulties where others did not appear to, despite sharing similar situations and concerns, I considered that this may be at least in part due to the personal, internal psychological 'structures' within the participants. I believed that the psychoanalytical perspective might uncover such 'structures' which other epistemological approaches and methodologies may have left undiscovered. Whilst data gathered from different epistemological foundations may have identified some knowledge and understanding of social structures, mechanisms or relationships I felt that they may have failed to access any areas which may exist independently of our knowledge of them.

The use of the psychoanalytic Free- Association Narrative interview technique did help to explore the defensive use of conversational devices and sources of possible anxieties, defences and issues that might otherwise have remained hidden. Concerns around the static nature of the concepts and structures of psychoanalysis being: separate from social relations (Wetherell, (2003); its focus on 'inner-psychological and individually demarcated reality' reproducing individual/social dualism (Sondergaard, (2002:448), and its positioning of people by the theoretical structures used to understand them (Parker, 2005), were overcome to some degree by triangulating the responses from the individual participants and comparing their different perspectives. When these different perspectives were put together with the researcher's perspective it was possible to gain some insight into a shared social context on which to consider the individual responses. However, the Free Association Narrative Interview did not go far enough beyond the 'individual' research subjects who presents through the spoken word as self-directed, consistent, rational and largely autonomous. Neither was it adequate for inquiring into embodied subjectivity either (something else that psychoanalysis is good at). As the Head teachers' difficulties often involved difficult relationships with other individuals in their working lives, it would have been useful to have gained an insight into the thoughts, experiences and perspectives of members of their staff, local authority officers, parents of pupils in the school, pupils, governors and other members of the school and local community. Had this been achieved, the different views could have been triangulated to produce a broader account and would have revealed a greater range of individual 'realities' which may have helped to reveal a wider and more general 'reality'.

As the researcher I was part of what was being studied and hence the act of researching affected what was being researched. Although conventional research regards the emphasis that Psychoanalysis places on how knowledge is mediated through the subjectivity - of the knower (analyst) as a problem, in this study this subjectivity was viewed as a resource (Parker, 2005:117). In attempting to understand the relationship between the interviewees' ambiguous representations and their experiences (Bunge, 1993; Watkins, 1994:5), it was necessary to learn about their experiences in the outer world which was achieved during the interviews. The interviewees' experiences of the outer world could not be understood without knowledge of the way in which their inner world allowed them to experience the outer world, and by acting as another 'psychosocial' subject (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000), I was able to draw on my own subjectivity to give an account whilst still remaining 'objective'. I believe that the

personal 'investment' I had in the material that I was studying played a major role in the quality of the research. I believe that my interpretive claims may be grounded through an analysis of the 'counter-transference' information that was generated through comparing the different responses the interviewees gave to the responses of previous participants (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005).

By attempting to articulate the experiences of the Head teachers or represent them in terms of psychoanalytical concepts it is possible that some degree of damage was done to their 'truths' (Carruth 1995). In attempting to unpick the complexities and intricacies of the Head teachers' experiences, facts, values, representations and actions the 'real' of their stories may have been damaged or lost.

Although I was not dealing with extreme examples of trauma in the accounts from the Head teachers, the interview transcripts contained individuals' experiences which for some had anxiety-provoking elements. From the outset I accepted that in recording and analysing the Head teachers' experiences and accounts I was not attempting to establish 'absolute truths' but rather trying to explore and understand a range of possible realities which may or may not have been constructed by psychoanalytical phenomena. I accepted that the psychoanalytical perspective was only one of several perspectives I could have adopted.

If the structures and concepts of psychoanalysis are merely created symbolic processes and representations as Schostak (2002) argues; there are as many symbolic worlds as imagination can conceive and the question of the methodological and epistemological nature 'representation' in the context of 'something' which is being targeted as a 'real' that exists independently of the representation remains. Pragmatic critical realism distinguishes between the natural world and the social world by arguing that whilst the natural world can be measured and statistically analysed the social world requires a different approach as is not that simplistic as it is "*messy*" (Schostak, 2002) and open to interpretation by many individuals. Therefore future work in this area should consider using a range of techniques and analytical tools. Future studies in this area should perhaps seek to explore why and how work place relationships exist and function and they should not be seen as static and taking place in a vacuum, but as subject to change which is continuous and where individuals interpret, understand and behave in a variety of ways.

The social constructionist concept of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), describes

how people and groups interacting together in a social system, over time, develop concepts or mental representations of each other's actions, which eventually become habituated into reciprocal roles played by the individuals in relation to each other. When these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalised. In this process meaning is embedded in society as knowledge and people's conception (and belief) of what reality is becomes embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Social reality is therefore said to be socially constructed. 'Constructivism', understood in regard to human psychology implies the impossibility of absolute truth: people's understanding of their psychology shifts with the ideas to which they are exposed. Social constructionism makes this anti-positivist claim even stronger through arguing that knowledge is negotiated and invented – 'constructed' – out of ideas and assumptions made available by the social and interpersonal context. (Frosh, and Saville Young, (2007).

Although there was an attempt to use a multimethodological approach by using questionnaires in addition to the free narrative interviews, the psychoanalytical paradigm was dominant and as such was possibly limiting in this study. Reed (2001:9) argues that reality cannot be accessed by ignoring the '*complexity of history, language, ideology and discourse*' and Joseph (1998:9) states that a multimethodological approach "*helps facilitate an analysis of a complex and contradictory social whole and its different structures and mechanisms*" suggesting that it would be an ideal 'tool' to use while attempting to understand the complex areas covered in this study. Any future multimethodological approach to data gathering should therefore allow information to be collected from a variety of sources using contributory rather than conflicting methodological techniques. This methodological triangulation, according to Denzin (1970: 313) overcomes any bias which is inherent within a single method approach and adds value to the theoretical debate. Smith (1975) adds that:

*We are really like blind men led into an arena and asked to identify an entity (say an elephant) by touching one part of that entity (say a leg). Certainly we might make better guesses if we could pool the information of all the blind men, each of whom has touched a different part of the elephant.*

(Smith (1975:273)

Denzin (1970:297) concludes that the use of a multi-methodological approach increases the validity and reliability of data gathered whilst Hammersely and Atkinson (1994), add that this approach strengthens research findings through the combination of

information sources and analytical approaches. As such, any methodology, epistemology and ontology used in future studies in this area should be drawn from a variety of sources and backgrounds so that the 'whole elephant' may be viewed rather than just glimpse parts which may lead to a misunderstanding of situations and structures. Essentially, future studies should put into place the necessary structures to promote dialogue through which the frozen social identities emanating from the formation of contextually specific 'me's' are de-constructed through the challenge derived from alternative views on 'reality' obtained through different subject positions (Schostak, 2002).

As Schostak, (2002) states :

*The pupil views the world different from the teacher. The accountant measures cost differently from the philosopher. The differences matter and dialogue facilitates not consensus but the creative production of alternatives.*

(Schostak, 2002:8)

In order to explore the cultural and social resources that future participants' draw on in their accounts further work might consider some of the significant advances made by discursive social psychology. Such studies might consider openness to interpretations grounded in an understanding of the social as something that permeates apparently 'individual' phenomena, (Frosh and Saville Young (2007:111). Therefore a syncretism of discursive social psychology and psychoanalysis may indicate a shared perception of the constructive role of language or communication as the medium through which people compose themselves. In this way both schools of thought assume constructionist theories of meaning, in which reality is always to some extent 'made up' discursively.

In order to further investigate the complex unconscious processes interacting with the research work, which may have encouraged some ways of doing things, whilst inhibiting others, future studies might also seek to engage in a dialogic encounter involving an interpretation of the researcher's own activity and checking out the impact of this interpretation on their understanding (Frosh, and Saville Young, 2007: pp. 112-113).

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 have compromised its appropriateness in the analysis of the interview material. Whilst the interview data obtained is rich in details concerning attitudes and thoughts, it is relatively sparse in relation to background features and fantasies. Therefore in future studies more focused ways of gathering personal biographical material may be necessary. These studies might favour respondents' in-depth accounts of their own perceptions of their experience rather than seeking merely 'factual' information.

Whilst other theoretical approaches might have been useful had they been adopted in preference to, or alongside the methods used in this study, their approach used in isolation would not have accounted for interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that may have contributed to their problems. Whilst a systems approach may have indicated difficulties in the systems used in individual schools, the local authority, the local community and other agencies; or cognitive behavioural, personal construct and solution focused approaches may have helped individuals derive answers to their problems, they would not have necessarily met their emotional needs and would have been difficult to achieve in a group session. The amalgamation of a supportive group alongside a solution-focused process proved to be effective in enabling 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 group's provision of a safe environment where emotion could be expressed and contained, in collaboration with the solution-focused process that supported individuals as they derived solutions to their difficulties offered a range of practical and therapeutic benefits and was its greatest strength. Moreover, whilst other approaches are more appropriate and effective in a one-to-one setting this approach lent itself very well to a group work, but due to time constraints this was not an option. The use of a psychoanalytic approach to the analysis of the interview data enabled the difficulties of the Head teachers to be viewed as more than merely practical issues and assisted the consideration of why some 'solutions' could not help some individuals where others found relief.

### *(ii) Generalisability*

The data gathered are not adequate to make generalisable claims about Head teachers' difficulties and their experiences of being in a peer support group. From the outset it was acknowledged that the study design was decided on the basis of a set of theoretically driven research questions (as well as practical considerations) referring

exclusively to the small sample used. However, as there was a comparative element to the design which looked at similarities and differences between the different perspectives of the participants the information collected was used to speculate if and how the: opinions, causes, experiences and solutions to Head teachers' difficulties and if and how their experiences of and reactions to the peer support group might be used to help others in the future. 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.

### *(iii) Reliability and Validity*

It was acknowledged from the start that the end point of this research was to obtain various constructed versions of experience rather than full knowledge of an objective and fixed external reality. In asserting the validity of the psychoanalytic paradigm required *both* a 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. These 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 a clinical context, this was 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? However, it is acknowledged that this will never be completely satisfactory as psychoanalytic interpretation by its very nature is capable of holding wavering uncertainty even when it can be tested against the interviewee's response and even more so when it cannot; but this can be a strength if, as was attempted in this study, the stance of uncertainty and tentativeness are maintained within a context of cautious checking against the emotional tone of the research participant's talk and of the researcher's own reactions.

In providing a means to identify areas of difficulty, generate helpful practical solutions for these problems and provide an effective container for the anxieties and uncertainties experienced by the Head teachers in this study, the elements of consultation and supervision used in the context of the peer supervision group proved to be both helpful



and appropriate. The advantages of a group work approach were also apparent from the participants' interview responses, although drawbacks included: the difficulties of arranging sessions for larger groups of people; the intimidation felt by some who did not feel confident in a group; and the topics discussed in the group settings not always being relevant to all group members.

The narrative method that was selected as means of collecting interview data was effective in producing a wide range of rich and varied data and provided a common theme that cut across psychodynamic, cognitive, social, humanistic, transpersonal and integral psychology. However, as Mischler (1995:117), states that as there is no *'singular or best way to define and study narrative'*, in future studies there is perhaps a need to 'open up the exploration of what we may learn from other approaches as we pursue our own particular one'.

The psychoanalytic narrative 'Free Association Interview' method used to collect the interview data enabled the complexity of the emotional lives and unconscious processes of the participants to be acknowledged. It can be argued that the dependence of psychoanalytic methods on biographical and interpersonal information in order to ground interpretations means that it is inappropriate for the analysis of interview material, which may be rich in details concerning attitudes and thoughts, is relatively sparse in relation to background features and fantasies. The limitations and the superficiality of much of the data collected is acknowledged. For such psychoanalytic procedures to be appropriate, perhaps more focused ways of gathering personal biographical material may have been incorporated into the methodology which in addition to gathering merely 'factual' information should favour respondents' in-depth accounts of their own perceptions of their experience. Close observation (at various levels) of the interviewee's response to the research interview itself may also have been used to 'test' psychoanalytic interpretations.

The interpretive approach used to analyse the interview transcripts gave particular attention to the *Gestalts* and the defended subjects contained within the interview texts. In using an interpretive method to analyze the data it is acknowledged that some of the data obtained was co-produced out of subtle and largely unconscious dynamics. The dynamics of the research relationship are better understood due to the information about the researcher's impressions and feelings in and around the 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 helped to create an understanding of the 'whole text'. However, it was acknowledged that the respondents could not be totally known, especially not in the course of one hour long interview. By placing myself within the methodology in this way whilst carrying out the interviews I was able to maintain an emotional link with the data produced. More empirical techniques may have decontextualised the respondents' accounts of their often complex and varied experiences, isolating them as discrete incidents removed from their contextual references and failing to reflect the rich variety of their experiences.

Contrary to the position of positivist science, the situations that were analysed in this study are not suitable for replication. Meanings were not just unique to the person involved they were also unique to the relational encounter (though, paradoxically, partly consistent over time as well). The reliability of the evidence generated in this study using interpretative methods may be checked but never guaranteed and if the interpretations and analyses offered are studied by others 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 placed against the available data. This argument is supported by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). In order to assist in the production of the respondent's voice and not to assume the stance of interpreter, it was necessary to give sufficient attention to both detail and contradictions. Any similarities between myself and respondent were noted. 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 is acknowledged. The analysis was taken only as far as evidence permitted and where this was lacking, uncertainty was acknowledged and admitted in the creation of methodologically, empirically and theoretically convincing accounts rather than 'truths' about interviewees. The data were approached openly and even-handedly, judgments were only made when they could be supported by evidence, and evidence was not ignored when it suited. By acknowledging my own responses to the data, putting myself alongside the respondents, using my own self-knowledge and familiar difficulties, I was assisted in understanding their inconsistencies, confusions and anxieties.

The use of descriptive findings may elicit criticisms such as: (1) merely presenting the details and structure of experience does not amount to articulating a theory; (2) arriving at categories of meaning and experience does not articulate or interpret their psychological meaning from the perspective of individual actors; (3) simply reporting categories of experience and meaning does not provide for an analysis of social dynamics or process, nor does it answer specific questions about or explore the theoretical and practical implications of the data (Willig, 2001b). However, the study did not merely rely on a loose presentation of themes derived from the data in the manner of abstract empiricism, as if the data merely speak for themselves, analytical framing or reading of the data was provided. In this way a balance for the demands for detailed description and analytical/theoretical explanation of participants' experiences and meanings was achieved.

In a final defence of psychoanalysis and in particular object-relations theory, when the theoretical underpinnings of this paradigm were presented to a number of groups of Head teachers including those in the pilot study, the current study and a group following this study, at introductory sessions (see appendices I, II and X), the participants related enthusiastically to the concepts being presented and many individuals came to further sessions as a consequence of this.

#### *(iv) Alternative Methodologies*

In conducting qualitative research of this nature it may be helpful for future studies to make decisions and choices about methodology in the light of an increasing comparative, possibly critical, awareness and understanding of a range of qualitative perspectives and methods based within and beyond psychology (eg. discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenological theory and method, voice, relational psychology). The implementation of different theories within psychology used in combination with other approaches as part of a flexible toolkit of methods has attracted a good deal of interest in social science internationally in recent years. This interest in developing principled and practical forms of 'methodological combining' will further encourage researchers not to think of methods as hermetically sealed (eg. Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2000; Todd, Nerlich, McKeown and Clarke, 2004; Henwood and Lang, 2005; Moran-Ellis, 2006).

### ***(v) Recruitment***

Although like the pilot study, group membership in this study was entirely voluntary the recruitment process was via a letter from a Recruitment Strategy Officer from the Local Authority rather than being an invitation from a familiar Educational Psychologist. This had implications for the way in which the flyer advertising the group was worded and caused suspicion and confusion for several recipients. In addition, the flyer was sent out late in the term which meant that a number of potential members were not able to attend due to prior commitments. This series of events had an obvious impact on the numbers of Heads who attended the group and perhaps on those who were put off by the tone of the flyer which could have been interpreted as either a direction to join a group for failing Head teachers or an event that had no relevance to the individual concerned.

### **3. Further Work**

#### ***Different Types of Group***

The decision to limit the group exclusively to Head teachers was made to avoid some of the previously documented problems of working with groups made up of individuals from a range of other professions. However, the presence of some of these individuals may well have offered a wide range of experience and expertise that may have been applied to some of the difficulties experienced by the Head teachers in the group.

Any further work in this area should consider a number of areas omitted in this study: These include working with different kinds of groups and including an on-going process of evaluation. The process used in this study could be used with a variety of groups. These may include, newly qualified teachers, SENCOs, Deputy Head teachers, Secondary Head teachers, local authority officers and any others belonging to discrete groups who may feel isolated and who might benefit from this approach. As both the pilot study group and the current study group contained a majority of individuals who were familiar to others in the group, it would be useful to set up a group where the members had no previous knowledge of each other prior to the establishment of the group. The experiences of these group members could then be compared with those of this or similar studies to see if familiarity has an effect. There is some suggestion that individuals are attracted to this type of work because of 'personal qualities' and whilst it would be difficult to recruit a range of personality 'types' and retain the voluntary basis

for membership of the group, it would be interesting to hear the views of those who did not choose to join the current group in a similar group. Whilst one of the central tenants of this group was that it should be exclusively for Head teachers, it would be useful to know how a group containing a variety of individuals representing different agencies would react in such a group. It could be that the individuals in the group may become so defensive that no effective work could be done. Alternatively, the different agencies could gain insights into the thoughts and experiences of those they interact with and a greater understanding of each others difficulties could be achieved.

### ***Facilitating the Group***

It is important that if the group does not have a designated leader then a facilitator is appointed who can: make prior preparation for each session; engage in active proactive promotion of the group to other prospective members and provide ongoing support for new members; maintain the momentum of the group through organisation and effective communication between group members to promote attendance at the sessions. Consistent with the theories of Bion (1966), there is also a need for a Chair who can guard against the corruption of the established process used in the group by enforcing adherence to this process. Due to time pressures and constraints group sessions must be organised well in advance so that members can fit the sessions in around their other commitments. The ongoing success and survival of the group may be facilitated through the promotion of group members' belief in the efficacy of the group and the cohesiveness of the group. This may be assisted by encouraging members to recognise and acknowledge their shared goals, culture, and knowledge of the locality. The selection of group members is also important and whether or not the group is made up exclusively of Head teachers or of others must be discussed and agreed by all concerned. An initial training session should be held where the clear structure of the sessions, the process and the authority of the Chair must be made clear. In addition, intermittent refresher sessions and ongoing evaluation must be built into the ongoing programme. A facility for paired work to offer support to group members between group sessions should also be considered and a process to select pairs of individuals to work together must be devised. In addition, the process to be used during paired work must be designed and training given. The pairs should then be encouraged to set time aside for their sessions and the facilitators should ensure that at least the first sessions has been scheduled by both parties.

## ***Evaluation***

Although this study has used evaluation at various times throughout the course of the programme, this was for the purposes of evaluating its effectiveness as an intervention both for my own purposes and for the local authority who commissioned this work. However, it is essential for some form of evaluation to be used as an ongoing process built into any future group-work programme. The relationship between group cohesiveness and the maintenance of membership has implications for the group as a whole and therefore a means of evaluating the group would offer a significant means of maintaining this relationship. If this were to be built into programme itself it could provide valuable and constructive feedback about certain aspects of the development of a group such as: how clear are the goals; how much trust and openness is in the group? how sensitive and perceptive are group members? is there a sense of belonging and loyalty (Douglas 1976). Conversely, Ganzarain (1989) cautions that evaluation of this kind can mobilise unexplored negative transference toward the 'bad mother' group. Thus a process of 'vilification' (rather than idealisation) may take place, casting serious doubt upon the efficacy of such evaluative questions. However, Vinogradov and Yalom (1989) emphasise the importance of 'self-monitoring' in a group. A self-monitoring group learns to assume responsibility for its own functioning. In addition, regular documentation of group processes and contents provides valuable material not only for evaluating the progress of the group but also for making sense of the various group experiences, consultation, supervision, planning and preparation of next steps.

Depending on the goals of the evaluation procedure, the researcher can choose from a variety of scales to assess a variety of factors. These scales include self-evaluative scales, scales completed by significant others in the member's world, scales completed by a group facilitator or an independent observer, or a combination of the above. The Repertory Grid Technique (Fransella, 1970; Watson, 1970) offers potential in evaluating the subjective experiences of group members and informs about the way the system is evolving and about its limitations and possibilities. If this is done before and after the group's course, the coefficient between the two grids can be measured and taken as a parameter of dynamic change. The resulting series of grids can be analyzed and compared to evaluate changes in group views of individuals and the views of each individual at different times. A 'person perception score' (Fransella, 1970) may be derived, because each group member has ranked all the other group members with respect to each of the 'constructs'. Thus, if you want to find out whether an individual

sees themselves as others see them, you simply look at their ranking for themselves and compare this with others' rankings of them. A 'background grid' for each member may also be constructed in which the 'elements' could be self and significant others in the member's world. The group grid method not only provides a wealth of information about changes in the way that group members construe group effects over time (when the grid is administered on a number of occasions), but also makes it possible to derive a score which provides some idea, quantitatively, of how each member sees the others and of how each member perceives 'significant others' in their world. Grid analyses can provide many psychodynamically relevant measures. The mean 'element' distance of self from others in a grid can be used to derive an Identification Score. Measures of change between occasions indicate how far the member's view of the group have reconstructed and can be qualified by the 'In Group Reconstruction Score'. Similarly, other aspects of group processes such as 'tendency towards consensual construing', 'group involvement', 'seem to have changed', and so forth, may be explored and quantified in this way (Ryle and Lipshitz, 1976).

Alternatively, a measure of functioning levels using valid rating scales before, during and after group work can provide useful information on behavioural, attitudinal and other psychological changes through the group process. Ryle (1976) emphasised that an ideal research record of a group should include: A satisfactory categorisation of members in terms of relevant dimensions, of: symptomatology, social adjustment, psychodynamic status and personality; Members' definitions of their problems, aims and self-ratings in terms of these definitions repeated at intervals throughout and after group work; definition of the group leader's (if applicable) aims for each member with ratings of achievements at appropriate intervals; an objective account of the group processes and relevant contents; and accumulated subjective accounts of the group experience from the group members.

However, some of the above dimensions and factors are not relevant in group work of this type and might miss the point of the psychodynamic approach entirely. In particular, terms such as 'symptomatology' and 'social adjustment' are not appropriate and as there is no group leader/worker, no aims would be set for individual group members. More useful to this kind of work would be the use of Self-report Questionnaires which may be used alone or in conjunction with any of the above. These are particularly helpful in assessing self-image. When an individual is assigned a task of evaluating themselves, whatever the method of evaluation, they inevitably make

reference to a system of central meanings that they have about themselves and their relations to the world about them, this may be referred to as the self concept. Self image is an efficient measurement to evaluate personality. It is a criterion of the quality of personality functioning (Fitts, 1973). Many studies have found that this measure can discriminate between adjusted and maladjusted people who were tested on the basis of behavioural criteria or different personality tests (Fitts, 1973). Self image is a central concept in all theories of personality ranging from the dynamic approach, which perceives the self as an efficient organiser and preserver of the balance between the dynamic energy systems that are active in the individual, through the humanistic approach, which emphasises the influence of the environment on personal growth, to the cognitive social approach, which focuses on the cognitive aspects of the self. However, if the group became too too scrutinized other problems may emerge such as group members adopting different roles, the group adopting a purpose different from its primary function and rivalries and competition emerging as members strive to be recognised.

### *Different Paradigms*

This study has used a mixed method approach to data collection and interpretation, utilizing narrative interviewing methods and psychodynamic interpretive methods, in addition to questionnaire data. As discussed previously, future studies in this area might involve further exploration of narrative inquiry with its roots in a social constructionist perspective providing a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive view that incorporates both a rich description of the socio-cultural (discursive) environment *and* the participatory and creative inner world of lived experience providing social constructionist and phenomenological perspectives (Hiles and Cermak, 2007:151). Narrative provides a common theme that cuts across psychodynamic, cognitive, social, humanistic, transpersonal and integral psychology in terms of both research and practice, (Hiles and Cermak 2007:152), and it therefore has potential to be used more extensively in further research.

As previously mentioned (see Methodology chapter) grounded theory as an interactive and interpretive method might allow future researcher to interact not only with the research participants but also with the resulting data about them which is interpreted through successive levels of analysis therefore it may offer a useful framework for future qualitative research of this nature.



Alternatively, as social science methodology has been based on the idea of the representative sample and psychoanalytic knowledge is based firstly on the single case, if the psychoanalytic paradigm is to be pursued in this area it may be that ontological and epistemological choices may lead other researchers towards more in-depth analysis of relatively few cases.

## CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

It is clear from this study that whilst some Head teachers appear not to have the same problems that others do, in most cases they share common concerns around current situations or have experience of similar issues in the past. These include: feelings of isolation; specific difficulties relating to specific contexts such as 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. All of the Head teachers had experienced a similar range of problems over time and rarely were their difficulties unique or novel. There is a common theme of isolation - all have common fears but each has different issues at different times.

The differential factor is the manner of dealing with these problems and the Head teachers' personal attitudes towards and their perceptions of these difficulties. In most cases the Heads had taken logical and practical decisions to manage the situations they had often been left with feelings of guilt, isolation, disapproval or uncertainty as to the wisdom of their actions due to imagined or real 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. It is these feelings that may be the source of distress and discomfort and the group helps to contain them and provide a positive way forward. Some Head teachers access available sources of support and advice without a second thought whereas others will not engage with them and treat them with suspicion and resentment. This is often dependant on the nature of the relationships between the Head teachers and the individuals who are offering the support. The nature of these relationships varies between the different individuals and for some, they are so negative they cannot be accessed as a form of support, and may even present a threat. 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, they all question their own competence and become defensive when discussing decisions they have made to greater

and lesser degrees.

Specific comments from the Head teachers during the interviews following the group sessions suggest that:

- Existing structures in the local authority do not provide enough emotional support and leave Head teachers feeling isolated, overwhelmed and unsure about procedures and skills that they needed to work effectively.
- The peer support group provides the type and quality of support that is required. The higher proportion of positive statements to negative statements about this process is a strong indicator that the peer supervision groups are of value to the Head teachers involved.
- The group is inclusive as each person is able to contribute to the range of expertise and experience needed to address the problems raised.
- There is a shared understanding of the role of the Head teacher and the context of working in primary schools.
- Some group members initially fear that 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.
- The group allows the normalisation of problems so that individual Head teachers see that 'it is not just them' and that others are facing similar difficulties and challenges.
- The sessions allow the Head teachers to keep problems in proportion and develop their problem-solving abilities.
- The group meets common needs such as; decreased feelings of isolation, promotes self-confidence, and develops feelings of self-efficacy as problem-solving skills increase.
- The group has a supportive function and is different from anything experienced previously or already established as it offers an emotional component as participants experience feelings of personal warmth, support and affirmation.
- Working with others in the group helps to establish co-operative relationships between individuals based on shared concerns or situations.
- The group provides individuals with reflection and this promotes self-appraisal to help with development of identity and self-esteem.
- 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 is testament to the level of trust and mutual respect established by the group.
- An important part of the process of developing trust is having the roles of supervisor and supervisee rotate around the group.
- The Educational Psychology Service draws upon its expertise of working in a therapeutic way and on experience of participating in and running peer supervision.
- Educational Psychologists have a potential role in contributing to this kind of work;
- The way in which Educational Psychologists are deployed by the Local Authority should be considered so that they are able carry out work of this nature;
- Educational Psychologists have skills and expertise to facilitate and contribute to work of this nature.

The group can be seen to conform to many of the characteristics of effective consultation in that it is: based upon equal relationships; characterised by mutual trust and open communication; uses joint approaches to problem identification; uses the pooling of personal resources to identify and select strategies that will have some probability of solving the problem that have been identified; and shares responsibility in the implementation and evaluation of the program that has been initiated. In addition the group helped to solve the current work problems of the help-seeker who profited from the relationship in such a way that future problems may be handled more sensitively and skilfully.

The advantages of group work are also evident in that the peer supervision group: helps to promote change; parallels the wider social environment and encourages members to generalise skills learned in the group outside of it; addresses common needs; provides an opportunity for sharing of emotional experiences and experimenting with new skills and behaviours; enables members to become more self aware rather than reactive to a hostile environment; changes behaviour through vicarious learning; cultivates a sense of belonging; enables participants to discuss problems without interruptions, in an atmosphere of trust and concern; enables participants to experience a sense of community; reduces feelings of isolation; offers support in practical and

psychological ways for staff under stress; provides many different angles to problems and raised the possibility of more solutions due to the range of experience amongst the members of the group; has a normalising effect and helps individuals feel less isolated and incompetent; provides a positive response to solving problems rather than just expressing concern in an unfocussed way. The 'therapeutic factors' resulting from human interactions in the group include: an instillation of hope; a feeling of universality; the imparting of information; feelings of altruism; the development of socializing techniques; imitative behaviour; interpersonal learning; group cohesiveness; catharsis and existential factors.

Hawkins and Shohet's (1989), three main functions of supervision were achieved through:

- The Educative or Formative function of the group which facilitates the development of themembers' knowledge and skills and allows reflection of the main content and process of the work undertaken. The transmission of professional knowledge, values and skills from the other group members enables the participants to learn about their individual strengths through the reflections in the group. The group also developes congruence between educational and pedagogic theory and practice and enhances and evaluates professional competencies.
- The Supportive or Restorative function of the group helps participants to deal with the emotional aspects of working with people. The group provides a space for members to reflect on the issues that arise from their work and helps them to integrate what they are doing, feeling and thinking. It provides valuable support after stressful situations and leads to an increase in feelings of competence and feelings of being able to cope with difficult types of work. Group members are validated as people as well as a workers.
- The Managerial or Normative function of the group provides a mechanism for the members to monitor the quality of their professional services. It provides an opportunity for participants to compare notes with other Head teachers facing similar challenges. Through the encouragement of pro-active thinking and planning about their work participants are helped to ensure the quality of the work undertaken and allowed to develop high quality practice.

Other perceived potential benefits of the peer supervision group include: an increased

reflectivity towards work; increased ability of the members to work autonomously with more educative supervision leading to less need for management supervision; and an improved ability to relate to others in their school and local communities.

The peer supervision group was therefore 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 individual group members' own resources were maximised to work more effectively. This gave the Head teachers opportunities to explore and learn from practical, experiential and theoretical elements of their own professional practice and that of other group members (Educative function). It also provided an opportunity for discussion of potentially controversial issues, or those with anxiety-provoking connotations (Supportive and Managerial functions). The quality of the Head teachers' ability to manage their own schools (Managerial function) was enhanced by using supervision as a way of exploring practical solutions that could then be tried through 'practical experimentation'. In addition the emotional health of the Head teachers was maintained and improved and the levels of perceived stress were reduced (Supportive function).

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 this sense, it places psychologists in the school improvement role rather than the traditional special educational needs role. The potential for EPs to use their positions of trust 'outside' of the realms of the Local Authority and to work more creatively outside their traditional role 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.

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;

3. 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.

4. Suggested that complex intra and interpersonal issues may have contributed to the distress of the individuals concerned.

### *Personal Reflections*

In looking back on this work I have some amazement that so much material has emerged from such a very simple idea that was initially a knee-jerk response to a local problem that was causing me personal anxiety and for which I could not see an obvious way forward. The process used in the peer support groups developed through the application of a number of approaches and practices that were familiar and commonplace to me as an EP and became something extremely powerful and revealing. When working within my own authority I assumed that part of the success of the group was due to familiarity between myself and the Head teachers involved and that perhaps they had 'humoured' me somewhat in making the group a success. Therefore when I was invited to set up a similar group in a neighbouring authority I was more than a little hesitant as I did not know how well the group process and my rationale would be received in 'foreign territory'. I was also aware that my position in the process had changed from being a familiar practitioner going about my daily work within my own 'patch' to that of an outsider looking in and observing the participants. I also felt more than a little trepidation as to how I might be received and feared that I would be regarded as some 'wishy-washy' outsider who had no idea about the situation in their authority. However, very soon during the initial training day I felt that I had achieved a rapport with the Heads. This was partly due to the co-presentation with an EP from within the Heads' own authority who was clearly very popular with them all and recognition from those in the group that I was talking about things that were of real concern to them. Indeed I was taken aback by the force of agreement when the outcomes from my own authority were presented and I was somewhat shocked by similarities with my own authority and the intensity of the Head teachers' expressed emotions when discussing the issues. I was reassured when I realized that the challenges and issues raised by the Heads in the host authority were essentially the same ones as in my own.

Having been initially concerned that the Heads would not carry out the groups and that interest would wane once I had departed I was very encouraged to receive reports that the group was meeting and that interest was high. When I returned to interview the individual Head teachers each one was very different but over all I felt that I had hit

upon something that was missing and that there was a lot of potential work to be done in this area in the future. When I analysed and offered interpretations for the data I was even more encouraged and understood how this work might influence my approach to my own practice in the future. When I was invited by yet another authority to speak at a Head teachers' conference I presented my initial training day information (see Appendix I) which includes the theoretical underpinnings of psychodynamic theory and this was received very well (see evaluation Appendix X) and with true recognition and support for the theories that were presented. Not only did this feedback make me feel more confident in applying familiar techniques and strategies in more creative ways but I am more aware of underlying inter and intra- personal dynamics which might account for different approaches and attitudes to different situations and relationships and how this can manifest itself at the individual and the institutional level. This awareness will influence my work in the future and will form a significant part of my appraisal of a situation or context and will influence how I might proceed.

I stated at the beginning of this study that although I am not a therapist, my work as an Educational Psychologist often requires me to work with people who are experiencing stress or difficult circumstances that are placing high demands on their emotional and mental resources. As my primary motivation for doing this work originated 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, 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 was extremely helpful. From the responses of all those participants who have contributed to this study, the pilot study and further work I have done in this area I will most definitely consider the concepts of psychodynamic theory when working with individuals who are experiencing anxiety provoking challenges at work. In addition, rather than avoiding a 'therapeutic' role I will endeavour to apply these principles to act as a starting point for understanding the individuals and their situations where appropriate. I have learned from this study that instead of avoiding areas which cause personal anxiety and which are not traditionally within my remit by working with individuals and helping them to contain their distress a more productive outcome may be achieved as well as a more trusting and open ongoing relationship. Power (2006) argues the case for psychoanalysis and its related concepts as follows:

*What psychoanalysis gave therapeutic practice is its focus on the therapeutic*



*relationship; if there is one fault that can be levelled at almost all other types of therapy and their practitioners, it is the problem of working in the therapeutic relationship, which leads even to an avoidance of such work of almost phobic proportions.....Time and time again, empathic therapists become overwhelmed by the feelings of despair, anxiety and hopelessness that their clients successfully make them feel; a repeating theme of supervision has been how to help therapists use these empathic feelings as a starting point for providing hope and understanding for their clients.....The literature demonstrates powerfully how important the therapeutic relationships is for outcome (eg. Roth and Fonagy, 2005), yet in this age of the shibboleth of evidence –based practice, very few of the non-analytical therapeutic approaches have an explicit model of the therapeutic relationship and how to work with it in therapy. The transfer of emotions and impulses from significant early relationships onto the therapist provides part of the story of what happens in the therapeutic relationship, but the interlinking of attachment theory, adult interpersonal functioning, and emotion regulation has some fascinating challenges ahead that should impact on all therapeutic practice.*

(Power, 2006)

The above quote summarises what I feel the possibilities the psychoanalytical paradigm offers me and others in future work when helping to support individuals who are experiencing stress or difficult circumstances that are placing high demands on their emotional and mental resources and which may stem from difficult intra or interpersonal relationships.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

### **Anxieties Arising from Nature of Work**

Anxieties arising from the nature of work often lead to the unconscious organisation of work to avoid the primary task and defend members of the institution against anxiety.

### **Basic Assumption Mentality**

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)**

In the Basic Assumption Dependency (baD) position 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. Examples of such baD behaviour may include the actions of a committee that repeatedly postpones difficult items on the agenda, rather than addressing them. The group leader may be absent or even dead, provided the illusion that they have the solution can be sustained.

### **Basic Assumption Fight-Flight (baF)**

In the Basic Assumption Fight-Flight (baF) position the assumption 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. For instance, instead of considering how best to organise its work, a team may spend most of the time in meetings worrying about rumours of organisational change. This provides a spurious sense of togetherness, while also serving to avoid facing the difficulties of the work itself. Alternatively,

such a group may spend its time protesting angrily, without actually planning any specific action to deal with the perceived threat to its service.

### **Basic Assumption Pairing (baP)**

The Basic Assumption Pairing (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. The group is focused entirely on the future, but as a defence against the difficulties of the present. In the case of a work team, this may take the form of an idea that improved premises would provide an answer to the group's problems, or that all will be well after the next annual study day. The group is in fact not interested in working practically towards this future, but only in sustaining a vague sense of hope as a way out of its current difficulties. Typically decisions are either not taken or left extremely vague. After the meeting, members are inevitably left with a sense of disappointment and failure, which is quickly superseded by a hope that the next meeting will be better.

### **British School of Psychoanalysis**

The Independent Group of Psychoanalysts in Britain has made important contributions to the theory of objects relations, countertransference, early environment, regression and female sexuality.

In the 1920s and 1930s two divergent theoretical lines developed - one in Vienna, the birthplace of psychoanalysis, the other in London where Melanie Klein had moved from Berlin. In spite of attempts to reconcile them, these streams came into conflict when the Freud family and some of their Viennese colleagues moved to London in 1938. The British Society witnessed dramatic clashes which resulted in the formation of three groups which still coexist within the Society: the Kleinians; the 'B' Group (followers of Anna Freud and the ego psychologists); and the Independents.

The Independent Group was made up of analysts who were unwilling to be identified with either orthodoxy. They constituted the majority of the members of the Society, and although they accepted many of the contributions from the Kleinian and Freudian

perspectives, they had their own body of ideas and concepts. From the very beginning, their contributions emphasized the interrelations between the analysand's and the analyst's subjective experience rather than continuing to model psychoanalysis on the natural sciences. The central conception of the group is that of object relations.

### **Containment**

Where 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. Another person or group may act as the 'container' at times when the affected individual cannot do this, for themselves (Bion, 1967). The term "container" is therefore primarily associated with the concept of "projective identification".

### **Countertransference.**

The state of mind in which other people's feelings are experienced as one's own is known as countertransference. When we recognise that our painful feelings come from projections, it is a natural response to 'return' these feelings to their source. This readily gives rise to blaming, and contributes to the ricocheting projections back and forth across groups and organisation (Halton, 1994).

### **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) to suggest an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life.

The concept of an anxious defended subject is simultaneously psychic and social. It is psychic because it is a product of a unique biography of anxiety-provoking life-events and the manner in which they have been unconsciously defended against. It is social in three ways: first, because such defensive activities affect and are affected by discourses (systems of meaning which are a product of the social world); secondly, because the unconscious defences that we describe are intersubjective processes (that is, they affect

and are affected by others); and, thirdly, because of the real events in the external, social world which are discursively and defensively appropriated.

### **The Depressive Position,**

A normal stage of development, occurring in early childhood and recurrent throughout life. A process of integration where 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 through play, normal maturation or psychoanalytic treatment.

### ***Gestalt***

On the basis of rigorous experimental research and scientific argument as well as on philosophical grounds, the Gestalt theorists Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka (1912 – 1935), opposed conceptions of science and mind that equated knowledge of nature with its effective manipulation and control. Instead, they attempted to establish dynamic principles of inherent, objective order and meaning in current language, principles of self-organization in human perception and thinking, in human and animal behavior, and in the physical world. The impact of their work ranged from cognitive science to theoretical biology and film theory.

Wertheimer, the founder of *Gestalt* psychology, objected to the way that, in his view, modern science proceeded from below to above. He believed that it was impossible to *'achieve an understanding of structured totals by starting with the ingredient parts which enter into them. On the contrary we shall need to understand the structure; we shall need to have insight into it. There is then some possibility that the components themselves will be understood'* (cited in Murphy and Kovach, 1972: 258-9). This is the principle that Hollway and Jefferson (2000:152), apply to their understanding of the 'whole' text. Wertheimer's primary law, that of 'place in context' (the significance is a function of position in a wider framework), addresses exactly 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, 1972:258). Similarly, the structuralist movement, which began in social anthropology and linguistics, emphasised that meanings could only be understood in relation to a larger whole, whether it be the

culture, the sentence or the narrative.

The theoretical principles of *Gestalt* (a whole which is more than the sum of its parts) are to suggest an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life.

### **Manic defences**

Manic defences are directed at denying that damage has occurred, and involve omnipotent fantasies about magical repair.

### **Object-Relations Theory**

Melanie Klein's work on 'object-relations' implies a model for human activity existing from birth. Klein (1946) conceptualised an unconscious inner world, present in everyone, peopled by different characters personifying differentiated parts of self or aspects of the external world (Halton, 1994).

### **Paranoid Defences**

Involve denial and projection of aggression so that it is experienced as coming from outside oneself in the form of persecutors.

### **The Paranoid-Schizoid Position**

Where splitting and projection are the predominant defences for avoiding pain and anxiety (Halton, 2004; Klein, 1946). 'Paranoid' refers to badness experienced as coming from outside oneself, and 'schizoid' refers to splitting.

### **Parataxic Distortion**

Parataxic distortion refers to an individual's tendency to distort their perceptions of others (Sullivan, 1953). A parataxic distortion occurs when one person relates to another, not on the basis of the realistic attributes of the other, but on the basis of a fantasy personification created of them by the former. Parataxic distortion differs from transference in that it refers to all the interpersonal relationships of an individual not just one. In addition, parataxic distortion not only involves the transference of attitudes

towards real-life figures of the past onto contemporary relationships but also involves the distortion of interpersonal reality in response to intrapersonal needs. However, despite these differences transference and parataxic distortion may be considered operationally identical (Yalom, 2005:22).

Transference distortions emerge from a set of deeply stored memories of early interactional experiences (Fonagy, 1999). These memories contribute to the construction of an internal working model that shapes the individual's attachment patterns throughout life (Bowlby, 1980). This internal working model, also known as a schema (Safran and Segal, 1990), consists of the individual's beliefs about themselves, the way he makes sense of relationship cues, and the ensuing interpersonal behaviour – not only his own but the type of behaviour he draws from others (Strupp and Binder, 1999).

Interpersonal (that is parataxic) distortions tend to be self-perpetuating. For example, an individual with a negative self-image may, through selective inattention or projection, incorrectly perceive another to be harsh and rejecting. Moreover, the process is compounded because that individual may then gradually develop mannerisms and behavioural traits that eventually will cause others to become, in reality, harsh and rejecting. The individual anticipates that others will respond in a certain manner and then unwittingly behaves in a manner that brings that to pass. This is supported by interpersonal research which demonstrates that one's interpersonal beliefs express themselves in behaviours that have a predictable impact on others. (Kiesler, :22)

Interpersonal distortions, in Sullivan's view are modifiable primarily through comparing one's interpersonal evaluations with those of others. Not infrequently a group member alters their distortions after checking out the other members' views of some important incident.

### **Primitive Anxieties**

Universal in mankind and stem from anything that threatens to isolate us including such things as: redundancy, retirement, migration and institutional change.

### **Projective identification**

Projective identification refers to an unconscious inter-personal interaction in which the recipients of a projection react to it in such a way that their own feelings are affected:

they unconsciously identify with the projected feelings (Klein, 1946). The state of mind in which other people's feelings are experienced as one's own is called the *countertransference*.

Projective identification frequently leads to the recipients acting out the countertransference deriving from the projected feelings. (Halton, 2004)

*In a schematic way, one can think of projective identification as a process involving the following sequence: first there is the fantasy of projecting oneself into another person and that of part taking over the person from within, then there is pressure exerted via the interpersonal interaction such that the recipient of the projection experiences pressure to think, feel, and behave in a manner congruent with the projection; finally, the projected feelings, after being "psychologically processed", by the recipient, are reinternalised by the projector.....*

(Ogden, 1979:358).

### **Splitting**

Klein (1946), argues that on an unconscious level, a fantasy exists whereby it is possible to split off part of one's personality and project it into another person. Often one situation is idealized whilst another is denigrated ('splitting'). Feelings which are deposited are often unbearable such as helplessness, panic, guilt, despair or depression.

### **Transference**

Transference is the unconscious projection of attitudes and feelings from past relationships, particularly with family, onto other persons in the present. Transference reactions are bound to occur in every person's professional as well as personal life and may limit our abilities to love and work with others.

### **Work-Generated Anxieties**

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).



## **Work Group Mentality**

The idea of the work group mentality is based on Bion's (1961) theory that 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 specific task and want to assess their effectiveness in doing it.

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## APPENDIX I

Script and slides for initial training day

### ***KEEPING HEADS ABOVE WATER***

Anne-Marie McBlain

Educational Psychologist – Staffordshire EPS

Ruth Slater

Educational Psychologist - XXXshire EPS

### **Programme**

9am	Coffee and Registration
9.30am	Welcome and Introduction (Ruth Slater)
	The Staffordshire Project (Anne-Marie McBlain)
	Activity 1 (Ruth Slater)
	Containment (Anne-Marie McBlain)
11am – 11.15am	Coffee
11.15am – 12.30	Supervision session 1
12.30 – 1.30pm	Lunch
1.30pm – 2.45pm	Supervision session 2
2.45pm – 3.00pm	Coffee
3.00pm – 3.30pm	Feedback and Plenary

*“There are too many pressures to perform – like getting one hundred percent of children to level 4 – how do you do this when you have so many 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.”*

## Concerns of Staffordshire Head Teachers

- Greater demands (from parents, public, DI, Education Authority, Government)
- Funding/resources
- More complex pupils/families
- More demanding &/or aggressive parents
- Unexpected Crises
- Issues with staff/personnel
- TLRs, SEF, New Initiatives, Policies etc
- Practical issues/concerns eg. Buildings/maintenance
- Constantly Raising Attainment
- Interruptions – changing priorities
- Greater feelings of ISOLATION

## Hope for Day 1

- Feel less isolated
- Reassured
- 'It's not just me'
- Time for reflection
- Hope for some control
- Support without perceived judgement
- Feeling confident to change traditional working practice
- Have some dedicated head teacher time
- Formalise systems of support

## Sources of stress experienced by pupils

- Equipment for day (eg. PE kit)
- Peer pressures
- Friendship problems
- Teachers (especially supply teachers)
- Competition
- SATS
- Parents
- Home situation
- Transition
- Out of school learning
- Homework
- Toilets
- Lunchtimes
- Learning issues

## **Sources of stress experienced by parents**

- Getting kids up and out to school
- Delivering to different schools
- Different starting times
- Safety
- Changes of routine
- Financial worries
- Homework
- Holidays
- Timings of meetings
- Employment/unemployment
- Concerns about achievement
- Transition/transfer
- Choosing the right school
- Uniform & equipment
- Family situation
- Availability of staff for sorting problems
- Understanding jargon
- Own negative experiences of school

## **Phone line**

- Too impersonal/formal
- Too far removed
- Lack of trust
- To admit a problem would be to admit failure/weakness
- No understanding of individual contexts/personnel/pupils/circumstances
- Need day-to-day &/or ongoing support
- Often need practical/informal support/help

## **Head teachers' meetings**

- Anxiety arousing
- Listening to other people complaining
- Listening to other people 'boasting'
- Competitive – have to give impression of being in control & successful
- 'Stakes' always being raised
- Don't really know people enough to let guard down

## **Reservations**

- Don't want to listen to others moaning – too negative
- Not got enough experience
- Will find it upsetting/too emotional
- Not got enough time – got too much to do
- Too 'wishy-washy'
- Nothing can be done – situation too desperate
- Don't want to admit weaknesses in front of 'competition'
- CONFIDENTIALITY issues

## **What Staffordshire Group Found Useful**

- Personal & informal – non-threatening
- Local
- Increased levels of trust
- Realized others had same problems/issues
- Understanding of individual contexts/personnel/pupils/circumstances
- Able to provide day-to-day &/or ongoing support
- Able access practical/informal support/help
- Improved personal problem-solving skills-new perspectives
- Able to define/articulate issues & get into perspective
- Reflective on own practice
- Range of ideas very helpful
- Range of experience helpful
- Understood different perspectives
- Reduced competitiveness
- Got to know people & saw them in a 'different light'
- Despite feeling emotional enjoyed being 'listened to' without feeling guilty
- Felt more 'in control'.
- More understanding

## My name is Brenda...I'm a stressed school boss

Jenny Legg

Published: 15 September 2006



### Where are they now?

Two are retiring (one of these never took part in group). The second (who did) said:

*"Thank you so much I now feel like I can go on my terms and not slink away as I felt like doing last September after 34 years in the profession. I now feel like I am leaving with my head up high and not a failure. I can see I have a value"*

- One is facing closure of their school:

*"Well I've done all I can and they're still going to close us but I do now feel that I got listened to and respected by [the other party] and there's no hard feelings now as I don't feel as devalued as I did before and I was able to put my points across and get them acknowledged and understood"*

- Another (who did not take part): is leaving the teaching profession with no job to go to: "I just might live a little bit longer"

## **What is being practised by the 6 remaining Head teachers**

- Joint responses to documents;
- Sharing of templates/systems/policies/ ideas;
- Interschool observations [NQTs, competency issues]
- Joint training
- Administrative/TA support if and when required
- Practical support
- Transfer of 'challenging' pupils
- Sharing of information more readily
- Continuing and developing group and paired sessions – hoping to involve new heads and the remaining one still not engaged in the group sessions.

## ACTIVITY 1

### Containment

#### *Personal Journey*

- Science teacher in highly rated High school
- Psychology Student
- Prison Service – Forensic psychology
- Mental Health
- Teacher in a Pupil Referral Unit
- Educational Psychologist

### Consciousness of unbearable emotions

#### *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.*

### 'maternal reverie'

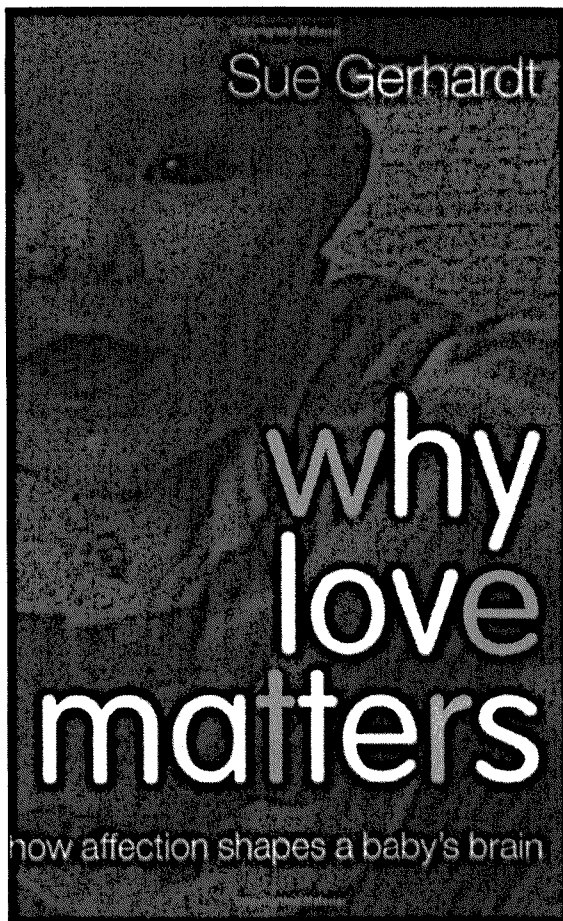
#### *Bion (1961)*

*'In the normal development of the infant, 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 as 'maternal reverie', a process in which the mother performs a containing function for the baby'.*

*Bion likened 'containment' to the function of the mother whose ability to receive and understand the emotional states of her baby makes them more bearable.*

*What was previously unbearable - and therefore projected onto the mother needs to be made bearable.*





## **Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain**

**Author: Sue Gerhardt**

**Publisher:**

**Brunner-Routledge**

**(24 Jun 2004)**

**ISBN-10: 1583918175**

**ISBN-13: 978-1583918173**

### ***Klein (1946)***

It is possible to split off part of one's personality and project it into another person. Often one situation is idealized whilst another is denigrated ('splitting') (Eg. Inclusion).

Feelings which are deposited are often unbearable such as helplessness, panic, guilt, despair or depression. Unsurprisingly, these are some of the feelings expressed by staff in schools [and in other 'public services' eg.

Health Service].

### **Projective Identification**

#### ***Halton (2004)***

An unconscious inter-personal interaction in which the recipients of a projection react to it in such a way that their own feelings are affected: they unconsciously identify with the projected feelings.

## **Transference**

**Weiss (2002)**

*'The unconscious projection of attitudes and feelings from past relationships, particularly with family, onto other persons in the present.'*

*Transference reactions are bound to occur in every person's professional as well as personal life and may limit our abilities to love and work with others.*

*Gaining insights into the emotional dimensions of our relationships can assist in clarifying and resolving differences, enhancing mutual understanding, and improving conditions for change'.*

## **Projective Identification and Counter-Transference**

The state of mind in which other people's feelings are experienced as one's own.

Projective identification frequently leads to the recipient's acting out the counter-transference deriving from the projected feelings.

## **Counter-transference**

**Weiss, (2002).**

*'The most problematic pupils (colleagues, parents) are those whose negative transference triggers teachers' complimentary negative counter-transference.'*

*These children (colleagues, parents) are often intensely hostile, fearful or pessimistic as an outgrowth of troubled interpersonal relationships within the family (they may also have been physically and emotionally abused or seriously neglected).*

*In challenging the authority of the teacher in a hating way, projected hatred can push the teacher into becoming more punitive and negative until they actually become, at that moment, a hateful figure, full of the split-off and projected feelings of the disturbed pupil'.*

**Coriat (1926)**

*'In school the teacher becomes a substitute for the father or mother of the child and in the emotional tie which exists between teacher and pupil, the earlier parent-child relationship is re-lived and re-animating.'*

*Teachers must understand their own unconscious, for if they fail to do so, they will never realize why they are acting in a certain manner toward the pupil or the effects of their daily contacts'.*

**Nutkevitch (1998)**

*"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 [the] 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'.*

**Teacher found hanged 'after she was slapped in the face' (The Times June 8, 2007)**

*A popular French teacher is believed to have hanged herself after walking out of school following a confrontation with a senior colleague. NQT Vanessa Rann, had complained that she had been slapped across the face in front of a class of startled pupils on May 17. Two weeks later, shortly before she was due to return to school after half-term, she was found dead by her fiancé. Since Miss Rann's death another teacher. At the Bristol comprehensive has complained to police about threatening texts sent to her mobile telephone.*

*Steve Cook, head teacher at the 900-pupil college, confirmed that an investigation into the incident was under way. He said: "A comment has been made about her being slapped by another member of staff in front of pupils. I am aware of this allegation and the school is now in the process of holding an internal investigation. News of her death has been a real shock to the school. It's a complete tragedy. We've lost a young and valued member of staff who was very popular with pupils."*

**Halton, (2004)**

*Like individuals, institutions develop defences against difficult emotions which are too threatening or too painful to acknowledge.*

*These 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.*

*They may also arise from the nature of the work and the particular client group.*

**Nutkevitch (1998)**

*'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'.*

**Gamman (2003)**

*Headteachers are enormously influential in establishing particular cultures and atmospheres and their experience of [difficulties] may represent an institutional defence against underlying anxiety.*

*Head teachers are important in making the school culture transparent, particularly to new staff....once such a culture has become thoroughly established within an organisation it will not exclusively be the responsibility of the school management to maintain it.*

*In a positive environment staff often show a willingness to work beyond closely defined roles*

**Obholzer (1994)**

*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.*

*In addition to the anxieties projected from society, anxieties arise from the very nature of the work, and anxieties of workers arising from their personal histories.*

### **The Primary Task**

*Rice (1963),*

*'The task [a system] must perform if it is to survive'.*

*Stokes (1994),*

*Two major factors essential for management systems to constitute a 'reliable container':*

- Ongoing clarification of the primary task of the organisation;
- Planning and defining roles in a manner consistent with the primary task.

### **Factors to promote "the containing function of an organisation"**

*(Obholzer, 1994)*

- Ongoing discussion in relation to the organisations' primary task;
- A clear structure of the authority, including who decides what the primary task is;
- 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;
- Regular meetings in which teams speak about their feelings and their work-related difficulties;
- Special support for managers.

## **SUPERVISION SESSION 1**

- **Group A – W Area**
- **Group B – M Area**

### **Supervision Preparation**

- Select a chairperson
- Establish ground rules (Confidentiality MUST be a priority!)
- Agree system for deciding issues to be discussed in session
- Allocate according to time available

### **SUPERVISION PROCEDURE**

1. Supervisee describes issue/problem
2. Chair invites individual group members to ask a question to clarify issue/problem
3. Chair summarises definition of issue/concern to supervisee (if still not clear – repeat step 2 above)
4. Chair invites individual group members to offer a solution/suggestion (no comments from supervisee at this stage)
5. Supervisee gives feedback to each group member or asks them questions about their suggestion
6. Supervisee decides plan of action using 3 of suggestions offered.

## **SUPERVISION SESSION 2**

### **New Groups**

#### **FOOTNOTES**

- Everyone is under increased pressure
- Stress makes everyone feel de-skilled
- Apparent strength maybe greatest weakness
- Other public services get supervision
- Need to keep disaffected people engaged
- More power in collaboration than as an individual
- Often small things push us over the edge
- Small ideas can become big solutions
- Difficulties will not go away
- Unique experience
- Success or otherwise depends on group
- Requires commitment
- Inevitable obstacles as important as successes
- Acknowledging strengths & weaknesses
- Making a contribution to LA practices/policies
- Giving a voice
- Reflection on own practice
- Getting help from other heads – only ‘experts’ who can help
- Essential to acknowledge & act on own ‘feelings’ about a situation (remember Bion!)

*Our own belief in ourselves and the belief of others in ourselves*

**(Anne-Marie and Ruth 2007)**

**THANKYOU FOR LISTENING**

**ANNE-MARIE and RUTH**

## APPENDIX II

### Script and slides for second training day

#### KEEPING HEADS ABOVE WATER

##### Day 2

**Kim Glynn**

**Educational Psychologist – XXXshire EPS**

**Anne-Marie McBlain**

**Educational Psychologist – Staffordshire EPS**

**Ruth Slater**

**Educational Psychologist - XXXshire EPS**

##### Programme

1.00pm – 1.15pm	Recap on Day 1
1.15pm – 1.30pm	Activity 1
1.30pm – 2.00pm	Activity 2 - Paired Supervision session
2.00pm	Coffee
2.15pm-2.45pm	Activity 3 - Group session
2.45pm – 3.00pm	Activity 4 - 'Where next?' – planning
3.00pm	Activity 5 - Close



### **Concerns of Head Teachers**

- Greater demands (from parents, public, DI, Education Authority, Government)
- Funding/resources
- More complex pupils/families
- More demanding &/or aggressive parents
- Unexpected Crises
- Issues with staff/personnel
- TLRs, SEF, New Initiatives, Policies etc
- Practical issues/concerns eg. Buildings/maintenance
- Constantly Raising Attainment
- Interruptions – changing priorities
- Greater feelings of ISOLATION

### **Hopes from Day 1**

- Feel less isolated
- Reassured
- 'It's not just me'
- Time for reflection
- Hope for some control
- Support without perceived
- Feeling confident to change traditional working practice
- Have some dedicated head teacher time
- Formalise systems of support

### **Sources of stress experienced by pupils**

- Equipment for day (eg. PE kit)
- Peer pressures
- Friendship problems
- Teachers (especially supply teachers)
- Competition
- Parents
- Home situation
- Transition
- Out of school learning
- Homework
- Toilets
- Lunchtimes
- Learning issues

### **Sources of stress experienced by parents**

- Getting kids up and out to school
- Delivering to different schools
- Different starting times
- Safety
- Changes of routine
- Financial worries
- Homework
- Holidays
- Timings of meetings
- Employment/unemployment
- Concerns about achievement
- Transition/transfer
- Choosing the right school
- Uniform & equipment
- Family situation
- Availability of staff for sorting problems
- Understanding jargon
- Own negative experiences of school

### **Sources of stress experienced by teachers**

- Parental expectations
- Supervising & Liaising with others (eg. Lunchtime staff)
- Discipline
- Marking
- Planning/preparing
- Meeting individual needs
- Keeping up with everything
- Technology
- Time management
- Head's expectations/demands
- Lack of workspace
- Deadlines
- Initiatives
- Perceived competitiveness
- Performance management
- Directed workloads

### **Sources of stress experienced by Head teachers**

- Many same as teachers (& parents)
- Awareness of others' stress
- Behaviour issues
- Absences (teachers & pupils)
- Maintaining standards
- Relationships
- Seeing the full picture
- 'Grey' areas
- Decision making
- Keeping 'all balls in the air'
- Supply cover
- Health & Safety
- Feeding back negative information
- OFSTED
- Initiatives

- Number of initiatives
- Lack of staff
- Feelings of failure – not enough time
- Fire-fighting
- No time for reflection
- ‘running around like a mad thing’.

## **Containment**

***Nutkevitch (1998)***

*“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 [the] 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’.*

## **ACTIVITY 1**

## **ACTIVITY 2**

### **Paired Solution-focussed Conversation**

**(See handout for procedure)**

## **ACTIVITY 3 - GROUP SUPERVISION PROCEDURE**

1. Supervisee describes issue/problem
2. Chair invites individual group members to ask a question to clarify issue/problem
3. Chair summarises definition of issue/concern to supervisee (if still not clear – repeat step 2 above)
4. Chair invites individual group members to offer a solution/suggestion (no comments from supervisee at this stage)
5. Supervisee gives feedback to each group member or asks them questions about their suggestion
6. Supervisee decides plan of action using 3 of suggestions offered.

## **ACTIVITY 4 – Where next?**

- 2 group sessions to be arranged
- 2 paired sessions to be arranged
- Dates in diaries?
- Location(s)
- Pairs identified
- Contact details
- Feedback to EPs

## APPENDIX III

### 10 Minute Solution Focussed Consultation

#### Introduction

This is an exercise in having a conversation that may be useful to your partner.

#### Activity

In pairs decide which of you will be the person seeking to consult about some issue or concern and which is the 'consultant' (at the end of the activity you will be able to switch roles and repeat).

During this activity the consultants should respectfully explore and ask questions about anything which might bring out evidence of **resources, strengths and successes** (however seemingly small). In addition they should remember that it is not the purpose of a solution focussed conversation to 'solve' the problem or to make useful suggestions, but to ask questions which lead to the client discovering their own way forward.

The suggested questions below follow the natural sequence of a SF conversation, but feel free to select the one's that seem most useful – or modify or add if you wish. The aim is to get a lot of concrete detail and to listen for, and draw attention to useful strengths and resources, and what the person is already doing or has previously done that seems useful.

There is no need to ask your partner to describe the situation that concerns him/her. Simply start by asking.....

- *Even though this is only an exercise, suppose, by some lucky chance, this short conversation turned out to be of some real use to you...how would you know?*
- *What will be the first small signs that things have begun to move forward, even just a little bit sometimes?*
- *What else will tell you that things have started to move in the right direction?*

- *What else?...what else?...what else?...*
- *Who will notice that this improvement has begun to happen?*
- *What will he/she see (lots of clear observable detail)*
- *Who else will notice? What will they see? (Repeat x N)*
- *How will these other people know that you yourself have started to notice improvements?*
- *How will they notice you responding and behaving differently? What effect will that have on them?*
- *Of the small signs that you have talked about, which ones are already happening, even if just a little bit sometimes? What are you doing then that's different, or what have you been doing differently?*
- *Tell me about the times in the past when this situation (or one like it) was a little better. What was it that was different?*
- *When you have been faced with similar situations in the past what have you done that has been useful?*
- *What else gives you hope that change is at least possible, however unlikely it seems at present?*
- *What's been helping you to keep going despite this situation?*

### **Conclusion**

Discuss with your exercise partner what thoughts and possibilities arise from this conversation.

[Switch roles and repeat]

## APPENDIX IV

### HEAD TEACHERS' PEER SUPERVISION 19<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2007

#### EVALUATION FEEDBACK FORM

Please rate the following questions 1-5 where 1= strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree

	1 Strongly agree	2	3	4	5 Strongly disagree
1. The day has been a useful experience	100%				
2. This has been a good use of my time	100%				
3. I would recommend this process to other Head teachers	100%				
4. The day has met my expectations	100% who had expectations				
5. The day was well structured with a good balance of activities	50%	50%			
6. The presentations were clearly delivered and the content was useful	50%	33%	17%		
7. The group supervision sessions were supportive and helpful	83%	17%			
8. I believe this work should be developed to become an integral part of Headship	100%				
9. I would find this method and structure of working useful and supportive	100%				
10. This process would be helpful to other groups eg. Deputy Heads, SENCOs, NQTs	100%				

- *Would have liked a slower pace when the theory was covered*

The listed comments were made in response to the following questions:

### **11. What brought you to this day?**

- *I felt it was necessary and important*
- *Need – the end of a difficult year on many levels*
- *Extranet info – an unusual opportunity to have mutual support*
- *A phone call at just the right time – it has been a very stressful year.*
- *I recognise the need to get support at critical times*
- *Phonecall plus the course heading*
- *Sounded interesting and of quality*
- *I know there is a real need for this sort of group*
- *I asked the question six years ago, 'Who supports the Heads?'*

### **12. Did you have any expectations that you feel were not met?**

- *Wasn't clear about expectations before the meeting (two responses)*
- *No (majority of responses)*
- *Perhaps a clearer idea of the next step*

### **13. What did you gain from being in the group supervision sessions?**

- *Great feeling of positive support, ideas and security*
- *A useful part of a supportive mechanism*
- *Wider experience*
- *Great insight into a formal support system*
- *Affirmation that we all share similar problems*
- *Structure of group*
- *Rules and boundaries*
- *Possible solutions*
- *Insight, understanding and security*
- *Very powerful strategy for problem solving*

### **14. Did you feel the group was an appropriate size? If not what would you prefer?**

- *Any bigger (more than ten) would have been too big*
- *Initially wanted smaller group, but soon felt size was fine*



- *Yes (50%)*
- *6 – 8 would be ideal*
- *Would like whole cluster to attend*

**15. What drawbacks can you see to working as part of a group in this way?**

- *Finding time to commit*
- *Too few secondary colleagues*
- *No drawbacks in terms of process*
- *How to translate this into a regular opportunity planned throughout the academic year*
- *None (50%)*
- *Time commitments*
- *Difficulty in getting consistent attendance due to own commitments*
- *It's not easy to negotiate non-negotiable time out of school but....*

**16. Which activities did you enjoy the most and why?**

- *Sharing in a non-threatening environment*
- *Structure of group sessions*
- *Stresses activity*
- *Highlighted role of Head teacher*
- *Psychology Theory*
- *Talking about stresses*
- *Supervision (50%)*
- *Initial Presentation*

**17. Have you learned anything from this day?**

- *Yes. The beginning of a fresh approach to the way of thinking about problems*
- *That we all 'feel' the same way*
- *Yes, a lot!*
- *Support is out there*
- *That this is a hugely supportive group*
- *Others have similar issues*

- *I'm not alone*

**Any other comments:**

- *Thanks for taking the initiative. Without it, my need to network (without the whinging) would just drift.*
- *Thanks for making this possible*
- *Thank you very much*
- *A very positive and valuable day*

## APPENDIX V

### HEAD TEACHER' PEER SUPORT GROUP – FEEDBACK DECEMBER 2007

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.How useful has the group been to you?			1				1	3	6	
2. Has the group been a good use of your time?					1			1	6	3
3. Would you be prepared to set time aside for this type of work in the future?					1				3	7
4. How would you prioritise this type of work?					1			6	2	2
5.What are the direct/indirect benefits to your colleagues in school of you attending the group?							3	6	2	
6. What are the direct/indirect benefits to pupils in your school of you attending the group?					1	1	3	3	3	
7.What are the direct/indirect benefits to parents of pupils in your school of you attending the group?		1				1	3	6		

## APPENDIX VI

Anne-Marie McBlain      Page 399      25/11/2009 University of Sheffield  
School of Education  
**RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM**

- This form has been approved by the University Research  
Ethics Committee (U-REC) -

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**Complete this form if your project involves human participants (either directly through physically participating and/or indirectly through providing data and/or tissue) AND does not involve the NHS.**

A guidance fact sheet on how to complete this form can be downloaded from:  
[www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/support/winning/ethics/system.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/support/winning/ethics/system.html).

If appropriate, this form must be accompanied by:

- A completed Participant Information Sheet
- A completed Participant Consent Form

(please confirm the applicability/inapplicability of these on the application form's cover sheet)

**Once the form(s) has been completed (and the applicant's name and date inserted into the footer of each page) it should be emailed to: STAFF - The School of Education 'Ethics Administrator' (m.l.hughes@sheffield.ac.uk). STUDENTS: The course secretary Jean Booker. A signed, dated version of 'Part B' of the application form should also be posted to the appropriate person above.**

The identity of your Ethics Administrator is at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/26/85/ethics\\_administrators.pdf](http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/03/26/85/ethics_administrators.pdf).

### **Who should complete this form?**

Normally the Principal Investigator in the case of staff-led research projects or normally the student in the case of supervised student research projects.

# University of Sheffield School of Education

## Research Ethics Application Form

### Cover Sheet

**Name:** Anne-Marie McBlain

**Member of Staff**

**Student**  **Course:** EdD (Educational Psychology)

**Module:** Part II Thesis

**Tutor/Supervisor:** Dr Tom Billington

**Date:** 12<sup>th</sup> January 2007

**I confirm that due to the nature of the project, in my judgment the use of a 'Participant Information Sheet / Covering Letter / Pre-Written Script' – i.e. use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (mark 1 box):**

<b>Is relevant:</b>	<b>Is not relevant:</b>
✓	

**I confirm that due to the nature of the project, in my judgment the use of a 'Participant Consent Form' (mark 1 box):**

<b>Is relevant:</b>	<b>Is not relevant:</b>
✓	

# University of Sheffield School of Education Research

## Ethics Application Form

### Part A

#### **A1. Research Project Title:**

**A1.1 URMS number (if known): The Application of Psychodynamic Theory to Peer Supervision Groups in Schools**

**A.2 Contact person (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised-student research projects):**

Title: Mrs                      First Name/Initials: A                      Last Name: McBlain  
Post: Postgraduate research student                      Department: Educational Psychology  
Email: [annemarie.mcblain@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:annemarie.mcblain@staffordshire.gov.uk) or  
[annemarie.mcblain@btinternet.com](mailto:annemarie.mcblain@btinternet.com) Telephone: 01260-298512 or  
07803251922

**A2.1 Is this a supervised-student research project?**

**If yes, please provide the Supervisor's contact details:**

Dr Tom Billington  
EdD (Ed Psych) Team, Room 8.03, School of Education, The University of  
Sheffield, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2JA

Tel: 0114 2228113  
e-mail: [t.billington@shef.ac.uk](mailto:t.billington@shef.ac.uk)

**A.3 Other key investigators / co-applicants (within or outside the University):**

None

**A.4 Proposed Project Duration:**

Start date: February 2007

End date: July 2007

**Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:**

- involves testing a medicinal product \*
- involves investigating a medical device \*
- involves additional radiation above that required for clinical care \*
- involves taking new samples of human biological material (e.g. blood, tissue) \*
- involves children or young people aged under 18 years
- involves using samples of human biological material collected before for another purpose
- involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
- involves only anonymised or aggregated data
- involves prisoners or others in custodial care (e.g. young offenders)
- involves disabled adults with physical or mental incapacity or physical or mental illness

X

has the primary aim of being educational (e.g. student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, other than an MD or PhD)

**A.5 Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?**

**Supervision**

Supervision is a recognised mechanism for dealing with individuals experiencing difficult circumstances that place high demands on their emotional and mental resources through a collaborative and reflective discussion with a trusted co-worker. It is increasingly being used in the helping professions as a forum for support 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).

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



- helped 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)

This list of established outcomes for peer supervision looks as if it might deal with some of the issues raised by head teachers. A peer supervision system has been in place for several years within my own Educational Psychology Service. This was established following the evaluation of four different models that could be used with EPs (Squires and Williams, 2003). It seemed that it might be possible to extend this approach to help groups of head teachers who are experiencing high stress levels.

Three main functions of counselling are cited as being central to peer supervision by Hawkins and Shohet (1989):

- The Educative or Formative function is concerned with the development of the supervisee's knowledge and skills and allows reflection of the main content and process of the work undertaken. 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).
- The Supportive or Restorative function is concerned with helping the supervisee deal with the emotional aspects of working with people. Head teachers frequently report facing conflict in their work and significant emotional stress occasioned by the nature of their work. Supervision provides space to reflect on the issues that arise from work (Isbell, 2003) and helps workers 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.

- The Managerial or Normative function is concerned with quality-control. It can 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)

Other perceived potential benefits of supervision are also reported. It leads 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).

Hawkins and Shohet go on to 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 way of defining professional supervision is used as the basis for thinking about Peer Supervision and leads to the aims for the outcome of supervision.

Supervision is therefore considered as a collaborative exercise that provides an opportunity for the supervisee to reflect on different aspects of their work with peers acting a supervisor 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)

### **Psychodynamic Elements**

The ethos and cultures that exist in different schools is often reflected in staff morale, staff attributions to pupil behaviour, staff relations, politics and policies within the school. An earlier pilot study outlined how each of these elements can impact on the success or failure of interventions designed to support pupils with challenging behaviour. During this previous study a number of psychodynamic concepts which may have influenced these elements were considered. These included the concepts of the 'container', 'projective identification' and how early mother-child interactions may be reconstructed in the classroom and at an institutional level. Similarly the concepts of transference, counter-transference and 'splitting' were considered at the individual and whole-school level, and connections were made between anxiety and organisational structure and culture, concluding that a school's capacity to function as an 'effective container' is largely influenced by the head teacher and Senior Management Team (SMT) and the systems they establish and maintain.

Building on a personal belief that teachers and other workers in schools must be emotionally healthy themselves if they are to be able to help the children they work with, this research aims to establish and evaluate an intervention designed to provide support for a group of head teachers who have found themselves emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job.

### **Aims**

The proposed intervention is a therapeutic solution-focussed peer supervision group where head teachers reporting high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction will be invited to participate in a Solution-Focussed Peer Supervision group as a potential way of providing support for them. The views of participating head teachers will be collected through individual interviews and will be subjected to thematic analysis and grounded theory to explore the benefits and negative aspects of this approach and to evaluate it's potential as a means of support for other similar groups.

The main aim is to establish and develop a self-supporting intervention which offers practical support to group members who are feeling emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job.

The second aim is to evaluate and critique the peer supervision group as an intervention for professionals who are feeling emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job. This will involve the application of psychodynamic concepts with regard to both individuals and groups.

The final aim is to attempt to elucidate and understand the issues or difficulties that head teachers experience which may contribute to the undermining or weakening of the school's ability to act as an effective 'container'. In addition, strategies and approaches to facilitate the bringing about cultural change in schools where containment ability is weak or ineffective will be considered. To this end a conceptual integration between psychoanalytic and systemic approaches will be explored along with the possible approaches and roles available to the Educational Psychologist (EP) in facilitating such change.

### **Objectives**

To identify and recruit group members for the peer supervision group.

To establish and develop a peer support group for head teachers.

Following two meetings of the group, participants will be interviewed and these interviews will be recorded and this data will be subject to thematic analysis and

grounded theory. This process will be carried out in order to explore:

- participants' experiences of the intervention (the peer supervision group)
- Reported causes of stress and job dissatisfaction experienced by head teachers in the group
- if and why existing support systems are inadequate
- the benefits of the intervention
- the negative aspects of the intervention and any barriers to its effectiveness
- factors which facilitate the intervention.

The intention is also to reflect on the experiences of the group members in the light of existing literature concerning groups and psychodynamic concepts such as transference, counter-transference and 'splitting'. These will be considered both at the individual and collective group level in order to investigate possible connections between the personal anxieties of the head teachers and the organisational structures, systems, practices and cultures which they influence and that may affect their schools' capacities to function as 'effective containers'.

### **Methodology**

Head teachers will be invited to attend a solution-focussed peer supervision group by means of a letter. Group membership will be entirely voluntary and participants can leave at any point.

During the initial session I will take the role of Chair and timekeeper and I will take responsibility for managing the group and task processes.

Prior to beginning the session I will establish ground rules and emphasise the need for absolute confidentiality.

Throughout the group session, I will ensure that only one person speaks at a time.

A volunteer will be asked to act as the supervisee and to share a problem or issue. Members of the supervising group will then take 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 are allowed. Once each member of the group has asked a question and received a response, the discussion will be summarized and checked with

the supervisee that the problem was well-defined. If there is still a lack of clarity then further questions can be asked in this phase.

In the next phase there will be an exploration of possible solutions. I will ask the group to make individual suggestions or offer possible solutions. The volunteer will not make any response to these suggestions until each member of the group had shared a solution.

The supervisee will then be asked to select suggestions that have potential value and explain why some solutions are inappropriate or impractical. Further structured discussion may follow allowing the supervisee to explore the viable solutions offered.

The supervisee will then agreed to carry out three actions to resolve their issue.

A second group session will then be carried out where one of the head teachers will be invited to act as the chair. I will not be present at this session

### **Data collection and evaluation**

- Semi-structured questionnaires will be used to act as a prompt when interviewing the head teachers in the group.
- The interviews will be recorded digitally and transferred to a computer for analysis. fOCUS-II software will be used to allow the audio recordings to be coded and for themes to be identified and further analysed.
- For the Thematic Analysis the codes and text will be exported into EXCEL and then grouped using the sort function.
- The grouped themes will then be available for further interpretation.

Head teachers will also be asked to rate their experiences to provide a measure of perceived usefulness of group and paired sessions.

### **References**

Aston, L. and Molassiotis (2003) Supervising and supporting student nurses in clinical placements: the peer support initiative. *Nurse Education Today* 23, 202-210

Baggerly, J. and Osborn, D. (2006) School counsellors' career satisfaction and commitment: correlates and predictors. *Professional School Counselling* 9, 197-205

Claveirole, A. and Mathers, M. (2003) Peer supervision: an experimental scheme for nurse lecturers. *Nurse Education Today* 23, 51-57

Counselman, E.F. and Weber, R.L. (2004) Organizing and Maintaining Peer Supervision Groups. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 125-143

Crespi, T.D. (1997) The Clinical Supervisor in School Psychology: Continuing Education and Professional Development for Schools. *The Clinical Supervisor* 16, 191-201

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Hawkins, P. and Shohet, R., (1989) *Supervision in the helping professions*.  
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Lantz, I. and Severinsson, E., (2001) The influence of focus group-oriented supervision on intensive care nurses' reflections on family members' needs. *Intensive and Critical Care Nursing* 17, 128-137

Nash, J. (1999) Developing and refining supervisory skills: An application of solution focused thinking. *Educational Psychology in Practice* 15, 108-114

Nelson, V. (2000) Supervision of the work of Educational Psychologists: are we meeting our needs? Unpublished discussion paper.

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Robiner, W.N., Saltzman, S.R., Hoberman, H.M., Schirvar, J. A. (1997) Psychology Supervisors Training Experiences, Supervisory Evaluation and Self-rated Competence. *The Clinical Supervisor* 16, 117-144.

Squires, G. and Williams, S. (2003) Peer supervision for EPs as a means to quality service delivery. *SEN Newsletter* Stafford: Staffordshire County Council

Zorga, S., (1997) Supervision Seen as a Process of Experiential Learning. *The Clinical Supervisor* 16, 145-161.

Zorga, S., Dekleva, B., Kobolt, A. (2001) The process of internal evaluation as a tool for improving peer supervision. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 23, 151-162

**A.6 What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?**

No physical harm anticipated

No psychological harm anticipated

Potential other sources of harm:

- Psychological exposure – There is a potential risk of psychological exposure if, whilst discussing their issue(s), a participant experiences overwhelming emotional sensations. Prior to starting the sessions the participants will be made aware that this may be a possible consequence of their sharing their issues with the group. In the event of this situation occurring the participant will be able to leave the group and will be able to access support by other



members of the group. As the purpose of the group sessions is 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 – although this is a potential risk the purpose of the group being to find solutions to and suggest ways forward with problems should minimise any anxieties created by the discussions.
- Other personal issues emerging as a result of being in group – again the group members will be alerted to the possibility of personal issues emerging whilst taking part in group sessions and the arrangements as described above will be applicable.
- Confidentiality breaches leading to personal or professional embarrassment or exposure – any individual found to breach the agreed confidentiality boundaries will be asked to leave the group immediately. Prior to starting each session group members will be reminded of the need for absolute confidentiality and the consequences to those who breach this and for those whose confidentiality is broken.
- If any group members are concerned about any of the above further individual sessions will be offered.

**A.7** *Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project? (especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises)*

None

**A.8** *How will potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?*

Participants will be invited to take part by means of a letter outlining the aims and objectives of the peer supervision group. This letter will be sent to all head teachers in a specified area

and the intervention will be available to all who request to take part.

**A.9 Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

YES  NO

Please explain the proposed process for obtaining informed consent. If informed consent or consent is not to be obtained please explain why. You may want to consult Section 2.4.3 of the University's Ethics Policy or the guidance fact-sheet on consent at: [www.shef.ac.uk/r/researchoffice/RO/ethicsreviewsystem.html](http://www.shef.ac.uk/r/researchoffice/RO/ethicsreviewsystem.html). Students should ensure that they have fully discussed their proposed procedures with their tutor/supervisor.

**A.10 What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

At the start of the initial session, rules around absolute confidentiality will be established and agreed by all parties. In the event of a group member breaking the rules of confidentiality they will be asked to leave the group by the principal researcher. All identifying features will be removed from written and recorded data from interviews and this will be treated anonymously. Subsequent write-ups will contain no references or identifying features which might incriminate participants either personally or professionally.

All efforts will be made to minimise the above risks and the collection, storage, disclosure and use of research data in this study will comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) as follows:

- The confidentiality of participants and their data will be carefully protected. All personal information collected will be considered privileged information and be dealt with in such a manner as not to compromise the personal dignity or professional safety of the participant or to infringe upon their right to privacy.
- Any personal information collected, or data that is coded, or that is still held in personally identifying form to which depersonalised data can be linked that could

identify them, will remain strictly confidential. Access to the information will be restricted to the Principal Investigator at all times, before, during and after the research activities.

- Where necessary and practical, personal information on participants, that could identify them, will remain anonymous at all times to all but the Principal Investigator.
- Information contained in the data collected during the study will be anonymised prior to writing up the investigation and will be presented in the final write up in such a way as to prevent the identity of a participant. This will be achieved by assigning each participant a code which will not be disclosed to anyone other than the Principal Researcher.
- The identity of a participant or any information that could identify that participant without having obtained, prior to the person's participation, the person's consent in writing will not be disclosed.
- Measures to prevent accidental breaches of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy posed by all kinds of personal information storage and processing which directly identify a person (e.g. audio recordings, electronic and paper-based files, and e-mail records) will be taken. In cases where confidentiality is threatened, relevant records will be destroyed. At the end of the study all primary and identifying data will be destroyed.
- All participants will have the right to access personal information, whether or not it is confidential, that relates to them, and to be provided with a copy of the information on request.
- Participants will have the right, following the completion of their period of involvement in the research and following discussions with the researcher, to withdraw their consent and to require that their own data be destroyed, if practicable.
- Should participants wish to make a complaint as to their treatment by the researchers they should discuss their concerns with the principal researcher (Anne-Marie McBlain) in the first instance. If the participant(s) wish to take their complaint further they should first contact the research supervisor (Dr Tom Billington); then the Head of Research Degrees in the School of Education (Prof. Jerry Wellington) or the Head of School (Prof. Peter Hannon).
- Should something serious happening during or following participants' participation in the project as a consequence of their involvement in the research, the University's

Registrar and Secretary is the designated official person responsible for receiving complaints brought against the University.

**Dr David Fletcher - Registrar**

**Mrs Helen Teasdale – PA to the Registrar and Secretary**

**Ms Suzanne Hubbard – Secretary**

Registrar and Secretary's Office

The University of Sheffield

Western Bank

Sheffield

S10 2 TN

**Tel: (UK calls): 0114 222 2000**

**Tel: (International calls) +44 114 222 2000**

**A.11 Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided)**

YES  NO

# University of Sheffield School of Education Research

## Ethics Application Form

### *Part B – Declaration*

**Full Research Project Title: insert title here:** A Study of Peer Supervision Groups in Schools

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project (project) in accordance with the University of Sheffield's (the University) policies and procedures, which include: the University's '*Financial Regulations*'; '*Good Research Practice Standards*'; and the '*Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue*' (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the project's external research funder.

**In signing this research ethics application form I am also confirming that:**

- The form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
- The project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy.
- There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
- Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol (protocol) without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter sent by the University ethics reviewers (reviewers) notifying me of this.
- I undertake to inform the reviewers of significant changes to the protocol.
- (if applicable) If this is an application for a 'generic' project, all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
- I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal

data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CiCS).

- I understand that the project (including research records / data) may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
- I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this application form will be held by those involved in the ethics review process (i.e. the Ethics Administrator and/or reviewers) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.

**Name of the Principal Investigator (or Supervisor in the case of a student project):**

**Dr Tom Billington**

**Name of student (if applicable):**

**Anne-Marie McBlain**

**Signature of the Principal Investigator (or student and Supervisor in the case of a student project):**

**Date:**

Ensure that you complete the form in full (including inserting the applicant's name and date in the footer of each page) and sign and date "Part B".

If appropriate, enclose a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

## APPENDIX VII

### UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheets (Information Sheets should be designed to assist participants to make informed choices. Potential recruits need to be given sufficient information to allow them to decide whether or not they want to take part and, should they take part, it should be made clear that they are free to withdraw at any time.

Researchers should take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported.

*It is recommended that the content of the Information Sheet is:*

- relevant to the proposed research.
- accurate and concise.
- clear and simple and can be easily understood by a lay person (use short words, sentences and paragraphs).
- presented on the headed paper of the institution where the research is being carried out.
- appropriate for the social and cultural context in which it is being given.

*It is recommended that the content of the Information Sheet does not include:*

- technical terms, jargon and abbreviations.
- Bias or coercion or any inappropriate inducements.

*How long should the Information Sheet be?*

Information sheets should only contain relevant information that a reasonable person would want to know (i.e. in order to decide whether or not to participate in a project).

The length and design of a information sheet should encourage a prospective participant to read it in full. A participant may take more care when reading a concise information sheet, and thereby be better informed, than if s/he has to read an information sheet that runs into several pages. However, with respect to projects that involve 'particularly vulnerable' participants and/or which require access to 'sensitive' personal data the information sheet may need to be relatively longer in order to cover more detailed information.

An information sheet should contain information under the headings given overleaf, where appropriate, and in the order specified. It should be written so that it can be easily understood by a lay person. Use short words, sentences and paragraphs.

If your research project involves access to and use of human tissue it is advisable that you consult the Medical Research Council's (MRC) guidance fact-sheet 'Human tissue and biological samples for use in research': [www.mrc.ac.uk/pdf-tissue\\_guide\\_fin.pdf](http://www.mrc.ac.uk/pdf-tissue_guide_fin.pdf)



## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **1. Research Project Title:**

**The Application of Psychodynamic Theory to Peer Supervision Groups in Schools**

### **2. Invitation**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

### **3. What is the purpose of the project?**

#### **Aims**

Building on a personal belief that teachers and other workers in schools must be emotionally healthy themselves if they are to be able to help the children they work with, this research aims to establish and evaluate an intervention designed to provide support for a group of head teachers who have found themselves emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job.

The proposed intervention is a therapeutic solution-focussed peer supervision group where head teachers reporting high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction will be invited to participate in a Solution-Focussed Peer Supervision group as a potential way of providing support for them. The views of participating head teachers will be collected through individual interviews and will be subjected to thematic analysis and grounded

theory to explore the benefits and negative aspects of this approach and to evaluate it's potential as a means of support for other similar groups.

The main aim is to establish and develop a self-supporting intervention which offers practical support to group members who are feeling emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job.

The second aim is to evaluate and critique the peer supervision group as a intervention for professionals who are feeling emotionally and professionally isolated and struggling to cope with the increasing demands of their job.

### **Objectives**

To identify and recruit group members for the peer supervision group

To establish and develop a peer support group for head teachers

Following two meetings of the group participants will be interviewed and these interviews will be recorded and this data will be subject to thematic analysis and grounded theory. This process will be carried out in order to explore:

- participants' experiences of the intervention (the peer supervision group)
- Reported causes of stress and job dissatisfaction experienced by head teachers in the group
- if and why existing support systems are inadequate
- the benefits of the intervention
- the negative aspects of the intervention and any barriers to it's effectiveness
- factors which facilitate the intervention.

In addition I hope to be able to reflect on the behaviour of the group in the light of the existing literature concerning group work and psychodynamic theory.

No individuals or organisations will be permitted access personal information or interview data.

#### **4. Recruitment of Participants**

Head teachers will be initially invited to attend a presentation followed by a solution-focussed peer supervision group by means of a letter. Group membership will be entirely voluntary and participants can leave at any point .

#### **5. Do I have to take part?**

Head teachers will be invited to attend a solution-focussed peer supervision group by means of a letter.

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. Refusal to take part will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and you will be asked to sign a consent form). If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without penalty or loss of benefits, and without giving a reason.

#### **6. What will happen to me if I take part?**

Group membership will be entirely voluntary and participants can leave at any point.

- Prior to beginning the session ground rules will be agreed and established and the need for complete confidentiality will be emphasised.
- A volunteer will be asked to act as the supervisee and to share a problem or issue.

- Members of the supervising group will then take it in turns to ask the supervisee a question about the issue for the purposes of clarification.
- Once each member of the group has asked a question and received a response, the discussion will be summarized and checked with the supervisee that the problem was well-defined. If there is still a lack of clarity then further questions can be asked in this phase.
- In the next phase there will be an exploration of possible solutions. The principal researcher will ask the group to make individual suggestions or offer possible solutions.
- The supervisee will then be asked to select suggestions that have potential value and explain why some solutions are inappropriate or impractical. Further structured discussion may follow allowing the supervisee to explore the viable solutions offered.
- The supervisee will be asked to agreed to carry out three actions to resolve their issue.
- A second group session will then be carried out where one of the head teachers will be invited to act as the chair. The principal researcher will not be present at this session and the group will follow the procedure as described above.
- Following the group sessions all participants will be interviewed by the principal researcher.

### **Data collection and evaluation**

- Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with all members of the group.
- The interviews will be recorded digitally and transferred to a computer for analysis. FOCUS-II software will be used to allow the audio recordings to be coded without the need for transcription and for themes to be identified.
- For the Thematic Analysis the codes and text will be exported into EXCEL and then grouped using the sort function.
- The grouped themes will then be available for further interpretation.

- Group members will also be asked to rate their experiences to provide a measure of perceived usefulness.

## **7. What do I have to do?**

Following the initial session each voluntary participant will agree to attend a second group supervision session. In addition participants will be required to meet up and engage in a peer supervision session with one other group member on two occasions between the initial group session and the second group session.

## **8. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

No physical or psychological harm of any description is anticipated. However potential sources of harm may include:

- **Psychological exposure** – There is a potential risk of psychological exposure if, whilst discussing their issue(s), a participant experiences overwhelming emotional sensations. Prior to starting the sessions the participants will be made aware that this may be a possible consequence of their sharing their issues with the group. In the event of this situation occurring the participant will be able to leave the group and will be able to access support by other members of the group. As the purpose of the group sessions is 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** – although this is a potential risk the purpose of the group being to find solutions to and suggest ways forward with problems should minimise any anxieties created by the discussions.
- **Personal issues emerging as a result of being in group** – again the group members will be alerted to the possibility of personal issues emerging whilst taking part in group sessions and the arrangements as described above will be applicable.

- Confidentiality breaches leading to personal or professional embarrassment or exposure – any individual found to breach the agreed confidentiality boundaries will be asked to leave the group immediately by the principal researcher. Prior to starting each session group members will be reminded of the need for absolute confidentiality and the consequences to those who breach this and for those whose confidentiality is broken.
- If any group members are concerned about any of the above further individual sessions will be offered.

Whilst these are potential risks they are minimal and every effort will be made to minimise them.

## **9. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Positive outcomes for supervisees have been cited by various 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
- helped 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)

**10. What happens when the research study stops?**

If this is the case the reason(s) should be explained to the participant.

**11. What if something goes wrong?**

Should participants wish to make a complaint as to their treatment by the researchers they should discuss their concerns with the principal researcher (Anne-Marie McBlain) in the first instance. If the participant(s) wish to take their complaint further they should first contact the research supervisor (Dr Tom Billington); then the Head of Research Degrees in the School of Education (Prof. Jerry Wellington) or the Head of School (Prof. Peter Hannon).

Should something serious happening during or following participants' participation in the project as a consequence of their involvement in the research, the University's Registrar and Secretary is the designated official person responsible for receiving complaints brought against the University.

**Dr David Fletcher - Registrar**

**Mrs Helen Teasdale – PA to the Registrar and Secretary**

**Ms Suzanne Hubbard – Secretary**

Registrar and Secretary's Office

The University of Sheffield

Western Bank

Sheffield

S10 2 TN

**Tel: (UK calls): 0114 222 2000**

**Tel: (International calls) +44 114 222 2000**

**12. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

Prior to taking part in this study you will be required to give your consent to an interview following the second group session which will focus on your experiences of being in the peer supervision group and taking part in the paired supervision sessions. This interview will be recorded and processed as outlined above.

All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is disseminated will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

The collection, storage, disclosure and use of research data in this study will comply with the Data Protection Act (1998) as follows:

- The confidentiality of participants and their data will be carefully protected. All personal information collected will be considered privileged information and be dealt *with in such a manner as not to compromise the personal dignity or professional safety of the participant or to infringe upon their right to privacy.*

Any *personal* information collected, or data that is coded, or that is still held in personally identifying form to which depersonalised data can be linked that could identify them, will remain strictly confidential. Access to the information will be restricted to the Principal Investigator at all times, before, during and after the research activities.

- Where necessary and practical, personal information on participants, that could identify them, will remain anonymous at all times to all but the Principal Investigator.
- Information contained in the data collected during the study will be anonymised prior to writing up the investigation and will be presented in the final write up in such a



way as to prevent the identity of a participant. This will be achieved by assigning each participant a code which will not be disclosed to anyone other than the Principal Researcher.

- The identity of a participant or any information that could identify that participant without having obtained, prior to the person's participation, the person's consent in writing will not be disclosed.
- Measures to prevent accidental breaches of anonymity, confidentiality and privacy posed by all kinds of personal information storage and processing which directly identify a person (e.g. audio recordings, electronic and paper-based files, and e-mail records) will be taken. In cases where confidentiality is threatened, relevant records will be destroyed. At the end of the study all primary and identifying data will be destroyed.
- All participants will have the right to access personal information, whether or not it is confidential, that relates to them, and to be provided with a copy of the information on request.
- Participants will have the right, following the completion of their period of involvement in the research and following discussions with the researcher, to withdraw their consent and to require that their own data be destroyed, if practicable.

You should always bear in mind that you, as the researcher, are responsible for ensuring that when collecting or using data, you are not contravening the legal or regulatory requirements in any part of the UK.

Guidance available at:

[www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/RO/ethics\\_guidance\\_anonymity.pdf](http://www.shef.ac.uk/researchoffice/RO/ethics_guidance_anonymity.pdf)

### **13. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of this research will be written up in the form of a Doctoral Thesis for the Doctor of Education (Educational Psychology) for the University of Sheffield. In addition a short report will be written to inform the County Council Human Resources Department of the principal findings of the research in order to advise their strategy for recruitment and retention of head teachers.

The report will be completed in 2007 and the thesis will be completed over 2008/2009.

A copy of the report will be sent to all those who participated in the study. The thesis will be available in the library of Sheffield University subject to it satisfying examiners.

Participants will not be identified in any report/publication produced.

The findings of this research project may be used for additional or subsequent research.

**14. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is being carried out as part of the Doctor of Education (Educational Psychology) award from the University of Sheffield.

**15. Who has reviewed the project?**

The University of Sheffield Research Ethics Committee and the Department of Education Ethics Review Procedure.

**16. Contact for further information**

**Anne-Marie McBlain - Principal Researcher**

**Staffordshire Educational Psychology Service**

Newcastle and Moorlands District Education Office

IC2, Keele University Science and Business Park

Keele

Staffordshire

ST5 5NH

Tel: 01782-297524

Mobile:07803251922

**- Many Thanks for taking part ! -**

**You will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed Participant Consent Form to keep.**

#### **References**

Aston, L. and Molassiotis (2003) Supervising and supporting student nurses in clinical placements: the peer support initiative. *Nurse Education Today* 23, 202-210

Baggerly, J. and Osborn, D. (2006) School counselors' career satisfaction and commitment: correlates and predictors. *Professional School Counseling* 9, 197-205

Counselman, E.F. and Weber, R.L. (2004) Organizing and Maintaining Peer Supervision Groups. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy* 125-143

Claveirole, A. and Mathers, M. (2003) Peer supervision: an experimental scheme for nurse lecturers. *Nurse Education Today* 23, 51-57

Isbell, B.,(2003) Clinical training in complementary therapies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. *Complementary Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery* 9, 83-89

APPENDIX VIII

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD  
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:** The Application of Psychodynamic Theory to Peer Supervision Groups in Schools.

**Name of Researcher:** Anne-Marie McBlain

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated: [                      ] for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

4. I agree to take part in the above project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Person taking consent  
(if different from researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

---

**Researcher**

**Date**

**Signature**

**Copies:**

**One copy for the participant and one copy for the Principal Investigator / Supervisor.**

## APPENDIX VIX

### Feedback from Derby City Training Session

(See below)



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

# Well Being Conference Evaluation Report

Friday 23 January 2009  
The Village Hotel

**34 delegates attended the conference 71% of whom returned their evaluation sheets. There was an overall rating for the conference of 100% excellent or good.**

	Excel lent	Good	Acce ptabl e	Unsatisfa ctory
Trevor Summerson	0%	25%	67%	8%
Anne-Marie McBlain	75%	25%	0%	0%

Conference Pack	21%	79%	0%	0%
Venue	33%	67%	0%	0%
Overall Conference	21%	79%	0%	0%

## Comments/reflections on overall conference / Speakers:

- I felt Trevor and Morag spoke well and shared information that was really interesting and helpful
- Morning was slower than afternoon – this ended up being a positive – gave opportunity to think through where we're at and where we're going
- SBM role - I am very interested, but not sure how to fund this or indeed find space in school for one to work. Are there any funding streams that could help?
- Anne-Marie – excellent. Intelligent assumption that we have the capacity to understand the situation and find solutions
- Practical strategies were useful to hear
- Felt Trevor was doing a 'sales pitch'. It might have been better to determine how many schools present already had a Business Manager. I found the remaining session interesting as I am in the early stages of having a BM – food for thought
- Morning session could have been condensed into a much shorter item, focusing more on practical aspects, benefits, pitfalls, role of business manager etc.
- PM session very 'hopeful' – there is a need for support mechanisms for head teachers
- The afternoon session was great – Anne-Marie was very easy to listen to and her presentation was very interesting and will help me in the future I am sure. Both of the heads presented really well and talked about situations that we could identify with. Good suggestions for a strategy that could really work! Very good!



- Disappointing that not many colleagues attended – could it be the title? If these days were titled 'Head Teacher Support Network' or 'Skills Development Conference', it might not appear as a nice day out
- School Head – Nicola Shipman and her business manager's input was very good
- **Afternoon session with Anne-Marie – was particularly resonant and the 'feel' in the room would seem to indicate this would be a very positive and supportive way forward for Derby City**
- Opened up opportunities that I didn't know were possible/available
- Nicola and Morag's presentations made it clearer about the benefits of SBM. The morning was very interesting and gives food for thought about ways of developing in the future
- **Anne-Marie's presentation should be part of Head Teacher induction, it clarifies why circumstances evolve as they do. Do the Ed Psychs in Derby have a role in well-being of school staff? Thank you for the afternoon, yes I would be interested in joining a support group**
- What I find really frustrating is the rudeness of some heads who insisted on talking all the way through the input by Morag.
- **It was a relief to hear our anxieties verbalised by someone 'outside' and to hear it explained and rationalised**
- One of the key messages mentioned by the morning speakers are the necessity for clusters – I firmly believe that the effective clusters within the LA should be celebrated and utilised to share their strengths so that all the existing clusters can be as organised and as effective. I feel clusters are a strength of the city by working in partnership. This is an area which supports leadership for the future
- Morning speakers obviously hadn't organised themselves as to how long they were going to talk for. With being a small school, it would be interesting to see how business managers would work across clusters.
- **Afternoon session – outstanding – I feel the other Head's in the City would benefit from the input – Heads' Briefings perhaps?**
- **Afternoon – absolutely fascinating and very helpful – Thank you so much for organising this.**

#### **What support do you feel you would need for the future?**

- Ways to develop better team working in schools
- Ways to help and support smaller schools with less capacity
- **Interested in exploring the supervision procedure**
- **Enjoyed the intelligent exploration of the issues that impact on my work experience (i.e. PM)**
- We have started a lot of new support ideas – we need to make sure they are taking us in one direction, we need to make sure what we are putting in addresses the root causation as well as the consequences
- Further days like this
- Counselling training
- A sounding board who could listen objectively and offer solutions
- **Supervision groups**

- Time to reflect, think and share with colleagues – like today
- Counselling support
- The supervision model is long over due – it could be a solution to the ‘cluster problem’
- Would love Peter to come to Ivy House to discuss much of what Anne-Marie said and possibly do some Inset for staff around these issues.
- Someone to facilitate supervision groups
- Very interested in Head Teacher peer support group through our cluster (6)
- I would be very interested in providing or helping to provide counselling services for Head Teacher colleagues, or indeed for my own staff, after being in a vulnerable situation myself I feel that I could offer support to others
- I would be interested in the support group format suggested during the afternoon / last session
- Support (practically – job description etc) in looking towards appointing a BSM
- Can we have a EP/Head network model in Derby City?
- Would like to try ‘supervision’ in our cluster where it could work well – could our Ed Psychs help us? Or can we buy in Anne-Marie?
- Monitoring of Head Teachers who did not attend this course and why?
- I would be interested in looking in more depth at the psychology of how and why people behave as they do.

#### **A One-to-One listening support service for Head teachers:**

**Do you feel that there is a need for a confidential one-to-one listening service for Head teachers?**

- Lucky a few of us have set up our own support systems that is working very well at the moment. I find it easier if it is someone that I know
- Yes (4)
- Definitely – from someone who has done the job themselves
- Yes – not a telephone service
- Not a head at present – but would seem to be a good idea
- Yes, and or a sounding board, trustworthy, confidential networks
- Possibly, but I’m in a very good cluster where I can pick up the phone and share a problem
- I found it useful as a new Head to have someone to talk to, so it would be useful to explore the possibility of extending that facility
- Probably depending upon how it was to be delivered – to a certain extent many head teachers already have informal systems in place
- Something is needed – not sure what!
- Face to face or via the phone?
- I need to know a bit more, would it run along side counselling / supervision?

- Yes, but head teachers need to feel totally confident in sessions being confidential
- Yes, but would depend on who and how it was structured
- Yes, but not over the phone and with confidentiality paramount
- I think there are contacts available – but mostly made between individuals with mutual respect
- I am not sure, tend to develop own networks, but I can see the use if the issue is very personal/critical.

**If such a service was made available would you choose to subscribe to it and use it?**

- Yes (5)
- Yes because therapists / counsellors have to 'off-load' in supervision themselves
- There also needs to be a system to refer other colleagues that are showing signs of stress
- I would have done in the past at certain times
- Probably not at the moment
- I feel I have established good networks via the cluster, so not at this stage
- It would depend who was providing it
- Possibly
- I'd certainly be willing to contribute
- Maybe I'm very lucky as I have a group of very supportive heads I can talk to at anytime. Not all Heads are so lucky
- Probably not – enjoy good support from colleagues/individuals
- Depends on nature and structure.

**Do you have any additional thoughts/concerns/suggestions to help shape such a service?**

- I am willing to use my experience of being off work with personal / work related stress/depression. I also have a qualification in counselling skills which could be used to help formulate the course for head teachers
- **A past/present head teacher or someone like Anne-Marie who can counsel – whatever the issue**
- Ideas from new visions course i.e. how you solve each others problems in turn and not just stack up problems. Proactive. Permission from a 'school culture' to, as a head, be absent from school.
- **I feel the way forward is to look into the possibility of working with the LA to discuss / explore the supervision procedure. Could this time be made available before/after briefing meetings / cluster meetings? I would be interested in being part of the pilot**
- At the moment have too many concerns to see the way clear!
- I believe that some head teachers may find it difficult to approach an LA organised support system. It would need to be done in such a way that heads

would feel that no judgements were being made. Such a service would only really work if there was trust in place – I do not believe that people would want to confide in complete strangers or in someone they did not know very well

- Would like to be involved in counselling training.