Young People Discussing Life

Challenges and troubles: hearing the voice of young people

Research Report • March 2005

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in collaboration with

SOUTH EAST SHEFFIELD EDUCATION ACTION ZONE

Action for Achievement

Acknowledgements

- Margaret Booth – Director of South East Sheffield Education Action Zone
- Professor Colin Pritchard (Research Project Supervisor) – Mental Health Group, School of Medicine, University of Southampton
- Kath Sharman (Research Facilitator) – Director, SH-INE (Self Help – Independent Nutrition and Exercise)
- Staff of the participating schools and especially the young people who took part in the research.

I am grateful to all the young people who allowed us to glimpse into aspects of their lives and spoke so frankly about their challenges and troubles. I hope firstly that our interpretation of their situation would be recognised by these respondents, and secondly that we may take appropriate action as a result of having had the privilege of being able to listen to them.

Dissemination

The research findings will be disseminated at a conference to be held by the South East Sheffield Education Action Zone and the University of Sheffield CARER Department on the 15th March 2005 and a post-conference publication will be available.

1. This research study is a collaboration between South East Sheffield Education Action Zone and the CARER department of the University of Sheffield School of Nursing & Midwifery.

2. Most of the research which has taken place with groups of young people has been investigating topics defined by adults via an agenda chosen by the adult researchers

3. The research aimed at hearing the voices/views of young people who are seen to challenge or be disengaged from the secondary school learning environment. The research encouraged selected young people to 'tell it as it is'. We asked them about Adults, Peers, Home and School with no further definition of the agenda and no boundaries or restrictions on what, if anything, the respondents may wish to say.

4. We know from Gordon and Grant (1997) and from Hill et al (1996 b) that young people, in general, know what it is that makes for a good life. Stimulating school experiences count a great deal, as do supportive families, but perhaps most important of all are friends.

5. The pressure of academic work, examinations and the expectations of parents and the tensions of friendship all add to the rapidly occurring psycho-social changes as young people grow through late childhood into early adulthood (Erikson1998).

6. There is for some young people, a deep sense of distress, emotional pain and a feeling of injustice in being excluded, used or insufficiently acknowledged or loved.

7. One in five young people are experiencing mental health problems. Also suicide, depression and self harm are all reported to be increasing (Mental Health Foundation 2002).

8. Young people who are excluded from school are, almost by definition educational under achievers. They are therefore vulnerable to a 'cycle of disadvantage' such as difficulty in finding employment, low self esteem, housing problems and poorer levels of health (Pritchard 2000).

9. Social exclusion begins in childhood, with poor parenting, truancy and disrupted education. The effects can be catastrophic for the individual and society, and are not infrequently implicated in mental illness in adulthood (Pritchard and Mason 2000).

10. The Audit Commission Report 'Misspent Youth' (1998) drew national attention to the cost and sequels of crime committed by young people. One example noted that 'Some 140 excluded youngsters can cost society over 4.2 million pounds – more than enough to provide each of them with their own police officer and social worker' (Pritchard and Cox 1998).

11. The psycho-social reality of 'troubled' young people's lives changes so turbulently that we have a responsibility to carefully examine the views of young people and in particularly those 'in trouble' at least each decade, in order that our understanding of their lives does not become obsolete.

Methodology

This research study took a radical approach of modernistic phenomenology, which aims to illustrate the feelings that people experience, and involved gathering data by focus groups of how participants makes sense of their experiences. 'The focus is on the understanding it from the individuals prospective, frame of reference, point of view, in other words, the participants' experiences as **they** see it' (Crotty 1996 p 12).

- Eight focus groups were held with young people meeting the target criteria (See Appendix 1 of the research report)
- The young people were aged between 14 to 16 years in order to be post-puberty and good witnesses
- Boys and girls were placed into separate focus groups in order to lessen flirting behaviours
- Appropriate consent was taken in writing from the school head teachers, the parents or guardians of young people and the young people themselves; ethical approval was also obtained

Initial emerging themes

The aim of the focus group research was to identify what it is like to be a young person today. Key themes were drawn from each of four categories: Home, Peers, Adults and School.

Home

All the groups stated at some point that parents 'don't listen' and 'don't understand'. Some mentioned that parents 'don't care, are nosey, or interfere'. When asked to elaborate on this, young people felt that parents often asked too many questions about where they were going and who they were with and what time they would be in. Although this could be due to genuine concern for safety, all the groups thought this was interfering. Some reported that they were not totally honest with parents, as they anticipated their reaction, for example, being with friends whom their parents disapproved of.

All groups referred to home in a practical way; 'It's just somewhere to eat and sleep' 'a sleeping place', 'where you get food', 'warm', 'food and clothing'. Only one young person in all the groups mentioned love. (G4)

'Home for me is tidying up, babysitting at 2:30 am in the morning and going to bed'. (G4)

'It's supposed to be safe but it's not – you feel safer in yer mates house'. (G4)

'Sleep at home, have tea and go out'. (G7)

There were many references to families being dysfunctional, arguing or fighting. Many referred to family traumas being the cause of their 'naughty behaviour' offering examples; death of mother, brother, sister, parents separating, or being compared to siblings who were better behaved.

Two groups recalled incidence of parents drinking and reports of domestic violence. When asked how they responded one said. 'I'm fucking packing my clothes and you're not going to see me again and I used to lock myself in the bathroom'. (G2)

All the groups referred to 'being out with mates' as a form of escape from what was happening within the home. Young people with similar background experiences seem to 'clump' together and form strong peer relationships. Some of the aggression observed at home appeared to be 'acted out' in the neighbourhood. Evening activities for all groups involved being in a 'gang' .

(G8) 'I'd rather they hit me and shout at me than saying they're disappointed – that's the worse than anything'. This comment suggests that although the young people use their bravado as a coping mechanism, they do care about their parents' reaction and they find it difficult to hear how their parents feel about their behaviours.

Peers

All the groups were very supportive of each other during interviews. The female groups were very tactile and perceptive of each other's feelings. If a member of their group became emotional, there was an immediate response within the group and hugging was very acceptable.

Many held hands with their peers as they expressed the difficulties they were experiencing in their lives. The young women were very emotionally literate and could express themselves well, with a high level of maturity. In contrast the male groups found difficulties in self expression, which was often through swearing, flatulence or rapping (singing) as distraction or most interestingly to soften apparently painful discourse. However, the males demonstrated an equal level of support, which was expressed in playful pushes, kicks and nudges. There was a deep level of empathy and understanding of each other within all groups and peers and particularly 'fitting in' with their social group consistently appeared to be the most important element for all focus groups.

All the groups perceived themselves to be 'bad' or 'naughty' and the peer groups in school continued to meet out of school, described as 'street gangs'. All peer groups were mixed gender and the main purpose of meeting outside school was to 'escape home', 'relieve boredom', and 'have a laugh'. When asked what happened in the 'street gangs', groups reported similar activities regardless of which school they attended.

Recalls of having fun with mates all involved some form of violence, aggression, drink (alcohol), or drugs. The groups did not appear to fully appreciate the seriousness of their behaviour as if it were some sort of game.

Adults

All the groups recalled experiences with the police, both positive and negative and described 'good and bad cops'. (G2) 'All we do is walk around streets and get a chase or get done off coppers'. (G4) 'A group of kids together always reads trouble to others, but all we do is chat an 'ave a laugh'.

It was very clear that peers are central to young peoples' lives and have a vital role in offering emotional support, someone to talk to and listen. Peers show a level of understanding that very few adults appear able to offer.

(G2) 'Friends are very important – frightened they won't be there when we leave school. I need them to talk too, couldn't cope without mates'.

(G4) 'Mates going through same shit so they understand'.

(G8) 'I have a good time with mates – I know that whatever happens the group sticks together'.

School

Not one person in any of the groups expressed positive comments about school. Groups 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 described school as 'shit', 'stressful' and 'boring'. Four groups stated that being 'bored' was why people messed about in lessons.

All could recall bad experiences they had had with teachers, which resulted in them feeling 'labelled' by schools as 'bad' or 'naughty'. All groups said once 'labelled' it was very difficult to change, 'even when you wanted to'. Group Three recognised that all the people in their interview were 'naughty':

(G6) 'We get blamed when we're not the culprits.' 'It's horrible to have a label'.

'If we have a problem with one teacher they spread it round the others'.

(G2) 'They humiliate me in front of everyone'.

'They pick arguments with you'.

'You get a really major label, but it's not our label it's given to you. I'm judged by brothers and sisters – I must be bad so act it out'.

Perceived reasons for why they are considered to be 'naughty' children

The young people offered statements related to why they were considered to be 'naughty' children. These fell into three main categories:

1. **Boredom**

   (G1) 'Boring that's why people mess about'.
   'Like school just hate lessons and teachers it's boring'.

   (G2) 'Boring so start messing about'.
   'Not able to talk and often we talk about what's happening in lessons but we still get done for it so we mess about'.

   (G3) 'School's crap and they teach us nowt. It's boring'

   (G7) 'I take drugs and smoke cos I'm bored'.

2. **Stress and Depression**

   (G1) 'School's crap, wank, shit, stressful'.
   'What stresses you most is teachers – always getting grief off someone'.

   (G7) 'The teachers when it goes wrong in their life they tek it out on the kids.'
   'Yes but that happens with us doesn't it, so I mean if you've had an argument at home and you're right mad then you come to school and start'.
   'I shout at school and take it out on the teacher.'
   How many bad days do you have?
   'a lot' 'every day'.

   (G3) 'We shouldn't have stress at our age we should be having fun. Things are too serious too soon'.
   'Teachers need to be more laid back'.
   'Smoke and drink cos stressed – keeps me calm.'

(G4) ‘They put so much work on you, they expect you to do so much stuff and it depresses you’.

3. **Standing up for yourself/Reaction to teachers**

(G8) ‘She doesn’t really misbehave; she acts up to teachers because they act up to her. They notice when your bad but they don’t notice when your good.’
‘They expect you to fail they expect you to misbehave.’
‘When they ask me to sit down I stand up I don’t care any more’.

(G8) ‘Teachers wind you up and they tell lies. You wrong a teacher once and he picks on you for the rest of your life and they talk in the staff room and then everyone as a go at you.’

(G5) ‘Teachers treat you like shit and they expect you to say nowt back to them’.

(G6) ‘My mum says if a teacher has her mouth in your face don’t just stand there and look stupid – yet if you mouth back you get done for it’.

(G2) ‘Lots of bullying and fighting in school – if you don’t stand up for yourself you end up being bullied physical and verbal’
Why does it happen?
‘not got right gear like Nike or expensive clothes they judge you without getting to know you’.

Introduction

Most of the research which has taken place with groups of young people has been investigating topics defined by adults. Studies have invited young people to present and discuss their views on a range of salient areas – for example Sexual Health, Citizenship, Disability and Experience of Care – but importantly always an agenda chosen by adults.

This research aimed at hearing the voices/views of contemporary 'problematic' young people. The project has enabled young people who are seen to challenge or be disengaged from the secondary school learning environment to speak out and 'tell it as it is'.

There is however a relative paucity of rigorous and systematic research, which considers the views of 'troubled' young people commenting freely on their lives. For the purposes of this research, the author relies on two assumptions: firstly that adults cannot accurately remember their teenage years and secondly even if this was possible the world which they would recollect would be significantly different to the world experienced by secondary school aged young people today.

Rationale for the Research Study

Young people, as they grow through late childhood into early adulthood face the most extensive and rapidly occurring psycho-social changes of their entire lives (Erikson 1998). We know that each individual has his or her own idiosyncratic pathway through adolescence, balancing the pressures of the external world with the influence of past present experience. We know from Gordon and Grant (1997) and the Hill et al (1996b) that young people know what it is that makes for a good life. Stimulating school experiences count a great deal, as do supportive families, but perhaps most important of all are friends.

At the same time, both within those making steady and confident progress but more predominantly in those less sure of their abilities, there is a great sense of pressure and distress. The strain of examinations, and the expectations of parents and the tensions of friendships all add to a sense of inevitable conflict and dissatisfaction. There is for some, a deep sense of hurt, betrayal and injustice in being excluded or used or insufficiently acknowledged or loved. Frightening feelings were reported that found outward expression in angry, violent behaviour and commonly leave 'troubled' young people feeling a great deal to self-hatred and even suicidal thoughts. These changes when taken together with the processes of physical and emotional maturation can, for some individuals contribute to considerable mental health challenges. One in five young people are experiencing mental health problems, also suicide, depression and self-harm are all reported to be increasing (Mental Health Foundation 2002).

Additionally, young people who are excluded from school are, almost by definition, educational underachievers. They are therefore vulnerable to a 'cycle of disadvantage', such as difficulty in finding employment, low self esteem, housing problems and poorer levels of health (Pritchard 2000).

Social exclusion begins in childhood with poor parenting, truancy and disrupted education. The effects can be catastrophic for the individual and society, and are not infrequently implicated in mental illness in adulthood (Pritchard and Mason 2000).

Just one 'problem' area faced by young people (from different perspectives) is crime. The Audit Commission (1999) published a major review of the costs and sequels of crime committed by young people. The report 'Misspent Youth' drew national attention to the connection between crime and a range or psycho social pathologies in what it termed 'the cycle of disadvantage'. The Audit

Commission's brief is to appraise the efficiency of public services, and it therefore catalogues the cost of crime committed by young people and its attendant social disruption.

One example noted that 'some 140 excluded youngsters can cost society over 4.2 million pounds, more than enough to provide each of them with their own police officer and social worker' (Pritchard and Cox 1998).

While research in psychotherapy for children and adolescents has advanced considerably in the past decade (Kazdin 1995a), the vast majority of this research had focused on treatment technologies, and in particular on their relative effectiveness (Kazdin et al 1990).

Although the cycle of life is common in all cultures and through all times, it is the tempo, key and forté of life that changes. Social history tells us that society's norms are changing rapidly. The psycho-social reality of 'troubled' young people's lives changes so turbulently that we have a responsibility to carefully examine the views of young people, and particularly those in trouble, at least each decade in order that our understanding of their lives does not become obsolete.

Research Design and Methodology

The research is mainly exploratory and qualitative in design. Although this method of research is often called 'soft', because it does not involve statistical analysis, the strength of qualitative design is that research can gain a valuable contribution from theory generated from the research subjects, which may then be supported or further tested. Another major strength of a qualitative approach is that it usually occurs in naturalistic setting, where the phenomena can be examined in detail, collecting a considerable amount of rich data from a relatively small number of respondents (Crookes and Davies, 1999:119).

This research study took a radical approach of modernistic phenomenology, which aims to illuminate the feelings that people experience and involves gathering subjective meaning of how participants make sense of these experiences.

The fundamental philosophy of modernistic phenomenological research is the need to understand the subjective meaning of lived experiences from the perspective of the subjects in order to;

> focus on understanding it from the individual perspective, frame of reference, point of view, in other words, the participants experiences as **they** see it. (Crotty, 1996, p12)

This is reinforced by Montibriand and Laing (1991) who state that;

> it is the task of the researcher to gain entry into the conceptual world of the informant, allowing them to construct and give meaning to their own reality, referred to as individualism.
> (Montibriand and Laing, 1991, p329)

> The main purpose of studying experiences is to understand them, their nature, their meaning and their essential structuring, even if it is only pertinent to one informant it is relevant.
> (Crotty, 1996, p 22)

Crotty reported that although most qualitative researchers explore narrative accounts or constructions of their subjects' experiences, they then proceed to report how they (the researchers) made sense of the informants' 'lived experiences', that is, the researcher offered their interpretation of their informants' experiences. Careful consideration was paid to this criticism by Crotty during the analysis of the study and every effort was made to ensure that the analysis was a true representation of the young people

interviewed. To ensure that we did not fall into this trap we followed the process of Hermeneutic Inquiry, which assures the researchers capture the 'real life' experiences of subjects. It was thought that if we were ever to understand the experiences what it was like to be a teenager in today's society, then we needed to focus on the narratives of the individuals in the study.

Hermeneutic Interpretation of Inquiry

According to Moustakas (1994), hermeneutic research develops through exhaustive self search, dialogues with others and creative depiction of their experiences. The research process for this method of inquiry is outlined in stages by Reason (1994, p 11). This process became the theoretical structure for research progression.

Stage One – Initial Engagement

The researchers clarify what is to be researched. They develop a passion for the need to know and research questions or a hypothesis emerge.

Little is known in the published literature as to how young people who are perceived as 'in trouble' or 'troublesome' see their lives. I became aware that I was one of many professional adults engaged in offering help to young people who were facing challenges or troubles in their lives. Although I could empathise with individual clients I had little understanding of 'troubled' young people as a social group.

My purpose was to conduct a rigorous and systematic study in order to derive some conception of what, if anything, young people 'in trouble' with the education system wish to say about their lives in relation to adults, peers, home and school.

Stage Two – Total Immersion

The researchers live their research whilst awake, asleep and in their dreams.

I asked about adults, peers, home and school with no further definition of what the young people may or may not say. Whilst not encouraging foul or potentially offensive language the facilitator to the project and myself made it clear that we wanted the young people to 'tell it as it is'.

We were conscious that both myself and the project facilitator were professional counsellors with a special interest in counselling young people. We were therefore particularly careful to use counselling skills to clarify the young people's meanings but not to enter into therapy.

Stage Three – Incubation

The researchers retreat from intense involvement and allow their unconscious process to take their research forward, reflecting on the subjects experiences.

The researcher and the facilitator independently reviewed transcripts of the focus groups sessions and then met on three separate occasions to compare and contrast our analysis of these data. Great care was taken to distil meanings from the remarks and illustrations provided by the respondents. The vocabulary and nomenclature used by the young people was particularly important in understanding their views of their lives and their situation.

However, some phrases or terms did not appear to have a clear or consistent meaning, for example 'you're a minger' or 'it's minging' appear to refer to someone or something outside the norms of the social group. We were careful to ask apparently naive questions in order to satisfy ourselves that we understood the young peoples discourse in the context of their illustrations.

Stage Four – Illumination

Awareness and insights emerge leading to a synthesis. This occurs naturally and is based on intuitive knowledge. The research emerges into consciousness it becomes real.

The Focus groups were conducted at the school sites and in school time. The young people were seated around a table with myself (male) and the project facilitator (female) being the only other people present during the focus group sessions.

The idea of focus groups is to collect qualitative data by encouraging group interaction and recording the interaction rather than asking individuals questions in turn (Kitzinger 1995). This process respects the whole potential of human experiences, 'including feelings and spiritual dimensions of experiences as well as cognition and behaviour' (McLeod 1995: 87). To ensure credibility, these may be structured or semi structured and taped.

Stage Five – Explication

Full examination of what has emerged with the development of new levels of understanding.

The interpretations of the initial emerging themes from the research findings will be strengthened by firstly constructing a piece of drama around the themes from the young people's responses. The work will be produced by a professional Director working in close collaboration with the researcher and with young people who fit the criteria for identifying 'challenged' or 'troubled' young people (Appendix 1).

Secondly, the initial emerging themes and the drama (once validated by the above process) will be presented at a Dissemination Conference in order to give a range of professionals involved in educating, helping or serving young people an opportunity to respond to the expressed views of the focus group sample.

Stage Six – Creative Syntheses

Further strengthening of the research (yet to be decided upon) and a post conference publication will extend the dissemination of this work to a wider audience.

Mental Health Emotional Well-being

The mental health of young people is of central importance not only to their everyday experiences and everyday lives but also to their general growth and development and capacity to enter into the adult world. Mental health is a difficult and potentially ambiguous concept; what we basically mean by it is emotional well-being. However, mental health is commonly confused with its opposite, mental illness.

There is an extensive literature on mental illness and mental disorder and a well considered set of classifications which underpin the assessment and treatment of serious mental health problems. These areas are the domain of clinical and academic psychiatry and psychology which undoubtedly serve a useful purpose.

However, these understandings do not adequately attend to the issues of health or enable an account to be taken of the wide and complex variations that exist within the broad spectrum of what can generally be called mentally healthy.

Young people grow up very differently and deal with the pressures of their experiences in a variety of ways according to their own personalities and temperaments, their family backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances.

The NHS Health Advisory Service (1995) publication 'Together We Stand' sets out a definition of mental health in terms of key capacities: to develop psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually; to initiate and sustain mutually satisfying personal relationships; to become aware of other people and empathise with them; to use psychological distress as a developmental process so that it does not hinder or impair further development.

The definition of mental health and some agreement as to the key characteristics is helpful. However, for my purpose the central question remains; what does it feel like to be a 'troubled' young person in the midst of developing these vital capacities?

The literature comprises research, considered comment and opinion, which is largely applied to managing the processes of the education and development of 'troubled' young people.

Theoretical Perspectives

The underpinning theoretical standpoints are social and psychological. However, many papers look at the young person, the family in social context and the influence of society, thereby drawing on both fields of theoretical perspective.

For this literature review I have somewhat artificially grouped together those papers which are primarily psychological and have dealt separately with the wider social perspectives.

Literature Review

I have searched the following databases.

- Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) via Web of Science
- British Education Index via Dialog
- International Bibliography of Social Sciences via BIDS
- (The Barnardo's and NSPCC websites)

I also conducted a search on Ovid Technologies database Eric. Fifty-one citations were searched from 1985 – March 2003. Key words were 'troubled' young people and 'problem' children. The search was limited to the English language.

The literature, in general, aims to help and/or understand the overlapping roles which coalesce around children and young people. Apart from the young people, parents and professionals have inevitable significance in the tripartite social arrangements which exist to regulate the home and school lives of children and young people.

Webster-Stratton (1990) pioneered seminal work focusing on helping young children 4-8 years to handle their emotions. The programme was based on the empirically validated Dinosaur Social Skills and Problem-solving curriculum. The approach emphasised the importance of two aspects of promoting children's social and emotional competence.

First, the key issue of parents and teachers working together. Encouraging parents to see the value of parent-child play, which is 'child-directed'. Webster-Stratton concludes that regular parent play with children can be very beneficial in helping children learn appropriate play skills and social skills with their peers.

Secondly, the recognition that whilst the parent/teacher partnership cannot change a child's neurological system, temperament or current mental development status. It can have a major role and impact on the child's ability to regulate their emotions through socialisation and environmental support.

Webster-Stratton's early work has been further developed by Larson (1994), Lochman and Dunn (1993) and Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1997) into exploring effective anger management.

Wurm and Haskell (1993) draw attention to the importance of work competence as a pre-cursor to resolving problem behaviours in children. Intervention strategies for behavioural problems in elimentary school aged children should first consider building their verbal competence.

Other researchers (Ahrens 1997), have focused on family life and interpersonal skills in middle school young people aged 12 to 13 years. They somewhat controversially suggest that social constructs may effect the interpersonal skill development of young people. This research implemented and evaluated a programme of interpersonal skill development in an American middle school. The researchers collected evidence of inappropriate interpersonal skill by observation checklists, teacher student surveys and discipline referrals. Analysis of the probable causes revealed that students may exhibit inappropriate skills in the classroom setting because of an increase in single parent families, increased television viewing and dual-income families.

Much of the literature suggests 'how to guides' for managing 'troubled' young people. The guidance is offered to a range of practitioners, teachers, counsellors, social workers, and health care practitioners. Many appear almost as panaceas to the problem of troublesome young people. Claiming to offer effective solutions, one programme has operated a standard approach for eighty years (Dowd 1998). Others (Netolicky1998; Hengglier et al 1999) claim to be effective in managing chronically troublesome

students (exhibiting significant social and/or emotional difficulties and behavioural disorders) against a predetermined timescale. The approach aims to rehabilitate young people into mainstream schools, technical college or the workforce by the end of nineteen weeks. This avoids the revolving door syndrome where exclusion leads to ever increasing learning deficits and further inappropriate behaviour, thus in part creating and enforcing troublesome conduct.

Kotter (2002) offers a guide to teachers in respect of how to manage difficult and disruptive students. This USA based research interviews teachers, counsellors, school administrators and students, and focuses on the forces that influence student behaviour. Professionally driven strategies for avoiding or overcoming conflict with students and parents are evidenced by theory, research and the author's personal experience.

Morse (2001) argues that the field has not yet absorbed Redl's insights (1966). In fact, except for a small but steadfast minority of humanistic professionals, a retreat from Redl's work has occurred. Wise (1999) furthers the student centred case and concludes that a firm commitment to prevention and a caring curriculum are a schools best defence against student violence.

Few educators have training for meeting student's psychological needs or techniques for working with angry frustrated youngsters. If a loner's need for recognition is not met, they will eventually act out or withdraw.

It is difficult to predict with accuracy what the long-term consequences of withdrawn behaviour may be, since the status of an individual young person in a group is subject to change over time and so many other variables are involved. Rejection, particularly when accompanied by aggression is often a precursor of later delinquency and poor psycho-social adjustment.

Asher (1987) emphasises that the causes and consequences influence one another in a transitional process. However, a study looking at a 22 year following up of young people referred to a psychiatric clinic in Australia found that delinquent girls and girls with behaviour problems were particularly at risk of developing psychiatric illness as adults (Mellsop 1997).

Maggs J et al (1995) have explored young people's relationships and the nature and development of problem behaviour. This research examined concurrent and longitudinal relations amongst adolescents: problem behaviour; self-image; and peer relations. Analysis showed age increases correlated with disobedience, school misconduct, and substance use and peer involvement. Longitudinal increase in problem behaviour was associated with decreases in positive self-image and increases in peer acceptance and involvement.

Long (1995) considers reciprocal aggression between young people, teachers and school staff. Counter aggression is discussed as a biological function or survival instinct that escalates violence in schools. This paper examines Fritz Redl's explanation of underlying reasons why staff dealing with delinquent youth become counter aggressive. Preventing or controlling counter aggressive behaviour through analysis of the reasons behind the reaction can help to stop the cycle of violence.

Whilst there is clearly considerable merit in the cycle of violence analysis, the outcome is that teachers, as those charged with establishing and maintaining an effective learning environment, are failing so to do. This implicit blaming of teachers for becoming ensnared in the violence of 'troubled' young people may in part, explain the retreat from Redl's insights noted by Morse (2001). The counter aggression model may elucidate the following case reported in the literature, as it is clear that 'troubled' young people can pose professional threats to teachers.

Vail (1995) cites Ruber Perez, former assistant principal at Horris Mann middle school in North Denver, who achieved folk-hero status when he suspended 97 disruptive students in a single day. The school board reprimanded Perez for deviating from district disciplinary policy and transferred him to another middle school. Supported by disgruntled teachers, Perez is suing the district for re-instatement.

Other researchers have provided help for parents. Giannetti & Sagarese (1999) offer information and reassurance to parents regarding potential crises in family life, drawing on a national survey of parents, teachers and students, interviews with a wide range of experts, and the latest research. This research provides parents with the information and reassurance they need to identify and handle the crises that can erupt with ten to fifteen year olds. Specific information and advice are presented for handling some of the most difficult crises affecting children including substance abuse, sexual encounters, troubling friends, depression, eating disorders, violence, breaking the law, non-traditional family structures, and internet dangers.

Ellis's research (1997) shows a significant departure from previous work. Until now, the literature reviewed has dealt with strategies for helping and/or understanding 'troubled' young people, parents and professionals in different combinations: in short, the professional agenda. Previous work has involved the views of 'troubled' young people, but importantly the young people have been asked about the professional agenda, i.e., how to manage or extinguish professionally defined; 'problem behaviours' which may or may not be seen as problems from the young person's perspective. This work facilitates an at risk twelve year old commenting freely on the teacher role. The research discusses the growing problem of 'troubled' young people and the increasing role of schools in meeting the development needs for attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism. The work reports the views of a twelve-year-old student commenting about what teachers should do and say to promote self-esteem amongst students and encourage them to stay in school.

Two Scottish studies, 'How We Feel' (HWF) (Gordon and Grant 1997) and a report for the Education Board for Scotland (EBS) by Hill et al (1996 b) have explored young people's views about their emotional needs and lives. The main lessons to be understood from HWF and EBS studies are that adults can take a great deal of reassurance from the fact that the children and young people who took part in the studies value and appreciate the love and support given to them. The respondents also commended the steps adults take to offer practical help which is seen as effective.

Verbal harassment is one issue, however, with which children and young people would like more practical assistance; so adults probably need to understand a little better than they do how distressing this is. The young people are looking to adults to take steps to address verbal harassment in their lives.

The young people who took part in the studies were not reporting a need for major changes in what adults do to support them. What they would like to see is a change in adults' attitudes to them. They would like adults to attend more closely to their concerns, realise that things that may seem trivial to adults are painful and distressing to young people, and above all, they want adults to listen and to understand.

As one group of children who took part in the HEBS study put it, we (adults) need to stop and think about the children's point of view; look for their feelings and listen to what they say.

It is important to see the findings from these studies in the context of the research with 'troubled' young people. HWF focussed on all young people in Glasgow schools on the 25th October 1995, who were 13½ to 14½ years old. The research relied on a skilfully constructed questionnaire, but nonetheless excluded, by its very nature those young people with substantial difficulties with written work. The report is silent as to whether special arrangements were made for 'troubled' young people.

The EBS study selected a sample of 96 children and young people aged 5 to 12 years and used a number of investigative techniques, which also involved the completion by the respondents of a questionnaire. This aspect of the methodology gives rise to similar concerns about the assumption of literacy on the part of the researchers.

It appears from the results of these two important studies that a key connection may exist between them; what we know from the young people respondents may be linked to what we know about young people in trouble. Lyon et al (2000) found that the young people in prison talked a lot about their families. Many spoke of disrupted lives: absent fathers, changing family relationships, abuse and neglect. In most cases the young people were valuing family life whether their experience had been negative or positive.

A tentative conclusion may be that young people who have their parents 'there for them' have parentally approved 'safe' freedom in which to develop and flourish. Conversely, one could argue that young people who have no such parental oversight or parameters of being 'held in mind' by their parents may feel that they cannot rely on them for support at crucial times. The implication of this cautious analysis is that boundless freedom equals no safe freedom at all.

Social Perspectives

The social trends impacting upon modern life are faster, more intricate and more interrelated than ever before. The pace of change in society serves to produce an increasingly challenging environment in which 'troubled' young people experience their world.

Contempory society is characterised by complexity, in that the number of factors and issues influencing 'troubled' young peoples lives are increasing and the trend continues. Another major characteristic is the dynamic pace of modern life.

Electronic communication, computer and internet use, and the media are producing, fast, faster and fastest definitions of what it is to be successful. A once relatively simple, stable pattern of life is becoming ever more media defined. For many 'troubled' young people family structures and family safety are becoming increasingly uncertain and unpredictable.

More marriages are ending in divorce. More couples are living together outside marriage. More children are being born into single parent families. More couples of the same sex are living openly together. Some who live in this country have traditions and norms which differ from those which have originally shaped British society.

> Sadly, many 'troubled' young people are the victims of cruel and destructive behaviour. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse continues to haunt the lives of a significant number of children and young people. There seems to be no decline in the number of victims of domestic violence. M Hayes (1999)

Nearly half of the children in England and Wales are not being brought up in 'traditional' families. The 'traditional' family was once assessed to mean children living with two heterosexual parents who were married and living together under the same roof. Figures from the 2001 census show 2,672,000 children living with one-parent families, most of which are headed by mothers. This is nearly one in four of the age group.

There are also 725,520 children in step families with a remarried parent and 1,278,455 children being brought up by unmarried cohabiting couples. There are another 125,834 children recorded as not

living in a family structure, and that these figures taken together bring the total number of children in non-traditional households to 4,801,695, which is more than 41% of dependants under sixteen (Office for National Statistics 2003).

At the same time, the expectations and perceptions of a 'normal' child are changing. Elkind (1993) perceives an increase in adult expectations in children's competence and a concomitant narrowing of what is considered normal child behaviour. Elkind questions the growing practice of placing children in transition 'pre-school', and 'gifted' programmes, and calls for greater acceptance of variety in children.

Lindquist (1995) highlights the media's image of 'bad kids' and suggests that adults need to acknowledge the nature of the world more frequently in their discussions of youth violence. The media's focus on retribution and punishment reflects the popular anger over 'bad kids'. Emotive language prompts a moral panic; seeds of evil have sprung from an unkept societal garden where widespread child poverty, disintegrating home environments, child abuse, a violent and materialistic culture, and achievement pressures are allowed to flourish.

Some researchers are trying to face the public with the reality of life for the most disadvantaged young people. In a companion volume to the '94 Kids Count Data', which profiles quantitative measures of children's lives, Beels (1994) features interviews with kids across the United States who describe their worlds in vivid terms. The forty interviews conducted by children and adolescents are grouped into three sections: Hard times/High hopes; Dropping out/Hanging on; Mother-daughter/Father-son. The aim of the research is to deepen public understanding of the desperate conditions, confronting too many of America's disadvantaged children, by hearing the voices of the most 'troubled' and troubling young people.

Researchers interested in the lives of 'troubled' or troublesome young people as a societal problem offer very different perspectives. The rest of this review highlights some of these disparate standpoints.

McGhan (1998) suggests that parents want to send their children to schools that are free not to teach everyone. Since schools are susceptible to societal disorders, pressure to provide school choices offering 'safe havens' for learning will persist.

Many research papers are aimed at helping teachers help children. However, some foretell of disaster for the families of the most disadvantaged and 'troubled' young people if the education, health, and political leadership systems should fail.

'Troubled' young people should be helped to respect each other and teachers. Armstrong (2001) in a literature review aimed at improving school, considers social attitudes of school children in respect to bullying, self-esteem, teacher respect of children and student achievement.

Brendtro (1995) advises that if educators cease trying to teach difficult students, there will be no one left to enculture them. Violence is unleashed in the presence of broken social bonds, unmanageable doses of stress and conflict, our violent culture, and brain abnormalities.

Teachers cannot reform society, but can achieve major victories on the fronts of primary prevention, early intervention, and growth centred treatment that stresses attachment, achievement, autonomy, and altruism.

Eitzen (1992) suggests the issues around 'troubled' young people need urgent attention. Today's children manifest more serious behaviour problems than those of the mid-seventies, resulting from changes in the economy, the racial and ethnic landscape, government policy, and family life. Immense

structural changes are necessary in education, health care, government, and political leadership if families and children of the underclass are to survive.

Other research has provided a social-historical perspective of social control. Finn (2001) examines constructions of adolescence and pathology and their relation to human service intervention. This paper locates a history of related discourses along a trajectory of 20th century capitalism, focusing especially on racialised, gendered, and class based aspects. The youth treatment industry is challenged as not preparing youth for healthy adulthood, but rather, for their place in a continuum of care, control, and containment.

Griffin (2001) discusses the importance of maintaining a critical perspective on questions related to the nature of youth and the possibilities of a fruitful debate between globalisation theory and youth culture research. This paper focuses upon developing a continued critique of the 'youth as trouble' paradigm in the context of an engagement of a globalisation theory.

The socially constructed 'troubled' child has been examined by Finn and Nybell (2001). This research suggests that constructions of pathology during childhood and adolescence play out along the lines of gender, race, class, age and citizenship. In ways that locate problems in the individual, bolster extant constructions of difference and inequality, and make possible connections between pathology and the structured practices of late capitalism.

Blyth and Miller (1993) link school exclusions to the social control debate. This paper analyses existing evidence and identifies remaining gaps in knowledge concerning the exclusion of British children from school for disruptive behaviour. The authors argue that an adequate understanding of exclusion from school can be achieved only by viewing it within the wider debate on social control and civic exclusion.

An alternative standpoint is offered by Cousins (2001). This analysis maintains that public policy discourse with narrow views of morality and character are at the centre of contemporary definitions and marketing of services for troubled/violent youth. Cousins further contends that left undisturbed moral entrepreneurs pose as much risk as the youths who are seen to be causing so much trouble.

Some important insights into young people's decision making, their personal agendas, and their views of parents as role models can be taken from health focused research with young people. Donovan's view on compliance (1992) is an interesting one, and may have important messages for the relationship between professionals and young people. He asks 'is compliance deviance or reasoned decision making?' His study considered young people as patients attending a rheumatologist clinic, although it is thought that this information is transferable to other professional client/patient situations. He used a qualitative anthropological study method to observe 39 patients and investigate their views of the clinic process and to demonstrate that patients are not passive or powerless.

What is clear from the study is that patients complied with medical advice when it made sense to them and seemed effective. It made sense if it accorded with their own lay beliefs, and was possible to carry out within the constraints of their every day lives.

The Health Education Board in Scotland (1994) commissioned a study of 15 year olds identifying and discussing their health needs. The results were published in Shucksmith and Headry (1998). Health is not seen by young people as a major life concern in the same way as adults perceive their health status. Young people's concerns tend to be with the 'here and now' and short term. Therefore, young people's perceptions are centred, for example, on their personal and physical appearance.

Parental influences on health were seen to be multi-faceted, in that parents could be seen as positive role models, and the young people would copy and integrate their health practices into their own lifestyle.

Alternatively, parents could be perceived as negative role models, the young people were repelled by their behaviour and deliberately chose to act differently. The pattern is further complicated by the fact that parental advice on health is structured by social class. Middle class parents use affection as emotional bate, giving clear indications that certain behaviours were not approved of, whilst working class parents often vetoed behaviour with aggressive and confrontational strategies.

Thomas (1996) develops our understanding of young people's views of parents. The study surveyed over 600 adolescents and their parents in order to examine the adolescent problem behaviour in single mother families. The results indicate that non-resident father involvement buffers the negative effects of single mother families for white adolescent males. However, black male adolescents reported fewer problem behaviours when non resident fathers were not involved in single mother families.

There is some self reported evidence that preferences and behaviour may be linked, as young people may live to an internal self image. Arnett (1991) in this somewhat esoteric research reported that 54 male and 30 female adolescents who liked heavy metal music were compared on various outcome variables to 56 male and 105 female peers who did not like it. Those who like heavy metal music reported a wider range of reckless behaviours than those who did not like heavy metal music.

In summary, a tentative conclusion may be that the social factors around 'troubled' young people can be seen to label them and enforce 'troubled' behaviour. Disruptive, non engaged behaviour in schools and in life may be seen as a product of having a bad boy/bad girl image. Once defined as a 'troubled' young person it would appear to be difficult to break free of the social mores that in part mark out their status as a 'troubled' young person.

Initial Emerging Themes

The aim of the focus groups was to identify what it is like to be a young person today. The focus group questions were open ended, based on four categories, adults, peers, home and school. Eight independent groups (G1–8) (four male and four female) were asked to recall their experiences. Key themes were drawn from each of these categories. The following analysis is structured around the natural flow of the focus group discussion rather than risking fragmentation of the discussion by adhering strictly to the categories asked about.

Home

Interestingly, reference to the 'home' was the least mentioned category. However, although comments were limited they were highly significant in relation to how the young people referred to themselves, their peers and their behaviour at school. There was an overlap between 'home' and the mention of parents under the Adult category.

All the groups stated at some point that parents 'don't listen and don't understand'. Some mentioned that parents 'don't care, are nosey, or interfere'. When asked to elaborate on this, young people felt that parents often asked too many questions about where they were going and who they were with and what time they would be in. Although this could be due to genuine concern for safety, all the groups thought this was interfering. Some reported that they were not totally honest with parents, as they anticipated their reaction, for example, being with friends whom their parents disapproved of.

The majority of the groups recalled negative home experiences, 'I hate going home' (G1) with the exception of two recalls which directly referred to 'good experiences' (G7).

The groups were asked their opinion on 'home'. All groups referred to home in a practical way; 'It's just somewhere to eat and sleep'. 'a sleeping place', where you get food', 'warm', 'food and clothing'. Only one young person in all the groups mentioned love. (G4)

'Home for me is tidying up, babysitting at 2:30 am in the morning and going to bed'. (G4)

'It's supposed to be safe but it's not – you feel safer in yer mates house'. (G4) 'Sleep at home, have tea and go out'. (G7)

There were many references to families being dysfunctional, arguing or fighting. Many referred to family traumas being the cause of their 'naughty behaviour' offering examples: death of mother, brother, sister, parents separating, or being compared to siblings who were better behaved.

Two groups recalled incidence of parents drinking and reports of domestic violence. When asked how they responded one said, 'I'm fucking packing my clothes and you're not going to see me again and I used to lock myself in the bathroom'. (G2)

Others reported;

'Spend time on my computer in my bedroom' (G2)

'Watch TV in bedroom' (G6)

'Listen to music in my bedroom' (G7)

'Go out to escape – it's better when out with mates' (G4)

All the groups referred to 'being out with mates' as a form of escape from what was happening within the home. Young people with similar background experiences seem to 'clump' together and form strong peer relationships. Some of the aggression observed at home appeared to be 'acted out' in the neighbourhood. Evening activities for all groups involved being in a 'gang' of mixed gender, common activities reported were;

'Smoking weed, getting stoned, getting drunk, smashing windows, burning wheelie bins, stealing cars, fighting'. All these activities were reported as 'having a laugh'. When asked *Why these activities?* reports were 'this leaves us buzzing'. When asked what this means – 'happy or excited'. 'Getting stoned and shit is not making it better, it's just making you forget it'. (G4)

When asked how parents reacted there was little reference to ground rules or boundaries which was perceived by the young people as 'uncaring'. (G2) – 'my parents try to choose my friends for me – they blame my friends for me getting into trouble'. 'Parents don't listen, they don't understand'. (G2) 'Fucking bollocks parents are dicks, they won't leave me alone, they're always telling me off'. (G3)

'Mum says I'm a rogue' – *what makes you a rogue?* 'I got drunk on the streets, I know it's wrong but it's just socialising with my friends'. 'Drink makes me feel happier'. (G2)

(G8) 'I'd rather they hit me and shout at me than saying they're disappointed – that's worse than anything'. This comment suggests that although the young people use their bravado as a coping mechanism, they do care about their parents' reaction and they find it difficult to hear how their parents feel about their behaviours.

When asked *What would make things better?*

'Having somewhere to go off the streets so the federals (police) don't get yer' (G4).

'Having own house, doing what you want, more youth clubs' (G4). 'Life's stressful – you can't have one day without being stressed out. Life's just shit isn't it'. (G4)

There was no mention throughout about family activities, either in the home or outside activities. Peers therefore become very significant.

Peers

All the groups were very supportive of each other during interviews. The female groups were very tactile and perceptive of each other's feelings. If a member of their group became emotional, there was an immediate response within the group and hugging was very acceptable. Many held hands with their peers as they expressed the difficulties they were experiencing in their lives. The young women were very emotionally literate and could express themselves well, with a high level of maturity. In contrast the male groups found difficulties in self expression, which was often through swearing, flatulence or rapping (singing) as a distraction or most interestingly to soften apparently painful discourse. However, the males demonstrated an equal level of support which was expressed in playful pushes, kicks and nudges. There was a deep level of empathy and understanding of each other within all groups and peers. In particular, 'fitting in' with their social group consistently appeared to be the most important element for all focus groups.

All the groups perceived themselves to be 'bad' or 'naughty' (see School) and the peer groups in school continued to meet out of school, described as 'street gangs'. All peer groups were mixed gender and the main purpose of meeting outside school was to 'escape home', 'relieve boredom', and 'have a

laugh'. When asked what happened in the 'street gangs' groups reported similar activities regardless of which school they attended;

(G1) 'Get drunk', 'mix with people who are similar to you', 'smoke weed', 'find wheelie bins and set them on fire to keep warm', 'pinch cars'

(G3) 'Need to have fun, walk the streets, go to the pub, drink in mates house, have laugh'

(G4) 'Getting drunk or stoned, makes it easier to forget and gives you confidence and helps you have a good time'.

(G7) 'Go to school we're bored, go home be bored, come here (school) be bored, go home be bored – it's all boring it's shit we can't do owt'

Recalls of having fun with mates all involved some form of violence, aggression, drink (alcohol) or drugs. The groups did not appear to fully appreciate the seriousness of their behaviour as if it were some sort of game.

The theme of boredom was recurrent in all groups and boredom was given as a reason for 'bad' behaviour, both in school and in the streets – 'that's what makes people smash things up, we're all so bored'. (G1). 'When we're bored we need something to give us a rush (explained as excitement) like pinching cars'. (G2)

The groups were asked *What's it like being a young person today?* No-one offered a positive comment, all groups spoke freely about how tough it was being a teenager (G2) 'it's shit'.

All the groups recalled experiences with the police, both positive and negative and described 'good and bad cops' (see Adults). (G2) 'all we do is walk around streets and get a chase or get done off coppers'. (G4) 'a group of kids together always reads trouble to others, but all we do is chat an 'ave a laugh'.

Adults

Adults were discussed in the focus groups in an undifferentiated way; all adults, including teachers, police, parents and youth workers, were seen as similar in two important respects. Firstly, all adults whether seen as good or bad operated the same range of interactions and negotiations with young people. That is they would give welcome and unwelcome news, tell them what to do and not to do and report adverse behaviour for sanction at home, on the streets or at school.

Secondly, and of striking importance, are their ideas concerning a good adult. A Good Adult was seen to be someone who listens, understands, is interested, 'does not rag you about (violence)', and 'does not shout' (not just being loud but also shouting is criticism). The respondents spoke of a felt fairness, a genuine interest in their well being, no violence, no shouting or criticism and being consistent.

When asked what could be done to prevent the reported activities – (G2) 'If they made somewhere to go it would be better'. All groups reported 'youth clubs' but only one group stated positive comments. All the groups expressed that there should be more available in the community for young people: a safe place to go which didn't cost anything. (G6) 'Build a teen village, it would keep kids off the streets and give em summat to do', however response from a peer was 'It wouldn't last they'd just wreck it'.

The groups expressed concerns about 'growing' up and entering the adult world. (G2) 'I don't want to grow up' – *what does growing up mean?* – 'having to work, pay bills, having kids, being responsible'. (G6) 'it's great hanging around with mates, need to live your life while you're young – it's crap when

you get older, you have to be responsible'. When asked how old this was, 18 years was seen as responsible, and 30 years was seen as old. (G6) 'I'm scared of getting older, losing my mates, and working'. (G1) 'Can do a lot when you're a kid – like they have to do everything while it is acceptable to make mistakes and make a fool of yourself'.

It was very clear the peers are central to young people's lives and have a vital role in offering emotional support, someone to talk to and listen. Peers show a level of understanding that very few adults appear able to offer.

(G2) 'Friends are very important – frightened they won't be there when we leave school. I need them to talk too, couldn't cope without mates'.

(G4) 'mates going through same shit so they understand'

(G8) 'I have a good time with mates – I know that whatever happens the group sticks together'.

There was very little reference in all groups to sexual activities, although the general impression is that the groups were very street wise. The female groups made reference to relationships and spoke responsibly and maturely (G4) 'Lads treat you like shit, they think they can get what they want all the time'. 'I go for the bad ones so you've got some' at to talk about. If you're with a boyfriend that's at college doing his homework you're not going to have fun are you'. 'When they're with their mates they're nasty to you (lads) but when they're on their own they're sensitive and will apologise, they've got to keep up their reputation'. Maintaining a good reputation and being accepted within the group were very important. When the male groups mentioned sexuality, their responses were giggly and immature.

School

Not one person in any of the groups expressed positive comments about school. Groups 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 described school as 'shit', 'stressful' and 'boring'… Four groups stated that being 'bored' was why people messed about in lessons.

All could recall bad experiences they had had with teachers, which resulted in them feeling 'labelled' by schools as 'bad' or 'naughty'. All groups said once 'labelled' it was very difficult to change, 'even when you wanted to'. Group 3 recognised that all the people in their interview were 'naughty':

'How come it's only the naughty ones here?'
What does that mean?
'We don't suck up to teachers'
Who gave you that label?
'Teachers'

All the group members were critical of teachers:

(G2) 'Teachers are on yer back all the time – why don't they just leave you to it'.

(G3) 'Its crap, hate teachers they're all pricks. Always having a go at you'.
What's it feel like?
'I just want to smack em, they don't understand, they don't know me'.

(G6) 'Teachers have favourites.' 'They don't listen, they don't want to hear'.

(G6) 'We get blamed when we're not the culprits.' 'It's horrible to have a label'.
'If we have a problem with one teacher they spread it round the others'.

(G2) 'They humiliate me in front of everyone'.
'They pick arguments with you'.
'You get a really major label, but it's not our label it's given to you. I'm judged by brothers and sisters – I must be bad so act it out'.

(G2) 'Being told off and people judging you all the time calling names and putting you down, it makes you feel bad and if you feel bad you do bad don't you?'.

The young people offered statements related to why they were considered to be 'naughty' children. These fell into three main categories:

1. **Boredom**

   (G1) 'Boring that's why people mess about'.
   'Like school just hate lessons and teachers it's boring'.

   (G2) 'Boring so start messing about'.
   'Not able to talk and often we talk about what's happening in lessons but we still get done for it so we mess about'.

   (G3) 'Schools crap and they teach us nowt. It's boring'

   (G7) 'I take drugs and smoke cos I'm bored'.

2. **Stress and Depression**

   (G1) 'Schools crap, wank, shit, stressful'.
   'What stresses you most is teachers – always getting grief off someone'.

   (G7) 'The teachers when it goes wrong in their life they tek it out on the kids.'
   'Yes but that happens with us doesn't it, so I mean if you've had an argument at home and you're right mad then you come to school and start'.
   'I shout at school and take it out on the teacher.'
   'I take it out on Mum'. 'It's worse when I've had a bad day'.
   How many bad days do you have?
   'a lot' 'every day'.

   (G3) 'It's stress'.
   'We shouldn't have stress at our age we should be having fun. Things are too serious too soon'.
   'Teachers need to be more laid back'.
   'Smoke and drink cos stressed – keeps me calm.'

   (G4) 'They put so much work on you, they expect you to do so much stuff and it depresses you'.

3. **Standing up for yourself/Reaction to teachers**

   (G8) 'She doesn't really misbehave; she acts up to teachers because they act up to her. They notice when you're bad but they don't notice when you're good.'
   'They expect you to fail they expect you to misbehave.'
   'When they ask me to sit down I stand up I don't care any more'.

(G8) 'Teachers wind you up and they tell lies. You wrong a teacher once and he picks on you for the rest of your life and they talk in the staff room and then everyone has a go at you.'

(G5) 'Teachers treat you like shit and they expect you to say nowt back to them'.

(G6) 'My mum says if a teacher has her mouth in your face don't just stand there and look stupid – yet if you mouth back you get done for it'

(G2) 'Lots of bullying and fighting in school – if you don't stand up for yourself you end up being bullied physical and verbal'
Why does it happen?
'not got right gear like Nike or expensive clothes they judge you without getting to know you'.

(G7) 'It's as if you're told to do something you sort of rebel in some way against it'.
'You can never win against a teacher'.
'Expressing yourself is classed as having attitude problems.'
'I don't think I'm bad. If teachers say sommat to me and I don't agree with it I will argue with them that's what they call bad – it gets me into trouble.'
It became apparent that the teachers' behaviour had a significant effect on the behaviour of the young person. One young person in G4 stated:
'I used to be bad but changed.'
What made you change?
'There was one teacher who used to teach me and talk to me and helped me with my homework when I were stuck. I then wanted to do it for myself'.
'You change for yourself and not for anybody else, people have got to accept you as you are or not at all'.

Others were less positive:

Do you see it as too late to change now?
(G4) 'Yes, it's what they expect'.

'Good' and 'Bad' Teachers

All the groups made reference to teachers being 'good' or 'bad'.
(G1) 'Some teachers are better than others'.
(G4) 'Some teachers are safe.'
Tell me what safe means.
'They're cool, they understand.'

Key words used to describe teachers who were classed as 'good' were; 'they listen, they understand, they have time, they have a laugh, they are fair, they give good lessons'.

Action Plan

- Develop a piece of drama around the initial immerging themes from the young people's focus group responses
- Validate the drama with young people who fit the criteria for identifying 'challenge' and 'troubled' young people (the target group) and amend the drama as appropriate
- Perform the drama in school in order to ensure that the portrayal of the young people's lives has resonance with the target group and amend the drama as appropriate
- Perform the drama, in final form, as part of a dissemination/consultation conference in order to enable a range of professionals involved in educating, helping and/or serving young people to respond to the expressed views of the focus group sample.
- Publish a post conference publication in order to further develop the dissemination of this work to a wider audience
- Publish material from the research in appropriate professional journals
- Consider how this work may be further strengthened by additional research activity.

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Appendix 1

Criteria for identifying 'challenged' and/or 'troubled' young people

1. 14-16 years boys/girls

2. Young people selected shall appear to the Deputy Head Teacher (Pastoral Care) to display at least three of the following features of disengagement during the previous two months of school.

   Active Features

   - Young Person says they clash with the Education system/school
   - Bullying others
   - Excessive behaviour
   - Violence physical/verbal
   - Stealing
   - Seriously challenging the school rules, for example, dress, graffiti, causing damage
   - Truancy

   Passive Features

   - Unproductive in course or homework assignments
   - Unexcited
   - Boredom
   - Naughty/inattentive
   - Mental truancy

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