Educational &
Child Psychology

Volume 25 Number 1
2008

Emergent Knowledge

Contents

A Grounded Theory study of Circles of Friends groups: The power of the set-up meeting as a tool for opening the social field for isolated children in schools

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Abstract

'Circle of Friends' (CoF) was originally developed in Canada as a social tool for including vulnerable children or adults within their mainstream communities (Pearpoint, Forest & Snow, 1992). Within the UK context, CoF has been increasingly introduced by schools as a strategy for including pupils, with a range of challenging needs or behaviours, who have become rejected by or isolated from their peers.

The initial set-up meeting plays a critical role in establishing CoF interventions. The present paper focuses on a review of relevant qualitative and quantitative literature and a Grounded Theory analysis of a research study undertaken by the lead author. The design involved interviews with 25 facilitators of CoF within mainstream schools in a large shire county and an outer London suburb. The children participating in the CoF groups ranged in age from seven to twelve years.

The psycho-social theories emerging from the analysis contribute to our understanding of the part played by the set-up meeting and 'perspective taking' in the initial stages of the change process.

At its highest level of conceptualisation the final theory describes how a 'Circle of Friends' can facilitate the movement of a pupil from a 'closed' or isolated social field to more 'open', peer based, social relationships. Hypotheses for subsequent social action and future research are discussed.

Circle of Friends and social and emotional well being

Circle of Friends developed in Canada and North America in the late 1980's to support adults with disabilities (e.g. Gold, 1994). This approach was adapted for supporting with children with social, emotional and/or behaviour difficulties in schools in the late 1980s (Pearpoint & Forest, 1992) and developed in schools in the UK in the mid nineties (Newton, Taylor & Wilson, 1996). It is now a widely promoted approach, endorsed in the UK by the Department for Education and Science (Ofsted, 2003). This in part reflects the growing emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of school life (e.g. DfES, 2002, 2005) and the belief that poor social relationships and isolation are associated with a variety of negative outcomes for children such as truancy, poor academic performance and

mental health problems (e.g. Bagwell et al., 1998).

What is the evidence that the set-up meeting has an impact on the social context?

Research suggests that Circle of Friends can be envisaged as a two part intervention (Frederickson et al., 2005). The first part involves a set-up meeting that impacts on the peer view of a socially isolated child. The second part involves the creation of a support group for the child, which serves a number of functions in terms of social influence and practical support for the target child and peer group.

There is a growing body of qualitative (e.g. Eddas, 2002; Mackan & Cormier, 1992; Newton et al., 1996; Taylor, 1997; Taylor & Burden, 2000; Whittacker, 1998) and empirical research (e.g. Frederickson & Turner,

2003; Frederickson *et al.*, 2005) suggesting that the set-up meeting for a Circle of Friends intervention can exert a powerful, immediate influence on the attitudes of a peer group to a socially isolated child.

Mackan and Cormier (1992) commented how 'in most cases, more students respond to the invitation to join a Circle than are going to be required' (*op cit* p. 59). Furthermore, Whitacker (1998) described the positive impact of the set-up meeting on the whole class 'this experience seemed to help them to avoid a blaming orientation towards the child with autism and allowed a more balanced acknowledgement of his or her strengths as well as difficulties' (*op cit* p. 62). An awareness of changes in the class attitude was also noted by peers in Taylor and Burden (2000).

Empirical studies have provided further support. Frederickson and Turner (2003) used a two phase between groups design, with 10 target children in each phase aged between 6 and 12 years. Following a set-up meeting a circle group was facilitated by an Assistant Educational Psychologist for six weeks. Pre and post measures of the target child's self-perceptions, peers' acceptance of the child and the classteachers' ratings of the child's behaviour were collected. In phase one the Circle members were more accepting of the target child than were the peer group. In phase two both the Circle members and peer group were more accepting of the target child. Teacher ratings of social acceptance increased in phase two, but no other measures were statistically significant. The authors concluded 'the Circle of Friends approach therefore appears to be a useful means of changing other children's perceptions and judgements about a focus child' (p.15). However, the design of this study was not able to distinguish between the relative contributions of the set-up meeting and/or Circle meetings to this effect.

Frederickson *et al.* (2005) therefore conducted a further study, which involved 14 socially isolated primary children. As in the previous study, following a set-up meeting a Circle group was facilitated by an Assistant

Educational Psychologist for six weeks. Peer report measures of the target child's social acceptance and behaviour were taken before and after the set-up meeting, after the last Circle meeting and a term later. After the set-up meeting the peer group were more accepting and less rejecting of the target child. The authors concluded that 'most children and adults, who experience Circle of Friends, are moved by the setting up session' (p. 213). Frederickson *et al.* (2005) hypothesised that attribution retraining (Carlyon, 1997) and/or empathy induction (Upright, 2002) might provide explanatory psychological mechanisms for this effect. The follow up a term later was hampered by a 50% drop out rate which made the long term effect of the set-up meeting difficult to evaluate meaningfully.

The aim of the current study was to gain a deeper understanding of the processes potentially at work during a Circle of Friends intervention. The focus of the present paper is on the role of the set-up meeting.

Grounded Theory design and method
Selection of sample
The data for this study was the adult facilitators' accounts of the set-up meeting and the development of the Circle groups. The facilitator should be well placed to comment on many aspects of the group functioning and the wider school context.

Interviewees were identified by asking educational psychologists and teachers to nominate schools, using Circle's intervention, which met the following criteria:
- The Circle groups had been run for at least 6 weeks.
- The Circle had been run within the last two years.
- 'Positive outcomes' had resulted.
- The interventions were set-up within the Newton and Wilson (1999, 2003) guidelines for setting up and running a Circle of Friends.

The aim here was not to select a statistically representative sample of a population, but a varied sample within a 'local context' (Silverman, 2000). Selecting the sample in this way

was designed to produce a range of responses that would create data with variation to allow an expansive theory to be generated.

Description of sample

The data was derived from interviewing 20 facilitators, who had facilitated 17 Circles of Friends groups within schools in one shire county. A further five interviews were conducted with facilitators of Circle groups, who worked as part of an Outreach Service to mainstream schools in outer London. This provided data, in total, from 22 separate interventions.

The sample included a range of city, suburban and rural schools. There was a spread of educational psychologists, assistant educational psychologists and Advisory Support Teachers, who had been involved with facilitating the set-up meeting. The majority of the Circle facilitators were members of school staff either the classteacher, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator or a Teaching Assistant. All the facilitators were female. The length of the intervention ranged from 6 weeks to 116 weeks, with the median being 18 weeks.

The ages of the target children within the sample ranged from Year 2 to Year 7, with the majority of interventions being used with children towards the end of primary phase in Years 4, 5 and 6. All the children had difficulties with social interactions with peers. Children with a range of 'underlying' difficulties such as ADHD, Asperger Syndrome and Down's Syndrome were also included.

Semi-structured interview

A semi-structured interview was used which covered the sequence of events within the intervention (Robson, 1999). Open questions were used from the outset with later questions being influenced by developing theoretical ideas recorded within memos. The semi-structured interview is conceived as a process through which the researcher and respondent 'co-construct' meaning or interpretation of events (Charmaz, 2006).

All interviews lasted between 35 and 75 minutes. They were transcribed to allow them to be coded and further analysed.

The research path

Grounded Theory was chosen as the research method as it could be used to develop theory about complex social situations in real world settings that evolve over an extended period of time (e.g. Miller, 1995). The aim of the study was to develop theoretical understanding (Hughes, 2000) rather than test extant theory.

For more background on the epistemological position of Grounded Theory see Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Haig, 1995; James, 2006; Pidgeon, 1996; Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996; Strauss and Corbin, 1998.

Table 1 below sets out the design for the study, which proceeds in a series of broad stages, which in reality involve more interaction of processes than can be depicted diagrammatically. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the process of theory generation as resulting from inductive reasoning and a

Acknowledging Theoretical Sensitivities/Bias Circles of Friends Literature Review
Interviews 1–5 with facilitators L1: OPEN CODING
Interviews 6–10 with Facilitators L1: OPEN CODING L2: AXIAL CODING
Interviews 11–15 with Facilitators L1: OPEN CODING L2: AXIAL CODING L3: HIGHER ORDER CONCEPTUAL CODING
DRAFT GROUNDED THEORY
Literature Review
Interviews 16–24 with Facilitators THEORETICAL SAMPLING
THEORY CHALLENGE AND REFINEMENT
FINAL GROUNDED THEORY

Table 1: A diagram showing the methodological design for the study.

'flip-flop' or interplay between the emerging data and researcher's ideas.

Initially a list of theories and ideas was generated to acknowledge and make explicit the authors' knowledge base at the outset of the study. A more detailed review of the literature about Circles interventions was conducted and is summarised in the introduction to this paper.

Fifteen interviews were then carried out. Interview transcripts unitised into data that could then be given an open code. Initial level 1 coding was undertaken on each transcript in turn and this analysis was used to inform questions asked at the next interview in all but four cases. The 'constant comparative' method and asking questions of the data were the two main analytical tools used (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Ideas and thoughts arising as analysis was conducted were recorded at the time using handwritten memos.

Level 1 coding produced a list of 312 'open codes' describing concepts. After five interviews, it was possible to begin speculative axial coding (level 2), which described categories of concepts. This developed further as more data became available. Collating and sorting ideas arising in memos was used as a technique to identify key ideas.

After 15 interviews, only a few new codes were being added and the coding scheme was thus nearing 'saturation'. Sixty-eight axial codes were consistently established and it was possible to start to reflect on level 3 codes, which describe the core psychological concepts that link axials together.

A further literature review allowed ideas from the coding scheme to be compared with existing theory and research.

Additional 'theoretical sampling' of a further 10 interviews was used to 'challenge' the theory and add additional data, description and precision to the theory. Eighteen axial codes were identified as central to the process, in so much as they were robust concepts that recurred in the data and were able to link categories, or account for variation between them. These were finally grouped into two principal level 3 codes which described the central psychological concept.

A final Grounded Theory describing the constructed theory in full and placing it within the context of existing theory and research was then written (see James, 2006).

Results of the analysis: A Grounded Theory of the set-up meeting

Movement from a closed to an open social field: The core psychological process

The level 3 and axial codes that underpin the Grounded Theory are described below. The analysis illuminated the movement from a 'closed' to more 'open' social system as the core psychological process. This provided the conceptual link between codes and recurred frequently in the data. This theoretical idea has also been used to describe other social contexts (e.g. Dowling & Osborne, 1994; Erwin, 1993; Luft, 1984; Murstein, 1977). Examples of coded data, below, are included for illustration.

It was conjectured that when children enter school they join a new and 'open field' rich with potential peer interactions (Erwin, 1993). 'Field' in this context is defined as the range of potential opportunities for a child to interact with other children and form new relationships (e.g. Putallaz & Wasserman, 1990). As time goes on, the field of opportunities becomes more limited and 'closed', as friendships and roles become established. An example of coded comments included

> *'It was a bit like a square peg in a round hole. She could not fit into the class and the class did not allow her to fit in either' (10).*

It was thought this arose as a consequence of daily interactions forming increasingly consistent and inflexible patterns, shaping, and being shaped by the perceptions that children develop of one another (Ladd, 1990; Sandstrom, 1999).

Nature of the child's social interaction difficulties: aggressive to passive

Children who are socially isolated may thus find it difficult to re-enter the social field of their peers, displaying behaviour that is

perceived at the extreme ends of a behavioural continuum ranging from socially aggressive, to socially passive. E.g.

> *The main problem was his aggression, usually outside class, but sometimes in class and that would be the way that he solved his problems, by hitting or thumping someone' (18). (Socially aggressive).*

> *'She lacked confidence, she didn't interact with other children spontaneously' (25). (Socially passive).*

Furthermore, the target child's 'reputation' amongst peers and consequent negative cycles of interaction can become self-perpetuating (Bierman, 2004). This can be the result of attributional biases in the rejected child's view of peers (e.g. Patterson *et al.*, 1990) and peers' views of the rejected child (e.g. Hughes *et al.*, 1991; Waas & Honer, 1990). An example of coded comments made by facilitators showing how the target child may react to situations on the basis of her previous experiences included

> *'Because I think she was used to being rejected and turned down her approach was very aggressive' (9).*

In turn, the peers' attitudes may be a block to creating any opportunities for the nature of interactions to change. An example of facilitator's comments in this category included

> *'They were not very forgiving at all, they didn't give her a chance or extra leeway' (9).*

Reaction of the peer group to the child: Active rejection to active acceptance

The peer group may develop a 'closed' view of the child influenced by factors such as limited information, negative experience, lack of social awareness related to age, and limited abilities to generate theories about behaviour (e.g. Rholes & Ruble, 1984).

Their reaction may be to reject or neglect the target child (Bierman 2004; Barrett & Randall, 2004), even if positive attempts to change are made. Reaction may take the form of:

● *Active Rejection* (i.e. hostile comments and actions)
> e.g. *'the children started retaliating and they would start on him when the teacher's back was turned' (2)*

● *Passive Rejection* (i.e. avoiding or ignoring the child)
> e.g. *'I think that a lot of his peers were wary of him' (1)*

● *Passive Acceptance* (i.e. wanting to help but not knowing how to)
> e.g. *'they were tolerant, but at the same time, must have got fed up with it really' (4)*

Part of the facilitator's aim of the Circle intervention is to re-open and reframe the peer group's view of the target child and towards 'Active Acceptance'. How entrenched the peer group's views are of the child may determine how far attitude shift is possible.

It is possible that peer attitudes to rejected children may be more resistant to change than in the case of neglected children. The peer view of the former may be more entrenched because of their presenting behaviour (e.g. Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983). In extreme cases, parents may further reinforce negative attitudes within a school community. An example of this was expressed by one facilitator as follows:

> *'We had inherited these problems from the previous school, and parents had got involved and parents' opinions had been put on their children' (10).*

Facilitator aware the social situation may contribute to the child's distress/behaviour

The facilitator may hold a complex view of the target child's situation. He/she may be aware of the social isolation of the target child and how this may contribute to the latter's attitudes and behaviour. He/she may also be aware of the social interaction difficulties of the child, which may range from aggressive to passive behaviour. In addition 'within child' diagnoses (e.g. ADHD, ASD) which may influence behaviour, as well as home-based issues. The facilitator may believe that peer/social support will benefit to the child, as it is the child's social isolation which significantly contributes to the child's distress and behaviour. An illustration of how one facilitator's dominant causal attributions tended to focus on external influences included;

> *'She over compensated for having very few friends by trying to dominate everybody' (10).*

The child's behaviour and social isolation may be more evident during unstructured sessions, such as break-times. These are the

times when the social challenge is greatest and adult intervention most difficult. Previous interventions may have focused, more specifically, on the child or peer group in isolation and, therefore, not impacted on the negative cycle of the interactions (Frederickson & Turner, 2003).

Children have open discussion of target child's positives and negatives

An 'open' social field is one in which attitudes can change and new relationships and patterns of behaviour can develop. As indicated earlier, Circles is a 'systemic intervention' (Dowling & Osborne, 1994). It aims to 'open up' the social field for the target child, creating new opportunities for social support, making new friends and facilitating positive interactions with peers. This in turn may influence the child's own attitudes and behaviour. The facilitator's aim, therefore, is to promote constructive interactions between the child and peer group.

This 'opening up' process involves crossing social boundaries. Systemic theory (Dowling & Osborne, 1994) proposes that social systems are defined by such boundaries, which are held in place by social conventions. For example, classmates and teachers do not normally talk about specific children in their absence.

In this instance 'permission' is required from the child at the centre of the Circle, and confidence in the intervention established among staff, who may be anxious about how to deal with any difficulties that could arise. This may require some preparatory training and assurance. A few facilitators described the initial anxieties of school staff and children to opening up the 'problem'. Part of the process of seeking permission involved talking through and overcoming these anxieties.

Range of processes underlying prosocial reaction of the class based on new perspectives

The set-up meeting is the first part of the intervention and, as we have seen, it focuses on the peer group, with the focus child absent. The class begin the meeting

with a 'closed' or limited view of the child. An example of a facilitator's comments included;

'I think they had just put up the shutters' (9).

The initial meeting allows a more 'open' view of the child to be obtained by the peer group (Luft, 1984). There are two elements of this meeting: the discussion of the child's positives and negatives, and the completion and discussion of the 'social circles' sociogram. Perspective taking appears to have been the central process of these activities. For example, the class might get insights into adults' views of the child;

'It heightened their awareness, the fact that we were trying to help him' (22)

and their peers' view of the child.

'I think it was a relief for them that they could tell somebody all of it and they were able to share it with the class' (3).

Completing their own social circle diagram enabled peers to 'stand in the child's shoes' (Taylor, 1997) and see the situation from the target other's perspective. The set-up meeting therefore has potential to influence the class view in the following ways:

- *Increasing the peer group's awareness of their own relationships*
  e.g. *'I think what that generates is an awareness, it makes explicit the sorts of levels of relationships you have'(14)*
- *Providing information about the child's social isolation and how s/he may be feeling*
  e.g. *'he was quite isolated so to begin with it might have been a bit of an eye-opener to them how isolated he did feel (8)*
- *Creating a theory linking the child's behaviour to his/her social isolation*
  e.g. *'they were thinking . . . . . he doesn't have a close friend and, therefore, he is sad and miserable. . . . being irritating and trying to get attention in any way (11)*

Potential barriers to this 'openness' may need to be overcome, such as peers being reluctant to be critical and feeling awkward about talking behind someone's back, albeit with permission. While the facilitator encourages openness and honesty (Pearpoint & Forest, 1992), as they are generally outside

the school system this may assist them in being seen as impartial and also confer added significance to the meeting. A number of facilitator's commented on this, for example;

> *'she values what they are saying so they talk.... they'll open up' (24).*

Class member volunteering for the Circle and Softening of Class Attitudes Towards the Target Child

Class members will generally respond to the set-up meeting by volunteering, often in significant numbers, to be part of the Circle. (Mackan & Cormier, 1992). In addition, unless views are extremely entrenched, they may subsequently become more accepting towards the target child (Frederickson *et al.*, 2005).

For example, many facilitators described the change in the class following the set-up meeting in the following way;

> *'They seemed more tolerant, I think because they knew his problems, they didn't just think "oh he is just being silly," so they accepted him more. They treated him like one of the class' (20).*

Perhaps the following processes help explain the peer group's response to the meeting.

● *Increased awareness that the child needs help* e.g. *'A lot of them I don't suppose that would have ever crossed their mind that people had difficulties like that ... suddenly to find .... he hasn't got lots of friends (11)*

● *Providing an opportunity to help the child* e.g. *'they would like to be supportive of her in whatever way they could be. This was an opportunity to do that (14)*

● *Emotionally based empathy (i.e. understanding how a socially isolated child may feel) (Hoffman, 2000)* e.g. *'I think a lot of the children put themselves in her situation and thought how it must be for her (5)*

● *Cognitively based empathy (i.e. understanding how a socially isolated child may behave) (Hoffman, 2000)* e.g. *'some of them realised though that the aggression that the child sometimes has was because she was so frustrated and having no friends an feeling so lonely' (5)*

Perspective taking and empathy are commonly associated with helping behaviour (e.g. Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Underwood & Moore, 1982). The degree of this prosocial response in the Circle depends on the children's level of social understanding, which is likely to vary with age, experience and cognitive skills (Hoffman, 1988, 2000). However, many children will have experienced some social isolation in their school life and may empathise on the basis of a shared experience (Barnett, 1984). A further comment made by facilitators illuminated this;

> *'a number of children, who will say 'I know what it's like to be left out' and I think it probably happens to everybody at some stage and so you can develop that empathy in other children' (15).*

Evaluating the Grounded Theory study

According to Silverman (2000), issues of validity and reliability in research are about establishing the trustworthiness of the results and conclusions. This is achieved by eliminating bias through the application of rigour, honesty and thoroughness in the analysis. These, of course, are important to any study. But in the case of Grounded Theory, for instance, they may be demonstrated in different ways than in quantitative methodologies.

Strauss and Corbin (1998), Silverman (2000) and Charmaz (2006) have suggested the following criteria for assessing the quality of Grounded Theory studies and qualitative research generally.

● *Are the data sufficient to merit your claims?*
The data were based on 25 interviews across a range of children's ages, types of school and geographical area. All the interventions followed the Newton and Wilson approach, but there were variations within the sample in the length of intervention, who took the set-up meeting and who ran the group. Two 'negative cases' were also sampled.

● *Have you made systematic comparisons between observations and between categories?*
A description of the coding process with examples is provided in James (2006), which was carried out rigorously using the

'constant comparison' method. The internal consistency of the coding scheme was also checked by asking another educational psychologist to place examples of data into a 10% random sample of open codes. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa and achieved a high correlation of 0.91. This indicated that the coding was reliable in so much as data representing the same concepts had been placed within the same code. Other colleagues and academics in regular supervision throughout the research have further inspected the coding.

● *Do the categories cover a wide range of observations?*

All data in the first 15 interviews were coded. The next 10 interviews were theoretically sampled. The categories were based on the close examination of hundreds of data units. Quantification of numbers of items or numbers of facilitators giving items in each code has not been provided as these were not statistically representative. The aim in selecting the sample was to create maximum variation, not to gather duplicate instances of the same code.

● *Are there strong links between the gathered data and your argument and analysis?*

Throughout the research process attempts were made to ground the theory within the data. All conceptual ideas can be traced to representative data codes. They fit well with the data and also appear grounded in the data conceptually as they are based on a common description of experience. The ideas also gain additional support from close links to psychological concepts described in previous published studies.

● *Is it a good theory?*

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined a theory as 'a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena' (p.15).

The theory identified the actors, provided a temporal sequence of events, indicated the range of potential processes and outcomes, and specified conditions at each point in the intervention that may facilitate or form a barrier to processes and outcomes. It covers the majority of variability in the data, as it is based on 15 fully coded and a further 10 theoretically sampled interviews. The current theory gives the clearest theoretical description to date of the Circle of Friends process and makes strong links with existing research.

● *Can the theory explain existing research and challenge and extend current thinking?*

The current theory offers credible explanations for the pattern of results shown in existing research, particularly the recent studies by Frederickson and colleagues. For example, the results of the Frederickson *et al.* (2005) study showed that the set-up meeting increased levels of acceptance and reduced rejection in the class. This matches with the current study with many facilitators describing the attitude change in the class following the intervention. The theory predicts that this would be the case, as perspective taking is associated with increased empathy and prosocial behaviour.

● *What is the relevance of the methodology to the research, its power of explanation/ generalisability and its limitations?*

The aim of this research has been the theoretical qualification of phenomena, not quantification. The theory operates at a substantive level, providing new ways of understanding the Circle's intervention, within a defined context. It has used subjective experience for its data, rather than objective measures. This type of data permits more of the complexity and richness of real life experience to be accessed. A wide range of examples have been examined and the developed theory is sufficiently robust to account for this variation. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argued that intersubjectivity between respondents in similar circumstances might suggest conditions and meanings that are part of an important shared experience. It is, therefore, highly likely that phenomena described in the current study will occur where the intervention is repeated in similar contexts. Some of the conditions that may make this more likely are explained within the theory.

Conclusions, hypotheses for social action and future research

The quantitative and qualitative evidence discussed in this paper provides a strong account of and support for the effects of the set-up meeting on peer attitudes towards those socially isolated children who are the focus of the Circle of Friends intervention. In addition, well-established psychological mechanisms provide a grounded theoretical explanation of why such an attitude change might well be expected to follow this intervention and the factors that are likely to contribute to its effectiveness.

Theory is necessary in order to guide meaningful practice (Hughes, 2000), but needs further confirmation. This can be achieved by following either a positivist or realist approach. Thus, it could be tested by further quasi-experimental studies (Holburn, 2002). However, O'Brien (2002) questions the meaning and value of this in relation to humanistic interventions. Theory may also be tested in the process of implementing an intervention. Thus, the research has generated hypotheses that can be tested further through social action (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and reflective practice. Hypotheses for social action that were generated from the current study include:

● If the class view of the child is categorised as entrenched and 'actively rejecting' is it less likely to shift its perceptions of the target child as a result of the set-up meeting, than if they are 'passively accepting'?

● The set-up meeting script implies a causal theory linking how a child feels with how they may behave. Does the intervention need to be presented differently for children whose rejection may be a response to their challenging behaviour, as opposed to children with learning or physical disabilities whose social isolation may have very different origins?

● Are changes in levels of acceptance a short or longer-term effect? Do continual reminders from the class teacher and/or words and actions from the Circle help to keep the 'norm of acceptance' in the minds of the class?

One final comment. Both Silverman (2000) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) have suggested that one of the tests of the usefulness of the Grounded Theory could be if it is read, discussed, criticised and developed further. Without this 'social impact' then the theory is redundant and it does not contribute to the development of knowledge and understanding. The intention behind this paper is to share current research with a wider audience to promote this further debate and enquiry.

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