Writing Stories with Feeling

An evaluation of the impact of

Therapeutic Storywriting groups

on pupils' learning

Pilot Evaluation Report for the

South-east Region Special Educational Needs Partnership

by

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Dopey the Dragon

There once was a dragon named Dopey. He feels quite sad because he gets name called. Everyone says to him that he gets behind with his work and that's why he's called Dopey. Everyone used to say to Dopey, *"I wonder why you haven't got any friends – perhaps it's because you sit on the bench looking thick"*

His dad wasn't nice to him either. He made him do the housework every day and sent him to his room six days a week. He isn't allowed to hang around with any of his friends. Dopey just sits down every day and feels left out. No wonder he has no friends if his dad says he can't have any friends to play with.

Dopey the Dragon written in a Therapeutic Storywriting group by a Year 6 girl, referred because of emotional anxieties. Her illustration shows other dragons making fun of Dopey.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In April 2004 the South-east Region Special Educational Needs partnership (SERSEN) commissioned this pilot evaluation study into the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting groups on the emotional, social and academic learning of pupils at Key Stage 2. This evaluation is a follow-up to the SERSEN Autumn 2003 Therapeutic Storywriting Initiative which involved a 3-day training delivered to more than 50 teachers in eight education authorities. Pupils are referred to Therapeutic Storywriting groups because of concerns about their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (EBSD) and most are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register.

Methodology

The methodology adopted was predominantly qualitative although some quantitative measures were used where appropriate. Specific methods adopted were:

- Group and individual interviews with twenty-one pupils who had attended a ten week course of Therapeutic Storywriting
- Interviews with teachers running the storywriting groups
- Case portrayal of three individual pupils, drawing on a content analysis of a selection of their stories
- Quantitative analysis and display of key issues.

Major Findings

The evidence from this evaluation suggests that Therapeutic Storywriting has had a number of positive effects on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning. In particular it has:

- Enabled pupils to use the medium of story writing to process emotional experiences
- Helped pupils move through difficult feelings
- Encouraged pupils to develop co-operative and trusting relationships with peers
- Supported listening and speaking skills
- Fostered an interactive relationship between the teacher and group with respect to story writing skills
- Increased pupils concentration and motivation to engage with story writing
- Improved pupils' self-esteem as writers

This pilot study suggests four areas for further research:

- Testing of the major findings of this report over a broader sample, possibly including pupils at key stage 3 and professionals from other agencies such as mental health and social care.
- An exploration of whether pupils are successful in transferring emotional and social skills developed in the group back into the main classroom and the impact this might have both on pupils' wider academic progress and reduction of exclusions
- Teacher based assessment of the impact of the approach on literacy skills
- An assessment of the ability of Therapeutic Storywriting to address specific Speech, Language and Communication difficulties

Section 1 Introduction

1.1   Aims of the Project

Therapeutic Storywriting is a process that addresses emotional issues through the metaphor in stories written by both pupils and teachers. Pupils are referred because of concerns about their emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (EBSD) and most are on the Special Educational Needs (SEN) register. This report is the result of a pilot evaluation commissioned by the South- east Special Educational Needs Partnership (SERSEN). The prime evaluation aim was to assess the impact of Therapeutic Storywriting groups on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning and identify outcomes which would benefit from further assessment using a broader sample.

The main methodology adopted was interviews and analysis of stories of Key Stage 2 pupils who had attended a course of Therapeutic Storywriting groups in mainstream schools. Research methods aimed to establish the impact of Therapeutic Story writing on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning.   Specific research questions are detailed in the methodology section.

1.2   Background to the project

In 2003, SERSEN invited me to lead a Therapeutic Storywriting Initiative that provided training to more than 50 teachers across eight education authorities. At the end of this training the teachers, who had set up groups during the training period, were asked to assess the impact of the training on their teaching. The results of this teacher evaluation are available on the SERSEN website (www.sersen.uk.net). The findings were positive and indicated that teachers found this approach effective in supporting pupils with EBSDs in mainstream schools. This current evaluation takes the evidence base a step further by asking the pupils themselves about their experience of Therapeutic Storywriting groups and what they think they have learnt from attending the sessions.

As part of the 2003 initiative, SERSEN also supported the writing of the book Therapeutic Storywriting (Waters 2004) which outlines the theoretical background to the model and also acts as a training manual with detailed exercises given at the end of each chapter. Readers of this report seeking a more comprehensive explanation of the approach may wish to refer to this book.

1.3   The educational context

Therapeutic Storywriting is a Special Educational Needs (SEN) intervention which has been designed to support pupils with emotional, behavioural and social difficulties (EBSD) at Key Stage 2. Over the last decade the government's inclusion policy has been to support these children in mainstream schools whenever possible. The recent green paper 'Every Child Matters' and the government's 2004 strategy for SEN 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' emphasise the need for early intervention and the importance of addressing mental health issues in mainstream schools. Both these papers acknowledge the need for professional development at this interface between mental health and education. Therapeutic Storywriting is a curriculum based approach which uses the medium of story writing to address children's emotional issues and as such supports current policy in this area.

1.4   The Therapeutic Storywriting Model

The model was initially developed by myself in 1999 as part of an MA project at Sussex University. Over the last few years it has been introduced to over 70 schools in south-east England. In order to run a Therapeutic Storywriting group, teachers are first required to attend a 3-day training course which usually extends over a period of 6 weeks. The teachers are asked to set up a group after the 1st day and bring the work from their groups to the 2nd and 3rd days of the training. Teachers attending the training are primarily school-based special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) or teachers working for one of the external agencies such as a Pupil Referral Unit or a Behaviour in Education Support Team (BEST).

The theoretical model presented in the training focuses particularly on the relationship between emotional and cognitive development and makes particular reference to Bion's (1984) theory of thinking that states that anxiety needs to be sufficiently contained in order for thinking to take place. The training also looks at different models of the self and draws on Assagioli's (1965) theory of subpersonalities. The workplace counselling skill of active listening is a core aspect of the training. Teachers practise using metaphor in their own story writing to address emotional issues and are also trained to keep reflections on pupils' stories within the story metaphor. In this way personal issues, which may be overwhelming for the child if discussed directly, do not need to be brought explicitly into the session. (For more details on the content of the 3-day training see www.therapeuticstorywriting.com)

1.5   Structure of a group session

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

- Feelings check-in (ten minutes)
- Review of previous week's stories
- Suggestion for new story theme
- 15 min when children and teacher both write stories
- Time to share stories and draw pictures
- A listening game to finish

At the beginning of the session, each child is given the opportunity to say how they are feeling before writing work begins. This is called the *Feelings Check-in*. After this, a suggestion is given for the story theme although children are given the choice of using this suggestion or using an idea of their own for their story.

A key element of the Therapeutic Storywriting model is the *Teacher's Story,* which the teacher writes while the children write their stories. The teacher chooses the theme of her story to reflect emotional issues perceived within the group. She asks the children for suggestions for her own story before the silent writing part of the session and as she develops her story, it is used to provide further points for discussion about pertinent emotional literacy issues. The engagement of the teacher with her own story is also intended to help establish a focused writing environment.

After 10-15 minutes silent writing each member of the group has time to share their story if they wish. Other members of the group are asked to provide constructive feedback on each story and children can ask for ideas for the next part of their story as modelled by the teacher. The teacher's role is to ensure that all members of the group

feel comfortable during these group interactions. The session usually ends with a short game designed to develop listening skills.

1.6 My perspective as the researcher

It will not escape the reader that I was both responsible for generating the model of Therapeutic Storywriting and training the teachers. For any qualitative researcher, familiarity with or engagement in the field under scrutiny has the ability to either enhance the understanding of the topic under investigation (Simons 1996) or to predispose the researcher to seeking positive results. In conducting this evaluation, I took the following steps to minimise bias relating to my position as the person who both developed the Therapeutic Storywriting model and led the SERSEN training.

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

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

1.7 What is meant by emotional learning?

As Weare (2003) points out there are many terms in use in the field of emotional development. The term emotional learning is used in this report to refer to the development of emotional literacy or emotional intelligence. Emotional literacy, popularised by Goleman (1996), is generally defined as, '*the ability to recognise, understand and appropriately express our emotions*' (www.FEEL.org 2003). Reference is also made to Gardner's concept of emotional intelligence. Gardner (1993) considers emotional intelligence to be made up of two aspects; the intrapsychic intelligence and interpersonal intelligences. Intrapersonal (or intraspychic) intelligence is concerned with our own internal unconscious feeling world, whereas the interpersonal is concerned with relationships with others in the external world and overlaps with what is referred to as social intelligence.

Section 2 Methodology

2.1 Research questions

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

1. In what ways does Therapeutic Storywriting impact on pupils' **emotional learning** and in particular their ability to:
   - access and articulate their feelings
   - process feelings through story metaphor

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

3. What impact does Therapeutic Storywriting have on pupils' **academic learning** and in particular their
   - motivation to engage with writing
   - imagination
   - self-esteem as writers

2.2 Methods

The evaluation adopted a predominantly qualitative methodology although some quantitative measures are used where appropriate. With particular reference to assessing the impact on pupils' emotional and social learning, the topics under investigation i.e. the child's own intrapsychic and interpersonal feeling states (see 1.6), are by their nature subjective. The method of interviewing the pupils themselves was therefore an appropriate way to investigate these topics. Specific methods included:
- Semi-structured group interviews with five groups of pupils who had attended at least ten group sessions of Therapeutic Storywriting
- Individual semi-structured interviews with individual pupils
- Semi-structured interviews with teachers leading four of the groups
- Semi-structured interviews with class teachers of pupils in my group
- Case portrayal of three individual pupils, drawing on a content analysis of a selection of their stories
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2.3 The Sample

The research focused on twenty-one pupils drawn from four schools in which teachers who had attended a 3-day training in Therapeutic Storywriting had run a Therapeutic Storywriting group for at least ten sessions. The schools were chosen mainly on an opportunistic basis in that they were those which replied first to the request to take part in the project and which the researcher could reach within one and a half hours **travelling** time. The four schools were located in two Local Education Authorities.

While some teachers had run more than one Therapeutic Storywriting group, just one was selected in each of the schools. The schools Special Educational Needs Co-

ordinator (SENCO) ran all of these four groups. An additional group was run by myself in one of the selected schools in order to trial before and after assessments of Therapeutic Storywriting groups giving five groups in total. (The results of these trial assessments are not included in this report.)

Discounted group

Interviews took place with a sixth group but these were discounted after interview responses indicated that the pupils had finished the group more than three months previously. More importantly they were confusing the group with a subsequent literacy support group.

Age and gender balance

The sample consisted of twenty-one pupils made up of thirteen girls and eight boys. Thirteen pupils were in Year 6, four pupils were in Year 5, two in Year 4 and two in Year 3. Pupils' ages are indicated by their year groups: Year 3 pupils are 7-8 years, Year 4 pupils are 8-9 years, Year 5 pupils are 9-10 years and Year 6 pupils are 10-11 years old.

Reasons for pupil referral

Of the twenty-one pupils interviewed, fourteen were on the SEN register, with the remainder being monitored for possible inclusion on the register. Ten pupils were at School Action level and four were at School Action Plus. (Details of these levels of need can be found in the DfES 2001 SEN Code of Practice). Three of the pupils had previously been temporarily excluded from school. All had been referred because of emotional, social or behavioural difficulties. For a majority of the pupils these difficulties were preventing them accessing the curriculum and/or forming constructive relationships with peers. For a couple of the pupils these difficulties were expressed in a tendency to self-harm.

Eight pupils had been the subjects of child protection concerns and 2 were currently on the child protection register. About a third (6 pupils) were identified by teachers as silent and withdrawn, a third (7 pupils) as having particularly aggressive behaviour and two-thirds (14 pupils) as having friendship difficulties.

A more detailed account of the group composition and reasons for referral in each of the five groups is given in Appendix 1.

Academic ability

Teachers responsible for referring the pupils were asked to categorise them as Below Average, Average or Above Average in academic ability in relation to their peers. According to the teachers 33% (7 pupils) were below average; 54% (11 pupils) were average and 14% (3 pupils) above average.

2.4 Ethics and Confidentiality

Permission was given by the parents of pupils to take part in the research. The names of the schools and LEAs have been omitted and all pupil names changed in this report in order to protect the identity of the pupils. In addition, care was taken to protect the privacy of pupils both when conducting the research by not asking intrusive questions and when writing up the report by not referring to unique incidents which could either embarrass or identify particular individuals.

2.5   *The Pupil Interviews*

All pupils were interviewed individually and a semi-structured group interview was also conducted with groups A, B, C & D. Group E which I ran with Y3&4 pupils was not interviewed as a group because I felt that the pupils might confuse a research group session with a normal storywriting session.

In the individual interviews pupils were asked a mixture of open and scaled closed questions. In the latter thought was given to using child-centred language for the different responses provided for pupils to choose from.

Semi-structured group interview

The group interviews took a semi-structured form with prompts drawn from the questions used in the individual inter group used as appropriate.

Formulation of Interview Questions

The questions used in the individual interviews are listed in appendix 2. In framing these questions thought was given to using language that would be familiar to the children.

As many pupils with EBSDs do not feel comfortable in the classroom and can see educational tasks as burdensome, questions such as 1, 4, and 18 aim to elicit responses about how much pupils enjoyed being part of the group and in particular whether they had enjoyed the actual storywriting. An enjoyable and satisfying experience of writing can be considered a first step in motivating pupils to engage with a similar writing activity in the future.

Another indicator of whether pupils have been engaged with a task such as storywriting is the amount they have written. This is particularly the case for those pupils with EBSDs who find it difficult to focus on writing tasks. Question 3 is included for this reason.

Many pupils with EBSDs suffer from low self-esteem and this often carries over to their image of themselves as learners. While they can often feel secure performing rote tasks such as copying or handwriting, these children can easily rubbish efforts at creative writing which reflect more of themselves. Questions 5 and 16 are therefore included to elicit responses in relation to pupils' academic self-esteem.

It is an important aspect of Therapeutic Storywriting that pupils see the groups as both positive and inclusive, that is, do not see just them as groups for difficult pupils or for those who are behind with their academic skills. Questions 18 and 19 particularly address this point.

As pupils had all written a number of stories, question 20 asks pupils to choose one that was particular significant for them. This removed researcher bias in the choice of stories from individual pupils and also provided a story sample of reasonable size.

Recording of pupil interviews

Both the group and individual interviews took place in a quiet room. The group interviews were all tape-recorded and later transcribed in full by an external agency. For the individual interview responses were written down by the researcher and also tape-recorded. The written responses were later checked against the recordings as well as one of them being transcribed by an external agency to check for accuracy.

2.6   Teacher Interviews

The SENCOs running groups A, B, C & D were mostly interviewed on the same day as the pupils. The interviews focused on three main areas: reasons for referral of individual pupils to the groups (including my group); how closely teachers had followed the suggested structure for running a therapeutic story writing group; and the teachers' assessment of pupils' emotional, social and academic learning from the group. Teachers were invited to speak both in relation to individual pupils and also to the group as a whole.

2.7   Pupils' stories

Each pupil was asked to choose one story that they would remember or had enjoyed writing most. These stories were mainly analysed with respect to whether they reflected individual pupils' emotional issues as identified both by teachers and the pupils themselves and these findings are integrated into the pupil profiles.

2.8   Pupil profiles

The pupil profiles draw on the whole range of data gathered. Two Y6 pupils, one boy and one girl, were selected to reflect the sample in which almost two-thirds (13) of the sample were Y6 pupils. A third pupil from Y4 was chosen to represent the younger age group.

2.9   Analysis and Validity

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

Validity

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

2.10 Presentation of findings

In this report emphasis has been given to allowing pupils to speak for themselves about their experience of and learning from Therapeutic Storywriting groups. Illustrative quotes from pupils are preceded by a summary of the key issues identified in the interview analysis. In reporting the findings sometimes only one or two quotations are given to support a point although there are more in the database. This method is used for ease of reporting and readability. In instances when one person said something particularly significant, this has been included and the uniqueness of the response indicated.

Section 3 Analysis of Pupil Interviews

3.1 Perception of the Purpose of the Therapeutic Storywriting Groups

Pupils' perception of the purpose of the group was assessed by asking them how they would describe the group to another child who knew nothing about it. Their response was as follows: It is a place where you
- write stories
- can calm down
- can share feelings with each other
- listen to each other's stories
- can have fun
- get to listen to the teacher's story
- can write about feelings
- get to know other children

Asked what sort of children would benefit from attending Therapeutic Storywriting group, pupils suggested children who
- are shy or have emotional problems
- need help with writing and help to think about what they are saying
- have family problems
- don't really feel very comfortable in their class
- don't really concentrate in class and don't listen
- want to improve their stories and might want to be story writers when older
- are getting picked on
- may have had a few problems and need someone to talk to
- are being teased

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

<u>Children's Voices</u>
Some children like Liam, in Y4, when asked to describe the group gave an ordered account of the main events of a session:

'We have relaxation time to get all of your feelings out – if you're sad you can get your sad feelings out and cheer up and it can <u>really </u>calm you down. After relaxation time we draw pictures and write words about how we're feeling and then we share our feelings with the group and put them on the feelings ladder. And after (that) we do stories which get you adventurous and you want to write more stories. If you look at my book - you start off with little stories and then get better and better.'

Others like Maya focused on writing stories to express feelings:

'It's for people who may have had a few problems and need someone to talk to. You can write stories and talk about problems but don't have to say it is you.' (Maya Y6)

Here is an extract from a group discussion in which Y5&6 girls are talking to each other about they would describe the group to another child who knew nothing about it:

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

Yasmin *You don't have to worry.*

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

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

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

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

3.2   Enjoyment of the Therapeutic Storywriting Group

All of the twenty-one children said they would recommend the story writing group to other children and a majority (68 %) used the terms 'fun' or 'enjoyment' when speaking of their experience of the storywriting group. 86% said they had enjoyed writing their stories a lot and 14 % said they had enjoyed writing them quite a bit. No children chose the lowest categories of 'a little', 'not much' or 'not at all'. Teachers agreed that all the pupils seemed to enjoy coming along to groups.

 The main reasons given by pupils for the enjoyment they experienced were:

- Clears the mind of worries
- Helps get you out of a bad mood
- You can express your feelings
- You get to know people that you wouldn't normally
- Better than being in class
- You can choose what to write
- You can put your feelings into stories
- Writing stories is fun
- Enjoyed hearing the teachers' story
- Others listen to you
- It is easier to concentrate than in class.

Children's Voices

Asked to elaborate, the children spoke primarily of how the storywriting group enabled them to cope with their feelings. Ira mentioned how putting her feelings into stories made her feel better about herself:

'You can get your feelings out and write them down so you don't feel so bad. You can just relax and let feelings out and write stories.' (Ira Y5)

Mia in Y6, like a number of other children, commented on how the relaxation and sharing at the beginning of sessions *'Got you in the mood to start writing'.* Yasmin also noted how the storywriting group had helped her concentration:

'I think it's really fun and relaxing because we can- like if we've had some problems or if we're just not in a good mood -we can come here and relax and we'll concentrate easily'. (Yasmin Y6)

Some children talked about their particular worries. For Nina, as for several other children, these were often about friendship difficulties:

'Sometimes it's annoying when I can't put my friendship problems out of my head and I can't concentrate. At the beginning of the group as we go through (the relaxation) it helps. It helps me more to get them out of my head'. (Nina Y6)

And for some, like Tom below, it was the highlight of their week.

'Before the only thing to look forward to was Friday evening … but then it was like "Yes its Friday, our session for storywriting". The only bad thing about it is that there's only one session a week.' (Tom Y6)

3.3   Use of Story Metaphor to Address Emotional Issues

Pupils were asked whether they thought writing their stories had particularly helped them think about their own feelings. As shown in figure 1, 72% of the children replied 'yes' i.e. their stories had made them think about their feelings, 11% said they didn't know and 17 % said no. The majority of the younger children replied 'don't know' or 'no' although the story analysis showed that many of their stories clearly reflected personal emotional issues.
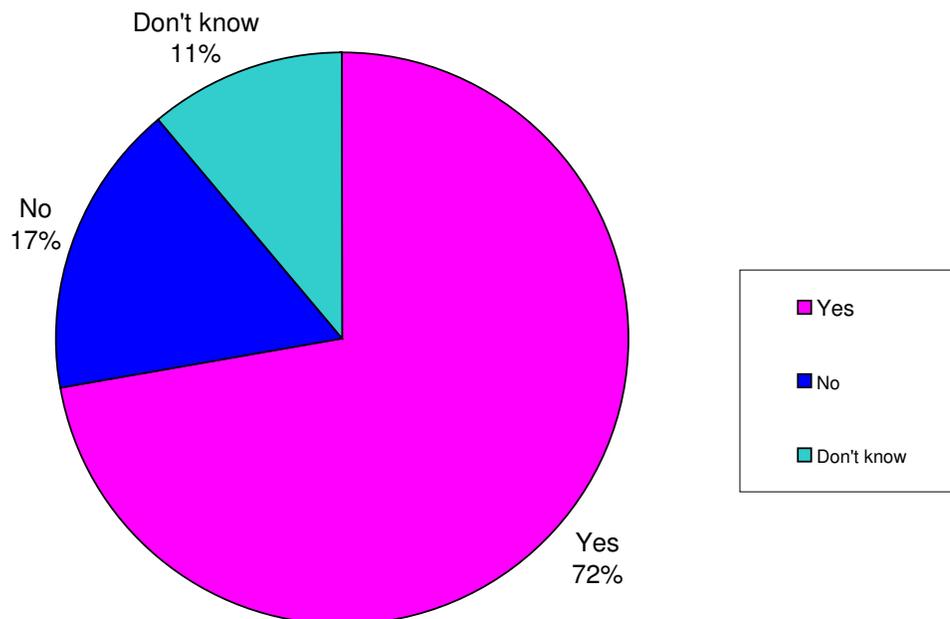

Figure 1: Pupils' response to the question,'Did your stories help you think about feelings'

Comments from the 72% of children who felt a connection between their stories and personal feelings included:
- You can think how you would feel if you were in the character's place
- In stories you can try out 'cures for problems'

- You can put your feelings on the page and this can help you feel better
- You can write about things that are worrying you without writing about yourself

Children's Voices
A couple of the children spoke particularly about how they had channelled their anger into their storywriting. For Laura, whose temper had led to several temporary exclusions, her anger could actually fuel her writing:

 'sometimes when I'm in a bad temper or a bit upset I write more than I usually would because like it's all the anger coming out onto the page.' (Laura Y5)

Several of the older children, like Ira, Nina and Miles, commented on how they liked the fact they could put their own feelings onto characters in their stories but not be writing explicitly about themselves:

'I like getting out my feelings. If you're worrying you can write about them but not so it's you.' (Ira Y5)

'You imagine your own characters and put yourself in their shoes. You think about them and not yourself'. (Nina Y6)

'I can visualise a place- like this guy's cornered and he's dodging bullets and he's starting to shoot back at them. You can think how you'd feel if you were in his place. … I really like doing that'. (Miles Y6)

Many of the children mentioned that putting their feelings onto characters helped to get '*bad moods out of your head.' (Maya Y5)* and some thought that by writing like this '*you can try out cures for problems' (Rose Y6).*

3.4   Pupils' Motivation to Write and Ability to Concentrate
According to teachers referring the pupils, the majority of the sample (52%) had difficulty concentrating in the main classroom because of hyperactivity, 'dreaminess' or a tendency to become distracted. An indication of pupils' ability to concentrate in the group and their motivation to write was sought by asking about their writing output.

The majority (95%) of the children said that the group had helped them to write more. They were then asked to estimate how much more they thought they would now write in the time normally allocated for writing in a session – generally 15-20 minutes. The children were not given specific amounts to choose from but gave the estimate in their own words and the data was then categorised as shown in Figure 2. 30% of the pupils thought they wrote 'a couple of sentences' or 'a little bit more'; 24% thought ' a paragraph' or '½ page' more; 24% thought they had written over 1 paragraph or ½ page more than before starting the group; 19 % said that they wrote more but couldn't say how much.

Discussions with teachers and an analysis of a sample of stories supported the view that for many of the pupils attending the group had helped them to increase their writing output although sometimes not by quite as much as pupils claimed.

Reasons given by pupils for why they could write more included:
- Feeling more relaxed
- Not worrying about getting things wrong
- Felt good to 'get feelings out'
- Wanting to write as much as the teacher
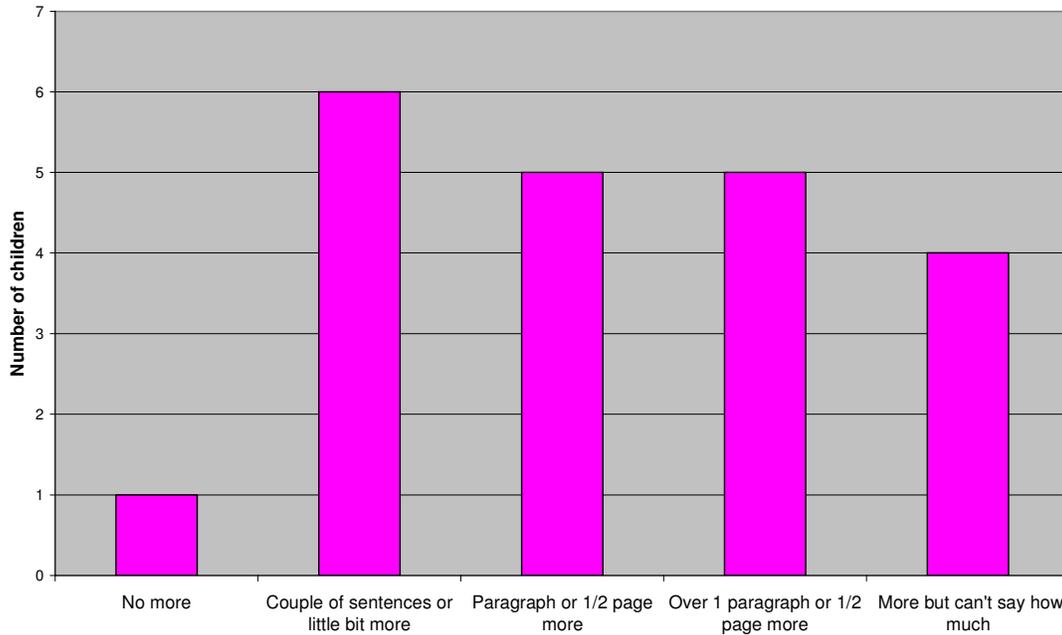- Able to concentrate better
- More interested

Figure 2: Graph showing how much more pupils thought they wrote after attending sessions

Children's Voices

Ira, like several of the children, mentioned that she could concentrate better in the group than in the classroom and that this helped her write more:

'It's helped me to concentrate more- I never concentrate in class. I daydream & stare out of the window.' (Ira Y5)

About a third of the pupils, like Martha and Rose, mentioned how an increased interest and motivation to write stories was reflected in their increased output and carried over into the classroom:

'In class I used to write 2 lines in an hour. Now I write loads when doing a story. On Tuesday I wrote 1 ½ pages and finished in ½ hr'. (Martha Y5)

'It's helped my spelling and the quantity I write. It's helped my concentration. I'm excited when we write stories in class now'. (Rose Y6)

3.5 Quality of Storywriting

62% (17 pupils) of the sample thought their stories had improved 'a lot' since coming to the group, 33% (13 pupils) thought they had improved ' quite a bit' and 5% (1 pupil) said 'a little'. No pupils chose the responses 'not very much' or 'not at all'.
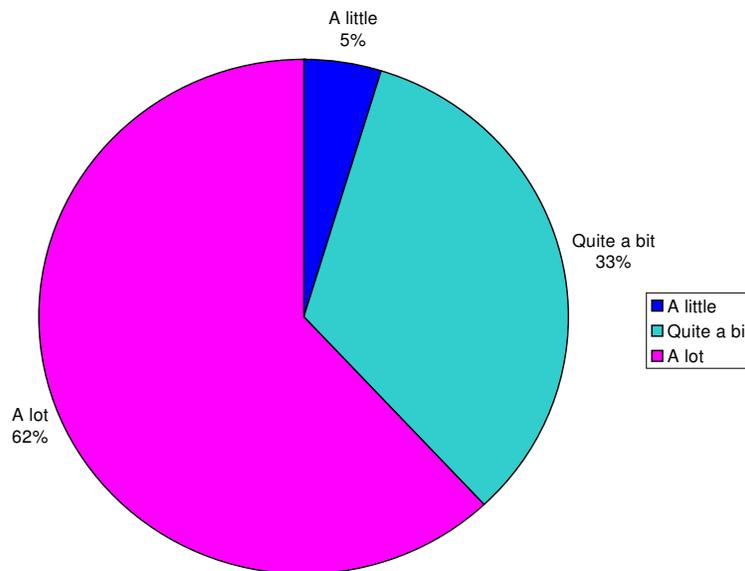
Figure 3: Chart showing how much pupils thought their stories had improved since coming to the group

What pupils counted as evidence of improvement included:
- Increase in quantity written (see 3.5)
- Improved imagination
- Improvements in handwriting, spelling or punctuation
- Better descriptive words
- Better beginnings or endings

Many of the pupils cited an increase in the quantity written as proof of improved stories. This point is covered in relation to motivation in 3.5. Improved imagination was mentioned frequently while extended vocabulary and better story structure was mentioned by a few pupils.

A majority *(85%)* of the children said the group had helped with their spelling, handwriting or punctuation. Handwriting was mentioned most frequently, with spelling next frequent and punctuation mentioned least. Cross-correlation with teacher assessment on this point was not included in the study.

Children's Voices
A number of children commented on how the group had helped them to feel more confident about their ideas for stories. Miles talked about how important this new confidence had been for him:
'If it's done one thing it's …encouraged me with my ideas because before I was like ' I don't know whether I should put that down' because people could think I was being silly when I meant to be serious.' (Miles Y6)

Miles went on to say, *'now I'm quite jammed with ideas and I'm …writing a proper book with one of my friends at the moment, out of school'.*

A few of the girls in two different groups mentioned how they had a wider vocabulary and in particular more words to describe the emotional states of characters in their stories. Laura in Y6 explained how these more '*detailed words'* helped them to *'express our feelings even more because it's the words that express, that tells people.'*

Liam in Y4 said that sessions had helped him structure his stories and that before he came to storywriting he '*didn't even know how to write beginnings of stories.'*

Some pupils talked about how their handwriting could be related to their emotional state. Miles said how his '*normal comfy writing used to be… quite un-neat' but* that now he could improve it when he wanted to, adding '*which I've discovered is when I'm relaxed' (Miles Y6).* However, Laura in Y6, was one of a few pupils who were clear that this had not been the purpose of the group and said, '*this group isn't really about punctuation, spelling & handwriting- it's about feelings.'*

Very few pupils mentioned grammar or punctuation although Andrew in Y6 was pleased that he now got his '*66s and 99s'* in the right place.

Use of drawing to extend story themes
66% of the pupils said they liked having time to illustrate their stories although 29 % said they did not and preferred writing to drawing. (5 % said 'don't know'). Many of those who enjoyed this activity mentioned how drawing helped extend their story themes and reasons given included:
- It can spark new ideas
- You can cartoon feelings of anger
- If you can't describe something in words you can draw it

For some pupils like Miles, the drawings moved them back into their writing:
 '*In these kind of drawings I do …I like writing about the emotions of each person'. (Miles Y6)*

3.6 Awareness of Others and Communication Skills
Awareness of others and communication skills constitute the interpersonal aspect of emotional literacy (Gardner, 1993). Here these are examined in relation to:
- Listening and speaking skills
- Degree of friendship/trust established between group members

Listening and speaking skills
Figure 4 shows pupils response to the question *How much did the group help children to listen to each other?* 61% said 'a lot', 29% said 'quite a bit' and 10 % said 'a little'. None chose 'not very much' or 'not at all'.

When asked to say how the group had helped them listen or speak responses included:
- Everyone gets a turn to speak
- Being interested in what is being said
- Giving and getting ideas from each other
- Trusting that other members of the group will not tease or laugh at you
- Feeling that others are interested in what you have to say
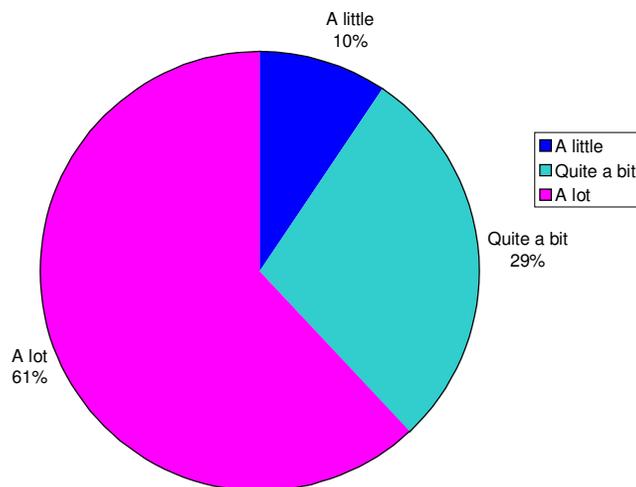- Not being forced to say something if you don't feel like it

Figure 4: Pupils response to, How much did the group help children listen to each other?

Children's Voices

In one of the group discussions pupils commented on how Andrew, a Y6 boy with ADHD, had managed his tendency to speak at inappropriate times:

'Andrew used to be a bit like, when you'd read out a story, 'Oh yes that reminds me of…' but now he holds it in until it's his turn. Andrew's probably improved the most out of all of us'. (Y6 girl)

Andrew himself agreed with this saying, *I don't talk out loud anymore' but* then adding very honestly *' I do sometimes but not so much'.*

Dave another Y6 boy in the same group had the opposite tendency and was introduced by another group member as *'the quiet one'.* While Dave said very little in the group discussion, in the individual interview he said that the group had helped him to speak because, *'it makes me give ideas for the other people's stories'.* A number of pupils commented that having sharing ideas for stories had given them more confidence in heir own writing and the other members of his group agreed with Miles when he said, *'if you take an idea from someone else they won't call you a copycat or something.'*

For Lyn, another shy pupil, it was *'knowing that you've got people listening to you and you don't feel silly 'cos no one is listening to you and you're not speaking for no reason'* that gave her the confidence to speak.

Mia, also in Y6, felt confident she *'could talk to others and they would understand'* yet indicated that she could hardly believe they were interested when she added *'even if they weren't listening they did well at acting at listening!'*

Several of the pupils, particularly those referred because of being shy or withdrawn such as Leanne, mentioned that it was good that everyone had a turn and *'you don't have to wait a long time like you do in class -everyone gets to speak'. (Leanne Yr 6)*

Degree of friendship/trust established between group members

The benefit of the group in terms of supporting pupils' relationships with peers was emphasised in pupils' responses in both individual and group interviews. All the children said they had got on well with the other children in their group. The only qualification to this was from 2 children in the Y3 & 4 group who said they had sometimes been irritated by a Y3 girl in their group who disturbed them when they were writing. The girl herself thought she had got on very well with the other children in the group.

Children's Voices
Ira, like several other children, said that the group had helped her make a new friend:

'I didn't really know Nina and things I had heard about her hadn't been good. But as I got to know her I liked her'. (IraY5)

In three of the four group discussions, pupils talked about how important the elements of acceptance and trust had been for their relationship with each other. Maya and Miles' comments reflect those of their two groups:

'You felt you wanted to be in the group and felt the others wanted you to be there.' (Maya Y5)

'It's good because you can share your feelings with one another and you can know that no one's going to like blurt it out and dare or something to someone.' (Miles Y6)

Laura in Y6 saw how improved speaking and listening skills had helped with her friendships, saying, '*I'm normally bossy. It's helped me to talk and listen to other people. I've got a lot more friends now.'*

3.7   The Teacher's Story

Twenty of the twenty-one children said they really enjoyed the teacher writing her story and were able to readily say why they liked it. One pupil (possible ASD) replied 'I don't know'. One pupil said he liked the teacher's story but sometimes it was a bit long while another said that he liked it but was' shocked' because he didn't expect to be able to understand an adult's story. Reasons given for enjoying the teacher's story included:

- Teacher uses the children's ideas in her story
- It's like a whole group story
- Stories are interesting and sometimes funny
- You can picture yourself as one of the characters in the story
- The teacher is doing what you're doing
- It's relaxing because the teacher is not looking over you
- Gives children ideas

Children's Voices
Many of the pupils like Miles, enjoyed the way the teacher used their ideas in her story:

'It's probably the best part for me. She will write really interesting stories and she'll ask for ideas and even if they could be quite silly or something she'll do them and make them more sensible and correct.' (Miles Y6 boy)

What emerged from pupils' discussion was how much they had been engaged by the teacher's story. Miles went on to say how he could easily identify with the characters in her story:

And they're usually really possible- like you can basically picture yourself –she's doing this one about a really nice little otter at the moment- I could really picture myself in one of the people's place. I could really really picture just walking down this lakeside and seeing an otter with a wound (Miles Y6)

Many pupils also mentioned how the teacher's story helped them with ideas for their own stories. Maya in Y5 spoke for them when she said, '*It was quite nice listening to her because it's giving us ideas what to write in our stories'.*

One boy in my own group said he particularly liked seeing *'how much you write because then I wanted to write as much' (Sean Y4).*

A number of the pupils in different groups commented on how the teacher writing her own story made them feel more comfortable about their own writing activity. Nina summed up their views when she said, '*It doesn't make you feel like some big human camera is watching us.' (Nina Y6)*

3.8   *Views on Choice and Marking*

Choice over what to write

While the teacher each week suggests a new writing theme in each session, pupils are free to make the final choice over what they write. Several pupils commented on how liberating this had been. In one of the group discussions, Mike commented on how that he had really appreciated this choice:

'there's no restrictions – no teachers telling you you've got to do this you've got to do that… like oh this type of story has to start with this or has to do tha't.

Andrew, also in the group, supported Mike saying that he felt a sense of freedom because *'we can always write whatever we want'.*

The group teachers agreed that pupils had enjoyed the freedom to choose what to write about. However two of them said they had felt a bit nervous when pupils had written a 'true' story as they were sometimes not sure how to respond to it.

Freedom from marking

In one group interview an individual pupil spoke quite passionately about how important it was for him that his stories were not marked in the group. He thought that marking *'just puts pressure on us. I think it's better to do the story writing like this…I still want to do it but I don't want to be marked.' (Andrew Y6)*

The rest of the group agreed with Andrew. Mike added that he thought that sharing ideas meant that marking was not relevant and this in turn felt liberating:
 'if everyone gives you ideas then you don't get marked and you feel a sense of freedom'.

It was clear from the pupils' books that all of the teachers had restricted their comments on pupils' work to those concerning emotional literacy issues in the story, as suggested in the training. Some spelling corrections were given but none had given graded marks.

3.9   Ending the Group

All pupils had just ended or were about to end their storywriting group. They were asked how they felt about this ending. Figure 6 shows the response to this question. Eighteen of the twenty-one children said they would be sad, upset or miss the group and didn't want the group to finish.

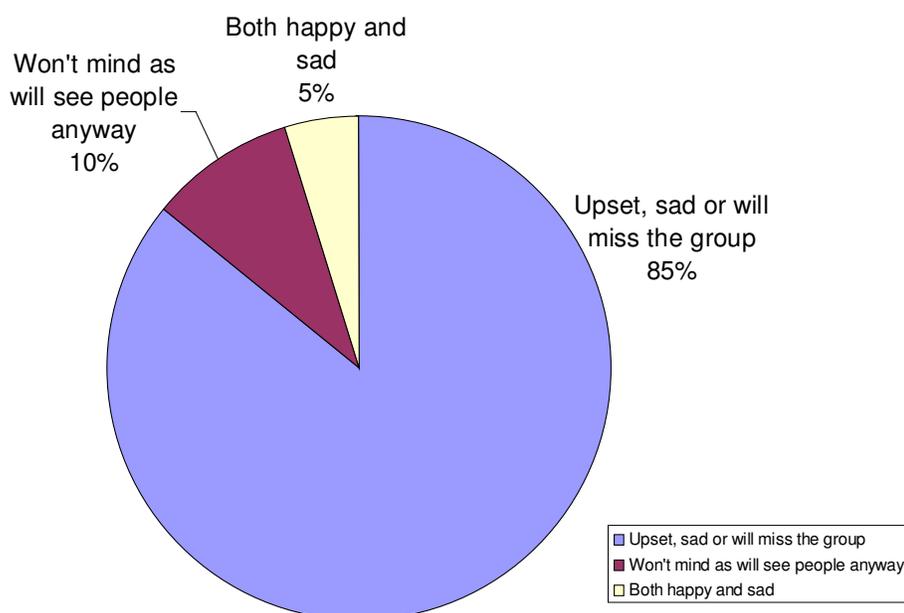*Figure 6: Pupils' response to the question, What will it be like when the group finishes?*

Most reasons given were concerned with missing one of the following:
- the story writing
- listening to teacher's and other children's stories
- the relaxation
- group members they wouldn't usually see

Others focused more deeply on the loss:
- feeling 'lost' or 'lonely' without the group
- losing something important

Of the two pupils who said they didn't mind the group finishing, one said this was because she would come back to see the group teacher when she needed to talk about things and the other pupil said he would see all the same people anyway. In fact discussions with the teachers indicated that both scenarios were unlikely as the pupils were moving onto secondary school.

<u>Children's Voices</u>
Comments about the ending showed how supportive the group had been for many pupils. Mia in Y6 said she would feel '*really upset'* about the group finishing and that *'It'll be like something's missing- won't feel right for a long time.*' Andrew, also in Y6, was more forceful saying, *'I'll be really p'd off. I really want to carry on with this and it's annoying that they won't do it in secondary school.'* One young Y3 girl, Nancy who had a lot of difficulty settling in the main classroom, simply said that she would feel, '*sad because I want to carry on.'*

Only one pupil saw some benefit in the group finishing and this was expressed with ambivalence saying she would be a *'little bit happy because I wouldn't be missing art … but a little bit sad at the same time because I would miss fun things like doing the feelings ladder…'*

Section 4   Findings from Teacher Interviews and Analysis of Stories

4.1   Findings from Teacher Interviews

Responses from teachers leading the groups, showed they had closely followed the structure of sessions suggested in the training programme. Time-tabling restraints meant that two of the teachers had needed to shorten their sessions to 45 min and because of this had not had time to include a finishing game. All had engaged well with the teacher's story. One had been surprised at how much the pupils had engaged with the feelings of the characters in her story,*'they love it- that it's for them and it's their ideas - it makes it something because I don't think of myself as someone who can write at all.'*

Teachers reported that all the pupils had looked forward to coming along to the groups and said they had enjoyed running the groups. All thought the groups had been beneficial for the pupils including one who had been less certain at first:

'I felt committed at the beginning but a bit sceptical- but I've realised the potential for it to benefit children is enormous'.

Teachers' responses with respect to pupils emotional, social and academic learning broadly supported the themes identified in the analysis of pupil interviews. They particularly mentioned how pupils had listened to and supported each other in the groups, how well the pupils used the time at the beginning of the session to say how they were feeling, that pupils had engaged well with the writing and had used metaphor in their stories to address personally significant emotional issues. Hardly any mention was made to skills relating to handwriting, spelling, punctuation or grammar.

Two of the teachers mentioned that they had felt a bit anxious when members of their group had written a 'true story', i.e. an account of something emotionally traumatic that had actually happened in their life. While the stories had not prompted new child protection concerns they felt unsure how to respond to these 'stories'. All four of the teachers said that they would like some regular supervision sessions to be available to support their work and one teacher thought she might be able to get this from her headteacher.

The teachers, who led the four groups other than mine, were asked to give a scaled response, on a 1-5 scale (5 high), to three questions. These asked them to assess the overall benefit of the Therapeutic Storywriting group in supporting pupils' emotional literacy, motivation to write and ability to use story metaphor to explore emotional issues. In relation to **emotional literacy** the average was **4.5,** for **motivation to write** the average was **4,** for **use of story metaphor to explore personal emotional issues** the average was **4.5**.

4.2   Story Analysis

The analysis of the metaphor contained in the sample of pupils' stories showed a high degree of correlation with pupil's emotional issues as presented by the referring teacher and the pupils themselves. This correlation is illustrated in the 3 pupil profiles and the opening story.

While most of these stories were set within fantasy metaphor, two were accounts of true life events. One Y4 boy chose the 'story' he had written about how his mother had found out that she had a terminal illness and a Y6 girl chose a story about what had happened to her when she had been taken into care when she was younger. Both pupils had also written fantasy stories but singled these out as particularly special to them.

Section 5 Three Pupil Profiles

5.1 Liam's Story

> *'At first when I came in the group I didn't think I'd be interested but when I went for the first time I got really interested'.*

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

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

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

In a later story the main character is able to escape his role as victim. Dino, a 50 year old dragon lives in a cave that is too small for it and is terrified that he will be killed by soldiers if he tries to find a bigger more comfortable cave.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His classteacher thought that he seemed *'slightly better at taking responsibility for his actions'* since attending the group but that she hadn't particularly noticed a change in his writing as he had not been reluctant to write before. She said that he never talked to her about the group but that he had *'loved going'* and was very excited about his finished book.

5.2   Rhea's Story

'When this group goes away some people might feel kind of a bit left out because there's no one to talk to or everyone's laughing at you and you can't really discuss it -why you're left out of the system'.

Eleven year old Rhea, of slightly below average academic ability, was on the SEN register at School Action for emotional difficulties.   There had been child protection issues when she was younger and as a consequence she had no contact with her father. She was of slightly below average academic ability. While she did not present with behavioural difficulties she could become very distraught at times. The SENCO said that she had been referred to the group because at the beginning of the year she was very upset and *'had a couple of days when she got in a complete state - beside herself, stuff with friendships'.*   The SENCO added, *'it really seems to have helped, the time she has coming here…it's great for her'.*

Rhea herself described the group as *'fun'* and said she particularly liked the feelings check-in because *'you get to tell what you feel'.* She enjoyed the quiet of the group describing it as *'a peaceful place, a break away from the classroom'*   and said she liked to *'let my imagination go'.*

Rhea said her story The Magic Stone was one that was particularly special for her. The main character, John, is a seven year old boy who has his magic dream-maker stone stolen and this means he can only make nightmares. On his journey to find the stone he is followed by a rain cloud. At one point in the story he notices the rain cloud is only above him and his dog:

He tried to run away from it but wherever he went the cloud followed him. He was now out of breath from doing all the running. He just sat under the umbrella which was under the rain cloud which was under the trees which was under the clear blue sky.

When he gets angry with the cloud it just gets bigger and starts to speak and tease him. The boy cannot believe his ears. He feels that his head has '*gone mad'* and says he has *'an image of my head trying to bomb the world'*   However after a rest in a tree house he has an idea¨that instead of getting cross with the cloud he could compliment it:

'I've sussed you out' John said walking over to the cloud. 'You are very pretty'. The Cloud looked at John and grew a size smaller. 'Your wind smells like fresh flowers'. The cloud grew another size smaller. ' I knew my dream was right. Your rain is like a constant reminder of summer'. The cloud grew a size smaller.

 The cloud then offers to fly John to where he can find his precious dream-maker stone.

The cloud in this story seems to be a wonderful metaphor for the mood that Rhea feels persecutes her at times. In her interview Rhea mentioned how she particularly enjoyed the group *'because we always get to listen to other people's stories which can give us ideas as well.'* This is evident in her story when she uses the tree house as the place

for a rest and where a new mode of interacting with the cloud can be discovered. In one of the teacher's stories, a fairy-like creature also lives in a tree house in a school playground and helps to sort out friendship difficulties at playtime. Although Rhea's story picks up on the teacher's idea of a tree house as a place where problems can be turned around, the rest of the story is her own.
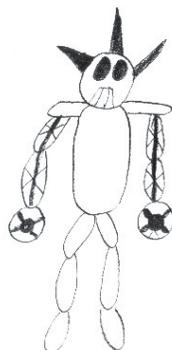
In interview Rhea said that the group had helped her to write more and that she had '*more descriptive words, which help me in the classroom*'. However, her statement about the group ending, shown at the top of this profile indicated that she would benefit from some other supportive group in the future.

5.3   Mike's Story

> '*It's really helped because I have an anger problem and … I can make a story around how I feel. And I can write it without any objections. I feel I can write my own story - it's just me and the paper*'.

Mike was an academically able Y6 boy who was on the SEN register at School Action for EBSDs. According to the SENCO '*he has a lot of difficulties with friendships, he's very intense - problems arising from how he feels about his situation at home*'. She said his behaviour in school had given cause for concern as '*he fights with kids, gets very angry with them-he talks all the time about being bullied, the victim.*' The SENCO added that while '*it is fair to say that he has been an outsider within the class friendship groups*', incidents had been investigated and the school did not think he was being bullied. She said he was referred to the group because, '*it was felt this was a good way for him to have a chance to be with others, share ideas and in a supportive way*'. She added, '*it's been great actually.*'

Mike himself mentioned his anger problem and said that the group had helped him '*to release my anger in small portions. Now it goes into my pencil and into stories.*' *I can make a story around how I feel*.' Several of his stories were mythical adventures where the main character has to kill some monster or 'hideous beast', as illustrated here.

However, Mike felt that his stories had become less aggressive since joining the group. Here is an extract from a group discussion where both Mike and another member of the group discuss how Mike' stories have changed:

Mike   I find it better because I wrote really aggressive stories sort of like hard…
Andrew   He doesn't any more though.

Mike *But I write better stories. I wrote stories with death, blood and now I can write better stories because you can basically try and put your feelings on to the paper.*

Andrew *And now he writes stories with one page.*

Mike *One page in one week.*

Researcher *So how would you say your stories have changed then?*

Mike *I would say they've changed in character and feeling personally. From aggressive to really nice, I don't use aggression.*

Andrew *But not lovey dovey nice.*

Mike was also able to talk about his relationship difficulties saying that he could *'get a bit edgy'* in class and that normally, *'I can't right away work with people because my ideas clash with theirs but it's easier here.'* He thought however, that he had got on quite well with others in the group and that it had helped his friendship skills. It was very important to him that he had been able to build trust with other members of the group, saying, *'if you're shy you can show your emotions and you know that people won't laugh their heads off, you can trust them now'.*

The support which Mike gained from the group seemed to be reflected in his story Pleasure Island, written as the sessions were drawing to an end. In this story the main characters are named after himself, another member of the group and the group teacher (he uses her surname, David):

One beautiful day, three kids called Mike, Andrew and David were taking a ride when suddenly the boat capsized near an island. After three days on that island they searched for food and drink. When they had been searching for 5 minutes they found a cave where on the wall was a piece of writing. It said 'When the clock strikes the hour, food and drink are yours. The hour came. The cave suddenly burst with wealth and food and everything you can imagine appeared before their eyes.
"We can build a boat and go home", said David.
"No we have everything we need here", said Mike.

One way of reading this story is to see it as a metaphor for how Mike had found emotional nourishment in the group. Interestingly when David (the group teacher) suggests that they can go now leave the island, Mike is reluctant to leave as he feels they *'have everything we need here.'* This could imply that Mike feels increasingly content to be in the story writing group and is reluctant for the group to end.

In interview he said that taking turns in the group had helped him with his listening skills and that taking part in the group had definitely helped him to write more:

'Before I would have rushed the events. I can write up to the ending – so I can write faster. Now I write up to 1 page of A4. Before it was about half a page of A4'.

He did not think the group had him helped particularly with spelling, handwriting or punctuation but 'more with ideas'.   When asked what sort of children would benefit from the group he replied, *'people who have problems - if your family's been really sad you can work that into a story. Basically people who are over emotional - like if you get really angry.'* When Mike was asked how he felt about the imminent ending of the group he replied rather dramatically *'Get my gravestone Granny*!' He then added, *'I just really like it. I really like it. I just prefer it to class. If the storywriting was class and I had to go there every Friday that would be even better.'*

Section 6 Discussion and Conclusion

The evidence from this evaluation, based mainly on an analysis of pupil interviews, suggests that Therapeutic Storywriting has had a number of positive effects on pupils' emotional, social and academic learning.

Responses from both pupils and teachers indicate that Therapeutic Storywriting groups have provided a space within the educational context where emotionally anxious pupils have felt supported, both by the teacher and their peers, and have been keen to use writing as a medium to process emotional experiences.

The conclusion that the approach helped pupils to move through difficult feelings is supported by the evidence in 3.2 and 3.3 where pupils, in particular the older ones, are able to articulate how expressing feelings either verbally or by projecting them onto characters in their stories helped them 'feel better'. An analysis of the pupils' stories and the findings from the teacher interviews in 4.1, confirmed that pupils were able to use the storywriting activity to explore emotional issues that related to their own emotional difficulties as identified either by themselves or the referring teacher. Stories were often used to try out *'cures for problems'*. Most of the children's stories were set in fantasy with some pupils on occasions choosing to write accounts of actual events in their lives which had caused emotional anxiety.

Responses detailed in 3.1, 3.6 and 4.1 indicate that the structure of the group enabled pupils to develop their emotional literacy skills. Group members were able to develop sufficiently trusting relationships in which they felt that what they said or wrote would not be ridiculed. Pupils also engaged in sharing each other's ideas for storywriting. These findings correlate with the finding, also evidenced in 3.6, that taking part in the groups furthered the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills.

The evidence presented in 3.7 indicates that the teacher's story, as well as providing a model for storywriting and facilitating the discussion of emotional literacy issues, seems to have particularly fostered an interactive relationship between the group teacher and pupils. This relationship is similar to that advocated by Pullman (2003) when discussing the teaching of literacy and which he terms a master/apprentice relationship. This in turn appears to have helped pupils to feel more relaxed about engaging with writing and is summed up by the girl who said that it *'doesn't make you feel like some big human camera is watching us.'*

What is clearly indicated by the evidence in 3.2, 3.4, 3.5 and 4.1, is that the story writing groups supported both pupils' motivation to write and their ability to concentrate. 3.5 also shows that the groups supported pupils' self-esteem as writers as all felt that their writing skills had improved by taking part in the sessions.

In summary this report concludes that from the sample used in this pilot evaluation, engagement in Therapeutic Storywriting groups has:

- Enabled pupils to use the medium of story writing to process emotional experiences
- Helped pupils move through difficult feelings
- Encouraged pupils to develop co-operative and trusting relationships with peers
- Supported listening and speaking skills

- Fostered an interactive relationship between the teacher and group with respect to story writing skills
- Increased pupils concentration and motivation to engage with story writing
- Improved pupils' self-esteem as writers

In addition to data from pupil interviews, all the above issues are supported either by the pupils' written stories or discussions with the pupils' teachers.

Implications for further research

This evaluation was commissioned as a pilot study and four possible areas of future research are outlined below.

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

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

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

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

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Appendix 1: *Composition of the five sample groups*

Group A: 3 Y6 pupils (all girls)
This group was run by the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and was made up of 3 Y6 girls, all of whom had considerable emotional anxieties. All were on the SEN register for Emotional Behavioural and Social Difficulties with two of them at the level of School Action and one at School Action Plus. One of the girls had been excluded on a number of occasions because of violent behaviour in school and at the time of the interview was not allowed to stay in school at lunchtime because of her behaviour on the playground. There were also child protection concerns about another of the girls whose anxiety was particularly extreme, leading to physical symptoms. The third girl exhibited inappropriate and bizarre behaviour.

*Group B***:** 6 Y6 pupils *(4 boys and 2 girls)*
This group of six Year 6 children was run by the SENCO and consisted of two girls and four boys. Four of the pupils were on the SEN register, three at School Action and one at School Action Plus, with the other two at the monitoring stage. There had been child protection concerns about both of the girls. One of them was withdrawn and had anorexic tendencies and the other became easily upset about friendship difficulties. Of the boys, one was silent and withdrawn with child protection concerns; one was distressed about an acrimonious parental separation and had stopped working in class; one had friendship difficulties and frequently got into fights; and one with ADHD had challenging behaviour both in class and in the playground.

Group C: 4 Y5&6 pupils *(2 boys and 2 girls)* - 1 girl absent for interviews
The headteacher who was also the SENCO ran this mixed gender group of 4 children. One of the girls was away on the day of the interview and so is not included in the sample. The three pupils interviewed were a Y6 boy at School Action Plus for EBSDs and possible Autistic Spectrum Disorder; a Y5 boy with EBSDs who had witnessed a particularly traumatic event; and a withdrawn Y5 girl who had been moved away from her mother and was at School Action because of EBSDs getting in the way of her learning.

Group D: 5 Y5&6pupils *(all girls)*
In this group of 3 Y6 & 2 Y5 girls, also run by the SENCO, one pupil was on the SEN register at School Action for EBSD and the other 4 girls, while not on the SEN register, had been referred to the SENCO by their class teachers as having social and emotional difficulties that were getting in the way of their learning in the classroom. One of these was described as 'disengaged ' since her parents had separated, one was anxious about her father's imminent release from prison, one would often faint in class when feeling particularly anxious about family issues and one was described as immature with friendship difficulties.

Group E: 4 Y3&4 pupils *(2 girls and 2 boys)*
This group was run by myself as the researcher in the same school as group A. The purpose of this group, which ran for ten sessions, was initially to trial the use of a before and after assessment with teachers and pupils. However, as this group consisted of Y3 &4 pupils and the other four groups were made up of pupils from only Y5&6, it was decided to also include these pupils in the interview sample in order to involve the whole Key Stage 2 age range.

The group was a mixed gender group of four pupils with twoY3 girls and two Y4 boys. Three of the pupils were on the SEN register, two at School Action and one at School Action Plus, because of emotional anxieties getting in the way of their learning. The fourth pupil was on the child protection register but not the SEN register. One of the boys had been withdrawn from his class on a number of occasions because of anger outbursts while the other boy had become very withdrawn following the death of his mother. One of the girls was on the child protection register with care proceedings about to start and the other girl had very poor concentration on any classroom task and had also been excluded on a number of occasions because of her behaviour.

Appendix 2: *Questions for Individual Pupil Interviews*

1) **How have you found the storywriting group?**
2) **In what ways has it particularly helped you?**
3) **Has it helped you to write more in a set time? Why?**
   (If yes) How much more do you write in an average lesson?
4) **How much have you enjoyed writing your stories in the group? (Scale: Not at all, Not very much, A little, Quite a bit, A lot) Why?**
5) **How good do you think you are at writing now?**
   (Scale: Rubbish, Not very good, OK, Quite good, Brilliant) Why?
6) **How has the writing group affected your writing in class?**
7) **What has the relaxation and saying how you're feeling at the beginning of the session been like?**
8) **How have you got on with the other children in the group?**
9) **What was it like to have the teacher also writing a story?**
10) **Was it good to be able to have time for drawing as well as writing? Why?**
11) **Did the group help children to listen to each other? (Scale: Not at all, Not very much, A little bit, Quite a bit, A lot) In what ways?**
12) **In what way has it helped you listen or speak?**
13) **How good are you now at talking about feelings – either your own or those of story characters? (Scale: No good at all, Not very good, OK, Quite good, Really good) In what ways?**
14) **Did the group help you with your spelling, handwriting or punctuation? How?**
15) **Did your stories help you think about feelings- in what way?**
16) **How would you describe the group to another child who knew nothing about it?**
17) **How much do you think your stories have improved by coming to the group? (Scale: Not at all, Not very much, A little, Quite a bit, A lot) In what ways?**
18) **How do you feel about the group finishing?**
19) **Would you recommend the group to other children?**
20) **What sort of children do you think would benefit from being in the group?**
21) **Which of your stories is the one you will remember/enjoyed writing most?**

Appendix 3: Acronyms Used in the Report

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SENCO: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (teacher)

SERSEN: South-east Region Special Educational Needs Partnership

Beds: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorders