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"They don't need to know that." Focus groups as a model for teacher-led research and curriculum consultation

Abstract

This paper describes a focus group approach to curriculum consultation and gathering data for the purposes of research within a primary school setting. The aim of the research was to explore teachers' and parents' attitudes toward Relationships and Sex Education for Key Stage 1 children and to examine how these align with the way children of this age (5 – 7 years old) construct, experience and perceive their sexuality and gender. At the same time, the focus groups served as a consultation process for the development of a KS1 RSE curriculum within the school. This approach allowed adults to discuss, develop and change their perspectives and consider their own attitudes and behaviours. It also ensured that children's prior knowledge, understanding and lived experiences were the starting point of the development of the new curriculum.

Introduction

From September 2020 primary schools in England were required to teach Relationships Education, with some additional flexibility given by the government due to the pandemic (DfE 2019, DfE 2020). This was the outcome of a long-fought battle to make the subject compulsory in schools across the country. For some advocates of the new policy, however, this represents only a partial victory. For example, many had argued, and continue to argue, that Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education should its entirety should become statutory, while others are concerned that under the new legislation parents' right to withdraw children from sex education lessons persists (NEU *et al.* 2018, PSHE Association 2019). These changes have left schools in a position where they need to consider carefully the

content and mode of delivery of Relationships Education lessons and whether they will go further than the basic requirements of the statutory guidance. Whether they decide to work within the confines of the statutory guidance or choose to teach content that goes beyond these, they also need to explore what this might "look like" in practice.

Under the new guidance for schools an obligation remains 'to consult parents in developing and reviewing their policy' and ensure this 'reflects the community they serve' (DFE 2019, p.11). Potentially, this leaves schools in an invidious position. It is only necessary to consider the protests in response to 'No Outsiders' lessons at Parkfield Community School in Birmingham to see that parental and broader community perspectives and can be both contradictory and cause confrontation (Kotecha 2019, Parveen 2019). When undertaking consultations, therefore, it is important that the process does not serve to inflame feelings, rather that it allows people to air and develop their views in a productive, supportive arena.

As a teacher in a primary school undertaking research for my PhD while simultaneously developing the schools' Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) programme and policy, I undertook a series of focus group interviews that yielded a great deal of insight into parents' and teachers' perspectives on RSE for Key Stage 1 (KS1) children (aged 5 – 7 years). More importantly, there is a real need to begin by eliciting children's prior knowledge, understanding and experience of sexuality and gender to formulate a truly beneficial programme of study that equips children to negotiate their social worlds both now and in the future. With this in mind, I also gathered much data illuminating children's experiences and understanding of sexuality and gender that I could compare these with the adults' attitudes and perceptions.

This proactive approach enabled the school to move forward with confidence to formulate a KS1 RSE curriculum. It might also serve as a model for consultation elsewhere and for

teachers to embark on research in their own schools. In this instance practitioner-based and university-based research were brought together with the dual aim of designing a school curriculum and developing a broader understanding of individuals' attitudes, understandings and experiences (Hedges 2001).

The setting

At the time I undertook my research, I had been employed for four years as a KS1 teacher at Brookbank Community Primary School (BCP). This was a two-form entry primary school on the outskirts of a town in the Midlands. Despite the wider area's semi-rural, affluent image, the school was located in a relatively impoverished area of the county. A significant number of parents were under- or unemployed, with many characterising themselves as "struggling" financially; the school's pupil profile was very much in line with the national average in terms of the proportion of pupil premium children. Most pupils were white British, although there was an increasing number of children entering the school with English as an additional language (mainly Chinese and Polish).

When I began my research, the children at BCP did not receive any Sex and Relationships Education, as it was then known, until Upper KS2 (DfEE 2000). Even then, in Year 5 only the girls attended lessons about puberty. In Year 6, the girls and the boys were taught (separately) more about the subject as part of their transition to secondary school. The school nurse delivered introductory lessons which were followed-up with lessons from class teachers (a female teacher who worked with the girls and a male teacher who worked with the boys). The aim was for the school to begin RSE lessons in KS1 and that as children moved up through the school for it to be introduced to the later year groups, with the children developing solid foundations for their future learning as they moved up through the school.

My role as a teacher-researcher: some challenges of school-based research

In this instance, the relationship between my PhD research and the consultation process for a new KS1 RSE curriculum in the school evolved more-or-less simultaneously and organically. I was already interested in the evolution of children's gender and sexual identities as a result of my experiences teaching in a number of primary schools and was developing the focus of my PhD at the same time as the school was considering a review of its PSHE and SRE policies. I realised that the data I gathered about teachers' and parents' attitudes and children's understanding and experience of gender and sexuality as part of my PhD could be used to inform the RSE curriculum content. However, the process undertaken could certainly be employed in other settings with the sole purpose of meaningful curriculum consultation.

Unlike much curriculum research undertaken by teachers, this was not an action research project, nor did it focus on the analysis and incremental improvement of my own classroom practice (Sagor and Williams 2016, Forster and Eperjesi 2017). For the teacher-researcher there are advantages in terms of, for example, contextual knowledge and understanding, but also inherent tensions in terms of whose agenda is being served by the questions asked (Labaree 2003). I needed to make clear to participants that my research served a dual function in helping me design a school curriculum and writing a PhD, which might ultimately result in publications. Furthermore, the 'topic' of the research and the nature of the participants meant that there were particular ethical concerns to address in the design and transaction of the research (a further examination of these is to be the subject of an additional paper).

The desire to value and empower participants was at the heart of this research process. However, as is generally the case, it was important for me to recognise that the research relationships were not symmetrical and this was potentially compounded by my role within

the school (Edwards and Mauthner 2012). The problems of balancing my role as a teacher with that of a researcher were both practical and ethical (Bell and Nutt 2012). As a teacher in the school, others might view me as an "insider" with privileged knowledge and status. However, a rigid insider / outsider positioning was a false dichotomy (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, McDermid *et al.* 2014). My role was subject to shifts and overlaps, as were those of the participants (Naples 1996). It was necessary to negotiate my position within groups on an ongoing basis throughout the research process, and ultimately to decide whose voices to give prominence (Hertz 1996, Connolly 2008). I needed to constantly reflect on my position in the research, particularly when participants asked about my own experiences in schools and expected me act as an expert.

The power relationship between researcher and researched is likely to be particularly pronounced when working with children and, in this instance, this was potentially compounded by my teaching role (Bell and Nutt 2012). These children were pupils at the school where I worked. Some were members of my class. As such, there was a pre-existing imbalance of power beyond the research context.

The research was undertaken for following British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) and university guidelines. It was also aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef 1989), which states that public institutions should act in the best interests of children, who have the right to express their opinions. Before beginning the consultation / research process, I sought permission from the headteacher and governors. Having received this, I contacted potential participants. All class teachers were given an outline of the study, its purposes, an explanation of the process and a guarantee of anonymity. All participants were given the option of either choosing or being allocated a pseudonym (see Allen and Wiles 2016 for an exploration of the use of pseudonyms).

All participants gave consent for the data produced from the focus groups to be used for publication. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged, that in a setting such as a primary school a teacher-researcher's name is potentially problematic in terms of publication and maintaining anonymity (Walford 2018). Publication might enable readers to identify the school and, for those who know that school, the participants. However, this consultation was undertaken in 2012. I left the school some years ago. Likewise, many of the teachers have changed roles and schools, and all the children have now moved on to high school. Finally, it might be thought that the male teachers would be very easy to identify in this study, however, unlike many other primary schools, at the time the research was undertaken the school employed an unusually high proportion of men in teaching positions, four of whom participated in the study. As such, every effort has been made to protect the identities of both the setting and the participants.

Teachers were simultaneously given an information sheet, inviting them to participate in the study, and consent form. The process of seeking parent and child participants was a little more complex than that for teachers. Due to the sensitive nature of the project, I made initial contact with parents via letter asking for anyone interested in the project to return a slip requesting further information and consent forms for themselves and their children. All participants were reassured that they could withdraw at any time and those willing to take part signed a consent form, which included consent for the use of quotations for publication.

Having gained consent from their parents, I was keen to ensure that children were given the opportunity to decide if they wanted to participate. I gathered the children together in my classroom to inform them about the topics they might be discussing and to explain the research process. They were given the opportunity to talk to one another and to ask me questions. They were then asked if they would like to take part, rather than being expected to opt out, and were assured they could leave the project at any time without repercussions. I

took this approach rather than asking them to say if they wanted to be excluded as this would have required them to actively dissent from the process in a setting and relationship where this would run counter to the established social norms. They were then given assent forms in child-friendly language, which we read and talked about together before the children signed to indicate they wanted to take part.

Research on / with children often takes place in schools and this presents practical and ethical issues (Hedges 2012, David *et al.* 2001, Hill *et al.* 1996, Phelan and Kinsella 2013). In some research projects children might take part because "gatekeepers" (for example, parents, carers, teachers, headteachers) agree they should do so rather than truly giving their own consent. However, in this case, if anything the opposite seemed to be true. Having heard that their friends would be taking part, some children from the Year 2 classes asked if they could join the focus groups. I had to explain to them that without their parents' permission this would be impossible. A few asked me to speak to their parents to seek consent, resulting in two additional children joining the project. Sadly, the parents of four children continued to withhold permission, much to the children's and my disappointment. As a teacher and researcher this presents something of a conundrum. My attempts to empower children by engaging them in discussion about their lives and building a programme of study that reflects their knowledge and understanding of the world was inhibited by their parents (Hill *et al.* 1996). Ironically, this also replicates the situation with sex education where parents have the right to withdraw their children regardless of their children's needs and desires (DfE 2019)

Focus groups

Focus groups have been employed with increasing frequency in social science research particularly in the fields of health and education, usually comprising between four and twelve individuals who take part in guided discussions. Within this context, it is not only what

people say within the meetings but the way individuals interact and come to arrive at their utterances that is significant (Duggleby 2005, Kitzinger 199, Leavy 2007, Powell and Single 1996, Reed and Payton 1997). As Sim (1998) points out, there are a number of benefits to working with focus groups:

- they are relatively inexpensive and quick to complete;

- they demonstrate how people's attitudes and opinions develop and change;

- they allow participants to express themselves spontaneously;

- participants can gain a feeling of comfort and confidence from group settings as it enables them to respond to questions only when they want to rather than feeling the pressure of being alone with an interviewer;

- group meetings may allow an individual to feel a sense of empowerment.

These are, therefore, a particularly apt research tool for teacher-researchers engaging in a curriculum-related consultation process, especially in sensitive areas like RSE as participants can potentially support one another throughout the process of gathering data. Furthermore, I planned to carry out a deep elicitation with children that I hoped would inform the overarching content of the curriculum and it has been demonstrated that they sometimes feel ill at ease being interviewed individually, often preferring the company of a friend or friends (David *et al.* 2001, Keddie 2004, Mauthner 1997). I also judged that parents would be more comfortable with the idea of their children being interviewed in groups than individually.

Teacher focus groups

The school employed nineteen teachers including me (three of whom were part-time). Although this consultation was only gathering information and opinions that would initially inform the schools RSE curriculum for Years 1 and 2, it was clearly important to consider

progression through from Nursery to Year 6. It was for this reason and because teachers often moved from one year group to another during their careers that all the teachers were invited to attend the focus group sessions. Sixteen agreed to participate. This undoubtedly represented a very high response rate among the staff at the school, unlikely to be repeatable in a setting where a researcher had not already built strong relationships and the teachers were able to recognise personal / professional benefits in terms of the outcomes of the process. Additionally, the school had a strong, active ethos of teacher development, so the principle of enquiry was well-established with the support of the head teacher and governing body.

The teachers took part in two rounds of meetings in my classroom, each session lasting 45 – 55 minutes. The meetings were recorded using two digital recorders. The first round of interviews was very open in terms of focus. As suggested by Colucci (2007), I used a variety of ways to help participants remain focused, and to promote collaboration, discussion, communication and the development of thought and opinion. Beginning with sharing their experiences of teaching RSE and their feelings about these, the groups then moved on to considering the nature and content of a KS1 RSE curriculum. Initially, the teachers produced a concept map; the groups talked about the topics they thought might be taught and how they should be covered. During this time, the teachers often reflected upon what they had already taught and situations they had encountered with their own classes. The groups then moved onto engaging with a number of prompt cards with relationship types / life events on them (bereavement, same-sex relationships, divorce, friendship, family and biology). These provided some reference points for discussions about what they already taught, what the teachers thought should be taught and what should be excluded from the KS1 curriculum. The list was not supposed to be exhaustive but to provide a "jumping off" point for an open discussion, participants were invited to add to this list if they wished. Finally, they discussed

the issue of teaching about values and how these would align, or not, with the views of parents and the local community.

The second-round of focus group sessions was attended by all first-round participants, although the group make-up changed due to other calls on teacher time. Each group comprised five teachers who evaluated a commercially produced scheme of work and resources frequently used and adapted in other schools in the area (Channel 4 Learning UK 2006, Christopher Winter Project 2009). The teachers worked through this one lesson at a time, considering the detail of both curriculum content and pedagogy.

It was clear from the interactions that teachers felt very comfortable with me as an interviewer and were happy to joke and reveal details about themselves that they might well have kept private with another researcher:

Mr Marshall: I think leave clitoris out until secondary I would say.

Miss Young: Yes, I think it's too much . . . to be honest.

Mr Marshall: Yes, I've never dreamt of mentioning the word.

Miss Mcintyre: It's when you're talking about sex for pleasure rather than sex for babies. Isn't it really, isn't it, really?

Mr Hall: When did you first hear the word clitoris? And I'm not talking about//

Mr Marshall: Um, fourteen and . . . in magazines. (Laughing)

Mrs Brown: You didn't! (Laughs)

In fact, on more than one occasion teachers shared details of their lives that they did not want to be included in the focus group transcripts. I was happy to comply with their wishes and

offered to turn of the recorder but in each instance teachers declined and trusted me to keep to my word and not write about what they had said.

While teachers did come with their own experiences and ideas about what and how to teach RSE to young children, the process of the focus group allowed them to explore the possibility of covering topics some had not previously considered, to think deeply about pedagogy and to develop their perspectives through discussion. The focus groups also provided an opportunity to consider their own practice more broadly (for example, the ways in which they ran their classrooms, how they dealt with issues like homophobic bullying and stereotyping) and to explore their concerns about how parents would react to KS1 RSE.

Parent focus groups

Having invited all parents of Year 1 and 2 children to take part in focus group sessions, I had hoped that from a cohort of 120 children I would be able to have at least twenty parents willing to take part in the study. Having consulted with the headteacher and governors, I sent a letter asking those with a general interest in the topic to contact me for further details. I then provided information sheets to parents and consent forms. Although 42 parents initially asked for further details, reflecting the experiences of other researchers seeking to examine this aspect of education (Martin and Luke 2010, Robinson *et al.* 2017) ultimately only fourteen parents went further and agreed to take part. Most of these were parents of children from my class, or whose older children I had taught in previous years. It was clear that, once again, the personal connection was an important factor in recruitment.

To address the challenge of finding times when parents were available to meet, focus group sessions were arranged to take place both during and after school hours to accommodate work schedules as much as possible. Sessions took place in either my classroom or the staff room. It was impossible to maintain the same group composition in the first and second

rounds. This did, however, have the advantage of disrupting the group dynamics established in the first round of interviews, thereby reducing the possibility than a single individual could dominate a group and giving more space for expression to those who were more reserved (Smithson 2000).

The first round of three focus group meetings followed a similar pattern to those of the teachers' meetings. Following assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and an explanation of how the sessions would run, I began by asking the parents to offer their initial thoughts on the principle of RSE for young children. Through the course of the interviews, every group addressed the same core themes but, beyond this, each was then free to take its own path. Members of some groups were very vocal and some asked for more clarity about what the KS1 RSE curriculum would cover, mistakenly believing that I and the school already had a plan for the curriculum. Some parents volunteered anecdotes about their children and talked about their own experience of growing up. Each group was also presented with the same set of prompt cards as the teachers with the aim of stimulating conversation and reflection. They were not, however, asked to engage in the mind mapping task as they were unfamiliar with working together and, for most, unused to developing curricula.

Like the teachers, the parents then participated in the second round of focus group interviews exploring the Christopher Winter Project (2009) materials and engaging with the *All about us: living and growing* (Channel 4 Learning UK 2006) DVD. With my support, the parents talked through the schemes of work for Years 1 and 2 lesson-by-lesson, viewed relevant sections of the DVD and gave their views on the suitability, relevance and scope of the associated materials.

Throughout the process, individual participants were outwardly respectful of each other's views, gave each other time to express themselves, and often engaged thoughtfully with

opinions at odds with their own. They frequently dealt with challenging subjects using humour (Browne 2016). One parent remained steadfast in her views throughout, explaining that: *I think sometimes we push learning onto them, when they don't need to know at that age. And I would say, if they didn't ask questions then I would say it's not important at that age.*

But, like the teachers, most parents developed their opinions through discussion (Kitzinger 1994). Indeed, the discussions resulted in one parent completely changing their mind about what should be taught at KS1:

Mr Heymann: Because I came in to this today, as an example, I really would disagree with same-sex relationships being brought up. But from listening to everybody I can actually see it, hopefully, from your perspectives as well. And actually, thinking now, it wouldn't necessarily be such a bad thing. . . . I can say, well, we believe something different from what you've been taught and just kind of clarify what your values are.

Although parents did not reach a firm decision about the shape and content of the curriculum, there was a broad agreement that the school has a genuine role to play in teaching RSE and that they held the teachers in the school in high regard, trusting their judgement but at the same time recognising teachers might make mistakes. Perhaps unsurprisingly given their willingness to participate, these parents envisaged a productive parent-school partnership that would benefit their own and other children.

Children's focus groups

The children at the centre of this research were drawn from the schools two Year 1 and Year 2 classes, each comprising 30 children. The intention was for the children to be participants in rather than the objects of the study, with their understandings of their public and private worlds being illuminated through their discussions In part because the children involved were

so young and had never received sexuality education, this was not an exercise in engaging with 'student voice' in the sense that children's input on the RSE curriculum content and pedagogy was not being sought (Cook-Sather 2006, Baroutsis *et al.* 2016). However, this was not merely a tokenistic engagement with children's voices (Baroutis *et al.* 2016). Rather, the purpose of the children's focus groups was to elicit and interrogate their prior knowledge and understanding of the world, to explore their feelings about and begin to comprehend their lived experience of gender and sexuality. Reflecting a rising trend within research with children (e.g. Corsaro, 2011, Renold 2005, Mayall 2002; Thorne 1987, 1993), the children were respected as social actors with their own valid ways of experiencing and viewing the world (Christensen and Prout 2002). In this way, I hoped to 'mobilise a curriculum that us more attentive to the lives and needs of young people' (Smyth *et al*. 2013, quoted in Baroutis *et al.* p.7). While the DfE's (2019) guidance portrays children very much as adults in the making, my aim was to build an RSE programme of study that drew upon and enabled them to navigate their current experiences of relationships, sexuality and gender as well as preparing them for the future.

If the project and ultimate programme of study were to be successful, it was important to understand children as social agents, setting their own agendas, developing their own identities and acting upon their social worlds. Furthermore, to position them as objects within the research would give only a very limited and distorted picture of their experiences and understanding of their relationships (Christensen and Prout 2002, Halstead and Reiss 2003). It would also replicate their disempowered position in society, which I actively sought to avoid. With all this and the age of the children in mind, the focus group discussions took different pathways from those of the teacher and parent participants.

Nineteen children took part in the focus group sessions. From Year 1 there were four boys and one girl, and from Year 2 there were an equal number of girls and boys. Both Renold

(2005) and Keddie (2004) propose the use of friendship or 'affinity groups' (Keddie 2004) to collect data from children. Renold, in her exploration of KS2 children's genders and sexualities, explained that her use of this type of grouping and her approach to interviewing meant that 'many children could talk about a range of issues' (Renold 2005, p.14), while Keddie observed that they led to 'group cohesion' and 'greater openness' (Keddie 2004, p.35). Due to the small number of participants, the children were unable to choose their fellow interviewees. However, it had been my observation that these children would happily work together in class and play together on the playground. In my capacity as a class teacher, I also knew from conversations with the children and their parents that some of the children would also play with one another outside of school. I therefore hoped that the children would behave and discuss much as if they had selected the group members themselves.

As for the adults, I planned two rounds of children's focus group meetings. The first round of sessions was intended to comprise all-girl and all-boy groups, with the second round being mixed-gender groupings, with Year 1s and 2s separated from one another (Halstead and Waite 2001). This was the plan as I thought that children might be more at ease talking about some issues in girl-only and boy-only groups, while following mixed groups might facilitate a different type of discussion. This arrangement proved to be impossible with the Year 1 children because only four boys and one girl were given permission to take part. Round one, therefore, consisted of one group of Year 2 boys, one of Year 2 girls and a group mixed-gender group of Year 1 children. For the second round, all three groups were then mixed-gender, although the year groups remained separated. In the end, I was unable to perceive substantive differences in group interactions between mixed- and single-gender groupings, but this is not to say that the outcomes would have been the same had these children been grouped differently.

All sessions took part during lesson time, when the children would otherwise have been in PSHE lessons. At the beginning of each meeting, I reminded the children that what they said within the group would remain confidential unless they said something that made me worry about them, in which case I would speak to the school's family liaison officer (also the school's safeguarding lead) to ensure they were safe. I explained that when I wrote about them I would change their names so that no one would know who had spoken to me, and that they should not share outside the room anything that the other participants had said.

At the beginning of the first round of focus group sessions, all the children drew and talked about their families and the people who were important to them This task was designed to both put the children at ease in an unfamiliar situation and to begin to explore their understanding and experience of family (Halsted and Reiss 2003, Yuen, 2004).
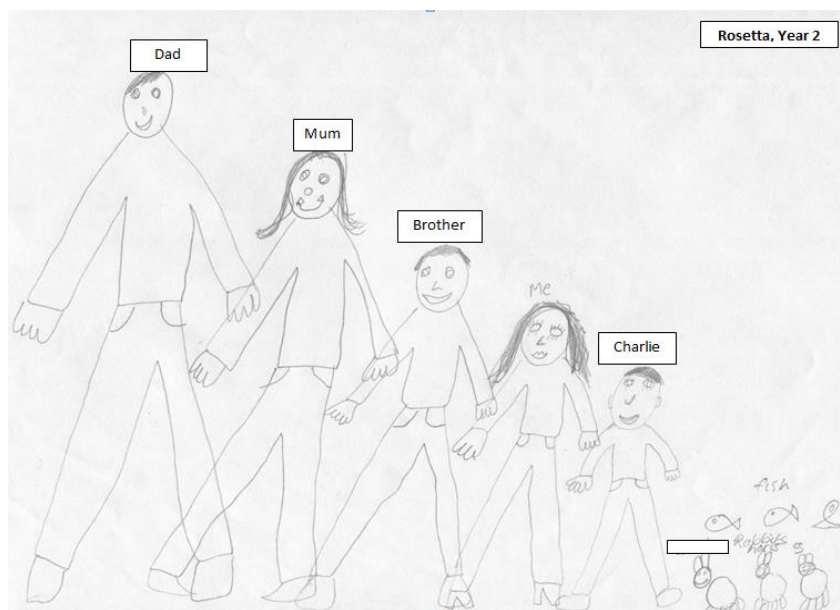
As this activity and the discussion developed, the children went on to talk about family roles, chores they performed at home, their aspirations and the types of parties they enjoyed (a subject raised spontaneously by the Year 2 girls and later picked up by other groups). With the children's agreement, the drawings were photocopied at the end of each meeting. I retained the copies and returned the originals. In the second round of focus group meetings,

the children focused on: friendships, play, the differences between girls and boys, and what it means to have or be a girlfriend or boyfriend.

This last topic provoked much discussion among the children from both year groups. For example, in one discussion, Nick (Year 2) explained what it meant to have a girlfriend and described his relationship with his girlfriend, Jenny:

I'm going with her on holiday this weekend. And we're going to say there only for two nights, and we're going to stay in a caravan together. And I'm hoping that me and Jenny will sleep in the room together. Because when we went to Disneyland together, we went to Paris first and we slept in the same bed together.

Later he continued:

She sometimes, like, goes out with us on holiday. And she, we go 'round houses and have tea, and the grown-ups get holidays when they phone each other, and sometimes we go 'round Jenny's house and we get a buffet together.

I had been concerned that my position within the research might inhibit discussion and candour; there is some evidence that children were less concerned about this than I had feared. For example, here some of the boys expressed their discontent with how teachers addressed playground disputes:

Mick: *But I wasn't going to tell them off. Because they would say, "I was playing."*

Bobby: *Yeah. Mick stopped me telling them off, 'cause it's not nice telling people off.*

Mick: *'cause we just get in, and, you know when you have to sort the boys out. And we just get called up. And we just miss our playtimes talking about it, so what's the point of going to tell people off?*

Jeremy: *When we're going to get told off as well.*

Bobby: *Yeah. And when people just tell them off they just lie to the teacher and say they haven't done anything.*

Jeremy: *Yeah.*

The children who participated seemed excited and to be enjoying the experience, asking when they could come and 'help' me again. Although two of the girls were particularly quiet in discussions, reflecting their general demeanour in school, all the children did contribute to the discussion. As children were used to taking it in turns to speak in class, they often reverted to this kind of behaviour in the focus group meetings – waiting for their turn as we went around the table and waiting with their hands up to indicate they wanted to speak. At other times, the children were so keen to offer their opinions and recount their experiences that they rushed to speak out. When this happened, for clarity it was necessary to go back over what the children had said and unpack their utterances as a group. Although I sometimes prompted children to focus on a particular topic, like Renold (2005, p.13), I found that the children often took discussions in 'unexpected directions'. This was one of the benefits of using focus groups, as they allowed the children to set the agenda and discuss what they considered important in their lives.

Conclusion

The use of focus group interviews as a tool for consultation was advantageous in a number of ways. They produced clarity than, for example, whole school meetings and were more open and developmental than, for example, questionnaires. While time consuming, they provided time and space for individuals to develop their thinking and the possibility of capturing that process. The use of focus groups also enabled me to involve the children in the process. It enabled the school to address parental concerns and avoid controversy, while ensuring that

they curriculum started with where the children were in terms of their learning and experiences. It was in this manner that I was also able to gather rich data for my research.

In my position as a teacher I acted as a professional facilitator, a role that might productively be taken up in other settings designing RSE programmes of study. In this way, the requirement to consult with parents about the curriculum was achieved, but the process yielded far greater benefits. It gave a voice to constituencies that are often side-lined when designing a curriculum. The adults were given time and space to consider deeply their own and others' views and reasoning and to begin to consider in a more informed manner what might be taught and how the best outcomes might be achieved. It also enabled them to reflect upon their own behaviours and attitudes. This was an opportunity for the school to work together with parents. Most importantly for me, children's experiences and perceptions were recognised, valued and put at the heart of the development of the curriculum.

Ultimately, this led to the formulation of a KS1 SRE curriculum that was implemented in the following September. As the children moved up through the school the curriculum developed with them year-on-year, thereby ensuring progression. Few parents removed their children from lessons and teachers, who had an opportunity to give their input into the development of the curriculum and had taken part in discussions about content and pedagogy were well invested in developing children's knowledge and understanding.

Word count: 5,924

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