WHAT ACCOUNTS DO YOUNG PEOPLE GIVE

OF THEIR EXPERIENCE OF

PERSON-CENTRED ANNUAL REVIEW MEETINGS

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Abstract

They're helpful
Because it tells you about
About all the stuff you need to work on
And what stuff you are good at already

(Nick aged 10)

Following recent reform in special educational needs (SEN) education in England, schools and settings are expected to include children with SEN in statutory meetings about their progress.

In the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH), a model of 'person-centred annual review' meetings has been developed. The meeting centres on the young person and includes discussion of strengths, difficulties and future plans. Information is presented in accessible language and using visual representations. Children are encouraged to participate fully in the meeting.

This idiographic and exploratory study sought the perspectives of six young people about their experience of these meetings. All the children had SEN and attended a single primary school in LBTH. Narrative interviews were conducted: children were asked to describe and draw the review. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and a narrative analysis was conducted incorporating psychodynamic concepts. Interviews were converted into 'rough verse'; a condensed way of presenting the children's words and interviewer's prompts.

Children presented a largely positive view of their experience of such meetings; all children described their own strengths and positive characteristics, most described difficulties and what they were working on, all described changes that they attributed to the meeting.

The children's accounts support the view that the meeting was an 'intervention', in that these children felt the meeting changed aspects of their experience of school, including practical benefits and feeling better understood and supported.

Implications for educational settings are outlined, and the value of meaningful pupil participation in reviews is considered.

(271 words)

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my godfather, Rashid Syed, Educational Psychologist.

1944 - 2013

Acknowledgements

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1 Chapter 1 Introduction

Title of study: What accounts do young people give of their experience of person-centred annual review meetings?

1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter starts by setting out the national context; that of reform in special educational needs education, which is intended to improve the life chances of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The chapter then describes person-centred approaches and their role within these reforms, and how these are being adopted in the local context in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH), where person-centred annual reviews (PCARs) have been developed and implemented through a pilot project. The chapter then defines and describes these meetings for the purpose of the research project, and concludes by explaining the rationale for the current study, which focuses on person-centred annual reviews and explores young people's experiences of these meetings.

1.2 National context: reform in special educational needs education

This study has taken place at a time of implementation of new Special Educational Needs (SEN) arrangements in the UK. Different systems operate in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the current study took place within the English SEN system.

The established national arrangements were set out in the Special Educational Need Code of Practice (2001), under the Special Educational Need and Disability Act (2001), linked to The Education Act (1996). Under the English system for supporting children who have additional educational needs, a proportion of children identified as having the most significant difficulties were subject to 'statutory assessment' of their 'special educational needs', under section 323 of

the Education Act (1996). This was a multi-professional assessment which usually resulted in the Local Authority issuing a 'Statement of Special Educational Need' (SSEN), a legal document that states: the nature and extent of a child's special educational need; the educational objectives that should be worked towards; and the provision of resources that must be made to support the child, such as specialist teaching.

However, a number of critical reviews pointed to failings in the established SEN system in England, such as that of the UK audit Commission (2002), and Ofsted (DFE 2010). Failings identified have included the lack of value of SSEN in helping meet a child's needs, the stressful and alienating nature of assessment processes, and lack of effective monitoring of progress over time (Corrigan 2014).

Therefore a number of reforms to the SEN system have been implemented, with the intention of achieving better outcomes for children with high level needs. From 1st of September 2014 a new law, 'The Children and Families Act 2014,' came into effect, with statutory guidance for schools and settings set out in the Special Educational Need and Disability Code of Practice (2014, amended 2015).

Under the new system, the established arrangements such as SSENs are being phased out and Education and Health Care (EHC) plans are being introduced. Notwithstanding changes, children and young people who have SSEN or EHC plans must have a yearly meeting to review their progress and support arrangements, called an 'annual review': a meeting involving parents or carers, teaching staff and professionals. Under the new SEND system, annual review meetings are expected to be carried out in a person-centred way, meaning that the child or young person will usually attend the meeting and participate actively in it.

Early documentation relating to the SEND reforms signalled that 'person-centred' ways of working would be central to the new system. The draft or 'indicative' code of practice described person-centred planning as:

> *A key approach that ensures that parents and carers, children and young people are actively placed at the heart of the system…planning should start with the individual (not with services), and take account of their wishes and aspirations, and the support they need to be included and involved in their community.*
>
> *… Using these approaches, educational settings, professionals and local authorities need to ensure that parents, children and young people are genuinely involved in planning, review and decision-making processes.'*

(DfE & DoH 2013: p 12)

In contrast to the implementation of the 2001 Code of Practice, when a detailed 'SEN Toolkit' was provided to enable schools and settings to establish the system (DfES 2001), the 2014 SEND Code of Practice was not linked to a comparable set of resources. Rather, the DfES organised the Pathfinder Champion Programme whereby some local authorities were given additional support to implement the SEND reforms prior to the rest of the country, with the intention that such authorities could provide leadership on best practice. This has sometimes appeared to be a system of guided trial and error, given the experimental nature of these project areas.

1.3 Local context

In a process that echoes some aspects of pilot projects in Pathfinder authorities noted above, two members of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, including the author, and an Educational Psychologist (EP) colleague, Andrew Sutcliffe, attended training by Helen Sanderson Associates (HSA), and then adapted this model to the LBTH context through a pilot project. These EPs have led a borough-wide project

trialling the implementation of person-centred approaches in annual review meetings for children with Statements of Special Educational Need (SSEN).

Most of the fifteen schools which participated in the project were longstanding members of an 'interest group' led by these two EPs, which included Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) who were adopting more 'child-centred' ways of working with children with additional needs, such as setting targets with children, using their goals and language and devising 'pupil friendly' individual educational plans.

This study was carried out in a Tower Hamlets school that participated in the project, and which has a long history of interest in child-centred teaching methods. For the purposes of this research, person-centred annual reviews will follow the definition set out in local guidance documents (Birney and Sutcliffe 2012; Sutcliffe and Birney 2015) which include all the key elements of person-centred planning described below.

1.4 Person-centred planning

Discourses about 'the voice of the child' and 'person-centred' ways of working are part of a broader social movement concerned with promoting social justice through the emancipation of people who have traditionally been marginalised (Gersch 1996), including the civil rights and women's rights movement in the US, and the Disability Rights/ Inclusion movements in the US and Canada (Shapiro 1993).

The UN convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC) was a landmark in enshrining children's rights internationally; with article 12 stating that 'children have a right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in matters that affect them', and article 13 stating that 'children have the right to freedom of expression, including the right to see, receive and share information and ideas in ways which make sense to them' (UN 1989).

In keeping with this, the Special Educational Need and Disability (SEND) code of practice has called for further change in how professionals work with children with SEN, towards a more 'child-centred' system. Person-centred approaches and a focus on the views and wishes of young people are emphasised, and the code of practice states in section 9.22:

> *The assessment and planning process should:*
>
> *• focus on the child or young person as an individual*
>
> *• enable children and young people and their parents to express their views, wishes and feelings*
>
> *• enable children and young people and their parents to be part of the decision-making process*
>
> *• be easy for children, young people and their parents or carers to understand, and use clear ordinary language and images rather than professional jargon*
>
> *• highlight the child or young person's strengths and capabilities*
>
> *• enable the child or young person, and those that know them best to say what they have done, what they are interested in and what outcomes they are seeking in the future*
>
> *• tailor support to the needs of the individual*
>
> *• organise assessments to minimise demands on families*
>
> *• bring together relevant professionals to discuss and agree together the overall approach, and*
>
> *• deliver an outcomes-focused and co-ordinated plan for the child or young person and their parents*
>
> *9.23 This approach is often referred to as <u>a person-centred approach</u>.*
>
> *(DfE/DoH 2015 p147-8, author's underlining)*

Person-centred planning is an approach originally developed in the field of social care, and there is convincing evidence that a person-centred approach promotes positive outcomes for adults with learning difficulties and care for the elderly (Sanderson and Lewis 2012).

From a humanistic perspective, 'person-centred' is not a technique, tool or strategy but a way of thinking, approaching and relating to the world. From this perspective humans are viewed as essentially trustworthy and intrinsically motivated towards constructive fulfilment (Rogers, 1978). Government documents (Routledge & Sanderson, 2002; TSP, 2010) have also recognised a range of person-centred tools such as communication charts, one-page profiles and learning logs (Sanderson, Mathiesen & Erwin, 2006; Murray & Sanderson, 2007; Sanderson, 2010). A definition of person-centred, which incorporates both philosophy and tools, takes in activities that are based upon what is important to a person from their own perspective and which contribute to their full inclusion in society (Murray & Sanderson, 2007).

(Taylor-Brown 2012 p55)

1.5   Definition of person-centred annual reviews for the current study

The person-centred annual review is a process for conducting a review meeting about a child or young person's SEN. The meeting attempts to cover the statutory obligations of the Local Authority to carry out an annual review meeting[1], but in a person-centred way.

The essential component is that the meeting considers the child or young person as a whole person. This is reflected in the importance placed on their strengths, preferences, hopes and wishes. The meeting is arranged with the intention of maximising their engagement, according to their current level of participation, as judged by key adults who are facilitating the meeting. This usually means that the young person is present during most or all of their meeting, but their wishes and preferences about this are also taken into account.

Tower Hamlets person-centred annual reviews always:

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[1] At the time of writing transitional arrangements are in place until 2018, where annual reviews are carried out under the Education Act 1996 for children with existing SSEN, and under the Children and Families Act 2014 for those with EHC plans.

i.   Acknowledge the child's strengths- what everyone 'likes and admires' about them. With some young people, for example in secondary settings, this can be termed what others 'respect' about them.

ii.   Consider what's working well.

iii.   Consider what's not working well. This may often be described as 'dealing with difficulties with honesty and care'.

iv.   Plan next steps.

1.6   The Tower Hamlets model of person-centred annual reviews

1.6.1 Preparation for the review

The student is informed about the review meeting in advance. They are also told why it is happening, and the agenda of the meeting is explained.

The people who will be invited to come are discussed and the student is asked if they would like to bring a friend, as a supporter. They may help make invitations to the meeting

The student is supported to bring a 'contribution' to the meeting appropriate to their current skills. This could simply be a photograph of the child doing some preferred activities. Alternatively it could be a film, poster, book or PowerPoint presentation that they have made, usually with adult support.

Other adults invited to the meeting, such as parents and staff, are told what to expect, and may also prepare contributions. These contributions often cover the areas: what we like and admire about the child, what's working well, and what's not working well.

Staff members may also elicit contributions from peers or classmates. These usually concern the same areas: what we like and admire about the child, what's working well, and what's not working well.

The student is involved in setting up the meeting room on the day, often choosing refreshments, discussing seating arrangements, and welcoming participants into the meeting room. It is essential that the child is present before the adults; so that they feel a sense of ownership of the meeting and that it is 'their space'.

1.6.2 How a person-centred annual review is conducted

The review is usually chaired by the SENCo of the school[2]. It follows the Tower Hamlets Person-centred Agenda:

Table 1.1 The Tower Hamlets person-centred agenda

1.   Welcome
Participants are introduced; the ground rules and agenda of the meeting are explained.
2.   Presentations
Contributions are shared which have been prepared in advance by the child or young person, their peers and adults who are not at the meeting. If the young person has prepared something, this is shown first.
3.   What do we like and admire about X?
All participants must make positive comments about what they like and admire about the child or young person.
4.   What is important to X?
The facilitator initiates a discussion about the child's or young person's views and preferences

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[2] Or an EP who works with the school or specialist teacher for person-centred planning employed by the local authority.

about, for example, relationships, learning and the future.

5.   Previous targets and actions

If appropriate, the facilitator summarises targets and actions from the previous review.

6.   What is going well?

The facilitator leads a discussion about the child's progress, support, successful strategies, and effective provision, targets that have been achieved and completed actions from the previous review. This includes the views of the child or young person, the parents and professionals.

7.   What is not going well?

The facilitator leads a discussion about difficulties, problems, and barriers to success, disagreements, targets that have not been met and uncompleted actions.

This includes the views of the child or young person, the parents, and professionals.

8.   What do we want X to learn?

If appropriate outcomes that are meaningful to the child or young person are devised and agreed.

9.   Person-centred action plan

A clear plan is made about how the outcomes will be implemented, and who will do what, when.

10.   Conclusion

The meeting concludes with a positive summary of the meeting.

(Sutcliffe and Birney 2015)

1.6.3 Following the review

Some kind of representation of the outcomes of the meeting is given to the child or young person; this might be a picture or other visual record. The local authority documentation (see appendix 1) is completed and submitted to LBTH SEN section.

Although this is a manualised approach (Birney and Sutcliffe 2012; Sutcliffe and Birney 2015), as can be seen, this is not a prescriptive model. Certain elements are essential, such as a

discussion of what people like and admire about a young person, and the general orientation of the meeting. However, other elements, such as whether a child or young person brings a friend or advocate with them, remain the choice of the young person themselves. How fidelity to this approach was maintained will be considered in Chapter 5, Discussion.

1.7   Relevance of research

This study took place at a time of implementation of the new code of practice for SEND (DfE & DoH 2014). This emphasises the person-centred approach, which attempts to place people at the centre of decisions that affect them: listening to children and empowering them (Sanderson and Lewis 2012).

However, as will be discussed in the following chapter, person-centred approaches have only recently been applied to work with children and young people. As will be shown, there is limited evidence yet about their effectiveness, and about the perspectives of those on whom it centres - young people themselves (Warner 2012; Taylor-Brown 2014). The current study proposes to address this, albeit on a modest scale.

The following chapter will explain how the current study links to relevant literature in educational and psychological research. It will start with psychological theories that underpin person-centred reviews, and then present a detailed summary and critique of studies in areas relevant to person-centred reviews, pupil participation and children's perspectives. The rationale for the current study is discussed in the context of this previous research.

2 Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Chapter overview

The previous chapter gave background information about the current study, explaining the national and local context. It explained the relevance of person-centred planning and defined what is meant by a person-centred annual review for the purpose of this project. It concluded with the rationale for carrying out research in this area.

The current chapter situates this project within the relevant research literature. The first section outlines psychological theory and literature that underpin the phenomenon being investigated: person-centred annual reviews. These include humanistic psychology, positive psychology and social learning theory. The second section introduces and explains a systematic search of the relevant research linked to both person-centred planning with children and young people, and pupil participation and 'the voice of the child': it sets out the inclusion criteria, details and critiques the studies and summarises their relevance. It concludes with implications of these studies for the current research project.

2.2 Psychological underpinnings of person-centred planning

Person-centred planning (PCP) draws explicitly on ideas from a range of psychological traditions, notably humanistic and positive psychology (Warner 2012). Ideas and models from other psychological domains also provide useful ways to conceptualise how it works, such as those from social and cognitive psychology (Sutcliffe and Birney 2015) and, as the current study will suggest, psychodynamic approaches.

2.2.1 Humanistic psychology

Humanistic psychology is an approach developed from the ideas of Rogers, who promoted a view of all individuals as inherently benevolent, and as motivated by a need to self-actualise or develop and fulfil their potential, an idea often referred to as 'constructive fulfilment' (Taylor-

Brown 2012). Rogers emphasised the rights of individuals to make their own choices, and also saw the way that people are treated by others as a mechanism for how a person develops and is socialised (Aspy 1988). Rogers is probably best known for introducing and popularising the concept of 'unconditional positive regard' from the therapist to the client as a necessary foundation for successful therapy (Rogers 1963; 1978). These ideas are embodied in person-centred planning because of the importance it places on the client as an individual, the focus on affirming them and acknowledging them as a 'whole person' rather than addressing them as a list of problems or difficulties, and the priority given to setting goals or targets linked to the client's' own hopes or wishes.

Humanistic psychology has been critiqued, especially the idea of 'unconditional positive regard' as this is seen by some as unrealistic, and ethically questionable when working with clients whose behaviour is dangerous to themselves or others around them, for example where a client is a perpetrator of abuse (Sanford 1984).

2.2.2 Positive psychology

Positive psychology is an approach to understanding how people think and behave, which focuses on positive aspects of human life, such as happiness, well-being and human flourishing. Martin Seligman, a key proponent, described it as: 'The scientific study of optimal human functioning'. Seligman first came to prominence as an animal experimentalist in the US, whose work helped show how depression can be caused through negative experiences, and who introduced the idea of 'learned helplessness' (Seligman 1972), which describes how those who experience uncontrollable stress eventually become hopeless, and stop attempting to change things around them. Seligman has argued that a positive outlook and set of expectations often leads people to achieve better outcomes (Seligman 1991).

The positive psychology movement has led many education professionals to question the negative assumptions that underlie a 'deficit model' of learning difficulties (Thompson-Prout 2009), and to promote ideas from positive psychology, including 'solution focused brief therapy (SFBT)' (De Shazer 1998), 'Appreciative Inquiry' (Cooperrider 2008; Harris 2013) and 'narrative therapy' approaches (White and Epston 1990), which systematically focus on strengths, positive skills or attributes, and which privilege discussion of the future and an individual's hopes, dreams and goals, to promote individuals having more positive accounts of their past experiences and future plans. There has been significant interest in these ideas within the profession of educational psychology (Rhodes 1995; Ajmal 2001, Wagner 2001; Hulusi, 2007). The content of the person-centred agenda applies these approaches with its focus on: what people 'like and admire' (strengths); what's working well (in SFBT exceptions to difficulties, also called 'unique outcomes' within narrative approaches); and plans and aspirations (preferred futures).

Positive Psychology has been a movement welcomed by many, including proponents mentioned above; perhaps unsurprisingly it has also attracted some criticism, for example Millar has argued that positive psychology is fundamentally unscientific and is:

> *'founded on a whole series of fallacious arguments: these involve circular reasoning, tautology, failure to clearly define or properly apply terms, the identification of causal relationship where none exist, and unjustified generalisation'*
>
> *(Miller 2008 p592)*

For the purposes of the current study, it is argued that a degree of objectivity can be maintained, especially given an awareness of potential biases noted above.

2.2.3 Social learning theory

Social learning theory takes a socio-cognitive perspective on how individuals learn and develop, one which emphasises both the importance of people learning from observation, and also the

role of the learner's intrinsic motivation: their sense of pride, satisfaction and achievement. The theory was formulated by Bandura (1986; 1977; 1971) and significantly developed by others including Dweck (2012), who emphasises the importance of having a 'growth mindset' with mistakes and challenges being an essential part of any meaningful learning process. Consistent with ideas from social learning theory, feedback to the individual should be constructive and expressed in clear, simple language within person-centred planning. There should be an emphasis on acknowledging and celebrating successes; for the client to find out and reflect upon *how* they have done well; discussion of 'what's not going well' should be used as an opportunity for learning and change, and there should also be a focus on *how* outcomes will be achieved. Taken together, these aspects of person-centred planning are argued to promote personalised learning, self-awareness, and thereby the 'self-efficacy' of the person at the centre of the process (Coulson 2007).

Overall, person-centred planning appears to incorporate aspects from a number of complementary psychological principles and approaches; it is humanistic and positive and includes elements that are believed to promote self-efficacy and metacognitive awareness.

2.3   Systematic search

Following this consideration of the psychological underpinnings of person-centred reviews (PCRs), a systematic search was made of research relevant to the current study, which concerns children's narratives of their experiences of person-centred planning meetings. The following areas of literature were therefore investigated; person-centred reviews, person-centred planning, pupil participation and the voice of the child. The systematic search was completed in sections to ensure the relevant domains were covered. The purpose was twofold: to ensure the researcher's knowledge of the general area she was researching was sufficiently comprehensive; and to select a small number of highly relevant studies for detailed critique.

EBSCO Host was used as search engine to explore the following databases: BEI- British Education Index; CINAHL; PsycARTICLES; PsycBOOKs: PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection and eBook Collection. Unless otherwise specified, all searches were carried out from 1980-2015. The articles included for critique were published in peer-reviewed journals and were written in the English language. In addition, selected doctoral theses were chosen, due to their high relevance, and a high quality study which was a systematic overview of person-centred planning research and included papers seeking young people's views of person centred planning. Because the current study concerns young people's perspectives, the critique excluded those which focused solely on adults as clients, or those in which the young person's view was inferred, usually from the 'family perspective'. As person-centred planning originated in North America spelling differences in British English and American English, different spellings and terminology were carefully considered.

In addition to the systematic search in the area of person-centred planning and reviews, numerous searches were carried out in the area of pupil participation, including search terms such as 'pupil participation', 'pupil involvement', 'voice of the child', 'pupil views', 'child*[3] perspective', in combination with search terms such as 'review', 'meeting' and 'consultation'. These yielded valuable papers for the section below on children's views, but no new papers considered relevant for detailed critique. The researcher also considered literature that she knew through her work as a practising psychologist, and that she found through preliminary research for this project. Additionally a number of articles were identified through detailed reading of studies cited in the literature.

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[3] In database searches adding an asterisk asks for the search to include all terms with this root, in this case child* therefore includes child, childhood, children and so forth.

Table 2.1 Systematic search

General area	Search terms	Refinements	No. of articles found	Articles selected for critique	Notes on inclusion criteria
Person-centred planning	Person centred planning	None	163	See below	Studies included explore CYPs perspectives
		Limited to childhood (birth-12yrs) and adolescence (13-17yrs)	15	Corrigan Hayes	Other studies were selected for general literature review inc Robertson et al
	Person centered planning	None	211	See below	Studies included explore CYPs perspectives
		Limited to childhood (birth-12yrs) and adolescence (13-17yrs)	26	Croke & Thompson Hagner, Helm and Butterworth	
	Person centred reviews	None	4	Warner Taylor-Brown	Studies included explore CYPs perspectives
	Person centered reviews	None	119	See below	
		Limited to childhood (birth-12yrs) and adolescence (13-17yrs)	8	No new studies	
	Student centred planning	None	0	No new studies	
	Student centered planning	None	1	No new studies	Study identified did not include CYP perspectives

Table 2.2 Articles included for critique: person-centred planning

Author	Title	Year	Country	Participants
Corrigan	Person-centred planning 'in action': Exploring the use of person-centred planning in supporting young people's transition and re-integration to mainstream education	2014	UK	6 children and young people aged 5-15 43 adults including parents, school/ setting staff/ external professionals
Taylor-Brown	How did young people identified as presenting with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties experience a person-centred transition review meeting?	2012	UK	3 year 9 boys (c.13 years old)
Warner	Person-centred reviews: an exploration of the views of students and their parents/carers.	2012	UK	16 students with SEN and their Parents/ carers (aged 10-13 years old)
Croke & Thompson	Person-centered planning in a transition program for Bronx youth with disabilities.	2011	USA	403 youth with disabilities (aged 15-18)
Hayes	Visual annual reviews: how to include pupils with learning difficulties in their educational reviews	2004	UK	1 child, 1 parent, 2 teachers and a TA
Hagner, Helm & Butterworth	'This is your meeting' a qualitative study of person centered planning	1996	USA	6 participants aged 16-22

Table 2.3 Articles included for critique: pupil views on involvement in planning

Author	Title	Year	Country	Participants
Aston & Lambert	Young people's views about their involvement in decision making	2010	UK	26 young people with SEN aged 8-16
Goepel	Constructing the Individual Education Plan: Confusion or collaboration?	2009	UK	4 students aged 10-11
Taylor	The participation of children with multi-sensory impairment in person-centred planning.	2007	UK	3 students with multisensory impairment aged 12-14
Test, Mason, Hughes, Konrad, Neale & Wood	Student involvement in Individualized education program meetings	2004	USA	Meta-analysis of 16 selected studies include views of CYP

Table 2.4 Studies considered in detail, then excluded from critique

Author	Title	Year	Country	exclusion criteria
Kaehne & Beyer	Person-centred reviews as a mechanism for planning the post-school transition of young people with intellectual disability.	2014	UK	Excluded 'family perspective' only
Davies & Morgan	What kind of future for young people with Down syndrome? The views and aspirations of young people and their families	2010	UK	Seeks views generally not linked to decision making
Childre & Chambers	Family perceptions of student centred planning and IEP meetings	2005	USA	Excluded, family perspective not CYP
Smart	Transition planning and the needs of young people and their carers: the alumni project	2004	UK	Excluded, family perspective, not CYP
Miner & Bates	The effect of person-centered planning activities on the IEP / transition planning process	1997	USA	Excluded, family perspective, not CYP

2.3.1 **Person-centred planning with children and young people**

2.3.1.1 Introduction to person-centred planning

As noted in the introduction, person-centred annual reviews have developed from an influential approach to planning in health and social care known as person-centred planning (PCP). Advocates of this approach describe PCP's place within a broader social movement which argues for a 'move from a culture of dependency for disabled people to one of rights and independence' (Murray and Sanderson 2007, p15).

'Person-centred planning has played a key role in the transformation of intellectual disabilities services for more than a decade' (Kaehne & Beyer 2014). Examples of person-centred frameworks include: Essential Lifestyle Planning (ELP) (Smull & Sanderson 2005); Making Action Plans (MAPS), (Forest & Lusthaus, 1989); and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH), (Pearpoint, O'Brien & Forest, 1993). These approaches all feature visual supports and advocate accessible language.

Another aspect common to all person-centred approaches is the development of 'circles of support' (Perske, 1988). The support circle is described as a group of caring people who come together to support someone's endeavours to clarify a vision of the future. Circles of support have been viewed as being critical components in a person's attainment of a more desirable and personalised future lifestyle. (Miner and Bates 1997 p105)

Documentation about person-centred approaches such as Murray and Sanderson (Ibid) tends to be practice- rather than research-orientated. Sanderson (2000), in her summary for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, lists five key features that are common to all PCP approaches and practices:

1. The person is at the centre;

2. Family members and friends are partners in planning;

3. The plan reflects what is important to the individual, their capacities, and what support they require;

4. The plan results in actions that are about life, not just services, and reflects what is possible, not just what is available;

5. The plan results in ongoing listening, learning, and further action.

Claes et al (2010) carried out a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of person-centred planning for adults with learning difficulties and used specified criteria to select fifteen studies that reported on the impact of PCP processes. Although their assessment of the quality of the research in this area was that it was weak overall when considering rigorous criteria for evidence-based research, the authors conclude that PCP has a moderate positive effect on personal outcomes. Thompson and Viriyangkura (2013) note systematic problems with the research literature, namely the 'absence of a universal definition of a PCP process, the diversity of processes used by practitioners, and difficulties in assuring that processes were implemented with fidelity' (ibid p331). Another, more troubling aspect of their investigations into the literature is that PCP may in practice be applied in what appears to be a discriminatory way at odds with the 'inclusive' values which it espouses. Claes and colleagues note that people with communication difficulties, challenging behaviour or severe learning disabilities are often excluded from the person-centred planning process (ibid).

There is a considerable literature concerning PCP in adults, such as the elderly, adults with learning difficulties and those with medical needs (Robertson et al 2007; DoH 2005) There is also a 'clear consensus in the literature that positive effects of person-centred planning have not been sufficiently evidenced to date' (Kaehne and Beyer 2014 p604).

There is limited research into person-centred meetings. However, the available research suggests that person-centred reviews improve people's participation in the meetings themselves and

suggest significant positive changes in such lifestyle factors as: social networks, contact with friends and family, community-based activities, scheduled day activities, and levels of choice (Robertson et al, 2007a, 2007b; Taylor-Brown 2012 p55).

Some commentators have also criticised current manifestations of PCP, raising concerns that some advocates of the approach, despite their laudable intentions, have overstated claims that person-centred work empowers individuals. The reality may be that clients experience 'more of the same' (Mansell & Beadle-Brown 2004), because although there is an aspiration towards a different relationship between professionals and their clients, this fundamental culture change calls for significant adjustments by both parties. Kaehne and Beyer's study of person-centred transition reviews…

> *...confirms to a large extent Claes et al's (2010) suspicion that even the best person-centred process in transition planning may remain a paper exercise unless services perceive person-centred planning as a mechanism to develop a genuinely personalised and individual service to young people with LD and their families.*

(ibid p612)

The application of PCP to work with children and young people and education is also relatively recent (Warner 2012; Taylor-Brown 2012). Moreover, much of the literature that relates to person-centred work with younger clients also concerns transition to adult services and rarely focuses on the perspectives of young people themselves (Corrigan 2014). The following section will address and critique studies that investigate children and young people's perspectives on being involved in person-centred planning.

2.3.1.2 Critique of studies

The critique will start with studies with the broadest scope, and will progressively examine those with a narrower focus but the greatest relevance to the current research project.

2.3.1.2.1 *Croke and Thompson (2011)*

Croke and Thompson (ibid) carried out a large-scale study of the effects of PCP in a transition programme for youth with disabilities, resident in the Bronx district of New York City, USA[4]. This study has been considered in detail due to its potential importance, and also because this extended critique highlights systematic and troubling flaws in the research. A preliminary reading of the paper indicates a number of strengths: its large sample size of 403 youths; its longitudinal design which tracks participants before, during and after transition between 2003-2010; the use of mixed-methods design, incorporating observations of PCP sessions, semi-structured interviews of youths, their parents and carers and staff members, and quantitative analysis of participation in PCP compared to participants' demographics. However, closer investigation of the research article reveals a number of methodological flaws which call into question the quality of the study overall.

2.3.1.2.1.1 Investigators are not neutral

The investigators were also the implementers of the project, a significant time investment given the extended period of the study. Ethnographic studies can bring insight available to the researcher who is embedded in context; such studies reflect carefully on potential conflicts and observer bias. In contrast, in Croke and Thompson's study, the investigators appear to believe that they could be both objective observers and participants. This is shown in 'observation' practice, where: 'Staff took time to point out strengths of the youth they have observed, and encourage youth and parents to consider youths' abilities'. Nor does the interview schedule seem balanced, rather it implicitly leads participants to a positive view, such as;

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[4] The authors note that this is one of the most deprived areas in the USA on measures of socioeconomic status.

- Qu. 1 'Did you like this meeting? Did you like talking about yourself and your goals?'

- Qu. 2 'How do you think this meeting can help you?'

- Qu. 3 'How did it make you feel to talk about all the friends you have and about all the things you are good at?'

2.3.1.2.1.2 Causation has been confused with correlation

A key finding of the study was that youth who participated in PCP were more likely to hold at least one paid job, an outcome authors attributed to PCP. However the study also notes that youth who participated more in PCP were already significantly more likely to come from higher income families. It appears that the authors have confounded correlation with causation, as the same results might have arisen irrespective of whether the youth took part in the PCP study. In fact it is widely recognised that youth from higher income families have a higher probability of securing employment (Green and Staff 2012).

2.3.1.2.1.3 Themes have not been rigorously derived from interviews

The authors summarised key themes from their interviews, which were derived from written notes and not recorded and transcribed according to more rigorous research practices. The authors summarise three 'key themes' from the interviews, which were 'relationship building', 'focus on strengths' and 'goal setting'. It is not specified what method was used to derive these themes, or whether an established method of analysis was used to code or analyse the interview data.

2.3.1.2.1.4 The authors have confused compliance and obedience from the participants with the participants achieving their own personal goals

The study makes very limited use of illustrative quotation, perhaps inevitably given the constraint of available space. Notably, only two of the 403 participants are directly quoted, and most quotation is from adults. More disturbing still, given the stated aims of the project, is the

observation that adults' comments apparently display an instrumental approach to the young people, where the adults espouse the idea of the youth's goals, when the sense is that they are describing their own pleasure in the compliance and obedience of the young people.

> *Observations revealed that focussing on youth strengths also creates a supportive, confidence-building environment. For instance, Kevin's PCP facilitator raved about his summer work experience. She said 'I'm going to just congratulate you…on an incredible, incredible…You have done everything you're supposed to do. You've been absolutely magnificent. You were where you're supposed to be. Your evaluations are incredible." In response Kevin's mother said "I'm proud of him. I am very proud of him. I mean, getting up, coming here and not even complaining, you know…so this program really worked out. It really did." For both youth and parents, it is crucial to operate from a strengths based perspective so they move forward positively toward their goals.*

> *(Croke and Thompson 2011 p814)*

The adults have apparently ignored Kevin's views, preferences and wishes. Moreover, in a later section Kevin is specifically mentioned as being reticent or unsure of his goals. Even here, Kevin is being *talked about* rather than focused on or included. The study concluded that PCP allowed youth to 'express themselves' and helped them to feel 'respected and understood'. These appear to be assertions, rather than findings which have been rigorously established.

Despite its promising beginnings, Croke and Thompson's study appears subject to 'agenda-driven bias', in that the authors have a vested interest in positive findings, and presumably a passionate belief in the positive qualities of person-centred planning. Unfortunately their editors appear to have failed to apply the customary standards for peer-reviewed research. This does not in itself mean that the project had no useful effects, only that they have not been demonstrated in the current paper.

2.3.1.2.2 *Hagner, Helm and Butterworth (1996)*

These researchers conducted a detailed qualitative study of a person-centred planning process called 'natural supports' through a combination of: participant observation, in-depth interviews

with participants, their parents, teachers and PCP facilitators, and document analysis. This research was conducted over a six-month period with six participants aged 16-22 who were making the transition from school to adult life, in order to explore and describe several examples of person-centred planning. The study found that most participants felt the process was valuable and that it generated an increased sense of community and shared responsibility, and a clearer focus. The authors also note 'many unplanned positive outcomes appeared to result from person-centred planning' (Hagner, Helm and Butterworth 1996 p168). With no comparison group, and with a sample of only six subjects, it is hard to be confident that the 'positive outcomes' can be attributed to PCP processes, as the authors contend. Any group of individuals might experience a number of positive events in such a period.

Although it only concerned a limited number of participants, the study has a number of advantages, such as the way that it combined rich information from different sources, enabling the effect of the PCP process to be considered from different perspectives over a significant period of change. Comments made by observers suggest greater neutrality when compared with the Croke and Thompson (2011) study described above. Firstly, they observed that professionals struggled to maintain a positive attitude during the meetings, and that this was particularly evident when family members were absent. Secondly, at times adults seemed to unknowingly ignore, reframe, misunderstand or otherwise misrepresent what the young person had apparently said, particularly when this did not fit with the adults' own agenda. Thirdly, they observed that adults tended to avoid the discussion of 'controversial topics'.

> *Several discrepancies are evident between theory and reality, at least as exemplified in the project examined here. These include some inequalities in participation of community friends in the process; some degree of negativity in what is often touted as a process focused in a positive way on dreams and gifts of the individual; only partial control of planning by the focal individual; some complexities involved in the role of facilitator and an indirect, tenuous relation between planning and outcomes.*
>
> *(Hagner, Helm and Butterworth 1996 p168)*

Although the PCP procedures were facilitated by professionals who had been trained in the approach, the study raises questions about whether the process that was enacted maintained fidelity to the person-centred approach being espoused, especially in the light of the negative aspects noted above, and since fidelity was not formally investigated or explored. Therefore, conclusions drawn from a small study of this nature are limited. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the article seems to be the potential insights it offers into what might happen when person-centred work is carried out in a flawed way. Appropriately the authors acknowledge some limitations of the study and the tone of their article is reflective rather than evangelical:

> *At its best, person-centred planning acts as a catalyst to redefine the relation between individuals, resources and their community… proponents of person-centred planning must be clear about making a commitment to a long-term process rather than to simply a meeting.*

(Hagner, Helm and Butterworth 1996 p168)

Research projects with more focused scope than these two studies from the United States have yielded more convincing results, as will be seen in the following sections.

2.3.1.2.3 *Hayes (2004)*

Hayes describes a single case study which illustrates the use of a 'visual annual review', a person-centred process adapted from Pearpoint's Making Action Plans (MAPs), designed to increase a young person's involvement in a review. The article concerns a child with 'moderate learning difficulties' in year 6, the final year of primary school in the UK. Perspectives of key stakeholders were elicited and presented diagrammatically during the review, including those of the young person. Comments from her peer group were also presented. Hayes states that presenting the information visually engages the young person more effectively, and emphasises the importance of preparation for the review. People who attended completed a brief questionnaire on the meeting day and pupil views were sought before the review, on the day,

and a week later, using verbal feedback and visual symbols and a photograph as a prompt. The author was also the EP involved in the meeting.

Although a case study methodology seems a useful way to provide rich information and illustrate an example of practice, the fact that the researcher was also a participant seems likely to have influenced the fact that reported views were purely positive. No information is provided about the specific items on the questionnaire and although the participant's views are reported, no direct quotation is used from the young person. Given that the study concerned a transition review, it could have been strengthened after transition by a follow up, which should have been relatively straightforward as there was only one participant.

2.3.1.2.4 *Warner (2012)*

Warner's doctoral thesis concerns an exploratory study investigating person-centred reviews (PCRs) which investigated the views held by sixteen students with SEN and their parents and carers. Although it has not been published in a peer-reviewed journal, it is highly relevant to the current project. Warner used a mixed-methods design with semi-structured interviews of young people and parents and carers, interpreted through thematic analysis. Standardised assessments were used to measure changes in the participants' locus of control, and rating scales were used to measure students' motivation and reported feelings of positivity towards school.

The findings showed that young people and their parents experienced the PCR as a constructive and reassuring process, and that they felt they contributed to the process as equal partners and their voices were heard. Parents valued sharing detailed information in an informal, yet structured process. There was found to be no change in student's locus of control or motivation; however the young people did show higher ratings of positivity towards school following the PCR.

Overall this seems to be an ambitious, useful and well-conducted study for a professional practice doctorate. The sample size and qualitative data analysis seems appropriate and carefully reported. Closer reading of the thesis shows that many participants struggled to understand the lengthy standardised locus of control measure. This requires binary (yes/no) answers but was not administered in a standardised way for example, questions were routinely rephrased, and participants were allowed to give 'maybe' as a response. Other rating scales were said to be problematic to administer because of the learning difficulties of participants. In these circumstances it would be wrong to infer from such results whether there are any changes in young people's feelings of being in control or of motivation, as the data gathered does not support any conclusion, and strictly speaking should probably have been excluded from results. The qualitative part of the study is stronger without the inclusion of flawed quantitative results.

2.3.1.2.5 *Taylor-Brown (2012)*

Taylor-Brown's small scale idiographic study explores how three young people identified as having social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) experienced a person-centred transition review meeting. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews, which were interpreted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Salient themes included power - the process of person-centred reviews, including visual representations and accessible language, brought an expectation of reciprocity that was experienced as reducing power imbalances and encouraging the boys and their families to participate more fully. The boys said they appreciated being addressed in a holistic way in the meeting, and the opportunities for new, more constructive narratives of their lives and experiences to be heard. All reported positive experiences overall yet also said they experienced some anxiety in anticipation of their transition reviews, which reduced during the meetings.

Although this study was limited in scope, given that there were only three participants all of whom had broadly similar needs and ages, this study comprises high-quality interviews, as reflected in the vivid and evocative comments of the boys who took part. Taylor-Brown also used an appropriate methodology to analyse and interpret them; IPA is well-chosen given the small sample size and the focus on understanding the experiences of students. The use of illustrative quotes from the young people is a particular strength.

2.3.1.2.6 *Corrigan (2014)*

This study explored the use of person centred planning (PCP) in supporting those who had experienced school exclusion in their transition and re-integration to mainstream settings. Six young people aged between five and fifteen years old participated in a PCP process adapted from the Essential Lifestyle Planning framework (Smull, Sanderson, Sweeney et al., 2005) that involved a 'guided process' for discovering what is important to a person and developing a plan to enable it to happen. Multiple stakeholder perspectives were sought to show outcomes of the PCP process, immediately after the initial meeting and at a review several weeks later. The study combined questionnaires with open-ended questions and 'Likert' rating scales about core elements of PCP[5] with Target Monitoring Evaluation (TME) where two targets for each participant were set in the initial meeting and later reviewed[6]. Qualitative information was analysed using thematic analysis. Findings indicated PCP procedures had a positive impact upon young people's social-emotional well-being, attendance in school, and educational achievement, and highlighted a range of 'supports' and 'barriers' that can facilitate and/or obstruct the use of PCP in practice.

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[5] Such as 'positive relationships have been strengthened' (strongly agree-strongly disagree)

[6] And were rated as 'below expected'-'expected'-'exceeded'

Strengths of this study include its longitudinal design and the fact that it sought and integrated views from different stakeholders, and that the quantitative measures seem relatively accessible and explore concepts that are closely related to PCP processes. The use of illustrative quotation is also a strength. Unfortunately the study combines all responses so it is not possible to differentiate between different stakeholder groups, such as whether there were any differences between themes and ratings given by young people in comparison to others. This study, like Taylor-Brown above, is limited in scope as it only considers the outcomes of PCP for a small group of young people, all of whom have social emotional and behaviour difficulties. Although it investigates outcomes over time, it takes a narrow definition of this through a single follow up at the time of reviewing the initial plan, and could have been strengthened by longer term follow up.

Overall then, there is limited research into person-centred planning with young people, and only a handful of peer-reviewed studies which systematically investigate young people's perspectives of such processes. Very little is known about what younger children might think of person-centred planning.

> *Person-centered planning is only a beginning; it is not a quick fix that has magical results.*

(Miner and Bates 1997 p112)

2.3.2 Pupil participation

2.3.2.1 Introduction to pupil participation

Since the United Nation Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) it has become almost axiomatic for legislation and documents from the UK government to emphasise the importance of listening to children. Examples include: the Children Act (Department of Health [DoH], 1991), which gave children the legal right to be consulted regarding their placements; the Green Paper Every Child Matters (2003), which placed obligations on Local Authorities to

ensure that children and young people participate in the design and delivery of services; and the Munro Review of Child Protection (2011) which called for a 'child centred system'.

> *Pupil voice should rightfully underpin, and be an integral part of, all professional practice for those working with children and young people.*

<div align="right">

(Griffiths 2014 p125)

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Arguments are made on a number of levels for increasing participation of those who have historically been marginalised: people who work with young people with disabilities have legal duties to consult them about decisions that affect them; there are important moral consideration individual rights. There is also the practical consideration that these childrens' contributions and insights may bring significant improvements in outcomes (Gersch 1998; Rose and Shevlin 2004).

> *The benefits and positive outcomes of pupil participation have been documented for individual children and young people, staff, organisations and communities (Kendall et al., 2008; Lyle et al., 2010). These benefits include gains for the learners themselves in terms of engagement, self-esteem, confidence and personal skills and development (Lyle et al., 2010). Better relationships between school staff and pupils have also been reported. At an organisational level, benefits include changes in organisational practices, services and facilities, policy and strategy developments. At a community level, research has highlighted improved community safety, an improvement in the image of children and young people within the community and an increase in children and young people providing support for their peers within their communities (Kendall et al., 2008).*

<div align="right">

(Griffiths 2014 p125)

</div>

Children are now formally recognised as important social agents, who are active in the construction and determination of their own lives and relationships, the lives of others around them and the societies in which they live (UNICEF, 2007). There is evidence that participation teaches and builds decision-making, problem-solving and self-determinism (Kjørholt, 2005).

However, in some ways, the idea of 'participation' remains an elusive or abstract concept. Hart (1992), a sociologist working for UNICEF, summarised degrees of participation in his 'Ladder

of Participation', based on Arnstein's ladder of community participation (ibid 1969). Hart's ladder has eight rungs, and he originally viewed the bottom three rungs of the ladder as 'non-participation' and rungs four to eight as 'degrees of participation'. Hart's model has been criticised as oversimplified and as seeming to denigrate the important small steps and achievements made by schools and other stakeholders beginning to review their practices of pupil participation and listening to children's views.

Figure 2.1 A representation of the Ladder of Participation adapted from Hart (1992).

Degrees of participation

Rung 8: Children and adults share decision-making
Rung 7: Children lead and initiate action
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children
Rung 5: Children consulted and informed
Rung 4: Children assigned and informed

Non-participation

Rung 3: Children tokenized
Rung 2: Children are decoration
Rung 1: Children are manipulated
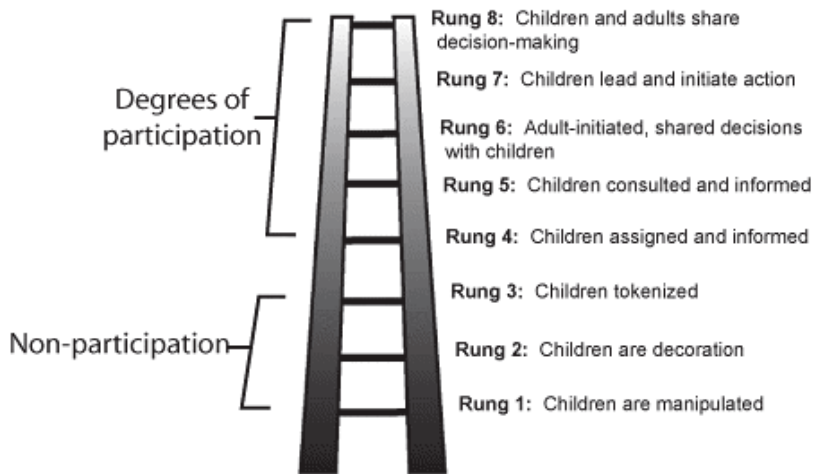
Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Therefore, some theorists prefer to think in terms of a 'continuum' of participation (Fajerman and Treseder 1997; Klein, 2003). This is similar to ideas of the process of overcoming barriers to participation explained by those working to promote the inclusion of students with additional needs (Booth and Ainscow 2011). It has been reported that support for the involvement of children across the UK in public decision-making is steadily growing (Komulainen, 2007), and that the number of studies which seek the perceptions of pupils continues to grow (Reid et al., 2010).

2.3.3 **Involving young people in educational review processes**

Consulting with children and young people is an area that is increasingly considered important by the professionals who work with them: 'Over the past three decades there has been a slow but steady progression in the interest by educational, social work and medical professionals in listening to the voice of children and young people' (Gersch et al 2014 p33). Children's participation in school is exemplified in such educational areas as learning processes, individual targets and choice of extra-curricular activities (Gersch, 1996).

Participation within school life is also reported to be an area for improvement for many children, such as in areas of 'personalised learning' (DCSF 2008), with many UK schools using inclusive approaches such as 'school councils', 'youth parliaments' or 'Circle Time', where children's views and wishes are routinely sought and considered (Aston and Lambert 2010). There is also growing recognition that young people with additional learning needs 'have valuable insight into what environments are conducive to their learning, what strategies support their development and why' (Griffiths 2014 p134). However experts note that adults often ignore the views or wishes of young people with additional learning needs and do not take their preferences into account when making plans (NCB 2008; McCarthy 2010). Children with disabilities are still less likely to be consulted than their peers:

> *Despite the policy agenda, and an overall increase in the participation of children and young people, disabled children are much less likely than their peers to be involved in decisions about their own lives.*

> *(NCB 2008 p 2)*

The troubling reality is that young people with disabilities may still be subject to systematic discrimination, with relatively little importance given to their views and wishes, even in comparison to other children:

Very often the voices of people with learning disabilities themselves are not heard, nor given sufficient weight in comparison with those of others.

(McCarthy 2010 p31)

2.3.3.1 Critique of studies exploring the outcomes of involving young people in educational review processes

Pupil involvement seems desirable and intuitively appealing. However, the critical reader will have already noted that some of the commentaries made in the above sections appear ideologically motivated. The current section will therefore consider whether these opinions are supported by studies that robustly demonstrate outcomes of pupil involvement, and whether the supposed value of participation stands up to detailed scrutiny.

2.3.3.1.1 *Test et al (2004)*

Test and colleagues carried out a systematic review of the literature to investigate interventions designed to increase students' involvement in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process in the US. This is equivalent to the annual review in the UK system. The authors based their literature search on a previously published study (Algozzine et al. 2001) and updated it to include more recent publications. It is unfortunate that the criteria used to select studies is not specified, but helpfully the authors explain how they carried out a narrative review analysing the research according to: a) purpose, b) participants/ setting, c) design, d) dependent variables, e) independent variables and f) results. The authors combined results from the 16 chosen studies, so that together there were results from 309 students from age 14-21 years.

The main conclusions of the study were that all studies showed increased participation in their IEP meeting or in measures of self-determination carried out at the time of the meeting. The authors also conclude that students with widely varying disabilities *can* be successfully and actively involved in the IEP process: 'although the level of student participation in IEP studies is less than ideal, it is not because students are incapable of being involved' (Test et al 2004 p408).

This systematic review found no studies that measure maintenance or generalisation of skills beyond the meeting context: in practice the studies summarised have not shown any lasting change caused by student involvement.

The systematic review has a number of well-established advantages: it integrates a number of different studies allowing broader conclusions to be drawn. However, like all such reviews it is subject to the 'file drawer problem' (Rosenthal 1979), because it necessarily relies on the available body of published studies, which can create bias or exaggerate outcomes, as those studies that show negative or insignificant results are less likely to be published - a problem not easy to overcome, as it's impossible to know how many studies or investigations have gone unreported.

2.3.3.1.2 *Aston and Lambert (2010)*

Aston and Lambert report on research conducted over a two-year period in a large Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in England, noting that:

> *In the wake of the apparent move towards a greater involvement of young people in decision-making it seems ironic that there has apparently been little research into the views of the young people themselves regarding how they feel about the nature and extent of their participation in decision-making, or, more specifically, how they feel things might be improved.*

> *(Aston and Lambert 2010 p43)*

These researchers sought to ascertain the views of twenty-six young people and thirty-five EPS members about young people being directly involved in educational decision-making and how their genuine involvement in such decision-making might be best achieved. Focus groups of between four and six participants were employed as a means of gathering data which were analysed using Content Analysis. Young people and EPS members ultimately identified "culture", "attitudes", "environment", and "systems" as being the most important factors in ensuring the genuine involvement of young people in decision-making.

The study has a number of strengths; it focuses on a highly relevant research question and does so in a simple and accessible way, evincing genuine curiosity about young people's perspectives. Focus groups were run in six different schools, spanning the age range between infant to secondary and including special and mainstream. Young people were interviewed in familiar surroundings, with care taken to ensure groups were run in a friendly and 'person-centred' way. Two Educational Psychologist (EP) researchers ran each group with support of an undergraduate psychologist. Responses from young people were written down by the researchers. Comments were presented in adult voice rather than verbatim. For example; 'society has a negative attitude towards young people' and 'school buildings would be accessible, friendly, with more recreational facilities'. Presenting the children's actual words in the context of prompts by adults may have enhanced the study and this is perhaps a missed opportunity. As other studies have shown, it is all too easy for adults to unintentionally and unwittingly ascribe their own views to children, a possibility that the authors presumably have been careful to avoid, especially given the finding of the study that children's voices are currently only occasionally or partially heard. Overall the study brings valuable insights, and questions the preoccupation of local authorities with improving 'review processes' without looking to more fundamental aspects such as the broader culture and attitudes towards children's participation in the system.

2.3.3.1.3 *Taylor (2007)*

Taylor is a teacher in a special school who carried out a small-scale study of three children who she taught, investigating 'the participation of children with multisensory impairment in person-centred planning'. However, closer reading shows the study's title to be misleading, as it actually describes three case studies about the process of seeking children's views and preferences, which took place during a period of approximately six weeks, with no evidence that these views were used in any planning process. Notwithstanding the limitations of the study, in

terms of its brevity, and small and heterogeneous sample size, it offers a personal reflection from Taylor as an experienced educationalist on the surprising amount that she learned through the process. Her experience underlines the value of seeking children's views, rather than assuming children and young people with profound needs have nothing of value to say.

> *Even if a student cannot give answers in all the different areas of person-centred planning, this does not mean they cannot express views in some areas. Partial participation is still significant and valid and worth the time and effort required.*

> *(Taylor 2007 p209)*

2.3.3.1.4 *Goepel (2009)*

Goepel carried out a small scale study that investigated whether there was agreement between teacher, parent and child about the nature of the child's need, and examined both the extent to which partnership is expressed through the targets shown on the Individual Education Plan (IEP), and whether the 'voice of the child is heeded'. The article concluded that although some children are happy to engage with IEP targets that are teacher-initiated, they may become disengaged from learning if their views and wishes are overlooked. The study concerned four children who were in the final year of primary school in the UK, and parallel questionnaires were completed by parents, teachers and pupils. The questionnaires concerned strengths, difficulties, and what would help the child make progress. The children were then interviewed about their IEPs.

The study found that the different stakeholders surveyed had differing perspectives of the child's needs, and the author argues that this is likely to lead to a less useful IEP. One child was found to have been excluded from the process, and the authors assert that this resulted in him being less motivated to follow the targets on the IEP. No empirical evidence was offered for this, and it seems plausible that, alternatively, his lack of engagement was in fact a causal factor, i.e. his disaffection caused the lack of consultation, as it was problematic to involve him (an example of a logical fallacy sometimes known as 'reverse causation').

Goepel's study concerned a small heterogeneous sample, and the investigation concerned self-report measures, and no measures of outcomes were taken, and nor was there an attempt to offer a comparison group. The observation that stakeholders had different perspectives seems to have 'face validity', as does the finding that all children raised issues that were not acknowledged in their IEP, and that the teacher's perspective was dominant. The author's suggestion that she has established a causal relationship between pupil participation in the IEP and how motivated children were to follow it appears tenuous with such a small sample. The study is best considered to be an interesting illustration of practice and a useful reminder that even adults who consult carefully and regularly with children about their learning may unintentionally give less weight to what the child has said than to other factors.

Overall the research into involving children in their educational review meetings has shown that this is a valuable activity, but as Aston and Lambert (2010) and others have noted, this is only of real value if it is embedded in a broader culture: a context that meaningfully involves children and reflects the importance of their participation.

2.3.4 Research into seeking children's views

As will be explained in the following chapter, the researcher holds a social constructionist and interactionist perspective, one that sees the views that children and young people express as social acts that happen in a particular situation. Researchers have come to understand important ways that context and relationships affect what children say and the 'situated' nature of conversations with children.

> *A critical, reflexive approach to child voice research needs to take into account the actual research contexts in which children's voices are produced and the power imbalances that shape them. However, instead of detracting from the value of voice research, acknowledging and reflecting on the situated character of children's voices and their limits can, potentially, contribute to new, more productive ways of producing and representing children's voices.*

(Spyrou 2011 p162)

The literature about seeking children's views, then, calls for creativity, variety and flexibility from researchers.

> *It should be noted that listening to CYP is complex and multi-levelled, and includes a variety of meanings of the concept of 'listening to children', allowing different research methodologies and ways of listening.*

(Tangen, 2008,).

In general, research into seeking children's views and the 'voice of the child' emphasises non-directive, multimodal approaches (Clark and Moss 2001; Gersch 1996) which take into account the child's level of understanding (Espiner and Hartnett 2012). These can include using game-like approaches and integrating choices and visual prompts (Lipscomb 2010) and interview techniques from Personal Construct Psychology, such as asking the child to give an account in the third person[7] (Beaver 2011; Butler and Green 2007).

> *No single method can guarantee successful representation in itself. Reflexive research however accepts the messiness, ambiguity, polyvocality, non-factuality and multi-layered nature of meaning in 'stories' that research produces. The quick and easy way is not necessarily the most ethical way; the ethical way necessitates time for reflection.*

(Spyrou 2011 p162)

The research also highlights the importance of a willingness to show true curiosity about what young people might have to say. Clark (2005), for example, writes about adults needing to 'take the leap to be co-learners with children in order to listen more effectively' (p.26). Mercieca emphasises the importance of embracing the uncertainty and attempting to put aside the wish to control and direct children:

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[7] For example, asking a child to describe something from the perspective of a friend or family member.

Other languages need to be learnt so that young children are allowed to have the 'upper hand'…visual, spatial and physical tools should not be seen as a 'creative extra' but offer a challenge to the dominant learning styles that value verbal/linguistic skills at the expense of other means of communication' (ibid., p.26). It is a question of shift of perception to allow oneself to be surprised and allow the unexpected. Whereas listening on adults' terms others children, in that it creates distance and erects barriers with children, the attitude of listening of the Mosaic approach invites adults to other themselves and to view in children's terms 'what does it mean to be in this place?'

(Mercieca 2014, p28)

The researcher's acknowledgement of the importance of working in a reflexive and reflective way is embodied in the methods chosen and described in the following chapter, Chapter 3: Methodology.

2.3.5 Concluding remarks and research questions

The previous chapter introduced the general area of person-centred planning (PCP) and set it in a national and local context, then explained the particular interest of the researcher in the perspectives of young people on PCP. The current chapter has situated the research within existing literature. It began by explaining the psychological underpinnings of the study, then set out a systematic literature search in the areas of person-centred planning, and pupil participation. Some of the problems inherent within these areas of research have been discussed, and some encouraging recent developments in the literature have been described, including some valuable small-scale studies which investigate young people's perspectives on person-centred planning processes (Corrigan 2012; Taylor-Brown 2012; Warner 2012). Research exploring young people's perspectives on a PCP process from children of primary school age is limited to a handful of cases (Hayes 2004; Corrigan 2012). Given the increased prominence of PCP approaches within national and local policy, there is a clear rationale for the current study, as encapsulated in the following research questions:

1 What accounts do young people give of their experience of person-centred annual review meetings?

2 What can be understood from these accounts?

The following chapter will start from these research questions, and will show how they were investigated using narrative interviewing and interrogated using narrative analysis.

3   Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1   Chapter overview

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how this research project has been carried out; it will begin with the aims of the current study, and its purpose as set out in the research questions. It will then state the research strategy and situate this within the researcher's ontological and epistemological position, and show how this informs her chosen methodology. The procedure of the study will then be specified: how participants were chosen and invited to take part in the project, and then how data was captured, presented, analysed and interpreted. Further ethical issues will be explained: firstly, how ethical approval was secured from the appropriate authorities; secondly, issues concerning anonymity and the appropriate handling of information, and thirdly, the trustworthiness of the study. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the methodology, and how this links to the following section: <u>Chapter 4: Findings</u>.

3.2   Aim

The aim of the study is to elicit, explore and interpret the accounts that children give of their person-centred annual review meetings.

3.2.1   Purpose

The purpose of the research is 'exploratory' in the sense described by Robson (2011), in that it seeks new insights and asks questions in an area where relatively little research has been published. It is also 'emancipatory', in the sense that the enquiry focuses on the voices of people from groups that have tended to be marginalised (Rose and Shelvin 2004), i.e. young people and people with special educational needs. Emancipatory research can be defined as 'research that seeks to empower the subjects of social inquiry' (Jupp 2006). Consistent with this, the conduct of the study and the reporting of its findings have been carried out in ways that demonstrate the importance placed by the researcher on young people's perspectives.

3.2.2 **Research questions:**

1 What accounts do young people give of their experience of person-centred annual review meetings?

2 What can be understood from these accounts?

3.3 **Ontology**

A qualitative approach is most appropriate when one is seeking to elicit a rich description of peoples' lives as they unfold in their 'natural habitats'.

(Small et al 2013).

Because of the exploratory and emancipatory nature of her enquiry the researcher chose a qualitative methodology, which she viewed as most appropriate for gathering rich information relating to the research questions. The study is orientated within a social constructionist paradigm, a philosophical orientation (ontology) that takes…

…a view that social properties are constructed through interactions between people, rather than having a separate existence. Meaning does not exist in its own right; it is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretation… the task of the researcher is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge… Values of the researcher are assumed to exist and subjectivity is an integral part of the research.

(Robson 2011 p24)

Burr (2003) situates social constructionism within broader intellectual movements, starting with the enlightenment project, which was a search for 'truth' through the application of reason and rationality. In the modern era these enlightenment ideas were embodied in work by theorists such as Marx and Freud who saw understanding social phenomena as the search for underlying structures or rules - described as 'structuralist'- in the belief that enquiry can result in grand theories or meta-narratives. As part of a continued rationalist intellectual tradition, in the middle part of the twentieth century psychologists investigating social phenomena routinely used scientific experiments to investigate them. Well known examples include Milgram's research into authority and control (ibid 1973) and Tajfel's investigation of group behaviour (Israel and

Tajfel 1972). Although the results of these studies were highly influential, there have been numerous critiques of this approach. Burr notes that; 'the 'voice' of ordinary people was seen as absent from such research practices, which, in their concentration on decontextualized laboratory behaviour, ignored the real-world contexts which give human action its meaning' (Burr 2003). Other important critiques include the use of ethically questionable practices and also the limited validity of these methods in 'capturing the essence of the social behaviours that they claimed to explore' (Hulusi 2007).

The psychologist Gergen questioned the usefulness and objectivity of this experimental approach for social psychology research, demanding more careful attention be paid to the historical and socioeconomic context in which the research took place, and arguing for a move away from the investigation of 'behavioural absolutes' and towards a more 'relational' view of self (Gergen 1973; 1978). Gergen's ideas were part of a movement sometimes termed 'post-structuralism' but more commonly 'postmodernism', which rejected both the idea that there can be an 'ultimate truth' and that the world can best be understood in terms of grand theories and narratives, instead advocating a more pluralistic way of thinking about knowledge and intellectual enquiry. Consistent with this philosophy, a social constructionist approach takes a more relational, dynamic and fluid view of knowledge, in keeping with the ideas and practices of narrative psychology:

> *A constructionist approach is very often adopted, in many of its features, by contemporary narrative researchers. The approach is distinct…because of its… attention to the diversity, contradictions and failures of meaning, research participants own generations of meanings, and to the mutual constitution of meanings between participants, researchers, the research context and the wider context.*
>
> *(Esin, Fathi and Squire 2014)*

Tamboukou, Andrews and Squire (2013) also situate the origin of contemporary narrative social research within: 'the post-war rise of humanist approaches within western sociology and

psychology'. These approaches proposed holistic, person-centred approaches, often including attention to individual case studies, biographies and life histories, as a counterbalance to the prevalent culture of positivist empiricism.

On what seems a refreshing note, Robson (2011) suggests that researchers may be well-advised to set aside wide-ranging philosophical debate about the nature of scientific enquiry or knowledge, and pragmatically adopt Johnson and Christtensen (2004)'s idea of 'science as an approach for the generation of knowledge that places high regard for empirical data and follows certain norms and practices that develop over time because of their usefulness' (P14). Robson describes real world, 'problem-based research' as benefiting from a 'scientific attitude', meaning that research is carried out 'systematically, sceptically and ethically' (Robson 2011).

The ontological position of the researcher acknowledges that the stories told by the young people are a social act, situated in a particular social context. The researcher's stance is reflected both in data capture and data analysis, as will be explained below.

3.4 Techniques: epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, investigating *how* we know something, and specifically our methods for understanding how this knowledge is acquired, held and best understood. A field of psychology related to the domain of social constructionism is constructivism, which is a theory of knowledge that views people as making knowledge and meaning through an interaction between their experiences and ideas. Personal Construct Psychology was first described by Kelly (Kelly 1955), and provides a useful framework for conceptualising how children think and learn (Ravenette 1999, Beaver 1996, Roller 1998, Butler 2007). The child is seen as a scientist exploring and testing hypotheses about the world, and comparing experiences with her existing 'constructs' or ideas.

In the current study, social constructionism is used as an overarching theory of thought and felt knowledge, and a systematic way to understand and integrate ideas that have been generated and held in different social groups or knowledge communities. It is argued that the ideas from cognitive and social psychology outlined in Chapter 2 are necessary but not sufficient to interpret the interviews and their overall meanings. All models are approximations, and necessarily incomplete; an idea encapsulated in Box's well known aphorism;

All models are false, some are useful.

(Box 1987)

Therefore complementary ideas from psychoanalytical thinking have also been incorporated (Chapter 3 p75-80); ideas which the author considers more useful when exploring the emotional content, and a means to develop what Hollway describes as 'an emotional theory of thinking' (Hollway 2015 p69). Increasingly authors have acknowledged that social constructionism is not purely a 'cognitive' way of seeing the world, but also can be a way to understand emotional experience too.

> *Social constructionism hypothesizes that all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in our interactions with others through time. The social practices of all life begin, are recreated in the present and eventually end. For psychotherapy, this view emphasizes the importance of the acquisition, creation and change of emotional behaviour, therapeutic ability and ways of interpreting things and people.*

(Owen 1992 p201)

Consistent with these ideas, telling stories about the world, and the way that these bring together thoughts and feelings, is seen as 'part of children's broader, intentional, meaning-making activity' (Sutherland 2000). Telling stories is; 'an aspect of the interactive, communicative practices through which children's thinking develops, representation is a constructive, self-directed, intentional process of thinking in action, through which children bring shape and order to their experience' (Cox 2005).

Therefore, from an epistemological stance, the approach of seeking children's narratives of the phenomenon under investigation, in this case their experience of a person-centred review meeting was selected because it was seen to be congruent with how children think and understand their lives and experiences.

The literature on 'the voice of the child' and 'pupil participation' has already been considered in Chapter 2: Literature Review. The practical benefits of this approach and how these ideas were put into practice are considered below.

3.5 Procedure

The procedure describes how the host school was identified, how participants were chosen and recruited, and then the specific narrative analytic strategy of this study and how this was carried out.

3.5.1 Identification of a school to host the study

The intention was to recruit one school where the study would be conducted and where the consistency and quality of person-centred work and person-centred reviews was well established. Working within a single school was considered to have a number of advantages. Overall it was anticipated that this would improve the quality of the information gathered and make better use of the time available for the study, so the researcher could readily speak to the participants, using briefer or more frequent informal meetings or visits should the need arise. The most important advantages therefore included:

- facilitating the process of explaining the research to the participants and seeking informed consent

- giving the participants and their families opportunity to withdraw from the study and ask any further questions, by making the researcher more readily available

- enabling the review meetings described to be relatively consistent

- the opportunity to better understand the stories' context.

Potential schools were limited to the fourteen schools that had already established person-centred annual reviews, as part of a pilot project within the Local Authority. The selection of a school within this group to host the study was opportunistic. The researcher made a pragmatic decision, by choosing a school that she viewed as likely to facilitate completion of the project, for reasons that are set out below.

At a conference for the local authority's Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) the researcher canvassed the interest of staff from the person-centred planning (PCP) pilot project. Discussion established that two interested schools had more than ten young people with Statements of Special Educational Need (SSEN). The researcher chose to work with a school where she had previously been link educational psychologist (EP), and had contact with the SENCo through an interest group linked to child-centred approaches. The researcher subsequently visited the school to explain the project to the Head teacher and the SENCo, as detailed below.

3.5.2 Participants: choosing children for the research

The sampling strategy was purposive, as explained by Robson: 'the principle of selection in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgement as to typicality or interest. A sample is built up which enables the researcher to satisfy their specific needs in a project' (ibid 2011 p275).

All participants had statements of special educational need (SSEN), and came from the project school. All eight children having an annual review between the summer term of 2014 and spring term of 2015 were considered for the study. The intention was for approximately six young people to be interviewed, and for each to be interviewed twice. The criteria for inclusion were:

- Young person wishes to participate in study

- Parents or carers wish for young person to participate in study, and the researcher views them as capable of giving informed consent

- The researcher views the young person as capable of giving assent to take part

- The researcher views the young person as capable of expressing views about the person-centred review verbally and possibly through drawing

As is clear from these inclusion criteria, the researcher intended to exclude children from the study who could not sufficiently understand or meaningfully contribute to the research project as planned.

3.5.3 Informed consent and withdrawal from study

The high value placed by the researcher on meaningful and informed consent was also shared by the SENCo, who arranged and coordinated all the meetings with parents or carers and children, and followed up the assent forms, ensuring that they were returned to the researcher promptly.

3.5.4 The process for ensuring informed consent of parents and assent of children

1. The researcher met with the Head teacher and SENCo of the school, to inform them about the research process and clarify issues around confidentiality and consent. Written

information for children and adults and the assent form were read and discussed (see appendices 2, 3 and 4).

2. The SENCo spoke individually to all parents of children who might participate in the study, explaining the research project, and arranging meetings with the researcher.

3. Individual parent meetings took place at the school with researcher and SENCo, and information sheets for adults and the leaflet and assent form[8] for children (appendices 2, 3 & 4) were discussed. Parents were given copies of these documents and asked to sign and return them within a week, rather than immediately, to allow opportunity for careful consideration.

4. Once forms were returned, young people were then invited to meet with the SENCo and researcher to explain the study and invite participation. The leaflet for young people was distributed and explained. Young people were invited to complete the assent form with adult support: again with an interval, so as to allow careful consideration.

5. While interviews were being conducted, the researcher again explained the purpose of the project, and confirmed this during the re-interviews, carefully monitoring any signs of unhappiness about any aspect of the process. Where relevant, she reminded them that they could withdraw from the study at any time; a principle referred to as 'monitoring assent of the child' (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010). During interviews themselves, the researcher discussed the fact that the children's stories would be

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[8] The assent form required signatures from parents or carers, the children and also the researcher.

anonymised and invited the children to suggest pseudonyms for themselves and other people discussed in the interviews.

The written information sheet, leaflet for children and assent form were carefully devised and piloted to support the process of consent / assent. The leaflet for children, which included both a photograph of the researcher and children's drawings, and was professionally designed, seemed to be visually appealing. Each participant had a copy to take away as a reminder of what they were being asked to do. In the researcher's opinion this engaged the children's interest and supported good quality discussion with them about what the project would entail, including their withdrawal from the study at any time, should they wish to.

In some of meetings with parents to seek permission, the SENCO was present and signalled that the researcher was a trusted person. Although this could have placed implicit pressure on parents and carers to join the study, the SENCo vouching for the researcher appeared in practice to be reassuring to the adults and children.

Each parent and child had the project explained first by the SENCo, before the researcher had individual interviews with one parent or carer of each participant and with all but one of the participants. This was to explain the project and what it would involve. An individual session was offered to the other participant, Eleanor, but she declined it, saying she knew she wanted to join the study. Therefore the researcher spent the first part of their original interview checking her assent. For the two parents who did not speak English as their first language, translation support was offered but not chosen.

Where parents expressed misgivings about their child taking part, the advantages and disadvantages of this were discussed with them in individual interviews with the SENCo or the researcher. However, for a range of ethical and practical reasons, the researcher did not seek to

persuade or convince participants to join the study. Primarily because this would seem incongruous, given the importance placed on acknowledging and listening to the perspectives of others within the person-centred approach, but also because persuasion could affect the quality of the information gathered and might risk later withdrawal from the study. Two children who had annual reviews at the time of the study did not take part in the project, one because the child was very young (of nursery age) and not yet verbal and therefore could not participate in an interview of this nature, and another because the parents did not wish their child to participate.

Issues of power disparity and informed consent and withdrawal from the study were therefore carefully considered, as reflected in the offer of individual interviews to all parents and individual participant interviews to all children, and in the engagement of a familiar adult to invite the parents and children to join the study. 'For children under 16 years of age and for others where capacity to consent may be impaired, the additional consent of parents or those with legal responsibility for the individual should normally also be sought.' (BPS 2010 p16)

In keeping with the BPS code of ethics and conduct (2009), the participants were 'given ample opportunity to understand the nature, purpose, and anticipated consequences of any … research participation, so that they may give informed consent to the extent that their capabilities allow'.

3.5.5 Narrative interview strategy

The interview itself was conceptualised as a process of exploration, as in Kvale and Brinkman's (2009) analogy of the interviewer as a 'traveller' on a voyage of discovery, rather than a 'miner' who seeks to uncover a specific piece of 'buried metal'.

> *The interviewer-traveler, in line with the original Latin meaning of conversation as "wandering together with," walks along with the local inhabitants, asking questions and encouraging them to tell their own stories of their lived world… The potentialities of meanings in the original stories are differentiated and unfolded through the traveler's*

interpretations of the narratives he or she brings back to home audiences. The journey may not only lead to new knowledge; the traveler might change as well.

(Kvale and Brinkman 2009 p48-9)

In keeping with this stance, narrative researchers choose 'open' questions, which invite the participant to share their account of the phenomenon under investigation (Andrews et al. 2013; Hollway and Jefferson 2013; Riessman 2008; Clandinin 2013).

Knowledge as Narrative. Stories are a powerful means of making sense of our social reality and our own lives. The interview is a key site for eliciting narratives that inform us of the human world of meanings. In open interviews, people tell stories about their lives.

(Kvale and Brinkman 2009 p55)

In contrast to other modes of enquiry, where the purpose is to find evidence to support or disprove specific hypotheses, the interview questions were planned to enable the researcher to *explore* the children's perspectives. The intention was to invite the children to share their thoughts and ideas and for the researcher to listen to, clarify and explore these with the children, with the eventual aim of developing the children's ideas into a narrative account of their experiences, which could then be analysed and interpreted.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the narrative orientation of the study, storytelling and drawing were chosen as appropriate starting points for interviewing the children. Stories are a familiar medium for children:

Children begin participating in, and listening to, stories some time before they can tell stories on their own. Children as young as 16 months listen attentively as their parents recount what they have done, what they will do, or repeat a favourite made-up story

(Engel 2005 p201)

Another advantage is that asking children to tell a story about events is a motivating way to interview children, which they can respond to with rich information (Butler and Green 2007).

As has been discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 2: Literature Review, the research on the 'voice of the child' demonstrates the value of offering children flexible, creative and multimodal ways to express their views and opinions. Children's drawings, like storytelling, are another familiar and accessible medium and their use when interviewing children is an established and valuable part of educational psychologists' casework practice (Beaver 2011).

> *There is a range of epistemological justifications for visual methods. Thompson (2008b: 11, 13–14), for example, argues that images may elicit different responses to speech or writing and are more likely to elicit quicker emotional (and not just intellectual) responses. Similarly, children who experience difficulties in expressing themselves verbally or in writing may find that images allow them to express themselves more easily and make their participation in research more pleasurable, especially when they are involved in aesthetic creation. Leitch (2008: 37) shows, for example, how the sensitive use of drawings and collage with children can help them narrate 'the unrecognized, unacknowledged or "unsayable" stories that they hold' while the power differential may be lowered since children are co-creators rather than simply sources of data (Leitch, 2008: 48).*

(Spyrou 2011 p153)

Drawings may also be a means to 'tap into' some unconscious or intuitive processes, consistent with the orientation of this study, and may support children to take part in more equal interactions within an interview, where the drawing supports an 'externalising conversation' (White and Epston 1990), so that emotive issues can be considered in a more neutral or objective way. Importantly there is also robust experimental evidence that drawing increases the quality of children's recollection of events, and that drawing and talking about something they have experienced leads to more detailed and accurate recall (Rowlands and Cox 2003; Bruck et al 2000).

Including drawing in the interview method therefore serves a number of purposes: as an enjoyable way to build rapport; as a known medium to support creative expression; to promote an 'externalising' conversation; to explore unconscious processes; and to promote accurate recall.

3.5.6 Data collection: how the interviews were conducted

> *The growing acknowledgement of the value of listening to children's views and experiences in social research, popularly termed as 'listening to their voices" brings with it methodological consequences. Regarding children as expert informants about their own lives carries within it the simultaneous call for researchers to be experts in developing and employing appropriate strategies that can effectively elicit the insights that children can bring to a research topic…the use of participatory methodologies has been foregrounded as the key to unlocking their potential to contribute rich and useful perspectives to inform research into their lives.*
>
> *(Tay-Lim 2013 p65)*

The fundamental strategy of data collection was to conduct individual interviews and re-interviews, inviting the participants to tell and refine their story, using the method that seemed the most appealing to them. All interviews took place in a quiet room in the children's own school. The children were invited to bring a supportive adult, a familiar teaching assistant (TA), with them. According to the children's preference, some interviews were conducted just with the researcher and the child, others with this additional adult present. Whether an additional adult was present is shown in the 'findings' chapter under the section 'interview context' and clearly indicated in the interview transcripts (appendices 7-18).

The interviews began with explanations of the process, such as checking assent and repeating research aims, and with open questions inviting the children to draw and talk about their annual review meetings, using an interactive 'draw and talk' method favoured by researchers such as Tay-Lim (2013) and Cox (2005). Tay-Lim has used this method effectively with participants as

young as four years old. In addition to these opening questions, the children were offered cards

with questions and prompts in a combination of words and pictures.

3.5.7 Resources used to support the interview process

- Plain A4 paper, coloured pens and pencils and HB pencil and rubber.

- A6 size prompt cards with words and pictures: before; during; after; parents; staff;

  friends; thoughts; feelings; I wish; what went well; what went less well. In addition to

  pre-populated cards, some blank ones were also offered for the young people to

  complete, should they want to suggest another missing element (see figure 3.1 below).

- A box of plastic figures, belonging to the school. These comprised play people, animals

  and characters, such as superheroes.

Figure 3.1 photograph of prompt cards

3.5.8 **Questions used within the interviews:**

Because of the narrative technique of the interviews, it was not appropriate to construct and implement a standardised 'interview schedule', with a uniform set of questions and prompts. However, in order to make the interview process transparent, during the process of data analysis the interviewer's questions and prompts were grouped and analysed. The categories included: explanation about assent and boundaries of the work; invitations to tell the story of the meeting; invitation to draw the meeting; description of what has been drawn; offering an interpretation; asking the child to interpret the drawing; prompts to elaborate; repeating the words used by the child; embedding the words used by the child in a further question; leading questions; questions that offer a choice of answers; externalising questions; questions about wishes; summarising

next steps (see appendix 19: Interviewer's Questions and Prompts during the Interviews). Further examples of the questions and the responses they elicited in each interview are detailed in Chapter 4: Findings, and are also clearly shown in the childrens' accounts of their annual review meetings as presented in 'rough verse' (Appendix 20). This is thought to be essential to supporting a meaningful consideration of how the narrative is co-constructed between the interviewer and interviewee.

The interviews were recorded using a password-protected iPad, which belongs to the researcher's Educational Psychology Service (EPS), as approved by both ethics committees. Full verbatim transcripts have been produced (see Appendices 7-18), to enable the researcher's role in the construction of the narrative to be carefully considered in the analysis phase, and to be interrogated by the critical reader.

3.6 Data analysis:

3.6.1 Introduction to narrative analysis

No story speaks for itself but instead requires interrogation and contextualization

(Riessman 2008)

Because the focus of this study is *the stories that children tell* about their person-centred reviews, narrative approaches have been chosen as an appropriate way to gather, interpret and analyse the findings. Narrative analysis is 'an approach which focuses on the structure, content and function of stories told by people. Researchers using narrative analysis believe that it is through such narratives that we come to understand people' (Robson 2011). Narrative analysis places central importance on the stories that people tell about themselves and their experiences (Andrews et al. 2013).

However, 'narrative' is a 'popular portmanteau term in contemporary social research' (Tamboukou et al. 2013), and 'narrative analysis' itself incorporates a number of distinct and overlapping methods. The multiplicity of approaches in narrative analysis presents both opportunities and challenges for the researcher.

> *Narrative analysis rarely provides strict guidelines for researchers that tell them where to look for stories, how to identify them, how to obtain them, or what aspects of them they should investigate… even within a single approach to narrative analysis, there is no single way to investigate it.*

(Esin et al. 2013 p210)

Despite the complexity of navigating this field, Tamboukou et al (2013) note that there are an ever increasing range of applications of narrative, which they term its 'current ubiquity within social research', and which they attribute to its ability to help 'see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to bring them into useful dialogue with each other, and to understand more about individual and social change'. Tamboukou et al (2013) consider narrative analysis as having three important conceptual divisions. Firstly, 'event centred' narrative analysis – where the focus is on events which have happened to the narrator as the most important element of the narrative, such as William Labov (Labov 1972). Secondly, 'experience centred' narrative analysis - where the quality of experience is thought to be more important even than the events themselves. Such researchers may remind us that the same events may produce a range of different, even conflicting stories, even when these stories are being told by the same person (such as Squire 2013). And thirdly, 'socially constructed' narrative analysis – where researchers emphasise the dialogical nature of stories and how these stories are situated in a particular social context (such as Riessman 2008).

Consistent with the social constructionist philosophy outlined above, the current enquiry is situated in the third of these domains. This orientation emphasises the researcher's role in eliciting and elaborating the story with the narrator, and that the story is being told is situated in

a particular social context. It also emphasises that stories are told with an awareness of audience/ audiences, and that the telling and interpreting of the story is a dynamic process, with the story being construed and re-constructed at a number of different levels.

As might be expected in a field that emphasises a multiplicity of different voices, views and methods, Riessman herself choses a slightly different way of summarising the major methodological divisions within narrative analysis: thematic analysis, structural analysis, dialogic and performance analysis and visual narrative analysis. Following this Riessman offers an: 'invitation to students and other investigators who want to initiate narrative projects. Interrogate the four broad approaches outlined in the book and then adapt them to your research problem' (Riessman 2008 p200).

Taking up this invitation, the researcher has adapted a narrative analytic strategy (NAS) used by Engel, incorporating psychodynamic concepts, as explained below.

From the point of view of this researcher, some of the most compelling applications of narrative analysis are studies where an author has been able to discover 'order from chaos'. This is memorably described in Salmon's work with a schizophrenic (Salmon and Riessman 2013); also Hughes' (2014) work with people with dementia, and Engel's work with young children (2005) all exemplify the flexibility and power of using what Riessman calls 'a narrative turn' to bring to light elements that were opaque or hidden within the unexpurgated version of the story.

3.6.2 Narrative analytic strategy used within the study

The method of narrative analysis follows the process described by Engel (2005), a well-known American developmental psychologist who has drawn on the work of Riessman and effectively applied narrative analysis to help make sense of the stories that children tell. Engel's approach has been chosen because of the relevance of its application to children's stories, and because the

categories considered a range of levels when analysing a narrative in a way that seemed relevant to this researcher. In addition to the overall structure taken from Engel, the Narrative Analytic Strategy (NAS) integrates a number of psychodynamic concepts, which were seen as particularly illuminating ideas when considering the children's developing sense of self, when conceptualising their view of relationships, and when exploring and interpreting the deeper meanings of the narratives.

Engel has described several levels of narrative analysis of stories; in terms of their content, form, underlying meanings, perlocutionary effect, intrapersonal and interpersonal functions, aesthetic devices and movement across categories. Engel analyses stories at several levels:

3.6.2.1 *Narrative analytic strategy strand 1: Engel's levels of analysis*

- Content

Considering what is the story about, and which elements such as events and characters have been included- what the focus of the story is. This is the most concrete and literal level of analysis.

- Form

Considering how the story is structured, and whether it uses any particular storytelling devices, such as dialogue.

- Underlying meaning

Considering what Engel describes as 'the conscious and unconscious themes, puzzles, and constructions of the world conveyed in the content, form, and process of the story and its telling' (Engel 2005).

- Perlocutionary effect

Considering what someone such as '(an adult, another child) hear, feel, see or think when he hears the subject's story' (Engel 2005). The analysis of perlocutionary effect assumes that the

way the story is experienced by the listener may be 'as important to know about as the intention of the speaker, or the content of the text' (ibid).

- Intrapersonal and interpersonal function

Considering what telling the story might mean, in terms of how the child sees themselves (i.e. intrapersonal) or their relationship to others (i.e. interpersonal). For example, does the story characterise the child as a 'hero/ heroine', a 'victim', and so on. How does the child describe themselves relative to others in the story?

- Aesthetic devices

Considering whether there are any storytelling devices such as changes who is narrating the story, using repetition or alliteration or using particular phrases which link to certain genres of story (for example, 'once upon a time' being linked to traditional tales).

- Movement across categories

Considering whether the story changes in tone or genre or content during the process of telling the story.

3.6.2.2 *Narrative analytic strategy strand 2: psychodynamic concepts*
Introduction to psychodynamic concepts used within the study
For the purposes of the current research, analysing the stories in terms of their content, underlying meanings and intra and interpersonal functions were considered to be the most rich and useful areas of analysis. Engel's description of the 'meaning' of the story is noteworthy; the fact that she explicitly signals both 'conscious' and 'unconscious' elements in the story, was for the researcher an invitation to explore what those conscious and unconscious meanings might be using psychodynamic concepts, which are established ideas for considering unconscious processes.

The theoretical basis for understanding implicit, subconscious communication has emerged from the object-relations school of psychoanalysis, specifically the work of Melanie Klein and her followers (Klein, 1949; Klein and Strachey 1975; Milton et al 1994). Key psychodynamic concepts embedded within this analysis include countertransference, splitting, the carapace, projection, projective identification, emotional containment and holding.

- Countertransference

Although Freud first introduced this term to describe a different phenomenon[9] (Carpy et al 1989), 'countertransference' is now generally used to describe the emotional reaction of a worker evoked through contact with their clients, some of which are simply a reaction to their story, but others that are a more complex reaction caused by the dynamics between the client and the worker, influenced by both of their histories (Batmanghelidjh 2009). For example a psychotherapist might feel stressed and anxious when working with parent who shows no outward hostility towards them during a session, but this could be a manifestation of some emotional content that is being communicated implicitly. Batmanghelidjh emphasises the importance of practitioners being aware of negative emotions they experience linked to vulnerable clients, as they may harm the worker and also reduce their ability to provide appropriate support.

For the purpose of the NAS, the relevance of the concept of 'countertransference' is the examination of the emotions evoked in the researcher during the interview itself, or later during the analysis phase.

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[9] The therapist's unconscious resistance against helping the patient deal with areas of psychopathology which he or she had found difficult to address.

- Splitting

Klein described infants perceiving their primary caregiver (mother) as split into 'good' and 'bad'. Positive experiences such as being cared for, fed or kept warm are seen as coming from the 'good mother' whom he or she loves; negative experiences such as feeling hungry or anxious about being reprimanded are seen as coming from the 'bad mother' whom she hates and wishes to destroy. Klein described this as the 'paranoid-schizoid' position: paranoid because the child believes adverse events happen because the 'bad mother' wants to deprive and persecute, and the child fears reprisal for these projections; schizoid because the main intrapyschic process involves splitting. Klein called this the paranoid-schizoid *position* rather than stage, in recognition that throughout life a person can return to this position, when anxiety becomes unmanageable. For example a teacher might think of a group of students as being 'good' and 'bad' as a subconscious defence against anxiety about finding the group difficult to manage.

Klein viewed the maturing infant as learning that the good and bad are parts of the same person, who at different times may help or fail them. This better-integrated view is described as the 'depressive' position, because the child's growing understanding also brings with it guilt and self-reproach about hostile attacks made on the mother, which may lead to acts of atonement and gratitude for good care previously received (Klein 1949).

For the purpose of the NAS, 'splitting' may be a way of conceptualising 'categorical' or 'black and white' thinking, where this can understood to be a manifestation of underlying anxiety.

- The 'carapace'

When negative emotions are too intense to deal with, defence mechanisms such as 'splitting' can be a spontaneous and functional reaction, enabling the person to manage a difficult event or 'cope with' acute stress at least in the short term. However, in situations where there has been

significant ongoing trauma, and inadequate mediation from caregivers, a young person may eventually develop a psychic 'carapace[10]', presenting an outwardly tough exterior or 'false self' in Winnicott's terms' (ibid 1975), which conceals their inner vulnerabilities (Tutte 2004; Green 1979). The idea of the carapace has memorably been used to describe the presentation of so called 'street children', where the need to appear strong genuinely reflects an adaptive behavior or survival skill (Taransaud 2011; Dale 2011).

For the purpose of the NAS the 'carapace' is considered to be a way to understand what might outwardly seem like aggressive, dismissive, rejecting behaviour, but might more usefully be understood as an adaptive behaviour (or even survival strategy) learned to cope with repeated experience of trauma.

- Projection and projective identification

Klein also described the phenomenon of projective identification, a psychological defence mechanism against intolerable feelings, and also an important form of unconscious communication. This is essentially a two-stage process. It starts with projection, where there is unconscious denial or ejection of intolerable feelings, which are then imagined to be an attribute or emotion of someone else. In the second stage of the process the recipient of this projection is inducted into the originator's way of thinking. He or she is subtly led to thinking, feeling and acting in a way to fits with the thoughts and feelings ejected by the other (Gilmore and Krantz 1985). Thus a person who has experienced trauma may make those around them feel, think and act as if they are also traumatised. Bion (1961) emphasised the importance of

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[10] A concept originally borrowed from biology: a carapace describes a tough 'exoskeleton' used by animals such as insects or crustaceans.

projective identification as a mechanism for understanding aspects of group functioning, including the facilitator's experience of the group.

For the purposes of the NAS projection and projective identification are thought to be useful concepts for considering the emotional experience of the child in the review meeting and later interviews, the emotional dynamics that may occur within the group involved and, complementary to this, the emotional response of the researcher to the interview and later analysis.

- Emotional containment

Bion also introduced the concept of 'containment', where an emotionally available caregiver responds appropriately and enables the infant to 'contain' his anxieties; through the process of repeated mediation from the adult, the infant learns that difficult or painful thoughts and feelings can be tolerated, understood and put into words, and eventually digested and internalised (Bion, 1967).

For the purposes of this study, there appears to be a useful parallel between the containment provided by a parent to an infant, and the containment provided by the group in the review meeting, a function also noted by Solomon and Nashat (2010). Here the group may act as a container for anxiety of the child, allowing difficult issues to be raised and articulated in a safe situation, in order that they can then be processed and rendered more 'digestible'. The experience that it is 'OK' to say difficult things shows the child that they can trust those around them. This is memorably encapsulated by Ogden:

It takes two minds to think a person's most disturbing thoughts

(Ogden 2009 p91)

For the purposes of the NAS, emotional containment is thought to be useful concept for considering the emotional experience of the child, both in the review meeting, and the interviews relating to the review.

- Emotional holding

Donald Winnicott (1987) described the importance of creating a 'facilitating environment' that allows care-givers to provide 'holding' to those they care for in a way that is reliable, adaptive and secure. The review meeting can also be conceptualised as providing and maintaining a 'facilitating environment' or 'transitional space' for staff, to help sustain in turn their capacity to 'hold' students.

For the purposes of the NAS, emotional holding is thought to be useful concept for considering the emotional experience of the child, both in the review meeting, and the interviews relating to the review.

3.6.2.3   Summary of narrative analytic strategy

For the purposes of this study, the different levels of analysis for considering the narrative described by Engel may be thought of as the 'skeleton' or underlying structure, and the psychodynamic concepts to be the 'meat' or the substance of the NAS. It will be demonstrated that both strands of this NAS complement each other well and provide an illuminating method for analysing and interpreting the children's accounts.

3.6.3   Procedure for narrative analysis

3.6.3.1   Introductory remarks about the procedure for narrative analysis

There are many decisions to make in the analysis and interpretation of the accounts given by the children. Narrative analysis occurs at several different interconnected levels. At each stage, decisions made by the researcher influence what emerge through the analysis. Just as two witnesses of the same event may tend to give surprisingly different accounts (Kahneman 2011),

two different researchers with the same material may make different interpretations or even derive different findings, despite the fact that they are using the same NAS. On reflection, this may be inevitable because, while the NAS provides the structure and 'prompts' for thinking, how the narrative is *received* and interpreted and what resonates to the researcher reflects her personal view and constructs as developed from her prior experiences.

The process of taking a transcript and turning it into a coherent 'story' has been memorably described by Salmon and Riessman as 'narrative shaping'.

> *Stories demand the consequential linking of events and ideas. Narrative shaping entails imposing a meaningful pattern on what otherwise could appear to be random and disconnected. The 'and then' of stories includes temporal ordering, but goes beyond this in presenting some kind of humanly understandable connection*
>
> *(Salmon and Riessman 2013 p199).*

In order to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the study, and that the appropriations and interpretations of the children's accounts are 'reasonable', a high level of detail has been provided within the appendices. The supporting information has been presented in a number of ways; audio recordings[11]; verbatim anonymised transcripts; photographs of all drawings made by the children during the interviews; sample photographs of the 'stories' which were constructed through the process of the re-interview; rough verse versions, see below, and the formal presentation of the findings in Chapter 4. Although there is what may be considered 'built in redundancy', because these accounts overlap, it is argued that each way of presenting

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[11] Because the audio recordings include identity data such as the name of the school, key staff members, and forenames and family names of participants, for reasons of confidentiality these are not included in the thesis. However a CD rom can be made available to the examiners, should this be required during the process of examination.

the information makes a unique contribution, and is necessary to demonstrate the integrity of the analysis overall.

Rough verse has been used as a way of presenting the children's accounts, in a method taken from Hollway (2015) [12] a way of 'cleaning up' the interview data to show narratives which she attributes to her reading of the poet, Ted Hughes:

> *Ted Hughes, English poet, discovered a form, 'rough verse', that best preserved 'the fresh simple presence of the experience'. When in his journal he 'happened to write in rough verse:*
>
>> *I discovered something that surprised me. In verse, not only did I seem to move at once deeper and more steadily into reliving the experience, but every detail became much more important (Hughes 2008)*
>
> *In my rough verse in chapter 1, I wanted to preserve the 'fresh simple presence of Juhana's experience, not smooth it over with an expert researcher voice that risked losing its aliveness. I wanted to use her case data so that readers' imaginations could conjure changing scenes*
>
> *(Hollway 2015)*

Stories presented in rough verse preserve the words spoken by the narrator verbatim, and have a vivid and dense character or 'fresh simple presence' that makes them highly engaging and open to a range of interpretations.

In the version of this approach used for the purposes of this study, two refinements have been made, which are consistent with the social constructionist ideas that underlie the research, in

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[12] But in a similar tradition to what Richardson (2002), and Butler-Kisber (2001) call 'found poetry' as described by Clandinin, where Richardson and Butler-Kisber 'find participants words and phrases and pull them into new interpretive texts they call "found poetry" ' (Clandinin 2013 p152); and McLeod (2001) and Gee (1991) call 'Stanza Analysis' an 'analytic strategy in order to increase a reader's access to a narrative (Hulusi 2007).

that they clarify and emphasise the way that the 'story' has been co-constructed through the interview process, mindful of Alldred and Burman's observation:

> *(when considering) the widely practised habit of inserting children's voices in research reports we may then ask: Are the researcher's questions presented together with children's responses so that the exchange as a whole can be evaluated or are children's words presented as decontextualized quotes which prevent the reader from examining and scrutinizing the researcher's role in their production (e.g. hidden agendas, underlying motivations and interests, biases, assumptions, theoretical influences)*

(ibid, 2005 p176)

Therefore, prompts and questions from the interviewer have been included, to acknowledge her contribution.

The researcher refined this method in two ways; the first to have a clear way of showing what are the actual words spoken by the person being interviewed (in this case boldface type), and which words come from the interviewer (in this case plain type if it is a clarification or interjection to support meaning, and italics if it is a question or prompt). These are set out in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Sample of verbatim transcript and the corresponding piece of rough verse derived from it

Anonymised Transcript	Rough Verse
C Like noticing um how um people notice about them. I Yeah? So it was something about noticing? Was it things that people noticed about you? C Yeah. I Yeah? So what, what was helpful about that? They notice things about you? C Yeah and then, and then… And then I notice they actually do listen really hard. I Ah, you notice they listen pretty hard. So they, they you felt that people in the meeting were telling you that they were listening carefully to you in general? Or was it just in the meeting you felt	**Noticing how people notice** about me **I notice that they actually** **Do listen** **Really hard** *They were listening carefully in general or just in the meeting?* **Just in the meeting**

they listened hard? C Just in the meeting (Candice transcript 1, lines 44-51)	(Candice 5-11[13])
Transcript Key: C = Candice, I = interviewer	**Rough Verse Key:** **Boldface** = Candice's words**.** Normal type = parts added by interviewer to preserve meaning**.** *Italics* = interviewer's prompts and questions

It is hoped that those reading this thesis may explore and investigate the information presented, in keeping with Lutrell who worked with teenage parents and who 'encourages readers to interpret the images' (Riessman 2008). The author invites the reader to interrogate the texts and to question and explore the interpretations offered. Further issues of trustworthiness are considered in the concluding section of this chapter.

3.6.3.2 *Steps taken in the narrative analysis*

1. During the initial interviews the researcher offered some thoughts and interpretations, for example of the drawings, and discussed these with the children.

2. Within forty-eight hours of the initial interview, the researcher made notes of impressions and ideas from the interviews in a research diary (see appendix 21 for sample).

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[13] The rough verse versions are referred to throughout this study by simply the child's name and line number.

3. Between the first and second interview the researcher listened to audio recordings of initial interviews numerous times, making notes and rough transcription, and typing out what seemed the most important ideas from the first interview, into a 'first draft story' to check and explore with participants (see Appendix 20: sample first draft)

4. Within two weeks of the first interview, the researcher interviewed the child again, bringing the 'first draft story'. In this second interview there was discussion and revision of the drawings and their meanings and the 'first draft[14]' to produce a 'second draft story' (See figure 3:3 example of second draft).

5. Full verbatim transcription of all interviews and re-interviews were carried out by a professional transcription service.

6. The researcher then checked transcripts for accuracy by reading and listening to audio recording. The researcher corrected, anonymised and added line numbers, (see appendices 7 – 18 anonymised full verbatim transcripts of all 12 interviews)

7. The researcher then rechecked and 'cleaned up' the 'second draft' by comparison and cross-referencing with the verbatim transcripts, to use exact words wherever possible, and explicitly show the words from the child, and ensure that prompts and questions from the researcher were included where necessary. At this stage the children's stories were converted into 'rough verse' form (see appendix 22).

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[14] Often including cutting and pasting sentences onto sugar paper

Figure 3.2 photograph of sample second draft story: Khaled
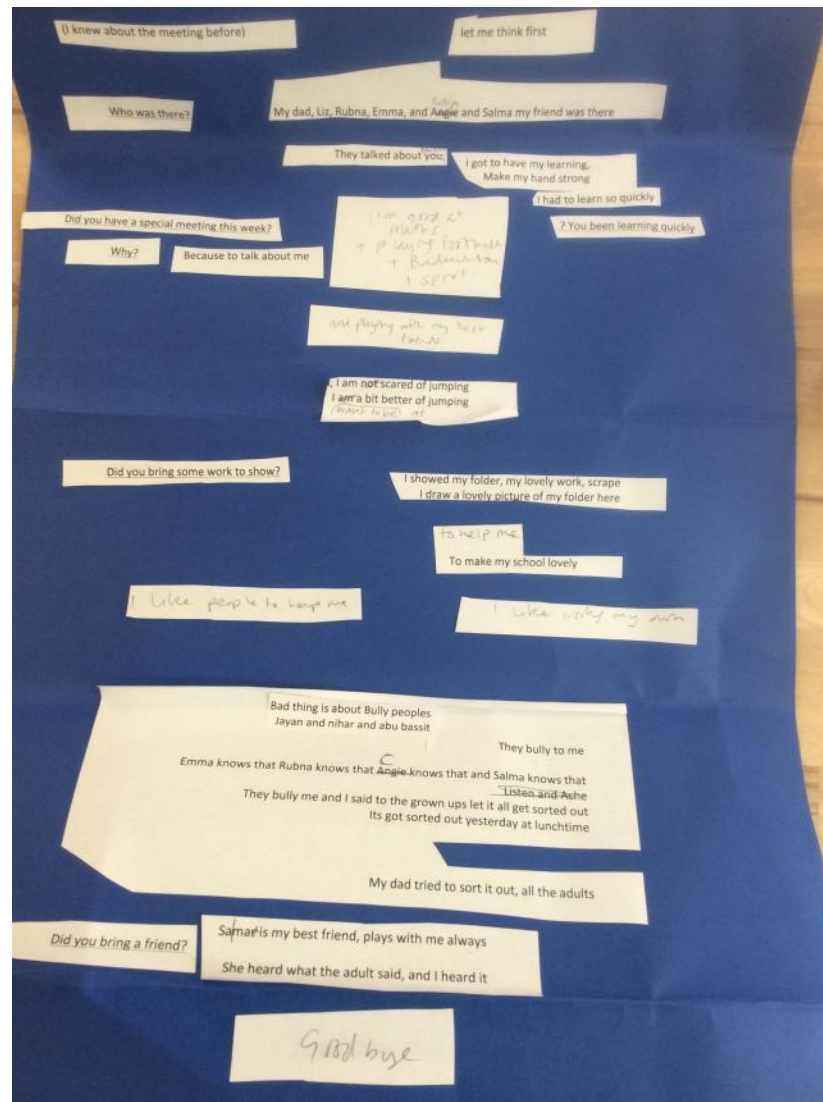
8. Rereading and annotating transcripts, and rough verse versions according to categories described in Engel's Narrative Analytic Strategy (NAS).

9. Sharing and discussing this analysis with supervisor.

10. Revising and amending analysis, following supervision.

11. Specialist teacher working in person-centred planning project reading and checking all rough verse against the full verbatim transcripts, to check the fidelity of the rough verse to the transcripts, and to identify any omissions.

12. Presenting rough verse and analysis to group of seventeen EPs, either colleagues or tutors on the M5 Tavistock course; (doctorate in educational and child psychology) to present the 'rough verse' and children's supporting drawings. Seeking firstly alternative interpretations, and secondly confirmation of the 'reasonableness' of my analysis (see appendices 23-24)[15]

13. Summarising analysis in <u>Chapter 4: Findings</u>. The analysis is organised under headings derived from Engel's NAS, supported by direct quotation from the 'rough verse' version of the children's accounts, which is considered to be the clearest representation of the childrens' narratives.

In conclusion, the interviews of the children have been interrogated using a multifaceted approach. Links to the appropriate research literature have been shown throughout the NAS, and attempts to show how and why the children's accounts have been analysed using this method have been made. The orientation of this research is interpretive, and the methods used to carry out this analysis have been shown to be detailed and rigorous.

3.6.4 **Reflections on the trustworthiness and usefulness of the study**

The quality of research carried out within a traditional quantitative or mixed methods paradigm is generally agreed to be demonstrated through 'validity, reliability and generalisability'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in qualitative research the emphasis is different with ideas of

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[15] See Hollway and Jefferson for an account of checking the reasonableness of interpretation by presenting and discussing analysis of narrative interviews in 'work discussion groups' at the Tavistock Centre (Hollway and Jefferson 2013)

'trustworthiness', 'relevance' or 'usefulness' used as comparable and more relevant concepts (Robson 2011). In practice 'trustworthiness' and 'relevance' can be challenging to demonstrate, and issues of quality and rigour remain contentious for those working in qualitative research areas, such as narrative research:

> *Many who embark on qualitative research in the form of narrative study, which is situated within the interpretive-constructivist paradigm, are regularly queried for its rigour and its quality*

> *(Loh 2013, p2)*

3.6.4.1 Trustworthiness

In the case of the current study, the trustworthiness and quality of the analysis has been improved and refined in a number of ways. These include:

- Corroboration of the quality and completeness of the narrative through re-interviews, where each child has had an opportunity to critique and refine the analysis of their account (what is sometimes referred to as 'member checking' Loh 2013). Re-interviews and other post interview interactions can be seen to increase the validity of the research, both as a way to give more power over the materials (consistent with the emancipatory orientation of the research) to check whether participants recognise these narratives as genuine reflection of their stories (Hollway and Jefferson 2013).

- Detailed scrutiny of sample transcripts and sample audio recording with doctoral supervisor.

- Presenting the analysis to a group of EP peers and tutors on the doctoral course at the Tavistock Centre, including rough verse and checking reasonableness of analysis. This aspect of the analysis was intended to mirror a process used by Hollway to strengthen her interpretation of narrative interviews (ibid), where Hollway used a group of peers to help process material from narrative interviews and explore the reasonableness of any

interpretations. This goes beyond what is sometimes referred to as 'peer validation' (Loh 2013). This part of the analysis was particularly useful for the researcher's thinking about psychodynamic concepts, and the exploration of imagery and the emotional functions of the meeting as derived from the children's narratives, and deriving a rich and multifaceted perspective on what the children might be describing.

- Detailed textual analysis and checking by a colleague and specialist teacher with a master's degree in SEN practice/ research, who compared and the transcripts line by line with the rough verse for fidelity to the transcripts.

3.6.4.2 Usefulness

The researcher leads a small team working on improving the quality of person-centred planning in the local authority where she works, with five members of staff working part time, who are either Educational Psychologists (EPs) or specialist teachers. Anonymised quotations from the children in this study have already been used for training purposes and to point out some development areas for staff. A detailed quotation of a child talking about his experiences in this project has been featured in a book on 'person-centred planning' that has been published locally, and in the evaluation and planning of training for staff[16]. Research shows that professionals may be strongly influenced by comments from children themselves.

> *Involving children and young people in research can bring benefits to communication of research findings, as the findings can 'have a powerful impact on audiences of all ages'*
>
> *(NCB 2011).*

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[16] One of the training sessions delivered to borough staff addressed the issue of how to make sure children know the names and roles of professionals who are supporting them, and how to explain diagnostic labels in accessible language, as a direct result of reflection on the account of one of the young people's

The relevance and usefulness of this study are considered to be strengths and are discussed in detail in <u>Chapter 5: Discussion</u>.

3.6.5 **Ethical issues**

This study has been scrutinised and approved by two distinct and rigorous research ethics processes: firstly within the Tavistock Centre (The Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) (see appendix 5); and secondly The London Borough of Tower Hamlets Research Governance Framework (RGF) (see appendix 6). The researcher found these processes of seeking ethical approval to be informative and helpful, in terms of helping her to design and plan a study with a coherent and comprehensive ethical basis.

The British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Human Research Ethics (2010) has been strictly adhered to throughout the study. The intention has been to conduct the study in a respectful and ethical manner, and that children's experiences of being part of the project would be safe and enjoyable. Comments made by the staff, and children during the project, indicated that the participants felt valued and listened to, and also that they found working with the researcher to be a valuable and interesting process.

3.6.5.1 Managing and reducing risks inherent in the study

The research participants are defined for the purposes of the BPS code as being from a 'vulnerable group' (such as children aged 16 and under; those lacking capacity; or individuals in a dependent or unequal relationship) (BPS, 2010 p15). The process of recruiting participants has already been described as part of the procedure of the study. Because of the potential vulnerability of the participants, every care was taken to conduct the study in a manner that acknowledged this. This included documentation designed to facilitate an ethically sound recruitment process, which gave the children every opportunity to understand the project and make informed decisions about participation.

3.6.5.1.1 *Leaflet for children - 'Will you tell me the story of your annual review?'*

The purpose of this leaflet was to support a meaningful conversation with a child, inviting them to join the project and informing them about what it might involve. The leaflet for children was designed by the researcher, and reviewed and improved following consultation with two young people with special educational needs, and by a number of EP colleagues and LBTH's specialist teachers, to increase its clarity and accessibility. Graphic designer Reuben Alghali made the final version of this leaflet, making it visually attractive, and incorporating a photograph of the researcher and illustrations made by the researcher's daughter, Rosemary Birney, then aged five (see appendix 3 for text of leaflet). This leaflet's content was also checked and approved by TREC, and LBTH's RGF as part of the ethical approval process.

Figure 3.2 cover (left) and inside the leaflet for children (right and below)–

'Will you tell me the story of your annual review?'
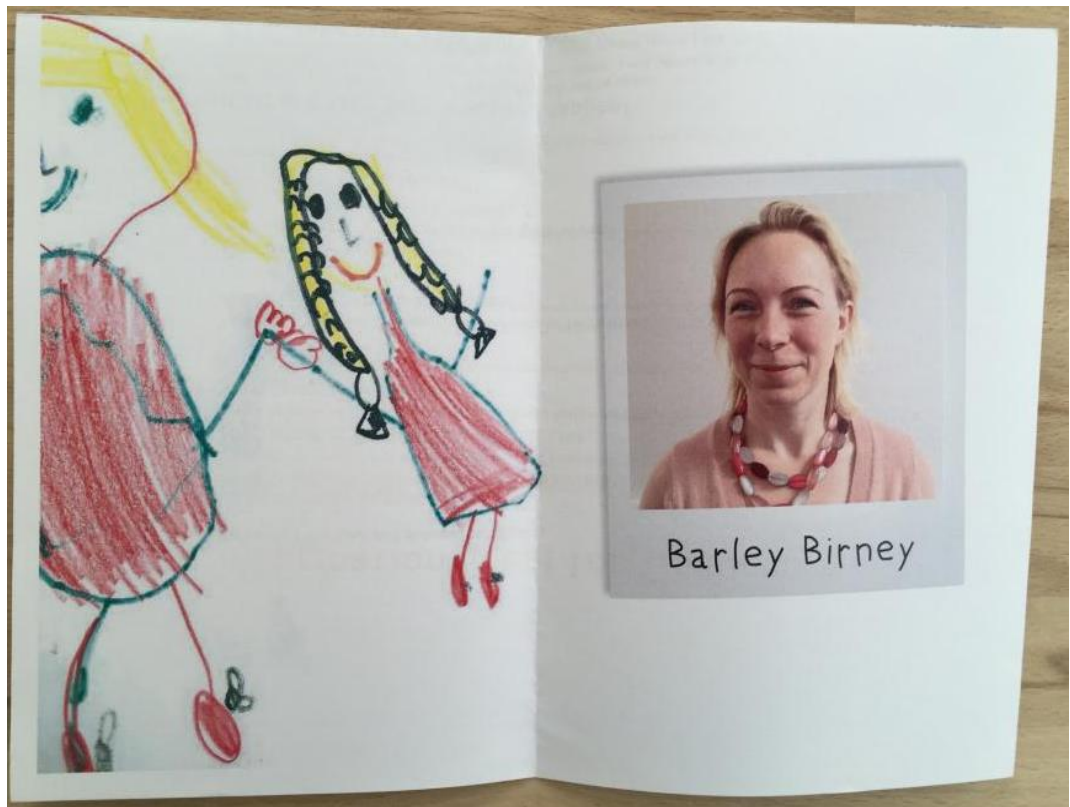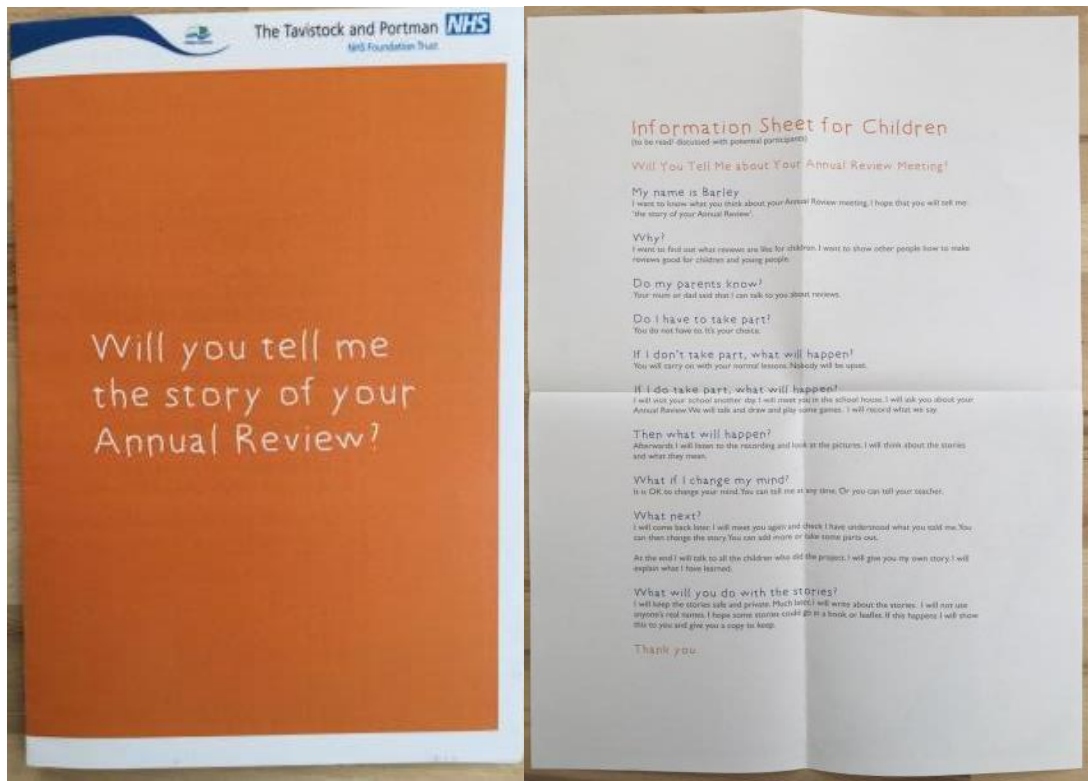
3.6.5.1.2 *Document for adults - 'Information sheet for adults - what are children's narratives about their person-centred annual Reviews?'*

The purpose of this document was to inform parents and staff members about all important aspects of the project, and to support the parent in making an informed decision about whether to allow their child to take part in the project. The information sheet for adults was based on a question and answer structure, in order to include an appropriate level of detail (see appendix 2). The researcher systematically incorporated all the elements recommended in guidelines from the 2014 Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) protocol, and this was also checked and approved by TREC, and LBTH's RGF as part of the ethical approval process.

3.6.5.1.2.1 Written permission to be included in the project - 'Assent form for children'

The purpose of the assent form was to record consent by the parent and assent from the child to participate in the study as described to them (see Appendix 4). The assent form was developed following Health Research Authority (HRA) Guidance: 'Participant information sheets and consent forms', (accessed 28.10.2014) which revised the previous NHS National Research Ethics Service guidance (2011) on the design of research participant information sheets and consent forms into an online format. The assent form was also checked and approved by TREC, and LBTH's RGF as part of the ethical approval process.

3.6.5.2 *Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection*

> *Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs.*
>
> *(British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010: p22).*

All data was kept confidentially, and stored securely throughout the study. Any data stored on computers has been double password protected through the secure encrypted system (Citrix 'Virtual Desktop') used throughout the local authority. Assent forms included names and signatures, but no other identity data, such as addresses or dates of birth, NHS numbers or UPN.

These were stored in a locker in the Town Hall, separate from other records. The researcher did not look at the children's files held in the Educational Psychology Service (EPS), for example to look at any diagnosis the children might have, or other reports or records.

Pseudonyms were used to store records during data capture. All names and identifiable details have been anonymised in this thesis and in all associated publications, including in one instance the gender of the child, due to a direct request by the child that this change be made. Although they have formally been thanked for their support, the Head teacher and SENCo have not been acknowledged by name in this thesis, as this would make the school identifiable and would compromise the anonymity of the participants.

3.6.6 Concluding remarks

The current chapter has given a comprehensive account of how the researcher went from her starting point of an interest in children's experiences and perspectives on being part of a person-centred process, and planned a coherent, ethical and trustworthy piece of research to elucidate this area. The research strategy is innovative in the way that the narrative analytic strategy (NAS) incorporates psychodynamic concepts.

The following chapter, Chapter 4: Findings, will demonstrate how this plan has been applied in the conduct and analysis of the narrative interviews which are the subject of this study. It will be shown that the NAS is a compelling and nuanced way to analyse the children's accounts, and that presenting the narratives of the children in 'rough verse form' is highly effective.

4 Chapter 4: Findings- presentation and interpretation

4.1 Introduction and chapter overview

This chapter explains and interprets the stories told by the children in interviews designed to explore the following research questions:

1   *What accounts do young people give of their experience of person-centred annual review meetings?*

2   *What can be understood from these accounts?*

Each story is considered as a separate narrative, in the order that interviews were carried out. The rough verse stories are included in appendix 2. The structure of the chapter is: introduction and overview, analysis of the six individual accounts, and conclusion.

Each account starts with a 'pen portrait' describing the child, from the perspective of the researcher and what she considered to be their most important characteristics, as well as the context of the interview including issues around consent and who was present. The analysis at the different levels described by Engel follows, incorporating psychodynamic concepts wherever most appropriate to the analysis.

a) 'Pen portrait' of the child and interview context

b) Content, including the language used

c) Form and aesthetic devices, including imagery used

d) Movement across categories

e) Intrapersonal function, interpersonal function

f) Underlying meaning: the 'nub'

g) Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis

The chapter will conclude with some reflections on the findings overall. Exploration of themes across the stories will be considered in Chapter 5: Discussion.

4.2 Participant 1: Laura

4.2.1 Pen portrait of Laura and interview context

Please note that this pen portrait is a subjective description of the participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise the child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of the child incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Pen portrait

Laura is a boy who asked to be described as a girl for the purpose of this project.

Laura is nine years old, I found her to have a good sense of humour and to be confident socially, and saw her as an extrovert with a great sense of humour and good friends. She appears well co-ordinated - fast, agile and dexterous, and staff report that she needs opportunities to be physically active during each day. Laura's behaviour is seen by staff as volatile; she has been observed to react quickly with physical or verbal aggression when she perceives there to be a threat. If she believes herself to be in trouble, Laura has been known to run and hide. Laura seems to need time to calm down before resolving problems.

Laura's behaviour can be impulsive and seem difficult for adults to manage. Laura and her sister Candice experienced a traumatic early life, including significant neglect and abuse. Laura moved to a new family and a new school approximately three years ago. At this school, she seems to be settled and growing in confidence, and less dependent on adult support. At the time of interview she was in the process of being adopted. Laura receives 20 hours adult support and is also having specialist therapy. At the time of her interview, Laura's National Curriculum levels were 2a in reading, writing and maths.

Interview context

Laura was interviewed twice at her school in the parents' room[17], and chose to be accompanied both times by her Teaching Assistant (TA), Alan. Laura's then foster parents were happy for her to be interviewed, so long as she was interested in doing the project and with the proviso that she could end the interview or withdraw from the study if she were 'unsettled' by the process. The timing of the interviews was significant, as her adoption was legally finalised in the week between the two interviews. Laura seemed to be relieved and delighted about this situation, and this is felt likely to have contributed to the even more positive and optimistic tone of the second interview, although the researcher felt she was happy, relaxed and playful during both interviews.

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[17] A pleasant room with comfortable chairs, a low table, a sink and tea making facilities

4.2.2 **Laura's picture**

4.1 Laura's drawing of her review
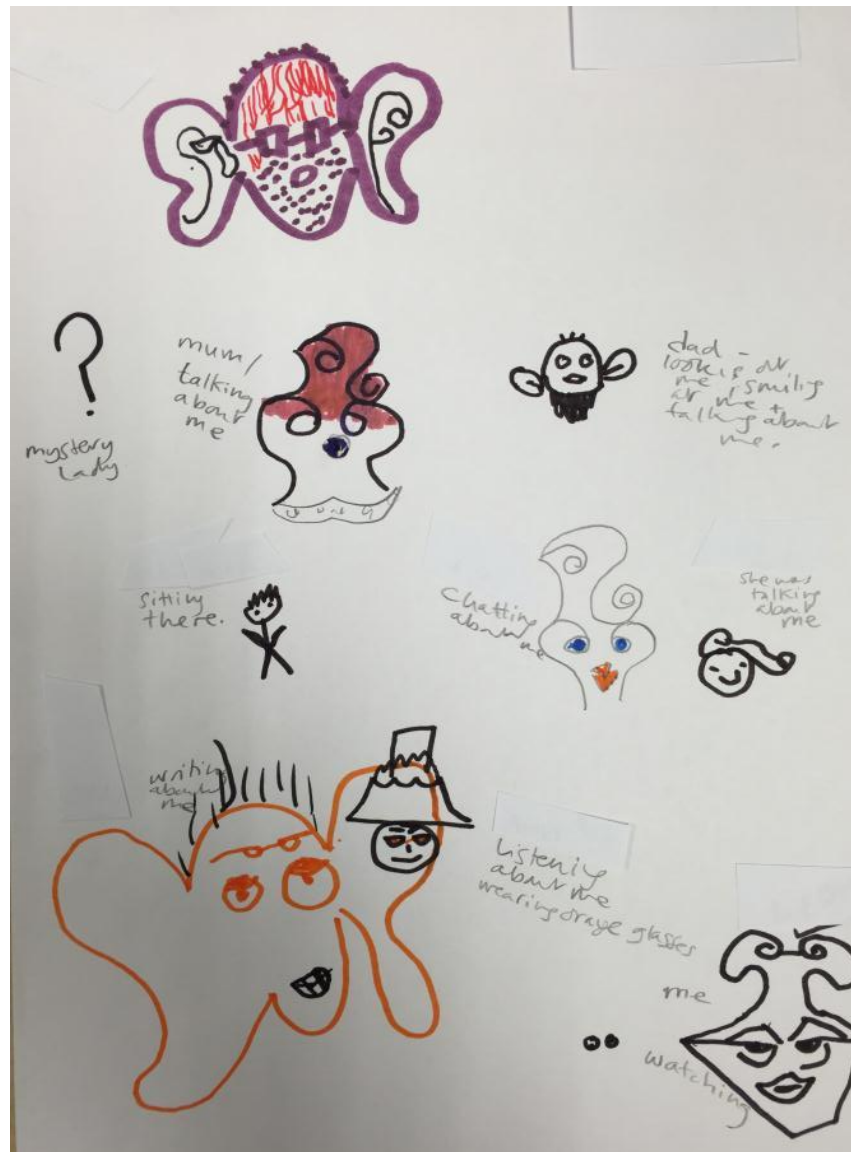
4.2.3 **Content**

The story appeared to be a positive and factual account of a person-centred review: Laura listed

the people in the room and then the basic structure of the first part of the meeting, with people

saying 'what you like about' Laura, what Laura 'doesn't do really well' and 'what we wish'.

Laura described her strengths, the fact that she likes herself in general. I took this to mean that

Laura felt confident and affirmed by the way she had been praised in the meeting.

Laura then drew a portrait gallery of the people at the meeting, using some vivid animal imagery, drawing her teaching assistant as an elephant with big ears because he was listening so much and drawing herself as a watcher – 'those are my eyes'. Laura explored her name with some free association about its meaning. Interpretation of this imagery is considered below.

Laura then considered the limits of what people know about her, including her secret maltreatment of her pet hamster, and the fact that others knew a surprising amount, and that they also learned new things about her in the meeting, and how to help her.

Laura describes her challenging behaviour as 'fizzy' and 'loud' and says that she needs to 'calm down'. Laura characterises the people in the meeting as being honest, and that the nice things they said about her were true.

Laura's account shows the meeting as a happy, even exhilarating, experience that has changed the way she feels about school. Laura acknowledges that the annual review meeting and its positive effects have coincided with her adoption 'getting sorted'. She concludes that 'I haven't got as fizzy because they understood me more'.

4.2.4 Form and aesthetic devices

Laura's language is rich and vivid and she uses repetition and rhyme; it has a rhythmic quality similar to poetry by children's poets such as Michael Rosen or Benjamin Zephaniah, and song lyrics or rap music:

> **So they knew**
> **What things they should do**
> **To calm me down**
> **And do stuff**
> **They got to know new stuff**

(Laura 136-140)

> **School – it's got better**

> **Feels different in every way**
> **I'm not sure how to say**
> **In class - outside, yeah**
>
> *(Laura 150-154)*

> **The one thing that would make me feel fizzy**
> **Was when I was getting adopted**
> **Now it's all sorted**
> **And now I'm less fizzy**
>
> *(Laura 156- 159)*

To me this has the effect of making her language sound pacy and playful, perhaps even humorous, in tone.

Laura frequently uses the words 'me' or 'I', and these words make up 46 of 473 words in her rough verse, or nearly one word in every ten, maybe reflecting the fact that she is the main focus of the 'person-centred' review. In some parts of the rough verse the phrases 'about me' and 'at me' act as a refrain[18].

> **I'm drawing Owen**
> **Look there's his ears**
> **Owen's writing**
> About **me**
>
> **I've done Linda**
> **And she was talking**
> **About me**
>
> *(Laura 74-81)*

This has the effect of linking each thing that happens in the meeting back to Laura.

---

[18] A refrain is a repeated line or phrase, generally used at the end of a stanza.

4.2.5 **Movement across categories**

I have not identified any specific instances where there seems to be movement across categories. In the second interview, Laura chose to change a few aspects of the draft story, for example she described her TA, Alan, as 'the star' in her original account of the review, but recast herself as the star in the redrafted story:

> **Alan was the star - no - me**
> **I was the star**

(Laura 5-6)

When describing the review overall, she also changed her assessment of the meeting in the second interview:

> **It was good - no - brilliant**

(Laura 116)

This has the effect of emphasising and intensifying the positive and affirming qualities of the review.

4.2.6 **Intrapersonal and interpersonal function**

Laura seems to be using the review meeting and our discussion of the review in the interviews, to explore themes about identity and sense of self. Consistent with an example mentioned above, Laura shows that all the things that happened in the meeting were about her and for her:

> **My dad**
> **He has a beard**
> **He was looking**
> **At me**
> **And smiling**
> **At me**
>
> **Kara's chatting**
> **About me**

(Laura 57-65)

As mentioned above, Laura asked to be given an 'alter ego' when the story was presented, and chose a similar name to his own, but a female version of this. I found this surprising because he appeared to be an assertive and masculine person, and because my experience of working with many boys of his age, both as a class teacher and psychologist, is that being perceived to be 'a girl' or 'girlie' generally has negative connotations. It was interesting, too, that he made this decision when he was with his TA who also appeared to be a strong and masculine man. Following the interview, I asked a teacher who knew him/ her well if Laura had shown any other signs of gender dysphoria, but she was not aware of any. I interpreted this change of gender as a sign of genuine confidence, showing that Laura felt free to play and explore his/ her identity, without fearing the censure or judgement of others.

Another intriguing aspect of Laura choice of identity was a part of the interview when Laura 'free associates' about his/her name. This has implications for how Laura sees herself (intrapersonal awareness) and also her view of herself within the group (interpersonal awareness):

> **That's me**
> **Me**
> **Me**
> **Laura**
> **Laurie**
> **Yeah ***
> **Yeah in Spanish**
> **Laura… and Kings of ** and the car**
> **And the *** King**
> **The *** King**
> **The *** King yeah!**
>
> *(Laura 86-96)*

Her self-reflection is intensified by repeated use of the word 'me', which is strong in effect. Laura knows that the root of her name carries the meaning of a strong animal. She seems to be playing with some of the rich and powerful symbolism of this. Laura refers to 'The Kings of **' (a well-known rock music band) and also 'the *** King' (a Disney movie and musical).

Linking her name to being a 'king' strongly suggests a sense of herself as powerful and important, and seems to allude to the *** being a top predator and 'king of the jungle', with aggression and violence subsumed within a regal exterior. In the story of 'The *** King', the main character's father is killed and he is banished, spending some time in the wilderness and then returning to take his rightful role as 'The ***[19] King'. This story includes themes of rejection, recovery and regeneration and triumph over adversity. This story appears to resonate with Laura's own life story of early trauma and dislocation from her birth family, and her recovery and achievement of a new, connected and positive life for herself.

This analysis resonated with EP colleagues at the Tavistock Centre, who saw this imagery as showing power and the 'need to be strong to survive', and who also noted that Laura's sense of feeling understood by those around her, and being 'held in mind', appeared to have had a therapeutic effect of helping her 'calm down'.

> **I haven't got as fizzy**
> **Because they understood me more**
>
> *(Laura 161-162)*

Laura clearly describes the meeting as something that helped people understand her better, and therefore a useful experience. She also acknowledged that there were some aspects of herself that were still hidden or unknown, both hidden from Laura and hidden from the others at the review.

> **They don't know everything about me**
> **They knew more than I thought**
> **I don't know everything about me though**
>
> *(Laura 98-100)*

---

[19] *, ** and *** have been used to redact words which could make the participant Laura identifiable.

This seems to be a relatively sophisticated consideration of the limits of our self-knowledge and the limits to the insight that others have into us. In the interviews Laura spoke about her cruelty to her pet hamsters, but said that this should not feature in the story of her review; a troubling undercurrent given the associations between childhood cruelty to animals and later violence or psychopathology (Patterson-Kane and Piper 2009).

Colleagues at the Tavistock responded to her story as a 'hopeful' narrative, with a sense of emerging identity and a 'stronger sense of self', but also saw her drawing as being 'more unsettling'. One interpretation of this is that the story represents the 'conscious' and current encouraging circumstances, with the drawing as a representation of unconscious processes, and troubling or unresolved issues from Laura's past that lie beneath the surface. Laura also presents herself as an observer of the review process, watching over what happens.

> **I'm watching**
> **Those are my eyes**
>
> *(Laura 83-84)*

Laura seems to be playing with and exploring opposites. For example, Laura's TA is bald, and when she draws him she starts with his 'red hair'; her mother, who is Caucasian, she describes as:

> **Mum**
> **Face**
> **Black**
>
> *(Laura 49-51)*

Laura represents the review as a pleasurable and happy experience:

> **I liked it**
> **Yeah**
> **Everything**
> **All the, all the good things about me**
>
> *(Laura 111-114)*

> **It made me laugh**
> **I smiled a lot**

Laura indicates that the reason that she enjoyed it so much was because she felt that the positive things being said about her were genuine, and people were truthful, and she felt they knew her better through the process:

> **Honest**
> **They were honest**
> **I was getting nice things**
> **Some of the children in the personal area**
> **Said Laura's kind when she's a friend**
> **When she's happy**
> **And that's true**
>
> *Do you think it did change anything?*
> I was **happier**
> **Because people understood me more**
> **Yeah**
> **It's just they knew what I was like**

Colleagues at the Tavistock interpreted this as showing that Laura sensed a 'shift' through being part of the review, and that she felt it had served some kind of 'therapeutic' function, through being talked about and 'held in mind'.

4.2.7 Underlying meaning: the 'nub'- the circle around me

My reading of this narrative is that Laura found the experience of the person-centred review thrilling and felt understood and accepted, and that the group were containing and affirming her, that people genuinely listened to her and understood her more, notwithstanding limitations, seen in drawings, that hint at aspects beneath the surface which have not yet been integrated or resolved. Laura describes her review as being like an intervention - a circle of people around her who 'hold her' emotionally and have new ways to help her. She explains that the meeting has transformed her feelings about school and how she behaves and helped her get on better.

4.2.8 **Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis**

Laura's was the first interview of the project, and the preparation for the interview led me to question myself and to worry that I was 'an impostor', that my work as an EP known to have a particular interest in interviewing children and 'pupil voice' would not be borne out in good interviews. This was heightened by the open structure of narrative interviewing, which sets aside a prescribed 'schedule' and relies on the interviewer to use minimal prompts, with the intention of following the interviewee's lead where possible.

In practice the interview was enjoyable and surprising; Laura seemed to be genuinely interested in talking about her meeting and was, in general, playful, optimistic and relaxed. The meeting had evidently been an interesting and happy experience for her. I found the open structure helped me listen carefully and follow what Laura wanted to say, without being distracted by a set agenda.

The analysis of Laura's story was surprising because listening to myself carrying out an interview was unfamiliar and instructive, and an opportunity for self-reflection, an unforeseen consequence which I discussed with Laura, and which is returned to in Chapter 5: Discussion. I was relieved to find that the interviewing technique was 'good enough', in that it largely followed my intended strategy.

Successive hearings of the interview enabled me to move past being focused on my performance, and to respond to the story as told by Laura. I found this to be an enjoyable and interesting story, with an intriguing number of strands. Overall my response was a happy and uncomplicated one, notwithstanding the unresolved elements mentioned above. Laura's enjoyment and enthusiasm about the process seemed genuine and infectious.

4.3 Participant 2: Candice

4.3.1 Pen portrait of Candice and interview context

Please note that the pen portrait is a subjective description of a participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise each child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of Candice incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Pen portrait

Candice is eleven years old; she presents as a quiet and introspective person who loves animals, drawing and computers. She seems watchful and still and adults can find it hard to interpret how she feels. Candice has been assessed as having difficulty with auditory processing, so in conversation her responses come be slow or seem to go off-topic. She often seems anxious about being unable to understand or answer and in class this can lead to her 'shutting down' if she feels pressure to speak or if the teacher hasn't allowed for information to be given in chunks, or mediated by another adult. Candice can find the fast and unpredictable nature of socialising in the playground challenging to manage on her own, so adult support is arranged to cover play and lunchtimes.

Candice struggles with reading and some other aspects of her learning, and seems to hate making mistakes. Candice and her sibling Laura experienced a traumatic early life, including significant neglect and abuse. They moved to a new family and a new school approximately three years ago, where they are settled and growing in confidence. At the time of interview she was in the process of being adopted. Candice receives 20 hours adult support, and is also having intensive specialist therapy. When interviewed Candice's national curriculum levels were 3c in reading, 2b in writing and 3c in maths.

Interview context

Candice was interviewed twice in the parents' room at her school, and in both interviews she chose to be accompanied by Kate, a TA who supports her regularly. Candice's then foster

parents were happy for her to be interviewed, so long as Candice was interested in doing the project and with the proviso that she could end the interview or withdraw from the study if she were unhappy about working with me. The timings of the interview were significant as both interviews took place just before her adoption was legally finalised, and therefore at a time of some uncertainty. During both interviews Candice appeared to be engaged in the process yet watchful, thoughtful and 'guarded' in her behaviour, with the second interview more 'subdued' in tone than the first. When I asked her if she would like to add any 'emotion' words to her draft story, Candice declined. Her TA commented later that this was usual for Candice.

4.3.2 Candice's drawing

Figure 4.2 Candice's drawing of her review
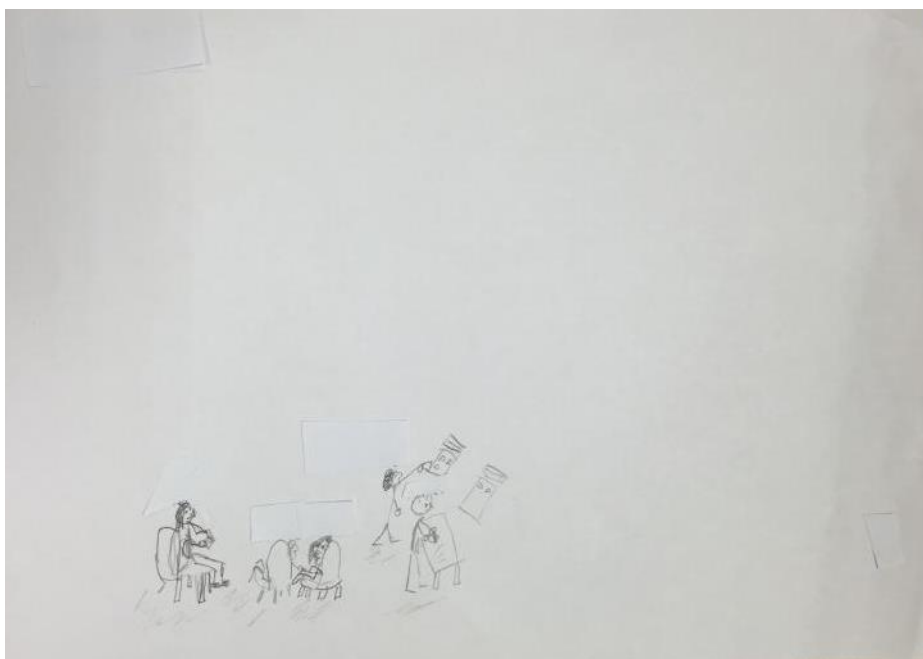
Figure 4.3 Close up of Candice's drawing
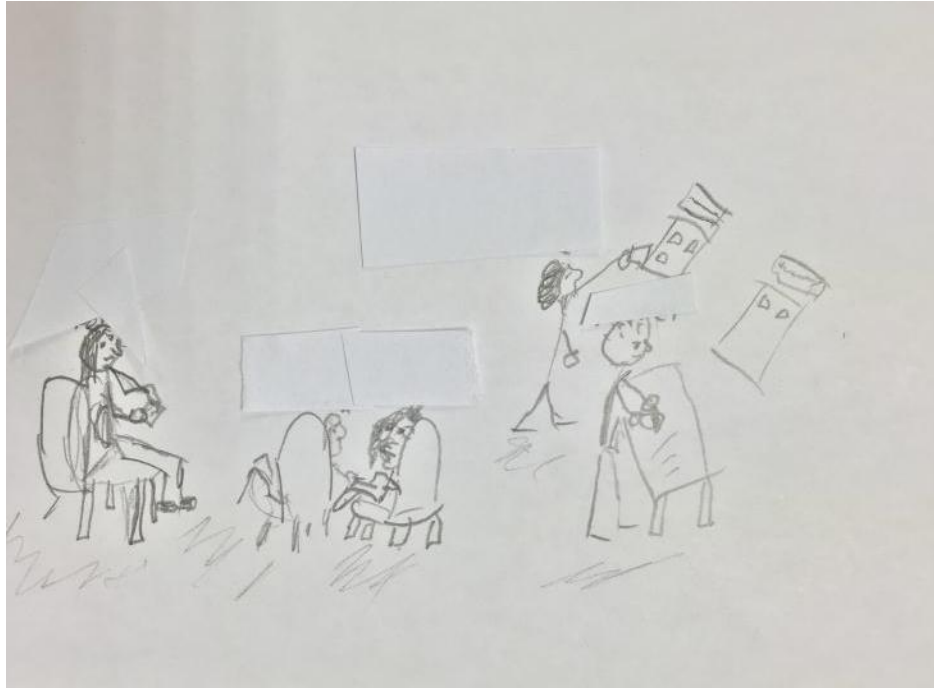
4.3.3 **Content**

Candice's story described a person-centred review; she explained she was going to say how helpful it was and what wasn't good about it – a formulation that echoes part of the structure of a person-centred meeting where there is discussion of strengths and difficulties. Candice stated that she noticed that people in the review noticed things about her, and that they listened really hard. The meeting started with introductions, and then people wrote things about her on post it notes, and then discussed them. In what seems like a digression from discussing the review, Candice spoke about animals, miniature schnauzer dogs and her pet hamsters. Then Candice said that she left the room half way through the meeting, which she seemed to see as quite a good thing. She reflected on the meeting, said that it was a 'good idea', and explained how she felt people tried to notice you and speak about you, and that she took part in my project 'for other kids in the future'. Candice's description of the meeting was quite neutral in tone, and she chose not to include words that described emotions.

4.3.4 Form and aesthetic devices

Candice uses repetition, which makes what she is saying sound like a song or a joke, as if it is funny or trivial.

> **Post it note**
> **Everyone's doing the post it note**
> **Post it note**
> **Doing the post it note**
>
> *(Candice 49-52)*

In another part of the rough verse, Candice uses repetition as if to erase, efface or blank things out.

> **We were having a discussion**
> **Then you were adding some stuff and then**
> **Blah**
> **Blah**
> **Blah**
> Then they **were getting on with the post it notes**
>
> *(Candice 60-65)*

EP Colleagues at the Tavistock commented that Candice's use of the phrase 'Blah, Blah, Blah' could mean that she needed more processing time, as if the words of the adults are 'washing over' her. In this section Candice moves from describing herself as engaged and collaborating in the meeting to losing interest, as the pronoun shifts from 'we', to 'you' to 'they', which could also describe the process of moving into a 'dissociative state'.

4.3.5 Movement across categories

There are two parts in the narrative when there seems to be movement across categories, firstly Candice's asides about animals, which are discussed in the following section, and secondly a point where Candice appears to take a step back, describing what seems like an intuitive, even visceral, reaction to what is happening in the review.

> **Weird**
>
> **When they just kept writing**

> **Mostly the same thing**
>
> *(Candice 69-72)*

Remarkably, 'weird[20]' is a particular word that Hollway (2015) has found used repeatedly by subjects in her narrative interviews with mothers exploring identity change. My interpretation is that, similar to the sense that Hollway has noted (ibid), Candice is finding her experience hard to put into words, and that it is at some level 'unsettling' or weird seeing something new in herself, possibly linked to her own increasing knowledge about who she is and how others see her through the review meeting process.

4.3.6 Intrapersonal and interpersonal function

In Candice's rough verse the intrapersonal and interpersonal functions of her story appear to be enmeshed or interleaved, as she is describing discovering things about herself, through her interaction with others in the meeting. At the beginning of her narrative she presents herself as watching the watchers, and her use of language underlines the symmetry of the relationship she is describing.

> **Noticing how people notice** about me
> **I notice that they actually**
> **Do listen**
> **Really hard**
>
> *They were listening carefully in general or just in the meeting?*
> **Just in the meeting**
>
> *(Candice 5-11)*

---

[20] I noticed the frequency with which the word 'weird' cropped up… 'weird' references the ineffable here, Ettinger's 'transgressive corporeality'; it points to the extent that pregnancy cannot be expressed adequately in language and consequently it is hard to understand

(Hollway 2015 p80)

Candice acknowledges that the quality of the interaction in her review was different, and that people listened and noticed more in that situation.

Candice also presents herself as a 'helper of others', in what seemed to be an example of her assuming a powerful and adult-like role, her sense that she is part of something bigger.

Put down that I was doing it for other kids in the future
(Candice 122)

Helping kids
(Candice 79)

Candice feels the spotlight is on her, which I viewed as a change from her more familiar and perhaps comfortable role of being silent and withdrawn. Candice chose to come to her review and to stay during the meeting, but expresses some ambivalence about being there. She explains her sense of the pressure of the group and her resistance to being 'put on the spot', and that being asked for her views in this way is not something that she feels at ease with.

I don't like being put on the spot

They are saying
Candice
What do you think
Just getting you to answer straight away
(Candice 16-21)

Although she is watchful, and somewhat resistant to being the focus of attention, she also tacitly accepts the praise that the group has given her.

And I like drawing
I am good at art
Good drawer
Understandable
Helping kids
(Candice 75-79)

Candice's drawing of the review is beautifully detailed and very small in scale, and placed in the lower part of the page. These are features of children's drawings which are believed to be

associated with shyness and emotional insecurity (Di Leo 1983; Koppitz 1968). The drawing is so small, that the viewer has to peer closely to see Candice and others in the review.

Other striking images are included in three stanzas where Candice talks about animals.

> **Miniature schnauzer**
> **Miniature schnauzer**
> **They're playful**
> **One of them's perfecto smart**
> **Not dumb**
> **Ends up in fights with other dogs**
> **But is nice to children**
>
> **If there's one miniature schnauzer it's fine**
> **If there's more than one it's not fine**
> **They're naughty**
> **They get naughty**
>
> **Two hamsters**
> **One's called Lightning**
> **One's called Thunder**
> **Fight, fight, fight, fight, fight**
> **So we had to separate them**
> **Buy a different cage for them**
> **And now that's all right**

(Candice 81-100)

Superficially these parts of Candice's narrative seem to be irrelevant or 'a tangent', but closer interrogation offers the possibility of seeing these images as metaphors, all of which concern duality or dyads. One interpretation of the two sections where Candice describes the 'miniature schnauzers' and 'hamsters' is that they may both represent the ambivalent relationship between her and her sister, their closeness and the danger inherent in this. There is a second compelling interpretation: that Candice identifies herself with these animals. Taking the interpretation a step further, both of these images of the two hamsters that are split up for safety, and the dogs that are split to avoid a 'fight' seem like a metaphor of the divided self. As described in the previous chapter, 'splitting' is conceptualised as a psychic defence against anxiety, when a person has two thoughts that are contradictory or otherwise too uncomfortable to hold at the

same time. If we think these images represent hidden aspects of self, there may be a need to 'split' to manage the anxiety that Candice experiences.

When I invited EP colleagues at the Tavistock Centre to look at the rough verse and consider whether my analysis was reasonable, they felt that it was, although they had not noticed this themselves, commenting 'you can see how that emerges from deep reading'.

It seems that the annual review meeting is being described as a kind of transitional space; Candice is starting to consider herself and maybe try out a new relationship to others, but this is not yet established.

4.3.7 Underlying meaning: the nub - the meeting as a 'transitional space'

Candice's response to the trauma that she experienced in her early to middle childhood seems to have been to 'shut down' emotionally, as a defence mechanism. My interpretation of what Candice is really saying is that the review was a different space where people listened more than usual, that she realised through the meeting that others knew more about her than she'd previously known. Candice acknowledges that she doesn't like being the centre of attention, and she also holds some ambivalence about the group, and being regarded by the group. However, that she was able to tolerate being the centre of attention gave me a sense that there was some 'containment' in the group, and that this might represent the emergence of new aspects of self.

4.3.8 Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis

For me Candice's is a fascinating story. I have repeatedly been drawn back to it because of its many different facets and layers. EP colleagues at the Tavistock, who commented on the emergent meaning of her story, said that they would need to read and reread Candice's story 'a hundred times' to fully understand it, and speculated that their own sense of confusion in the

face of the narrative might relate to Candice's own experience. I interpret the ambiguity of Candice's narrative as being a feature of the fact that Candice is a 'defended subject' in Hollway's terms, and one who is both watchful and reticent. She has a tough 'carapace' but there are also several glimpses of an emergent, more trusting side, that accepts the praise of others and has faith that when she left the room there was a constructive discussion, and that can acknowledge that having the meeting was overall a 'good idea'. To me this feels like fulsome praise from a young person who has been described as a 'very cool customer[21]'.

4.4 Participant 3: Adham

4.4.1 Pen portrait of Adham and interview context

Pen portrait

Please note that the pen portrait is a subjective description of a participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise each child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of Adham incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Adham's teachers say he is 'full of life' and 'loves school', and that his favourite activity in school is making things from paper and card and he can do this confidently and independently. He is very close to his younger brother and makes things with him at home too. Adham loves books and stories and has a vivid imagination. He speaks English and Sylheti Bengali at home.

Adham has a diagnosis of 'global developmental delay'; he's small and light for his six years and wears glasses. He moves quickly. He has significant learning difficulties and teachers find his primary need is for support with speech and language development. He speaks quickly and quietly in mostly short utterances so it can be tricky for adults to 'catch' what he says. Adam

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[21]A term used by her TA Kate to describe Candice in interview 2

can be defiant; his first answer to many questions is 'no', but with time to process he can respond differently. Adham is impulsive, active and distractible in class and is strongly influenced by the behaviour of those around him, whether it is good or bad. Adham seems to be motivated by praise and to want to do his school work well. He appears to dislike mistakes and can become upset when he feels his work is imperfect. Adam can seem to focus excessively on detail and surroundings and can be upset by them. Adham receives 15 hours adult support a week, and has a speech and language programme which is updated regularly by a therapist. When interviewed, Adham was six years old and had national curriculum levels of W+ for reading, 1c for writing and 1c for maths.

Interview context

Adham's father was happy for me to interview Adham, but was sceptical about whether Adham would have anything meaningful to say. The SENCo, Linda, wanted me to interview Adham, as she thought that he could respond well to an interview. In order to make an informed decision, I visited Adham twice, observing him in the classroom, and during an individual session with his TA. Adham seemed to warm to me, remembering my name and indicating he wanted to work with me.

Because of Adham's young age and his learning needs I interviewed him on the day of his review, with the second interview within one week, in order to give Adham the best opportunity to recall the meeting. Because Adham was at a 'concrete' stage of learning, I also invited him to show me what happened in the review using plastic figures, in addition to the questions, prompt cards and drawing that were offered to the other children in the research project. Using the plastic figures seemed an enjoyable, but ultimately distracting, aspect of the interview, so these were eventually set aside. Adham did not choose to use the figures in the second interview, and showed great interest in the printed words from his first interview.

Adham was interviewed at his school in two different small rooms,[22] unaccompanied both times due to the illness of his TA. Adham was highly active and yet engaged well in both interviews. His behaviour and mood seemed to vary significantly, from happy and playful to anxious and, at times, stressed. Adham enjoyed the interviews, as shown by the fact that he implored me to return, and begged to work with me again at the end of one interview.

4.4.2 **Adham's drawing**

Figure 4.4 Adham's drawing of his review
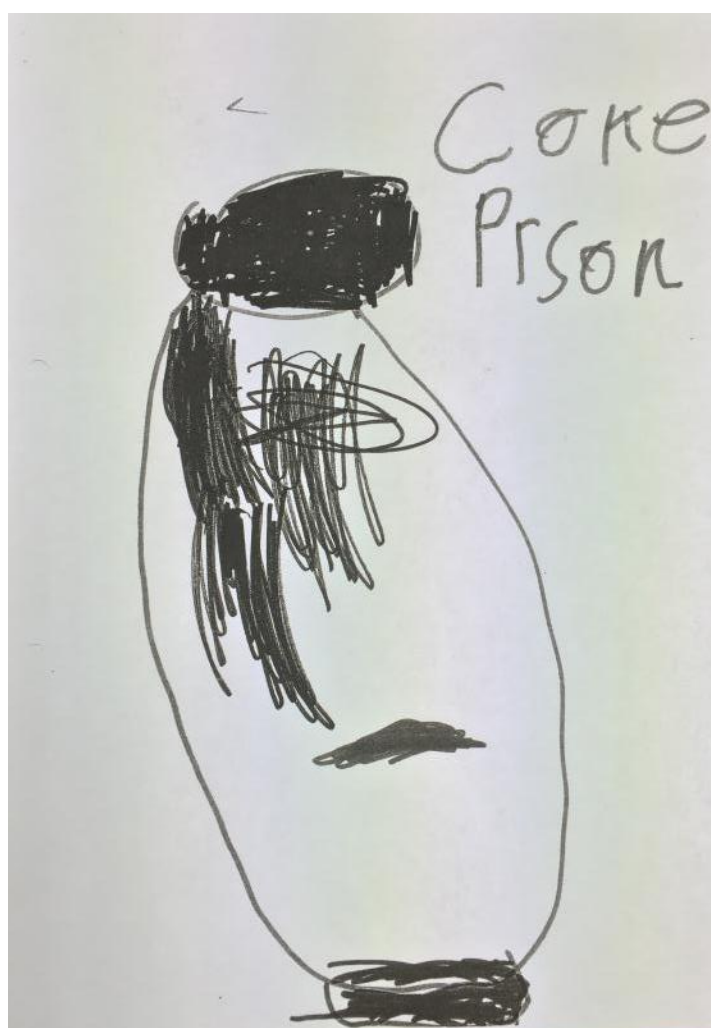
4.4.3 **Content**

Although Adham has learning difficulties and marked language difficulties, he gave a clearly recognisable account of a person-centred review meeting, including discussion of strengths, difficulties and next steps, and also some interesting digressions.

Adham spoke about being taken by his Teaching Assistant, Serena, to see his mum and dad. He recalled that it was only him, and no friend, that his parents and brother were there and he felt excited, that the SENCo Linda was there, and that they were all 'having a meeting'.

When asked to draw the people in the review, Adham chose to draw a bottle of Coke and said there was Coke in the meeting. He also drew a gingerbread man. The possible meaning of these images is discussed below.

Adham explained that his classmates made a film about him, and listed the number of people involved in filming for him. Adham spoke about the film at length, twice in his account of the meeting, emphasising the importance of this aspect for him, and also said that this made him and the other children happy.

Adham spoke about what was discussed in the meeting and how they put these ideas on 'post it notes' which suggested things to do, such as 'how to look, how to look after toys or property', and how his dad wrote a note for 'Adham to do better listening'. He said that everyone was reading, doing 'the target'.

Adham told us that he stayed in the meeting for a long time, that he was excited, that his teacher Ella was happy, happy about lots of things. Adham described himself both as a 'boy' and also a 'little fox', which I interpreted as showing that that the process of the review has prompted him to think about and play with ideas about his identity.

Adham's account emphasises the people who were there, and the fact that a film was made, and vividly evokes his recollection of the review as a happy and exciting experience.

4.4.4 Form and aesthetic devices

Although it is a feature of Adham's language use that is associated with his learning and language difficulties, the way that he expresses himself reminds the reader that Adham is a young child; furthermore he is 'developmentally young', and at a stage where he is still acquiring language. Adham moves between tenses:

> **It's going to filming, they're filming in Gold they filmed**
> **Everybody did filming in year one**
> **Filming**
>
> *(Adham 29-31)*

In this example Adham goes through the correct time sequence, from anticipation of the filming (future), the actual event (present) and then the event moving into the past. He casts and recasts what he is attempting to say apparently until he has communicated what he want to. The repetition of talk about 'filming' is emphatic, and indicates that the filming was significant for Adham.

Adham sometimes omits auxiliary verbs, such as 'was' or 'were':

> **…I excited**
>
> *(Adham 21)*

> **Happy**
> **The children happy**
> **And me**
>
> *(Adham 65-67)*

Adham also over regularises some verbs, here not using the irregular 'told':

> **Serena telled me**
>
> *(Adham 26)*

Although Adham speaks as a young child, his ideas seem clear and well expressed. Overall, the shifting pattern of Adham's language use gives his account a poignant and vivid quality to me.

4.4.5 Movement across categories

Adham's story seems to be full of movement, but the two parts of his story which show a marked change in content are when he starts to draw 'people in the review'. In the first instance, Adham goes from talking about the content of the film to drawing a 'coke person'.

> **Filming**
>
> **Phonics and handwriting and playtime and making and cross your my legs and cross your arms**
>
> **A drink, it's a drink**
>
> *(Adham 31-36)*

In the second instance, Adham goes from talking about his brother in the meeting, to drawing a 'gingerbread man'.

> **Ella** was **happy**
> **Adil looked at his mum**
>
> **I'm going to draw a gingerbread man**
>
> *(Adham 69-72)*

The initial impression is that Adham is going off on a 'tangent' consistent with his impulsivity. However, if we interpret these images as representing something about Adham's identity, as is explored in the following section, then there may be more coherence than is first apparent, in that he is considering an aspect of himself, as prompted by the person-centred review.

4.4.6 Intrapersonal and interpersonal function

4.4.6.1 Intrapersonal function

In Adham's account, he seems to be saying a number of different things about his identity and how he sees himself. When discussing his review, Adham considers himself from different perspectives; at times he refers to himself in the first person, as 'I' or 'me'.

I was talking

(Adham 14)

At other times he refers to himself in the third person, as if seeing himself through other people's eyes.

Dad he wrote a note for Adham to listen something

(Adham 51)

Adham makes some playful and intriguing statements about who he is.

I'm going to draw a gingerbread man
A box of gingerbread men

I'm a boy
I'm the **little fox**

(Adham 72-76)

The image of the fox suggests someone who is an important protagonist, and often an antihero. In fables and traditional tales the fox is generally a character who is cunning, wily and sly, and who prevails in the end. Adham refers to the story of the gingerbread man, which is about a chase: 'run, run as fast as you can you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man'. In the end the fox triumphs: tricking the gingerbread man, and devouring him. It is possible that Adham identifies with the fox, or maybe he is simply speaking about something he has learned about in school recently, as children in year 1 learn about traditional tales, including 'The Gingerbread Man'.

When I invited EP colleagues at the Tavistock Centre to look at the rough verse and consider whether my analysis was reasonable, they identified similar themes. In addition to this, my colleagues explored the image of the Coke/person. When asked to draw people at the review, Adham draws a bottle of Coke, saying:

A drink, it's a drink
A person and a drink
Coke
Was there Coke in your meeting?

Yeah

(Adham 36-40)

My colleagues interpreted this as a representation of Adham himself, as someone who is 'fizzy, lively, impulsive, ready to burst and full of energy'; an interpretation which resonated with me, and my experience of Adham as a 'bubbly' and active person. The overall impression of Adham and what he is saying about himself is of a mischievous person who is happy, and a thrill seeker who lives in the moment.

4.4.6.2 Interpersonal function

In the account that Adham gives of himself in the meeting, he shows himself as very close to his brother:

It was only me
And my Adil
Baby sister - no - brother
I like Adil
Adil is near to me, I excited

(Adham 17-21)

But without friends:

Did you have a friend with you?
No
Because I said no
I don't have a friend

(Adham 7-10)

Adham's comment about friendships was poignant, and ultimately unresolved.

Earlier in the narrative Adham describes reciprocal and balanced interaction:

I was talking
Someone was talking to me

(Adham 14 - 15)

But later in the narrative, Adham becomes more of an observer, whilst others are more actively engaged in the meeting:

> **My mum is talking**
> **Something in the post it**
> **How to do**
> **And how to look after propert** (sic)
> **And how to look after toys**
>
> **Everybody was reading**
> **They were doing**
> **The target**
> **Dad he wrote a note about for Adham to listen something**
> **Better listening**
>
> **She did notes, Linda**
> **How to do something**

(Adham 42-55)

From what Adham said he seems to trust adults around him, and see them as 'holding him in mind' and telling him 'how to do' things. Adham knew what they were there to talk about, and seemed to understand what is happening.

When I shared this analysis with EP colleagues at the Tavistock, they considered my interpretation reasonable. However, their emphasis was different as they saw Adham as being 'on the periphery' or a 'passive recipient' within the meeting. These colleagues thought that Adham seemed to be 'loving the love' (i.e. appreciating the positive attention from others in the meeting) but also to be unsure what the meeting was really about. However, there is evidence in Adham's narrative that he knows what was discussed at the meeting and that Adham knows the staff were thinking about how to help him with his listening skills and to take care of objects around him. I would characterise this as being 'consulted and informed' according to the 'Ladder of Participation[23]' (Hart 1992). For Adham this could be an appropriate level of participation at his current stage.

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[23] See Chapter 2: Literature Review for a description of 'the Ladder of Participation'

4.4.7 **Underlying meaning: the nub – people together, and a film about me**

Adham's story means that he understood that the meeting brought together people from home and school to talk about him, to think about what he had learned and set new targets. The meeting was an exciting experience for Adham, and seeing a film made for him by his classmates was the most memorable aspect. Adham was informed about what things he had done well this year, and was there while others set a target for him. Although it is hard to interpret what Adham learned from the experience, it gives an insight into his perception of the world, which is vivid, confabulatory and experiential.

4.4.8 **Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis**

Adham was rewarding to work with and a demanding person to interview, both in terms of his level of learning and language skills and his impulsive and active behaviour. When I interviewed Adham I worked hard to engage him and he spent the majority of the time 'on task'; however, he also spent some time under a table and inside a cupboard!

I experienced this story as a 'romp', with a sense that it was fun and exciting; it felt like a journey where I needed to move fast to keep up with Adham, as he shifted between topics, and moved between tenses. Working with Adham evoked protective feelings in me, because at times Adham seemed relatively stressed and upset by what he saw as 'mistakes'; therefore I gave Adham frequent reassurance and encouragement during the interview process. Listening to the recordings was engaging and at times confusing, but I experienced little anxiety because I had a strong sense that Adham enjoyed the process of working with me and was able to explain some significant things to me, and feel understood. I thought that he participated in our interviews in an engaged and appropriate way, when considering the degree of his learning difficulties.

4.5 Participant 4: Khaled

4.5.1 Pen portrait of Khaled and interview context

Pen portrait

Please note that the pen portrait is a subjective description of a participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise each child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of Khaled, incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Khaled is eight years old. He's often quiet and is seen by those who know him well as a happy, loving person. He seems full of curiosity about the people around him and to have strong ideas about who should be where and doing what at school. Khaled seems to have a strong sense of family and to be especially close to his father. Khaled's family speak Hindi at home.

Khaled has a diagnosis of 'global developmental delay'; he has significant learning difficulties with marked speech and language needs. His speech often seems difficult to understand unless the listener knows him well, and Khaled seems to process what he hears slowly. When Khaled he has understood, he may check repeatedly for reassurance. Khaled is inclined to focus on one theme at a time and to rehearse his understanding of things aloud. Once Khaled has grasped something, it seems not to be easily forgotten or passed over.

According to teachers, as Khaled has matured, the gap between him and his peers has widened, which seems to make him vulnerable to 'unkind' behaviour in the playground. In addition, Khaled has some difficulties with aspects of his physical skills, for example jumping confidently. He has adult support for 15 hours a week, and support from a speech and language therapist. At the time of interview Khaled was working at the P levels of the national curriculum and was assessed at level P7b in reading, P7c in writing and P8a in maths.

Interview context

Khaled's father told me he was happy for Khaled to be interviewed, and thought that he would enjoy working with me. Both interviews took place in the 'parents' room at his school. In the first interview, he was alone with me and the second he was accompanied by a TA he works with regularly, Rushna. Khaled seemed happy and relaxed during both interviews. Despite my difficulties in decoding his speech, he was a patient and determined interlocutor who clearly understood the purpose of my interviews, and seemed to know what he wanted to tell me.

4.5.2 Khaled's drawing

Figure 4.5 Khaled's drawing of his review

4.5.3 Content

Khaled's story described the people in the meeting, saying that they were 'talking about me', and some of the main elements of a person-centred review, such as the discussion of his strengths, what he found difficult and the help that he needed. Khaled talked about showing a

folder with all his 'lovely work'. The most striking part of Khaled's story was when he explained how he had told the group that he was being bullied at school, how everyone listened to him, and heard what he had to say; how he believed that the bullying would stop because of telling the adults at the meeting. Khaled said that his best friend came to the meeting, that he played with her and he helped her always.

4.5.4 Form and aesthetic devices

Even though it is possibly an artefact of Khaled's pattern of language use, as his interlocutor I hear Khaled's use of repetition as a strong rhetorical technique, bringing emphasis, power and clarity to what he is saying. Rather than summarising or simply listing the people who were there, he specifies each name in turm, and that they 'know that'. The use of the present tense makes Khaled's statements vivid and current; the present tense also is conventionally used to describe states or to imply permanency.

> **My teachers said Ella knows that**
> **Rushna knows that**
> **Angie knows that**
> **My dad knows that**
> **And I know that**

(Khaled 60-64)

The account appears to be highly factual and concrete, with no discernible use of imagery or allusion to other stories. Khaled seemed to be a determined, even dogged, communicator, who was clear about what he wanted to say, sometimes working and reworking a statement until he seemed satisfied that the meaning had been established:

> **Before I was so scared of jumping**
> **Now what's happened**
> **I am not scared of jumping**
> **I am better of jumping**
> **Not so better of jumping**
> **A little bit better**

(Khaled 43-48)

Khaled showed he could reflect on and explain the progress that he had made in a specific and nuanced way, showing that he is an able communicator, despite his evident language difficulties - in this case explaining the progress that he had made in terms of reducing anxiety and improving his jumping, but that he still found jumping difficult.

Khaled's drawing was an abstract heavily shaded image in orange and yellow. It was not obviously representational, and he commented at one point that it showed his father, and at another that it showed his folder of work. This is a challenging drawing to interpret, and for me its most important function was that Khaled enjoyed doing this during the interview, and it kept him focused on talking about the review.

4.5.5 Movement across categories

There did not seem to be any significant movement across categories this story.

4.5.6 Intrapersonal and interpersonal function

Through the process of analysis, Khaled's account emerged as one of his own power and ability to influence. Khaled told me that everyone had come to school to talk about him, and that this was to improve school for him. The impression given was one of someone who felt optimistic about the meeting, and knew that he was at the centre.

> **Rushna, Linda, and Ella, and Angie was there**
> **And Rushna**
> **And my dad**
>
> *Why do you think all these people came into school?*
> **Because to talk about me**
> **They were talking about me**
>
> *Why were they talking about you, Khaled?*
> **They talk about me**
> **They going to make my school lovely**

(Khaled 7-17)

Khaled seized the opportunity of the meeting to talk about something of great concern and seriousness: that he was being bullied in school. He told me that everyone had listened and understood what he had told them. Khaled also said that things had got better in school.

> **Bad thing's about**
> **Bad things about**
> **Bully peoples**
> **Jian, and Naeem, and Abu Bhakkar**
> **They're bullying to me**
>
> **My teachers said Ella knows that**
> **Rushna knows that**
> **Angie knows that**
> **My dad knows that**
> **And I know that**
>
> **I said to the grown ups**
> **I said to the grown-ups and its getting all sorted out** (claps)
> **It's got sorted out yesterday on lunchtime**
>
> *(Khaled 54-68)*

Khaled described himself both as a victim of bullying, and also someone who has a good friend and who can help others:

> **Saima** came
> **Saima is my best friend**
>
> *What did you hear in the meeting?*
> **I heard about my best, best, best, best friend**
> **I play with her**
> **And I help her always**
>
> *(Khaled 79-85)*

Overall this account gives the sense of Khaled as someone who is generally quite happy, and feels confident that people around him listen to him.

4.5.7 Underlying meaning: the nub - my meeting to help me, to make my school lovely

My reading of this narrative is that the meeting was an important and useful event for Khaled: the people there came there to help him and talk about him; he spoke up about something that he was very worried about; he was taken seriously and listened to; his concerns were addressed, he got the help that he needed and wanted.

4.5.8 Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis

My reaction to Khaled's story started with the interview process; disconcertingly, in the first part of our meeting, Khaled spoke almost unintelligibly for a few minutes and I had a rising sense of panic that I might not be able to understand what he had to say - that the interview would not work. Then Khaled prompted me and said:

Let's start now

(Khaled 1)

Despite the challenges of understanding his language, Khaled presented as confident and self-assured; it appeared that he knew what he had to say, and was prepared to tell me a number of times, and I felt this was so that I should understand him.

It was a struggle to make sense of the first recording; I questioned my skills as an interviewer and psychologist. I contacted the Head teacher to explain my struggle to understand what Khaled said, and he arranged for Khaled's TA to come to the re-interview, so I could check understanding with her as someone who knew Khaled well and had attended the review. Thankfully Rushna thought I had understood Khaled's comments appropriately and that they genuinely reflected things discussed in the meeting.

When I later played the recording to my thesis supervisor, we initially baulked at the recording, questioning whether Khaled could access the interview. When we interrogated it together,

listening to the recording while cross-referencing interview transcripts, we came to see that the underlying story was convincing and strong.

When I shared Khaled's story with EP colleagues at the Tavistock centre, they found my analysis to be reasonable, and pointed to the 'emotional containment' that Khaled seemed to have experienced through his review. On reflection, I felt there could be a degree of 'parallel process', where my own experience of anxiety and perception of a lack of control was followed by help seeking, then resolution and relief, and that both myself and Khaled experienced something of Bion's concept of the container/ contained, chewing and representing difficult material back in a digestible form. This is further discussed in Chapter 5: Discussion.

4.6 Participant 5: Eleanor

4.6.1 Pen Portrait of Eleanor and interview context

Pen portrait

Please note that the pen portrait is a subjective description of a participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise each child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of Eleanor incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Eleanor is seven years old, she has a soft voice and loves to laugh and make jokes. She is kind and seems to enjoy helping others, get on well with those around her. Eleanor has cerebral palsy which affects her whole body. With the support of her walking frame she can move around the school; other adaptations such as a writing slope help her write more comfortably. Eleanor seems increasingly aware of differences between her and others and also to be increasingly upset by them. The playground appears a particular concern for her because she can't keep up with her peers, and they can't always hear what she says. Eleanor is dependent on some children being willing to play more static games. Eleanor worries a great deal about the adults and physical resources that help her, such as the lift. These worries can seem overwhelming; it can be difficult for adults to reassure her.

Eleanor has adult support all through the school day, although some of the time the Teaching Assistants that work with her keep their distance to encourage her independence. Eleanor works regularly in school with an occupational therapist and a physiotherapist. At the time of interview Eleanor's National Curriculum levels were 3b in reading and 3c in writing and maths.

Interview context

When I met with Eleanor's mother, she said that she was happy for Eleanor to be interviewed by me, but also concerned that talking to me could be upsetting for Eleanor. She told me that the previous year Eleanor had been happy and elated immediately after her review. However, she seemed subdued and 'emotionally flat' in the two weeks that followed. Eleanor's mother's interpretation was that, although the review itself was positive and enjoyable, it also increased her self-awareness. Because Eleanor has very significant physical difficulties, this was a 'bitter-sweet' experience, as the positive and affirming comments of others were tempered with increased awareness of the things that she could not do, and the fact that she is different from others.

In the end Eleanor chose to take part in the project. Both interviews happened at the parents' room in her school, and both times she was accompanied by a familiar TA. Eleanor seemed thoughtful, interested and happy to be involved. She laughed and was quite chatty at times, and gave the clear impression that she understood the purpose of our interviews and was happy to help me with my research project.

4.6.2 Eleanor's drawing

Figure 4.6 Eleanor's drawing of her review

4.6.3 Content

Eleanor's account of her review meeting comprised a series of linked vignettes or episodes, apparently a 'stream of consciousness'. Eleanor's account started in the middle of her review meeting with a dramatic moment when her friend Waheda was scared by being looked at by the Headteacher and crunched herself up in a small ball. Eleanor then described who was present at the meeting, what was discussed there, and what participants ate and drank. There was then a flashback to her friends and classmates preparing a surprise for her before the meeting: a presentation about what they liked and admired about her. Eleanor had some anxiety that it might not go well, and tried to take care of people in the meeting, giving them refreshments and telling jokes to amuse and reassure. Eleanor enjoyed the way the meeting brought her important people together, and that this felt like a family. At times Eleanor described the meeting as

'scary and exciting', and at other times 'happy'. Eleanor went back to class before the meeting ended and was not sure why she had the meeting.

The account seems to begin with drama, includes some enjoyable activity and then ends in what feels like an 'anti-climax'.

4.6.4 Form and aesthetic devices

Eleanor's account includes a relatively high number of prompts and questions.

> **Well, before the meeting there were lots of like these cards**
> **They were purple**
> **They said**
> **What do you admire about Eleanor** (laughs)
> **And then the other ones said** (long pause)
>
> *TA Do you want me to help with that bit?*
> **Yeah**
> *TA It said what do you find difficult. And do you remember what the third one said or do you need a bit of help with that one?*
> **I need some help**
> *TA It was a third card that said 'What works well?'*
>
> <div align="right">(Eleanor 22-33)</div>

The impression that this creates is one of uncertainty and vulnerability, and of someone who feels that they need a lot of help.

4.6.5 Movement across categories

As is described above, Eleanor's story has a distinctive, non-chronological structure. It starts with a dramatic event that happened in the middle of the review, when Eleanor's friend was frightened by the Headteacher, and then it moves to a 'flashback' of the preparation of the 'surprise' for Eleanor. Then it shifts back to the meeting itself and ends with a return to class.

I discussed whether she wanted to start the story with 'a dramatic event', as she had when she told me the story initially, and Eleanor thought this was the right way to begin. My impression

was that Eleanor found her review to be dramatic and thrilling, and that she wanted the story to reflect that by mentioning the most emotive parts first, and choosing this 'dynamic' structure.

4.6.6 Intrapersonal and interpersonal function

Eleanor tells us a number of different things about her view of herself through this story, characterising herself as small and quiet when she is in her classroom, using the image of a mouse; something that is small, timid and 'quiet as a mouse'.

> **Like sometimes in class**
> **I, I'll be like** (makes squeaking noise, as if pretending to be a mouse)
> **Sometimes in class**
> **I speak so quiet**
> **That nobody can hear what I'm saying**
>
> *(Eleanor 79-83)*

In contrast, in the review meeting, Eleanor describes herself in a larger, more expansive role; being the host and someone who chooses and offers refreshments to others, including adults, and as a person who make decisions, such as whether her parents need to prepare something for her meeting.

> *Did your mum and dad get anything ready?*
> **Nuh-uh.**
> **Because they didn't need to get anything ready**
> **Because I wanted to surprise them**
>
> **Well first I offered everyone a drink**
> **At first they offered a drink**
> **And the funny thing was I said**
> **'Eleanor what do I want to drink?'**
> **Water**
>
> *(Eleanor 85-93)*

In this example Eleanor portrays herself in dual roles, as host and guest (in the third person). It is as if she steps outside herself through the process of the review, seeing herself through others' eyes.

Eleanor's drawing of the meeting is a striking and bold picture, including eleven people, eight of whom are smiling. Eleanor herself has a relatively neutral facial expression, at 'the head of the table', a traditional place of power, flanked by her parents on either side. The drawing is dominated by the large box or container-like figure of the table, and inside this are post it notes, papers and refreshments. Some of the largest and best elaborated figures are her mother and father and her smiling TAs, wearing their headscarves, in contrast to the more lightly drawn image of herself. Eleanor's friend Waheda is shown face down on the table, opposite the long-necked image of the head teacher. My interpretation of this drawing is that Eleanor sees she is in an important position, but in some ways she is more interested in others than herself, as shown by the light sketching of herself relative to others. I see this as Eleanor presenting a unified scene, and one in which others appear to be happier than she.

Even though it is her review meeting, Eleanor seems to take a role where she is caring for others and trying to make sure their needs are met, as in the example above, where she is thinking of a surprise for her parents and making a joke, apparently to amuse the people who are there. Eleanor chose refreshments and different types of fruit juice for the two TAs who work with her, knowing what they like.

> **And something Halima likes** Mango juice
> **And I had water**
> **And Issa wanted the orange**

(Eleanor 41-43)

When describing things that people like and admire about her, this kind and caring side of Eleanor is again emphasised. She does not mention other attributes, such as her academic accomplishments, or evident skill in drawing.

> **In the annual** review
> **They said things that they liked**
> **They said I'm friendly**
> **And if someone trips up**

I always say sorry to them

(Eleanor 66-70)

Eleanor may be referring to her walking frame tripping others up. However, it is not clear whether this is a use of the word 'sorry' to express regret or apology. As Eleanor's physical needs are so significant, she has constant support in school in the form of TA who is there to help her. It is perhaps natural that she should rely on the help of others.

Why did the meeting happen? They're talking about things, about you, and why do you think they have that meeting?
I forgot

(Eleanor 47-49)

However, other elements, such as the dramatic opening to her story, and jokes and laughter as she told the story, showed heightened emotion and activity.

What was it like coming to your own meeting? How did it feel?
In some parts of it, it, it felt a bit scary
And then other parts it felt
Happy
And people were chatting a lot

(Eleanor, 100 - 104)

That a meeting with so many people in has been convened for her is an exciting and scary experience for Eleanor, and she draws an analogy with 'my family'. To me this is a family with secrets; the fact that there is no mention of Eleanor's physical disability feels like the 'elephant in the room' and runs counter to the stated intention of person-centred review meetings as 'addressing difficulties with honesty and care'. Even the 'surprise' is something where information was withheld from her.

Taken together, Eleanor seems to be using the 'space' of the interview to reflect on herself as a person, and on her relationship with others in the review. The picture that she shows is a complex one. Eleanor is showing herself at the centre of a network of people who care about her. In the meeting Eleanor took a bigger and more influential role than usual, and then went

back to class, while the others carried on talking. The meeting helped Eleanor feel clearer about adults' expectations.

4.6.7 Underlying meaning: the nub - people are happy and I like my family to be all together

My interpretation of this account is that Eleanor found the meeting an intense and emotional experience, and a celebration. Eleanor saw that her important people were happy in the meeting and talking a lot. Despite the excitement, the outcome was uncertain, and Eleanor was unsure about what had changed or why the meeting took place. The meeting gave a glimpse of someone who might be growing from being a little mouse into someone who is shown to be important.

4.6.8 Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis

Eleanor's story has evoked a range of reactions in me at different times. My initial impression was of a happy, relatively carefree person, who found the meeting thrilling. I heard her laughter as excitement, highlighting the dramatic and vivid way that she told the story and her glee at her friend being scared.

There was also a 'dramatic incident' for me with Eleanor's story, as the original drawing that she did went missing. This prompted hours of searching and significant anxiety. When I explained what had happened, Eleanor told me that her friend 'Makka Pakka' had probably eaten it, and kindly offered to make me a new one - a further example of Eleanor as a caring person who attend to the needs of others, including adults around her.

When I presented my analysis to my tutor, he was struck by what he saw as an ultimately disappointing experience for Eleanor, and drew an analogy with a party that ends in disappointment. In contrast to this, when I presented the story to EP colleagues on the doctoral course, they interpreted it differently, emphasising the emotional containment that Eleanor

seems to be getting from a 'caring system', and noting that 'being part of the scary meeting had a transforming effect'. They specifically questioned my analysis that the experience of the review was 'not empowering' for Eleanor, pointing out that she knew what to work on afterwards, which felt like a step towards being more in control, relative to her own starting point.

On balance, this is a poignant and ambiguous story that is open to a number of readings. I am left with the uneasy sense that Eleanor liked the meeting because it made those she cares about happy, rather than having a sense that it met her needs. However it was still an exciting and positive experience for her overall.

4.7   Participant 6: Nick

4.7.1 **Pen portrait of Nick and interview context**

Pen portrait

Please note that the pen portrait is a subjective description of a participant from the perspective of the researcher. It is intended to enable the reader to contextualise each child's narrative, and was derived from the researcher's observations of Nick's incorporating some additional information provided by the SENCo of the school where relevant.

Nick is ten years old and has been assessed as having high cognitive ability. Nick is highly articulate and has good academic skills, in spite of having removed himself from a proportion of writing and maths tasks throughout his primary years. Nick excels in science and drawing and has sophisticated reading skills.

Nick can seem to be easily overwhelmed, and so responds best to having his learning tasks planned in smaller chunks. In common with other people on the autism continuum, Nick finds unexpected changes and too much stimulation upsetting and can need to step away or 'take time out'. He is increasingly able to manage this himself. There are still some areas of the curriculum which may cause difficulty, for example imaginative writing. He has no targeted

adult support but works in a classroom where everyday practice is 'Asperger-friendly'. At the time of interview, Nick's national curriculum levels in reading writing and maths were 4c.

Interview context

Nick was interviewed in the spring term of year six; both interviews took place in the Headteacher's office at his school and he was unaccompanied. Nick seemed relaxed, confident and poised during both interviews. In the second interview he chose to read the story draft silently to himself, and suggested some changes. The overall impression that Nick gave was that he had a good level of insight into taking part in the project, and into why I was doing this piece of work.

4.7.2 Nick's drawing

Figure 4.7 Nick's drawing of his review
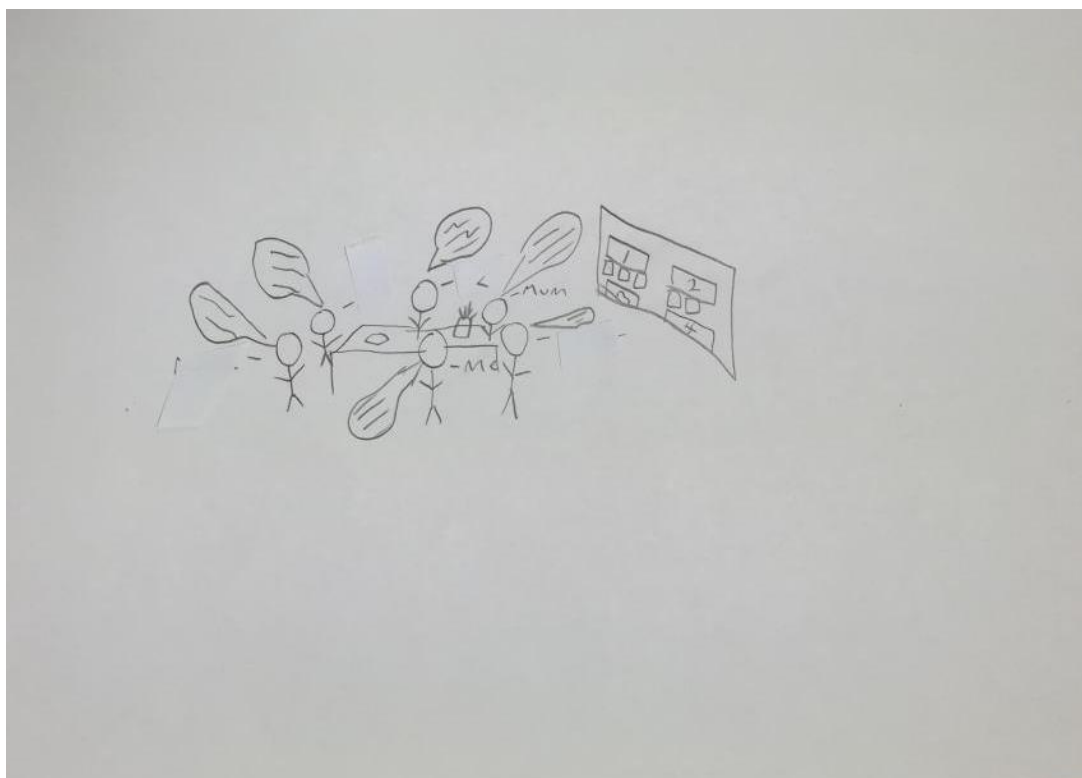
4.7.3 **Content**

The story appears to be a neutral and factual account of a person-centred review, including discussion of what people like about Nick (strengths) what's important (needs or difficulties) and what people wish for him (goals) followed by some thoughts on the value of having a review meeting, and also Nick's reflections on the account that he has given of the review.

Initially Nick listed the people in the room, including his parents, staff and his friend. Nick then offered to draw the review: depicting a scene with the people involved sitting around a table with 'post it notes' and signs up around the room 'saying nice things about me'. After that there was discussion of ideas to 'work on'. Then Nick and his friend left the meeting. Nick described the meeting as 'pretty useful', saying that it was 'helpful to talk about what stuff he needed to work on, and that he found out new things, such as his levels of attainment (grades) in science.

When considering what he would say to a younger child about having a meeting, Nick explained that there's be 'lots of talk about you' and 'mainly about things you need to work on' and that 'it would be helpful to bring a friend to support you'. Nick described himself as feeling 'calm' during the meeting, and stated that the meeting helps by letting you know what you need 'to work on'.

Nick described the content of his review in a way that is coherent, predictable and unified. Likewise, the content and structure of his story echoes this. Similarly, the drawing that he made of his review is a harmonious and well-balanced depiction of a review meeting.

Nick explained that although he learned new things, such as his levels in science, there were no surprises.

> *Surprises?*
> **No, not really**
> **I've been to one before**
> **It was quite the same**

> **As the first one**
>
> *(Nick, 102-106)*

4.7.4 **Form and aesthetic devices**

Nick describes his story as a 'recount', and consistent with this type of narrative there is no use of imagery or symbolism such as the use of similes or metaphors. Nick uses simple and neutral connectives, such as 'and' and 'because'. Conventionally in with this type of 'non-fiction', the language is consistently factual, and neutral. When prompted to say how he felt about it, Nick describes his feeling about the meeting as 'calm'.

> *Did you feel nervous or happy or sad or worried?*
> **Not really**
> **Quite calm**
> **Calm I guess**
>
> *(Nick, 97-100)*

In general Nick used the past tense, as might be expected for description of past events. However, in the part of the story when he was drawing the meeting, this sometimes moved to the present tense, which makes the story appears to be more vivid, as if Nick were re-living the meeting.

> **There's the table**
> **There's my friend, Vince**
> **My mum was over there**
>
> *(Nick, 14-16)*

Returning to the past tense gives the impression of a careful attempt to tell the real events that happened and makes the story feel convincing and accurate. The overall impression is of a documentary, and there is something 'grounding' about the uniform tone and the unhurried pace in which it is presented and the use of conversational phrases such as 'I guess' and 'stuff like that', and 'just ideas really'. Nick gives the impression of someone who genuinely feels calm and 'in control'.

4.7.5 **Movement across categories**

There does not appear to be significant movement across categories. Consistent with Nick's factual and literal way of approaching the task, the account of his review appears to follow a clear linear structure of a recount.

4.7.6 **Intrapersonal and interpersonal function**

4.7.6.1 Intrapersonal function

There seems to be no conflict and little dissonance between what the group has said and what he feels to be true about himself as a person. Because people with autism may often be found to have less well developed self-awareness than 'neurotypical' individuals, it is interesting to consider whether the reflective feedback from the group brought something particularly helpful and balancing to him as an individual.

4.7.6.2 Interpersonal function

Nick showed no self-consciousness or apparent anxiety about being praised in a group by others. Nick explains that praising him led quite naturally into a discussion of what would help him do better in school.

> **Everyone said something**
>
> That I'm **clever,**
> **Good at science**
> **Good reading and drawing skills**
> **And I'm a great friend, of course**
> **That came from Vince**
>
> **And then after we've read them all out**
> **Then we start talking about what stuff**
> **How it would help me to join in more in lessons**

(Nick 33-43)

Nick's comments show that it felt normal for him to experience a meeting like this; that they are an accepted and regular part of school life, and a situation where he feels calm and

confident. Also the predictable format of the meeting, with clear ground rules and a well-organised structure, supported by visual cues such as the posters around the room, seems to have been managed in a way that Nick experiences as 'Asperger-friendly'.

Nick seems to have trusting relationships with others and to feel both appreciated and helped by the group. Nick is describing a group that is 'on task' and unified. It is helpful to consider how Nick's experience of the review relates to Bion's ideas about group functioning. Bion considered all groups to be made up of two groups; the 'work group' and the 'basic assumption group'. The work group addresses its efforts to the stated primary aim of the group. This aspect of group functioning will 'keep the group anchored to a sophisticated and rational level of behaviour' (Bion 1961 p66), in contrast to the 'basic assumption' group, where the subtext runs counter to the stated aims of the group. This is a way of thinking about the conscious and subconscious processes of the group. Nick appears to be describing a clear example of 'work group' behaviour. It is interesting to consider how much this reflects Nick's thinking as a young person with high functioning autism, and with that a concrete and literal way of seeing the world, which could mean that he was not attuned to subtexts within the group; alternatively it could simply reflect what took place in the review.

4.7.7 Underlying meaning: the nub – business as usual

The 'nub' of what I have understood from this story is that Nick is saying that 'It's normal for people to help and support me. They understand me and help me know what to work on'.

My interpretation is that Nick felt being part of a review was an 'everyday' and familiar experience, useful but unsurprising. Nick's reiteration that he knows what to 'work on' since the meeting suggests the practical focus of the meeting was significant for him.

They're helpful
Because it tells you about

About all the stuff you need to work on
And what stuff you're good at already
That's about it

(Nick 87-91)

In the analysis I have repeatedly attempted to look for different 'levels of meaning' and have not been able to identify a subtext that seems more profound in Nick's story. My considered view is that the story speaks for itself, the meeting was pretty useful but 'business as usual' for Nick.

This analysis was viewed as 'reasonable' when discussed with EP colleagues in the discussion group at the Tavistock Centre. My colleagues expressed relief that my analysis was very similar to theirs, as they were troubled by the search for a 'missing element'.

4.7.8 **Perlocutionary effect and reflections on the process of analysis**

As described above, my feelings and experience of the story was that it was interesting and engaging. The iterative process of repeatedly listening to the recordings, reviewing the transcript, writing the first draft of the story and constructing the rough verse has felt like a relatively linear trajectory. In parallel with Nick's experience in the review itself, I have learned new things, but there have not really been any significant surprises. My reaction to Nick's story has consistently been a calm and relatively cool one.

It was enjoyable and interesting to spend time with Nick, who seemed attentive, relaxed and thoughtful. For example, Nick paused and read the 'first draft' for one minute and thirty two seconds, a significant silence to share with an unfamiliar adult. This is borne out by the questions that Nick asked about the text, such as 'what are the brackets for?' [24] (Nick interview

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[24] These were used to indicate words which were mine, rather than Nick's from the transcript of the first interview.

2, line 79), and the calm and uncomplicated way in which Nick pointed out occasional inaccuracies - 'I think you misheard me' (Nick interview 2, line 40). I felt that he enjoyed working with me, and managed both interviews with poise and quiet confidence.

Again this adds to the impression of a unified and consistent story, which felt relatively cool emotionally, and was thought-provoking and reflective, rather than stressful or exciting.

When EP colleagues at the Tavistock reviewed the rough verse and my analysis, they remarked that Nick's story gave a clear impression of someone who had experienced an inclusive school[25] and respectful treatment; someone who trusts those around him.

4.8   Reflections on findings overall

The current chapter has shown that each child's narratives bring surprising, striking and vivid insights to their perspectives and experiences of a person-centred review. The findings also show the value of the current narrative analytic strategy (NAS) as a systematic and thorough way to analyse and interpret these children's accounts.

The next and final chapter will start by considering commonalities that emerge from these children's accounts, while carefully avoiding generalising in a way that would be questionable given the idiographic nature of the study.

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[25] Meaning a school where children with additional needs were respectfully worked with, consistent with the view of 'inclusion' described in the introduction.

5   Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1   Chapter overview

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the strengths, limitations and implications of the current study, and to summarise and reflect on what has been discovered through the project. Firstly it will comment on the findings overall; secondly, reflect critically on ethical issues which arose; thirdly, address the study's strengths and limitations, including the quality of research design, its conduct, and suggested improvements; fourthly, its implications, including its meaning to the participants and its relevance at a school and local authority level, for the researcher's practice, and for Educational Psychologists (EPs) more generally; and lastly it will conclude with overall reflections and suggestions for future research.

5.2   Commentary on findings

5.2.1   Research question 1: what accounts do young people give of their experience of person-centred annual review meetings?

Given the idiographic nature of this study it is important to avoid generalising from the findings in a way that would be questionable. Some striking communalities, however, do emerge from these accounts. All the children interviewed seemed willing and able to describe their experiences of person-centred annual review meetings; each narrative offers insight both into the child as individual and into their experience of a person-centred review.

5.2.1.1   Understanding of the review meeting

All children interviewed explained important features of the person-centred review: that they were at the centre of the meeting; that people had come together to talk about them; that their strengths, difficulties and plans to help them were considered.

> **They talk about me**
> **They going to make my school lovely**

(Khaled 238-239)

> **I guess there's going to be lots of talk about you**
>
> *(Nick 78)*

> **In the meeting they told me**
> **They told the people to**
> **Write what you like about Laura**
> **And what Laura doesn't do really well**
> **What we wish**
>
> *(Laura 25-29)*

> **Serena take me to my mum and dad**
> **He wanted to talk to Serena**
>
> *(Adham 2-3)*

It seems, then, that all these children knew and understood key aspects of the person-centred annual review process.

5.2.1.2   Description of their own strengths

All the children eloquently described their strengths and positive qualities:

> **And I like drawing**
> **I am good at art**
> **Good drawer**
> **Understandable**
> **Helping kids**
>
> *(Candice 75-79)*

> **I'm good at maths**
> **I'm good at playing badminton**
> **And I'm good at playing football**
> **And sports**
> **Playing with my best friends**
>
> *(Khaled 37-41)*

The fluent, detailed way that these children spoke about strengths appeared to reflect discussions at their recent meeting, and gave the impression that this was a familiar topic.

5.2.1.3   Use of animal imagery

Intriguingly, four of these six children used animal imagery to describe themselves, in evocative ways that suggested they were considering their identity and relationships with others.

I'm a boy
I'm the **little fox**

(Adham 75-76)

I, I'll be like (makes squeaking noise as if pretending to be a mouse)
Sometimes in class I speak so quiet
That nobody can hear what I am saying

(Eleanor 79-83)

On reflection, this use of animal images is less surprising given the prominence of animals in children's literature (Hogan 2009; Cosslett 2006; Arnold 1996) and how frequently children use animal images in their own stories (Oswald 1995).

5.2.1.4   What was learned through the review

Some children talked about what they had learned or discovered through the meeting:

And I also found out
When Linda was looking at the computer
To see what levels I got

(Nick 69-71)

Noticing how people notice about me
I notice that they actually
Do listen
Really hard

(Candice 5-8)

Some also said it was a helpful experience, enabling them to know more about plans and others' expectations:

I think it was pretty useful
I guess it was helpful to talk about what stuff
I need to work on
I guess it just helped me

(Nick 62-65)

It was a good idea
Because then you can listen to what they said
'Cos if they say anything you could get better at
Then you could do it

(Eleanor 108-111)

My mum is talking
Something in the post it

> **How to do**
> **And how to look after propert ((sic))**
> **And how to look after toys**
>
> **Everybody was reading**
> **They were doing**
> **The target**
>
> *(Adham 36-44)*

Some also commented on what they thought adults had learned through the meeting, such as how to help them more effectively:

> **So they knew**
> **What things they should do**
> **To calm me down and do stuff**
> **They got to learn new stuff**
>
> *(Laura 136)*

Some of the children also reflected on how they like to work and approaches that help them in school:

> **I like the people to help me**
> **And I like working on my own**
>
> *(Khaled 50-51)*

> **I don't like being put on the spot**
>
> *(Candice 16)*

Overall the children said a number of new things were discovered through the meeting.

5.2.1.5 Whether the meeting changed anything

Some children, such as Nick and Eleanor, expressed uncertainty about the outcome, or said it was not yet known:

> **It was only yesterday**
> **I don't think it will have changed anything yet**
> **We are still trying out some of the things that were in the meeting**
>
> *(Nick 108-111)*

> *Do you think anything's changed because of the meeting? Or not really?*
> **Sort of**
> **I'm not quite sure**
>
> *(Eleanor 128-130)*

Others, such as Khaled and Laura said that the meeting had already made things better, in important ways.

> After the meeting it felt different
> **I got on better outside**
> **Yeah, and helped with the class**
>
> **School, it's got better**
> **Feels different in every way**
>
> *(Laura 146-151)*

When taken together with comments about what was learned in the section above, it seems reasonable to conclude that the meeting was felt to have made some difference to the children interviewed.

5.2.1.6 Whether children would recommend a meeting to others

All three children who were asked said that they would recommend having a meeting like this to another child.

> **It is a good idea**
> **The point is you have to just chill out**
>
> *(Candice 117-118)*

> *Would you recommend one of these meetings?*
> **I guess, yeah**
> **They are helpful**
>
> *(Nick 85-87)*

> *…What would you say?*
> **It was a good idea**
>
> *(Eleanor 107-108)*

These children, then, endorsed the meeting process.

5.2.1.7 Children's comments on leaving before the end of the meeting

Eleanor, Nick and Candice mentioned that they left the meeting before the end, and expressed no concern about this.

> *Would you say that you were in the meeting for most of it, half of it, just a little bit of it?*

> **Half of it**
>
> **I went out of the room and they discussed**
> **I need to have more time out of the room working stuff out**
>
> *What did you think about the fact that they carried on talking and you weren't there?*
> **It was good because Kate and Hettie told me**
> **What was said in the meeting**
> **When I was gone**
>
> *(Candice 102-111)*

> **We were there for most of the meeting**
> **And then nothing much happened, the rest of it, my mum says**
>
> *(Nick 58-59)*

The impression was that they were relaxed about leaving and felt informed about what was discussed in their absence.

5.2.1.8   Children's feelings overall about the review

All these children's narratives present a largely positive view of their person-centred review, and reported them as an emotive experience.

> **I liked it**
> **Yeah**
> **Everything**
> **All the, all the good things about me**
>
> **It was good – no – brilliant**
>
> *(Laura 111-116)*

> **In some parts of it, it felt a bit scary**
> **And then in other parts it felt**
> **Happy**
>
> *(Eleanor 101-103)*

Children seemed to feel supported and encouraged through the meeting. For example, Laura said that feeling understood by others in the meeting dramatically changed her experience of school. Candice, who chose not to attend her meeting the previous year, stayed, and listened to and accepted affirming comments by others. Adham said it made him happy to see a film made about him by his classmates. Eleanor, who described herself as mouse-like in class, took an

active role in the meeting and played host. Khaled spoke out about bullying and felt everyone listened and that it was then addressed. Nick learned about what to work on.

Overall, the review seemed to be a 'safe' and emotionally containing space, where these children felt supported and encouraged by those around them, and sometimes learned or imparted important information.

5.2.2 Research question 2: what can be understood from these accounts?

The children's accounts of their person-centred reviews support the view that they were an 'intervention', in that the meeting changed something for them: they learned through this process, seemed to know more about their strengths and identities and what to work on.

The emotional aspects of the meeting are a striking theme: how being in the meeting made these children feel noticed, listened to and better understood. Some children's descriptions of being part of the person-centred annual review suggest that it provided emotional containment or a safe 'transitional space'.

The encouraging findings of the current study are consistent with other recent UK PCP studies such as Corrigan (2014), Warner (2012), and Taylor-Brown (2014), which showed that some children's experiences may be positive on a number of levels.

5.2.2.1 Should children stay in meetings throughout?

In this study the children who missed the end expressed no concern, appearing to trust that this decision was benign. In contrast to this, some advocates of PCP approaches aver that children must be present in all parts of meetings that concern them, as is sometimes expressed in the slogan 'no decision about me, without me' (Coulter 2011). The reality of what this may mean in practice calls for careful consideration, given the views of the children in this and other studies.

Although outwardly it seems desirable for young people to attend meetings, especially considering their potential importance, attendance alone must not be assumed to sufficient to make it be empowering or meaningful. Tokenistic involvement in meetings can be a problem or children being asked to meetings 'in order to hear, and one suspects, *agree with* the decisions that have been made by the key adults around them' (Aston and Lambert 2010 p42) Consulting with children is a complex issue, and, even when adults have attempted to seek children's views, ultimately this can lead to disappointment if these opinions are not sufficiently considered:

> *"Teachers will listen to young people's views but if they don't agree, will adapt it and put their views on it." (School leaver 2002)*

(ENQUIRE 2008, p8)

This danger that adults may seek children's views, but then disregard or misrepresent them is increasingly recognised.

> *Recent commentators on child 'voice' have drawn attention to the temptation to invite views but then to ignore, or subvert these voices. The thoughtfulness evident in the responses from the children and young people in our case studies requires that serious consideration be given both to the process of hearing these views and to the nature of the views. Responses from children, young people (and advisory group members) may be challenging and uncomfortable, but if part of a trustworthy process, can lead to genuine improvements in educational provision.*

(Lewis et al 2007, p192)

In practical terms many decisions about children are made at professionals' meetings that are almost entirely made up of adults, whose contributions are naturally guided by the responsibilities of their different professional roles. Such meetings may be forums where children are not well included, and may not be conducive to young people expressing opinions about matters that affect them.

> *The child's voice can be lost at meetings where there is often a cacophony of adult voices competing to give their opinion on what, from their diverse perspectives, the child needs.*
>
> *(Mainwaring 2014 p101)*

Comments made by some young people about coming to their own meetings can be salutary and concerning:

> *"I hated reviews – I came out more upset than I went in. I felt that people were talking over me – there was no eye contact. I felt like a shadow" (School leaver 2002)*
>
> *(ENQUIRE 2008, p6)*

That adults are honest with young people about the limits of their participation seems important, as does the quality of their relationships with those around them.

> *Awareness of some of the pitfalls in involving children in meetings and careful attention being paid to the degree of participation that is being offered to a young person at the time when they are involved can support realistic and meaningful participation. Honest and trusting relationships with reliable adults can build the confidence of young people, as does looking for everyday opportunities to give children and young people some independence and control*
>
> *(ENQUIRE 2008 p11).*

Everything considered, it may not be assumed that participating in all aspects of meetings is always in a child's best interest, nor necessarily what they want.

5.3 Strengths and limitations of the current study

The study originated from an interest in understanding person-centred ways of working from the perspective of the young people who are at the centre of them.

> *Narrative inquiries do not - indeed, cannot - start from explicit theoretical assumptions. Instead, they begin with an interest in a particular phenomenon that is best understood narratively. Narrative inquiries then develop descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers, and others.*
>
> *(Flyvbjerg 2006 p25)*

Reflections on the conduct of the study overall show congruence between the phenomenon being studied and the chosen research methods: the selection of narrative interview methods for data capture; and the selection of narrative analysis for identifying and interpreting the interview data. The overall impression is of a piece of work that is coherent and flexible - 'the methodology does not require a unified account to emerge - contradictions and differences are acceptable and accepted within a narrative approach' (Squire et al. 2013).

5.3.1 Reflection on ethical issues

Overall, the ethical stance of the researcher and the open and respectful way that the study was conducted is to be considered a strength. However, the psychosocial orientation of the research acknowledges the complex role of conscious and unconscious processes.

5.3.1.1 *Did the children see the researcher as independent?*

The researcher conducted interviews in a school where she was not previously known to the children and does not normally work. While planning the study she envisaged that this could encourage candour about their experiences. However, the relationship between the SENCO of the school and the researcher could have unintentionally influenced what was said, as the SENCO chairs all the person-centred annual review meetings and her association with the researcher was evident.

5.3.1.2 *Can we be confident that informed consent or assent was secured?*

Overall, the process of seeking informed consent from the parents and assent from children is to be considered a strength of the study, and considerable time and care was given to this aspect. However, the possible influence of the relatively powerful position of the researcher and less powerful position of children with additional needs should be acknowledged. Scrutiny of interview transcripts demonstrates that the researcher repeatedly explained the nature and purpose of the study, following the principle of 'continuous checking of assent', and that she

also explained other ethical considerations such as the planned anonymisation of their accounts (see Appendices 7-19).

5.3.1.3   *How might the researcher have unknowingly influenced the participants' accounts?*

In her work as a practitioner psychologist, the researcher has a longstanding interest in promoting 'pupil involvement' and an investment in developing and promoting the 'person-centred' way of working. The possibility that the researcher unintentionally guided the children, for example towards giving a more positive account of their experiences for example, cannot be discounted.

The researcher's particular interest, consistent with the nature of the study, is in gaining a better understanding of the young peoples' accounts of their person-centred review. She considers it less relevant whether they are seen to be 'positive' or 'negative'. The researcher aspires to work with children's perspectives in what Spyrou calls 'critical reflexive representation', an orientation that acknowledges their 'messy, multi-layered and non-normative character' (Spyrou 2012), and to maintain curiosity about children's perspectives, and what they might bring. From this standpoint, unforeseen and critical comments could have been instructive in developing and improving the quality of person-centred work, taking into account young people's opinions about it.

For the purposes of the research project it would have been of great interest had narratives emerged questioning what appears to be a commonly held assumption: that taking part in person-centred meetings is a positive experience for children; it is a problematic assumption, since it has been largely unresearched (Corrigan 2014).

The incorporation of psychodynamic concepts within the analysis is thought to be another strength of the study. It provided a conceptual framework for systematically exploring unconscious processes and within which 'undigested' emotional content could be processed

and 'digested', 1 as when Bion describes transforming the 'beta function' (the unspoken processes) within a group into 'alpha function' ((conscious awareness), so that they can be spoken about and understood (Bion 1962). Although careful reading of the interview transcripts indicates the researcher strove to elicit a balanced account of the children's experiences, it is however in the nature of unconscious processes that they are 'out of awareness'. Therefore, it is ultimately for the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about the trustworthiness of the study in this respect.

5.3.1.4 Power in the interview situation

From an ethical perspective it is important to consider power relationships and how they are enacted in the study. The researcher's thinking about this area has been informed by her awareness of the ideas of Foucault (ibid 1982). From a Foucauldian perspective, power is considered to be 'widely dispersed, and held everywhere, in different forms. Power is multiple, mobile and contestable, always relational, and inheres within language itself' (Esin, Fathi and Squire 2013). Some researchers following a feminist perspective have questioned the implicit power relationships within quantitative methods; designs and research conduct, and argue that both positivist and post-positivist research can be seen as manifestations of oppressive and patriarchal traditions. They have also reflected critically on the implicit power relationships within a traditional interview, where the researcher's selection of questions frames and guides the potential range of responses, thereby unconsciously imposing her views on the 'subject', and limiting what can be said:

> *Feminist researchers have criticised unequal power relations in the interview, whether these are based on gender, race class and/or something else…all structured interviews and most aspects of semi-structured interviews come under the question and answer type, where the interviewer sets the agenda and in principle remains in control of what is produced*

(Hollway and Jefferson 2013 p28-29)

While it would be naïve to deny the implicit power relationship in the interview situation, the current study has attempted to balance this somewhat by taking an exploratory approach, and acknowledging the complexity of this, in keeping with Alldred and Burman's perspective (ibid 2005).

> *Consistent with the epistemological stance the 'narrative' is acknowledged to be co-created through a dynamic interplay between the participant and the researcher… to state that both the 'hearing' and the 'analysis' of what children say are active processes of interpretation raises complex questions about epistemology, including who counts as a 'knower', that highlight the significance of the researcher…For when research accounts are not seen as definitive statements of 'knowledge', they may be subject to scrutiny and contestation, (including by competing claims to represent children's views), which undermine the seeming omnipotence of the researcher implied in conventional models of research.*

(ibid p187)

An attempt to balance the conventional power relationships, so far as this is possible, is reflected in a number of ways throughout the study. These include the approach to seeking the assent of participants described above, and, significantly, by the use of a relatively open 'narrative interviewing' process, whereby children were given a degree of control over how they wanted to explain their perspectives though a combination of talking, drawing, showing what happened using play characters or using prompt cards. The researcher attempted to 'follow the child's lead' where possible during the interviews, and to ask for their help with checking and redrafting their accounts.

5.3.1.5 *Power and emancipatory research*

The current study was envisaged as a piece of 'emancipatory' research, consistent with ideas of Rose and Shevlin, (2004) which are also explored further below. Once again, closer consideration of the implicit processes shows a more complex picture.

Riessman (2008) reminds us that it cannot be assumed that researchers' good intentions lead to good outcomes for participants. For example when interviewing victims of crime or abuse, the researcher may be 'unconsciously re-enacting a coercive situation, the idea being that, since the interviewer is dominant and the 'subject' is subordinate, the outcomes of the research may be 'taken out of their hands, thus producing outcomes against their interests' (Hollway and Jefferson 2013).

> *I want to introduce a caution, however to the belief that narrative research is "empowering".... the claim rests on the assumption of the healing power of storytelling. Molly Andrews argues that "giving voice" and "empowering" marginalized groups can mask complicated questions. Who benefits from the work...How are stories going to be received by differently situated audiences? Will it be heard as the author intended?...investigators who want to argue for a political use of their projects need to remember that "an emancipatory intent is no guarantee of an emancipatory outcome."*

> *(Riessman 2008, p199)*

For this reason, the anonymisation of any quotation used will be strictly adhered to, and the researcher has not named the school, SENCo or Headteacher in the thesis, as this might lead to children's narratives being attributed to them as individuals, with unforeseen consequences. However, the nature of the research makes it unrealistic to conceal the Local Authority where it has been conducted.

5.3.2 Limitations of research design

5.3.2.1 Sample size: was the sample too small?

The study took place in a single school and had six participants, all of whom met the researcher around three times. There are many precedents of the use of small sample sizes within qualitative research; for example in ethnographic studies, where researchers such as Clandinin (2013) emphasise the 'situated' or context-specific nature of knowledge. Small sample sizes are characteristic too of much of the existing literature on young people's perspectives on person-centred planning discussed in detail in Chapter 2: Literature Review (Taylor-Brown 2012;

Warner 2012; Corrigan 2014). The fact that the current study used narrative interviews placed clear constraints on the number of children that might be involved and the potential generalisability of findings; it cannot be assumed that the experiences of the children in this particular school would be directly comparable to that of others in different settings.

In fact, when the current study is considered from the alternative perspective of narrative research, having as many as six participants could also be seen as a potential weakness, as the number of participants could have led to a superficial analysis of information presented in interviews. Some narrative studies use single case studies (Gilgun 1994).

Overall the researcher is satisfied that the sample size is both defensible and appropriate. Certainly case studies need to be interpreted with caution; however, a detailed understanding from the perspective of a small number of individuals can also offer broader insights. Flyvbjerg (2006) cogently argues for the unique and powerful contribution of case studies in advancing both expert knowledge and theory, and describes 'five common misunderstandings about case-study research'. Flyvbjerg demonstrates that the detailed and complex information in case studies can challenge 'received wisdom' about the phenomenon being explored, both in professional practice and scientific research.

5.3.2.2   *Data collection*

5.3.2.2.1   *Were there disadvantages to conducting the research in a single school?*

Overall, carrying out the study in a single school is considered to have brought a number of advantages and to have improved the quality of the research overall (see <u>Chapter 3: Methodology</u>). Limitations placed on the generalisability of the study are noted.

5.3.2.2.2 *How sure can we be that the narratives as represented genuinely represented the children's views?*

Narrative researchers such as Jefferson and Hollway (2013) argue that the trustworthiness of narrative interviews can be increased by re-interviews, which check that the researcher has understood what participants intended to say. In keeping with this, the young people were each interviewed twice, with an initial interview to seek the stories, and a second interview within two weeks to revisit and refine the stories and check inconsistencies. However, once more, this is more complex than it might seem:

> *The credibility of an investigator's representation is strengthened if it is recognizable to participants. For ethical reasons alone, it is important to find out what the participants think of our work. But obtaining corroboration turns out to be complicated, even illusory.*

(Riessman 2008 p197)

In the current study the researcher acknowledges the 'rough verse' is her appropriation of the children's narratives, rather than simply viewing these as 'true stories' that could have been taken from a modernist or structuralist perspective. This is further discussed in <u>Chapter 3: Methodology</u>. However, the researcher intentionally used the phrase 'true story' in her explanations to the children, because she viewed this as a useful encapsulation of both factual and creative aspects inherent within her enquiry and believed the use of such familiar and accessible terms would help explain the study clearly.

5.3.2.3 *Data analysis*

5.3.2.3.1 *Can the meaning of the children's narratives ever be reliably established?*

Squire presents narratives as dynamic, fluid and socially constructed, and focuses on 'how we can study narratives as stories of experience, rather than events'. She notes that some narrative researchers may neglect the complexity of 'Representation itself; the uncertain, changeable nature of written, spoken and visual symbol systems means that stories are distanced from the

happenings they described, have many meanings, and are never the same when told twice' (Squire 2013 p47).

> *Children can tell us a lot about their lives, and about how they experience their lives, through their stories. But it is clear that a story reflects a dynamic process, one which is influenced by a myriad of forces. Those who elicit, record, and analyse such stories need to be acutely aware of the ways in which their methods shape their findings.*
>
> *(Engel 2005 p215)*

Several researchers who use narrative approaches remind us that the process of narrative analysis has no defined 'end point' (Hollway 2015; Andrews 2013). For the purposes of this doctoral project, the submission deadline created the need for an 'ending', however arbitrary this might be. The researcher is satisfied that the analysis has been carried out in a detailed and varied way that interrogates the children's narratives on a number of levels, although no analysis can be considered to be definitive or 'exhaustive'.

In order to enrich and improve the trustworthiness of her analysis of the children's narratives, the researcher has sought alternative views, as described in Chapter 4: Methodology. These include: re-interviewing the children to check her understanding of them; returning to the children's narratives on multiple occasions; sharing materials[26] with her supervisor; having a specialist teacher read through all verbatim transcripts and rough verse to check for fidelity and completeness; and presenting the rough verse analysis to a group of EP colleagues and tutors at the Tavistock Centre to explore unnoticed elements in the narratives and to check the reasonableness of her interpretation.

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[26] Including audio recordings, children's drawings, interview transcripts and rough verse versions of children's narratives.

On reflection, the presentation at the Tavistock was a particularly important session, which drew on practices described by Hollway in her psychosocial research concerning narratives of maternal identity change (see Hollway 2015 p49). However, there were important differences in how Holloway's process was adapted in the current study. Hollway's work concerns an ongoing process where a group meets regularly and interacts with raw data in a way that supports exploration of implicit processes within the interview and the interviewer's responses to it.

In the current study, the researcher had access to a group of approximately twenty experienced EP colleagues for one hour, and therefore took a pragmatic decision to explore the rough verse and children's drawings, and not verbatim transcripts or field notes (see appendix 23-4). She split the group into six smaller groups, each of whom considered a different participant's account and its analysis. This helped explore the reasonableness of her interpretations, and offered a fresh perspective on features such as the meaning of imagery used by the children. The wider scope of the group work has presumably led to a more limited exploration of the material. Nevertheless the results of this session provided a number of surprising aspects which have been considered in Chapter 4: Findings.

5.3.2.4   *Fidelity to the Tower Hamlets model of person-centred annual reviews*

Although the researcher is confident that all important features of a person-centred review were present in the meetings the children experienced, not least because these were consistently described and shown by the children in the research interviews, the question of the fidelity to the Tower Hamlets model of person-centred annual reviews has been largely assumed, rather than systematically established.

The SENCo facilitated all reviews, and practice in the school was modelled, developed and supported by Andrew Sutcliffe, joint lead of the person-centred project in LBTH, and link EP

for the school for seven consecutive years. However, some variation in the actual conduct of the reviews was noted: for example, in two of the six reviews described, the child did not have a friend with them, and the nature of the presentations that they made to the review was not directly investigated. However, in some ways, a degree of variability fits with the orientation of person-centred work, as by definition it suggests a more individualised, less prescriptive approach to the work with the child or young person, since this work can't simply be undertaken using a set of steps or formula. This idea has been well-described by Taylor-Brown:

> *(Person-centred) reviews depend on a philosophy of person-centredness rather than a specific set of tools. In this way, the focus is on full participation of the young people and the key people in their life, with a concentration on what is important to them as well as for them… the person-centred review meeting should sit within a person-centred school ethos*

(ibid 2015 p63-4)

On reflection, the study might have been improved by directly checking which aspects of the LBTH model of person-centred annual reviews were present in the reviews the children experienced, for example by observing the review meetings , or asking a key member of staff to complete a checklist after each review. Although it may have been interesting to consider the children's narratives in the context of some specific information about how the reviews were conducted, this could have subtly changed the focus of the interviews, and reduced the importance placed on what the children themselves recalled and described.

5.3.3 How the study could have been improved

5.3.3.1 Adoption of 'rough verse' to present the children's narratives throughout the study

The researcher constructed deliberately rough 'first draft' versions of the children's narratives (see appendix 20), in order to show the participants that they could change t hem during the second interview. When revisiting the verbatim transcripts, it became apparent that the researcher had subtly and unintentionally changed the words used by the children, when

creating these 'first drafts': for example, when Adham had said 'telled', she changed it to 'told', thereby smoothing over or effacing what Hughes describes as the 'fresh simple presence of the experience'. Of more concern was that in the first draft story of Laura's interview, the idea of the meeting as 'a circle around me' was introduced by the interviewer, not Laura, as the researcher had originally believed. This vividly demonstrates how easily a researcher can be guided by her own expectations, a cognitive bias described as 'what you see is all there is' (Kahneman 2011).

Because the researcher knew about 'rough verse' and analogous techniques of narrative analysis using poetic forms when carrying out interviews, she then took a decision to present the children's narratives in this form. The researcher checked and rechecked the specific words used by children in the interview transcripts when constructing the rough verse, and was careful to clean up and remove or attribute her own comments and interjections.

Improvements to the 'research diary' to support interrogation of unconscious processes

Although a research diary was kept, this made a limited contribution to the analysis overall; on reflection it was maintained in a superficial, even perfunctory way. An improvement would have been to adopt techniques employed by Hollway, whose research diaries (termed 'field notes') use prompts intended to 'surprise the unconscious' or tap into unspoken or out of awareness aspects of the interview, such as 'what are my hopes and fears for this participant' (Hollway 2015).

Methods used in the current study have drawn on researchers such as Engel (2005) and Hollway (2015), who have considerable research resources available, including full-time researchers. Engel describes a narrative analysis process whereby her doctoral students separately analyse the same stories and then compare their interpretations of them, and, as noted

above, Hollway describes a narrative analysis process including a weekly seminar to process field notes and explore and deepen the understanding of the narratives described. For a practicing psychologist completing a part-time doctorate, these techniques have been adapted to the time and resources available, thereby presumably limiting aspects of this work.

5.4 Implications of findings

5.4.1 What significance could the project have had for participants?

Researchers such as Rose and Shevlin (2004) remind us that the views of people from certain groups, such as children with special educational needs, have tended to be ignored, and implicitly treated as unimportant.

> *An analysis of the educational experiences of young people from marginalised groupings offers insights into how a discourse of power between the powerful and the powerless effectively excludes the voices of young people from meaningful participation in decision-making processes.*

(ibid)

Prior to starting the project, the researcher hoped that the children would find discussion of their person-centred review helpful – for example through articulating and gaining perspective on negative aspects, or having the opportunity to recall and celebrate positive ones.

There were a number of ways that the importance of the project to the researcher was likely to be evident to the participants: the fact that the researcher met with their parents and carers first; that she visited the school to ask for their help and explain the project; that the interviews were in rooms such as the head teacher's office; that the researcher revisited the school with their words typed up to check her understanding.

Beaver (2011) views it as an unusual and valuable experience for children to have an adult listen to them in depth, attempting to understand their perspectives in an open and 'blame free' way. It was the researcher's impression that the participants enjoyed meeting an interested

adult; however, because of the 'inclusive' nature of the school and the skills and child-centred attitudes of key staff, this may not have been such a unique experience for the children in the study.

During the project the researcher discussed with the SENCo whether she should give gifts to the children in acknowledgement of their contributions. The SENCo did not see these as desirable or necessary, and expressed the view that each child seemed to have enjoyed the process, and appreciated the interest shown by the researcher in their views and ideas. On reflection, an 'instrumental' view of reward did not fit with the ethos of the study.

5.4.1.1   How might the school context have influenced the children's accounts

In the researcher's experience, the school where the study was conducted is unusually child-centred in its approach. This was apparent historically when she was the link psychologist, and was shown in the comments and actions of the SENCo and her wish to support the project throughout. Overall, the findings from the interviews endorse the value, from the children's perspective, of being part of the person-centred annual review. One can only speculate how much of a contribution to the children's accounts about their person-centred review was made by the broader culture of the school, and on the likelihood, from the researcher's perspective that the children have learned to expect that they will be listened to and that their views and wishes will be taken seriously.

5.4.2   Implications for the school

The accounts given by the children appear to reflect well on the practices in the school, and illustrate how 'safe' and supported the children felt during these meetings. There are also some possible learning points for the school, such as the importance of all children knowing who the other adults and their roles, especially where external professionals are involved. As a small acknowledgement of support given to the project, the researcher will deliver a professional

development session for staff about person-centred planning and children's perspectives, incorporating anonymised comments from the young people in the study.

5.4.3 Implications for the Local Authority

Some of the comments and observations made by children in the study have been included in published guidance documents and training materials about person-centred reviews for staff. It is anticipated that this will help stakeholders understand some childrens' perspectives on person-centred reviews.

5.4.4 Implications for self-reflection and personal learning

5.4.4.1 Knowledge base

Carrying out this research project has helped integrate and increase the researcher's knowledge of a number of areas of longstanding interest, including: pupil voice, involving children in decision making, person-centred planning, positive psychology and narrative psychology.

5.4.5 Implications for educational psychologists

5.4.5.1 Audio recordings as a professional development tool and to increase accuracy of representation of children's comments and views from interviews

Audio recordings of interviews during the research have been shown to be an accessible and professional development tool and transcription aid, as is discussed in more detail below. With permission from others involved, interviews, consultations or presentations may be recorded and used for EPs to reflect on their practice and techniques.

5.4.5.2 *Presenting findings to practitioners in other Local Authorities*

As a practical outcome, the researcher and her colleague Andrew Sutcliffe have been asked to present at or lead training events in a few other local authorities, such as the London Borough of Greenwich, and Plymouth. Quotations from the research and key findings of the project are influencing practitioners beyond the local authority. Direct quotation from children and young

people can be more persuasive than other pieces of information (NCB 2011). Including the perspectives of children has been a valuable addition to established training programmes.

5.4.5.3 Sharing knowledge of narrative interviewing and analysis and the usefulness of 'rough verse' with EP colleagues

As described above, the researcher enlisted the support of colleagues at the Tavistock centre: a mixed group of practicing EPs, both doctoral students and their academic tutors. Feedback from the group showed that some of these participants learned more about narrative interviewing, and in particular found 'rough verse' to be a novel, vivid and interesting technique for presenting interview data.

The researcher shared techniques of narrative analysis from this study with a colleague who is an educational psychologist in training within Tower Hamlets, this colleague has now used 'rough verse' to analyse and present the findings of her own doctoral research, due to be submitted in summer 2016, which concerns narrative interviews of young fathers.

It has also enabled the researcher to learn more about recent interests linked to ongoing study at the Tavistock: namely, psychodynamic approaches and psychosocial research.

5.4.5.4 Interview technique and the importance of involving children

All Educational Psychologists (EPs) now complete a professional practice doctorate during their initial training, but the researcher had several years of practice before beginning these studies. Therefore, certain techniques, such as those used when interviewing children, have become familiar or even routine. Clearly the research interview has important differences from those carried out as part of EP casework. However, detailed scrutiny of the research interviews has prompted critical reflection on her casework interviews. The researcher has significantly increased the time set aside for interviews, and for her and the young person to reflect on what has been said, and to consider how these ideas might be interpreted and presented. The

researcher has begun to record interviews so as to report verbatim children's comments and the interviewer's prompts and questions, and has spoken with all EP colleagues in her service to encourage them to do likewise. The researcher has subsequently seen examples in EP reports where children and young people's views are recorded verbatim from audio recordings.

This research has prompted a renewed focus on pupil perspectives for the researcher, and in her role as a manager in an EP service. It has also prompted some sobering reflection on the well-intentioned but ultimately tokenistic or even self-serving way that 'pupil voice' has been used by some (Spyrou 2011). The researcher has also become more aware of feminist discourses about interviews and power (Hollway and Jefferson 2012), and of how a prescriptive interview schedule can sometimes constrain, or even subjugate, the voice of the interviewee. Likewise, she has reflected on some of the complexities of interviews, and Riessman's warning that emancipatory intentions do not guarantee emancipatory outcomes (Riessman 2005).

5.4.6 Reflections on involving children in research

There is increasing recognition of the important insights to be gained from involving children in research, and that this can improve the quality of research:

> *Involving children and young people in research can improve the research process and validity of the research by keeping it grounded in the lived experiences of children and young people, helping identify appropriate methodologies and research tools, enhancing the quality of the information itself and by bringing an additional perspective to the interpretation of findings*

> *(NCB 2011, p5)*

While the value of what children have to say is rightfully being given increased prominence, commentators such as Spyrou remind researchers that traditional ideas of 'voice' may not pay sufficient attention to other power dynamics that are being enacted within research, and the complexity of understanding and interpreting what children have to say.

By giving children a voice – and presenting them to the rest of the world, researchers hope to gain a better understanding of childhood. The disempowered social position of children and the need to attend to children and childhood from a social justice and rights perspective also add a moral imperative to the cause. Yet, this preoccupation with children's voices, which is well deserved both in an ethical and a research sense, has mostly failed to scrutinize itself and to attend critically to issues of representation.

(Spyrou 2011 p151)

It seems that work in the area of pupil voice, like narrative research itself, is both fascinating and surprisingly complex. Argyris and Schon's ideas explain that few people are generally aware that their theories-in-use are often not the same as their espoused theories, and even fewer people are aware of the maps or theories they do use (Argyris, 1980). Aspiring to reflexive representation is no guarantee that it will occur.

5.5 Concluding comments - implications for future research?

The researcher acknowledges that the involvement of children has been relatively 'traditional' in this study, although they are considered to be 'participants' rather than 'subjects'. Through her reading she has learned more about dynamic ways to involve children and young people in research processes, for example by establishing a group of young people as an advisory or planning group (NCB 2011; Lipscomb 2014). The researcher is already in consultation with EP colleagues about carrying out a piece of research using these ideas.

It is hoped that the current study will directly and indirectly influence some future research. The researcher has discussed shared techniques from the project with another EP colleague in LBTH who is doing an initial training doctorate and who is now using 'rough verse' to analyse and present her narrative interviews of school-aged fathers.

Narrative is an ancient method and perhaps our most fundamental form for making sense of experience…narratives not only give meaningful form to experiences we have already lived through. They also provide us a forward glance, helping us to anticipate situations even before we encounter them, allowing us to envision alternative futures.

(Flyvbjerg 2006 p25)

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