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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**THE USE OF THERAPEUTIC STORYWRITING TO SUPPORT PUPILS
WITH BEHAVIOURAL, EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES**

by

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Thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy (by publication)

This thesis has been completed as a requirement for a higher degree of the
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ABSTRACT

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This thesis is comprised of five published pieces of research, with commentaries, that explore the use of therapeutic storywriting to support pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) in primary schools in England. These pieces were selected from a larger body of work in order to illustrate the underpinning theoretical perspectives of two models developed by the researcher as well as the progression from practitioner research to a broader research design which evaluates the impact on pupils' learning when these models are delivered by other educational professionals trained by the researcher.

The first three papers focus on the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model. The first is a piece of practitioner research and explores the psychodynamic aspects of therapeutic storywriting, illustrated by an individual profile of a pupil with selective mutism. The second is also practitioner research and extends the theoretical framework to include aspects of psychosynthesis theory and in particular Assagioli's theory of subpersonalities. The third paper evaluates the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, delivered by a cohort of educational professionals trained by the researcher, on pupils' emotional, social and academic development. The findings, largely drawn from interviews with the pupils themselves, show how the groups enabled pupils to use the medium of story writing to process emotional experiences and increased their motivation to engage in writing.

The final two published pieces explore the Story Links parent-partnership model which uses therapeutic storywriting to include parents of individual pupils who are at risk of exclusion because of their extreme BESDs and who also have poor reading skills. Story Links draws on the relationship between attachment anxiety and behaviour. The fourth paper is a piece of practitioner research and a case study of Story Links work with an individual pupil at risk of exclusion and his parent. It illustrates how the emotional containment provided by the Story Links sessions created a potential space where a parent with a previously hostile attitude to the school could begin to collaborate with the school in supporting her son's learning. The final and major piece of research included was part of a 20-month Story Links project funded by the TDA and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (attached as a separate document). It is an evaluation of the impact of the Story Links intervention delivered by a cohort of educational professionals on the emotional and social well-being of the pupil; parental engagement with their child's learning; rates of exclusion; reading skills; and pupil engagement with learning. It adopts a case study approach, and uses both qualitative and quantitative measures. The findings contribute to an understanding of how parents of pupils at risk of exclusion – often a hard-to-engage parent group – can be facilitated to support the learning and emotional well-being of their child.

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(excluding references, appendices & executive summary of paper E)

Declaration of authorship

I, Trisha Waters, declare that the thesis entitled *The Use of Therapeutic Storywriting to Support Pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties* and the work presented in the thesis (PhD by publication) are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

- no part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- the published works included in this thesis are as follows:

Waters, T. (2002) 'The Therapeutic Use of Story Writing', in *Psychodynamic Practice* Vol. 8, No 3 pp 343-358

Waters, T. (2004a) 'Subpersonalities and a Model of the Self' in *Therapeutic Storywriting: A Practical Guide to Developing Emotional Literacy in Primary Schools*. London: David Fulton

Waters, T. (2008) 'The Use of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups to Support Pupils with Emotional Difficulties', in *British Journal of Learning Support* Vol. 23, No 4 pp 187-192

Waters, T. (2009) *Story Links Programme Evaluation: The impact of a parent partnership intervention that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils at risk of exclusion*. University of Chichester

Waters, T. (2010) 'Story Links: Therapeutic Storywriting with Parents and Pupils at Risk of Exclusion', in J. Adelizzi & M. Ficksman (eds) (2010) *The Dynamics of Educational Therapy*. New York: Routledge

Signed:

Date:.....

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I would like to thank Professor Helen Simons for her role as an advisory expert evaluator on both the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and the Story Links projects. Her expert advice, insightful seminars and writings on the use of case study in educational research have been a guiding methodological light throughout my research over the last few years.

My thanks also to Dr Heather Geddes for your on-going encouragement of my work over the years - your own commitment and work in the field of educational therapy have been an inspiration for me. Your support as a member of the Story Links Project steering group and your critical feedback on the sections relating to attachment theory in this thesis are much appreciated.

I would like to thank the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Training Development Agency for Schools (TDA) who provided the funding for the major and most recent piece of research included here, the evaluation of the Story Links intervention.

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The inspiration for my work has always been the children who have shared their stories with me over many years. My special thanks to those children and their parents who have given permission for their stories to be used in the research documented here. I was frequently moved by the power of the stories and experiences that you shared with me in the course of this research.

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University of Chichester

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Abbreviations

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASC: Autism Spectrum Conditions

EBDs: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

BESDs: Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (formerly EBDs)

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families (now DfE)

DfE: Department for Education (formerly DCSF and before that DfES)

DfES: Department for Education and Schools (now DfE)

LA: Local Authority

LM: Learning Mentor

NARA: Neale Analysis of Reading Ability

NASEN: National Association of Special Educational Needs

PATOSS: Association Parents and Teachers of Students with Specific Learning Difficulties

PGCE: Postgraduate Certificate of Education

SA: School action

SA+: School action plus

SDQ: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

SEAL: Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SENCO: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (teacher)

SERSEN: South-East Region Special Educational Needs Partnership

SL: Story Links

SLP: Story Links Programme

TA: Teaching Assistant

TTRB: Teacher Training Resource Bank

Definitions of Main Terms

Attachment anxiety: Separation anxiety or grief following the absence or loss of a consistently available care-giver, particularly in the first two years of infancy. (Bowlby, 1973)

Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs): Defined by the SEN Code of Practice as pupils 'who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skill; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs'. (DfES, 2001, 7:60)

School action, school action plus, statement of SEN: the three progressive stages of concern on the SEN register. (DfES, 2001)

Special Educational Needs (SEN): children have special educational needs if they have learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for them to learn or access education than most children of the same age. (DfES, 2001)

Story Links: The use of therapeutic storywriting with parents and pupils at risk of exclusion. The intervention focuses on supporting pupils' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties while also developing their reading skills. (Waters, 2009)

Subpersonalities: different aspects of the self which come to the fore in different situations and with which we may then become identified. (Rowan, 1993)

Therapeutic Storywriting: The use of storywriting to process emotional anxieties through projection of these anxieties onto characters and events within the story metaphor. (Waters, 2002)

Therapeutic Storywriting Groups: The use of therapeutic storywriting with groups of pupils (4-6) who are on the SEN register because of at risk of behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs). The intervention focuses on supporting pupils' BESDs while also developing their writing skills. (Waters, 2002)

Therapeutic teaching: using the educational curriculum as a context in which to support the emotional and social well-being of pupils. (Waters, 2009)

Chapter 1: Introduction

The research to be submitted in my PhD by Publication has grown out of my own practice, as a teacher and educational therapist, supporting pupils with challenging behaviour and mental health difficulties in both special and mainstream schools. My research investigation seeks to document and understand how therapeutic storywriting facilitates the emotional and cognitive learning of pupils whose learning is impaired due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The submission will draw on a selection of my published work, a substantial part of which will be drawn from research completed in my current post as senior lecturer in Special Educational Needs (SEN) at the University of Chichester (2005-present).

This chapter provides an introduction to the personal context of my work, an overview of the research and policy contexts and an outline of the topics to be presented in subsequent chapters.

The personal context

After completion of a PGCE, following my first degree in Logic and Modern Physics, I began my teaching career in a therapeutic residential community school (1977-1980) for pupils with severe behaviour difficulties related to attachment anxiety. It was here that I first studied the work of a number of leading thinkers in the field of child mental health: Winnicott (1971) with his notion of the 'potential space' where children can explore the interface between fantasy and reality; the insightful work of Bettelheim (1976) into the significance of story metaphor for severely troubled children; the writings of Dockar-Drysdale (1973) who pioneered the idea of a therapeutic community provision for pupils with extreme behaviour difficulties; and also Bowlby's (1973) hugely influential work on attachment and children's emotional development. These studies, mainly influenced by the psychodynamic psychological school of thought, helped me to develop an awareness of the significant impact that early emotional experiences can have on children's later emotional and social well-being as well as their cognitive development. It was at this time that I also discovered, through my own classroom practice, how vulnerable pupils who were reluctant to focus on educational tasks, could be encouraged to engage in story writing that resonated with their own unresolved emotional issues when given a sufficiently emotionally containing learning environment.

As my career progressed as a class teacher and senior manager in an inner-city school (1987-1997), this interest in the relationship between the emotional and cognitive development of the child stayed with me. My training at the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust (1993-1996) was supported by my education authority and extended my therapeutic knowledge base to include humanistic psychology and psychosynthesis theory. A research-based MA at Sussex University (1999-2001) then gave me the opportunity to begin formal research into the relationship between emotional and cognitive development. It was at this time that I coined the term 'Therapeutic Storywriting' to describe the process of engaging pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties through story metaphor in order to process difficult feelings while also developing their academic skills. I then formalised the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model to support pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDS) in my work as a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (1999-2003).

Research grants, first from the DfES (now DFE) and then from the South-East Region Special Educational Needs (SERSEN) partnership facilitated the dissemination of my MA research findings (2002-2004) and allowed me to develop a training course for Crawley College (2002-2003) and to write a book on

Therapeutic Storywriting (Waters, 2004a) published by David Fulton, one of the leading publishers in SEN. I was later commissioned by SERSEN (Waters, 2004b) to undertake an evaluation of the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on pupils' learning, following the delivery of the school-based 10-week intervention by teachers who had completed the training. This evaluation used a case study methodology and methods included interviewing pupils and teachers in five schools, an analysis of SEN records and a content analysis of the pupils' stories. This confirmed the position of the approach as research-based and subject to reflective evaluation and development. The 3-day training in Therapeutic Storywriting Groups intervention has now been delivered to professionals around the country and the 10-week intervention implemented in over 500 schools in England.

Following the completion of the research into Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, I became interested in what could be done for highly vulnerable pupils in mainstream schools who are at risk of exclusion because of behaviours related to attachment anxiety. This group of pupils are usually at School Action Plus on the SEN register or have a statement of Special Educational Need for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and provide a real challenge to the current policy of inclusion as educational professionals often struggle to know how to meet their needs. This work is grounded in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1998; Ainsworth 1979; Main & Goldwyn, 1985) and is also supported by more recent research (Sroufe, 2000; Schore, 2001; Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Geddes, 2006) highlighting the critical impact parenting has on both children's emotional development and their academic achievement. 'Story Links' is the term I introduced to describe the parent-partnership intervention that uses Therapeutic Storywriting to support parents and pupils at risk of exclusion and who are also behind with their reading. Story Links extends the previous Therapeutic Storywriting group model to include parents of individual pupils at risk of exclusion and who also have poor reading skills. The evaluation of this 10-week Story Links intervention in selected primary schools is the most in-depth and extensive study that I have conducted and the report is the final research output to be included in my submission (see chapter 7).

As the above paragraphs indicate, most of my research has either been practitioner research or concerned with evaluating the impact of educational interventions that I have personally developed. In order to support the validity of my work I have put procedures in place to monitor my subjectivity and to minimise bias in the research outcomes. This point is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 and specific procedures are also outlined in Chapter 4 and section 2.2.4 of the Story Links Programme Evaluation (attached as a separate document).

The research context

My work is set within the context of previous and current developments by other researchers and practitioners using narrative to support the emotional and social well-being of children. Mills & Crowley (1986) were early pioneers in using story to support emotionally troubled children and drew on the work of Erickson (1985) who made extensive use of story metaphor in his therapeutic work with adults.

Quite soon after, Australian family therapists White & Epston, (1990 & 2007) established what they termed 'narrative therapy' as a clinical approach for use with both adults and children. For them narrative is not constrained to literary texts but is used continually in the stories we construct for ourselves about our lives. Epston and White consider these internal stories as the "receiving context" (1990:2) for the events experienced in our lives. Apart from giving us a map for making sense of experiences they also point out how events that cannot be put on this map tend to be ignored. It is through the process of re-storying, therefore, that we construct and reconstruct our lives. They consider that the narrative process of 'externalising the problem' as something separate from the person can enable a more careful examination of the interaction between person and problem. Working in a family therapy situation they take the presenting 'problem' which is often seen as being attached to the child or the family and externalise it into a character which provides some distance between self and problem. They suggest that working in this way

tends to create a lighter atmosphere wherein children are invited to be inventive in dealing with their problem, instead of being so immobilised by blame, guilt or shame (1990:6).

An example of this way of working might be to characterise a child's sulkiness as Mr Grumpy who can then be discussed in various narrative scenarios. This is a different approach from talking about the problem of the child himself as being sulky. In this way, rigid negative descriptions of the child are avoided and instead they are invited to 'bring their own resources to bear' by offering alternative narratives in which this character can play a part. However, their way of working with the imaginary in children differs in an essential respect from that used in Therapeutic Storywriting as in the narrative therapy model it is the therapist who creates the narrative whereas in Therapeutic Storywriting the children are encouraged to create the story themselves.

There is now a wealth of literature (Cattanach, 1997; Davis, 1990; Sunderland, 2001) detailing narrative therapeutic interventions with children with some of the more recent work focusing on the use of therapeutic narratives to promote attachment (Lacher et al, 2005; Vetere & Dowling, 2005; Dallos & Vetere 2009). Much of this work is located in clinical mental health or social care settings and mainly focuses on making up or reading a pertinent story to the child and is rarely also used to support academic skills. The work of Hunt & Sampson (1998) does focus on the use of writing to process difficult feelings but all the case studies focus on adults rather than children.

In the field of education, many school counsellors use published stories to address pupils' emotional anxieties (Sunderland 2001) and Morton (2000) has also written about her work as an educational therapist where she scribes a co-created story with groups of vulnerable pupils, and thus models the writing process as well as supporting emotional well-being. The recent SEAL materials (DfES, 2005) also make extensive use of story to support emotional and social well-being; while the focus here is mostly on emotional literacy discussion some of the tasks do provide an opportunity to also develop reading and writing skills.

My own work aims to extend the work of that detailed above in that it aims to develop emotionally safe and appropriate models of intervention that not only draw on therapeutic principles but also support the development of academic skills. The school curriculum is used as the context for therapeutic story work and the focus is on therapeutic teaching, delivered by education professionals with additional training, to support pupils identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The research context is further explored in the individual papers and reports in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 & 7.

The policy context

Inclusion of pupils with BESDs

Over twenty-five years ago the Warnock Report (1978) instigated the inclusion debate and suggested that many pupils in special schools, including those with BESDs, should be 'integrated' into mainstream schools and in 1994 the UK government supported the UNESCO Salamanca statement (1994) which sets the goal of social inclusion for all children. Over the last two decades the government's inclusion policy has been to support pupils with BESDs in mainstream schools whenever possible. However, the inclusion

of pupils with BESDs has been a contentious issue (Visser et al, 2003; Warnock, 2005) not least because of the disruption they can cause to the learning of their peers.

The particular needs of pupils with BESDs was highlighted in the revised SEN Code of Practice (2001) which identified behaviour, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) as a separate category of need - an amendment to the first SEN Code of Practice (1994) which had only considered BESDs to be a SEN if accompanied by low academic attainment. The revised code (2001) defines pupils with BESDs as those

who are withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration; those with immature social skill; and those presenting challenging behaviours arising from other complex special needs. (7:60)

Every Child Matters (2003) written as a response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry states that every child, whatever their background or circumstances, should have the support they need to achieve five key outcomes: be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution; and achieve economic well-being. This influential document discusses the need for 'joined up thinking' between health, education and social care. *Removing Barriers to Achievement (2004)*, the document which applies the principles of *Every Child Matters* to Special Educational Needs (SEN), particularly emphasises the need to address mental health issues in mainstream schools while also acknowledging the need for professional development at this interface between mental health and education(2:27). The subsequent *Children's Plan (2007)* provided more concrete details for services on how they should move towards integrated service delivery models that link health, education and social care and this is now common practice around the country. One aspect of this re-structuring is that in many Local Authorities, Learning Support Services have been amalgamated with Behaviour Support Services (e.g. West Sussex). As Therapeutic Storywriting uses the educational curriculum as a therapeutic context and supports educational professionals to bring psychological-mindedness to their work in supporting pupils with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties it aligns well with current multi-disciplinary policy.

Integration within SEAL

One result of the increased focus on mental health and emotional well-being over the last few years has been the development of the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme and materials to support this have now been disseminated to both primary and secondary schools. These SEAL

materials focus on five particular aspects of social and emotional learning: developing self-awareness; the ability to manage feelings; motivation; empathy; and social skills in order to support pupils' learning (see appendix 3 for full definitions of these SEAL categories). The SEAL policy documents are clear that the materials provided are not exclusive and are designed to support a range of social and emotional learning programmes in schools. As the papers in this thesis will illustrate both Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and Story Links address these five aspects of social and emotional learning identified by SEAL using the particular context of working with story metaphor created by the pupils themselves.

Therapeutic Storywriting Groups target pupils who are typically at School Action (SA) or School Action Plus (SA+)¹ on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and as they support pupils whose BESDs require more support than can be provided in the whole class group the group intervention can be considered as a wave 2² SEAL intervention. The Story Links model, however, is a wave 3 intervention in that it provides support for those individual pupils whose BESDs are giving the school particularly serious cause for concern both in terms of their inclusion in the classroom and their progress in learning. These pupils will be on the SEN register at either SA+ or statement level for BESDs, indicating that their needs require a more specialist support than is normally provided by the school.

Parent partnership

The work of Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), commissioned by the DfES (now DfE), has also highlighted the link between parental involvement and pupils' academic achievement and been highly influential in subsequent government policy. The National Audit of Support, Provision and Services for Children with Low Incidence Needs (2006) further addresses the need to improve parent-partnership in meeting the needs of pupils with BESDs at risk of educational exclusion and also expressed concern about the lack of support for such parents (3.39 & 6.25). Soon after the discussion paper *Policy Review of Children and Young People* (2007) reiterated these concerns saying that

¹ DfES, 2001, SEN Code of Practice

² The UK Primary National Strategy (2003) uses a 3 wave model of intervention: Wave 1: Quality education of all (whole class); Wave 2: Small group; Wave 3: individual.

more could be done to build children's resilience to poor outcomes in key areas, including enhancing educational attainment and building social and emotional skills; and parents and communities are vital to create a supportive environment in which children and young people can develop; more can be done to build their capacity to fulfil this role. (p1)

The recent Steer report (2009) also highlights the role of parents in supporting both children's behaviour and academic attainment. It points out that while

There are few parents who do not want the best for their children, some may not have the confidence to engage with the school and some may feel alienated from school as a result of their own educational experience. (Steer 2009:53)

The inclusion of parents in supporting pupils at risk of exclusion is a key element of the Story Links model , which developed out of the earlier Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model and clearly supports the policy of parent partnership that has been emphasised in the above key policy documents.

Outline of following chapters

The published papers and reports are presented in chronological order in chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, & 7 and each is preceded by a commentary outlining the linkage and progression from previous work as well as further reflections on the research, literature and policy contexts. As individual papers have their own bibliography, a separate bibliography is given at the end of each commentary and at the end of the chapters 1, 6 & 8. Chapters 2 & 3 both use a simple case study approach in which the 'case' is an individual pupil and provide an introduction to the theoretical concepts informing the Therapeutic Storywriting approach. The methodology chapter is not presented until Chapter 6 as it is primarily written with reference to the major research report in this thesis presented in Chapter 7. However, some of the issues discussed are also pertinent to earlier chapters.

The final extended piece of research in chapter 7 received ethical approval from the University of Chichester where the research was conducted. There is also a detailed discussion of pertinent ethical issues in both the commentary in chapter 6 and the report itself in chapter 7. The research projects presented in the earlier papers were conducted independently and ethical considerations are outlined in the papers themselves.

Chapter 2

Paper A [journal paper]: (2002) 'The Therapeutic Use of Story Writing', in *Psychodynamic Practice* Vol. 8, No 3 pp 343-358 (sole-author, peer-refereed) [5,900 words]

This paper provides an introduction to the concept of 'therapeutic storywriting' and focuses on the psychodynamic aspects of the underpinning theory. The discussion is illustrated with reference to an individual pupil profile drawn from my own early work as a reflective practitioner.

Chapter 3

Paper B [chapter]: (2004) 'Working with Subpersonality Polarities' (chap. 4 pp. 35-44) in *Therapeutic Storywriting: A Practical Guide to Developing Emotional Literacy in Primary Schools*. London: David Fulton (sole author book) [3,000 words]

This chapter expands the discussion of the theory informing therapeutic storywriting to include aspects of psychosynthesis theory and in particular Assagioli's theory of subpersonalities. It is taken from my sole-author book *Therapeutic Storywriting* (Waters, 2004a) and again uses an individual pupil profile, drawn from my own practice, to illustrate theoretical points.

Chapter 4

Paper C [journal paper]: (2008) 'The Use of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups to Support Pupils with Emotional Difficulties' in *British Journal of Learning Support* Vol. 23, No 4 pp 187-192 (sole-author, peer-refereed) [4,100 words]

While the material in the previous two chapters draws on my research as a reflective practitioner, this paper extends my research in that it evaluates the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups delivered by a group of other educational professionals, following their completion of a 3-day training course in setting up Therapeutic Storywriting Groups. It is based on a wider evaluation report *Writing Stories with Feeling* (Waters, 2004b) which was commissioned by the South-East Region Special Educational Needs Partnership (SERSEN).

Chapter 5

Paper D [chapter]: (2010) 'Story Links: Therapeutic Storywriting with Parents and Pupils at Risk of Exclusion' in J. Adelizzi & M. Ficksman (eds) (2010) *The Dynamics of Educational Therapy* New York: Routledge (peer-refereed) [7,800 words]

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the Story Links parent-partnership model which extends the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model to include parents of individual pupils who are particularly at risk of exclusion because of their extreme behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The paper presented here was written as a chapter for a book on educational therapy published earlier this year in the United States. The theoretical background to the Story Links model is illustrated with a case study drawn from my own work with an individual pupil and his parent.

Chapter 6

The Rationale for using a Case Study Approach in Evaluating the Impact of the Story Links Intervention and Ethical Considerations

This chapter is an extended commentary on the methodological and ethical considerations relating to the major research evaluation presented in chapter 7. Due to its length it has been placed in a separate chapter. As specific details relating to research aims, methods, validity and ethical procedures are included in the actual report, this chapter explores more generic issues related to using a case study approach to evaluate Therapeutic Storywriting intervention such as Story Links. It also discusses some of the broader ethical issues that need to be considered when working with vulnerable pupils. Many of the methodological issues addressed are also of relevance to research presented in the earlier papers.

Chapter 7

Paper E [report]: (Dec 2009) *Story Links Programme Evaluation: The impact of a parent partnership intervention that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils at risk of exclusion. Part of the University of Chichester's Story Links Project, funded by the TDA and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and published on the TTRB website.*(sole-author) [45,000 words]

This is the major piece of research work presented in the thesis and, as it is an extended in-depth report, is attached in its original published format. This report documents the evaluation strand of the Story Links Project (2008-2009) which was funded by the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This final chapter provides a summary of the key research findings presented in the collection of papers, a discussion of key emergent themes and the implications of the findings for future research and development.

Notes

Note 1:

Gender convention - For ease of expression, pupils are generally referred to using the male gender and teachers using the female gender. While this is an arbitrary convention it does partially reflect the contexts described in the papers presented as the majority of pupils with BESDs in the research target groups were boys and the majority of the teachers participating in the research were female.

Note 2:

Anonymity - The names of all pupils and professionals referred to in the research data have been changed and permission given for the data to be used (see methodology in chapter 6 for more details.)

Note 3:

Referencing convention - There is some variance in the referencing convention adopted by the different publishers of the papers and reports included here. For coherence of presentation, however, I have used a uniform style for referencing throughout this thesis. Original references for published pieces are kept with the papers. References are also provided after each commentary section and at the end of chapters.

Note 4:

Referring to the published material - The published material included in this thesis consists of two journal papers, two book chapters and one report. However, for ease of referral they will at times be referred to as papers A, B, C, D and E.

Note 5:

Attached document - Paper E, the Story Links evaluation report that constitutes chapter 7, is attached as a separate published document.

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Chapter 2

Paper A: The Therapeutic Use of Story Writing (2002)

Psychodynamic Practice Vol. 8, No 3 pp 343-358 (sole author, peer-refereed)

[5,900 words]

Commentary on Paper A

This paper was written for a special edition of *Psychodynamic Practice* that focused on therapeutic interventions in schools. This paper is included here as it provides an introduction to what I have termed ‘therapeutic storywriting’.

A therapeutic teaching approach

Therapeutic Storywriting is a therapeutic teaching approach that uses the educational curriculum as a therapeutic context. It does not require educational professionals to become therapists but rather to bring psychological-mindedness to their work in supporting pupils with severe social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. As mentioned in chapter 1, the focus is on addressing the needs of pupils whose behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are getting in the way of their learning. The need to address this overlap between BESDs and learning is highlighted in the Policy Review of Children and Young People (2007) which refers to the research of Greenhalgh (1994) and states:

Social and emotional skills and attainment are mutually reinforcing, either positively or negatively. Some negative emotions (such as sadness, anger) can block learning, while other positive feelings (such as a sense of well-being, feeling safe and valued) promote learning. Managing the emotions can therefore assist learning. (para 3.28)

The interim Steer Report also concurs with this view and states that learning and behaviour are ‘inseparable issues for schools’ (2009:25).

Theoretical underpinning

As this paper was written for a psychodynamic journal, the focus is on the psychodynamic aspect of the theory underpinning the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups intervention (detailed further in chapter 3) and references are mainly to literature drawn from this tradition. In particular it draws on the concepts of attachment, emotional containment, and creating a ‘potential space’ (Winnicott, 1999) where parent and child can meet in a mutually enjoyable activity. It integrates this psychodynamic approach with the positive behavioural perspective which usually informs schools’ behaviour policies and practice.

Much of the literature is drawn from the field of psychotherapy rather than education: the reason for this is that at the time of writing there was little literature that addressed the interface between

psychodynamic theory and education in mainstream schools. This situation has since been remedied somewhat with the work of Geddes (2006) and Bomber (2007) who, since this paper was written, have written on the application of attachment theory to educational settings and this will be referenced particularly in chapter 5.

The paper aims to illustrate some of the basic principles of therapeutic storywriting that I later identified in my sole-author book as:

- Unconscious aspects of the self may be projected onto story characters
 - Story metaphor provides an emotionally safe medium in which to explore issues that might overwhelm the child if discussed directly
 - Storywriting can be viewed as a development from play
 - Story writing that engages the child's core sense of self can increase the motivation to write and develop academic literacy skills
 - Containment of anxiety is necessary for thinking to take place
 - Each child has a source of inner wisdom
 - Any shared interpretations should be kept within the story metaphor
- (Waters, 2004:11)

These principles are illustrated and supported in the following paper by an in-depth account of my own work with a pupil who presented as a selective mute in a large junior school where I was working as a SENCO.

Methodology

Methodologically, the paper presents the simplest form of case study with the 'case' being an individual pupil. Stake (2000), one of the leading exponents of the case study approach posed the question, 'What can be learnt from a single case?' (2000:442). In his response he employs the term 'naturalistic generalization' (ibid) to refer to the way a case study report can provide a vicarious experience for a reader familiar with a similar context and suggests that this can provide an opportunity for readers to

extend their memories of happenings...the reader comes to know things told, as if he or she had experienced it ... case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge. (ibid.)

What Stake is suggesting here is that, by telling the story of a particular case in a coherent and insightful manner, the reader or educational practitioner is able to integrate this into their own experience. This has certainly been corroborated by my own experience when I have shared this particular paper with SEN professionals over the past few years, as many of them have been emotionally affected by the case study account and a number have commented that it reminded them of their own work with emotionally vulnerable pupils, some of whom also presented with selective mutism.

My role in this case study is that of participant observer as the case is drawn from my own practice working as a SENCO. The concept of 'teacher as researcher' is well established in educational research in the UK (Stenhouse, 1979; Hammersley, 1993; McNiff & Whitehead 2009) and my aim in writing up this case was to show how an understanding of psychological theory can inform reflective practice in an emotionally safe and appropriate manner within the educational context of a mainstream school.

(See chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of case study methodology.)

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Paper A [journal paper]: The Therapeutic Use of Storywriting: Can literacy work provide a therapeutic context in which to support children with emotional and behavioural difficulties in mainstream schools?

Waters (2002) Psychodynamic Practice Vol. 8, No 3 pp 343-358 (sole author, peer-refereed)

Abstract

This paper looks at the possibility of supporting children with emotional and behavioural difficulties through the context of storywriting and considers whether by working therapeutically in this way it may be possible to integrate emotional and academic support in the mainstream school. The theoretical background draws on Bion's theory of containment in order to facilitate thinking, Winnicott's concept of setting up a potential space and Schore's idea of the sharing of metaphor in order to facilitate attachment. The way in which such a therapeutic view can be held within an educational context is illustrated through work with a 10 year old pupil in a literacy support group. The case example shows how story writing allowed a selective mute to express her feelings of being rendered unable to speak following domestic violence. This led to a marked development in both the quantity and quality of her writing as well as a confidence to begin to speak out. The relation of such therapeutic work to the special educational needs requirements in an inclusive mainstream schools is also discussed.

Keywords: Potential space, containment, holding, attachment, metaphor

Introduction

As a teacher I have often observed how children with emotional difficulties, who also often find it hard to stay on task in the classroom, can suddenly become completely focused and motivated when storywriting. When I began my teaching career in a therapeutic community school for boys with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBDs), I remember being particularly struck by how much the boys' own stories also seemed to say about themselves. These were children whose life 'story' had inevitably been a painful and complicated one, which they had felt powerless to affect. By playing with

different characters, scenes and plots of which they are the creators, storywriting seemed to provide a way of exploring who they were and what they felt within the protected world of the imaginary. With my later training in counselling and psychotherapy, I gained a deeper understanding of the potential therapeutic effect of encouraging children to express themselves through story and I have attempted to integrate this into my work as a mainstream junior teacher.

I currently work as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in a large junior school where, in addition to other duties, I teach support literacy groups as well as providing educational counselling for some individual children who are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register for EBDs. This paper is drawn from a wider research project conducted over the last three years based on storywriting work I have done with children aged 9-11 years. All of these children were on the special educational needs register because of emotional and behavioural difficulties as well as poor literacy skills and the work mainly took place within the literacy hour. I was interested in how storywriting might be used to help these children explore their inner worlds and whether by setting this exploration within a safe learning environment there could be an increased motivation to use and develop literacy skills. I have used just one case example in this paper to illustrate the main theoretical points discussed.

As a SENCO I am responsible for the allocation of our school's special needs budget. According to the Code of Practice for SEN (DfES, 2001) any referral for special educational needs due to EBDs is made because these difficulties are preventing the child accessing the curriculum. Any therapeutic work which uses school SEN resources will therefore need to be evaluated as to whether it has helped the child progress not just emotionally but also academically. While other therapeutic approaches may well provide emotional support for these children, I believe therapeutic storywriting is interesting because of the possibility of explicitly addressing both the emotional and cognitive needs of children with EBDs within the everyday context of the teaching of literacy.

Theoretical background

Storywriting as a development from play

Anna Freud (1926) and Klein (1932; 1982) developed Sigmund Freud's ideas of metaphor (1991) as a vehicle for the unconscious in their play therapy work with children. In the play therapy room a child may experiment with role play and story making but it will generally be verbalised without a formal structure. As Winnicott (1971) points out, more formalised cultural activities such as the storywriting expected of

junior age children in the literacy hour, can be considered as a natural progression from the play of the young child. Both involve, he says, the “*perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated.*” (p60).

If formal storywriting can be considered a progression from play it may also be useful to remember the conditions that enable young children to play creatively and see whether they may be transferred to this later form of expression. According to Winnicott (1971) creative play takes place when the primary caregiver is able to both ‘hold’ the child in awareness even when out of sight and also when they can provide a ‘potential space’ where the child can feel secure enough to play. This potential space is located between the individual and the environment but

failure of dependability (of the environment)... means to the child loss of the play area, and loss of meaningful symbol. (p120)

What might this mean when translated for an older school-aged child who is functioning emotionally at a younger developmental stage? In the context of a literacy class, I would suggest that it means that the child needs to feel secure in the learning group both with respect to the teacher and his peers. More than this they need to feel engaged with the writing task in a meaningful way which may not necessarily be conscious. They also need to feel secure that the teacher is aware of their particular needs and confident that they can explore and express their own ideas in their stories without fear of shame or failure in the eyes of the other children or the teacher.

Containment of anxiety in order for thinking to take place

Bion’s theory of thinking (1984) states that anxiety needs to be contained if thinking is to take place. The ability to think, he suggests, develops as a means to

bridge the gulf of frustration between the moment when a want is felt and the moment when action appropriate to satisfying the want culminates in its satisfaction. (1984:112)

Bion discusses how an incapacity for tolerating frustration can obstruct the development of thoughts and a capacity to think even though ‘*a capacity to think would diminish the sense of frustration intrinsic to appreciation between a wish and its fulfilment.*’ (ibid. p113) This is analogous to Freud’s (1989) idea that the thinking process engages when the reality principle is dominant. The concept which Bion uniquely

puts forward, however, is that the containment of this frustration by a significant other is what gives the subject the space to develop thinking. He considers that when a mother is able to provide empathic verbal reflection of the infant's anxiety then the child *"is receiving its frightened personality back again but in a form that it can tolerate- the fears are manageable by the infant personality"* (ibid. p115).

Thus the mother gives the child's experience of anxiety both meaning and also language. The child internalises this meaning and language which can then be used for his/her own thinking. By thinking about the child's anxiety the mother gives it meaning and the unbearable (unthinkable) is made bearable (thinkable). Bion's ideas on the relationship between containment and thinking are very pertinent to educational work with children who are emotionally insecure and I have found his language useful in framing what for me seems to be the fundamental question i.e. *How can we provide containment for the anxiety these children feel and help them feel secure enough to begin to think and learn in the classroom?*

Sharing of story metaphor as a means to facilitate attachment

Bowlby considered secure attachment to a significant other to be essential for the healthy emotional development of the child. He described in detail three different forms of attachment behaviour- one secure, and two insecure. Barrett and Trevitt (1991) have applied his ideas to the school environment and describe how the teacher as well as the therapist can become an attachment figure for the schoolchild. Cattanach (1997) who has used story extensively in her therapeutic work with children, also refers to the ability of story to facilitate attachment. She describes a story written by two sisters which seems to symbolise their anxieties about adapting to a new family and describes how the story, when read by the adoptive mother *"stirred the beginnings of attachment between mother and children"*. (p12).

I find Schore's (2000) writing on attachment particularly interesting, however, as he talks specifically about how the process of sharing of unconscious symbols and metaphors can facilitate attachment in a similar manner to the way the 'reverie' of the mother, described by Winnicott (1971), facilitates attachment between mother and the infant. Although Schore's work is set in the therapist/adult client context it seems equally pertinent to therapeutic story writing with children where metaphor is a central element.

Interpretation through the metaphor

Reflection and interpretation of the meaning of story metaphor is integral to the therapeutic process in that it provides the teacher/therapist with insight into the child's inner state and as mentioned above can facilitate attachment. However, one of the key points in working with children's metaphor is whether it is appropriate to communicate this directly to the child or whether interpretation, if verbalised at all, is confined to the metaphor. In the field of play therapy this has been discussed at length. At one end of the spectrum is the Kleinian (1932) approach which considers explicit interpretation to be essential for healing to take place and at the other end is the Axline (1947) approach endorsed by Winnicott (1971) who states clearly that , *"It is not the moment of my clever interpretation that is significant"* (p 51).

Bettelheim (1997) who pioneered the therapeutic use of story in his work with severely emotionally disturbed children considered the imaginary to have an intelligence of its own and talks about unconscious material being *"worked through in imagination."* He emphasises that the significance of stories is intimately connected with the child's search for meaning but this is done, he says,

not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams- ruminating, rearranging, and fantasising about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. (p7)

This implies that direct interpretation by a 'wise therapist' would be inappropriate but rather leads to the view that the imagination has a wisdom in itself which when given the right conditions has an internal healing force. My own intuitive sense through working with children using story has also led me to adopt this view. In trying to endorse this with a more rigorous intellectual framework, it is only in the writings of the French philosopher Ricoeur (1991) that I have found the issue addressed. Ricoeur considers that stories are not just recounted but *'lived in the mode of the imaginary'*. He distinguishes between the unconscious imaginary where untold stories reside and what he calls 'second-order narrative' thinking where the creative imagination is structured through the formation of a specific narrative. He describes how this structuring may also lead to a reconfiguring of the self. What Ricoeur seems to be saying is that the very act of structuring the unconscious through narrative leads to a greater availability of feeling and expression albeit in the metaphor. Thus the act of writing or sharing unconscious images allows some sort of integration within the psyche of these unconscious elements, independently of whether they have been interpreted or not.

Case example

Anya joined my weekly Year 6 literacy support group as she was on stage 3 (now SA+) of the special educational needs register for emotional, speech & language and literacy difficulties. She was an attractive ten year old who appeared well cared for but who in class was very withdrawn and was in effect a selective mute. Her teacher said she would not speak to her even to say yes or no and mostly would just sit and not attempt her work at all. The most response she would give would be a shrug of the shoulders. At times she would become completely stubborn and have temper tantrums. She had been referred to a child psychotherapist at CAMHS but after a long wait for an appointment had only attended 2 or 3 times because she refused to speak in these sessions! Anya lived with her mother and sister.

In the first session when the group met Anya arrived without her guidelines that were needed for the writing task. When I asked her to go back to class to get them she said nothing and did not get up. I repeated in a gentle but firm manner that she needed to go and get these for the work we were doing. A similar non-response was given. When I asked if she was concerned about disturbing the teacher and whether she would like someone to go with her tears came to her eyes. By now the other five members of the group had been sitting around the table for a few minutes waiting to begin the task. At this point I asked her if she was feeling unwell. Again no reply but more tears were welling up. Not being aware of her psychological history in this first week of the academic year, I thought that something particular had upset her or perhaps she was unwell and I said I would take her to the medical room. Leaving the other members of the group for a moment, I handed her over to the office staff who took her to the medical room and I returned to the group to teach the literacy lesson. About 10 minutes later the secretary came to tell me that Anya was having a huge tantrum in the medical room kicking the wall and sobbing hysterically. It was at this point that I realised how deep-rooted a psychological problem she had.

By the second week following discussions with the previous special educational needs coordinator and classteacher, I had more of an idea of Anya's difficulties. In this session she arrived but would not sit down at the table with the rest of the group. When I approached her to quietly ask if she was alright, she physically withdrew and hunched up her shoulders. She had tears in her eyes and looked frightened. I told her that it was OK for her to stand there and that we would just get on with the lesson. I noticed the other members of the group, particularly the boys most of whom were used to being pretty disruptive themselves at times, looking at me somewhat amazed. I said to them that we would just get on with the lesson and that it was OK for Anya to stand there. They responded in what felt to me as a very supportive manner and immediately focused on the task, without any comment on Anya's behaviour. I felt their

ability to recognise that Anya's behaviour was not 'normal', especially as they had observed the incident over the guidelines the previous week, meant that they could allow me to give her a different set of boundaries to the rest of the group. Anya stood up throughout the lesson, did none of the task and did not say anything –nor did she disturb us.

The next week she came in and sat down in the place nearest to me which I had reserved for her and, although she had the appropriate writing equipment, again did not begin the task or speak. I focused on the main work with the group though occasionally would repeat the instructions to her and say that she could do some work when she was ready. She did not write anything during this lesson. On speaking with her classteacher after the lesson she confirmed that she was not doing any writing in class either. There were also a number of incidents during this first half-term when Anya had had tantrums which caused a disturbance to the whole class. The classteacher had, understandably with a class of thirty-five children, found these very difficult to deal with. On two occasions she was unable to pacify Anya or to get her to leave the classroom and resorted to taking the rest of the class out of the classroom into the playground while an adult was called into the classroom to deal with Anya who was screaming, sobbing and kicking. At parents evening Anya's mother told me that she had similar tantrums at home. She also mentioned that Anya had witnessed traumatic and violent domestic events although she did not go into details.

Although Anya did not do any writing and remained silent during the first 3 or 4 sessions, I noticed that she listened intently to any story I read. The literacy project we were engaged in at this time was based on the Y6 literacy curriculum aspect of understanding parody through work on fairy tales. I had been reading some modern day parodies of fairy tales. Several weeks into the term, I asked the children to think of a well-known fairy tale and to write their own version of it. To my amazement Anya picked up her pen and began to write her story "We've Been Eaten" based on the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears.

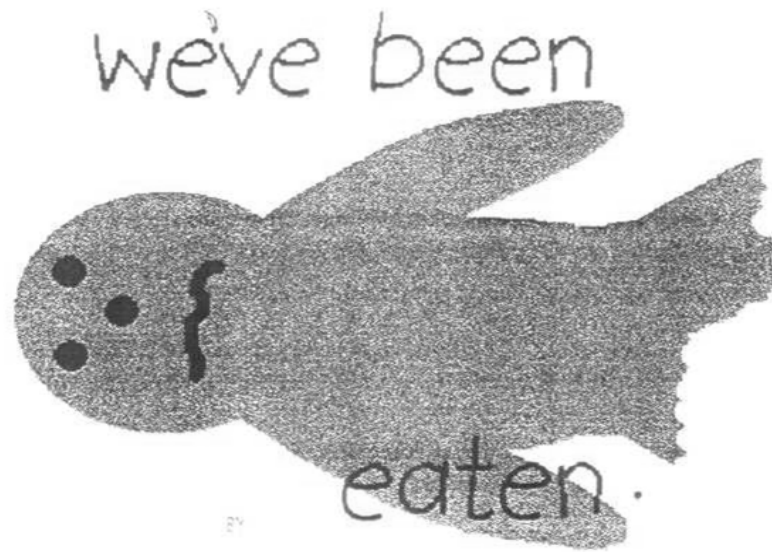


Figure 1: Cover picture for Anya's story

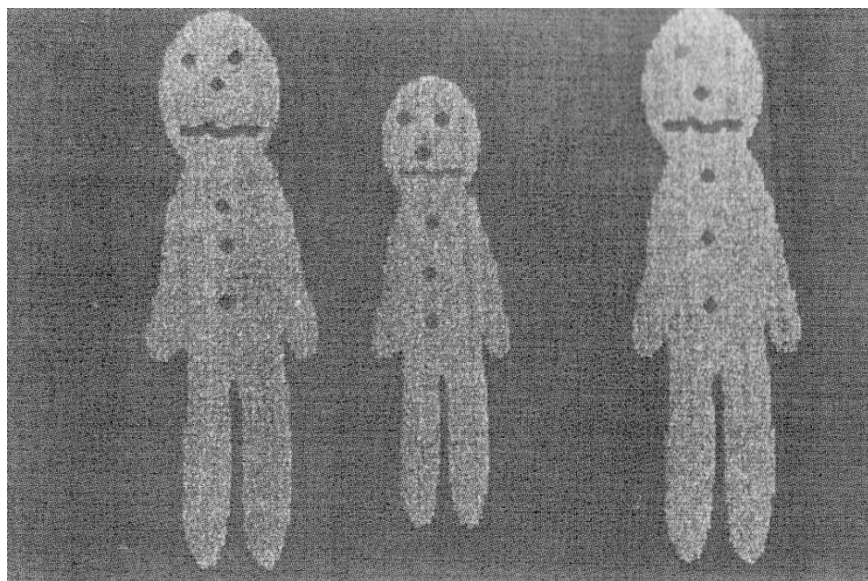


Figure 2: Inside picture for We've Been Eaten

On the first page it said, 'This book is dedicated to all the gingerbread men I have ever eaten.' And then it began:

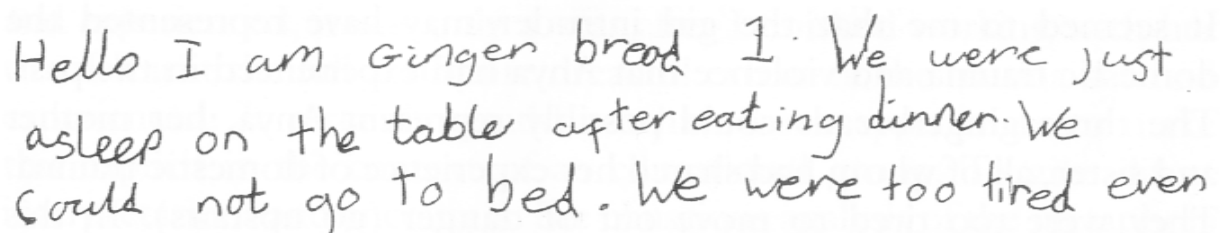
Hello I am Ginger bread 1. We were just asleep on the table after eating dinner. We could not go to bed. We were too tired even to walk upstairs. Suddenly a girl jumped in through

our window which made me wake up but I lay still just in case. She fell asleep in baby bread's bed, woke up and tried out my bed and ginger bread 2's bed. Then she sat on baby bread's chair and broke it. After that she rejected my chair and Ginger bread two's chair.

Then she started nibbling baby breads toes and up and up and up. So now baby bread was eaten. Then she ate gingerbread two- and now she is eating me. She is eating my little toes and now is up to my knees. Being eaten, as you know, is very painful. You just wish they would hurry up and eat you all up. I'm afraid I cannot speak anymore because I'm very nearly eaten. (165 words)

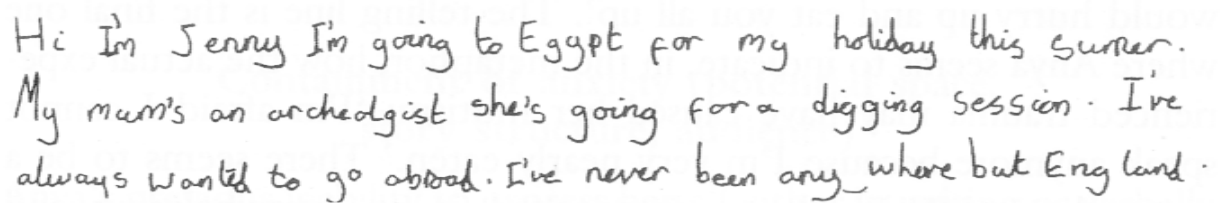
For homework the children were asked to do a cover and an inside picture for their stories. Anya brought in the picture shown in figures 1 & 2 above. This was the first lesson in which Anya spoke to me and said very quietly that she had done them on the art package of her computer at home. Nothing else was said and when we went around the table sharing our stories with each other she did not want to share hers or to have it read out.

In the weeks following Anya became engaged in all the literacy tasks given to the group. The next story she wrote was 925 words long compared to the 165 of the first one. While written only about six weeks after the first story, it showed a marked improvement in handwriting fluency as shown in figures 6 & 7 and a considerable leap both in sentence construction and maturity of expression.



Hello I am ginger bread 1. We were just asleep on the table after eating dinner. We could not go to bed. We were too tired even

Figure 3: Example of handwriting from We've Been Eaten



Hi I'm Jenny I'm going to Egypt for my holiday this summer.
My mum's an archeologist she's going for a digging session. I've
always wanted to go abroad. I've never been any where but England.

Figure 4: Example of handwriting from Jenny in Egypt, written six weeks later

It really seemed as if a blockage to her expression had been removed. In this story too, there was a working through of unconscious issues as shown in this short extract:-

How am I going to get back? (home) I got here by travelling through time. I went in the mummy case and I was here (in Ancient Egypt) so if I go back in the mummy case I will be back to the modern world. But how will I get back unless I die...Everyone was talking and joking and nobody noticed that there was a poisonous snake on the loose. It came straight towards me and bit me.

Although she continued not to speak in the group, even when a question was directed to her, she would occasionally say a quiet 'yes' or 'no' to a question that I would ask about her work.

Anya was happy for me to read out her second story to the group. She was now taking the first draft of this second story home and word processed most of the text adding her own computer generated art images. Although she had quickly overtaken the other members of the group in terms of her literacy skills, we decided to keep her in this weekly group for the rest of the year in order to foster her newly found self-confidence. She became gradually more verbal over the next two terms and would occasionally by the third term put up her hand to answer a question speaking in a whisper. However, she was still unable to take a turn in shared reading. Throughout the year I cultivated her interest in information technology (IT) especially in relation to the IT art packages. In the summer term I was teaching the use of the computer programme Dazzle to the whole of Y6 as part of the IT curriculum. Anya was in the first group I taught and produced some excellent work. I decided to train several children as 'teachers' of Dazzle to help the other children. I asked Anya if she would be one of these. She looked really shocked when I asked her- she would have to communicate with them! But she also flushed with pride. She agreed to give it a go. When her name was mentioned as one of the 'teachers' the other

children also looked surprised. She managed this task quite well, quietly teaching a couple of the other girls that she felt more secure with in the room where I worked.

At the end of term we were doing an achievement assembly and I asked her if she could speak in the assembly about the IT work. She looked even more worried this time! I said she could practise with me on her own first to see how it went. She spoke in a big confident voice. I was amazed. When repeating her speech in the hall in a loud, clear confident voice one of the boys next to me turned and said, “We didn’t think she could speak”. It was quite a moving end to the year of work with Anya.

Discussion of Case Example

Interpretation of ‘We’ve been Eaten’

I experienced Anya’s first story as a particularly powerful one and I will therefore first make clear what my intuitive interpretation was, before going on to discuss it in relation to other aspects of the work. It seemed to me that the girl intruder may have represented the domestic trauma and violence that Anya had experienced in the past. The three gingerbreads could possibly represent Anya, her mother and sister- all of whom had long ginger hair and had also shared her experience of domestic trauma. They were too tired to move out of danger (go upstairs). In this interpretation, Anya watched while the other two were consumed by the violent events and then was consumed by the trauma herself. She is able to say that this is so painful that *“You just wish they would hurry up and eat you all up”*. The telling line is the final one where Anya seems to indicate in the metaphor about how the actual experienced trauma may have caused her mutism: *“I’m afraid I cannot speak anymore because I’m very nearly eaten.”* There seems to be a sense that what has been experienced is so overwhelming and destructive that it is impossible to give it words. It is interesting to note that it is also the mouth, from which words come, that is the destroyer of the gingerbreads.

Attachment, Interpretation within the Metaphor and Confidentiality

My interpretation of Anya’s stories led to a reflection on and engagement with the metaphors used. This took the form, not of a logical standard analysis, but more of an intuitive response, albeit informed by my particular therapeutic training. In this sense it became a meeting of two unconsciousnesses, similar to the manner discussed by Schore (2000) and where he says attachment can most effectively take place. The usefulness of my personal interpretation was that it gave me an insight into the significance for Anya of

this piece of writing. It showed me the depth of the wounding that she had experienced – a wounding that had felt like obliteration – and because of this strengthened my desire to provide a safe and nurturing environment, i.e. a potential space, where she could continue to develop self-confidence and expression through her creative writing. My interpretation could have been wide of the mark but it facilitated a closer attachment between us.

At no time during or after the writing of her story did I share any of my interpretation of the story with her. Any interpretation was only made within the metaphor with comments like *“she must have felt very scared watching that”* or *“that must have been very painful for the baby gingerbread”*. It is worth noting particularly how in the case of Anya that although I had a sense from her story that something terrible had been witnessed and experienced, it was only a year after I finished working with her that I learnt the full and quite dreadful extent of the trauma she had experienced. It certainly would not have been appropriate to make this explicit in the context of an educational group. To give direct interpretations and encourage the conscious analysis of the metaphors would also have serious implications for confidentiality- a key issue when considering offering therapeutic provision in an educational setting.

Containment of anxiety (potential space, story structure, audience)

Anya's previous inability to express herself either in writing or verbally can be viewed as linked to her inability to contain her feelings about the traumatic events she had witnessed. In my interpretation these had truly been too awful for her to speak about. In fact, for her, the experience had felt like being eaten – an extremely painful process which resulted in her feeling as though she no longer existed. If you do not exist you certainly cannot speak. Her rage could only be given wordless expression through kicking, screaming and sobbing in a hysterical manner as evidenced in the tantrums at school and home. In addition to the provision of a safe place, I would suggest that both the use of a story structure and the availability of an audience (myself) who would receive the stories also provided a containment for her anxiety.

Through the initial setting up of a regular special needs group which consisted of just six children in a room off the main classroom, a 'potential space' was created. For Anya to be able to engage with learning it seemed that it was necessary for her to feel that her anxieties could be accepted and contained in the group. She also needed to have some control over her personal boundaries. By allowing her firstly to stay standing in the corner and later just to sit at the table next to me without doing any work gave her the message that she could be allowed to exist with her anxieties in this place. That I was

able to protect her from comments or intrusion from the rest of the group enabled her to dare to bring herself into the group through her stories. This would have been very difficult for the class teacher to do with a group of thirty-five children to teach. In this space she was allowed first to be passive and receive the stories until she was ready to 'play' with her own ideas. A new and different potential space was established later when she was allowed to work independently with another child on the computer at the other end of the room in which I was teaching, having by this time formed an attachment relationship with myself. This felt very much like the 'holding' described by Winnicott when the mother has the child in mind even when not interacting directly.

I had already modelled story structure through the reading of fairy tales and their parodies- in which often quite terrible things happen and yet the narrator survives. The structure of the story allowed her to project the previously unbearable feelings onto the characters and in so doing she began to describe the feeling of being devoured. In this way she was able to place herself in the new position of narrator/author. By taking up this stance, it is possible that a new centre of self was created which could survive the traumatic events - in fact could survive to 'tell the tale'. From this strengthened sense of self she was able to further explore the theme of death/obliteration.

I was the main receiver/audience of Anya's stories. Through the process of reflecting on and interpreting the metaphor of her stories, I noticed an increased tendency on my part to think about her unspeakable anxieties. By mirroring with my comments, both verbal and written, the anxieties expressed in the stories, I helped to give her experiences extended language and meaning. In Bion's terms, I began to contain her anxiety which may have allowed her to begin to think about feelings which had previously been too unbearable to think about. This in turn supported further development of the thinking process as reflected in the increased output of writing and improved sentence construction in her second story. In this later story, in fact, the main character was able to use her thinking to overcome the death situations and return to the mother in the present.

Emotional and academic learning

As she became able to articulate her feelings in her stories, Anya began to find her actual voice albeit tentatively at first. The improvement in Anya's literacy skills as described in the profile was dramatic. One way in which I communicated my respect for both the stories written by all the children in the group was by ensuring time was given to completing final edited published drafts with illustrations. The cultivation of Anya's interest in IT in order to publish her stories also led to her quickly acquiring new IT skills.

Through the teaching of these to other children, her speech and language skills improved to the point where she was able to speak aloud in an assembly for the first time at the school.

Conclusion

With the current policy of inclusion, mainstream schools are being expected to deal with children who have considerable emotional difficulties and whose behaviour can be both disturbed and disturbing. Such children often also have learning difficulties in the area of literacy. Given that funding for special educational needs must relate to improving educational attainment, therapeutic storywriting may be a useful way to integrate emotional and literacy support for such children. For this to happen thought needs to be given to setting up a potential space where the child can feel secure enough to explore their ideas through writing. This potential space needs to include an appropriate physical space, regular sessions and the presence of a psychologically-minded teacher with whom the child can form a secure relationship (there are implications here for professional development). By projecting feelings onto story characters the child may be able to begin to identify and name emotions in the safety of the imaginary. By taking the role of narrator they are in a position to explore how the characters will react in different situations. In this way the child may begin to work through previously unresolved emotional issues. By supporting children in this process through modelling and mirroring the stories, the teacher may be able to extend the child's language and meaning associated with the emotional dilemmas of the story. The benefit of keeping any interpretation by the teacher within the metaphor is that the child's personal vulnerability is not exposed and confidentiality does not become a big issue. By giving children the space to explore core issues through their storywriting they may become more motivated to engage with the process of writing and develop their writing skills. The stories which are produced by these particular children can be truly compelling. They can lead us to wonder, as Freud did,

from what sources that strange being, the creative writer, draws his material, and how he manages to make such an impression on us with it and to arouse in us emotions of which, perhaps, we had not even thought ourselves capable. (Freud 1959:143)

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for parental permission to use the pupil's work in the case example. The child's name has been changed to protect confidentiality.

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Chapter 3

Paper B: Subpersonalities and a Model of the Self (2004)

*from Therapeutic Storywriting: A Practical Guide to Developing Emotional Literacy in Primary Schools.
London: David Fulton (sole-author book) (chapter 3 pp. 24- 30)*

Commentary on Paper B

While the previous paper explores the psychodynamic aspect of the Therapeutic Storywriting model, this chapter draws on psychosynthesis theory developed by Assagioli (1965) and in particular his theory of subpersonalities. It is taken from my book *Therapeutic Storywriting* (Waters, 2004) that was published by David Fulton, a leading publisher in the field of SEN. It is included as it provides a clear introduction to the concept of subpersonality theory that is a core aspect of Therapeutic Storywriting, a consequence of my own counselling training being rooted in the psychosynthesis tradition. As my book was written primarily for teachers supporting pupils with SEN and is less academic than the other papers included in this thesis, the commentary will present the theoretical context for Assagioli's Theory of Subpersonalities.

Assagioli's Theory of Subpersonalities

Assagioli initially trained as a Freudian analyst and while his model grew out of the psychodynamic tradition, he was also much influenced by the work of humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1951) and Maslow (1954). In common with these humanistic theorists, Assagioli considered that each person has an innate drive to health and well-being and included what he called a 'higher unconscious' in his model of the Self (1965). He considered that the role of the therapist was not to solve the client's problems but to facilitate them in their own process of self-discovery or self-actualisation.

In his theory of subpersonalities, Assagioli also drew on the work of Goffman (1959) who had developed a theory of multiple selves. Goffman suggests that we have many selves each with a range of identities that are called up according to the social situation in which we find ourselves. Am I most truly 'myself' when I am in my role as mother, as daughter, as frantic housewife or aspiring academic? Goffman points out that each of these selves has its own persona with an associated set of feelings, body postures, tone of voice etc.. Each of these selves is, if you like, her own character. As soon as the social stage changes, this character will be put away and replaced with another more appropriate to the current situation.

The notion of subpersonalities has overlaps with the narrative therapy concept of externalization (White 2007) but in addition provides a step-by-step approach by which this externalizing process can be used to strengthen the sense of self (Assagioli, 1965). Assagioli developed Goffman's ideas to unite the subpersonalities around a central core Self which is not identified with a particular subpersonality but is able to engage and disengage with them at will. The image he gives is of the conductor of the orchestra who does not play an instrument but is able to bring in and quieten each with their different qualities at

will. The core Self is characterised by a sense of clarity and an ability to choose to act of one's own free will. Assagioli's model deals extensively with the unconscious elements of these subpersonalities and proposes methods for working with their dysfunctional elements. He outlines four progressive steps that can be used to work on subpersonalities which can lead to a strengthening of the self. They are recognition, identification, integration and dis-identification. Whitmore (1995) gives a clear illustration of these processes in adult therapy. Assagioli hoped that his ideas would be applied to the world of education as well as to adult psychotherapy (it was for this reason that the centre in London was called the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust) but in fact, apart from the work of Whitmore (1990), little has been done in the education field to date. The following chapter illustrates how I have tried to adapt Assagioli's theory of subpersonalities to the context of therapeutic storywriting with children.

As in the previous paper, theoretical concepts are illustrated with a case study of an individual pupil. The pupil was one of six who attended a course of 10 weekly one hour group sessions. This work is taken from a later period of my work as a SENCO than the case study in Chapter 2 and I had by this time started to use the term Therapeutic Storywriting Group to describe the sessions.

Commentary References (chapter 3)

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Paper B [chapter]: Subpersonalities and a Model of the Self

From Waters (2004) Therapeutic Storywriting: A Practical Guide to Developing Emotional Literacy in Primary Schools. London: David Fulton (sole author book) (chapter 3 pp. 24- 30)

Narrative is like a template that we place upon our lives, so that we can understand our selves, and our world. It is through narrative that we can step out of the darkness of ourselves. (Pie Corbett 2001:4)

What are subpersonalities?

Many of us may, at times, have experienced ourselves as not just one self but as different selves each wanting different things and sometimes competing for attention. Subpersonality is the term used in psychosynthesis therapy to refer to these different aspects of the self which come to the fore in different situations and with which we may then become identified. As Rowan (1993) shows in his book *Discover Your Subpersonalities*, other therapeutic traditions including transactional analysis, gestalt therapy and neuro-linguistic programming also use the concept of subpersonalities.

One particular subpersonality may come into play when we are at work, we may identify with another when we are with a close relative and yet another with a close friend. Sometimes the parts of ourselves that take over can seem to be outside our control leading us to make comments such as 'I don't know what came over me' or 'I just wasn't myself'. The subpersonalities that take over at these times are generally the ones of which we are least conscious.

Children also have a range of subpersonalities which come to the fore in different situations. They can behave and feel one way with their classteacher, another with a supply teacher, another with their friends in the playground and yet another with their parents. Anyone who has taught children with EBDs will also be familiar with how these children can change persona quite dramatically even without any obvious change of outer circumstances. What is interesting, however, is that each of us, children and adults, seem to have a unique set of subpersonalities. Subpersonality theory provides a structure for working with these in order to develop a stronger core sense of self.

Subpersonalities as psychological entities

Each subpersonality can be considered as a psychological entity, each with its own particular set of attributes including a belief system, emotional state, set of body postures and even tone of voice. It can be interesting to try and name them- the Perfectionist, the Couch Potato, the Mischievous Child, the Heroine, the Mystic, the Materialist are some common ones that come to mind. Naming these aspects of ourselves in this way can bring a humorous lightness and also confirms that each subpersonality is just a part of ourselves. However, in everyday life when certain subpersonalities are triggered, we can sometimes feel that we are only that subpersonality and forget that any other state of being is possible. Training exercise 3.1 (not included here) provides a practical introduction to the concept of subpersonalities by asking participants to explore their own personal set of subpersonalities that vie for attention. This exercise is not suggested for use with children but will develop the teacher's own understanding of subpersonalities as different aspects of the self.

Projection onto story characters

In both adult and children's writing, subpersonalities may be projected onto the characters in the story. Much of what has been written in previous chapters about characters as aspects of the self can also be described in terms of subpersonalities.

Not every character in a child's story, however, will represent a significant subpersonality. One of the particular skills that a Therapeutic Storywriting teacher needs to develop is to identify which characters in the child's story are particularly pertinent to the child's core sense of self and hence represent a significant subpersonality. In order to do this it is necessary to be familiar with the child's presenting issues and personal history.

Case example to illustrate identification of a significant subpersonality within a child's story: The Parrot by Nathaniel

As an example of identifying a significant subpersonality, we will look at the beginning of a short story written in a group by 8 year old Nathaniel. Nathaniel had been taken into care at an early age before reaching his current stable foster home. He had a history of playing with matches in his room and stealing food. He was also very small for his age.

The Secret Message

There was a secret garden and in it everything was secret. On a Summer's day there was a message. It said,

To Luke,

I hope the U.F.O. has gone

See you soon, Daniel

Then Luke's Mum called him in because his Granny and Granddad were coming and they were having roast dinner. That moment, the door rang. Mum told Lucky not to bark as she went to open the door. It was Granny and Grandad - and a parrot who ate all the roast! So Mum had to do the roast again. This time the parrot was upstairs and they had a good meal. That night they were watching a James Bond video when the siren on the smoke alarm went off. Mum shouted,

"Get out of the house!"

The firefighters came quickly and put out the fire.

Later the parrot found a lighter and set the bed on fire. Mum ran up the stairs and opened the door. All the smoke came out and Mum shouted,

"Call the firefighters again. The bed is on fire!"

That second they all dived for the phone but Luke got it and dialled 999 and asked the police and firefighters if they could come round again...

There are a range of characters in this story but knowing something of his history it is clear that Nathaniel has projected a significant subpersonality onto the parrot who stole the food and lit fires just as Nathaniel had done himself. As we continued to work on this story my focus therefore was on the parrot rather than Daniel, the grandparents, Lucky the dog, the firefighters, Mum or even Luke. I also wondered whether the message received at the beginning, which mentions an Unidentified Flying Object, might also refer to the parrot –the unidentified part of himself that could cause trouble. Although the story had veered away from the The Secret Message indicated by the title my concern was not to focus on this initial theme but to stay with Nathaniel's interest which was clearly the parrot. My questions were designed to help Nathaniel become more familiar and to begin to identify with the parrot. Here are some of the questions and Nathaniel's replies:-

Q/I wonder why the parrot ate the dinner

A/Because he had never been fed

Q/Why was he so hungry?

A/Because he had just been made

Q/I'm also curious about why he set fire to the bed

A/Because he wanted to be naughty because he was angry at being locked up in a smelly bedroom

Q/I wonder how he could get out of the bedroom

A/ There was a secret password: chocolate. That would open the door but he didn't know that.

Nathaniel asked for help from the group, as he didn't know what to write next. Several children and myself made suggestions. He wrote these all down and chose the one I had made which was that the parrot needed to be free. His story continued,

'The fire fighter said,

"Let the parrot go. Let it have its freedom and grow bigger"

So they did. The parrot had all it wanted. He felt very happy with the firefighter. But when it was free the parrot met a horrible parrot. They had a battle. The parrot threw a TV at the other horrible parrot and it died. Everyone cheered and they had fun".



Figure 5: Nathaniel's picture of the parrot

Having escaped the parrot was able to defeat the other horrible parrot just as Nathaniel now living in a supportive family was more able to contain the tendencies he still had in himself at times to take things and cause mischief. He was also able to start having fun!

A good indicator of when a character reflects a significant subpersonality is the engagement of the child when discussing the character. Nathaniel became quite excited and his facial expression changed dramatically when talking about the parrot. His accompanying illustration, which included none of the other characters, also shows that the parrot is a projection of a significant subpersonality. I felt the picture to be a powerful expression of his attempt to contain feelings that he thought of as evil. This also reflected his recent efforts at improving his behaviour both at school and home. However, it also seemed to point to his need for future support in coming to terms with difficult feelings that he still held inside.

Unconscious subpersonalities cause problems!

When listing our personal subpersonalities as in exercise 3.1 (not included here), it is interesting to note which of our subpersonalities we are least willing to accept. Subpersonality theory works on the premise that it is our unconscious subpersonalities that cause the problems. These are the ones we don't like to acknowledge and perhaps are not even aware of. However, the law of the dynamic unconscious is that aspects of the self that are denied expression cause a build up of psychic pressure with the consequence that it is these very parts of ourselves that claim centre stage when we least want them around. Although a particular subpersonality may cause us to act in a way that we do not like or is against our interests, we seem unable to control it by an act of will. This is particularly evident in children with EBDs, many of whom can be described as having 'poor impulse control'. By projecting these unconscious subpersonalities onto conscious story fantasy the child can begin to explore those aspects of themselves that might be overwhelming to confront directly. In Bettelheim's words, 'the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content.' (1991:7)

By projecting a subpersonality onto a story character such as Nathaniel did with his parrot, the child is able to protect his own vulnerability while still tentatively exploring this less acceptable part of himself.

Every subpersonality serves a purpose

According to subpersonality theory, each subpersonality has actually been developed to serve a purpose – generally to protect the core sense of self. Although subpersonalities may seem unhelpful in the way they present, there is considered to always be an underlying positive quality whose energy can be put to

constructive use in the individual's life. In Nathaniel's story it was his Parrot subpersonality which brought the family to the attention of the police and the fire fighters just as Nathaniel's own difficult behaviour had indicated that care intervention was required.

A Model of the Self

The Self as Conductor of the Psychological Orchestra

If subpersonalities are viewed as different aspects of the self, we need to consider what is the core nature of the self. Subpersonality theory considers that while the core sense of self often becomes identified with a particular subpersonality, it also has the ability to step out of these roles. It can be compared to the conductor of an orchestra where the different instruments represent the different subpersonalities. The quality of each one of the orchestral instruments needs to be known intimately by the conductor and only then can she bring them in at will and use them to the desired effect. The timpani are not allowed to boom out when what is needed at that point is a delicate flute although at another time their power and assertion may be required. Likewise, as subpersonalities are brought into the awareness of the core self, the individual becomes able to choose the appropriate time and place to use the energy of their different subpersonalities. For instance, certain feelings and behaviours, which are not appropriate to express in the classroom, may be quite acceptable at home or in the playground.

Like the orchestral conductor, the qualities of this core self are considered to be **awareness** and **will**. Awareness involves becoming familiar with the feelings, thoughts and actions of our different subpersonalities. As this awareness develops so does the need for an extended emotional vocabulary with which to give it expression – both to ourselves and others. The will aspect of the self can be measured by an increase in control over self-expression, the ability to make constructive choices and increased personal motivation.

Working with subpersonalities in order to strengthen the sense of self

In working with children with EBDs one of the main tasks is to help them develop a stronger core sense of self. One way to do this is to help the child to have more awareness and control over unconscious subpersonalities. In order for the self to have control over a subpersonality it is necessary to be able to step back a little from it and be able to disidentify from it. This process does not happen by ignoring the unconscious subpersonality but by first recognising it, getting to know it intimately and integrating it with

others. There are four steps which subpersonality theory outlines for the process of strengthening of the self:-

- Recognition of subpersonality
- Identification with subpersonality
- Integration with other subpersonalities
- Disidentification from the subpersonality

Whitmore (1995:80) gives a clear illustration of these processes in adult therapy. According to subpersonality theory, when the personal self is able to completely disidentify from all subpersonalities, connection is made with a higher or transpersonal aspect of the self. Guided imagery work which focuses on particular transpersonal imagery as described in chapter 9 (not included here) can help develop this connection.

The process of bringing all our subpersonalities into consciousness is, of course, a lifetime's work but the principles can be useful to work with at all stages of personal development. In working with children with EBDs the main work will be to recognise and identify with a particular subpersonality with small steps towards integration and disidentification. Below is an adaptation of the theory to the context of story writing with children.

Working with subpersonalities in the context of children's storywriting

Recognition of subpersonality: The first step is for the child to be able to recognise and access the energy of a significant subpersonality. In children's therapeutic writing this is done by setting up a writing environment which encourages the child to write freely about issues that are pertinent to them. An opening activity which checks-in on how children are currently feeling, resources to extend their emotional vocabulary and some choice over the story theme are all ways of encouraging children to project core subpersonalities onto story characters. These practical approaches are explored in chapter 5 (not included here). A teacher's modelled story that draws attention to a particular aspect of the child's personality, as outlined in training exercise 3.2 (not included here), is another way of naming and recognising a subpersonality. Following the general principle of working through metaphor, a subpersonality described in the teacher's story should be sufficiently disguised so as to not be immediately identifiable by the child as relating to himself as this could make him feel too emotionally exposed. The writing of the teacher's story is explored in more depth in chapter 8 (not included here).

Identification with subpersonality: Having recognised a particular subpersonality, the next stage is to really get to know and be able to identify with it. This is achieved by encouraging the child to get 'inside the skin' of a particular character. How would that character feel in a particular situation? How would it react to a particular event? What does it want? What does the character really need to be happy? By encouraging the child to address these questions they begin to really get to know this projected subpersonality. Drawing the character and listing different adjectives to describe it also help to tease out the character. It may even be possible to take this stage into mask-making or drama.

Integration with other subpersonalities: This is the process whereby a subpersonality is integrated with other subpersonalities especially those with whom they may be in conflict. This takes place in the story metaphor by exploring the interaction between the characters and how conflicts get resolved. It is interesting how children, particularly children with EBDs will often want to kill off their main characters to get them out of sticky situations rather than enter into new allegiances with other characters. In the next chapter we will look particularly at how subpersonalities with opposing qualities, called subpersonality polarities, can be integrated through storywriting.

Disidentification from the subpersonality: This is the place where the individual is free to let go of the subpersonality. In this place of disidentification we are able to be aware of the subpersonality but engage with it only when we consciously choose to do so. It is the place of the conductor self which can call on the energy of a particular subpersonality to suit the situation. This is really the essence of emotional literacy- to be aware of our feelings yet not taken over by them. This state of being requires the individual to have a considerable degree of awareness and constructive will - the two essential qualities of the core self.

In the context of children's story writing, a degree of disidentification can be considered to have been reached when the child is able to discuss the feelings and behaviour of a significant subpersonality character from a more objective point of view. They are able to comment on what has caused the character to feel this way and to have an understanding of the implications of their actions. This objective view might be given through the words of a narrator, a wise character or perhaps in the group discussion about the story characters.

Disidentification may also be reflected in the ability to satisfactorily complete a story – often the most difficult part of storywriting for many children. In order to extricate their characters from the events of the story it is necessary to gain a wider perspective. It is easy for children to end by making it all a dream

'or for the main character to suddenly find themselves home, but to complete the story in a way where the conflict or dilemma has been truly resolved is not so easy. The exploration of different endings to a particular story can provide choice points for the characters and help the child to view story events from a new perspective.

Conversely a **lack of ability to disidentify** is evident when:-

- a child writes without the use of a narrator as though his characters are continually speaking
- characters in the third person randomly change to the first person
- the story goes around the same loops and the child is unable to arrive at a resolution/conclusion

Reflection on adult and children's subpersonalities

It is interesting to speculate on the difference between adults' and children's subpersonalities. Philip Pullman, children's author, when discussing his best-selling Northern Lights trilogy in a recent TV documentary talked about the 'daemons' of his characters which appear in animal form as being aspects of the self i.e. subpersonalities. Interestingly in his story, whereas adults tend to have a particular daemon which acts as an alter ego, children have several daemons which are not yet 'set'. Fanciful as this may sound, it is one way of reflecting on how children when they get to adolescence do become 'set' in their personalities, i.e. have a narrower set of subpersonalities to choose from, whereas younger children can seem to be open to a wider range of possibilities given. Such a view emphasises the importance of early intervention when working with children with EBDs.

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Chapter 3

Paper B: Subpersonalities and a Model of the Self (2004)

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Chapter 4

Paper C: The Use of Therapeutic

Storywriting Groups to Support Pupils with Emotional Difficulties (2008)

British Journal of Learning Support Vol. 23, No 4 pp 187-192 (sole-author, peer-refereed) [4,100 words]

Commentary on Paper C

While the material in the previous two chapters draws on my own research as a reflective practitioner, this chapter extends my research to look at the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting delivered by other professionals supporting pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It is based on a wider evaluation report *Writing Stories with Feeling* (Waters, 2004b) commissioned by SERSEN following the delivery of a series of 3-day training courses in ‘Setting Up Therapeutic Storywriting Groups’, delivered to more than fifty teachers in eight education authorities and also commissioned by SERSEN. As chapter 7 will present an in-depth research evaluation, this summary rather than the full-report is included here.

The first part of the paper gives an outline of the Therapeutic Storywriting Group model, which I first developed in 1999 while working as a SENCO after completing my MA research. Since then, with the support of SERSEN, the model has now been used in over 500 schools in England – one Local Authority in particular, Warwickshire, has rolled it out in schools across the county.

Setting Up Therapeutic Storywriting Groups Training

In order to run a Therapeutic Storywriting group, teachers are first required to attend a 3-day training course which usually extends over a period of 6 weeks. The teachers are asked to set up a group after the 1st day and bring the work from their groups to the 2nd and 3rd days of the training. Teachers attending the training have been primarily school-based special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) or teachers working for one of the external agencies such as a Pupil Referral Unit, Behaviour/Inclusion Support Agency or Behaviour in Education Support Team (BEST).

The theoretical model presented in the training focuses particularly on the relationship between emotional and cognitive development and makes particular reference to Bion’s (1984) theory of thinking that states that anxiety needs to be sufficiently contained in order for thinking to take place. The training also looks at different models of the self and draws on Assagioli’s (1965) theory of subpersonalities. The workplace counselling skill of active listening is a core aspect of the training. Teachers practise using metaphor in their own story writing to address emotional issues and are also trained to keep all verbal and written reflections to the pupils about their stories within the story metaphor. In this way personal issues, which may be overwhelming for the child if discussed directly, do not need to be brought explicitly into the session. (See appendix 1 for an outline of the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups training programme.)

Comments on methodology

The evaluation of the impact of the intervention delivered by these professionals used a case study approach. Whereas chapters 2 and 3 relate theoretical points to an individual pupil profile, the 'case' to be examined in this wider evaluation is the impact of the 10-week Therapeutic Storywriting Group intervention on pupils' learning. Much of the methodological rationale for using a case study approach to evaluate Story Links, also a therapeutic storywriting intervention, applies to the evaluation of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups. However, I will briefly outline a few of the key points regarding design and validity used in the wider evaluation that are not covered by the following paper or chapter 6.

Including pupil voice

In designing the research evaluation of the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups thought was given to including pupils' voice, an issue that had been recently highlighted in a number of recent policy documents (DfES 2003; DfES 2004) following the endorsement of the UK government of article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which called for participating countries to

assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child (Article 12).

In order to provide an opportunity to listen to the voice of pupils, it was decided that the main source of data to be used in the evaluation would be interviews with pupils and the stories written by these pupils. These were triangulated with interviews from the professionals running the groups.

Analysis and validity of pupil interviews

The analysis of the pupil interviews comprised four stages:

- Written records and transcriptions from the external agency were checked for accuracy against the tape recordings;
- Tapes and transcripts were listened to and read several times to provide total immersion in the data;
- Initial themes were highlighted from individual and group interviews in one school;
- These initial themes were checked for consistency across all pupil interviews.

The validity of pupils' interview responses was achieved in four ways:

- Themes arising from individual pupils' responses were compared with the frequency of similar responses from the whole sample
- Views expressed by pupils in group interviews were checked for consistency with views expressed in their individual interviews
- Themes from the pupil interviews were triangulated with themes arising from the stories of the pupils used in the pupil profiles
- Themes which arose from the pupil interviews were triangulated with themes from the interviews with SENCOs and other teachers.

Monitoring my subjectivity

For any qualitative researcher, familiarity with or engagement in the field under scrutiny has the ability to either enhance the understanding of the topic under investigation (Simons 1996) or to predispose the researcher to seeking positive results. While this point is discussed further in chapter 6, I will outline here some of the specific steps I took to minimise bias, relating to my position as the person who both developed the Therapeutic Storywriting model and led the SERSEN training, in this evaluation study.

Firstly, I aspired to impartiality in the collection and analysis of the data. Secondly, a proportion of tape recordings of interviews were transcribed by an external agency and compared with notes I took in interview. Thirdly, a leading academic in the field of qualitative research supervised my methodology and approach to analysis. Fourthly, I checked my perceptions of the children's development with those of the teachers who worked with them.

It is also important to note the positive benefits of a deep knowledge of the programme. In this case my intimate knowledge of Therapeutic Storywriting meant that teachers were keen to discuss their groups and the pupils' stories with me. My experience of the type of emotional, social and academic difficulties that pupils brought to the group also helped me to formulate appropriate research questions and to manage the group dynamics when conducting the group interviews.

Presentation of findings

In the wider evaluation report (Waters, 2004b) and the paper presented in this chapter, the emphasis was on allowing pupils to speak for themselves about their experience of and learning from Therapeutic

Storywriting groups. Illustrative quotes from pupils are preceded by a summary of the key issues identified in the interview analysis. In reporting the findings sometimes only one or two quotations are given to support a point although there were more in the database. This method was used for ease of reporting and readability. In instances when one person said something particularly significant, this was included and the uniqueness of the response indicated.

Commentary References (chapter 4)

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Paper C [journal paper]: The Use of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups to Support Pupils with Emotional Difficulties

Waters (2008) *British Journal of Learning Support* Vol. 23, No 4 pp 187-192 (sole author, peer-refereed) [4,100 words]

Abstract

Trisha Waters presents the theoretical basis for Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, an outline of how they work in practice and a summary of the research report commissioned by SERSEN to evaluate their impact on pupils' learning. The article finishes with a short case study of a nine-year old boy who is on the SEN register for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

Introduction

Therapeutic Storywriting Groups use the metaphor in stories written by both pupils and teachers to address emotional issues that are impeding pupils' learning. Pupils are referred to the groups because of concerns about their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) and most will be on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register. For many of these pupils, their emotional difficulties also prevent their accessing the educational curriculum. Teachers supporting pupils with BESDs can find themselves wondering whether to prioritise the pupil's emotional well-being or to focus on their academic achievement. Therapeutic Storywriting Groups have been developed to address both emotional and academic literacy at the same time. They provide an emotionally containing environment in which pupils are encouraged to write stories in which they can project their own worries and concerns onto story characters. By working through the emotional safety of story metaphor, pupils are able to discuss and process feelings that might otherwise be overwhelming or inappropriate to share in an educational setting. However, what makes this approach different from other therapeutic interventions used in schools such as play or art therapy, is that in Therapeutic Storywriting Groups pupils are engaged in actually writing out their stories and thus also developing literacy skills. The approach is clearly in line with the *Every Child Matters* (2003) agenda, the SEN policy document *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (2004) and the more recent *Children's Plan* (2007), all of which address the need for emotional well-being along with academic achievement.

With the support of the South-east Region SEN Partnership (SERSEN), Therapeutic Storywriting Groups have been set up in over 400 schools in England in the last few years. The model has been used by the DfES (2005) as a case example of exemplary inclusive practice. Following the initial phase of dissemination, SERSEN commissioned a research evaluation into the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on pupils' learning.

The first part of this article will look at how the groups are set up and discuss the underlying theoretical principles. A summary of the SERSEN evaluation report, 'Writing Stories with Feeling' (Waters, 2004b), will be presented in the latter section.

Which pupils benefit from Therapeutic Storywriting Groups?

Therapeutic Storywriting Groups target pupils identified by their school as having emotional difficulties which are impeding their learning. The intervention is designed to be used for the 7-12 yr age range. The reason for the lower limit is that younger children, particularly those with BEDs, are generally not ready to engage with the formal structure of group writing sessions. At the other end of the age range, pupils who are coming up to adolescence are entering what Piaget termed the 'conceptual stage' of cognitive development and with this comes an intuitive facility to read metaphor in a way that is not accessible for the younger child. A consequence of this ability is that adolescent pupils may be able interpret the stories of others and confidentiality within the group can become an issue. It is for these reasons, that the model is most appropriate for the 7-12 age range; although a professional judgement needs to be made which takes into account the pupils' emotional and cognitive stage of development.

Pupils are required to write for themselves. However, pupils with emerging writing skills (SATs level 1) can participate as long as they are at least able to read back to the teacher what they have written. If the writing is of poor legibility, the teacher can then type out what has been read and place it underneath the child's own writing.

Selecting the group

Groups consist of 4-6 pupils, referred by their classteacher or SENCO as having emotional difficulties that are impeding their learning in the classroom. An emphasis is placed on balancing the group by including not only pupils who act out but also those who 'act in', i.e. those who are withdrawn and disengaged. Teachers are encouraged to also maintain a gender balance as it is easy to overlook the emotional needs of a compliant but withdrawn girl.

Group Facilitators and Training

Therapeutic Storywriting Groups can be led by SENCOs, SEN support teachers, learning mentors, teaching assistants or school counsellors (for ease of expression the term ‘teacher’ will be used in this article to refer to this group of professionals). In order to run a Therapeutic Storywriting Group, teachers are first required to attend a 3-day training course which usually extends over a period of 6 weeks. The training days are spaced out over a term to give participants the opportunity to set up a Therapeutic Storywriting Group while the course is being taught and to bring material from their groups for discussion to the later training days.

The training focuses on developing some key skills which include:

- Active listening skills
- Understanding the significance of and responding to metaphor
- Use of subpersonality theory in relation to story (Waters, 2004a)
- Group management
- Assessment, reporting and referring on

Underpinning theory

The theoretical model presented in the training focuses particularly on the relationship between emotional and cognitive development and makes particular reference to Bion’s (1965) theory of thinking that states that anxiety needs to be sufficiently contained in order for thinking to take place. The training looks at different models of the self and draws on Assagioli’s (1965) theory of subpersonalities which provides a graduated process for integrating different aspects of the self. The workplace counselling skill of active listening is also a core aspect of the training. Teachers practise using metaphor in their own story writing to address emotional issues and are also trained to keep reflections on pupils’ stories within the story metaphor. In this way personal issues, which may be overwhelming for the child if discussed directly, do not need to be brought explicitly into the session.

As Weare (2003) points out there are many terms in use in the field of emotional development. The term emotional learning is used in the training and in the SERSEN evaluation report (Waters, 2004b) to refer to the development of emotional literacy or emotional intelligence. Emotional literacy, popularised by Goleman (1996), is generally defined as, *‘the ability to recognise, understand and appropriately express*

our emotions' (www.nelig.com). Reference is also made to Gardner's concept of emotional intelligence. Gardner (1993) considers emotional intelligence to be made up of two aspects; the intrapsychic intelligence and interpersonal intelligences. Intrapersonal (or intrapsychic) intelligence is concerned with our own internal unconscious feeling world, whereas the interpersonal is concerned with relationships with others in the external world and overlaps with what is referred to as social intelligence. In relation to story metaphor, the intrapsychic world is generally expressed through fantasy, fairy tale and dream-like imagery whereas the interpersonal is expressed through the interaction of characters typically set in a world of everyday reality.

Structure of a Therapeutic Storywriting Group Session

Groups run weekly and have a maximum of 6 children. The groups are described to parents and pupils as an opportunity to explore different feelings through story characters. Each session lasts about 1 hour and includes:

- Relaxation and feelings check-in
- Suggestion for new story theme
- Silent writing when children and teacher both write stories
- Time to share stories and draw pictures
- A listening game to finish

The session begins with a short body relaxation at the end of which each child writes down a feeling word that best describes their current emotional state. Each person then has a turn to say a bit about why they are feeling as they have described and they then place their feeling word with those of others on a '*feelings ladder*'.

The teacher then presents a story theme that reflects some of the emotional issues in the group. The teacher will use this story theme for her own story which she writes while the children write their stories. By asking the children for suggestions for her own story she both models asking for help and encourages discussion of the emotional issue that she has focused. For instance, if there are issues around anger for some of the pupils in the group, the teacher might begin with a story opening such as,

Dino the dragon lay outside his cave. Never before had he felt so angry.

The teacher will then ask the children why they think Dino might be feeling angry. The children naturally project their own experiences of being angry onto Dino and typical pupil responses might be 'because he'd been told off again and it wasn't his fault' or 'none of his friends would play with him' or 'someone was throwing things at him'. The teacher makes a note of these suggestions and includes at least one of them in her story. She retains overall control of her story but uses it to model the resolution of emotional dilemmas. As the teacher develops her story, it is used to provide further points for discussion about pertinent emotional literacy issues. The engagement of the teacher with her own story helps establish a focused writing environment as well as providing a model of good academic story writing. The pupils can use the same story theme as the teacher or one of their own choosing.

There then follows about 15 minutes of silent writing during which all pupils and the teacher write their story. After this each member of the group, including the teacher has time to share their story. It is at this point that the teacher uses active listening skills to reflect the feelings expressed in each pupil's story. She will also draw on her awareness of subpersonality theory (Assagioli, 1965) to bring the children's attention to specific characters in their stories. Members of the group are encouraged to provide constructive feedback on each other's work and can ask for ideas for the next part of their own story as modelled by the teacher. The teacher ensures that all members of the group feel emotionally safe during these group interactions. While listening to the stories children can illustrate their stories. The drawing activity deepens and extends the story metaphor and can help children with ADD or ADHD to listen to the others. The session ends with a short game designed to develop listening skills.

Evaluation of the Impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on Pupils' Learning

The evaluation report 'Writing Stories with Feeling' (Waters, 2004b) was commissioned by SERSEN in order to evaluate the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning. This evaluation followed on from the SERSEN Therapeutic Storywriting Initiative which had delivered a series of 3-day training courses, to 60 teachers drawn from eight education authorities in the South of England. The following section gives a summary of the methodology and major findings of this evaluation study.

Research Questions

The overall aim of the evaluation was to evaluate the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning. The following research questions were formulated to address this aim in more detail:

In what ways do Therapeutic Storywriting Groups impact on pupils' **emotional learning** and in particular their ability to:

- access and articulate their feelings
- process feelings through story metaphor

In what ways can Therapeutic Storywriting be considered to impact on pupils' **social learning** and, in particular, their ability to listen to and empathise with others?

What impact does Therapeutic Storywriting have on pupils' **academic learning** and in particular their

- motivation to engage with writing
- imagination
- self-esteem as writers

Methodology

The evaluation adopted a predominantly qualitative methodology although some quantitative measures were used where appropriate. With particular reference to assessing the impact on pupils' emotional and social learning, the topics under investigation i.e. the child's own intrapsychic and interpersonal feeling states are by their nature subjective; pupil voice was therefore used as the main data source in this area with teacher interviews used to triangulate and validate the data gathered from the pupils. Specific methods included:

- Semi-structured group interviews with five groups of pupils who had attended at least ten group sessions of Therapeutic Storywriting
- Individual semi-structured interviews with individual pupils
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers leading the storywriting groups
- Analysis and display of key issues identified in interviews

- Case portrayal of three individual pupils, drawing on a content analysis of a selection of their stories

The Sample Cohort

The research focused on twenty-one pupils drawn from five groups in four schools in which teachers who had attended a 3-day training in Therapeutic Storywriting had run a Therapeutic Storywriting group for at least ten sessions. Pupils were from Years 3, 4, 5, & 6 and all the groups were run by the SENCO.

Eight pupils had been the subject of child protection concerns and two were currently on the child protection register. About a third (6 pupils) were identified by teachers as silent and withdrawn, a third (7 pupils) as having particularly aggressive behaviour and two-thirds (14 pupils) as having friendship difficulties.

Ethics and Confidentiality

Permission was sought from parents for pupils to take part in the research. The names of the schools and LAs were omitted and all pupil names changed in the report (as they are in this article) in order to protect the identity of the pupils. In addition, care was taken to protect the privacy of pupils both when conducting the research, by not asking intrusive questions, and when writing up the report, by not referring to unique incidents which could either embarrass or identify particular individuals.

Analysis of Pupil interviews

The interview questions were drawn up to encourage pupils to give their views on a range of topics and these were then analysed using a thematic categorisation of data. One of the key themes was the pupils' perception of the purpose of the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups. This was ascertained by asking how they would describe the group to another child who knew nothing about it and who would benefit from attending the group. The analysis gave their responses as follows:

It is a place where you

- write stories
- can calm down
- can share feelings with each other

- listen to each other's stories
- can have fun
- get to listen to the teacher's story
- can write about feelings
- get to know other children

They said that the children who would benefit from attending the groups would be those who

- are shy or have emotional problems
- need help with writing and help to think about what they are saying
- have family problems
- don't really feel very comfortable in their class
- don't really concentrate in class and don't listen
- want to improve their stories and might want to be story writers when older
- are getting picked on or are being teased
- may have had a few problems and need someone to talk to

Discussion with the SENCOs about the reasons for individual referrals to the groups showed that for almost all of the children their response to this question reflected their own personal needs or situation.

Each section of the report includes representative examples of the pupils' comments. Maya, a Year 6 girl, said she would describe the group to another child as a group *'for people who may have had a few problems and need someone to talk to. You can write stories and talk about problems but don't have to say it is you.'*

In one of the group interviews, some Year 5 & 6 girls discussed how they would describe the group to another child:

Nina: *Quite exciting and friendly, because like if you make a mistake or like do something wrong...*

Yasmin: *You don't have to worry.*

Rose: *Yes and it's very calming for people that have problems.*

Nina: *You get to write the stories and get your feelings out, and you can get like bad moods out of your head. You get to talk to people as well.*

Mia: *Because you just concentrate on your story sometimes and just forget about everything else.*

Rose: *I think 'concentrate' is like too strong a word ... but there isn't another word, you don't have to concentrate lots but it's one of those things that you can just do easily.*

Pupil profile: Liam's Story

Here is an individual pupil profile that draws on the range of data gathered about the pupil, including an analysis of the child's stories, to show how he used a Therapeutic Storywriting group to explore and process difficult feelings:

Nine year old Liam was on the SEN register for emotional and behavioural difficulties at the level of School Action. While an able boy capable of engaging with educational tasks, he had often been sent out of class and also excluded on a number of occasions because of 'tantrums' and aggressive behaviour. The SENCO said he had a 'short fuse' and described him as 'a time bomb'. She reported that when he lost his temper he could kick out, throw furniture or refuse to move. He saw himself as a victim and would never take responsibility for his actions. She also mentioned he had talked about wanting to kill himself and that he often scratched his right arm. His classteacher described him as the most difficult pupil to handle in her class. The headteacher described him as 'intimidating' and said that he bullied other children. Liam, however, in discussing the storywriting group described himself very differently, saying, '*I thought the writing group was going to be hard and I'd be really shy like I usually am.*'

A number of Liam's stories explored the polarity between victim and bully identified by his teacher. His first story was about a selfish bunny called Barry who '*didn't even know he was greedy and selfish*'. Barry had no friends. The story ends with Barry trying to become friends with some other bunnies but they only see his presence as threatening and think '*he will be horrible*' to them:

*He went up to the other bunnies while they were eating carrots. He had a carrot with him.
He dropped it on the ground and said,
"Hello everyone! Mind if I eat with you?"
They all ran away. While they ran, one of them said,
"We'd better get out of here or he will take our carrots and be horrible to us."
Barry said,
"That's it! I'm going on holiday."*

In a later story the main character is able to escape his role as victim. Dino, a 50 year old dragon lives in a cave that is too small for him and is terrified that he will be killed by soldiers if he tries to find a bigger more comfortable cave. (The cave can be seen here as a metaphor for the sense of self).



Liam explained that 50 in dragon years meant the dragon would be the same age as himself. While we usually think of a dragon as an angry and scary creature, much like a bully, in this story the dragon clearly feels the victim:

Three days later he saw no soldiers anywhere. So he flew out slowly. All of a sudden someone shouted, "Kill the dragon!" and a zillion arrows came from the left and a zillion from the right. It was absolute chaos. Luckily Dino managed to fly away. (Liam added when reading out: the dragon didn't know he could fly until he tried) He found himself a beautiful cave and he lived happily ever after.

Liam initially distanced himself slightly from the rest of the group but from the second week onwards he chose to sit closer to the others. His surprise at enjoying the group was also reflected in his response to the question about the teacher's story which he said he enjoyed but found it *'a bit shocking- 'cos I don't normally like stories in a special writing group.'* He also described the group as *'really fun'*.

Interest was mentioned both in recommending the group for children *'who don't get interested in much- this might interest them'* and also for himself when talking about his listening skills: *'Normally in class I'm not very good at listening but I actually take an interest now.'*

Given the picture presented by the teachers, Liam focused remarkably well on the body relaxation at the beginning of sessions and said himself that *"I've been really relaxing, really like good and it calmed me down.* He also found the writing activity relaxing saying, *'it was a way to get all your feelings out. And it calms you down just doing a little bit of writing.'*

One week during the feelings check-in, one of the other boys in the group said that he was upset because Liam had teased him in the playground. Liam responded in a different manner than usual by apologising to the boy concerned. When asked how he got on with the other members of the group at the end of the course of sessions he said,

Before we came to the writing group me, Nancy, Sean & Sarah weren't really good friends and usually argued but now we're the best of friends.

Liam thought his stories had improved *'really a lot'* by coming to the group and that it had particularly helped him write story beginnings, to write more and to improve his handwriting and punctuation. He said he felt *'a bit sad'* about the group finishing and that he was *'going to miss all the story writing and the relaxation time 'cos you don't get much of that in the class.'*

Summary of Research Findings

The evaluation found that, overall, Therapeutic Storywriting Groups had a number of positive effects on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning. In particular it:

- enabled pupils to use the medium of story writing to process emotional experiences
- helped pupils move through difficult feelings
- encouraged pupils to develop co-operative and trusting relationships with peers
- supported listening and speaking skills
- fostered an interactive relationship between the teacher and group with respect to story writing skills
- increased pupils concentration and motivation to engage with story writing
- improved pupils' self-esteem as writers

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Chapter 5

Paper D: Story Links - Therapeutic

Storywriting with Parents and Pupils at Risk of Exclusion.

Chapter in J. Adelizzi & M. Ficksman (eds) (2010) *The Dynamics of Educational Therapy* New York:
Routledge (sole author, peer-refereed) [7,800 words]

Commentary on Paper D

This chapter provides an introduction to the Story Links parent-partnership model which I developed in 2004 and which extends the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model to include parents of individual pupils at risk of exclusion because of their extreme behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. I coined the term 'Story Links' to describe the intervention as it aims to link:

- parent and pupil to develop a more positive attachment relationship
- home and school, by including the parent in a pleasant creative learning experience in school
- emotional wellbeing with academic learning
- parent and classteacher, by including weekly feedback to the parent on the child's performance during the week
- parent and teaching assistant, both of whom attend the group
- parent, school and wider services e.g. social care, health, adult literacy

The way in which the intervention uses a co-created story to promote these links will be illustrated by the published piece presented in this chapter, written as a chapter for a book on educational therapy and due to be published in the United States in May 2010.

Educational therapists are professionals with a therapeutic training and who are, usually, also experienced teachers. The aim of their work is to bring a therapeutic approach to supporting the education of pupils whose emotional difficulties are impeding their learning. Some educational therapists work exclusively in a clinical setting although others work primarily as therapeutic teachers. It is this latter therapeutic teaching role that professionals delivering Story Links are encouraged to adopt and this point is discussed further in the main text.

Working with a hard-to-access and socially excluded parental group

The paper refers to the research by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) which highlighted the importance of parental involvement in pupils' academic achievement and has helped put parent-partnership at the centre of government policy for children and young people. In developing an intervention that includes parents of pupils at risk of exclusion, the programme targets what is often a socially excluded and hard-to-engage group of parents.

The *Policy Review of Children and Young People* [PRCYP] (DfES 2007) identifies exclusion of pupils from school as a typical issue amongst socially excluded families who are themselves defined in *Reaching Out* (Cabinet Office, 2006) as those who experience five or more of the following disadvantages:

- no parent in the family is in work
- the family lives in poor quality or overcrowded housing
- no parent has any qualifications
- the mother has mental health problems
- at least one parent has a longstanding limiting illness, disability or infirmity
- the family has low income (below 60 percent of the median)
- the family cannot afford a number of food and clothing items

Reaching Out (ibid.) states that in the UK there are about 2% of such socially excluded families. The PRCYP document further states that for this '*small minority of families the multiple problems that they experience can lead to 'particularly harmful outcomes for the children in the family'*'. (2007:2)

Trans-generational patterns of deprivation

Both the above documents also highlight the trans-generational aspect of these difficulties with patterns of anti-social behaviour and poor academic achievement being passed from parent to child. In order to break the cycle of disadvantage across generations, the PRCYP identifies a number of key challenges which include:

- ensuring services are able to engage effectively with these families through building their trust, where this is a barrier to engagement
- providing sufficient support and motivation to front-line professionals to engage in what are often extremely challenging circumstances. (2007:2)

The case study presented in this chapter's paper is drawn from my own work with an individual pupil and his mother, a single parent, and had at least five of the disadvantages for the criteria of a socially excluded family, including poor literacy. As the paper illustrates, much of the work was about engaging the mother's trust, especially important as she had previously had a poor relationship with the school.

Reading as a solution-focused approach to engaging parents

One reason for focusing on reading, with the parents of pupils at risk of exclusion, is that it provides a solution-focused common endeavour for parent and school: most of these parents do not relish talking about their child's poor behaviour (again!) but, in my experience, almost all are keen for their child to improve their reading (even if they cannot read well themselves). Also, reading rather than writing or maths is an activity with which most parents in our culture generally expect to support their children. This dual focus on both emotional well-being and reading is a key element of the Story Links intervention. As well as supporting academic achievement, whether a child can or cannot read on leaving primary school has a wider implication for a child's general life outcomes:

Low attainment during school years is a strong indicator of children having poor outcomes in later life. For example, available evidence suggests that learning to read during the primary school years is crucial. Pupils entering secondary school without basic literacy skills struggle to access the curriculum and are at substantial risk of falling further behind their peers. Longitudinal research has found that pupils registering in the bottom 20 per cent of reading skills at age ten, for example, are up to four times more likely not to be entered for any public examinations at age 16 than good readers at age ten with similar social disadvantage risk factors.
(from Parson & Bynner, 2002, in PRCYP 2:18)

Promoting positive attachment

The Story links intervention draws extensively on Bowlby's attachment theory which was backed up by clinical research (Ainsworth, 1979) using the Strange Situation Procedure. This procedure involves infants 12-18 months being briefly separated from their mothers and left with a stranger before being reunited with their mother. Based upon the responses, Ainsworth identified three types of attachment: secure attachment, ambivalent-insecure attachment, and avoidant-insecure attachment. Main and Solomon (1986) later conducted further research and added a fourth attachment type called disorganized-insecure attachment. While these attachment patterns are established in infancy, Bowlby considered that attachment issues continue to be a feature throughout an individual's life.

The impact of poor attachment on educational attainment is now widely accepted (Geddes, 2006; Bomber, 2007; Elfer, 2007) and the PRCYP (DfES 2007:3) clearly states that

Insecure emotional attachment and poor stimulation can lead to reduced readiness for school, low educational attainment, and problem behaviour, and the risk of social marginalization in adulthood. (from Wilkinson and Marmot, 2003)

The papers in this chapter and in chapter 7 will particularly consider the impact of anxious attachment patterns on the behaviour, emotional and social well-being and academic achievement of the schoolchild.

Trans-generational patterns of attachment

The trans-generational cycle of deprivation, discussed above, is also mirrored in poor familial attachment patterns. Research using the Adult Attachment Interview (Maine & Goldwyn, 1995) shows that for about 70% of us the way we parent is dependent on the way we were parented, i.e., we tend to just replicate what our parents did. It is clear, therefore, that changing the way vulnerable pupils are parented is vital if this cycle is to be changed.

Co-Regulation of Affect and Co-Construction of Meaning (Co-Co)

Hughes (2007), a psychotherapist who has applied the principles of attachment theory to his clinical work with maltreated children, focuses on the importance of co-regulation of affect in promoting a positive attachment relationship between child and parent. This builds on the earlier work of Stern (1985) whose research illustrated the importance of affective attunement and regulation between the infant and their primary caregiver. Hughes (2007) also argues that this process of matching emotion further allows the parent/child dyad to engage in a search for meaning in order to better understand the child's experiences. He calls this secondary process the co-construction of meaning and humorously refers to the two terms together as 'Co-Co'.

While these two terms are not made explicit in the following paper, it will illustrate how the parent is encouraged to attune to her son's feelings within the story metaphor and also to contribute to the understanding of issues that emerge within the co-created story. This point is further illustrated in the research report in chapter 7 and reflected on in the concluding remarks in chapter 8.

Implications of this research

This chapter refers to my own work with an individual pupil and his parent in order to illustrate the theoretical background to the Story Links model. This piece of practitioner research informed my

development of the 3-day Story Links training delivered to other professionals, the impact of which is the subject of the major evaluation in chapter 7.

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Paper D [chapter]: Story Links - Therapeutic Storywriting with Parents and Pupils at Risk of Exclusion.

Chapter in J. Adelizzi & M. Ficksman (eds) (2010) *The Dynamics of Educational Therapy*. New York: Routledge (sole author, peer-refereed) [7,800 words]

Abstract

This chapter explores the Story Links parent partnership model of intervention which supports pupils at risk of exclusion due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It considers whether a therapeutic teaching model which uses the context of joint story-making, and where the parent is supported to use story metaphor think about their child's emotional issues, can be used to integrate emotional and academic support for these pupils. The theoretical background draws on Bowlby's concept of attachment, Bion's theory of containment in order to facilitate thinking, and Schore's idea of sharing of metaphor in order to facilitate attachment. The way in which such a therapeutic teaching approach can be implemented within an educational context is illustrated through work with an eight-year old pupil and his parent over a ten week period. The case example shows how Story Links sessions helped the parent to regain the adult position in relation to her son and also overcame the pupil's reluctance to read. The relation of such a therapeutic teaching intervention to the special educational needs requirements of an inclusive mainstream school is discussed, as is its place within current UK special educational needs policy. This model of intervention, which considers the emotional issues and relationships embedded in the learning process is akin to the practice of educational therapy in the U.S. as well as in 11 others countries.

Key words: attachment; attachment object; exclusion; behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs); Special Educational Needs (SEN); psychodynamic; potential space, containment, therapeutic teaching; Story Links

Introduction

This paper will explore how the Story Links model of intervention can engage parents in supporting pupils at risk of exclusion because of behaviours related to attachment anxiety. A pilot 3-day Story Links training was delivered, with the support of the South-east Region Special Educational Needs Partnership (SERSEN), to twelve educational professionals drawn from four Local Authorities (LAs) in the South of England. As originator of the model I have also been involved in piloting the model in five schools in the South of England in order to refine and develop the training programme. This paper will draw on my work with a parent and eight-year old pupil, whom for the purpose of this paper I will call Owen. I will first explore some of the general theoretical underpinning of the Story Links model and then use the case study to further illustrate these theoretical points. Parental consent has been given for the use of material included and all names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Background to the Story Links model

Story Links uses the principles of Therapeutic Storywriting (Waters, 2004) to engage parents in supporting pupils at risk of exclusion because of their behaviour. While it is the child's behaviour that will trigger school exclusion, these pupils often also have severe underlying emotional difficulties. Therapeutic Storywriting uses story metaphor to address emotional issues that might be overwhelming for the child – and possibly for the parent- if addressed directly.

The intervention particularly targets primary age pupils exhibiting behaviours associated with attachment anxiety and who also have below average reading skills. The emotional preoccupation of pupils with poor attachment experience means that they are often unable to engage with educational tasks, with the consequence that they are likely to have not only behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESDs) but also poor literacy skills. The Story Links programme therefore addresses the needs of some of the most vulnerable pupils in our primary schools. By including parents in sessions, Story Links aims to nurture more positive attachment patterns between parent and child while engaged in the two-fold task of a) developing the child's reading skills and b) improving their behaviour in school. As working with parents of vulnerable pupils can itself present challenges, given that they often have a poor history of positive engagement with the school, the model has been developed to be both non-threatening and emotionally containing for parents who may themselves feel vulnerable within the school environment.

Development of Story Links as a wave 3 intervention

Story Links grew out of the now established Therapeutic Storywriting Groups (Waters, 2004), also developed by the author with the support of SERSEN, which were designed for small groups of pupils and which have now been introduced into many schools in England. The groups are a wave 2 intervention³ and target pupils who are typically at School Action (SA) or School Action Plus (SA+)⁴, on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register because of BESDs that require more support than can be provided in the whole class group. The evaluation study, 'Writing Stories with Feeling' (Waters, 2004a), commissioned by SERSEN, showed that Therapeutic Storywriting Groups develop pupils' emotional literacy and social skills as well as increasing their motivation to write.

The Story Links model to be discussed here, however, is a wave 3 intervention in that it provides support for those individual pupils whose BESDs are giving the school particularly serious cause for concern both in terms of their inclusion in the classroom and their progress in learning. These pupils will be on the SEN register at either SA+ or statement level for BESDs, indicating that their needs require a more specialist support than is normally provided by the school. As parental participation is central to the Story Links model, the curriculum area chosen as the context for the intervention is not writing, as in the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, but reading as this is an area of learning in which most parents traditionally expect to play a role.

A therapeutic teaching approach

Story Links is a therapeutic teaching model that uses the educational curriculum as a therapeutic context. It does not require educational professionals to become therapists but rather to bring psychological-mindedness to their work in supporting pupils with severe behavioural emotional and social difficulties. By focusing on this interface between education and mental health, Story Links is very much in line with the current UK SEN policy outlined in *Every Child Matters* (2003) and *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (2004); both of these documents stress the need for educational professionals to become more aware of

³ The UK Primary National Strategy (2003) uses a 3 wave model of intervention: Wave 1: Quality education of all (whole class); Wave 2: Small group; Wave 3: individual.

⁴ DfES, 2001, SEN Code of Practice

pupils' mental health issues and to explore new ways of using the curriculum to support emotional literacy.

The model draws on psychodynamic thinking and in particular the concepts of attachment, emotional containment, and creating a 'potential space' (Winnicott, 1999) where parent and child can meet in a mutually enjoyable activity. It also aims to integrate this psychodynamic perspective of behaviour with the positive behavioural perspective which usually informs schools' behaviour policies and practice.

Theoretical Underpinning

Attachment theory, behaviour and learning

Attachment theory was developed by Bowlby (1997) in the 1950s and highlights the central importance of the parent/child relationship, particularly in the first 2-3 yrs of life, to the child's healthy psychological development. While this is now taken for granted by most child professionals, it was a radical departure from the then established developmental models most of which considered developmental stages as being entirely located within the child. What Bowlby did was to emphasise that a child's development can only be considered within the context of their relationship with a primary carer. Ainsworth (1979) then published the results of her Strange Situation clinical experiment, showing that healthy attachment patterns along with two anxious forms of attachment- avoidant and ambivalent - can be identified at one year of age. Later Main and Solomon (1986) identified a third form of anxious attachment which they termed disorganised or confused. With the evidence from this research, attachment theory began to receive widespread acceptance and even to change social policy particularly in relation to parental contact for hospitalised children.

While attachment theory has informed health policy for many years, it seems, however, that it has had a much lower profile in relation to educational policy. True, it is beginning to inform practice in the early years (Elfer, 2007), particularly within the UK Sure Start initiative, but at primary school level and beyond, while attachment anxiety is beginning to appear on pupils' Individual Education Plans (IEPs), there are few educational professionals who have an understanding of attachment theory. This is despite a growing body of research evidence (Sroufe et al, 2000) that poor attachment patterns have a strong correlation not only with BESDS but poor educational achievement.

The child brings behavioural patterns from the relational dynamic established with their primary carer into school and these will affect the quality of their relationships with both peers and adults. Behaviours associated with poor attachment patterns that are exhibited in the classroom may include:

- poor concentration
- constant talking
- ignoring instructions in class
- getting into trouble during breaks
- refusing to be helped with work
- presenting explosive reactions
- exhibiting a sudden deterioration in behaviour when making mistakes

(Geddes, 2006)

These are clearly behaviours that can seriously challenge a classteacher and it is easy to see why these pupils are often at risk of exclusion.

The challenge of parental involvement

The view that the quality of the child-parent relationship affects educational achievement throughout the primary phase of schooling is supported by the findings of the influential Desforges and Abouchaar report (2003) which reviewed the latest international research on the effects of parental involvement on pupil achievement.

The table below from Sacker et al shows that right up to the age of 11 years, parents

	Effect of parent on pupil achievement	Effect of school on pupil achievement
Age 7	0.29	0.05
Age 11	0.27	0.21
Age 16	0.14	0.51

Figure 6: Sacker et al., 2002, cited in Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003

continue to have more influence on their child's achievement than does the school. Therefore, in addressing the needs of poorly performing pupils with BESDs, parental involvement is crucial.

However, parents of pupils at risk of exclusion are often the group of parents who are hardest to engage in school partnership. This can be due to the defensiveness engendered by having to continually come up to the school to hear about their child's poor behaviour, by the triggering of uncomfortable memories of their own schooling or to the fact that they are themselves under stress and struggling to cope with day to day matters.

So how do we go about engaging such parents in school? The Story Links programme uses a solution-focused approach by inviting them to come into school to support their child's reading rather than asking them to come in to discuss behaviour difficulties. Parents of pupils at risk of exclusion may be defensive, disengaged and even aggressive towards the school but in my experience they always want their children to learn to read. So here is an assured point of mutual interest where parent and school can meet.

Outline of a Story Links session

The Story Links programme runs over 10 weeks and is led by an educational professional who has attended a 3-day training course. The facilitating professional can be a special educational needs coordinator (SENCO), SEN support teacher, educational counsellor, learning mentor or inclusion manager (for ease of writing the term 'teacher' will be used to refer to this group of professionals). Sessions with the parent and child last 30 minutes with a further 30 minutes required by the teacher for writing up, printing and distributing the story. A teaching assistant (TA), ideally one attached to the pupil's class, also joins in the sessions and implements 2 x 20 minute school-based follow-up sessions using the written text to develop the child's reading skills during the week. As the model has an open systemic structure other professionals such as a learning mentor, home-school liaison officer or a social worker engaged in supporting the child can also be invited to attend sessions. There is an initial session with the parent and pupil to tell them about the programme, deal with any concerns and ensure commitment to the programme of 10 sessions.

The main sessions begin with the teacher having a few minutes with the parent to review how things have been at home with their child during the week and in particular to ask how joint reading activities have gone. They are then joined by the TA and the pupil who will bring some feedback from his/her teacher on their behaviour during the week in class which is shared with the parent. There follows a

‘feelings check-in’ during which the teacher uses active listening skills (empathic verbal reflection) to reflect and contain the feelings expressed by the parent and pupil. The child then reads the previous week’s story to the group with support from the teacher or the parent. This then leads into the central activity of joint story-making. The teacher gives the story opening, which will have emerged from the discussion with the parent about the child’s current emotional issues. For instance, if the parent says the child has had angry outbursts it might be, ‘Leslie the lion roared. He was furious.’ Beginning with the child and followed by the parent, each person present then takes a turn to continue the story, with the teacher making notes. The teacher takes responsibility for completing each week’s story and then retells the newly created story to the group. The child leaves the room with the TA and the teacher encourages the parent to reflect on the metaphor/imagery in the newly created story and to think about what metaphors might be included in the next week’s story. Once the parent has left, the teacher types up the story at the appropriate reading level for the child. This is not done as a verbatim report but the core story line is maintained with an effort made to include the actual phrases used by the parent and child. A copy then goes home with the child to be read with the parent at home and a copy goes to the teaching assistant for work on the two 20 minute reading skills sessions during the week.

Use of story as an attachment object

As attachment anxiety occurs when the primary carer has been unable to provide appropriate emotional containment for the child, the Story Links model is based on the premise that for such pupils, attachment anxieties in school may be reduced if a way can be found to bring the parent into a positive relationship with the child within the educational environment.

Healthy attachment occurs when the parent and child are engaged in a mutually enjoyable activity. When the parent of an infant engages in games such as peek-a-boo they are not thinking ‘I better do this so that I form a good bond with my child’; they are doing it because they’re enjoying it; because it gives them, as well as the baby, pleasure. By engaging the parent in the creative process of spontaneous story making, Story Links sessions aim to provide a mutually enjoyable educational activity. The idea is that the co-created story can become a positive attachment object for the child – holding a reminder of the parent in school and a reminder of a positive shared school-based experience while at home.

In discussing the home learning programme the parent is encouraged to reflect on whether the reading activity was something that they also enjoyed. Parents and children can easily become embattled over homework activities, particularly with this group of children. So at the beginning of each session the

teacher asks the parent open questions about the home reading activity: Was it a relaxing time for them? Was their child relaxed? Where did they sit? Were they snuggled up together on the sofa or under a duvet? Did they both enjoy it?

A Case Study

Identifying attachment anxiety

Owen was an eight year old boy who had initially been referred to a Therapeutic Storywriting Group that I was running in a school where I was modelling the intervention for a group of staff I was training. The school was in the local authority's most socially deprived area and there were concerns about both the school's poor attainment levels and the high number of exclusions.

Although the least able in the group, with his writing and reading still at level 1, Owen worked well in the group sessions when he was present. However, he was often absent due to the fact that he was excluded on four separate occasions during the term the Therapeutic Storywriting group was running with one of his exclusions being for 5 days. The reason for his exclusion was challenging behaviours that included running out of class, violent outbursts in class and in particular physically attacking other children. According to his classteacher, while he often seemed to 'kick off' for no apparent reason, his anger could also be easily triggered by some of the other children making a disparaging comment about his mother. He had been referred for diagnosis of ADHD but this had not been confirmed.

The headteacher described Owen as one of the most troubled and troubling pupils in the school. He also said that Owen's mother usually came 'gunning' for him on a daily basis; he then added 'and often not once but twice a day.' It seemed that Owen's mother was as much of a concern to the school as Owen himself! In fact when I spoke to a number of staff about how we might best support Owen, I was told by more than one that his problems came from his home situation. When I suggested that we might invite his mother to participate in a Story Links programme I was told, again by more than one member of staff, that she was unreliable and that she was unlikely to attend sessions. Despite Owen's challenging behaviour, all of the staff who had contact with him appeared to also have a 'soft spot' for him – they particularly mentioned his honesty as a redemptive characteristic i.e. he always owned up to what he had done. There was a feeling that he somehow couldn't help himself when he 'kicked off' and blame was generally placed on the mother's parenting rather than on Owen.

I spoke to the SENCO and found out a bit more about Owen. She told me that he, along with his younger brother, had been taken into care for 2 years when he was 3 years old because of child protection concerns. Certainly, Owen's behaviour seemed consistent with a child with confused attachment: hyperactivity, rescuing the parent, 'kicking off' for no apparent reason, (Geddes, 2006; Barrett & Trevitt, 1991). This hypothesis was confirmed by a short piece of writing he had produced in the Therapeutic Storywriting Group.

I had given the group the opening *"Dino the dragon lay outside his cave. Never before had he felt so lonely..."*. I wrote this opening in Owen's book to help him get started.

After 10 minutes of concentrated effort he managed to write 'because he didn't have anyone who wanted to play with him. So he burnt his Mum's plants.' (spelling corrected)

I then used active listening skills and reflected back to Owen, "I imagine Dino was upset because he didn't have any friends, but I wonder why he burnt his Mum's plants?"

He then replied, "He wanted to tell his Mum how miserable he felt and had called her 17 times but she didn't come. So Dino just walked off into the dark shadows."

I typed out his story including his reply in italics and pasted it into his book.

Engaging the parent

Owen's mother was invited in to meet me by the SENCO at the school. When she arrived she accepted my offer of a cup of coffee and I then explained the outline of the Story Links programme, focussing first on the school's concern over Owen's poor reading skills and pointing out that as the most important person in his life it might make a difference to his achievement if we could work together to support his reading for a period of time. I also said that we would use the stories to address emotional issues that Owen might be having difficulty with in order to help him feel happier in school.

Mother listened but seemed rather noncommittal until I showed her Owen's book from the group. I took what felt like a calculated emotional risk and read her Owen's story about Dino's mum not coming despite his calling her 17 times. Owen's mother then seemed to become engaged for the first time in our meeting. She looked me directly in the eyes and asked, "Do you think children just write stories or are

they writing about themselves?” Using my best active listening skills I replied, “What do you think?” She then said, “I think this story is about him. I think it’s because I don’t give him any time. I give all my attention to his younger brother who’s still my baby even though he’s only a year younger than Owen.” She then said that she thought she should come into the sessions in order to give some time to her older son. She mentioned how she found his behaviour hard to manage at times though also mentioned how he seemed to think he was ‘the man of the house’ and would ‘have a go’ at his younger brother if he was ‘horrible’ to her.

Owen’s mother then spoke about how the children had been taken into care but that they had been returned to her three years ago and that she was now trying to get her life ‘back on track’. She also asked if her trusted social worker would be able to come along to sessions with her. As the Story Links sessions have an open systemic format I said this would be no problem. I later contacted the social worker who was pleased to have a chance to be involved with a school-based project. Mother was also concerned about her own poor literacy skills and described herself as ‘dyslexic’. I reassured her that this wouldn’t be a problem. With the support of the social worker, Owen’s mother managed to attend 8 out of the 10 sessions, with one missed because of a hospital appointment and one missed without any explanation.

The stories

In all of the spontaneously created stories, most of the story elements introduced by Owen related to dangerous and fear-provoking situations; these included a boy being imprisoned in a jar; the badger’s hillside being burnt; fox cubs not being fed by their family; two little monkeys being attacked by a snake; and two hound-dogs being attacked by wasps. My role as the facilitator in all of these stories was to aid the exploration of feelings that were pertinent for Owen and also to contain the fearful emotions within the structure of the story by bringing each story to some point of resolution. For as Bettelheim points out:

For a story to truly hold the child’s attention, it must ... be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him. (Bettelheim 1991:5)

The co-created story

I will now share a story created in the sixth week of the course of sessions to illustrate the process.

The Wasps and the Two Hound-dogs

(Owen) One day there was a wasps' nest and two hound-dogs. But the wasps weren't just any wasps - they were dangerous wasps and the hound-dogs were stung by them.

(Mum) The wasps nest was really close to a children's playground and the children kept getting stung by the wasps. (TA) So somebody reported the wasps' nest to the council.

(Social worker) The men from the council came in their protective suits and took the whole nest away.

(Owen) But the two hound-dogs saw one wasp that had got away and was up in a tree.

(TA) So the hound-dogs hid in some bushes at the end of the garden. (Mum) The wasp met another normal wasp and got married. (Owen) But the normal wasp then turned poisonous and they had lots of baby wasps who had extra long stings that could go through protective suits. (Social worker) So the men at the council got some extra thick protective suits and came again. They took the wasps away. (TA) This time they took all the stings out of the wasps and then let the wasps go free. (Me) The wasps never stung anybody again. The two hound-dogs came out of their hiding place and played in the garden. The End

(Owen: 'There's one more thing...') The two hound-dogs both had a prickle on their nose to remind them of the wasps.

Discussion of sessions in the light of underpinning theory

Story imagery as an expression of the unconscious

The process of creative story-making involves the use of imagery which often arises out of the unconscious as do images that arise in art or play therapy. In the above story, eight-year old Owen certainly did not consciously plan, nor do I think his mother did, that we would make up a story about child protection issues, as one might interpret that this story is about. The spontaneous nature of the story-making activity precluded the possibility of such a conscious approach to the story line. Bruner (1986) describes this as the 'narrative mode of thinking' which is associated with right-brain activity and emphasises that is different from the more analytical logical mode of thinking but equally valid in conveying meaning.

Story as a medium for attachment

Schore (2000), whose work bridges the fields of neuroscience and psychology, discusses the role of dyadic engagement in right-brain activity as fostering attachment relationships. This was evident in the sessions particularly with respect to Owen's mother whose body language would often reflect a depressive and isolationist state of mind. However, each week her face lit up as we began the story. She listened attentively particularly to her son and she appeared enlivened as she made her contribution. There was often laughter in the group as the story lines emerged providing a joint experience of attachment-promoting fun for parent and child.

In sending the story home Owen and his mother were reminded of this positive shared experience that had taken place in school. And in working with the story in school with the TA, Owen had a reminder of his mother's presence in a supportive context. The TA mentioned that he was always interested to point out which part of the story was his contribution and which was his mother's. Thus, the actual story text could be considered as a positive attachment object linking mother, child and the school.

As close physical proximity and comfort is important in fostering attachment, Owen was seated next to his mother and encouraged to welcome his mother with a hug at the beginning and end of each session which he did. His mother was also encouraged to think about how the reading activity at home could be a cosy time for the two of them. This required some thought as she said that the younger brother would often push Owen away if he snuggled up with her at home. We talked this through and she decided to make some time for Owen after his younger brother was in bed. She had difficulty keeping to a regular schedule but mostly managed this once or twice a week.

Interpretation of the story metaphor and encouraging parental reflection

While the above story can be interpreted as reflecting Owen and his brother's experience of feeling unsafe and of the central role that social services has had in providing child protection it is not the place of the facilitator to make these interpretations to the mother or to other professionals. A key point made in the training course is that any interpretations by the teacher should be held tentatively and reflective comments kept within the context of the story. This is a key point of distinction between implementing therapeutic teaching and 'therapy'. Hence at no time did I attempt to give an analysis of the above story to the parent or other professionals.

However, key to the intervention is to involve the mother in reflecting on the story herself and to encourage her to think about what might be useful to include in future stories. Using the medium of story gives parents the opportunity to think about their child's internal world and to express empathy within the emotional safety of the story metaphor. That Owen's mother was capable of doing this was reflected in her comment on the initial Dino the dragon story. There is also an attempt by the mother within the above story to provide some normality for the two hound-dogs when she says '*The wasp met another normal wasp and got married.*'

It was clear from Owen's behaviour in defending his mother both at home and school that he was acting at times as the 'parentified' child. As mentioned above, this is typical of children with confused attachment where there has been inconsistent care-giving.

According to Piaget (1979), it is only around the time of adolescence that children begin to develop the capacity for abstract or meta-cognitive thinking. The interpretation of metaphor, the meaning of which is to transfer something from one level or place to another, is itself a meta-cognitive skill. This is why a child will accept a story at face value, operating as he does at what Piaget calls the 'concrete-operational level', while as adults we have the ability to intuitively read it on another level. The basic activity of thinking in the metaphor is an adult skill. Thus by supporting Owen's mother to reflect on the stories and imagery that might be used in future stories, she was encouraged to take on the parent/adult position in relation to her son.

Empowering the parent to support the child's learning

The sessions were also used to encourage the mother to support her son's reading. Although she described herself as dyslexic, it turned out that she could easily recognise high frequency words and could certainly read better than her son. In the first couple of sessions, myself or the TA would support Owen when he read last week's story at the beginning of the session- helping him to sound out the letters and recognise familiar patterns. In the third week his Mum began to join in supporting his reading of the text. The TA and I now stepped out of the supporting role as Owen sat closer to his mother, looking to her for help. Occasionally when Mum would give an inappropriate reading clue, e.g. asking him to think what colour the sky was in order to decode the word 'blue', I would mention afterwards when Owen had returned to class that it might be helpful to get him to sound out and blend the first two letters so that he could then use this strategy with other words. As the weeks went on mother became increasingly

confident in supporting Owen with his reading in the sessions, again enabling her to be in the position of enabling parent and Owen to be the young child that he was.

Interestingly mother mentioned her own parents on more than one occasion in the sessions. A couple of stories had been shared with the maternal grandparents at home and in one story the main character find's safety in the grand-parents actual garden. Adult attachment interview research (Main and Goldwyn, 1995) shows 70% - 80% correspondence between parents' early experience and their own parenting style. Mother was clearly proud of the work she was doing in supporting Owen and was keen to show this to her own parents. It seemed that her own 'inner child' was being put into the appropriate relational context, i.e. with her own parents, as she stepped into a more adult role with her own son.

This also reminded me of the importance of the whole family network in supporting the child's learning and emotional well-being. In Story Links sessions with other parents and pupils, the story has sometimes been taken by the child to read to the parent who has left the family home, thus providing a link between members of the extended or separated family.

Therapeutic Storywriting as a process-oriented activity

While it is useful for the parent to begin to reflect on the story metaphor in relation to her child's internal world, the story making process itself provides an opportunity for parent and child to process unresolved emotional issues. To quote Bettelheim who spent much of his life using story to support children with severe emotional difficulties,

When unconscious material is to some degree permitted to come to awareness and worked through in imagination, its potential for causing harm- to ourselves or others- is much reduced; some of its forces can then be made to serve positive purposes. (1991: 7)

It is not about getting a clever or the 'right' interpretation but rather about providing a safe or 'potential' space where unresolved issues can be explored, played with and re-storied within the world of the imaginary. It is this process that is so engaging for the parent and child, particularly as their jointly created story will contain images projected from their own internal imaginary worlds. It is this resonance with their internal worlds that gives parent and child ownership of the jointly created stories and the reason why Owen and his mother were so very proud of them; Owen asked his teacher to read them to his classmates and mother shared them with her own parents.

Providing emotional containment in order for thinking to take place

Bion (1984) made extensive clinical observations of mother-child interactions and focused particularly on the relationship between cognitive and emotional development. The theory of thinking that he developed states that containment of emotional anxiety is required for thinking to take place. Owen clearly was far too emotionally preoccupied to focus on educational tasks in the classroom and it seemed from the family history that mother was also too emotionally preoccupied with her worries to provide sufficient emotional containment for her children. It was of utmost importance, therefore, that the sessions would be emotionally containing i.e. that both parent and pupil experienced the room and session as a 'safe place' and that the activity did not leave them feeling emotionally vulnerable at the end of the session. This was achieved by attending to beginnings and endings both of individual sessions and the whole course, by ensuring time boundaries were kept, giving time for everyone to share how they were feeling, keeping a consistent session structure, using the same room with a set seating arrangement and by employing active listening skills. Thus the session provided parent and child with what Winnicott (1999) terms a 'potential space' i.e. an emotionally containing place where there is the possibility for the parent and child to engage in a relaxed manner in shared playful activity.

Maintaining time boundaries

Maintaining time boundaries was a challenge at first with Owen's mother as she would often turn up 10 or 15 minutes late and then want to keep talking about other issues at the end of the session. I responded to this by ensuring a cup of coffee was ready at the time the session was due to start and saying before we began when I would need to finish. I tried not to get drawn into tangential discussions on other matters to do with school by referring her onto other professionals in the school. Fortunately her social worker was able to pick up issues related to health and housing. As mother became more familiar with the routine structure of the sessions the time boundaries were tested less.

Reframing the parental thinking about behaviour

Occasionally, behavioural incidents would be mentioned by the mother in the few minutes before Owen joined the session. One time near the beginning of the term mother referred to an incident in the previous term when Owen had hit a child who had said something rude about her. Mother's response was supportive of Owen saying that 'Of course he's going to hit out- I don't expect him to just take that sitting down'. There was a few minutes discussion with myself and the social worker pointing out that the outcome to Owen's response was often exclusion which then created problems for him and her.

Clearly mother thought about this as a couple of weeks later when Owen mentioned a conflict incident with another child in the feelings ‘check-in’ she said, ‘You remember what your uncle said- it’s a bigger man who can walk away.’ This felt like a significant shift in her thinking and the messages that she gave to Owen about how he should respond in a conflict situation.

Linking to the school’s behaviour policy

The school’s behaviour policy used a point system for rewarding pupil effort in relation to both behaviour and learning. As the weekly sessions were a valuable point of contact between the school and home, I arranged with the classteacher that he would give Owen a score out of 10 for meeting a set behaviour target chosen by the teacher as the behaviour that would most support his learning. The teacher decided this should be that Owen did not hit any other children in the classroom. Rather than provide a reward in the classroom I suggested that Owen’s mother could reward him if he met his target. Each week Owen brought his score, drew it on a bar chart, set his target for the coming week and negotiated a reward with his mother. I facilitated this negotiation ensuring that mother was not bamboozled by Owen’s demands and that she felt confident about delivering the reward which I stressed need not involve expense. The first reward negotiated was to go lizard hunting together –something that turned out to be of interest to both Owen and his mother and thus functioned as an attachment-promoting activity. I discouraged discussion of events that had influenced any loss points but the bar chart gave the parent a visual picture of how her son had done over the week. This seemed reassuring for her as one thing she had complained about in the past was that it was only when she was informed that Owen was to be excluded was she told that things were not going well for him in school. This bar chart also meant that Owen’s classteacher although not present was able to input into the sessions.

A convergent personalised systemic approach

It is very easy for the support networks put in place to support vulnerable pupils to mirror the fragmentation that has occurred in the child’s home-life where there may have been, as in Owen’s case, lack of contact with a parent, separation, frequent house moves and general inconsistency. While a multi-agency approach is essential, care needs to be taken to ensure that, in assessing and writing reports, that support does not get divergent and distant from the child. Story Links sessions have a systemic structure in that they can include different professionals while engaging in a task with the child and parent. While there can be several adults in the room with the child, and in Owen’s case there were four, sessions are democratic in that everyone present has a chance to initially share how they are feeling and then

contribute to the story, thus avoiding the child feeling overwhelmed by too much attention. However, all of the adults will be holding the individual child's particular needs in mind, thus providing an intervention that is focused or convergent on the child and one that is personalised to meet the child's needs at the time.

Outcomes of Story Links intervention

The Story Links programme was evaluated using pre and post semi-structured interviews with Owen his mother, Owen's classteacher and the headteacher. The TA who supported Owen was also asked to evaluate the work she had done with Owen at the end of the course. During the term that the Story Links programme ran Owen was not excluded once compared to his four exclusions in the previous term. The headteacher also reported that his mother's attitude had dramatically changed towards the school and that she had even mentioned running a stall with books made by children for the Christmas fair. In reality this didn't happen but it was interesting to note how her attitude had changed. The TA reported that Owen, who she had supported before the course of Story Links, was now generally keener to read than he was before. Owen himself thought his reading had improved and also said, 'It's good when my mum's there- it makes me feel more supported and it helps me to calm down'.

The social-worker who attended the sessions, mentioned how it was a new experience for her to work collaboratively in the school situation and found the structure of the sessions provided a good framework for her contact with the family.

Owen's mother gave a positive evaluation of the programme in relation to Owen's behaviour and his reading. She said that, *'he does walk away from conflict sometimes now – he has more patience even with his brother at home.'* She also said that Owen was now looking at writing in shops and added,

I thought it was going to be difficult but it has helped me to realise a few things -especially about Owen. It's taught me how to help him with reading and also helped me with my reading.

While the evaluation showed that Owen's engagement with reading had improved the study did not include a standardised assessment of his reading progress. It is planned to build this into future case study evaluations.

One issue that had arisen over the term, however, was that Owen's younger brother had started to present more challenging behaviour at school and also at home and this was proving to be a concern.

Conclusion

The above case study illustrates the positive effect that the engagement of a parent in creative story-making with her child had in reducing his risk of exclusion. The pupil who had been excluded four times in the previous term had no exclusions during the term the parent engaged in the Story Links programme. The emotional containment provided by the regularity of the sessions, the use of active listening and the structure of the stories themselves created a potential space where a parent with a previously hostile attitude to the school could begin to collaborate with the school in supporting her son's learning. The sense of fun and shared laughter meant that the parent and child found mutual enjoyment in the shared story-making activity, an essential factor in promoting more positive attachment patterns.

By supporting the parent to think about her child within the story metaphor and to become more confident about her ability to support him develop his reading skills, she was able to take a more authoritative parental position, hence alleviating the child's need to 'parent' his mother.

While largely drawing on psychodynamic theory, the Story Links programme was also integrated with the school's positive behavioural policy and the educational curriculum. Sessions incorporated feedback from the teacher on the pupil's behaviour during the week and the finished stories were used by the TA in the classroom to support the child develop his reading skills. The created stories became a positive reminder for the child of the voice of his mother and when using the stories as his reading text in his work with his classroom TA, he became eager to read whereas before he had been a very reluctant reader.

Implications for future work

While the above case study is very positive in its outcomes, it would be useful to evaluate the outcomes of Story Links programmes implemented by other professionals who have completed the 3-day training, given that the facilitator in this case is also the author of the model. It would also be helpful to engage an expert in the field of evaluation in future research to ensure that any issues relating to bias are addressed. In order to assess the impact of the programme on the pupil's learning more precisely, future evaluation would benefit from the inclusion of a standardised testing of pupils' reading skills before and after the intervention.

The above points were included in a proposal for further research into the impact of Story Links in supporting pupils at risk of exclusion and submitted to the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the UK Teaching and Development Agency for Schools, both of whom have kindly agreed to support the project. The results of this wider research evaluation will be available in December 2009.

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Chapter 6

The Rationale for using a Case Study

Approach in Evaluating the Impact of the Story Links Intervention and Ethical Considerations

Introduction

This chapter will present the rationale for using a case study approach in my field of research. It will relate predominantly to the '*Story Links Programme Evaluation: The Impact of a Parent Partnership Intervention that Uses Therapeutic Storywriting to Support Pupils at Risk of Exclusion*' (Waters, 2009) presented in Chapter 7 and which is the major piece of published research presented in this thesis. However, the discussion will also reference my research report '*Writing Stories with Feeling: An evaluation of the Impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on Pupils' Learning*' (Waters, 2004) a summary of which is presented in Chapter 5. Both these pieces of research explore the impact of delivering a specific time-limited programme of intervention and focus on a similar target group, i.e. vulnerable pupils with BESDs and involved the gathering of data from the pupils themselves as well as the educational professionals supporting them, along with an analysis of written therapeutic stories. In the Story Links programme the target pupils were also deemed to be at risk of exclusion and consequently their behaviour and social difficulties were generally of a more severe nature than in the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and, as the programme to be evaluated involved parent partnership, the views of parents were also sought. Thus in justifying the use of case study as an appropriate methodology for evaluating the Story Links Programme, the case will also be made for its use in the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups evaluation.

As detailed accounts of specific research aims, methods used, issues relating to validity and ethical considerations for the two evaluations are included in the reports in chapters 5 & 7, this chapter will primarily focus on a more generic discussion of the case study approach and its suitability for the evaluation of these as specific therapeutic storywriting interventions which aim to support vulnerable pupils and their parents. This discussion was not appropriate in the commissioned evaluation reports for funders. However, in order to provide a context for this methodological discussion the research aims of the Story Links evaluation are re-stated here. They were to assess the impact of the parent-partnership Story Links intervention, delivered in schools by professionals who had completed a 3-day Story Links training (see appendix 2), on

- pupils' emotional and social well-being
- pupils' behaviour and rates of exclusion (from school, classroom and playground)
- the engagement of parents with their child's learning
- pupils' reading skills and engagement with learning.

I will first explore what is meant by case study, how it has developed in the field of educational research and address some of the issues raised by critics of the approach. I will then look at the appropriateness of using case study in evaluating the Story Links intervention.

The final section of this chapter will look at some of the ethical considerations that need to be addressed when working with vulnerable pupils and their parents. Again, as specific measures to address ethical concerns are included in the individual research reports (chapters 5 and 7) the discussion will mainly focus on generic issues.

What is Case Study?

An in-depth study of the singular

Simons defines case study as ‘a study of the singular, the particular, the unique’ (2009:1) that allows for an in-depth exploration of ‘a person, a classroom, an institution, a programme, a policy, a system’ (2009:4). Case study aims to collect in-depth data about complex events and interactions within a bounded case and to illustrate these with ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973).

Stake, one of the first evaluators to adopt the case study approach (Stake, 1978) in the United States considers that, ‘case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of enquiry’ (2000:435). A particular strength of the case study approach is that it can incorporate both qualitative methods and quantitative methods, depending on the nature of the particular case to be studied. As Stake (2000) points out, a medical practitioner’s data relating to a particular case will be more quantitative than qualitative whereas the formal record of a social worker is likely to be more qualitative than quantitative. What is important is to identify the specific ‘case’ to be studied and that ‘certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside.’ (Stake 2000:436)

It is important to also mention that some researchers use the term Case study in a narrower sense. Foster et al. (2000), while acknowledging that the term is somewhat ‘ambiguous’, consider that Case Study focuses solely on qualitative methods and that it is essentially ‘generally contrasted with quantitative approach to social research’ (p215).

I would like to make it clear that in the research documented here I am using the term as defined by Stake and Simons referred to in the above paragraph i.e. an approach that can incorporate both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Development of Case Study in Educational Research

Case study has been used extensively as a research method in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, history, law, medicine and psychology for well over a century e.g. the case studies of Freud. However, case study only became accepted within educational research in the 1960's and 1970's. Previous to this the norm in educational research had been a quantitative positivist approach, drawn from the physical sciences, with the use of control groups, a focus on examining specific variables and analysing the difference between pre and post measures. What changed this perspective was the need to evaluate a number of newly developed large scale educational programmes in the US and the UK (Simons 2009:14). The use of a positivist methodology which focused on inputs and outputs failed to provide sufficient data as to why the programmes worked in some situations and not in others. As Simons points out,

Many programmes were specific and innovative. No comparative control groups could be established to make sense of an experimental design, no benchmarks of 'normal' practice existed with which to compare the innovation, and focusing on pre/post testing as the sole indicator of the worth of the programme clearly fell short of representing the programme in action. (2009:14)

In order for stakeholders to make informed policy decisions more in- depth data regarding the actual process of implementation of a particular programme was considered necessary. These processes might include variables such as the feelings of the teacher about implementing the programme, the ethos of the school, pupils' attitudes to learning and the general perceptions of those involved.

Overlaps with other approaches

The qualitative aspect of case study has overlaps with other methodological approaches such as Illuminative Evaluation (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976) which also aimed to move educational research methodology away from the bio-medical model, with its focus on pre and post testing, to one more in line with the ethnographic model, and responsive evaluation (Stake, 1975 & 2004) with its focus on observation, reaction and communication in naturalistic settings.

Another overlapping methodology is that of action research which is sometimes described as a special form of case study. In fact, McNiff & Whitehead (2009) state that 'most projects in action research turn out to be case studies, in the sense that they are studies of singularities' (p.165). However, the main distinction is that action research in education generally involves a cycle in which initial research findings are used to inform a subsequent intervention which may then again be researched /evaluated.

In discussing educational research, Stake (2000) even goes as far as to say that that 'perhaps a majority of researchers doing case study call their studies by another name.' (p435).

Product or Process?

The aim of methodology is to help us understand, in the broadest possible terms, not the products of scientific enquiry but the process itself (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:45)

The above quote highlights the epistemological divide that exists in educational research as to whether meaningful educational research should focus solely on the measurable outcomes or products that result from educational interventions, in line with a positivist approach, or whether an in-depth examination of the processes that take place is a more relevant approach, in line with the phenomenological and interpretivist school of thought.

Simons (2000:81) highlights the importance of 'situating' ourselves in case study research as

You are the main instrument of data gathering: it is you who observes, interviews, interacts with people in the field. Your world view, predilections and values will influence how you act.

In order to 'situate' my personal epistemological perspective within the research presented in this thesis, the next paragraphs will attempt to summarise my own epistemological journey which, over the course of my academic career, has encompassed the extreme ends of the positivist/phenomenological continuum.

My first degree was in Logic with Modern Physics and for the first two years of this study, my own perspective was firmly embedded in the positivist tradition with any discussion of feelings, personal perceptions, or hints of subjectivity deemed irrelevant (Ayer, 1966) as only empirical evidence that can be objectively measured is considered meaningful within this paradigm. This perspective had truly been a shock to my personal philosophy, having been the recipient of thirteen years of Catholic education, but one which as a scientist that I now felt intellectually compelled to adopt. However, as I became aware of the paradoxes thrown up by relativity theory and quantum physics my personal epistemological perspective again underwent a dramatic shift. In quantum measurement theory Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which states that it is impossible to know both the location and velocity of a subatomic particle at the same time (Heisenberg, 1927), the very logical positivist approach that had been rigorously used in the data gathering for the experiments that came to this conclusion appeared to be undermined. And the reinterpretation by twentieth century physicists (Feynman 1965:1-8) of the

work of Young (1802), a nineteenth century physicist, also questioned the positivist notion of an objective world that exists independently of the observer; in Young's Two-Slit Experiment light is shown to act as a wave if the experiment is set up to measure waves which give a concentric ring distribution pattern when passed through a diffraction grating, yet behaves as a particle when passed through two slits designed to measure particles and in this case produce a normal distribution curve. In other words, the scientific results indicate that whether light is a particle or a wave – and these are mutually exclusive states- depends entirely on what we set out to measure (Heisenberg, 1958).

As I studied further I became aware that in reflecting on the philosophical implications of modern physics, particularly within the macrocosmic world of galactic structures and the microcosmic world of subatomic physics, positivism is not always the most useful paradigm for understanding how the world works. The radical logical and epistemological implication of this scientific research is that even using a positivist approach to understand the world we cannot avoid the issues of relativity and subjectivity. These philosophical implications of 20th century physics have been explored by a number of eminent writers with a background in physics (Schrödinger, 1964; Kuhn, 1970; Capra, 1975).

Thus, as I realised that even within the 'hard' scientific discipline of physics the logical positivist was one of a number of possible paradigms (Kuhn, 1970) by which we could attempt to understand the world, I found myself more and more interested in the phenomenological perspective. My later training as a psychosynthesis counsellor and therapist drew extensively on the humanistic psychological tradition in which the phenomenological is the dominant perspective. While I found this exploration of experiential reality both engaging and exciting, I continued to also be interested in how this phenomenological perspective could marry with our understanding of the physical world. Mindell (2000), also with a background in physics, draws parallels between the worlds of psychology and physics and talks about how, in attempting to make sense of the world and our experience of it, we need to address the subjective 'process' of experiencing the world as well as the measurable 'product'.

I bring my interest in both the positivist and phenomenological perspectives to my research into work with vulnerable pupils and their parents and I am particularly drawn to the case study approach because of its ability to encompass both a qualitative in-depth exploration of the complex inter-relational processes involved in supporting pupils with extreme behavioural and emotional issues as well as considering objective measurables such as reading progress, exclusion rates and attendance of parents.

Addressing criticisms of the Qualitative Approach in Case Study

While quantitative approaches are generally accepted, rooted as they are in the scientific method, the qualitative methods used to evaluate the implementation of many innovative educational programmes are often not so well understood or accepted. House (1980) considers that evaluative research in the social sciences is a persuasive rather than a scientific activity and states that evaluation

'persuades rather than convinces, argues rather than demonstrates, is credible rather than certain, is variably accepted rather than compelling'(p 73)

The issues that have particularly been questioned by critics of the case study approach are those relating to qualitative methods and in particular the issues of subjectivity, validity and generalizability (Simons, 2009:1). I will now discuss some of these issues.

Monitoring subjectivity

Research conducted from a positivist perspective aims to minimise subjectivity and results are often presented in a statistical format. However, within qualitative research, the views and judgements of the researcher herself are necessarily involved in analysing and interpreting data which is generally gathered from interviews, observations, field notes and/or document analysis. It is not surprising, therefore, that critics of qualitative research (Schwandt 2001:15-16) have pointed to subjectivity as a weakness of the approach.

One key way to address the issue of subjectivity is to ensure that the researcher takes responsibility for monitoring their own subjectivity and bias. Simons suggests that as *'the researcher is the main instrument in collecting and interpreting data'* (Simons, 2009:14) we need to first become honestly aware of our own particular perspective:

To be fair to those within the case, we need to be clear how our values and judgements affect our portrayal of them. (Simons 2009:81)

A number of other researchers (Bentz and Shapiro 1998; Coffey, 1999; Denzin, 1997) working in social and educational research also focus on the importance of monitoring the role of the self in order to mitigate undue bias. In my own research, where I aimed to evaluate intervention programmes which I had personally developed, procedures to monitor my own bias were clearly an important aspect of my

research design. The specific procedures adopted are described in detail in the methodology sections of chapters 5 and 7.

Both Stake (2004) and Simons (2006; 2009) point out that there is a difference between subjectivity and bias. Stake points out that *'expert evaluators have biases, as do all people, but most work hard to recognise and constrain their biases'* (p60). However, he adds that to deny subjectivity 'is a step to oversimplification'. Simons (2009) actually considers that *'subjective understandings are part of the strength of qualitative case study research'* (p 162) as what it is examining are phenomena that are subjective by nature. For instance, the Story Links evaluation sought to assess the impact on pupils' emotional and social well-being. This is something that was mainly explored through a personal encounter between myself and the participants in an interview setting and addressed data relating to the subjective experience of participants. Inevitably we each bring our personal qualities and skills to such encounters. I believe that one of the reasons that the professionals, primarily SENCOs, generously volunteered to take part in the research project was that they knew I was personally committed to the therapeutic storywriting approach: I had taken the time to develop and implement the Story Links model myself and also had, like them, spent many years supporting pupils with BESDs. This personal commitment and experience also meant that I was confident and competent in engaging disaffected pupils and their parents in interview discussions about pertinent issues. This is a significant point as the establishment of rapport is an important factor when attempting to gather in-depth qualitative data. Thus in addressing the issue of subjectivity, it is not about attempting to provide a 'value-free' (Stake, 2004) perspective but rather to ensure that our unique perspective is brought into awareness and made explicit.

Validity

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) consider that validity is a complex issue but that essentially it is about the 'worth' of a piece of research: *'if a piece of research is invalid then it is worthless'* (2000: 105). Validity in qualitative research is supported by a range of strategies including the self- reflexivity of the researcher discussed above. Other important strategies include triangulation by using a range of methods; triangulation through collecting data from multiple-perspectives; adequacy of sampling; respondent validation and appropriateness of methods for the topic (Cohen et al, 2000; Simons, 2009). All of these were employed in the research presented in chapters 5 & 7 of this thesis and details of specific strategies are included in the methodology sections of these chapters.

Another strategy advocated by Stake (2004:60) to support validity is the use of a critical friend. This strategy was adopted in the two research evaluations by engaging an expert external evaluator to monitor the validity of the research methods, analysis and mode of reporting. Again specific details are outlined in the methodology sections of chapters 5 and 7.

Generalizability

A key question often asked in relation to case study is 'Can we theorise from a particular case?' Simons (2009) identifies six different ways of generalizing in case study: cross-case generalization; naturalistic generalization; in-depth generalization; concept generalization; process generalization; and situated generalization (p.164). In the Story Links evaluation I made use of the first three of these methods.

Cross-case generalization involves studying several cases and then identifying common themes and interconnecting issues. Simons states that cross-case analysis can then 'generate patterns and themes that have relevance in many contexts of a similar nature' (Simons 2009:169). In the Story Links evaluation twelve separate cases of the Story Links intervention were examined and, with the help of NVivo software an in-depth cross-case analysis, was conducted (see methodology sections in chapter 7 for more specific details). By looking in-depth at this range of cases the evaluation aimed to address issues that are presented by other pupils with severe behavioural issues in many schools around the country.

Naturalistic generalization is concerned with engaging the reader with the events described in the research report in such a way that they can recognise similarities in their own practice and in this way discern which elements can be generalised to their own context. In the research reports in chapters 5 & 7, this would apply if professionals reading the research reports find that the material triggers memories of work they have done with vulnerable pupils and possibly the stories written by some of these children. Perhaps they may have had a visceral reaction to a story written by a particular child but had not been able to construct a meaningful interpretation for the story. In reading the stories presented in the case studies they may find that insights are triggered about the therapeutic stories they have facilitated themselves and may gain further insights into the pupils they have worked with themselves. This iterative process can lead the reader to construct their own wider generalizations for as Stake says

Enduring meanings come from encounter, and are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter. (2000:442)

Naturalistic generalization is also discussed in the commentary in chapter 2.

Simons (2009: 167) considers that in-depth particularization can be the 'strongest justification' for generalising from case study research data. This aspect is concerned with looking for some wider generalization by looking in-depth at a particular instance:

The aim here is not to search for generality in the case ... but rather to try to capture the essence of the particular in a way we all recognise. (p 167)

This idea of looking at the particular has a resonance with Bruner's idea of how narrative, i.e. a particular story, can be an alternative way of 'convincing another' and conveying meaning (1986; 2008) He contrasts the 'logico-scientific' and the 'narrative' modes of thought:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality... A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth but verisimilitude. (1986:11)

By providing in-depth accounts of the pupils presenting issues, the views and feelings of parents and professionals and the stories written in Story Links sessions, it is hoped that the reader will gain wider insights into the complex issues behind the behaviour of some of these children, the way in which parents of pupils at risk of exclusion might be persuaded to support their children more and strategies that might be used more widely to engage such pupils in academic learning.

Suitability of the Case Study approach for the evaluation of the Story Links interventions

Story Links, like Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, is a therapeutic teaching intervention that focuses on supporting pupils' emotional well-being and behaviour as well as aiming to support their academic learning. The programme targets pupils at risk of exclusion and these are some of the most vulnerable pupils in our primary school system. Stake points out that often in topics studied with case study 'issues are complex, situated, problematic relationships' (2000:440). This is certainly the case in relation to this group of pupils - they are children about whom there will have been considerable concern and whose emotional and learning needs are of a complex nature. These are pupils that classteachers are often in despair about, who find difficulty in getting along with their peers or applying themselves to educational

tasks and often have complex home lives. Some pupils in the target group will also have had child protection issues identified in the past. Given that the Story Links intervention aims to also involve parents of these pupils in a ten-week intervention, it is clear that both the background context and many of the relationships are of a complex nature and required a data rich analysis such as offered by the case study approach in order to adequately explore these issues.

In addition the evaluation of the Story Links programme aimed to assess the social and emotional well-being of pupils as well as the involvement of parents in their child's learning. The use of qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth exploration of the impact of the intervention from the multiple perspectives of the pupils, parents and professionals participating in the intervention. In particular the approach allowed the voices of pupils and parents from a group of pupils and parents, who were often drawn from what can be termed a socially excluded group (Social Exclusion Task Force, 2007), to be heard.

However, there were also some aspects of pupils' academic progress and presenting behaviours that lent themselves to assessment using standardised quantitative measures such as the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA) (1997) and Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)(1997). It was decided therefore that the case study approach which allows for the incorporation of these quantitative methods alongside the qualitative data gained from interviews would be appropriate.

Given that the intervention followed a standard structure and was of a specific duration it was possible to define the boundary of the case as the delivery of the 10-week intervention in a particular school.

Ethical concerns when working with vulnerable pupils and their parents

Clearly in working with vulnerable pupils at risk of exclusion and their parents many issues that arise will be of a sensitive nature. As Stake says,

Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict. (2000:447)

Some of the specific strategies to ensure sensitive ethical procedures adopted in the Story Links evaluation included providing relevant information for gatekeepers; gaining permissions from parents, pupils and professionals; anonymity; the right of withdrawal from the research for all participants;

sensitivity in writing up the report; and confidentiality conditions put in place for the external transcriber and external expert evaluator. Details of how these particular procedures were put in place are addressed in detail in the methodology section in chapter 7.

In undertaking research with vulnerable pupils and their parents, the ethical principle of 'do no harm' needs to be addressed at all stages of the project. However, sometimes decisions regarding ethics are not straightforward and as Cohen et al. (2000) state,

Ethical concerns encountered in educational research in particular can be extremely complex and subtle and can frequently place researchers in moral predicaments which may appear quite unresolvable. (p49)

In order to illustrate this point I will describe an ethical concern that arose as a consequence of the research project that is not addressed in chapter 7 as it was not part of the main evaluation but none-the-less required some serious ethical reflection.

This was a request towards the end of the project to make a Teachers TV programme about the Story Links project. I felt it would have been quite inappropriate to film one of the school-based professionals delivering a Story Links session with a pupil and parent given the sensitive nature of the work and the contract to protect confidentiality. However, I had delivered two 10-week interventions myself in order to pilot the measuring tools for the evaluation and one 10 year-old pupil involved had expressed a desire to share his stories with other pupils who might be finding it difficult to manage anger as he had himself. His mother who had attended the sessions also mentioned his desire to support other children with the problems that the sessions had helped him deal with. I therefore contacted the headteacher and SENCO along with the TA who had taken part in the Story Links programme who all responded positively.

I then arranged a meeting with the pupil and his mother and both were very keen to take part in making the programme. When I explained that the film crew could maintain their anonymity by either filming from behind or blurring faces they were very definite that they were happy to be identifiable. So now I had permission from both pupil and parent but still I was concerned as to how the programme would be edited and if they would feel comfortable with the final result. Fortunately the editing was done very sensitively and when I arranged a 'premier' showing for the pupil, his family and involved professionals at the school, both pupil and mother appeared to be very proud of their contributions.

So, on the whole, my primary concerns were allayed. However, I still had, and continue to have, the worry as to how the pupil might view the programme when he is older. The only way I could think of addressing this was to provide the family with my contact details and to say that if they had any concerns in the future, I would be very happy for them to contact me. I would then try to have the programme or their identities removed. However, the programme would already have been extensively viewed.

Cohen et al. (2000) discuss the 'costs/benefits ratio' (adapted in Cohen et al from Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992). This relates to the ethical dilemma that researchers need to 'consider the likely social benefits of their endeavours against the personal costs to the individuals taking part' (p 50). In relation to the ethical dilemma outlined above, the resultant eight minutes of film in this Teachers TV programme has now been viewed by many teachers (who would not have taken the time to read an academic report) and has supported the dissemination of the Story Links intervention that supports vulnerable pupils and their parents. I believe therefore that in this case the costs/benefits ratio was an acceptable one. I felt I took all possible precautions to ensure a high ethical standard— although I continue to hope that if the pupil watches the video when he is older he will still feel happy to have appeared in the video.

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Chapter 7

Paper E: Story Links Programme Evaluation: The impact of a parent partnership intervention that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils at risk of exclusion (Dec 2009)

Part of the University of Chichester's Story Links Project, funded by the TDA and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. (sole-author) [45,000 words]

Commentary on Paper E

This chapter is the major piece of research work included in this thesis and is attached in its original published format. This report documents the evaluation strand of the University of Chichester's Story Links Project, for which I was the project director and which was funded by the Training and Development Agency for schools (TDA) and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. The twenty month project finished in Nov 2009 and this report was published and sent to funders in Dec ember 2009. The full report is available as a resource for teachers on the Teacher Training Resource Bank website (www.ttrb.ac.uk).

While the report includes specific methodological and ethical procedures relating to the evaluation, a more generic and detailed discussion regarding the use of the case study approach to evaluate a Story Links intervention has been provided in the preceding chapter 6.

The reader may also be interested to view the Teachers TV video 'Working with Families' (2009) available at www.teachers.tv/video/34482 (8.12-13.45) as, while not formally part of the evaluative research, the five minute video clip provides a clear introduction to the topic.

Paper E: Story Links Programme Evaluation: The impact of a parent partnership intervention that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils at risk of exclusion (2009)

Paper E [report]: (Dec 2009) Story Links Programme Evaluation: The impact of a parent partnership intervention that uses therapeutic storywriting to support pupils at risk of exclusion.

Part of the University of Chichester's Story Links Project, funded by the TDA and the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. (sole author) [45,000 words]

Please see attached document in original published format.

(An electronic copy is available at www.storylinkstraining.co.uk/?page_id=133 and www.ttrb.ac.uk)

Chapter 8

Conclusion: Review of papers, final reflections and implications for future research and development.

Review of papers

The papers presented in this thesis provide a critical exploration of how story metaphor can be used to support pupils on the SEN register whose behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are getting in the way of their academic learning. In particular, the papers look at two models of intervention developed and evaluated by myself over the last decade, both of which are based on the principles of Therapeutic Storywriting, a term I first introduced in 1999. The first model, Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, is a wave 2 intervention⁵ to support groups of 4-6 pupils in the development of emotional and social skills while also developing their writing skills. The second model, Story Links, is a wave 3 intervention that targets individual pupils at risk of exclusion and is a parent-partnership intervention that aims to support pupils' behavioural, social and emotional development while also developing their reading skills.

Such therapeutic teaching interventions are pertinent to current practice given the emphasis over the past couple of decades to include such pupils in mainstream schools (DfES 2001) and the more recent emphasis on using the educational curriculum to address emotional issues (DfES 2004 & 2005). These pupils are some of the most vulnerable pupils in our schools and their behavioural and learning difficulties often provide serious challenges for both classteachers and senior managers.

I will now review the main findings of the individual papers presented. Following an outline in Chapter 1 of the personal, research and policy contexts for the research to be included, the papers in chapters 2 & 3 then provided an introduction to the theoretical concepts underpinning the therapeutic storywriting approach, illustrated in each by an individual case study drawn from my own practice facilitating Therapeutic Storywriting Groups. Chapter 2 focused on the psychodynamic element while chapter 3 drew on aspects of humanistic and psychosynthesis theory which inform the Therapeutic Storywriting Group model. The stories written by these two pupils show that the 'emotional containment' and 'potential space' provided by these groups sessions enabled them to use the activity of storywriting to project

⁵ The UK Primary National Strategy (2003) uses a 3 wave model of intervention: Wave 1: Quality education of all (whole class); Wave 2: Small group; Wave 3: individual.

some of their core emotional anxieties onto story characters and in so doing to explore and process some of the emotional difficulties getting in the way of their learning.

The paper presented in chapter 4 summarised a more extensive and formal piece of funded research which sought to evaluate the impact of the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups on pupils' learning. Here the case is the 10-week Therapeutic Storywriting Groups intervention, delivered, not by myself, but by other SEN professionals following their completion of a 3-day training in 'Setting Up Therapeutic Storywriting Groups'. The research was designed to include the voices of the pupils themselves along with an analysis of their written stories and teacher interviews provided additional triangulation of the data. The evidence from this evaluation suggests that Therapeutic Storywriting Groups delivered by other professionals had a number of positive effects on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning in that they: enabled pupils to use the medium of story writing to process emotional experiences ; helped pupils move through difficult feelings; encouraged pupils to develop co-operative and trusting relationships with peers; supported listening and speaking skills; fostered an interactive relationship between the teacher and group with respect to story writing skills; increased pupils' concentration and motivation to engage with story writing; and improved pupils' self-esteem as writers. The comment from the case study pupil, Liam, in chapter 4 was typical of those made by many of the pupils interviewed. He described the programme as *'a way to get all your feelings out. And it calms you down just doing a little bit of writing.'*

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 then focused on the Story Links model which developed out of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and is designed to support pupils at risk of exclusion, some of the most vulnerable and challenging pupils in our schools. The model draws particularly on attachment theory and involves parents, from what is often a hard-to access parental group, in attending weekly sessions with their child over a 10 week period. The co-created stories aim to provide the child with emotional containment by showing that their parent is able to 'hold' them 'in mind' within the story metaphor. The typed up stories are then used both as a positive attachment object and as a text to support the child's reading skills. Chapter 5 addresses some of the key theoretical points underpinning the Story Links model and is illustrated by a case study with an individual pupil and parent drawn from my own practice. The findings from this small piece of practitioner research were very positive: the pupils' behaviour improved dramatically reducing the number of school exclusions and the mother's negative attitude to the school also improved significantly. The findings from this pilot study were incorporated in a successful bid to the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the TDA, which enabled me to conduct an in-depth evaluation of the

impact of the Story Links model, delivered by other educational professionals following their completion of a 3-day training in Story Links.

The Story Links evaluation element of the project, based at University of Chichester, ran over an eighteen month period. The research design again used a case study approach and the rationale for this methodology is discussed in detail in chapter 6. While qualitative methods were used in this evaluation, as they had been in the previous research papers, this larger in-depth evaluation also included standardised quantitative methods to measure reading ability and pupils' behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Records of parental attendance and home reading patterns were also analysed. The qualitative data included the analysis of over one hundred co-created stories and the analysis of over eighty interviews with parents, teachers, TAs and pupils who participated in the Story Links intervention.

The key findings of the Story Links evaluation were mainly positive and included: a significant improvement in pupils' overall emotional stress; a significant improvement in pupils' peer relationships; pupils and parents were able to write stories that addressed pertinent emotional issues for the child; the sessions and the stories themselves supported positive pupil/parent attachment; significant improvement in behaviour with a reduction in exclusions from school, classroom and playground; significant reduction in hyperactivity and attentional difficulties in the classroom; parental attendance, contrary to many expectations, was remarkably good; and parents increased the frequency with which they heard their child read at home. However, while there was an increase in pupils' engagement and confidence in reading, there was no significant improvement in their standardised reading score as measured on the NARA. All these findings are discussed in detail in the actual report in chapter 7. A couple of unexpected findings were the frequency with which the story metaphor related to an absent father and the change of dynamic in sessions when a couple rather than a single parent attended.

Final reflections

I will now discuss a few of the key themes to emerge from the findings of all five of the papers presented in this thesis.

The search for meaning

A dominant theme to emerge from the analysis of stories written in both the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and Story Links sessions was that sessions had provided a learning environment in which pupils

were able to project their own emotional issues onto the story characters. This was evident in the high degree of correlation between the feelings expressed by the story characters and the pupils' own presenting behavioural, emotional and social issues as reported by the school-based professionals. Storywriting can provide the child with an opportunity to reframe or 're-story' their personal experiences and it appeared that the pupils, many of whom had experienced difficult life situations, were keen to engage in this process. By transposing characters and events in their lives into the metaphor of the stories the children were able to play with different outcomes to actual dilemmas. In the Story Links sessions parents and pupils were also engaged in a 'co-construction' of meaning as they worked together to create a coherent story that sought to resolve emotional issues that paralleled those of the child. This re-storying of past events within the safety of the metaphor allows the child to make sense of what has happened to them.

Story as transformation- from coal to diamonds

Drawing on my background in physics, this process of using storywriting to understand and make sense of unresolved emotional experiences can be viewed as analogous to the relationship between coal and diamond both of which contain carbon atoms, with diamond being pure carbon and coal primarily carbon. However, in diamond which is one of the pure forms of carbon, it is the highly ordered three-dimensional structure of the atoms which leads to its unique strength and brilliance. Analogously, while the child's unconscious may be full of all sorts of imagery, it is only when particular images are expressed and ordered within a coherent story structure that the images can provide information that clearly reflects the child's internal world and in so doing strengthens the child's self-concept and supports them in their search for meaning.

Just as the way the diamond appears depends on the light in which it is viewed, pupils' stories do not have one correct 'clever' interpretation. The power of the created stories to engage the attention of the children participating in the research documented here, was evident in their engagement with the storymaking process, in their body language, in the amount they wrote (groups model), in their interest in re-reading the stories (Story Links model), in the significance of their pictures and in the personal relevance of the metaphors used. Taking the objective role of narrator also appears to have personally empowered the pupils as evident in their improved self-esteem.

Overall, the provision of an emotionally containing space in which pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties were supported to write their 'own' stories, allowed pupils to express something of their

own inner wisdom. Rather than the smoke, fire and darkness of the difficult side of their nature the stories allowed a lighter diamond-like inner nature to shine through. In fact one pupil's story actually used this metaphor. In Lewis' story Dino the dragon who had earlier been so angry he had been burning everything to a cinder gradually finds a way to control his firebox . Here is an extract from the last story co-written with his mother:

At last he reached the mountain peak and in the distance he could see something glistening. As he got closer it became so bright he couldn't look at it. Dino closed his eyes but started to go off course. So he landed and slowly opened one eye and then the other. Gradually Dino's eyes became accustomed to the brightness. Dino saw that there was not one but many diamonds in this place. He decided he would stay and live here.

A means to facilitate positive attachment

Within the therapeutic storywriting groups, the results presented in chapter 4 indicate that the shared stories helped pupils develop trusting relationships with other group members and the teachers 'story' supported positive attachment between the teacher and pupils.

For the pupils at risk of exclusion involved in the Story Links project, many of whom had attachment issues, the opportunity to co- create a therapeutic story with their parent/carer fostered positive attachment between the child and parent. A significant number the parents were able, with support, to progress towards an ability to make story contributions that were attuned to the emotional needs of their child, and as discussed in chapter 1, it is this emotional attunement by the parent that is key to the formation of positive attachment. Furthermore, the typed up story frequently became a positive attachment object, reminding pupil and parent of an enjoyable shared experience within the educational context.

The evaluation of the Story Links intervention indicated that the inclusion of parents in the story-making provided additional emotional containment for the child both through the 'mutually enjoyable' activity of co-creating a story in which there was enjoyment and laughter and also through parents' empathic story contributions which showed they were able to use story metaphor to 'hold' their child 'in mind'.

Bridging the mental health/ education divide

The use of stories which reflect pupils' emotional anxieties are commonly used in schools to support pupils with BESDs. However, the research findings indicate that by facilitating pupils to create their own stories, which they are involved in either reading or writing themselves, means that the same activity can have a dual function i.e. to support emotional well-being while developing literacy skills. The fact is that these pupils are doubly disadvantaged. No matter how much empathy and emotional support we give them, if these pupils leave school without basic literacy skills, their life chances will be very poor. The ability to read and write develops the child's capacity to think and this in turn supports the development of emotional resilience as the individual can begin to reflect on their emotions rather than just react to them.

Bion (1984) considers that emotional containment is necessary for thinking to develop and the papers show that story metaphor can provide emotional containment for pupils whose anxious preoccupation is getting in the way of their learning. All the papers clearly indicate a beneficial effect for Therapeutic Storywriting in terms of supporting pupils' emotional security and well-being, as reflected in comments from pupils, parents and professionals as well as a standardised behaviour screening assessment. In both evaluation reports it is also shown that for most pupils their engagement with the educational task also significantly improved.

A safe way to address difficult emotions

The first paper presented in chapter 2 is a dramatic illustration of how story metaphor can provide a safe way to communicate feelings that might feel overwhelming if shared directly in the 'cold light of day' and this point is particularly made in chapter 2 and confirmed in the findings of the later papers. The fact that pre-adolescent children are still in what Piaget (1979) called the 'concrete operational stage' and are not yet able to engage easily in meta-cognitive or abstract thinking means that for them, while the underlying 'message' may connect with them in an unconscious way, overall a story is 'just a story'. In the words of one of the pupils interviewed, *'You can write stories and talk about problems but don't have to say it is you.'* (Maya Yr 6)

Implications for further research and development

I will now look at the implications of the research presented with particular reference to the evaluation reports in chapters 4 & 7 which evaluated the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups model and the Story Links

model respectively, considering each of these in turn before considering how future developments might support capacity and sustainability of the interventions.

Areas for further research relating to Therapeutic Storywriting Groups

In relation to the findings from the evaluation of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups, there are four possible areas for future research.

Test the findings on a broader sample and in a wider multi-agency context.

Firstly, while this pilot study points to the positive impact of Therapeutic Storywriting on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning, it was a relatively small sample drawn from pupils at Key stage 2. The groups in this study were led by SENCOs but with the current government policy to develop extended schools (DfES 2004), there are an increasing number of other professionals drawn from agencies such as child mental health and social care who are working in schools with emotionally anxious pupils. While the intervention is designed primarily to be used at key stage 2, some teachers at key stage 3 have completed the training and are using Therapeutic Storywriting with Year 7 pupils. It would be useful, therefore, to test the findings presented in chapter 4 both on a broader sample and in a wider multi-agency context.

Explore whether improvements in pupils' social and emotional skills are transferred to the main classroom

Secondly, it would be useful to explore whether social and emotional skills acquired in the group are transferred back into the main classroom and the impact this might have both on pupils' wider academic progress and on reducing school exclusions. Again it would be useful to involve class teachers in such an evaluation.

Evaluate the impact of the intervention on spelling, handwriting and grammar

Thirdly, while the intention of these groups was to help pupils develop their emotional and social awareness through the activity of storywriting and also to develop their motivation to engage with writing, the groups do not aim to explicitly teach spelling, handwriting and grammar. However, as evidence from the pupil interviews suggests, the groups also had some impact on these skill areas. It might be useful to conduct a further study involving teacher-based before and after assessment, possibly

involving a group which runs over a whole academic year, to look at the impact of the approach on the whole range of literacy skills.

Explore the impact on speech, language and communication difficulties

Finally, while speaking and listening skills were commented on in this evaluation, there was not a focus on specific speech and language difficulties. Given the connection between BESDs and Speech, Language and Communication difficulties, exploring the impact Therapeutic Storywriting may have on these might also be a fruitful area for further investigation.

Areas for further research relating to Story Links

Story Links

In relation to the findings from the evaluation of the Story Links intervention, there are several potential areas for future research.

Engagement of fathers

Firstly, as the majority of parents attending Story Links were mothers it would be interesting to investigate ways in which to engage fathers more, particularly given that many of the issues addressed by the stories related to fathers. This might be done through encouraging them to attend sessions or to read the story with their child during the week, which as one pupil profile indicated can be done even when the father lives separately from the mother.

Further refinement of measures to assess impact on reading skills

Secondly, while the Story Links intervention clearly supported the pupils' engagement with reading, as mentioned above there was no significant improvement indicated by the NARA. However, this may have been due to the fact that the majority of the pupils were below the baseline in the pre test and also that the testing interval was about 12 weeks. Therefore, in future evaluations it might be useful to:

- use an early reading standardised test to assess reading alongside the NARA
- test pupils' reading skills again 6 months after completion of the intervention

Explore ways to further encourage parents to support their child's reading skills during and subsequent to the Story Links intervention

Thirdly, a number of parents expressed a desire to learn more about how to support their child's reading. In addition, it would be useful to explore how the goodwill, evidently established between the school and parent during the Story Links programme, could be capitalised upon to encourage parents to further support their child's reading skills both during and subsequent to the intervention. Some strategies that might be considered are:

- providing sentence-making activities based on the co-created story for the pupil to do at home
- involve the parent in a clear follow-up programme of reading for the pupil once the Story Links intervention finishes
- provide training for parents on how to support their child's reading skills – including those parents who have reading difficulties themselves

Implications of research findings for future training developments

Developing capacity and sustainability through a train-the-trainer programme

Both the evaluations into the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting Groups and Story Links models were conducted primarily by myself following the delivery of a training course which I had developed and delivered. Clearly both of these interventions have only been disseminated due to my commitment and passion for the Therapeutic Storywriting approach, which grew out of my own practice supporting vulnerable pupils and my particular professional experience of being both a SEN teacher and a qualified therapist. However, the research findings from the evaluations of both models indicate that other professionals are capable of delivering this intervention given the appropriate training and support. In order to develop capacity and sustainability, so that dissemination of the training is not solely dependent on myself, the next stage of development would be the establishment of a train-the-trainer programme for both models and it would also be useful to have other independent researchers evaluate a pilot of such a programme.

Conclusion: Review of papers, final reflections and implications for future research and development.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Outline of 3-day training in Setting Up Therapeutic Storywriting Groups

Day 1

- Introduction to Therapeutic Storywriting
- The significance of story metaphor
- Setting up a Therapeutic Storywriting group
- Ways into story
- Interpretation within the metaphor
- The teacher's story

Day 2

- Characters as a projection of subpersonalities
- Containment of anxiety for thinking to take place
- Receiving the child's story
- Active listening and reflection of children's stories
- Using choice points in the teacher's story to support emotional literacy discussion
- Discussion of points arising from teachers' groups

Day 3

- What is emotional literacy?
- Setting stories in fantasy or external reality
- Addressing specific issues through the teacher's story
- The group dynamic & boundaries
- Liaison and reporting to other professionals
- Discussion of points arising from teachers' groups

Appendix 2: Outline of 3-day training in Story Links

Day 1

- Attachment theory and the school child
- The therapeutic use of story metaphor
- Structure of a Story Links session
- Liaison with parents/carers and teachers
- Using a solution-focused systemic approach

Day 2

- Providing an emotionally containing environment
- Active Listening Skills
- Responding to story metaphor
- Writing up the story at the skill appropriate level

Day 3

- Weekly follow-up programme in school
- Home learning programme
- Linking with positive behaviour programmes
- Assessment and referring on

Appendix 3: Definition of SEAL categories

self-awareness: enables children to have some understanding of themselves: how they learn, how they relate to others, what they are thinking and what they are feeling. They can use this understanding to organise themselves and plan their learning;

the ability to manage feelings: children use a range of strategies to recognise and accept their feelings. They can use this to regulate their learning and behaviour – for example managing anxiety or anger, or demonstrating resilience in the face of difficulty;

motivation: enables learners to take an active and enthusiastic part in learning: motivated learners recognise and derive pleasure from learning. Motivation enables learners to set themselves goals and work towards them, focus and concentrate on learning, persist when learning is difficult and develop independence, resourcefulness and personal organisation;

empathy: children being able to empathise involves understanding others and anticipating and predicting their likely thoughts, feelings and perceptions. It involves seeing things from another's point of view and modifying one's own response, if appropriate, in the light of this understanding;

social skills: these enable children to relate to others, take an active part in a group, communicate with different audiences, negotiate, resolve differences and support the learning of others.

(Adapted from Primary National Strategy: Excellence and Enjoyment: – social and emotional aspects of learning, Guidance, DfES, 2005).

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