

An exploration of reception class teachers' experiences of supporting children with  
Autism Spectrum Disorder in the first year of mainstream school.

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## **Abstract**

Increasing numbers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are being educated in mainstream schools and literature reflects a need to address how best to support this process. Previous studies exploring perceptions of mainstream education for children with ASD have highlighted the importance of the teacher's role. This research recognises the importance of the Early Years and addresses a lack of research around supporting children with ASD in the first year of school.

Interviews were conducted with six reception class teachers with the aim of gathering an in-depth picture of their perspectives around including children with ASD in a mainstream class. The purpose of this was to gain an understanding of their experiences which can be used to guide future thinking around support for teachers in this position.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to shape an exploration of the teachers' accounts resulting in the identification of key themes across the group. Two overarching themes derived from the analysis: 'The psychological and emotional process of striving to meet the needs of the child as part of the class' and 'Being a part of the system of support'. The associated themes are discussed with reference to the developing research base around supporting children with ASD in mainstream schools. Opportunities to support reception class teachers and the associated implications for EPs are presented.

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## **Glossary of Terms**

AET- Autism Education Trust

AS- Asperger's Syndrome

APA- American Psychological Association

ASD- Autism Spectrum Disorder

CRAE- Centre for Research in Autism and Education

DCSF- Department for Children, Schools and Families

DSM- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

DfE- Department for Education

EHCP- Education, Health and Care Plan

EP- Educational Psychologist

EYFS- Early Years Foundation Stage

ICD-International Classification of Diseases

LA- Local Authority

NAS- National Autistic Society

NICE- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

NIASA- National Initiative for Autism: Screening and Assessment Working Group

PDD- Pervasive Developmental Disorder

SEN- Special Educational Needs

TEP- Trainee Educational Psychologist

WHO-World Health Organisation

UNESCO- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction to Chapter 1**

The introduction will outline the reason for pursuing this topic and the purpose of the research. A description of the diagnostic and theoretical explanations of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) provides an overview of current thinking about this condition. Key contextual information sets the scene for the research. This includes an overview of the broad national context of inclusion for children with ASD. Literature around parents' views of support in mainstream schools is summarised. The chapter moves into a description of the approach to early years education and how this links to support for children with ASD. Finally, the local context for the research is outlined.

### **1.2 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream school. It is felt that by giving teachers a voice and analysing their experiences, the research will provide valuable insight into what is needed to support them. This may inform local education services, including Educational Psychologists (EPs).

### **1.3 Personal Motivation for the Research**

My personal interest in this research grew from previous roles working in special schools for children with ASD. I noticed that children at increasingly young ages were coming into the specialist setting and began to wonder what was happening in mainstream schools to result in this pattern. My current role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in local mainstream primary schools has often involved work with children with ASD. Assessment often includes information gathering from teachers, but

there is not space to gain a true sense of what the experience is like for them. A combination of these professional experiences and local concerns sparked my interest in exploring this topic. Subsequent searches around the existing literature highlighted a lack of research focusing on offering mainstream support for young children in the United Kingdom (UK) and this consolidated my motivation to pursue this exploration.

#### **1.4 Introducing Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Leo Kanner (Kanner, 1943) first identified 'autism' in children who withdrew from social contact and displayed atypical repetitive behaviours. This understanding has been developed into the umbrella term Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to describe a broad range of developmental disorders which affect social communication, interaction and imagination (Wing, 1981). For many years, the main diagnostic manuals, International Classification of Diseases, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition (ICD-10. World Health Organisation [WHO], 1992) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV. American Psychological Association [APA], 2013), reflected the triad of impairments suggested by Wing (1981), providing diagnoses of 'Childhood Autism' and 'Autistic Disorder' respectively. Both documents also included various other diagnostic terms such as Asperger's Syndrome (AS) and Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) for presentations that met some, but not all, of the criteria.

In 2013, new criteria were published in the DSM-V for Autism Spectrum Disorder which encompassed each of the previous subgroups (APA, 2013). These criteria are split into two main areas for consideration:

- Deficits in social communication and social interaction- including social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communication and developing relationships.

- Restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour including insistence on sameness, fixated interests and hyper/ hypo activity to sensory input.

These symptoms must be present from early childhood and affect daily functioning. Importantly, the sensory needs of those with ASD (Bogdashina, 2003) have been recognised in this revised manual. The DSM-V also provides three levels of severity descriptors with the purpose of establishing support needs. Although the ICD-10 is most commonly used in the UK, it is assumed that these criteria will also be revised to reflect the changes made in the DSM-V.

Guidelines published by the National Autistic Society (NAS, 2003) and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines (NICE, 2011) advocate a local autism team to provide a multi-disciplinary investigation of ASD. This process should involve a thorough diagnostic assessment using tools such as the (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) and the (Autism Diagnostic Interview – Revised). Although these resources provide some qualitative support for clinicians in the process of diagnosis, the decision is ultimately based on professional opinion.

#### **1.4.1 Prevalence of ASD**

The most recent prevalence studies indicate an increasing trend, estimating 1 in every 100 children have ASD (Baird, Simonoff, Pickles, Chandler, Loucas, Meldrum, & Charman, 2006; Baron-Cohen, Scott, Allison, Williams, Bolton, Matthews, & Brayne, 2009). These conclusions are based on a sample of school-aged children in the UK. It is recognised that incidence patterns may be dependent on the local system of assessment and the diagnostic criteria used.

### 1.4.2 Theoretical explanations of ASD

There have been various attempts to provide causal models to explain the wide range of traits presented by those with ASD. In education, understanding from a cognitive perspective provides the basis for many interventions. A brief description of three prominent theories is given here:

**Theory of Mind-** Baron- Cohen (2000) identified that children with ASD demonstrate an impaired ability to understand mental states, both in themselves and others. This means they are not able to read the beliefs or intentions of those around them. This can cause challenges in social communication and interaction due to a misperception of what others are thinking.

**Central Coherence-** Frith's (1989) explanation centred around an information processing style associated with ASD. This theory suggests that there is a limited ability to see the "big picture". This can present as a strength in processing details but it makes it difficult for those with ASD to understand a wider context.

**Executive Dysfunction-** Executive functions are responsible for planning, monitoring, inhibiting and selecting different actions. Ozonoff (1997) proposed executive dysfunction as an explanation for behaviours such as rigidity, repetitive behaviour and difficulties with change.

### 1.4.3 Focusing research on the support for individuals with ASD

A wealth of UK research has focused on understanding the biological, neurological and cognitive basis for ASD (Pellicano, Dinsmore & Charman, 2013). The complexity involved in trying to understand ASD is demonstrated by the difficulty in developing a comprehensive theoretical explanation. A survey by the Centre for Research in Autism



and Education (CRAE. Pellicano et al., 2013) identified that stakeholders- including people with ASD, family members and practitioners- felt that the research focus needs to shift to providing insight that is relevant and applicable to life outcomes. This included a desire to better understand how ASD affects learning and how public services can best meet the needs of those with the condition. This research focuses on providing insight that could support the practice of educational professionals supporting children with ASD.

### **1.5 Inclusion**

Inclusion means schools can accommodate a range of different needs through responsive adaptation of the learning environment (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Integration is a term that was used previously and appears in some of the earlier literature on this topic. This term refers to placing a child in mainstream school setting and expecting the child to adapt to meet the existing environment.

Government guidance in the UK demonstrates an aim to improve inclusive practice by creating a whole school approach which enables all children to access equitable opportunities. This supports an international declaration of the rights of all children to access equitable education opportunities (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994). The National Curriculum inclusion statement sets out that schools should respond to diverse needs in a way that supports all children to overcome potential barriers to learning (DfES, 2005). Specific barriers referred to include the social and emotional aspects of learning which are often associated with the needs of children with ASD.

The Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014a) has continued an emphasis on educating children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in a mainstream school where they take

part in activities together with children without needs (35.1; p.30). The SEN Code of Practice (CoP. DfE, 2014b) sets out the 'reasonable steps' that schools should take to promote this inclusion. Other focal points of the most recent CoP (DfE, 2014b) are the importance of early intervention, collaboration with parents and multi-agency working (DfE, 2014b).

National statistics for England (DfE, 2010 & 2017a) show that the percentage of students with a Statement of Special Educational Need (SSEN) or Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) attending special schools has gradually increased each year.

### **1.5.1 Development of inclusion for ASD**

During the initial push for inclusion, an autism working group (National Institute for Autism: Screening and Assessment [NIASA], 2003) developed advice around a whole-school approach including adaptation of academic activities and strategies to develop communication and interaction skills. Further to this, an Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) was put in place from 2008-2011 to develop practice in mainstream schools. In 2009, this focused on supporting children with ASD (DCSF, 2009a).

There have been associated attempts to outline evidence based strategies (Humphrey, 2008) and good practice (Autism Education Trust [AET], 2011) to create positive experiences for students with ASD. This included consideration of how the classroom environment, lesson content and teaching approach can be adapted according to the needs associated with ASD. There is an emphasis on pursuing high aspirations for children through an individualised, strengths based approach. The AET (2011) report also suggested that school leaders needed to create an ethos which values motivated, empathetic staff in addition to providing continuous training on autism.

### **1.5.2 Educational setting for children with ASD**

Current figures (DfE, 2017a) show that there are approximately 100,000 school aged children in England with ASD detailed as their primary need on the SEN register, SSEN or EHCP. Reports indicate that 70% of this population are educated in mainstream settings (DfE, 2017a).

Despite a push to develop inclusive practice in mainstream schools, provisions established for ASD remain the most common type of specialist setting (DfE, 2017). The number of special schools created for children with ASD is increasing (DfE, 2010 & 2017). Although this correlates with an increase in prevalence rates, there continues to be questions around the experiences in mainstream schools.

### **1.5.3 Challenges around inclusion for children with ASD**

A divide in the perspectives on inclusion for children with ASD has caused challenges for staff offering support in schools (Ravet, 2011). A rights based approach emphasises that schools should adapt to include all children in a mainstream setting, offering equal opportunities to access high quality teaching. On the other hand, the needs-based approach advocates diagnostic labels and specialised pedagogy for children with ASD. Ravet (2011) argues that there should be a compromise which allows teachers to include children with ASD in a mainstream class whilst also accepting that autism specific strategies are useful.

A 2010 review (Wilkinson & Twist, 2010) illustrated that schools continued to face challenges in meeting the inclusion needs of children with ASD. The uniqueness of each child with ASD was noted as being a challenge when trying to implement interventions. Assessment was also highlighted as something which put increasing

pressure on teachers to make adjustments to measures in order to fit better with the development of children with ASD. A key conclusion was the need to collect teachers' opinions in order to develop practical guidance around offering equitable support through inclusion.

Ravet (2015) noted that the increasing number of children with ASD entering mainstream schools with complex needs is highlighting inadequate levels of understanding in staff. Poor inclusive experiences are often attributed to a lack of school-wide training (National Autistic Society [NAS], 2015). Research indicates that the negative consequences for children with ASD can include rejection (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a; Symes & Humphrey 2010), bullying (Humphrey & Hebron, 2015) and higher rates of exclusions (Reid & Batten, 2007).

### **1.6 Exploring Perspectives around Educational Support for Children with ASD**

Most of the research around supporting children with ASD has focused on gaining the views of those involved. This supports the importance of perspectives which is emphasised in this study. A recent review culminated international literature exploring stakeholders' perspectives on mainstream inclusion for students with ASD (Roberts & Simpson, 2016). This concluded on a need to "build capacity in education systems to enable the participation of students with autism in mainstream school" (p. 1094). The scope of UK research involved in this included studies gaining the views of students (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a) and teachers (Humphrey & Symes, 2013) in secondary schools. Given the early years focus of the current study, an explanation of such research is not felt to be relevant. The remaining UK based research included in the review (Roberts & Simpson, 2016) comprises a study presented in critical literature

review (Emam & Farrell, 2009) and two studies which are referenced in the subsequent section on parents' views.

### **1.6.1 Parents' views on the inclusion of children with ASD**

Parents' views have been focal in research exploring mainstream provision for children with ASD. This reflects a national focus on working together with parents to improve inclusive practice (AET, 2011; DfE, 2014b; Ravet, 2011). The ongoing dissatisfaction reported by parents (NAS, 2015) continues to fuel research into improving the way children with ASD are supported in school. This report shows that teachers' understanding was a key factor identified by parents and young people with autism and satisfaction with this decreased between 2011-2015.

A recent review of international literature around parents' perspectives, emphasised the teacher's role in facilitating inclusion (Falkmer, Anderson, Joosten & Falmer, 2015). Research based in the UK showed that teachers' understanding of both ASD and the child as an individual shaped parents' views (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Parsons, Lewis, Davison, Ellins & Robertson, 2009; Tobias, 2009; Waddington & Reed, 2006; Whitaker, 2007). Relationships that fostered reciprocal communication between parents and teachers were shown to be important (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Tobias, 2009). Aspects identified on the teacher level were also linked to the wider systems such as school ethos, training provided and staff sharing (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Waddington & Reed, 2006). This review does not reference how perspectives differed according to the age of a child.

### **1.6.2 Parent views on the first year of school for a child with ASD**

One piece of UK research conducted recently explored parents' experiences of their child with ASD starting school (Connolly & Gersch, 2016). Although the current study does not focus specifically on the transition to school, this research highlights that this is a key point in the life of a child and their parents. The literature presented in this study also demonstrates a lack of UK based research around the transition and first year of school for children with ASD. The findings show the beginning of school to be a significant time for parents as they are coming to terms with a child's diagnosis, wondering how this will affect their future and trying to get the support they perceive to be needed. In terms of teacher support, parents valued nurturing qualities and an understanding of ASD.

The research presented around parents' views supports the rationale for the current study by highlighting the importance placed on the teachers' role in supporting children with ASD.

### **1.7 Early Years Foundation Stage**

This research centres on experiences within a reception class. Reception is generally used to describe a child's first year in primary school beginning at the age of four or five years old. Depending on the setting, other terms such as Year 0, foundation stage or early years may be used to describe this year group. The latter two phrases derive from the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) defined by the government as the first five years of a child's life.

The EYFS was set up in 2008 in recognition of the importance of early learning and development experiences in providing a foundation to support children to reach their

future potential. The statutory framework provides standards which must be followed in supporting all children during this stage (DfE, 2017). Children's progress is measured against seven key areas:

- Communication and language.
- Physical development.
- Personal, social and emotional development.
- Literacy.
- Mathematics.
- Understanding the world.
- Expressive arts and design.

At the end of reception, teachers complete an EYFS Profile which assesses the pupils' development across the early learning goals. Reception teachers pass these on to Year 1 colleagues, together with a report of how the child has engaged with the three key characteristics of learning: playing and exploring, active learning and creating and thinking critically.

### **1.8 Early Years and ASD**

A report by the AET (Jones, English, Guldborg, Jordan, Richardson & Waltz, 2008) indicated the importance of early intervention for children who receive a diagnosis of ASD. It was noted that many LAs create targeted intervention for the early years to facilitate the development of social communication and appropriate behaviour at a

young age. The need for prompt support for parents in the form of information and training was also highlighted.

As part of the IDP, specific guidance was devised for early years settings (DCSF, 2009b). This emphasised the importance of the first stages of education for children with ASD, by highlighting the additional barriers they may experience in reaching early learning goals. It is recognised that ASD can affect all areas of learning and development. The guidance is structured under the four guiding principles of the EYFS, which are:

- Every child is **unique** , who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.
- Children learn to be strong and independent through **positive relationships**.
- Children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- Children **develop and learn** in different ways and at different rates.

(p. 6, DfE, 2017)

The essential message of the inclusion guidance is that consideration of these principles in light of any child's unique strengths and areas of need should shape practice in a way that supports individual development. However, it is accepted that children with ASD may need additional support as social understanding and communication are key skills required to access early learning goals (DCSF, 2009b). Teachers are advised that children with ASD may find it difficult to access a play based curriculum independently or make connections with others without additional support.

Guldborg (2010) used the EYFS principles to structure a review of literature around supporting children with ASD through early years' interventions. This demonstrates that



the framework fits with the research investigating the inclusive support needs of children with ASD. The article culminates with suggestions around the key developmental areas that should be addressed for children with ASD, summarised here:

**Communication and language-** focus on development of the verbal and non-verbal communication skills in addition to promoting appropriate interaction.

**Social understanding and skills-** provide strategies that support emotional recognition in the self and others and enable the development of relationships.

**Learning with and through peers-** support collaborative learning and modelling opportunities through appropriate groupings and structured tasks.

**Overt teaching of play behaviours-** explicit support to practise play skills through structured activities.

### **1.9 Local Context**

The current study took place in a small local authority outside of London including approximately 80 primary schools. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the area, I collaborated with the Special Educational Needs Manager and Principal Educational Psychologist to plan this research. There were several local issues which contributed to the creation of the study:

**Over-representation of SEN-** A broad area of concern is the high number of children identified on the SEN register.

**Reliance on special schools-** There is an increasing pursuit of special school placement for younger children at the beginning of their education. Compared to the

overall population, the area was well-resourced for special school provision but places were oversubscribed despite the additional use of out of borough settings. Approximately 40% of children accessing specialist provision have a primary need of ASD.

**Increasing requests for EHCPs-** Often linked to the above point regarding the desire for special school placement, both school and parental requests for EHCPs have risen in the area. The most common primary need identified in these assessments is ASD. This aspect was not specifically explored with the teachers during the interviews, however, one of the teachers did make reference to additional support provided for a child with ASD who had received an EHCP before starting school.

**SEN strategy-** In order to address the above issues, a new SEN strategy was in development whilst the current study was being conducted. This had not been implemented at the time of data collection. The general aim of this strategy was to promote inclusion by supporting mainstream schools with additional funding.

**Prevalence of ASD-** The latest service model proposal published in 2016 highlighted weaknesses in the autism pathway. Despite the NICE guidance (2011), the diagnosis process for children in the local area is predominantly the responsibility of lone paediatricians. From personal experience and information shared by other members of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), the diagnostic decision is often made following a discussion with parents and a single meeting with the child. This arguably contributes to the growing number of diagnoses in the area which places prevalence rates higher than the national average for children aged 0-18.

**Reduction of early years support-** A restructure of support in the local area has significantly reduced support for children aged 0-5 years old. Outreach teams made up

of early years specialist teachers have diminished and therefore schools are receiving children with ASD with very little information around needs and intervention required.

**Early diagnosis of ASD:** Although, this has not been raised as a concern by the Local Authority, the prevalence of ASD and nature of diagnostic process, mean that a growing number of younger children are starting school with a diagnosis of ASD. During the planning process, consideration was given to children beginning school with this label and how this may influence the teachers' perspectives. The following extracts from the research diary show the thought given to this topic:

Supervision December 2015

Identifying and considering pre- assumptions.

How do I feel about early diagnosis of ASD?

Personally, I do not feel it should be necessary to access the support a child requires. I am aware that the local view is that a diagnosis will give access to resources. I wonder if this is leading to a high rate of diagnoses at an early age given the current system which is not multi- disciplinary.

How will the diagnosis effect teachers perspectives?

Perhaps this would make them notice particular traits/difficulties more because they relate these to the diagnosis. This may also lead to the child receiving more attention and reduced discipline from the teacher. I can explore their perceptions around diagnosis through interpretation of their answers to the first question in particular.

Is it necessary to explicitly direct the teachers on children with a diagnosis?

I think it will help with ensuring that we are exploring the specific phenomenon of supporting children with ASD. Without this, teachers may be inclined to speak about a variety of children who show speech and language/ social communication/attachment difficulties.

Pilot interview reflections:

The pilot participant and I discussed that teachers may be inclined to discuss the children with the more challenging behaviour because they may be more likely to receive a diagnosis. This may be an unfortunate truth about early diagnosis. However, we agreed it would be difficult to focus a teacher to explore a specific experience without the clear boundary of a diagnosis.

## **1.10 Summary of Chapter 1**

This chapter has outlined the purpose of the research, which is to explore the experiences of reception class teachers and provide insight around the support that would be helpful. The rationale for this is supported by professional motivation and a description of issues in the local context. This is set within a national context of increasing prevalence of ASD and an ongoing pursuit of inclusive practice in mainstream schools. Literature has indicated some challenges with providing appropriate support and demonstrated the importance of gathering teachers' views to understand this. Parents' views have been valued as a way to understand school support for children with ASD and research has shown the importance they place on the teachers' role.

A description of the EYFS emphasised the importance of the beginning of a child's education. The principles underlying this stage have been linked to guidance around early years support for ASD. This includes creating an environment that nurtures individual social and communication skills through play and learning with peers. Guidance suggests that children with ASD often face challenges engaging with the play based curriculum applied in a reception setting. The introduction has emphasised the value of understanding teachers' perceptions of offering support at this stage.

## **2. Critical Review of Literature**

### **2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2**

This chapter aims to identify and evaluate the existing research related to the phenomena being explored in this study. I will explain the systematic process used to conduct the review, including a description of how papers were selected through inclusion and exclusion criteria. The review is presented as an evaluative description of each paper following the use of a critiquing tool. The rationale for the current research is built with reference to specific areas lacking in the existing research base. Relevant theoretical models which arise throughout the review will also be outlined.

### **2.2 Literature Search**

In October 2016, I carried out a critical review of the literature around teachers' experiences of supporting children with ASD in mainstream schools. The question guiding this review was "What research is there around teachers' perspectives on supporting children with ASD in mainstream school?" By conducting a pilot review and utilising the thesaurus tool in each database, I was able to establish appropriate search terms and inclusion/ exclusion parameters. I entered the terms shown in Appendix LR1 into the EBSCO search engine to search the online databases PsychINFO, Education Source and ERIC.

I utilised the same terms to search the journal articles available online through Autism Data. To establish a manageable number of relevant studies, I also selected the key terms of "autism spectrum" and "teacher" from the options available. This search produced numerous duplicates of the articles revealed in the other databases and there were no additional studies fitting the inclusion criteria.

I repeated these searches in November 2017 to check for recent research relevant to the study. Although additional papers were identified in the search, none of these fit the inclusion criteria as shown in Appendix LR1.

### **2.2.1 Inclusion/ exclusion criteria**

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the literature search to ensure I selected relevant papers in a systematic way. I limited my search to peer reviewed articles published from the year 2000 up until the time of the literature search. This supported relevance and quality in the papers selected.

Inclusion criteria:

- United Kingdom only- Considering the importance of national demographics and political contexts, I felt it was necessary to focus on research conducted in the United Kingdom.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) only –the aim was to deliver papers which specifically centred around supporting children with ASD rather than a more broad range of developmental or SEN needs.

Exclusion criteria:

- Outside of primary age range- due to the differences in primary and secondary schooling, papers were excluded if they explored the effects of ASD outside the early years or primary age range.
- Narrow focus- During the pilot study, numerous papers were found to have a narrow focus on a particular difficulty associated with ASD. In my opinion, this emphasis on examining the parts of the experience does not contribute to the

theme of this study. Similarly, I chose to exclude research studies which focused on implementing a specific intervention for ASD.

I applied these criteria using a graduated approach to eliminate studies by reading first through the titles, then the abstracts and finally the full articles, if clarification was needed. This process revealed four papers which fit the inclusion criteria. The systematic literature review on international research (Roberts & Simpson, 2016), referred to in the introduction, appeared in the results. However, this was not included in the critical review as only one paper of the 23 reviews met the criteria of exploring primary school teachers' views in a UK setting (Emam & Farrell, 2009) and this study had already been selected. Using a snowballing technique whilst reading the initial papers revealed a further relevant paper which is included in the critical literature review.

### **2.3 Critical Review of the Research Literature**

I devised a literature critiquing template (Appendix LR2) based on the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) to evaluate the rigour and value of the research papers. This template was adapted using information from Centre for Evidence Based Medicine (CEBM, 2017) in order to assess the quantitative aspects of the papers. In this section, the research papers identified and critiqued in the literature search are presented in chronological order. The aim here is to describe how the topic has been explored up until this point, what findings have been suggested and how much credibility the research conclusions hold. This helps to position the research in terms of value and purpose.

### **2.3.1 McGregor and Campbell (2001)**

McGregor and Campbell (2001) used questionnaires to gather views around advantages, disadvantages and influential factors effecting integration, from both specialist and mainstream teachers. The use of the term integration is not specifically defined and seems to represent the historical context of the research. The research noted an aim to “assess provision for integration in Scotland” (p. 201). However, given the small number of schools approached (four specialist and five mainstream), and the 1 in 3 response rate (72 participants total), it is questionable whether the data collected is a fair representation of all Scottish schools.

The authors briefly note the use of pilot questionnaires in devising the surveys used for data collection; however, the rationale behind the different questions used for the mainstream and specialist staff is unclear. The findings are skewed by this as only specialist staff were asked about “most beneficial teaching situations” whilst mainstream staff were asked about their “ability to cope”. This bias means certain comparisons cannot be given weight.

Due to the number of respondents, there is only occasional reference to statistical analysis and most findings are presented as number of responses. As well as separate analysis, an additional section compared mainstream and specialist views. Both highlighted the benefit of social interaction for children with ASD but mainstream staff seemed to also perceive socialising with mainstream peers as a problem. In response to a scale of helpfulness, the majority of all participants shared views that EPs were not helpful in terms of practical assistance. Given the additional question requesting suggestions around how the EP role could be used, this seemed to be a focus area although this was not presented in the purpose of the study. There was also some



agreement on the positives for mainstream children around learning to value different people. The only statistically significant difference noted is that specialist teachers viewed the attitudes of staff to be a key influence on integration at a higher percentage than mainstream staff.

Focusing on the mainstream attitudes, in line with the current project, the authors highlighted the lack of enthusiasm for integration, particularly in inexperienced staff. Difficulties in class were related to communication and socialisation and inexperienced staff, in particular, did not feel they had the skills to support these needs. The authors referenced previous research linking to a need for increased training for all staff. There were also concerns around the mainstream children's understanding of and coping with an autistic child's behaviour and receiving less adult attention.

The epistemology adopted in this research is not detailed. A positivist approach fits with the aim of assessing provision and the quantitative analysis of the findings. However, the authors also noted an aim to "explore the experience and attitudes of specialist and mainstream teachers" (p. 201) which suggests a desire to understand their subjective perspectives. The methods used did not allow for this level of analysis. Conclusions suggest the experience of working with children with autism works to increase positivity and commitment to integration. However, given the lack of exploration around the experiences which led to the answers provided, this assumption is unsubstantiated. The authors seem to show recognition of this, suggesting avenues for more detailed research into 'the reality of classroom life' (p. 203).

### **2.3.2 Glashan, Mackay and Grieve (2004)**

Glashan et al. (2004) used a phenomenological approach to explore the experience of outreach support from the perspective of mainstream teachers. Sampling was

purposeful as the five participating primary schools were selected based on an expected need for outreach support with additional consideration for representing the demography of the area. The authors highlight the diversity of the individual children with ASD in the selected schools.

Qualitative data was initially organised into broad descriptive clusters of speech and language therapy, parents, special assistants, multi-professional team and generic learning support service. A deeper analysis of how the participants experienced the phenomenon of support showed that teachers developed through “reflective teaching” (p. 58) and so time and reassurance were important in developing confidence. Interestingly, the authors opt to use the term ‘school’ when describing the findings which assumes the individual experiences represent the whole school. At the second level of analysis, the authors clearly illustrate the unique experiences in the different schools. The presentation of results gives insight into both similar and diverging experiences.

Support for parents of children with ASD was highlighted as key in the teachers’ experiences due to providing extra emotional support and managing expectations of what can be offered in mainstream. The authors concluded that this “appears to have a significant effect on success of placements” (p. 55). Generally, teachers felt the other children had accepted a child with ASD; however, there were concerns about the effect of challenging behaviour in terms of distraction and safety. Special assistants were valued by teachers but the authors noted a need for specific training and work on the collaborative partnership between teachers and the assistants.

In terms of external support, the analysis shone a positive light on the contribution of speech and language therapists linking to social skills groups that had been run in schools. EPs were perceived to take a diagnostic role and the authors suggested a

need to increase the number of EPs and range of duties. Multi-professional liaison was identified as lacking in four out of five schools and the communication of external messages to teaching staff seemed dependent on an appropriately skilled coordinator in school.

The authors link their findings back to the national inclusion initiative and conclude that local level factors such as training, multi-professional working and teachers managing diverse needs should be considered. The credibility of the findings in this paper is supported by verification of transcripts by participants and independent checks of the researchers' analysis. A more transparent account would have been supported through the use of direct quotations, reference to the researchers' role and dynamics in the interviews. There is a sense that the research was designed primarily to provide support for an autism specific outreach service as this is the primary action reported. Only two teachers indicated that generic learning support service was not appropriate for children with autism, although there seems to be an assumption that these experiences can be generalised to the wider population. There is also no link back to research or theory to give a better understanding of the findings.

### **2.3.3 Emam and Farrell (2009)**

Linking back to research around teacher-student relationship and teacher burnout, Emam and Farrell (2009) attempted to provide an explanatory account of how teachers' experiences shape their views of support for pupils with ASD. They report findings from a large scale research project (2005-2008) which used 17 case studies of children with ASD aged 7-16 to "understand and inform practice relating the inclusion of students with ASD" (p. 409). Data collection included observations focusing on the social

interaction of students with ASD with school staff and peers. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with various staff members.

The authors identify with a realist ontology whilst valuing the concepts of idiography and interpretivism in their approach to analysing the case studies. It would have been interesting to understand how the process of interpreting information was dealt with during observations and interviews. The analysis procedure is described as combining a grounded theory approach to initial thematic analysis with case study analytic strategies to create a conceptual network of links/ explanations. The initial individual descriptions and results from the coding procedure are not provided in the paper which makes it difficult to understand how themes were derived. However, the authors do offer a figure, which illustrates the links between the two aspects of the research question: a. the tensions experienced by teachers and b. how support is viewed in school.

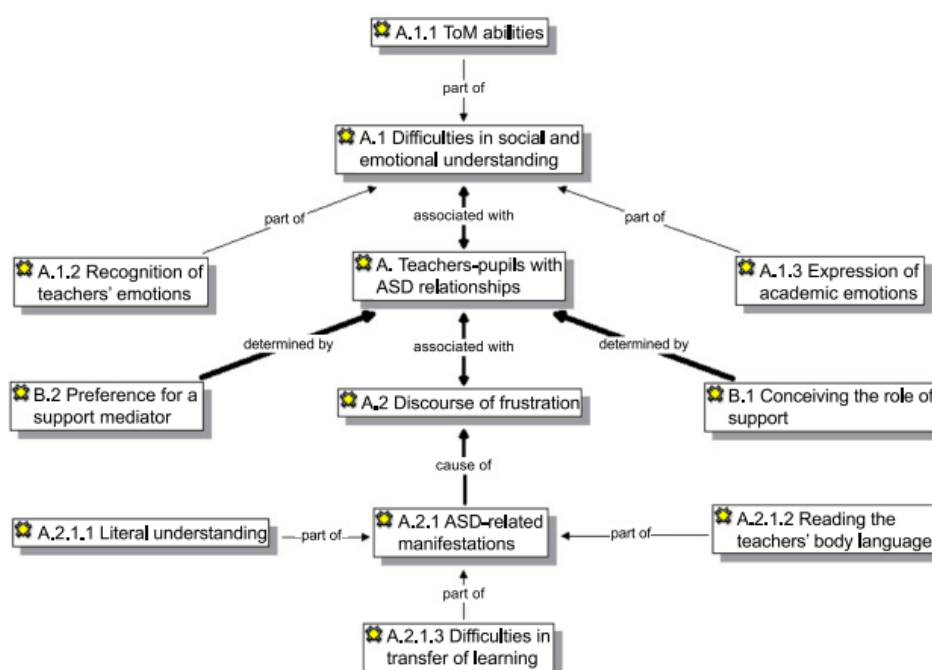


Figure 1: Emam and Farrell (2009)- Key themes illustrating the tensions in the relationships between the teachers and pupils with autism spectrum disorders and the relationship between these tensions and perceived support arrangements

Findings around teachers' tensions related to the effects of the social and emotional needs often related to ASD. This included a lack of emotional understanding and difficulty in perceiving the thoughts/ feelings of others. Linking to this, the authors describe a discourse of frustration from the staff surrounding the adaptation to language and communication that they had to make. There was a conflict caused by trying to fulfil the national curriculum whilst diversifying lesson content for students with ASD.

Thoughts around the Teaching Assistant (TA) role dominated findings around how support is conceived. The majority of the students were supported by TAs (12 of 17). Observation data showed that TAs can be a barrier to the teacher-student relationship. However, teachers valued TAs as they were viewed as alleviating the pressures around maintaining students' focus on academic work. TAs, on the other hand, perceived their role to be focused on the wider facilitation of access to both the academic and social aspects of the mainstream environment. Differences between primary and secondary schools were apparent as secondary school teachers perceived TAs to be the expert on students with ASD. Other support mediators such as teachers, peers and outreach support staff were identified. One primary case highlighted a multi-disciplinary system of such mediators indicating positive results, particularly in relation to supporting independence. However, teachers were generally more positive when TA support was available and felt peer support was more challenging to implement. As TA support was emphasised, the authors suggest future research focusing on the positive outcomes of using a TA compared to other support mediators.

Conclusions were amalgamated into a framework of inclusion (Figure 2) which is guided by a developmental systems approach.

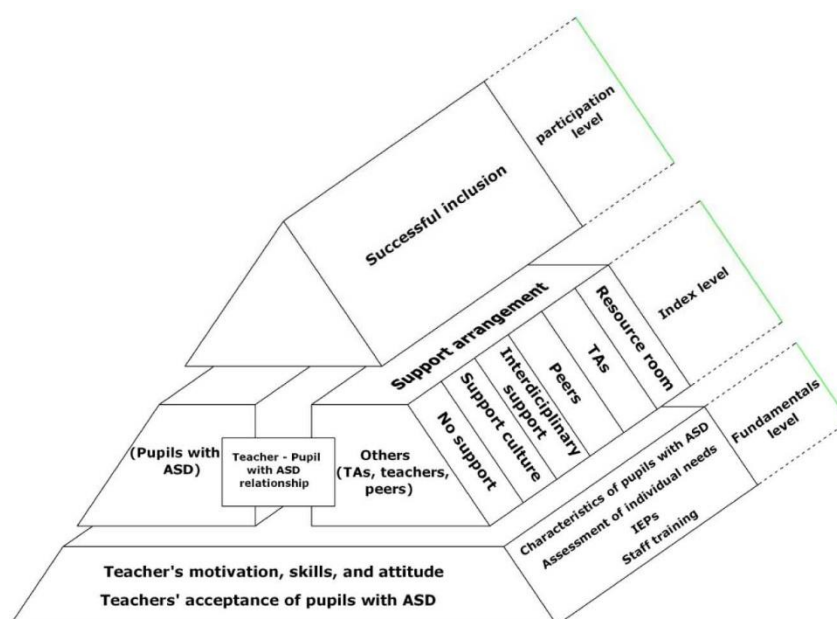


Figure 2: Emam & Farrell (2009) A conceptualisation of successful inclusion of pupils with autism spectrum disorders

This is discussed in further detail in the subsequent section ‘Theoretical Explanations’ (2.5). By highlighting the weaknesses in previous models of inclusion, this research focuses on relational aspects highlighting the teacher-student relationship as vital in creating appropriate links with other support mediators. It is suggested that positive developmental outcomes would derive from relationships that support social and emotional understanding, hence reducing the difficulties experienced by both teachers and students with ASD.

The authors provide a good rationale for this study and the guiding theoretical principles by linking to previous research. It was valuable to combine observations with interviews to understand more about the support dynamics in school but there is no discussion of the type of observation used (covert/overt) and how this may have affected behaviour. The results section is clear and thorough with direct quotations used effectively to support the conclusions. The authors recognise the limitation of the small sample in

generalising the framework. This research is therefore valuable in providing a new theoretical perspective on the teacher's role in inclusion for children with ASD.

#### **2.3.4 Frederickson, Jones and Lang (2010)**

Inclusion for children with ASD takes various forms, including the use of specialised resource units within schools. Frederickson, Jones and Lang (2010) recognised the literature showing parents' satisfaction for this type of provision over mainstream schools. The aim of their two year study was to compare the provision and strategies used in schools both with and without a resource base. Although it is not explicitly stated, the approach reflects an objective view of the world which suggests that the differences found reflect reality. A final research question focused on understanding whether the differences reflected factors raised by parents.

Content analysis was used to arrange the information from semi-structured interviews with a wide range of staff who were involved in providing support for students with ASD. The interview questions focused on current provision, individual strategies, training, desired changes and whole school modification. Scenarios were also given to the participants to gain a deeper understanding of the short and long term strategies that would be used in reaction to challenging behaviour, bullying and lack of participation.

The analysis provided percentages which gave a clear comparison of the provision and strategies used in schools with an ASD resource base and those without. Key differences identified for schools with a resource base included additional training, higher use of assisted communication and more home-school collaboration around behaviour management. There also appeared to be greater use of personal interests being woven into academic work rather than being used as a motivator. Both provisions used TAs and support from external professionals. In a reflection of the previous study's

conclusions (Emam & Farrell, 2009), TA support was regarded as important for inclusion in the mainstream setting and all TAs had received training. In addition, both showed appreciation for building ASD awareness amongst students and parents, although staff outside of resource bases were less keen to provide parental sessions. Similarities were also shown in the availability of various whole school and individual strategies as well as the level of home- school collaboration for generalising skills.

When exploring changes staff would like to see, a third of mainstream staff expressed their concern that their provision was not adequate and a resource provision would be better. Increased peer awareness strategies and social skills interventions were also desired. The authors concluded that the use of peer support in academic and social development may be beneficial. However, the link between the findings reported and this conclusion seems tenuous as peers are only briefly mentioned by the staff. Having said this, given the findings around the variety of support systems in place and the identified barrier of time in mainstream schools, it is a reasonable suggestion for future research.

The scenarios provided an opportunity to explore how strategies were used and highlighted the use of more systemic, proactive intervention in resourced bases. However, it could be argued that asking teachers to imagine situations gives more insight into espoused strategies rather than those applied in daily practice. Nevertheless, the authors suggested that the higher use of such strategies, combined with information around the lower levels of training in schools without a resourced provision, highlighted the importance of ASD specific expertise. This was linked to a conclusion around the final research question, suggesting resourced bases do reflect parental perceptions of more knowledgeable teaching staff.



The authors recognise that the use of staff self-report in research commissioned by the Local Authority may not provide a valid description. Methodological strengths can be identified in the use of piloting to provide rationale for the interview structure and the role of multiple researchers in negotiating key themes. Overall, this paper offers a clear and concise description of a two year research project investigating the differences between schools with and without resourced bases. The majority of schools in the area where the research was carried out were involved, which may indicate good representativeness. The paper is somewhat limited to a thorough description of the information rather than possible links to theory. Identifying the similarities and gaps between pure mainstream and resourced unit support had some value in showing the potential for mainstream settings.

### **2.3.5 Bond and Hebron (2016)**

Extending the research around resource provisions for students with ASD, Bond and Hebron (2016) reported on a longitudinal study to explore the views of teachers over time. The focus here was more on understanding teachers' experiences during the first three years of providing support within newly established resourced provisions. This aim of the research is specified as extending the use of Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic model (2005) as an "interconnected theory of inclusion" (p. 253) which can also reflect changes over time. This model is explained in the following section 'Theoretical Explanations' (2.5).

A range of staff were selected in five primary and three secondary schools according to their regular involvement in supporting students with ASD. Of the 43 staff involved, only 15 took part in both the initial and follow up interviews which significantly reduced the sample able to comment on development. There is no consideration around this

retention difficulty or description of the staff that remained involved throughout. The authors noted that participants were advised of the 'opt in' nature of the research. However, given the involvement of the Local Authority in supporting the provisions, it could be argued that staff, particularly provision leads and headteachers, felt an obligation to participate.

Semi structured interviews took place three times across the first year of practice with a follow up three years later. The interviews are described as exploring staff perceptions around the factors contributing to the development of the resourced provisions. However, there is no description of the specific themes explored and whether the questions were shaped to provide information that fitted with the eco-systemic model. The thematic analysis combined inductive analysis to highlight the key areas described by staff with a deductive process to arrange information into the theoretical framework.

The findings are presented clearly within the headings provided by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model. Direct quotes from participants are also used effectively to support the themes. Initial analysis highlighted the importance of the immediate support network (microsystems) in the views of the staff. This included the role of the resourced provision in fostering home-school collaboration and support for parents. The experience within the provision focused on working as a team to understand and plan for the individual needs of the students. Specific preparation strategies were recognised in supporting students to access mainstream (e.g. Social Stories). Resourced provision staff were also seen as important in creating evidence of progress and contributing to review meetings.

Expanding out from this level, the exosystemic themes focused on the wider school system, external training and inter-professional working. The recruitment of appropriate

personnel, shared responsibility and the challenge of flexible staffing arrangements were discussed. Comments around staffing highlighted the need to ensure thorough induction procedures and specialist training. Follow up comments were around the increased connections made with other schools through the support offered by the LA. The admissions process was perceived to have improved and the number of students in provisions had risen to overcapacity. In inter-professional working, speech and language therapists (SALTs) had become part of the staff team as part of the resourced provision arrangements, whereas links with other agencies were less consistent.

The authors conclude positive findings around the development of well-equipped resourced provisions within mainstream schools. It would be interesting to know whether staff reports were supported by any other data to create this conclusion as part of a wider evaluative project. Poor retention of participants makes a developmental view difficult to gather and there is little consideration of staff members' desires to provide positive descriptions in support of themselves. Caution should also be taken in generalising these findings to other resourced provisions for ASD, as the setup is context specific and the range of students' needs is unclear with some reference to speech and language difficulties only.

The findings seem to fit well into an eco-systemic model, highlighting the importance of the immediate support networks (micro and meso) as well as wider systemic issues. Therefore, the suggestion is that this model can be used to consider the planning of resourced provisions in other settings. However, the authors accept that they require the views of pupils and parents to fully understand an eco-systemic model of how resourced provisions support children with ASD.

## **2.4 Rationale for Current Research**

I have provided a critical overview of the five papers that were selected through the literature search. The existing research base has explored different types of provision for children with ASD, including specialist settings, outreach to mainstream schools and resourced provisions. This reflects the range of national support for children with ASD and the significance of using teachers' views to understand this. I will now detail how the current research hopes to add to the information that is currently available.

### **2.4.1 Focus on the teachers' experiences**

The papers in the review demonstrate the importance of exploring the views of those working closely with children with ASD in school settings, in order to gain a better understanding of the experience. However, they do not provide an in-depth insight into the specific role of teachers as a wide range of staff are included. Most of the studies group mainstream teachers in with other roles in their analysis. Support staff, named 'auxiliary staff' (McGregor & Campbell, 2001) and 'special assistants' (Glashan et al., 2004), are included with no reference to how this role was represented in the findings. Emam and Farrell (2009) subsequently demonstrated that TAs and teachers hold different views. This highlights the importance of presenting these voices separately. The most recent study (Bond & Hebron, 2016) provided the only illustration of the distinct contribution of different professionals through labelled quotes but these roles were not separated in analysis or discussion.

In terms of the current research, it is felt that it is necessary to recognise that a class teacher plays a specific and important role in supporting a child with ASD in mainstream school. Therefore, this study aims to shift focus away from what is being offered to children with ASD to the experience of the teacher providing this support, while

ensuring they are heard as a unique voice by not grouping them with the perspectives of SENCOs, headteachers or support staff.

Although the use of a wider range of school professionals may have been appropriate for the purpose of the literature reviewed, the current research values an idiographic focus on class teachers' experience. There are certain aspects of teachers' perspectives that have not been explored fully in the existing research due to an alternative focus. For example, Frederickson et al. (2010), identified that teachers felt they could not offer what was needed but there was little exploration of how this view was constructed. The phenomenological approach used in this study will offer a deeper insight into how perspectives are shaped through experiences.

#### **2.4.2 Focus on the first year of school**

The research included in the review used samples of staff from a range of educational settings. This included specialist settings (McGregor & Campbell, 2001), mainstream nursery and primary schools (Glashan et al., 2004), secondary schools (Emam & Farrell, 2009; McGregor & Campbell, 2001) and resourced provisions for ASD (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Frederickson et al., 2010). Although there are some references to the ages of the children being supported (Glashan et al., 2004; Emam & Farrell, 2009) there is no explicit consideration of this factor. Emam and Farrell (2009) note differences between primary and secondary teachers' perspectives of support. The nursery school was also highlighted several times in the findings of Glashan et al. (2004), suggesting some difference in the experiences here.

The literature review has highlighted a lack of understanding around giving support at particular stages of a child's education. This research aims to provide a deeper look at teachers' experiences of supporting a child with ASD in the first year of school. The

importance of the early years of education for children with ASD has been emphasised in the introduction (1.7/ 1.8). This supports the rationale for focusing the exploration of teachers' experiences on this stage.

## **2.5 Theoretical Explanations**

The bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) appears in two of the papers included in the literature review. This model frames an individual's development as a dynamic, reciprocal process of connecting with the various systems which surround them. Emam and Farrell (2009) considered the bio-ecological theory as part of a developmental systems approach to understanding inclusive practice. The aim of this was to provide a conceptualisation that goes beyond a focus on the individual child's difficulties. A framework based on their findings around the teacher-student relationship is presented in Figure 2 (2.3.3).

Teachers' attitudes towards students with ASD is presented as the foundation for success. This is intertwined with general school provision (staff training and approach to individual assessment) and the characteristics of the students with ASD. Moving up a level in the prism framework, there is a focus on relational aspects as the teacher-student relationship is perceived as crucial in creating appropriate links with other support mediators. It is suggested that positive developmental outcomes would derive from relationships which support social and emotional understanding, hence reducing the difficulties experienced by both teachers and students with ASD.

Further to the longitudinal case study data collected, Emam (2014) detailed the ecosystem of a child with ASD in a mainstream school (Figure 3) before a more focused exploration of the microsystemic processes.

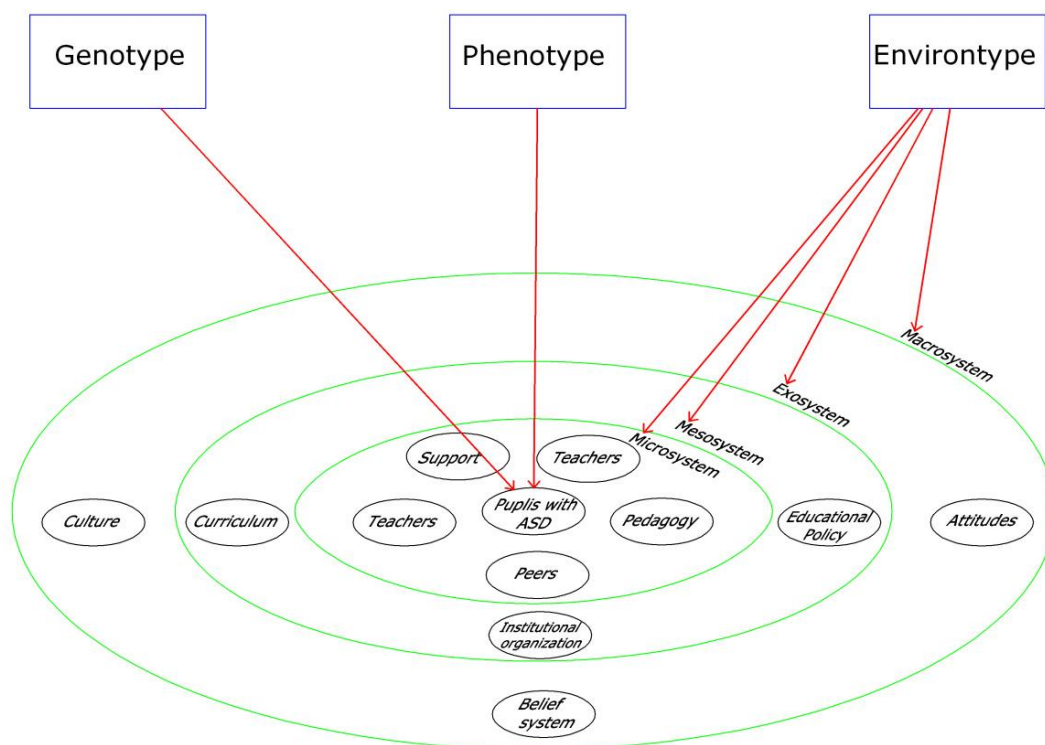


Figure 3: The ecosystem of pupils with ASD in mainstream schools: A developmental systems conceptualisation (Emam, 2014).

Bond and Hebron (2016) shaped their findings on resourced provisions in mainstream schools around the different systems in the bio-ecological model. The following is a brief description of each:

The MICROSYSTEM(s) are the closest settings to the individual where he/she interacts directly with the social and physical activities.

The MESOSYSTEM represents the interrelations between the microsystems or connections between contexts.

The EXOSYSTEM does not include the individual but the interaction of elements within this system will have an indirect effect on his/ her position in a given environment.

The MACROSYSTEM is defined as the culture in which individuals live.

The CHRONOSYSTEM is the element of time which is apparent across all of the other systems. This represents changes over time including the transitions that occur throughout life.

Connolly and Gersch (2016) also used this framework to understand the experiences of parents with a child with ASD starting school. This paper focused on the microsystem of the family and highlighted the parents' experiences within that.

## **2.6 Summary of Chapter 2**

This chapter has provided an overview of the existing literature which has gained teachers' perspectives of supporting children with ASD. Given the breadth of research surrounding the topic of ASD, it was important that the search terms provided literature with a focus around mainstream schools, teachers' experiences and primary aged children. In addition, I chose to focus on research gathered in the UK as this reflected the educational context of the current study. The systematic search process identified five research papers which have been evaluated through the use of an adapted critiquing template.

The review provides descriptions of the aims, methods, findings and conclusions of each study. I have contemplated the weight that should be attributed to the research conclusions based on an evaluation of the approach and quality of the method used.

The bio-ecological model has been outlined as this was the predominant theoretical framework noted in the two of the existing studies. Existing research has shown the value of understanding the experiences of those working with children with ASD in schools to plan appropriate practice and support. Further justification has been shown



by highlighting the gaps in the research focusing solely on teachers' lived experiences and around perspectives of the first year of school for children with ASD.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3**

The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodological approach that has been used to explore the research questions. I will first detail the aim of the research before outlining the research paradigm which describes the beliefs that guide this study. A description and justification for the method chosen, namely Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), will be provided following consideration of various models of qualitative analysis. Moving on to the procedural elements, I will describe the selection and recruitment of participants. The interview schedule used to explore the experiences of the teachers is detailed including an overview of the pilot stage which helped shape this process. A consideration of ethical values and quality criteria is presented. This leads into the importance of reflexivity and how this has been addressed at each stage of the research. Finally, a clear description of the analysis process is provided.

#### **3.2 Aim of the Research**

The aim of this research is to gain some understanding of how reception class teachers perceive the phenomenon of supporting children with ASD in the first year of mainstream school. In exploring this, I hope to gain an understanding of what is needed to support teachers throughout this experience to inform planning for local services.

#### **3.3 Research Questions**

1. What are reception class teachers' experiences of supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream school?

2. What is needed to help reception class teachers in supporting children with ASD?

The second research question was created to meet the aim of this study to use the exploration of experiences to support planning in schools and local education services.

### **3.4 Research Paradigm**

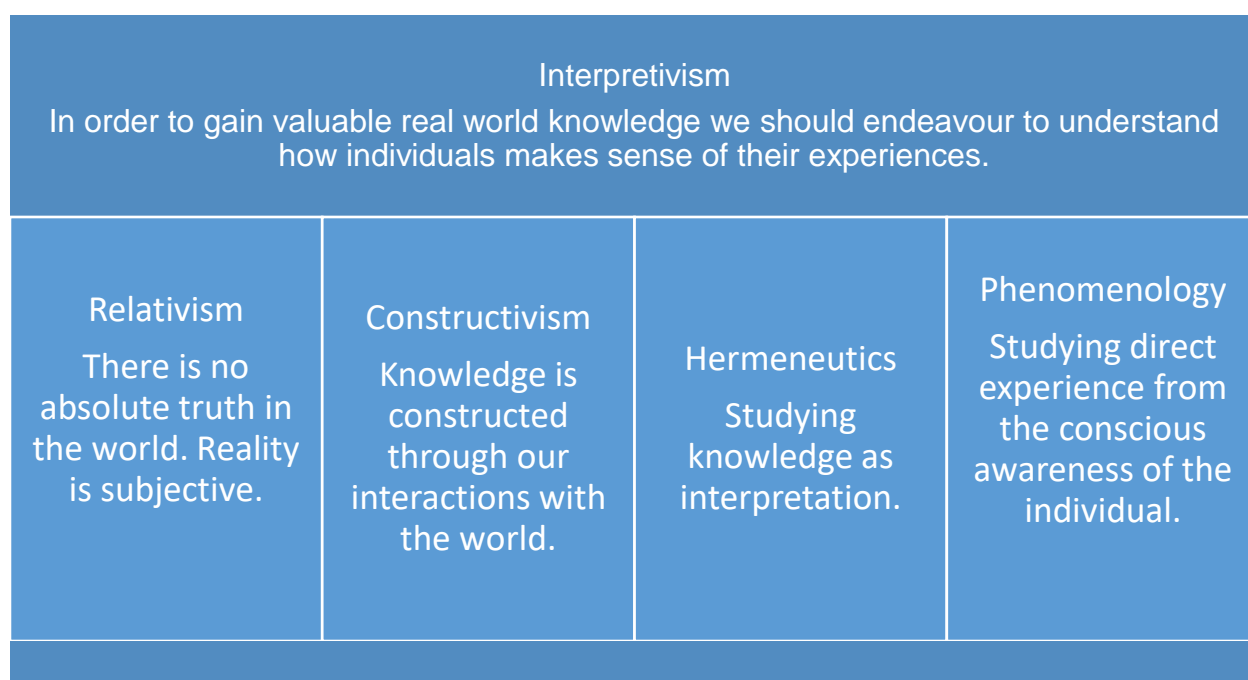
My research journey began, in line with suggestions from Grix (2004), with confirmation of my guiding beliefs in relation to the nature of knowledge and social reality. I considered how, in practice, whilst working with a wide range of clients, my guiding thought is that I need to understand *this* person's interpretation of the situation, respecting that individuals construct meaning in a different ways. The identification of this real life belief was the first step in creating the research paradigm.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) illustrate the complexity of piecing together a research paradigm with philosophical, ontological and methodological systems whilst considering the way each of these interact with the position of the researcher. I have given this much consideration and aim to provide a transparent description of the belief systems which guide this research. Figure 4 illustrates the overarching interpretative paradigm and associated perspectives.

Interpretivism frames research as a subjective meaning making process. A hermeneutic theory views knowledge as interpretation aligns closely with this assumption. This fits with a relativist ontological position which rejects the idea of a universal, discoverable truth. Rather, this research follows a belief in multiple realities which emerge through an individual's engagement with the world (Willig, 2013). In line with this theory of reality, there is a need to understand experience from an

epistemological standpoint which explores constructions from inside the perspective of the individual, namely constructivism (MacKenzie & Knipe, 2006).

A phenomenological approach supports this attempt to understand meaning from an individually constructed perspective by exploring how the human experience is shaped through conscious awareness (Langdridge, 2007). This ties back into a hermeneutic theory by recognising that participants' perceptions are developed through their unique interpretations of their lived experience. These concepts are further discussed as the theoretical basis for the method selected (3.8).



*Figure 4: Research Paradigm*

### **3.5 Methodology**

The exploratory purpose of this research and the constructivist view of what we can know fits best with a qualitative methodology.

Qualitative research grew out of criticisms for the dominance of quantitative methods translated from the natural sciences to psychological studies (Robson, 2011). Quantitative research is used to explain an objective world. This fits with a positivist perspective which presumes there is an absolute truth discoverable through deductive and systematic research methods. Quantitative methods are perceived to be beneficial for testing specific theories and producing generalisable theories (Robson, 2011). There is an attempt to minimise external factors that may interfere with understanding the specific relationship between two variables. I perceive this type of information to provide limited insight into a real world context.

Qualitative researchers see beyond cause and effect relationships to the complexity that creates meaning (Willig, 2013). In order to gain this type of rich understanding, it is necessary to work with the information that naturally emerges from participants rather than testing discrete variables. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to focus on issues that are meaningful to participants and value the context within which phenomena occur (Robson, 2011). This approach also recognises the subjective nature of knowledge, both in the world and in the researchers' interpretation of data.

A qualitative methodology emerged naturally from the research paradigm but the numerous qualitative methods available required further investigation.

### **3.6 Choosing a Method**

Starks and Trinidad (2007) demonstrate the convergence of key approaches in qualitative analysis, highlighting the importance of choosing a method based on the researcher's theory of knowledge and the unique aim of the study. The aim of this research is to understand how reception class teachers experience supporting children with ASD within the context of mainstream schools in the local area. I believe that it is

important to understand how individuals construct their view of reality whilst also appreciating the influence of the social environment in which they do this. I will give a short introduction to the rationale for selecting the method for this research before discussing the consideration that was given to other options.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as it is grounded in philosophical ideas which describe the unique nature of who we are in body and mind, and how we engage with the world around us. This guides the elicitation of a rich, detailed account of individual experience which respects the use of language in portraying emotions and thoughts (Smith & Osborn, 2008). I wished to stay close to each participants' descriptions in order to understand their individual perception (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Importantly, IPA also respects the 'person-in-context', meaning interpretations are made with the specific context in mind (Larkin, Eatough, & Osborn, 2011).

IPA is an inductive process which does not aim to fit with a pre-existing theory. This provides the flexibility to make interpretations on various levels and incorporate psychological theory into that (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). By respecting the value of a bottom-up approach, IPA can unveil a new perspective on a phenomenon (Shaw, 2001). This meets the exploratory purpose of this study. The systematic guide for analysis also provides a rigorous structure for understanding the data (Smith et al., 2009). This analysis process unveils importance at an individual level as well as generating themes across the participant group (Smith, 2004). This will support the LA in identifying important areas to focus on when providing support for teachers.

I was also drawn to IPA due to the recognition of the complexities involved in attempting to elicit, interpret and analyse a conscious world outside of your own. IPA situates the

researcher as a dynamic and interactive part of the research process. Therefore it shows the importance of being personally aware and open-minded throughout the process (Smith et al., 2009). The associated guidance around developing understanding through reflexivity, empathy and questioning is valuable in gaining insight into personal experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

### **3.7 Comparison to Other Qualitative Methods**

#### **3.7.1 Grounded theory and IPA**

The exploratory nature of IPA does not allow for an understanding of why the phenomenon is constructed in a particular way. This can be said to limit theoretical development by pausing interpretation at the level of rich description (Willig, 2013). Grounded theory, on the other hand, provides an explanatory theory by extending the researcher's interaction with the data to an examination of the key social mechanisms (Charmaz, 2006).

Analysis associated with grounded theory fits with a social constructionist view of the world and moves away from the emphasis on idiographic experience. It also relies more on the inference of the researcher to make decisions on a core theme as the basis for explanation. I prioritised an in- depth exploration of the individual experiences of reception class teachers as I believe this provides the most valuable insight into the phenomenon. This reflects the value I place on the participants as the experts on the lived experience of supporting children with ASD and the desire to understand how meaning is constructed from their perspectives (Reid et al., 2005).

### **3.7.2 Discourse analysis and IPA**

Discourse analysis gives more emphasis to the *how* by analysing the use of language in social activities. This is achieved through the deconstructive analysis of forms of language/ communication. Discourse analysis has been criticised for only observing the linguistic tools individuals use (Reid et al., 2005). The constructionist view adopted in discourse analysis suggests that language constructs reality. IPA challenges the view of individuals as discursive agents (Eatough & Smith, 2008) and focuses on understanding the fullest sense of an individual through the descriptions they provide. The investigation into discourse analysis accentuated awareness of language in the interview and analysis process. However, I selected IPA due to the view that language can be used to understand the cognitive, affective and physical nature of being (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

### **3.7.3 Thematic analysis and IPA**

Thematic analysis provides a method to identify and analyse patterns in the data. Thematic analysis is a systematic process which supports understanding of the important aspects of the data related to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis lacks the theoretical affiliations of IPA which is said to create a different level of flexibility. The risk in this approach is the creation of codes by the researcher which do not remain true to the data and divert from the quality of the individual experience (Willig, 2013). IPA was selected above thematic analysis due to the focus on rich psychological interpretation of meaning emerging from the participants' data.



### 3.8 Understanding IPA

IPA has strong philosophical roots that relate to the interpretivist position of this researcher. Smith et al. (2009) give a full description of the influential theoretical foundations of this method, which are phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Each area highlights important themes to keep in mind and shape the overall approach to data collection and analysis.

Idiography provides a focus on the uniqueness of lived experiences. The aim is to understand a particular phenomenon from a specific perspective. An idiographic approach aims to give a detailed investigation of an individual experience. This is often contrasted with nomothetic approaches which aim to generate general theories. An idiographic approach is applied in IPA as the researcher begins by analysing particular, individual cases and maintains the respect for this uniqueness whilst cautiously moving to consider common themes apparent across cases.

Phenomenology is the study of experience and, more specifically, how the human experience is shaped and understood. Hence, IPA often involves examining experiences which are perceived to be significant in shaping our lives (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) describe the contributions of Husserl (1970), Heidegger (1978) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1969) to the development of phenomenology. Husserl (1970) focused on directing our attention inwards to begin to understand our individual experience and the different perceptive lenses that influence the way we experience something.

Husserl (1970) focused on a reductionist analysis of an individuals' experience but the concept of phenomenology was expanded by Heidegger (1978), Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Sartre (1969) who recognised the importance of an interpersonal context.

Heidegger (1978) described how individuals are embedded in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture and therefore interpretations are always related to engagement in the lived world (Smith et al., 2009). Similarly, Sartre (1969) also focused on an individual developing within a social context. Merleau- Ponty (1962) described an important consideration for current researchers in IPA by suggesting we can never fully understand how another experiences the world because the unique embodiment is key to how we perceive. Phenomenology contributes to IPA the recognition of the complexity of individual sense-making in an ever-changing world. This is reflected in the importance of reflexivity in conducting this piece of IPA research.

Hermeneutics is another key theory underpinning IPA as it examines the process of interpretation. Smith et al. (2009) point to the works of Schleiermacher (1998), Heidegger (1978) and Gadamer (1975) which highlight key elements for an interpreter to consider. Heidegger's (1978) contribution to phenomenology connects to hermeneutics as it shows interpretation as both our natural perceptions of objects in the world and the way we analyse the social discourse. Gadamer (1975) highlighted the influence of history and timeliness of interpretation in discussing the impact an interpretation can have on the phenomenon. The contextual information provided in the introduction sets the scene for the interpretations made by both the participants and the researcher in this study.

The hermeneutic roots of IPA underwrite the importance of the role of the interpreter/ researcher. Schleiermacher (1998) described the in- depth holistic understanding the interpreter is able to gain by developing insights that participants may be unable to see. He also emphasised the relationship with participants as key to understanding the

psychological meaning of what is said. This relationship enables what is coined as the 'double hermeneutic' (Smith et al., 2009), which is the process of the researcher interpreting the interpretation the participant is making of the experience. The hermeneutic cycle describes the interpretative process as alternating between looking at the parts of the experience and the whole: to understand the parts, you have to understand the whole and vice versa. This is reflected in the analysis used in IPA, which uses a range of ways of looking at the data (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.9 Limitations of IPA**

In selecting IPA, I also recognised that there are limitations to the method. Willig (2013) suggests that an interview transcript tells us more about the ways in which an individual expresses themselves through language, rather than the actual experiences. Given the constructivist epistemology underlying this research, it is accepted that pure experience is not accessible and the interviews will provide perspectives of the phenomenon. An associated critique of IPA has been around the participant's ability to communicate accurately the detail that is sought in a reflective way (Willig, 2013).

The difficulty of portraying thoughts and feelings through language has been acknowledged in IPA (Smith & Osborn, 2008) and links with the second potential limitation. The researcher takes an active role in supporting the participants' exploration of their experiences and interpreting the responses (both verbal and non-verbal). A sample of previous IPA studies have opted to return to participants or approach other professionals in the field for their thoughts around the initial interpretations (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). It was not practical to return to participants within the timeline of this research. However, the thorough analysis process (3.14 & 3.15) details judgements

made by the research, including the use of reflexivity, which addressed this potential criticism.

### **3.10 Participants**

#### **3.10.1 The sample**

Purposive sampling (Robson, 2011) was used in order to select participants who were able to provide a perspective on the particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009).

#### **3.10.2 Inclusion criteria**

Participants were reception teachers who had experience of supporting a child with a diagnosis of ASD in their first year of mainstream school. Considering the possible movement of teachers across year groups, it was important to emphasise that participants were in role as reception class teachers at the time of interviewing as I felt their current context would support the retrieval of meaning around the phenomenon.

I considered various aspects that may affect the homogeneity of this sample, including the duration teachers had been in the profession. I felt that the experience of being a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) would lead to significant factors which may affect the relevance to the particular phenomenon. Therefore, my inclusion criterion specified that the reception teachers had at least two years' experience of teaching, one year outside of the newly qualified year.

Whilst considering length of career in light of history and timeliness factors, I also contemplated how recent the experience of the phenomenon was. I felt it was necessary for the experience to be clear in the teachers' minds in order to gain the rich detail required in IPA. Hence, the second inclusion criteria was that the teachers had

experienced supporting a child with ASD in the first year of mainstream school, during the last three years.

### **3.10.3 Exclusion criteria**

Excluded participants included teachers who I have worked with as part of my practitioner role in the EPS. It was felt that previous experience with the interviewer in this role may have various effects on the dynamics of the interview process. Special schools in the area were also not included in the selection process as it was felt that the reflections of supporting children in mainstream school would be influenced by more recent experience of teaching in a specialist provision.

### **3.10.4 Selection**

In line with the recommendations from Smith et al. (2009), I planned to recruit six teachers to provide sufficient data for analysing similarities and differences. The sample size reflects the desire to provide an in-depth interpretative account.

I recognised the potential bias in the LA around suggesting schools which are either more likely to participate in the research or would have particular views on the research topic. In recognition of this, a random number generator was used to select and approach schools in a staged approach. Firstly, schools in which I was the allocated professional were excluded from the selection process to limit the potential blurring between role as an LA representative and the role of the researcher/ interviewer. From the remaining primary schools in the area, random selection began with the three form entry schools.

The reason for selecting from three form entry schools initially was the pursuit of a 'homogenous sample' (p. 49; Smith et al., 2009). It was thought that recruiting teachers

in the same school offers a sense of environmental ‘sameness’ in the experience of the phenomenon.

### 3.10.5 Recruitment

The full recruitment process is detailed in Appendix M1. Initial contact was made with the headteacher of a school to request permission to approach the teachers in their school and ask them to take part in the research. I approached the school EP to request the headteacher’s email address for the purpose of sending the headteacher information form (Appendix M2).

I emailed the headteachers explaining the research project and my request to approach reception teachers in their school. I attached the information forms explaining that consent could be confirmed via email. All headteachers replied with permission within one week. They also attached individual email addresses for the reception teachers so I was able to contact them directly.

I emailed the teachers with a short explanation as to my research and attached the participant information (Appendix M3) and consent forms (Appendix M4). In the case of no response, I followed the process of reminders and time restrictions detailed on the participant information forms. When teachers met the criteria, and completed consent forms were received via email, they were contacted on their preferred method of contact to arrange suitable dates/ times for the interviews.

### 3.10.6 Overview of Participants

*Table 1: Description of Participants*

	<b>T1</b>	<b>T2</b>	<b>T3</b>	<b>T4</b>	<b>T5</b>	<b>T6</b>
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<b>School</b>	A	B	A	C	C	A
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
<b>Duration of teaching career</b>	2 years post NQT	20 years post NQT	10 years post NQT	6 years post NQT	7 years post NQT	12 years post NQT
<b>Short description of teaching career</b>	Started career in School A and worked in reception there for two years.	Spent entire career in School B working in reception.	Eight years in previous school. Taught in reception and Year 1.  Two years in School A teaching reception.	Three years in Year 1.  Two years in nursery.  Three years in reception.  Moved from local one form entry primary school to School C three months ago.	Three years outside LA schools in reception and Year 1.  Two years in reception in one form entry school.  One year in School C reception class.	Ten years in schools with LA.  Joined School A at the start of academic year (six weeks before interview).
<b>Interview conducted</b>	End of academic year	End of academic year	End of academic year	Beginning of academic year	Beginning of academic year	Beginning of academic year
<b>Other key information</b>	Moving to Year 2 next year at her request.	Early years Lead for 8 years.	Leaving school at the end of the academic year.  Son with ASD	Job share-two days	Job share-three days	Lead role for Foundation Stage

### **3.11 Data Collection**

Semi- structured, one-to-one interviews were selected as the tool for collecting information on the teachers' experiences. This method is often used in IPA studies as it provides a space for participants to share their individual perceptions of the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). Semi-structured interviews facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings through 'a conversation with a purpose'. The informal style supports the building of rapport and helps the participant feel comfortable to discuss personal feelings.

This format supports the aim of following the lead of the participant and delving into their lived experience (Robson, 2011). The interview schedule (Appendix M5) provided a guide to ensure areas pertinent to the research question were discussed. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews also supports exploration of unexpected interests which the participants' discuss (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This maintains a comfortable flow to the interview and reflects the idiographic nature of the process.

#### **3.11.1 Interview schedule**

The questions used in the interview schedule represent an attempt to gather perspectives on various aspects of the experience of supporting a child with ASD in their first year of mainstream school (Appendix M5). Initially, the broad areas of interest were positive experiences, challenges and support received. The interview schedule underwent careful scrutiny in supervision to consider elements such as appropriate order and framing of the questions (Appendix RD1d).

This process led to critical reflection on the wider purpose of the research. At this point, the decision was made to add the additional research question of 'What is needed to



help reception class teachers in supporting children with ASD?’ and interview questions were devised to address this. The final format of the interview schedule covers the following areas:

**Setting the Scene-** encouraging the participants to share their understanding of ASD and putting them in the appropriate mind set to recall experiences.

**Challenges-** supporting the participants to reflect on the thoughts and feelings they experienced in association with the challenging aspects of the phenomenon and what this meant to them.

**Support-** exploring the participants’ interpretation and experience of support they received.

**Positives-** supporting the participants to reflect on the thoughts and feelings they experienced associated with the positive aspects of the phenomenon and what this meant to them.

**Moving forward-** allowing the participants to reflect on the discussions and share their perspectives on the overall experience.

### **3.11.2 Interview Procedure**

In organising the interviews via email, the importance of privacy and comfort in the setting was emphasised. Each participant chose to use their classroom rather than accepting my offer to arrange a separate room in the school. All the interviews were conducted after school hours as requested by the participants. The expected duration of the interview was reiterated when arranging the interview to ensure participants were prepared for the time commitment.

An introductory script was used to explain the interview process to the participants, acknowledging the importance of their voice in describing personal experiences. I spoke about the flexible format of a semi-structured interview and explained that I may take notes to prompt my memory. This was also an opportunity to review the information sheets and ensure the participants understood ethical points such as confidentiality, audio recording and the right to withdraw. The interviews were audio-recorded using a dictaphone.

Before the interviews, I created an informal discussion around the participants' background in teaching and current context. Gathering this information supported the analysis stage whilst also developing a rapport.

In conducting the interviews I aimed to encourage participants to provide in-depth personal reflections (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Active listening was key in unravelling the meaning of responses and appropriately shaping follow up questions. Professional consultation experience supported this approach to offering non-verbal reassurance and verbal prompts at appropriate times throughout the interview. The interview schedule was used flexibly to provide open-ended questions, which explored thoughts, feelings and interpretations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Probes to clarify meaning and prompts to expand descriptions were also used frequently. Each interview was unique in terms of the time taken for the participants to feel comfortable to talk at length and the flow of conversation.

### **3.11.3 Pilot interview**

A pilot interview was used to review the schedule of questions for clarity, flow and access to appropriate information for analysis. The reflections and amendments considered are described in full in Appendix (M5). The pilot participant was a fellow Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) who was a reception class teacher before entering her doctoral training. Therefore, she met the criteria of having experience of

supporting a child with ASD in the first year of mainstream school during the last three years. The pilot participant's current role, relationship with the interviewer and position in planning her own research were recognised as potential drawbacks. However, it was felt that her reflective ability would be beneficial in evaluating the interview process.

The pilot interview was an invaluable process which re-invigorated my passion for the research topic. Reflection on the framing of the interview questions highlighted the potential emotional impact of timing and wording. However, it was important to keep in mind that the pilot participant's response to such aspects may not mirror the experience of actual participants still in role as teachers.

The pilot interview also provided an opportunity to think about the style of the interview. Personally, I had unexpected anxiety during the interview around the risk of leading the pilot participant and subsequently felt that this caused an avoidance of additional probes into particular areas of interest. I used the following questions (adapted from Smith et al., 2009) to support collaborative reflection on my role as an interviewer:

Is there enough time to answer fully?

Was the schedule used flexibly?

Does the interviewer listen to what the participant says and follow it up?

Are these follow ups open or leading?

Does the interviewer empathise with the participant in an appropriate manner?

Although the responses to these questions were reassuring, it was important to keep in mind the influence of a trusting relationship and mutual experience as TEPs. We reflected on the discomfort teachers may initially feel in the situation particularly when

there are periods of silence or prompts to expand. This supported my own preparation for the interviewer role by considering the importance of paying attention to the expression of the interviewee.

### **3.12 Ethics**

The British Psychological Society (BPS) provides guidelines to ensure practitioner psychologists have ethical practice in mind at all times (BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2009). In addition to this guidance, which is integral to my daily work, I also referred to the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2011) in planning this research. This code (BPS, 2011) outlines the principles of 'Respect for the Autonomy and Dignity of Persons', 'Scientific Value', 'Social Responsibility' and 'Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm.' These principles are incorporated in the following descriptions of ethical considerations taken in this research.

#### **3.12.1 Avoidance of harm**

It is the researcher's responsibility to consider potential risks to the psychological well-being, personal values and dignity of the individuals (2.4, BPS, 2011). I hoped that the research interview would be a positive experience for teachers as it provided a space for reflection which they may not receive elsewhere. However, the potential negative impact of engaging in the process of in-depth description and sense-making was also considered. In the opening discussion, participants were reassured that the interview could be suspended or terminated if it was felt that the situation was causing emotional distress. I also planned additional time at the end of the interviews for debriefing. Here, the participants were given the opportunity to discuss any difficult feelings that remained with them after the interview. However, none of the participants felt this was needed. In addition, the allocated EP for each school agreed to be a point of support if

there were any residual thoughts and feelings associated with the interview that the participant wished to discuss with an independent person.

It is important to address the power balance between the roles of researcher and participant. I purposely selected participants who had no previous personal or professional relationship to the researcher. In addition, I did not have contact with the teachers' schools in role as a TEP before or during the research process in order to avoid the potential perception of power given to a LA representative. The research was shaped around respect for the expert knowledge of the participant and the structure and preparation for the interview reflected this (1.1; BPS, 2009).

### **3.12.2 Informed consent**

Smith et al., (2009) points out that informed consent must apply to both the taking part in the interview and the use of the data. In approaching the participants, I was transparent about the topic of my research and what the interviews would entail. Participants were provided with thorough information sheets (Appendix M2) which detailed the purpose of the research, what participation would involve and how the data would be shared. The consent form also reiterated the key points of the research and the participants were asked write their initials next to each statement to confirm they understood.

### **3.12.3 Right to withdraw**

Guidelines around working with human participants highlight the importance of acknowledging their autonomy in choosing to take part in, and withdraw from, the research (BPS, 2011). The teachers were informed that the head teacher in the school had agreed for them to be approached but it was their decision whether to participate.

Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research for up to one month after participation in the interviews. This was clearly stated on the participant information forms (Appendix M2) and reiterated on the consent forms (Appendix M3) which were verbally reviewed before beginning the interview.

#### **3.12.4 Anonymity and confidentiality**

In qualitative research of this kind, where direct quotations are used, anonymity can be a challenge. Participant data was anonymised with the use of pseudonyms and reasonable adjustments were made to identifiable information related to a child, family or school. Participants were informed via the information and consent forms that the researcher would seek to keep their identity confidential through these measures of anonymisation (1.2; BPS, 2009).

Throughout the research process, any data related to participants has been securely stored on a password protected memory stick or computer. Hard copies of participant information, transcripts and original digital recordings were stored in a lockable case. All information will be kept for a period of five years, in accordance to the principles outlined in the Data Protection Act (1988).

#### **3.12.5 Ethical approval**

By showing due thought to the application of the ethical principles above, I was granted ethical approval from both the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee (10/06/16) and the Local Authority's Ethic Board (15/06/16).

### **3.13 Quality of Research**

Due to the diverse nature of qualitative methodologies based in various epistemological standpoints, it is not possible to produce a specific set of criteria for assessing validity. With this in mind, I used the broad criteria provided by Yardley (2008) to address various aspects of quality in this research. I also referred to the guidelines presented by Smith (2011) around the specific elements which encapsulate good IPA research. Each of these shaped the following procedures for ensuring quality:

#### **3.13.1 Clarity and transparency**

The participant information and consent forms (Appendix M3 & M4) provided a clear explanation of the aims of the study and how the findings would be used. The teachers were also given the opportunity to ask further questions before the data collection to ensure transparency.

The outline of the analysis process (3.15) details the unique path I followed to identify themes with reference to relevant appendices which illustrate the process.

I endeavoured to create an accurate, comprehensible account of the entire research process. A research diary (Appendices RD) supported the creation of a clear report and reflection on the journey. Descriptions of the origins of the idea purpose and research questions are shared (RD1). This is linked to the choice of methodology and the ways in which decisions were made around sampling and interview structure. Finally, the reflective comments noted in the analysis (Table 2) show the reader how particular interpretative decisions were made.

### **3.13.2 Theoretically embedded**

The philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography were key reasons for choosing IPA. The respect for the unique and complex nature of how individuals perceive and interpret their experiences in the world is fundamental. This is reflected in the data collection and analysis which highlights the process of the researcher attempting to make sense of the individual's interpretations.

### **3.13.3 Sensitivity to context**

By opening with a description of the local area and a review of relevant literature, I demonstrated a recognition of context. An important element of this was considering the teachers' role and how the research would approach this. Although it was necessary to approach the headteachers as the leaders in the school, the email communication direct to the teacher did not portray pressure to take part. The interviews were organised to accommodate the teachers' requests and avoid an impact on their daily routine. The use of the classroom provided a physical prompt to aid the teachers in their reflections whilst also allowing entry into the context for their experiences. The experience of the environment was held in mind during interpretation of the data gathered during the interviews.

The analysis process (Table 2) demonstrates the attention paid to the interaction between context and the data produced. In addition, I reflected on how the dynamics during the interviews relied on being sensitive to the context and adapting according to this.



### **3.13.4 Rigorous analysis**

I have developed a firm understanding of IPA (3.8) and the theoretical principles which guide research in this area (3.4). My commitment to this method is demonstrated through the efforts I made to reflect at each stage of the research process (3.14).

The interviews provided the starting point for strong data analysis as it was here I began interpreting and guiding questioning according to the participants' response. I considered the criticisms around depth of interpretation in IPA (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011) and have utilised various levels of interpretation to address this (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). I followed the guidelines provided by Smith (2011) by selecting extracts that portray convergence and divergence, representativeness and variability. I hope this provides the depth to create an engaging analysis. Rigour is also shown by referencing the prevalence of each theme.

### **3.14 The Researchers Role- Reflexivity and Bracketing**

A key element to ensuring quality in this research was to be explicit about my subjective role in shaping the process, gathering data and conducting analysis (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). I respect that the philosophical roots of IPA explain the complexity of attempting to understand the lived experiences of another. The phenomenological aspect of IPA identifies the need to put aside conceptions of reality or theory in order to access the true essence of the participants experience (Husserl, 1970). This is reflected in an endeavour to approach the research with a sense of openness or "an attitude of wonder which is highly empathetic". (Wertz, 2005, pg. 172)

In addition, the hermeneutic contribution demonstrates that the nature of 'being in the world' means preconceived ideas will be moulded by our contextualised experiences

(Gadamer, 1975). The understanding we acquire from this unique interaction with the world shapes the natural interpretations we are constantly making (Heidegger, 1978). Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge how the subjective views that the researcher brings to the research may affect the process.

Reflexivity describes an attitude of self-awareness which allows a researcher to examine the thoughts, feelings and assumptions that occur throughout research. Finlay (2002a; 2002b) has described various ways reflexivity can be utilised to provide insight into the intersubjective experience whilst recognising the complexity of applying this in phenomenological research (Finlay, 2005; 2008). I have made reflexive comments throughout the research regarding personal experiences and relational dynamics.

Bracketing is the term used to describe the attempt to suspend personal views and pre-existing knowledge in order to explore the phenomenon with fresh eyes (Husserl, 1970). The question of whether this is entirely possible or optimal for gaining insight into the research has been debated (Finlay, 2008; Smith et al., 2009). I was conscious to record my preconceptions about the topic during planning and data gathering in an attempt to put these aside. However, I accepted that it was not possible to be aware of every way my assumptions may influence the process (Finlay, 2008). I also appreciated that reflection on the natural thoughts, feelings and reactions I experienced provided valuable insight into the interpretations made. Therefore, I embarked on a process encapsulated well by Finlay (2008):

*“Dancing between bracketing pre-understandings and exploiting them as a source of insight, the researcher experiences contradictory and paradoxical pulls (p.29).”*

I will now describe how reflexivity and bracketing were incorporated during the planning and data collection stages before explaining the analysis process.

### **3.14.1 Devising research**

In a demonstration of introspection (Finlay, 2002b), I recognised that my reason for choosing the research topic was embedded in both professional experiences and associated personal intrigue. Having worked with children with ASD in various roles, I inevitably had ideas about the role of teachers in providing support. However, entering into my doctoral training actually highlighted the lack of understanding I had around the experiences of teachers in mainstream schools. My research was devised around the pre-conception that other professionals in the LA may require better insight into the true experience of teachers supporting children with ASD. However, in creating the research questions, my research diary helped me to reflect on thoughts that came to mind about what I expected to find (Appendix RD1d.). This was the first recognition I had of the need to bracket these thoughts in order to be open to the world of the participants.

### **3.14.2 Interviews**

IPA recognises that the semi-structured interview process is a collaborative task and the researcher plays an active role (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In planning the interview, I was conscious that I needed to develop a style of interviewing distinct from the way I consult with teachers in my practitioner role. Shared understanding of meaning could not be assumed and it was important to consider how my professional knowledge may be a barrier to accessing the participants' world. The first question 'What is your understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder?' reflected my desire to bracket my knowledge and frame the process around the participant's perspective.

However, the interview process highlighted the complexity involved in trying to explore meaning collaboratively whilst being conscious to put aside aspects of myself to engage fully in the participants' world (Finlay, 2008). The pilot interview reaffirmed the need for

a reflexive stance during the interviews as I recognised that my emotional responses would affect the way I conduct the interview and the associated inter-relational dynamic (Finlay, 2002a; 2002b). Therefore, I went back to my initial notes (Appendix RD1) around my views on the topic and prepared myself for how I might feel if the participants held highly opposing views or told stories I related to.

Directly after the interviews, I reflected on my own thoughts and feelings during the process (example shown below and in Appendix RD2). I recorded points around the dynamics of the experience with thoughts around how this may have affected the data collection (Finlay, 2002a; 2002b). I also noted assumptions that came to mind around how the accounts of the teachers may have been influenced by various aspects such as time of the year/ day. Such notes, helped me to contemplate the appropriateness of interpretations made during the analysis process.

### **T1 Interview Reflections**

September- end of year. Next year she is moving to teach Year 2. This is something she requested as she finds Early Years is a tiring place to work- This may impact on her reflection in two ways. 1) Reflecting positively on something she is now leaving because she knows she doesn't have to do it again? 2) Reflecting negatively on something she has chosen to leave?

I felt anxious initially- I wondered if I was reflecting her feelings. She spoke for long periods, starting in a very erratic fashion which was hard to follow. I became aware of the need to slow the process by allowing pauses and not rushing in with prompts/ questions. Then, I felt I was getting a deeper insight into her psychological experiences. She reflected that she enjoyed the experience- she enjoyed having time to think things through. What does this say about her experience?

### 3.15 Data Analysis

As I move on to describe the analysis process, I have included captions of reflection from my research diary to demonstrate the role of reflexivity. I feel this is crucial to provide a transparent account of the journey I went through in shaping the themes. I worked within the flexible guidelines provided by Smith et al. (2009) in analysing the data. In recognition of the complexity involved, Table 1 describes the unique steps I took through individual to group level analysis with directions to relevant appendices and reflections throughout.

*Table 2: Description of Data Analysis Process*

<b>Individual Level</b>
<p><b>Listening, Checking Transcript, Reading and Re-reading</b></p> <p>Following transcription through an online service, I read and made alterations to ensure the transcript matched the audio-recording. During the process of re-reading the transcript, I made reflective notes about particular aspects that stood out to me. This included the role I played in asking particular questions and automatic thoughts that came to mind. An example of this is shown in Appendix A1.</p>
<p><b>Exploratory Comments</b></p> <p>The transcript was placed in the middle of a table with a column on either side.</p> <p>The following is a description of the types of comments made (summarised from Smith et al., 2009):</p> <p><b>Descriptive comments-</b> Focused on describing the content of what was said and highlighting the objects which structure the participants' thoughts and experiences.</p>

**Linguistic comments-** Focused upon exploring the specific use of language including aspects such as pauses, repetition, metaphor and tone.

**Conceptual comments-** Focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level. This is about asking interpretative questions to develop an understanding of the key messages.

Appendix RD3 shows an example of the struggles I had making progress at the beginning of the analysis due to personal feelings of doubt. This also demonstrates the importance of reflection in supervision which helped me move forward and recognise that constant questioning is part of the interpretative process. An example of the exploratory comments made for T1 are shown in Appendix A2 with the analysis of each transcript provided on the attached CD.

### **Identifying Emergent Themes**

Emergent themes were identified through focused analysis of the parts of the text and associated exploratory comments whilst also holding the whole account in mind. Succinct phrases were developed with the aim of describing the key message behind each section of text. An example of the emergent themes created for T1 are shown in Appendix A2 with the themes for each transcript provided on the attached CD.

### **Reviewing Emergent Themes**

Emergent themes were reviewed and amended. Some emergent titles were changed to portray more of the essence of what was said, whilst others were amended to show how I also recognised that several emergent themes had been given different titles when they shared a similar meaning/ theme. A process of abstraction led to emergent themes being amended if they described the same aspect with different wording. An example of these processes is shown in Appendix A3.

### **Identifying Subordinate themes**

Emergent themes were grouped according to commonality. In these cases I went back to the transcript and checked what was said to consider how this connected to other emergent themes. A process of subsumption meant some subordinate theme names developed from the numeration of emergent themes. Appendix A4 gives an example of the initial subordinate themes developed for T1 with all teachers' themes provided on the attached CD.

### **Identifying Superordinate Themes**

In an effort to stay with the individual I attempted to move to a further level of grouping by creating superordinate themes. I did this for T1-T4. An example of these are shown in Appendix A5 with the remainder included on the attached CD. The reader will see that I struggled to do this additional grouping and several of the subordinate themes were simply made superordinate themes. When I came to reviewing T5's subordinate themes, I recognised that it would be more helpful to think about the superordinate level from a group perspective. Therefore, I made the decision to stop at the subordinate themes for T5 and T6.

### **Group Level**

#### **Grouping Individual Subordinate themes**

A key reflection from this point in the analysis was the difficulty I had with moving from the individual to the group level (Appendix RD4). Given this desire to maintain the individual analysis I had done up until this point, I began by grouping existing subordinate themes from each teacher into areas of similarities. This stage is shown in Appendix A6.

### **Moving Emergent Themes to Create Group Level Subordinate & Superordinate Themes**

Although the above stage gave some indication of the overarching themes that may emerge, I recognised the need to delve deeper into a group based analysis. Hence, I started re-arranging the emergent themes into new subordinate groupings to represent themes on a group level. I placed these into tables titled with descriptions of what the themes describe (Appendix A7). The descriptions at the top of each table provided ideas for potential superordinate titles. At this stage, I eliminated some emergent themes that did not fit into key groupings or hold particular significance in the teachers' accounts.

### **Moving Superordinate Themes into Overarching Themes**

This stage involved grouping the themes developed in Stage 8 into three initial overarching categories. As part of this, initial subordinate theme titles were created. This is shown in (Appendix A8).

### **Collecting Quotes from Emergent Themes Led to Re-arrangement of Themes**

After generating overarching themes, I began to collect extracts for each theme in preparation for writing up the Findings Chapter. Appendix A9 is the table giving examples of quotes and changing themes. Appendix A10 shows overarching themes with editions. This was an important stage as it led to a re-configuration of emergent themes and, in turn, changed the subordinate and superordinate levels. An extract from the research diary is shown below with further reflections from this stage of the analysis shown in Appendix RD5.



I really wanted an 'Effect on Self' theme because I felt that was important- this highlights my bias of focusing on emphasising the psychological/ emotional experiences of the teacher. These were the bits where I felt the teachers were really sharing an in depth account but I'm realising that by separating them from the rest of the themes, I've gone too far into dividing it into parts. The emotional/ psychological experiences only make sense when connected to the actual situation they were describing so I need to go back to the whole again- hermeneutic circle.

### **Re- Structuring Second Overarching Theme**

At the stage of writing up the second overarching theme, I wondered about the subordinate/ superordinate groupings. The extract below from Appendix RD6 shows contemplation around my interpretation of the themes which helped to determine whether the groupings accurately reflected the key messages portrayed in the participants' accounts. The restructure of the support section is shown in the final theme structure (Appendix A11)

'Working with other staff to support' and 'Positives of a team'- These are kind of the same aspect from different angles because the team are other staff. Why am I scared about naming that the 'Working with other staff to support' aspects as difficult because lots of the emergent themes demonstrate this? I know from my professional experience, I hold assumptions around TAs/ one-to-ones being solely responsible for children. The challenges of T1 around working with TAs really resonated with me because I know TAs can have a lack of training. So I am worried if I focus on this, then I am following my own understanding. Reflection in supervision helped to identify that it is important to illustrate the divergence in the teachers' experiences of working with TAs as this was something that seemed to be a key relationship for all of them.

### **Decisions around Analysis Write Up**

Appendix A11 shows the final themes used to structure the analysis. In writing the analysis I needed to make decisions around the significance of each theme in portraying the lived experience of the teachers. I considered that some of the themes would not be included in the final representation of themes but they were used to inform the narrative of the Chapter 4. Appendix RD7 shows some of the thoughts I had during this stage.

The reader will also notice that theme titles were amended throughout the analysis process. The process of writing the analysis allowed me to delve back into the experiences of the teachers and use their words to shape the names of themes (Appendix RD7)

### **3.16 Summary of Chapter 3**

This chapter is a coherent description of the process I have followed to create research which provides insight into reception class teachers' experiences of supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream school. I have explained the constructivist epistemology which guides my pursuit of the individual teachers' perspectives. The value of IPA has been explained with reference to the theoretical foundations of idiography, phenomenology and hermeneutics. This method supports the collection of a detailed account of the unique lived experiences of the teachers in addition to guiding a rigorous analysis process. I have identified the complex nature of the researchers' role and demonstrated the reflexive stance adopted to support the quality of the research.

The description of the procedure reflects the research paradigm and principles of IPA. This includes purposive sampling to support homogeneity in a group of six reception teachers. The development of a flexible interview supported the elicitation of a wide range of experiences and a pilot stage, supported by my skills as a researcher. This chapter also demonstrated how ethical guidelines have been followed in conducting the research.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Introduction to Chapter 4

This chapter presents the results of the analysis process detailed in the previous chapter (3.15). The aim is to answer the primary research question of '*What are reception class teachers' experiences of supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream school?*' I will open by providing contextual information for each teacher and some reflections from the interviews. The three levels of themes (overarching, superordinate and subordinate) that emerged from the analysis are shown in Figure 5. The subsequent narrative presents a clear description of the findings which demonstrates the contribution of each teacher.

### 4.2 Reflection on Participants

Descriptions of the teachers and my experiences with each, supports the idiographic quality of the analysis and gives the reader an opportunity to consider interpretative influences. Teachers are labelled according to the order they were interviewed e.g. T2 was the second interview. However, I have chosen to order the teachers' descriptions according to those who share the same school settings. I felt there was something qualitatively different about the way the individuals from the different schools engaged in the interview process which was important to highlight. Each teacher has also been allocated a colour to illustrate the voice represented in each extract:

Teacher 1	T1
Teacher 2	T2
Teacher 3	T3
Teacher 4	T4

Teacher 5	T5
Teacher 6	T6

**School A-** Three form entry academy newly opened in the last four years. The school began with three forms in reception, Year 2 and Year 3 and has rapidly grown to include Year 1, Year 4 and Year 5 students.

Teachers in School A (T1, T3, T6) portrayed more of an emotional engagement with the children and were generally more open to sharing detailed accounts of their experiences.

### T1

T1 had been a qualified teacher for two years. She was the youngest and least experienced teacher interviewed. Before her teaching career, she completed a degree in psychology and she remarked that this was something that had made her particularly interested in learning about children with ASD. The interview was conducted at the end of the academic year. Before the interview, T1 shared with me her plans to move position and teach further up the school years. She commented that she felt this may be less tiring.

T1 was warm and welcoming when I arrived and seemed enthusiastic about the research area. Whilst I was reading through the introductory notes, T1 was very attentive and seemed eager to please. I also noticed that she giggled a lot and I felt this was a combination of nerves and excitement. This can be recognised by the way T1 speaks very quickly at the beginning of the interview, darting from one subject to another and saying a lot without prompting. T1 reflected primarily on the experience of

supporting three different children with ASD who had been in her class that year. She showed a lot of passion and was very open about her emotional experiences.

### **T3**

T3 had been teaching for eight years as both a reception and Year One teacher. For the last five years she has been working as a reception teacher only. Her last three years have been teaching in School 1. Before meeting T3 I was struck by her perseverance in trying to rearrange the interview after several cancellations due to her illness. I felt this reflected her desire to have her voice heard on this subject. When I began the interview, it quickly became apparent that T3 had a son with ASD and she initially referred to him in her descriptions rather than considering her role as a teacher. I recognised a reaction of fear and panic in myself but I was able to provide prompts that refocused her on the phenomena the interview aimed to explore. This added an interesting aspect to the interview as she seemed to use her experiences with her son as an introduction to the way she creates meaning in supporting a child with ASD in her class.

T3 spoke about both her experiences in School 1 and her previous school, which she described as a lot smaller in size. T3 reflected on supporting various children with ASD over her teaching career. However, most significant seemed to be supporting a child with ASD early on in her teaching career, as she had experienced significant challenges with the mother of this child. She related this to her own personal experiences of having a child with ASD who, at the time, was also reception aged. She also associated this with what she thinks about when she knows a child with ASD is going to be entering her class;

I'm more worried about the parents. And I think that is from experience. It's that I've had more than one parent that has been kind of a bit over the top with it. But then I think as well that's a bit of my um, insecurities because I'm very much-- and my son has to fit in in the real world (T3: 113-119).

Although having a child with ASD was unique to T3, it did highlight how personal experiences are intertwined with the professional role of teaching. This interview was conducted at the end of the academic year. T3 shared plans to move to a different school in September but she seemed reluctant to give any reason for this.

## **T6**

T6 was interviewed at the beginning of the academic year and she had recently (six weeks) moved to School 1 to take on the lead role for the foundation stage. Before this, she had twelve years' experience as a reception and Year 1 teacher. She continued to be the main teacher to a reception class but she noted that she had allocated time out of class to fulfil her management responsibilities. Before the interview, T6 spoke about how this change had initially seemed strange to her as she was used to being with a class constantly. However, she seemed very enthusiastic about her new role, especially as she felt that it was important that the foundation stage of School 1 had a leader with her expertise specific to this area.

This was the only interview that took part during the school day and not in a classroom. She automatically sat at her desk and I initially perceived that she was preparing to share her expert knowledge with me as she seemed eager to explain all of her training/ experience. Therefore, during the introductory script I reinforced my desire to delve deep into her personal experiences. She seemed surprised initially but she then became more relaxed and was open to sharing. I was struck by T6's passion for this stage of learning and related this to her new position.

**School B:** Three form entry infant school separated from the junior school.

## T2

T2 has been a reception teacher in School 2 for her whole twenty year career and she held a senior position (Early Years Lead) within the infant school. When I arrived at the school, I was waiting for half an hour and there was a sense of urgency in T2 when she collected me from reception. However, she also said she was still happy to do the interview at that time. The dynamic throughout this meeting was uncomfortable as demonstrated by the notes I made in my research diary (Appendix RD2).

My reaction was to try to reassure T2 before and throughout the interview. However, in hindsight I feel I should have discussed with her in more detail the option to withdraw from the interview if she did not feel comfortable with the process. T2 seemed inclined to give practical answers around supporting children with ASD, rather than exploring her own experience. It was then awkward when I asked her to clarify or expand on a phrase as she became flustered and hesitant.

On reflection, I felt T2's level of experience may have suppressed the emotional significance of her experience. She showed some negativity about the support she could offer in the mainstream class and focused on the children who had moved on to specialist settings with positive results. I considered that she would have started her teaching career at a time when inclusion for children with ASD was less valued.

**School C:** Three form entry maintained school which has recently joined the infant and junior schools into one large site.

Both T4 & T5 expressed that their experiences of supporting a child with ASD had not been a bad experience. However, this seemed less about emphasising the positive



experiences involved and more a comparison to a situation they imagined could have been worse;

I definitely haven't have haven't had a bad experience. So I guess maybe if I had had that experience I might be a bit more like [groan] but I haven't something so. (T4:101-104)

I've been quite lucky that they have been generally positive. Um, to be honest and quite supportive. I've never really struggled or had any major issues and, um, yes [laughs] sorry I feel quite fortunate. (T5:429- 433)

I interpreted that these statements may have felt necessary because of a perception that I was looking to hear about challenges (perhaps because this came first in the questioning). However, another key thing about both T4 and T5's accounts was the way they described the support in school for a child with ASD. Both teachers spoke mainly about the SENCO as the person they would go to for support and information.

#### **T4**

T4 had recently moved (three months ago) from a much smaller setting to School C following maternity leave. Before this she had worked in both reception and Year 1 in her previous school for six years. T4 worked part time and shared a class with T5. This interview took place at the beginning of the academic year. When I arrived at the interview T4 said she only had thirty minutes despite the time I had stipulated in our email conversations. However, when I said we could rearrange for another time, she decided that she could allow more time. Particularly noticeable about T4's account was the emphasis she placed on the SENCO in school. She explained that the SENCO would take the lead in communicating with parents and managing one-to-one support around a child with ASD. She noted;

My job is to teach (T4: 630)

Therefore, her reflections portrayed more distance from the child/ family compared to the other teachers.

## **T5**

T5 had been a teacher for seven years in both reception and Year 1 classes. For the last two years, she worked part time in School 3. T5 shared a class with T4. This interview was conducted the week after meeting T4 in the same classroom. T5 said she had not spoken T4 about her experience of the interview. T5 generally portrayed a sense of confidence in supporting children with ASD. She mentioned several times a feeling of being lucky, as shown in the above comment. When I asked her to reflect on the reason for this, she made this interpretation;

I don't know [laughs] hopefully so, I have always been interested in the, like what the-- Maybe if, in the future being like a SENCO. So I have en-- enjoyed teaching children with different kind of needs, um, and autism is so different--and supporting them. (T5: 435-440)

This gave insight into the positive and interested approach she took to supporting a child with ASD and how that shaped her experiences.

### **4.3 Presentation of Analysis**

The initial subordinate themes that were apparent for each teacher are provided in Appendix A4. As explained by the analysis description, these individual subordinate themes will differ from those drawn together at the group level. The narrative is structured using the superordinate themes that were generated through the group analysis. However, I endeavoured to ensure that the unique voice of each teacher was heard by highlighting points of divergence across their accounts.

Two overarching themes were revealed through the group level analysis and within these are superordinate themes which represent different elements of the teachers' experiences. In recognition of the criteria provided by Smith (2011), the subthemes that were formed through the group analysis are also shown in a table format under the relevant superordinate heading as an illustration of how each teacher contributed to the overall theme. Figure 5 provides a visual representation of this structure of themes. The reader will notice that the subthemes connect/ overlap in the description which demonstrates the hermeneutic process of bringing the parts back into the whole that is this analysis section. Subheadings in bold illustrate the overarching, superordinate and subthemes which provide the structure of the analysis.

Verbatim excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate the phenomenological core from which my interpretations have developed. I aimed to sample the quotes across participants to demonstrate evidence across cases whilst also representing individual voices. Tables 3-8 represent individual contributions to the group themes which represents the respect for the idiographic core of the research. Identifiable information has been removed and replaced with a pseudonym which is underlined. Following each excerpt is a reference indicating the teacher and the corresponding line numbers.

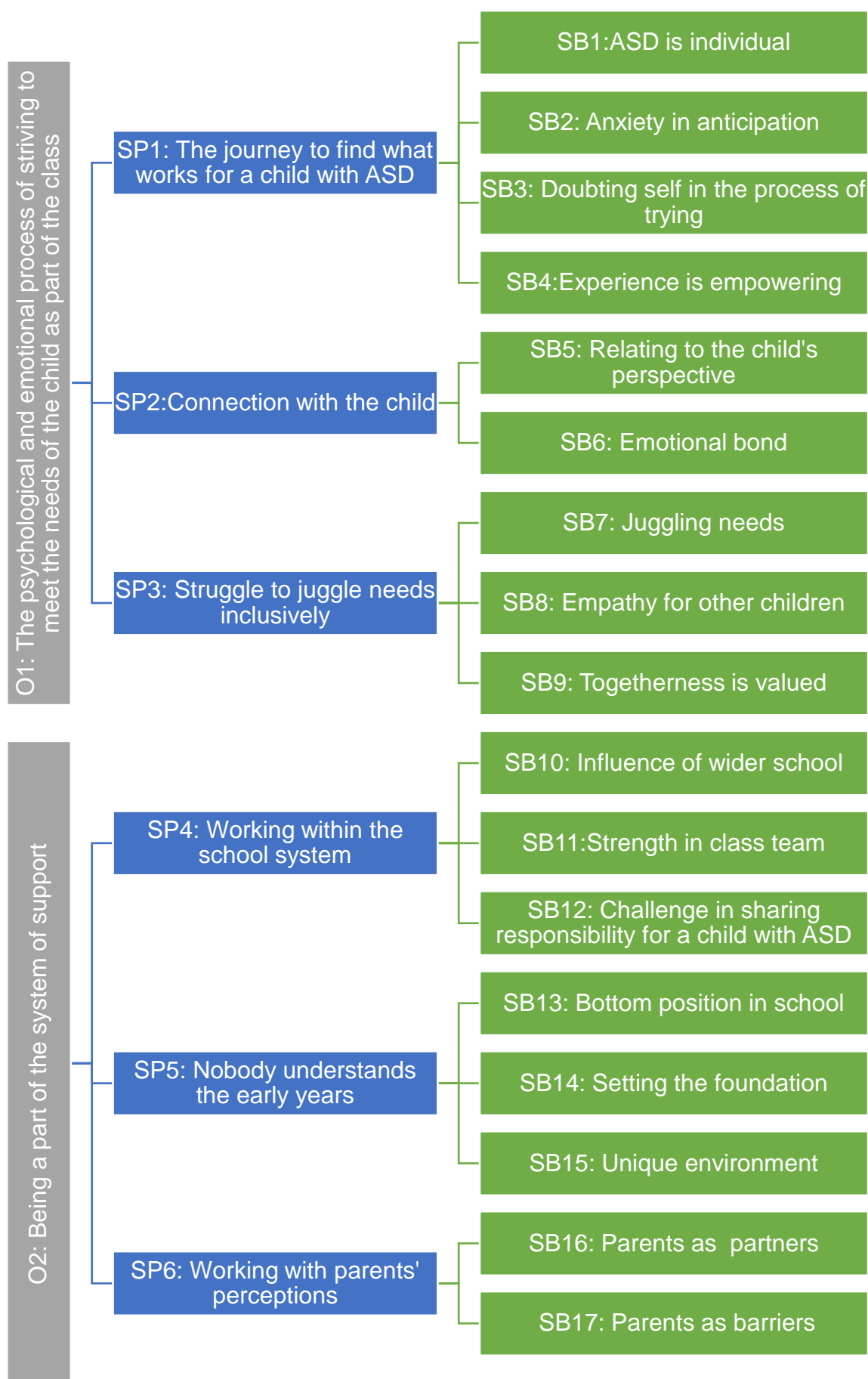


Figure 5: Visual representation of overarching, superordinate and subordinate themes.

#### **4.4 Overarching Theme 1: The Psychological and Emotional Process of Striving to Meet the Needs of the Child as Part of the Class**

This overarching theme describes the psychological and emotional experiences the teachers associated with striving to meet the needs of the child as part of the class. The first superordinate theme provides insight into **the journey to find what works for a child with ASD**. This includes insight into the teachers' experiences of preparing for and working out how to support a child with ASD in their class. The teachers described building a **connection with the child** and the associated thoughts and feelings that are experienced make up this second superordinate theme. Lastly, the third superordinate theme captures the teachers' **struggle to juggle needs inclusively** in the mainstream class.

##### **4.4.1 Superordinate theme 1: The journey to find what works for a child with ASD**

This superordinate theme encapsulates the journey of developing an understanding of a child with ASD. The teachers emphasised that **ASD is individual** and therefore gathering information on the unique qualities of the child was important. The second subtheme of **anxiety in anticipation** relates to preparing for the arrival of a child with ASD into their class. The teachers described the journey throughout the year of offering support as a constant process of trying to find what works. This experience generated feelings of self-doubt reflected in the third subtheme of **doubting self in the process of trying**. However, the teachers reflected on their journeys of supporting a child with ASD explaining that the **experience is empowering**.

*Table 3: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB1-SB4*

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
SB1:ASD is individual	x	x	x	x	x	X
SB2:Anxiety in anticipation	x	x		x	x	X
SB3: Doubting self in the process of trying	x	x	x	x	x	X
SB4: Experience is empowering	x	x	x	x	x	X

#### ***4.4.1.1 Subordinate theme 1: ASD is individual.***

This first subtheme sets the scene for how the teachers perceive children with ASD. Some of the teachers spoke about challenges with social understanding and communication. However, all of the teachers found it difficult to define ASD as they focused on the individuality of each child on the spectrum. This meant there was no simple way of understanding or preparing for a child with ASD. The teachers' descriptions portrayed both the range and magnitude of the term in their minds;

...for me ASD is huge, it's you couldn't pin point every child on the spectrum as the same because every single one is different (T2: 9-11)

There was an emphasis on the unique presentation of ASD in different children. This meant the teachers thought it was important to have knowledge of this before the child arrives;

...just get as much information possible as you can about that child and their specific autistic traits or anything that works for them to support (T5: 630-633)

Particular focus was around gathering an understanding from parents but teachers also referred to information from nurseries and outside agencies. However, teachers still

held a perception that it was challenging to understand how to support children with ASD;

ASD is just massive, isn't it? It's not just the right, this is the symptom, this is the cause, this is what you need to do because it's just not-- it's just not like that. (T6:1228-1231)

T6 is connecting to the complexity of working with a child with ASD by identifying that there are no answers available. This meant there was no simple way of understanding or preparing for a child with ASD. The emphasis on the size of ASD gives a sense that it may be something quite daunting to think about. This links into the next subtheme, which highlights the feelings associated with preparing for a unique child with ASD.

#### ***4.4.1.2 Subordinate theme 2: Anxiety in anticipation.***

The teachers were asked how they think/ feel when they find out a child with ASD is coming into their class. Several of the teachers shared feelings of anxiety/ worry as they anticipated the arrival of a child with ASD. T1 described her fears at the beginning of the academic year;

I was, I was terrified, if I'm honest I was really, really--....I didn't wanna get it wrong for those children and everybody says you know-- I think autism gets a bad-- bad rep almost if I'm honest because everybody else made me feel like, "oooh you're gonna have the toughest year." But they couldn't tell me (long pause) (T1:91-100)

T1's anxiety seemed to be linked to a sense of not knowing and not being able to get the answers from anyone. She also identified that the impression of others affects the way she felt in preparation for supporting a child with ASD.

In reflecting on her first experience of anticipating a child's arrival, T6 emphasised her feelings of fear around being unprepared and she linked this to a construction she held of herself as a teacher and what her purpose in this role is. She connected to an

experience of having the confidence in her skills damaged by the arrival of a child of ASD;

It -- it -- it's scary. Really because you want to make sure as a teacher, you know, you're there to support and educate, you want to change the world in your idealistic and this is the -- this is what I'm gonna do and then new reality hits off. Okay, so all these wonderful strategies I've learned don't work for this child. And I can use majority here but actually that's not gonna work for that child and that can be -- that can be quite scary (T6:123-132).

This extract provides a description of the feelings evoked by a realisation that she did not know/ have the strategies that would work. The next subtheme explores the process teachers went through after a child's arrival.

#### ***4.4.1.3 Subordinate theme 3: Doubting self in the process of trying.***

Despite the desire to gain understanding from others, the teachers also hinted at an impossibility of feeling ready for how a child with ASD will respond to the experience of school. T3's comments around this portray some reluctance in admitting it;

--it sounds awful and I hope it's-- not to sound awful, but you kind of learn as you go because you can't know that child before (T3:1091-1093).

The other teachers shared this experience and reflected on an ongoing process of trying different support options;

So continuously changing the strategies to try and suit a particular child until we find something that works.(T2:189-191)

...nine times out of ten it won't work, be flexible try-- try everything (T1:928-932).

Adaptability and perseverance were highlighted as important qualities that are utilised by the teachers in supporting a child with ASD. In reflecting on this, some teachers expressed a need to accept failed attempts and move on in the process of trying. However, it is clear from a deeper look at specific experiences that teachers found this



challenging. T1 concluded the following around her internal conflict of finding the right level of support for child who found it difficult to communicate;

*It's just a challenge, it's a minefield, it is a minefield (T1: 204-205).*

Her use of the word 'minefield' emphasises how dangerous it felt to risk offering support that she perceives to be wrong for the child. T1 went on to express feelings of guilt around not being able to understand or provide for a child with ASD. An example from T4 also demonstrates feelings of disappointment in herself when she perceived that she had failed to recognise what a child needed;

*I was quite upset with myself for not kind of making him feel like that. And thinking you know I should have thought about his needs and that I should have made sure that he was feeling comfortable and not realising before that he was feeling upset (T4:302-307)*

These reflections expand our understanding of the difficult journey the teachers went through in getting to a point of accepting the process of trying (and failing) as part of the experience of supporting a child with ASD. For some of the teachers, part of this seemed to be overcoming a personal sense of blame or failure;

*...just because you've tried something and it doesn't necessarily hurt--doesn't necessarily work, that you haven't failed as a teacher, actually you just need to try something else (T6:265-269)*

T6's slip of the word 'hurt' links to a recollection of an actual physical injury she suffered from a child with ASD but can also represent the internal experience of failure. The psychological impact of the teachers' journey of trying to understand a child with ASD became more apparent in the self-doubt expressed by most of them;

*...you're asking yourself, "What haven't I done? Did I do this wrong? Did I do that wrong?". (T3:715-717)*

*...shut the door and sort of rocking in the corner going, "Am I doing this right? Are they going to come and tell me I have to leave now because I shouldn't be really doing this?" (T6:1340-1349)*

The self- doubt and inner turmoil was also reflected on as something that could be overcome by the teachers when they accepted that there were no right answers.

#### **4.4.1.4 Subordinate theme 4: Experience is empowering.**

The experience of working through the process of supporting a child of ASD was identified as generating an important feeling of self-confidence;

*That is amazing so I think I feel better and I feel more empowered to now work with other autistic children because I've already-- because now I've done it. (T1- 404-408)*

This feeling of empowerment seemed to be most significant for T1 and I associated this with her first experience of supporting a child with ASD being the most recent. Most of the teachers identified that their initial years of teaching were most challenging as they had not been through the journey of developing an understanding.

Having the experience seemed to generate confidence in the teachers' professional skills (e.g. in differentiating work) as well as building a sense of resilience as demonstrated by T3's comment;

*There's always those times that go completely wrong, and you just have to roll with it and just start again. (T3: 700-702)*

#### **4.4.2 Superordinate theme 2: Connection with the child**

This superordinate theme captures the teachers' experiences of feeling connected to a child with ASD. The teachers felt an important aspect was **relating to the child's perspective** in order to understand how to support them. The second subtheme is around the **emotional bond** the teachers formed with a child with ASD showing how emotional experiences were generated through this.

*Table 4: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB5- SB6*

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
<b>SB5: Relating to the child's perspective</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x
<b>SB6: Emotional bond</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x

#### ***4.4.2.1 Subordinate theme 5: Relating to the child's perspective.***

As part of the process of figuring out what works for a unique child with ASD, the teachers spoke about the importance of building a relationship;

...I think it's just having the relationships with the adults in the room. So, we all made a conscious effort to kind of bond with them or have something in common knowing what their interests are so to hook them into it. (T5: 236-241)

T5's use of the phrase 'conscious effort' suggests that creating a bond was at the forefront in her mind in shaping support. However, I also held in mind a question of whether this effort was needed because it felt more difficult to form a relationship with a child with ASD.

The teachers described how they related to the perceptions of the child. A strong sense of empathy was portrayed as the teachers spoke about a child's unique understanding of the world. They expressed the importance of understanding how a child thinks and adapting their own behaviour around that;

Don't ever shout at them [long pause] because whatever they're doing, they think it's normal... (T2:370-372)

This empathetic relationship allowed the teachers to be in tune with the needs of the child and understand what is needed. A connection like this was associated with being able to read a child's signs and provide proactive support that prevented an escalation in challenging behaviour. There was a significant moment in T3's transcript where she

made this association for the first time, identifying that an inability to develop a bond was a barrier to recognising cues of a child's distress;

Whereas with another child, I probably would have foreseen it before. And a child that I got that maybe that more relaxed feel with and got to know them, so I would know or see that kind of look that triggers the panic and the going into the little paddy and yeah (T3: 620- 625)

This highlights the importance of the teacher feeling comfortable around the child and having the time to develop a connection to their perspectives.

#### **4.4.2.2 Subordinate theme 6: Emotional bond.**

The teachers described the bond they built with a child with ASD through the journey of finding what works for them;

You get so attached to them, because you need to get to know them inside and out' (T3: 1174-1176)

This bond was something that seemed to generate strong feelings, both positive and negative. They portrayed a sense of connecting to the child's emotional experience. T1 emphasises the emotional drain that she felt through this closeness with a child who experienced frustration;

...and emotionally for me personally what I found really challenging is the tiredness and the emotion because you just-- You get so wrapped up in this world of these children are everything to you (T1: 177-181)

This extract highlights a dedication that was shared by all of the teachers as they persevered through the process supporting a child with ASD. There was a sense of needing to make a difference for the individual child. This commitment, associated with an emotional connection to the child, created poignant moments of joy;

I: And how does that feel for you?

T5: Yeah, just really, quite almost emotional, it's just very rewarding. (T5: 618- 620)

Um I nearly cried-- cried when Lewis started to read because I was proud that he could do that and because I could see the pride in him (T1: 479- 482)

Do you know the younger they are the more motherly you become over them, and, um, it makes you feel really proud... (T6: 889-897)

T6's extract describes an attachment to a child which amplifies feelings of pride when she notices a child make a small step of success in controlling his emotions. This was perceived by many of the teachers as something that is important to hold on to throughout the journey of supporting the child;

...take pleasure in them and find the bright bits. It can be hard sometimes but find those little bright sparks every day what they do. (T4: 801- 804)

...keep looking for those wonderful things on the days when you've, you know, you worked ridiculous hours and all you want to do is cry into, um, your husband's shoulder, actually to remember all the wonderful things that you've seen as well. (T6: 1016- 1021)

T4's extract suggests that teachers need to search through the challenges to find those unique moments of success that were highlighted by most of the teachers. The teachers' bond with the child helped them find the positive moments to give them strength during more difficult times.

#### 4.4.3 Superordinate theme 3: Struggle to juggle needs inclusively

This superordinate theme captures teachers' perceptions of supporting a child with ASD within a mainstream reception class. This includes an experience of **juggling needs** present in both the child with ASD and the rest of the class. **Empathy for the other children** was shown in the teachers' descriptions of the effect on the class associated with including a child with ASD. The third subtheme derived from positive comments around seeing a child with ASD as part of the class. The teachers highlighted the importance of social participation and indicated that a sense of **togetherness is valued**.

Table 5: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB7-SB9

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
SB7: Juggling needs	x	x	x	x	x	x
SB8: Empathy for other children	x	x	x	x	x	x
SB9: Togetherness is valued	x	x	x	x	x	x

#### 4.4.3.1 Subordinate theme 7: Juggling needs.

The teachers were all trying to meet the needs of a child with ASD whilst also holding responsibility for approximately 29 other children. Associated with this, the teachers described challenges in terms of practical demands such as finding the time to dedicate to a child with ASD, differentiating work and creating individualised resources. The experience of striving to meet the needs of all the children in class was described as a 'juggling act' by T1;

...I would spend my day managing all these different children with needs while all the children who didn't present as having any additional need weren't getting any attention. Well they were, obviously I wasn't just ignoring them, but they were then losing out because I was there, but if I'd left them and gone to them, then they would lose out and it was a juggling act... (T1: 356-364)

This illustrates the act of constantly trying to keep up with the various responsibilities and a feeling that time with other children was sacrificed for a child with ASD. The teachers identified a struggle between focusing on a child with ASD to ensure they were settled in the class whilst also experiencing guilt around the other children not getting enough;

Um, with obviously you're panicking about this one child fitting in, but then you're thinking, "I've got 29 other children here." I had a couple that had other issues as well, and then others that didn't have issues but they still needed a good education. Um, so you don't want to leave those out... (T3:241-247)

T3 highlights a focus on helping the child be part of the class which is reflected later in the subtheme **togetherness is valued**. Her reference to 'good education' shows a challenge of trying to fulfil a teaching role for the entire class amidst the stress of trying to include a child with ASD.

T2 emphasised the balancing ('juggling') of the emotional needs of a child with ASD with the educational entitlement of the other children. She experienced a strong sense of wanting to protect the class from the potential danger caused by the behaviour of a child with ASD. This led her to have feelings of frustration around the need to sacrifice the needs of the class for one child;

I can get frustrated when he he gets violent and I have to move all the children out of the classroom, because it's not safe for them to be in here and it's-- it's-- I've got to safeguard them as well as him and I find it frustrating that then I'm not teaching the children and I'm having to look after one child. I find that-- I do find that quite frustrating.(T2:153-161)

This was particularly significant for T2 who was the only teacher to describe doubt around the appropriateness of the mainstream environment for a child with ASD. This unique view amongst the teachers seemed to be linked to the challenges experienced around juggling needs in class, as well as a perception that special provisions could offer something better.

#### ***4.4.3.2 Subordinate theme 8: Empathy for other children.***

This subtheme describes the empathy the teachers felt for other children in class in relation to coping with the behaviours of a child with ASD and accepting the different treatment they receive.

The teachers described how the responses of the other children affected their experiences of supporting a child with ASD. T5 illustrates this, explaining the potential for stress in a situation when a child with ASD becomes overwhelmed;

...it could feel quite stressful for you too. Depending on the situation of the rest of the class and how they react and if they're getting the stress too (T5: 161- 164)

T5 is showing how a connection with the emotions of the other children can magnify her experience of stress. Some of the teachers identified specific times when the behaviour of a child with ASD created feelings of sympathy for the effect on the other children. When explaining the various reactions of children, T6 described the upset induced by the behaviour of a child with ASD;

...one of the ASD children starts screaming, he just bursts into tears and he gets really upset cause he just, for him, um, that's really awful.(T6: 839-842)

Differences were noted in the way teachers reflected on the response from other children in class. Most of the teachers mentioned some positive occasions when peers offered a supportive role and helped a child with ASD cope in the class. T4 & T5 felt the reception environment was an easier place to include children with ASD because children are particularly accepting of difference at that age;

They don't judge, they just get on with it, they accept it. (T4:730-731)

...they soon seem to kind of subtly or almost distinctively understand that this child rules are slightly different to this child's (T5:146-149)

T5 has constructed a view that other children sense the need for different boundaries and are quietly tolerant of this. However, some of the teachers experienced a challenge in creating different boundaries for a child with ASD whilst ensuring the rest of the class followed expectations. T6 and T2 empathised with the injustice that is perceived by the other children around the different treatment received by children with ASD;



...and umm my little ones will stand up and walk off because they are kind of sick of it. "Why are they getting up? Why aren't they doing that? While I'm doing this?" and actually it's a valid question (T6: 809-813)

...they see things that are happening for this child and they think well I'm always good, so why aren't I getting those treats, why aren't I being allowed to do. So I feel-- I do feel quite sad for them sometimes and I feel sometimes it can seem very unfair (T2: 146-151).

#### **4.4.3.3 Subordinate theme 9: Togetherness is important.**

The teachers all identified benefits of including children with ASD in a mainstream reception class, focusing around opportunities for learning from peers. From the teachers' perception this was a key part in supporting the development of independence, social skills and appropriate behaviour in the school environment;

Just these really basic things that we think every day that children should know by that age. They don't know and they need a model and if they're not included, who's going to be their model? (T4: 742- 747)

In terms of progress for a child with ASD, the emphasis was generally on participation rather than achievement of specific academic skills. Teachers experienced rewarding moments when they noticed children communicating for the first time, connecting with another child or joining in with group activities;

It's just been seeing that child become a part of the class and cope with their school life in the routine really nice, going from not participating or to answering questions and even responding to you conversing with you as well and attempting to do some learning at whatever level is always really lovely...(T5:586-592)

Associated with this, there was also a sense of success when it became unnoticeable that a child with ASD was different from the rest of the class. The teachers placed importance on making the difficulties disappear to the point where the child could be seen as an equal member of the class;

...it's just nice to see the way that they're all working together and they-- the positives are that they're in mainstream school and they-- You wouldn't know, you would not know. You wouldn't walk into my classroom and pick those children out (T1:456-461)

## 4.5 Overarching Theme 2: Being a Part of the System of Support

The second overarching theme gives an insight into the teachers' perception of working with others in offering support for a child with ASD. The first superordinate theme is **working within the school system** which explores how the teachers' role is effected by the wider setting and varying experiences of working with other staff. The second superordinate theme entitled **nobody understands the early years** is dedicated to the distinct experience of being a teacher in the reception class. The third superordinate theme is around teachers' experiences of **working with parents' perceptions** in shaping support for a child with ASD.

### 4.5.1 Superordinate theme 4: Working within the school system

This superordinate theme captures the teachers' experience of working as part of a wider school system. The subtheme entitled **influence of the wider school** captures their experience of the availability of support and the expectations placed on them. The teachers' accounts highlighted the importance of working collaboratively with others to offer support, portraying a sense of **strength in the class team**. However, half of the teachers(T1,T3,T6) also identified that this depended on the supporting staff and when this did not work, they experienced a **challenge in sharing responsibility for a child with ASD**.

Table 6: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB10- SB12

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
<b>SB10: Influence of the wider school</b>	x		x	x	x	x
<b>SB11: Strength in the class team</b>	x	x	x	x	x	x

<b>SB12: Challenge in sharing responsibility for a child with ASD</b>	x		x			x
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#### ***4.5.1.1 Subordinate Theme 10: Influence of the wider school.***

Most of the teachers associated parts of their experiences with being part of a wider school system. T6 and T5 identified that this can represent a strength if a school had a culture that tied in with their way of thinking, particularly on inclusion;

...you need to very much um, identify with their ethos um, in this school...they're very very very set on it being child centred child first is they aspire to teach um and that's what appealed to me...(T6: 1074- 1079)

...I was so lucky schools have worked in. Yeah I've worked in three different schools but all of them in their kind of taglines have included an inclusion [laughs] in there...(T5: 442-445)

On the other hand, there were also times when the teachers felt confined by the school rules;

The expectation that all children will join in to certain things like assemblies, nativities, sports' day. Some heads are okay, and they say, "yes, no we understand if that child becomes-- we have to be inclusive so we have to let them try but if they become upset then you can remove them." (T6-336-350)

This description shows how the decision of those above her in the school hierarchy affected the way she had to approach her role. T6 went on to describe a distressing situation around a child that was expected to take part in sports day. This highlighted her challenge in shaping support for a child with ASD around the expectations in school rather than her understanding of the child.

The sense of being somewhat confined by the limited power attached to the teacher role was shared tentatively by several of the teachers, relating particularly to access to support;

...it's just taking so long, whereas I think-- 'cause as a class teacher I can ask for it and ask, and ask, and ask for it but I need someone above me to demand it, if that makes sense. (T1:1046-1050)

The teachers associated this with feelings of frustration around waiting for what they perceived to be important support for a child with ASD.

In School 1, the teachers' position as part of the wider school system had led to feelings of isolation for T1 and T3;

I felt alone, definitely alone, definitely lonely um partly 'cause I was out of this room but largely because every time I asked a question, "Can you help me?" There wasn't really much of a response. (T1: 84-88)

In addition to feeling that there was not a lot of support available, both reflected on the pressure they felt to provide everything for a child with ASD on their own;

SENCO would pretty much say, "Have you done what they told you," and that was it. [laughs] There wasn't a, "Let me help you", or anything like that or, "This is what it should look like." It was just, "Have you done it yet?", um, or, "They're not happy. This needs to be done now," and it would be something upon something upon something. (T3: 374-381)

This pressure and lack of support caused stress and panic for T1 and T3. During the interviews, they reflected on the school system and associated their experience with an overall lack of knowledge in staff across the school;

I think now, looking back, it was a case of just them not knowing enough themselves, so it was a case of everyone chasing their tails. (T3:382-385).

This extract illustrates that there was an unhelpful cycle of 'not knowing' in this school at the time which had detrimental effects on the teachers' experiences.

The other side of this, is reflected in T4 and T5's appreciation for the support they could access in School 3 particularly referring to the SENCO position;

But the SENCO would be the first place to go to and they would have ideas. If I went to SENCO here and said you know, "this is the issue is not working." He would have ideas of what to do... (T4:1046- 1050)

Both teachers portrayed a sense of positivity and security as they felt they could easily access support in school. The differences between the teachers' accounts of support demonstrates some influence of the wider school system on their experience of supporting a child with ASD.

#### **4.5.1.2 Subordinate theme 11: Strength in the class team.**

The importance of a staff team was highlighted by all of the teachers. They often spoke in terms of 'we' when discussing the support being offered to a child with ASD. Generally a sense of strength seemed to come from a team mentality that provided security and allowed the teachers to relinquish some responsibility;

You're only as strong as your team...I try really hard to make sure that we support each other...(T6: 237- 240)

"Well it's not your job it's our job." So that's probably-- it's a bit like a family isn't it, but like a family and a friend unit like-- And that's how we work, we work through positivity (T1: 517-521).

T1 describes how this mantra in her class team fosters a positive mental attitude which she associates with her experience of being able to overcome challenges together. Her use of the word family indicates both a closeness and a sense of trust she has in her current team.

All of the teachers spoke about utilising other adults in class to support a child with ASD. These support staff included reference to Teaching Assistants (TAs) and one-to-ones. Specifically, it was felt that additional staff could alleviate practical demands, in addition to providing more individualised support and helping the teacher cope with the competing demands within the whole class. T2 emphasised the importance of TAs;

TAs are -invaluable. They are just the best ever. If you-- if you ever took the TAs away-- then the whole education system would fall apart I think--[laughs] (T2:433-436)

In School 3, T4 and T5 explained that the SENCO managed the one-to-ones' duties in relation to a child with ASD. Nevertheless, it remained the teacher's responsibility to negotiate the structure of support in class. Both reflected on this relationship in a positive and productive way showing respect for the knowledge of the one-to-one;

...feeding that kind of joint planning with them so planning the curriculum for them that making sure we use the, um, additional adults kind of expertise as much as possible (T5:308-312)

**4.5.1.3 Subordinate theme 12: Challenge of sharing responsibility for a child with ASD.**

Half of the teachers (T1, T3, T6) had found the experience of working with certain support staff challenging at times. The teachers associated this with a lack of experience, training or a general difference in perception/ approach to supporting a child with ASD. T3 made the following point;

...it depends on the adults that you've got as to how much you can rely on other people. (T3: 809-810)

T3 goes on to reinforce that there is an issue of trust involved in being able to relinquish responsibility over a child with ASD. T1 also portrayed that she could trust a more experienced member of staff more than an inexperienced TA;

Working with the first one-to-one there was a lot of me saying, "Try this, try that," and having to constantly say to her, you know, "Don't do it that way, do it this way. Try this, try that." Whereas the second one-to-one...she would just go on with it and that made my life easier because I knew that he had someone who I knew was doing the right thing for him all the time. (T1: 268-278)

This description encapsulates both the added pressure that was experienced when having to constantly guide a member of staff and the relief of knowing the child would be supported appropriately. In addition to experience, T6 also emphasised the need for training to ensure support staff are able to recognise a child's needs;

It is an absolute nightmare when you are on the floor and you are trying to deal with a certain group and you look up and you can see it happening and your colleague who should be seeing it happen doesn't. (T6: 664- 668)

This highlights the challenge for T6 of working with someone who cannot relate to the child in the same way as she does. The emotional effect of this challenge increased significantly when the teachers' perceptions conflicted with those of the TA.

...we had this very old school and no matter what you said to her, it will be, "Well, they shouldn't be behaving like that. There's no reason for it." And she just could not get around her head that there was a difficulty.(T3: 878- 883)

This extract provides an insight into the barrier T3 faced in trying to work with a TA who did not share her understanding of ASD. T1 and T6 experienced similar challenges. This generated feelings of frustration as they strived to ensure the child was getting the support they thought was required. This links with the **struggle to juggle needs** as teachers did not always feel they could call on reliable support to do this. In some situations, this meant the teacher felt the need to play a bigger part in supporting a child with ASD over spending time with the other children;

...she had no patience for my ASD lot. She just had no patience, so actually it was playing to her strengths, she was much much better to take the whole class, "Come out let's go and do some numbers. Let's do this" and then I would take him outside to go and jump in puddles. (T6: 644- 651)

I recognised that the perceptions around support staff shared by T1, T6 and T3 link with the connection that the teachers described having with a child with ASD. The teachers who emphasised their bond with a child with ASD and portrayed a dedication to meeting their needs, also portrayed some challenges in trusting others to offer support.

#### 4.5.2 Superordinate theme 5: Nobody understands the early years

This superordinate theme encapsulates perceptions around the distinct nature of being a teacher in a reception class. This includes experiences associated with their **bottom**

**position in school.** The teachers also spoke about the importance of the developmental skills they provided for children with ASD in reception. The third subtheme describes the teachers' views on the **unique environment** of reception and how this effects their experience of supporting a child with ASD.

*Table 7: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB13-SB15*

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
SB13: Bottom position in school	x					x
SB14: Setting the foundation	x		x	x		x
SB15: Unique environment	x			x	x	x

#### **4.5.2.1 Subordinate theme 13: Bottom position in school.**

Both T1 and T6 perceived that the unique set up of reception meant it was given a separate position within the wider school system. They identified this to be an undervalued position and identified that others did not have a good grasp of what their role entails;

*...nobody understands the early years, they all think we play all day. (T1: 1098- 1099)*

*...it's a hard job and being in foundation stage is so niche, and a lot of people still don't see the benefits, don't understand the importance you know, all you do is mess around in sand all day, all you do is play in the play den, I don't know why you're so tired you're moaning about (T6: 319-326)*

T6 illustrates a lack of empathy from colleagues further up the school for the challenges involved in teaching reception classes and she went on to link this to the importance of having support from those who can relate to her experiences. T1 associated a struggle to get support with her position in reception.



It makes you feel we've-- we say quite often well we're bottom of the pecking order down here, and we just get on with it so. (T1: 634-636).

This shows a lack of feeling valued in the school. T6 shared this belief that less importance was placed on this stage of the education;

...the foundation stage colleagues are still seen as not quite as important as a Year six teachers (T6: 1094- 1096)

This created feelings of isolation and frustration around the lack of understanding and support in school. T6 reflected this lack of respect in comments around the allocation of poorly trained staff. Whilst T1 felt that if the senior management could empathise with her experience, then support would be more readily available.

#### **4.5.2.2 Subordinate theme 14: Setting the foundation.**

This subtheme describes the importance that teachers placed on the experience they were providing in reception. As the first year of school, there was a perception that they were providing the foundation for the children's future. They felt it was the start of the child's learning journey and predicted that these first experiences of school would dictate future engagement.

...if you get it right in the early years, children will flourish in their older years. (T1: 600-602)

Particular emphasis was placed on supporting the development of social and emotional skills in preparation for life. The teachers felt that reception experiences supported a child with ASD to manage situations they found difficult and develop resilience for future challenges.

I think with the autism if you don't get their coping mechanisms in early enough then that's when you find they becoming the real difficult behaviours...(T3: 203-207).

There are key skills, values, everything we do is about um, making children independent being able to learn how to learn (T6: 1148-1154)

It's not about the academic, I don't think. It's about them the social aspects at that stage anyway and seeing their development in social aspects and being able to cope with large situations, being able to cope with different routines... (T4: 596- 601)

The importance the teachers placed on the early years was reflected in the pressure they placed on themselves to create an appropriate environment for development.

#### **4.5.2.3 Subordinate theme 15: Unique environment**

The title quote from T1 describes the teachers' perceptions around the unique approach fostered in the reception setting. The general perception was that the natural approach used to support children at this stage, enabled teachers to support a child with ASD. The flexibility available was highlighted as enabling the necessary adaptation to the child's needs.

...it is a lot more fluid and play-based at that stage often apart from all it can be a bit chaotic, but it lends itself more to an autistic child. (T5: 687- 690)

On the other hand, the teachers also felt that a lack of structure in certain parts of the day created a greater challenge in supporting a child with ASD, as preparation for change was important. In particular, a key part of the reception experience - child-initiated time - was perceived to be difficult;

It can be very, very loud and sometimes he finds that quite intimidating and it took them quite a while to kind of get used to it and he was very busy lots of children running around if you are not quite sure what you are doing it can be quite intimidating. I found that can be quite a challenge and just making them feel secure in that kind of environment. And also they can get a bit lost in that kind of environment when there's lots of children playing and you're trying to concentrate (T4: 249- 260)

The confused nature of this extract moving between 'him', 'them', 'I' and 'you're' was interpreted as demonstrating how the teacher struggles with the chaotic nature of the environment in a similar way to a child with ASD. It gives a sense that they both experience a sense of insecurity during this unstructured time. The other teachers also

identified challenges unique to the reception environment such as sensory overload (T2) and a child with ASD having unlimited access to their obsession with trains (T6).

Several of the teachers raised concerns around the children with ASD currently in their class moving on to Year 1. For some, this could be interpreted as a difficulty with letting go of the child (associated with their connection to the child). However, it was apparent that there was also a distinct perception about the confines of the curriculum further up the school. Half of the teachers (T4, T5, T6) spoke from experience of teaching in Year 1 previously, explaining that they felt the structure of reception provided the most appropriate support for a child with ASD. T6 felt that it was important to hold on to these qualities and spread them throughout the school in order to continue a positive experience;

...good practice shows that children aren't really ready so recept... um-- Year one colleagues need to be more like – set more – set up to be the Year R classroom rather than the other way around (T6: 1121- 1125)

#### 4.5.3 Superordinate theme 6: Working with parents' perceptions

This superordinate theme captures teachers' experiences of working with parents. The two subthemes are contrasting, describing the teachers' experiences with **parents as partners** and **parents as barriers**. This seemed to be related to the perceptions held by the parent and their associated openness to suggestions.

Table 8: Contribution of participants to subordinate themes SB16- SB17

	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
SB16: Parents as partners	x	x	x		x	x
SB17: Parents as barriers	x	x	x			x

All of the teachers reflected on how the experience of supporting a child with ASD involved some interaction with parents. T4 referred to parents but this did not hold strong significance as an individual theme as she felt her role was to pass on the needs of the family to others in school. I also feel it is important to note here that although T3's experiences contributed to the creation of the superordinate theme, she reflected during the interview that some of her perceptions of parents were intertwined with her mutual role as a parent to a child with ASD.

#### **4.5.3.1 Subordinate theme 16: Parents as partners.**

Partnerships with parents were generally perceived as important to facilitate an understanding of a child with ASD and support their progress. The teachers experienced a need to support the understanding of parents as they recognised that acceptance of an ASD diagnosis can be difficult. T1 identified that school staff were often the only professionals regularly accessible for parents of children in her class. She portrayed a need to help parents understand the needs of a child with ASD in order to ensure the child receives appropriate support;

...it's our job to make sure Bethany gets the best For Bethany to get the best we need to know that mum and dad are giving her the best. For them to give her the best they need some support... (T1: 818- 823).

When the teachers experienced what they felt to be a successful collaboration with parents, it created a greater sense of reward as described by T5;

But for the most part it is rewarding, very, almost complimentary when they see their child's progressing and very supportive because they reinforce different routines and ideas at home. So it's been positive on the most part... (T5: 560-565)

T5 reflected that the majority of her experiences of parents had been positive. The other teachers also shared their joy at being able to work with closely with some parents, particularly in sharing feelings of pride when a child shows progress.

#### **4.5.3.2 Subordinate theme 17: Parents as barriers.**

The teachers experienced a challenge when a parent held on to a perception of the child which they, the teacher, did not agree with. The teachers described certain parents as creating a barrier to the child accessing the best level of support. This included acceptance of the nature of the child's difficulties;

Well, it's very sad because I know they're going to have difficulty throughout their life until their parents accept that they've got issues. You know, if they – if they just think they're just naughty children or something, they're not just naughty children (T2:488-493)

T2's extract demonstrates the empathy she has for children with ASD when the condition cannot be recognised and supported accordingly. Other teachers experienced similar feelings of sadness and frustration around parents' influences in the opposite circumstances. Four out of the six teachers described experiences with parents who were reluctant to accept the strengths their child was showing in school. The teachers then found themselves battling against the negative perceptions the parents held for the child. This is demonstrated by T1's description of a mother who had a conflicting view as to her child's ability to be independent;

I feel like mum is still quite um, "He can't do this and he can't do that." Um and she um she's needy in the sense that she constantly needs my attention, because of her Marcus's autism, she marks him out as more important than everybody else... (T1: 690-695)

As the second part of this extract shows, the teachers also felt some parents became demanding in their approach. This was an experience shared by half of the teachers (T1,T3,T6) who portrayed this as a barrier to collaboration due to the parents' focus on their child's needs. In the same way that teachers highlighted the challenge of meeting the needs of all the children in the class, they also felt pressure in balancing the support

for parents. T6 emphasised the significant emotional impact that difficult relationships with parents had on her experience of supporting a child with ASD;

It's always really hard when you get sworn at and screamed at and people are aggressive to you because obviously you're trying to do your very best and everything you're doing is -- You eat, breathe and sleep their children, you're thinking about how the- -how you're going to help them, what their next steps are and um, for a whole year, all you do you think about their child and how you gonna help them and it becomes really upsetting and frustrating when you don't feel that you've got the support from the parents...(T6:587-698)

This extract shows how the dedication of the teacher and the process of constantly striving to meet the needs of the child increases frustration with parents who do not value this effort. The teachers felt they were doing the best for a child and therefore many of them experienced feelings of disappointment and frustration when they were not supported by a parent.

#### **4.6 Summary of the Chapter 4**

This chapter has presented the two overarching themes and associated superordinate and subordinate levels, which emerged from the analysis across the group of six reception teachers. Firstly, the teachers provided insight into **the psychological and emotional process of striving to meet the needs of the child as part of the class.**

This included anxiety around preparing for the individual needs of a child with ASD and self-doubt provoked by the challenging process of figuring out what works. The teachers emphasised the need to connect with the child's perspective and their accounts demonstrated the emotional bond which had been formed. The final part of this theme was a struggle to balance the responsibility of providing support for a child with ASD that means they can benefit from participating with others, whilst ensuring the whole class is able to learn. Differing responses from other reception children were

described and the empathy that the teachers felt for them influenced their emotional experience of managing needs in class.

The second overarching theme described the teachers' experiences of **being part of the system of support**. The teachers had divergent experiences of working within the expectations, knowledge and support systems established in the wider school. The teachers felt it was important to have support from additional staff; however, half of them highlighted a difficulty in trusting others to understand and meet the child's needs. The position of the reception class within the wider school was emphasised by two teachers who felt a lack of understanding and value for their role. Most of the teachers identified that reception offers a unique environment that provides children with ASD with a social and emotional foundation that supports the rest of their education. As part of the wider system of support, parents were highlighted as a significant influence in the experiences of teachers. The teachers described the value of engaging parents but most had experienced frustration due to the defensiveness and demanding nature of some parents.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction to Discussion**

This chapter provides a review of the findings in relation to existing research. A theoretical framework and associated models are introduced to frame the themes derived from the teachers' accounts. The discussion of these themes provides insight for the second research question around the support required for reception class teachers. The limitations of the methodology are reviewed with reference to the transferability of the research. The unique contribution of the insight derived is outlined

with consideration of the potential role of education services, particularly EPs. Directions for future research are suggested before a summary of the discussion.

## **5.2 Theoretical Framework for Discussion**

The bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) has been used to frame an illustration of the themes (Figure 6). This model was outlined in the literature review (2.5) as existing studies have used it to consider the inclusion of children with ASD (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Bond & Hebron, 2016) Although the research was not designed or conducted with a specific model in mind, the themes present in the teachers' accounts fit within the framework. In contrast to previous studies which used teachers' descriptions to understand the educational support for a child with ASD (Bond & Hebron, 2016), this research places the teachers' experiences at the centre of discussion.

The bio-ecological model has been used to understand the systemic influences that affect teacher well-being in recognition of the connection between teachers' performance and children's outcomes (Price & McCallum, 2015; Roffey, 2012). This trend of research considers a teachers' role more broadly, rather than focusing specifically on supporting a child with ASD. However, it does support the relevance of the bio-ecological approach in understanding the influences on teachers' experiences.

The premise of a bio-ecological approach is that an individual's development is shaped by their bi-directional interactions with the social and physical components of their environments (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). There are several layers of influence that surround the individual, ranging from wider community culture to those in close, regular contact (e.g. family). The different systemic levels defined by the bioecological model are described in the literature review (2.5).



The bioecological model identifies aspects of process, person, context and time as influential for development. The interactions that occur between person and context are defined as proximal processes. The theory surmises that the quality of proximal processes is determined by predisposed individual characteristics, internal resources and environmental factors which facilitate interaction.

These concepts have been adapted into specific models of development focusing on the interaction processes. The transactional model (Sameroff & Feise, 2000; Sameroff 2009) conceptualises that the biological aspects (genotype) and unique characteristics of a child (phenotype) have a continuous reciprocal relationship with the external influences (enviromtype) they encounter. Hence, a child's behaviour and development is a result of these ongoing interactions. The key people in a child's life are important external influences as they can guide a child in negotiating the transactional opportunities available in the environment (Sameroff & Feise, 2000; Sameroff 2009). Pianta and colleagues looked more specifically at the teacher-child dynamic exploring how the personal characteristics of both individuals can affect interactions (Myers & Pianta; 2008; Pianta, 1999). The following discussion will refer to the concepts outlined in these systemic models and associated research that relates to the overarching themes described in the findings.

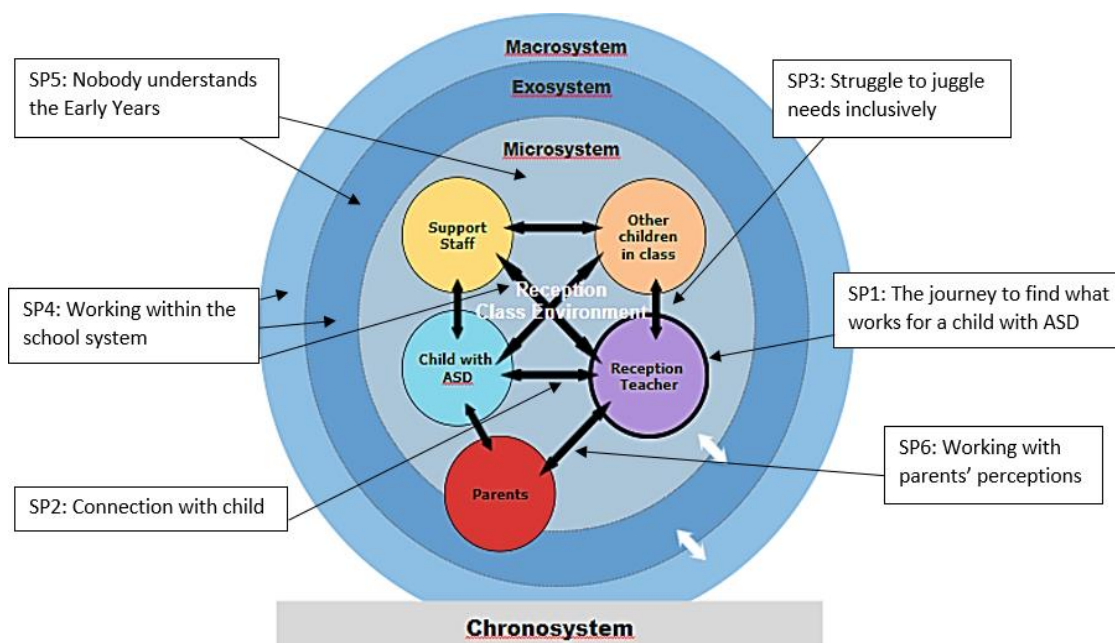


Figure 6: Illustration of superordinate themes within framework of a bio-ecological model.

### 5.3 Discussion of Themes

The findings chapter followed a structure which opened with the teachers' perspectives of directly supporting a child with ASD and expanded to describe wider influences on the teachers' experiences. The flow of thinking about broader themes is continued by opening the discussion with a review of the overarching themes related to the school and parent systems. This is then funnelled back into thinking around the psychological and emotional aspects of working with a child with ASD.

### 5.4 O2: Being a Part of the System of Support

#### 5.4.1 SP4: Working within the school system

The teachers provided insight into their position as part of the wider school. Most of the teachers identified that the ethos and related expectations in school influence their experience of supporting children with ASD in their class. This included positive recollections of an organisational culture that was perceived to support inclusion. Research exploring parental views has also linked the experiences of the teachers' role

to the systemic factors such as school ethos, training provided and staff sharing (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Waddington & Reed, 2006).

Previous research has used the bio-ecological approach to frame the experiences of children with ASD in mainstream schools and resourced provisions (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Bond & Hebron, 2016). In this approach, an inclusive culture would be part of the macrosystem and the associated inclusion policies are an exosystemic influence. These factors were generally felt to support the teacher's endeavours to facilitate a class including children with ASD. However, the expectations of the wider school system was also experienced as causing challenges for the teacher. An agenda to provide equal opportunities to all children may conflict with the teachers' opinions on what is best for an individual child with ASD.

The exosystem also includes relationships between teachers and other positions in the school. Most of the teachers identified the role of the SENCO in their descriptions. The SENCO is identified in the Code of Practice (DfE, 2014b) as having responsibility for shaping provision in line with the school's SEN policy, liaising with key stakeholders involved with a child and providing professional support for colleagues. Some of the teachers felt confident that the SENCO in their school could provide guidance but others had felt isolated in their attempts to support a child with ASD. They identified experiences of pressure and a lack of control due to their position in the wider system. A lack of knowledgeable, consistent and prompt support available in school led to experiences of stress and frustration in the process of trying to support a child with ASD (4.5.1.1).

A key component in the teachers' experiences was working as part of a team. The definition and duties of additional staff supporting the class was somewhat dictated by

the school setting and whether a child had been allocated one-to-one support. In one school (School C), teachers perceived a one-to-one TA to be the main support for a child with ASD, following interventions provided by the SENCO. This role reflects research around teaching assistants in secondary schools who play this individual support role (Symes & Humphrey, 2011a/b; 2012). Findings suggested that this can create a barrier to the teacher-child relationship (Emam & Farrell, 2009) as well as creating social exclusion (Symes & Humphrey, 2011b). The teachers in this research did not express strong views around separation from the child with ASD or social exclusion

TAs were generally perceived to be a helpful resource. The teachers emphasised the importance of collaboration when supporting a class which included children with ASD. The value placed on the TA role reflects previous research which described the potential of a TA to alleviate pressures on the teacher and support inclusion (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Emam & Farrall, 2009; Frederickson et al., 2010; Glashan et al., 2004). Experiences were positive when the teachers felt they could trust the support staff in class to do the 'right' thing for a child with ASD. The reception teachers' views reflect research across the school years that training, experience and characteristics of TAs are important to successful support (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Symes & Humphrey, 2011a/ b).

The challenge arose when the teachers felt their perspectives around ASD conflicted with those of the TA. In this situation, it was hard for a teacher to relinquish responsibility. A lack of shared knowledge and understanding has been highlighted in previous research around the role of the TA (Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Symes & Humphrey 2011a/ b). However, this has generally been linked to the TA being given

the lead role in planning and implementing support which is not the case for the majority of the teachers in this research. The conceptualisation provided by Emam (Emam & Farrell, 2009) suggests that the links a child with ASD has with support mediators such as TAs is affected by the teacher-child relationship. This element seems important to consider in this research given the other themes identified. The reluctance to delegate duties for a child with ASD seemed to be influenced by the strong connection the teacher felt for the child in addition to conflicting levels of understanding.

#### **5.4.2 SP5 Nobody understands the early years**

A unique contribution of this research was an understanding of the teacher's position in the reception class within a school. Some of the teachers felt the niche nature of reception was hard for others to understand and was therefore undervalued. Contrasting perspectives around the importance of this stage and associated challenges, contributed to an ecosystem which created feelings of isolation and frustration for T1 and T6.

There is an inherent difference in the pedagogy and assessment in the first year of primary school due to the EYFS curriculum (DfE, 2017b). The reception environment should enable children to develop early learning skills through an individualised, positive approach. The views shared by the teachers suggest that this approach facilitates differentiation for a child with ASD but the unstructured nature of a play-based curriculum can also cause the environment to be overwhelming. Guidance around children with ASD at this stage recognises that this was a key time to build social communication and interaction skills (DSCF, 2009b; Guldberg, 2010). The findings demonstrate an appreciation of these principles and the importance of establishing strategies that will be supportive throughout education.

### 5.4.3 SP6 Working with parents' perceptions

Relationships with parents have been shown to be key in understanding and supporting a child with ASD (Falkmer et al., 2015). Within the bio-ecological model, parents represent an important microsystem for a child with ASD (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Connolly & Gersch, 2016). The teacher-parent mesosystem has the potential to create both positive and negative developments for a child. Research exploring parents' views has shown that regular communication and a teacher's willingness to listen to parents' advice is related to satisfaction with mainstream provision (Whitaker, 2007). Glashan et al. (2004) also showed that teachers associated parent engagement and knowledge with the success of mainstream placements for children with ASD.

However, supporting parents has been identified as a demanding part of a teachers' role (Glashan et al., 2004). The current findings provide insight into the teachers' perspectives on the relationship with parents. Most of the teachers perceived parent support as an important responsibility that is integral in supporting the development of a child with ASD (Glashan et al., 2004). T1 identified that she was the only form of support for parents which reflected a reduction in family support services in the local area. Teachers experienced collaboration with parents as positive when there was a shared approach that supported the child's progress.

However, the teachers' recollections of working with various parents demonstrate the challenge of working with both under and overestimations of a child's needs. It is interesting to consider how this may be related to the age of the child and recent diagnosis. Parents have been shown to experience frustration around not having their opinions heard by educational professionals when their child is beginning school (Connolly & Gersch, 2016). It seems difficult to come to a shared understanding of

appropriate provision at this early stage of intervention. Teachers need to cope with both denial and demands from parents who are experiencing anxiety around the beginning of their child's formal education when they have recently received a diagnosis of ASD. Most of the teachers expressed frustration in working with some parents as they felt there was a barrier created by parents who focused on a child's difficulties rather than their potential. Hence, the role of supporting parents can take an emotional toll on teachers as they strive to offer reassurance (Glashan et al., 2004) whilst also being dedicated to ensuring the child receives the most appropriate intervention.

In the current national context, parents are central in the guidance around children with SEN (DfE, 2014). Furthermore, this theme is interesting in the local context as increasing numbers of parents are requesting specialist placements for children with ASD. Frederickson et al. (2010) explored the factors associated with parents' satisfaction and determined that staff knowledge and home school collaboration could be embedded in mainstream schools with appropriate training. However, thinking needs to go beyond these practical arrangements to consider the emotional processes involved.

## **5.5 O1: The Psychological and Emotional Process of Striving to Meet the Need of the Child as Part of the Class**

### **5.5.1 SP3: Struggle to juggle needs inclusively**

Moving from the discussion of the school and family systems, focus is now given to the teachers' experiences within their reception class environment. The findings reflected previous research showing the value teachers place on inclusion for children with ASD (Glashan et al., 2004). Most of the teachers wanted to help the child become a member of the class by encouraging their participation in all activities. However, similar to a

previous study (Emam & Farrell, 2009, Emam, 2014) there was some tension around the issue of equality in class. The teachers felt they had to make certain individual allowances for a child with ASD, however, this made it difficult to ensure the other children understood the boundaries in class. The teachers felt the development of social interaction skills was a key benefit of being included in a mainstream class (McGregor & Campbell, 2001).

Similar to previous research, all of the teachers highlighted the need to consider the other children in the class when supporting a child with ASD (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Glashan et al., 2004). There was a desire to ensure equal support opportunities for all children whilst recognising that a child with ASD often needed more attention due to their difficulties with coping with various aspects of the classroom environment e.g. noise.

Beyond finding time to meet their teaching responsibilities, the teachers also felt they had to balance the emotional impact on the other children. This was related to the emotional atmosphere that is experienced by the other children and feelings of injustice. Most teachers felt that the other children in class were accepting and accommodating to the differences in the behaviour and treatment of a child with ASD (Glashan 2004). However echoing other studies, there were concerns around other children having to cope with the challenging behaviour of a child with ASD (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Glashan et al., 2004).

The experiences with peers in school is something that has been explored for older children with ASD. They have been shown to experience rejection and isolation from peers (Humphrey & Lewis, 2008a; Symes & Humphrey, 2010; Humphrey & Symes, 2011b; Humphrey & Hebron, 2015). Emam (2014) conceptualised that a weak Theory



of Mind (ToM), associated with ASD, means that a child is not able to connect to the intentions of their peers. Although primary school children were less likely to hold negative perceptions of children with ASD, reduced interactions were observed at this stage. The authors linked this to difficulties around ToM which cause challenges in reciprocal communication. This was not apparent in this study as teachers focused on positive observations of the child showing early social skills. I would associate this with the early developmental stage of all of the children in nursery which means they are less likely to notice differences and avoid peers due to this.

### **5.5.2. SP1 The journey to find what works for a child with ASD**

The discussion now leads into themes around the internal and dyadic experiences of supporting a child with ASD. Research has given some thought to the specific challenges teachers face in providing education for children with ASD (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Tutt, Powell & Thornton, 2006). However, I feel the descriptions in this theme provide a deeper insight into the individual emotional and psychological processes experienced.

Guidelines and practice reviews have considered school strategies that are used to support children with ASD (DCSF, 2009a/b) and several discrete educational programs are available to address the cognitive deficits that may affect engagement in school (Tutt et al., 2006). However, the teachers emphasised that a key issue in applying this guidance is the uniqueness of each child with ASD (Wilkinson & Twist, 2010). This meant they never knew what to expect or how to prepare for a child entering the class. This pressure is arguably increased for a reception class teacher as further up the school, teachers can benefit from colleagues' knowledge of the child.

The teachers reflected on emotions including anxiety and feelings of failure in the journey of working out how best to support a child. Billington (2006) has discussed the sensitivity and reflective position that is required to understand what a child with ASD really needs in the moment. The teachers' accounts supported Billington's (2006) suggestion that it is important to consider the difficult feelings that are evoked for those who are involved in this process. They described an ongoing feeling of not knowing and self-doubt, which is often a painful experience.

The teachers' reflections suggest that coming through the process of supporting a child with ASD is reassuring and fosters positivity and confidence (Glashan et al., 2004; McGregor et al, 2001). A feeling of empowerment was particularly significant for T1 as she had the most recent experience of supporting a child with ASD for the first time. The teachers seemed to develop a resilient perspective which acknowledges the process of trying various strategies and accepting that they will not always be successful.

The idea that the teachers go through a journey in supporting a child with ASD links to the concept of the chronosystem in the bio-ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). There is a beginning, middle and end of the reception year which are marked by various thoughts and emotions. The significance of giving time and learning from the experience are apparent.

### **5.5.3 SP2: Connection with child**

This theme brings the discussion to a close by considering the relationship between the teacher and child with ASD. The models of interaction introduced at the beginning of this chapter (Sameroff & Feise, 2000; Sameroff 2009; Myers & Pianta, 2008) have

recently been recognised as helpful perspective to understand teachers' relationships with a child with ASD (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Emam, 2014).

The teachers' descriptions highlighted the need for a good relationship with a child with ASD in order to be able to respond to their individual needs and nurture their strengths. The transactional model has been used to emphasise the importance of utilising the teacher-child relationship to enhance social skills and engagement of young children presenting with challenging behaviour (Sutherland, Conroy, Abrams & Vo, 2010). The teachers identified that they were more able to find what worked well and support positive outcomes through their connection with the child. This was shown through descriptions such as 'just by clicking and understanding' (T3: 659-660) and moments of non-verbal communication with a child:

'but for him, he knew I clocked him, he kind of did just a look up and I was picking up on...So if I'm making that decision, for me, is a wow moment.' (T6: 916- 920)

Emam and colleagues (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Emam, 2014) studied the experiences of children with ASD in mainstream schools with a focus on the tensions felt by teachers supporting this inclusion. They used the bio-ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006) and transactional models (Sameroff & Feise, 2000; Sameroff, 2009) to conceptualise the challenges that occur for children with ASD within their microsystemic interactions.

Firstly, they identified that developmental differences such as poor social understanding and communication skills can lead to misunderstandings and avoidance of interaction. Therefore, their findings suggest that these traits associated with ASD limit the resources to engage in positive proximal processes with teachers. The teachers in this study did not describe this as a barrier to building a relationship with the child. Rather, they emphasised the bond they developed with a child with ASD

because they spent more time utilising an empathetic connection to work out how to support them.

Emam's study (2014) also focused on a child's difficulty in understanding the perceptions of others (ToM) and found that this stimulated both tolerance and tension for teachers. Both primary and secondary school teachers felt that a weak ability to perceive the underlying intentions or meaning of an action created difficulties with social and academic engagement. The reception class teachers in this study did not identify this as a deficit in a child with ASD but empathy for their view of world was important. Associated with a need to be in tune with an individual child, the teachers described the need to understand the perspective of a child with ASD rather than expecting them to grasp the underlying purpose of others' actions.

## **5.6 Interlinking Nature of Systems**

The themes have been discussed in relative isolation up until this point but the bi-directional influence of the various levels of systems surrounding an individual teacher is apparent. I will now describe how different levels can be seen to interlink using concepts derived from the bio-ecological approach.

The culture of a school (macrosystem) shapes the formal and informal processes that are carried out by individuals within the system. The dynamics between structures in schools are shown in the exosystem. This would include elements such as the professional duties of staff and how they are expected to interact with other members of the system. The difference between the wider school environments will account for some variation in teachers' accounts. Nevertheless, the reciprocal connections between systems means there is far more complexity involved in exploring experiences.

A good example of this is how the subthemes under 'working within the school system' (SP4: 4.5.1) are associated with various levels. The formal roles of support staff are dictated by whole school policy. However, the teachers' experiences of working with other staff in class have a bi-directional link to aspects such as relatedness between teacher and TA, the attachment between teacher and a child with ASD, the teacher's perception of the TA's empathy for the child and the dynamics of the other children in the class. In addition, the natural preferences of a teacher may also influence their reaction to additional staff as indicated by T3:

I hate it. I am one of these people that, um, I used to-- until I came here, I used to make TAs work outside with children because I didn't like to being watched teach or anything like that. (T3: 869- 873)

This demonstrates the value of idiographic research as it provides insight into how the characteristics of a teacher interact with the multiple systems surrounding them. The unique profiles of the teachers (3.10.6 & 4.2) provide a richness to the data collected as each person responded to the experience of supporting a child with ASD in their own way. This fits with the bio-ecological understanding that disposition and experiences in other systems (e.g. personal life) will affect the way an individual connects with objects in their environment.

Another link that I felt was important to touch upon is the multi-directional influences between parent, child and teacher. The theme 'working with parents' perceptions' (SP6: section 4.5.3) focuses on interactions in the teacher- parent microsystem. Significantly, one of the teachers also interpreted how a challenging relationship with a parent affected her connection with a child:

I feel that I did everything I could with her, but because I always had the mum on my shoulder, I couldn't relax enough to get to know her and the bits that I thought would trigger her enough (T3:611-615)

Research shows that the parent-child relationship is reflected in the way children approach new interactions (Myers & Pianta, 2008) and therefore the teacher's experiences with a child will inevitably be influenced by parents.

### **5.7 The Reception Class Experience**

The unique contribution of this research was the focus on the reception class setting. This adds to the current literature which gathered a broader view from mainstream school staff across primary and secondary settings (2.4.2). There is something specific about the macrosystem that surrounds a reception class as it includes both the culture of the wider school and the ethos set out by the national EYFS (DfE, 2017). This shapes the curriculum, approach to teaching and the environmental opportunities for a child with ASD.

The uniqueness of this setting is reflected in some of the findings which illustrate a different perspective to the phenomena of supporting a child of ASD. Contrary to previous research, concerns around peer relationships (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Symes & Humphrey, 2010; Humphrey & Symes, 2011) and difficulties relating to a student with ASD (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Emam, 2014) were not indicated. Rather, the teachers emphasised how their connection to the individuality of a young child with ASD in their class helped them to interpret their behaviour. There has been some indication that differences between primary and secondary settings (Emam & Farrell, 2009; Emam, 2014) mean the early stages of schooling may be more conducive to providing an inclusive ecosystem. The teachers' views on this setting are explored further in considering implications but the themes suggest that there are elements in the reception setting which provide a positive environment for supporting a child with ASD.

## 5.8 Second Research Question

*What is needed to help reception class teachers in supporting children with ASD?*

There was much contemplation about the inclusion of this research question and the associated sections in the interview schedule (3.13). However, I found that prompting teachers to think about the help needed encouraged further reflections and interpretations from the teachers, which contributed to an overall understanding. The following example shows how T1 automatically thought of advice from specialists. However, her reflections actually provided insight into the position of the early years within the school system:

Specialist help, so someone that I can go to and say right this child presents this you know. 'Cause I don't know in their first term at school, somebody who could come in and observe them and say, "Right try this." And then not just disappear... And then keep coming back throughout the time all I don't know-- again every autistic child is different, but autism in the early years is different because we have a very different structure down here. Um and I think, I think senior leadership understanding just how challenging it is to have 30 children who you then say, "Right child led, learning time," (T1: 1004-1021)

This continues to be the part of the research which I have grappled with the most as I wonder whether the interpretation provides an accurate representation of what is needed to help the teachers. It felt as though some of the teachers struggled to answer these questions. Perhaps there was a sense of them not knowing what might help, finding it hard to think about themselves needing help or their ideas being restricted by external restraints:

It's that needing something else. I think when you've got a lot of SEN children it's underst... it's that needing something else. (T3:1047-1050)

T4: Um, making sure they ([long pause] that their support is there (T4: 899-900)

I: What about for teachers specifically?

T2: You mean support for us?

I: Mm hmm.

T2: -more bodies on the ground--we're never going to get that ([long pause]).

I: And who would those bodies be?

T2: Um, I'd like to say people with a background in ASD, but you're not going to get that. (T2: 410- 418)

Again in the dream world because it's budgeting and everything else that comes with it. (T3: 1061-1063).

It is important to note that my analysis did not focus specifically on the answers given to the questions around the help that is needed. An appreciation of the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009) enabled my interpretation of their answers as part of the wider accounts given by each teacher. An example of the reflective process used to interpret the participant's own interpretation of their experiences is shown in the research diary extract below:

My interpretations of the second research question could be swayed by the local setting (timeliness). It is important to hold in mind the setting for the teachers' experiences (reduction in early years support/ increased ASD diagnoses at a young age) but I need to focus on the message I am interpreting from the accounts.

Most of the teachers made brief references to training and needing more people. But that was not necessarily what I was interpreting from their perspectives of their experiences. For example, T1 initially mentioned training for other staff in relation to Year 1 teachers (learning reception principles) and TAs having a good understanding of ASD. But as we went through the interview, her interpretation seemed to change and she was able to express the need to talk to others who understand her experience. What I took away from a combination of her words and the emotion shown at particular times in her interview was a need to be listened to and just have safe space to speak about her experiences (the interview represented this for her- she said she enjoyed it).

This resulted in the themes described in the findings. From this insight, I have derived the following ideas on the support required for teachers supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream reception class.



### 5.8.1 Support vs training for staff

Much research has pointed to the importance of training to provide staff with information around ASD (Emam & Farrell, 2009; AET, 2011; Roberts & Simpson, 2016; Humphrey & Lewis, 2008b; Waddington & Reed, 2006; McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Glashan et al., 2004; Frederickson, Jones & Lang, 2010). Some of the teachers mentioned this, however, but getting to know an individual child was emphasised more than a generic understanding of ASD. Notwithstanding comments that newly qualified teachers require some additional knowledge (T3, T4), the teachers' accounts provided insight into a different type of support that may help them in the process of supporting a child with ASD.

The findings highlight the emotional and psychological struggles teachers' experience in figuring out how to support a child with ASD within a mainstream class. T1 directly identified what she would find helpful to cope with this:

...a chance to discuss challenges would be really good. So a chance to have those conversations where I can be quite honest and frank, and say, "Oh my goodness I could cry." (T1: 1101-1105)

In addition to a listening ear, T1 spoke about discussing situations with those who share their experiences who can provide empathy and practice based advice. This idea is in line with Billington's (2006) suggestions that professionals need to explore experiential processes to understand how best to support a child with ASD. Being able to take a reflective position can be difficult particularly within the time constraints of the mainstream teacher's role. However, this is something that would help the teachers to work through that 'process of trying' to understand a child with ASD. T6 emphasised this throughout her account:

In the back of your mind because just sometimes I think it's becoming reflective because quite often you can kind of look at a situation and realise afterwards that actually I spoke directly to that child when actually I shouldn't have (T6: 289-294).

Billington (2006) also suggested the need for containment (Bion, 1962) for a child with ASD. In order to offer containment, a teacher needs to have this experience themselves. Having identified the difficult feelings (stress, self-doubt and frustration) the teachers faced in managing the whole class environment, parents and support staff, it is reasonable to assume that their capacity to cope with the emotions of a child with ASD would be limited. Therefore, the type of support that teachers need seems to be more about creating a safe space where they can explore how their thoughts and emotions may affect their practice. Suggestions around this are provided in the implications for EPs section (5.10).

### **5.8.2 Collaboration between teachers and support staff**

Teachers also identified the need for practical support such as creating resources that may be needed for a child with ASD. A member of support staff, such as a TA, was associated with these duties. The analysis shows the importance of a team approach within the class and how challenges arise when there are conflicting views around the needs of a child with ASD. Building awareness to create a shared approach to ASD has been highlighted as crucial in supporting inclusion (Ravet, 2011). Therefore, in a reflection of previous research suggestions, it would be helpful to consider the time allocated for teachers and TAs to build a relationship and create collaborative plans (Webster & Blatchford, 2015; Symes & Humphrey 2011a/b).

### **5.8.3 Support with helping families.**

The final aspect of help teachers may need is derived from the theme 'working with parents perceptions' (SP6:4.5.3). The findings reflect the importance of considering the

role a teacher has to play in negotiating the varying levels of understanding and expectations of parents. Glashan et al. (2004) suggested that a separate service should take on this responsibility. This approach was partly adopted in one school (School 3), where the duty of parent support seemed to be formally allocated to the SENCO so the teachers attributed less significance to this aspect. The teachers (T4, T5) had experienced some rewarding collaboration with parents, but the SENCO seemed to take on the challenging aspects:

*If someone is being particularly reluctant or difficult to engage at school then asking the SENCO to get more involved in a more official capacity and to call them in and speak to them (T5: 536-540)*

This represents a change in the exosystem that shifted the relationship between teacher and parent. Research on parents' views has focused on communication with teachers as a component for satisfaction (Falkmer et al., 2015). However, the process of supporting the understanding of a parent whose child has recently received a diagnosis of ASD and managing varied expectations of school, places extra pressure on reception teachers. Providing parent support and maintaining home-school communication through another avenue would reduce the emotional strain on teachers.

## **5.9 Evaluation of Research**

### **5.9.1 Reviewing method**

IPA was selected to gain an in depth understanding of reception class teachers' experiences. The method fits within a wider epistemology of constructivism which is interested in an individual's understanding of an experience. This approach provides an idiographic account of supporting children with ASD in their first year of school. The research questions were addressed with opportunities to explore similarities and differences between the individual teachers' experiences. The detailed accounts

derived from the use of IPA provided the insight sought. In addition, the above discussion of themes revealed in this research shows that this method has unveiled some new perspectives on the phenomenon of supporting children with ASD.

In providing a coherent, transparent description of the systematic research process with the aid of a research diary, the criteria of quality have been addressed (3.13). I have outlined the influence of my role in gathering and interpreting the accounts of the participants to create the findings (3.14). Clear descriptions and reflections from each stage of the journey supported the credibility of the research process (Smith et al., 2009).

### **5.9.2 Sample size**

The findings of this study are based on a small sample of six reception class teachers. The aim of the sampling method was to select a homogenous group and therefore specific criteria was used to narrow the selection (3.10). The idiographic nature of the study means findings cannot be generalised to a wider population. However, the description of the schools and teachers involved in the research allows the reader to make a judgement of how the findings can be transferred to other settings. I recognise that the transferability of the insight gained through this exploration will depend on the context.

### **5.9.3 Single interview**

The concept of the chronosystem in the bio-ecological approach identifies that the timing of events is important. This led me to reflect on the specific occasions when the interviews were conducted. Although the participants reflected on experiences throughout their careers, the data collected illustrates the thoughts and feelings

prevalent in that particular moment. Some of the teachers were interviewed at the end of an academic year whilst others were interviewed at the start. It is not possible to know how the teachers' accounts may have differed if they were conducted on different occasions. Bond and Hebron (2016) used a phased approach to explore the development of a resourced provision. This approach may have provided deeper insight into changes in the teachers' experiences across the year.

## **5.10 Implications for Local Services and Educational Psychologists**

### **5.10.1 Supporting systemic thinking**

The findings in this research fit with a trend towards an approach to inclusion for children with ASD that considers all aspects of the school ecology rather than focusing on the child (Emam & Farrell, 2009). This should be reflected in practice at all levels within the school and, importantly, in local education services. Currently, there is a pattern of applying for additional funding and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for individual children with ASD. The local SEN strategy, which is in the early stages of implementation, emphasises the empowerment of mainstream schools through whole school approaches to inclusion.

This research supports this approach but it is not enough to make this suggestion and expect change. Schools need help to reframe their understanding of support for children with ASD. EPs are well placed to promote a systemic perspective through consultation (Campbell & Huffington, 2008). This can prompt senior leadership to consider how the structure and ethos of the school, established through formal and informal mechanisms, affects the experiences of staff and children. In addition, EPs have regular opportunities to work with the key people involved with a child with ASD. The use of systemic questions will help teachers, support staff and parents think about

the way a child is connecting with their various environments and recognise the bi-directional nature of this.

### **5.10.2 Support for families**

Another implication of these findings is to reinforce the importance of supporting parents of children with ASD. Services for parents in the local area have recently been reduced and with the absence of an Autism Pathway, parents may experience a diagnosis with little explanation or follow-up support. This research focuses on the beginning of formal schooling which can be a particularly stressful time for parents whose young child has recently received a diagnosis of ASD (Connolly & Gersch, 2016). The findings show that teachers can experience significant challenges working with parents' perceptions and this may affect their approach to the child. As part of a whole school approach to inclusion, schools should be supported to implement a system that supports home-school collaboration whilst reducing pressure on teachers to directly support parents.

### **5.10.3 Support for teachers**

Support for teachers should help them work through the range of experiences they encounter when supporting a class which includes a child with ASD. EPs can offer facilitation of work discussion groups (Jackson, 2008), which would provide a safe environment for this reflection. This setting would offer staff an opportunity to explore their relationship with the child and consider how their feelings relate to the experiences of the child. The trust and collaboration that is needed between staff to share and think together in this way also strengthens a team approach to support.

#### 5.10.4 Reflecting on understanding of the reception setting

A key reflection from this research is that the pre-conceptions we hold as professionals may not always reflect the perspectives of those working closely with the children. This is specifically related to the views the teachers held around the suitability of the reception setting for children with ASD. In my professional experience, teachers portray a struggle with managing children with ASD in the unstructured environment of a play based curriculum. Therefore, I was surprised that many of the teachers described this as an environment that was conducive to supporting a child with ASD. Even when I felt their comments would fulfil my assumptions, they took a positive turn:

But I suppose because of the early years' environment, because it is a lot more fluid and play-based at that stage often apart from all it can be a bit chaotic, but it lends itself more to an autistic child. It's not as formal, whereas if I had an autistic child coming in further throughout the school I could imagine it'd need more support...(T5: 687- 693)

I reflected that perhaps the pessimistic views which some of the teachers held around a child moving up the school represented their reluctance to let the child go. This thought linked to the theme around 'Connection with the child' (SP2:4.4.2) and the suggestion that this may be stronger due to the age and needs of the child. In addition, I recognised that the teachers felt they were giving a lot through the journey of supporting a child with ASD. Perhaps this belief that they were offering everything they could leads to an idea that there is nothing better elsewhere.

I also contemplated whether there was a sense of 'not-knowing' which led the teachers to fear that a child with ASD would not cope outside the reception class. Having said this, several of the teachers had taught in Year 1. In these circumstances, I considered that their individual experiences may not have included supporting a child with ASD or perhaps there was a particularly challenging situation that created a negative construction of the Year 1 experience. Ultimately, the teachers had returned to teach

in a reception class so their passion for this stage of learning may be reflected in how they feel it caters to a child with ASD.

Given the epistemological stance of the research, I accepted the participants' individual constructions of the phenomena and this is reflected in the themes. However, I have considered that taking a critical realist approach to this study would have opened opportunities to questions these views (Maxwell, 2012).

As this discussion demonstrates, I wondered around this topic for a while. However, I recognised that the value that can be derived from this unexpected finding was the realisation that EPs may not always see the full picture of experiences. It is important to be open to hearing views that may contradict our pre-conceptions in order to offer appropriate support.

#### ***5.10.4.1 Support for the early years.***

The idea of misinterpreting what is really happening in the early years' environment of reception, connects to thinking about how schools position this stage of learning. The teachers here indicate that reception class provides an important foundation for schooling but the unique principles implemented can create a feeling of separation from the rest of the school. Local specialist teacher provision for early years is no longer available to all education settings. This recent change means that schools have taken on a greater responsibility for devising support for children in the EYFS. There is a need to shift thinking about the reception year group within school systems to ensure teachers feel understood and supported. One way this can be done is through whole-school training to broaden teachers' understanding of how the early years' principles are used to support children with ASD.



### **5.10.5 Consideration of local context**

The introduction provided a description of local concerns around increased applications for EHCPs (1.9). By recognising the needs of teachers and using this to inform support plans, I feel this research is a positive step forward in reducing the desire to apply for EHCPs. Although I recognise it would be necessary to further explore the reasons behind school requests, a combination of this research and professional experience, supports the idea that staff who feel empowered in their supporting role would be less likely to seek external assessment. In addition, findings around parents' expectations highlighted experiences which may be contributing to a high level of parental applications. Reviewing systems to collaborate with families could not only relieve pressure on teachers but also provide reassurance to parents that the school can provide appropriate support without the need for statutory assessment.

### **5.11 Areas for Future Research**

The second research question around what is needed to support teachers in the reception context requires further exploration. In reviewing this question, I highlighted that there seemed to be some contextual barriers which hindered the teachers' consideration of this topic. I wondered if there is an element of the teachers not knowing what might help as they have not had the opportunities to explore different options. Another reflection that informs my suggestion for future research in this area is that teachers in the same schools had different ideas. Sharing their views may support the development of better support mechanisms in school.

Collaborative participatory action research (Jacobs, 2016) would support this process in addition to providing a structure to implement and review different options for help. Given the importance of the systemic approach highlighted in this research, this should

include all reception teachers, support staff, the SENCO and members of the Senior Leadership Team. This would allow the key people involved to explore the most effective use of resources and develop practice based on what works well.

#### **5.11.1 Exploring experiences in other stages of education**

This research provides insight into a particular period of a child's education, which is deemed to be significant as it is the start of a school career. By focusing on teachers in this year group, the exploration added new ideas to the research in the literature review which had taken a broader view. It would be interesting to delve deeper into the perspectives of teachers in other stages of education.

In the local EPS, recent wonderings have been around what happens in Years 5 and 6 which makes schools apply for more support for children with ASD, and specifically for EHCPs. In addition, the teachers in this research identified a concern around the transition into Year 1. Although hypotheses are often made by EP teams, this research has highlighted the need for caution in making assumptions around what is driving the actions of school staff. In recognition of the inherent variation of the roles teachers take in different year groups, future research should explore this more thoroughly in relation to supporting children with ASD. This would provide specific insight and help professionals consider the proactive support that is needed for teachers at different levels.

#### **5.11.2 Building the bio-ecological understanding**

A bio-ecological approach provides a more holistic perspective of a situation than simply focusing on actions in isolation. This research has gained the views of a single person within a school ecosystem at a particular point in time. It would be interesting to

explore the chronosystem in more detail by conducting interviews throughout the academic year. This would include transitions to and from the reception class to gain a better understanding of the journey through the first year of school and the importance of particular stages.

The themes identified here have been tentatively connected with other important systems based on the views of the teachers. However, there is also scope for further work to gain the views of key people involved in the surrounding systems. Existing research (McGregor & Campbell, 2001; Glashan et al., 2004; Emam & Farrell, 2009; Bond & Hebron, 2016; Frederickson et al., 2010) has taken the approach of including a range of school staff to give a wider understanding of what is happening in the system. I feel the depth of information derived from analysis focused on the teacher level has provided important insight into this specific role. Moving forward, the findings indicate that support staff in class and SENCOs could provide more insight into the process of supporting a child with ASD in the first year of school. This would inform an explanatory theory of what works well for children in the reception setting which would, in turn, support future practice.

### **5.12 Plans for Dissemination**

The research was carried out with the support of the Local Authority where the data was collected. Therefore the final thesis will be provided to the departments associated with educational support in the area, particularly the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) departments. As noted in the participant information forms (Appendix M3), the researcher will also provide an anonymised report

to the participating schools which will briefly detail the findings and conclusions of the study.

The growing number of children with ASD attending mainstream schools means the insight from this research is relevant to an increasing number of education professionals. I plan to contact the National Autistic Society (NAS) to disseminate my findings to a wide range of individuals who are interested in this topic. This will include providing insight into their guidance around 'Autism in the primary Classroom: Strategies and resources to support successful inclusion' (Beaney & Kershaw, 2014). In addition, I would like to contribute an article to the 'Your Autism' magazine describing the study's findings and the implications for support in mainstream reception classrooms.

I have explored various peer reviewed journals to consider dissemination of this study. As I have touched upon the implications for EPs, I feel this study would contribute to 'Educational Psychology in Practice: Theory, research and practice in educational psychology'. I will also attempt to publish in 'Good Autism Practice' which aims to provide innovative insight into supporting those with ASD and appeals to an audience of education practitioners and parents. More broadly, dissemination will be sought through the 'Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs'. Finally, to allow for a wide scope of exposure, I will endeavour to contribute to an open access journal specifically for autism entitled 'Autonomy, The Critical Journal of Interdisciplinary Autism Studies.'

### **5.13 Summary of Chapter 5**

This chapter has reviewed the findings using a bio-ecological approach which has been applied in previous research to understand support in schools. This framework demonstrates that interaction between various levels of systems has influenced the teachers' experiences. The findings have supported various conclusions of previous research which has explored teachers' perspective of support for children with ASD throughout primary. This includes the need for whole-school approaches which foster a shared understanding of ASD and the challenges teachers experience in providing equality for all children in a class. The teachers also reflected the importance of the teacher-child relationship, conceptualised in previous research which applied a transactional model. Collaboration with parents was also a key factor and I have discussed the specific difficulty of supporting parents at the beginning of their child's education.

The focus on a reception setting added novel insight. The national approach to early education provided a positive environment for social development. Issues highlighted in previous research around peer conflict and tensions in communicating with children were not perceived to be significant. The reception teachers naturally valued the uniqueness of each child, recognised the need to understand their perspectives and shaped support around this. I have also highlighted the deeper level of understanding around the emotional journey of teachers provided by this research, with links to related support.

The quality of the research has been reviewed with consideration of limitations. I have contemplated the support required for reception teachers and associated implications for EPs. Future research can develop a bio-ecological explanation using perspectives

from other key stakeholders who support the reception experience of children with ASD. I have also suggested explorations of other key stages in education and the use of participatory research to develop practice. Finally, my plans for dissemination are detailed.

## 6. Conclusion

This research addressed a gap in the research around reception class teachers' perceptions of supporting a child with ASD and provided insight into experiences in the local area. The analysis revealed two overarching themes which are summarised below with associated implications.

*O1 The psychological and emotional process of striving to meet the needs of the child as part of the class.*

The teachers highlighted a journey from self-doubt as they tried to figure out how to support an individual child with ASD, to a feeling of empowerment when reflecting on the success of the process. An empathetic relationship with the child facilitated this development and generated strong emotional experiences. Within the class context, there was a struggle in trying to create inclusive support for the child with ASD whilst striving to ensure the needs of the other children were equally valued.

This insight implies a need to create support which provides an opportunity to work through the thoughts and feelings involved in the teachers' experiences. EPs can provide the psychological knowledge to facilitate a safe, containing space which would support teachers through their journey of supporting a child with ASD within their classroom.

*O2 Being a Part of the System of Support*

The systemic elements influencing the teachers' experiences of supporting a child with ASD included school ethos and working relationships with other staff. Importance of parent relationships were highlighted with associated challenges in meeting expectations from home. A key contribution of this research was insight into the specific

experience of teachers within an early years setting of a school system. Themes highlight the positive foundation that this unique environment can provide for a child with ASD and a desire to spread this understanding throughout the school.

EPs are well placed to support staff in schools to consider a systemic perspective of support for children with ASD through consultation. This would facilitate collaborative planning of universal approaches including a school community approach to supporting parents. Whole school training has also been suggested to support a shared understanding of the principles adopted in reception.

## **7. Reflections of the Research Process**

In creating this research, I valued the opportunity to develop a study which allowed the voices of those on the 'front line' of supporting children with ASD to be heard by a wider audience. My professional appreciation of the importance of early years education meant I was surprised that the research into mainstream support for young children with ASD was so sparse. I considered that the reduction in local early years support could also portray a lack of value for this stage and I wondered how this was reflected in schools practices. I was conscious to bracket these views when conducting the research and focus on gaining insight directly from the reception class teachers.

I respect the role teachers play and often worry that we, as EPs, do not get enough opportunity to delve into their experiences as consultation is often focused on assessment and finding solutions. This is reflected in my approach to this research. In devising the data collection, I had concerns around how I would develop my skills as a researcher and considered how this would be influenced by role as a TEP. I engrossed myself in literature around IPA and, in particular, reflexivity to ensure I was conscious of important concepts as I approached the interviews. The pilot interview process



helped to build confidence in my ability to enter the world of the participants and make collaborative interpretations.

The complexity increased as I embarked on the actual interviews and the interpretation began. I was reassured by the wealth of information I was able to gather in the interviews but I naturally questioned how much insight this provided as I was anxious to provide a valuable piece of research. The process of analysis was a difficult journey of considering how my interpretations fit with those of the teachers. I paid attention to my feelings so I was able to question moments where I became caught up focusing on particular aspects of the accounts.

It was important to demonstrate the complexity involved in a continual process of analysis which I found difficult to bring to an end point. There were several moments where I felt 'stuck' and I have shown how I made decisions to overcome this. Supervision offered vital opportunities to explore possible directions and offer reassurance around the thoughtfulness of my approach. My motivation to illuminate the views of teachers gave me the push to continue through these challenges. There was a sense of excitement when I began writing the findings as I felt assured of the value of the research.

The use of a research diary has helped me reflect on my journey through this research. In reviewing this, I recognise that I have been through feelings of anxiety and doubt that reflect the teachers' accounts of working through the unpredictable experience of supporting a child with ASD. Positively, I also came to a point of accepting the ups and downs and feeling confident in my understanding. This meant that making links to theory and developing implications was an enjoyable moment.

This research has reinforced the value I place on understanding the individual constructions of others in my role as an EP. I appreciate the empathetic and reflexive skills I have developed through this process.

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## 9. Appendices

### Appendix LR1- Literature Search Process

Stage 1- Initial Searches

Search Engines:

Psychinfo

ERIC

Education Source

Limiters- Peer Reviewed

Year Range- 2000-2017

#### Search Terms:

Autism terms

(autis\* OR asperger OR ASD OR Pervasive developmental disorder)

Teacher terms

(teach\* OR school staff OR educator)

Mainstream school terms

(mainstream OR regular)

Exploring experience

(experience OR attitudes OR voice OR report)

Primary terms

(Primary OR Preschool OR early years)

41 results (without duplicates) shown below:

Review of 41 papers derived from literature search of Psychinfo, ERIC, Education Source (detailed above)		Process of selecting inclusion/ exclusion
1	Roberts, J., Simpson, K. (2016). A review of research into stakeholder perspectives on inclusion of students with autism in mainstream schools. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i> , 20 (10), 1084-1096.	Read Title Read Abstract Read whole paper  Checked where individual papers were conducted. Only 7 papers in the UK and only two in primary age range. Saved for introduction.
2	Syriopoulou-Delli, C, K., Cassimos, D. C., & Polychronopoulou, S. A. (2016). Collaboration between teachers and parents of children with ASD on issues of education. <i>Research in Developmental Disabilities</i> , 55, 330-345.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>



3	Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Listening and hearing to voices from the grassroots. <i>Journal of Autism &amp; Developmental Disorders</i> , 46(4), 1429- 1440.	Read title Read abstract <b>Outside UK</b>
4	Bond, C., & Hebron, J. (2016). Developing mainstream resource provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder: Staff perceptions and satisfaction. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 31(2), 250-263.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  Included in literature review
5	Mandy, W., Murin, M., Baykaner, O., Staunton, S., Hellriegel, J., Anderson, S. & Skuse, D. (2016). The transition from primary to secondary school in mainstream education for children with autism spectrum disorder. <i>Autism</i> , 20(1), 5-13.	Read title <b>Outside of primary age range</b>
6	Goodall, C. (2015). How do we create ASD-friendly schools? A dilemma of placement. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 4, 305-326.	Read title Read abstract <b>Not a research article</b>
7	Lee, F. L., Yeung, A. S., Tracey, D., & Barker, K. (2015). Inclusion of children with special needs in early childhood education: What teacher characteristics matter? <i>Topics in Early Childhood Special Education</i> , 35(2), 79-88.	Read title Read abstract <b>Not ASD specific</b> <b>Outside UK</b>
8	Moyse, R., & Porter, J. (2015). The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic girls at mainstream primary schools. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 30 (2), 187-201.	Read title <b>Narrow focus- Gender specific</b>
9	Al-Sharbati, M. M., Al-Farsi, Y.M., Ouhtit, A., Waly, M. I., Al-Shafae, M., Al-Farsi, O., Al-Khaduri, M., Al-Said, M. F., & Al-Adawi, S. (2015). Awareness about autism among school teachers in Oman: A cross-sectional study. <i>Autism: The International Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 19 (1), 6-13.	Read Title <b>Outside UK</b>
10	Boucher-Gagnon, M., & des Rivières, C. (2015). Le regard des mères sur les attitudes, les compétences et les connaissances sur le TSA du personnel scolaire qui influencent l'intégration en classe ordinaire de leur enfant présentant un TSA. <i>Revue de Psychoéducation</i> , 44(2), 219-243.	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b>
11	Barlow, A., Humphrey, N., Lendrum, A., Wigelsworth, M., & Squires, G. (2015). Evaluation of the implementation and impact of an integrated prevention model on the academic progress of students with disabilities. <i>Research in Developmental Disabilities</i> , 36, 505-525.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
12	Ratcliffe, B., Wong, M., Dossetor, D., Hayes, S. (2014). Teaching social-emotional skills to school-aged children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A treatment versus control trial in 41 mainstream schools. <i>Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders</i> , 8(12), 1722-1733.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
13	Fortuna, R. (2014). The social and emotional functioning of students with an autistic spectrum disorder during the transition between primary and secondary schools. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 29(2), 177-191.	Read title  <b>Outside primary age group</b>
14	McGillicuddy, Sarah., O'Donnell, Grainne M. (2014). Teaching students with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i> , 18 (4), 323-344.	Read title <b>Outside UK</b>

15	Calder, L., Hill, V., Pellicano, E. (2013). Sometimes I want to play by myself': Understanding what friendship means to children with autism in mainstream primary schools. <i>Autism</i> , 17(3), 296-316.	Read title <b>Narrow focus- specific aspect</b>
16	Soto-Chodiman, R., Pooley, J. A., Cohen, L., & Taylor, M. F. (2012). Students with ASD in mainstream primary education settings: Teachers' experiences in Western Australian classrooms. <i>Australasian Journal of Special Education</i> , 36(2), 97-111.	Read title <b>Outside UK</b>
17	de Boer, A., Pijl, S. J., Post, W., & Minnaert, A. (2012). Which variables relate to the attitudes of teachers, parents and peers towards students with special educational needs in regular education? <i>Educational Studies</i> , 38(4), 433-448.	Read title Read Abstract <b>Not ASD specific</b>
18	Rowley, E., Chandler, S., Baird, G., Simonoff, E., Pickles, A., Loucas, T., & Charman, T. (2011). The experience of friendship, victimization and bullying in children with an autism spectrum disorder: Associations with child characteristics and school placement. <i>Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders</i> , 6(3), 1126-1134.	Read title <b>Narrow focus- specific aspect</b>
19	Su, H.F.L., Lai, L., Rivera, L., & Herminia, J. (2012). Effective Mathematics Strategies for Pre- School Children with Autism. <i>Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom</i> , 17 (2), 25-30.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
20	Reinson, C. (2012). A Collaborative Decision Tree System for Designing a Sensory Diet Curriculum for Children with Autism in the Classroom Setting. <i>Journal of Occupational Therapy, Schools &amp; Early Intervention</i> , 5 (1), 61-72.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
21	Low Hui Min; L. L. W. (2011). Teaching of Speech, Language and Communication Skills for Young Children with Severe Autism Spectrum Disorders: What Do Educators Need to Know? <i>New Horizons in Education</i> , 59(3), 16-27.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
22	Gaus, V.L. (2011). Cognitive behavioural therapy for adults with autism spectrum disorder. <i>Advances in Mental Health and Intellectual Disabilities</i> , 5(5), 15-25.	Read title <b>Outside primary age range Specific intervention</b>
23	Wang, X., Yang, W-H., Jin, Y., Jing, J., Huang, X., Li, X-H., Wei, W. Bao, P., Wang, H. M., Li, S-Y; Xiu, L-J., Guo, J., Liang, H-N., Ning, J., Cheng, S-Y., & Fan, Y-B. (2011). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders in preschool children of Guangzhou kindergartens. <i>Chinese Mental Health Journal</i> , 25(6), 401-408.	Read title <b>Outside UK</b>
24	Maich, K., & Hall, C. (2011). Out in the Field: Experiencing a Research Learning Journey through a Community-Based Pilot Project. <i>College Quarterly</i> , 14 (2), 5-16.	Read title Read Abstract <b>Not ASD specific</b>
25	Jones, K., & Howley, M. (2010). An investigation into an interaction programme for children on the Autism Spectrum: Outcomes for children, perceptions of schools and a model for training. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 10 (2), 115-123.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
26	Agyapong, V., Migone, M., Crosson, C., & Mackey, B. (2010). Recognition and management of Asperger's syndrome: Perceptions of primary school teachers. <i>Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine</i> , 27(1), 6-10.	Read title Read abstract <b>Outside UK</b>
27	Emam, M. M., Farrell, P. (2009). Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper <b>Included in literature review</b>

	with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 24(4), 407-422.	
28	Smith, C. (2009). Review of Playing, laughing and learning with children on the autism spectrum: A practical resource of play ideas for parents and carers. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 25(3), 295-296.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
29	McMurray, S., Drysdale, J., Jordan, G. (2009). Motor processing difficulties: Guidance for teachers in mainstream classrooms. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 24(3), 119-125.	Read title <b>Narrow focus-specific aspect</b>
30	Lian, W. B., Ying, S. H.K., Tean, S. C.H., Lin, D.C.K., Lian, Y. C., & Yun, H. L. (2008). Pre-school teachers' knowledge, attitudes and practices on childhood developmental and behavioural disorders in Singapore. <i>Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health</i> , 44(4), 187-194.	Read title <b>Outside UK</b>
31	Humphrey, N. (2008). Including pupils with autistic spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 23(1), 41-47	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper <b>Advice rather than research paper.</b> Saved for introduction
32	Walker, S., Berthelsen, D. (2008). Children with autistic spectrum disorder in early childhood education programs: A social constructivist perspective on inclusion. <i>International Journal of Early Childhood</i> , 40 (1), 33-51.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
33	Whitehead, Jo. (2007). Telling it like it is: Developing social stories[TM] for children in mainstream primary schools. <i>Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal for Pastoral Care &amp; Personal-Social Education</i> , 25 (4), 35-41.	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
34	Lloyd, H. (2007). Review of <i>Surviving the special educational needs system: How to be a 'velvet bulldozer'</i> . <i>Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry</i> , 12(3), 467.	Read title <b>Book review</b>
35	Sharma, R., Chandrakantha, E. L., & Mold, B. (2007). National Autism Plan standards for assessment are achievable. <i>Child: Care, Health and Development</i> , 33(4), 500-501.	Read title <b>Not a research paper</b> Saved for introduction
36	Jones, V. (2007). "I Felt like I Did Something Good"-The impact on Mainstream pupils of a peer tutoring programme for children with Autism. <i>British Journal of Special Education</i> , 34 (1), 3-9.	Read title  <b>Specific intervention</b>
37	Kasa-Hendrickson, C., & Kluth, P. (2005). We have to start with inclusion and work it out as we go: Purposeful inclusion for non-verbal students with Autism. <i>International Journal of Whole Schooling</i> , 2(1), 2-14.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
38	Lewis, L., Trushell, J., & Woods, P. (2005). Effects of ICT group work on interactions and social acceptance of a primary pupil with Asperger's Syndrome. <i>British Journal of Educational Technology</i> , 36 (5), 739-755.	Read title  <b>Specific intervention</b>
39	Paquet, A., Giroux, N., & Forget, J. (2005). L'inclusion scolaire des enfants autistes. <i>Revue de Psychoéducation</i> , 34(2), 265-286.	Read title <b>Outside UK</b>
40	Glashan, L., Mackay, G., & Grieve, A. (2004). Teachers' Experience of Support in the Mainstream Education of Pupils with Autism. <i>Improving Schools</i> , 7(1), 49-60.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  Included in literature review

41	McGregor, E., & Campbell, E. (2001). The attitudes of teachers in Scotland to the integration of children with autism into mainstream schools. <i>Autism</i> , 5 (2), 189-207.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  Included in literature review
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Search Engine:

Autism Data- NAS Library Catalogue

Search Terms:

Autism terms

(autis\* OR asperger OR ASD OR Pervasive developmental disorder)

Teacher terms

(teach\* OR school staff OR educator)'

Mainstream school terms

(mainstream OR regular)

Exploring experience

(experience OR attitudes OR voice OR report)

Primary terms

(Primary OR Preschool OR early years)

Limiters:

Publication type- Journal articles

Key words- autism spectrum, teacher

<b>Review of 15 papers derived from literature search of Autism Data (detailed above)</b>		<b>Process of selecting inclusion/ exclusion</b>
1	Chang, Y. C., Shih, W., & Kasari C. (2016). Friendships in preschool children with autism spectrum disorder: What holds them back, child characteristics or teacher behavior?	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
2	Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Listening and hearing to voices from the grassroots. <i>Journal of Autism &amp; Developmental Disorders</i> , 46(4), 1429- 1440.	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b> <b>Duplicate of first search</b>
3	Al-Sharbati, M. M., Al-Farsi, Y.M., Ouhtit, A., Waly, M. I., Al-Shafae, M., Al-Farsi, O., Al-Khaduri, M., Al-Said, M. F., & Al-Adawi, S. (2015). Awareness about autism among school teachers in Oman: A cross-sectional study. <i>Autism: The International Journal of Research &amp; Practice</i> , 19 (1), 6-13.	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b> <b>Duplicate of first search</b>
4	Donato, C., Shane, H. C., & Hemsley, B. (2014). Exploring the feasibility of the Visual Language in Autism program for children in an early intervention group setting: Views of parents, educators, and health professionals. <i>Developmental Neurorehabilitation</i> , 17(2), 115-124.,	Read title  <b>Narrow focus-specific aspect</b>
5	Segall, M. J., & Campbell, J. M. (2014). Factors influencing the educational placement of students with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders</i> . 8(1), 31-43.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>

6	Coman D. et al., (2013). Commitment to classroom model philosophy and burnout symptoms among high fidelity teachers implementing preschool programs for children with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 43(2), 345- 360.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
7	Humphrey, N., & Symes, W. (2013). Inclusive education for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in secondary mainstream schools: Teacher attitudes, experience and knowledge. <i>International Journal of Inclusive Education</i> , 17, 32–46.	Read title  <b>Outside primary age range</b>
8	Wong, C. S. (2013). A play and joint attention intervention for teachers of young children with autism: A randomized controlled pilot study. <i>Autism</i> , 17(3), 340-357	Read title <b>Specific intervention</b>
9	Falkmer, M., Parsons, R, & Granlund, M. (2012). Looking through the same eyes? Do teachers' participation ratings match with ratings of students with autism spectrum conditions in mainstream schools? <i>Autism Research and Treatment</i> , 1, 1-13.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
10	Kelly, A., Barnes-Holmes, D. (2012). Implicit attitudes towards children with autism versus normally developing children as predictors of professional burnout and psychopathology. <i>Research in Developmental Disabilities</i> , 34(1), 17-28.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
11	Rodríguez, I.R., Saldaña, D., & Moreno, F.J. (2012). Support, inclusion, and special education teachers' attitudes toward the education of students with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Autism Research and Treatment</i> , 2012.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
12	Segall, M. J., & Campbell, J. M. (2012). Factors relating to education professionals' classroom practices for the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Autism Research and Treatment</i> , 2012, 16-24.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
13	Quintero, N., & McIntyre, L. L. (2011). Kindergarten transition preparation: a comparison of teacher and parent practices for children with autism and other developmental disabilities. <i>Topics in Early Childhood Special Education</i> , 35(1), 52-62	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
14	Jones, K., Howley, M. (2010). An investigation into an interaction programme for children on the Autism Spectrum: Outcomes for children, perceptions of schools and a model for training. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 10 (2), 115-123.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Specific intervention Duplicate of first search</b>
15	McGregor, E., & Campbell, E. (2001). The attitudes of teachers in Scotland to the integration of children with autism into mainstream schools. <i>Autism</i> , 5 (2), 189-207.	1. Read title  Duplicate of previous search Included in literature review

#### Summary of Exclusion of Literature Papers

Exclusion Criteria	Number of Papers Excluded
Not produced in the UK	23 1 international systematic literature review
Not ASD specific	2
Narrow focus- specific aspect of ASD	5
Focused on a specific intervention	13
Not primary aged	4
Not a research article	3

Selected papers	4
<i>1 duplicate of selected paper</i>	1
Total number of papers reviewed	56

### Stage 2- Snowballing for Additional Papers

Second read through of the systematic literature review entitled 'A review of research into stakeholder perspectives on inclusion of students with autism in mainstream schools' (Roberts & Simpson, 2016). Two papers were detailed as being based in the UK and in the primary age range:

Conn, C. 2014. Investigating the Social Engagement of Children with Autism in Mainstream Schools for the Purpose of Identifying Learning Targets. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 14, 153–159.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  <b>Narrow focus- specific aspect</b>
Emam, M. M., Farrell, P. (2009). Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. <i>European Journal of Special Needs Education</i> , 24(4), 407-422.	Already included in the selection of papers.

I did another thorough read through of the four papers selected through the literature search process. I checked several references which occurred in these papers to find whether they fit with the inclusion criteria. The following paper was selected through a process of snowballing from Bond & Hebron (2016)

Frederickson, N., Jones, A. P., & Lang, J. (2010). Inclusive provision options for pupils on the autistic spectrum. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 10 (2), 63-73.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  Fits with inclusion criteria Included in literature review
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### Re- Run of the Literature Searches – November 2017

#### Stage 1- Initial Searches

Search Engines- Psychinfo, ERIC, Education Source

Limiters- Peer Reviewed, 2000-2017

(autis\* OR asperger OR ASD OR Pervasive developmental disorder) AND (teach\* OR school staff OR educator)' AND (mainstream OR regular)AND (experience OR attitudes OR voice OR report)AND (Primary OR Preschool OR early years)

8 Additional papers shown below:

1	Coogan, C., & Farrell, A. M. (2017). Transition to the post-primary section of a special school for students with mild general learning disabilities. <i>Reach</i> , 30 (2), 120-133.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Not ASD specific</b>
2	Padmadewi, N. N., & Artini, L. P. (2017). Teaching English to a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder in regular classroom in Indonesia. <i>International Journal of Instruction</i> , 10 (3), 159-176.	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b>
3	Rivera de Antonio, F. A. (2017). El síndrome Asperger: estrategias y soluciones para una inclusión efectiva. <i>Actualidades Pedagógicas</i> , 69, 133-165.	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b>

4	Cullinan, E. (2017). Voice of the child - an investigation into the social inclusion of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder in mainstream primary settings. <i>Reach</i> , 30 (1), 23-35.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
5	Marks, L. (2016). Playing to learn: An overview of the Montessori approach with pre-school children with autism spectrum condition. <i>Support for Learning</i> , 31(4), 313-328.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Specific intervention</b>
6	Teixeira, D. M., & Inês; M, J. (2016). School participation of students with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs</i> , 16(1), 972-977.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper <b>Outside UK</b>
7	Dagli, G., & Öznacar, B. (2015). An Evaluation on Mainstreaming Practices of Primary Schools According to the Views of School Administrators, Teachers, and Parents. <i>Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice</i> , 15(5), 1317-1332.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
8	Finch, K., Watson, R., MacGregor, C. (2013). Teacher needs for educating children with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the general education classroom. <i>Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship</i> , 2(2).	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>

Search Engine- Autism Data- NAS Library Catalogue

Limiters:

Publication type- Journal articles

Key words- autism spectrum, teacher

(autis\* OR asperger OR ASD OR Pervasive developmental disorder) AND (teach\* OR school staff OR educator)' AND (mainstream OR regular) AND (experience OR attitudes OR voice OR report)AND (Primary OR Preschool OR early years)

16 Additional papers shown below:

1	Mayes, S. D., & Lockridge, R. (2017). Brief report: how accurate is teacher report of autism symptoms compared to parent report? <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 29.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
2	Stadnick, N., Chlebowski, C., & Brookman-Fraze, L. (2017). Caregiver-teacher concordance of challenging behaviors in children with autism spectrum disorder served in community mental health settings. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 47(6), 1780–1790.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
3	Caplan, B. et al. (2016). Student–teacher relationships for young children with autism spectrum disorder: risk and protective factors. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 46(12), 3653–3666.	Read title Read abstract Read whole paper  <b>Outside UK</b>
4	Lopata, C. et al. (2016). Brief report: parent–teacher discrepancies on the Developmental Social Disorders Scale (BASC-2) in the assessment of high-functioning children with ASD. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 46(9), 3183–3189.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
5	Zeedyk, S. M. (2016). Perceived social competence and loneliness among young children with ASD: child, parent and teacher reports. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders</i> , 46(2), 436-449.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>

6	Eisenhower, A. S., Blacher, J., & Bush, H. H. (2015). Longitudinal associations between externalizing problems and student-teacher relationship quality for young children with ASD. <i>Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders, 9</i> , 163-173.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
7	Kamio, Y., Moriwaki, A., & Inada, N. (2013). Utility of teacher-report assessments of autistic severity in Japanese school children. <i>Autism Research and Treatment, 2013</i> .	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b>
8	Ooi, Y. P. et al. (2012). Comparisons between autism spectrum disorders and anxiety disorders: findings from a clinic sample in Singapore, <i>Asia-Pacific Psychiatry, 7</i> .	Read title  <b>Outside UK</b>
9	Pearson, D.A. et al., (2012). High concordance of parent and teacher attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder ratings in medicated and unmedicated children with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology, 31</i> .	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
10	Estes A. et other authors (2011). Discrepancies between academic achievement and intellectual ability in higher-functioning school-aged children with autism spectrum disorder. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 41(8)</i> , 1044-1052.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
11	Morrier, M. J., Hess K. L., & Heflin, L. J. (2011). Teacher training for implementation of teaching strategies for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. <i>Teacher Education and Special Education, 34(2)</i> , 119-132.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
12	Murray, D. S. et al. (2009). Parent and teacher report of social skills in children with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools, 40(2)</i> , 109-115.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
13	Probst, P., & Leppert, T. (2008). Brief report: Outcomes of a teacher training program for autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, 38(9)</i> , 1791-1796.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
14	Constantino, J. N. (2007). Rapid quantitative assessment of autistic social impairment by classroom teachers. <i>Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 46(12)</i> , 1668-1676.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
15	Lecavalier, L., Leone, S., & Wiltz, J. (2006). The impact of behaviour problems on caregiver stress in young people with autism spectrum disorders. <i>Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 50 (3)</i> , 172-183.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>
16	Lavie T., & Sturmey, P. (2002). Training staff to conduct a paired-stimulus preference assessment. <i>Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, 35(2)</i> , 209-211.	Read title Read abstract  <b>Outside UK</b>



## Appendix LR2- Literature Critiquing Tool

Parts of the CASP (2017) for case control was adapted along with the CEBM (2017) critical appraisal tool for analysing a survey.	Notes
<b>AIMS/ RATIONALE</b>	
What is the goal?	
The rationale for conducting the research- why is it important? (linking to research & context)	
Purpose?(exploratory, explanatory, evaluative etc)	
<b>Critique- Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?</b>	
<b>QUANTITATIVE TECHNIQUES</b>	
Quantitative approach used?	
Reason for this- linked to purpose/goal (interpret/ illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of participants).	
<b>Critique- Is the use of a quantitative methodology appropriate.</b>	
<b>DESIGN</b>	
Research design?	
Why this method?	
<b>Critique- Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?</b>	
<b>SELECTION</b>	
Selection- Clear description?	
Do the participants represent the population?	
Recruitment process?	
<b>Critique- Was the recruitment strategy acceptable for the aims of the research?</b> Is there any bias apparent in selection? Do the participants represent the defined population? Is there a clear description of who the participants are? Was there a sufficient number of cases selected? Was there a power calculation?	
<b>DATA COLLECTION</b>	
Data collection method?	
Why this data collection method?	
Response rate?	
Setting- Time	
Form of data?	
<b>Assurances of reliability/ validity.</b>	
<b>Critique- Are the data collection tools reliable (measure what they say they do) and valid?</b> Did the study receive a good response rate? Could there have been something different about the non-responders?	
<b>BIAS- VALIDITY OF QUESTIONNAIRE</b>	
<b>Critique- Is the questionnaire measuring what it says it is measuring?</b>	
<b>ETHICS</b>	
Ethical Considerations	

<p><b>Critique Have ethical issues been taken into consideration? (ETHICS)</b>          If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained          If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g.issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)          If approval has been sought from the ethics committee</p>	
<b>ANALYSIS</b>	
Description of Analysis Process	
Statistical methods?	
Data to support findings	
<p><b>Critique- Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?</b>          Are you confident with the researcher's choice and use of statistical methods?          Was statistical significance assessed?</p>	
<b>FINDINGS</b>	
What are the findings?	
Credibility?	
Link to original research question?	
<p><b>Critique- is there a clear statement of findings?</b>          Were all the possible outcomes/ results considered?          Are confidence intervals given for the main results?</p>	
<b>CONCLUSIONS/ MAIN MESSAGE</b>	
What do the findings say about inclusion?	
<b>VALUE</b>	
Contribution to current knowledge- policy/ literature?	
Future areas of research?	
How can the research be used?	
<p><b>Critique- How valuable is the research?</b>          If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy?, or relevant research-based literature?          If they identify new areas where research is necessary          If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used.</p>	

## Appendix M1- Recruitment Process

### Recruitment Process

Received list of mainstream primary schools from Local Authority. Selected the eleven three form entry schools. Randomly selected two schools with the rationale that each could provide three teachers.

Emailed Headteachers of the two randomly selected primary schools (**School 1 & School 2**) to ask permission to approach reception class teachers- *Headteachers Information form attached.*

Permission received from both Headteachers in **School 1 & School 2** and email addresses provided for three teachers in each school.

Emailed six reception teachers across **School 1** and **School 2** a short explanation of the research and invited to take part- *Participant Information Form and Consent Form attached.*

**School 1**- Two reception teachers responded, met criteria and agreed to take part

**School 2**- One reception teacher responded but did not meet the criteria (she was a Newly Qualified Teacher).

Randomly selected **School 3** from the remaining nine primary schools

Emailed Headteacher to ask permission to approach reception class teachers - *Headteachers Information form attached.*

Permission received from **School 3** Headteacher and email addresses provided of three reception teachers.

**School 3**- One reception teacher responded and agreed to take part.

Randomly selected **School 4** from remaining nine primary schools

Emailed Headteacher to ask permission to approach reception class teachers – *Headteacher's Information form attached.*

Permission received from **School 4** Headteacher and email addresses provided of three reception teachers.

Emailed the reception teachers in **School 4** a short explanation of the research and invited to take part- *Participant Information Form and Consent Form attached.*

**School 4**- Two teachers responded, met criteria and agreed to take part.

September 2016 (wanted one more teacher)- Went back to **School 1** where 3 new reception teachers had been recruited from other schools within the Local Authority. Approached teachers one at a time via email.

**School 1**- Two teachers did not respond to prompt process detailed in the participant information form. 3<sup>rd</sup> teacher contacted via email met criteria and agreed to take part.

## **Appendix M2- Headteacher Information and Consent Form**

Dear (headteacher Name), My name is [REDACTED], I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working for XXXXXX Educational, Child & Community Psychology Service (XECCP). I would like to request your permission to approach the reception class teachers in your school to take part in a research project which explores their experiences of supporting a child with ASD. This project forms part of my doctoral course undertaken at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust (accredited by the University of Essex) and XXXXX are also in full support of the research.

### **Description of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to explore the experience of teachers who have supported children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their first year of mainstream school. The Local Authority feels that reception class teachers play an important role in providing the first experiences of inclusion in mainstream school for children with ASD. Therefore, their reflections on this experience are important in the process of reviewing and improve the practice of the key professionals supporting schools in XXXXX.

### **What will the teachers' participation involve?**

Your school was randomly selected from all of the three form entry schools in the local authority. If you agree for your teachers to be approached, the following criteria will be used to select participants:

A reception teacher who has been **teaching for over a year** (excluding newly qualified year) and has had **experience of supporting a child with ASD** in their class, in the **last three years**.

Teachers will be asked to take part in a one to one interview lasting approximately one hour. The interviews will take place in May and June 2016. I would like to conduct the interviews in a private space in your school to ensure the teachers are comfortable in a familiar setting. The researcher will work with the teacher to organise a convenient time for this so that it does not disrupt their usual work commitments or the routine of the school. The interview will be audio-recorded ready for transcription and analysis.

**The researcher does not work directly with your school and involvement in this research will not affect the services provided by XXXXXX Educational Psychology Service.**

**This research is explorative so it will not 'evaluate' the practice of the teachers or the school in any way.**

If you feel this is something you would like your teachers to take part in, I would appreciate it if you would share email addresses of the reception teachers so that the participant information and consent forms can be sent directly to them. Following their response, direct contact will continue to organise convenient times for interviews.

### **What will happen after?**

The research findings will be shared via an anonymised project report sent to you, as the head teacher of the school, and to all of the teachers that participated in the study. The research findings will also be presented to the key teams in the LA that provide support to

primary schools in the area. This will include the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and Educational Psychology team. The researcher may also apply for publication in a peer reviewed journal after completing the doctoral thesis and this will allow other professionals who are interested in the topic to read the findings.

### **Clarifying some common questions**

**Right to withdraw-** It will be the teachers' decision if they decide to participate or not. If they choose to take part, they are free to withdraw at any time during, and up to one month after, the date of the interview.

**Confidentiality-** Every attempt will be made to ensure the teacher, the school and any children who are referred to in the interview will not be identifiable. Particular consideration will be given to this due to the small amount of participants involved. Amendments beyond pseudonyms will be considered within the constraints of maintaining the integrity of the data.

The audio version of the interview and any notes made will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available to the researcher and research supervisor. The only time information may be shared is when there is an issue of safety for participants or others. The anonymised transcripts will form part of the appendices of the research thesis and extracts from the interview will be part of the final research report.

**Security-** In accordance with the University's data protection policy based on the principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) all information will be kept securely under password protected files. Information will not be kept for any longer than necessary.

### **Contact Details**

I will be carrying out the entire research project and I am happy to answer any questions you may have via the following methods of contact:

Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

My research supervisor is [REDACTED] and can be contacted on the address below if you have any further queries regarding the conduct of the research.

Address: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Telephone: [REDACTED]

E-mail:

Should you have any concerns about how the research is being conducted, you can also contact



.....

If you are happy to give permission for the teachers to be approached to request participation in this research, please provide an **email address for each of the reception class teachers**:

Alternatively you may wish to delegate organisation of this to another member of staff. If this is the case, please provide the email address of this person:

Please return this information to Martina Jones (martina.jones@xxxxxx.gov.uk) within two weeks of receiving this letter (*by reminder date*). If there is no response by (*deadline date*), the researcher will withdraw this school from the selection.

## Appendix M3- Participant Information Form

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in my research project entitled:  
**'Exploring teacher's experiences of supporting children with ASD in the first year of mainstream school'**

My name is Martina Jones, I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working for XXXXXX Educational, Child & Community Psychology Service (XECCP). This research project forms part of my doctoral course undertaken at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust (accredited by the University of Essex).

*This research has received formal approval from the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).*

### Why am I asking you to take part in the research?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experience of teachers who have supported children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in their first year of mainstream school. The Local Authority feel that reception class teachers play an important role in providing the first experiences of inclusion in mainstream school for children with ASD. Therefore your thoughts and feelings reflecting on various aspects of this experience are valuable to informing the practice of professionals supporting schools in XXXXXX.

Your school was randomly selected from the three form entry schools in the local authority. The head teacher has agreed for teachers to be approached but it is your decision as to whether you would like to take part. The criteria that has been used to select participants is:

A reception class teacher who has been **teaching for over two years (one year after NQT year)** and has had **experience of supporting a child with ASD** in their reception class, within the **last three years**.

**The researcher does not work directly with your school and your decision whether to be involved in this research will not affect the services provided by XXXXXX Educational Psychology Service.**

**This research will NOT 'evaluate' your opinions, teaching approach or the school.**

### What will you be asked to do?

Your participation will involve an interview lasting no longer than an hour, where you will be asked questions related to your experiences of supporting a child with ASD in the first year of mainstream school. The interviews will take place in May and June 2016. I would like to conduct the interviews in a private space in your school for your convenience and to ensure a comfortable setting for both you and me. The interview will be audio-recorded and I might take some notes during our conversation.

No physical or emotional risks are anticipated as a result of participating in this research but I will be available to discuss any concerns that may arise.

### What will happen after?

The research findings will be shared via an anonymised project report sent to all of the teachers that participated in the interviews and the head teachers of the schools in the study. If you would like to discuss the findings with the researcher, a meeting will be organised. The research findings will also be presented to the key teams in the LA that provide support to schools in the area. This will include the Special Educational Needs (SEN) and XECCP team. The researcher may also apply for wider publication in a peer reviewed journal after completing the doctoral thesis as this will allow other professionals who are interested in the topic to read the findings.

It is felt that the results of this study will be useful in helping the LA understand the position of teachers who are required to support the inclusion of children with ASD as they begin their mainstream education. By gaining an understanding of this, the LA can review the support provided to teachers at this stage and shape the future plans around the key themes that arise.

### Clarifying some common questions:

**Right to withdraw-** Your participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time during, and up to one month after, the date of the interview.

**Confidentiality-** Every attempt will be made to ensure the teacher, the school and any children who are referred to in the interview, will not be identifiable. Particular consideration will be given to this, due to the small amount of participants involved. Amendments beyond pseudonyms will be considered within the constraints of maintaining the integrity of the data.

The audio version of the interview and any notes made will be kept strictly confidential and will only be available to the researcher and research supervisor. The only time information may be shared is when there is an issue of safety for participants or others. The anonymised transcripts will form part of the appendices of the research thesis and extracts from the interviews will be part of the final research report.

**Security-** In accordance with the University's data protection policy based up the principles of the Data Protection Act (1998) all information will be kept securely under password protected files. Information will not be kept for any longer than necessary.

### **My Contact Details**

I will be carrying out the entire research project and I am happy to answer any questions you may have via the following methods of contact:

Address: X Educational Psychology Service



Telephone: 



E-mail: [REDACTED]

### **Additional Contacts**

My research supervisor is [REDACTED] and can be contacted on the address below if you have any further queries regarding the conduct of the research.

Address:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Telephone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Should you have any concerns about how the research is being conducted, you can also contact [REDACTED] (Trust Quality Assurance Officer) on [REDACTED]

## Appendix M4- Participant Consent Form

As detailed in the participant information sheet, I am seeking your consent to participate in my doctoral research project entitled '**Exploring teachers' experience of supporting children with ASD in the first year of mainstream school**'. I would like to assure you that this research has received formal approval from the [REDACTED] and XXXXXX Ethics Panel.

Please initial the following statements, to indicate that you are giving informed consent to participate in this research.

I have read and understood the participant information sheet and I have had the opportunity to clarify any queries.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time up until one month after the interview.	
I understand that the interviews will last approximately an hour and they will be audio-recorded.	
The researcher has made it clear that the small sample size will be considered when making adjustments to identifiable data. I understand that my interview data will be anonymised using a pseudonym in order to protect my identity <b>as much as possible</b> .	
I understand that the only time information may be shared is when there is an issue of safety for myself or others.	
I understand that anonymised extracts from my interviews will be used for this research and cannot be accessed for any other purposes.	
I understand that the findings of this research will be shared with myself and the other teachers who participate, the headteachers of the schools involved and key teams who support schools in [REDACTED]	
I understand that the research will be written up as a thesis, which can be accessed through libraries, and the findings may also be available for wider access if published as a peer reviewed journal article.	
If you agree to participate in this research, please sign and date below:	

Print Name.....Sign..... Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

As the researcher who will be conducting this research in accordance with the information shared with you, I am also signing to agree this:

Print Name.....Sign..... Date \_\_/\_\_/\_\_

Please confirm your preferred contact details so that the researcher, can contact you to discuss convenient times for the interview.

Email .....

Telephone.....

Please return this form to [REDACTED] via the contact details shown in the participant information sheet.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

## Appendix M5- Interview Schedule

### Introduction

- Introduction- 'The purpose of this research is to explore your experiences of supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream reception class. So we will be thinking about how children with ASD are included in mainstream school focusing on your experiences of supporting a child in the first year'
- Talk through the information sheet clarifying purpose and key issues such as confidentiality and anonymity.
- Make sure the participant understands what an interview is including that I am using a 'semi-structured' interview so there are some broad areas I would like to hear about but the process is flexible.
- Explain that the aim of my questions is to prompt them to describe their experiences so I will say very little as I am interested in what they have to say. Explain that I would like them to feel comfortable in taking time to describe their thoughts and feelings because it is important to me to gain a good understanding of their personal experiences.
- Explain that I am aware that some experiences may be linked to difficult feelings and it is important to me that the participant is not left with feelings of distress or discomfort. Explain that the participant can request a break at any time and I may also check that they are okay to continue at points during the interview. Inform the participant I have allocated time at the end of the interview for debriefing and I would like them to feel comfortable to use that space to discuss any difficult thoughts or feelings they are having.
- Explain that I may make some notes of certain things that are said and then come back to them at the end to do some more exploration by asking some additional questions.
- Remind the participant how long the interview may take but explain there is flexibility around this depending on the direction we go in.

Inform participants that they can interrupt me at any point if they need something explained further.

Remind the participant that the interview will be audio-recorded, clarify the reason for this and confirm permission for the recording.

### Interview Questions

*(words in italics were considered/ amended during pilot interview- see Appendix M6)*

#### Setting the scene

What were your initial thoughts when you heard you would have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in your class?

#### Challenges

Can you describe any issues or challenges that you encountered in supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream reception class?

How did you *respond* to these issues/challenges?

**Support:**

Were you able to access any support?

Can you describe the type/s of support that were available to you?

How did this support affect the experience of supporting a child with ASD in your class?

**Positives:**

Can you describe *any/ the* positive experiences you had in relation to supporting a child with ASD in your class?

How did it feel when something went well?

**Going forward:**

Now we have reflected on these experiences, what would you share with fellow teachers who will be supporting children with ASD in mainstream reception classes?

What more do you feel would be helpful in supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream?

Prompts-Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Probes- What do you mean by.....?

## Appendix M6- Pilot Interview

I approached the pilot interview in the way I planned to conduct the interview with the participants, including reading through the introduction and offering opportunities for debriefing. After the interview, we reflected on the process in terms of individual questions and the experience as a whole. This Appendix shows the questions asked, a brief summary of the answers given, the reflections made following the interview and amendments considered.

<b>Questions</b> Bullet points of answers given Questions added during interview- prompts/ probes Bullet points of answers given	<b>Reflections</b>  R(Researcher)  P (Pilot Participant)	<b>Consideration of Amendments/ Factors to keep in mind</b>
<p><b>What is your understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorder?</b></p> <p>Social communication difficulties- not being able to see from other people's perspectives. Broad range of strengths and difficulties Originally I had an idea of severe/ profound but experience/ CPD has shown that things can change. I originally had a thought that it was quite a fixed thing.</p>	<p>R- What did you think of this question?</p> <p><i>P-Helpful to talk about ASD detached from a child initially.</i></p> <p><i>P-Helped to think about what does that label mean?</i></p> <p><i>P- Thinking that a lot of children would not have a diagnosis in reception, but teachers may be automatically thinking they have ASD.</i></p>	<p>There may be a need to emphasise that we are thinking about children with a diagnosis in the introduction.</p> <p>Need to ensure clarification of my understanding when they are using terms such as 'severe' and 'profound'.</p>
<p><b>Why do you think that is?</b></p> <p>Medical diagnosis. Teaching experience limited. Children who have been seen with a diagnosis at a young age, it is quite severe. In the first year of school you are still learning how to support them so there might not be a lot in place. As they get older, things are put in place and they are supported well/ learnt how to cope better.</p>	<p>R- Worked well in exploring where this understanding came from.</p> <p><i>P- I think these questions worked well to make me think about ASD in a broad sense before thinking specifically about the experience of supporting a child.</i></p>	<p>May be helpful to explore where this understanding came from through prompts 'why?', 'how did you gain this understanding?' because it gives a deeper understanding of how their interpretation of the phenomenon has been shaped.</p>

<p><b>What were your initial thoughts when you heard you would have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in your class?</b></p> <p>I wanted to know Little boy thinking about in particular. Need to know a lot. Worried about having the right support in place. He had a Statement but no additional adult was in place to support him. Will we have the right support in place and will we find the right person? Concerns around previous experiences with TAs.</p>	<p><i>P- Really interesting thing to ask. There is anxiety when new children are coming.</i></p> <p><i>P- It comes back to whether you have taught a child with ASD or not.</i></p> <p>R- How would I have accessed this information, possibly asking 'Why there were feelings of worry?</p> <p>R- At the end (question about sharing with fellow teachers) the P explained a bit more about the experience of finding out so I wonder how I would access this information here?</p> <p><i>P- You find out about children in the previous year, before starting with them so maybe need to ask specifically about who made the decision or when?</i></p> <p>R- Would like to tap in to more specific details. Possibly thinking about the word time more to take them back to that moment:</p> <p>Potential question 'Tell me about the time you first found out you would have a child with ASD in your class.'</p> <p><i>P- Yes, asking about the 'time' would have put me back into the moment a bit more.</i></p>	<p><b>Changing question to:</b></p> <p>Tell me about the time you first found out you would have a child with ASD in your class.</p> <p>With prompts of:</p> <p>What were your thoughts? What were your feelings?</p> <p>Making sure to explore 'why?' certain feelings were present in order to ensure I am not making assumptions.</p>
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<p><b>Can you tell me a little bit more about what you mean by “wanting to know”?</b></p> <p>Wanted to know: How he was functioning in his nursery. How much language does he use? Does he have a visual timetable and other visual supports? Is that something that is used for him and works for him? Level of independence- toileting. How he got on with other children- I worried about the conflicts there might be with other children. Also- the end of the academic year and thinking about the next year, provokes a lot of anxiety about how they will be. Forget how young they start off and it is always a shock and you forget that they change so much over the year.</p>	<p><i>P- yes this helped to encourage me to explain.</i></p> <p>R interpretation- emphasising the need to know everything and the anxiety around this.</p> <p><i>P- Yes definitely and this question helped me realise how worried you feel at the beginning of the year.</i></p>	
<p><b>Can you describe any issues or challenges that you encountered in supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream reception class?</b></p> <p>It all went well at the start- contradicted reports about his functioning. The person who was his 1:1 and I felt we were doing quite a good job and things were going well. Recommendations about when he first came- visual timetables and visual supports. “I don’t know how the decision was made but we decided to wait to see how he was here”. Private Autism Outreach- I knew things weren’t quite right but she confirmed that he was highly</p>	<p><i>P- No need to say the entire question- you are interviewing reception teachers in mainstream schools.</i></p> <p><i>P- Do you want to hear about ‘a child’ or various children? I feel there is a natural instinct to focus on a child. But do you want to force this?</i></p> <p>R- It may be interesting to hear about varied experiences and the effect of these on the teachers.</p> <p>R-Will they only talk about children that are most difficult? Is this linked to</p>	<p>Use the wording of the question flexibly- do not need to emphasise in mainstream reception classroom.</p> <p>Think it is best to allow them to talk generally if that is what they decide to do and then if there was a particular case, explore that a bit more.</p> <p>Be aware to explore the emotions attached to this by returning to probes such as ‘How did that feel?’</p>



<p>anxious. Recommendations needed to be followed.</p> <p>TA at the time had interpreted his behaviour (demonstrating squeezing fists) as excitement/enjoyment. Everything she had perceived as he is enjoying this, was not so.</p> <p>Worked with outreach person to put things into place. At this point the relationship with the TA began to break down. Looking back, maybe this was because she wasn't involved and she felt criticised. TA ended up leaving.</p> <p>Worst thing that has ever happened in my teaching career- this child ran out of school, through gate and walked home. I had visions of not being able to find him. Parents were lovely and didn't have a bad word to say. That really shook me and terrified me.</p>	<p>having a diagnosis of ASD at a very young age. (Possibly bias coming from my understanding).</p> <p>R understanding-relationships with adults created challenge. There are ups/downs with feeling like things are going well and then realising maybe you couldn't see the challenges. The emotions linked with reflecting on difficult situations are hard to deal with.</p> <p><i>P- Yes I think that reflects what I was saying.</i></p>	
<p><b>Can I take you back to the beginning where you said at the beginning "it was going well, we thought it was fine". How were you feeling then?</b></p> <p>At the point where I thought it was ok?</p> <p>Like we got it right- a bit of all of these professionals think this but he is doing well in a nurturing environment/ trusting relationships and that has done him good.</p> <p>What helped was that children had a staggered start- cohort in September were small and typically the most able, settled children. So it was a calm environment, children were accepting and supportive. I could give him more time, in that first term there was a lot of good and maybe he didn't need everything that everyone said. But it was after, when the rest of the</p>	<p>R- further exploration, led to more detail over something that was just mentioned briefly.</p> <p><i>P- This got me thinking about why it was going well even though that is not what you asked.</i></p>	

<p>children came after Christmas that things went.</p>		
<p><b>How did you feel when things changed and the rest of the children came?</b></p> <p>Tied up in anxiety of new children coming.</p> <p>High levels of needs in children coming, not with statements but significant needs. All of that “filled me up” and made things difficult.</p>	<p><i>P- potential of starting to talk about children with other needs here. Do you want to focus them in on ASD only?</i></p> <p>R- this is relevant as it is something that affected the experience. However, if they went completely off the topic, I may need to pull it back.</p>	
<p><b>What do you mean by “filled you up”?</b></p> <p>So much to think about, so much to do/prepare for/ put in place and manage, that maybe I really wanted to be able to leave the boy with ASD to be with a 1:1.</p> <p>After the first term, I felt maybe I could give her (TA) more responsibility but it didn’t work so my anxiety was high.</p> <p>For that little boy- new children, highly anxious adults, we should have expected him to regress a little bit.</p> <p>Parents- mum was the kind of person who would either love you or hate you- that terrified me. When I first met her, she was so enthusiastic but I always worried if I wasn’t doing right in her eyes how would she react.</p> <p>‘Don’t know if I answered your question?’</p>	<p>R- good clarification of term and opens up more discussion about the feelings related to the experience.</p> <p>R- doubt at the end of the answer may be due to the P relaxing and allowing her thoughts to flow which perhaps causes feelings of uncertainty.</p>	

<p><b>How did you react to these issues/challenges?</b></p> <p>How did I react?      Took a lot more control- spending more time with him      Putting more structure/ detail in lesson plans in place to give clear expectations and feedback to TA.      More detail in lesson plans for him      Proximity became a lot closer- not time, but closer to my awareness.</p>	<p>R- noticed you repeated the question back and felt as though this broke the flow for a second.</p> <p><i>P- The word react has negative connotations to me- quite attacking.</i></p>	<p>Change the word 'react' to 'respond'</p> <p>Consider the emotions related to the challenging experiences.</p>
<p><b>Were you able to access any support?</b></p> <p>SENCO- very understanding, could discuss difficulties with her.      Other reception teacher- support team.      No support from outside- but I don't think that is what I needed.      More internal was needed:      TA should have been sent on course. Should have been more capacity for me to work more with her and develop her skills. This was tied up in the fact that she had her own life- it wasn't her priority and she wasn't paid for it.</p>	<p>Took some time to think about the answer.</p> <p><i>P- the automatic response may be 'no' because I had to really think about the different things support means.</i></p> <p>R-Be interesting to see how they define support.</p> <p>Researcher bias- first thoughts were around external support so I felt a sense of being surprised by the answer.</p>	<p>Might need some 'what else' prompting if they focus on inside/outside support only. However, need to avoid leading down a particular path due to my bias.</p>

<p><b>Thinking about the support you did have... Can you describe the type/s of support that were available to you?</b></p> <p>“Don’t think there was any giving support-that is hard to say.”</p> <p>Getting to appraisal time, there was some requesting for extra support and recommending how support might be shaped e.g. suggesting support for TAs.</p> <p>Parent was very supportive- would do anything for her son, class and school. Emotional support through a lot of positive feedback.</p>	<p>The above question may be a bit of a provoking question because it could be Yes/ No. If they say no, may have to use this question- asking for descriptions of the support- to push them to explore deeper?</p> <p>R interpretation- feeling of reluctance to talk about support due to a feeling of a lack of support. Focused in on parent because it was difficult to think of what happened in school.</p> <p><i>P- yes, I didn’t want to be overly critical of school so I tried to think about something positive outside.</i></p>	<p>May need prompting around how support looked to get more description rather than vague references.</p>
<p><b>How did that support effect the experience of supporting a child with ASD in your class?</b></p> <p>On the one hand it made it better-could speak honestly with parent.</p> <p>On the other hand- did not want to do wrong by her. Example of upsetting parent by writing something in a report focusing on his needs (directed by SENCO). Felt awful like I had betrayed her and broke all the positivity.</p>	<p>R- Focused on what she was saying.</p> <p>R- Didn’t go back to asking specifically about how other types of supports effected experience? Perhaps because I was concerned about being leading by going back to ‘how did support from SENCO effect experience?’</p> <p>R interpretation- this answer bought back to challenges involved with the different pressures from systems involved.</p> <p><i>P- Could ask ‘what about the other types of support you had?’</i></p>	<p>Explore the effect of different types of support they describe in previous answer if they only focus on one.</p>

<b>Positives:</b>		
<p>Can you describe any positive experiences you had in relation to supporting a child with ASD in your class?</p> <p>Lots of it. Adored him, he was a lovely little boy. Amazing to see him develop. Any teacher in early years when you can see children learning and develop, it is a feeling that you can't really describe.</p> <p>He developed a good relationship with me and that was important/validating. He would hug me and seek touch with me.</p> <p>Relationships with family went outside of school so I was quite connected to the family/ him. You invest quite a lot with a child/ family with needs.</p> <p>Helped me to feel positive when I saw what he was doing in year one. The rest of the school were really positive about the foundation he had in reception.</p> <p>Gave an example of specific development in writing shown in year one.</p>	<p><i>P- Made me feel like I'd been really negative. It was quite emotive.</i></p> <p>R- Could change the order depending on what they say- start with positives. It may have felt disjointed due to the last question leading to a description of another challenge.</p> <p><i>P- Maybe the any is the bit that made me feel like I hadn't said ANY?</i></p> <p>R- Perhaps THE is too leading and suggesting that there were definitely positive experiences.</p> <p><i>I think either way by asking that question it may feel you are suggesting they haven't said anything positive.</i></p> <p><i>P- 'Can you' suggests you haven't said anything positive so far so maybe you can't.</i></p> <p>R-'tell me about' fits more comfortably with the way I speak. However, is it too directing suggesting there were positive experiences?</p> <p>R- Could have picked up on words 'validating'</p>	<p>Wording of question- (if they have already mentioned something positive) Tell me a bit more about the positive experiences.</p>

<p><b>How else had he developed when he was in reception with you?</b></p> <p>Interaction with other children- he knew which children he liked/ wanted to play with vs those who didn't.</p> <p>I can remember the photographs of him playing with other children.</p> <p>Never wanted him to 'not be a part'. Going on school trips was positive. Wanted him to have a role like the other children not a different role. Seeing the reaction in the parents felt really good.</p>	<p>R- Trying to focus her back on to reception year...Is this too leading?</p> <p>Considering the impact of the TEP role, it is difficult to avoid a temptation to explore this child specifically rather than focusing on the teacher's experiences.</p>	
<p><b>How did it feel when something went well?</b></p> <p>I don't think I can describe it. It was the best feeling in the world. Felt so proud and give you a sense of doing ok.</p> <p>As a teacher you are constantly observed, criticised and told that things need to be better but actually those moments make it feel like you are doing something right. Those are the bits I hold on to.</p>	<p><i>P- Really nice question to finish reflection on.</i></p>	
<p><b>SHOULD STAY WITH THE ABOVE REFLECTION FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE BEFORE MOVING ON TO THESE QUESTIONS</b></p>		
<p><b>Now we have reflected on these experiences, what would you share with fellow teachers who will be supporting children with ASD in mainstream reception classes?</b></p> <p>Relationships with parents are very important. It can be source of difficulty but it was also the best part/ most important things to keep openness/ consistency between home and school.</p> <p>Should think more about relationships with TAs. She wasn't</p>	<p><i>P- Really interesting question. Made me think about what went wrong.</i></p> <p>R- I wondered if this is exploring her experiences...Does this fit with IPA? +It is putting them in position of interpreter.</p> <p><i>P- It's almost like saying 'If you do it all over again, what would your ideal situation be? What would you do? I liked it.'</i></p>	

<p>included as much as she should have been. That was unfair and I can understand some defensiveness and her giving up as a result of that.</p> <p>Relationships with other adults- it's ok to share that you don't feel like you are the right thing/ you are struggling.</p> <p>People think of children with ASD as not being able to form relationships- I would want to dispel that myth because I feel his relationships were even more special.</p> <p>This mum was in debate about special school. I feel he was gaining so much from his relationships with other children. He was learning so much about how to cope and how to manage independently.</p> <p>The other children also got a lot from having him in the class in terms of understanding difference.</p>	<p>R- Pilot participant bought new information to this section i.e. effect on other children, inclusion, special school. Therefore, I feel I should have explored more before these questions.</p> <p>R interpretation- emphasis on relationships and thinking about wider systems.</p>	
<p>What more do you feel would be helpful in supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream?</p> <p>Flexibility in terms of what is expected- it helped that he started off in a smaller cohort of children, we were able to adapt the school day. Feel that you are in a position of 'that is what I have to do'</p> <p>A lot more coming together of people- only time all the network of professionals involved was at the annual review which is too late after a whole year of trying to work this child out. Each professional only had their own priorities in mind and had no consideration for how this would work in a classroom of 29 children</p>	<p><i>P- I liked this question.</i></p>	

<p>with varying needs. I don't thinking there is thought there just lots of expectations on teachers and TAs to do those things but no support or thought in terms of how that would play out.</p> <p>Whoever is part of the support for the child, needs to be fully on board with it. Needs to be flexibility with working hours and arrangements and opportunities for teachers and TAs to communicate. This is a good investment in the early days.</p>		
<p><b>Can you clarify what you mean by 'On board with it'?</b></p> <p>I think 'on the same page'. TA's understanding of ASD was less than mine and there were no opportunities for training.</p> <p>Different interpretations/ approach if you have different understandings.</p>	<p>R- can feel uncomfortable when you are asking someone to clarify something that seems obvious.</p>	

### **How was the whole experience of the interview for you?**

*Emotive, feelings of incompetence (when talking about challenges) and very positive/ proud feelings when thinking of the little boy.*

*Might want to think about timing:*

*End of school day- could be drained and find it difficult to switch off from planning.*

*End of school year- losing children and knowing what is coming.*

### **Were there any particular parts of the interview you found useful?**

*I found the end questions useful. I think when you are giving advice to someone you are really thinking about your own experience and what you would have liked and what you would have done differently.*

*As a teacher you don't get an opportunity to do that so that is really valuable.*

*The way it started was really good because it was really exploratory in terms of understanding where they were coming from in 'what is ASD' for them.*



*I think it could be quite an emotive topic- I think there is something about talking about children with SEN/ challenges can make you feel inadequate. The debriefing for them is important.*

**Do you feel there would be anything else that would be relevant to ask when exploring your experiences of supporting a child with ASD in their first year of mainstream school?**

*Participant Reflection- Could have got more into the systemic context/ ideas around inclusion but not sure how you could have got there.*

R- Don't want to guide but asking more 'what kind of support did you have with this?' when you are talking about positives. Perhaps it would work better to weave the support section in a bit more to get a fuller understanding of what created the positives/ challenges (social constructionism).

### **Interview skills**

**Is there enough time to answer fully?**

*P- I think you left lots of periods of silence which worked well to get me talking again. However, I'm not sure I would have felt comfortable/ kept thinking in the silences when I was still a teacher. May need some more prompting.*

**Was the schedule used flexibly?**

R- I think I could be more flexible with it now I have practised.

**Does the interviewer listen to what the participant says and follow it up?**

*P- Yes I think it was good to explore the phrases I used because that made me describe things in more detail and gave me the idea that you wanted me to say lots.*

**Are these follow ups open or leading?**

*P- I didn't feel led at any point.*

**Does the interviewer empathise with the participant in an appropriate manner?**

*P- I felt you were listening intently which made me comfortable to share difficult experiences. However, we have a prior relationship.*

### **Researcher's Overall Reflections**

#### **Consideration of the Pilot Participant's Role**

Pilot participant is detached from this role now so she has had the space to reflect on this experience from a different position.

I feel the TEP role was noticeable with the desire to emphasise inclusion and systemic thinking throughout the interview.

### **Practical Considerations**

Need to keep balance in making notes and listening.

Do I really need to make notes on points to return to? May need 1-2 words to prompt but I should try to stay with the flow of the conversation rather than focusing too much on specific words. Phrases which hold a lot of meaning will naturally stay in my memory.

Important to remember we have time and feel relaxed about that.

### **Did the interview schedule gather the information you require for analysis and research questions?**

Yes. However, I think I could have explored the experiences more before moving on to last two questions.

The interpretations I checked with the participant were suitable.

The process highlighted several of my own **pre-conceptions** which I need to be conscious of when conducting the interview/ analysis so it does not affect my reaction or follow up questions:

They may only talk about children that are most difficult? Could be linked to having a diagnosis of ASD at a very young age. Will I feel a slight sense of discomfort around this if they are focusing on the challenges because I am positive about the inclusion of children?

My first thoughts around the type of support they might think about were external support they would refer to so I need to be careful not to guide in this way.

In addition, my own role as TEP may create a temptation to interview in a way that explores systems around a particular child. Therefore, if the teacher decides to speak about a particular child, I need to be careful not to approach the interview as a data gathering/ problem solving consultation.

Keep in mind:

The emotional impact of being asked- Can you tell me about ANY positive experiences.

The need to fully explore the experience before moving on to the 'Moving Forward' questions.

## Appendices from Research Diary (RD)

### Appendix RD1 Extracts from the Planning Stages

#### Appendix RD1a. September 2015- Research Clusters

Local Authority priorities around over representation of SEN or poor results in KS2. Broad topics but I'm not excited by them yet. What can I do that I feel is really helpful? What hasn't already been done?

New SEN strategy is trying to push inclusion because there is an over-reliance on special schools.

Personal interest in ASD and mainstream education due to my experience of working for National Autistic Society.

Noticing the diagnosis process is not multi-agency so there seem to be a lot of diagnoses made through single meetings. Then the support afterwards and in the community is also being cut.

Interest in schools' reactions to children with ASD- particularly young children. It seems they are raised a lot at reviews which has surprised me.

Wondering how children with ASD are supported as they enter school.

Thinking about the changes to legislation and how that has affected view of inclusion.

Why are teachers feeling like they need to raise the young children with ASD?

What is missing for them that means there is a push for special schools from the beginning?

What is it that is making parents' apply for more EHCPs- just the change in legislation or dissatisfaction with school support? Would like to give parents a voice and could relate this to EHCP process for a particular group of children?

Not sure that addresses the over-representation of SEN in schools though.

Anecdotally I am not seeing lot of positivity about the inclusion of children with ASD even when they have only been in school a short time.

Need to take an idea back to Local Authority- worried they will reject an idea that is too niche but need them to understand my approach to research.

#### Appendix RD1b. September 2015- Generating Ideas in Local Authority

Senior EP encouraged to go with my interests.

SEN prefer me to focus on teachers/ school staff because they think they will provide insight they can do something with.

Planning to interview teachers around those with SEN- focus on children with ASD because SEN is too broad and I have a personal interest in ASD.

I want to focus on a small section so I am able to gain in-depth understanding within the time constraints. Year 6- has this been done as it is around transition and it is generally accepted that this is the reason for an increase in EHCPs at that stage. Secondary could be interesting as there is so much anxiety around children with ASD going there.

What I'd really like to look at is what is happening at the beginning of a child's school life- the early years team has been reduced so I wonder what that means for teachers now?

Looking into the research in the area shows a significant lack of literature focusing on mainstream education for young children with ASD. It is all around specific interventions and the majority is in the US which is a very different culture. I wonder why this is- because this age is not seen as challenging?

██████ PEP agreed I can focus on ASD, teachers and Early Years/ Reception/ Year 1.

### *Protocol Reflections*

#### **Appendix RD1c.**

##### **October 2015- First Research Supervision**

Need to do: ethics form, interview questions, information letters. Buy Larkin and Flower Book.

Consider researcher bias around inclusion- Richard pointed out that I speak like I am in favour of inclusion, I have to be aware of this and other pre-conceptions. Meeting with other trainees using IPA to establish pre-conceptions that I hold to support the process of bracketing researcher bias: I don't know what it is like to be a teacher.

I think teaching reception is very different to other years.

Something around TAs taking responsibility for children with ASD.

It must be hard to have children with ASD in the unstructured environment of reception.

I feel sad when people give up on very young children with ASD being kept in mainstream school.

How much do the teachers know about a child arriving if the early years team no longer exists.

Is there a tendency for teachers to be negative when they are asked about experiences?

I think children with ASD are great and I love seeing how they view the world. Teachers are trying to support many different children in lots of ways.

Also consider bias around the desires of the PEP and Local Authority. Will I want to produce something that makes the Local Authority services look good? It seems their motivation is to gain insight.

IPA interviews are not the same as consultation. The interviews are a process of constant clarification. I am worried I will not be able to do this correctly but that ties into my general feeling about a lot of things on the course. Consideration of other research methods- both narrative and thematic analysis could work. Thematic analysis gives you the opportunity to say 'I don't believe what they said' and interpret what you think they meant. IPA is more exploring, accepting + relating that to something. I like this idea more because I don't think it is my place to question the perspectives the teachers share of their experiences. Their constructions are important.

Issue of the word 'transferability'- can't generalise but may be APPLICABLE to other settings.

#### *Working out recruitment process*

Where should interviews take place- Inside school. WHY? Because it is convenient and comfortable for participants and they are able to use contextual information from their classroom to cue them into experiences. But outside school would protect them from pressure of the head teacher knowing if they participate or not.

#### *Completing Ethics Form*

#### **Appendix RD1d.**

#### **December 2015- Creating Research/ Interview Questions**

Reconsidered interview questions- do I want to push towards inclusion? Am I following my own thoughts too much e.g. assumptions that knowledge will affect teachers' approach to children. Why am I so scared of leaving it open for the teachers to bring their information- that is exactly what I wanted to

do initially because I don't necessarily feel teachers have the chance to just give their full experience.

*What do I really want to know? How will I access this information through the interviews?*

Consideration/ Amendments to interview questions. Text that is crossed out indicates deleted questions/ prompts following discussion in supervision

### **Setting the scene:**

Stop worrying about it being leading- it is a good starter and suggested in ethics.

Where I am trying to link initial understanding of ASD and the teacher's approach- possible research bias.

**What were your initial thoughts when you heard you would have a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in your class?**

~~Additional prompts What was your understanding of ASD beforehand? How did you feel at the time? What and who was involved in the preparation for this?~~

### **Challenges:**

Rationale of asking about negatives first is that this is the natural way the human brain works so it is expected that this will go better with the flow of the discussion.

**Can you describe any issues or challenges that you encountered in supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream reception classroom? (How did you cope with these challenges?)**

### **Support:**

Moved support before positives rather than after because it feels that it would link better to the challenges that are fresh in mind and help the interview finish on a positive.

~~What support systems and resources did you utilise to support a child with ASD in class?~~ There are two questions here about both 1) systems and 2) resources. This is also making an assumption that there was support. What does system mean to the participant?

**Were you able to access any support? (What form did that take?)**

**Positives:**

Can you describe what went well? Reconsidering wording? Can you describe the positive experiences you had in supporting a child with ASD in mainstream? OR Can you describe experiences you enjoyed about supporting a child with ASD in a mainstream class?

~~Can you describe how you encouraged the inclusion of a child with ASD in your class?~~ What does inclusion mean to that staff member? There are many areas of inclusion. Do I feel like I need to explicitly make reference to inclusion because of the underlying aim of the LA?. After consideration, I would like to stick with the broad experiences of what the teachers bring rather than guiding down the use of the word inclusion and thoughts about particular areas that may be expected to be difficult when including a child with ASD in mainstream.

**Going forward:**

Now we have reflected on these experiences, what would you share with fellow teachers who will be supporting children with ASD in reception?

What more do you feel would be helpful in supporting children with ASD in their first year of mainstream?

Thoughts that come to mind are that they are going to ask for more staff or more specialists to come in.

**Appendix RD2 Example Interview Reflections**

## T2 Interview Reflections

Some awkwardness in this dynamic. On the way to the classroom, she mentioned "I hope I can help" and I reassured her that I was interested in her personal experiences and therefore she couldn't give any wrong answers. Immediately, she said "Oh, I'm not very good at talking about myself". She asked if it was okay if her TA stayed in the room to complete her jobs and my answer (not really ideal) created more uncomfortable feelings as I had to reiterate that it was important that she was able to talk openly about her personal experiences. This made me feel guilty and question whether I should have done more in organising the interviews. I then felt uncomfortable to ask clarifying questions, like when I asked her to explain more I was delving too deep. I didn't feel I was really able to access her emotional experiences or encourage her interpretation. Left feeling disappointed.

She seemed like she wanted the interruptions (3), it felt like it brought her some relief.

Something about the difference in her role (as a very experienced/ Early Years lead) - I got the idea that she did not expect to be talking about her own experiences, rather giving advice/ professional opinion so maybe that is what she does on a daily basis.

Part of me struggled with her focus on getting children out to special schools. I felt it was sad that the first positive that came to mind was getting a child into special. I had to hold back from my urge to question this opinion because I didn't want my personal views to affect what she was trying to express.

The anxiety and guilt I felt meant I was particularly concerned not to leave her with any residual difficult feelings. I was reassured by her relaxed persona when I stopped recording and began the debriefing procedure. She also suggested that I should do the interview with the other teachers in school as she felt they would be open to that. This gave me the sensation that it wasn't a negative experience for her and I wondered whether my interpretation of her persona was skewed due to my feelings.



### **T3 Interview Reflections**

Reason why she kept trying to rearrange because of her son and wanting to get her voice heard in that way? I had some panic that I would not be able to use her account because she began talking a lot about her son. However, as it went on, I was able to take her back to her experience as a class teacher. I enjoyed her passion and empathy for children with ASD.

She was very open about the emotional experiences (depression) she faced. Her connection with the child made her extremely passionate.

Spoke about different experiences in different schools and how the support affected her.

Really emphasised the experiences with parents- this could be related to her experience being a mother of a child with ASD.

This makes me wonder how much the other teachers' personal life affected their experiences.

### **Appendix RD3**

#### **November 2016- Starting analysis**

Feeling really anxious about starting the analysis- keep reading forums wondering if I'm going to do it right and that seems to be putting me off starting. What if I figure out that my interviews are not useful?? Would it be easier to focus on the literature review for now? - PUTTING IT OFF

I'm thinking more and more as I read about analysis that my transcripts just talk about on the surface ASD experiences rather than more personal ones for the teachers- PANIC.

#### **Exploratory comments**

After writing out all the notes from Smith et al. (2009) to have a clear idea of what the different comments could mean in front of me, I thought I understood what I needed to do.

But I'm experiencing confusion over where a linguistic note should be. Reflection in supervision highlighted that this is linked to my personal fear of not 'being good at English' and doubting whether I can analyse language at such a minute

level. Reassurance over identifying phrases that seem to say something important. Trust my instincts!

So now I feel better about linguistic comments, I think I might be missing out descriptive comments because I'm jumping to conceptual comments all the time. Why am I jumping to conceptual comments? In my nature (professional role) to quickly analyse information on the spot?

Thought about keeping a separate record of my interpretative thoughts on a different page but I think this is a fear of making conceptual comments and putting my own interpretation into the process.

Am I writing too much in comments because I can't keep it in line with the transcript?

Stuck very early on (on the first few pages) and worried that if I move on too quickly, I'll miss something/ get it wrong. Also frustrated that if I can't move on then I will never get anywhere.

In addition to the above concerns about getting to grips with the process of initial noting, I am concerned that I'm following one particular aspect because of my own interest. I seem to be focusing on guilt in the conceptual comments- doubt over whether this is linked with the guilt I experienced during this interview. Discussed this in supervision and was able to give a rationale directly from the transcript why guilt was a relevant comment to include.

Feel like every time I look back onto it, I'm analysing in a different way. Maybe I need this space away to see everything more clearly?

Get nervous when I get less comments on a page. Some pages just seem a bit boring- like not much is being said. I don't want to make too much out of something that isn't overly important but I also don't want to miss anything.

## **Appendix RD4**

### **January 2017- Moving to Group Level of Analysis**

I am finding it very hard to move on to the group level. This is why I wanted to go to superordinate level so I could stay at the individual level.

I feel anxious. Fear of not being able to hold on to the individual's experience when information starts to come together? Perhaps returning to that doubt of not being able to do the analysis 'right' as I move on to the next level.

But I know I have to create a broad understanding across the teachers and I do have an interest in what will come out of this.

## **Appendix RD5**

### **Collecting Quotes from Emergent Themes Led to Re-arrangement of Themes**

I think I'm ready to start writing so I am going to get quotes from the transcripts. I was going to do this as I went along but I think this was a better process because it helps to review my decisions.

It's exciting to return to the individual transcripts but now I'm questioning some of the groupings in the analysis. I'm recognising that I may have misinterpreted the titles of the emergent themes because the associated parts of the transcripts actually fit better in other subordinate themes.

Firstly, I thought it is impossible to separate the emergent themes under 'Negative Emotional Experience' from aspects in other themes:

Anxiety links to not knowing/ being prepared.

Stress links to various other themes so I need to separate that out to demonstrate that- Should have given longer emergent theme titles to make it clearer but I think I chose one word emotion titles to make it hard hitting and perhaps to show the numeration of how stress/ frustration reoccurred.

Now I'm noticing that actually 'Positive Emotional Experience' and 'Self Development' can't really stand alone either because it is through specific experiences of understanding/ connecting with the child where they get those feelings.

I really wanted an 'Effect on Self' theme because I felt that was important- this highlights my bias of focusing on emphasising the psychological/ emotional experiences of the teacher. These were the bits where I felt the teachers were really sharing an in depth account but I'm realising that by separating them from the rest of the themes, I've gone too far into dividing it into parts. The emotional/ psychological experiences only make sense when connected to the actual situation they were describing so I need to go back to the whole again- hermeneutic circle.

## Appendix RD6- Restructuring Second Overarching Theme

### Themes around Support

'Working with other staff to support' and 'Positives of a team'- These are kind of the same aspect from different angles because the team are other staff. Why am I scared about naming that the 'Working with other staff to support' aspects as difficult because lots of the emergent themes demonstrate this? I know from my professional experience, I hold assumptions around TAs/ one-to-ones being solely responsible for children. The challenges of T1 around working with TAs really resonated with me because I know TAs can have a lack of training. So I am worried if I focus on this, then I am following my own understanding. Reflection in supervision helped to identify that it is important to illustrate the divergence in the teachers' experiences of working with TAs as this was something that seemed to be a key relationship for all of them.

Parents should be their own separate superordinate theme because this was an important external aspect that affects the teachers.

'What is valued as supportive' and 'Support needs'- am I just trying to answer the second research question directly? When I look at 'Support needs' there is nothing unique about it and several of the themes can go elsewhere e.g. Position in school system/ Positives of a team.

### Themes around the Early Years

This feels like it deserves to be its own superordinate theme because it is something more than just being a part in the school system- there is something specific about reception. I am wary of this because I'm questioning whether I

just want to emphasise this because my research was shaped around the importance of Early Years. However, when I review the themes/ quotes it is clear there is something significant about this aspect of the experience.

The idea of being undervalued in Early Years/ Foundation Stage comes out strongly from T1 and T6 who were very passionate and open in their accounts. Can I make this a subtheme even though it is only two of the teachers? Research supervision highlighted that as long as I show who contributed to each theme I should trust my analysis process and this was a significant aspect that held in my mind after the interviews.

I am quite surprised by some of the messages coming through around the positive aspects of the reception environment and inclusion. This goes against what I have heard from teachers in consultations- but perhaps this is because I only go in for difficult situations? There are some references to the lack of structure in a play based curriculum, which I expected, but this is not actually portrayed as a challenge- So I need to pull away from this pre-conception.

## **Appendix RD7**

### **Decisions around analysis write up**

I need to think about what is really important to include in the narrative now. It is hard to eliminate any themes because I want to portray everything the teachers said.

I am contemplating the themes that show their understanding/ thoughts on ASD in terms of particular traits. This wasn't really focused on by the teachers or something that became a strong group theme (more just a response to the first question). I feel the more important message that is coming through is around the uniqueness/ individuality of each child with ASD so this should be the opening theme.

I recognise that half of the teachers had themes that related to outside support systems but this seems less significant than what was happening inside the school. This contradicts my assumptions because I thought they would rely

more on external agencies for the answers. I will focus the narrative around the different aspects of working within the school system.

Point from research supervisor that I should reconsider the titles of the themes so they reflect the accounts more closely. I have been worrying about titles of themes hoping that they encapsulate what is being said.

As I continue writing, I realise the value of hearing the participants' voice so I'm going to attempt to use their words directly to help the reader enter their worlds e.g.

- Instead of 'thinking of other children' I will change the title to 'struggle to juggle needs' to reflect the psychological balancing act that the teachers portrayed in their accounts.
- Instead of 'Being part of the class' I'm going to change it to 'Togetherness is valued' to portray what it means to the teacher to have the child as part of the class.

Edits from research supervisor around providing more structure and clarity about what it is I'm suggesting. Perhaps I had kept it vague due to concern around my interpretations but when I look back at the process I have been through I recognise that I have been rigorous in the analysis.

As I'm trying to re-write/ change the structure to provide a more coherent picture of the themes and interpretation, I'm realising how much they all really connect. Perhaps that's why I didn't want to use lots of subtitles initially- because I didn't want to hinder the overarching message.

It is tricky to choose the quotes to use. I feel like some of the teachers give a stronger/ clearer description in their quotes but I also want to allow all of the voices to be heard.

## Appendices A: Key

Colours allocated to teachers	Exploratory comments	Theme information
T1	Initial reflective comments	() brackets show numeration
T2	Descriptive comments	<del>Strikethrough</del> —shows themes deleted from sections
T3	Linguistic comments	<b>Bold</b> shows themes add to sections
T4	Conceptual comments	
T5		
T6		

## Appendix A1: Reflective Comments made when listening and checking transcription

	Original Transcript	Reflections
	<p>I: So we'll just start with, what is your understanding of Autism Spectrum disorder?</p> <p>T1: Um, er [long pause] to me from my perspective it's a person-- I won't say a child 'cause obviously adults as well who sees the world very differently to how normal person would. Not that you wanna use that word 'normal' because that's not you know I think, I think everybody's is on the A-S-D spectrum really, I know I am. But it's somebody who stereotypically lacks a bit of order, organisation but p- people quite often think-- I find people quite often think that's because they're autistic, it is because they're autistic but they like that order and organisation 'cause they don't understand the world around them so it's about-- We're trying to fit them into our world and actually they don't understand they've got their own view on it. They've very little emotional understanding.</p> <p>Um, from my experience um very little ability to understand their own emotions but then again I work with 4-year olds so it's hard to to know-- It's not, they are significantly behind the other children but-- Um, challenging [long pause] that actually is a really hard question. It actually is a challenging question because when you-- when you work with autistic children, you just work with them every day and you just see them as-- To me my children are just children. They're not autistic children they're just-- And I just have to do things slightly different for them. But from my perspective they-- I suppose I had the stereotypical</p>	<p>Panic from the question- worried about giving the wrong answer? I felt guilty at this point.</p> <p>Shared this aspect of her identity very quickly- I know I am on the ASD spectrum. Surprised at how comfortable she seemed with me.</p> <p>I was touched by her sense of empathy for the children. This really related to how I feel about the need to help.</p> <p>WOW- she gave a lot very quickly- how much organisation is in this?</p> <p>I wrote down to ask her about significantly behind and I wonder if this then prompted her to hesitate and think about the tone of her answer.</p>



	<p>view when I first started, of routines, lack of empathy, very little understanding but that's obviously changed [chuckles] and now I you know, having worked with these children, they are the most wonderful children. They just see the world a little bit differently.</p> <p><b>I:</b> And can I just ask what you mean by 'significantly behind'?</p> <p><b>T1:</b> So they're significant -- But in terms of their um academic development it's because we er early years we obviously have the 17 areas so we have to assess in personal social emotional development um and they are significantly behind so having those conversations about emotions and all those things. So that was actually a really difficult question I don't feel I have answered that at all [laughs].</p> <p><b>I:</b> You've kind of touched on this already um can you tell me about the time where you first found out that you were gonna have a child with A-S-D in your class?</p> <p><b>T1:</b> I was stressed, worried, nervous, um when we first- - Um, I have three autistic children this year. When I first was told about my class there was only one that I was told about in the list um and I met mum and the picture she gave me of that child was quite different to the child that arrived. So I'd already was thinking, "I've got to spend all my time with this child," and-- and I was-- I was worried. I was worried about all the other children as well 'cause I was worried about the attention I would have to give to the autistic child and then I got three [laughs]. But um yeah it was-- I didn't- I didn't know, I didn't know how to-- What I had to do, I didn't know-- Nobody could really give me an answer because it's early years. Obviously the EP has been in</p>	<p>Again felt guilty asking this question.</p> <p>What does this term mean to me- was I offended by it?</p> <p>Felt uncomfortable- felt I had made her uncomfortable and didn't want to probe further. Desire to reassure but unsure of whether I was 'allowed'.</p> <p>Feeling of excitement that she was sharing all of these emotions straight away.</p> <p>I'm glad she was reflecting on her experience at the end of the year rather than current because I would have wanted to help.</p> <p>Compensating due to knowing my role?</p> <p>Sharing her feeling of isolation and frustration- but also aware that perhaps that was my pre-assumption so I was quickly engaged by this topic.</p>
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	<p>and giving me some but they're not here all the time. Um you know, our the SENCO at the time couldn't really give me an answer. She didn't really know how to because she worked upper years so she didn't know from this level. She said it's quite rare but I think, well it can't be that rare 'cause if you've got children with autism in the upper years they obviously had it in reception.</p> <p>Yeah, I felt alone, definitely alone, definitely lonely um partly 'cause I was out of this room but largely because every time I asked a question, "Can you help me?" There wasn't really much of a response. And it wasn't until I went and I said to the head, "I can't. This is unmanageable," that something started to move along. So yeah it was-- I was, I was terrified, if I'm honest I was really, really-- I'm not now and I've loved this year but I was really, really scared 'cause I didn't wanna get it wrong for those children and everybody says you know-- I think autism gets a bad-- bad rep almost if I'm honest because everybody else made me feel like, "ooh you're gonna have the toughest year." But they couldn't tell me--</p> <p><b>I:</b> And who were those people?</p> <p><b>T1:</b> Just other teachers, other you know, other teachers, friends that are teachers you know, everybody's got the-- Yeah.</p> <p><b>I:</b> And what kind of thoughts did you have?</p> <p><b>T1:</b> Um, "How am I going to do?" is probably the main line of thought. At first, that very first term I would say, "How am I going to do this? How am I going to make sure that child gets exactly what they need and all my other children get exactly what they need? How is that</p>	<p>Really appreciating her honesty and realising how hard this might have been to share at the beginning of the year when she was first experiencing this.</p> <p>I often have a fear of getting it wrong. I expected the fear 'reputation' of ASD.</p> <p>Felt the need to quickly jump in to understand who was making her feel in this way. Perhaps I felt defensive for her and the children and wanted to know who these people were saying negative things.</p> <p>Should have explored this more- think I made an assumption based on my own thoughts/ feelings linking so much to hers. Was also anxious to make sure I asked the 'right' questions as first interview.</p> <p>Theme coming to mind around 'doubt'/ questions- related closely to the pilot study so perhaps I expected this answer/ was happy that this was shared.</p> <p>Why did I interrupt with this? Could have left more time? My mind in systemic consultation?</p> <p>I feel I probably could have asked this question in a much more flexible way as T1 already seemed relaxed with me. Worried this interfered with the flow a bit.</p>
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	<p>going to happen?" It just so it did, didn't it [laughter]? Um, so and, "How can I make sure they make the best progress possible for them?" So it was it was how it wasn't necessarily woah is was me it was how and who can I ask? There were a lot of questions I had so many questions when I first started with the autism.</p> <p><b>I:</b> Can you describe any issues or challenges that you encountered in supporting children with A-S-D in your class?</p> <p><b>T1:</b> Um, routine has been quite challenging down in F-S foundation stage because things are so-- things are quite flexible down here. So we-- so today we practice for for sports day. That's completely out of routine so obviously we manage that but it's that flexibility down here. Um, keeping up with all-- When people did start to tell me what you know, what to do to help and support, keeping up with everything that everyone was telling me 'cause everybody had different ideas and everyone -- Make this, do this, do this and it was very challenging to know where to go with it. Um, supporting 'cause what-- Can I use the child's name?</p> <p><b>I:</b> Mm-hmm.</p> <p><b>T1:</b> Yeah, 'cause Marcus obviously has a one-to-one. So supporting the one-to-one 'cause she was-- She'd never worked with autistic children before um that was-- that was quite a challenge. There's been a lot of change this year so we've changed classrooms. Marcus's changed one-to-one twice, he changed it immediately yesterday. Yesterday morning I came to school and he's one-to-one was changed again. So that's obviously a challenge. Um,</p>	<p>Do I ever do this to teachers in my TEP role? Difficult to stay with her experience and not try to help her work it out. However, would have been a lot more difficult if she was still going through it.</p> <p>Am I assuming what challenge means to her? My assumptions about one-to-one is giving knowledge and providing clear guidelines but also difficulties in relationships. Also thinking about research around 1:1 not being the best option.</p>
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## Appendix A2: Example Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes- T1

Key of Transcription			
		-pause --longer pause (long pause)- Significantly long pause	
		Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	1	I: So we'll just start with, what is your	
	2	understanding of Autism Spectrum	
	3	disorder?	Difficulty in articulating thoughts (ong pause)?
	4	T1: Um, er [long pause] to me from my	
	5	perspective it's a person-- I won't say a	'obviously adults' Why is it important to explain there are adults as well? Showing her knowledge or linking to personal experiences of adults with ASD?
	6	child 'cause obviously adults as well who	
	7	sees the world very differently to how	Wanting to qualify her use of the word 'normal' but struggling. Concerned at her use of the word 'normal'. Wonder if this provoked feelings of guilt in her?
Relating to children with autism- empathy.	8	normal person would. Not that you wanna	
	9	use that word 'normal' because that's not	
	10	you know I think, I think everybody's is on	
	11	the ASD spectrum really, I know I am. But	Strong personalised statement 'I know I am'. Identifying self as having ASD. What does this mean to her? How does this perception of herself affect the way she understands the phenomena?
	12	it's somebody who stereotypically lacks a	
	13	bit of order, organization but p- people	Reluctantly explaining other's views (stutter, hesitation). Separating herself from other 'people'. It is important to explain a need for empathy for ASD and emphasise that she has a unique understanding of that.
	14	quite often think-- I find people quite often	'because they're autistic'
	15	think that's because they're autistic, it is	
Respect their perspective of the world.	16	because they're autistic but they like that	
	17	order and organisation 'cause they don't	Emphasising lack of understanding in those with ASD.
	18	understand the world around them so it's	Pauses (--) before giving a definitive statement of what she really thinks and putting herself back into the collective (We're)- where does she see herself? Imposing 'our world' or actually being imposed upon? 'trying to fit them into our world' 'they've got their own view on it'. Respects their perspective?
	19	about-- We're trying to fit them into our	
Emotional understanding is poor.	20	world and actually they don't understand	
	21	they've got their own view on it. They've	
	22	very little emotional understanding.	
	23	Um, from my experience um very little	Emotional understanding poor.
	24	ability to understand their own emotions	
	25	but then again I work with 4-year olds so	

Sees the child, not the autism.	26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37	it's hard to to know-- It's not, they are significantly behind the other children but-- - Um, challenging [long pause] that actually is a really hard question. It actually is a challenging question because when you-- when you work with autistic children, you just work with them every day and you just see them as-- To me my children are just children. They're not autistic children they're just-- And I just have to do things slightly different for them. But from my perspective they-- I suppose I had the stereotypical view when I first started, of routines, lack of empathy, very little understanding but that's obviously changed [chuckles] and now I you know, having worked with these children, they are the most wonderful children. They just see the world a little bit differently.	There is something specific about working with 4 year old which make it difficult to understand. Hesitating (um and pauses). Fear of giving the wrong perspective on ASD? Long pause- struggling to continue. Difficulty in defining ASD.
Positive reflections on her developing perspective.	38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45	I: And can I just ask what you mean by 'significantly behind'?	'Challenging' description of both the children and the experience of trying to answer the question? What is this word actually saying?  Her perspective of the children with autism- see them as children. 'My children' possessive. Strong attachment to children. 'They're just --' no words to explain. 'not autistic children' Take the label away. Repetition of 'just' 'just children', I 'just'. No more than children. Perhaps protective of 'her children' don't want them to be seen as different.  'Stereotypical' Reflecting on her views on ASD when she first started. [Chuckles] laughing in embarrassment of her previous self. Recognition of development in herself. 'obviously changed' I wonder how/ when this perception changed and if it is linked to her own view of herself. Is she is only reflecting on this for the first time now? 'most wonderful' Now positive views on children with ASD 'Just see the world a little bit differently'
Emotional understanding is poor.	46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57	T1: So they're significant -- But in terms of their um academic development it's because we er early years we obviously have the 17 areas so we have to assess in personal social emotional development um and they are significantly behind so having those conversations about emotions and all those things. So that was actually a really difficult question I don't feel I have answered that at all [laughs].	Clarification question  Pauses --, but, um 'obviously'- real difficulty in explaining what was meant by this phrase. Perhaps some guilt for using the term? Or feeling like she is being tested by q? 'We' as teachers? 'have to assess' Assessment. Discomfort with the assessment of children with ASD- put on her in the teacher role?  ASD children are behind when talking about emotions/ social things. 'all those things' hard to define

Stress	58 59 60 61	I: You've kind of touched on this already um can you tell me about the time where you first found out that you were gonna have a child with ASD in your class?	Nervous laugh. Concerned that she did not answer the question. Constant feeling of being assessed linked to teacher role?
Anxiety raised by others.	62 63 64 65 66 67	T1: I was stressed, worried, nervous, um when we first-- Um, I have three autistic children this year. When I first was told about my class there was only one that I was told about in the list um and I met mum and the picture she gave me of that child was quite different to the child that arrived. So I'd already was thinking, "I've got to spend all my time with this child," and-- and I was-- I was worried. I was	Emotions (worried/ stresses) associated with anticipating ASD child in class.  'Was told' done to? Unexpected arrival of children with ASD. She is lacking control/ information from the higher power and this causes stress? 'only one' that would have been ok?
Not knowing.	70 71 72 73	worried about all the other children as well 'cause I was worried about the attention I would have to give to the autistic child and then I got three [laughs]. But um yeah it was-- I didn't- I didn't know, I didn't know how to-- What I had to do, I didn't know-- Nobody could really give me an answer because it's early years. Obviously the EP has been in and giving me some but they're not here all the time. Um you know, our the SENCO at the time couldn't really give me an answer. She didn't really know how to because she worked upper years so she didn't know from this level. she said it's quite rare but I think, well it can't be that rare 'cause if you've got children with autism in the upper years they obviously had it in reception.	Speaking to parent of child with autism before arrival. Sharing self-thoughts – catastrophising. Pausing, hesitation- reliving the stress/ worry experienced. Unreasoned thinking associated with nervousness before child with autism entered the class.
Unique aspects to the early years challenge.	74 75 76 77 78 79		Worried about other children. Fear of having to give too much of herself but still not giving enough to all the children.  'I got three' [laughs] - sense of hysterical (laugh instead of cry). How did she get, who gave her three. Sense of why her? Reiterating 'I didn't' real sense of pressure on self. Feeling of not knowing caused fear/worry. Her own self- worth associated with knowing about autism?
No answers Frustration.	80 81 82 83 84 85		'Nobody' Feeling of isolation in early years. Early years is difficult- no one knows.  'They're not here all the time' Others come and go, she's stuck there? It's the constant nature of the experience. She wants someone to hold her hand?
Isolation.	86 87 88 89		'couldn't really give me an answer' Lack of support/ knowledge. Sense that there is no knowledge anywhere about autism in early years so nowhere to go. Prevalence of autism in reception perceived to be low. 'it can't be that rare' Frustration at response

Plea for help.	90 91 92 93 94	Yeah, I felt alone, definitely alone, definitely lonely um partly 'cause I was out of this room but largely because every time I asked a question, "Can you help me?" There wasn't really much of a response. And it wasn't until I went and I	'obviously had it in reception' it's lifelong. Frustration that people aren't paying attention to children with autism in reception? Moving beyond her feelings of finding out to reflection on whole emotional experience Repetition of 'definitely alone, lonely' emphasizes this. Feelings of isolation 'I was out of this room' Importance of classroom-security in environment.
Fear at the beginning.	95 96 97 98 99	said to the head, "I can't. This is unmanageable," that something started to move along. So yeah it was-- I was, I was terrified, if I'm honest I was really, really--	'much of a response' lack of support. What was she asking for? Expectations. What sense does she make of different types of responses that leads her to say this? 'I can't' 'unmanageable' Asking for help. Desperation and depression associated with isolation 'Move along' journey started after a traumatic beginning?
Anxiety raised by others	100 101 102 103 104 105 106 107 108	I'm not now and I've loved this year but I was really, really scared 'cause I didn't wanna get it wrong for those children and everybody says you know-- I think autism gets a bad-- bad rep almost if I'm honest because everybody else made me feel like, "ooh you're gonna have the toughest year." But they couldn't tell me [long pause]	Stuttering- reluctant to show weakness and then 'terrified' 'really really' emphasising fear. Fear/ panic at the beginning.  'get it wrong'. Is there a right/ wrong for her or a good enough? Is this my worry? 'you know'—assuming I know. Assumptions around shared stereotypes- everyone thinks the negative. 'bad rep' Negative expectations associated with autism label. Speaking about autism as a thing outside of a child? 'If I'm honest' doesn't feel she can always be honest? 'everybody else' overwhelming. Negative views from others. Where does she place herself in these views- doesn't fit with everybody else? 'couldn't tell me [long pause]' frustration. Mystery around what she wanted to be told/ what there she wants to know to make her feel ok?
Questioning self.	109 110 111 112 113 114 115 116 117	I: And who were those people? T1: Just other teachers, other you know, other teachers, friends that are teachers you know, everybody's got the-- Yeah. I: And what kind of thoughts did you have? T1: Um, "How am I going to do?" is probably the main line of thought. At first, that very first term I would say, "How am I going to do this? How am I going to make sure that child gets exactly what they need and all my other children get exactly what they need? How is that going to happen?"	'you know' x 2 assumptions that I would answer this question from my own personal knowledge of who would say that she would have a tough year. 'Everybody's got the—Yeah' reluctance to share what everyone has. So what hasn't she got then- missing a part? She becomes the other away from everyone else.  Recalling all the doubts in her mind at the beginning. How? How? So many questions. 'I' answers all on her. 'make sure'
Not knowing.	118 119 120 121	and all my other children get exactly what they need? How is that going to happen?" It just so it did, didn't it [laughter]? Um, so	'gets exactly' Searching for something very specific. Questioning how to meet needs in class.

Unique aspects to the early years autism challenge.	122 123 124 125 126 127 128 129 130 131 132	and, "How can I make sure they make the best progress possible for them?" So it was it was how it wasn't necessarily woah is was me it was how and who can I ask? There were a lot of questions I had so many questions when I first started with the autism. <b>I:</b> Can you describe any issues or challenges that you encountered in supporting children with ASD in your class?	It just so it did, didn't it [laughter]? Fleeting celebration of success. No appreciation of her role/ effort in making it happen. Wanting the best for the children with ASD. 'best progress possible for them' High but personalised/unique expectations. High expectations of herself- pressure to create progress? 'It wasn't necessarily woah is was me' Noting no self-pity. Is it okay to feel sympathy for herself/ look after herself? Repeat 'questions' emphasise the unknowing. Reflecting on questions she had at the start- how and who. The start was a time of anxiety/ not knowing. 'the autism' THE- big scary thing? This idea of autism being separate from the child again.
Trying everything.	133 134 135 136 137 138	<b>T1:</b> Um, routine has been quite challenging down in F-S foundation stage because things are so-- things are quite flexible down here. So we-- so today we practice for for sports day. That's completely out of routine so obviously we	The flexibility in reception was a challenge 'Down' 'down here' at the bottom? Sense of not being valued in foundation stage? But also that it is very separate/ different to the rest of the school.
Confusion.	139 140 141 142 143 144	manage that but it's that flexibility down here. Um, keeping up with all-- When people did start to tell me what you know, what to do to help and support, keeping up with everything that everyone was telling me 'cause everybody had different ideas	Managing being out of routine. 'We' team 'Manage' just getting by? 'Keeping up' x 2 There is always a feeling of being behind/ rushing? 'tell me' Again being done to
Challenge working with one-to-one.	145 146 147 148 149	and everyone -- Make this, do this, do this and it was very challenging to know where to go with it. Um, supporting 'cause what- Can I use the child's name? <b>I:</b> Mm-hmm.	Emphasis on EVERY 'everything', 'everyone', 'everybody'. Managing various guidance. It is overwhelming to take on all the information around supporting children with autism. 'Make this, do this' commands. She becomes the student with authority. teachers- no scaffolding or discussion. 'where to go with it' Confusion over how to use the advice. No empowerment through guidance- left feeling lost.
Change outside her control.	150 151 152 153	<b>T1:</b> Yeah, 'cause Marcus obviously has a one-to-one. So supporting the one-to-one 'cause she was-- She'd never worked with autistic children before um that was-- that	Working with a one-to-one. 'supporting' Another person to look after? Lack of experience of one-to-one.



Dedicated to inclusion.	154 155 156 157	was quite a challenge. There's been a lot of change this year so we've changed classrooms. Marcus's changed one-to-one twice, he changed it immediately	Pauses – reluctance to touch on the 'challenge' with the one to one. 'quite a challenge' Passive aggressive feelings towards one-to-one situation? Changes the subject to change. Feels safer to talk about the one-to-one from a different angle- away from the personal.
Managing parent's expectations.	158 159 160 161 162 163 164 165 166 167 168 169 170 171	yesterday. Yesterday morning I came to school and his one-to-one was changed again. So that's obviously a challenge. Um, working with mums' been quite challenging 'cause mum um, can be quite needy. Um I like- I- I believe in inclusion and I believe that the best for-- for all of my autistic children is to see them as children. Um, so when for example transition we've obviously put extra in place for Marcus, um to support in like photographs and he's seen his new teacher and he went up and met her before everybody else and I've spent time with him together. Um, but we didn't make a big deal out of that but mum wanted to.	'changed it immediately' Unexpected change of one-to-one for her and the child. Change enforced without a reason- generate feelings of anger? 'Changed Again' regular thing. 'Obviously a challenge'. Avoidance of talking about who is making the changes that are causing challenges? Or an assumption I know? This particular Mum is a challenge 'needy' Another pull for help? Does she perceive neediness as a negative/ weakness? Hesitation to share personal thoughts 'I-I' I believe' 'all of my' strong attachment to children in her class. 'see them as children' as oppose to? Inclusive beliefs for children with ASD Transition support for a child with ASD 'We've'- team 'extra in' giving more. Children with ASD need more support with transition.
Sees the child, not the autism	172 173 174 175	So that's been a challenge because to me Marcus is one of my 30, yes he does have these extra things but he's also one of my children and part of [name of class] class and he'll be part of his next class and he doesn't need this label as-- It's been quite a challenge to remove that label I think and not have him seen as just an autistic child.	'Before everyone else'- comes first. Friction between giving more, putting child with ASD first but also treating them the same. 'big deal' too much? She had different view to mum about how child with ASD should be treated. Putting her views before mum for the sake of the child/ class? 'one of my 30' desire for the equality and a family feeling. Wanting to make sure he is part of the class
Challenging behaviour	176 177 178 179 180	Um, behavior's been challenging at the start of the year, behavior was challenging particularly with, um I mean Lewis but the	Repeat 'Part of' class- fitting in? It's important to be part of something? Uncomfortable feelings about label- challenge overcoming this. Different to the previous comments around 'the autism'. Opening up to share true feelings about the label as she begins to relive experiences. 'remove that label'
Emotionally draining	181 182 183 184 185	Um, behavior's been challenging at the start of the year, behavior was challenging particularly with, um I mean Lewis but the	'Just an autistic child' What is her understanding of what this means to others? Behaviour was challenging at the start 'start' beginning is the hardest bit 'But the diagnosis—' difficult to talk about this.

Tired	186	diagnosis-- but he was quite a challenge.	
	187	Bethany she can sometimes hurt herself	
Constant needs.	188	when she becomes frustrated um, and	Experience of a child with autism hurting herself through frustration. 'Emotionally for me personally' Emotional effect on her
	189	emotionally for me personally what I found	
	190	really challenging is the tiredness and the	Tiredness
	191	emotion because you just-- You get so	'Emotion because you just--' difficult to talk about 'wrapped up in this world' 'everything to you' Extremely invested- like parenting and it is draining.
	192	wrapped up in this world of these children	
	193	are everything to you, you don't	
	194	necessarily stop to say actually, "Yes I can	Reflectively questioning self. She recognises the need for help for herself on reflection. When did she see this? During the interview?
	195	help that child but how am I helping	'I've—we've' emphasising the team again. Friction between thinking about her but feeling safer to think as at team or not wanting to take credit personally?
	196	myself?" And I've worked-- We've worked	'incredibly hard' The class team have worked hard.
	197	incredibly hard this year um, and every	'Constant'
Emotionally draining	198	day you end the day tired because the	'constantly need you' it is non-stop. does she like to feel needed? Or is that me?
	199	autistic children in particular are constant.	
	200	They constantly need you to be directing	
	201	and rephrasing and telling this child it one	
	202	way and that child it a million different	'Million different ways' Lots of different strategies that need to be used. Overwhelmed by endless possibilities. 'And the emotions' Emphasizing that the emotions associated with the experience cannot be forgotten. The emotional experience of seeing progress in a child with ASD.
	203	ways and pictures and um yes, and the	'Trying to hold that emotion in' Effort that goes into containing emotions. Where can those emotions go?
Careful to give the right amount of support.	204	emotions. It's emotional when for example	
	205	Lewis started to read. That's really	'he obviously doesn't understand' barrier.
	206	emotional, I'm trying to hold that emotion	Really difficult [quiver in voice]. Emotions still held? Is this why she's so open because she needs to let them out?
	207	in while he's there because he obviously	'really draining' what does it take out of her and how is that put back in?
	208	doesn't understand that, was really	Difficulty in supporting a child with ASD associated with lack of understanding/ communication
	209	difficult [quiver in voice]. Um when	
	210	Bethany hurts herself, it's really draining	'you don't wanna put that on her' Feeling uncomfortable talking for child with ASD. Fear of doing too much for child with ASD- not giving space for development. So holding back.
	211	because she's so distressed but she	
	212	doesn't understand so she doesn't have	
	213	the vocabulary to to talk about that and	
	214	you don't wanna put that on her, you	
	215	wanna give her the chance to talk about it. You don't wanna say, "Oh you've fallen over and hurt yourself." You obviously do,	Giving a chance vs giving the answer. 'you wanna give her the chance' x 2 providing an opportunity for her. Does this link to giving the child with autism a chance in life?

	<p>to explain it to her but you wanna give her the chance. It's just a challenge, it's a minefield, it is a minefield. So sorry I'm talking so much. [Laughs]</p> <p><b>I:</b> Can you tell me a bit more about, you just mentioned the one-to-one and the challenges around that.</p> <p><b>T1:</b> Yes, so it's been challenging to ha-- because Marcus has a one-to-one, but Marcus doesn't present as the most needy in the class. It's been challenging to ensure that the one-to-one is priority so actually Marcus has a one-to-one for a reason because quite often my TA would be used to cover other</p>	<p>'it's a minefield' Have to be very careful or someone could get hurt? Apologising/ nervous laughter. Feeling guilt for saying how difficult it is?</p> <p>'—' difficult to talk about this challenge</p> <p>'doesn't present as most needy' Balancing allocated resources (one-to-one)with need in class. What is her perception of need? Is it then a challenge to defend this role? 'Priority' One-to-one is an important resource.</p>
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## Appendix A3: Example of Reviewing Emergent Themes

### Eliminating/ Collecting Emergent Themes Together

Some emergent themes were eliminated or collected together to portray an overall understanding of the section.

Child's strengths Working to child's interests Get to know what works for the child	239	with them or have something in common	Building a relationship with the child with ASD.
	240	knowing what their interests are so to hook	
	241	them into it. And their– their kind of their	'hook them' draw the child's attention
	242	strengths and their weaknesses. So in this	
	243	child's case it's very into numbers. So, he'd	Drawing on the strengths/ interests of the child.
	244	actually towards the end participate in a small	
	245	group activity with number even starting to	

### Making the Emergent Theme Title Reflect the Essence of the Section

On reflection, some emergent themes failed to portray the essence of the section. The extract below shows the initial title allocated to the theme (in grey) and the new title. I feel this shows a better understanding of the psychological meaning behind the account.

Providing for child Giving everything for child	590	trying to do your very best and everything	
	591	you're doing is – You eat, breathe and sleep	
	592	their children, you're thinking about how the-	'You eat, breathe and sleep their children' Dedication to the children. Everything becomes about the children, it is consuming for her.
	593	-how you're going to help them, what their	
	594	next steps are and um, for a whole year, all	'a whole year' significant amount of time to dedicate.
	595	you do you think about their child and how	

### Reflecting on Detailed Sections

Some sections required more attention because of the amount of detail and different themes occurring. The extract below shows the addition of new themes (in bold) and renaming of themes (previous titles in grey).

Developing as a school to support ASD	239	amount of things that we had to put in place became quite difficult. Um, with obviously	'Panicking'
	240		
Panic	241	you're panicking about this one child fitting in, but then you're thinking, "I've got 29 other children here." I had a couple that had other issues as well, and then others that didn't	'fitting in' her main concern seems to be around the child being included in the class rather than other challenges. Thinking about all the children in the class. 'other issues as well' Every child in class needs something from her.
	242		
	243		
Fitting in	244	have issues but they still needed a good education. Um, so you don't want to leave those out, um, and I think again with the parents, that then becomes an issue because they want their child to have everything, and its like, "Yes, but there's only one of me to get all of this stuff done." And then also you're worrying all the time, are they fitting in with this, or can they do this, and should I take them out for that. It's become easier now, but I think when you first start, is that kind of—it's like a child with an allergy, you panic over every little thing. Um, and its learning as you go, because the problem is, obviously they're not all the same, they don't all trigger at the same things. So it's learning what triggers them and that fitting in with everybody else. Because you can't stop the rest of the children with what they want to do and, um, say, again with this Milly girl, we-she would struggle with parties, but her mum would get very angry if the children would have a party and we'd find her something else to do. Um, it was like, "Well I	'needed a good education' 'leave those out' tries not to allow the other children to be forgotten just because they don't have needs. Balancing the needs with providing good teaching for them all. Parents prioritize their child. 'want their child to have everything'
	246		
Balancing all needs of all children in class	247	only one of me' feeling alone in managing all the demands/ needs. Concerns. 'worrying all the time' constant concern 'fitting in' vs 'take them out' she seems to be confused by a priority of having them fit in or whether they should be taken out at times. Questioning actions. Constant pressure of questioning what she is thinking and worrying about her actions, is she getting it right? 'when you first start' Reflecting on the beginning of the teacher journey She has noticed a change in herself as she recalls the panic she went through at the start. 'learning as you go' can't know it all before, continuous experiential learning. 'they're not all the same' unique. The uniqueness of the child means she has to open to learning new things all the time. 'Fitting in'	
	248		
Worry	249	can't stop the rest of the children' protecting the rights/free will of the other children.	
	250		
Pressure on self	251	Providing alternatives to group activities that were difficult. 'would get very angry' angry about party upsetting child or separation? 'find her something else to do' don't force her to join in Mothers' anger around child not being included was frustrating as T3 tries to balance giving the class what they need and supporting the child with ASD.	
	252		
Self-doubt.	253		
	254		
Experience builds confidence	255		
	256		
Appreciate individual difference	257		
	258		
Always learning	259		
	260		
Other children	261		
	262		
Balancing all needs of all children in class.	263		
	264		
	265		
	266		
	267		
	268		

### Emergent Themes Sharing the Same Meaning: Numeration

I noticed that several of the themes shared the same meaning but were allocated different names. The extracts below demonstrate how I reviewed several sections and changed the names to reflect the commonality. The supported the process of numeration.

<p>Challenge of balancing one-to-one support Negotiating one-to-one support</p>	<p>149 150 151 152 153 154 155 156 157 158 159 ...</p>	<p>support, but that they you know get their own coat, they get their own water bottle. They-- because they can. I have seen that they then rely upon the one-to-one because they know that the one-to-one will do when they're quite capable of doing themselves. It's that one-to-one knowing what needs support and what you know what kind of support to give. And that can be tricky, but I like to encourage one-to-one to try and make sure that they are-- if they can do it to do it themselves</p>	<p>Promoting independence from one-to-one  'because they can' child's ability.  'rely upon the one-to-one' Ability can be overshadowed by a reliance on one-to-one.  'capable' 'one-to one knowing what needs support' One-to-one needs to give the right balance of support 'encourage' rather than tell. 'can be tricky' challenge of helping one-to-one balance what to give/ how much support.</p>
<p>One-to-one connected with the child Negotiating one-to-one support</p>	<p>179 180 181 182 183 184 185 186 187 188 189 ...</p>	<p>and then he would just look at the timetable, tick them off for whatever as he went and got it. So it's kind of making a target for both of them almost that he would get those things or they would get those things rather than it being done for him. Um, same with like kind of getting them to do more formal learning with things that they are able to do. Um, having like a timetable where they uh have to do that activity but then they can get something that</p>	<p>'making a target for both of them' one-to-one put with the child- she guides her in the same way?</p>
<p>Avoiding confrontation with one-to-one. Negotiating one-to-one support</p>	<p>218 219 220 221 222 223 224 225 226 227 228 229 230 231 232 ...</p>	<p>off type thing. So I find they naturally go and support maybe a bit too much and then you just have to like gently remind them you know that he- "Oh they can do that themselves." and I kind of tend to not tell the TA tell the child and then the TA kind of thinks."Oh yeah". So I will be like "blah blah can't you do that yourself?" You know in like a simpler way if they can't quite understand that. Or "Go and get your coat" Or rather than actually saying to the actual one-to-one themselves because that can then lead to confrontation. If you are actually saying this to a child and then it reminds the TA, "Oh yeah they should</p>	<p>'gently remind'  'not tell the TA, tell the child' she doesn't want to be in the position of having to tell an adult, makes her uncomfortable to be in a leading role in that way. What does this say about the position in classroom/ school? Shift between one-to-one and TA?  Prompting child to be independent to prompt realization one-to-one.  'that can lead to confrontation' But she isn't sharing any experiences of this so a natural fear of conflict perhaps?  'more often than not' majority of the time.</p>

## Appendix A4: Subordinate Themes T1

T1 Subordinate Theme	T1 Emergent Themes (numeration)
<b>Connection to a child with autism</b>	Sees the child, not the autism (5) Unique moments of success are special (3) Respect their perspective of the world (2) Wants to support independence (2) Relating to children with autism- empathy.
<b>Supporting the needs of children with ASD within a class.</b>	Managing different needs in the environment (3) Learning from peers (2) Other children not getting enough (2) Trying everything (2) Emotional understanding is poor (2) Constant needs. Challenging behaviour. Importance of changing communication style. Careful to give the right amount of support. Never prepared for children with autism.
<b>Dedicated to inclusion (subsumption)</b>	Dedicated to inclusion (2) Togetherness hides the differences (2) Equal value for all children (2)
<b>The experience of support</b>	Plea for help (5) Support is lacking (4) Need more staff to help (2) Support needs to be there throughout (2) Needs someone to give her hope. More training is needed. Collaboration and communication help. Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.
<b>Working in a staff team</b>	Staff experience is important (5) Challenge working with one-to-one (3) Strength in a supportive team (2) Team spirit fosters positivity Values a dedicated team Preparing other staff to support autism.
<b>Position within the school system</b>	Change outside her control (4) No power (2) Others don't understand (3) Isolated (3) Early years not a priority. Envy for support in the rest of the school.
<b>Early years as different to the rest of the school</b>	Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3) Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2) Early years foundation is important.

<b>Parents</b>	<p>Values her relationships with parents  Balancing the needs of parents (5)  Have to support parents needs to support child (2)  Managing parents expectations (4)  Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2)  Alone in supporting parents (2)</p>
<b>The emotional aspects of the experience</b>	<p>Frustration (5)  Pride (4)  Stress (3)  Guilt (2)  Emotionally draining (2)  Tired (2)  Anxiety raised by others' (2)</p>
<b>The psychological experience of providing support</b>	<p>No answers (3)  Not knowing (2)  Questioning self (2)  Confusion  Acceptance of failed attempts.  Feeling of failure.</p>
<b>Reflecting on her own development</b>	<p>Striving to give everything (3)  Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)  Values time to reflect on positives (2)  Still building confidence.  Self-recognition (2)  The experience of success has empowered her.  Fear at the beginning.</p>

## Appendix A5- Superordinate Themes T1

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes (numeration)
Connecting to the child with autism to support them together with class	Connection to a child with autism	Sees the child, not the autism (5) Unique moments of success are special (3) Respect their perspective of the world (2) Wants to support independence (2) Relating to children with autism- empathy.
	Supporting the needs of children with ASD within a class	Managing different needs in the environment (3) Learning from peers (2) Other children not getting enough (2) Trying everything (2) Emotional understanding is poor (2) Constant needs. Challenging behaviour. Importance of changing communication style. Careful to give the right amount of support. Never prepared for children with autism.
	Dedicated to inclusion <i>(subsumption)</i>	Dedicated to inclusion (2) Togetherness hides the differences (2) Equal value for all children (2)
Working with support within the school system	The experience of support	Plea for help (5) Support is lacking (4) Need more staff to help (2) Support needs to be there throughout (2) Needs someone to give her hope. More training is needed Collaboration and communication help. Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.



	Working in a staff team	Staff experience is important (5) Challenge working with one-to-one (3) Strength in a supportive team (2) Team spirit fosters positivity Values a dedicated team Preparing other staff to support autism.
	Position within the school system.	Change outside her control (4) No power (2) Others don't understand (3) Isolated (3) Early years not a priority. Envy for support in the rest of the school.
Early years as a unique position in school	Early years as different to the rest of the school.	Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3) Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2) Early years foundation is important.
Parents	Parents	Values her relationships with parents. Balancing the needs of parents (5) Have to support parents needs to support child (2) Managing parents expectations (4) Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2) Alone in supporting parents (2)
Impact on self	The emotional aspects of the experience	Frustration (5) Pride (4) Stress (3) Guilt (2) Emotionally draining (2) Tired (2) Anxiety raised by others (2)

	The psychological experience of providing support	<p>No answers (3)          Not knowing (3)          Questioning self (2)          Confusion          Acceptance of failed attempts.          Feeling of failure.</p>
	Reflecting on her own development	<p>Striving to give everything (3)          Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)          Values time to reflect on positives (2)          Still building confidence.          Self-recognition (2)          The experience of success has empowered her.          Fear at the beginning.</p>

## Appendix A6: Grouping Subthemes

Subthemes around perceptions of ASD, developing an understanding of a child with ASD and supporting the specific needs.	
T1- Supporting the difficulties associated with autism	<p>T1- Trying everything (2)</p> <p>T1- Emotional understanding is poor (2)</p> <p>T1- Challenging behaviour.</p> <p>T1- Importance of changing communication style.</p> <p>T1- Careful to give the right amount of support.</p> <p>T1- Never prepared for children with autism.</p>
T2-Accepting the difficulties associated with ASD	<p>T2- Acceptance of difference (2)</p> <p>T2- Blame the ASD for behaviour, not the child (2)</p> <p>T2- Difference is not wrong.</p> <p>T2- Positives are hard to find.</p> <p>T2- Behaviour demands attention.</p> <p>T2- Unpredictable behaviour.</p>
T2- Preparing for a child with ASD	<p>T2- Hard to know everything (2)</p> <p>T2- Different perceptions around the child.</p> <p>T2- Knowledge changes approach.</p> <p>T2- Values all information.</p> <p>T2- Anxiety of anticipation.</p> <p>T2- Importance of diagnoses.</p>
T3- Understanding and adapting to ASD	<p>T3- Children with ASD lack understanding.</p> <p>T3- Social difficulties.</p> <p>T3- Diagnosis.</p> <p>T3- Figuring out ways to help (3)</p> <p>T3- Being clear in communication (2)</p> <p>T3- Being proactive to maintain positivity.</p> <p>T3- Practical demands.</p> <p>T3- Preparation is key.</p>
T4- Understanding and meeting needs	<p>T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)</p> <p>T4- Desire to know everything at the beginning (2)</p> <p>T4- Finding what works for unique child (2)</p> <p>T4- Making a difference (2)</p> <p>T4- Supporting child to cope.</p> <p>T4- Making the difficulties disappear.</p> <p>T4- Keeping needs in mind.</p>
T5- Perception of ASD	<p>T5- ASD comes in different forms (2)</p> <p>T5- Intrigued by differences within autism (2)</p> <p>T5- Flagging up.</p> <p>T5- Diagnosis.</p>
T5- Supporting child with ASD	<p>T5- Relationships are key (3)</p> <p>T5- Enabling child to settle (2)</p> <p>T5- Get to know what works for the child (2)</p> <p>T5- Time (3)</p> <p>T5- Sensory sensitivity as a challenge (2)</p> <p>T5- Working to child's interests (3)</p> <p>T5- Gather knowledge to prepare (3)</p> <p>T5- Preparing transition.</p>
T6- Perception of ASD	<p>T6- ASD is individual.</p> <p>T6- Routine helps.</p>
Subthemes around relating to children with ASD	
T1- Connection to child with ASD	<p>T1- Sees the child, not the autism (5)</p> <p>T1- Unique moments of success are special (3)</p> <p>T1- Respect their perspective of the world (2)</p> <p>T1- Wants to support independence (2)</p>

	T1- Relating to children with autism- empathy.
T2- Connecting to what works for each child with ASD	T2-Connecting to what works for the child (2) T2-Need information to work out the child (2) T2-Recognising the child's way of understanding (2) T2-Constant search for what works. T2-Every child with ASD is different. T2-Happy to make a difference.
T3- Building an attachment with child	T3- The right type of person (3) T3- Lack of trust in others ability to meet needs of ASD (3) T3- Hard to let go. T3- Attachment. T3- Anxious for children moving on.
T3- Connection with the child	T3- Appreciates individual differences (3) T3- Advocate for child (2) T3- Empathy for child (2) T3- Connection is important. T3- Time to get to know child. T3- Hold the moments. T3- Values their perspective of the world (2) T3- Searching for strengths (2)
T6- Relationships with child	T6-Knowing how to communicate. T6-Reading the child (4) T6-Thrill of seeing child develop (4) T6- Giving everything for child (4) T6- Emotional comfort to calm child (2) T6-Attachment to child (3) T6-Adapting to child's needs (2) T6-Discovering what the child needs. T6-Need to make a difference
Subthemes around supporting a child with ASD as part of the class.	
T1-Supporting the needs of children with ASD within a class	T1- Managing different needs in the environment (3) T1- Learning from peers (2) T1- Other children not getting enough (2) T1- Constant needs.
T1- Dedicated to inclusion	T1- Dedicated to inclusion (2) T1- Togetherness hides the differences (2) T1- Equal value for all children (2)
T2- Balancing needs of child with ASD with needs of other children in class	T2-Empathy for other children (2) T2-Managing needs/ desires of other children in class. alongside the needs of children with ASD (2) T2-Protecting the other children. T2-Individuality is the same in all children. T2-ASD difficulties create separation (2)
T3-Supporting needs within class	T3- Balancing needs of all children in class (3) T3- Extra for ASD (2) T3- Fitting in (2) T3- Interaction from peers.
T4- Working with ASD in class	T4- Facilitating inclusion. T4- Promoting independence. T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities. T4- Importance of trusting relationships. T4- Opportunity for modelling. T4- Routine as a challenge.
T5- Working in class with them/ helping them fit	T5- Other children's acceptance (3) T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2) T5- Progress as participation (3)

	<p>T5- Managing whole class (2)</p> <p>T5- Fitting in child with ASD.</p>
T6- Supporting ASD in class	<p>T6-Gathering information to prepare.</p> <p>T6-Sympathy for other children (2)</p> <p>T6-Other children's experience of inequality.</p> <p>T6-Managing other children's approach to child with ASD.</p> <p>T6-Balancing needs of child vs needs of class.</p> <p>T6-Adapting to child's needs (3)</p> <p>T6-Emotional difficulties in ASD.</p> <p>T6-Inclusion of ASD fosters empathic relationships (2)</p> <p>T6-Diversity of needs (2)</p>
Subthemes around support in school/ offering support in school	
T1- The experience of support	<p>T1- Plea for help (5)</p> <p>T1- Support is lacking (4)</p> <p>T1- Need more staff to help (2)</p> <p>T1- Support needs to be there throughout (2)</p> <p>T1- Needs someone to give her hope.</p> <p>T1- More training is needed.</p> <p>T1- Collaboration and communication help.</p> <p>T1- Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.</p>
T1- Working in a staff team	<p>T1- Staff experience is important (5)</p> <p>T1- Challenge working with one-to-one (3)</p> <p>T1- Strength in a supportive team (2)</p> <p>T1- Team spirit fosters positivity.</p> <p>T1- Values a dedicated team.</p> <p>T1- Preparing other staff to support autism.</p>
T1- Position within the school system	<p>T1- Change outside her control (4)</p> <p>T1- No power (2)</p> <p>T1- Others don't understand (3)</p> <p>T1- Isolated (3)</p> <p>T1- Early years not a priority.</p> <p>T1- Envy for support in the rest of the school.</p>
T2- Questioning whether the environment is right	<p>T2-There is something better elsewhere (2)</p> <p>T2-Environment is important (2)</p> <p>T2-Questioning what she can provide.</p> <p>T2-Not the right place.</p> <p>T2-Not able to give what was needed.</p>
T2- Perception of support available in school	<p>T2-More staff needed (2)</p> <p>T2-Values TA support (2)</p> <p>T2-Pessimistic about future support.</p> <p>T2-TAs could provide what she can't.</p> <p>T2-Values support from staff in school.</p>
T3- Working within school system	<p>T3- Lack of knowledge around her (3)</p> <p>T3- Alone in role (3)</p> <p>T3- Working against conflicting perceptions of ASD (3)</p> <p>T3- Developing as a school to support ASD (2)</p> <p>T3- Pressure from others (2)</p> <p>T3- Pushing to influence the system (2)</p> <p>T3- Sharing experiences helps.</p> <p>T3- Sharing responsibility.</p> <p>T3- Need supportive school community.</p> <p>T3- Others focus on challenges.</p>
T3- Support needs	<p>T3- Inexperience needs support (2)</p> <p>T3- Wants collaborative support (2)</p> <p>T3- Resigned to ideal support being impossible (2)</p> <p>T3- More training.</p>

	<p>T3- Support as discussion.</p> <p>T3- Need a break.</p> <p>T3- Help in class.</p> <p>T3- Model support.</p>
T4- Her experience of support	<p>T4- Appreciating her experience of support.</p> <p>T4- Support depends on severity (2)</p> <p>T4- Frustration of waiting (2)</p> <p>T4- Strength in asking for help (2)</p> <p>T4- Only need to discuss issues.</p> <p>T4- Size of school hinders communication.</p> <p>T4- Paperwork gives the answers.</p> <p>T4- Direct communication is reassuring.</p>
T4- The teacher role within the school system	<p>T4- SENCO holds the information (2)</p> <p>T4- Teachers sharing ideas (2)</p> <p>T4- Staying in the teaching role (2).</p> <p>T4- One-to-ones know more (2)</p> <p>T4- One-to-ones as separate.</p> <p>T4- Admiration for one-to-one role.</p> <p>T4- Passing family needs on (2).</p>
T4- Working with a one-to-one in class	<p>T4- Negotiating one-to-one support (2).</p> <p>T4- One-to-one creates space from the child (2)</p>
T5- Working with one-to-one	<p>T5- Collaboration with one-to-one (2)</p> <p>T5- Respect for one-to-one (2)</p>
T5- Support/ team	<p>T5- Work hard together (2)</p> <p>T5- More people helps (2)</p> <p>T5- Entitlement to support (2)</p> <p>T5- Support in school (2)</p> <p>T5- Appreciates different perspective (2)</p> <p>T5- Adapting to level of support available (2)</p> <p>T5- Separate outside assessment.</p> <p>T5- School supporting inclusion.</p>
T6- Working within the school system.	<p>T6-Frustration with others lack of awareness (4)</p> <p>T6-Importance of team (4)</p> <p>T6-Foundation stage not valued in school.</p> <p>T6-Foundation stage as separate (2)</p> <p>T6-Others don't understand early years (2)</p> <p>T6-Being part of the school (3)</p> <p>T6-Evaluating role of one-to-one.</p> <p>T6-Working together with TA.</p> <p>T6-Shaping TA role around personal qualities.</p>
T6- Experience of support	<p>T6-Feeling secure in support.</p> <p>T6-Availability of support (2)</p> <p>T6-Knowledge empowers practice (2)</p> <p>T6-Sharing experiences as supportive (2)</p> <p>T6-Sharing knowledge/ experience.</p> <p>T6-Discussion is useful.</p> <p>T6-Waiting on others (2)</p> <p>T6-Values collaborative support.</p> <p>T6-Openness to support (2).</p> <p>T6-Learning from others.</p>
Subthemes around work with parents	
T1- Parents	<p>T1- Values her relationships with parents.</p> <p>T1- Balancing the needs of parents (5)</p> <p>T1- Have to support parents needs to support child (2)</p> <p>T1- Managing parents expectations (4)</p> <p>T1- Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2)</p>

	T1- Alone in supporting parents (2)
T2- Parents	T2- Parents' reluctance to see need can be barrier (2) T2- Parent appreciation.
T3- Parents	T3- Meeting demands of mother (2) T3- Barrier of challenging mum (5)
T4 – Parents	T4- Sharing strategies with family.
T5- Parents	T5- Positive experiences with parents (3) T5- Negative parent perception is difficult (2) T5- Need parents to support progress. T5- Others' role to engage parents. T5- Balancing the need for all parents. T5- Empathy with parents.
T6- Parents	T6- Openness of parents. T6- Managing demands of mum (2) T6- Values parent partnerships (2) T6- Parent perception as a barrier (2)
Subthemes around the specific position of Early Years.	
T1- Early years as different to the rest of the school	T1- Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3) T1- Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2) T1- Early years foundation is important.
T2- X	
T3- Being the start	T3- Their beginning (2) T3- Positive start is important (3) T3- Preparing them for the future.
T4- Something particular about reception	T4- Reception suits ASD (3) T4- Reception children accept inclusion (2) T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school. T4- Environment is challenging.
T5- Reception suits inclusion	T5- Reception suits inclusion (2) T5- Flexibility enables inclusion (2) T5- Keeping child in reception (2) T5- Diversity is accepted.
T6- Importance of foundation stage	T6- Importance of foundation stage. T6- Valuing the qualities of reception (2) T6- Laying the foundation for learning (2) T6- Reception is child centred. T6- Inclusion in foundation stage. T6- Desire to spread foundation stage principles. T6- Natural adaptability in reception. T6- Social and emotional preparation for life. T6- Building child's resilience (2) T6- Empowering children for the future (2)
Subthemes around psychological and emotional experiences of being in the teacher role.	
T1- The emotional aspects of the experience	T1- Frustration (5) T1- Pride (4) T1- Stress (3) T1- Guilt (2) T1- Emotionally draining (2) T1- Tired (2) T1- Anxiety raised by others (2)
T1- The psychological experience of providing support	T1- No answers (3) T1- Not knowing (2) T1- Questioning self (2) T1- Confusion. T1- Acceptance of failed attempts.

	T1-Feeling of failure.
T1- Reflecting on her own development	T1-Striving to give everything (3) T1-Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2) T1-Values time to reflect on positives (2) T1-Still building confidence. T1-Self-recognition (2) T1-The experience of success has empowered her. T1-Fear at the beginning.
T3- The link between the personal and professional	T3- Personal intertwined with the professional (8) T3- Pressure on self (3) T3- Self-doubt (3) T3- Recognising limitations (3) T3- Self-development through experience (3) T3- Relinquishing control (2) T3- Experience builds confidence (2)
T3-Emotional aspects of the experience	T3- Frustration(2) T3- Negative impact on emotional well-being (2) T3- Panic (2) T3- Worry. T3- Stress. T3- Joy of making a difference (2)
T4- Psychological processes of being a teacher of ASD	T4-Accept you tried (2) T4-Losing awareness of hidden difficulties. (2) T4-Doubting knowledge of ASD. T4-Disappointed in self. T4-Reward of overcoming struggles. T4-Find the positives. T4-Making up for mistake.
T5- Experience of being teacher	T5- Appreciates her experience (3) T5- Perseverance (2) T5- Confident to differentiate work (2) T5- Experience builds confidence (2) T5- Prepare to avoid stress (2) T5- Rewarding. T5- Nurturing role. T5- Anxiety in anticipation.
T6- The self in role	T6-Positive moments with children give strength (2) T6-Reframing idealistic hopes (2) T6-Let go of the personal blame (2) T6-Personal effect of the job. T6-Self-confidence linked to success with child. T6-Acceptance that it is a process of trying. T6-Separating the personal and professional T6-Using personal to support professional. T6-Try to avoid the feeling of failure. T6-Feeling attacked by parents. T6-Self-recognition. T6-Effort is worth the reward (2) T6-Inexperience leads to self-doubt. T6-Seeing others experiences brings perspective (2) T6-Reflection helps (2) T6-Hold on to the positives.
T6- Emotional experience	T6-Pride (2) T6-Fear of being unprepared (2) T6-Become fixed in a negative bubble (2) T6-Emotional impact of parents' rejection.



## Appendix A7: Moving Emergent Themes to Create Subordinate and Superordinate Themes

This is the first stage of moving emergent themes around to make different collections under possible subtheme and superordinate groupings.

Key	
Each table	Possible superordinate groups
Each column	Possible subtheme groups

Subthemes around Perceptions of ASD/ Developing understanding/ Support for specific needs			
Getting to know what works		Gathering Information	
Knowing	What works?	Information	Preparation
<p>T4- Desire to know everything at the beginning (2)</p> <p>T2- Hard to know everything (2)</p> <p>T1- Never prepared for children with autism.</p>	<p>T5- Get to know what works for the child (2)</p> <p>T4- Finding what works for unique child (2)</p> <p>T3- Time to get to know child.</p> <p>T2-Connecting to what works for the child (2)</p> <p>T2-Recognising the child's way of understanding (2)</p> <p>T5- Working to child's interests (3)</p> <p>T1- Trying everything (2)</p> <p>T2-Constant search for what works.</p> <p>T3- Figuring out ways to help (3)</p> <p>T6-Discovering what the child needs.</p>	<p>T5- Gather knowledge to prepare (3)</p> <p>T2-Need information to work out the child (2)</p> <p>T2- Knowledge changes approach.</p> <p>T2- Values all information.</p> <p>T6-Gathering information to prepare.</p> <p>T2- Different perceptions around the child.</p> <p>T6-Knowledge empowers practice (2)</p>	<p>T3- Preparation is key.</p> <p>T5- Preparing transition.</p>
The challenges associated with ASD		Adapting to child's needs	
<p>T1- Emotional understanding is poor (2)</p> <p>T1- Challenging behaviour.</p> <p>T2- Behaviour demands attention.</p> <p>T2- Unpredictable behaviour.</p> <p>T2- Blame the ASD for behaviour, not the child (2)</p> <p>T3- Children with ASD lack understanding.</p> <p>T3- Social difficulties.</p> <p>T5- Sensory sensitivity as a challenge (2)</p> <p>T1- Constant needs.</p>		<p>T6-Adapting to child's needs (3)</p> <p>T3- Being clear in communication (2)</p> <p>T3- Being proactive to maintain positivity.</p> <p>T1- Importance of changing communication style.</p> <p>T6-Knowing how to communicate.</p> <p>T1- Careful to give the right amount of support.</p> <p>T6-Routine helps.</p> <p>T4- Keeping needs in mind.</p> <p>T6- Emotional comfort to calm child (2)</p>	

T6-Emotional difficulties in ASD.	
<b>Uniqueness of children with ASD</b>  T2-Every child with ASD is different. T5- ASD comes in different forms (2) T6-ASD is individual. T2- Acceptance of difference (2) T2- Difference is not wrong. T5- Intrigued by differences within autism (2) T3- Appreciates individual differences (3)	<b>The difference that can be made.</b>  T4- Making a difference (2) T4- Supporting child to cope. T4- Making the difficulties disappear. T5- Enabling child to settle (2) T6-Social and emotional preparation for life. T6-Building child's resilience(2) T6-Empowering children for the future (2) T1- Wants to support independence (2) T4- Promoting independence. T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities
<b>Diagnosis</b> T3- Diagnosis T5- Diagnosis. T5- Flagging up	

Subthemes around relating to child with ASD	
<b>Moments</b>  T1- Unique moments of success are special (3) T3- Hold the moments. T6-Thrill of seeing child develop (4) T2-Happy to make a difference. T3- Searching for strengths (2) T6-Need to make a difference.	<b>Attachment/ dedication to child</b>  T3- Attachment. T3- Lack of trust in others ability to meet needs of ASD (3) T3- Hard to let go. T3- Anxious for children moving on. T6-Attachment to child (3) T3- Connection is important. T3- Advocate for child (2) T6- Giving everything for child (4) T6-Reading the child (4)
<b>Relationships</b>  T5- Relationships are key (3) T4- Importance of trusting relationships. T3- The right type of person (3)	<b>Empathy to perspectives</b>  T1- Sees the child, not the autism (5) T3- Empathy for child (2) T1- Respect their perspective of the world (2) T1- Relating to children with autism- empathy. T3- Values their perspective of the world (2)

Subthemes around supporting child within class	
<b>Managing all the needs in class</b>  T1- Managing different needs in the environment (3) T3- Balancing needs of all children in class (3)	<b>Empathy for other children</b>  T2-Empathy for other children (2) T1- Other children not getting enough (2) T2-Protecting the other children. T6-Sympathy for other children (2)

<p>T2-Managing needs/ desires of other children in class alongside the needs of children with ASD (2)</p> <p>T5- Managing whole class (2)</p> <p>T6-Balancing needs of child vs needs of class</p> <p>T2-ASD difficulties create separation (2).</p> <p>T6-Managing other children's approach to child with ASD.</p> <p>T6-Diversity of needs (2)</p>	<p>T6-Other children's experience of inequality.</p>
<p><b>Practical demands of including a child with ASD in class</b></p> <p>T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)</p> <p>T3- Practical demands.</p> <p>T5- Time (3)</p> <p>T5- Fitting in child with ASD.</p>	<p><b>Importance of being part of the class</b></p> <p>T4- Facilitating inclusion.</p> <p>T1- Dedicated to inclusion (2)</p> <p>T1- Togetherness hides the differences (2)</p> <p>T1- Equal value for all children (2)</p> <p>T3- Fitting in (2)</p> <p>T5- Progress as participation (3)</p>
<p><b>Peers</b></p> <p>T3- Interaction from peers.</p> <p>T1- Learning from peers (2)</p> <p>T5- Other children's acceptance (3)</p> <p>T4- Opportunity for modelling.</p> <p>T4- Reception children accept inclusion (2)</p> <p>T6-Inclusion of ASD fosters empathic relationships(2)</p>	

<b>Subthemes around experiences of support</b>	
<p><b>Support Needs</b></p> <p>T1- Need more staff to help (2)</p> <p>T1- Support needs to be there throughout (2)</p> <p>T1- Support is lacking (4)</p> <p>T1- Needs someone to give her hope.</p> <p>T1- More training is needed.</p> <p>T3- More training.</p> <p>T2-More staff needed (2)</p> <p>T5- More people helps (2)</p> <p>T3- Need a break.</p> <p>T3- Help in class.</p> <p>T4- Frustration of waiting (2)</p> <p>T6-Waiting on others (2)</p> <p>T4- Strength in asking for help (2)</p>	<p><b>Positives of staff team</b></p> <p>T1- Team spirit fosters positivity.</p> <p>T1- Values a dedicated team.</p> <p>T1- Strength in a supportive team (2)</p> <p>T2-Values support from staff in school.</p> <p>T5- Work hard together (2)</p> <p>T6-Importance of team (4)</p> <p>T6-Feeling secure in support.</p>
<p><b>What is valued as supportive?</b></p> <p>T6-Sharing experiences as supportive (2)</p> <p>T3- Support as discussion.</p> <p>T4- Direct communication is reassuring.</p> <p>T1- Collaboration and communication help.</p> <p>T3- Wants collaborative support (2)</p>	<p><b>Working with other staff to support children with ASD</b></p> <p>T3- Working against conflicting perceptions of ASD (3)</p> <p>T6-Frustration with others lack of awareness (4)</p>

<p>T6-Discussion is useful  T1- Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.  T6-Values collaborative support.  T4- Only need to discuss issues.  T4- Teachers sharing ideas (2)  T6-Openness to support (2).  T6-Learning from others.  T3- Model support.  T3- Sharing experiences helps.  T6-Sharing knowledge/ experience</p>	<p>T1- Staff experience is important (5)  T3- Inexperience needs support (2)  T3- Lack of knowledge around her (3)  T3- Others focus on challenges.  T1- Preparing other staff to support autism.  T3- Sharing responsibility.  T1- Challenge working with one-to-one (3)  T2-TAs could provide what she can't.  T2-Values TA support (2)  T4- One-to-ones know more (2)  T4- One-to-ones as separate.  T4- Admiration for one-to-one role.  T4- Negotiating one-to-one support (2).  T4- One-to-one creates space from the child (2)  T5- Collaboration with one-to-one (2)  T5- Respect for one-to-one (2)  T6-Evaluating role of one-to-one.  T6-Working together with TA  T6-Shaping TA role around personal qualities</p>
<p><b>Position in school system</b>  T1- Change outside her control (4)  T1- No power (2)  T1- Isolated (3)  T1- Plea for help (5)  T3- Alone in role (3)  T3- Pushing to influence the system (2)  T4- Staying in the teaching role (2).  T3- Pressure from others (2)  T3- Need supportive school community.  T3- Developing as a school to support ASD (2)  T6-Being part of the school (3)  T5- School supporting inclusion.  T4- Size of school hinders communication.  T4- SENCO holds the information (2)</p> <p>T4- Appreciating her experience of support.  T5- Adapting to level of support available (2)</p>	<p><b>Role in school</b>  T1- Others don't understand (3)  T1- Early years not a priority.  T1- Envy for support in the rest of the school.  T6-Foundation stage not valued in school.  T6-Foundation stage as separate (2)  T6-Others don't understand early years (2)  T1-No answers (3)</p>
<p><b>T2 had a negative perception of what could be offered in school.</b></p> <p>T2-There is something better elsewhere (2)  T2-Environment is important (2)  T2-Questioning what she can provide.  T2-Not the right place.  T2-Not able to give what was needed.</p>	<p><b>Outside support</b>  T4- Support depends on severity (2)  T5- Separate outside assessment.  T5- Appreciates different perspective (2)  T5- Entitlement to support (2)  T4- Paperwork gives the answers.</p>

Subthemes around parents	
<p><b>Challenges of working with parents.</b></p> <p>T1- Managing parents expectations (4)  T3- Meeting demands of mother (2)  T6- Managing demands of mum (2)  T5- Balancing the need for all parents.  T1- Balancing the needs of parents (5)  T5- Negative parent perception is difficult (2)  T6- Parent perception as a barrier (2)  T3- Barrier of challenging mum. (5)  T2- Parents' reluctance to see need can be barrier (2)  T6- Openness of parents  T6- Feeling attacked by parents</p>	<p><b>Importance of relationships with parents</b></p> <p>T1- Have to support parents needs to support child (2)  T1- Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2)  T5- Need parents to support progress  T4- Sharing strategies with family.  T1- Values her relationships with parents  T5- Positive experiences with parents (3)  T2- Parent appreciation.  T6- Values parent partnerships (2)  T5- Empathy with parents.</p>

Subthemes around the specific nature of the reception environment	
<p><b>Reception suits inclusion of ASD</b></p> <p>T6- Valuing the qualities of reception (2)  T5- Flexibility enables inclusion (2)  T5- Reception suits inclusion (2)  T4- Reception suits ASD (3)  T6- Inclusion in foundation stage.  T6- Reception is child centred.  T6- Desire to spread foundation stage principles.  T5- Keeping child in reception (2)  T1- Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2)  T6- Natural adaptability in reception.</p>	<p><b>Importance of the experience in early years</b></p> <p>T1- Early years foundation is important.  T6- Importance of foundation stage.  T6- Laying the foundation for learning (2)  T3- Their beginning (2)  T3- Positive start is important (3)  T3- Preparing them for the future.</p>
<p><b>Challenges in reception environment</b></p> <p>T4- Environment is challenging.  T1- Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3)  T4- Routine as a challenge.</p>	<p><b>Inclusion further up the school</b></p> <p>T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school  T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)  T5- Diversity is accepted.</p>

Subthemes around psychological and emotional experiences of being in the teacher role	
<p><b>Self-confidence linked to role</b></p> <p>T5- Experience builds confidence (2)  T3- Self-development through experience (3)  T1- The experience of success has empowered her.  T3- Experience builds confidence (2)  T1- Still building confidence.  T6- Inexperience leads to self-doubt.  T1- Questioning self (2)  T3- Self-doubt (3)</p>	<p><b>Psychological experiences</b></p> <p>T5- Prepare to avoid stress (2)  T5- Appreciates her experience (3)  T6- Seeing others' experiences brings perspective (2)  T6- Reflection helps (2)  T1- Confusion.  T4- Losing awareness of hidden difficulties. (2)  T4- Making up for mistake.  T2- Individuality is the same in all children.</p>

<p>T1-Not knowing (2)  T4-Doubting knowledge of ASD.  T1-Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)  T6-Self-confidence linked to success with child.</p>	<p>T5- Confident to differentiate work (2)  T5- Others' role to engage parents.  T4- Passing family needs on (2).  T1- Alone in supporting parents (2)</p>
<p><b>Personal effect of the experience</b></p> <p>T6-Let go of the personal blame (2)  T6-Personal effect of the job.  T6-Try to avoid the feeling of failure.  T1-Feeling of failure.  T4-Disappointed in self.  T3- Pressure on self (3)</p>	<p><b>Acceptance</b></p> <p>T4-Accept you tried (2)  T1-Acceptance of failed attempts.  T6-Acceptance that it is a process of trying.  T5- Perseverance (2)  T3- Recognising limitations (3)  T3- Relinquishing control (2)</p>
<p><b>Positive emotions</b></p> <p>T3- Joy of making a difference (2)  T6-Effort is worth the reward (2)  T6-Self-recognition.  T6-Positive moments with children give strength (2)  T1-Self-recognition (2)  T1-Values time to reflect on positives (2)  T6-Hold on to the positives.  T5- Rewarding.  T4-Reward of overcoming struggles.  T4-Find the positives.  T1-Pride (4)  T6-Pride (2)</p>	<p><b>Negative emotions</b></p> <p>T1-Frustration (5)  T3- Frustration(2)  T1-Stress (3)  T3- Stress.  T1-Guilt (2)  T1-Emotionally draining (2)  T1-Tired (2)  T1-Striving to give everything (3)  T1-Anxiety raised by others (2)  T2- Anxiety of anticipation.  T6-Fear of being unprepared (2)  T1-Fear at the beginning.  T5- Anxiety in anticipation.  T3- Negative impact on emotional well-being (2)  T6-Become fixed in a negative bubble (2)  T3- Panic (2)  T3- Worry.  T6-Emotional impact of parents' rejection</p>
<p><b>Personal and professional linked</b></p> <p>T3- Personal intertwined with the professional (8)  T6-Separating the personal and professional.  T6-Using personal to support professional.</p>	

## Appendix A8: First Edition of Overarching, Superordinate, Subordinate Themes

Overarching Themes		
Developing support for child/ Connecting/ Within class	System of Support	Effect on self
<p><b>Understanding the child</b></p> <p><b>Preparation/ Knowing</b> T2- Hard to know everything (2) T1-Fear at the beginning. T1- Never prepared for children with autism. T4- Desire to know everything at the beginning (2) T3- Preparation is key. T5- Preparing transition.</p> <p><b>Value placed on information</b> T5- Gather knowledge to prepare (3) T6-Gathering information to prepare. T2-Need information to work out the child (2) T2- Knowledge changes approach. T2- Values all information. T2- Different perceptions around the child. T6-Knowledge empowers practice (2)</p> <p><b>Figuring out what works for the child</b> T5- Get to know what works for the child (2) T5- Working to child's interests (3) T4- Finding what works for unique child (2) T3- Time to get to know child. T2-Connecting to what works for the child (2) T2-Recognising the child's way of understanding (2) T1- Trying everything (2) T2-Constant search for what works. T3- Figuring out ways to help (3) T6-Discovering what the child needs.</p> <p><b>Adapting to child's needs</b> T6-Adapting to child's needs (3) T3- Being clear in communication (2)</p>	<p><b>Experience of Support in School</b></p> <p><b>Position in school system</b> T1- Change outside her control (4) T1- No power (2) T1- Isolated (3) T1- Plea for help (5) T3- Alone in role (3) T3- Pushing to influence the system (2) T3- Pressure from others (2) T3- Need supportive school community. T3- Developing as a school to support ASD (2) T6-Being part of the school (3) T5- School supporting inclusion. T4- Size of school hinders communication T4- SENCO holds the information (2) T4- Staying in the teaching role (2) T4- Appreciating her experience of support.</p> <p><b>Working with other staff to support children with ASD</b> T3- Working against conflicting perceptions of ASD (3) T6-Frustration with others lack of awareness (4) T1- Staff experience is important (5) T1-Frustration (5) T3- Inexperience needs support (2) T3- Lack of knowledge around her (3) T3- Others focus on challenges. T1- Preparing other staff to support autism. T3- Sharing responsibility. T1- Challenge working with one-to-one (3) T2-TAs could provide what she can't.</p>	<p><b>Positive emotional experience</b> T3- Joy of making a difference (2) T6-Effort is worth the reward (2) T6-Self-recognition. T6-Positive moments with children give strength (2) T1-Self-recognition (2) T1-Values time to reflect on positives (2) T6-Hold on to the positives T5- Rewarding. T4-Reward of overcoming struggles. T4-Find the positives. T1-Pride (4) T6-Pride (2)</p> <p><b>Negative Emotional experience</b> T1-Frustration (5) T3- Frustration(2) T1-Stress (3) T3- Stress T1-Guilt (2) T1-Emotionally draining (2) T1-Tired (2) T1-Striving to give everything (3) T1-Anxiety raised by others (2) T2- Anxiety of anticipation. T6-Fear of being unprepared (2) T1-Fear at the beginning. T5- Anxiety in anticipation. T3- Negative impact on emotional well-being (2) T6-Become fixed in a negative bubble (2) T3- Panic (2) T3- Worry. T6-Emotional impact of parents' rejection.</p> <p><b>Personal effect of the experience</b></p>

<p>T3- Being proactive to maintain positivity.  T1- Importance of changing communication style.  T6-Knowing how to communicate  T1- Careful to give the right amount of support.  T6-Routine helps.  T4- Keeping needs in mind.  T6- Emotional comfort to calm child (2)</p> <p><b>Uniqueness of children with ASD</b>  T2-Every child with ASD is different.  T5- ASD comes in different forms (2)  T6-ASD is individual.  T2- Acceptance of difference (2)  T2- Difference is not wrong.  T5- Intrigued by differences within autism (2)  T3- Appreciates individual differences (3)</p> <p><b>The difference that can be made/ purpose for child with ASD.</b>  T4- Making a difference (2)  T4- Supporting child to cope.  T4- Making the difficulties disappear.  T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities  T5- Enabling child to settle (2)  T6-Social and emotional preparation for life.  T6-Building child's resilience(2)  T6-Empowering children for the future (2)  (More about the importance of early years' experience... in supporting child in life?)  T1- Wants to support independence (2)  T4- Promoting independence.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connection with child</b></p> <p><b>Attachment to child</b>  T5- Relationships are key (3)  T4- Importance of trusting relationships.  T3- The right type of person (3)  T3- Attachment.  T3- Lack of trust in others' ability to meet needs of ASD (3)</p>	<p>T2-Values TA support (2)  T4- One-to-ones know more (2)  T4- One-to-ones as separate.  T4- Admiration for one-to-one role.  T4- Negotiating one-to-one support (2)  T4- One-to-one creates space from the child (2).  T5- Collaboration with one-to-one (2)  T5- Respect for one-to-one (2)  T6-Evaluating role of one-to-one.  T6-Working together with TA.  T6-Shaping TA role around personal qualities.</p> <p><b>What is valued as supportive?</b>  T6-Sharing experiences as supportive (2)  T3- Support as discussion.  T4- Direct communication is reassuring.  T1- Collaboration and communication help.  T3- Wants collaborative support (2)  T6-Discussion is useful  T1- Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.  T6-Values collaborative support.  T4- Only need to discuss issues.  T4- Teachers sharing ideas (2)  T6-Openness to support (2).  T6-Learning from others  T3- Model support.  T3- Sharing experiences helps.  T6-Sharing knowledge/ experience.</p> <p><b>Positives of a staff team</b>  T1- Team spirit fosters positivity.  T1- Values a dedicated team.  T1- Strength in a supportive team (2)  T2-Values support from staff in school.  T5- Work hard together (2)  T6-Importance of team (4)  T6-Feeling secure in support</p> <p><b>Support Needs</b></p>	<p>T6-Let go of the personal blame (2)  T6-Personal effect of the job.  T6-Try to avoid the feeling of failure.  T1-Feeling of failure.  T4-Disappointed in self.  T3- Pressure on self (3)</p> <p><b>Self-confidence linked to role</b></p> <p>T5- Experience builds confidence (2)</p> <p>T3- Self-development through experience (3)  T1-The experience of success has empowered her.  T3- Experience builds confidence (2)  T1-Still building confidence.  T6-Inexperience leads to self-doubt.  T1-Questioning self (2)  T3- Self-doubt (3)  T1-Not knowing (2)  T4-Doubting knowledge of ASD.  T1-Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)  T6-Self-confidence linked to success with child.</p>
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<p>T3- Hard to let go. T3- Anxious for children moving on. T6-Attachment to child (3) T3- Connection is important. T3- Advocate for child (2) T6- Giving everything for child (4) T6-Thrill of seeing child develop (4) T2-Happy to make a difference. T3- Searching for strengths (2) T3- Hold the moments. T6-Need to make a difference.</p> <p><b>Relating to child</b> T1- Sees the child, not the autism (5) T3- Empathy for child (2). T1- Respect their perspective of the world (2) T1- Relating to children with autism- empathy. T3- Values their perspective of the world (2) T6-Reading the child (4) T1- Unique moments of success are special (3)</p> <p><b>Supporting children with ASD as part of a class</b> <b>Managing needs within the class</b> T1- Managing different needs in the environment (3) T3- Balancing needs of all children in class (3) T2-Managing needs/ desires of other children in class alongside the needs of children with ASD (2) T5- Managing whole class (2) T6-Balancing needs of child vs needs of class T2-ASD difficulties create separation (2). T6-Managing other children's approach to child with ASD. T6-Diversity of needs (2)</p> <p><b>Empathy for other children</b> T2-Empathy for other children (2) T1- Other children not getting enough (2) T2-Protecting the other children. T6-Sympathy for other children (2)</p>	<p>T1- Need more staff to help (2) T1- Support needs to be there throughout (2) T1- Support is lacking (4) T1- Needs someone to give her hope. T1- More training is needed. T3- More training. T3- Stress. T2-More staff needed (2) T5- More people helps (2) T3- Need a break. T3- Help in class. T4- Frustration of waiting (2) T6-Waiting on others (2) T4- Strength in asking for help (2)</p> <p><b>Working with Parents</b></p> <p><b>Importance of relationships with parents</b> T1- Have to support parents needs to support child (2) T1- Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2) T5- Need parents to support progress. T4- Sharing strategies with family. T1- Values her relationships with parents. T5- Positive experiences with parents (3) T2-Parent appreciation. T6-Values parent partnerships (2) T5- Empathy with parents.</p> <p><b>Challenges of working with parents</b> T1- Managing parents expectations (4) T3- Meeting demands of mother (2) T6-Managing demands of mum (2) T5- Balancing the need for all parents. T1- Balancing the needs of parents (5)</p> <p>T5- Negative parent perception is difficult (2)- around African family and family against mainstream T6-Parent perception as a barrier (2) T3- Barrier of challenging mum. (5)</p>	
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<p>T6-Other children's experience of inequality.</p> <p><b>Practical demands of including a child with ASD in class.</b></p> <p>T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)</p> <p>T3- Practical demands.</p> <p>T5- Time (3)</p> <p>T5- Fitting in child with ASD.</p> <p><b>Importance of being part of the class.</b></p> <p>T4- Facilitating inclusion</p> <p>T1- Dedicated to inclusion (2)</p> <p>T1- Togetherness hides the differences (2)</p> <p>T1- Equal value for all children (2)</p> <p>T3- Fitting in (2)</p> <p>T5- Progress as participation (3)</p> <p><b>Peer support</b></p> <p>T3- Interaction from peers.</p> <p>T1- Learning from peers (2)</p> <p>T5- Other children's acceptance (3)</p> <p>T4- Opportunity for modelling.</p> <p>T4- Reception children accept inclusion (2)</p> <p>T6-Inclusion of ASD fosters empathic relationships (2)</p>	<p>T2-Parents' reluctance to see need can be barrier (2)</p> <p>T6-Openness of parents.</p> <p>T6-Feeling attacked by parents.</p> <p><b>Unique Position of Early Years</b></p> <p><b>Early Years position in school</b></p> <p>T1- Others don't understand (3)</p> <p>T1- Early years not a priority.</p> <p>T1- Envy for support in the rest of the school.</p> <p>T6-Foundation stage not valued in school.</p> <p>T6-Foundation stage as separate (2)</p> <p>T6-Others don't understand early years (2)</p> <p>T1-No answers (3)</p> <p><b>Reception suits inclusion of ASD</b></p> <p>T6-Valuing the qualities of reception (2)</p> <p>T5- Flexibility enables inclusion (2)</p> <p>T5- Reception suits inclusion (2)</p> <p>T4- Reception suits ASD (3)</p> <p>T6-Inclusion in foundation stage.</p> <p>T6-Reception is child centred.</p> <p>T6-Desire to spread foundation stage principles.</p> <p>T5- Keeping child in reception (2)</p> <p>T1- Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2)</p> <p>T6-Natural adaptability in reception.</p> <p>T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school.</p> <p>T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)</p> <p>T5- Diversity is accepted.</p> <p><b>Challenges in reception environment</b></p> <p>T4- Environment is challenging.</p> <p>T1- Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3)</p> <p>T4- Routine as a challenge.</p>	
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	<p><b>Importance of the experience in early years</b></p> <p>T1- Early years foundation is important.</p> <p>T6-Importance of foundation stage.</p> <p>T6-Laying the foundation for learning (2)</p> <p>T3- Their beginning (2)</p> <p>T3- Positive start is important (3)</p> <p>T3- Preparing them for the future.</p> <p><b>Inclusion further up school</b></p> <p>T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school</p> <p>T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)</p> <p>T5- Diversity is accepted.</p>	
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## Appendix A9: Example of Collecting Quotes- Reviewing Themes

Original Subtheme Emergent Theme	Quote	Subtheme Moved to
<b>Negative emotional experience</b> T1-Anxiety raised by others (2)	So I'd already was thinking, "I've got to spend all my time with this child," and-- and I was-- I was worried. I was worried about all the other children as well 'cause I was worried about the attention I would have to give to the autistic child and then I got three [laughs]. But um yeah it was-- I didn't- I didn't know, I didn't know how to-- What I had to do, I didn't know- (T1:64-72)	Anxiety in anticipation
<b>Negative emotional experience</b> T6-Fear of being unprepared (2)	It -- it -- it's scary. Really because you want to make sure as a teacher, you know, you're there to support and educate, you want to change the world in your idealistic and this is the -- this is what I'm gonna do and then new reality hits off. Okay, so all these wonderful strategies I've learned don't work for this child. And I can use majority here but actually that's not gonna work for that child and that can be -- that can be quite scary (T6:123-132)	Anxiety in anticipation
<b>Negative emotional experience</b> T2- Anxiety of anticipation	And the mum's saying put him on the bean bag um he has massive tantrums, doesn't know how to do things and I'm thinking how am I going- how am I going to cope with this (T2:504-508).	Anxiety in anticipation
<b>Negative emotional experience</b> T3- Stress	It would be nice to have someone else that could just say, "I can see you guys are a bit stressed with this today." Because it is stressful sometimes.	Influence of wider school
<b>Negative emotional experience</b> T3- Worry	And then also you're worrying all the time, are they fitting in with this, or can they do this, and should I take them out for that.	Balancing needs
<b>Difference that can be made</b> T6-Social and emotional preparation for life. T6-Building child's resilience(2) T6-Empowering children for the future (2)	...for me it's not about outcomes, for me it's about that journey about um, the twists and the turns of the journey that they need and being able to have the skills to cope with those things. Um, as I said to you, many of the children come in and they can't leave mummy and they can't do this, they can't do that and then within a short time, they can....So it's that self-resilience, um, that they need to learn early on, the not everything will go your way (T6:1156-1173).	Setting the foundation
<b>Positive emotional experience</b> T6- Self-recognition	You've learnt how to calm them down and get them back in and that they are still coping in mainstream and that you've got--you can adapt the curriculum to meet their needs and yeah you'd be a bit alien if you didn't sort of get a bit of a kick out of "I've done that"	Experience is empowering

## Appendix A10: Second Edition of Overarching, Superordinate, Subordinate Themes

Developing support for child/ Connecting/ Within class	System of Support
<p><b>Understanding the child</b></p> <p><b>Anxiety of Anticipation</b>  <b>T2- Hard to know everything (2)</b>  T1-Fear at the beginning.  <b>T1-Questioning self (2)</b>  <b>T1-Not knowing (2)</b>  <b>T1-Anxiety raised by others (2)</b>  T2- Anxiety of anticipation.  T6-Fear of being unprepared (2)  T6-Never prepared for everything.  T5- Anxiety in anticipation.</p> <p><b>Value placed on information</b>  T5- Gather knowledge to prepare (3)  T6-Gathering information to prepare  T2-Need information to work out the child (2)  T2- Knowledge changes approach.  T2- Values all information.  T2- Different perceptions around the child.  T6-Knowledge empowers practice (2)  T4- Desire to know everything at the beginning (2)  <del>T2- Hard to know everything (2)</del>  T1- Never prepared for children with autism.</p> <p><b>Give a lot of self to figure out what works for the child- can lead to feelings of failure/ doubt</b>  T5-Get to know what works for the child (2)  T5-Working to child's interests (3)  T4- Finding what works for unique child (2)  T3-Time to get to know child.  T2-Connecting to what works for the child (2)  T2-Recognising the child's way of understanding (2)  T1- Trying everything (2)  T2-Constant search for what works.  T3- Figuring out ways to help (3)  T6-Discovering what the child needs.  <b>T6- Try to avoid the feeling of failure.</b>  <b>T1- Feeling of failure.</b>  <b>T4- Disappointed in self.</b>  <b>T3- Pressure on self (3)</b>  <b>T3- Negative impact on emotional well-being (2)</b>  <b>T3- Panic (2)</b>  <b>T1-Stress (3)</b>  <b>T6-Let go of the personal blame (2)</b>  <b>T6-Personal effect of the job.</b>  <b>T1-Striving to give everything (3)</b></p> <p><b>The process of adapting to child's needs empowering</b>  T6-Adapting to child's needs (3)  T3- Being clear in communication (2)</p>	<p><b>Experience of Support in School</b></p> <p><b>Position in school system</b>  T1- Change outside her control (4)  T1- No power (2)  T1- Isolated (3)  T1- Plea for help (5)  <b>T1-Frustration (5)</b>  T3- Alone in role (3)  T3- Pushing to influence the system (2)  T3- Pressure from others (2)  T3- Need supportive school community.  T3- Developing as a school to support ASD (2)  T6-Being part of the school (3)  T5- School supporting inclusion.  T4- Size of school hinders communication  T4- SENCO holds the information (2)  T4- Staying in the teaching role (2)  T4- Appreciating her experience of support.</p> <p><b>Working with other staff to support children with ASD</b></p> <p>T3- Working against conflicting perceptions of ASD (3)  T6-Frustration with others lack of awareness (4)  T1- Staff experience is important (5)  <b>T1-Frustration (5)</b>  T3- Inexperience needs support (2)  T3- Lack of knowledge around her (3)  T3- Others focus on challenges.  T1- Preparing other staff to support autism.  <b>T3- Sharing responsibility.</b>  T1- Challenge working with one-to-one (3)  T2- TAs could provide what she can't.  T2- Values TA support (2)  T4- One-to-ones know more (2)  T4- One-to-ones as separate.  T4- Admiration for one-to-one role.  T4- Negotiating one-to-one support (2).  T4- One-to-one creates space from the child (2).  T5- Collaboration with one-to-one (2)  T5- Respect for one-to-one (2)  T6- Evaluating role of one-to-one.  T6-Working together with TA  T6-Shaping TA role around personal qualities.</p> <p><b>What is valued as supportive?</b>  T6-Sharing experiences as supportive (2)  T3- Support as discussion.  T4- Direct communication is reassuring.  T1- Collaboration and communication help.  T3- Wants collaborative support (2)  T6-Discussion is useful</p>

<p>T3- Being proactive to maintain positivity.  T1- Importance of changing communication style.  T6-Knowing how to communicate  T1- Careful to give the right amount of support.  T6-Routine helps.  T4- Keeping needs in mind.  T6- Emotional comfort to calm child (2)  <b>T6-Effort is worth the reward (2)</b>  <b>T6-Self-recognition.</b>  <b>T6-Positive moments with children give strength (2)</b>  <b>T1-Self-recognition (2)</b>  <b>T5- Rewarding.</b>  <b>T1-Pride (4)</b>  <b>T6-Pride (2)</b>  <b>T6-Become fixed in a negative bubble (2)</b>  <b>T5- Experience builds confidence (2)</b>  <b>T3- Self-development through experience (3)</b>  T1-The experience of success has empowered her.  <b>T3- Experience builds confidence (2)</b>  <b>T1-Still building confidence.</b>  <b>T6-Inexperience leads to self-doubt.</b>  <b>T3- Self-doubt (3)</b>  <b>T4-Doubting knowledge of ASD.</b>  <b>T1-Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)</b>  <b>T6-Self-confidence linked to success with child.</b></p> <p><b>Uniqueness of children with ASD</b>  T2-Every child with ASD is different.  T5- ASD comes in different forms (2)  T6-ASD is individual.  T2- Acceptance of difference (2)  T2- Difference is not wrong.  T5- Intrigued by differences within autism (2)  T3- Appreciates individual differences (3)</p> <p><b>The difference that can be made/ purpose for child with ASD.</b>  T4- Making a difference (2)  T4- Supporting child to cope.  T4- Making the difficulties disappear.  T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities.  T5- Enabling child to settle (2)  <del>T6-Social and emotional preparation for life.</del>  <del>T6-Building child's resilience(2)</del>  <del>T6-Empowering children for the future (2)</del>  <del>(More about the importance of early years' experience.... in supporting child in life?)</del>  <del>T1-Wants to support independence (2)</del>  <del>T4-Promoting independence.</del></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Connection with child</b></p> <p><b>Attachment to child</b>  T5- Relationships are key (3)  T4- Importance of trusting relationships.  T3- The right type of person (3)</p>	<p><b>T1-Values time to reflect on positives (2)</b>  T1- Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.  <b>T6-Values collaborative support.</b>  T4- Only need to discuss issues.  T4- Teachers sharing ideas (2)  T6-Openness to support (2)  T6-Learning from others  T3- Model support.  T3- Sharing experiences helps.  T6-Sharing knowledge/ experience</p> <p><b>Positives of a team</b>  T1- Team spirit fosters positivity.  T1- Values a dedicated team.  T1- Strength in a supportive team (2)  T2-Values support from staff in school.  T5- Work hard together (2)  T6-Importance of team (4)  T6-Feeling secure in support.</p> <p><b>Support Needs</b>  T1- Need more staff to help (2)  T1- Support needs to be there throughout (2)  T1- Support is lacking (4)  T1- Needs someone to give her hope.  T1- More training is needed.  <b>T3- More training.</b>  <b>T3- Stress.</b>  T2-More staff needed (2)  T5- More people helps (2)  <b>T3- Need a break.</b>  <b>T3- Help in class.</b>  T4- Frustration of waiting (2)  <b>T6-Waiting on others (2)</b>  <del>T4-Strength in asking for help (2)</del></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Working with Parents</b></p> <p><b>Importance of relationships with parents</b>  T1- Have to support parents needs to support child (2)  T1- Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2)  T5- Need parents to support progress.  T4- Sharing strategies with family.  T1- Values her relationships with parents.  T5- Positive experiences with parents (3)  T2-Parent appreciation.  T6-Values parent partnerships (2)  T5- Empathy with parents.</p> <p><b>Challenges of working with parents.</b>  T1- Managing parents' expectations (4)  <b>T3- Meeting demands of mother (2)</b>  <b>T6-Managing demands of mum (2)</b>  T5- Balancing the need for all parents.  T1- Balancing the needs of parents (5)</p>
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<p>T3- Attachment.  T3- Lack of trust in others ability to meet needs of ASD (3)  T3- Hard to let go.  T3- Anxious for children moving on.  T6-Attachment to child (3)  T3- Connection is important.  T3- Advocate for child (2)  T6- Giving everything for child (4)  <b>T3- Joy of making a difference (2)</b>  <b>T4-Reward of overcoming struggles.</b>  <b>T6-Hold on to the positives.</b>  <b>T1-Emotionally draining (2)</b></p> <p><b>Relating to child</b>  T1- Sees the child, not the autism (5)  T3- Empathy for child (2)  T1- Respect their perspective of the world (2)  T1- Relating to children with autism- empathy.  T3- Values their perspective of the world (2)  T6-Reading the child (4)  <b>T1-Pride (4)</b>  <b>T6-Pride (2)</b></p> <p><b>Supporting children with ASD as part of a class</b></p> <p><b>Managing needs within the class</b>  T1- Managing different needs in the environment (3)  <b>T3- Balancing needs of all children in class (3)</b>  T2-Managing needs/ desires of other children in class alongside the needs of children with ASD (2)  T5- Managing whole class (2)  T6-Balancing needs of child vs needs of class  T2-ASD difficulties create separation (2)  T6-Managing other children's approach to child with ASD.  T6-Diversity of needs (2)  <b>T1-Tired (2)</b>  <b>T1-Striving to give everything (3)</b>  <b>T3- Worry</b></p> <p><b>Empathy for other children</b>  T2-Empathy for other children (2)  T1- Other children not getting enough (2)  T2-Protecting the other children.  T6-Sympathy for other children (2)  T6-Others children's experience of inequality.  <b>T1-Guilt (2)</b></p> <p><b>Practical demands of including a child with ASD in class.</b>  T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)  T3- Practical demands.  T5- Time (3)  T5- Fitting in child with ASD.</p> <p><b>Importance of being part of the class.</b>  T4- Facilitating inclusion.</p>	<p>T5- Negative parent perception is difficult (2)-around African family and family against mainstream  T6-Parent perception as a barrier (2)  T3- Barrier of challenging mum (5)  T2-Parents' reluctance to see need can be barrier (2)  T6-Openness of parents.  T6-Feeling attacked by parents.  <b>T6-Emotional impact of parents' rejection.</b></p> <p><b>Unique Position of Early Years</b></p> <p><b>Early Years position in school</b>  T1- Others don't understand (3)  T1- Early years not a priority.  T1- Envy for support in the rest of the school.  T6-Foundation stage not valued in school.  T6-Foundation stage as separate (2)  T6-Others don't understand early years (2)  T1-No answers (3)</p> <p><b>Reception suits inclusion of ASD</b>  T6-Valuing the qualities of reception (2)  T5- Flexibility enables inclusion (2)  T5- Reception suits inclusion (2)  T4- Reception suits ASD (3)  T6-Inclusion in foundation stage.  T6-Reception is child centred.  T6-Desire to spread foundation stage principles.  T5- Keeping child in reception (2)  T1- Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2)  T6-Natural adaptability in reception.  <b>T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school.</b>  <b>T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)</b>  <b>T5- Diversity is accepted.</b></p> <p><b>Challenges around the reception environment.</b>  T4- Environment is challenging.  T1- Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3)  T4- Routine as a challenge.</p> <p><b>Importance of the experience in early years</b>  T1- Early years foundation is important.  <b>T1- Wants to support independence (2)</b>  T6-Importance of foundation stage.  T6-Laying the foundation for learning (2)  T3- Their beginning (2)  T3- Positive start is important (3)  T3- Preparing them for the future.  T4- Promoting independence.  <b>T6-Social and emotional preparation for life.</b>  <b>T6-Building child's resilience (2)</b>  <b>T6-Empowering children for the future (2)</b></p>
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<p>T1- Dedicated to inclusion (2)  T1- Togetherness hides the differences (2)  T1- Equal value for all children (2)  T3- Fitting in (2)  T5- Progress as participation (3)</p> <p><b>Peer support</b>  T3- Interaction from peers.  T1- Learning from peers (2)  T5- Other children's acceptance (3)  T4- Opportunity for modelling.  T4- Reception children accept inclusion (2)  T6-Inclusion of ASD fosters empathic relationships (2)</p>	<p><b><del>Including ASD more difficult further up the school</del></b></p> <p><del>T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school</del>  <del>T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)</del>  <del>T5- Diversity is accepted.</del></p>
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## Appendix A11: Final Theme Structure

<b>SP1: The Journey to find what works for a child with ASD</b>	
<p>Thoughts around ASD</p> <p>T1- Emotional understanding is poor (2)</p> <p>T1- Importance of changing communication style.</p> <p>T1- Challenging behaviour.</p> <p>T2- Behaviour demands attention.</p> <p>T2- Unpredictable behaviour.</p> <p>T3- Children with ASD lack understanding.</p> <p>T3- Social difficulties.</p> <p>T3- Being clear in communication (2)</p> <p>T5- Sensory sensitivity as a challenge (2)</p> <p>T2- Blame the ASD for behaviour, not the child (2)</p> <p>T6-Knowing how to communicate.</p> <p>T6-Emotional difficulties in ASD.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASD is individual</b></p> <p>ASD is individual</p> <p>T4- Finding what works for unique child (2)</p> <p>T5- ASD comes in different forms (2)</p> <p>T5- Intrigued by differences within autism (2)</p> <p>T6-ASD is individual.</p> <p>T3- Time to get to know child.</p> <p>T2-Every child with ASD is different.</p> <p>T1-No answers (1)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Anxiety in anticipation</b></p> <p>Anxiety in anticipation</p> <p>T1-Anxiety raised by others (2)</p> <p>T1-Fear at the beginning.</p> <p>T1- Never prepared for children with autism.</p> <p>T5- Enabling child to settle (2)</p> <p>T5- Anxiety in anticipation.</p> <p>T2- Anxiety of anticipation.</p> <p>T6-Fear of being unprepared (2)</p> <p>T4-Doubting knowledge of ASD.</p> <p>Gathering info</p> <p>T2- Different perceptions around the child.</p> <p>T2- Knowledge changes approach.</p> <p>T2- Values all information.</p> <p>T2-Need information to work out the child (2)</p> <p>T5- Gather knowledge to prepare (3)</p> <p>T5- Prepare to avoid stress (2)</p> <p>T4- Desire to know everything at the beginning (2)</p> <p>T3- Preparation is key.</p> <p>T6-Gathering information to prepare.</p> <p>T6-Knowledge empowers practice (2)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Doubting self in the process of trying</b></p> <p>Process of trying</p> <p>T1- Trying everything (2)</p> <p>T1-Acceptance of failed attempts.</p> <p>T1- Careful to give the right amount of support.</p> <p>T2-Constant search for what works.</p> <p>T3- Figuring out ways to help (3)</p> <p>T3- Being proactive to maintain positivity.</p> <p>T3- Practical demands.</p> <p>T3- Stress.</p> <p>T4-Losing awareness of hidden difficulties (2)</p> <p>T4-Making up for mistake.</p> <p>T4- Making a difference (2)</p> <p>T4-Accept you tried (2)</p> <p>T4-Disappointed in self.</p> <p>T5- Perseverance (2)</p> <p>T6-Adapting to child's needs (2)</p> <p>T6-Acceptance that it is a process of trying.</p> <p>T6-Discovering what the child needs.</p> <p>Self-doubt</p> <p>T1-Feeling of failure.</p> <p>T1-Questioning self (2)</p> <p>T1-Not knowing (2)</p> <p>T4- Keeping needs in mind.</p> <p>T6-Inexperience leads to self-doubt.</p> <p>T3- Self-doubt (3)</p> <p>T3- Self-development through experience (3)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Experience is empowering</b></p> <p>T1-Positive reflections on her developing perspective (2)</p> <p>T1-Still building confidence.</p> <p>T1-Self-recognition (2)</p> <p>T1-The experience of success has empowered her.</p> <p>T3- Inexperience needs support (2)</p> <p>T3- Experience builds confidence (2)</p> <p>T5- Experience builds confidence (2)</p> <p>T5- Confident to differentiate work (2)</p> <p>T6-Positive moments with children give strength (2)</p> <p>T6-Reframing idealistic hopes (2).</p> <p>T6-Let go of the personal blame (2)</p> <p>T6-Self-confidence linked to success with child.</p> <p>T6-Try to avoid the feeling of failure.</p> <p>T6-Self-recognition.</p> <p>T6-Effort is worth the reward (2)</p> <p>T6-Reflection helps (2)</p> <p>T6-Become fixed in a negative bubble (2)</p> <p>T6-Pride (2)</p>
<b>SP2: Connection with the child</b>	

<p><b>Relating to child's perspective</b></p> <p>T4- Importance of trusting relationships.</p> <p>T5- Relationships are key (3)</p> <p>T1- Sees the child, not the autism (5)</p> <p>T1- Respect their perspective of the world (2)</p> <p>T1- Relating to children with autism- empathy.</p> <p>T2-Recognising the child's way of understanding (2)</p> <p>T3- Values their perspective of the world (2)</p> <p>T3- Appreciates individual differences (3)</p> <p>T3- Empathy for child (2)</p> <p>T6-Reading the child (4)</p> <p>T5- Get to know what works for the child (2)</p> <p>T5- Working to child's interests (3)</p> <p>T2-Connecting to what works for the child (2)</p> <p>T3- Connection is important.</p> <p>T6- Emotional comfort to calm child (2)</p> <p>T6-Adapting to child's needs (3)</p>	<p><b>Emotional bond</b></p> <p>T5- Nurturing role.</p> <p>T3- Attachment.</p> <p>T6-Attachment to child (3)</p> <p>T6- Giving everything for child (4)</p> <p>T6-Need to make a difference.</p> <p>T3- Hard to let go.</p> <p>T3- Anxious for children moving on.</p> <p>T3- Advocate for child (2)</p> <p>T1-Emotionally draining (2)</p> <p>T3- Negative impact on emotional well-being (2)</p> <p>T1- Unique moments of success are special (3)</p> <p>T1-Pride (4)</p> <p>T3- Searching for strengths (2)</p> <p>T3- Joy of making a difference (2)</p> <p>T2-Happy to make a difference.</p> <p>T4-Find the positives.</p> <p>T6-Thrill of seeing child develop (4)</p> <p>T3- Hold the moments.</p> <p>T4-Reward of overcoming struggles.</p> <p>T5- Rewarding.</p> <p>T6-Hold on to the positives.</p>
<p><b>SP3: Striving to juggle needs inclusively</b></p>	
<p><b>Juggling Needs</b></p> <p>T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)</p> <p>T1- Managing different needs in the environment (3)</p> <p>T1- Constant needs.</p> <p>T1-Stress (2)</p> <p>T1-Tired (2)</p> <p>T2-Managing needs/ desires of other children in class alongside the needs of children with ASD (2)</p> <p>T1-Striving to give everything (2)</p> <p>T3- Balancing needs of all children in class (3)</p> <p>T3- Extra for ASD (2)</p> <p>T3- Panic</p> <p>T3- Worry</p> <p>T5- Fitting in child with ASD.</p> <p>T5- Managing whole class (2)</p> <p>T5- Time (3)</p> <p>T6-Managing other children's approach to child with ASD.</p> <p>T6-Balancing needs of child vs needs of class</p> <p>T6-Diversity of needs (2)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Empathy for other children</b></p> <p>T1- Other children not getting enough (2)</p> <p>T2-Empathy for other children (2)</p> <p>T2-Protecting the other children.</p> <p>T4- Finding time to meet needs (2)</p> <p>T5- Time (3)</p> <p>T6-Sympathy for other children (2)</p> <p>T5- Other children's acceptance (3)</p> <p>T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities</p> <p>T2-ASD difficulties create separation (2)</p> <p>T6-Other children's experience of inequality</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Togetherness is valued</b></p> <p>T1- Learning from peers (2)</p> <p>T4- Focusing on the communication opportunities.</p> <p>T4- Opportunity for modelling.</p> <p>T3- Interaction from peers.</p> <p>T4- Facilitating inclusion.</p> <p>T1- Equal value for all children (2)</p> <p>T3- Fitting in (2)</p> <p>T1- Dedicated to inclusion (2)</p> <p>T1- Togetherness hides the differences (2)</p> <p>T5- Progress as participation (3)</p> <p>T4- Making the difficulties disappear</p> <p>T6-Inclusion of ASD fosters empathic relationships (2)</p> <p>T2-Individuality is the same in all children.</p>

<p>T2-There is something better elsewhere (2)  T2-Environment is important (2)  T2-Questioning what she can provide.  T2-Not the right place.  T2-Not able to give what was needed.</p>	
<b>SP4: Working within the school system</b>	
<p><b>Outside support</b>  T6-Availability of support (2)  T4- Support depends on severity (2)  T4- Paperwork gives the answers.  T5- Entitlement to support (2)  T4- Only need to discuss issues.  T4- Direct communication is reassuring.  T5- Separate outside assessment.</p> <p><b>Working within the School System</b>  T3- Need supportive school community.  T3- Lack of knowledge around her (3)  T3- Developing as a school to support ASD (2)  T3- Pushing to influence the system (2)  T3- Sharing responsibility.  T6-Being part of the school (3)  T4- Size of school hinders communication.  T3- Alone in role (3)  T3- Pressure from others (2)  T3- Stress.  T3- Panic (2)  T6-Waiting on others (2)  T3- Frustration(2)  T1- Change outside her control (4)  T1- No power (2)  T1- Isolated (3)  T1-No answers (1)  T1- Needs someone to give her hope.  T1- Needs a safe space to discuss challenges.  T4- SENCO holds the information (2)  T4- Staying in the teaching role (2)  T1- Plea for help (5)  T1- Support is lacking (4)  T1- Support needs to be there throughout (2)  T4- Appreciating her experience of support.  T4- Frustration of waiting (2)  T4- Strength in asking for help (2)  T5- School supporting inclusion.  T6-Openness to support (2).  T2-Pessimistic about future support.  T3- Resigned to ideal support being impossible (2)</p>	<p><b>Strength in Class Team</b>  T6-Importance of team (4).  T1- Values a dedicated team.  T5- Support in school (2)  T1- Team spirit fosters positivity.  T6-Feeling secure in support.  T1- Strength in a supportive team (2)  T1- Need more staff to help (2)  T5- More people helps (2)  T2-More staff needed (2)  T3- Recognising limitations (3)  T3- Need a break.  T3- Help in class.  T3- Wants collaborative support (2)  T2-Values support from staff in school.  T2-Values TA support (2)  T2-TAs could provide what she can't.  T3- Sharing experiences helps  T4- Teachers sharing ideas (2)  T6-Sharing experiences as supportive (2)  T6-Sharing knowledge/ experience  T6-Discussion is useful.  T6-Values collaborative support.  T3- Support as discussion.  T6-Learning from others.  T3- Model support.</p> <p><b>Challenge of Sharing Responsibility for a Child with ASD</b>  T6-Evaluating role of one-to-one.  T6-Working together with TA.  T6-Shaping TA role around personal qualities  T3- Working against conflicting perceptions of ASD (3)  T3- Lack of trust in others' ability to meet needs of ASD (3)  T3- Frustration(2)  T3- Others focus on challenges.  T3- The right type of person (3)  T3- Relinquishing control (2)  T3- More training.  T5- Collaboration with one-to-one (2)  T5- Respect for one-to-one (2)  T5- Work hard together (2)  T5- Appreciates different perspective (2)  T5- Adapting to level of support available (2)</p>

	<p>T4- One-to-ones know more (2)  T4- One-to-ones as separate.  T4- Admiration for one-to-one role.  T4- Negotiating one-to-one support (2).  T4- One-to-one creates space from the child (2)  T1- Challenge working with one-to-one (3)  T1- Staff experience is important (5)  T1- More training is needed.</p>
<b>SP5: Nobody understands the early years</b>	
<p><b>Bottom position in school</b>  T1- Early years not a priority.  T1- Envy for support in the rest of the school.  T1- Others don't understand (3)  T1- Preparing other staff to support autism.  T6-Frustration with others lack of awareness (4)  T6-Others don't understand early years (2)  T6-Foundation stage not valued in school.  T6-Foundation stage as separate (2)</p> <p><b>Setting the foundation</b>  T6-Importance of foundation stage.  T6-Laying the foundation for learning (2)  T1- Early years foundation is important.  T3- Positive start is important (3)  T3- Their beginning (2)  T3- Preparing them for the future.  T6-Social and emotional preparation for life.  T6-Building child's resilience (2)  T6-Empowering children for the future (2)  T1- Wants to support independence (2)  T3- Joy of making a difference (2)  <b>T4- Promoting independence.</b>  T4- Supporting child to cope</p>	<p><b>Unique environment</b>  T1- Unique aspects of the early years challenge (3)  T4- Environment is challenging.  T4- Routine as a challenge.  T6-Routine helps.  T6-Desire to spread foundation stage principles.  T4- Reception suits ASD (3)  T4- Reception children accept inclusion (2)  T6-Inclusion in foundation stage.  T5- Reception suits inclusion (2)  T5- Flexibility enables inclusion (2)  T5- Keeping child in reception (2)  T5- Diversity is accepted.  T1- Take on the approach to autism naturally in early years (2)  T6-Natural adaptability in reception.  T6-Reception is child centred.  T6-Valuing the qualities of reception (2).  T4- Formality as a barrier to inclusion further up school.  T5- Separation grows as child grows older (2)</p>
<b>SP6: Working with parents' perceptions</b>	
<p><b>Parents as partners</b>  T4- Sharing strategies with family.  T4- Passing family needs on (2)  T1- Values her relationships with parents  T5- Positive experiences with parents (3)  T2-Parent appreciation.  T6-Values parent partnerships (2)</p>	<p><b>Parents as barriers</b>  T1- Balancing the needs of parents (5)  T1- Have to support parents needs to support child (2)  T1- Managing parents' expectations (4)  T1- Supporting parents' understanding of autism (2)  T1- Alone in supporting parents (2)  T1- Guilt.  T2-Parents' reluctance to see need can be barrier (2)  T3- Meeting demands of mother (2)  T3- Barrier of challenging mum (5)  T5- Negative parent perception is difficult (2)  T5- Need parents to support progress.  T5- Others role to engage parents.  T5- Balancing the need for all parents.  T5- Empathy with parents.  T6-Openness of parents.  T6-Managing demands of mum (2)  T6-Parent perception as a barrier (2)  T6-Feeling attacked by parents.  T6-Emotional impact of parents' rejection</p>

