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'Let's Discuss It': Group Discussions as a Tool for Learning
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Abstract

From sociocultural roots whereby 'talk for learning' is deemed vital, much research over the last century considers the group discussion to be a fundamental pedagogical tool for learning. It is widely considered essential that pupils are given opportunities to create meaningful knowledge collaboratively, particularly through informal 'exploratory talk'. Yet, KS3 English curriculum guidance contradicts such literature, predominantly focusing on promoting 'formal' debates. Within these controversies, the pupil's voice is habitually sidelined. This article therefore considers the utilisation of collaborative talk as a pedagogical tool for learning, primarily focusing on KS3 pupils' perceptions of group discussions within their English lessons. To unearth pupils' perspectives, 39 semi-structured questionnaires were distributed and 1 paired interview was carried out within a secondary academy in Lincolnshire. In conjunction with literature, questionnaire data reveals that a majority (95%, n=37) prefer group discussions to independent learning. Concurring with literature, pupils seemingly prefer small group discussions overall and many cannot find fault in group discussions within English lessons (64%, n=25). Conversely however, interview findings elicited contrasting views, implying that not all pupils prefer to discuss within a group dynamic. As a result, this article highlights a need for future research into pupils' perceptions of group discussions in order to attain a reliable, representative perspective.

Introduction

Sociocultural perspectives convey the significance of social interaction in the facilitation of cognitive development, noting the importance of productive talk (i.e. talk which holds educational value) in the construction of meaningful learning (Vygotsky 1962, 1978; Gillies and Ashman 2003). A plethora of research over recent decades has focused on talk as a tool for learning, often highlighting the underestimated educational potential of group discussions within UK classrooms. As a general consensus, 'talking, thinking and knowing are intimately connected' (Alexander 2008:10).

However, as literature regarding group discussions often omits the voice of the child (Fisher and Larkin 2008), the purpose of this research is to unearth Key Stage 3 (KS3) pupils' perceptions of group discussions within their English lessons, to give them a 'voice' (Hopkins 2009). This article discusses talk as a pedagogical tool for learning, with particular regards to group discussions; specifically exploring the perceptions of 41 KS3 pupils on group discussions within their English lessons. Findings are taken from 39 semi-structured questionnaires and one paired interview, undertaken in a secondary academy. The aim of this article therefore, is to attain an in-depth insight into KS3 pupils' perceptions of group discussions through a mixed-method approach, to discover whether or not pupils agree with the favourable attitudes sociocultural researchers have on group discussions as an educative tool. Due to the small sample size however, findings lack representativeness in regards to the whole of KS3 nationwide.

Literature Review

National Curriculum guidance for Key Stage 3 English (DfE 2013) first and foremost focuses on promoting high standards of spoken language, signifying that all pupils must have opportunities to work collaboratively and take part in discussions and debates. Although this gives pupils opportunities to take part in group discussions and to learn collaboratively, researchers who favour 'exploratory talk' might find fault in its performance-based aims (Barnes 1990, 2008; Rubin 1990; Mercer 2000; Alexander 2006). The DfE (2013: 6) outlines expectations in which pupils should use Standard English when participating in *formal* debates and *structured* discussions, and should rehearse and *perform* plays and poetry. This notion clashes with a majority of research which highlights the importance of exploratory talk; talk which is tentative, unperfected, in its first stages and open to judgement and development (Barnes 1990, 2008; Bullock 1975; Mercer 2000; Alexander 2008). It is

suggested that exploratory talk allows pupils to verbalise their thoughts and reorganise their understandings collaboratively to create new meanings together (Barnes 1990, 2008; NERF 2005:3; Thinking Together 2013).

Research highlights that pupils who work collectively during exploratory discussions can co-reason, add to each other's knowledge, act as 'more knowledgeable others', and scaffold each other's learning, assisting them to bridge the gap between what they already know and their potential knowledge (Vygotsky 1978; Bruner 1985; Mercer 2000). Exploratory talk gives students the freedom to explore their thoughts, think together and feel comfortable enough to make tentative suggestions, thus solving their own learning challenges and 'uncovering alternative answers' (Rubin 1990: 5; Robinson 2011:162).   Despite this, a variety of research suggests that 'talk for learning' is frequently underused or performed unsatisfactorily in the majority of UK classrooms (Alexander 2003, 2006, 2008; Fisher and Larkin 2008; Mercer and Dawes 2008). Furthermore, the new KS3 English National Curriculum does not appear to support exploratory talk, instead, favouring talk which focuses on performance rather than collaborative exploration of ideas (see DfE 2013: 6).

Through multiple studies, Barnes (1976, 1990, 2008) uncovered rigid formality within teachers' expectations of classroom discourse which reflects the DfE's (2013) KS3 English expectations. Via observational research, Barnes (1976) found that teachers often enforced too much structure when carrying out classroom discussions, reducing the productivity of classroom talk by minimising opportunities for exploratory talk (cited in Mercer and Hodgkinson 2008: 12). It must be noted that the representativeness and reliability of this particular research may be lacking as a result of Barnes' small sample size, as he only observed one school. Additionally, his findings could be outdated, lacking relevance within 21st century schools. However, a wealth of corroborative findings from further research gives supplementary strength to his findings (Barnes 1990; Alexander 2006; Mercer and Dawes 2008; Alexander 2006, 2008). Here, a perturbing picture wherein classroom discussions remain predominantly teacher-controlled and asymmetrical is painted. It is suggested that closed-questions are prevalently used by teachers, testing students' memory, rather than deepening understanding. This is explicated further within Mercer (2000) and Mercer and Sams (2006: 6), who add that pupils are rarely offered guidelines as to how to use group discussions effectively, and are 'expected to work out the ground rules for themselves', hence the asymmetricality (Mercer 2000: 134). This links neatly within Alexander's (2008) 'dialogic teaching', which advocates that productive educative talk must be tailored by specific 'ground rules'. Reznitskaya and Gregory (2013: 144) highlight the potential of dialogic teaching in helping pupils develop a deeper understanding and a 'higher order of thinking'; emphasising the importance of such ground rules.

Based on Barnes' ideas, The Bullock Report (1975) similarly provides explicit guidelines as to how talk may be pursued productively, promoting exploratory talk within small group discussions to deepen understanding. The report suggests that a learner must be given opportunities to make independent thought processes within relaxed environments to increase complexity of thought (Bullock 1975: 142). Contrastingly, Mercer's (2000) observational study within a primary setting found that the majority of talk which took place within classrooms, lacked the exploratory talk which both Barnes and *The Bullock Report* strived for. Mercer observed talk which remained either 'disputational' or 'cumulative', lacking the depth and active joint engagement which exploratory talk within small group discussions encourages (Mercer 2000: 133; NERF 2005: 3; Alexander 2006). Seemingly, exploratory talk through group discussions which is favoured by the majority of researchers, often remains deficient within classrooms.

Generally, much research appears to focus chiefly on how the usage of productive talk can be implemented within a primary environment (Mercer 2000; Alexander 2003; Littleton et al. 2005), or within distinct curricular subjects such as Mathematics, Science or ICT (Terwel 2003; Mercer et al. 2004; Mercer and Sams 2006). In addition, the majority of research regarding educative group discussions is often pursued via non-participant observations or analysis of classroom video footage, and does not consider the perceptions of the pupils involved (see Mercer 2000; Corden 2002; Alexander 2008).   Although observations give the researcher first-hand experience of group discussions in situ, the possibility of researcher bias is elevated, as data are subject to personal perception. Furthermore, an 'observer effect' may be an issue, hindering the validity of data, as pupils and teachers may behave unnaturally in the presence of the researcher or video recorder (Byard 2002: Denscombe 2010). More significantly however, the use of observations disregards the viewpoints of those being researched. Finding research which provides secondary pupils' perceptions of group discussions as an educative tool has thus proven challenging.

Evidently, there seems to be a gap in the literature when it comes to secondary pupils' perceptions of group discussions. As Fisher and Larkin (2008: 2) suggest, 'the pupils' voice is often absent from discussion'. As a result, Fisher and Larkin (2008) themselves conducted research into pupils' and teachers' expectations for talk in the classroom. They triangulated their research methods, using both questionnaires and interviews to gain both qualitative and quantitative data. Rather than focusing on a particular subject or age range however, they pursued their study across numerous age groups and subjects, with a 6:1 ratio of primary schools to secondary, perhaps skewing their data in favour of primary perceptions. They discovered that pupils' and teachers' expectations of classroom talk were contradictory - pupils were enthusiastic about discussions, whereas teachers held negative views regarding classroom disorderliness (Fisher and Larkin 2008: 2). This coincides with Knowles' (1983) findings, wherein group discussions were often challenging for teachers due to alarming noise levels.

Consequently, this research partially replicates Fisher and Larkin's research with the aim of gaining both qualitative and quantitative data into *only* secondary pupils' perceptions of group discussions. It centres exclusively on Key Stage 3 pupils' opinions about group discussions, as this area lacks a strong literature base. KS3 English is the focal point, as this is constitutes a gap in the literature.

The aim therefore, is to give pupils a voice and pay regards to their views about their education (DfE 2004; Hopkins 2009), to determine: 'What are pupils' perceptions of group discussions as a tool for learning within KS3 English?'

Methodology

Overview

To uncover KS3 pupils' perceptions of group discussions as a tool for learning within their English lessons, pupils from a multicultural suburban secondary school in Lincolnshire were recruited. The sample was selected via non-probability 'convenience sampling' (Denscombe 2003: 8; McMillan and Schumacher 2006: 125; Walliman 2006: 163), as particular classes were the most accessible to the researcher. As this method of sampling could detract from the overall representativeness of the findings, a diverse range of pupils' perceptions were collected from three different English classes of mixed cognitive abilities with the aim of overcoming this limitation.

In order to gain both quantitative and qualitative data, triangulation via a 'mixed-methods' approach (Lambert 2008: 71; Denscombe 2010: 134) was used. Semi-structured questionnaires and a semi-structured paired interview were pursued, in order to gain a more 'comprehensive picture' of pupils' perspectives on educative discussions within their English lessons (McMillan and Schumacher 2006: 401). The aim was to collect both measurable, numerical data and/or trends regarding   pupils' perceptions of discussions, as well as in-depth data which provides 'a fuller description or more complete explanation' (Williamson 2006: 38; Denscombe 2010: 135). To ensure ethicality throughout this process, consideration was given to BERA's (2011) Ethical Guidelines and BGU's (2013) Research Ethics Policy, to secure the safety, wellbeing and confidentiality of all participants involved. Voluntary informed consent was provided by all respondents, and all were made aware of what the research entailed and were given the option to withdraw at any point.

Questionnaires

Before questionnaires were filled out by the volunteering participants, a pilot version was given to a small sample of pupils via random selection, to ensure that the questions were clear and met the purpose (Anderson 1990: 11; McNiff et al. 2003: 123; Walliman 2006: 168). Improvements were made accordingly to the questionnaire layout, and 40 redeveloped semi-structured questionnaires were created. They consisted of various fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, dichotomous-response, comment-on and 'Likert scale' questions (Anderson 1990; McMillan and Schumacher 2006). The intention of this was to keep participants engaged, whilst also producing a well-rounded depiction of pupils' perceptions through multiple methods of data collection. Most questions were examined through thematic content analysis (Denscombe 2003: 16), thus,

recurring themes were coded and categorised to quantify qualitative findings (Sharp 2009: 112). To ensure informed consent and ethical soundness, all pupils were briefed regarding their potential purpose in the research, and only those who wished to participate were given a questionnaire (Lambert 2008; BERA 2011; BGU 2013).

Participants were reminded that their contribution was entirely voluntary. To ensure confidentiality, no participants' names were disclosed and all were assured of their anonymity. As well as promoting ethicality, an additional purpose of this was to motivate respondents to provide truthful, valid responses, as anonymous questionnaires have 'a fair chance of getting a true reply' (Walliman 2006: 166). Despite anonymity however, the possibility of participants misunderstanding particular questions and/or being dishonest within their answers, remains a limitation. This could be a particular cause for concern regarding data accuracy here, as participants completed questionnaires in the company of their peers; perhaps hindering both the validity and reliability of results. Some respondents might have been influenced by peer participants, therefore cautiousness during the process of data analysis was observed and limitations were considered.

Interviews

Denscombe (2003: 3) notes that as an information-gathering tool, the interview lends itself to being used alongside other research methods. Similarly, McNiff et al. (2003: 124) highlights the benefit of supplementary interviews in providing 'richer data as a result of being able to probe further'. This was the intention here, as a 'follow-up interview' was pursued to add sufficient detail to the existing questionnaire data (Denscombe 2003).

A semi-structured paired interview was chosen as the most suitable additional research method, as it allowed for flexibility (Sharp 2009: 74), as well as having the advantage of 'synergy' within a pair group dynamic (Anderson 1990: 225). Furthermore, it allowed the researcher to collect the perspectives of two participants at once, which saved time. Unfortunately, a larger sample of interviewees was not accessible, which could hinder overall reliability and representativeness of results. However, 39 out of 40 questionnaires were completed altogether (a larger response rate than expected) which may compensate. The aim of triangulating both methods was to achieve a well-rounded view of pupils' perceptions of group discussions, achieving a deeper understanding or '*verstehen*' (Davidson and Layder 1994: 121).

 In a similar manner to the questionnaire sampling process, non-probability convenience sampling was also used to select interviewees, however on this occasion, the voluntary participants were chosen by their teacher. One male and one female was selected to take part in the paired interview, having the benefit of providing perspectives from both genders. As one participant did not provide the consent necessary to be audio-recorded, 'less intrusive' short-hand note-taking was used to record data instead (Scott and Usher 1999). This had the potential disadvantage of losing valuable information regarding the tone of voice of respondents (Sharp 2009: 76). Non-verbal notes were recorded to avoid this. To circumvent any additional issues regarding an interviewer effect or 'power relations' between the interviewer and interviewees (Burgess 1989: 83; Scott and Usher 1999: 109), the researcher dressed casually and ensured humour was maintained throughout the interview, encouraging the interviewees to feel comfortable enough to share their true views (Anderson 1990: 232). Despite these efforts, the teacher's part in sample-selection may remain an inhibitor regarding data validity, as the pupils chosen were those deemed to be sensible and 'quiet'. This could affect overall data accuracy, as the chosen participants' perceptions of educative discussions within their English lessons may differ from their more talkative peers. To overcome this, data collected was analysed vigilantly and in conjunction with the data collected from the larger sample of questionnaires, to see how it compared.

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

Data gathered from the questionnaires are presented and analysed first, followed by data from the interview.

What Is a 'Good Group Discussion'?

In order to establish KS3 pupils' perceptions of group discussions within their English lessons, data were

initially collected regarding pupils' perceptions as to what a successful discussion actually entailed.   Open-answer responses were coded and categorised to allow qualitative ideas to be tallied quantitatively (Sharp 2009).   Objectivity was maintained by the researcher to avoid 'researcher bias' during this process (Anderson 1990: 210).   Some participants discussed more than one notion within their response.

Figure 1 What makes a good group discussion?
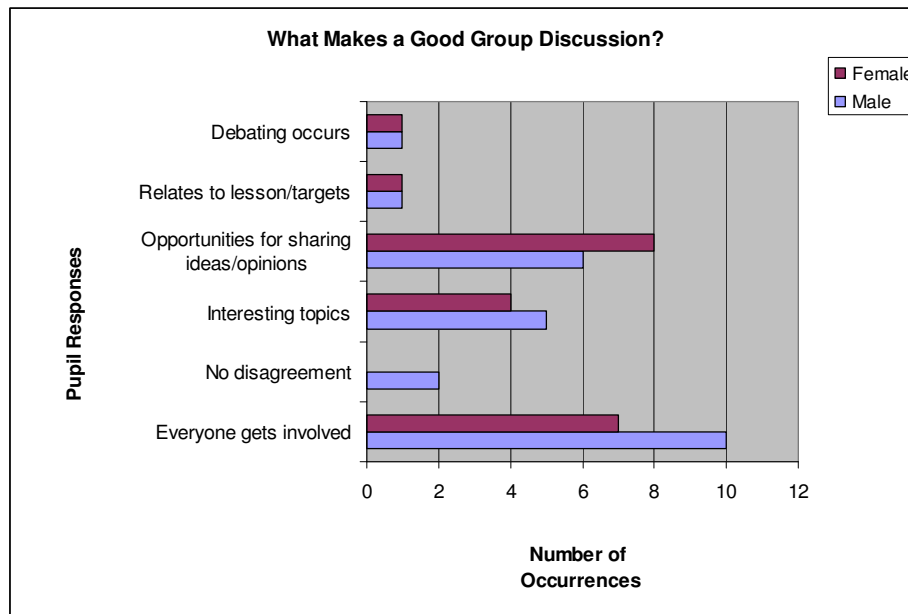
Findings suggest that the majority of pupils felt that a good group discussion required opportunities for openly sharing ideas and opinions, and it was necessary that everybody within the group participated building up a joint hypothesis, each adding a new idea to what has gone before (see Figure 1).

These findings imply that pupils' perceptions of a good group discussion tally with Barnes' views, as a high percentage of pupils deemed it important for pupils to share opinions and add new ideas collaboratively (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Moreover, Alexander's (2006, 2008) notions regarding 'dialogic teaching' and the rules regarding such, are also implicitly presented, as a majority of pupils concurrently suggested that all members of a group discussion should have equal involvement and have fair dialogical input. These findings suggest that the majority of KS3 pupils are in favour of equal involvement within group discussions, and strive for equality within collaborative talk. As a small-scale study however, this may have been a result of the school's particularly inclusive ethos.

 Figure 2 Written responses to 'What makes a good group discussion?'
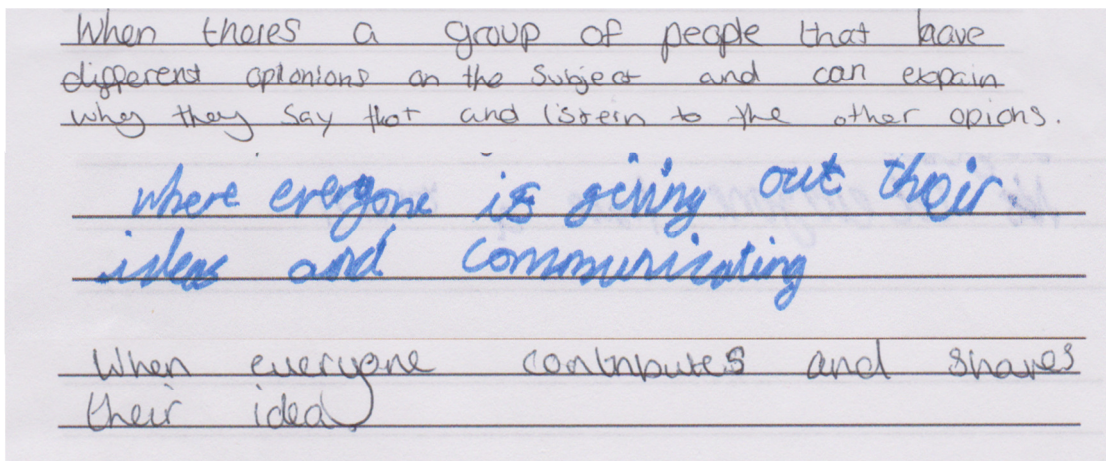
Group Work or Independence?

Before pupils disclosed their preference for working in groups or individually, pupils were required to provide brief personal context by placing themselves on a scale from 1-9. This allowed the researcher to group pupils into three categories: Very Quiet; Occasionally Talkative; Very Talkative. The aim was to discover whether or not pupils' perceptions of group discussions within their English lessons were affected by how they perceived themselves. Notably, this method could be flawed in regards to the subjectivity of pupils' perceptions of themselves, thus the precision and accuracy of data may be lacking. However, this method provides an uncomplicated way of characterising participants, to discover whether or not personality affects perceptions of working and discussing within a group dynamic.

Of the 6 participants who scored themselves within the 'Very Quiet and Shy' category, 4 preferred working in groups to working independently. Group work within this category was thus marginally preferred to independent learning, at a ratio of 2:1. Of the 18 participants who grouped themselves within the 'Occasionally Talkative' category, a larger 16 preferred working within a group dynamic. The ratio of group to independence preference here was 8:1. Finally, of the 15 participants who scored themselves within the Very Talkative category, 14 preferred group work, at a ratio of 14:1.

Findings suggest that there *is* a correlation between how pupils perceive themselves, and whether or not they prefer to work and discuss within a group dynamic. Those who described themselves as 'Very Talkative' were more likely to prefer group work, whereas those who described themselves as 'Very Quiet and Shy' were the least likely. Evidently, standardisation of results could be a limitation here, as the three categories were irregularly weighted. Despite this, the perception that working within a group is more favourable to working independently, was the predominant perception across all three categories, regardless of pupil characteristics. This correlates with the findings of Fisher and Larkin (2008), who noted that overall, pupils held positive opinions on working and discussing within groups. Nevertheless, a larger sample of pupils would need to be studied further to ensure the reliability and representativeness of such a conclusion.

Let's Discuss: Whole Class, Small Groups, Pairs, or Independence?

In addition to looking for correlations between pupil characteristics and their perceptions, this research also sought to discover whether pupils preferred taking part in whole group discussions, small group discussions, paired discussions, or working independently within their KS3 English lessons. The aim of this was to reveal whether or not the widely held perception wherein small-group discussions are the most favourable pedagogical dynamic (Barnes and Todd 1977; Mercer 2000; Grainger 2002; NERF 2005; Alexander 2006; Mercer and Dawes 2008) is reflected in the perceptions of KS3 pupils themselves.

Figure 3 Pupils' preferences
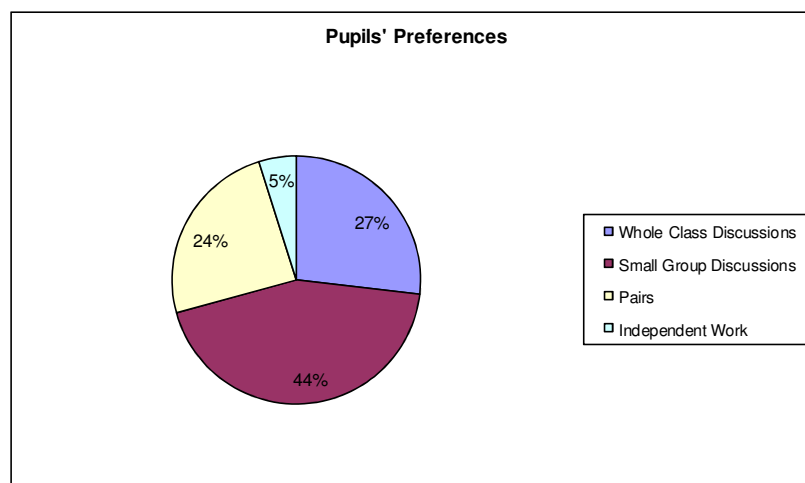
Findings suggest that 17 or 44% (the largest percentage of all four options) of pupils preferred small group discussions (see Figure 3). This implies that KS3 pupils' perceptions' of small group discussions within their English lessons *do* correlate with the above research. However, a considerable 11 or 27% and 9 or 24% preferred either whole group discussions, or working in pairs, which must also be taken into consideration. Comparatively though, only 2 or 5% preferred working independently, meaning that 37 or 95% of all respondents were more in favour of collaborative/group discussions overall. When this is compared with the findings within literature on secondary schools, this differs, as many studies suggest that group discussions are frequently underused and performed unsatisfactorily in the majority of UK classrooms (see Alexander 2003, 2006, 2008; Fisher and Larkin 2008; Mercer and Dawes 2008). This leads to the question: 'Why do the majority of pupils prefer group/pair discussions?'

Why Group Discussions?

Reasons were coded and categorised into the areas outlined (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 Reasons for preferring group discussions
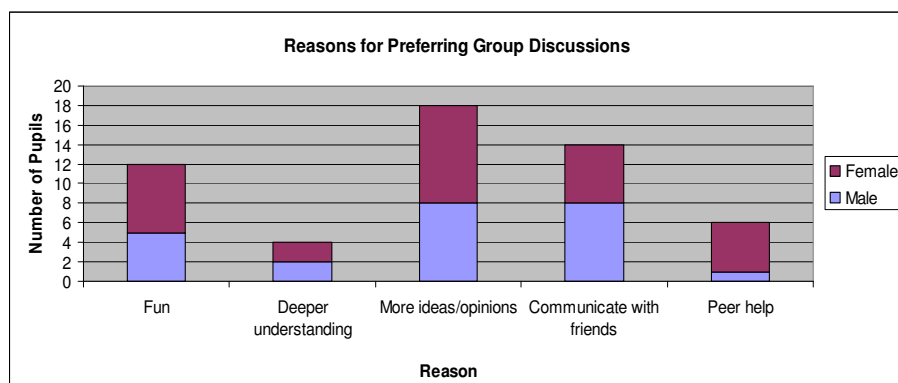
Note: some participants gave more than one response, hence results total more than 39)

Findings suggest that the three most predominant reasons for pupils preferring group discussions were: to generate more ideas and to share opinions; to communicate with friends; to have fun. When comparing these findings to Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1985) and Maybin et al. (1992), their suggestions regarding the notion of 'scaffolding', and pupils gaining knowledge from 'more knowledgeable others' seemingly resonate - pupils primarily preferred discussing with their peers, as it helped to generate new ideas and stimulated learning. However, a large number of pupils noted that they preferred group discussions, due to them being more 'fun'. When we consider the teachers' perceptions in Knowles (1983) and Fisher and Larkin's (2008) study regarding disorderliness within discussions, it could be an indication that pupils prefer working together to have 'noisy' fun, rather than for educative purposes. To discover whether this was the case, the next area to be explored, was pupils' perceptions of 'ground rules' within discussions.

Are Ground Rules Essential?

22 or 56% of participants asked believed that there should not be rules put in place for a successful group discussion. This notion clashes with that of *The Bullock Report* (1975) and Alexander (2008), wherein distinct 'ground rules' are deemed to be essential for productive group discussions.

When combining this finding with the large percentage of pupils who preferred group discussions for 'fun', it could be an indicator that many pupils preferred to discuss within groups as it was more entertaining, rather than it being more beneficial to their education; conflicting with the educative benefits of group discussions outlined within much literature (e.g. Vygotsky 1975; Bruner 1985; Barnes 1990; Mercer 2000; Thinking Together 2006; Alexander 2003, 2006, 2008).

Those who did think rules were essential, however, gave some of the following reasons (see Figure 5):

Figure 5 Pupils' rule suggestions
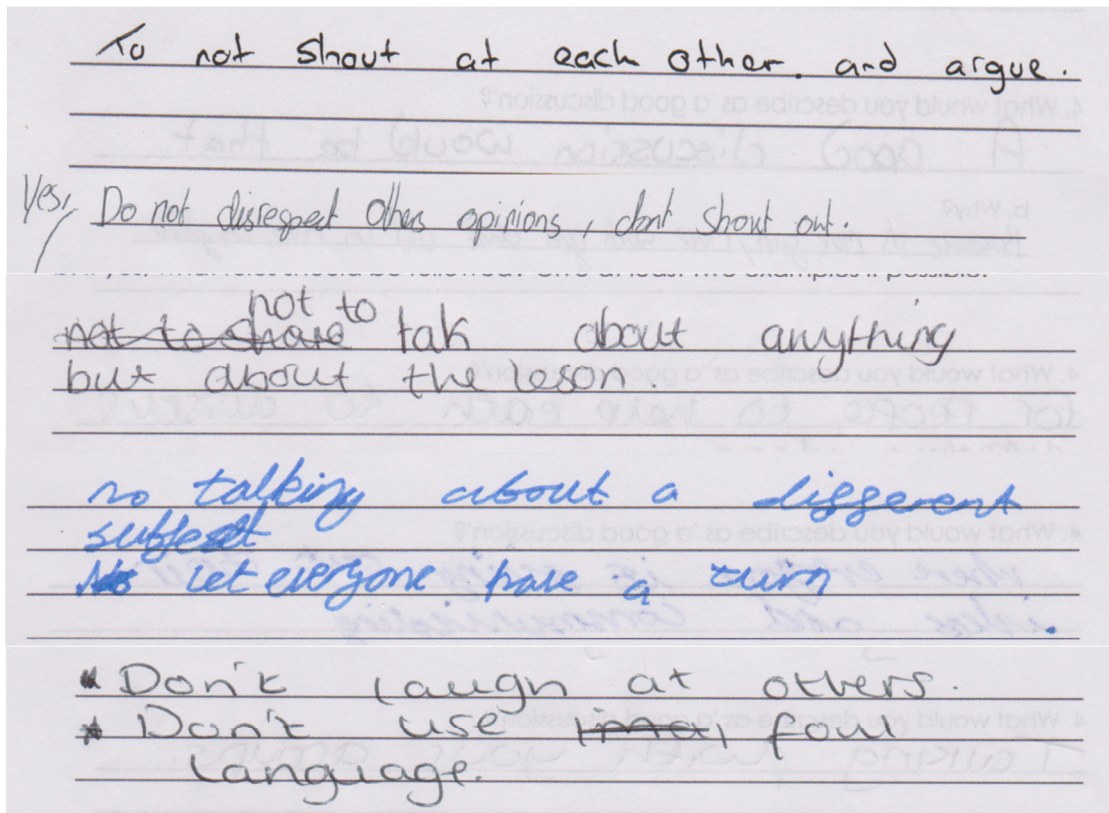
Overall, the majority of respondents' rule suggestions resonated with the ground rules suggested by Alexander (2006, 2008) regarding 'dialogic teaching'.

Most respondents (n=13) suggested one or two of the following rules:
· Listen when somebody speaks
· Stay on topic/task
· Take turns
· No arguing
· Speak clearly
· No making fun of others
· Respect each other's views

This implies that many KS3 pupils concur with Alexander's (2006, 2008) ground rules for discussion, and are aware of rule benefits. However, a minority of pupils (n=6) responded with seemingly suppressive rules (e.g. put your hand up, remain in seat, no shouting out) which might alternatively imply that pupils were heavily influenced by school policies and practice, and perhaps had not experienced exploratory discussions. This could advocate that all pupils' responses were influenced somewhat by what they believed was expected of them, rather than providing the research with data regarding their own personal perspectives. This could be a limitation within these findings.

What Do Pupils Dislike About Group Discussions?

In order to avoid possible bias towards the favouring of group discussions, it was essential that pupils had the opportunity to explain what they *disliked* about them. Responses were coded accordingly and categorised (see

Figure 6).

Figure 6 What do pupils dislike about group discussions within KS3 English lessons?
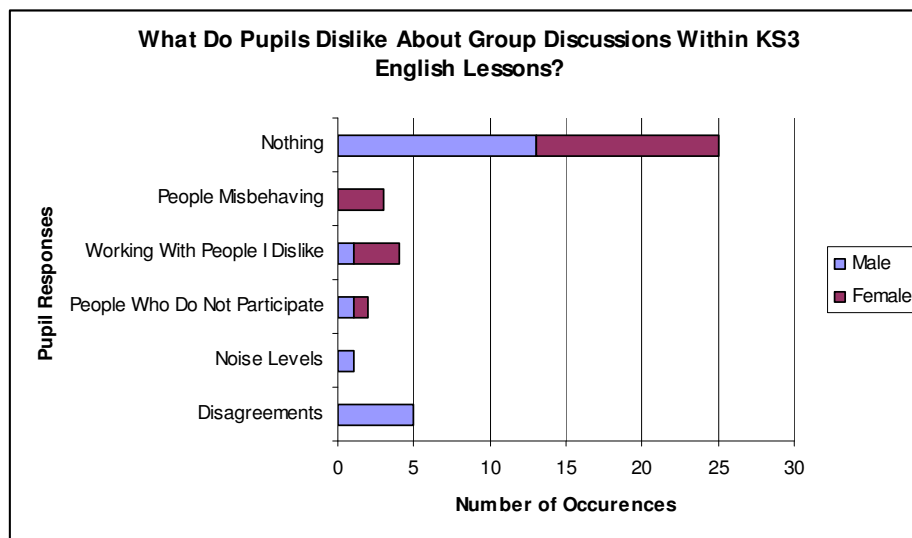
Overall, the majority of pupils responded with the suggestion that there was nothing negative they could think of regarding group discussions. Although this finding could be taken at face value and could suggest that the majority cannot find any fault in group discussions, it is essential to consider the possibility that pupils were unable to think of a response, therefore taking the easy option by writing 'nothing'. Nevertheless, other responses, such as 'people misbehaving', 'noise levels' and 'disagreements', relate to Knowles (1983) and Fisher and Larkin's (2008) findings, wherein many teachers were also wary of group discussions due to disorderliness and 'alarming' noise levels. This suggests that pupils are aware of these disadvantages, and are somewhat in agreement with teachers' worries. This is paralleled within some respondents' rule suggestions (e.g. "don't shout out"). However, it must be noted that these could be reflective of the school rules and teachers' expectations, and not necessarily the true perceptions of the respondents. Nonetheless, taking the data at face value, 25 or 64% of respondents could not find anything they disliked about group discussions, which could suggest that the majority agree with educative researchers who primarily emphasise the outweighing advantages of collaborative learning (Barnes 1976; Rubin 1990; Mercer 2000; Mercer and Hodgkinson 2008).

Paired interview

Before the paired interview commenced, both participants provided voluntary informed consent to ensure ethicality (BERA 2011; BGU 2013). However, they were nominated by their teacher for being sensible and quiet. Both participants were chosen from a Year 9 Set 1 class, meaning that they were of the highest ability within the sample range, which could affect findings. To ensure anonymity (Sharp 2009; Denscombe 2010), as well as encouraging a greater sense of informality to put the interviewees at ease, participants were given the opportunity to choose pseudonyms for each other (Ben and Gemma).

Firstly, in conjunction with the questionnaires, participants were initially asked to score themselves from 1-9 (1 = very quiet, 9 = very talkative), and then to score each other to cross-reference. Both participants categorised themselves and each other within the 'Very Talkative' category, with scores of 8 (Ben) and 9 (Gemma). This may suggest that pupils' perceptions of themselves matched with the notions of their teacher, as both were chosen for being particularly 'quiet'.

Participants were then asked whether they preferred to work alone, or to discuss as part of a group and why (see Transcript 1).

Transcript 1

> Gem: On my own I think. It's easier to just get on with work.

> Ben: Hmm… yeah me too. I think *my* ideas should be written on my paper. Not on other people's. I don't want people to dictate what I write.

Here, Gemma and Ben both suggested that they found it more manageable to be in charge of their own learning, rather than sharing ideas and discussing within a group. Although this contradicts the literature and the questionnaire data, McWhaw et al. (2003: 69) highlight an alternative perspective, wherein some students are often 'apprehensive about group learning'. McWhaw et al.'s (2003: 69) findings suggest that some students fear that other pupils within a discussion do not pull their weight, or they may have to 'waste their time explaining the material to be learned to slower pupils'. The latter idea could be prevalent here, due to interviewees' higher cognitive ability. This idea is further exacerbated within Ben's response to other questions, wherein he notes that he prefers discussing his English work with peers of the same cognitive ability as him (see Transcript 2).

Transcript 2

> Ben: Erm. I'd prefer to have a group discussion with someone of the same ability level as me, so we don't lose each other and know what each other means. It's easier to keep up with each other.

> Gem: I'm more likely to go for one of my best friends, so I can talk to them easier.

When interviewees were asked whether they preferred whole class discussions, small group discussions, or independent work, both agreed on 'independent work', but suggested favourable alternatives. Gemma noted that she preferred to work in pairs or independently. She also liked whole class discussions as they allowed for "more ideas to be shared". This notion aligns with the reasons given by the majority of questionnaire respondents (see Figure 4); connecting group discussions with the benefit of gaining a wider range of ideas (Barnes 1976, 1990; Mercer 2000; Gillies and Ashman 2003). Ben, on the other hand, preferred independent work and small group discussions, as both of these options meant that the classroom was "less chaotic". Here, Ben's perceptions of discussions correlate with those of the teachers within Knowles (1983) and Fisher and Larkin's (2008) study, as he seemed to be most concerned with classroom noise/disorderliness. This could be a reflection of his own status within the school, as Ben was a leader within some extra-curricular activities, which may have given him a greater sense of authority. Nevertheless, both interviewees had an overall preference for working alone. These findings contradict with the questionnaire data, wherein only a minority preferred independent learning. This could be a result of the small sample chosen, which may not be representative of the whole KS3 population. Additionally, Ben and Gemma may have been influential on each other's responses (Walliman 2006).

When asked whether there was anything they disliked about group discussions within English lessons, Gemma noted, "sometimes people don't take part". This resonates with questionnaire data, wherein the majority believed that everybody should participate, adding credence to the perception that some pupils do not pull their weight (McWhaw et al. 2003).

In contrast, Ben suggested that "some people talk all the time". This may strengthen the argument wherein Ben's perceptions of discussions seemingly correlate with those of teachers, as he recurrently suggests that the classroom is too noisy or "chaotic" during discussions (Knowles 1983; Fisher and Larkin 2008). Ollin (2008) may suggest that a 'silent pedagogy' might be preferred here, where silence is used to boost productivity.

Finally, interviewees were asked who tended to talk more within their English lessons (the teacher or the pupils), and what their perceptions were of this (see Transcript 3). The intention was to discover whether findings correlated with research suggesting that classroom discussions were often asymmetrical (Barnes 1990; Mercer and Dawes 2008; Alexander 2006, 2008), and to subsequently unearth pupils' perceptions on this.

Transcript 3

> Ben: Erm…both really. It depends on the lesson.
>
> Gem: (*Nodding*) Yeah, it depends on the lesson. Sometimes the teacher talks a lot, or sometimes she'll ask a lot of questions.
>
> Ben: I think it's alright to let the students talk more. Like, have a debate. Not too often though. I think it's good that the teacher does most of the talking so we can learn more. She knows more than us! (*Both smile*)

Findings here seem to partially agree with research, implying that asymmetricality does occasionally exist. However, in contrast to the suggestions of researchers (Barnes 1990; Mercer and Dawes 2008; Alexander 2006, 2008), participants' perceptions were that asymmetricality within discussions was *beneficial*, "She knows more than us!" In this sense, pupils seemingly viewed their teacher as their 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky 1978), instead of their peers being so. This could be taken at face value, or alternatively, could be resultant of   pupils' higher cognitive ability and position within Set 1, as they may not have more intelligent peers to learn from and therefore wished to primarily listen to the teacher.

Conclusion and Implications

Overall, findings uncovered correlations between the perceptions of KS3 pupils within their English lessons and research which favours group discussions as a pedagogical tool (Barnes 1976; Vygotsky 1978; Bruner 1985; Mercer 2000; Alexander 2008). Agreeing with research, most KS3 pupils felt that group discussions were the preferential classroom dynamic, with small group discussions being a marginal favourite (Bullock 1975; Barnes and Todd 1977). Many pupils perceived a 'good group discussion' as one which involved equal participation and the sharing of ideas, with a majority suggesting that there was nothing to dislike about group discussions whatsoever. This might suggest that group discussions within English should be re-evaluated by KS3 teachers and used more prevalently due to pupils' preferences. As this was only a small-scale study, however, pupils' perceptions may be pertinent to the school involved, but not necessarily to schools nationwide. Supplementary research would need to be pursued to add strength to findings and to ensure a reliable, representative conclusion could be attained.

Unfortunately, some areas still remain ambiguous (e.g. ground rules, asymmetricality) as data contradicted literature (Bullock 1975; Barnes 1990; Mercer 2000; Alexander 2008) and may require future research. Equally, it might be advantageous to explore with greater precision the effect of a pupil's personality/cognitive ability/gender on their perceptions of discussions, as results were intriguing in these areas. Some findings were not delved into and analysed further due to restrictions on word limit, and therefore lacked significant depth necessary. If this research was repeated, this would be avoided by reducing the number of themes to be covered during data analysis.

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Exploring Parent Experiences and Perceptions of Childhood Brain Injury
Stephanie Stow

Abstract

This case study presents an exploration of the experiences and perceptions of one parent on the impact of childhood encephalitis, causing neurological dysfunction. In relation to this case study, the child in question acquired encephalitis, an inflammation of the brain tissue which affects the central nervous system, at 18 months of age. The chosen method of enquiry was to interview the participant. This method gave wider scope to explore the parent's feelings and lived emotions, alongside an appreciation of the significance of their experiences, together with understanding of private interpretations of their social reality. The child's mother was interviewed twice. The preliminary interview began by building foundations and rapport with the mother, alongside highlighting the family background. The follow up interview began by exploring in more detail the lived experiences of the family, including how life was before her child acquired encephalitis, gradually talking through the sequence of events, experiences and emotions leading up to the present day. The outcomes of this case study highlighted feelings of grief and loss when referring to their child before the injury in comparison to the child's characteristics now. Furthermore the participant expressed social isolation when striving to maintain normality for their child. Changed roles within the family had effects on the whole family unit that were described as feelings of unpredictability and uncertainty. Following these periods of anger and frustration, feelings of adaption and restoration began to emerge. Finally, feelings of hope and positivity were displayed when looking to the future for all involved.

Introduction

Encephalitis is an inflammation of brain tissue affecting the central nervous system (CNS). The inflammation can be caused by a recent viral infection or vaccination such as measles, mumps or rubella. Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis (ADEM) can be contracted at any age. However, it predominantly affects children and young adults. The inflammation can affect one or multiple areas of the brain, and present as acute or chronic brain dysfunction (Stone and Hawkins 2007).

The incidence of encephalitis in children is difficult to establish as reported cases have used differing case definitions and methodologies to identify the symptoms. However, in the United Kingdom, approximately 8 – 10 cases of childhood encephalitis are reported each year in large tertiary hospitals (Kneen et al. 2012). While these approximate case numbers are only small, they do not convey the full impact and scale of each case. Following the diagnosis of encephalitis, recovery can result in permanent neurological damage depending on the areas of the brain affected.

The impact including learning difficulties and cognitive impairments were illustrated in a study completed in the United Kingdom by the Encephalitis Society in 2000. The study found that in reported cases of encephalitis, more than half of the children had some form of special educational need and had significant difficulty learning and retaining new information, including specific memory function. The neurological damage may also result in other impairments in one or more areas which may include personality changes, irritability, attention, poor impulse control, language, abstract thinking, behavioural challenges, judgement and sensory processing (Clark et al. 2008).

Literature Review

The literature and theory surrounding childhood encephalitis and the family impact is examined to provide an evidence base for this research study. The term encephalitis is defined as an inflammation of the brain, triggered by a recent viral infection or vaccination, with evidence of brain dysfunction. An example of this would be Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis (ADEM). Neurological damage is also defined as a form of cognitive impairment to include but not exhaustive of storing and retrieving information, reduced memory function, poor concentration, inability to process information, difficulty in adapting to different situations, environments or changes.

In other research studies, it is highlighted that much of the responsibility for caring for the brain injured child during their recovery falls on the family. It is not uncommon for hospital staff to rely on family members to carry out a range of tasks such as feeding, cognitive stimulation and behaviour management. Reported signs of stress in family members have been noted in a study carried out by Brooks (1991). Brooks (1991) noted how families were needed to be at the injured child's bedside during a long hospital stay and therefore the family members required leave from their current employment. Similarly, Hall et al. (1994) reported a significant increase in financial strain over time, which could be linked to long hospital stays generating increased levels of anxiety and stress for the caregivers. These levels of anxiety and stress were also reported in concerns about the future of the family, including the demands of caring for a child with encephalitis. Interestingly, almost ten years later, very similar results were found in a study by Martin (2002). This study highlighted an onset of disruption within the family routine, and in severe cases of childhood encephalitis, families needing to change their lifestyles and roles to adapt to new situations. Unlike the above studies, Hooper et al. (2007) discovered that while poor adjustment to childhood encephalitis was apparent and feelings of stress and burden were clear, post injury parents felt that a good level of adjustment had been reached within 2 years, but emphasised that adjustment could continue for five years.

Family system theory considers the patterns occurring within the family unit according to developmental changes. These changes or transitions do inevitably cause some level of stress, resulting in a crisis too great for the family to make the adaptive transition. These processes may take various forms, including emotional shock, denial or guilt, depression, grief, worry and finally acceptance and adjustment. Hooper et al. (2007) propose that these changes and emotions are a cycle which is likely to happen as a gradual but continuous process. Following on from this cycle, the theoretical application to childhood encephalitis outlines the importance of grief, loss and adaption within the adaptive cycle. These feelings arise when family members begin to think about the future and where that takes them, together with the loss of the child they once knew. Additionally, Stroebe and Schut (1999) also recognise the importance of the grieving process and highlight a more traditional notion of 'working through'. This focuses on the future and the changes in the child's characteristics. Furthermore, Stroebe and Schut (1999) identify a period of restoration, similar to Hooper et al.'s (2007) adaptation, which focuses on dealing with the reorganisation of the family's life and accommodation of the change.

Highlighting further theoretical links may help progress other research by providing avenues to investigate. All of the studies highlighted above cover issues of stress in their research study sample of ten or more families or mothers. The studies explore feelings of stress and burden as a general emotion. However, the reports do not give in-depth information into what exact experience, such as poor cognitive functioning or memory loss, causes feelings of stress, or emphasise the great magnitude of living and supporting a child with encephalitis.

Procedure

This case study aims to explore parent perceptions to uncover the real experiences and situations they face, describing their thoughts and emotions. To gain a clearer insight into these emotions, and a more profound perspective, qualitative research methods were applied. Qualitative research and analysis is associated with in-depth interpretation when understanding participant's circumstances, experiences and perspectives. Qualitative research interviews which explore the lived experiences of others are referred to as biographic narrative interviews (Wengraf 2006). This methodology facilitates the understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and small groups of people. Interpretivism is a way of viewing or understanding the world. The methods of collecting data for qualitative research are usually through close interactions, by building a strong rapport with the participant, allowing for emergent and unplanned issues to also be explored and encouraged (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). This provides a unique insight into the individual's life, their beliefs and their own interpretations of events. The researcher's intent is to ask initial open ended questions and then use probes to capture the participant's perceptions and perspectives achieving a greater depth of answers. The researcher can then begin to make sense of and reconstruct meanings attributed to situations and circumstances.

No assumptions are made through this means of collecting information as it is the individual's own personal stand point based on their life experiences which matters. It is important, however, to note that there are differing perspectives of the world and there is more than one way of viewing and understanding the world around us.

This case study gains a deeper understanding of one parent's thoughts and experiences through two interviews. An interview schedule was produced as a guide; however, this was not a mechanical process of moving through the questions, but was instead a conversation with a friendly and flexible approach. This method gave a wider scope to explore the parent's feelings and lived emotions alongside trying to appreciate the significance of their experiences. With this approach the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding into the private interpretations of the family's social reality.

A preliminary interview began by building the foundations and rapport with the mother highlighting the family background in preparation for the follow up interview. The follow up interview explored in more detail the lived experiences of the family, including how life was before their child acquired encephalitis, gradually talking through the sequence of events, experiences and emotions leading up to the present day. Alongside how life is now, adjusting to supporting a child with encephalitis, the interview asked what the family's hopes and dreams are for the future. During the interview, breaks were offered to support the family in recognising that the feelings and experiences maybe still very raw. As Sharp (2009) suggests, talk can be very difficult to analyse and because of this voice recordings were taken of both interviews. Whilst there was awareness of how recording in this way, instead of note taking, could alter responses if the participant feels uncomfortable, this method can reduce the chance of missed information and produce more accurate transcripts. Alongside this, voice recordings enabled the researcher to be completely immersed in the interview and maintain the fluidity of the conversation.

This case study was approached following British Educational Research Association ethical guidance, in line with Data Protection and UK Research Integrity Office regulations. These guidelines have been produced to uphold good conduct, help reduce issues of misconduct and produce research of the highest quality. As Opie (2004) considers, any research that involves people of any stance has the potential to cause some degree of harm. Ethical considerations were applied to this case study to prevent harm or wrong doing to the participants and promote professionalism and respect. Any potential risks to the participant were considered, and steps taken to reduce and address those risks. This type of research examines the lives of the participants, providing the researcher with personal and sensitive information, and in this instance entering the participants' home. To maintain professional relationships with the participants, the researcher expressed their sincere gratitude and appreciation. To preserve anonymity, the mother is referred to as Claire and her son Tom. Claire's husband is referred to as Sam.

Background to the family

The family was approached after the researcher had worked with members at length to support their child while attending a local pre-school. The family was informed of the research process and happy that the research study would not only highlight their personal family experiences but support their child.

Tom and his mother Claire were originally from America, but moved to England after Claire met Sam, her husband. It is important to note here that Sam is not Tom's biological father; however, Sam played a crucial role in providing Tom and Claire with the support they both needed throughout the stressful events following Tom's illness. Because of this, Claire made the important decision to move to England so that they could become a family together. Sam shall be referred to as Tom's father, as Claire feels and knows that he has provided Tom with the love and guidance that Tom's biological father could not.

Tom lives with his mother Claire, father Sam and younger sister in a small city. Tom attends the local pre-school four days a week. Sam, Tom's father, is in the military and his mother is a highly qualified health care clinician.

Medical Overview

In April 2011, following his MMR vaccination, Tom, aged 18 months, was admitted to hospital after contracting Rubella and experiencing prolonged seizures. After a 10 day hospital stay, which included two MRI scans, a lumbar puncture and numerous EEGs, Tom's mother Claire, was given a diagnosis of Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis (ADEM). Acute Disseminated Encephalomyelitis was the result of the inflammation from an

infection to the brain which affected the Central Nervous System (CNS). This inflammation caused the seizures and subsequent neurological damage. Tom's right hippocampus and a portion of his left mesial temporal lobe were permanently damaged.

The temporal lobe, which contains the hippocampus, plays a key role in the formation of long-term memory, retaining and collating new visual memories, comprehending language, storing emotion and the ability to derive meaning. This form of   neurological damage is commonly referred to as mesial temporal sclerosis or hippocampal sclerosis (Stone and Hawkins 2007).

Prior to his MMR vaccination, Tom was reaching all developmental expectations for his age. However, following the brain damage Tom regressed to a developmental stage of 3 – 6 months. Through high levels of support from weekly speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, Tom has regained almost all his physical abilities. Tom however, has struggled to regain his speech and language skills, diagnosed as aphasia communication disorder, and sensory processing skills with constant sensory processing seeking behaviours, difficulties with sleep initiation and maintenance, together with poor social interaction and reduced awareness. All are associated with the irreversible neurological damage.

There is a current debate surrounding vaccinations being associated with potential adverse side effects and several studies have been conducted to investigate such. In light of this debate, the argument as to whether parents should vaccinate their child or not, has been raised. Ward et al. (2007) investigated early childhood immunisation and found that in the six cases studied, all children contracted fever symptoms and complex febrile convulsions. There were mixed recovery rates, with five out the six cases discharged from hospital after 1 week. The remaining case suffered severe epilepsy as a serious reaction to the vaccination and subsequently suffered neurological damage. The study highlighted that the prevalent reactions varied from child to child, but an allergic reaction to the vaccination could cause inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) in relation to the symptoms analysed.

In relation to some children being affected more than others, Tom's reaction to the vaccination began similarly to the symptoms described in the above study, however, as the infection and symptoms developed, the severity of the neurological damage also increased.

Analysis

The capability of the family in maintaining its cohesiveness and its adaptability relies on the capacity to cope effectively with the stress and frustrations that stem from childhood brain dysfunction. These feelings of stress, frustration, anger and worry can begin immediately after the incident and continue for years as the family begins to adapt. While the sources of stress, frustration and experiences vary from family to family, there are distinct features of similarity across studies. Studies by Hall et al. (1994), Clark et al. (2008) and Hooper et al. (2007) all contain similar patterns of stress, frustration and uncertainty, together with major themes and situations by which these feelings occur and are most apparent. The following four dominant themes emerged most strongly from the interviews as the experiences and emotions the family experienced:

- Grief and loss of past child
- Psychological and social effects
- Changed roles and effects on the whole family
- Adaptation and hopes for the future

Claire described how Tom completely regressed from an active 18 month old, who was running and talking, to the developmental age of 3-6 months. Tom's speech and language skills were completely lost as a result of seizures, which Claire commented on as '*just like starting all over again'* (Claire 2014).

Claire recalled how Tom would wander around the room unresponsive, walking from toy to toy, and placing every object in his mouth. She went on to say how this behaviour carried on for some time, with no progressive or noticeable development for approximately 10 months after leaving hospital. Tom could not respond to his mother calling his name or show any recollection or awareness that his name was being called.

Claire explained that seeing your child almost not recognise you is extremely soul destroying. Claire continued by describing how some of Tom's physical skills were preserved during the seizures, however most of his learned abilities and skills like talking and social awareness were lost. These feelings of loss and grief described by Claire are recognised by Stroebe and Schut (1999) as a dual process model which operates in variance but as an inevitable, 'working through' process.

Tom also became withdrawn towards family and friends, even to the extent that when Tom had injured himself playing, he wouldn't seek comfort in a cuddle or close interaction from his mother. Claire expressed how, at this point, she felt like her son had died. When referring to the grief of losing Tom as she knew him, Claire became emotional; the researcher too, although not understanding completely the minute details of the circumstance.

The feelings of withdrawal from Tom towards his loved ones is unlike the findings of Clark et al.'s (2008) study, which reported that mothers felt their children who had suffered some form of brain damage needed a sense of closeness with their mother and that the child would not leave their mother's side, as a form of safety.

These emotional changes were often described by Claire in the past tense in comparison to Tom's abilities now. Claire described Tom before he became poorly, '*as amazing…a normal kid…her buddy*'. Thomsen (1992) was one of the first researchers to report that personality and emotional changes contributed most to the family grief. When personality changes are most apparent, feelings of sorrow and despondency develop in the realisation that a child has changed forever.

Psychological and social effects

Claire described how she wanted to ensure that Tom still had a fulfilled childhood and wanted him to have the same experiences and involvement in life as other children and before he contracted encephalitis. Tom at this time was still putting everything in his mouth. For example, he would lick the rubbish bin or the brick wall. This behaviour would result in strange looks, feelings of social isolation and embarrassment for Tom and Claire.

Claire seemed to display feelings of frustration when talking about other children not wanting to play with her little boy and she was concerned that it would impact on Tom's social experiences. It was clear that this produced the most anger, as Claire's body language became closed and inward, voicing that she wanted nothing more than for Tom to have social peace. She described how she wanted him to play with other children, rather than alongside them, and how social understanding and awareness is where Tom needs the most support.

Perhaps not surprisingly, social isolation and loneliness impact on quality of life and wellbeing. 'Contact a Family' is an organisation which raises awareness of social isolation and supports UK families with disabled children, regardless of the disability or health condition (CAF 2011). The study carried out by the organisation highlights how families with disabled children experience isolation in many forms, including reduced social interactions for fear of how other people will react of feeling alone because no one else shares their experiences. These feelings of isolation, similar to how Claire felt, can have devastating effects on the mental health of the family or cause a family breakdown.

Claire went on to describe how she had feelings of anger and injustice, and that because she could not express her anger towards anyone the anger was turned to blaming herself for not being able to protect her child. These feelings of injustice and isolation could be reduced if greater awareness of these cases was made readily available.

Changed Roles and Effects on the whole Family

Claire and Tom's biological father decided to separate. However, Tom eventually saw his biological father on a regular basis. This arrangement helped enable Claire to work full time and support her son. Three months after Tom contracted Rubella, Tom's biological father made the decision not to be in Tom's life any more. Claire was now a single parent, looking after her very poorly son. Claire did, however, have a very supportive family unit

and friendships around her. At this point Claire and Tom were still living in America and Claire and Sam were in an international long distance relationship. Claire then made the decision to move the England so Claire, Sam and Tom could be a family altogether. Claire felt this would give Tom the safe and secure family unit he needed so much more now. This changed the dynamics of Claire and Tom's life with Claire now able to stay at home to support Tom fully while Sam worked full time. Martin (1988) describes alterations in the family structure as having an influential impact on the adaption and rehabilitation process. The change in Claire and Tom's life, by moving to England, was a positive influence and having Sam's love and security almost instantly relieved some pressures and anxiety.

Claire recalled that when living in America she had to leave her full time employment to look after Tom, which at times brought a financial strain. She also referred back to Tom's regression, stating that Tom had developed some independence before his encephalitis diagnosis and was doing things for himself. Claire felt she was now caring for another baby but had lost Tom as she knew him. Alongside leaving her employment, Claire was also studying for her Master of Business Administration qualification, which was a rigorous programme, making it almost impossible for her to support Tom due to his intensive therapy schedule and numerous medical appointments. Claire had to make the decision to put her degree on hold to be able to support Tom fully. Claire was, however, able to continue her studies online which were completed almost a year ago.

A longitudinal study by Crowe (1999) reported that caregivers and parents noted a financial strain over time and that career changes or different roles were undertaken within the family to support their child. Alongside this, Martin (2002) outlined that stress frequently occurs as a child requires numerous weekly rehabilitation sessions from physical, occupational and speech therapy, which parents need time off work or studies to transport their child, together with repeating the therapies at home. She continues by adding that the sheer volume of time and money spent can be emotionally, physically and financially draining.

Claire described how the experience had ripple effects on their whole family. However, she felt she had a job to do which was to stay strong and do what any other loving mother would, to be there for her child. Following the shock and the grief, Claire expressed how coming so close to losing her precious little boy changed to feelings of realisation. Claire felt lucky to still have her son even through the pain and worry of what the future may hold.

Adaptation and hopes for the future

Despite all the feelings of worry and loss, Claire demonstrated her positive adaptation to the situation and expressed her hopes and dreams for Tom's future and their future as a family. Adaptation represents a stage in a family's life when they reach some form of emotional equilibrium. This adjustment happens over time when the family has received more information about the severity of the brain dysfunction, expectations about recovery and redefining and organising life to accommodate such needs. Adaptation is not a static, one-time event but a very fluid process which may fluctuate over time with influential factors. Families follow the feeling of loss by the feeling of adaptation but this is dependent on several elements. These elements include the families own intrinsic motivation and coping strategies, the degree of external support, number of other siblings, length and stability of marital relationship and the parents' educational background. Families progress through stages of adaptation but add that these stages of adaptation will be dependent on their experiences and the situational crises that they encounter. It is also important to note here that families respond to different experiences and situations in vastly different ways. Alongside this, families may experience varying degrees of adaptation as their child progresses through different life events and developmental stages.

After Tom had left the hospital, Claire and her family were told that two year post diagnosis, most, if not all, of Tom's skills and abilities might return to normal. Claire and her family were hopeful that this would happen to Tom. However, as the two year mark approached, Claire knew that this was not the case. Claire became angry and frustrated and recalled how she would have preferred to be told how every brain injury is different and that no time scale could be placed on the rehabilitation process. Claire explained how her family were almost holding on to that two year milestone, however, Claire unsurprisingly thought different. With vast experience working in research, Claire conducted her own inquiry to try and determine if or when Tom's skills would return, and gain a deeper understanding and awareness of Tom's situation. Claire knew that from this

investigation and owing to the part of Tom's brain which had been damaged that the two year milestone may never happen. Claire describes herself as realistic about Tom's abilities, commenting how she accepts Tom for the amazing little boy he is. Hooper et al. (2007) highlight how parents reach a stage in the rehabilitation process known as realistic acceptance. These problem solving skills and information seeking behaviours are effective forms of adaptation which allow parents to appreciate and be realistic towards the abilities their child achieves.

Very few studies highlight the importance of looking forward to the future for their child and family, and naturally, despite their realities, Claire and her family remain extremely hopeful. These feelings of positivity and motivation could be contextualised as attachment theory. The feelings of increased desire to protect and support their child develop as a key human driver, as Clark et al. (2008) describe, parents protecting their child triggers attachment behaviours. Furthermore, Clark et al. (2008) describe this behaviour primarily in mother and son relationships, resulting in families becoming close, strong and protective units.

Every day Claire recalls how Tom does something that they never thought he would be able to do and explains how she and her family take one day at a time and that anything Tom achieves is a step forward. When Claire looks to the future, she describes feelings of worry and uncertainty. However, she explains how she reminds herself of how far they have come as a family or how their situation could be very different. Each milestone Tom accomplishes, such as independently feeding himself or beginning to talk in two or three word phrases, makes Claire so very proud of him and positive and realistic for the future. Claire also commented on the love and support of her husband, who she referred to as amazing, which keeps her strong.

Conclusion

This case study, in examining the everyday experiences of parents following their child's diagnosis of ADEM and subsequent neurological damage, highlights the importance of considering the impact and magnitude on the family. Although it may not be possible to fully comprehend the full effect of the injury on the family and individual, it is vitally important for educators and health professionals to work with the child and family to understand the nature of their experiences and circumstances, alongside understanding their perspective.

The ability of the family to cope with the stress and adaptation appears to be related to a mix of internal and environmental factors. These include the families own intrinsic motivation towards life experiences and their active involvement in positive thinking. The external or environmental factors could include access to multi agency services, support networks for the rehabilitation process, connections with educational services and positive interactions with society.

Through these two emotive interviews, the case study has provided a starting point for further research, such as deeper theoretical understanding and the impact of the rehabilitation process. The biographic narrative interviews conducted in this case study provided an in-depth insight into understanding this family's lived experiences, in the hope that similar families might find reassurance and support. Together with supporting other families, educational professionals and wider society can gain an informed understanding of other family circumstances, differing cases of encephalitis and types of neurological damage.

Although there is a need for further research surrounding childhood encephalitis and its effects, this case study highlights the strains and disruption this causes but also how one family is positively surviving it.

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'Do-Re-Mi': Can You Hear the Sound of Music in the Classroom?
Jacqueline Cotton

Abstract

This small-scale action research project aimed to answer the question: Can the sound of music influence children in the classroom? It synthesised research and literature from the fields of music, science and education and attempted to demonstrate the correlation between music, the human body and behaviour. The project examined three key areas of inter-related perspectives with reference to music: the effects of music on the human body, the influence of music on emotion and mood, and music as a classroom management tool. In order to triangulate findings, three associated studies were conducted using quantitative and qualitative data collection methods: Study 1: field experiment, Study 2: survey, and Study 3: semi-structured interview. The participants were children aged 7 – 11 years and a class teacher in a primary school. The findings suggest that music has the ability to move the children both in mind and body with the most notable aspect being that the children demonstrated an ability to recognise and interpret emotion in music. There appeared a slight positive impact on behaviours within the classroom environment, noise levels were slightly reduced and the time taken for the boys to get changed for Physical Education (PE) also decreased. What had not been anticipated was the individual animated, rhythmic co-ordination of body movements exhibited by the children when listening to musical excerpts which further suggested evidence of music's influential powers.

Introduction

The effect of music on emotion, mood and behaviour is widely acknowledged (Giles 1991; Hallam and Price 1998; Gardiner 2000; Jackson and Joyce 2003). In order to understand the complexities and breadth of this area of research it is critical to explore the influence of music on the brain and body. This paper seeks to link the effects of music to the body and the mind and investigate if music has the ability to influence emotion and mood (Hallam et al. 2002). Kawakami et al. (2013) suggest that music is an expression of emotion and that it has a duality; music can evoke emotion and represent emotion. This paper explores the notion that there is a distinction between felt and perceived emotion from music and that well-being is a physiological conditioning, therefore open to hearing sensory influences from music (Kawakami et al. 2013). Zentner et al. (2008: 516) suggest that music-induced emotion is an area of research that is 'neglected' and therefore caution should be exerted in formulating a generalisation from the results of this research.

The work here originated from a critical incident which occurred within my practice setting. In my role as a volunteer Teaching Assistant (TA) in a primary school I had observed that on the two consecutive days during the times when the children (boys) were getting changed for Physical Education (PE) in the classroom, the noise level in the classroom was consistently loud. Each day the class teacher had to intervene verbally to reduce the noise level and focus the children's attention towards the task of putting on their PE kits. I wanted to investigate if this scenario could be responded to by having calming classical music playing in the background (Giles 1991; Roberts et al. 2003) and if this would have an influence on the children and thus reduce the noise level (Hallam and Price 1998; Chalmers et al. 1999). I considered, therefore, if music could serve as a classroom management tool (Hallam and Price 1998; Chalmers et al. 1999; Jackson and Joyce 2003; Smith 2011). In this study classical music with no lyrics was used and for the purposes of acknowledging the limitations and to add reliability to the findings, it was crucial to note the study could have used a combination of music with lyrics as researched by Brattico et al. (2011). This may have produced different results and therefore affected the findings (Brattico et al. 2011).

Literature Review

The Effects of Music on the Human Body

The association between music and the human body has been extensively documented (Giles 1991; Hallam and Price 1998; Chalmers et al. 1999; Myskja and Lindbaek 2000; Jackson and Joyce 2003; Smith 2011). Whilst

there is significant evidence to suggest that music has a positive effect on the human body there has also been research to indicate that it can have negative implications and therefore on those who listen to it (Roberts et al. 2003; Paediatrics 2009; Smith 2011). There is research to show that 'affective reactions to music have been observed in infants as young as four months of age' and herein I propose lays the enormity of the influence that music can have on children in the classroom (Zentner et al. 2008: 494). The review of the literature in this section will consider the notion that if music affects the brain it must by default impact on the self.

Music stimulates neural activity in the brain (Sacks 2006: Kalinowska and Kulak 2010; Brattico et al. 2011; Jolij and Meurs 2011) and therefore I suggest that music has the capacity to affect the body by producing physiological responses (Chalmers et al. 1999; Myskja and Lindbaek 2000; Hallam and Price 2008; Kalinnowska and Kulak 2010; Parimibi et al. 2011). The use of music specifically in relation to children who had developmental delays produced results to suggest that there were improved outcomes in memory, speech, hearing, hand-eye co-ordination and communication skills (Parimbi et al. 2011).

There is also research to suggest that music can 'promote certain action tendencies' when spontaneous movements of the body have resulted from listening to music (Maes and Leman 2013: 1). This could be explained by the different hemispherical components of the brain which are activated when music is listened to and then engaged with by the listener (Brattico et al. 2011). The sounds heard by the listener are processed and 'associated motor representations are automatically and concurrently activated' (Maes and Leman 2013: 9). The body reacts by way of the neurological responses to the 'sonic patterns woven in time' (Sacks 2006: 2532) and to the structure of the music (Kalinowska and Kulak 2010; Maes and Leman 2013). In this context, the power of music could be questioned, as it could be perceived as a 'coercive' measure and this could be associated with power over the human body (Sacks 2006: 2532). I suggest that music also has the capacity to exert power over the human emotional condition (Dalla Bella et al. 2001; Nawrot 2003; Brattico et al. 2011; Kawakami et al. 2013). Hallam and Price (1998) state that listening to music produces positive effects on the physiology of the body and further studies have shown that listening to music can lower the body's metabolism which produces an effect of calmness (Savan 1998, in Hallam and Price 1998). Music has been found to have beneficial traits such as its capacity to reduce stress (Jackson and Joyce 2003) and a number of studies report that listening to music can reduce the levels of cortisol produced in the brain (Thoma et al. 2013). It could be argued, therefore, that music's functionality extends to that of serving a therapeutic role (Chalmers et al. 1999; Jackson and Joyce 2003).

Music has been used as a therapeutic treatment for many years to treat illness (Sacks 2006; Thaut and Wheeler 2010). Parambi et al. (2011: 240) reported that the effects of music on the body in the form of therapeutic interventions produced significant results of increased 'blood flow and oxygen' levels when music was listened to. Sacks (2006: 2532) agreed that there were therapeutic benefits to music as 'auditory and nervous systems are tuned for music' and this notion is expanded if we consider that music can affect the 'physical and psychological condition of the human' (Kalinowska and Kulak 2010: 78). Research has shown that music can improve 'psychological and emotional well-being which can go a long way in the physiological responses of the body' (Parambi et al. 2011: 245). I propose therefore there is a relationship between music and well-being and that this concept extends beyond the individual, whether child or adult, and transcends the classroom.

The Influence of Music on Emotion and Mood

Eudemonia is rooted in Aristotle's belief that achieving the state of well-being was the goal of humanity (Dodge et al. 2012). 'Listening to music may be a viable method in improving well-being' (Ferguson and Sheldon 2013: 25) and, linking the aforementioned, there is evidence to suggest that music has the capacity to influence a listener's mood both in a positive manner and negative manner (Rea et al. 2010). It is relevant to offer a definition of emotion and mood in order to understand the interplay between the two elements and their relation to music, however it could be argued that there are three considerations; 'mood, emotion and feeling' (Västfjäll 2002: 3). Mood could be described as occupying a prolonged period of time whilst emotion lasts a shorter time period (Västfjäll 2002).

Jolij and Meurs (2011) suggest that music can significantly affect the mood and change the way our worlds are perceived. There is a breadth of research to suggest that listening to music can regulate mood (Hallam et al.

2002; Sacks 2006; Saarikallio and Errkilla 2007; Zentner et al. 2008), however, Ferguson and Sheldon (2013: 32) would argue that the greatest gains from music, in terms of well-being, are when the listener is actively trying to be 'happier'. DeNora (1999) stated that music is often used by people to regulate their mood and therefore I propose the influence of music played to children in the classroom and beyond is a critical element. Kawakami et al. (2013) proposed that music can represent emotion and evoke emotion and this idea is further developed if we consider that emotion induced by music is perceived (Nawrot 2003; Zentner et al. 2008; Kawakami et al. 2013; Maes and Leman (2013):

> Tolstoy was deeply ambivalent about music - it had, he felt, a power to induce in him fictitious states of mind, emotions and images that were not his own, and not under his control (Sacks 2006: 2529).

The function of emotion is to steer the 'adaptation and adjustment of the individual to events that have potentially important consequences for his or her physical and psychological integrity' (Zentner et al. 2008: 495). There is research to suggest that music-induced emotion differs to real emotion and that music-induced emotion is a perception (Nawrot 2003; Zentner et al. 2008; Kawakami et al. 2013). In the state of perceived emotion as a consequence to listening to music, it could be argued that there is no danger to the listener and that there is no authentic impact on well-being (Kawakami et al. 2013). Emotion identification has been the focus of a breadth of academic research (Giles 1991; Dalla Bella et al. 2001; Jolij and Meurs 2011).

From the age of five years children show the capacity to match emotion to music; recognising the distinctions between happy/sad music excerpts, with an awareness of changes in tempo being present before that of mode (Kastner and Crowder 1990; Dalla Bella et al. 2001; Nawrot 2003). Studies conducted by Resnicow et al. (2004) investigating the relationship between emotion recognition and Emotional Intelligence (EI) found that there was a correlation between those participants that could identify emotion in classical music and also scored highly in EI (Trimmer and Cuddy 2008). The evidence suggests that EI is the premise for emotion recognition and 'not music training or music perception abilities' (Trimmer and Cuddy 2008: 838).

The amount of time spent listening to music and the variety available, reflects the importance of music in daily life (Ferguson and Sheldon 2013). This could be explained in that, amongst other things, there are emotional rewards to be elicited from music (Zentner et al. 2008). 'Music provides validation for the emotions' (Schwartz and Fouts 2003, in Saarikallio and Erkkilä 2007: 104) and furthermore, music gives pleasure to 'people of all ages' (Roberts et al. 2003: 156). Zentner et al. (2008: 494) suggest that reactions to music are subjective and whilst 'music is present in every culture…and…plays a prominent role in people's everyday lives': it is experienced in uniqueness by an individual.

Music as a Classroom Management Tool

'Music is a powerful classroom tool – in learning, managing and creating atmosphere' (Kramer and Kovarik 2014: 79). There is also evidence to suggest that the benefits gained from music are negligible, short-lived or inconclusive and therefore it could be argued that it has little place in the classroom (Chalmers et al. 1999; Rauscher 2003; Zentner et al. 2008; Mehr et al. 2013). Gardiner (2000) considered that music within the arts was firmly positioned in education as a valuable resource and the use of music in the classroom has therefore been the focus of considerable research (Hall 1952; Reston 2001; Jackson and Joyce 2003). Used by teachers, background music has been documented to improve the behaviour of children (Chalmers et al. 1999; Jackson and Joyce 2003; White 2007; Smith 2011). There is additional rhetoric to consider in that specific music chosen to reflect a slow or fast pace (rhythm and melody) can increase or decrease the actions of individuals (Chalmers et al. 1999). This premise suggests it could have a place in the classroom as a management tool. There is also evidence however that sometimes no differences are apparent in given scenarios, either with or without music (McIntyre et al. 1993, in Chalmers et al. 1999).

Hall (1952) demonstrated that background music was used successfully during settling-in periods during the school day as a calming strategy and improved results were also identified in the children's academic performance. This was corroborated by Chalmers et al. (1999) who conducted a study of lunchtime noise levels and behaviours and found comparable results. In a study carried out by Rauscher et al. (1993) music by Mozart was played to a class of 36 college students and results showed an improvement in a 'spatial-temporal

task' (Rauscher 2003: 1). This became known as 'The Mozart Effect'. However, there is 'no scientific evidence [that] supports the claim that listening to music improves children's intelligence' as the study's participants were undergraduates and therefore the research was not child-specific (Rauscher 2003: 1). The author concluded that 'educational implications appear to be limited' (Rauscher 2003: 1). Hall (1952) and Savan (1998) proposed that background music aided concentration in students although while music appeared to increase work rates it did not improve the accuracy of tasks (Hallam and Price 1998). Child-specific research conducted more recently examined the 'effects of early music education on children's cognitive development' and found that 'children provided with music classes performed no better than those with visual arts or no classes on any assessment' (Mehr et al. 2013: 1). Mehr et al.'s (2013: 1) report recommended 'caution in interpreting the positive findings from past studies of cognitive effects of music instruction'. Parambi et al. (2011) suggest that music has educational benefits with improvement in academia and beyond. They argue that music aids a child's character development and personality. Whilst music could be linked to emotional, social and personal development there is research to suggest that purely listening to music does not have a lasting impact on humans when compared to taking part in music (Gardiner 2000).

Research Methods

The research used in this small-scale study is mixed positivist and interpretivist, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Ilisko (2013) stated that an increasing number of researchers are using both quantitative and qualitative methods in seeking to answer research questions and therefore this corroborates with the decision to use this approach in this study. Action research was chosen as it is indicative of creating 'change rather than produce new knowledge' (Mukherji and Albon 2010: 90). The action research steps as defined by Schmuck (2006) were referred to and part utilised in terms of completing this work (Mukherji and Albon 2010). It was necessary to adapt and use elements of this approach to guide the research process, due to my position within the school as a part-time volunteer and not as a contracted member of staff. This work therefore offered a recommendation for change based on the findings which replaces a formalised action (Mukherji and Albon 2010). The discourse of action research (Conway and Jeffers 2004) and teacher research (Robbins et al. 2007) as approaches (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1999; West 2011) is explored as this could give rise to conflicting interpretations of findings and recommendations.

From an epistemological perspective, I suggest that within this small-scale research study, 'knowledge that is grounded in a combination of practice and reflection' is an emerging approach to educational research (Check and Schutt 2012: 269). A constraint of this, however, is that it remains at a local level and does not have a wider audience outside of the educational sector (Check and Schutt 2012). Hart and Bond (1995) and West (2011) argue that action research is best placed as an approach because it allows a reflective practitioner to make changes in practice as a result of identified challenges. Within this research project, three studies were conducted in order to collect a breadth of data. This was based on triangulation, the purpose of which is 'to obtain confirmation of findings through convergence of different perspectives' (Kasunic 2005, in Mukherji and Albon 2010: 30). The following research tools were employed to gather data: the field experiment, survey and interview.

Study 1

Sample: Twenty-five boys in Years 3, 4, 5, and 6 and one class teacher were involved in the field experiment, during which the children were getting changed into their PE kits in the classroom.

Music: Sinfonia in C Major (Vivaldi 2001)

Task: The use of a decibel meter and time sampling was employed to record maximum sound levels in order to gather quantitative data (Chalmers et al. 1999). Readings were taken at one minute intervals and recorded in a table. This process was carried out at the same time on two consecutive days; the first day without music in the background and the following day with music in the background.

Study 2

Sample: Eleven children in Year 6 (aged 10 -11 years) were invited to take part in the survey; six girls and five boys made up the 'sampling frame' (Mukherji and Albon 2010: 195). This was based on a discussion with the class teacher who suggested that all children should have the opportunity to participate to ensure equality of opportunity and this concurs with the ethical responsibilities of conducting this research (Mukherji and Albon (2010). In order to simplify the data processing, I decided to randomly select ten surveys to analyse from the 'sampling frame' (Mukherji and Albon 2010: 195). Before the task began the children were informed of the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary (Hallam et al. 2002).

Task: The survey sheet incorporated a simple scale for each child to mark with a pencil their individual feelings and thoughts on each of the four given pieces of music: calming/exciting, happy/sad and like/dislike. The children were asked to listen to four excerpts of classical music and then to mark on the survey sheets their responses. Hallam et al. (2002) conducted a similar study to which this element of this research study is comparable. In addition there were five questions for the children to answer to ascertain their wider thoughts about music.

Calming: Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, OP 27 – Slow Movement (Rachmaninov 2001).

Exciting: "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" (arr. Rachmaninov) (Rimsky – Korsakov 2001).

Happy: Four Slavonic Dances, OP 46 Nos. 1 and 2, OP 72 Nos. 10 and 15 (Dvorak 2001).

Sad: Sospiri, OP 70 (Elgar 2001).

*Technical notes: The use of major and minor modes in the presentation and analysis of data within this report serve to explain the tonal distinction of the music excerpts (Bowling 2013). The decision to label each music excerpt 'calming/exciting' and 'happy/sad' was made by the researcher, based on literature reflected on concerning the tempo and major/minor modes of music (Dalla Bella et al. 2001; Bowling 2013).

Study 3

A semi-structured interview with the class teacher was conducted using open and closed questions to ascertain experiences and opinions about music within the classroom. On reflection, this section of the data collection proved limiting in terms of the sample size: one class teacher. To provide validity to the findings of the study it would have been more appropriate to interview all four of the class teachers and the head teacher in the primary school. This could have provided the opportunity to gather richer data and therefore greater scope for analysis (Mukherji and Albon 2010).

'A consideration of ethics is important at every stage of the research process' (Mukherji and Albon 2010: 40). The research proposal and ethics declaration form completed as part of the research process evidence this element. The research conducted for this work was carried out in accordance with Bishop Grosseteste University's policy on research ethics (Bishop Grosseteste University 2013). Ethical considerations were discussed and written consent was gained from the class teacher and the head teacher of the primary school before the research was conducted. A paragraph was included in the class newsletters for the pupils in Years 3, 4, 5 and 6 to seek informed consent and explain to parents and children that the research study was being carried out in school as part of a degree project and that a copy of the report's findings would be available in school from mid-July 2014. All data were gathered, recorded and presented anonymously (Mukherji and Albon 2010). Limitations within research are required to be acknowledged in order to protect the validity and reliability of the study as they 'impact[ed] or influence[d] the application or interpretation of the results' (USC 2014). Within this small-scale study the following limitations were considered in order to clarify the positioning of this work in the breadth of research written concerning the effects of music.

Sagor (1992) suggested that in conducting classroom-based research there are distinctions between the individual and the group purpose of mind. Munday (2006) and West (2011) advocated that participating in

group research can promote a collective identity on subject matter and therefore not a distinct perspective. When conducting studies relating to music and emotion, there is evidence to suggest that participants 'may be inhibited from entering into a specific mood if they can be observed by others' (Bates et al. 1999). Data collection using a group format is 'likely to yield inaccurate findings' (Bates et al. 1999: 246). It could be argued

that conducting research in a group environment has practical advantages, in terms of accessibility of participants (Bates et al. 1999). The sample taking part in the field experiment was made up of boys and therefore the results of this report should acknowledge that there may be some gender differences had the sample include girls and this may have biased the data collected and the analysis of results (Rea et al. 2010). A further limitation could be the initial mood of those participating in the study and the possibility that this could impact on their responses to the music and so influence the results of this study (Västfjäll 2002).

Research Outcomes and Analysis of Findings

The Effects of Music on the Human Body

The physiological effects of listening to music on the body have been extensively argued (Hallam and Price 1998; Chalmers et al. 1999; Myskja and Lindbaek 2000; Parambi et al. 2011; Smith 2011). I propose that the positive effects of music on the   participants, who were involved in Study 2, further evidenced this concept. During the process of conducting the survey, it was observed that many of the pupils were animated: air conducting, nodding their heads, swaying from side-to-side or bouncing their torsos in time to the music. Nietzsche philosophised that as humans 'we listen to music with our muscles',   tapping feet and displaying facial expressions (Sacks 2006: 2528). These movements are often engaged in without full conscious thought, as almost an 'involuntary' reaction to music (Sacks 2006: 2528). 'Physiological arousal and the drive to move' is acknowledged by Brattico et al. (2011: 3) as feedback by the body to music. Jolij and Meurs (2011: 4) state that when music induces mood it has the capacity to bias sensory input 'as in the generation of conscious visual percepts in absence of structured visual input'. This could be understood as perception: the brain 'facilitating mental imagery and contemplation' (Saarikallio and Erkkilä 2007: 100). If children are sensitive to emotion within music (Nawrot 2003) then I propose that music has the capacity to impact on children's emotion (Jolji and Meurs 2011). Expanding this concept, it is feasible to suggest that mood and perception can be manipulated by music and that the music that children listen to could directly alter the way they perceive their world (Zentner et al. 2008; Jolji and Meurs 2011).

The amount of time spent listening to music (Tables 3, 4), either as a direct source or as background music, increases as children grow into adulthood and it has been documented that girls listen to music more than boys (Roberts et al. 2003). The results of this research study when comparing where music was listened to, indicate that as a child or an adult, the environments were the same. The specific amount of time spent listening to music was not examined within this study.

It appears that listening to music plays a significant part in the lives of the children and the teacher (see Tables 1 and 2). Listening to music aids personal and character development (Gardiner 2000; Parambi et al. 2011).

Table 1 Survey of children (n=10)

Question	Yes	No
Do you like listening to music?	10	0
Do you listen to music at home?	10	0
Do you listen to music in the car?	10	0

Table 2 Interview with class teacher

Question	Yes	No
Do you like listening to music?	√	
Do you listen to music at home?	√	
Do you listen to music in the car?	√	

Listening to music aids personal and character development (Gardiner 2000; Parambi et al. 2011). It allows opportunity for self-expression and offers a means to express and comprehend the complexities of emotion, identity and relationships (Saarikallio 2007). There is evidence to suggest that music plays an important role in the lives of adolescents by regulating mood (Saarikallio 2007). Children entering adolescence use music to help 'sort out emotions and feelings' (Roberts et al. 2003: 170) and intensely ingest it to support their psychological and social development (Saarikallio 2007). This has relevance to this study in consideration of the ages of the children (10 – 11 years) who participated in this research. I propose that links can be made to the children's physiological and psychological conditions and that this culminates in their well-being. Music can discharge negative emotions; being a diversion from worry and having the capacity to reduce stress (Jackson and Joyce 2003; Saarikallio 2007). Ferguson and Sheldon (2013: 30) suggest that 'the simple activity of listening to music evoking positive emotions could positively influence well-being'. This concurs with the discussion as presented in the literature review; music has therapeutic benefits (Jackson and Joyce 2003; Sacks 2006; Thaut and Wheeler 2010; Parambi et al. 2011). Kawakami et al. (2013) and Zentner et al. (2008) suggest that music could be perceived as having no impact on well-being. The influence of music on the physical condition is explored next and presents results from Study 1 to evidence this (Hallam and Price 1998; Chalmers et al. 1999; Parambi et al. 2011).

The time taken by the boys to get changed was recorded on both days of study and this produced data which suggested that on the day without music the pupils took longer (Figure 1). On the day with the background music, the time recorded for the group to get changed was reduced by one fifth. It could be argued that music has the capacity to focus children's concentration and drown out distractions (White 2007) and therefore speed up actions (Chalmers et al. 1999).

Figure 1 Changing times for PE

Chart to show the time taken to get changed recorded on two consecutive days during the boys' PE changing times.

■ Without music: 10 minutes
■ With music: 8 minutes.
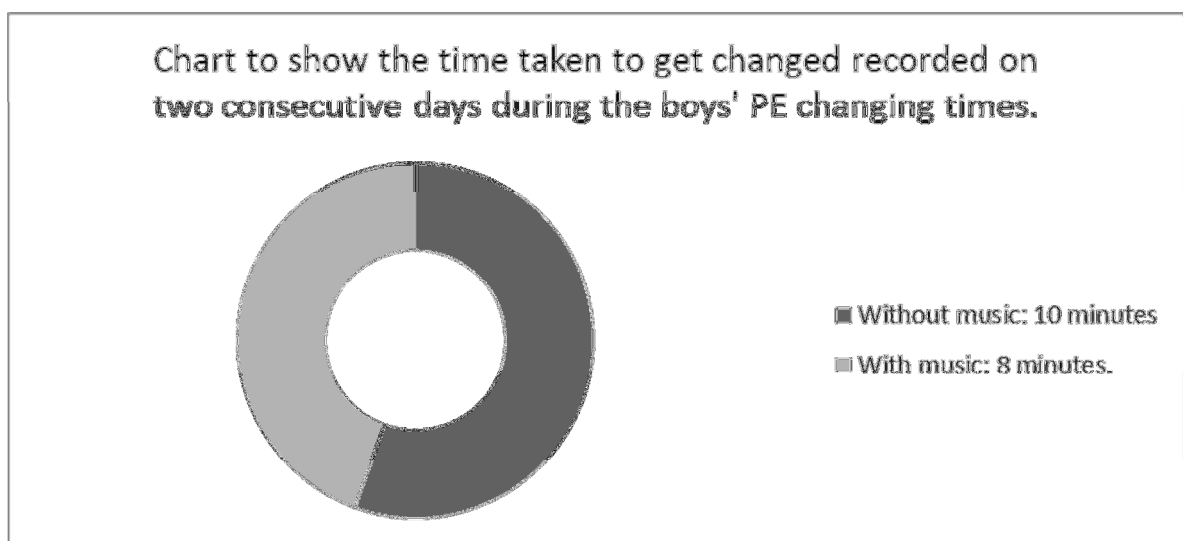
The Influence of Music on Emotion and Mood

To evidence if children could interpret emotion from music (Kratus 1993) the participants were asked to indicate whether they felt each piece of music was calming or exciting against the selected music excerpts (Table 3).

Table 3 Emotional Interpretation

Music Excerpt.	Calming	Exciting	Happy	Sad
1 (Fast tempo - major mode)	1	9	9	1
2 (Slow tempo - minor mode)	9	1	1	9
3 (Fast tempo – major mode)	1	9	10	0
4 (Slow tempo – minor mode)	8	2	4	6

In each instance the majority of children agreed with the selections as categorised by the tempo and minor/major modes (Bowling 2013) and this corroborates with the study carried out by Dalla Bella et al. (2001). Pupils identified calming music with a slow tempo and minor mode. The musical excerpts offered that were of this category were also associated by the pupils as correlating with the perception of sadness. Music that was presented as having a fast tempo and major mode was marked overwhelmingly by 9/10 of the pupils as being exciting and this matched with the perception of happiness. Dolgin and Adelson (1990) and Roberts et al. (2003) found that young children can discriminate between happy and sad music. Nawrot (2003: 76) suggested that infants are 'sensitive to emotional information specified in music'. The notion that babies could be responsive to music offers the concept of greater communication through this means as an alternative to direct verbal language (Rock et al. 1999). It could be considered that music is 'a more powerful medium than speech for effective communication with infants' (Rock et al. 1999: 527). The associations and attachments to music we have as an adult could be founded in the music that we are exposed to in childhood, as music can evoke memories and emotions of childhood which could for some, include memories of being held, safe and secure (Saarikallio and Erkkilä 2007). Zentner et al. (2008) proposed that from music, emotional rewards could be elicited and this may offer an explanation of the popularity of music in its social context.

In response to the questions in the survey as to whether the participants liked or disliked the music choices (Table 4), in relation to the categories of calming/exciting and happy/sad, results indicated that whether the music excerpts were perceived as happy/sad), the music was largely 'liked'. It is important to acknowledge the duplicity of music in that emotion and information generated from listening to music could be deemed as a product of the brain functioning as an evocative engine (Kawakami et al. 2013). Zentner et al. (2008) state that categorising emotion is complex and there is not sufficient research to define if emotional responses to music are based on 'listeners' perceptions of emotional connotations of the music, not on anything the listeners felt themselves (Collier 2007, in Zentner et al. 2008: 496).

Table 4 Music likes and dislikes

| Music Excerpt.	Like	Dislike
1 (Fast tempo/major mode)	8	2
2 (Slow tempo/minor mode)	7	3
3 (Fast tempo/major mode)	10	0
4 (Slow tempo/minor mode)	8	2

The disparity in the results in terms of those participants who recorded 'dislikes' in response to a number of the musical excerpts could be explained by the individuality of each participant and their specific personality (Zentner et al. 2008). People interpret and react differently to music and this could explain why the results are not unanimous for each piece (Hallam et al. 2002). All the participants agreed collectively that they enjoyed "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" (Rimsky - Korsakov 2001) and this could be explained by the informal group discussion that followed the survey which I observed. The participants talked about how the piece of music had been played to them by the head teacher of the school, on a number of occasions, for example during assembly. Kawakami et al. (2013) warned of using familiar music when conducting research as it may serve to skew results as could be exemplified by the aforementioned. It could be argued that listening to the known excerpt of music (Ferguson and Sheldon 2013) from a constructivist perspective enabled the children to build on their former knowledge and experiences as they were acquainted with the piece of music (Johnston and Nahmad-Williams 2009).

In response to the question: Did you enjoy participating in the research survey? 9/10 children expressed positivity (Figure 2)

'I like all the music'. 'I enjoyed all of them'. '…enjoyed it – yes!' 'I enjoyed doing it.'   (Research Participants)

One participant stated the type of music was 'not my thing' and this correlates to the choice of popular music over classical music in previous research studies (Chalmers et al. 1999). Giles (1991: 43) proposed that 'the most effective music for children is that which they like' although it is suggested that the genre should not 'overly excite them'. Extending further the notion of taking part in the research study, I suggest it enabled the children to engage in a shared experience in a group as 'learning involves a deepening process of participation in a community of practice' (Smith 2003).   Engaging in the survey in a group format as opposed to individually saw pupils interacting with each other in conversation about the pieces of music. It also promoted thoughts and memories about when they had previously listened to music and what music they enjoyed or did not enjoy. This exemplified a communal benefit of music (Storr 1992), although Munday (2006) suggested that in group research participants views could adopt collective opinions and therefore reduce the individuality and spectrum of data collected.

Figure 2 Enjoyment of survey

Chart to show if participants enjoyed or did not enjoy the music survey.

n=10

■ Enjoyed – 9
□ Did Not Enjoy – 1
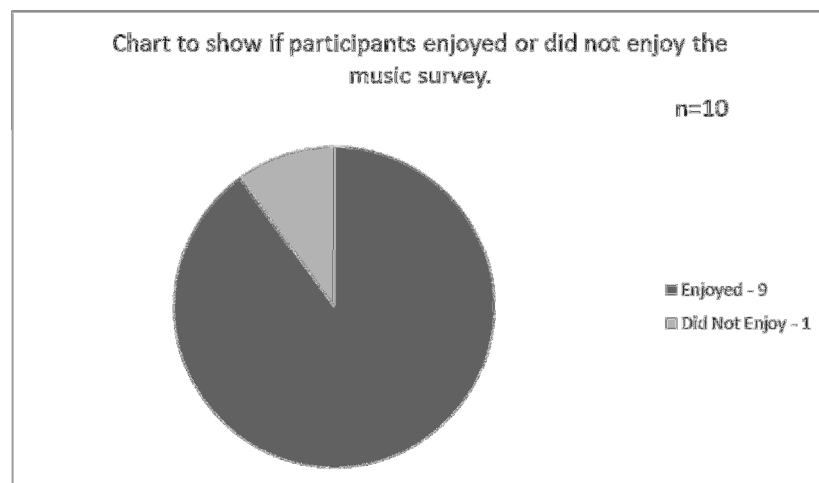
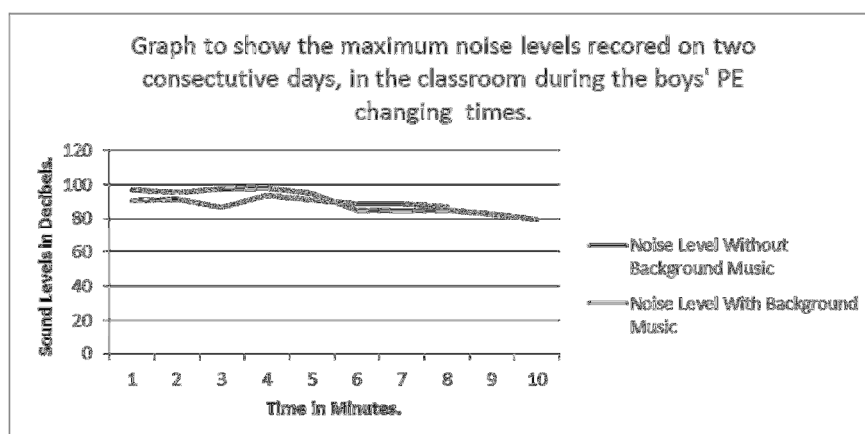**Music as a Classroom Management Tool**

Reston (2001) and Gardiner (2000) suggest that music can be utilised in numerous applications within the classroom. The class teacher stated that music:

> ...has a big value in school…singing; accompanying school plays; music lessons; hymns; dance; instrument lessons; counting the beats in maths; listening and commenting on the genre and when children are entering and leaving the hall for assembly.

The use of background music in the classroom as a tool to manage behaviours is increasingly being acknowledged (Hall 1952; Hallam and Price 1998; Jackson and Joyce 2003). On the day when there was no background music playing, the noise level recorded was higher during the first half of the changing period.

Study 1 presented findings that suggested the use of background music during the PE changing period in the classroom initially resulted in the noise level decreasing as the pupils entered the classroom and began to get changed (Figure 3). The noise level proceeded to rise after three minutes. However, when the teacher intervened using verbal instruction, the trend was to drop. Music to aid 'settling in' periods during the school day for example when entering the classroom was found to promote a calming nature (Hallam and Price 1998).

Figure 3 Noise levels during changing times

Graph to show the maximum noise levels recored on two consecutive days, in the classroom during the boys' PE changing times.

Noise Level Without Background Music

Noise Level With Background Music

The number of teacher interventions to manage the noise level within the classroom on the day without background music was more than twice the number recorded compared to the day when background music was used (Figure 4). This occurrence could be rationalised by the notion that the music helped the children become absorbed in their given task (White 2007). It should be acknowledged that there may exist a 'novelty' effect in having music played in the classroom (Hallam and Price 1998: 90). These results therefore, should not be considered definitive outside of the research presented in this study in terms of validity and reliability (Mukherji and Albon 2010).

Figure 4 Teacher interventions
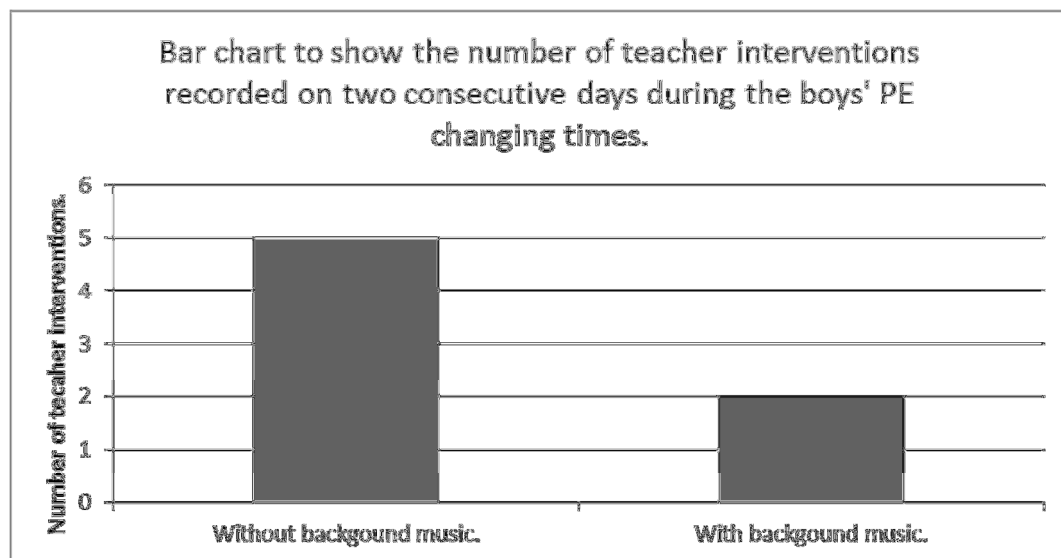
What and how background music is used in the classroom has its complexities in the individual preferences of a class teacher and ethos of a school, as music selection is critical (Chalmers et al. 1999). Music has the capacity to stimulate and sedate mood and therefore influence children (Chalmers et al. 1999). Caution should be exercised when choosing the music so it does not become overly stimulating and disruptive (Chalmers et al. 1999). The class teacher interviewed as part of this study expressed the importance of using:

> …the right music at the right time…depending on the responses of the children at a specific time…I have used background music to cheer up a mood and…when the children are doing art…painting…to lighten an activity.

Evidence has suggested that children are sensitive to emotional information in music (Nawrot 2003) and that music lies 'on a continuum from highly stimulating and invigorating to soothing or calming…people respond differently to stimulative and sedative music' (Gaston 1968, in Hallam and Price 1998: 88). In aspiring to promote a classroom environment which is calm, relaxed and happy, 'the music which appeared to be most beneficial in enhancing performance and improving behaviour was instrumental as opposed to vocal using instrumental background' (Hallam and Price 1998: 90). Giles (1991: 44) states that with the appropriate background music 'children function very well' and this report concludes similarly.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This small-scale action research project aimed to answer the question: Can the sound of music influence children in the classroom? The findings seemed to suggest that music was accessed, listened to and enjoyed by both the children and the class teacher and this was evidence that music plays a significant part in everyday life (Zentner et al. 2008). Collectively the group of children demonstrated the ability to recognise emotion in music and produced physical responses to the music excerpts played during the survey. This study does not

conclusively state that music has the capacity to reduce noise levels or accelerate children's actions consistently, however, it does indicate a small downward trend in both when background music was played in the classroom. I propose therefore, that within this study, it could be argued that music has been shown to have the ability to affect the human brain, the body and thus have the potential to influence children in the classroom.

This project recommends that further research is conducted to authentically implement music in the classroom. This fulfils the action research step which proposes that after evaluation, then the cycle commences once more, building on the newly generated knowledge (Mukherji and Albon 2010). I propose this action as data collected in this report, with regard to the noise levels and teacher interventions within the classroom, was only carried out on two days. It did not seek to record the long term effects of the background music within the classroom setting. Giles (1991) suggested that the most positive outcomes for music within the classroom are largely dependent on the children selecting the music. This would require a collaborative approach between the class teacher and the children. A musical list (Giles 1991) could be drawn up by the class teacher and the children, from which children could make a music selection to play in the background for the duration of the PE changing times.

The informal conversation following Study 2 saw the children spend time together talking about their recollections and shared experiences of having previously heard "The Flight of the Bumble Bee" (Rimsky - Korsakov 2001). I propose that this action exemplified the concept that music has the potential to transcend the limits of the individual and can tread into the wider expanse of society as a conduit to bring people together (Storr 1992). Music in society is recognised as 'part of growing up' (Paediatrics 2009: 1488) and as an Early Years Professional Practitioner (EYPP) I propose that the discourse of the influence of music in the classroom is one of great relevance. Rea et al. (2010) stated that those in the position of choosing music should be informed of the effects of it and this report is a modest offering towards the discussion: Can the sound of music influence children in the classroom?

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Perceptions of Homophobic Language use within a Secondary School Implementing the Stonewall 'Tackling Homophobic Language' Resources
Lisa Edwards

Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate perceptions of homophobic language use among secondary school pupils. The research was prompted due to the adoption of Stonewall Tackling Homophobic Language resources by a school in response to the frequent use of the word 'gay' amongst students. This qualitative study included data from questionnaire responses and interviews with staff and pupils. The data highlighted that some young people and staff did not perceive pejorative use of the word 'gay' as homophobic. However, a change in attitude was recorded after educational intervention and staff training.

Introduction

This research aims to explore the use of homophobic language within a secondary school focusing in particular on perceptions of the word 'gay' in discourse. A further focus is to evaluate the impact of Stonewall resources which were developed in response to research reporting that 'ninety eight percent of young gay people hear the phrases "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" in school' (Stonewall 2007a).

Since the overturn in 2003 of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 which prohibited the promotion of Homosexuality, Government policy (Equality Act 2010) and a new Ofsted Framework (Ofsted 2014) states that all schools take action to ensure pupils who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) are protected from harm and take an active role in preventing homophobic and transphobic bullying. In light of this the Sex Education Forum (2014) recently published new guidance on Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) advocating an inclusive approach. This included calling for content and use of inclusive language reflective of the diversity of the school community and incorporating same sex relationships. Working for the Nottinghamshire Achievement and Equality Team, my role adapted to the meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. This involved advising schools of their duties and supporting them to meet the new requirements.

Involvement with working in secondary schools supporting and mentoring pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds has allowed for first-hand experience of the behaviours and language use of young people across one county. The use of homophobic language was witnessed and one pupil disclosed homophobic bullying. Therefore the chosen research topic was of interest due to personal experiences and reading around the subject as a result of changes in job role. Liaisons with Stonewall also indicated their interest. Gray (2014: 41) suggests that a good research topic is one that combines a personal source of interest with an organisational concern thus creating the potential for personal learning and development and organisational and management gain.

Stonewall, the organisation founded in response to the Local Government Act 1988, works to achieve equality and justice for LGBT people with a vision that every young person in Britain is given the opportunity to develop to their full potential (Stonewall 2007a; Stonewall 2014). As a result of large scale research, Stonewall developed an educational resource (Stonewall 2013) campaigning to tackle homophobic language in secondary schools. The resources include posters challenging the use of the word 'gay' accompanied by a guide for young people on how they can challenge homophobic language among their peers, and a guide for teachers. A teacher also attended training by Stonewall and disseminated this to school staff   during an INSET event.

The school where the research took place is a Community Academy school for pupils aged 11-18 situated in a town centre with approximately 770 pupils on role. Prior to the work undertaken by staff the use of the word gay was commonly heard amongst students who also reported that staff very seldom intervened. Conversely, the staff reported that homophobic language was only occasionally heard.

The research is small scale therefore presenting limitations with regards to validity and generalisation.

Literature Review

Themes of the literature will focus first on a review of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education including current Government guidance and key elements of PSHE programmes relevant to this study drawing on positive and negative practices. Homophobic language use will then be addressed, focusing in particular on research by Stonewall (2007a, 2007b, 2013) and also highlighting attitudinal or perception nuances. Finally an overview of cultural capital theory by way of explanation of the origins of attitudes and language use will ensue.

PSHE can be defined as a: '...planned programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future' (PSHE Association 2014a).

The DfE provide funding to the PSHE Association (2014b) who support practitioners to raise the quality of PSHE teaching by offering advice, training and resources. The association locates PSHE at the heart of the ethos of a school and suggest personal development underpins other learning and is a fundamental aspect of education. PSHE is non-statutory under the new National Curriculum Guidance (DfE 2013) with the rationale being that 'schools are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription'. Conversely, statutory in maintained schools and an important element of PSHE is Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). This should ensure young people are given the opportunity to discuss diversity and difference. Sessions should allow for discussion on different types of relationships and explore their attitudes (SEF undated). However, as the school where the research is to take place is an Academy, SRE also remains non-statutory (DfE 2013). Furthermore, another important element of PSHE in secondary schools is citizenship education, helping young people to develop the knowledge and skills to play an effective role in their communities by examining issues related to democracy, social justice, human rights, identity and diversity from a range of perspectives (BBC 2014). Sexuality is a key dimension of humanity and a moral and political contemporary subject therefore prime material for citizenship education. Biddulph (2012) poses the knowledge and understanding of sexualities as an entitlement to young people not only for those questioning their sexuality and for pupils who may have family or friends identifying as LGBT but, more importantly, for humanitarian and compassionate reasons.

Ofsted (2013) recently reported, based on evidence of inspections in fifty schools including interviews with 700 pupils and 200 teachers, that PSHE provision required improvement or was inadequate in forty percent. A critique including the perspective of some teachers is that the government focus on international and national comparison of pupils attainment in Literacy and Numeracy limits time for other subjects (Cremin and Faul 2012; Cleaver 2013; GreatSchools Undated). In a report for *The Guardian,* Secret Teacher (2013) reported that the current focus on attainment does not ensure students will become outstanding citizens of the world: 'Grades and data don't do that, integrity and humanity do'.

Further, pupils' understanding of diversity, prejudice and discrimination was not developed well enough in one in eight secondary schools. Pupils usually learn about racism and sexism but prevalent in too many schools was 'the casual use of homophobic and disablist language'. This resulted in their failure to appreciate the impact on others that the use of derogatory language has, indicating that schools are 'not doing enough to ensure that pupils have a good awareness and understanding of *all* forms of diversity and discrimination' (Ofsted 2013: 19). This issue is one not only prevalent in the UK but also a subject highlighted by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (UN news centre 2011) who posited 'homophobic bullying of young people constitutes a grave violation of human rights' suggesting it occurs in schools in all parts of the world and tackling the problem with teaching is one element of a shared approach.

The Ofsted (2013: 29) report highlighted areas for improvement in secondary schools including training for teachers as 'they have limited subject knowledge and are unskilled in teaching sensitive and controversial issues'. These findings are supported by the views of Stonewall ambassador Will Young who suggested that a priority is educating staff just as much as the students (Vaughan 2013). Research by Westwood and Mullan

(2007) found secondary teachers had insufficient knowledge to teach SRE but were still expected to contribute to the programmes. In a recent *LGBT Conference* (NCC 2014a) a young person keynote speaker suggested that her experiences in school would have been more positive had the curriculum included and acknowledged LGBT people.

Douglas et al.'s (2001) research addressing the issue of lack of teacher confidence or knowledge of these issues within PSHE discusses a model whereby an external provider was used in four secondary schools in England. This proved a successful method of delivery and improved outcomes for both staff and young people involved. A Gay and Bisexual Men's Development Worker provided educational activities to address sexual orientation and identity issues to both male and female students in four sixth forms. Positive outcomes included a noticeable change in attitudes of young people with evidence presented from staff and the pupils themselves. Staff reported improved confidence both in their ability to challenge homophobia and teach PSHE lessons.

The model also concluded that 'discussion of sexual orientation issues appeared to work well with young people within the context of an equalities framework' (Douglas et al. 2001: 160). Within the points mentioned above a subtle theme throughout is the use of homophobic language which will now be discussed in more detail.

Homophobic language is thought endemic in schools and comes in many different forms (Stonewall 2007a; 2013; Bloom 2014). The distinction between homophobic language use is acknowledged in literature and reports (Sherriff et al. 2011; Teachers TV 2011; Ho 2013; McCabe 2013; McCormick 2013; Bloom 2014) recognising homophobic insults directed at people who are gay, perceived to be gay or gender nonconforming pupils as a direct insult or bullying. Alternatively, more prevalent amongst young people is the casual use of homophobic phrases for example 'that's so gay' as pejorative 'with no conscious link to sexual orientation at all' (Stonewall 2013: 4). However, varying opinions and interpretations of this, which will now be explored, highlight the complexities faced by schools in their duty to tackle homophobic language.

The Stonewall *School Report* (2007a) is based on 1145 survey responses from secondary school young people who are LGBT or questioning their sexuality. Results reveal sixty five percent of LGBT young people have experienced direct homophobic bullying. Significantly ninety eight percent of pupils hear the phrase 'that's so gay' in school, the majority of these frequently or often, and ninety seven percent of pupils hear other insulting homophobic remarks for example poof, dyke, queer and bender. Findings are reflected in Sherriff et al.'s (2011: 949) similar smaller scale research whereby the use of the word gay as pejorative is reported to contribute to a hostile and unsafe environment. This impacts negatively on a young person's sense of belonging and self-esteem, ultimately effecting attainment (Stonewall 2013: 7).

In contrast, McCormick (2013) contests this view suggesting that how a word is used, its intent and interpretation determines if it is homophobic or not. It is postulated that the use of homophobic language as pejorative (named 'gay discourse' in this case) only has negative impact in a homophobic environment, for example schools where students have homophobic attitudes and gay students are 'closeted'. McCormick (2013: 96) suggests, however, that in different social contexts, in this case amongst rugby players, where gay discourse lacks any intent, the language does not have negative social effects, although acknowledgment that it implicitly privileges heterosexuality was held. However, a critique of the study conducted with 'heterosexual rugby players who espoused pro-gay attitudes and had openly gay friends' could be that the opinions of the gay friends themselves are paramount to gain valid and reliable sentiments. Ho (2014: 25) suggests that the word gay now synonymous with 'bad' could 'simply be a representation of thoughtlessness rather than malice', his article, nevertheless, discusses negative impacts of such connotations.

It could be suggested that this study is comparable in findings with results of McCabe et al.'s (2013) exploration of psychologist's abilities to recognise and describe bias and harassment towards LGBT students. In spite of the fact that at the beginning of the survey it was explained that harassing behaviour includes the use of expressions like 'that's so gay' the discrepancy between the number of reported incidents of bias and harassment and the reported use of such remarks, which was significantly lower, suggests that some participants did not consider this language use as bias or harassing behaviour. It could be suggested, therefore, that both McCormick (2013) and the psychologists in McCabe's (2013) research misunderstood or overlooked effects of 'gay discourse' on LGBT individuals in certain situations.

Stonewall (2007b) reported a disproportionate correlation according to teachers and LGBT pupils between the frequency of intervention from staff on hearing homophobic language (intervention according to teachers was 66% but according to pupils 7%). It is relevant to make reference to this finding as in schools where teachers are reported to always challenge homophobic remarks the level of homophobic bullying was significantly lower (Stonewall 2013).   Stonewall highlighted the fact that Black History Month and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month were celebrated but in February, LGBT History Month was not and this would have presented the perfect opportunity for dialogue to begin. This again is reflective of previously mentioned literature highlighting racism being tackled in schools in contrast to homophobia (Ofsted 2013).   This again could be a reflection of aforementioned viewpoints of 'gay discourse', posited as 'just harmless banter' by almost half (46 percent) of secondary school teachers who have not intervened when homophobic language is heard (Stonewall 2007b). Will Young, Stonewall ambassador, suggests that teachers do not 'clamp down on homophobic language in a way they do with racism or sexism' and often school leaders dismissed the pejorative use of 'gay' as not homophobic (Vaughan 2013: 14).Exploration of possibilities to explain how homophobic language has become part of everyday conversation amongst young people in school will now ensue.

Bourdieu and Patterson (1977, in Bartlett and Burton 2007) considered the education system as instrumental in social reproduction stating that social inequalities in society are being constantly reproduced from generation to generation. A child's original social class is likely to be their destination social class (Wyness 2008: 143).   Bourdieu (1977 in Bartlett and Burton 2007) suggested that parents and communities pass on cultural values that, depending on class, determine educational success or failure. Pupils from a middle class background are more likely to succeed as they have the 'right' social frames of reference and are 'in tune with dominant modes of thought and speech found within…school' (Wyness 2008: 146) whereas for working class children these are likely to be opaque' (Bartlett and Burton 2007: 150). Furthermore, in relation to this study, the theory suggests that middle-class children better understand how to speak and conduct themselves and have developed a social awareness to a far greater degree than working-class pupils (Bartlett and Burton 2007:150). Bartlett and Burton (2007: 150) also discuss the 'hidden curriculum' in relation to social reproduction recognising uncontrolled features of school life where an unofficial process of learning takes place for example the behaviours and social conduct at break times.

Bourdieu also introduced the concept of 'habitus' which refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital (Routledge 2011) and 'results from our socialisation experiences in which external structures are internalised' (Swartz 1997: 103). Reay (2004) postulates that habitus can be used in research to focus on the ways in which different classes play out attitudes of cultural superiority and inferiority ingrained in their habitus in daily interactions. Such dispositions are influenced by gender, race and social class. Sexism and racism but also homophobia, disabilism, and ageism are widely studied forms of division, domination and exclusion in social research (Sayer 2004, in Reay 2004: 436). Sayer (2004, in Reay 2004: 436) suggests this is one of the most distinctive yet unremarked features of Bourdieu's theoretical framework but only enters as incidental modifiers, if at all. Conversely this could potentially be a particular focus of this study.

Although habitus refers to collective history, deeply ingrained habits, skills and dispositions (Routledge 2011) and is based on socialisation within the family, it still remains permeable and responsive and is re-structured by individuals' encounters with the outside world (Di Maggio in Reay 2004). The structure of the social setting in which the habitus operates, in this case the school, is defined by Bourdieu as the 'field' (Swartz 1997). Rather than referring to groups, organisations or institutions by referring to the 'field', Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, in Swartz 1997: 119) draws attention to the latent patterns of interest and struggle to highlight the conflictual character of social life. Bourdieu (1990, in Swartz) stressed that practices must be deduced from their interrelationship between habitus, capital and field and not from the present conditions which may seem to have provoked them or from past conditions which may seem to have produced the habitus.

Therefore, in relation to this study, when gaining research data it is imperative to consider these concepts. Students hold their own habitus and cultural capital yet this can then be influenced by different 'fields'. Within the school 'field' there are also different cultural norms, expectations and languages and the correlation between the two could determine future outcomes. Real (2004) suggests that the complexity of the theory creates a danger of habitus becoming whatever the data reveal. However, Bourdieu (1988, in Reay 2004: 439)

states 'habitus provides a method for simultaneously analysing the experience of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible'.

The school in the study serves a former coalfield district, the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average and attainment is low. Despite this the school offers adult education and extended services provision and community spirit is a strength (Ofsted 2010). It has 'a significant impact in raising the socio-economic aspirations of the local community and in promoting lifelong learning' (NCC 2014b). Evidently, within this close school community the use of homophobic language has become socially acceptable amongst a significant number of students. Therefore in relation to social reproduction theory it could be suggested that within the pupil's groupings or friendship networks it has become a cultural norm to use homophobic language. Ho (2013) suggests this is a problem particularly prevalent with young people due to them not being well informed and following others as a natural human nature process.

Ogburn (1950, in McCormick 2013: 96) suggests 'cultural lag' where two related social variables, in this case young people employing language without consideration of or even knowledge of its previous use, become disassociated because meanings change at different rates, a factor in the use of homophobic language as pejorative. As in McCormick's (2013) study the pupils in this school could maintain a non-homophobic stance with no malice or intent.

Methodology

The research was initiated as a result of a school implementing the Stonewall resources in response to reports of Homophobic language use amongst students. The Stonewall resources were disseminated to schools via the educational support team I work with. This was to ensure any additional support could be offered, hence my involvement with the project, and rationale for investigating the impact.

Rylance (2014) discusses the importance of researching impact and suggests results could aid quality of life, the enhancement of culture or design better policy. In this case future advice and support to schools could be influenced whilst also providing the subject school with valuable feedback to inform areas of future development.

Working closely with a named person from the school responsible for overseeing the implementation of the resources ensured professional standards and ethical procedures were adhered to in line with Bishop Grosseteste University's Research Ethics Policy (2013).

The research took the approach of an investigative qualitative study in order to gain a holistic overview of the context (Koshy 2005; Gray 2014). A comparison of data from interviews and questionnaires formed part of the analysis and evaluation. The number of reported incidents formed a quantitative measure and the third element of the data triangulation, a multi-method approach to data collection, helped to ensure validity and reliability (Sharp 2009: 46). Laws (2003, in Bell 2010) explains further triangulation as a means to confirm or challenge findings with those of another by being able to see the same thing from a different perspective.

The interviews were conducted with five Year 8 students and five members of staff from a range of departments. Interviews were used to 'establish the variety of opinions concerning a topic or to establish relevant dimensions of attitudes' (Fielding and Thomas 2001) and were the flesh on the bones of questionnaires yielding rich material (Bell 2010). However, this method of data gathering concerned interpersonal interactions and produced information about human condition therefore presenting ethical considerations (Cohen et al. 2013: 442). Main areas of consideration were gaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality and sharing consequences of the research with the participants (Bell 2010; Cohen et al. 2013; Gray 2014) which, as previously mentioned, was paramount to the investigation. As the interviews took place with pupils, due regard and compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef 1989) ensued. Article 3 required that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child are of primary consideration and article 12 stating 'parties shall 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' were relevant.

Bell (2010), Cohen et al. (2013) and Gray (2014) discuss interviews as a potential source of bias. Cohen et al. (2013: 204) postulates the 'most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimise bias'. Sources include characteristics of the interviewer, characteristics of the respondents and substantive content of the questions (Cohen et al. 2013 and Gray 2014). Responses to questions may be influenced by what respondents believe you want to hear (Koshy 2005: 89) as the interviewer 'may seek answers which support their preconceived ideas' (Cohen et al. 2013: 204). This stems from the type of question and way in which it is articulated (Gray 2014: 408). Contrary to a situation whereby personal outcomes or achievements might be supported by the results of an investigative research project, this project does not hold a vested personal interest but merely forms evidence for future work, therefore suggesting validity was somewhat achievable. 'Interviewees may differ in motivation to co-operate and to answer accurately and truthfully affecting validity and reliability' (Sharp 2009: 81). Considerations for reliability included changes in the wording, emphasis and content as any changes could be perceived as a different question between respondents (Cohen et al. 2013). Every effort was taken to ensure validity and reliability particularly supported by a conscious effort to ensure a uniform approach.

Questionnaires provide opportunity to collect straightforward information in a standardised way and are particularly suited for providing supplementary information for triangulation of data (Sharp 2009). They are also a method particularly suitable for collecting information on attitudes and perceptions (Koshy 2005: 89). However, the reliability of questionnaires can be compromised due to the potential of low responses (Koshy 2005 and Cohen et al. 2013) and hurriedly filled in responses (Cohen et al. 2013: 209) therefore a design not too time consuming was written. Reliability is more certain if the form, response mode and overall presentation is appropriate for the audience (Sharp 2009: 72) therefore two sets of questionnaires were devised to suit both the staff and pupils. Overall a questionnaire provides greater reliability than an interview as it encourages greater honesty (Cohen et al. 2013: 209). The potential for subjectivity and bias in questions could influence validity (Koshy 2005) therefore it is essential that questionnaires clearly link with the purpose of the research (Gray 2014: 375) and this outline of the title of the study was shown as a title at the beginning of the questionnaire (Sharp 2009).

Both qualitative data collections posed limitations as the number of participants' views taken is only a small percentage and may not be wholly reflective of the majority (Bell 2010). Due to the nature of the subject the results could be based on personal opinion, be biased or reflective of personal attitudes. However, as previously mentioned, steps were taken to minimise these effects. The collection of quantitative data had limitations as it involved relying on the school to share data as it is no longer statutory duty to report incidents to the Local Authority (Equality Act 2010). Schools should log reports internally.

**Presentation and Analysis of Findings**

The questionnaires were answered by fifty students and nineteen members of staff. Interviews took place with five Year 8 students and five teachers from the following subject departments: PE and PSHE, Teaching Assistant and Head of Pastoral Care, PE and Head of Year 9, PE and ICT. Evidently three of the five teachers taught PE and it could be argued that this presents limitations as it may suggest that their experiences would be similar and a varied viewpoint has not been gained.

A further point to make is that the students were not asked to disclose their sexual orientation and therefore it is impossible to evaluate differences in opinion or perceptions based on this. Conversely, the Stonewall surveys previously referred to were taken only from the viewpoint of LGBT young people (Stonewall 2007a).
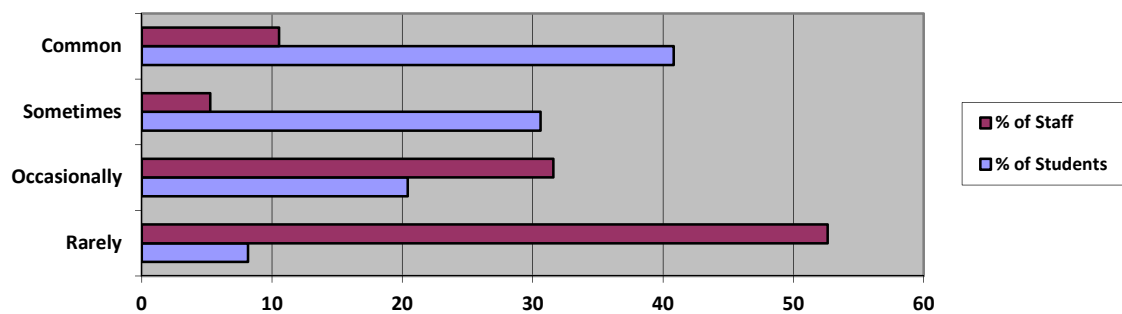
Frequency and perceptions of the use of the word 'gay'

The following graphs show responses about the use of homophobic language.

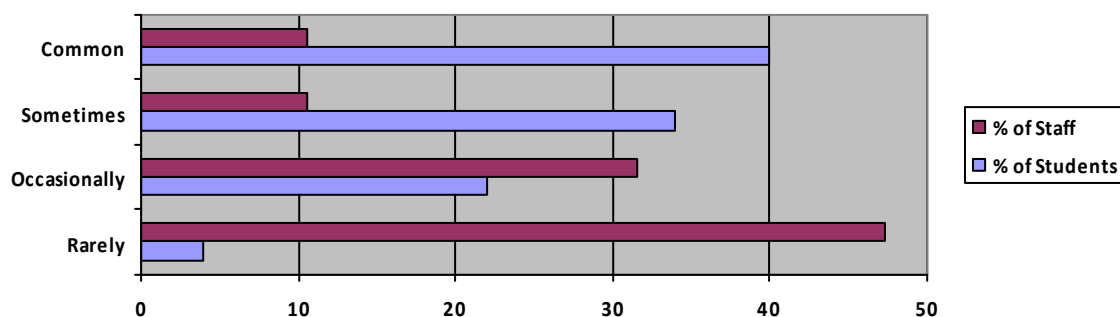Q1. How often do you hear the expression "that's so gay" used in school when students are talking about something they dislike?
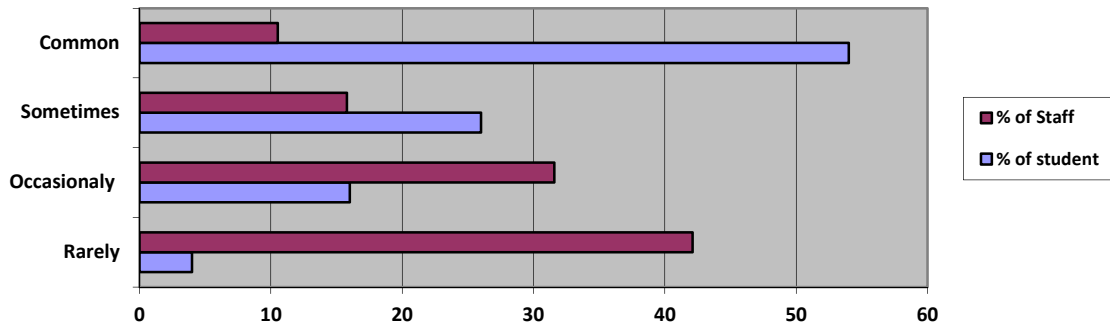
Q2. How often do you hear the expression "you're so gay" as an insult?

Q3. How often do you hear other homophobic remarks used such as faggot, dyke or bent?

A significant finding in the above results was the non-correlation between responses from students and staff. This is reflective of results from the Stonewall surveys (Stonewall 2007a; 2007b) whereby it was reported that seventy percent of gay pupils experience verbal abuse though only fifty percent of teachers reported being aware of it. An explanation of this could relate to Bourdieu's (1992, in Swartz 1997) theory of habitus and field,

in particular focusing on field as structure of social setting where the habitus operates. The difference between an organisation and a field is highlighted; in this instance both staff and students belong to the same organisation, the school. However, to highlight the conflictual character of social life and patterns of interest and struggle, the 'fields' that separate groups occupy within the school have conflicting practices, therefore potentially explaining the differences in experiences.

A further explanation relates to Ogburn's (1950, in McCormick 2013: 96) theory of a 'cultural lag' whereby language is employed by the younger generation due to the pupil's lack of knowledge or disassociation of meaning. This point is supported by comments made during student interviews; one student admitted to using the word 'gay' in the past but followed with the comment:

> 'It's offensive to people who are lesbian or gay, I know that now.'

Another student discussed being called gay and admitted:

> 'I didn't really know what it meant then.'

The last question of the student interviews asked for suggestions for future practice. One student response was:

> 'I don't think some people know, like in Year 7…when you go up from primary to secondary you don't really know what it means.'

In relation to the theory of habitus, as Reay (2004) suggested could be used in research to focus on ways different classes play out attitudes, it would be difficult to draw conclusions due to limited knowledge of the pupils' social and cultural capital. The high number of pupils on FSM's, low attainment levels (Ofsted 2010) and teacher communication of the student cohort being from a deprived area suggests a lower class. However, without comparison to a school with a contrasting cohort it would be unfair to make judgements based on social class.

As suggested earlier an unremarked element of Bourdieu's theoretical framework was homophobia as a form of division (Sayer 2004 in Reay 2004). It is evident from examples:

> 'Why you being so gay?'

> 'He's being gay though.'

That the language employed implies LGBT people are inferior which, as Reay (2013) highlights, is a distinctive feature of Bourdieu's theoretical framework (Sayer 2004, in Reay 2004). As previously mentioned, key to tackling this issue is the training of staff and education of pupils (SEF undated; Biddulph 2012; Ofsted 2013) which will be addressed during this analysis.

The main aim of the research was to investigate the varying perceptions and interpretations of the use of homophobic language. It was interesting to note that McCormick's (2013) suggestion that intent and interpretation determines if a word is homophobic or not was a viewpoint discussed by a PE teacher.

McCormick's (2013) example used rugby players and also suggested that language that lacks any intent does not have negative social effects. When discussing the nature of reported incidents the teacher explained that within the PE department most instances were directed towards players during sport with comments such as 'He's being gay though' when a player fails to tackle, the teacher continued with the following statement:

> 'Homophobic comments are accepted, [it is an] accepted culture within sport for example; you're tackling like a woos.'

Evidence from questionnaires indicate the word 'gay' as pejorative is used more frequently than as an insult, 54% compared with 41%. Comments made during the interviews also reflect the viewpoint of Ho (2014),

Stonewall (2013) and Young (in Vaughan 2013) that young people do not see the use of 'gay' as pejorative as homophobic and fail to recognise the potential negative impact.

This is evident in comments in response to the question 'Do you view the phrase "that's so gay" as homophobic?'

> 'No…in classrooms if you get work, pupils will say urgh that's gay'.

> 'No because it's not directly to a person who might be gay'.

> 'Depending on what way they take it is whether it's offensive or not'.

Thus it can be implied from this study that some student's perceptions are that the pejorative use of the word 'gay' is not viewed as homophobic. However, evidence suggests some student perceptions changed as will now be discussed.

Stonewall resources

An aim of this research was to evaluate the impact of the Stonewall resources. However, significant reports from both students and staff early on in the interviews highlighted the lack of presence of the Stonewall posters. As this became apparent an example poster was shown, this confirmed certainty over the subject being discussed thus increasing reliability of answers. Only two members of staff and two students had seen the posters, which were evidently displayed in the 'Community' or PSHE department of the school. Both members of staff had direct contact with the Department due to their positions. Therefore it became apparent that an evaluation of the impact of the Stonewall posters would prove difficult. However, question four of the student interviews 'What have you learnt in school about lesbian, gay and bisexual relationships/homophobic bullying and language use?' highlighted that students had recently participated in a PSHE lesson about LGBT relationships and the use of homophobic language. Therefore an alternative evaluation to include the impact of this lesson will take place.

Impact of Staff Training and Pupil PSHE lessons

On closer examination of interview responses it became apparent that a high percentage of both student and staff participants reported a change in frequency of homophobic language use since staff training and a student PSHE lesson   focussing on homophobia. Interview data make reference to the change in frequency or change in understanding of student's use of homophobic language suggesting that as a result of intervention a positive outcome has begun to ensue. Key statements included:

> 'Less people are using the word…the older kids aren't doing it as much'.

> 'Since the lessons people have a better understanding of it…I haven't heard it as much'.

> 'Made kids more aware of it – what is acceptable and what's not'.

The points mentioned above could suggest that a heightened profile of LGBT people within the curriculum as posited by NCC (2014a) and Biddulph (2012) could contribute to more positive experiences for LGBT young people in school. It could also suggest an increased awareness of the impact it has on LBGT people supported by the following comment:

> 'It made me think that if you was in a group and someone heard it they would take offense'.

As mentioned above an emergent theme throughout the collection of interview data was the reference to recent PSHE lessons with a focus on relationships and the use of homophobic language. This was delivered by an outside provider. As discussed by Douglas et al. (2001) this model of delivery proved successful in four secondary schools, a conclusion that could also be drawn from this study with evidence from interviews

illustrating this.   Two students suggested that future engagement with outside providers could reduce homophobia further:

'Get people in to talk about it, then it might reduce the use of homophobic language a bit more'.
'Bring more people in to talk about it, or people who are gay and lesbian in to talk about it'.

Disparities between data emerged relating to the reporting of homophobic incidents and the intervention of staff when remarks are made. Teachers had attended a training session about homophobic bullying, language use, and school policy including procedures for dealing with this.

Interview data, from staff in particular highlighted a change in the way incidents were dealt with since the training, evident from the comments below:

'I never had confidence before, now I have zero tolerance'.

'It has highlighted to staff that what you have previously let slip you now would know what should be said and done'.

'The change is the way that it is dealt with; I didn't use to report, now I always do'.

'Have done two referrals since the training, before I would have just told them off but now it is more serious'.

From these findings a hypothesis was made that the number of reported incidents would increase and data from questionnaires would show teacher intervention common. However, the third method of data collection, a quantitative measure of the number of reported incidents revealed a slight decrease in reports from twenty in the Autumn term to eighteen in the Spring term. One explanation could be that homophobic language use has fallen. This could be due to the greater awareness by the students of consequences of homophobic language use. A statement made by one student supports this theory:

'[we've been] told by the teachers that if they hear it you will get detentions'.

It would be interesting to compare this data again at the end of the Summer term.

The third data triangulation, the questionnaires, again presented findings opposing the hypothesis made. Below are results of questions asked of staff and students:

'When homophobic remarks are made and a teacher is present, how often does the teacher intervene?' (students)

'When homophobic remarks are made how often have you intervened?' (staff)
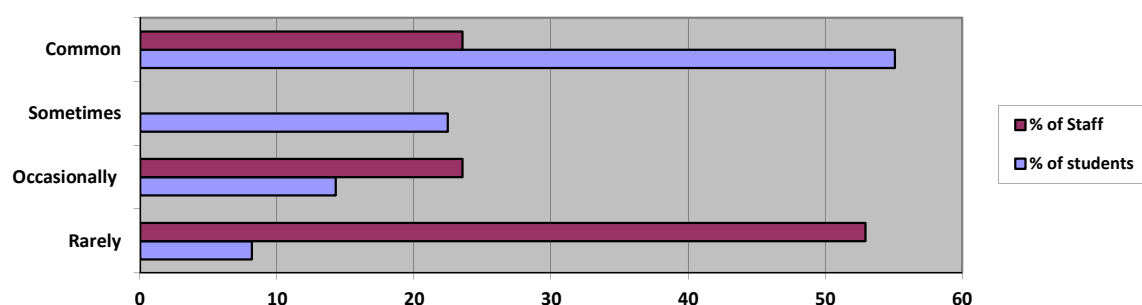
Student feedback indicates intervention is common corresponding with interview data, however, teacher feedback suggests the opposite. A possible explanation could be that most teachers have not witnessed any incidents of homophobic language use and therefore have not intervened, hence generating the above result. This also correlates with previous analysis of the frequency of homophobic language witnessed by staff which presented a discrepancy with the number witnessed by pupils, which again could be related to Bourdieu's (1990, in Swartz 1997) theory of habitus and field. An alternative explanation could be that the small number of interviews undertaken is not representative of majority views; this again is a limitation of small scale research.

The overall analysis was reflective of literature surrounding several themes including language perceptions and frequency and the influence of teacher training and the education of pupils.

Conclusion

The aim of the research was to investigate perceptions of homophobic language use within a secondary school and to evaluate the impact of the Stonewall resources. The frequency of homophobic language was reflective of results from the Stonewall *School Report* survey (2007a) and *Teachers Report* (2007b) revealing that young people hear it frequently whereas teachers do not. It would be interesting to gain teachers perspectives on this piece of evidence for purposes of them gaining awareness of the discrepancies with the view to prompting future change within school and personal practices.

Student perceptions of the use of the word 'gay' as pejorative reflected literature stating that sometimes this was not viewed as offensive. However, evidence of a change in attitudes and perception became apparent after a PSHE lesson about LGBT relationships and the use of homophobic language. Some students' awareness of the impact on LGBT people increased, therefore leading to less using homophobic language, suggesting the lessons had a positive impact. This also corresponded with an increased awareness of school procedures by staff after training on homophobic language use was received.

Evidence emerged that the Stonewall posters had only been displayed in one department of the school and were unfamiliar to most students and staff. Therefore an alternative evaluation of the impact of PSHE lessons ensued. This revealed a change in frequency of homophobic language as previously stated. It was suggested the outside provider model of delivery of the lesson proved successful, with comments from students supporting this.

Elements of this small scale research were reflective of larger scale findings. However, it was pleasing to note in this case that the school is making positive changes and implementations to ensure homophobic language use is being addressed. Areas for future improvement as suggested by some students would be to continue to introduce outside providers to discuss the topic, ensuring that all pupils from Year 7 to 11 have this opportunity. A wider dissemination of the Stonewall posters could lead to the issue to be at the forefront of student thoughts.

As the interventions for both staff and students have only recently taken place it would be interesting to revisit in the future with a view to evaluating the impact long term. As a result of this research, training sessions for use with primary school staff were developed and delivered in two schools. Positive feedback was gained and the impact of this on the children will be sought. It has also prompted my own desire to work with young people around the issues raised within the research as striving for equality for all continues to be a personal passion.

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Voice and Choice: an Investigation into Ways of Overcoming Boys' Resistance to Engaging with Choirs
Richard Gombault

Abstract

The main aims of this research were to explore the well-documented reluctance boys display towards singing and to investigate ways of overcoming such resistance. The research was carried out in a small, rural primary school, with Year 5/6 boys providing the focus. The boys' existing attitudes and behaviours were obtained from questionnaires, observations and interviews, while the effects of implementing a voluntary choir – in which boys were afforded ownership of song choice - were identified through further observations and group interviews. Though some quantitative methods of data collection were employed, the research was more qualitative in its approach to the generation and analysis of data. The results initially highlighted boys' positive attitudes towards singing, despite a reluctance to engage therein. Later findings suggested that, although affording ownership of song choice proved partly effective in eliciting boys' engagement with a choir, positive relationships between choirmaster and pupils appears to be a more significant determinant. Consequently, it was recommended that boys continue to be afforded ownership of song choice by a choirmaster with whom positive relationships are well-established.

Introduction

Singing in primary schools is an issue about which there has been much recent discussion. Aside from the potential to be an enjoyable pursuit in itself, singing is claimed to offer a supplementary wealth of cognitive, physical, emotional and social benefits (McCormack and Healey 2008; Freer 2009; Punke 2009; Hallam 2010; Henley 2011; Broomfield 2013; Sing Up 2014). As such, it would appear that singing in primary schools is an activity highly conducive to a child's holistic education. Recent governments have recognised the inherent value of singing, with significant funding afforded to schools to support such activities (Welch et al. 2008; Henley 2011; DfE 2011). Given the current climate of budgetary cuts, that such funding continues (albeit reduced) is irrefutable evidence of the high importance attached to school singing (Ashley 2013: 311). Although music maintains its place within the National Curriculum, albeit as a foundation rather than core subject (DfE 2013: 196), it is stated that 'singing should be an important part of every child's school life' (DfE 2011b: 4).

Despite the reported benefits of singing, and the generous funding it has enjoyed in recent years, my own observations in primary schools from a wide range of social contexts have revealed boys' general reluctance to engage with singing activities. Such observations are in line with findings of recent research (Ashley 2006; Pugh 2008; Welch et al. 2008; Phillips 2012) which also offers a range of explanations as to why boys appear not to engage. As a teacher with a passion for singing, I was keen to examine potential ameliorative strategies.

The intention of my research, then, was to investigate ways of overcoming boys' resistance to engaging voluntarily with singing. The research took place in a small primary school between November 2013 and January 2014, and focused on boys in Year 5/6. The research was conducted in two stages. Firstly, through questionnaires, observations and interviews, the boys' existing views and behaviours regarding singing were obtained and examined. Secondly, I implemented a voluntary choir and, through further observations and group interviews, assessed the factors behind boys' engagement therewith. Given the relatively small and context-specific sample, however, any results or conclusions may not be widely applicable.

Review of Literature

The benefits of singing

It is suggested that singing is a fundamental instrument to which we all have access (Hallam 2001; Broomfield 2013; Jaffrey, in Welch 2008; Jones and Robson 2008). Though in itself claimed to be an 'enlightening, happy enterprise' (Harrison 2007: 274), singing appears to have additional benefits which are both multitudinous and well documented.

Although problematic to establish causality, much recent research points to singing being linked to children's increased levels of self-esteem, confidence, and enjoyment and engagement in class, as well as enhanced social skills and sense of team spirit (McCormack and Healey 2008; Gale, in Owen 2009; Hallam 2010; BBC 2011; Henley 2011; Broomfield 2013; Sing Up 2014). It is further claimed that singing has the potential to transcend racial, social and cultural boundaries, as well as to engender a powerful sense of community (Jaffrey, in Welch 2008; McCormack and Healey 2008; Punke 2009). When added to reported inherent physical, cognitive and emotional benefits (McCormack and Healey 2008; Punke 2009; Freer 2009; Gale, in Owen 2009; Hallam 2010; Ashley, in Owen 2009), the case for engaging children in singing activities appears unarguable. Although Philpott (2012: 54) sounds a note of caution in warning that music has the potential to engender and perpetuate prejudice, this is not mentioned with specific regard to singing and, as Philpott himself concedes, is merely 'provided in the name of balance'.

However, despite such endorsements, opinion has been divided as to the educational value singing provides (Plummeridge 2001; McCormack and Healey 2008), with budgetary cuts and governmental prioritisation of the teaching of numeracy and literacy resulting in some schools in England and Wales reducing the amount of curriculum time devoted to music (Shepherd 2011; Cox 2001; Brown et al. 2001). A more recent survey by De Vries (2013: 375) indicates a similar situation in Australia, although it should be noted that such claims are based on the responses of only nine teachers and cannot, therefore, be said to be representative of the country as a whole. Nevertheless, the findings are congruent with the views of Lierse (2012) that Australian educational authorities are allowing music to be marginalised.

Despite such an apparent raft of benefits to singing, there exists a body of research which highlights boys' lack of engagement in singing activities and, in particular, a reticence to participate in voluntary choirs (Ashley 2006; Harrison 2007; Welch et al. 2008; Pugh 2008; Punke 2009; Freer 2009; Phillips 2012). Ashley (2006: 199), a leading figure in the field of boys' singing, suggests that this is not a recent phenomenon, while Freer (2009:142) further claims that the situation is not restricted by 'geographical or national boundaries'. Certainly, there appears to be a wealth of cross-cultural literature to support such views. However, Green (1996: 50) attests that, although the majority of boys do not voluntarily join choirs, there are - of course - exceptions. Indeed, Ashley (2006: 194) claims that the popularly held view of reluctant male singers is not an accurate representation of males as a whole, and warns that a prevalence of 'the problem with boys' literature may prove counter-productive. In a later study, Ashley (2007: 59) contends that boys would, in fact, like to sing yet 'police their own exclusion' from such activities. Such behaviour may be attributable to several factors.

Perceived images of singing

One such factor concerns the perceived image of boys' singing - in particular that of choristers. While singers in bands were perceived by the majority of boys from a nationally representative sample of schools in the UK as 'cool' (Ashley 2007: 61), choristers received far less generous an appraisal and were dismissed as 'weird' (Ashley, in BBC 2007). Although such views may have been proffered with a misguided sense of conformity to popular stereotype, nevertheless, there exists the perception of boys who sing as being 'cute, sweet children' (Bloom 2010). Such a perception is believed to be unhelpful with regard to engaging boys in choirs. Ashley (2006: 197) postulates that describing young boys' voices as 'beautiful' is unlikely to encourage them to sing, while the notion of 'cute, motherable angels' is viewed as 'highly damaging to the cause of boys' singing' (Ashley 2007: 61). Indeed, Milne (2007) suggests that boys do not want to sing in their 'high, childlike voices', as doing so gains little approval from their peers, only 'grannies'.

There is also the issue of boys viewing singing as a feminine pursuit (Owen 2009; Harrison 2007). Philpott (2012: 55) suggests that music is gendered, with such sociocultural messages adopted from a young age (Hall 2005: 16), while Ashley (2006: 200) points to the fact that 'singing in a high voice is clearly predominantly female'. Viewed as such, Hall (2005: 6) describes how boys avoid and denigrate singing in an attempt to uphold hegemonic masculinity, while Harrison (2007: 277) also details the social cost to boys of being involved with that which is perceived as feminine. Indeed, Ashley (2006: 194) bemoans the effeminate portrayal in the B*eano* of Walter the Softy – a 'soft boy foil to Dennis the Menace' who is often depicted singing *O for the Wings of a Dove.* Although male singing can – indeed, should - be a 'revered masculine behaviour' (Hall 2005: 6), there appears to exist amongst boys a clear aversion to engaging in an activity which is viewed as the

preserve of females.

To help ameliorate such a scenario, a proliferation of positive role models is recommended. Although Ashley (2006: 61) claims that the gender of a music teacher is irrelevant, he also recognises that younger boys do need young men and older boys to act as role models, and that a dearth thereof is a contributory factor in boys' lack of resilience regarding singing (2007: 61). Indeed, it is suggested that boys are 'more strongly influenced' by the gender of role models than girls (Bruce and Kemp 1993; in Hall 2005: 7) and Hall (2005: 17) points to the success of same-sex older peer modelling in regard to motivating boys to participate in singing activities.

Harrison (2007: 278) also champions the part role models can play in achieving such goals, yet it should be noted that the research of both Harrison (2007) and Hall (2005) was conducted in Australia, where different cultural imperatives may have been in effect. Indeed, it is suggested that many cultural differences between Australia and the UK exist, with Australia cited as a 'more masculine society' (Hobbs 2013). As such, it is possible that any effect a male role model had on the boys may have been more pronounced, though this is not to suggest that the strategy would not prove effective if replicated elsewhere.

In attempting to address the issue of boys viewing singing as a female activity, Wright (2012: 21) suggests that there is 'a pressing need for teachers to be aware of the sociological waters within which we swim'. Certainly, if too few boys are able to achieve their potential as a consequence of stereotyping (Harrison 2007: 278), then singing needs to be 're-packaged as an attractive option for boys' (Ashley 2006: 199) - it needs to be viewed as being as worthwhile an activity as sport (Ashley, in Owen 2009). Indeed, Harrison (2007: 276) notes that music receives diminished status in relation to sport, and it is recommended that any choir in which it is hoped boys will participate should be strategically timetabled so as not to clash with sports practice (Ashley, in Owen 2009). However, Green (1996: 53) warns that boys' musical behaviours and deeply   entrenched gendered differences cannot be changed simply by altering what is available to them. Despite this, logic dictates that removing any potential barriers to boys' participation in a choir is a sensible and necessary step.

Uninspiring song choice

If the aim is to increase boys' engagement within choirs, a further issue to address is that of repertoire. Ashley (2007: 61) reports boys' common complaints regarding the 'childishness' of what they are asked to sing, while songs typically sung in schools are frequently perceived as 'posh' or 'religious', and have a negative effect on boys (Welsh et al. 2008; Ashley, in   Morrison 2008). A potential solution may lie in Hall's suggestion (2005: 6) that a male-dominated contemporary music industry has contributed to boys' acceptance of certain styles, such as rock and rap, which could be used as a means of procuring their engagement in choirs. However, Dunbar-Hall (1996: 216) claims there is no accepted model for teaching such styles, while more recently – and perhaps more pertinently - Ashley (in Morrison 2008) champions the promotion of 'real' singing and not 'dodging the issue by falling back on gimmicks like rap'. Despite this, Gale (in Owen 2009) contends that capturing boys' imagination and interest is vital, with Jones and Robson (2008: 45) citing a rich song repertoire as integral to this.   Therefore, it could be argued that if engaging boys' interest in singing is the primary objective, providing a repertoire of varied, familiar, contemporary songs may be the springboard to achieving this – although it should be pointed out that familiarity with a song does not denote an ability to sing it (De Vries 2013: 384).

Boys are afraid of ridicule

It is also worth noting the impact that music and talent shows, such as '*The X Factor*', have had on singing in public. It is claimed that the inherent public humiliation displayed on such programmes has proved a destructive influence (Milne 2007; Ashley 2007), with boys particularly fearful of being heard by girls (Ashley, in BBC 2007) and ridiculed (Ashley 2006: 201). Although not all children will watch such programmes, nevertheless, their effects may well permeate into a cultural consciousness from which children are far from immune. To combat such a scenario, it is suggested that teachers must provide an environment free from girls' ridicule, in which boys are afforded dignity and pride (Punke 2009: 45), with group singing offering such securities (Ashley, in Milne 2007). While such views do not necessarily suggest the exclusion of girls, a certain

amount of teacher discretion is perhaps needed when providing opportunities for boys to sing, given that girls' participation in similar activities is not considered problematic.

Ownership and motivation

It would appear that providing boys with the motivation to join a choir is a key issue, with an intrinsic motivation – described as participating in an activity because it is 'inherently interesting and enjoyable' (Ryan and Deci 2000, in Freer 2009: 143) - believed to be of greatest importance. Although White (2002: 142) claims that intrinsic and external motivations rarely occur in isolation, Hallam (2001: 67) contends that it is intrinsic motivation which is necessary for sustained engagement. Indeed, White (2002: 148) forwards the view that such motivation is not just necessary for initial engagement, but 'an important component in a flourishing life'. The conundrum, then, is how to engender in boys an intrinsic motivation to sing.

A possible solution may lie in providing boys with ownership of song choice. Ownership, and its inherent promotion of autonomy, choice and responsibility, is claimed to reinforce motivation (Nixon et al. 1996; Brown 2001; Freer 2009), while it is further suggested that consulting children on their views and providing experiences meaningful to them result in effective learning (White 2002; Nixon et al. 1996). However, although Brooks (2003) points out that affording children ownership is not synonymous with a teacher abdicating responsibility, there exists a dichotomy between the amount of structure and freedom afforded to children. Indeed, Witchell (2001: 197) warns that too much freedom may result in 'incoherent musical outcomes at best and musical anarchy at worst'.

The role of the teacher in striking the right balance, then, should not be understated, with musical competence the area of most contention. Although many children in England reportedly enjoy 'excellent music teaching from excellent music teachers' (Henley 2011: 5), a wealth of recent cross-cultural literature points to inconsistent provision of an effective music education – with a teacher's lack of musical competence central to such claims (Young 2001; Ashley 2006; Ashley 2007; Harrison 2007; DfE 2011; De Vries 2013). Although Topping and Ehly (1998, in Hall 2005: 8) note that children can view a teacher as 'super competent' and 'too distant a mastery model', this is not to suggest that a teacher's musical skills are undesirable – indeed, quite the opposite is claimed (Hall 2005; Harrison 2007; Freer 2009).

However, while a lack of musical competence may impact on teachers' confidence to teach singing (Young 2001; Hallam 2010; Garvis 2012), it is worth noting the positive effect vocal programmes such as *Sing Up* have had on teachers' confidence (Henley 2011), as well as the effectiveness of working alongside music specialists (Ofsted 2009; Hallam 2010; Hallam 2010 ; Broomfield 2013). It is also worth considering, however, the view of McCormack and Healey (2008: 130) that instilling confidence in pupils is more important than a teacher's subject knowledge and ability. To this end, it is argued that displaying an enthusiasm for singing is preferable to having a 'perfect voice' (Jones and Robson 2008: 40). Indeed, Gilbert (2002: 37) claims that 'enthusiasm is contagious', with Ashley's suggestion (2007: 61) that boys' enthusiasm for singing is invariably a 'direct result' of the teacher's enthusiasm particularly pertinent. It is worth pointing out, however, that a teacher's enthusiasm and ability are unlikely to be unrelated commodities, and that the existence of one may denote or lead to the presence of the other.

The literature shows that, despite longstanding debate as to its educational merits, singing is claimed to offer a multitude of benefits. Much research, however, indicates boys' general lack of involvement in voluntary singing activities, with suggested reasons including perceived images of singing, uninspiring repertoire and fear of public ridicule. It is suggested that ameliorative measures may include the provision of positive role models, a rich and varied repertoire, and a safe, encouraging environment, while a sense of ownership may provide boys with the motivation to join a choir in the first instance.

Research Methodology and Methods

This research, conducted in a small primary school between November 2013 and January 2014, was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 attempted to unveil the existing attitudes and behaviours boys in a Year 5/6 class displayed towards singing, through observation, questionnaires and individual interviews. Phase 2 involved

the implementation of a voluntary boys-only lunchtime choir, in which the boys were afforded complete freedom of choice (within the realms of decency) of the songs they sang. The boys were observed during the lunchtime choir sessions (which ran for three days and culminated in a performance for their classmates), and interviewed as a group after each session. The observations and group interviews in Phase 2 were conducted in an attempt to investigate reasons behind boys' motivation to join and engage with a voluntary choir. In the interests of equality, the same was provided for the girls in Year 5/6, although this scenario was not the focus of the research, and therefore not subjected to analysis.

This research project was best served by adopting a qualitative approach. Given that the research was conducted in one Year 5/6 class, it was decided that the relatively small number of pupils would not generate sufficient quantitative data from which to draw any meaningful conclusions. Although initial questionnaires produced quantitative data (in terms of the proportion of boys within the class with particular views on singing, for example), such data merely served as the basis for qualitative research that attempted to address the underlying complexities quantitative research may not explain (Kincheloe 2012: 188). Indeed, a fundamental premise of qualitative research is not to highlight a particular social phenomenon, but to understand the subtle 'shifting organic elements' which underpin it (Burton and Bartlett 2009: 21).

The BGU Research Ethics Policy (Bishop Grosseteste University 2013) was adhered to at all times. Particular consideration was given to the confidentiality of participants and, in accordance with Section 27, pupils' names have been changed in order that their identities cannot be determined. As detailed in Section 18, parental/legal guardian consent for child(ren)'s participation was obtained prior to commencing research, along with the consent of the headteacher (Section 22). The children themselves were made aware that, although consent had been obtained for their involvement, their participation was entirely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any point (Section 19) without suffering any negative consequence.

Phase 1

Initial questionnaires

Initial questionnaires were distributed in an attempt to ascertain boys' existing attitudes towards singing, with the boys able to complete them anonymously and in their own time. Questionnaires can prove a cheap and relatively quick way of obtaining 'broad and rich' information (Bell 2012; Sharp 2009; Hopkins 2002) and the data produced offered some indication of the boys' views. However, Sharp (2009: 71) claims the validity and reliability of questionnaire responses may be difficult to establish, with McNiff et al. (2003: 122) also warning that a respondent's answers on any given day may vary according to any number of factors. Although the anonymity a questionnaire affords is argued to result in more honest and, therefore, valid answers (Schwalback 2003: 67), it is suggested that children can try to produce what they perceive to be 'right' answers (Hopkins 2002: 118), or that they can be 'fearful of answering candidly' (Koshy 2005: 89). Although the boys were instructed to answer as honestly as they could, such views must be taken into consideration when drawing any conclusions from questionnaire responses. A further limitation to questionnaires lies in the depth of their elicited responses, which can be restricted to the options or categories offered (Taber 2007; McNiff et al. 2003; Hopkins 2002). Although open questions can provide opportunity for fuller answers (Taber 2007: 149), it is perhaps unlikely that such answers would be forthcoming from a group of boys who are   generally reluctant writers.

Furthermore, Bell (2010: 12) suggests that although questionnaires provide answers to questions of who/what/where/when/how, they do not answer 'why' – a fundamental tenet of qualitative research. Added to which, Taber (2007: 150) contends that questionnaires reveal little about actual behaviour, only thoughts, beliefs and potentially inaccurate recollections. To this end, additional observations of the boys were made during a singing assembly, to determine whether the boys' behaviour matched the views they expressed in the questionnaires, while individual interviews were also conducted to afford the opportunity for greater elaboration on questionnaire responses. In this way, a triangulation of results could be argued to afford increased validity to any findings.

Initial observations

It is argued that observations of groups or individuals, and the close scrutiny such scenarios afford, can reveal behaviours and characteristics that may not have been otherwise possible to discover (Bell 2010; Koshy 2005). Central to such claims is the premise that observations should be conducted in the participants' naturalistic setting (Kincheloe 2012: 187), with the observer as unobtrusive as possible (Taber 2007: 150). Consequently, during the weekly singing assembly, I sat at the side of the hall, alongside the boys, so as to be able to observe their actions discreetly without overly-influencing them. However, Burton and Bartlett (2009: 23) warn of the difficulties in taking a 'detailed and dispassionate view' of a culture in which the observer is involved, especially when observation is centred on a topic about which they hold strong views (Bell 2010: 169). Indeed, prior knowledge of the boys may have led to particular expectations of, and assumptions about, their behaviour. Although knowing the boys could be argued to have been beneficial in terms of being able to interpret their actions, any such interpretation will always owe much to the observer's own perceptions (Bell 2010: 191), which may not be an accurate reflection of events. Therefore, Hopkins (2002: 71) advocates guarding against a 'natural tendency to move too quickly into judgement' and, to this end, I was careful to set any conclusions from my observations against the views offered by the boys themselves.

It was also important to be aware of Sharp's claims (2009: 92) that observations should not be selective. Although careless and unfocused observation can potentially lead to the 'over-simplification of complex situations' (Sharp 2009: 92), Koshy (2005: 103) suggests that significant details can be overlooked as a result of their not conforming to a pre-determined check list. Therefore, I felt it important to note and record each boy's most prominent behaviour, as opposed to looking for preconceived examples of possible conduct. Although it is possible that, as a result, more subtle behaviours may have been missed, it could be argued that more pronounced behaviours may indicate what a boy is happy to be seen to be doing, which perhaps offers rich insight into his pervading attitude.

However, a pertinent criticism of observation as a research method lies in the contention that people modify their behaviour when being observed (Koshy 2005; Sharp 2009). Clearly, it cannot be proved that behaviour in any observed scenario would be different under unobserved conditions due to the simple fact that variables cannot be controlled to such a degree that two situations (one of which would, of course, pass unobserved) would be identical in every regard. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to suggest that people may alter their behaviour to some extent as a result of being observed and, although I positioned myself discreetly so as to limit my influence on the boys' behaviour, this must be taken into account when considering any findings.

Initial interviews

The boys' views and attitudes on singing were also procured through individual interviews, for which five boys volunteered. It is suggested that interviews provide a greater degree of flexibility than questionnaires, with the opportunity to rephrase questions, clarify answers and prompt elaboration all cited benefits (McNiff et al. 2003; Koshy 2005; Taber 2007). Indeed, Bell (2010: 161) claims that interviews can 'put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses', while Walford (2001: 92) champions the generation of data which may not arise from more naturalistic situations – ethnographic studies, for example. Certainly, the interviews provided greater depth of response than the questionnaires. However, it is possible that the boys - aware that an interview is not a 'transitory conversation' (Walford 2001: 88) and that their answers would be subjected to later analysis – did not offer genuine responses.

Indeed, interviewees may not always answer truthfully (Walford 2001; Sharp 2009), with the artificiality of the situation inhibiting responses (Bell 2010: 167). With this in mind, I informed each boy prior to the interview that any views they expressed would remain anonymous, there were no 'right or wrong answers', and that I was interested exclusively in their honest opinions. While the positive relationships I had established with the boys may have gone some way to easing any pressure they may have felt under (Walford 2001: 89), nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that interviewees do not always offer natural responses (Taber 2007: 155).

Phase 2

Implementation of the choir

After having observed the boys' behaviour during a singing assembly, and listened to their views on singing, I implemented a voluntary, boys-only choir, which ran during lunchtime on three consecutive days in January 2014. This can be termed 'practitioner research', in which practitioners have control and ownership of the research, with the intended aim of 'improving rather than proving' (Campbell 2007) as an overarching approach (Dadds and Hart 2001; McNiff et al. 2003; Cain and Bernard 2012). Furthermore, it is recommended that practitioners approach the research of important and complex issues from a 'position of strength' and confidence (Dadds and Hart 2001: 148). Indeed, this research was conducted in an area I feel confident in, and the new knowledge gained in Phase 1 was subsequently able to be put to practical use in Phase 2, with the intention of improving boys' engagement with voluntary choirs. Indeed, the identification of a problem before implementing and evaluating an appropriate intervention is cited as being essential to effective 'action research' (Fox et al. 2007: 50).

Observations of choir

While running the lunchtime choir, I was able to observe the behaviour of the six boys who attended, and record any significant findings. Although Bell (2010: 191) warns that observations reveal only what people perceive to have happened, the criteria for my observations were designed to be as simplistic as possible to reduce the potential for misinterpretation. Therefore, I merely recorded who attended and whether or not they engaged in the singing, along with any particularly notable behaviour the boys displayed during the session. However, previously stated limitations to observation as a research method must still apply (Hopkins 2002; Koshy 2005; Bell 2010).

Group interviews after choir

After each choir session, the boys were interviewed as a group and encouraged to offer views on their experience. Although it is possible that any opinions the boys contributed were influenced by the presence of their peers, it could equally be argued that the more informal nature of a group discussion provided a more realistic setting than a one-to-one interview (Koshy 2005: 93), and afforded the boys greater freedom to express their views. Indeed, the boys were encouraged to be as forthright as possible, safe in the knowledge that there would be no negative repercussions to voicing their opinions. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility that the boys did not offer truthful responses (Walford 2001; Taber 2007; Sharp 2009).

Analysis

The initial questionnaire responses in Phase 1 were analysed with a view to establishing boys' existing attitudes towards singing. Although the overarching paradigm of this study is qualitative, Schwalbach (2003: 79) contends that it can be helpful to quantify some data. Indeed, the questionnaires were designed to indicate the prevalence (or otherwise) of particular attitudes, rather than to try and explain them, and the data generated lent itself well to quantitative presentation. Similarly, initial observations were conducted in order to note the proportion of boys engaging (or not) in singing during an assembly, rather than to understand their underlying motivations.

In Phase 2, the proportion of boys attending the voluntary lunchtime choir was recorded, which would qualify as quantitative data, albeit from a small sample. However, the main focus of Phase 2 was to observe the boys' behaviour during the sessions and examine their perceptions of the experience, in an attempt to establish the significant factors in determining their engagement. The interviews were transcribed and scanned in an attempt to identify any occurring themes and emergent patterns (Koshy 2005; Bell 2010). In so doing, a process of data reduction was employed, in which relevant data could be selected and analysed, in order for conclusions to be drawn (Schwalbach 2003; Koshy 2005). However, it should be noted that any such conclusions should be tentative, with a competent researcher 'maintaining openness and scepticism' (Hopkins 2002: 139).

As the research was conducted in a small and relatively monocultural primary school, any conclusions cannot be said to be generalisable to the wider population. Any conclusions must also come with the proviso that isolating suggested causes of boys' engagement was problematic, reflecting White's view (2002: 142) that motivation is not usually attributable to a single cause. Furthermore, Walford (2001: 89) states that external factors, such as the time of year and weather, can affect reliability. Given that phase (ii) of the research was conducted in January, when the boys' desire to be playing outside in the cold may not have been as strong as in warmer months, there exists the possibility that results may have been different had the research been conducted at a different time of year. Nevertheless, validity of this study is increased through triangulation of research methods (Burton and Bartlett 2009: 26).

Analysis of Results

After having analysed the results of the research into boys' engagement with singing, I arranged the findings into the following three themes:

- Context – the behaviours and attitudes boys in Year 5/6 display towards singing
- Conduit – the role of the teacher leading the singing
- Content – song choice and the impact of affording boys ownership thereof

Context: Boys don't engage with singing but claim to like it

The boys' responses to initial questionnaires and interviews, set alongside their behaviour during an observed singing assembly, appeared to indicate something of a paradox. Observations showed that 4 of the 9 boys were very engaged during the singing assembly, as evidenced by them singing enthusiastically and responding physically to the music, while an equal number appeared disengaged, not joining in the singing, with physical responses unrelated to the music. Despite the majority (8 out of 9) expressing positive attitudes towards singing, it did not appear to be an activity with which boys engaged in general, with only 2 of the 9 boys taking part in the choir. This was reinforced by interview comments such as: "I enjoy it. I don't do it all the time but I enjoy doing it." Such findings are consistent with much recent research highlighting boys' general lack of involvement in singing activities (Ashley 2006; Harrison 2007; Welch et al. 2008; Pugh 2008; Punke 2009; Freer 2009; Phillips 2012) despite a reported desire to do so (Ashley 2007: 59). Indeed, as indicated above, some of the boys did engage with singing activities, echoing the suggestions of Ashley (2006: 194) and Green (1996: 50) that the stereotypical image of the reluctant male singer does not represent males as a whole. Within this setting, then, it appeared that boys needed an appropriate vehicle within which they could engage with singing activities.

The implementation of a boys-only, voluntary choir, in which boys were afforded control of repertoire, appeared to precipitate their engagement, with 6 of a possible 7 boys attending. In accordance with recommendations of recent research (Harrison 2007; Ashley, in Owen 2009), the choir was scheduled not to clash with any sports practice - yet it cannot be stated whether such high proportion of uptake would have occurred had there been any such conflict. However, this resulted in the choir taking place at lunchtime, which meant that two of the boys who went home for lunch were unable to attend. Ensuring most of the Year 5/6 boys were able to attend the choir, however, did not result in the attendance of all boys. Indeed, the initial views of Lee ("I just don't like singing.") did not change and he was the only boy who chose not to engage with the choir throughout the research period. Such a scenario is congruent with the views of Green (1996: 53) that boys' behaviour with regard to singing cannot be altered merely by changing what is available to them. Indeed, one such boy, Colin, offered a resounding endorsement of the boys-only choir ("This choir rocks!"), while all six attendees claimed they would continue to attend. It is important to consider why this may have been.

Conduit: positive role models and positive relationships

The boys' responses to initial questionnaires suggested that, for some, a male singing teacher would be preferable to a female (4 out of 9), although it should be noted the majority stated no preference (5 out of 9).

While those boys, in expressing a preference for a male singing teacher, appear to endorse the suggested importance of positive male role models (Hall 2005; Ashley 2006), it could be argued that a positive relationship between child and teacher is of greater significance. Indeed, the vast majority of boys (7 out of 9) cited liking the singing leader as being one of the two most influential factors in deciding whether or not to join a choir. Having established positive relationships with the boys while on placement, the possibility that such relationships played a significant role in procuring the boys' attendance cannot be disregarded. Such findings correspond to those of Harrison (2007: 276), who also details the importance of strong relationships between pupil and music teacher. It is suggested that 'relationships between teachers and pupils are central to learning' (Hallam 2001: 67), and that once positive relationships have been established, children will 'leap through hoops of flame for you' (Gilbert 2002: 136). Though leaping through hoops of flame is not necessary for the aims of this research, boys' continued voluntary engagement with a choir is perhaps a more realistic and desirable by-product of building positive relationships.

It could certainly be argued that positive relationships are beneficial for providing the supportive environment recommended for eliciting boys' engagement with singing activities (Ashley, in Milne 2007; Punke 2009). For some of the boys, an exclusively male choir was part of such a supportive environment. Nicholas said: "No, don't ask the girls, I want it to be boys only. Girls are scary when there's loads of them." Similar views came from Clive who said that singing: "…makes me feel weird and nervous, especially when there are girls watching." The views of Clive and Nicholas that the presence of girls is detrimental to their confidence when singing are consistent with recent research (Ashley 2006; Ashley, in BBC 2007) and need consideration. Indeed, although most boys expressed a preference for singing in mixed gender groups (5 out of 9), with Oliver particularly enthusiastic about such a scenario ("I like the fact there are lots of girls!"), the opinions of Nicholas and Clive are unlikely to be anomalous within a wider context. Consequently, a supportive environment needs to be fostered, in which boys are given the confidence to sing, free from ridicule – regardless of whether girls are in attendance or not.

The notion of instilling boys with the confidence to sing is of critical importance. Alex expressed the view that he did not feel his singing was of sufficient quality to join a choir, yet, after having engaged in the supportive, encouraging environment of the boys-only choir, he was keen to perform for the rest of his class – albeit as part of a group and when standing at the back. It is also worth noting that gender was not an issue for Alex, who was primarily concerned with the security that singing in a larger group affords, regardless of gender. Indeed, Ashley (in Milne 2008) advocates group singing as a way of hiding 'insecurities and individual failings', although this is not to suggest that merely affording boys safety in numbers will provide them with sufficient impetus to engage with singing activities. Nevertheless, confidence was engendered amongst the more reluctant performers – a trait McCormack and Healey (2008: 130) cite as being of highest importance in determining boys' engagement with singing, and which a teacher's enthusiasm can also play an influential role in promoting (Gilbert 2002; Jones and Robson 2008).

A particularly revealing aspect of this research, however, was the importance boys attached to my musical background. When pressed on why they attended the boys-only choir and not the existing after-school choir, Colin and Charles cited my experience of having been the singer in a band as their motivation for joining. Such findings are arguably consistent with those of Ashley (2007: 61) who claims boys view singers in bands as 'cool'. However, while perceptions of what constitutes 'cool' are unlikely to remain constant – nor, indeed, consistent within any given group – the fact that the boys perceived me as having credibility is perhaps of greater significance. Indeed, contrary to the views of Topping and Ehly (1998, in Hall 2005: 8) that children can view a teacher as 'too distant a mastery model', my perceived musical competence was arguably highly influential in initiating, and maintaining, the boys' voluntary attendance.

Content: song choice is uninspiring

A further determinant of initiating boys' engagement with the choir was the repertoire of songs. As previously discussed, the boys initially expressed positive attitudes towards singing, yet later discussions revealed a negative attitude towards the songs they are expected to sing in school. Colin voiced a dislike of singing boring songs' during assembly, while Charles attributed his reluctance to engage with the after-school choir to an undesirable repertoire. Even John, a child who enjoys singing and engages with the after-school choir, expressed a strong dislike of choral music. Such a scenario appears to echo the findings of Welsh et al. (2008)

and Ashley (in Morrison 2008) that songs typically sung in schools do not meet with boys' approval, and result in their disengagement. Providing a desirable repertoire, then, would appear to represent an important factor in precipitating engagement. Indeed, responses to initial questionnaires revealed that the majority of boys cited a choir's repertoire as the chief motivation behind their joining or not, while a minority felt a teacher's capacity to deliver a variety of musical genres was of highest importance. Such views are entirely consistent with those of Gale (in Owen 2009) and Jones and Robson (2008: 45) that providing a rich repertoire of songs is vital for procuring boys' imagination and interest.

However, given that the boys-only choir ran for the relatively short period of three lunchtimes, providing a rich repertoire was perhaps unrealistic – indeed, the aim was to learn, rehearse and perform one song of the boys' choosing. Arguably more pertinent, then, was the relevance of the chosen song to the boys themselves. That the boys chose a song by *One Direction* is perhaps no coincidence – it is certainly in line with Hall's contention (2005: 6) that a male-dominated contemporary music industry has led to boys' acceptance of certain musical genres. While it cannot be generalised that all boys will conform to particular context-specific tastes, the boys in this study appeared happy to engage with the song they had chosen, singing enthusiastically and responding physically to the music. Although the singing was not of a high standard, the boys' engagement was evident. While De Vries (2013: 384) indeed warns that familiarity with a song does not translate into an ability to sing it, I was primarily concerned that the initial emphasis should be on the boys' engagement with, and enjoyment of, singing (Jones and Robson 2008: 40), rather than on the 'mastery of technique' which can lead to disengagement (Witchell 2001: 197).

It could be argued that affording boys the ownership of song choice proved a successful strategy in eliciting their involvement with the choir. When interviewed, Charles expressed his endorsement of such premise, while Alex also welcomed the opportunity to sing songs of personal preference. Such opinions appear to provide a compelling argument for affording children choice and ownership (Nixon et al. 1996; Brown 2001; White 2002; Brooks 2003; Freer 2009). However, a disadvantage of affording choice of repertoire lies in the necessarily consensual nature of such a scenario. Indeed, although John liked the song chosen by the group, he would prefer to have sung the song he nominated. It could reasonably be assumed that, given the relatively small number of boys involved in this study, such occurrences may be more frequent amongst a larger group. Therefore, it is worth considering whether the notion of complete ownership of song choice actually exists, with boys potentially having to exercise diplomacy and conformity to group consensus – though these are not undesirable skills.

It could further be argued, however, that central to the success of affording boys the ownership of repertoire was the musical competence of the teacher. In this scenario, the boys' choice of song needed to be transposed to a more appropriate key – one which would suit the register of the boys' voices – and I was able to make the necessary adjustments. Such actions are deemed important by Ashley (in Bloom 2010) and Gale (in Owen 2009), who highlight the need to cater for boys' voices. Although such claims are made with regard to older boys, whose voices are in the process of breaking, the notion of adapting material to suit the voices of any choir is relevant. Indeed, the adaptability of a teacher in being able to transpose contemporary songs to suit boys' voices is, arguably, crucial. Given the bulk of research outlining generalist teachers' lack of musical expertise (Young 2001; Ashley 2007; Harrison 2007; DfE 2011; De Vries 2013), it is debatable as to whether teachers are equipped with the skills to facilitate effectively boys' ownership of repertoire. Consequently, the need to work alongside   music specialists (Ofsted 2009; Hallam 2010; Broomfield 2013) may be fundamental to the success of any replication, although it is perhaps likely that any teacher leading a choir in this way would have some existing degree of musical expertise.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this research project was to examine the existing attitudes and behaviours that Year 5/6 boys at a small primary school displayed towards singing, and to assess the underlying motivation behind their engagementwith a voluntary choir. However, it must be stated that any conclusions or recommendations are context-specific and may not be applicable to a wider society – nationally or internationally.

My findings suggest that boys, in general, are willing to sing yet do not voluntarily do so. Indeed, given the existing opportunities within school for boys to sing, it would appear Ashley's claim (2006: 199) that singing needs to be 're-packaged as an attractive option for boys' still stands. To this end, it is recommended that boys are provided with the appropriate   forum to engage with singing. In this situation, the voluntary choir was boys-only and such a strategy appeared partly effective in initiating the involvement of some boys. However, it cannot be stated how these boys would have reacted had the choir been mixed-gender (such a scenario could perhaps form the basis of future research). Coupled to which, Ashley (2007: 61) remains unconvinced that single-sex choirs represent a viable solution, at least not in primary schools. Moreover, when taking into account equal opportunities legislation (DfE 2013: 8), a school would need to consider whether single-sex choirs foster an inclusive ethos.

In this scenario and putting gender issues to one side, affording the boys ownership of song choice appeared to be well-received. Certainly, the boys seemed to enjoy the control and responsibility of choosing and agreeing on the song they wanted to sing. As such, it could be argued that allowing boys the freedom to choose their own repertoire can be an effective strategy in eliciting their engagement with a choir. However, this must come with the caveat that, in larger groups especially, perhaps not all boys will feel that their choices hold currency. Consequently, a teacher may be required in such situations to act as mediator, to ensure as many song choices as possible are represented within the agreed repertoire.   Furthermore, it is also worth noting that facilitating the boys' choices requires some degree of musical expertise. Contemporary song choices featuring adult male voices may need to be transposed to be more sympathetic to boys' voices, with a sound understanding of music theory fundamental to this process. To this end, the involvement of music specialists may be necessary. Indeed, specialist input may also be required with regard to ensuring progression and appropriate levels of challenge. Boys may not select songs of increasing incremental difficulty, and a music specialist may be able to adapt their choices to incorporate more complex arrangements as necessary.

Although affording ownership of song choice appeared to be a successful strategy in procuring the boys' involvement in the choir, it is unlikely that this alone was the reason for their engagement. Indeed, the provision of a supportive, ridicule-free environment, in which boys were able to gain the confidence to sing with pride in front of their peers (Ashley 2006; Punke 2009), was conducive to the choir's success, with such a scenario wholly advisable for future replication. Equally, it would appear that the musical competence and consequent perceived credibility of the choirmaster may also be significant factors in determining boys' engagement with a choir.

However, it could be argued that central to the success of this choir were the positive relationships I had previously established with the Year 5/6 boys over the course of my placement. Quite simply, had I not been known to the boys, in the absence of positive relationships, it is perhaps unlikely they would have attended the choir in the first instance – although such claims must be qualified by the non-attendance of Lee, with whom I had also established a positive relationship. Nonetheless, although a musically competent teacher, who affords ownership of song choice in a supportive environment, is not in itself an undesirable scenario, any such factors could be rendered meaningless without the ability to form, establish and maintain positive relationships with children. Indeed, as with many educational issues, the relationship between teacher and pupil is pivotal (Hallam 2001; Gilbert 2002). Therefore, if boys are to profit from the reported abundance of benefits singing offers (discussed in the literature review), it would appear that positive relationships play the predominant role in procuring their crucial initial engagement. Indeed, such relationships can be influential in the recommended 're-packaging of singing' (Ashley 2006: 199) as an acceptable, desirable and worthwhile activity for boys. To capitalise on the progress made in this regard thus far, it is recommended that a choir is continued by the school's existing music specialist – with whom the boys have positive relationships - with ownership of song choice afforded to the boys. Further research is also required into alternative strategies for procuring the engagement of those boys who, despite positive relationships with the choirmaster, did not attend the choir.

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