"Inclusion – That word!" Examining some of the tensions in supporting pupils experiencing Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

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This paper explores issues around stigmatisation and labelling as they pertain to pupils with SEBD. The paper draws upon an evaluative case study conducted in two Scottish Local Authorities of the implementation of Support Groups and examines how the approach was experienced by pupils who participated within the intervention, drawing from a range of accounts. The study was implemented in upper Primary (aged 10 -12) and lower Secondary (aged 12- 14). It is principally qualitative and draws upon data generated from open-questionnaires, interviews and Focus Group discussions. Pupil responses to intervention were largely positive but there was evidence that a minority of children had experienced the intervention as stigmatising. Variables relating to the establishment of trusting and respectful relationships within the group; partnerships with parents; professional development for staff; and the adoption of a whole school approach emerged as key variables in determining how pupils experienced the intervention.

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Introduction

"Inclusion – that word!" Whilst with regard to (Social), Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties/Needs (SEBD/N)/EBD/BESD[2] the expectation might be that the above words would have been expressed by the many teachers who perceive children in the aforementioned group principally in relation to the disruption which they present to other children's learning, this was not the case. This was an expression of frustration by a highly committed teacher who struggled with the perception of some teachers that any attempt to support pupils outwith the mainstream classroom, even for short periods of time, was regarded as exclusionary, even although the long-term goal of such work was to enable pupils to be able to participate more fully academically and socially within learning and the life of the school and, ultimately, in society at large. Yet, the same teachers would regularly place children in corridors when they misbehaved and separate them from their peers during lunchtime and the same schools would exclude pupils from 'Golden Time' and other 'earned rewards' in the name of promoting positive behaviour but, after all, this was 'inclusion'. This is representative of very muddled thinking which has the potential to do great harm and a lack of a common understanding of what inclusive practice constitutes, the latter of which is frequently alluded to within the literature (Slee 2012).

In any intervention to support children and young people who may be perceived as having Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Additional Support Needs (ASN) (Scottish context) it can be assumed that the desired outcome is intended to be beneficial to the child or young person in question. However, a dilemma for educators is that the very act of identifying a child as having SEN/ASN and the provision of additional support may carry with it the attendant risks of labelling and stigmatisation. Yet, if educators, concerned about the potential negative effects of such, withhold from children therapies and interventions which could potentially be of benefit to them the risks posed to children could be even greater (Kaufmann 2005, 2012). The implication of the above is that educators and other professionals with whom they engage have to make highly complex decisions in which the wellbeing of the child is paramount, recognising that it is a matter of fine judgement. The difficulty for those making these judgements is that it is very difficult to predict how a child may respond

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[2] From this point onwards, referred to as SEBD. Within the Scottish context both SEBD and SEBN are used. 'D' within the USA refers to 'disorders'.

to intervention and it is also difficult to ascertain retrospectively what the outcomes might have been for the child if intervention had not taken place. The premise of this paper is that, through developing a deeper understanding of how children experience the process of being identified as being in need of additional support and the provision of it, educationalists and practitioners may come to a deeper understanding of how to manage the process such that potential negative effects can be minimised.

This is particularly of the essence within the context of Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) in which simplistic explanations are often forwarded, locating the problem as either residing in inadequacies within the child (MacLeod 2006) or in parenting (Araújo 2005) without examining the wider social and political context in which the child and family operate, including schooling (Slee 2012), leading to a discriminatory and stigmatising agenda. Whilst this paper does not restrict its discussion to the group of children who have been identified as 'having' SEBD, few studies examine or explore how children within this specific group experience intervention and whether indeed it does lead to a sense of stigmatisation. Whilst there has been some examination of the pupils' perceptions of their schooling, there had been little focus upon their experience of having been categorised or labelled (MacLeod 2012).

This paper will therefore focus upon how participation within a group-work intervention (Support Groups), designed and developed by the author to support children perceived as 'having' SEBD (or at risk of developing it), was experienced by the children participating within it and what the outcomes were for them.

Background to the study

The study is built upon a previous case study (Bassey 1999) conducted within a single setting which focussed upon the evaluation of Support Groups (Mowat 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c and 2011). The aims of the study were to evaluate the efficacy of the approach and to identify variables that had impacted upon pupil outcomes as a means of fostering understanding of inclusive practice for pupils experiencing SEBD. On completion of this study, a research and development project to extend the approach into two Scottish Local Authorities and to evaluate its implementation was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The Support Group Approach and its implementation

The SG approach is predicated upon an ability rather than a deficit perspective of the child. Such an approach adopts a pedagogical approach which 'complements the skills, abilities and knowledge that children already have and provides a context in which they can be developed in collaboration with others' (Head, 2014, 96). Head allies the approach with emerging complementary pedagogical approaches towards supporting children experiencing SEBD which emphasise the importance of relationships founded on trust and respect; which value children's own experiences, thoughts and beliefs; in which the goal is humanistic and in which there is a focus upon pupil autonomy, emotional self-regulation and integrity.

The focus of the programme is upon the development of intrapersonal (understanding of self) and interpersonal (understanding of others) intelligences (Gardner 1993) such that pupils can come to a deeper understanding of their interpersonal relationships and the contexts in which they find themselves, enabling them to make informed choices, to grow in empathy and to develop more positive dispositions towards learning, leading to sustainable change.

Staff participating within the study (Support Group Leaders and Cluster Leaders, the latter of whom were responsible for the smooth running of groups within their cluster of schools) received four days of In-service training and guidance was offered to schools about the nomination process. Materials were provided to schools (leaflets and powerpoint presentations) to facilitate the sharing of information about the programme with staff, pupils and parents and it was advised that both pupils and parents should be consulted fully about participation prior to seeking informed consent. A standard letter prepared by the research team (which could be customised by the school) was issued to parents of pupils who had been selected for intervention inviting them to attend either an individual consultation with the Support Group Leader or an information event at which pupils were also welcome. This approach was adopted to allay the fears and concerns of parents and pupils and all consent forms were returned to the research team.

Pupils were nominated by Pastoral Care teachers (Secondary) and class teachers (Primary) in consultation with the wider staff, senior management and Support Group Leaders. A nomination form, setting out the criteria for nomination (to follow) and asking the nominating teacher to provide a reason for the nomination and

to explain what they hoped the child would gain from participation, was used to support the nomination process. The criteria for inclusion within the programme were:

1. The child was experiencing (or showing early signs of) difficulty in coping with the norms of school life.
2. It was felt that the programme could be beneficial to the child.

Pastoral Care and class teachers were asked to provide a reason for the nomination and to explain what they hoped the child would gain from participation. Participating children were drawn from Primary 6 and 7 (ages 10 -12) and Secondary 2 (age 13-14). The programme extended over sixteen one hour sessions with pupils being extracted from class after consultation with school staff had taken place.

It should be recognised that participation within a Support Group poses significant challenges for both staff and pupils. In gaining a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with others, pupils may have to confront difficult truths about themselves and it is the role of the Support Group Leader to support them through this journey.

A Focus upon stigmatisation and labelling

It should be recognized that stigmatisation can arise from a wide range of circumstances (Dyson and Kozleski 2008, cited in Slee 2012; Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Riddick 2012; Skovlund 2013) but, for the purposes of this discussion, the principal focus will be upon labelling, whether formal or informal. The discussion initially explores the nature of labelling and the process by which it comes about before examining the functions which are forwarded for its use. It then explores how labelling exists within a socio-cultural and political context and serves to stigmatise specific groups, playing a significant role in the construction of identities. Finally, there is a brief discussion as to how the effects of labelling can be ameliorated.

What is labelling and how does it come about?

Examined broadly, labelling (which is a form of classification) is part of a natural process by which we make sense of our world. Without the capacity to bring together disparate pieces of information to form a whole (walls + windows + doors = house) the mind would be overwhelmed with information of which it could make little sense.

Such classification enables the conversion of working memory into long-term memory, enabling its retrieval at a later point (Wolfe 2001), a process which Gillibrand, Lam, and O'Donnell (2011, 145) liken to a filing system. Thus classification facilitates learning. Labelling is also intrinsic to how we efficiently and effectively communicate with each other (Wilson 2007, cited in Riddick 2012).

The labelling of children by teachers lies on a continuum from the informal categories, often implicit, which are used on a day-to-day basis within the classroom, to the categorisation of children's needs arising from formal processes and involving a range of professionals in gathering and analysing data about the child (Riddick 2012, 25-26). Some forms of informal labelling upon which teachers draw can have positive or negative effects depending upon the spirit in which they are applied (26) which suggests that a more nuanced understanding of labelling is required: one which recognises that labelling can have positive, negative or ambiguous outcomes (34).

Labels are social and cultural artifacts (Armstrong and Hallet 2012). It is the attributions and interpretations of the label which render them as either good, bad or neutral and these interpretations exist within an existing culture, place and time (and set of cultural norms and values representative of the aforementioned) which frame these understandings. Riddick draws from Goffman (1963) and Corigan (2006) to argue that it is the underlying negative attitudes within society which lead to stigmatisation rather than the label per se (Riddick 2012).

In examining provision for children with SEN internationally, Rix et al. (2013) identified that there was no shared understanding or commonalities in practice between different countries:

> No two countries shared a view about who needs support, the nature of the support they provided or the nature of an appropriate curriculum. No two countries had the same mechanisms for assessment, resource distribution, in-class support or support service provision. (14)

Thus, processes, systems and structures that appear on the surface to be rational and objective may be highly subjective. This reproduces itself at a local level in which different local authorities/councils/regions or even individual schools may interpret and enact national policy differently (Allan 2013; Squires 2012), often influenced by budgetary constraints, leading to a 'postcode lottery'.

The above presents educators with a very difficult dilemma. If it is argued that the use of formal labels should be discouraged, it is very likely that people will create

their own informal categorisations around which it may be even more difficult to create an inclusive discourse and to create shared understandings of how best to support children and young people, even allowing for the multiple and often conflicting understandings around concepts such as inclusion and what constitutes inclusive education/schooling. The issues then become ones of fitness for purpose (does the label act to facilitate, or as a barrier to, inclusion?) and process (how can an inclusive and responsive approach be adopted?). Riddick (2012) poses a series of questions such as, 'Will the label in question lead to a better understanding of the child's needs?' 'Will the label help the wider community to have a more positive and understanding view of their differences/difficulties?' (29)

More fundamentally, the questions arise as to how we can create a tolerant, caring and compassionate society in which people are not discriminated against because they are in any way different from the norm (recognising that this concept, in itself, is contentious); and, through developing our knowledge and understanding of how children and young people experience the act of being identified as being in need of additional support (irrespective of whether a formal label is applied) and the provision of such support, how do we create inclusive school environments such that children and young people can be affirmed, have a sense of belonging, can play a valued role in the school community and can learn in an environment which is attuned to their needs? Squires (2012) asks us to 'imagine a different world - one that values all human beings whatever their abilities and treats all children with respect as learners' and which accommodates the needs of all learners, no matter their starting point. (24)

Exploring the function of labels more fully

Facilitating understanding and action

Within the literature, commentators (Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Riddick 2012; Kaufmann 2012) describe how labels can serve a range of functions, primarily related to explanations for the problem, facilitating understanding which then acts as a basis for action.

Serving a social and inclusive function

Riddick (2012) identifies a range of positive functions which labels can play from enabling those with similar types of difference to develop their own culture and advocacy groups; to facilitating self-understanding and empowerment; and acting as a mediator to promote greater tolerance and understanding within the community. (27)

Acting to differentiate between different categories of need and as a gateway to resources

Reindal (2008, 137) forwards the view that classification 'serves to understand differences between pupils and to rationalise the distribution of resources.' (137), a perspective shared by Warnock (2005). Other commentators argue that the label serves as a doorway to additional resources which otherwise might be denied the child (Bilton and Cooper 2012; Hjörne and Säljö 2012).

Labels understood as existing within a socio-cultural context

As previously argued, labels exist within a cultural and historical context and reflect those contexts. Thus the discourse has changed from the use of labels such as 'imbecile' to labels such as autistic spectrum disorders. However, the IMD (Individual, Medical and Deficit) model still prevails (Hjörne and Säljö 2012). The negative attitudes of practitioners towards children experiencing SEBD arise through poor understanding of what constitutes SEBD and of what might constitute typical/a-typical child development. (Armstrong and Hallet 2012, 79, drawing from Avramidis et al. 2000, Cooper 2008, and Mowat 2009). Children presenting with SEBD are often measured against unexamined norms, related to 'socio-cultural constructs around what is considered as normal or abnormal repertoire for children.' (79, citing Cooper 2008 and Grieve 2009). Such constructs arise from psychopathologising discourses which categorise children as 'disorderly' (Graham 2008) or 'bad, sad, or mad' (MacLeod 2006 & 2012). (Armstrong and Hallet 2012, 79; Mowat 2010a & b)

Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) also posit that 'challenging behaviour is a social construct', arising from the 'social environments and relationships within the classroom' (508) and observe that teachers use terms such as 'serious misconduct', 'aggressive behaviour' routinely in an unexamined way (509-10). Such discourses 'privilege control and discipline over learning and participation of all students in the classroom' (510), leading to a 'them and us' culture (516) with *them* being regarded as somehow 'lesser'.

Labels as fulfilling a political function

Slee (2012) and Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006) draw attention to the detrimental influence which the standards agenda exerts upon inclusive practice within schools: '… in a risk averse culture, it becomes attractive to label children who threaten the standards agenda, the label serving as a means of justifying additional support or exemption from examination statistics.' (Slee 2012, 28) Resources are directed towards those children who fall just short of national targets rather than those children who are in most need of support (Squires 2012, 21).

The constraints placed upon schools as public institutions, which have to work effectively and efficiently, create an emphasis upon systems, structures, accountability, rules and regulations which leads to a focus upon control and conformity rather than upon community, having the effect of either creating or exacerbating the difficulties which children may experience. A range of commentators argue for a radical restructuring of schools and an examination of the social relationships within them if they are to become inclusive environments (Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006; Riddell and McCluskey 2012; Slee 2012).

Labels serving to stigmatise and stereotype specific groups

Slee (2012) draws from a range of commentators who express concern about the disproportionate number of pupils from minority ethnic groups represented in official statistics. Within the UK and USA contexts, those groups who, on a wide range of social indicators, perform poorly – 'health, employment, income, encounters with the penal system' (23) - and who generally perform less well in school are more likely to be classified as having SEN (Dyson and Kozleski 2008, 170-1 cited in Slee 2012, 23). Slee (2012) highlights four principal concerns. *Net-widening* refers to the tendency for increasing numbers of children to be diagnosed as having a range of disorders and directed towards alternative provision or programmes. *Accelerated disablement* is the 'enhancement' of the difficulties which children experience in order to be able to gain access to additional resources. *System segmentation and atomisation* refers to the direction of children towards the 'therapeutic margins' with the concordant movement of resources away from the centre and attention away from the need for system reform

which could potentially benefit all children. *School-to-prison pipeline* is the tendency for pupils diagnosed with behavioural disorders to make the transition from school to the penal system. (24)

Within the Scottish context, children in poverty, children who are Looked After and Accommodated (LAAC), children with an ASN and boys are over-represented in government statistics for school exclusions (Scottish Government 2011). Araújo (2005) is concerned that the situating of 'the problem' of indiscipline within families and children coupled with the deficit approach towards disadvantaged communities and families makes it more likely that children coming from these backgrounds will be perceived as likely to misbehave and, therefore, stereotyped as such. Further, the discourse within official documentation and policy situates the problem as being more one of how *the disrupters* affect *the disrupted* and upon the economic costs of social exclusion rather than upon meeting the needs of this specific group.

Armstrong and Hallett (2012) identify that teachers hold a range of perceptions of children with SEBD ranging from a *chronic disposition towards failure* (arising from personal circumstances pertinent to the child) to the positioning of the problem as being related to *educational practice and policy* which serve to disable the child (82-84). The authors conclude that 'many educators in the UK appear to be conceptually and emotionally under-equipped to support children and young people presenting SEBD,' highlighting the need for professional development, 'avoiding the tendency toward a 'chronic predisposition' view of a child or young person.' (85)

Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) observe: 'In schools teachers are the ones with power and knowledge and who … regulate rules and students' behaviours depending on the available discourses.' (511) Teachers locate the problem as 'the child', rather than the problem behaviour, leading to exclusionary practices. Araújo (2005) observes that teachers are often portrayed as the victims of indiscipline that stems from the home, failing to take cognisance of the role which teachers and schools can play in creating indiscipline in the first instance (247).

Labelling and the construction of identities

A major concern highlighted by a range of authors is the impact of the label upon

others' perceptions of the child and how this impacts negatively upon the child's sense of identity. The child comes to have a new identity conferred by the 'label' – the label transcends beyond its initial function to take on a much broader meaning:

> … categories are constitutive of the construction of identities, and they will be used for many purposes outside the boundaries of their alleged medical definitions. Thus, the diagnosis operates as a kind of filter through which everyone involved—the child, the parents, teachers, classmates and others—interpret and understand different behaviors and problems. (Hjörne and Säljö 2012, 42)

The child comes to take on the characteristics ascribed to the label – the label becomes a shortcut to shared understandings, thus there is no need to explore the specific circumstances pertinent to the child as the label explains it all. Discussion is framed around understandings of the 'problem child' but the expectations of what constitutes 'normal behaviour' are taken for granted and left unexamined (Hjörne and Säljö 2012). Skovlund (2013) identified that children had internalised the labels which had been attached to them and used them as a means of understanding their 'conditions', limiting their aspirations.

Riley and Rustique-Forester (2002) draw from the voices of disaffected pupils to examine their experience of schooling. For these pupils, 'learning was a fragmented, inconsistent and interrupted experience'. Poor relationships and a lack of communication between staff and pupils led to a sense of alienation within the pupils – they were 'bottom of the pile'. Referral to a behaviour unit, which was described as 'a good place to sleep', did nothing to address the problem (27). Once pupils had descended into a spiral of bad behaviour and exclusion, their prospects were bleak and there was no return – 'they were labelled as failures' and perceived themselves as such (31).

Macleod (2012) describes the dominant discourse as being that children and young people, through the act of having been removed from mainstream provision, will experience this as stigmatising (Macleod 2012, 69). However, contrary to expectation, it wasn't the label itself that was troubling to pupils but difficulties experienced in relationships with teachers in mainstream classrooms (Jahnukainen 2001, cited in Macleod 2012):

> … pupils are acutely aware of how they are perceived by teachers and … this matters to them. It is interesting that very few pupils in mainstream talk about the consequences of a formal 'label', of having an Individual Education Plan or being identified in some other way as 'different'. It would appear that concern about formally 'naming' the difficulty that a child is experiencing because of the risk of stigmatising them does not generate the

problems for the pupil that might be imagined. (Macleod 2012, 71)

MacLeod infers that it is how pupils are treated which is of the essence: '..it is not the act of being labelled that in itself appears to be most significant, but the way in which it is applied, how it is used, by whom and the quality of the relationship between the labeller and the labelled.' (Macleod 2012, 72-73), confirming Riddock's assertion that it is the underlying discriminatory attitudes which are the principal source of the problem rather than the label itself.

Ameliorating the effects of labelling

A theme to emerge within the literature is that the positive affirmation of the child by the adult (Graham and Harwood 2011) and the act of building trusting relationships with children can serve to help teachers to see 'beyond the label'. Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2012) observe that relationship building, characterised by 'trusting, communicating and listening' is the true path to enabling pupils to make real changes (522). Macleod (2012) and Mowat (2010) draw from Cooper (1995) to explore how, through a process of resignification (the mirror-image of the process through which children take on negative identities), fostered through positive relationships with a caring and affirming adult, children and young people can begin to see themselves in a more positive light and take on a more positive identity.

Summary

Labelling is a natural process which facilitates meaning making, learning and communication. It is the attributions and interpretations which people make of the label which may render it as being positive, negative or neutral in effect. The negative attributions of the label are symbolic of underlying prejudices present within society. Whilst the systems and processes by which children and young people come to be identified as 'having' SEN/ASN may appear to be rational, inconsistencies internationally, nationally and at the local level render this not to be case. What is important with regard to the identification of need (and the labelling which often accompanies it) is to give consideration to fitness for purpose and process such that potential detrimental effects can be minimised and inclusive practice promoted.

A range of commentators recognise that labels can play a valuable function, facilitating understanding and action; serving a social and inclusive function; and acting to differentiate between different categories of need and as a gateway to resources.

Labels exist within a social-cultural and political context and reflect these contexts, serving to marginalise children and families. Stereotypical attributions of families in poverty lead to exclusionary practices but insufficient attention is paid to the social factors which create these conditions. Teacher's attributions of children experiencing SEBD vary significantly and many teachers are ill-prepared to support such children.

The process of labelling impacts negatively upon children's sense of identity but MacLeod (2012) argues that it is how the label is applied and the quality of the relationship between the 'labeller' and the 'labelled' which is of the essence. The forming of trusting, respectful and caring relationships between adults and children can help children to form more positive identities mitigating the potentially negative effects of the label.

Methodology

Study design

The study was conducted in two Local Authorities in Scotland across six clusters of schools. Thirty-two Support Group/Cluster Leaders participated within the project. The sixty-three Support Group pupils within the study were distributed across three phased projects – the Primary 6 project (30%), the Secondary 2 (S2) project (41%) and the Transition project (spanning Pr7 and S1) (29%).

It is an evaluative case study (Bassey 1999), drawing upon the principles of Action Research (Mills 2007 and Somekh 2006). An interpretivist paradigm was considered to be most apt, enabling phenomena to be explored in depth: '… it is only through interpreting the world do we come to know anything about it.' (Denscombe 2010). The study is therefore principally qualitative but adopted a mixed-methods approach to establish benchmarks and measure pupil progress on a range of indicators such as pupil attendance.

Aims of the study

The aims of the study were:

- To evaluate the efficacy of the approach through examination of pupil outcomes
- To identify variables which had impacted upon pupil outcomes
- To examine issues pertaining to pedagogy, transitions and inclusion
- To examine issues pertaining to change management and sustainability.

Ethics

The study was guided by ethical principles as set out in Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) Guidelines 2005 and was scrutinised by the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation and the University's ethics committee. Informed consent was sought of all participants within the study and parents of participating pupils and participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice and of their rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

Methods

Quantitative data relating to attendance and behaviour were gathered and all pupils completed a Semantic differential questionnaire both pre- and post-intervention which measured their perceptions of themselves on a range of indicators relating to behaviour, inter-personal relationships, empathy, self-esteem and dispositions towards learning.

Qualitative data, focusing principally upon pupil outcomes, were gathered by means of open questionnaires. These were issued to a sample of pupils (N = 17), their parents, Pastoral Care Teachers, SG Leaders and a purposive sample of their class teachers. In total, sixty-two questionnaires were completed.

In addition, in-depth interviews, using a semi-structured interview schedule (Table 1), were conducted with six case study pupils (one from each cluster) and their related stakeholders (as identified above) at the end of the intervention and further

interviews took place a year later with the pupil and Support Group Leader. The interviews focused upon similar themes but enabled them to be explored in greater depth. This constituted, in total, thirty-seven interviews of around 40 minutes duration.

A template was used to aid the design of questionnaires and interview schedules such that the language used and form in which the question was asked could be customised for different stakeholder groups (Table 1). The research tools were piloted with pupils (and their related stakeholders) who were not part of the sample (to follow) or who were in support groups additional to the study (which arose when clusters or schools elected to run additional groups). Few modifications were required to the research tools.

Table 1. Extract from template from Interview Schedules

Sg Leader	Pupil	Parent	Pastoral Care/Class Teacher
Q.1 What were your initial thoughts/feelings/ considerations about XXX joining the Support Group? *Did anything worry or concern you?* *Tell me more.*	Q.1 How did you feel about being invited to join the Support Group? *Did anything worry or concern you?* *Why did you feel that way?* *Why do think that was?* *Tell me more.*	Q.1 How did you feel about XXX being invited to join the Support Group? *As for pupil*	Q.1 What were your initial thoughts/feelings/ considerations about XXX joining the Support Group? *As for SG Leader*

At the end of intervention, SG Leaders conducted group and individual de-briefing sessions with pupils which then informed the six Focus Group discussions which took place with SG Leaders (N = 32). The discussions focused upon all four aims as described above. Templates were used to structure the Focus Group discussions (Table 2). The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Table 2. Extract from template to structure Focus Group discussion

What things would you consider have made a difference to pupil outcome? [Brainstorm and discussion]	
Positive/About the Approach	**Negative/About the Approach**
Able to adjust pace to accommodate needs of children Brings a range of pupils with different needs together Achievable targets	Longer intervention period required The degree and demands of monitoring required (especially if more than one pupil in a class)

Pupils are engaged	
Inclusive approach – linking to values and beliefs	
Flexible to met range of needs	
Children having confidence to disclose information about themselves	
Helps build trust and relationships with pupils and parents	
Target setting – clear positives	
Structured approach	
Time afforded to pupils	
Being listened to	
Safe environment	
Positive/External to the Approach	**Negative/External to the Approach**
Expertise and commitment of Support Group Leaders	Interruptions to programme
Leadership of Cluster Leader	Time factor – timetabling
Facilitation of the project within the school	Partnerships with parents – needs more work in this area
	Influence of home/external issues/factors

Sampling method

Sampling was conducted via a stratified, multi-phase sampling method. It was *stratified* in that pupils were selected based upon:

1. The cluster to which the pupil belonged
2. The Support Group to which the pupil belonged
3. The gender of the pupil
4. The degree of concern that had been expressed about the pupil at the nomination stage.

However, it was also *multi-phased* in that the above also represented a series of phases through which the selection of pupils was gradually refined.

Conduct of interviews and Focus Group Discussions

For reasons of efficiency and economy, all interviews and Focus Group discussions were conducted on school premises. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

Taking account of the age of participants and the demands upon teachers, rather than return lengthy transcriptions for verification, at the end of the response to each question, the interviewer paraphrased the response back to the interviewee and asked whether it was a true reflection upon what had been said. These passages were excluded from the analysis (but helped to inform it).

Analysis of data

The data were analysed using thematic analysis (King and Horrocks 2010) using a bottom-up approach. Descriptive comments were placed in the margin of each transcript and these were then translated into *descriptive codes*. The *descriptive codes* were then placed onto a data-base and sorted and clustered such that *analytical codes* could be generated. This was a complex process and the codes were refined on many occasions before the *analytical codes* were sorted and clustered and *over-arching themes* developed. In parallel to this, the transcripts were also entered onto NVivo (an electronic tool to support data analysis) to enable comparisons to be made. Reliability was assured through initial moderation exercises carried out by the Research team and collaborative coding (Table 3).

Table 3. Exemplification of coding process

Code	Response	Descriptive Code	Analytical Code	RQ
IS2g	At first I was uncertain about the group. I didn't understand why I had been picked. It took quite a long time to explain but after it had been explained to me I did understand why I was there because initially I thought it was because my behaviour was too bad, but it wasn't, it was just, like, to 'nip it in the bud'. …	Initial uncertainty about participation. Initial lack of understanding of reasons for nomination to Support Group. Gained understanding as to reasons for nomination to Support Group. Preventative reasons for nomination.	Initial response to nomination. Communication issues. Gaining insight. Reasons for nomination.	RQ1

All Focus Group discussions, once written up, were returned to each cluster for verification and each case study was presented as a powerpoint presentation to participating staff, suitably anonymised.

Findings

The findings and discussion will focus principally upon how the six case study pupils experienced the intervention and its impact upon them, and the findings derived from the six Focus Group discussions. Two of the case study pupils – Jennifer and Jack – participated within the S2 project; one – David – within the Transition project and three – Jane, Kate and Martin – within the Pr6 project[3].

Brief profiles of the case study pupils

Jennifer was nominated for preventative reasons. She is a young carer who helps to look after her father who is disabled. Her relationship with her stepmother is strained. Whilst she was considered to be an academic girl who was achieving well at school, she could have difficulty in her relationships and was considered to be 'bolshie' (a 'guid' Scots word for belligerent).

Jack was considered to be under-achieving and had not made a smooth transition to Secondary school. He had been temporarily excluded from school in S1.

David had presented in early Primary school as being highly problematic and at risk of exclusion. Whilst his behaviour had improved, he was considered at risk on transition to Secondary school. He was very protective of his family and reacted aggressively to taunting about them.

Jane is one of six siblings who was considered to be at risk of under-achieving and presented with low-level indiscipline. Mum worked and found it difficult to find time to spend with the children, and the police had been involved in resolving neighbourhood disputes.

Kate was regarded as an outgoing, friendly girl but who was presenting with low-level disruptive behaviour. She came from an exceedingly dysfunctional home. Her elder sister was a school refuser and her brother was placed in a List D school for pupils with SEBD and had subsequently been in trouble with the police. Family relationships were complex and difficult.

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[3] All names are pseudonyms

Martin lives with his Mum who had separated from his father. As a child he spent considerable periods of time in hospital with kidney disease and had been diagnosed with ADHD for which he was on medication.

Response to intervention

A consistent pattern of response emerged across the six case studies. Initially, pupils were anxious about the invitation to participate within a Support Group (SG): 'I was a bit shocked. Didn't know what it was for a start. Wasn't too sure about it.' (Jack) This was coupled with a fear of 'getting into trouble' and of being branded as a 'trouble-maker'. One pupil talked about the negative connotations of behaviour support: 'Because, just like the name of it. If you really think about it, 'Support Group', you just think, "Support for behaviour, for bad ones." You say, "Oh, oh."' (David)

A few pupils (and their parents) were initially confused about why the pupil had been selected: 'I never thought of myself as badly behaved. I mean, yeah, I would carry on with my friends but I would always get my work done and stuff.' (Jennifer); 'And I was just wondering, like, why she'd picked Kate, ken. Is there something wrong wi' Kate that she'd picked Kate?' (Kate's Mum)

Martin's mother had initially been worried about her son being stigmatised but this fear had proved to be groundless: 'I was worried it was going tae single him out. … at the moment, that one's completely unfounded.' None of the case study pupils reported any adverse reactions from other pupils to their participation within the intervention.

In all cases, the Cluster Leader and/or SG Leader played an important role in allaying the fears of both pupils and parents and persuading them that the SG would be of value to them: '… So really all I tried to do was be very encouraging and friendly as I could be and just to try and build up a relationship with her to try and encourage her …' (Jennifer's SG Leader).

Given the initial trepidation, surprisingly, all six case study pupils responded positively to the approach and contributed actively to activities and discussions. Pupils enjoyed participating within the discussions and were supportive of each other: 'It was quite fun because there were people in it, and, likes, helps you out with problems and all that, as well as (the) teacher.' (Jane) Martin had been motivated by

target-setting and took great pride in the Support Group pledge which the group had devised.

Parents corroborated these largely positive accounts and were very enthusiastic in their support for the approach: '… its been 100% a success … You've given him confidence, you've given him a bit of motivation. He now realises that you've got to study and show respect and try to listen and try to get on, which he didn't do before.' (Jack's Dad)

Support Group Leaders, Pastoral Care Teachers and class teachers also corroborated the above. SG Leaders talked about how participation within discussions had helped pupils take cognisance of the views of others: '… as time's gone on she's been able to give more freedom to the others to say things.' (Kate's SG Leader)

However, there were negative aspects to participation. Jack, whilst still describing the SG as 'good fun', talked about the disruptive behaviour of others within the group. Jennifer had been upset by the negative response of a few of her class teachers who had disparaged the targets that she had set herself for improvement and Jane and Jack had been concerned about being extracted from Assembly/class to attend the SG.

The Impact of the intervention

It is beyond the scope of this paper to outline in detail the outcomes for the six case study pupils but many positive outcomes were in evidence. In response to the question posed one year after intervention had ceased: *If there is one thing in particular which you learned from being in a SG, what would it be?* Jennifer responded, 'Stopping and thinking before I act and possibly hurt somebody just because I was in a bad mood - they don't have to suffer.' Jane stated, 'I can do my homework more now. … I'm more focused on wanting to learn than before.' Kate said, 'If I have a problem, I will ask someone for help and I won't do a 'Nicky, Johnny or Jerry.' (The Educational Psychologist who interviewed Kate noted, 'I think this is hugely significant as Kate has recognised the poor outcomes for her siblings and wants to do better for herself.') David responded, 'Learned to listen in class. … more respectful to my Mum.' However, this didn't extend to his younger brother which was a step too far: 'No' my wee brother'!' Martin said, 'To give everyone else a chance to participate. I've learned that other people are entitled to make a contribution.' Jack simply stated, 'Just

a good experience.'

If one were to synthesise the above what emerges is that pupils have been able to encapsulate the desired aims of the approach with regard to the development of intra- and inter-personal intelligences, self-regulation, interpersonal relationships and empathy, self-esteem and confidence and dispositions towards learning.

One year on, all of the SG pupils were unanimous in agreeing that participation within the SG had been worthwhile for them and had made a difference to their lives. Jennifer was the most vocal:

> Yes - definitely - glad I didn't just go to class and just skip it … because it really benefited me, and others because of the relationships - friends, family, classmates. Benefited all of the people around me. … It was helpful to have people to go to on the staff that I could talk to. …. am really glad I was picked now even though I was singled out … I'm still focussed on my learning and doing well.

What was of particular significance was that Kate (despite the poor outcomes for her siblings) stated her intention of staying on until the end of 6th year to complete her education.

Variables which impacted positively upon pupils' experience of the Support Group

The following themes emerged as variables that had impacted positively upon pupil outcomes:

- The creation of time and space for children in which they could reflect upon their behaviour and their relationships with others, gaining insight in the process
- The ethos of the SG in affording a secure, safe and non-judgemental environment in which pupils could 'open up' and talk about things which were of importance to them without fear of reprisal - 'giving them a voice'
- The importance of trusting, respectful relationships which formed within the SG, breaking down barriers and developing empathy and understanding
- A structured, progressive, all-encompassing and purposeful approach focusing upon improvement and fostering self-responsibility in pupils

- An in-depth approach focusing upon teaching for understanding, for transfer and fostering higher-order thinking skills, afforded by the small group setting
- Fostering partnerships with parents and the support of parents for their children
- The importance of a whole school approach and developing the understanding and skills of staff
- Fostering inclusive values and behaviour within the wider school community.

Findings derived from Focus Group Discussions

In general, SG Leaders considered that pupils had responded positively to the approach and had engaged well in activities and discussions but this was not the case for all pupils. In drawing upon these accounts, many of the themes identified above are replicated. It was agreed that pupils and parents were initially anxious, and sometimes confused, when approached about participation within the SG and some were concerned about potential stigmatisation. When the question was posed, 'Would it make a difference if the SG had a different name?' the response from one of the SG Leaders was, "Kids always understand. They just make up their own because they can see who they're with." (SG Leader, D Cluster).

For a few pupils concerns about being labelled as a troublemaker created anxieties for them:

> He was very sensitive and embarrassed about being part of the group and concerned about what others would think of him. … Any involvement would have been an admission that he needed to address his behaviour. … He doesn't want to be labelled. He doesn't want to be associated with having bad behaviour.
>
> SG Leader, I Cluster

but it can be seen from the quote below that pupils themselves were balancing the negatives with the positives, as per this account from another child: 'It felt like I was being labelled as a trouble-maker. Near the end I didn't feel like I was benefitting from it so I left and then came back after one week. I came back because I enjoyed talking and getting my feelings out.' (SG Pupil, I Cluster)

Concerns about stigmatisation were also expressed in terms of how other pupils in the class would perceive the extraction of pupils for behaviour support -

'"Oh, they're going out again."' (SG Leader, H Cluster). Within another Cluster it was acknowledged that it could be difficult for pupils to leave the class for support: 'She found it quite embarrassing, actually, to come out.' (SG Leader, D Cluster) There were also concerns expressed about the educational aspects of what children were missing when extracted.

Whilst processes such as target-setting (an integral aspect of the approach) could be carried out discreetly in Primary school it was much harder to achieve this in Secondary school: 'It was to do with them handing over this card at the start of each lesson, they were saying. Whereas in the Primary, it's the one teacher seeing them all day, they had to pass [the target card] over and they weren't used to doing that.' (SG Leader, D Cluster)

In contrast to the above, most SG Leaders had positive stories to tell and there were many instances in which pupils had enjoyed their participation within the SG

> They couldn't be more delighted. Honestly, they…they, they came to every meeting. They did every exercise. They knew there was a (purpose). … This was there to help them. … they had a perception that things were going better for them. … the confidence level was, you know that you could just set them free. … You knew they were gonna be fine.
>   SG Leader, F Cluster

and had responded positively to target-setting.

Discussion

It has been argued within this paper that the negative connotations of labels which are attached to children with SEN/ASN are symbolic of and arise from the underlying discriminatory attitudes which prevail within society towards people who are perceived not to conform to social norms. With regard to the six case study pupils, it became evident that, whilst negative effects arising from nomination for support and the provision of it were experienced, these negative effects were largely transient and were countered by the positive effects and outcomes of participation within the intervention. This is not to negate or trivialise the experiences of the children who did not experience the intervention so positively nor to downplay the potential dangers of the label becoming internalised and becoming part of the child's identity (Hjörne and Säljö 2012; Skovlund 2012), especially within the context of the discourses which

prevail around children with SEBD in schools (Araújo 2005; Armstrong and Hallett 2012; MacLeod 2012; Riley and Rustique-Forester 2002).

It is evident also that issues pertaining to systems and structures (for example, the timetabling of the group) and pertaining to aspects of the approach itself (for example, target-setting) also posed their own dilemmas.

As previously noted, Slee (2012) comments upon the disproportionate representation of specific groups in SEN statistics and observes that the processes of *net-widening, accelerated disablement, system segmentation and atomization* and *school-to-prison pipeline* act against the promotion of inclusive schooling. With regard to the last of these, Slee is not making a causal link but observing that the act of identifying children as 'having' SEBD does not in itself prevent them from going down a road of crime. However, there is a fundamental tension between the imperative to intervene early with this specific group of children before difficulties become entrenched (as exemplified within the nomination criteria for the SG) and Slee's legitimate concerns about *net-widening* and *accelerated disablement.*

Whilst the argument is made that the inclusion of pupils with SEN/ASN is beneficial to the whole school community as it promotes tolerance and respect for diversity, pupils 'with' SEBD are often perceived to be detrimental to the education of other children (Munn and Lloyd 2005) and the discourse then becomes one around how we 'contain' and 'control' such children rather than supporting them in their learning. They are perceived as agents in their own marginalisation – making deliberate choices to misbehave (Khon 2001) – and, through their own actions, have become the 'undeserving' (Hamill, Boyd, and Grieve 2002). The attachment of Learning Auxiliaries/Assistants to such pupils within the classroom setting often does little more than act as a sticking plaster (whilst drawing even more attention to their difficulties) rather than dealing with the root of the problem - its more about maintaining classroom order rather than meeting the needs of the individual child. OFSTED (2006) reported that support from teaching assistants 'did not ensure good quality intervention or adequate progress by pupils' (2).

Whilst some might argue that the aims of SG work could be achieved through a whole-school approach without recourse to group work, what is being missed is that it is that very environment which affords the building of trustful, respectful relationships with pupils who may find it very difficult to establish positive relationships with adults (Wright 2009; Mowat 2010c), or even with each other, and

24

which then affords the mediating and scaffolding of children's learning, promoting understanding, thinking skills and the transfer of learning to wider contexts. However, the values and principles that underlie the SG group approach would be very apt in developing a whole school ethos of caring and respect.

An important aspect of Support Group work is that it should reside within the body of the school and be owned by the school. The approach is not delivered by 'experts' external to the school but by staff within the school itself who have been supported and trained to fulfill this role. It is about the school taking responsibility for the welfare of **all** of its pupils and about the adoption of a whole-school approach. However, it can be seen, particularly from Jennifer's case study, that this can be difficult to achieve and much work needs to be done to educate staff and to develop an understanding of inclusive practice.

This study provides important insights into how inclusive practice for pupils experiencing SEBD can be promoted and how potentially negative impacts can be ameliorated. These were illuminated within the personal accounts of case study pupils and outlined within the Focus Group discussion (cc. 'Variables which impacted …'). Clear messages emerge about the importance of consultation with pupils and families; of high quality communication between home and school; of high quality professional development for teachers; and leadership that sets the context for inclusive practice.

Conclusion

What is evident is that it is important to weigh up and balance the potential for harm with the potential for good; to recognise that assumptions cannot be made about how children will experience the identification of need and provision of support; and to recognise that the responses of children will be unique to them and may not be predictable. The imperative is to come to a deeper understanding of the variables which impact upon how children experience the identification and meeting of need (recognising that they may be context specific) and how they interact with each other to create either a sense of belongingness (inclusion) or a sense of otherness (exclusion), recognising that inclusion is fundamentally about the principles and values which guide how we lead our lives.

Limitations of the study

Being a small-scale case study, it would be inappropriate to make broad generalisations but what it highlights is that issues pertaining to stigmatisation and labelling as they pertain to pupils with SEN/ASN (and, in particular, SEBD) are perhaps more complex than generally understood to be the case and examination of this specific study can help to illuminate some of the issues for others as they pertain to similar settings and contexts. Whilst every care was taken to ensure that the six case pupils constituted a representative sample from the SG population as a whole, it cannot be inferred that other pupils would have experienced the SG in a similar way and the accounts of SG Leaders would indicate that there had been a differential response to the intervention. What these two points highlight is the need for further research such that a deeper understanding of how to support pupils experiencing SEBD in an inclusive and caring way can be developed to inform policy and practice.

Further Developments

Arising from the study, further developments have taken place across one of the Local Authorities, taking account of the findings arising from the study. The approach has been rebranded as, 'Supporting Positive Futures and Transitions', and a message of enablement has been promoted through it. http://www.usingsupportgroups.org.uk

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