Building pupils’ understanding of themselves and others such that it impacts upon their behaviour

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1 Introduction

This paper describes a study which took place over a five year period (1998-2003) involving four cohorts of Secondary 2 (S2) pupils in a Scottish Secondary school situated in an area of deprivation. The study evaluates an initiative - Support Group Initiative (Sgi) - which was devised by the author based upon the Social Constructivist principles of ‘Teaching for Understanding’ (Perkins et al. (1997)) which offers support to S2 pupils with (or considered to be at risk of developing) Social and Emotional Behavioural Difficulties (S.E.B.D.). Pupils, identified by their Guidance/Pastoral Care teachers on the basis of specified criteria, attend behaviour support groups which meet weekly for a portion of the school year led by a Support Group Leader (SgL) who, in most cases, is their Pastoral Care Teacher or a member of the Behaviour Support staff within the school. The author, as former Depute Head Teacher with responsibility for the year group, led the initiative, recruited, supported and trained the voluntary team of staff and developed the materials upon which the approach is based. The author also led groups and mentored members of staff new to the approach through collaborative teaching. Parents and pupils involved within the initiative were fully consulted about participation and parents were invited to an introductory meeting at which they had the opportunity to raise any concerns.

Within the groups of three - six pupils, pupils participate in activities which are designed to foster thinking skills, reflection and discussion; undertake negotiated, individual target-setting with their SgL and, on occasions, complete a Pupil Diary which encourages them to critically evaluate experiences (positive or negative), fostering transfer through retrospective and prospective reflection (Perkins and Salomon,1989).

The study follows the progress of sixty-seven pupils who embarked upon the programme over a four year period, establishing benchmarks prior to intervention (relating to attendance/unauthorised absence; attainment; measures of indiscipline and attitudes in

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3 From this point onwards, the term Pastoral Care will be used
relation to a range of indicators), comparing these benchmarks with comparator groups and following up the progress of the pupils one to two years after intervention.

2 Defining the Study

The study is as an evaluative, theory-seeking and theory-testing case study. (Bassey, 1999) A case study in the sense that it is:

- an empirical enquiry
- a study of a singularity (a single and unique case), an instance in action (Adelman, 1980; Bassey, 1999) (it is dynamic in nature)
- within boundaries - a bounded system (Bassey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2000) - (defined by Bassey as time and space)
- within its natural setting (Bassey, 1999; Cohen et al., 2000; Gillham, 2000)
- which enables in-depth study
- multifarious and therefore (in the views of some commentators) requires triangulation of approaches and perspectives, and study of the inter-relatedness of the parts.

It is theory-seeking in that it seeks to give insight into the unique circumstances of the case but, in so doing, to perhaps illuminate wider issues which may impinge beyond the study itself. As Brown (2001) states of ‘evidence led’ enquiry:

We make naturalistic generalisations from one context to another and then take decisions in the light of our own circumstances.

(Brown, 2001, p12)

This insight is gained through an evaluation of the approaches adopted within the Sgi to determine what works here and why it works in this set of circumstances (Brown, 2001, p12) (or the converse) and by determining and exploring the variables which affect outcome.

It is theory-testing in that it is predicated upon the hypothesis that:

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5 Bassey M. (1999) Case Study Research in Educational Settings, Buckingham, O.U.P.
Through the application of the ‘Teaching for Understanding’ Framework (Perkins et al., 1997) to the Affective Field, pupils will develop understanding of themselves, of others, and of their relationships (building upon their capacities for intra- and inter-personal intelligence (Gardner, 1993\textsuperscript{10}, 1999\textsuperscript{11})) such that it impacts upon their ability to reflect upon their behaviour and to apply judiciously, within a range of contexts, what has been learned; their capacity to demonstrate empathy and to develop further their inter-personal skills; their confidence and self-esteem; and the development of learning dispositions and more positive attitudes towards school.

Whilst purists might make the case that, within a study which is largely qualitative in nature, it is inappropriate to base the study upon the testing of an hypothesis, there are others (Silverman (2001)\textsuperscript{12}; Gillham (2000); and Watt (1998)\textsuperscript{13}) who argue for a less purist approach combining practice associated with both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to examine the case as fully as possible.

3  The wider context of the study: Scottish policy and practice and the influences upon it

The two principal drivers which have characterised Scottish Education in the period of the study and beyond have been the quest for improved educational outcomes (as exemplified through the Target-Setting Agenda (SOEID, 1998a)\textsuperscript{14}); the focus upon ‘Excellence’ (SEED, 2004a\textsuperscript{15}, SEED, 2004b\textsuperscript{16}; Gillies, D., 2006\textsuperscript{17}) and the HMIE series ‘How Good is Our School’ (HMI,1996 onwards) paralleled with the focus also upon Social Justice (SEED, 1999a\textsuperscript{19} and Equality (HMI, 1999)\textsuperscript{20} as expressed through the quest for Social Inclusion.
Within these principal themes, a set of sub-themes has emerged, some of which may be in conflict with each other and may create tensions within the system which are not easy to reconcile and make the resolution of problems and removal of barriers to achievement difficult to attain. Amongst these sub-themes are:

- a concern for social justice (SEED, 1999a) paralleled with a focus upon accountability (HMI, 1996 onwards; SOEID, 1998a)
- a focus upon inclusion (Ibid.) paralleled with a standards agenda and quest for ‘excellence’ (SEED 2004a, 2004b; Gillies, D., 2006)
- a shifting landscape of centralisation/de-centralisation (reflected in above policies)
- a concern for children’s rights and the ‘voice’ of the child (HMSO, 199828, 200029)
- growing concerns about school discipline paralleled with a drive to reduce school exclusions and a focus upon the ethos of the school (Munn et al., 199730, 199831, 200032, 200433; GTC, 200534; HMIE, 200135, 200536; SEED, 1999a, 2001a37, 2003a38, 2004d39)

24 SOEID (1998b) Social Inclusion: Opening the door to a better Scotland
25 SEED (1999b) Implementing inclusiveness: realising potential (The Beattie Committee Report)
26 SEED (2004c) Support in School: The Views of Harder to Reach Pupils
27 SEED (2006a) More choices, more chances: A Strategy to reduce the proportion of young people not in Education, Employment or Training in Scotland
34 GTC (2005) Discipline in Scottish Schools: A Survey of Teachers’ Views
35 HMIE (2001) Alternatives to School exclusion
37 SEED (2001a) Better Behaviour - Better Learning
38 SEED (2003a) Circular 8/03
• a growing concern about and focus upon the performance of vulnerable and low-performing groups (SEED, 2004e, 2006a; HMIE, 2006a) (including widespread concerns about the under-achievement of boys (SEED, 2000, 2001b))
• a broadening of the definition of inclusion and movement away from the concept of integration (SEED, 2004e, 2004f, 2006b)
• a recognition of the importance of high-quality Initial Teacher Education (ITE) (SEED, 2005), ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) (SEED, 2003b) and inter-professional training (Kane et al., 2005)
• a focus upon inter-agency working and movement towards integrated children’s services (HMIE, 2004; SEED, 2001b; Baron, 2001)
• the importance of high-quality leadership (SEED, 2005).

This is a very ambitious agenda, occurring within the political context of ‘The Third Way’ which, according to Baron (2001) signified a modernising agenda in which Labour sought to seek the middle-ground, moving towards an ethical position in which individuals owe a duty to one another and the broader society; and the collective power of all should be used for the individual good of each other (Baron, 2001, p92 (quoting from Blair, 1994)). However, Baron maintains that, in practice, this manifests itself not so much in an ideological manifesto for education but in a pragmatic ‘what works’ focus enabling Blair to build upon the ‘quasi-market’ of education established during the Thatcher era in which the needs of the economy, within the context of globalisation, are taken as a given, leaving the only question as to how to meet those needs.

The Influences underlying the Support Group Initiative (Sgi)
The principal influences upon the ‘Sgi’ are ‘Teaching for Understanding’ (‘TfU’) as developed by Perkins et al. (1997) under the auspices of Project Zero, Harvard University and Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligence (Gardner, 1993, 1999). A summary of the influences upon the approach is provided in figure 1.

4.1 Teaching for Understanding (‘TfU’)

4.1.1 Why Teach for Understanding?

Understanding is central to our being, to our existence and to our survival as a species. From their earliest moments, people seek to make sense of the world, to ‘make connections’ which enable each individual to develop cognitive skills - to think, to be creative and to reason; and to grow physically, socially, and emotionally. Donaldson (1987)\(^\text{52}\), drawing from the experimental studies of Papousek on infants, observes:

\[
\text{... we may conclude that there exists a fundamental human urge to make sense of the world and bring it under deliberate control.}
\]

\[
\text{(Donaldson, 1987, p111)}
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Brooks (2004)\(^\text{53}\), observes that living means perpetually searching for meaning (Brooks, 2004, p12) and Dewey (1958)\(^\text{54}\) maintains that the capacities to think and learn are

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evolutionary in nature and therefore are related to the survival of the species. Yet, the
development of understanding is not only a cognitive process but a product of the social
and cultural experiences which shape our lives. Gardner (1995)\textsuperscript{55} stresses the cultural
aspects of understanding, noting that what counts as understanding is determined by the
experts of the time - understanding is therefore context related, in time and in place.

If understanding is so central, why should there be concerns about it? surely teachers are
already teaching for understanding? “Well... yes, but! “ sums up the response of Perkins
and Gardner to this question. Perkins observes that, whilst teachers do, to an extent, teach
for understanding, it is not approached in a thoughtful or rigorous way resulting in
knowledge which is ‘fragile’ - teachers are building upon sand rather than upon solid
foundations. The evidence lies in the gaps which children have in their knowledge base or
misconceptions - objects remain in motion in the classroom, but come to rest on the
playground (Perkins, 2004, p16)\textsuperscript{56}; the ‘naive’ knowledge based upon self-constructed
models which persist despite instruction; and the ‘inert’ knowledge which lies dormant
and is not applied when needed (failing to transfer from one context to another) (Perkins,
1993)\textsuperscript{57}.

Gardner (1993)\textsuperscript{58} identifies a series of obstacles between what schools are trying to achieve
and educating for understanding. They lie on a continuum from the notion that recall
equates to understanding; the fallacy that by ‘covering’ a topic, it will have been
understood; the inability of even educated youngsters to be able to relate the ‘problem’ to
the disciplines to which they have been exposed; the constraints under which teachers
work; and constraints arising from the need to learn to think in ways consistent with the
subject discipline.

Perkins defines the problem as lying within the curriculum, advocating the need to teach
for understanding in parallel with the development of thinking skills:

\begin{quote}
A good deal of the typical curriculum does not connect - not to practical
applications, nor to personal insights, nor to much of anything else.
(Perkins, 1993, p32)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} Dewey, J. (1958) The Child and the Curriculum and The School and Society (Joint ed.), Chicago:
University of Chicago Press
\textsuperscript{55} Gardner, H. (1995) The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach, New York:
Basic Books
4.1.2 A Performance Perspective of Understanding

Perkins and Gardner forward a performance perspective of understanding as an active mental process which, at its simplest, is described as - being able to think and act with what one knows (Perkins, 1997, p40)\(^59\). There are many definitions within the literature pertaining to ‘Teaching for Understanding’. The following summarises the ‘understanding performance’ perspective of understanding\(^60\):

**Understanding as:**

- an active mental process
- a flexible performance capacity
- both a process and a product
- pro-active and sense making - seeking connections between and amongst things, building upon prior knowledge and understanding
- internalised - a constructivist perspective
- a reflective process demanding engagement in subject-matter at a deep level, drawing from the domain of thinking skills
- generative and creative
- transcending narrow subject boundaries
- life-enhancing
- fostering metacognition and the self-regulation of thought
- arising from cultural processes deriving from interaction, collaboration, mediation and other social processes
- arising from an enriching, generative curriculum - requiring careful definition of ‘what’ is to be taught as well as ‘how’
- being context specific
- open-ended and a matter of degree.

Perhaps the definition of an understanding performance which is most applicable to Support Group work is that of Perrone (1997):

*Teaching for Understanding - the view that what students learn needs to be internalised, able to to be used in many different circumstances in*

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\(^{60}\) This summary has been discussed with and agreed by Perkins on the proviso that some understanding performances are of a more routine nature.
and out of classrooms, serving as a base for ongoing and extended learning, always alive with possibilities.
(Perrone, 1997, p13)

4.1.3 The Teaching for Understanding Framework

The underlying philosophy of the Teaching for Understanding Project is that it is possible to conceptualise teaching for understanding and to derive a common framework which can be applied across a range of contexts and disciplines. It encapsulates the definitions of understanding to which reference has previously been made and establishes principles of practice which can be understood and applied by teachers. The four key elements of the TfU framework are described in figure 2 and their characteristics identified.

**Figure 2:** The ‘TfU’ framework derived from Wiske, 1998, Ch 3 (p.61-86)

4.1.4 The influences upon ‘Teaching for Understanding’ (TfU)

The principal influence upon the ‘TfU’ project is social constructivist theory and, in particular, the work of Dewey and Bruner, influenced, in turn, by Piaget and Vygotsky. (c.c. Fig. 2))

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4.1.5 The significance of the TfU framework for the Sgi and for the study

The organising principles around which the course was devised emanate from the ‘Tfu’ framework (c.c. App 1: an exemplification), the methodologies adopted exemplify the social constructivist principles of ‘TfU’ and the research aims and questions, and therefore the findings, are expressed in terms of ‘understanding goals’ and ‘understanding performances’.

4.2 Multiple Intelligence Theory (MI Theory)
4.2.1 The Nature of Intelligence: A new conception

Gardner’s principal claim (1993) is that, rather than there being one single, measurable, general intelligence which is innate and immutable, there is a profile of intelligences, each with its own strengths and constraints, which is unique to each individual and which can be drawn upon, nurtured and developed. He describes the essence of the theory as being:

.. to respect the many differences among people, the multiple variations in the ways that they learn, the several modes by which they can be assessed, and the almost infinite number of ways in which they can leave a mark on this world.

(Gardner, preface to Armstrong (2000))

He describes an intelligence as:

.. the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are valued within
one or more cultural settings.

(Gardner, 1993 (2nd ed.), p xiv)

However, in a later definition, he redefines intelligence as:

a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated
in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of
value to a culture.

(Gardner, 1999, p34)

This difference in emphasis between an intelligence as an ability and as a dormant capacity (waiting to come to fruition if given the right stimulation) lies at the heart of much of the confusion which reigns in relation to this concept. There is no shared and agreed understanding of the nature of intelligence and how it manifests itself. It could be argued that Gardner’s theories arise from earlier traditions such as those exemplified in the interactive approach, concerned with matching learning and teaching approaches, as described by Tomlinson (1985)\(^\text{63}\) and exemplified subsequently in a wide range of theories in support of learning styles\(^\text{64}\) in which there are no claims made in relation to intelligence.

4.2.2 The Personal Intelligences

Whilst Gardner maintains that the two personal intelligences (intra- and inter-) are distinct from each other and can be justified in terms of the criteria against which each intelligence has been measured\(^\text{65}\), he makes the case that the development of each is dependent upon the other. Indeed, Gardner (1993, p243) suggests that a sense of identify arises from a fusion of one’s intra-personal and one’s inter-personal knowledge.

4.2.2.1 Intra-Personal Intelligence


\(^{64}\) critiqued by Coffield (2005)

\(^{65}\) Gardner (1993 (2nd ed.)), notes, for example, that the neurological pathways for processing \textit{intra-personal intelligence} (one’s inner state) are different from those processing \textit{inter-personal intelligence} (communicating inner states to others).
Gardner (1999) describes intra-personal intelligence as being:

... the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself - including one’s own desires, fears, and capacities - and to use such information effectively in regulating one’s own life.

(Gardner, 1999, p43)

The use of the term ‘working model’ suggests a ‘meta’ function - a mental representation or schema which guides and regulates one’s actions, a theory of mind. The definition also extends beyond understanding of emotions to embrace the concept of efficacy (in its use of the word, ‘capacities’). It is not sufficient to be able to discriminate amongst and between emotional states, it is necessary also to be able to evaluate one’s abilities to act upon them (eg. the extent to which one is resilient in the face of adversity).

Astington (1994) makes an important distinction between young children’s capacity to express emotions and to experience beliefs and desires; and their understanding of these states and ability to attribute these states to others. The capacity to perceive the world from a range of perspectives and to understand the intentionality of others is only possible when the child has reached a stage of development whereby he can differentiate self from others and,

... he has worked out (ie. has come up with the theory) that people have minds, and he understands that it is the thoughts and ideas in those minds which govern people’s behaviour.

(Brewer, 2001, p38).

This theory is described as a theory of mind and is believed by many psychologists to be a very important ‘stepping stone’ in a child’s development. Without a theory of mind, a child is locked into his own world, lacking the capacity for empathy and the ability to form effective inter-personal relationships.

What is the significance of this concept for the Sgi? Might it be the case that some children, whose behaviour is often conceived by others as self-centred, selfish and inconsiderate, may not have a theory of mind consistent with their stage of development? - lacking the capacity to reflect upon their behaviour; failing to understand the potential impact of their

behave on others and therefore lacking a capacity to understand the consequences of their behaviour for themselves and others.

4.2.2.2 Inter-Personal Intelligence

Gardner (1993) (2nd ed.) describes inter-personal intelligence as being:

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\text{the ability to notice and make distinctions among other individuals and, in particular, among their moods, temperaments, motivations, and intentions.}
\]

(Gardner, 1993 (2nd ed.), p240)

and, in a quote from a further text:

\[
\text{.. capacities to discern and respond appropriately to the moods, temperaments, motivations, and desires of other people.}
\]

(Gardner, 1989, p8)\(^{68}\)

At a skilled level, an individual exhibiting this intelligence would be able not only to discriminate amongst the emotional states of others but to potentially act upon the information to achieve a desired outcome, the latter of which is stressed more within the second quotation. In a further text (Gardner, 1993) describes inter-personal intelligence as being:

\[
\text{.. the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them.}
\]

(Gardner, 1993, p9)

Whilst this definition differs from the previous definitions, what it has in common is an emphasis upon cognition - upon understanding as being a key to action rather than upon the action itself. It resonates with Goleman’s theory of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1996)\(^{69}\).

5 Research Aims and Questions


The study seeks to evaluate the efficacy of the approaches adopted within the ‘Sgi’ and to ascertain the effects upon pupil participants, examining the school related variables which affect pupil outcome, exploring how the school, in partnership with parents, can make a difference to the lives of pupils with SEBD. It also seeks to establish the significance of the study within the wider educational arena.

It should be noted that the research questions, whilst standing alone, are also inter-dependent upon each other. For example, research question 1 may be ascertained by asking pupils directly about their understanding but it may also be discerned through the responses they give to questions and through the manifestations of their understanding (relating to research question 2) (the latter two examples being ‘understanding performances’).

Research Question 1 (RQ 1)

To what extent have pupils succeeded of failed in developing understanding of self, of others, and of the nature of their inter-personal relationships (building upon their capacities for intra- and inter-personal intelligence) (as defined within the ‘Sgi’ - ‘understanding goals’)?

Research Question 2 (RQ 2)

To what extent, if any, have pupils been able to demonstrate ‘understanding performances’ (as defined within the ‘Sgi’ (c.c. Section 2: hypothesis))?

Research Question 3 (RQ 3)

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘Sgi’ approach?

- if through participation in the ‘Sgi’ an effect has been observed, whether positive or negative, how is it accounted for by the individual pupil and others?
- does it apply equally to all pupils? What factors might be put forward to explain any variability in effect?
- does it last over time? How does the pupil perceive the experience of participating within the group retrospectively?
- are there any other factors which could account for any effects observed which could reasonably be taken account of within the parameters of this study?

Research Question 4 (RQ4)
In which ways does the ‘Sgi’ address current priorities and imperatives within Scottish education and add to the body of knowledge within the fields? (c.c. Section 3).

6 Research Design and Methodology
6.1 Research Design

The study is principally, but not solely, interpretivist, drawing primarily upon qualitative approaches. However, an eclectic and pragmatic approach is adopted (Gillham, 2000; Watt, 1988) drawing also from quantitative data in order to illuminate the case from many different perspectives. (c.c. Fig 4)

The study compares the performance on a range of indicators (c.c. introduction) of the ‘Sgi’ population to wider comparator groups - the national, local authority and school cohorts - and draws from accounts of stakeholder groups - school management (SMT), parents, Support Group Leaders (SgLs), Class Teachers, Pastoral Care Teachers and Support Group pupils. A decision was made not to include peers as amongst the stakeholder groups because of the sensitivities involved. Six case studies, drawn from a multi-phase, stratified sample were conducted with the assistance of Stuart Hall (SCRE) who was involved in the piloting of the interview schedule and the conduct of the interviews.

It should be noted that the study is a collaborative venture, involving the full team of Support Group Leaders in the design and conduct of research tools for which in-service training was provided.
6.2 Ethical Considerations

The normal procedures were adhered to in relation to seeking permission of Local Authority, Head Teacher, parents and pupils. All participants were offered privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. The study meets the revised guidelines (SERA, 2004) in respect of a commitment to an ethic of respect for:

- the person
- knowledge
- democratic values
- justice and equity
- quality of educational research (issues of trustworthiness, reliability and validity (to follow))
- academic freedom.

Particular attention was paid to the status of the author as Depute Head Teacher within the school in negotiating and conducting the research, ensuring that requests were made in a personal capacity, seeking permission to disclose information within the study which had been passed on in a professional capacity and ensuring that all parties were aware of the boundaries of the study.

6.3 Research Methods

The study is emergent in nature (Gillham, 2000) as the research tools were piloted, implemented, refined and added to over the period of the study, arising from the insights gained during the course of the study. As such, not all research tools were applied to each of the four cohorts of S2 pupils included within the study who were tracked over three periods of time:

- pre-intervention (Pr 7 - S1 (term 1))
- intervention (S2 (terms 2 & 3))
- post-intervention (S2 (term 4) - end of S3/4).

A summary of the research tools as they applied to each stakeholder group and of the range of documented evidence as it applied to different aspects of the study (eg. Social

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Work and Children’s Panel reports) can be found in the Appendix (App. 2). Response rates to research tools were generally high (the majority ranging between 82% - 100%) with the exception of parental responses at 44%.

6.4 The trustworthiness of the study: issues of validity and reliability

Bassey (1999) makes a case for trustworthiness in case study research related to the degree of engagement with the case, the authenticity of the raw data, the degree of triangulation of the data, the rigour of the interpretation and the degree of detail in the report, providing an audit trail which can be unravelled and followed up. It is important to be clear about the ‘truth status’ of the findings. Case study is not concerned with the establishment of universal truths but with the illumination of the case (Watt, 1998). These considerations need to be taken into account at all stages of the study from the design through to the analysis and reporting of findings. Of fundamental importance is the need to ensure that the research aims and questions reflect the aims of the ‘Sgi’.

In the design, trialling/piloting/refinement of Research Tools, issues which were addressed relating to the trustworthiness of the study related to:

- the extent to which questions within the research tools reflect the research aims and questions and take account of audience
- the extent to which questions (and the use of prompts and probes) minimise bias whilst promoting rigour
- the extent to which instructions for the conduct of research tools are clear, shared and agreed.

Due to the scale of the study, data from interviews was scribed and authenticated through reading back a synopsis of the interview and/or returning a transcript to the interviewee.

At the stage of analysis of data, considerations related to:

- ascertaining the reliability of data and, if necessary, returning to source
- deciding how to cope with data spanning more than one category; data which was applicable to questions other than that under consideration; and ‘stand-alone’ or deviant data
- the relative weighting of data
- ensuring consistency in analysis.
In relation to practitioner research, one of the key difficulties is that of being able to achieve an objective stance. One is almost inevitably drawn into the ‘ways of thinking/being’ which pertain within the institution and it is very difficult to stand back objectively and perceive the object of study in a distanced way and perhaps, from the perspective of an independent researcher. Gillham (2000) attests that even research undertaken by an independent researcher is not truly objective:

*A research investigation is not neutral; it has its own dynamic and there will be effects (on individuals, on institutions) precisely because there is someone there asking questions, clarifying procedures, collecting data. Recognising this is part of doing good research. Ignoring it is ‘bad science’.*

(Gillham, 2000, p7)

Bringing out into the open and examining the assumptions which one holds is an important aspect of trying to achieve a more objective stance. However, one can compensate, to an extent, for these factors through the design and conduct of the study.

7 Establishing Benchmarks: the nature of the ‘Sgi’ population prior to intervention

7.1 Attendance

Within a context in which the differentials between % attendance and unauthorised absence rates of both the Local Authority and school in relation to national statistics are highly significant (lower and higher, respectively), the differential between the ‘Sgi’ population and ‘other’ (other pupils within their year group) in relation to both measures is also highly significant. (p=<.001) (c.c. Fig 5)
7.2 Attainment

On the proviso that it has been recognised that 5-14 National Tests are not a reliable means of measuring progress (and they have subsequently been replaced by the National Survey), the performance of the ‘Sgi’ population in comparison to all comparator groups (national, local authority, ‘other’) for both reading and writing\textsuperscript{71} at the Primary 7 stage is highly significantly below that of the other comparators. (c.c. Fig 6)

7.3 Discipline Measures

\textsuperscript{71} the data for Mathematics was compromised because of industrial action within the school
Within the context of highly significant differentials between the Local Authority and national statistics relating to exclusions (higher), there are highly significant differences ($p = <.001$) in the number of referrals to Senior Management for serious indiscipline and in the days of suspension from school (as expressed in unit measures, controlling for attendance) between the ‘Sgi’ population and ‘other’. (c.c. Fig 7) Support Group pupils (pre-intervention) accounted for 56% of all referrals and 53% of all exclusions yet only represented 8.7% of the cohort.

Figure 7: Comparison of Discipline measures between ‘Sgi’ population and ‘other’

7.4 Attitudes

Figure 8: Comparison between the perceptions of the ‘Sgi’ population and ‘other’
The attitudes/perceptions which distinguish the ‘Sgi’ population to a significant extent (p=.05 - <.001) pre-intervention relate to:

- behavioural indicators (eg. understanding of motivations underlying behaviour)
- self-control
- the quality of relationships between pupils and teachers
- feelings of self-efficacy and learning dispositions.

The widest differentials between the populations are illustrated in Figure 8.

7.5 Reasons given by Pastoral Care teachers for referral to the ‘Sgi’

The principal concerns over which Pastoral Care teachers nominated pupils for the ‘Sgi’ related to:

- defiance of/argues with teachers/disobedience
- deliberately annoying other pupils
- failure to accept responsibility for bad behaviour
- lack of self-control
- aggressive/spiteful and/or vindictive behaviour
- over-sensitivity to the actions of others.

These concerns were identified from a Likert scale questionnaire (derived from an adaptation of descriptions of ‘Conduct Disorder’ and ‘Oppositional Defiance Disorder’) (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996)72.

It is important to note that, for all of the measures given within this section, whilst these factors delineate the ‘Sgi’ population from ‘other’, the population within itself is diverse, ranging from some pupils with severe SEBD to those who have been nominated for preventative reasons.

8 Summary of Findings

8.1 RQ 1

The extent to which pupils have succeeded or failed in gaining understanding of themselves, of others and of their relationships with others

Data from SgLs, parents and pupils indicate that pupils, to varying degrees, are developing understanding of self and others and of their inter-personal relationships as demonstrated through: heightened awareness of behaviour, greater capacity for reflection upon behaviour, greater insight into motivations, growing awareness of the needs of others, growing sense of responsibility towards others and a greater capacity to appreciate the perspectives of others.

*It's not just “me, me, me” but them. Never used to think about it before. I used to think, “never mind everybody else - it's only me”. The Support Group has helped me a lot.*  

(SgL pupil)

8.2 RQ 2
8.2.1 The ability to apply judiciously, to a range of contexts, what has been learned within the ‘Sgi’

The majority of pupils are considered to have demonstrated improvements in their behaviour if only to some extent and in some contexts. Parents are very positive in their responses and class teachers more mixed. The outcomes, and factors underlying them, are individual to each pupil and are related to the quality of relationships between teacher and pupils, feelings towards the subject and the extent to which the pupil feels motivated to want to improve. Parents tended to comment in terms of behaviour rather than learning related outcomes.

*I thought it was going to be a boring group (like some classes) and not do anything for me. What did I get out of it? - more self-control and it made me aware of what was happening in school. I see school now as a place to improve your knowledge and still a social place.*  

(SgL pupil)

*He deliberately avoids situations in which he is likely to be in trouble, choosing to ignore others whose behaviour is distracting.*  

(SgL)

8.2.2 The development of empathy and social skills

SgLs consider that, for some pupils, these capacities were expressed in the pupils’ more positive perceptions of their relationships with others and growing capacity to form trusting relationships (even if only between SgL and pupil). Class teachers note
improvements in the pupils’ relationships with them but less so in relation to their relationships with peers. Some positives are noted in this respect (eg, calmer; less likely to be a negative influence on others). ‘Sgi’ pupils are clear in reporting improved relationships with their teachers, relating to the development of empathy and improved communication skills. For some pupils, the positive effects had extended to the home. Parents comment positively on the quality of relationships between SgLs and their children.

I care a bit more and realised that people were trying to help. Before I thought that they were picking on me but then I realised that some teachers were trying to help.

(‘Sgi’ pupil)

Well it got my Step-Dad to appreciate the fact that the Sgi helped you to talk instead of being a tube about it - I’m getting on fine with him.

(‘Sgi’ pupil)

8.2.3 The development of confidence and self-esteem

Although self-esteem/confidence was not regarded as an issue for some ‘Sgi’ pupils, and had not been a factor which (pre-intervention) had delineated the ‘Sgi’ population from other pupils within the year group, SgLs considered that most pupils had gained in this respect. This was attributed to:

• the quality of relationships within the group
• the opportunities it provided for pupils to be able to talk in a ‘safe’ environment and be listened to
• a developing sense of self-efficacy.

Around half of ‘Sgi’ pupils reported gains in self-esteem and a few parents identified the former two factors as being important for their children.

At school he finds it hard to speak up in front of others - it built up his confidence to speak up.

(‘Sgi’ parent)

That’s one of the problems nowadays. If you get listened to, you take in much more of what is said to you.

(‘Sgi’ pupil)
He felt that, “I could say things and do things there. Nobody would laugh at me”.

(SgL)

8.2.4 The development of learning dispositions and more positive attitudes towards school

Responses to this outcome were generally favourable (as reported by SgLs, pupils and parents) but not achieved for some pupils.

She chooses not to learn - she made the choice very early in her school career and has stuck to it..

(SgL)

More positive attitudes in general to school were identified with:

- more positive attitudes towards learning
- a developing sense of self-efficacy
- more positive relationships with teaching staff
- for some, changes in learning related behaviour (eg. ability to cut out distractions).

Class teachers reported significant gains for some pupils. A few pupils reported that, for the first time, they understood the purpose of school.

School was just a place you were sent to - you realised that you were there to learn. 
It’s for a reason.

(‘Sgi’ pupil)

8.3 RQ3 Identifying the strengths and weaknesses within the approach
8.3.1 The effectiveness/value/worth of approaches adopted within the Sgi

The materials were generally considered to be very good and many pupils loved taking part in the discussions. It was generally felt better to devote the time that was needed to exploring the activities in depth rather than ‘covering ground’ even if it meant that not all of the activities were attempted and this approach is very much endorsed by the author. Responses of pupils towards the target-setting process varied and the Pupil Diary, whilst

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73 Derived from a group interview (conducted by Stuart Hall (SCRE) based upon an interview schedule devised by the author. The author was not present at the discussion.
considered to be of value, was time-consuming and it was acknowledged that some pupils were reluctant to talk about their feelings and reactions to events.

8.3.2 The quality of support for staff

It was generally considered that there had been a high level of support for staff encompassing the teachers’ guide; provision of materials; regular staff meetings; co-operative teaching for staff new to the approach; in-service training (internal and external); provision of materials and guidance to aid the evaluation process.

Staff would have welcomed more opportunity to share ideas on the use of materials and perhaps less emphasis on philosophical ideology. More time devoted to ‘trouble-shooting’ and less administration were also advocated.

8.3.3 Outcomes for pupils and the reasons forwarded for these outcomes

There was full agreement from all SgLs that pupils involved in the ‘Sgi’, in general, had been able to demonstrate insight into their attitudes, values, beliefs and motivations and those of others, the latter related to the development of empathy; inter-personal skills (to some extent); and ability to reflect upon behaviour and exercise self-control (majority did, drop in incident reports). SgLs were less certain that pupils had developed a sense of self-efficacy or more positive learning dispositions or attitude towards school although all had worked with at least one pupil who had demonstrated these things. It was generally felt that evidence in respect of improvement in attainment was not yet forthcoming - although there were some green-shoots - but some improvements in application had been noted in pupils.

It was considered that these outcomes were largely the result of the opportunities which the ‘Sgi’ had provided for developing relationships, for bonding with pupils - for the pupil and SgL to see each other in a rounded way. The Sgi created time for these pupils and provided an opportunity for them to be listened to. It was felt that the ‘Sgi’ could stand alone and make a difference for pupils although other interventions could also help. Home support was considered to be crucial. The home was considered to be the source of attitudes and values. A positive relationship with the school on the part of parents was considered to be very important.

8.3.4 Looking at the Sgi as a whole
It was generally considered that the ‘Sgi’ was of benefit to the majority of pupils whilst recognising that there are some pupils who find it hard to trust, who have difficulty in expressing emotions and who therefore can’t be reached. It was also felt that the ‘Sgi’ had been of positive impact upon the ethos of the school, making it more inclusive in its practice.

8.3.5 The Progress of pupils in relation to benchmark measures

8.3.5.1 Attendance

In comparing the % attendance rate of ‘Sgi’ pupils in comparison to ‘other’ (which falls for both groups) the differential between the two groups remains highly significant but to a lesser extent ($x^2 = 2828$ (pre-int); $x^2 = 682$ (post-int)). (c.c. Fig 9)

![Figure 9: Pre-/Post- comparison of attendance data](image)

![Figure 10: % of unauthorised absence attributable to ‘Sgi’ population in relation to Year group cohort](image)
Whilst unauthorised absence rose for both populations, the ‘Sgi’ pupils accounted for less proportionally of the total number of unauthorised absences, a trend which continued into S3. (c.c. Fig. 10)

8.3.5.2 Attainment

![Attainment Data](image)

Figure 11: Comparison between ‘Sgi’ population and ‘other’ in National Tests

Given the proviso that the broad-banding of National Tests may not demonstrate the progress of pupils who may have improved their performance working within a level and the previous rejoinder regarding the reliability of National Tests, the data would confirm the perspectives of the Support Group Leaders regarding pupil attainment (c.c. Fig. 11). Taking account of the very low starting point of the ‘Sgi’ population when considered in relation to the year group as a whole, 35% of ‘Sgi’ pupils moved up at least one level in reading and 34% in writing (in comparison to 54% and 56% for ‘other’). The differentials between the two groups for both measures remains highly significant (p = <.001).

8.3.5.3 Discipline Measures

After controlling for attendance, the mean referrals and days of suspension for ‘Sgi’ pupils reduces to a significant extent post-intervention. (c.c. Fig. 12 & 13)
The most significant improvements were noted amongst those initially categorised as ‘high/severe’ concern, although this was not universal. For the vast majority of pupils, the ‘Sgi’ had succeeded in stemming further deterioration and, for some pupils, significant or highly significant improvements in the reduction of discipline measures had been observed, although the converse was also observed. The mean for ‘other’ demonstrated a deteriorating pattern which continued into S3, illustrating the national trend.

8.3.5.4 Post-Intervention Self-Assessments
Figure 14: Changing Perceptions of ‘Sgi’ pupils post-intervention

Figure 14 illustrates the changes in perception of ‘Sgi’ pupils post-intervention on the range of factors which delineated them most from their peers. Various interpretations could be brought to bear on these findings. It could be speculated, for example, that the negative responses to the first three categories might represent a greater awareness of the difficulties experienced by Support Group pupils arising from their participation with the ‘Sgi’, although, it could also indicate deteriorations in relationships and in behaviour for these pupils. What is of significance is the high proportion of pupils indicating that, to a greater extent than before, they try to show respect towards their teachers and are extending more friendly relationships towards other pupils. These findings are of importance as it was the extent to which ‘Sgi’ pupils extended outwards in their relationships (rather than their perceptions of others’ behaviour towards them) which delineated them most from the comparator group prior to intervention.

8.3.5.5 Summary

The findings of this study resonate with much of the literature in the fields of Social Constructivism, theories of intelligence, motivational theory and Social Inclusion. In examining the full range of data (and taking account of the perspective of Support Group
Leaders (8.3.3)), the variables which affected pupil outcome were many but perhaps the most important were:

- the realisation in the child of the need for change and a desire to wish to improve, arising from the development of intra- and inter-personal intelligence (Gardner, 1993) and empathy (Astington, 1994; Goleman, 1996)
- the scaffolding of the learning to enable the child to reach his/her full potential (Vygotsky, 1978)\(^74\), the Support Group Leader acting as a mediator (Feuerstein, 1980)\(^75\) in the child’s learning
- the development of a sense of self-efficacy (Dweck, 2002\(^76\); McLean, 2005)\(^77\) within the child such that he/she has the confidence to put into practice, in a range of contexts and situations, what has been learned within the groups (Perkins and Salomon, 1988\(^78\), 1989)
- the need for the responsible adults not to ‘give up’ on the child but to persevere and continue to provide the child with opportunities to succeed (Lloyd et al., 2001)\(^79\)
- the need for parental involvement and support, and partnership working between school and home and, when required, the involvement of wider agencies (Lloyd et al., 2001; Tomlinson, 2003\(^80\))
- the need for the development of trusting and warm, respectful relationships between the pupil and Sg Leader (Kinder et al., 1996\(^81\), 2000\(^82\); Kendall et al., 2001\(^83\))

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Prince’s Trust, 200284; Cooper, 200285; SEED, 2004c, 2006c86; Munn and Lloyd, 200587; GTC, 2005)

- related to the above, the need to respect confidentiality and provide a safe forum for discussion and reflection (Ibid.)
- the importance of context in understanding the variability in pupil response
- the need to press the child beyond what he/she understands (Bruner, 197388) and is comfortable with through gentle probing and the development of critical thinking skills (what Perkins would describe as ‘Socratic questioning’) (Perkins, 1997; McGuinness, 199989)
- the need for high quality leadership (SEED, 2005) and staff development
- the need to ensure that class teachers are informed and understand the principles by which the ‘Sgi’ operates
- the need to ensure that there is a whole school approach and that the initiative is fed into Development Planning and the timetabling arrangements for the school.

8. RQ4: The Significance of the Study

It should be evident that this study has much to offer in terms of taking forward knowledge and understanding in a range of fields, not least the application of the ‘Teaching for Understanding’ Framework to an entirely new field and one in which it was not envisaged that it could be utilised90. To return to the initial hypothesis (c.c. Section 2),

84 The Prince’s Trust (2002) The Way it is: Young People on race, school exclusion and leaving care
86 SEED (2006c) National Evaluation of Xlerate with Xl: January 2005
90 This assertion is made on the basis of a meeting with David Perkins on 08.09.06 at which the
can it be substantiated? The answer could be described as “Yes ..., but”. It is certainly the case that almost all children (including those who demonstrated deteriorating patterns of indiscipline) gained something from the experience of participation, even if it was only a heightened awareness of the issues which pertained to their own specific circumstances and it is clear that most children, to varying extents, achieved some or all of the desired outcomes, at least, within some contexts. Some children exceeded expectations and achieved significant outcomes over a range of factors.

The study has demonstrated that it is possible to work with some of the most damaged young people (those who are often “written off” by their teachers and peers and sometimes even their families) and to help them to re-evaluate their relationships, their dispositions towards learning and their attitudes towards school. It is sobering to realise that some pupils within the study had never understood the purpose of schooling - school was a place you were ‘sent to’.

Kinder et al. (1996) note that some teachers personify a range of attitudes which reflect a lack of equivalence between adult and child (failing to show respect to young people, being unfair, rude and victimising and humiliating individuals), reflected in the concerns of pupils and parents over the negative effects of labelling and being stigmatised because of the locale in which they live (Munn et al., 1997).

Munn and Lloyd (2005) posit that negative labelling and stigmatisation of pupils may be part of a defence mechanism on the part of teachers to distance themselves from any responsibility for disruptive behaviour which might emanate from their practice and to protect their sense of self-esteem, perceiving disruptive behaviour as a public challenge to their authority. This can become a self-perpetuating cycle - the more disruptive pupils become, the less sense of efficacy will the teacher have, resulting in an even greater
propensity to label and stigmatise pupils, thus leading to further indiscipline. The real challenge for schools is knowing how to break this cycle.

Kendall et al. (2001), drawing from a range of studies (Kinder et al., 1995 - 1998) characterise these negative observations of teacher behaviour (and observations such as, “School’s boring”) by disaffected pupils as being part of a larger systemic breakdown between mainstream education and its pupils - a ‘flight or fight’ response by pupils to a discomfiting environment with which they cannot cope. These perceptions of some teachers by disaffected young people are replicated in many studies. (Kinder et al., 1996; Kinder et al., 2000; Munn et al., 1997; The Prince’s Trust, 2002; Hamill et al., 200291; Cooper, 2002; Munn and Lloyd, 2005; SEED, 2004e; McCluskey, 200592, 200693).

What this study has been able to demonstrate is that these attitudes are not intractable. Many pupils within the study reported more positive attitudes and more empathetic responses towards their teachers and, as has already been noted, some pupils were developing more positive learning dispositions and positive attitudes towards school, the latter noted particularly by parents. Likewise, Sg Leaders, and some classroom teachers, reported ‘seeing pupils in a new light’, becoming aware of aspects of their personality which had hitherto been unknown. As previously noted, the study had impacted at the whole school level, creating a more inclusive ethos and encouraging staff to understand that pupils with SEBD are deserving of support and have a right to be heard (an issue which has been raised in many other studies (Munn et al, 1998, 2000; Hamill and Boyd, 200094; Kendall et al., 2001; Lloyd et al., 2001, Hamill et al., 2002; Munn and Lloyd, 2005).

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There is a wide range of current imperative within Scottish education to which this study can potentially make a very worthwhile contribution. (c.c. Fig. 15). At the least, it should have added to the discourse and the debate and, hopefully, illuminated the issues such that others may understand their own situations more fully.

What can be learned from the Sgi which could be applied to imperatives within Scottish Education?

- ‘A Curriculum for Excellence’
- ‘Excellent, Ambitious Schools’
- Inclusion & ASN
- ‘Better Behaviour - Better Learning’
- ‘Happy, safe and achieving their potential’

Figure 15: Current Imperatives in Scottish Education

In the words of Watt (1998):

*What should we be looking for from evaluation studies? Increased insight and understanding, new interpretations of familiar ideas, a contribution to the debate on the direction of evolutionary change - no more.*

(Watt, 1998, p8)
Research Question 4

This aspect of the study has yet to be overtaken and will be reported upon at a later date.

Tentative Interim (Brief) Conclusions

It would not be appropriate at this stage of the study to put forward firm conclusions but the evidence is indicating, if tentatively, that the hypothesis upon which the thesis rests can be held to be true for this particular case. It does appear that the application of constructivist approaches to the affective field can result in positive outcomes in relation to the development of inter-personal and intra-personal intelligences (Gardner) and emotional intelligence (Goleman) for some pupils, in some contexts and to varying extents.

The variables which affected outcome were many but perhaps the most important were:

- the realisation in the child of the need for positive change (ie. the development of self-responsibility)
- the scaffolding of the learning to enable the child to reach his/her full potential
- the development of a sense of self-efficacy within the child such that he/she has the confidence to put into practice, in a range of contexts and situations, what has been learned within the groups (situated learning/teaching for transfer)
- the need for the responsible adults not to ‘give up’ on the child but to persevere and continue to provide the child with opportunities to succeed
- the need for parental involvement and support and partnership working between school and home
- the need for the development of trusting and warm relationships between the pupil and Sg Leader
- the need to respect confidentiality and provide a safe forum for discussion and reflection
- the need to press the child beyond what is comfortable through gentle probing and the development of critical thinking (what Perkins describes as Socratic thinking)
- the need for high quality management and staff development
- the need to ensure that class teachers are informed and understand the principles by which the Sgi operates
- the need to ensure that there is a whole school approach and that the initiative is fed into Development Planning and timetabling arrangements for the school.
It is clear that the Sgi has an important contribution to make to the Social Inclusion agenda and to providing, in McConnell’s words (c.c. p5):

Education that brings out the ability and nurtures the talent that is in every child…. Nothing less will do.