In search of the imaginary beams: how pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses can be enabled to reflect on their experiences of school using individualised transactional support methods

by

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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study, underpinned by the theory of intersubjectivity, was conducted in Southwest England and explored how to elicit the views of four primary-aged pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses on their experience of their mainstream school.

A flexible, multi-method approach was employed and included the use of observation, field notes, semi-structured interviews and informal chatting. Transactional support methods were developed for and with the pupil participants to enable them to share their views in their interviews and play sessions. The elicitation methods used were Lego play and role play set within the context of the participants' special interests, as well as bespoke visual supports.

Data was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and this produced themes at an individual level, as well as across cases. Four superordinate themes emerged at group level based on participants' experiences of their school which revealed a communication gap between the participants and their teachers; the need for clearer learning structures within the classroom; improved autism training for school staff; and a lack of engagement with peers by participants.

Findings also highlighted that more individualised transactional support methods were required across all participants. As there has been limited research in this area, this study's

findings call for more research on how to co-develop elicitation methods with individual autistic participants, as research projects unfold, to ensure their voices are at the centre of research. Implications for practice include the need for education professionals to better understand autism and dedicate time to creating spaces for autistic pupils to be able to express their lived experiences through creative methods that they choose and can develop with or without support.

DEDICATION

To you, Dad – I would not be where I am today without you x

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
AS	Asperger syndrome
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASC	Autism Spectrum Condition
AET	Autism Education Trust
CYP	Children and young people
DEP	Double Empathy Problem
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHSC	Department of Health and Social Care
DSM-5-TR	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Version 5
EHCP	Education, health and care plan
EF	Executive functioning
HFA	High-functioning autism
ICD-11	International Classification of Diseases Version 11
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local authority
LD	Learning difficulties
LFA	Low-functioning autism
LSA	Learning Support Assistant
NAS	National Autistic Society
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Experience
SCERTS	Social Communication, Emotional Regulation and Transactional Support
SEN(D)	Special educational needs (and disabilities)
SENDCO	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
SLT	Speech and language therapy
SMS	Sensory-motor-synchrony
ToM	Theory of Mind
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
WCC	Weak Central Coherence
WHO	World Health Organization

FOREWORD

A young boy and his mother are returning home from a local park near to the boy's school after school one day. The mother and son cross back through the school grounds (a short-cut to their home), and the boy slides down a metal rail flanking some steps with routine-like precision. He dawdles behind his mother, as she moves on ahead impatiently.

Part of the school roof is supported by a pillar, and the boy's mother approaches it, deciding to bypass it to the left. To her surprise, the boy shouts out in a distressed tone for her to walk back around the pillar in the other direction. The mother asks her son why. He replies indignantly, 'Come this way ' (in the direction he is walking). The mother feels bewildered: why does she have to go the same way as her son?

Another family is now blocking the mother's way around the pillar. The boy has become highly agitated; his breath has quickened; he shouts aggressively. People stare and look at the mother and son judgmentally. She and the boy are blocking the path; people cannot get through. The mother capitulates and does as she is told by walking back to the pillar and making her way around it in the direction her son insists on.

In the incident above, I was the mother and my autistic son (aged eight), the boy. I discovered some months later, and after exhaustive detective work, that my son experienced an imaginary 'beam' connecting us, and that was why he would not allow us to go around the pillar in different directions, as our beam would have been severed. After

this disclosure, I interpreted the beam as signifying our bond, or a form of safety for my son, but could not be sure. However, had I only followed a 'textbook' interpretation of his behaviour, my understanding would have been limited to assuming it was an expression of a need for sameness (both of us passing the pillar in the same direction), given this was part of the diagnostic criteria for autism. Had I not persevered in trying to understand the underlying cause of this behaviour, I would never have been able to understand the nuance of my son's need or been as empathetic in how I approached his behaviour.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

1.1 Personal context to research

One of the most challenging aspects of being a parent of an autistic child with learning difficulties has been the long journey to understanding *why* my son has behaved in the ways he has. As exemplified in my personal anecdote above, he was not always able to verbally explain why he needed to do something in the way he did. In his mind in the above narrative, he was transmitting a 'beam' to me from his internal world which he felt connected us. He seemed convinced the beam was reaching me. However, I was not able to receive it, as I did not know it existed. Nevertheless, by adapting my language, presenting alternative examples of interpretation, and using forms of analogy, eventually, I was able to reach my son. But I was only able to intersubjectively connect with him by entering his world and focusing on its uniqueness. I also needed to see his world from his point of view and on his terms. This struck me as a hugely valuable process, and I wondered if many other autistic children were transmitting similar beams, signalling their needs to those around them that possibly were being missed. I wanted to explore if it was possible to detect these beams, in metaphorical terms, and find ways to meet the child in the middle of an intersubjective discourse.

Furthermore, as a secondary school teacher, working in various mainstream and independent schools in the United Kingdom (UK) for 15 years, I also sometimes struggled to understand some aspects of my autistic pupils' behaviour. It was only after extensive

training in autism (National Autistic Society's Early Bird parent-training programme, and MEd in Autism: Children) that my understanding of how best to support autistic pupils in school burgeoned. I felt the adults working to support the autistic pupils in the various schools I taught in lacked knowledge of autism at the most basic levels. Personally, I often found myself deferring to pupils' Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) and/or their parents for information and advice, rather than being able to ask my pupils directly or indirectly about their needs. At times, I simply felt out of my depth.

These experiences provided the motivation for my master's dissertation which focused on how two autistic, secondary-aged pupils were included in mainstream school drama lessons. One of my autistic participants was a selective mute, and I encountered difficulties in trying to ascertain his views, given this perceived limitation. This, and the experience of connecting intersubjectively with my son, led me to wanting to explore elicitation methods in much more detail, and that intense curiosity gave birth to this study.

1.2 Rationale for terminology

Firstly, regarding my references to gender, I refer to my participants as male or female, as that is how they identified. However, I wish for my references to people in the wider population to include plural forms to respect non-binary identities. For ease of expression, and to avoid repeating every singular and plural form each time I refer to gender, I have chosen to use the terms 'their' and 'they' to encompass all identities.

The International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (World Health Organization, revised 2019) is predominantly used by diagnosing clinicians in the UK, and labels autism as 'Autism Spectrum Disorder' (ASD). Personally, when I was handed this diagnostic label for my son 10 years ago, by his diagnosing paediatrician, I felt devastated. The nouns autism and spectrum were solely defined by one other qualifying noun: disorder. For me, this term made me feel like my son was all wrong and needed fixing. It only summed up part of who he was, not the whole of him, as he also had perceived cognitive strengths such as hyperfocus and good memory. Consequently, I view autism as a difference not a disorder, and, therefore, only use the terms 'disorder' or 'impairment' in my thesis when referring to others' use of these terms.

Furthermore, I also consider the label 'Autism Spectrum Condition' (ASC), which appears to be used by many professionals as a more politically correct version of ASD, to be a pathologising term framed by the medical model of disability. For me, the word 'condition' engenders a sense of there being an underlying disease or something that needs fixing in a person, for example, as in a 'liver condition'. I prefer the paradigm of neurodiversity (Dwyer, 2022) which espouses the idea that no two brains are the same and, therefore, autism and other neurocognitive variants are just part of the natural spectrum of human biodiversity. For the same reasons, I refer to people, who do not have autism diagnoses, as non-autistic, rather than 'neurotypical'. I feel the term neurotypical 'others' autistic people, as they are being grouped in a separate category to 'typical' humans. However, I also recognise that for some autistic individuals, they do feel more connected, neurologically, to autistic people (Lawson, 2024).

Problematically, there is no consensus within the literature regarding the most preferred language to describe autistic people (Botha et al., 2023). However, for autistic adults in the UK, as well as their family members, friends and parents, Kenny et al. (2016) found that identity-first language such as 'autistic person' was the most endorsed term, though half of the professionals in their study preferred person-first language (e.g. 'person with autism'). Proponents of the neurodiversity model see person-first language as implying that autism is somehow an appendage of who people are, rather than a central and defining element of their identity, like race or gender. Considering Kenny et al.'s (2016) findings, and the fact that the diagnosed participants and their mothers in my study, as well as myself, preferred identity-first language, I have chosen to adopt this when referring to autistic people throughout my thesis.

I choose to use the terms 'high-functioning ' (HF) and 'low-functioning' (LF) autism only when referring to other studies adopting these terms. These terms are not official labels included in the diagnostic manuals and allude to people being one or the other. An autistic person can possess average to above average intelligence (seen by medical professionals as denoting HF autism) yet struggle with everyday tasks such as dressing or eating (associated more with LF autism). Therefore, I feel these descriptors are not helpful.

I use the term 'people with disabilities' within my thesis, as this could include an amputee war veteran, for example, and they may not view a prosthetic limb as a central feature of their identity, as many autistic individuals do. I also use the term 'disabled person', as this

is the officially recognised description used by the UK Government (Cabinet Office [online], 2021).

I have chosen to use the term 'special interests' to describe the avid interests of my autistic participants. Generally, this still is the recognised term used within the autism field to describe autistic people's interests which they deem far more time-consuming than 'hobbies', and which offer focus, comfort, and a strong sense of identity (Nowell et al., 2021). As there does not appear to be consensus on an alternative term yet, and to be able to communicate to my readers exactly what I mean by unique interests within the context of autism, I have decided to use the term special interests. However, I do acknowledge that some people consider the word 'special' offensive, and feel it erases the expertise of autistic people, as they feel it is infantilising, pathologising, and others them in relation to non-autistic people.

When I refer to the term 'complex communication differences', I am referring to the differences in how some people initiate social interactions (or not), respond to others, are able to articulate their thoughts and feelings to others, and use interaction to show people things or to be sociable.

Lastly, regarding the use of the term 'transactional supports' throughout my thesis, I need to distinguish my use of transactional from how some theoreticians use the term such as in Transactional Analysis psychoanalytic theory (Berne, 1958), the Transactional Model of Development (Sameroff, 1975), or the conceptualisation of transactional support within

the SCERTS Model (Social Communication, Emotional Regulation, Transactional Support; Prizant et al., 2006). The closest of these theoretical models to my conceptualisation of transactional support is the SCERTS approach which is concerned with the ways in which partners such as professionals or parents can modify the environment as well as themselves to enhance the learning opportunities for autistic students (Mackdonald, 2020). Whilst there are some similarities between my use of the term and how it is used within the SCERTS approach, there is one main difference. I use the term to describe how I attempted to enter the world of my child participants and co-develop opportunities for them to share their views of the world. My aim was not to enhance their social competence or learning capabilities. Thus, when I refer to transactional supports in my thesis, I simply mean the processes of capturing my autistic participants' beams of communication and finding ways to help them articulate their experiences through the co-development of elicitation methods. I justify in more detail why I chose to adopt the term transactional supports to describe my elicitation methods in section 4.9.4.

1.3 Aim of study

At the centre of this research, which explores how to ascertain the inside perspectives of children with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses on their school experience, is a conceptual framework that places a child's lived experience ontologically and epistemologically at the heart of the inquiry. By inside perspectives, I mean experiences which have not necessarily already been reflected on by participants or expressed outwardly to others.

My own positionality and pedagogical approaches to learning and child development influenced how I developed this study. Essentially, my guiding principle was to see each autistic child as 'uniquely human' (Prizant and Fields-Meyer, 2015). As Prizant and Field-Meyer (2015) suggest, so many caregivers do not ask *why* autistic people act as they do; there is an over-focus on managing behaviour, rather than understanding what lies beneath and causes behaviour for each, unique individual. As my priority was to try to gain a more inside perspective of my participants' experiences, I felt I could only do this by trying to co-construct a link between their subjective experiences and my own through the principles of intersubjectivity. The principles of intersubjectivity and cited problems some autistic people experience when intersubjectively engaging with others are explored in sections 2.3.

The focus of this study changed somewhat over time, as the research developed within an 'emergent' design frame (explained in section 4.3). This meant I entered the field without a prior agenda, adopting a flexible approach where decisions about methods could be taken at various stages of the research based on contextual information. Initially, my research question was:

> 'How do some pupils on the autism spectrum experience Project-Based Learning and asset-based approaches to teaching and learning in a mainstream school?'

However, I decided part way through my research that by only exploring my main participants' experiences of teaching and learning within the context of their Project-Based Learning (P-BL) lessons, I was missing out other, interesting aspects of their experience such as friendships, self-identity and their wider school experiences. Therefore, I extended

my study's remit to include my participants' general experience of school (see my final research questions in section 1.5 below) and focused more on how to co-develop individualised transactional support methods to enable them to share their views.

Given I collected my data in 2019, it may appear that I use some older references. However, these older references reflect the time at which I consulted the literature to inform this study.

1.4 Rationale for research

Whilst this research was inspired by my experiences of autism both as a teacher and parent, it was also informed and further developed from identifying gaps in the literature. I begin this section by explaining these gaps, which provides further rationale for my research exploring how best to elicit the views of primary-aged autistic pupils on their experiences of school.

Paradigmatically, to place the child's 'voice' at the heart of my inquiry meant I needed to explore how best to listen to my autistic participants and enable them to locate meaning in their experiences.

1.4.1 Listening to children and young people's voices

Actively engaging autistic children and young people (CYP) in research and making informed decisions on matters that will affect their lives is their legal right (United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989; Children and Families Act, 2014). Listening to children helps to raise their confidence, motivation and aspirations, while also positioning them in society alongside adults more equally (Cheminais, 2008). It also has been found to encourage responsibility, increase empathy, communication skills, and cognitive skills, as well as allow resources to be better targeted for them (Badham and Wade, 2010; Robinson, 2014). However, there has been limited research exploring effective methods for eliciting the voice of autistic CYP (Richards and Crane, 2020). A meta-analysis identified only 33 studies published between 1980 and 2014 focusing on the lived experience of autistic individuals, most of which involved verbal autistic adults with no intellectual disability (DePape and Lindsay, 2016).

The ubiquitous lack of the individual's voice in autism research (Fayette and Bond, 2018) may be primarily due to methodological issues (Fletcher-Watson et al. 2019). Preece and Jordan (2010) suggest the difficulties of including autistic individuals in research may be due to current methods not accommodating the characteristics of autism. Although some autistic children are verbal, they often demonstrate difficulties with conversational skills (Charlop-Christy and Kelso, 2003) and the ability to reflect on their own lived experiences (Jordan, 2005). This can create perceived barriers to understanding their inside perspectives.

Furthermore, my own personal experience of Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) annual reviews held within schools is that there is limited training and resources available to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCOs) to be able to capture

the ‘voice’ of autistic CYP. One SENDCO I knew piloted the use of video software to record pupils’ views, which was enterprising, given the lack of time she had to devote to this aspect of her work. However, not all pupils in the school felt comfortable with this form of expression, thus more individualised methods were required.

1.4.2 Participatory research

Bearing in mind the apparent research gap in developing methods to help elicit the individual voice of autistic CYP in schools, and for whom there were cited barriers to normative forms of communication, it seemed vitally important to look at ways in which I could individualise and personalise my approaches to elicitation processes. I was aware of being a non-autistic adult aiming to elicit the views of autistic children. Given the potential gaps between our ontological states, I felt I needed to adopt a child-led paradigm in relation to my research to ensure I focused on aspects of the child’s lived experience most important to them. To conceive the notion of entering another person’s consciousness to gain a sense of their lived experience, in addition to relating to children for whom everyday forms of communication sometimes felt difficult and uncomfortable, I knew I would need to develop approaches that were unique to each individual child, drawing on their own expertise and strengths.

Considering my desire to work with my participants as collaboratively as possible, I began to explore participatory models of engagement in autism research. One of the fundamental premises for participatory research is that it shifts the balance of power by positioning

participants as experts who are knowledgeable about their own lives and, therefore, ideally placed to guide research (Bourke, 2009). Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) suggest participatory research should integrate the views of autistic people and their allies (e.g. family members and advocates) about what research is done, how it is done, and how it is implemented. For a research project to meet the principle aims of participatory research, the researcher must collaboratively involve the community as much as possible from the design stage through to dissemination (Keating, 2021). There are a multitude of benefits of participatory research which I elaborate on in section 4.3.2.

When considering how to support individuals to reflect on and own their experiences and stories, some aspects of Parsons et al.'s (2015) co-created Digital Stories methodology (which involves the sharing of views and experiences in visual, video form) seemed relevant to my research. Their exploration of the process of story creation and the production of a 'tangible artefact as an outcome that can be viewed and reflected upon by others' (p.250) seemed pertinent to my main research question and is discussed further in section 4.3.2.

However, and notwithstanding participatory research involving Digital Stories, or projects such as the Participatory Autism Research Collective (PARC), whose aim is to build a community network where those who wish to see more significant involvement of autistic people in autism research can share knowledge and expertise, there has been increasing concern about the lack of meaningful participation of autistic people in autism research in the past decade (Pellicano and Stears, 2011; Milton and Bracher, 2013; Parsons et al., 2013,

2023; Milton, 2014; Chown et al., 2017; Woods and Waltz, 2019; Ward et al., 2024). Unfortunately, where there has been autism community involvement (autistic people, family members, and practitioners), it has been viewed as little more than tokenistic by some researchers (Fletcher-Watson et al., 2019; Michael, 2021). Some have viewed this tokenism as creating a disconnect between researchers and the autism community (Keating, 2021). This disconnect may also be due to other factors such as limited dissemination of findings to the autism community, and use of demeaning language about autistic people in scientific works (Gowen et al., 2019).

Considering these research findings, I was mindful to find ways to ensure my participants and allies felt their involvement in my research was meaningful for them, and how they communicated their views was person-centred and co-developed. This led me to explore what elicitation methods had already been developed for and with autistic CYP by researchers and educators.

1.4.3 Methods used to elicit child voice

Several systematic reviews of the methods used to elicit the voices of autistic CYP have been undertaken in recent years (Fayette and Bond 2018; Nicholas et al., 2019; Tesfaye et al. 2019; Tyrrell and Woods, 2020). Most qualitative studies attempting to elicit the lived experience of autistic people have predominantly used semi-structured, oral-based interviews conducted with adults or older youths who were highly verbal (Tesfaye et al., 2019). These approaches potentially limit data elicitation from sub-populations such as

younger autistic individuals with co-existing cognitive and/or communicative challenges (Nicholas et al. 2019).

Developing frameworks that support practitioners to include and involve autistic CYP in processes that are potentially empowering is important (Goodwin, 2013). Following this principle, I searched for researchers and practitioners, who had focused on harnessing the creative potential of CYP through developing creative elicitation methods. For example, the focus on autistic children's play (Conn, 2014), narrative diaries and collages (Ridout, 2017), or walking maps, sticker placement and photo elicitation (Evans, 2021).

However, an issue for most of the data collection methods utilised in the studies cited in the aforementioned systematic reviews is that they were developed for participants in advance of the research when the researchers did not know the participants' individual needs first-hand. This carries the risk of data collection methods not being wholly suited to participants' unique needs. Notwithstanding some of the more creative approaches to eliciting the voices of young people with disabilities, both Tesfaye et al. (2019) and Nicholas et al. (2019) concluded there is not enough research addressing this topic. This led me to consider developing creative approaches based on the individual needs and preferences of the child.

1.4.4 School experience of autistic pupils

In their meta-analysis, Horgan et al. (2023) found most studies aiming to explore autistic

pupils' experience of mainstream education involved secondary-aged pupils rather than primary-aged, used traditional research methods (primarily semi-structured interviews) with little consideration for the individual needs and abilities of participants, and often prioritised the voices of adult stakeholders. Likewise, Warren et al. (2021) found most evidence presented in studies came from parents rather than pupils and most of the children were older.

Increasing numbers of autistic children are being educated in mainstream schools in the UK (McKinlay et al., 2022). Autism is the most common type of special educational need for children with EHCPs, and there were 103,429 pupils with EHCPs in June 2022 (Department for Education and Skills, 2022). However, a growing body of empirical research has suggested that the experiences of autistic pupils enrolled in mainstream education are complex and often challenging (Horgan et al., 2023). Autistic pupils are viewed as more difficult to effectively include than pupils with other special educational needs (SEN) (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) and three times as likely to be excluded from school than most other groups of learners (Guldberg et al., 2019), as well as often suffering from poor mental health (Brede et al., 2017; Crane et al., 2018). In a National Autistic Society (NAS) online survey, 74% of parents and carers of autistic young people (over 4k respondents) felt their child's school place did not fully meet their child's needs (this figure doubled between 2017-2021), and only 26% of 605 autistic pupils felt happy at school. More than one in four parents (26%) waited over three years to receive support for their child (NAS School Report, 2021).

This study attempts to address some of the gaps in autism education research primarily in addressing the paucity of primary-aged autistic pupils involved in research exploring their school experiences, as well as participatory methods used to elicit their voices. To ensure a more participant-led paradigm, transactional support methods were predominantly co-developed with my autistic participants during the data collection phase, as opposed to before meeting them, as seems to be the case with all other studies of this nature, as far as I can see.

1.5 Research questions

This study's main research question was:

1) How can pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses be enabled to reflect on their experiences of a mainstream school using individualised transactional support methods?

Subsidiary questions:

2) How should adults position themselves in relation to autistic pupils to enable them to reflect on their school experiences?
3) Which transactional support methods work best to enable autistic pupils to share and reflect on their inner perspectives?
4) What are the experiences of autistic pupils attending a mainstream school?

1.6 Research context

At the time this research was conducted in 2019, the research school was an all-through school (ages four to sixteen) with the arts at the centre of its curriculum. Located in an economically challenged area of Southwest England, pupils on roll were predominantly White British and all main participants, apart from one, who was second generation Latvian, also were classed as White British. The pupils addressed staff by their first names, and the school uniform was informal. There was a relatively high percentage of pupils either diagnosed as autistic or considered autistic by staff and/or their parents and carers.

The school had an open-plan design, architecturally matching that of a nearby arts college. As a result, the space was extremely noisy and bright, as there were ceiling-to-floor windows throughout the school. I pondered how some autistic pupils might experience the cacophony of sound and busy, open-plan design. According to the Principal, the autistic pupils seemed to be coping well.

I did much of my observational work within the Project-based Learning (P-BL) studio. The school was developing P-BL throughout the year groups. At that point in time, P-BL was uncommon practice in most UK schools (Strevy, 2014). Potentially, this could have been challenging for some autistic pupils given P-BL requires a self-directed learning style (Katz, Chard and Kogen, 2014) and pupils to be engaged in a considerable amount of group work (Hovey and Ferguson, 2014). Self-directed learning and group work can be challenging for some autistic pupils, given their differences in social understanding and interaction, and

executive functioning such as organisation, planning and metamemory (Williams and Minshew, 2010). However, P-BL projects often involve hands-on experience and a multi-sensory approach, utilising various modes of communication and presentation, which can be helpful for pupils with learning difficulties (Filippatou and Kaldi, 2010).

The ethos of the school was based on total inclusion, thus there was no resource base for autistic CYP to withdraw to, if they felt they required a quieter working space. There were fewer one-to-one LSAs in the primary phases compared to most other primary schools, and this seemed to have been based on the tenet of the 'Quality First Teaching' strategy (Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2008). This strategy advises that activities are personalised to each individual learner's needs, therefore, the need for one-to-one LSAs is reduced.

Each pupil identified as having SEND in the school had an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) which the Base Camp Leaders within the younger year groups or form tutors within the older year groups were responsible for writing, and the SENDCO reviewed them annually. The ILPs set out what pupils' educational needs were and listed termly targets accordingly.

1.7 Methodology

This ethnographic study, framed within an emergent design, explored how to elicit the views of four, primary-aged pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses on their experience of school by using individualised transactional support

methods. Participants were positioned as experts on their own experience, and from an ‘insider’ position. My researcher role was to interpret this experience. The research was underpinned by the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in how data was collected, but mostly in how it was analysed. Some adaptations were made to IPA practice when analysing data by incorporating The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) and using a less ‘bracketed’ approach phenomenologically to how phenomena were scrutinised initially, given the level of immersion I experienced within the field.

Epistemologically, an etic (wider) lens was applied at the beginning of data collection through ‘fly-on-the-wall’ participant observation for several months, semi-structured interviews with my participants’ mothers, and informal chats with school staff (ending in more formal interviews later in the research). The aim of this was to gather contextual information. Through several, one-to-one play sessions and semi-structured interviews with my main participants, an emic (narrower) lens then was applied to explore their inside perspectives on school. The co-development of methods with my participants through intersubjective discourse focusing on their special interests enabled this to happen.

1.8 Arrangement of thesis

My thesis is organised into eight chapters. This chapter is followed by Chapter Two which provides an overview of the conceptual framework underpinning this study, which is the theory of intersubjectivity. I also explain how the framework informed the literature review and influenced the development of my research questions.

Chapter Three explores the literature relating to the context of my study and relevant autism theories. The chapter begins by outlining the methods used for searching the literature and ends with a summary of the gaps in the literature which helped to inform my research questions. My review also focuses on methods previously used by educators and researchers to elicit autistic pupils' views on their experience of school, as well as the potential neuro-psycho-biological barriers that sometimes can get in the way of these processes. Lastly, I review what research has shown about autistic pupils' school experiences.

Chapter Four describes my research design and begins with an overview of my philosophical position. Next, I provide the rationale for using ethnography, as a methodological approach to collecting data, which is followed by an exploration of my own positionality in relation to this research. I then outline the ethical considerations for my study. Afterwards, I outline the choice of sample and procedure for collecting my data. Next, I outline my choice of data collection methods and discuss my adopted safeguarding strategies. Following this, I provide a rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as a data analysis tool, as well as explore its limitations. Finally, I explain how the data was analysed, and subsequent superordinate themes were drawn.

In Chapter Five, I discuss my findings. This chapter focuses on what I did with each of my participants, as well as what worked and did not work in terms of our intersubjective communication and the elicitation of their views. I present my findings (illustrated with examples from the data), as well as reflections on my participants' data in relation to two

areas: one, which transactional supports were successful in enabling them to reflect on their school experiences, as well as what I learned about each transactional support and its uses, and two, what my participants' school experiences were. I then present the superordinate themes across participants.

In Chapter Six, I discuss my findings in relation to the relevant literature within the context and framework of my study. Finally, in Chapter Seven, I provide an overview of my findings and offer recommendations for adults working to enable autistic children and young people to express and reflect on their lived experiences. I then consider both the strengths and limitations of my study, as well as discuss the ways in which my findings may inform practice and research in the field more generally. The following diagram provides a full overview of the structure of my thesis (see fig.1).

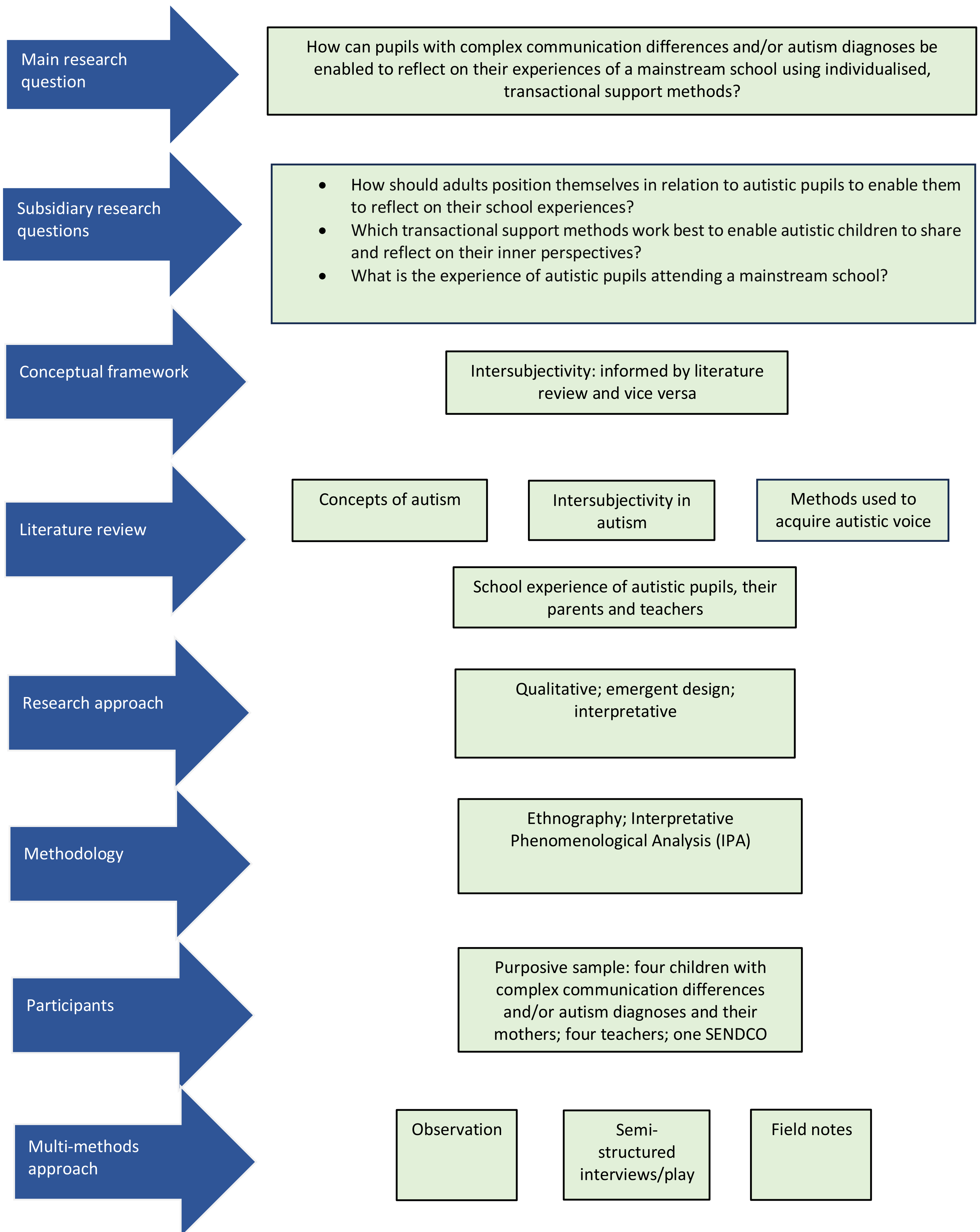


Figure 1: Design frame

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The conceptual framework of this study is underpinned by the theory of intersubjectivity. In this chapter, I set out the purpose of my conceptual framework; summarise the theoretical models under-pinning intersubjectivity, as well as their limitations; explain and justify how I used intersubjectivity to frame my research conceptually; how I adapted the theory accordingly; and how my conceptual framework provided a lens for organising my literature review.

2.2 Purpose of conceptual framework

Given the historical dearth of research exploring how best to elicit autistic CYP's voices on matters which are most important to them and which allow them to be fully involved in how data collection methods are developed and applied in accordance with their individual needs, I wanted to conduct research that enabled me to co-navigate with a child a way into their own lived experience. This co-navigation would create a link between my subjective experience and the child's, so that a better understanding of their experience could be gained. Rather than research being decided by academics and education leaders, my priority centred on trying to open spaces for young people to be able to locate and share their views on what they felt they needed to be happy in school.

I envisioned creating dyadic, bi-directional discourses with autistic pupils to create channels of communication through which our different ontological positions could align, where possible, enabling us to share our respective subjective states. Therefore, the focus of my study was on finding ways to bridge any gaps between these ontological states, given I was a non-autistic adult trying to access and understand the possibly uncharted, inside perspectives of autistic children. This led me into the field of intersubjectivity.

2.3 Intersubjectivity

As the aim of my research was to enable CYP to reflect on their lived experiences, understanding some areas of human cognition and perception played a key role in my research on intersubjectivity. To be able to relate to and understand others, I first had to look at the bio-psycho-social processes that constitute what and who we are, as individuals (Engel, 1977). Therefore, to formulate a conceptual framework for my study, I decided to draw on developments in phenomenology and neuroscience. I also needed to scrutinise learning theories, as my study took place in the context of a school. I did not research psychoanalytic theory as a relevant field, as interpreting unconscious psychic phenomena, as a basis for treatment, was not the focus of this study. The purpose of this study was to enable autistic children to share what their existential states were for them in the moment; not to psychoanalytically analyse what may have lain beneath these states and why.

The four elements of intersubjectivity I focus on are: phenomenology, primary/secondary intersubjectivity, intra-subjectivity, and learning theory. To be able to define

intersubjectivity in the context of my study, I needed to find synthesis between phenomenology, neuroscience, learning theory, and autism theory which made sense, given the existing literature. I begin by defining intersubjectivity, as it is represented in the literature and then discuss it in relation to these areas.

2.3.1 Phenomenology

The phenomenologist, Husserl (1913) argued the most effective means of locating objectivity in the world was through acts of consciousness called ‘intentionality’. He introduced the notion of bracketing which involves setting aside the question of the real existence of a contemplated object, as well as all other questions about the object's physical or objective nature (*noumenon*). Instead, the focus is on analysing the *phenomenon* of the object by systematically peeling away the symbolic meanings until only the thing itself as meant and experienced remains. Thus, one's subjective intending of the bracketed phenomenon is examined and analysed in phenomenological purity.

However, Husserl’s method does not consider the socio-cultural dimension in the way he argues objectivity is to be arrived at (Gunderson, 2020). Perception entails something being seen by somebody and the something seen is significant for the one who sees it. Phenomenologists refer to this as ‘apperception’ (Dant, 2015, p.51) whereby a person’s perception is informed by their prior understanding and expectations, such that they perceive more than they see. Bourdieu (1984) argues that many factors may account for differences in visual experiences between people, ranging from cultural and social position

through to purpose, mood, and momentary inclination. However, we are encultured into a specific version of the visible world from an early age by adults who define perceptual reality for us. Crossley (1996) argues we 'acquire culturally specific perceptual schemas' and 'our visibility is inverted with a symbolism and political value and serves as a locus for relations of conflict and control' (p.30). Critical phenomenology (Miglio and Stanier, 2022) is an emerging theoretical and methodological approach which investigates how political, socio-cultural, economic, and historical dynamics influence lived experiences. Critical-phenomenological approaches recognise that human experiences are 'shaped by factors like discriminatory practices, social injustice, and structural violence' (Miglio and Stanier, 2022, p.5).

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty (1962) is critical of philosophies that fail to recognise that objects always emerge in the context of a structured visual field. Empiricism, a philosophy of science which views perception as a physical sensation and caused effect of a determinate object or stimulus upon a person's visual system, is one such philosophy. Merleau-Ponty suggests it assumes a pre-given, isolated object which can impose itself upon a visual system. He gives the example of a 'dot' and argues if you draw a dot under an eyebrow, it will become an eye; if you place a dot at the end of a string of words on a line, it will become a full stop and so on. How one perceives an object depends on its structural relation to a background. Essentially, Merleau-Ponty asserts the idea that other perspectives on the world other than our own are necessary if objectivity in the world is to be established, as we see illustrated in the literature on intersubjectivity below.

I concur with Steiner (1989), who argues that ‘the “otherness” which enters us makes us other’ (p.188). Alone as individuals, we cannot make unique meanings for our actions. The essence of self-development is what emerges from moving and feeling with others over time, in embodied intersubjectivity (Gallese, 2009). Gallese (2009) states that research shows evolution has provided us with brain mechanisms for a ‘“we-centric” space... grounding our identification and connectedness to others’ and that ‘social identification, empathy and “we-ness” are the basic ground of our development and being’ (p. 520). Thus, the self is a social self.

Merleau-Ponty (1962) argues that what is seen by people is framed by the activity in which they are engaged. He suggests there is a dialectical movement between perception and action: action frames perception whilst perception calls forth action. The seer’s world is neither observed nor contemplated; it is participated in, according to Merleau-Ponty. He conceptualises consciousness as neither solely in the mind nor in the body and refers to people and their embodied subjectivity as ‘body-subjects’ (1968). In his view, body-subjects are ’visible-seers, tangible-touchers and audible-listeners’ (p.269). Perception is not seen as an inner representation of an outer world; it is an opening out and into that world and consciousness is co-constructed through visceral inter-relationships.

Similarly, Goffman (1959) posits the idea that people have private and public selves and conscious stage-management can enable them to craft and manipulate their interactions with others. He argues that private spaces are not inner spaces, but constituted from intersubjective space, by way of intersubjective agreement. Goffman suggests we tend to

keep private those matters that are generally (intersubjectively) agreed that we ought to keep private.

2.3.2 Primary intersubjectivity: protoconversations in babies

Intersubjectivity, as a term, officially entered the social and behavioural sciences in Europe and the US in the 1960s and sprang from the publication of several books, inspired by the writings of Husserl (1859-1938) (Duranti, 2010). As I have referred to Husserl, as one of the forefathers of intersubjectivity, in my section on phenomenology, I focus here on more recent developments in thinking and research in relation to intersubjectivity.

Compelling evidence in the literature suggests primary subjectivity begins to develop in humans from the moment of birth. Many studies (Maratos, 1973; Kugiumutzakis, 1998, 1999; Butterworth, 1999; Nagy and Molnár, 2004; Reddy, 2008), some involving the micro-analysis of video recordings, have concluded that neonates imitate their primary caregivers' facial expressions from birth, with the earliest study arguing imitation occurred, in the form of tongue protrusion, from 42 minutes (Meltzoff and Moore, 1989). Neonates have been observed to open and close their mouths, protrude their tongues, widen their eyes and so on in response to their mothers doing the same (Hobson, 2004). Fuerte et al. (2024) refer to this as 'cross-modal' behaviour (p.391) and involves an infant mapping what it sees onto what it feels proprioceptively with its face. In this way, the first psychological notion of self in humans does not appear to concern itself with featural properties, but rather movements and body postures (Meltzoff, 1990).

Researchers have found that infants, as early as two months old, mutually regulate their interests and feelings in intricate, rhythmic patterns with their mothers, exchanging multi-modal signals in the form of facial, verbal and gestural expression (Bateson, 1975, 1979; Beebe, 1982; Stern et al., 1977; Weinberg and Tronick, 1994). It is argued an infant's ability to perceive a connection between its own behaviour and that of its mother's provides it with a fundamental relatedness between self and other (Meltzoff, 2007). Kugiumutzakis and Trevarthen (2015) conclude 'Neonatal imitation displays innate alteroceptive readiness for interpersonal dialogic awareness, which is regulated by relational emotions of interest and pleasure' (p.481).

Moreover, this observational data has been further validated by the neuro-scientific discovery of 'mirror neurons' (Ferrari et al, 2003; Iacoboni, 2008) which possibly emerged because of an evolutionary leap in human development. As Hobson (2004) argues, the evolutionary roots of thinking and human consciousness seem to be when our ancestral primates began to emotionally connect in the same ways that human babies connect with their caregivers. Mirror neurons are pre-motor neurons that fire both when an action is performed and when it is observed being executed by someone else. They do not fire when people perceive inanimate objects such as trees or hammers (Gallagher, 2005). This demonstrates that the registration of other people's experience seems to be hard-wired into the human brain (Seligman, 2009).

2.3.3 Secondary intersubjectivity

The chief proponents of intersubjectivity (Stern, 1971; Trevarthen, 1980; and Meltzoff, 1985) generally concede that primary intersubjectivity (protoconversations) is evident from birth. However, they also agree that secondary intersubjectivity begins to develop between nine and 12 months old (Terrace et al., 2022). Secondary intersubjectivity differs to primary intersubjectivity in the way it includes an object and refers to the inter-coordination of self, other and an object based on a cooperative exchange of referential gestures (Trevarthen and Hubley, 1978). A child can request its caregiver to do things for it, look at and point things out, follow another's looking or pointing, engage in reciprocal 'to and fro' games, and look to someone else not only to share experiences, but check for danger, too. An infant can detect what an adult is feeling and change its own feelings toward a particular thing (Hobson, 2004). As Hobson argues, an infant can roll between the role of receiver and the role of giver; the exchange becomes reciprocal.

This non-verbal, dialogic flow seems to act as a precursor to language development. Scaife and Bruner (1975) argue language emerges in the context of joint action between an infant and its caregiver. They posit symbolism, in the form of language, enables us to think of absent realities and fix objects and events in our minds as experiences which we then can think about. In this way, symbolising gives us mental space in which to take up attitudes to things; to transcend our own perspective, and almost gain an outsider's viewpoint back on ourselves. This develops the ability to be able to think and feel about ourselves.

2.3.4 Intra-subjectivity

As Goffman (1974) suggests, the keeping of some matters to ourselves raises the question of how humans intra-subjectively reflect. The philosopher, Mead (1934) defines the concept of intra-self in terms of the concepts of 'I' and 'me'. The 'I' is the speaking, acting, feeling body-subject which is not yet reflectively aware of either itself or its world. The 'I' only knows itself in the past tense as 'me'. The 'me' is the 'I's' recollection or image of itself; the conception that 'I' forms of itself. The 'me' is the image through which the 'I' can imaginatively project itself into future events and invest its dreams, ambitions, hopes, and fears. It is this reflexive looping that enables the subject to engage in dialogue with themself.

Moreover, in their work on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Smith et al. (2009) argue a process for self-reflection more explicitly by citing four stages in human reflexivity. They refer to the first stage of a person's reflection process as 'pre-reflective reflexivity' (p.189) which involves a person being mostly engaged with the world in a non-reflective, natural way (walking down a country lane listening to bird song). However, they argue there is still an element of minimal consciousness in this activity: a person is 'conscious of being conscious' (Sartre, cited in Smith et al., 2009, p.189). The second stage of reflection is referred to as 'reflective "glancing at" a pre-reflective experience' (p.189) and involves undirected reflection on the pre-reflective experience such as experienced when engaged in imagination, daydreaming and memory. The third stage of reflection describes the process of how 'experience becomes "an experience" of importance' and is referred to as

‘attentive reflection on the pre-reflective’ (p.189). A person may wonder why their leg is hurting and recall events linked to this occurrence to understand the phenomenon. The fourth and last stage is called ‘deliberate recalled reflection’ and involves a person deliberately replaying and formally analysing the content of their pre-reflective reflections on the events that they have experienced. Flavell (1979) might argue there is a fifth stage in the reflective process: metacognition. He defines metacognition as an individual’s own awareness and consideration of his or her cognitive processes and strategies. In other words, when people are metacognitively engaged, they are thinking about how they are thinking.

2.3.5 Limitations of intra/intersubjectivity theory

On the one hand, it would appear a problem for the intersubjectivist position is that it primarily considers external behaviours and ignores a person’s inner world; a world to which they alone have access (Crossley, 1996). In Crossley’s view, ‘The existence of this world and our privileged access to it…ensures that our relationship to our self comes before any relations which we may have with others and thus negates the supposed primacy of intersubjective relations’ (p.33). On the other hand, it would seem some proponents of primary and secondary intersubjectivity (e.g. Hobson, 2004) seem to overlook how the construction of ‘self’ is influenced by political, socio-cultural, economic, and historical factors.

Husserlian transcendental phenomenology poses the problem of there always being a solipsistic element because it begins and ends with an analysis of the constitutive operations of a solitary consciousness (Dreyfus and Hall, 1984). Husserl's 'other' is always necessarily created by himself through an imaginative, analogical process. Even though Zahavi (2020) argues Husserl's phenomenology involves 'the idea that the subject in order to constitute the world must necessarily be bodily embedded in the very world that it is seeking to constitute' (p.126), Husserl's 'subject' is constituted exclusively through observation. It observes and experiences others but never interacts with them in any way. They are always reduced to a consciousness which self has of them (Cerbone, 2020). As with Merleau-Ponty, Husserl fails to fully recognise the extent to which the visible is a site of political differentiation, wherein people (in groups) engender a sense of their own distinct visual identity and where ideological influences increase likelihood of members of certain groups being objectified by the other.

In the context of this study, it would seem the major limitation of the literature on intra or intersubjectivity is the fact that the theoretical frameworks for investigating autistic sociality tend to assume neuro-normative definitions of being social (Heasman and Gillespie, 2019). Additionally, most research in the autism field has involved measured comparisons between autistic individuals and their non-autistic peers (Fayette and Bond, 2018), and it would appear some assumptions have been made about the behavioural presentation of autistic children when measured against standardised developmental norms. For example, Hobson (2004) describes an experiment involving comparison groups comprising twenty-month-old infants (10 autistic, nine with developmental delay and 19

typically developing) in which the investigator feigns hitting his thumb by accident when playing with the infants. He pretends he is hurt and cries out in pain, holding his thumb. The experiment found that not one of the autistic participants showed any facial concern, only four out of ten looked at the investigator's face and only two looked at his hand. This result was in marked contrast to the other (non-autistic) participants, all of whom looked at the adult's face. Hobson concludes that the 'interpersonal, emotionally charged contact seems to be weak or missing in children with autism' (p.46). I would question Hobson's apparent epistemological assumption here that just because his autistic participants did not display signs of 'interpersonal' communication on the outside, this was necessarily an indication that emotional responses to the situation were not happening on the inside. It would seem Hobson is assuming autistic infants experience the world or express their inner, emotional responses in the same way as their non-autistic peers.

There is evidence to suggest that many autistic people can experience emotional responses on the inside, but not necessarily display them outwardly in a socially 'normative' sense (Bogdashina, 2016; Higashida, 2013). Hobson (2004) seems to be basing his whole argument about the theory of development in relation to thinking based on what is supposedly missing in autistic people, but he is assessing that by using experimental design frames that were not designed either for, by, or in consultation with autistic people themselves. According to Gowen et al. (2019), autistic individuals are still being largely excluded from the decision-making and consultation processes within autism research, and I concluded I needed to be mindful of this when reviewing the literature.

Similarly, Smith et al.'s (2009) 'layers of reflection' are based on normative models of behavioural psychology which assume a person can decentre from an egocentric position and move into a more allocentric mode of analysis in relation to self and others. To illustrate allocentricity and de-centring, Piaget posited that young children can easily understand the relationship between themselves and their mother but can struggle to understand their mother is also their father's wife (Donaldson, 1978). Frith and De Vignemont (2005) show that many autistic individuals can find de-centring and engaging in third-person perspectives difficult. Therefore, this phenomenon needed further exploration to determine whether Smith et al.'s philosophy of self-reflection could be applied to my research.

2.3.6 My position in relation to intersubjectivity

I concur with the intersubjectivist's position that 'self' originates from a pre-wired, 'we-centric' faculty in the brain which relies heavily on intensely focused, dyadic communication and interplay between a primary caregiver and a child in the first few months of life. This then forges the pathway for subsequent internalised thought. I also follow Merleau-Ponty's concept of 'body-subjects' (1962) and his Gestalt view that consciousness is neither solely in the mind nor in the body, but perception is an opening out and into the world, and consciousness is co-constructed through visceral inter-relationships. I believe the socio-cultural features of a society influence how consciousness and a sense of self develops in humans. As Maninni and Manuti (2017) argue, '"objects" and "subjects" reciprocally mold [sic] each other in the world through situated utterances,

deriving their “meaning” from the relationship between “text” and “context”’ (p.244). This bears relevance to the concept of ‘community of practice’ within learning theory, and which I discuss further in section 2.4.2.

2.4 Learning theory

The internalisation of socio-cultural meaning and dialogic process in how the internal and external components of self operate is reflected in parts of Vygotskian learning theory. For the purposes of my conceptual framework, I primarily focus on Vygotsky’s theory of language and culture in the development of thinking in humans (with some references to Piaget, as a comparison), and Lave and Wenger’s (1991) situated learning theory, as these theories seem most relevant to intersubjectivity within the context of my study.

2.4.1 Vygotsky and Piaget

World-renowned educational psychologist, Vygotsky (1886-1934), held the view that ‘knowledge is not mechanically acquired, but actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment’ (Liu and Matthews, 2005, p.387). This theory was commonly regarded as a shift in paradigm in twentieth century educational psychology from the more mechanistic, positivist view of learners as recipients of hard-wired knowledge (Mayer, 1996).

The other major contributor to twentieth century cognitive development and learning was Piaget (1896-1980). Some of his theories are congruent in nature with Vygotsky’s, but they

differ in some fundamental areas. The key difference is in how they conceive structural development in the mind. Piaget argues that development precedes learning: a child's mind contains all the stages of future intellectual development in complete form and are awaiting the proper moment to emerge. He concludes that development happens in four, distinct stages (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational) and that each must be reached in that order (Donaldson, 1978). Whereas Vygotsky argues that learning precedes development and does not accept that development happens in distinct stages; he emphasises the role of language and culture in cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, language and culture play essential roles both in human intellectual development and in how humans perceive the world. Humans' linguistic abilities enable them to overcome the natural limitations of their perceptual field by imposing culturally defined sense and meaning on the world (Vygotsky, 1934).

2.4.2 Situated learning

Vygotsky's view that knowledge is actively constructed within the constraints and offerings of the learning environment aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) view that learning is a social process and situated in a specific context and embedded within a particular and physical environment. Lave and Wenger (1991) view learning as the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice and move toward full participation in it. Learners' participation in the community of practice always entails situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world by which they reconstruct their identities and

evolve the form of their membership in the community. Motivation is viewed as situated because learners are naturally motivated by their growing value of participation and their desires to become full practitioners. For me, both Vygotsky's and Lave and Wenger's views broadly acquiesce with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) position in relation to consciousness not being an inner representation of an outer world, but a construct shaped through how we inter-relate with that world.

2.4.3 Limitations of social learning theory

The main criticism of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory centres on the fact that it disregards the individual by only regarding the collective (Resnick, 1996). Vygotsky asserts that the mind is not considered separate from the group. Liu and Matthews (2005) argue the theory 'does not recognise that individuals can rise above social norms based on their ability to bring about personal understanding' (p. 392). For Wertsch (1987), Vygotsky did not find a satisfactory way to integrate the two areas of human mental functioning: the abstract, logical side of thinking and the aspect concerned with the highly contextualised processes found in inner speech. Similarly, Fox (2001) and Cobb (1996) argue the theory fails to address how the external world is bridged across to the internal mind.

For Liu and Matthews (2005), Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory does not seem to apply to all social and cultural groups either. They argue social groups may not be equal with all learners being able to gain the same meaning from engagement. They exemplify this by arguing 'learners with learning disabilities or learning difficulties might not (be able to) take

away the same meaning from group interactions as those learners without learning disabilities or learning difficulties' (p. 392). The fact that biological factors are not considered in Vygotsky's theory of learning is problematic.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of community of practice does at least lend itself to the idea that a community of practice could consciously work to include learners with similar learning needs. However, there is an assumption that all learners are socially motivated to feel part of a community. As the literature indicates, this is not always the case for autistic people, as they are not necessarily motivated by their growing value of participation in a community to the degree that non-autistic people are (Chown, 2017). This had implications for my research looking at intersubjectivity in autism, as co-constructing shared consciousnesses with my autistic participants through visceral inter-relating may not have aligned with how they needed to be in the world or share their views. However, the aim of my study was to try to find angles of connection between my autistic participants' worlds and mine, so that the motivation to socially engage came from them and sprung from forms of communication they preferred and understood.

2.4.4 My position in relation to learning theory

I follow Vygotsky's and Lave and Wenger's learning theories in terms of how they argue thinking and language evolve in children from an internalisation process originating in their social inter-relations with others (primarily adults), as this theory is corroborated by the proponents of primary intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1998). The problem I had was

knowing how and at what point intersubjective relations with others become intra-subjective (inner) dialogue with oneself. This element does not seem clear in the literature. It seemed important to establish if and how autistic children could reflect on their lived experiences. In applying the theory of situated learning to how I intended to support my autistic participants to conceptually abstract meaning from their experiences, I needed to ensure ideas and the reference to objects were as concrete as possible (Sherratt and Peter, 2002). The primary use of my participants' special interests enabled the contexts of our explorations to be wholly relevant and familiar to them, potentially enabling situated learning processes to develop.

2.5 Intersubjectivity in autism

Over the past two decades, research into autistic sociality and communication has begun to focus on the concept of intersubjectivity (Williams et al., 2021). Studies of intersubjectivity in autism have been primarily based on autistic-to-non-autistic interactions and have highlighted difficulties such as shared intentionality (Tomasello et al., 2005) and reciprocating non-verbal cues (Hobson and Lee, 1998; García-Pérez et al., 2007). However, I would question the paradigmatic nature of the social interactions within some of these studies, as they seem to have been constructed through a 'coordination' model of engagement, as a means to form social consensus, rather than through the paradigm of intersubjectivity.

To explain, Heasman and Gillespie (2019) differentiate intersubjectivity from coordination

by describing intersubjectivity as characterising the 'diversity of ways people create shared understanding' (p.911). For example, if an interlocutor shares information that is not acknowledged or reciprocated by another interlocutor in the next conversational turn, this could be deemed a failure to coordinate on the part of the first conversational partner, but also on the part of the second partner receiving the information (particularly on the part of an autistic recipient). However, this moment of interaction also could be interpreted as a moment of intersubjectivity on the part of the first interlocutor because it is an attempt to bridge subjectivities. Moreover, silence or an atypical movement may be the communicative forms of retort for the second interlocutor in the above example. Thus, it would seem important to interrogate the neuro-normative criteria by which autistic people are being deemed incapable of coordination and/or intersubjectivity, as autistic people do not necessarily fit this mould.

However, it seemed important to understand what autistic people need to be able to do to intersubjectively communicate with others. If simulation theory (understanding others through self-simulating what they might be thinking or feeling; see section 3.3.1) was applied to intersubjectivity in autism, an autistic person would need to be able to impute a mental state to another by (a) imagining themself in the situation of the other and (b) assuming a similarity between their imagined mental state in that situation and the other's experienced mental state. Further, for a conversation to run smoothly, each participant would need to try to understand what the other knew already, did not know, needed to know for their purposes, and wanted to know for their pleasure (Donaldson, 1978). Understanding another person in any case requires knowledge of specific contexts and this

depends on background knowledge, which is cultural, socially generated, and shaped by linguistic practices. How autistic people experience these highly complex social transaction systems needed further investigation in relation to the wider literature and is discussed in section 3.3.1.

At a more neurological level, difficulties with face recognition (Blair et al., 2002), emotional perception (Bachevalier and Loveland, 2006), and a variety of sensory-motor differences are prevalent in autistic children (Whyatt and Craig, 2013). The neurology of shared representations for intersubjective perception suggests that differences with one's own motor or body schematic system could significantly interfere with the ability to understand others (Georgieff and Jeannerod, 1998). Gallagher (2004) hypothesises that developmental differences involving sensory-motor processes may affect primary intersubjectivity, and often autistic children have baseline sensory integration challenges affecting their tactile, visual, auditory, proprioceptive, and/or interoceptive fields (Ben-Sasson et al., 2019). Therefore, there may be difficulty in picking up subtleties of gesture from non-autistic children (Di Cesare et al., 2017a).

However, some autistic people have been seen to employ theorising strategies to compensate for loss in capacities of primary and secondary intersubjectivity (Zahavi and Parnas, 2003). They can use their intellectual powers to analyse cause and effect relations, thus forging a theoretical understanding of non-autistic Theory of Mind (ToM) (Gallagher, 2004). Problematically, non-autistic adults also have difficulty picking up subtleties of

gesture from autistic children (Casartelli et al., 2020). This bidirectional range of perceptual and motoric dissimilarity can lead to mutual misunderstanding.

Given my social constructivist position in relation to intersubjectivity and interest in communities of practice framed by situated learning theory, I was keen to consider the dialectical nature of the relationships I aimed to build with my autistic participants, as part of my research. I believe a person has no sovereign internal territory. By this, I mean a person's internal thoughts and feelings cannot be entirely governed by the 'I' that Mead (1934) describes (explored earlier in section 2.3.4). Conversely, I believe people's subjectivities are predominantly shaped by socio-cultural forces. I view relationships as the interplay between people's self-narratives which have evolved and been internalised from social narratives and are the processes by which we locate meaning for and about ourselves through others.

However, when planning my research, I was acutely aware that these relational processes might be different for autistic people, and that is what I intended my research to explore: how I could intersubjectively relate to autistic children to be able to better understand their inner worlds. As I refer to in my foreword in relation to my son, I did not want to start from a purely theoretical position in relation to my participants' behaviours. To quote Bakhtin, 'We cannot understand the world of events from *within* the theoretical world. One must start with the act itself, not with its theoretical transcription' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, p.50). Being guided by the child to help me understand the processes by

which they and I might be able to share our respective ontological states was emerging as the central tenet of my study.

2.6 Frame for literature review

This conceptual framework provided a lens for my literature review. Essentially, my literature review needed to focus on exploring how autistic CYP intersubjectively relate to others (depending on their unique needs) and then if/how they intra-subjectively reflect on their own experiences. For me, intersubjectivity, in the context of my study, needed to centre on how to develop angles of connection with my autistic participants, as an invitation to them to share their inside views on the world, if they so wished. I needed to research cognition and learning theories in autism to better understand the potential barriers I could encounter when embarking upon communication of this nature, and then how best to develop transactional support methods to support my young participants.

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature relating to the methods used by researchers and educators to elicit the views of autistic CYP on their lived experiences of mainstream schools. The chapter also focuses on what previous research has discovered about the educational experiences of autistic CYP attending mainstream schools, as well as in relation to teachers and parents/carers' views. Firstly, I outline the process for identifying relevant studies, then the main body of the chapter is divided into three areas: 'Concepts of autism', 'Eliciting autistic voice' and 'School experience'. Each area presents the identified studies and critically analyses the findings. Following this, I discuss gaps identified from my review, and the relevance of my research within the existing literature. The chapter concludes with a summary of the literature.

Review of literature

As I progress through this chapter, I provide a rationale for why I deemed each area of the literature to be relevant to my research. The areas I cover are set out below.

1. Concepts of autism: diagnosis; social communication; cognition and learning; sensory integration; strengths associated with autism; difference-not-deficit paradigm; and the Double Empathy Problem.

2. Methods used to acquire autistic voice: special interests; drama methods; interview; visual supports; and inter-synchrony.
3. School experience: how autistic pupils are included in mainstream schools; teachers' experience, parents' experience; and autistic pupils' experience.

I did an initial scope of research on child-centred play therapy, as this seemed relevant, given I aimed for a more child-led paradigm for my study. Playing with younger participants was a possible option, as a data collection method. However, even though child-centred play therapy has an evidence base for certain issues when working with children, very little research has been conducted using child-centred play therapy for autistic children (Hillman, 2018). I also found much of the focus of studies was on 'reducing unwanted behaviours' (Bratton et al., 2005), self-regulation, empathy, and social competence (Ware Balch and Ray, 2015). Moreover, the cited 'main aim of play therapy is to prevent or solve psychosocial difficulties and achieve optimal child-healthy growth and development' (Elbeltagi et al., 2023, p.1). Thus, I did not feel much of the literature on play therapy, psychotherapy or counselling was relevant to my study, as I was not setting out to 'improve' anything in the child. My focus centred on connecting with an autistic participant to try to understand their lived experience from their point of view. Nevertheless, I did look at some of these studies for how to build rapport and trust with my participants (see section 3.4.3 on inter-synchrony).

3.2 Methods for searching the literature

My review of the extant literature was a continuous and recursive process, given the emergent research design of my study. I reviewed some literature prior to entering the research field, but then needed to revisit it, and look at other areas of the literature depending on which phenomena emerged.

There were two phases to my search. In Phase One, I took a broad approach to searching the literature on the methods used by researchers to elicit autistic 'voice' and autistic pupils' experiences of school. I started with a broad scope to help me gain a general view of the existing theories and practices in relation to my study. This included play therapy interventions, although I eventually filtered these out, given their therapeutic focus on developing social skills (Gibson et al., 2021).

In Phase Two of my literature search, I narrowed my scope, as my research unfolded, and I needed to find out about specific phenomena such as drawing or role play, as elicitation methods. The journals signposted me to key themes in the literature and provided references to other relevant papers which I searched manually, particularly studies conducted in the UK. In addition to ensuring journals were peer-reviewed, I introduced periods of time within which to search the literature. For example, I looked at literature on eliciting autistic voice spanning the past 20 years to see what had changed over that period. I refined it further to include only research which had been carried out in schools, and then only in primary schools, as I identified this as a gap in the literature.

I conducted searches through the University of Birmingham tool, Findit @ Bham, and other databases such as Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), SAGE journals, ScienceDirect, and Mendeley. I also used Google Scholar, as a search engine and the catalogue, Amazon. In the boxes below, I list all the key words I used in search engines, databases and catalogues for each thematic area.

Box 1: Key search words for 'Concepts of autism'
Autism; prevalence rates in school; theory of mind; double empathy problem; weak central coherence; executive functioning; cognition and learning; sensory perception; sensory-motor difficulties; autistic strengths; monotropic; deficit model of autism; neurodiversity model of autism

Box 2: Key search words for 'Methods used to acquire autistic voice'
Autism; eliciting pupil voice meta-analysis; special interests; intensive interaction; play therapy; strengths-based elicitation methods; curriculum interventions; social skills; role play; drama methods; drama handbooks; first-person perspectives; interviewing autistic pupils; visual supports for learning, drawing methods; inter-synchrony; transactional supports

Box 3: Key search words for 'School experience'
Autism; pupil voice; autistic-friendly schools; mainstream inclusion; teaching autistic pupils; parents' views; SEN needs in schools; school experience

I also set up alerts to relevant literature via Academia, ScienceDirect, Mendeley and Google Scholar and followed key authors through the same mechanisms.

3.3 Concepts of autism

I aimed to develop angles of connection with my autistic participants, as an invitation to

them to share their lived experiences. Therefore, I felt I needed to research autism theory to better understand the potential enablers and barriers to communication I could encounter in the field. In this section, I set out the prevalence rates of autism in CYP, and how autism has been defined and diagnosed.

Interest in autism, as a field of research, has grown exponentially over the past few decades and there has been a huge shift in terms of how autism is defined (Happé and Frith, 2020) since Leo Kanner (1943) and Hans Asperger (1944) first described it. Autism is a lifelong, biologically and neurodevelopmentally determined way of being considered as different by the medical profession to how most other people are. Roman-Urrestarazu et al. (2021) discovered prevalence rates in school children to be 1.76 percent per 7 million children, with male pupils showing a prevalence of 2.81 percent compared with female pupils showing a prevalence of 0.65 percent (male-to-female ratio of 4.32:1).

In the fifth edition of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM-5-TR; American Psychiatry Association, 2022) and the ICD-11 (WHO, 2019), autism is referred to as ‘Autism Spectrum Disorder’ and defined by ‘deficits’ in social interaction and communication, cognitive inflexibility, repetitive behaviours, and sensory sensitivities. Genetic and chromosomal differences (Folstein and Rutter, 1977), failed theory-of-mind modules (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985), different cognitive styles (Edelson, 2000, cited in Chown, 2017, p.104), environmental influences (Boucher, 2022), and apoptosis (failure to prune excess neurons in the brain) (Wei et al., 2014) have been proffered as explanations for autism across the years, yet autism’s genesis remains elusive. It is important to state that many of the

characteristics of autism that can present perceived difficulties are found to decrease as a child develops.

The issue of heterogeneity is complex in autism, as how it manifests in one individual is often quite different from the way it manifests in the next. The term 'autism spectrum' was introduced by Wing (1996) providing the concept of a broad spectrum encompassing a wide range of abilities and differences, including sub-categories such as classic autism, Asperger syndrome and pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). The issue of heterogeneity in autism was important in relation to my study, as I intended to work individually with my autistic participants and, therefore, understanding that how autism presented in one pupil may not be the same for the next was crucial. Thus, I needed to adapt my approaches and methods according to each child's unique needs, as they presented.

3.3.1 Social communication

To be able to approach building relationships with my main participants, it was important to research the literature exploring social interaction and communication in autism. Research has shown that differences in how autistic CYP socially interact and communicate can cause profound and wide-ranging difficulties in relation to other people, and a loss of opportunities for social learning that are available to non-autistic CYP (Jordan, 2002). Moreover, differences in the pragmatic use of language in autism are common so that a

child with apparently good language skills may have significant difficulties with inter-personal communication (Blume et al., 2021).

Researchers have worked on the premise that the socio-communicative difficulties in autism are caused by ‘impairments’ in Theory of Mind (ToM) functioning (Baron-Cohen et al., 1985; Baron-Cohen, 1989; Flavell, 1999; Frith and Frith, 2005). Baron-Cohen (2008) defines ToM as the ability to ‘put oneself into someone else’s shoes in order to imagine their thoughts and feelings, so as to be able to make sense of and predict their behaviour’ (p.47). When a child is born, it has no understanding that the world exists independently of itself and cannot form mental representations of persons or objects. An object exists for a child only when it is in sight. As the child grows, its developing ToM enables it to form mental representations of objects and persons and, eventually, it learns that other persons have a thinking existence of their own (Frith and Happe, 1999). Wimmer and Perner (1983) argue meta-representation is a ‘necessary precondition for…social interaction’ (p.104).

The two, primary explanations for ToM are Simulation Theory and Theory Theory (Gallagher, 2005). According to Theory Theory, we understand the minds of others and our own minds by virtue of possessing a theory of mind: a theory either acquired by observation and hypothesis formation, or a theory innately endowed (Currie, 1996). Conversely, Simulation Theory (ST) purports our understanding of others is based on self-simulating our beliefs, desires, and emotions so that we put ourselves in the place of others and ask what we would be thinking or feeling. The results are then projected onto them. It would seem a combination of ST, TT, and public criteria (the criteria by which a society

defines and explains itself) all work in unison to form a ToM in a person. Notwithstanding genetic predisposition, I would argue ToM is also co-constructed through socio-cultural conditioning in the form of public criteria, as Wittgenstein suggests (1953). Criteriology is the process involved in acquiring the rules governing the use of linguistic expressions about the mind and this is publicly agreed upon. Therefore, one set of theories in one culture would differ to another set of theories in a different culture, depending on the unique value and belief systems of each.

More recent systematic reviews of ToM research have significantly questioned its construct validity and the interpretation of results in relation to autistic people (Gernsbacher and Melanie Yergeau, 2017; Heasman and Gillespie, 2018; 2020; Williams, 2021). One problem for ToM in autism is the idea that 'impaired' meta-representational ability cannot explain the problems with joint attention, gaze following, and proto declarative pointing apparent in very young autistic children, as meta-representational ability does not emerge in children until the age of five (Flavell, 2000). Zalla et al. (2015) argue differences with agency monitoring processes (whether one is, oneself, controlling an action or whether an action is being controlled by external forces) could affect the understanding of others' perspectives and in knowing that others' perspective are different from one's own perspective. Whereas Trevarthen and Delafield-Butt (2013) propose that a primary disruption exists in the sensorimotor systems of autistic people, 'obstructing efficient intentional movement and affective engagement' (p.61). This account argues that difficulties in perceiving and responding to the communicative behaviours of another underlie the social differences in autism.

Furthermore, some autistic individuals have central coherence (ability to process complex, perceptual stimuli and higher order experiences as part of wholes) differences but intact ToM and vice versa (Happe, 2000 cited in Kearley, 2003). Lopez (2022) argues that ToM testing does not factor in the important role of social interactions in processing social information; it only employs methods in which participants are placed in ToM tasks and not actual social situations.

Some researchers and autistic people are disapproving of how autistic people are depicted as having defective 'social brain[s]' or possessing 'zero degrees of empathy' (Milton, 2014, p.797). Autistic artwork (Mullin, 2014) or the non-verbal language expressed by Mel Baggs (2007) are the products of sharing processes that exist within social worlds. Research highlights autistic people might be just as socially motivated as non-autistic people, but this motivation might be marred by negative experiences or be overlooked by non-autistic others (Sasson et al., 2017; Cage and Burton, 2019; Morrison et al., 2020; Cola et al., 2020). Bogdashina (2006) philosophically challenges the medical model of disability when she questions who is mindblind to whom. She argues that non-autistic individuals have as much trouble with the 'Theory of Autistic Mind', as autistic people have in interpreting the 'Theory of Non-Autistic Mind' (p.126). The premise of this argument was developed into the Double Empathy Problem by Milton (2012) and is explained in section 3.3.6.

In light of the literature exploring ToM theory and social communication in autism, it seemed I needed to plan for possible mutual misunderstanding when interacting with my autistic participants. I could not assume there would be shared intentionality in relation to

our respective actions or reciprocity in non-verbal cues. Being able to distinguish intentional from unintentional behaviour on both sides of social transactions was a potential barrier. Just because a child nodded their head, it did not necessarily signal their agreement. I felt I needed to build in means of second-guessing and checking how I was interpreting my participants' behaviours, as we communicated. Moreover, I needed to consider how I could make my intentions and subsequent actions as explicit as possible so that my motives were clear to my participants. To do this verbally or non-verbally required an understanding of cognition and learning in autism, as well as how different forms of language might be processed and understood by autistic CYP. I address these areas in the next section.

3.3.2 Cognition and learning

Executive functioning (EF) theory within the field of autism posits that 'deficits' in higher order cognitive skills underlie the functioning of autistic individuals (Williams and Minshew, 2010). EF refers to cognitive processes thought to be mediated by the frontal lobes of the brain (Roca et al. 2010), and are activated in situations that require conscious, deliberate, and goal-directed behaviour (Perner and Lang, 2000). Skills include working memory, planning, cognitive flexibility, set-shifting, self-regulation, attention maintenance, emotion regulation, prioritising, inhibition of prepotent responses, and monitoring the environment for feedback on progress toward goal attainment (Szczepanski and Knight, 2014; Demetriou et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is a cited gap between cognitive abilities and daily life skills (Charman et al., 2011, p.201). For example, an autistic child may be able to

verbally recall how to get dressed or tend to their own personal hygiene yet struggle to execute these tasks in real time, due to difficulties with motor planning and executive functioning. Intellectual disabilities occur in about half of young autistic people (NICE, 2013).

Less research has been carried out on the association between EF and social functioning in autism (Freeman et al., 2017), and most EF research in autism has involved children, many of whom have had an intellectual learning disability in addition to autism (Hill, 2004). Essentially, the problem for EF theory in autism is the fact that whilst difficulties in EF are common in autism (Attwood, 2006), they are not universal, especially in more cognitively-able autistic people (Hill and Russell, 2002), thus begging the question whether EF difficulties seen in autistic children with learning disabilities are due to intellectual functioning disability rather than autism (Thurm et al., 2019).

A monotropic account of autism and cognition may explain many of the difficulties regarded as EF difficulties more broadly. A monotropic mind is one that focuses its attention on a small number of interests at any time, tending to miss things outside of this attention tunnel. Most non-autistic people are polytropic meaning the many co-aroused interests can constantly establish and reinforce connections between each other. Whereas autistic individuals possess 'atypical strategies for the allocation of attention' (Murray et al., 2005, p.139). Many of the perceived difficulties in autism such as social and communication difficulties, restricted and repetitive behaviours and interests, and atypical patterns of sensory experience might arise from attention firing into 'monotropic super

drive' (Murray et al., 2005, p.143). This may result in some information falling within the attention tunnel, and being processed, therefore, with heightened significance, and others falling outside, becoming virtually unnoticeable. A monotropic focus leads to a fragmented view of the world, and from such a viewpoint it is exceptionally hard to make sense of social interactions, leading to potentially both apparent and real Theory of Mind (ToM) difficulties.

The problem of other minds also is intertwined with issues related to conceptual development and categorisation (Chown, 2017). The way in which children internalise or frame their learning experiences was described as 'schema' by Piaget (1923, cited in Chown, 2017, p.81). The process of taking in new information into pre-existing schema without altering the schema is known as 'assimilation' (p.82). New experiences extend and expand schemas, but major new insights about the world (understanding of object permanence or ToM) can radically transform a schema and lead to a 'step change' called 'accommodation' (p.82). Chown (2017) postulates the idea that if all new knowledge is assimilated into existing schemas without these step changes (not seeing parts in relation to wholes), thinking would be very slow to develop. The differences that can occur with central coherence in autism (referred to as Weak Central Coherence (WCC); Happe and Frith, 2006) may interrupt this framing process and interfere with intersubjective communication, as the linking of concepts may not happen in the typical way. To go beyond rote learning requires a learner to evaluate new knowledge in terms of what they already know. Without the ability to evaluate new knowledge in terms of its significance to oneself

and its relatedness to what we already know, it is difficult to establish intentionality. This could pose challenges for dyadic or group work with autistic CYP.

Another factor I needed to consider when working intersubjectively with autistic CYP was the paradox of some autistic people generally possessing good rote memory abilities compared to their differences in personal event memory recall (Boucher and Lewis, 1989). Some autistic people can struggle with auto-biographical memory which Millward et al. (2000) refer to as 'personal episodic memory' (p.15). Thus, an individual would be able to recall autobiographical facts about themselves that did not include a personal element but would be 'unable to remember themselves performing actions, participating in events or possessing knowledge and strategies' (Powell and Jordan, 1993, p.362).

Dritschel et al. (1992) suggest that development of personal auto-biographical memory depends on the existence of an 'experiencing self' which codes events as part of a personal dimension. To compound this, Shalom et al. (2006) propose that some autistic people experience the physiological components of emotion but fail to associate this experience with whatever stimulated the emotion. I concluded that, if I encountered these needs when working with my autistic participants, I would need to research strategies used to support the processing of and retention of autobiographical events possibly through diary-use or visual aids such as drawings.

3.3.3 Sensory integration

Another key area pertaining to cognition and learning I needed to investigate was sensory integration, as this is cited within the diagnostic criteria for autism (DSM-5-TR, 2013). Successful integration of sensory inputs is critical for both basic perceptual functions and higher-order processes related to social behaviour and cognition (Martinez et al., 2020). Sensory sensitivities are considered by many to play a major role in the day-to-day lives of autistic people (Grandin and Scariano, 1986; Grandin 1995, 2013; Higashida, 2013; Bogdashina, 2016). These differences in sensory perception can make it difficult for autistic individuals to filter out irrelevant sensory information, and to integrate sensory information from different sources. For example, an autistic child may experience sound fading in and out making it difficult to attend to a conversation or task.

Sensory sensitivity to auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), proprioceptive (body awareness), vestibular (balance) and interoception (internal body senses) stimuli is common in autism and can produce either hyper or hypo imbalance as responses to different environments (Williams, 1996). A child may be tactile defensive and experience clothing as uncomfortable or not be able to self-regulate their body temperature. Furthermore, synaesthesia is experienced by many autistic people which is when specific input such as tastes, smells, sounds, or letters automatically generate additional sensations such as colour, texture, or shape (Van Leeuwen et al., 2020).

These challenges are 'neurosequentially primary to social engagement, often leading to a primary feeling of wrongness, unsafety, and dysregulation' in autistic individuals (Daniel et al., 2022, p.2). Any attempts at interaction may result in further withdrawal, thus support for playful co-regulation (partners repeatedly regulating the behaviour of the other) needs to address challenges of sensory integration. Often, adjustments to school and home environments are needed to support the sensory needs of autistic children such as Irlen-lensed glasses, ear-defenders, and/or low-level lighting. Discovering what adjustments my participants required to be able to engage in play or discourse with me was a priority. Playing to their strengths was part of this process, and I explain why this was important in the next section.

3.3.4 Strengths associated with autism

I was aware that many studies had routinely emphasised only the negative aspects of autism, even when some of the results were positive (Grandin, 2013). However, strengths-based approaches to autism are increasing in research and clinical practice (Taylor et al., 2023). Building on my autistic participants' strengths felt an important part of enabling them to engage and communicate more easily in my study. This decision was based on my own experience, as a teacher and parent, but also because studies have shown pupils' motivation to learn increases when they utilise their strengths (Lanou et al., 2012) and areas of special interest for this purpose (Hinton and Kern, 1999).

There are various strengths associated with autism such as unique, isolated skills, and some autistic people possess an above-average IQ and are endowed with extraordinary skills, referred to as 'savant' abilities. Perceptual strengths in visual (Dakin and Frith, 2005) and auditory (Gomot et al., 2008) modalities also have been found in autism. Additionally, higher-level visuospatial performance is cited by some researchers (Soulières et al., 2011) and is claimed to be attributable to enhanced perceptual functioning (EPF; Mottron et al., 2009). According to the EPF model, autistic perception is characterised by greater activation of perceptual areas during visuospatial, language, working memory or reasoning tasks. Moreover, superior mathematical information processing in autistic children has been found and explained by the idea that cortical regions typically involved in perceptual expertise may be utilised in novel ways in autism (Iuculano et al., 2014). Rote memory, verbal ability, an eye for detail, and resistance to duplicity within social relationships are all recognised as common strengths in autism (Boucher, 2022).

Coming from an asset-based model of human development framed within the neurodiversity paradigm (explained in the next section), I wanted my data collection methods to be led by my autistic participants in ways they felt enabled them to reflect on and share their lived experiences. In the next section, I explain why a difference-not deficit model of disability was important to me.

3.3.5 Difference-not-deficit paradigm

A major criticism of the triad of dominant theories of autism (WCC, EF and ToM) is that they all are fragmentary and only partly explain some of the characteristics typically found in autism (Milton, 2011). The consensus on the potential explanatory value of these previously promising cognitive theories has declined in the past decade (Lord et al., 2020), with more recent research situating itself in a difference-not-deficit paradigm. Historically (and still currently to a large extent), the medical model of disability has framed autism diagnosis and treatment (Kapp, 2020). This means that disability has largely been viewed by society as physical or mental 'impairments' inherent within individuals. Much research has typically sought to alter differential socio-cognitive processing styles that result from being autistic (Waltz, 2013; Pearson and Rose, 2021) within the hegemony of what is considered normal by non-autistic people (Milton, 2013).

However, the social model of disability (Dowling and Dolan, 2001, p.23) conceptualises disability not from impairment, but from social organisation. Dowling and Dolan (2001) illustrate the social model with an example of an individual, who is unable to walk, not as being disabled because they are unable to walk, but because society does not accommodate their inability to walk. Further, the biopsychosocial (BPS) model of disability (Engel, 1977) aims to look beyond the reductionist frameworks of the bio and social models by including psychological, as well as social and biological factors affecting health. However, this model has been criticised for a lack of integration between factors (Pilgrim, 2002).

I follow the neurodiversity paradigm which contests the idea of neuro-normativity (Lewis and Arday, 2023) and instead espouses the view that all human brains and resulting perceptions differ to a degree (Milton, 2020). Mueller (2020) proposes that everyone has a unique processing profile that cannot be grouped into singular socio-cognitive framing. People framed as 'neurotypical' are instead viewed as those who find dominant social constructs enabling. Much of the autism literature focuses on helping autistic individuals understand non-autistic perspectives, rather than the other way around (DeThorne, 2020). Dinishak and Akhtar (2013) argue that 'mindblindness', as a metaphor in autism, 'obscures the fact that both [parties] contribute to the social and communicative difficulties between them' (p.210). Milton (2012) hypothesises that 'many autistic people have indeed gained a greater level of insight into non-AS society, and more than vice versa, perhaps due to the need to survive and potentially thrive in a non-AS culture' (p.886). It is argued that strictly scientific research methodologies in autism research should be avoided to prevent reliance on binary, neuro-normative ideologies. Instead, methodologies that provide an immersive, shared experience are more likely to afford double empathy understandings (Mueller, 2020).

3.3.6 Double Empathy Problem

I wanted to guard against any assumption that potential problems with communication would lie with my autistic participants. I followed Milton's (2012) argument that autism needs to be re-conceptualised as a difference that is both 'biologically and socially derived' (p.866). Research has shown the ways in which autistic people experience high levels of

mutual understanding when interacting with other autistic individuals (Heasman and Gillespie, 2019; Crompton et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2020). These recent findings support the Double Empathy Problem (DEP) (Milton, 2012) which argues that intersubjective problems between autistic and non- autistic individuals are rooted not in one individual's deficient cognitive system but rather represent ‘a disjuncture in reciprocity between two differently disposed social actors’ (Milton, 2012, p.884). These actors hold different norms and expectations of each other, and the lack of understanding is not a consequence of autistic ‘impairment’ but a mutual failure in reaching consensus through bidirectional empathy. The ability to cognitively process social information (ToM) is only one factor contributing to our understanding of others. Some theoretically propose that social interactions themselves are key to our ability to understand others (Hobson, 2004; Reddy, 2008; Di Paolo and De Jaegher, 2017).

De Jaegher et al. (2017) note that some researchers misunderstand social motivation as being situated within an individual, when it is more appropriately understood as arising from a dynamic interaction between the individual and how others perceive and react to them. Within the transactional perspective of development (Sameroff, 1975), it is recognised that how one grows socially and emotionally depends not just on a fixed aspect of the individual's nature but also on how the behaviour of others shapes how an individual behaves towards them. The difficulty with social connectedness in autism is not so much the features of autism but consequences of being autistic. When autistic people experience feeling socially excluded, they will find social situations (particularly with non-autistic others) to be unrewarding. Mitchell et al. (2021) propose that how the behaviour of autistic

people is perceived by non-autistic people (often negatively) influences how they behave towards and treat autistic people. Stigma experienced towards the autism community is enhanced for those with intersecting identities such as autistic individuals from racialised minorities (Spense, 2020). This, in turn, impacts on autistic people's behaviour, resulting in mistrust of others, low self-esteem, and a lack of social ability due to a deficit in positive and rewarding social experiences.

3.3.6.1 Limitations of DEP theory

It would seem a limitation of DEP, as a theory, is that it does not seem to question what happens in the gap between autistic and non-autistic theories of mind. Garfinkel (1967) argues that non-autistic people tend to 'fill the gaps' in their perception to gain what they consider is a full picture of a context or situation. However, Milton (2013) suggests because of the differences in the way autistic people process information (due to monotropism, WCC, a lack of mirror neurons, or long connectivity in the brain), this filling in of the gaps tends not to occur, or at least to the extent it does for non-autistic people. He argues autistic people work on what is more tangible and present, thus conclusions are reached through more literal interpretations (without filling in as many gaps). I agree with Milton's argument, but what seems important to question is *how* we can even begin to identify the gaps between autistic and non-autistic theories of mind?

Firstly, one must define the public criteria through which ToM is culturally shaped for both

autistic and non-autistic people. Wittgenstein (1953) argues that public observables serve as the criteria needed to acquire the meaning of psychological terms. For example, a child learns the concept of toothache through observing a physical referent connected to the word 'toothache', i.e., a person holding their cheek and groaning from the pain. Wittgenstein speculates what it would be like if humans did not show any outward signs of pain, for example. He suggests it would be impossible to teach a child the use of the word 'toothache'. A child's early usage of mental terms is conjoined with non-verbal, natural expressions and the presence of these non-verbal signs is used by parents as criteria of correctness. Wittgenstein refers to this phenomenon as 'criteriology'. However, Wellman (1990) argues that knowledge of other minds is not based upon empirical correlations between outward signs and mental states because 'there is no set of observable activities in self or other that consistently correlates with inferred mental states' (p.95). There are no 'neutral observational data' as such because a 'theoretical lens' organises observable data (p.95). Furthermore, it would appear the correlation between outward behavioural signs and mental states is different in autism compared to non-autistic cognition, as many autistic people struggle to detect social cues (Lord and Risi, 1998).

The criteriological view holds that meanings of mental states are derived from the criteria (behaviour indicators) that signify the presence of a mental state rather than via the conceptual interrelation of various mental terms, as the Theory Theory view promulgates (described in section 3.3.1). With the TT view, the emphasis is more on the inter-dependency of mental terms (Malcolm, 1954). To illustrate, in discussing pretend play in children, Lillard (1994) identifies two requisite mental states that are defining features of

pretence: knowledge and intent. Lillard exemplifies this with reference to a child who is pretending a banana is a telephone. She explains that a child cannot represent a banana as a telephone without the knowledge that telephones exist. Further, to pretend to talk into a telephone, the child cannot do this unless the child is intending the banana to be regarded as a telephone. Thus, we see how the term 'pretence' is given meaning by being embedded within a framework of other mental states.

Alternatively, Wittgenstein (cited in Montgomery, 1997, p.291) argues that understanding the mind is 'a process embedded in acquiring the rules governing the use of linguistic expressions about the mind. These rules are publicly agreed upon and, therefore, separable from one's subjective phenomenological experiences. I disagree with Wittgenstein here and prefer to conceptualise subjective (phenomenological) experience as being inseparable from the criteriology of a society in its construction of ToM. In my view, one dialectically informs the other; people's subjective experience is continually being shaped by the many voices of society (public criteria).

In autism, this process is problematised by the fact that both autistic and non-autistic people will be more inclined to speculate about the gaps between their different theories of mind from their own neuro-perspectives. Thus, there almost becomes a double DEP when the criteriology constituting ToM in a particular socio-cultural context is interpreted differently by each neuro-type. How each neuro-type then attempts to work out what the gaps consist of will be limited by their own ToM lenses. Chown (2017) argues that the public criteria used by members of society to impute mental states to others are, by definition,

public criteria of a fundamentally non-autistic ontological state. He suggests there are no criteria of an autistic ontological state to assist non-autistic people to develop understanding of other (non-autistic) minds. Sinclair (1993), an autistic writer, suggests non-autistic people need to give up their assumptions about shared meanings. He argues they need to translate and check to make sure their translations are understood at the most basic levels. Giving up the certainty that comes of being on their own familiar territory and letting autistic people teach them a little of their language to guide them some way into their autistic worlds.

For a non-autistic researcher working with autistic participants, an awareness of this problem seemed imperative, and I would argue the development of various strategies to overcome potential assumptions about ToM gaps needs to be part of future research designs. For my study, I needed to be mindful of how I potentially filled in the communication gaps between myself and my participants, and by which frames of reference.

3.4 Eliciting autistic 'voice'

With this in mind, and an intention to enter the world of the child in my study, I needed to review all the many approaches researchers and practitioners had previously used to elicit autistic voice. By using multiple facilitation strategies, such as visual supports, photographs taken by participants, drawing, digital storytelling and storyboards, diaries, as well as prompts and reformulation of questions, some researchers have been successful in

eliciting the views of autistic pupils (e.g. Williams and Hanke, 2007; Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Ha and Whittaker, 2016; Blagrave, 2017; Richards and Crane, 2020; Warren et al., 2020; Parsons et al., 2023). In their systematic review, Tesfaye et al. (2019) identify six distinct primary methods of acquiring the lived experiences of autistic pupils (questionnaires, interviews, group discussion, narratives, diaries, and art) expressed through four communication output modalities (language, sign language and gestures, writing, and images).

Bloom et al. (2020) identify other elicitation strategies in their review and critique their strengths and limitations. The reviewed methods include the Diamond Rank Sorting Task (Thomas and O'Kane, 2000), Talking Mats (TM; Murphy, 1998), focus groups, the Ideal School Drawing Technique (DIST; Moran, 2001), the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2001), and In My Shoes (IMS; Calam et al., 2000). There are many cited strengths associated with using the Mosaic Approach from the triangulation of different data supporting the validity of the project, and the fact that use of a craft and photographs the children had taken themselves relaxed and focused them.

Some cited problems with the aforementioned approaches include limitations in what the children could talk about (as seen with the sorting activity); open-ended questions being difficult for some children with cognitive and communicative differences (as in Talking Mats); and the requirement of considerable training for professionals, for example, when using DIST, as an adult needs to interpret the drawings. Nevertheless, O'Kane (2008) states that active forms of communication are more effective and engaging for children rather

than the passive communication that takes place during typical interviews. I liked the idea of the Mosaic Approach, as it made it possible to triangulate a range of qualitative data, which could offer a more robust approach than any single elicitation strategy (Conn, 2014).

Further, a relevant study by Courchesne et al. (2022) captured the first-person perspectives of autistic adolescents through an ’inclusive strength-oriented method’ called ‘Autism Voices’ (p.1123). The modalities used by the participants to answer questions included writing, texting, using emojis, drawing, choosing, or pointing at pictures that were provided by the interviewer, speaking, and an augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device. It made sense for the media and forms used by my participants to communicate their ideas and views to relate to their identified strengths and areas of special interest. I had explored some of the benefits of using a strengths-based approach but also needed to explore how special interests could be utilised as part of elicitation strategies to acquire autistic voice.

3.4.1 Special interests

Special interests (SI) are defined as ‘Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus’ within the diagnostic criteria for autism (DSM-5, APA, 2013). Repetitive behaviours and special interests are considered to hinder learning in early autism intervention by some researchers and educators (e.g. Rogers and Dawson, 2009). However, autistic academics and advocates in medical, psychological and educational fields have advocated for a more positive, less deficit-focused understanding of autism in

general (Broderick and Ne’eman, 2008; Milton, 2014). Wharmby (2022), an autistic author, advocate, and ex-English teacher, argues most autistic people will have SI, but they are often misunderstood as hobbies or pastimes. In fact, they provide complete absorption into a topic or activity (‘hyperfixations’) which can be both ‘life-affirming’ and ‘life-allowing’. He asserts ‘they give depth and meaning to our lives but also enable us to enjoy our lives, by acting as a kind of mood regulator, keeping our stress levels down and helping us get through the events of the day’ (Wharmby, National Autistic Society (NAS) website, 2022).

Educators and researchers have attempted to build relationships and emotionally and socially engage with autistic CYP by using their SI and play through interventions such as Intensive Interaction (Nind and Hewett, 1988), the Options Approach (Jordan, 1990), DIRFloortime (Developmental, Individual-differences, and Relationship-based; Greenspan and Weider, 2006), Improvisational Music Therapy (IMT; Geretsegger et al., 2015), and dance and movement therapies. The aim of Intensive interaction (Nind and Hewett, 1988), as an intervention, is for an adult practitioner and person with learning difficulties and/or an autism diagnosis to mutually develop the fundamentals of communication that would normally precede speech. The practitioner partner intently observes what their partner is doing and then joins in, using the same movements, vocalisations, and rhythms. The technique offers a ‘means of building a direct, contingent and embodied relationship between the two partners within the domain of primary intersubjectivity’ (Delafield-Butt et al., 2020, p.63). This mode of communication between an autistic person and

practitioner appears to be at one end of the spectrum in the sense that the interaction is wholly person-led.

Special interests also have been utilised by researchers and educators in school settings, but mostly to measure whether tasks became more motivating for autistic pupils using their special interests (Gagnon, 2001; Winter-Messiers et al., 2007; Porter, 2012; Jung and Sainato, 2015; Davey, 2020). Gagnon (2001) developed a visual aid which she claimed assisted autistic students in schools to make sense of 'social situations, routines, the meaning of language, and the hidden curriculum' (p.1). Her 'Power Card Strategy' combines a story about a social situation with an illustration from an individual's special interest to teach a target behaviour. Likewise, Davey (2020) developed a special interests map (a one to two page profile that presented a pupil's SI in diagrammatic format and how they linked to curriculum areas in school) to see if tasks could be better differentiated and, therefore, more effectively include autistic pupils in the classroom. She found special interests motivated the participants to 'engage in tasks, develop their relationship with staff, and, for some, led to an increase in expressive language in both spoken and written form' (p.43).

Studies also have investigated whether autistic children can be encouraged to play more with others. Jung and Sainato (2015) employed the use of children's special interests (Disney characters), as motivators, to encourage the participation of autistic pupils in games with their non-autistic peers in a school. The researchers stuck pictures of the characters on playing cards and placed a character mask and princess jewel in front of

playing cards before play, as means to increase the autistic pupils' motivation to play the games.

Further, Porter (2012) explored how a web-based approach used the special interest (trains) of a pre-school aged, autistic child to promote and foster pretend play skills in the child. The author concluded that the four steps taken - creating a web, modelling pretend play through use of divergent materials, modelling verbal interaction in pretend play, and providing theme boxes and field trips/excursions - were useful for not only fostering the child's active involvement in pretend play, but also in helping expand the topic of special interest into a wide range of pretend play. Similarly, Winter-Messiers (2007) evaluated the impact of special interest areas on CYP with Asperger syndrome (AS) and their families. Strong positive relationships were found between SI and improvements in students' social, communication, emotional, sensory, and fine motor skills.

Despite recommendations made by the Autism Education Trust (Wittemeyer et al. 2012–15; Guldberg et al. 2019) to embed the interests of autistic children within the curriculum to motivate and engage learning, Tansley et al.'s (2022) scoping review identified very limited evidence of studies examining this topic for secondary-aged children. Conversely, the primary focus was on deficit-based social interventions, involving very small numbers of children overall. There appeared to be a gap in the literature regarding how SI could be used to engage autistic pupils in processes aimed at eliciting their views about their school experience. As an ex-drama teacher, I was interested to see if SI could be used in combination with any drama methods.

3.4.2 Role play

I was particularly interested in how role play and special interests had been used with autistic CYP in previous studies, as I had heard of a pioneering, longitudinal study in Dublin involving process drama, which I refer to later. Thus, I utilised my knowledge of drama to explore the literature on how others had used different drama methods to elicit the views of CYP, with a focus on their special interests.

Role play is defined as play which consists of a person pretending to be someone else with their voice, body, or both (Smilansky, 1990). Play activities based on real-life or imagined scenarios enable children to internalise socio-cultural conventions and learn cultural tools such as conversational skills, turn-taking and queuing (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, when (non-autistic) children are engaged in role play, they develop the ability to acknowledge and understand perspectives of others as well as their own (Fein, 1984; Gupta, 2009). Play provides the opportunity for children to practice communication, social interaction, emotional regulation, and process sensory input (Lang et al., 2009). However, autistic children often show 'significant delays in action-on-object play skills, vocalisations during play, and novel responding' (Boswell et al., 2023, p.1). If autistic children can acquire play skills, the likelihood of their inclusion in classroom settings can increase, as can opportunities for peer and adult interaction (Brown and Murray, 2001).

The extant literature on the use of drama and role play with autistic CYP falls into three categories: journals and books which describe and analyse planned intervention work

(Kearley, 2003; Peter, 2003; Guli et al., 2008; Sherratt and Peter, 2012; Kempe and Tissot, 2012; O'Sullivan, 2014, 2015); drama handbooks written for teachers and therapists (Nelson, 2010; Carleton, 2012; Barragay, 2013; Hunter, 2015; Vickers, 2017; Conn, 2019); and articles, dissertations and books on the use of dramatherapy (e.g. Carrette, 1992; Crimmems, 2006c; Chasen, 2011; Corbett et al., 2011; Godfrey and Haythorne, 2013; Hoddermarska, 2013; O'Leary, 2013, Bololia et al., 2022). In the drama handbooks, teachers such as Conn (2019) and Barragry (2013) focus on a range of interesting forms of drama from storytelling to mime, as well as sections on role play. In Conn's case, the work focusing on role aims to develop social skills and awareness. The pupils explore how they can express different attitudes and intentions through movements, gestures and words, and this extends to how they might adapt their roles depending on who they are with. Both handbooks contain useful ideas but were not immediately relevant to the approach I wanted to explore. I was more interested in using role play to explore facets of my participants' experiences by possibly personifying them, in role.

Some theatre projects designed for autistic CYP aim to develop social skills, verbal expression, empathy for others, and a sense of self-worth and accomplishment, for example, 'Theatre Horizon' in Dublin or the 'Limitless' project in Scotland. However, many of the drama methods used in these types of projects either primarily serve to develop performance skills or are not geared towards exploring the CYP's own lived experiences. Therefore, I did not feel these avenues were wholly relevant to my study either.

There is a paucity of systematic research on drama interventions for autistic CYP other than in relation to developing social skills through role play (Tse et al., 2007; Leaf et al., 2009; Neufeld and Wolfberg, 2010; Leaf et al., 2012a, b; Ferguson et al., 2013; Gutman et al., 2014; Beadle-Brown et al., 2018; Iswari et al., 2019; Stratou et al., 2023). The use of role play within these cited studies can be described as adults or peers modelling social etiquette in conversation with autistic participants, for example, turn-taking, maintaining eye contact, and making appropriate reciprocal statements. However, I cannot locate any studies within the literature which utilise role play with autistic pupils to elicit their views on their lived experiences.

The only large-scale, longitudinal study into the benefits of using 'process' drama with autistic children as far as I can see is an on-going research project between the School of Education in Trinity College Dublin and Aspire (Asperger Syndrome Association of Ireland; O'Sullivan, 2015). Most of the researchers involved in drama interventions espouse the benefits of using 'process drama' (Bolton, 1998, p.228), which 'involves the teacher and students collaborating as participants while simultaneously making, performing and reflecting on an evolving "play"' (Haseman, 1991, cited in Kempe and Tissot, 2012, p.99). In process drama, participants engage experientially in an exploration of how fictional characters might often act in challenging situations with the aim of understanding and resolving conflicts as they arise (O'Sullivan, 2014). In O'Sullivan's (2014) study, children and young adults between the ages of 6 and 26 attended weekly process drama sessions, organised into several age specific classes lasting from between 70 to 90 minutes. The main aim of the study was 'to respond to direct and indirect questioning and conversation

through engaging with the technique of "teacher in role" and "student in role"' to 'initiate and sustain conversation with peers and teachers in role to achieve specified drama outcomes' (p.3).

There are many challenges that this form of drama could pose for pupils with autism such as the predominance of teacher-in-role (TIR) or the fact that the drama can evolve spontaneously and unpredictably. Therefore, it is vital that drama teachers are sensitive to the emotional, social, and cognitive needs of these pupils. Essentially, teachers must ensure that there is 'sufficient narrative structure to enable a child to embed play and extend it by linking associated, relevant, and meaningful ideas' (Sherratt and Peter, 2002, p.36). Sherratt and Peter (2002) also suggest ensuring representational objects look like what they are supposed to be, for example, a toy car looks like a real car. Teachers also should aim to repeat and restructure difficult concepts in order that autistic pupils can access and understand the significance of their work (McKenzie, 2008). Moreover, teachers also should develop the ability to convert an autistic child's often alternative logic to make it compatible with an evolving fiction (Sherratt and Peter, 2002). Morgan and Saxton (1987) provide useful techniques (pp.302-308) to drama teachers. I do not include them here, as they are pedagogically framed techniques written with a classroom setting in mind and not relevant to intersubjective discourse in the context of my study.

I was mindful that should I use role play and other drama methods with my autistic participants, I would need to plan for realistic object-substitution, the narrative linking of associated ideas, the unpredictability of spontaneous live dramas, and how to re-structure

or re-define difficult concepts. Additionally, I considered how intersubjective discourse, and play would involve inter-synchronous communication. As part of my reading on intersubjectivity, I developed more knowledge of inter-personal synchrony and its importance in establishing trust and co-regulation in relationships and wanted to explore this further.

3.4.3 Inter-synchrony

Within the context of intersubjectivity, inter-synchrony can be defined as aligned behaviours that occur in social interactions between people in a variety of social contexts such as when conversation partners match their gestures, expressions and language in time while communicating (Louwerse et al., 2012). Moving in synchrony with a social partner leads to increased liking and prosocial behaviour towards that partner (Vicaria and Dickens, 2016; Morgan et al., 2023). Further, synchrony in (non-autistic) communication is associated with improved problem-solving outcomes (Wadge et al., 2019), and physiological and neural synchrony are related to empathy, rapport, and engagement in the social unit (Palumbo et al., 2017). However, there is some evidence to suggest that synchrony is present but reduced or atypical in autistic individuals during interactions with non-autistic individuals (McNaughton and Redcar, 2020; Fitzpatrick et al., 2017a).

Based on personal experience of playing therapeutically with my autistic son under the direction of a qualified play therapist, I was interested to explore more about vitality-

matching, selective mirroring, social timing, and co-regulation, as these are crucial elements of successful intersubjective communication (Daniel et al., 2022).

3.4.3.1 Vitality-matching

Vitality-form is a term originally introduced by Stern (2010), to describe how an action is performed, and refers to the 'affective energetic vector of a particular (potentially communicative) act: a waving hand could be vigorous (possibly welcoming, possibly warning) or gentle (possibly kind, possibly hesitant)' (Daniel et al., 2022, p.7). Vitality forms can also include stillness and silence. The capacity to perceive the vitality-form of others' actions is a fundamental element of social interactions and a basic way of relating to others (Di Cesare et al., 2014). Being able to recognise the vitality-forms of other people's actions enables us to determine their affective and cognitive states, as well as their relationship to us (Daniel et al., 2022).

Autistic children, as compared to non-autistic children, demonstrate significant differences in vitality-form expression (Casartelli et al., 2020a), and challenges in vitality-form recognition (Hobson and Lee, 1999; Di Cesare et al., 2017a). Lai et al. (2012) found that neuroanatomical systems that process speech and song are more effectively engaged by song than by speech for autistic children. Daniel et al. (2022) suggest adults should use melodic voices (light and playful in tone, pitch, timbre, and volume) and/or sing the words so that autistic (younger) children can receive the social intentionality auditorily, as well as visually.

3.4.3.2 Selective mirroring

Similar to Hobson and Lee (1999) and Rochat et al. (2013), Di Casare et al. (2017a) found the autistic children in their study displayed difficulties in perceiving vitality-form differences between two contiguous stimuli compared to non-autistic children. They concluded autistic children can often recognise extreme vitality but lack distinction of the more nuanced vitality-forms characteristic of everyday interaction. Daniel et al. (2022) suggest playful interaction with autistic children can provide a 'platform to use big, distinct gestures when needed – to initiate and to clarify – and then to build toward sharing more nuanced actions' (p.14). While maintaining an overall style, exaggerating, or diminishing a mirrored aspect of a child's communicative behaviour could also help vitality-form recognition.

Given this cited need in some autistic children, I considered using exaggerated expression and selective mirroring of my participants' actions/gestures and verbal expressions, when appropriate, to help their vitality-form recognition. Mirroring simply refers to the unconscious imitation of others' behaviour in a bid to forge social bonds (Lakin and Chartrand, 2003), for example, through synchronised smiling or the swaying of body motion. Selective mirroring involves the deliberate selection of specific features of human behaviour to mimic or exaggerate (Daniel et al., 2022) and possibly can provide transactional support to autistic children within intersubjective interactions. How and when to time selective mirroring would be dependent on the individual participant's needs and any given situation.

3.4.3.3 Social timing

Humans share a predilection to perceive, move, and interact in temporal, rhythmic ways (Papoušek, 1996; Trevarthen, 1999; Osborne, 2009), necessitating a mode of social timing in which 'both players continuously communicate near-future states and plan communicative acts just-ahead-in-time' (Daniel et al., 2022, p.3). Social timing involves both intra-personal sensorimotor timing on an individual's part and social-motor-synchrony (SMS) which is the temporal alignment of the perceptions, predictions, and motor behaviour of two or more people (Wimpory et al., 2002). Autistic individuals often display altered auditory temporal processing, and for autistic-non-autistic interaction, bidirectional SMS appears challenged (McNaughton and Redcay, 2020; Baldwin et al., 2021; Glass and Yuill, 2024). Asynchronies in the meeting of two people can lead to a mismatch in timeframe, making it difficult to play together.

The potential for asynchronous social timing between my participants and me was a matter of which I needed to be aware. Trying to stay connected to the moment-by-moment ebb and flow of my participants' temporality, and where they needed to be in this respect, seemed important.

3.4.3.4 Co-regulation

I hoped to support inter-synchrony with my participants through vitality-matching, selective mirroring, and good-enough social timing, as well as by building trust through showing empathy and an avid interest in the subjects they wished to talk about. I felt the

likelihood of establishing co-regulation would be high if I could do this. Co-regulation is the ability of two people to mutually attain and maintain an appropriate state of arousal (the state of behavioural or physiologic activation) fit for a task and/or environment (Porges, 2018). From birth, non-autistic infants actively seek signals and experiences of safety from others (Porges, 2018). Without safety and co-regulation, all infants become dysregulated which can manifest as fight/flight/freeze, agitation, avoidance, or sensory-seeking behaviours. Co-regulation is only possible when people feel safe together. For co-regulation, what is important is the sense of travelling safely together through a familiar-enough narrative flow of play, from calm through to vulnerable and back again (Schore, 1994; Porges et al., 1996; Porges, 2021; Porges and Daniel, 2021). Co-regulation felt important to achieve, if my participants were to share more emotively challenging aspects of their school experience.

I envisaged using elements of inter-synchrony to establish trust with my autistic participants. I also needed a cache of other elicitation support methods.

3.4.4 Visual supports

To aid cognition and learning, it is recognised that visual supports are needed by many autistic CYP (Cohen and Sloan, 2007). In their study exploring first-person perspectives, Courchesne et al. (2022) used picture cards with both verbal and minimally verbal autistic participants. Some participants were provided with picture cards that they could sort by order of preference or into categorical piles such as ‘Things I like to do’ and ‘Things I don’t

like to do.’ Picture cards were used with verbal participants to support questioning by the interviewer and to suggest response options for participants who were unable to generate answers without prompts. This technique is similar to the ‘Talking Mats’ (TM) (Murphy, 1998). With TM, a set of symbols relating to a subject area are set out on a mat. Open questions are then asked in relation to the presentation of each symbol, for example, ‘How do you feel about…?’ A top scale is introduced, for example, ‘Happy’, ‘Unsure” and ‘Sad’, and interviewees place each symbol on an area of the mat that corresponds to their views, feelings, or experiences about that symbol.

Bradshaw et al. (2018) found the children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in their study using TM were able to give information on more abstract topics such as their own behaviour and factors that influenced it. However, these approaches have limitations in the sense that the areas of focus are prepared by the facilitator, not the participant. Therefore, one cannot guarantee the focus of the discussion is wholly relevant to the participant or expansive enough. Moreover, Preece (2002) warns that, whilst the use of photographs and visual cues can improve children's understanding and increase their ability to participate in interviews, this may limit the consultation to the range of photographs and symbols offered.

Drawing, as a visual method of data collection, has been used by researchers to help elicit the views of autistic pupils in interviews (Happe and Frith, 2006; Williams and Hanke, 2007; Humphries and Lewis, 2008; Jolley et al., 2013; Blagrave, 2017; Warren et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2024). Happe and Frith (2006) found their participants were able to draw coherently

and contextually in relation to their lived experiences, and Jolley et al. (2013) found their participants were able to express emotions such as happiness and sadness in their drawings.

Cunningham (2022) was successful in drawing qualitative data from the use of the 'Three Houses Approach' (Turnell and Edwards, 1999) in her study involving group and individual interviews in which autistic pupils were questioned about the views they had recorded about their school life in (drawn) houses of good things, of worries, and of dreams. The approach has been used previously with children in the field of child protection (Turnell and Edwards, 1999; Weld, 2008), but this was one of the first times it had been used to gain the views of autistic pupils. As Harrington et al. (2014) suggest, diagnostic-related assumptions about autism, particularly relating to social communication, receptive and expressive language difficulties, may have previously restricted attempts to elicit the voice of autistic pupils. Therefore, Turnell and Edwards' (1999) use of the Three Houses Approach seems a genuine attempt to enable participation and elicit authentic pupil voice.

Further, Warren et al. (2021) co-created a qualitative visual storyboard methodology with school staff to access the views of five autistic pupils aged nine to eleven years about their everyday experiences, including transitions between special and mainstream classes. The storyboard method encouraged children to draw and write about the main aspects of a 'typical day at school'. Children were asked to reflect on their own experiences and emotions at different points of the day to create a poster.

Likewise, Williams and Hanke (2007) describe how the ‘Drawing the Ideal Self’ technique (Moran, 2001), based on Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955) was adapted to seek the views of 15 mainstream autistic pupils on what they felt were the most important features of school provision. The Drawing the Ideal School technique provided a structure that enabled pupils to express their view using a mixture of drawing, talking, and writing. The pupils’ responses, overall, were coherent and unequivocal, thus it was possible to draw out key themes with minimal adult interpretation.

Hill et al.’s (2016) use of ‘The Graffiti Wall’ method also afforded their pupil participants flexibility in expression. Participants (with special educational needs, of whom over 50 percent were autistic) were given access to a wall, large white board, or sheet of paper on which they could record their views to stimulus questions about their school experiences through drawings, symbols or writing on different coloured Post-It notes (one colour for good things and another colour for bad things about their school experience).

There are some limitations to how researchers have used drawing as part of interviews in previous studies. Blagrave (2017) identifies one limitation of her study is the fact that all her participants were given the same prompt ‘Draw me a picture of what your APE [Assisted Physical Education] class with teacher ___ is like for you’ (p.19). She felt the question was too vague and may have forced participants to focus only on a good or bad day in their class. Likewise, Lewis et al. (2024) used drawing with all their autistic participants in their study, but found it was not suitable or of interest to them all. In particular, some struggled with fine motor skills, and so activities involving drawing and

writing were less accessible. Moreover, some participants required additional prompting to be able to describe their drawings, hence the researchers may have unwittingly influenced interpretations and discussions.

It is important to highlight that the use of several, combined methods often are needed to be able to elicit participants' views, not just one or two methods, and this has been cited to enrich data (Darbyshire et al., 2005). For example, Shepherd (2015) successfully used a combination of visual methods, tablet applications, and walking interviews to develop ways of engaging young autistic people in research. This concurs with Kusters et al. (2017), who argue that combining the use of images and writing as part of data collection increases the validity of findings by dealing with the 'monopoly of interpretation' (p.66), as the child can provide immediate feedback and thus avoid researcher misinterpretation.

3.5 School experience

The next part of my literature review focused on what previous research had highlighted about the school experience of autistic CYP. As the central focus of this study was on *how* to elicit the views of autistic pupils, I have dedicated more time to exploring that in my literature review and methodology chapter compared to researching what previous studies have shown about the school experiences of autistic pupils, their parents and teachers. However, I aim to capture the key themes emerging from previous research in relation to these areas in the following sections.

3.5.1 How autistic pupils are included in mainstream schools

Firstly, to provide an overview of the current situation in autism education, there are over 182,000 autistic pupils in England, 73 percent of whom are in mainstream schools (NAS Education Report, 2023). Increasing numbers of autistic children are being educated in mainstream schools in the UK (McKinlay et al., 2022). There are many perceived benefits for autistic pupils attending mainstream schools. It can afford pupils regular exposure to peer role models for support in developing academic, social, and behavioural skills, while also providing greater access to a general curriculum (Jones, 2002). The successful inclusion of autistic pupils in mainstream schools can result in improved academic attainment (Freeman and Alkin, 2000), having more advanced education goals (Eldar et al., 2010; Lindsay et al., 2014), a sense of belonging to a social community (Barned et al., 2011), and enhanced sociability (Sansour and Bernhard, 2018).

However, the inclusion of autistic pupils is cited as one of the most complex and poorly understood areas of education (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Horgan et al, 2023). Autistic pupils are viewed as more difficult to effectively include than pupils with other SEN (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) and there is a misconception in schools that academically able autistic CYP are automatically capable of coping in a mainstream school environment (Morewood et al., 2011). Wing (2006) notes that 'even the most able children with autistic disorders may find mainstream school intolerable' (p.32). Outcomes for autistic children and young people are often poor, with low academic achievement, mental health issues, and school exclusion identified as some of the priority areas for

intervention (Brede et al., 2017; Totsika et al., 2020; Toft et al., 2021). Research indicates that autistic pupils are three times more likely to be excluded from school than most other groups of learners (Guldberg et al., 2019), more likely to be bullied (Hebron et al., 2017), and experience higher levels of rejection and lower levels of acceptance in school (Chamberlain et al., 2007; Symes and Humphrey, 2010). Therefore, supporting autistic pupils in educational settings seems an important and timely issue.

Autism is the most common type of SEN for children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and there were 103,429 pupils with EHCPs in June 2022 (Department for Education and Skills (DfES), 2022). Eighty-seven percent of teachers surveyed by NAS in 2021 felt confident or very confident supporting autistic pupils in the classroom. However, 70 percent of autistic pupils felt their teachers did not understand enough about autism (NAS School Report, 2021). Lack of teacher-training in autism continues to be an issue. Only 39 percent of teachers surveyed by NAS in 2021 had received more than half a day's autism training and for secondary school teachers alone this figure was just 14 percent.

3.5.2 Teachers' experience

Humphrey and Symes (2013) found that teachers have positive attitudes towards the inclusion of autistic pupils, but report tensions when dealing with the difficulties these pupils have in social and emotional understanding. Classroom teachers report less confidence in teaching autistic pupils than SENDCOs and senior leaders, with classroom teachers viewing inclusion as both a benefit and a challenge (Humphrey and Symes, 2013).

In their study, Emam and Farrell (2009) found primary school teachers were more likely to adapt their teaching style and behaviour to accommodate the needs of autistic pupils compared to secondary school teachers, as the pupils are with them most of the day. Whereas secondary school teachers only see pupils for a limited period, so often defer to LSAs for advice about how to deal with autistic pupils. Emam (2014) argues a teacher's sense of responsibility for autistic pupils seems to lessen as pupils graduate from primary to secondary. They can feel anxious and uncertain about their ability to manage successfully a class including autistic pupils (Barnard et al, 2002).

Three major barriers to the successful inclusion of autistic pupils in secondary schools have been cited: a lack of teacher training; a lack of acceptance from peers; and the presence of LSAs, as opportunities for independent work and social inclusion reduce when they are present (Symes and Humphrey, 2012). Teachers are under immense pressure to manage 30 or more pupils in their classes, all with varying, individual needs. Therefore, LSAs are often responsible for ensuring that autistic pupils complete academic tasks, prompting them to take part in activities, and managing behavioural problems (Webster and Blatchford, 2014). Florian (2014) cites three basic assumptions within the inclusive pedagogical approach in action (IPAA) framework which is used to guide teachers about how best to include all children in learning:

- Teachers must believe they can teach all children.
- Difference is accounted for as an essential aspect of human development in any conceptualisation of learning' (p. 290).
- Teachers continually develop creative new ways of working with others' (p. 291).

3.5.3 Parents' experience

Past research has tended to focus on teachers' experiences of including autistic pupils in mainstream schools rather than on parents' perceptions (McKinlay et al., 2022). In the limited research relating to this area, findings have been mixed. Some authors suggest parents favour inclusivity (Majoko, 2019; Su et al, 2020), while others argue parents are less positive (Falkmer et al., 2015), as they and their children are stigmatised by educators (Farrugia, 2009). McKinlay et al. (2022) found that parents felt their children struggled socially in a mainstream school, with such experiences negatively impacting on their child's wellbeing. The 'detrimental impacts were a result of parents believing school staff dismissed their concerns and thus appropriate strategies for their child were not always implemented' (p.1).

In their review of the literature on parents' attitudes towards inclusive education, De Boer et al. (2010) found that parents of children with SEN reported various concerns, including individualised instruction and the availability of services in mainstream schools. With regard to the child's type of disability, the results showed that parents were the least positive about the inclusion of children with behavioural problems and severe cognitive disabilities. They were more positive about the inclusion of children with physical disabilities and sensory disabilities.

3.5.4 Autistic pupils’ experience

Stafford (2017) cites a push among researchers to develop participatory methods for accessing the first-person perspectives of children with disabilities. Taneja-Johansson’s (2023) scoping review found an increased research interest in first-person accounts of schooling from autistic children and young people from 2016 onwards. However, these accounts are strongly skewed towards more academically-able students. There was an over-representation of boys and secondary school children across the studies reviewed. A child’s social class, ethnicity and socio-economic background were largely neglected, with details associated with the diagnosis being foregrounded. The latter is something that has also been observed by Nicholas et al. (2019), who argue for the need for greater diversity in participant sampling in terms of communication and cognitive abilities.

In their systematic review of the barriers to inclusion cited by autistic pupils across 48 quantitative studies (including mainly male participants), Bailey and Baker (2020) found difficulties with friendship, anxiety, and sensory sensitivity were common for autistic pupils. They found gaps in the research in the domains of cognitive systems, negative and positive affect (experience of positive and negative sensations, emotions, and sentiments), arousal, and sensorimotor processes. An autistic pupil’s inability to take the perspective of a teacher can also create a gap between a teacher and pupil (Jordan, 2005).

In addition to difficulties in sustaining peer relationships, autistic girls also find conforming to the social expectations of student-teacher relationships difficult (Sproston et al., 2017).

For adolescent, autistic female pupils, there is a drive to feel a sense of belonging in school, but they can experience pressure to adapt their behaviour and minimise their differences to gain social acceptance (Miles et al., 2019). In their study, Moyse and Porter (2015) identified autistic female pupils, who struggled when teacher instructions were inconsistent, confusing or without rationale. These issues are likely compounded by academic pressure including exam stress and demand anxiety coupled with striving for perfection which can lead to intense feelings of stress on the inside (McCann, 2019).

Furthermore, a factor that may significantly reduce interaction with peers for both male and female autistic pupils is the anxiety they experience daily which is regarded as a prominent challenge by some researchers (Weisbrot et al., 2005). Symes and Humphrey (2012) show some anxiety for autistic pupils having to perform in front of other students in class, or about their ability to work in those groups where behaviour is lively or noisy. Some teachers report that autistic pupils participate less actively in lessons than their non-autistic classmates, with only half of autistic pupils presenting to a class as compared with a third for peers (Newman, 2007). Ashburner et al. (2010) cites evidence that 43 percent of HF autistic pupils within their sample group exhibited clinically significant issues with perfectionism, as well as problems with emotional regulation. Behaviours resulting from the inability to regulate emotions effectively included a tendency to be easily frustrated if demands were not met, cry, rapidly change mood, and have frequent temper outbursts. The preference for routine, predictability and low sensory stimulation expressed by autistic individuals conflicts with the noisy, bustling and chaotic environment within the secondary school setting (Leekam et al., 2007; Humphrey and Lewis, 2008; Moore et al., 2021).

Humphrey and Lewis (2008) conducted a study in which pupils with Asperger's syndrome (AS) were consulted about their personal experiences of attending mainstream secondary schools in the Northeast of England. The degree to which the pupils successfully 'submerge[d] themselves in the social world of the school was dependent on the perceived "normality" or "abnormality" of their behaviour' (p.40). One pupil in the study commented, 'Sometimes it's like, "make me normal"' (p.40). Ochs et al. (2001) found that those pupils with HFA in their study whose diagnosis had been disclosed and explained to peers, as well as to school personnel, 'tended to encounter a more tolerant and affirming peer atmosphere' (p.405). Children whose families had personalised the disclosure process encountered more caring responses from peers, even in situations where the autistic child's behaviour was challenging for peers.

Other specific difficulties experienced by autistic pupils, such as the inability to notice a teacher's tone of voice and body language or understand figurative language, can intensify the tension in the relationship (Bowe, 2004; Emam and Farrell, 2009; Wilmshurst and Brue, 2010). There also can be difficulty with understanding or communicating their needs to teachers and classmates (Lindsay et al., 2013). Jordan (2005) argues the best teaching arises from an empathetic understanding and a willingness to be flexible, the worst, from rigidity and an expectation that it is the child who must change. There is no single approach that can meet all the needs of autistic pupils; nor are needs entirely determined by individual behaviour. It is the understanding of autism that enables the teacher to correctly identify the child's learning needs and begin to meet them (Jordan, 2005).

The autistic participants in Goddall's (2018) study suggested simple strategies and curriculum adaptations they felt would have helped make their time at mainstream more successful. These included having more breaks, smaller class sizes, less homework, instructions broken down, safe places to use when feeling anxious, and teachers who listened to their concerns and took account of their needs. Warren et al. (2021) and Tippett (2004) found the autistic pupils in their studies struggled with the noise within mainstream schools. Offering ear plugs, sensory breaks, and opportunities to move to and from break times at slightly different times to their peers may help to support pupils who experience the sensory aspects of the school in an unusual or extreme way.

3.6 Overview of literature review

Building on existing research and some gaps in the literature (as identified above), I outline the main aims of this research. There is a feeling within the autism community that autism research to date has not placed autistic people at the centre of research epistemologically by including them in the co-design and implementation of studies. Autistic individuals are the ones with the lived experience after all. It is also recognised that autistic researchers and writers, some education and health professionals, as well as autistic people and their advocates wish for a difference-not-deficit model of how autism is conceptualised by society-at-large. There has been paradigmatic shift away from seeing autism as an inherent set of deficits within individuals to a social model of disability which considers how disabilities are socially and psychologically constructed phenomena, as well as biological states.

Unfortunately, this paradigmatic shift does not appear to have extended to educational contexts to the same extent, as the literature indisputably shows autistic CYP do not yet feel adequately included within mainstream settings or otherwise. Neuro-normative models of behaviour and lack of adaptiveness on the part of education providers seem to be driving this inequity.

Given the gaps in the literature, the purpose of this research was to investigate how the voice of the child could be placed at the centre of the inquiry, so that data collection methods were developed with them in real-time contexts and more naturally depending on their strengths, interests and concerns. This meant I needed to explore how to position myself in relation to each, uniquely different child, so I could be an enabler and ally, not a conductor - to be a conduit between their inner world and the (adult) outer world. This, I envisioned would be most helpfully explored through the principles of intersubjectivity, as, dynamically, I aimed to receive their beams of communication, and felt I needed to meet them in the middle to be able to do this.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

In discussing my methodological approach to this study, I firstly reiterate my research questions and justify my choice of design frame. I then discuss my rationale for choosing ethnography, as a research methodology. Next, I explain how I went about implementing my research, including information about my research sample and data collection methods. The process by which I analysed my data using Phenomenological Interpretative Analysis (IPA) is then discussed (with examples from my analysis), as well as the subjects of ethics and researcher positionality in relation to my study.

4.2 Research questions

The preceding two chapters reviewed the literature relating to the key aspects of my research and helped me to refine the questions that shaped it. Figure 2 below sets out the research questions of this study.

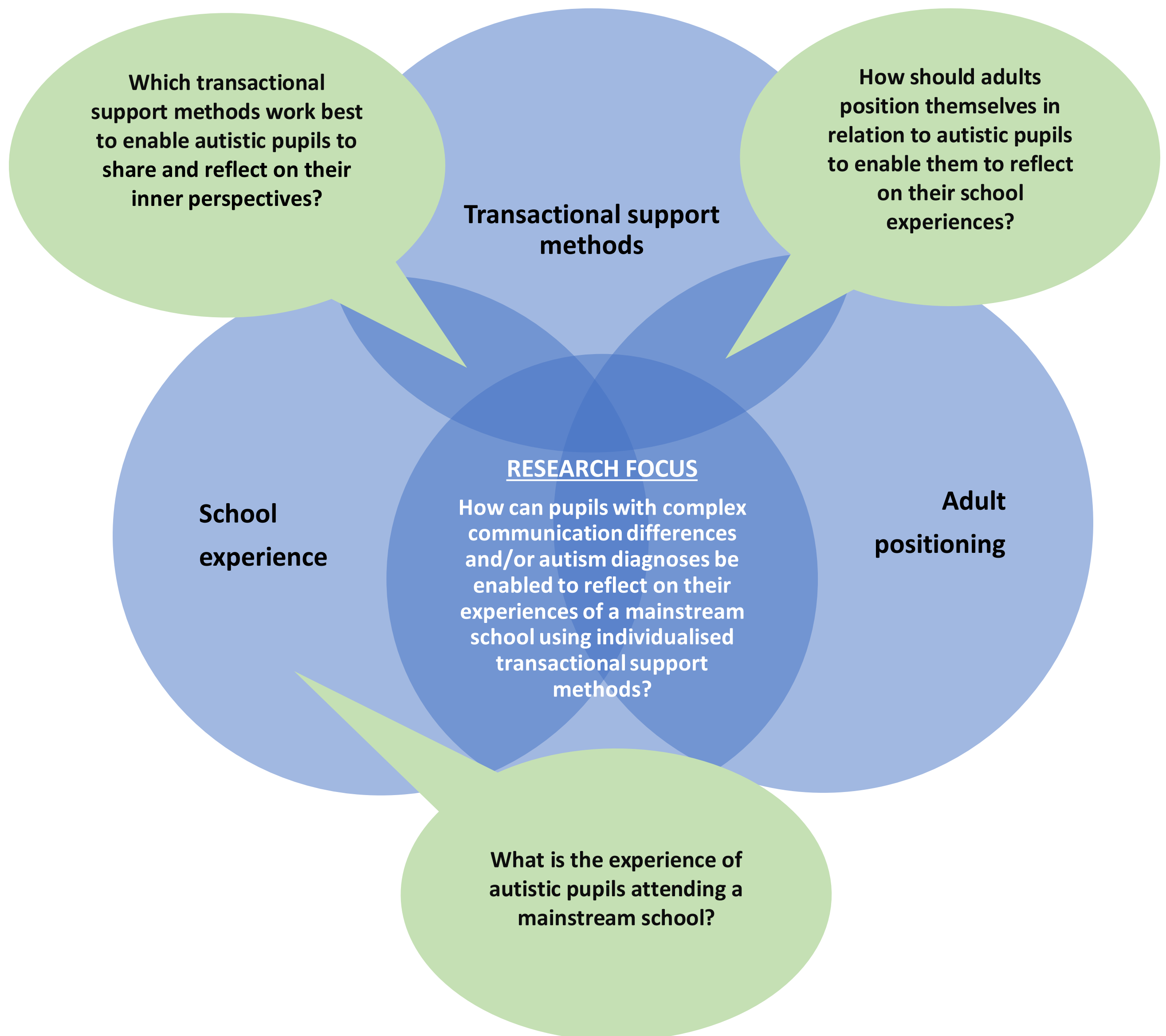


Figure 2: Research questions

4.3 Flexible research design

Methodologically, my study required an approach that enabled my autistic participants to help me to understand their perspectives on their school experience. I did not know what to expect in terms of my participants' needs and previous experiences before entering the

field. I anticipated I might have needed to experiment with different data collection methods, given my participants' differences in social understanding and communication. Therefore, I expected the research process to be iterative, and the focus to change as my project evolved. Consequently, I deemed a qualitative methodology framed by an 'emergent' design (Thomas, 2023, p.138) was most suited to my study. I understand emergent design to mean a flexible approach where decisions about methods can be taken at various stages of the research based on contextual information. The need for a flexible, recursive process, focusing on the idiographic qualities of individuals' lived experiences with the goal of understanding rather than predicting or theorising, led me to choose an interpretative paradigm for my study.

4.3.1 Interpretivism as a paradigm

An interpretivist paradigm places importance on understanding meanings that participants assign to their experiences within social contexts. In developmental psychology, interpretative approaches are increasingly recognised as means to foreground the voices of CYP, centre their individual experiences within socio-cultural contexts, and address power imbalances in the relationship between the researcher and researched (Demuth and Mey, 2015; Burman, 2017). My research questions required an understanding of situations that were 'complex, contextual and influenced by the interaction of physical, psychological and social factors' (Bernard, 1985), thus a qualitative and inductive approach to my research felt most suitable.

Interpretivism has been criticised for being unscientific because it does not deal with the objective world of fact (Thomas, 2023), and, instead, involves a researcher's own subjective interpretation of complex realities. This can make the generalisation and replication of findings difficult and invites scepticism about their validity. However, the strength of more interpretivist paradigms is 'the creation of local theories for practice rather than generalizable findings' (Mack, 2010, p.8). Mack (2010) defends interpretivism as being an approach that problematises and addresses issues productively. I hoped my study would lead to more 'local' understandings of deeply individual and psychological perspectives. I understood my research would not be replicable, as it stood, but possibly offer transferable insights to teachers and other professionals working with autistic pupils in schools, as well as other researchers about how to approach similar research.

4.3.2 Participatory approach

I hoped to support autistic pupil participants to share their inside perspectives on school using the principles of intersubjectivity within an emergent research design, thus it felt relevant to explore existing participatory methods of research in the autism field. This felt relevant because of the reported disconnect between the current landscape of autism research and what autistic people and their allies want from research (Pickard et al., 2022). I wanted to ensure my participants felt as involved in my research as possible and empowered to make decisions about how I interacted with them.

In the field of autism, there has been a growing interest in adopting a participatory approach. I define participatory research (PR) in section 1.4.2, but, essentially, the fundamental premise for PR is that it provides opportunities for young people - or other service users - to actively participate and engage in the research process. If participatory, research can be a means by which community members are given a voice and opportunities to raise their concerns and expose inequities (Gold, 1998). Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) argue that 'the key element of PR lies not in the methods but in the attitudes of the researchers which in turn determine how, by, and for whom research is conceptualised and conducted' (p.1667). Essentially, the relevance of research, the quality of the data collected, and application of findings into real-world settings are positively impacted when people with disabilities are closely involved in the research process (Stalker, 1998; Inglis and Cook, 2011; Parsons and Cobb, 2013; Parr, 2016). The involvement, collaboration and trust between researchers and autistic people can also be enhanced (Gowen et al., 2019). However, Bourke (2009) cites case studies in which participants did not always want to maximise their own participation in research and may have preferred external researcher involvement.

For this research, the intention was to avoid making generalised assumptions about how participants wanted to engage in the research, but rather to focus on individual preferences as far as possible. Building in flexibility into how participants wanted to engage was a priority. Different options for interview participation were offered to the adult participants in my study which were face-to-face; telephone; video calling; written correspondence via email; and any suggested alternatives. This provided them with a

choice of format that hopefully included their preferred means of interaction. For my pupil participants, my interactions with them were carefully staggered and planned-for, employing various approaches that, largely, were based on their pre-stated preferences and needs. Epistemologically, the priority for me was to explore how my participants and I could co-construct understanding of their subjective experiences. Therefore, a participatory paradigm was relevant, although I understand my study was not participatory, in the fullest sense, as my participants were not involved in the design of my project from the outset.

However, eliciting individual voice sat at the heart of my study, thus I continued to explore studies which adopted more participatory designs and creative data collection methods utilising participants' strengths and interests (I make reference to some of these in sections 3.4 and 3.4.4). Ridout's (2017) study places the autistic voice as the expert insider voice and her methodology demonstrates that flexible, mixed media readily tap into the communication preferences of individuals. By using narrative diary and mind-mapping in the form of a collage, participants were able to share insightful and novel views on important matters such as anxiety in autism. Likewise, Evans (2021) used walking maps, sticker placement, photo elicitation and voting slips, as creative methods to include learners with significant communication difficulties in 'voice' activities. These studies provided me with ways in which creative approaches could be used and became an important aspect of my study.

In respect of play-based interventions, Conn's (2014) work was of particular interest. Conn explores how to support the social engagement and development of autistic children in schools by adults closely watching and thinking about what children naturally do, particularly within group situations. She argues that 'sensory-perceptual play is frequently used as the starting point in developmental relationship-based approaches for the development of communication in children with autism' (p.155). Conn states, through play-based interventions, developmental approaches seek to provide shared instances of social meaning between adult and child within real-life spontaneous interactions which mainly follow the child's lead. The child's behaviour is treated by the adult as socially purposeful even when it is not. This model of participation aligned with how I wanted to position myself in relation to my participants, given the potential barriers our different communication styles might have engendered.

When considering how to support individuals to reflect on and own their experiences and stories, some aspects of Parsons et al.'s (2015) co-created Digital Stories methodology also seemed useful. This involved a school project looking at how practitioners could embed innovative technologies for autistic children in classroom practice. The Digital Stories methodology was then developed further in the 'Our Stories' project (Parsons et al., 2023) which explored how best to authentically gather a range of views from autistic children, families, and practice at points of transition.

A more recent project 'I am Lil' (Ward et al, 2024) used the 'I am' Digital Stories approach to support young people to produce short videos providing overviews of who they are and

what their lives entail. This exploration of the process of story creation and production of a 'tangible artefact as an outcome that can be viewed and reflected upon by others' (p.250) seemed pertinent to the self-reflection element of my main research question. Moreover, the idea that the process of creating a digital story could help individuals feel validated through their stories being screened to others (Gubrium 2009) was appealing. Even though I did not utilise Digital Stories, as a data collection method in the end, I tried to follow the epistemological premise of placing each young person at the centre of my inquiry to enable them to make decisions about how they wished their lived experiences to be represented.

To participate as fully as possible in the school lives of my pupil participants, I needed to immerse myself in the natural environment of the school to observe and understand its culture and practices, and how each of my participants fitted into it. Further, to be able to critically examine their behaviours and establish validity in my interpretations, it felt important to triangulate what I witnessed with what my participants' teachers, Learning Support Assistants (LSAs), peers, and parents said about them. The apparent need for an interpretivist paradigm, holistic approach to data collection, and high level of immersion in the field led me to using ethnography, as a methodological approach, for my study.

4.4 Ethnography

Originating in social and cultural anthropology in the early twentieth century (Jones and Smith, 2017), ethnography is a type of social research involving the examination of cultural

phenomena from the point of view of the subject of the study. Studies usually focus on social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities. Ethnography is both a method of data collection and a methodological framework (Brewer, 1994). The use of participant observation, as a primary source of data, enables ethnographers to immerse themselves in a setting, thereby generating a rich understanding of social action and its subtleties in different contexts. Spradley (2016) argues 'Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. Instead of collecting data about people, the ethnographer seeks to be taught by them' (p.3).

Fetterman (2020) suggests that to be able to create a picture of the social whole, a great deal of time must be spent in the field gathering many kinds of data. He also argues fieldwork requires multiple methods and hypotheses to ensure that the researcher covers all angles. The aim is to discover the inter-relationships among the various systems and sub-systems in a community, and, as Fetterman suggests, through an emphasis on the contextualisation of data.

In ethnography, the researcher is the instrument of research (Ortner, 1995). A researcher must see their knowledge of people, social systems, and structures and how they relate to the subject of inquiry, rather than rejecting this knowledge. Geertz (1973) refers to this approach as 'thick description' (p.6) which he argues is much richer than merely reporting phenomena. He argues in the very act of describing phenomena, one interprets them based on one's human knowing (Geertz, 1975). Such descriptions help readers better

understand the internal logic of why people in a culture behave as they do and why the behaviours are meaningful to them. However, one must question whether how a researcher understands the 'internal logic' of a culture is accurate or not. Inevitably, the issue of subjectiveness and bias is a major consideration when embarking on ethnographic research, and I address this by tackling my own positionality in section 4.4.3.

The core elements of ethnography are set out below and based on Hammersley et al. (1994) and Hammersley's (2006) view of ethnographic research within education.

Table 1: Core elements of ethnography adapted from Hammersley et al. (1994) and Hammersley (2006)

Core elements of Ethnography
1. Empirical data drawn from 'real world' contexts rather than being produced under experimental conditions created by the researcher.
2. Sustained engagement of research in a particular site.
3. Focus is a single setting or group of relatively small scale.
4. Data gathered from range of sources, but observation and informal chatting key tools.
5. Researcher attempts to make sense of the participants' understanding of a phenomenon.
6. Work primarily with unstructured data that have not been coded at point of data collection, as a closed set of analytical categories.
7. Analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of meanings and functions of human actions; product of this analysis primarily takes form of verbal descriptions and explanations.

4.4.1 Emic and etic perspectives

One of the key paradoxes of ethnographic fieldwork is the tension between the researcher being part of the community being studied - an 'emic' stance - and, at the same time, retaining an outside perspective - an 'etic' stance. The challenge is to be involved enough

to be able to learn about and describe a culture, as the participants live it, and detached enough to be able to make the '"known" unknown – to understand everyday behaviour in problematical terms' (Everhart, 1977, p.1). Powdermaker (1966) argues involvement is necessary to understand the psychological realities of a culture, but detachment is necessary to 'construct the abstract reality; a network of social relations including the rules of how they function – not necessarily real to the people studied' (p.9).

Some ethnographers are interested only in describing the emic view and do not posit their data within an etic frame of reference. Other ethnographers prefer to rely on etically-derived data first and consider emically-derived data secondary in their analysis. However, most ethnographers seem to start collecting data from the emic perspective and then try to make sense of what they have collected in terms of both the participant's view and their own scientific analysis (Hammersley, 2006). The emic and etic approaches each have their own strengths and limitations, and each can be useful in understanding different aspects of culture and behaviour. By documenting multiple perspectives of reality, a researcher is better able to understand why people think and act in the different ways they do.

4.4.2 Challenges for contemporary ethnography

In their paper on ethnography in education, Jordan and Yeomans (1995) argue that ethnographers should not ignore the historical antecedents to ethnographic theory and practice. They argue that ethnography and anthropology are methodologically premised on colonialism and imperialism (particularly in Britain and America). Feuchtwang (1973)

shows how the British imperial state became interested in the practice of anthropology in the early nineteenth century primarily because it allowed it to collect information and data on its subject territories which was necessary for economic power and domination. This 'cultural mapping of subject peoples for the purposes of objectifying, controlling and regulating their entry into capitalist relations' (Said, 1993, p.19) seems to have created a modern-day legacy institutionally. Gitlin et al. (1989) refer to this legacy as 'narrative realism' (p.240) which they argue is a product of the empiricist tradition and how this has positioned researchers epistemologically. I would argue that to assume one can describe things as they are in a research field without embellishment or bias is foolhardy. The institutionally framed observer-observed dynamic within contemporary ethnography is problematic because of the way in which researchers are epistemologically framed as 'looking in' on nuanced worlds but often fail to see their own socio-political relationships to those worlds. Sharp (1982) espouses that conventional ethnography, commonly practised by sociologists of education, tends only to grasp the 'phenomenal forms of everyday life' without considering the 'inner relations, causal processes and generative mechanisms which are often invisible to actors' (p. 48). She argues that ethnography reinforces ontological and epistemological social atomism which primarily focuses on individuals, their beliefs, intentions, and assumptions. I aimed to address this epistemological problem by ensuring I immersed myself in the school environment for a sustained period of time, as well as gather data from as many relevant sources as I could to understand causal processes.

Hammersley (2006) raises another issue for ethnographers which involves moving from the older anthropological model of ethnographic fieldwork to its more recent forms in which only parts of people's lives over relatively short time periods are studied. He feels there are problems of sampling and generalisation here, and a danger of failing to recognise both cyclical variability and fundamental patterns of change. As a counter measure, I always ensured I cross-referenced what I observed my participants do or what they told me with as much background information as I could glean from their mothers, staff, and peers.

4.4.3 My role as an ethnographic researcher

In ethnography, there is a concern about whether researchers are discovering context or constructing it through how they pitch their fieldwork (Spradley, 2016). A central dichotomy prevailed in my research methodologically between my need to focus ontologically on my participants' lived experience in the Heideggerian (1962) 'bracketed' sense and the inevitability of fore structuring their experiences with my own apperception based on contextual knowledge gathered in the field, as well as my own positionality. However, I accepted that I did need to rely on contextual evidence to make sense of my main participants' experiences, as often they were not in a position to explain their behaviours, or it was not appropriate to ask them about their experiences soon after significant events had occurred. Moreover, I understood I was researching 'in context' and, therefore, there was a need to see phenomena from all stakeholders' viewpoints to be able to identify cause and effect relationally.

I tried to approach the field with an open mind with any preconceptions checked. I had to try to forget the meanings that observed phenomena had for me to be able to understand their significance for my participants. A non-judgmental orientation requires an ethnographer to suspend personal valuation of any given cultural practice. Furthermore, I needed to be aware that how I interacted with my participants' experiences of phenomena may have altered them. By just asking them a question, I, inadvertently, may have affected how they saw the experiences in question. Smith et al. (2022) promote the idea that what we encounter in our lives does not become experience until we have reflected on it. Consequently, how we reflect on what happens to us will determine how we understand and remember our experiences. I tried to bear this in mind when engaging with my participants.

Regarding my 'positionality' (Thomas, 2023, p.150), as a researcher, I propose my own teaching and parenting positions, in addition to my cultural heritage, educational background, gender identity, and political and social views were central to the interpretation of my research. It is important to acknowledge that my academic experiences of studying for my MEd and my PhD research influenced my thinking in relation to autism, shaping how I constructed it. I also have extensive experience of autism, as a parent of an autistic child with learning difficulties (LD), as well as many years' experience of being a mainstream schoolteacher in a wide range of schools. My child-centred position and dislike of the behaviourist methods (conditioned responses achieved through extrinsic reward or punishment) commonly used in schools to manage pupil behaviour factored into how I interpreted teachers' handling of classroom conflict. I often

found myself instinctively siding with my participants and their mothers, and, therefore, tried to play devil's advocate with myself by reversing situations in my head to be able to see them from teachers' perspectives. I also had to work hard at detaching my 'critical' voice from teachers' actions, so that my own emotional responses did not cloud my interpretations.

My positionality also will have influenced how I recorded what I saw in the field within my field notes. Bearing this in mind, however, I concur with Maloret and Scott (2018) in their view that credence should be afforded the professional competency of researchers who often bring years of practical experience and should not have to suppress their professional judgment but allow it to enrich their interpretation of data. However, I needed to retain a sense of objectivity, and therefore, documented a clear audit trail of my research (Yin, 2018) and kept a reflective diary in which I grappled with some of the ontological problems of how I was interpretating what I was seeing in the field. These reflective tools enabled me to determine my ethnographical position in relation to the subject of inquiry (see example of audit trail and reflections in Appendix 1).

4.5. Ethical considerations and approval

Before embarking on my study, my research proposal was scrutinised by the Ethics Committee of the University of Birmingham (UoB), culminating in ethical approval for my research (Ref: ERN-18-1174). When preparing for and conducting my research, I complied with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018; fourth edition

at the time), particularly in relation to article three which requires that researchers consider the rights and interests of those being researched. Guidance from the Ethics Committee was sought about whether assent was required from every pupil or teacher consent in the classes I planned to observe. It was felt not necessary, as only the sample pupils were being observed explicitly and written about.

To be able to work alongside the pupils in the school, I applied for clearance from the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) which was granted. The school also issued me with a red badge to wear on a lanyard when in school which was more permanent than a visitor badge and worn by existing school staff. This signalled to the school population that I had been officially vetted by senior leaders and deemed safe to work with pupils.

I was aware of the risk of becoming too close to my participants (Everhart, 1977), as this can make it harder to preserve one's distance, as a researcher, which in turn can lead to reduced critical awareness. This phenomenon had particular relevance in my case, as my main participants were vulnerable, and some of their needs were not being met by the school. I sometimes found myself wanting to protect them when they were being told off by their teachers or mothers, and had to distance myself from this biased response. I also understood I was a human being in real-life situations and could not always avoid being emotionally affected.

Within the consent forms and in chatting with my participants, I made it clear that they were entitled to privacy and anonymity. I notified them that my research data would be

kept on a password protected computer at my home and research storage facility at my university. The data would be stored for 10 years on the University's computer server, after which point it would be destoyed. Data on my home computer would be destroyed once my research had been analysed and written up.

4.6 Informed consent, confidentiality and right to withdraw

Potentially, my study could have highlighted problem areas for pupil participants in the school, if they existed. Therefore, I had to consider the possibility of coercion on the part of worried parents urging their children to take part in my project. Thus, my participants were provided with their own assent forms (see Appendix 2) in which it stated it was their choice to become involved in the research. However, before doing this, I designed an information sheet for them (see Appendix 3) which each of their mothers checked was suitable in relation to their respective needs. One participant's mother helpfully suggested the language in the last bullet point on the assent form needed simplifying, and further clarity was required about where the child would chat with me and with whom exactly, and that our sessions would not involve any additional homework.

All participants could read well; therefore, their assent forms were mostly presented in written form. Their mothers facilitated the signing of the assent forms at home and then sent them back into school via my participants. When I started chatting to my pupil participants, I checked their understanding of my research, and that they fully consented to being involved and understood their right to withdraw.

Before gathering consent from all other participants (headteacher, school staff, and participants' mothers), I prepared information sheets for them too (consent form and information sheet samples in Appendices 4 to 7). Within the information and consent forms, it was important to include a disclaimer which aimed to clarify the fact that the research may or may not have been successful in meeting its aims. The aim of this statement was to mitigate the potential for any disappointment in the participants.

4.7 Participant recruitment

Given the high degree of sustained immersion in the field I would be experiencing, I anticipated there would be several participants to recruit, in addition to my main (pupil) participants. In the sections below, I explain who my participants were, how I recruited them, and the ethical procedures I followed when doing this.

As my qualitative study involved the individualised experiences of potentially a small sample size, I felt my participants' experiences would "'represent' a perspective, rather than a population" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). Therefore, a purposive approach to sampling felt more appropriate. Initially, I began liaising with Phase Leaders under the direction of the Principal to identify potential pupil participants. However, the Governance and Compliance Officer of the school did not feel this was an ethical means of recruiting my participants. Alternatively, her view was that, in discussing potential candidates for my research with the Phase Leaders, they, inadvertently, were disclosing confidential and sensitive information about pupils without their permission. I agreed, and we swiftly

changed the recruitment model to the Principal sending out an open invite from me to all school parents and carers.

4.7.1 Parent participants

Eight parents responded to the Principal's invitation to their children to participate in this study. Of those who came forward but did not eventually participate in the research, one had some SEN needs but not an autism diagnosis or complex communication differences, and so was discounted; two (older) young people had autism diagnoses, but were very able to communicate their thoughts and feelings, and so did not fit my inclusion criteria; and the fourth, older pupil with an autism diagnosis initially agreed to partake in the research, but then withdrew for personal reasons. A total of four participants (n=4), two males and two females across three year groups, went on to give consent and participate in my research.

For my participants to be eligible to take part in my study, the following inclusion criteria were used.

Table 2: Main participants' inclusion criteria

Participant inclusion criteria
1. Must have a diagnosis of autism and/or needs involving complex communication differences, for example, Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) or Selective Mutism (SM). 2. Experiences difficulties with social communication and expressing their views. 3. Between 7 and 16 years of age and in full-time primary/secondary mainstream education. 4. Preferably, both male and female participants.

5. Preferably, from different year groups and classes.

6. Must freely assent to the research and see the potential benefits of it.

For each family that was selected to partake in my study, one mother and one pupil participant took part. The four mothers' details are presented in Table 3 below. Pseudonyms have been applied.

Table 3: Summary of parent participants

Name	Mother of	Means of communication	Number of formal interviews	Other children	Siblings in school
Liz	Cayden	Email, text, telephone, in-person in school	1 non-voice-recorded, in-person	1 older female	1
Monika	Robert	Email, telephone, in-person in school and home	2 voice-recorded, in-person	1 older male	1
Lily	Marie	Email, text, telephone, in-person in school	1 voice-recorded, on phone	1 older female	0
Jan	Debbie	Email, text, telephone, in-person in school	1 non-voice-recorded, in-person	2 older males	0

In addition to the more formal interviews, I regularly spoke to and emailed each main participant's mother over the course of eight months. This provided a means to check in with how the mothers thought their children were experiencing my research and ask for advice about methods and approaches to my data collection.

4.7.2 Pupil participants

The pupil participants' profiles are set out below in Table 4. I represent each child by using

a pseudonym and present my main participants in the order they appear in my findings chapter. Cayden's older, non-autistic sister (pseudonym Evie) also took part in my research. She was in year 6 at the same school and considered very academically able by her mother and all staff who knew her.

Table 4: Summary of pupil participants

Name (pseudonym)	**Gender**	**Age**	**Autism diagnosis**	**Ethnicity** (as described by their mothers)	**Code of Practice (EHCP)**	**Complex Communication Differences**	**School year**	**Session format**	**Number of voice-recorded sessions**	**Session length range** (mins)
Cayden	M	7	Acquired part way through research	White British	No	Yes	3	Play-based	5	11-47
Robert	M	8	On assessment pathway	Second-generation Latvian	Yes	Yes	4	Face-to-face interview	4	22-47
Marie	F	9	Yes	White British	No	Yes	5	Face-to-face interview	4	11-53
Debbie	F	9	Yes	White British	No	Yes	5	Play-based/face-to-face interview	5	6-38
Evie (non-main participant)	F	10	No	White British	No	No	6	Face-to-face interview	1 (not recorded)	30
*EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan (statutory provision)										

I introduced ‘complex communication differences’ to the main research question, as not all the pupils that wanted to take part in my study had autism diagnoses. However, the mothers and school staff of the two undiagnosed, male participants did consider them autistic, and they were on autism assessment pathways. One of them was diagnosed as autistic towards the end of my research, while the other was still awaiting assessment, as I concluded my research.

4.7.3 Teacher participants

I also used a purposive approach to recruit some members of the school staff, as participants, in my study. This selection process unfolded gradually, as I immersed myself in the school environment, and got to know the staff and who they taught. There was a point at which general classroom observation transitioned into formally recorded interviews with staff, and, at that point, I approached each teacher to see if they were happy to be interviewed about my main participants, and their experiences of the school, generally. I targeted the teachers who taught my autistic participants and/or knew them well.

Pseudonyms have been used in place of all adult participants’ real names. The school staff participants are recorded in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Summary of school staff

Teacher (pseudonym)	Subject	Pupil participants involved with	Interviewed
Hal	P-BL	All	✓
Scott	Head of P-BL	All	✓
Denise	P-BL	All	✓
Lou	Base Camp Leader	Cayden	X
Colin	Base Camp Leader	Marie and Debbie	Pilot
Mike	Nurture Group Leader	Cayden and Robert	✓
Neil	School SENDCO	Oversaw all, but knew none	✓
Damien	Principal	Oversaw all, but knew none	✓ NVR
Miles	Assistant Principal, responsible for Teaching and Learning	Oversaw all, but knew none	✓ NVR
*NVR = Not voice-recorded			

Table 5 above features the six teachers I observed in school over eight months and the five teachers (including the SENDCO) I interviewed about my pupil participants. I did not interview Lou, as I did not observe her teaching as much as the other teachers. I interviewed one teacher (Colin) as a pilot (explained in section 4.11), thus did not include his interview as part of the data. I also interviewed the Principal and Assistant Principal. I did not voice-record their interviews, as they did not know my pupil participants, and were not as informed about the school's SEND practices to the degree the SENDCO was. These two interviews focused more on the general ethos and management of the school.

4.8 Data collection

The rationale for choosing the data collection methods I did is explained in subsequent sections, but, firstly, I present an overview of how I collected data over a 10-month period, as shown in Figure 3 below.

4.8.1 Overview of data collection

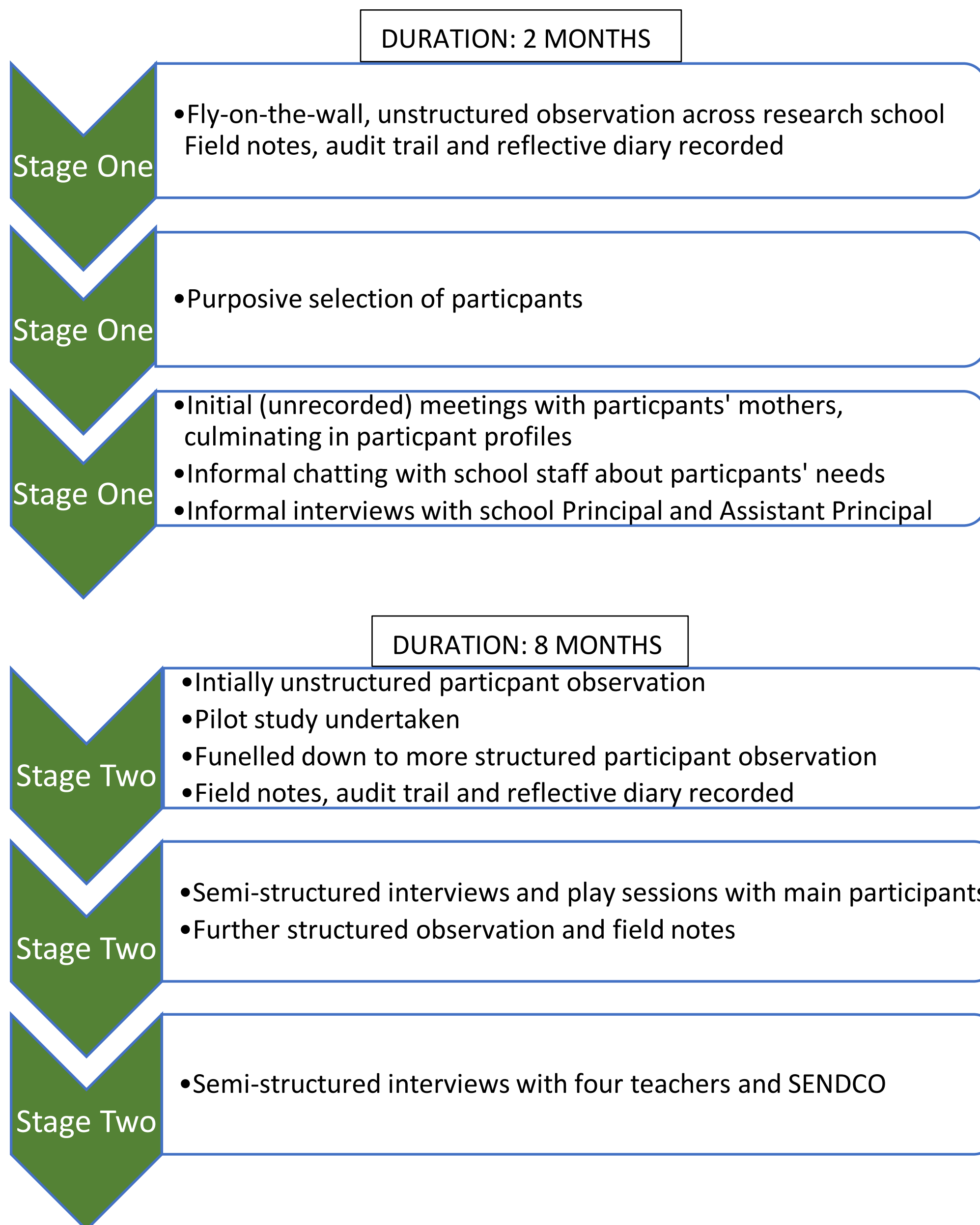


Figure 3: Overview of data collection

4.9 Methods

As part of an ethnographic framework, I decided to adopt a multi-method approach to help me ascertain a deep understanding of how my autistic participants' saw their world. To be able to pre-empt the Double Empathy Problem, it felt necessary to immerse myself in their school environment, observe them for a sustained period of time, and talk to as many people as I could about them to help me understand them in context. I also was keen to co-design the instruments of data collection with them as much as possible to ensure their modes of communication were based on their preferences and areas of strength.

I found Hummerstone and Parsons' (2023) user-centred design approach interesting, as it focused on understanding what their participants' needs were, addressing them in the design of their methods, and then gaining iterative feedback on the design, prototype and product developed. However, and this is the case with all other studies of this nature, the participants were feeding back on researcher-initiated prototypes, rather than generating the initial design prototypes themselves. I did design some visual aids based on my knowledge of my participants and previous work undertaken with them, but, initially, I set out to explore how I could use their special interests as the basis for developing transactional supports in an open-ended way.

I used observation, field notes, informal chatting, and semi-structured interviews with all participants, as well as one-to-one play sessions with Cayden. Role play for all four autistic participants, visual supports for three of them, and drawing, as a medium, for the female

participants featured in our interviews. I also collected data on the research school's pedagogical frameworks, policies, and documentation from the SEND department such as the Individual Learning Profiles (ILPs) of my participants. The main methods I used for collecting my data are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Methods of data collection

Method	Details	Participants
Observation	Stage one: fly-on-the-wall Daily life across whole school: wide cross-section of lessons and tutor groups, assemblies, playground, staffrooms, dining hall, reception	Everyone in school environment
	Stage two: semi-structured Purposive observation: specific lessons and events in school; individually shadow-observed all main participants over course of one day	Main participants (4), their teachers (5), classmates and peers (different ages in Phase Two classes)
Informal chatting	In staffrooms, offices and classrooms Across whole school In and out of lessons	Teaching and support staff; senior leaders Random pupils and participants' peers All main participants (4)
Field notes	Notebooks and reflective diary	
Interview	Semi-structured with interview schedules for teachers Teacher interviews lasted between 30 – 45 minutes	All main participants All main participants' mothers Teachers (Denise, Hal, Mike, Scott), Neil (school SENDCO)
One-to-one play sessions with participants	Initially unstructured Semi-structured Role play, use of dolls and toy animals	Cayden and Marie All participants
Visual supports	Drawing Pie chart, Yes/No columns on mini white board Question sheets	Marie and Debbie Marie Cayden, Robert and Marie

4.9.1 Observation

It felt important to start my study by building an etic perspective; one founded on trying to understand the ethos and practices of the school through the reading of non-verbal

communication and seeing from afar the material conditions my participants were situated in. This led me to choosing observation, as a data collection tool.

The first stage of my observation in the school involved fly-on-the-wall, unstructured observation, and the recording of field notes. This phase lasted approximately two months and involved me visiting the school once per week. A major criticism of unstructured observation is that it can lead to observer bias (Wilson, 2013) which is the idea that researchers may approach data collection with 'a priori' lenses and only see what they want to see. However, Bell (2010) states that the structured approach can also be criticised as being subjective and biased, as the researcher dictates the focus, rather than letting it emerge naturally in context. Further, Denscombe (1998) argues the disadvantage of structured observation is that deeper analysis is not possible and could lead to the researcher over-simplifying or distorting the subtleties of a situation. I followed Simpson and Tuson's (1995) recommendation of trying to cross-check my interpretations with others who were present in the classroom such as the pupils and staff.

I found I could not record everything happening in the field. McIntyre (1980) makes the point that because of the extreme complexity of interaction in the classroom, it is impossible to achieve an objective description of the totality of what is happening. He suggests ignoring much of what is happening and focusing carefully on selected and pre-defined facets of classroom activity in relation to one's research questions. With this in mind, and as themes and meanings began to emerge in the field, I funnelled my material into lines of inquiry producing a more structured and channelled form of observation. For

example, Cayden displayed evidence of not engaging in work for much of his lessons, thus I used a time-sampling method one lesson to record how much of his time was spent disengaged from work (see section 5.2.2). Further, these lines of inquiry also involved questions I wanted to ask various individuals within the school. I recorded my observations in a hand-written notebook (see Appendix 8, as an example) and discuss this process in section 4.9.2.

The second stage of my observation narrowed down to participant observation in school. This phase lasted approximately eight months. Prior to commencing observation work, I attended two planning meetings with school staff to help me understand all participants' timetables and school commitments. Then, the first two weeks of observation work comprised general observation in P-BL lessons. The third week involved following selected child participants to see how they were getting along in school, specifically. I had read about some ethnographers adopting a 'go along' method which involved accompanying individuals throughout their daily activities to 'explore the stream of experiences and practices as they move[d] through and, interacted with, their physical and social environment' (Kusenbach, 2003, p.463). Therefore, I shadow-observed all my main participants individually for a whole day during the fourth week (in addition to my general observation). This offered a useful snapshot of how their experiences flowed from one context or lesson to the next and, consequently, exposed some possible causes and effects of their behaviours.

As I had begun to immerse myself in the environment of the school, I needed to consider

the ‘Hawthorne effect’ (Thomas, 2023, p.146). This is the idea that the presence of a researcher may affect how participants behave. For example, my pupil participants may have tried to stay on task for longer or tidied their things away when they ordinarily would not have done. Luckily, the flipped studio design of the teaching spaces created hectic and busy environments, as different people continually moved around the studio spaces. Thus, I feel I was less conspicuous. I tried to mitigate the Hawthorne effect by observing my participants from afar, and appearing preoccupied with my notetaking, so they did not feel under scrutiny.

My observation style gradually became more participatory, as my study progressed. I spent a great deal of time chatting informally to anyone within the school community I deemed useful in helping me to context-build with my research questions at the centre. I became part of the staffroom community, eating my lunch with staff and respectively sharing life stories. This helped me gain an inside view of the school staffs’ collective mindset.

However, it took time to build trust with the teachers, as they seemed a little suspicious of me to begin with and wondered if I was an Ofsted (school regulatory body) inspector, or some other professional observing them for a specific purpose. I did request that a circular email was sent to all staff from the school Principal explaining my presence. I also stood up in front of Phase Two (primary phase) staff and introduced myself. This seemed to allay any perceived suspicion that I was there to judge them, as staff began to open up more. Additionally, how I dressed and how it was perceived by different members of the school community also played a part in establishing trust. On the one hand, I did not want to

appear overly formal to teachers, as my presence in their lessons may have felt intimidating. On the other hand, I did not want to turn up in very casual clothes (jeans and t-shirt), as I wanted to be taken seriously. In the end, I settled for a casual top and smart trousers.

4.9.2 Field notes

In addition to informal chatting, one of the key methods of data collection in ethnography is the recording of field notes and is central to the process of how an ethnographer reflects on what they have seen in the field. I both took notes during my observations in case I forgot the detail and after play sessions or interviews. Post-interview note-taking is a common strategy and necessitated by some of the details of the context and qualities of the interview not being captured in the recording (Harrison, 2018). These notes became re-consultable records that I relied on to develop methodological awareness. By reflecting on events and situations that happened in the field, I was able to detect gaps in what I had recorded and then plan what to focus on when next in the field. According to Lederman (1990), field notes serve as mediators between fieldwork and ethnography.

Wolfinger (2002) suggests it is not possible to record everything that happens within a research context, and argues ethnographers need some sort of selection strategy. I was drawn to his reference to a ‘salience hierarchy’ method (p.92), which involves researchers intentionally writing about those things which stand out to them, rather than recording everything seen in the field. It is significantly shaped by the researcher’s evolving

knowledge and beliefs. Malinowski (1884-1942) refers to 'foreshadowed problems' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) whereby a researcher can go into the field looking for instances of something. However, there are no hypotheses; the researcher is not there to prove or disprove a theory, but rather to explore. This is the key difference between ethnography and journalism, and an approach I wanted to adopt.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) suggest arranging field notes into the following categories:

- Broad, analytical interpretative.
- Observational notes – what you saw.
- Method notes – strategies for future observation.
- Personal notes – how you felt about and reaction to observation.
- Theoretical notes – attempts to connect interpretation to observation notes ('field coding' or immediate analysis).

I used my field notes as a reflective tool to help me pursue new lines of inquiry (see example in Appendix 9). I also triangulated this data with the data I collected from my interviews, informal chatting with staff and pupils, school documentation and policy, and my play sessions. This combined approach helped navigate my direction within the field and what I decided to focus on. Ultimately, I had to position myself in the field where I knew I had abundant opportunities to encounter the social phenomena that were relevant to my research questions.

4.9.3 Semi-structured interview

After the initial period of fly-on-the-wall observation in school, and once my participants had been recruited, I decided to informally interview my participants' mothers to gain more background information to my participants' environments, learning experiences, individual needs, communication preferences, and relationships to others. All but one of these interviews were not voice-recorded, as I wanted the initial discussions to be as relaxed and non-pressuring as possible. I used a semi-structured interview schedule for these initial interviews (see Appendix 10). At this early point, I also interviewed Cayden's sister before I started my play sessions with Cayden. The purpose of that interview was to ascertain how best to communicate with him, and what his interests and preferences were from a sibling's perspective.

I chose to interview the school teachers later on in the research process once I had spent enough time observing them teach, informally chatting to them, and working with my main participants. At the beginning of all interviews, I thanked the interviewee for agreeing to meet me, reiterated the purpose of my research (information sheets had already been disseminated), negotiated the time limits, and explained what would happen to the data from the interview. I requested that I should be allowed to voice-record the interview using a digital voice recorder. I used an interview schedule, as an aide-memoire, when interviewing my participants' teachers (see Appendix 11), although substantial flexibility to go off-piste was built in. I decided not to send prompt sheets to the teachers prior to their interviews, as I wanted them to respond as naturally as possible on the day, not having had

time to formulate pre-prepared answers. I felt I would obtain a more realistic view of the current situation that way. However, I did verbally provide them with a very brief overview of the subject areas I wished to explore.

4.9.3.1 Interviewing main participants

I only met my main participants after first conferring, at length, with their mothers and teachers. An important feature of how I approached my participants and built relationships with them was through a triadic model of connection between them, their mothers and me. Their mothers often acted as a conduit between us which meant I could check things with my main participants via their mothers, who knew them best, and vice versa. They seemed much more trusting of me compared to the teachers. I felt a major aspect of that trust was founded on the fact I had an autistic son myself and was able to personally empathise with what they told me about their situations. However, building rapport and trust with my pupil participants took a little more time and needed to be built up gradually.

The first stage of introducing myself to my participants evolved out of general observation within their classes. I wanted them to get used to me being around in a non-threatening or pressurising way first. Being part of the classroom business and casually chatting to lots of their peers before chatting to them was an important part of ensuring they felt comfortable with me being present. After a couple of weeks and checking with their mothers and teachers, I started to sit nearer to them and began to comment on something they or their immediate classmates were doing. By this stage, they knew who I was, as they had signed

their assent forms, and knew they were going to meet me individually at some point. I feel this graduated exposure gave my main participants plenty of time to change their minds about being involved in my study, if they needed to.

After another week or two, I began to broach the idea of meeting my participants individually and, again, spent a lot of time discussing how best to do this with their mothers and teachers. My participants were asked where and when they would like to meet and what they would like to do, as part of our first sessions. For example, it was decided that my first session with my female participants would be a joint one, as they felt that would support them most, given they were best friends. Subsequent sessions were arranged on an ad-hoc basis, depending on how my participants felt and when they were free.

I conducted 17 voice-recorded informal interviews/play sessions in total with the main participants. To be able to build rapport (Thomas, 2023) with my participants and understand how they experienced their school and played their roles within it, it was necessary to offer them space in their interviews to bring what they felt they needed to bring. Therefore, I did not want to employ the use of structured interview schedules, as they would have generated a more closed style of questioning. However, and even though ethnographic interviews are mostly unstructured, I needed to incorporate some structure into my interviews with my participants to help scaffold our interactions and provide support structures, given their communication needs (individually itemised in Chapter Five).

Figure 4 below shows how my interviews progressed from initial chatting to my main participants about their special interests or aspects of their school experience to more focused role play and/or drawing. Each of my sessions with Cayden involved playing with Lego (mostly in role, as superhero characters), but our first session did start with initial chatting about the contents of his favourite magazine.

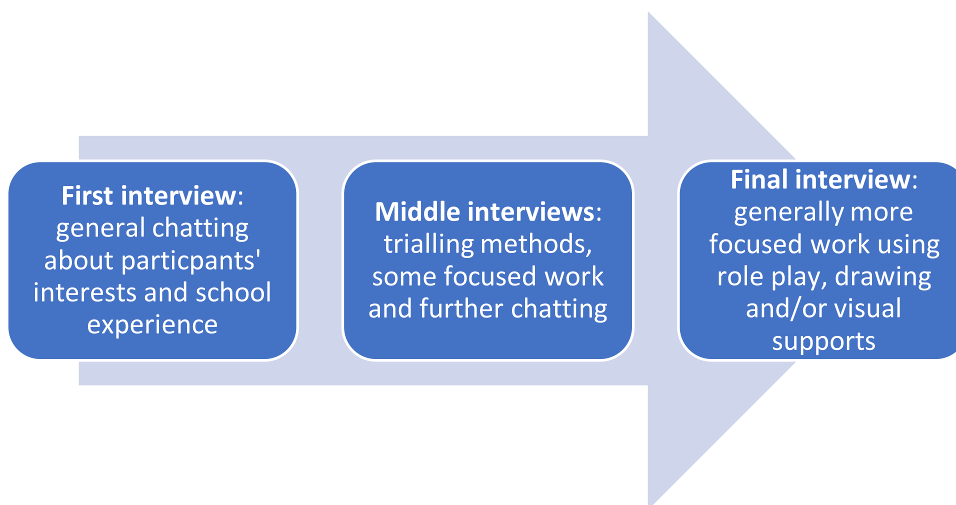


Figure 4: Interview structure for main participants

Morris (2003) suggests that researchers should include autistic pupils in the development of their interview schedules through piloting and adjusting following their feedback. I wanted to go one step further and attempt to co-design parts of the sessions with my participants, as they unfolded. An important aspect of how I approached their sessions was being prepared for them to go in any direction depending on what my participants brought each time. Eventually, I did have lines of inquiry I wanted to explore through our role play, drawings, visual supports, and discussions. However, I would abandon these completely when a participant wanted to focus on something else. This approach was concomitant

with the principles of child-led interaction. Within sessions, I tried to listen with the whole of my being - through all my senses, intuition and empathy - to what my participants were trying to tell or show me. There is no replicable formula for this; each, different relationship was unique and built up over a considerable period of time. My role was to attempt to build on whatever each participant brought to our sessions. Much of my reading of my participants' communication involved guess-work and intuition.

4.8.3.2 Adaptations to interviews

In some studies exploring autistic pupil voice, adaptations to interviews have been made and safeguarding measures put in place such as identifying an appropriate adult in advance in case of distress in the interview (Huws and Jones, 2015), and providing children with a stop card (Humphrey and Lewis, 2008). Based on other researchers' recommendations, it felt important to establish a 'get-out clause' for my main participants during interviews and play sessions if they suddenly felt uncomfortable or upset. I agreed a signal system with each of them before commencing my research. For the more confident children, a verbal expression was all that was needed, but for those with more complex communication needs, a gesture was more appropriate. The process did involve a degree of trial and error, and I soon discovered methods for communicating with my participants when they were feeling upset. For Marie, I would ask questions, and she would answer with either a 'Yes' or 'No' or head shakes. This reduced her anxiety and placed helpful limits on what was expected of her.

In relation to questioning form and style in my interviews and play sessions, I concurred with Lewis' (2009) suggestion that using statements as opposed to questions, including more closed rather than open-ended questions, and repeating questions might help increase the understanding and engagement of autistic individuals. Courchesne et al. (2022) also highlight the need for question re-formulation. When conversations with my autistic participants became more strained, I tried open-ended questions such as 'C*an you tell me a bit more about that*?'. However, this phraseology proved too nebulous and pressurising for some. Young et al. (2005) and Courchesne et al. (2022) found that some autistic children struggle with answering inferential questions. I also was aware that some autistic children can experience difficulties with abstraction (Beresford et al., 2004). Therefore, I aimed to support my autistic participants' ability to think abstractly and generalise from their experiences by using concrete frames of reference (Booth and Booth, 1996) and examples to illustrate concepts such as drawings, diagrams, and visual aids, when necessary (Tierney et al., 2016).

Harrington et al. (2014) explored the school experiences of eight mainstream, secondary-aged autistic pupils through interviews and shared that the meaningful engagement of the pupils in interviews may have been impeded by their difficulties with recalling past events, staying on the research topic, and delays in processing and responding to interview questions. I provided my autistic participants with outlines of topics via their mothers prior to interviews to help prepare them for topics I anticipated we may discuss. This also helped circumvent any potential anxiety in them regarding what our sessions would focus on (Cridland et al., 2014; MacLeod et al., 2017).

Recognising that autistic students might feel anxious during interviews, Humphrey and Lewis (2008) included the use of pupil diaries, as a form of data collection, in their study on the experiences of autistic students in mainstream schools. I could see the benefit of projecting self-reflection onto an object instead of questioning participants directly which could have induced anxiety in them. Thus, based on my review of the literature in relation to elicitation methods (detailed in section 3.4 onwards), I decided to use my main participants' special interests, as central pivots, in our interviews and play sessions.

4.9.4 Transactional supports

Within section 3.3.6, I refer to the transactional perspective of development (Sameroff, 1975), and the proposition that how an individual grows socially and emotionally depends not just on a fixed aspect of the individual's nature but also on how the behaviour of others shapes how an individual behaves towards them. I use the term transactional to describe the way in which I accepted my participants' beams of communication and then tried to make contact with their beams through inter-synchrony (defined in section 3.4.3). To illustrate what I mean by beams of communication: a teacher may have noticed a pupil staring out of the window for a prolonged period of time and interpreted this behaviour as the pupil being 'off-task'. I wanted to investigate what layers there might have been behind such behaviours, if any, to see if there were feeling states the beams signified, and which pupils may not have been able to articulate such as 'I do not feel happy here and would rather be elsewhere'.

To build inter-synchrony, I tried to channel my participants' beams of communication into symbolic forms they, themselves, invented or showed a preference for. The process of working out the symbolic forms was transactional and required mutual reciprocity. Symbolic forms based on their special interests (Lego or drawing), or facets of their experience that were important to them (imaginary characters), were used to explore their school experiences. For example, two of Marie and Debbie's special interests were drawing and cats, so I asked them if they could draw themselves, as cats in school and at home, and then reflect on them.

In addition to special interests, I also used role play with all participants to support their self-reflection processes. For Marie, we imagined we were her home and school cats and role-played a conversation between them. Likewise, with Cayden, he and I role-played superhero characters in the context of his school. Developing inter-synchrony was central to these processes which I describe in detail in my findings chapter (in sections 5.2.4.4 and 5.4.4.4). A detailed description of all the individualised transactional support methods, including visual supports, developed for each, main participant are described in my findings chapter, as it seems more logical to explain why they were used within the context of each participant's individual story.

4.10 Safeguarding strategies

I recognised I was in a position of power in relation to the children I intended to work with,

as an adult researcher and aimed to ensure this relationship was not exploited in any way. In approaching my work with my participants, I did consider the idea that some autistic people experience their authentic selves as non-social (Daniel et al. 2022). Therefore, attention was given to the rights of my participants to remain silent in sessions, if they so wished. If, at any point, I felt a pupil participant was at risk of harming him/herself, or any other person due to illegal or unsafe activity, I had agreed to disclose it immediately to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and my university supervisors.

I always arranged my sessions via my participants, their mothers and Phase Leaders in unison. For safeguarding purposes, I interviewed my participants in a room in the school with the door open or with a door that had a glass window in it, so we were always visible. I also notified the Phase Leader where and when I would be working with my participants and ascertained which member of staff would be available should there be an emergency. Whilst respecting my participants' right to privacy, I often updated their mothers on what had happened in my sessions with their children, as I wanted to keep them in the loop in case their children had any questions or concerns about our work together.

There also were ethical considerations I had to make in relation to the participation of the adults in my study. For my participants' mothers, there also was the risk of them becoming upset or angry should areas of our discourse become too close to the bone. Liz (Cayden's mother) did become tearful in our first interview, as she talked about the loneliness she felt Cayden experienced in school. My strategy for this was to allow her space to share her feelings, provide comforting words, and ask if she needed any support from the school

(which I could have relayed to the relevant member of staff, if that was what she wanted). Regarding any safeguarding issues for my main participants based on what their mothers said about their homelives or otherwise, I agreed with my supervisors that I would report any serious concerns to them and the school's DSL.

Another concern I had in relation to collecting data was how to build relationships with my participants when, effectively, they all could be talking about one another. Teachers may have wanted to share criticisms of the school, other teachers, and/ or senior leaders with me, and that might have felt awkward and unethical. If this happened, my planned response was to welcome their views on school practice and policy but discourage comments which were overly personal or of a disparaging nature. I took a slightly more lenient approach with my participants' mothers, but I still followed the same principle. I also guarded against any potential collusion in how I sympathised with their concerns. Generally speaking, I ensured I did not talk about participants' contributions to my research to anyone other than with my supervisors.

Lastly, regarding home visits to (three) families to discuss their children's suitability for my study and to meet with my pupil participants' mothers, the school's safeguarding team requested I completed a 'lone working' risk assessment prior to visiting homes and senior leaders vetted the parents to see if there were any safeguarding issues for me. The Assistant Principal of the school insisted I watched the school's own training video on safeguarding normally reserved for new staff. This was useful and ran through all the school's safeguarding protocol.

4.11 Pilot work

To determine the feasibility of my research and test for any potential obstacles that might arise once in the field, I decided to pilot some of my data collection methods prior to fully commencing my study. Kezar (2000) proposes carrying out pilot studies enables researchers to gain 'real world' experience which in turn improves their research designs. A pilot was carried out to test the following: (1) how to observe my participants, (2) how to record my fieldnotes and (3) how best to conduct a teacher interview.

I did not feel the official piloting of interview methods with my main participants' mothers was necessary, as I got to know them personally over a nine-month period and was in regular contact with them via email and telephone. After each interaction, I would reflect on how I had approached our conversations in terms of what may have hindered or helped elicit their views.

This recursive process was emulated with my main participants. The development and use of individualised transactional support methods spanned all our sessions. One session led to another; thus I trialled methods along the way. As I mention in section 4.9.3.1, how I approached my main participants was based on months of observation, their participant profiles, informal chats with them in the classroom, and what their mothers and teachers deemed in advance would be suitable. Therefore, I did not officially pilot any methods with them.

My first pilot focused on how to observe classroom behaviour and then how to record my field observations. I experimented with Becker et al.'s (1967) definitive categories of child and teacher behaviour which allow for the demonstration of functional relationships between the two. These categories focus on child behaviours such as those which interfere with classroom learning (e.g. time not spent on-task) or include particular behaviours a teacher wants to change in a child (e.g. thumb-sucking). I found being bound by these categories somewhat restrictive, as often understanding the preceding action and precipitative elements to significant incidents was more important in explaining why a child or teacher acted in the way they did. Therefore, I decided not to filter my observation lens, but only record those things that seemed relevant to understanding the whole context for each child.

However, I discovered through piloting that some of my commentary was overly interpretative. For example, I scrutinised one of my notes stating, '*All children seem to have a sense of purpose*' and realised I had unintentionally interpreted the pupils' behaviour in that situation. Thus, I attempted to record future observations as objectively as I could in terms of what I saw in the field, for example, '*Boy on floor, knees crossed, head bowed'* or '*Girl on stool near whiteboard fiddling with ribbon*'. As Moran (2002) states, explanations are not to be imposed before phenomena have been understood from within. Recording my observations as factually as I could helped me guard against observer bias.

Regarding interviewing in the field, I used my first interview with one of the six school staff, as a test run, to check how to use an interview schedule and whether my questions were

suitable. I discovered that my list of questions sometimes formed a barrier to creating more a free-flowing interaction. Therefore, in subsequent staff interviews, I decided to 'top and tail' my interviews with informal chatting. This helped build rapport with my interviewees and acted as springboards into a more formal questioning style. I also found simultaneously scribing notes and listening carefully to what was being said difficult. Thus, I decided to keep note-taking to an absolute minimum whilst interviewing from then on and aimed to write up salient features of my interviews immediately after the interviews had taken place.

4.12 Data analysis

This research was underpinned by the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in how data was analysed. I justify this decision in section 4.12.2. In addition to IPA processes, I also considered Goffman's (1974) concept of 'Frame Analysis' in how I interpreted some behaviours in the field.

4.12.1 Frame analysis

Frame Analysis promotes the idea that human beings frame themselves in relation to a set of social conventions in different contexts. For example, if a person met some friends for a drink in a pub, how that person behaved would be different to how they behaved in a professional meeting at work. Goffman refers to these different sets of behaviours as 'frames.' However, I would argue that people are also framed externally by institutions and the rules and expectations that institutions dictate define people's behaviour. I followed

Foucault's (1984) view that reality cannot be systematically grasped within one philosophical system or from one vantage point. He claimed a multiplicity of viewpoints is necessary to comprehend reality. This, he refers to as the 'revolving door of rationality' (p.249). I wanted to address this epistemological premise in relation to the fact that my subjects of inquiry were framed within the institution of a school. I also wanted to explore how I was being epistemologically positioned in relation to my subjects of inquiry, but also how the social forces within the institution of the school were determining how my participants behaved and, therefore, how I behaved. I followed Woolger's (1988a) suggestion that ethnographers should locate their data in the context of the social processes that brought them about and recognise the limits of their representation of reality.

To exemplify, part way through my research, an incident happened that made me question whether a teacher's response to an incident involving one of my participants was being framed by the institution of the school. Cayden, one of my participants, was admonished by a teacher for wasting too much time in the toilet during a P-BL lesson. Given the teacher suspected he was autistic, had an autistic son herself, and seemed an empathetic person, I found her response surprising. I listened carefully to her discourse, and it suddenly struck me that her language seemed to be institutionally situated. Based on my extensive experience of teaching and listening to how teachers speak to pupils, I instinctively felt her response to Cayden's perceived miscreance was being framed by her social position, as a teacher. There are pressures on teachers to get work out of pupils and meet targets by ensuring pupils stay on task. It felt as though she might have been approaching the incident

from this fixed modus operandi. Likewise, for Cayden, he seemed to be being framed by the typical power dynamic between teachers and pupils in schools (pupils having lower social statuses to teachers) and his possible need to escape the discomfort he felt in class.

4.12.2 Rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

I had been introduced to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009), as an analysis method, and the concept of the double hermeneutic whilst studying for my master's degree. I could see its relevance, as I would be interpreting how my participants made sense of their own experiences - the double hermeneutic.

I considered using two other analysis approaches - grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and the 'constant comparative method', as alternatives to IPA which are seen as sharing several similarities. Similarities between approaches include iteratively mapping out the individual or group's view of the world by starting with individual cases and moving outwards to look at the data across cases; systematically processing themes into categories; and both grounded theory and IPA have shared analytic language in common (Willig, 2008).

However, the problem with grounded theory approaches is that they do not focus on each data set in its entirety from a researcher's initial (bracketed) description through to superordinate theme coding before moving onto convergent and divergent themes across data sets. Furthermore, grounded theory seeks to develop theory. This is incompatible with

IPA's focus on gaining understanding of the participants' worlds, but without trying to generalise the findings. Additionally, large samples are not appropriate for IPA, as is the case with grounded theory, as the aim of IPA is to carry an out an in-depth analysis of a phenomenon without generalising the findings to the wider demographic (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). Conversely, IPA promotes detailed and rich exploration of the phenomenon at an individual level and considers how it is contextualised by society, history and cultural forces (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Therefore, it aligned with my social constructivist position and the central tenets of my study's conceptual framework. After further reading, I decided to attend a two-day workshop on IPA at Glasgow Caledonian University with Professor Paul Flowers.

4.12.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Primarily, IPA is used as a data analysis method, but also encompasses inductive data-collection methods, notably, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observational methods. Epistemologically, IPA is committed to the examination of how a person makes sense of their lived experience and has its theoretical roots in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2022). Smith (1996) argues IPA is concerned with a chain of connection between embodied experience, talking about that experience, and a participant's making sense of, and emotional reaction to that experience. It is committed to examining experience which is of existential importance to a participant. IPA emerged in health psychology in the mid-1990s when its chief proponent Smith (1996) advocated an approach to psychology which was able to capture more experiential and

qualitative data. He argues much of experimental psychology had been 'too concerned with making direct claims about cognition-as-process than it had with understanding the meaning or contents of thoughts' (Smith et al., 2022, p.138).

IPA has been influenced by key philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Smith et al., 2022). Smith et al. (2022) state Husserl felt the human predilection for order meant people too quickly looked to fit 'things' into their pre-existing categorisation system. Instead, he argued humans should focus on each thing in its own right. Heidegger (1962) espoused a similar philosophical position in his subject Dasein ('there-being') and was concerned with the ontological question of existence itself. He argued it is not possible to ignore the subjectivising influences on language, culture, ideology, expectations, or assumptions, and felt we could not remove ourselves and our meaning systems from the world to find out how things really were (Larkin et al., 2006).

4.7.2.1 Double hermeneutic

IPA theory and practice are founded on the principle of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of interpretation and has its roots in exegesis, which primarily was the practice of interpreting the word and grammar of biblical texts. The use of hermeneutics widened out to the field of humanities in the last century and now focuses on the interpretation of non-verbal, as well as verbal and written communication.

A hermeneutic in the case of IPA research would be a participant's understanding of their

experience, whereas a double hermeneutic would be a researcher's interpretation of the participant's interpretation. Moreover, there also is a triple hermeneutic which is the reader's interpretation of the researcher trying to make sense of a participant's interpretation of phenomena. Hermeneutic theorists are concerned with questions such as 'What are the methods and purposes of interpretation itself? Is it possible to uncover the intentions or original meanings of an author?' (Smith et al., 2009, p.22).

IPA operates the double hermeneutic through what Ricoeur (1970) distinguishes as two broad interpretative positions: the hermeneutics of empathy and the hermeneutics of suspicion. The hermeneutics of empathy aims for an 'insider's perspective' (Conrad, 1987) whereby a researcher focuses on seeing a phenomenon from a participant's point of view. On the other hand, a hermeneutic of suspicion uses perspectives from outside to shed light on the phenomenon. This mirrors emic and etic perspective-taking in ethnography. Successful IPA should draw on both stances (Smith et al., 2009), hence I ended up alternating between the two in much the same way I did when collecting my data ethnographically by employing an etic-emic stance.

To illustrate how I used the double hermeneutic to micro-analyse my main participants' significant events, I provide an example from Cayden. A significant event within Cayden's transcript involved him partitioning a Lego building mat into two halves in the same way I had done in our previous play session. One half of the board represented his school and the other Starlord's spaceship (character from the 'Guardians of the Galaxy' film). The question I asked myself was 'What do I do with this action, as the researcher, and how can

I apply the double hermeneutic?' I needed to consider whether Cayden was demarcating the board space because it was something we had done in our previous session, or he was 'stuck-in-set' (repeating certain behaviours because transitions can be difficult). This involved taking an etic stance and drawing on my experience and knowledge of autism more generally. However, his action may have symbolised a need to compartmentalise his school experience to escape it, as it seemed uncomfortable for him. This question sprung from my empathetic understanding of Cayden's previous experiences in context, and relied more on my emic position, as an insider-researcher.

Essentially, IPA aims to describe a participant's world and to analyse it through more overtly interpretative techniques, which position initial description in relation to wider social, cultural, and sometimes theoretical contexts (Larkin et al., 2006). Smith et al. (2009) refer to the 'hermeneutic circle' (p.27) which they use to analogise the iterative process of entering a text from many different levels, all of which relate to one another. They promote the Gestalt part-whole theory which espouses the idea that one cannot derive meaning from part of an entity on its own. Rather, one must understand how the part relates to the whole it belongs to and vice versa.

4.12.4 Recommended IPA approach to analysis

In their analysis section, Smith et al. (2009) recommend IPA researchers start the process of data analysis by immersing themselves in their data by slowing down, listening and re-listening to the original recordings (if interviews) and jotting down any pertinent

observations that come to mind, possibly in the right-hand margin of transcripts. At the IPA workshop I attended with Professor Paul Flowers, he promoted the idea that a researcher must ‘bracket’ off the phenomenon at this stage and look at it in its own terms.

Smith et al. (2009) go on to recommend IPA researchers embark on a detailed and comprehensive categorisation process for each participant or data set after the initial immersion stage through which the exhaustive coding of texts occurs. Three areas of the data are scrutinised as part of this process: description, language, and conceptual content. Descriptive content pertains to the understanding of what things matter to the participant (objects, events and so on); language analysis involves the exploration and highlighting of specific language used by the participant; and the conceptual category focuses on more over-arching understandings of the matters a participant shares. The conceptual part of the process often involves researchers using their own life experiences and knowledge to reflect on what the participant may mean symbolically.

The analysis process is distilled further by extrapolating and developing emergent themes. These lead onto an abstraction process by locating superordinate themes and developing thematic summaries for each participant. At this point, researchers are urged to look for convergences and divergences across cases. I have adopted the older IPA terminology here such as ‘emergent’ and ‘superordinate themes’ (Smith et al., 2009). This reflects the time that I carried out my analysis, rather than an indication of preference. It should be noted that in the second edition (Smith et al., 2022, p.76), the term emergent themes were

replaced by 'experiential statements' and these are clustered to form 'Personal Experiential Themes' (PET), rather than superordinate themes.

4.12.5 Using IPA in autism research

A key area of concern for using IPA with autistic participants is the Double Empathy Problem (DEP; Milton, 2012; explained in section 3.3.6) whereby possible mutual misunderstanding between non-autistic and autistic people threatens to undermine the authenticity of qualitative research. Willig (2013) expresses concern that IPA focuses heavily on language, while Newman et al. (2010) question whether autistic people 'experience memories linguistically' (p.268). They suggest the epistemological assumption underlying hermeneutic phenomenology that language is integral to understanding experience needs to be reassessed when conducting research with autistic participants. Additionally, there can be temptation on the part of the researcher to redescribe what participants say rather than interpret and critically engage with their experiences, especially if participants have trouble expressing themselves verbally.

However, Howard et al. (2019) argue that IPA views participants as experts of their own social and personal worlds and seeks to 'establish equality of voice between the researcher and the researched' (p.1). They claim the presence of the double hermeneutic can go some way to alleviating the DEP, as the researcher is working doubly hard to try to understand a participant's inside view. Fletcher-Watson et al. (2019) heed greater reflexivity in autism

research on the part of the researcher in both engaging with their own experiences and preconceptions and acknowledging the potential impact of the DEP.

The main strategy I used to try to mitigate the potential for misunderstanding between my participants and me was by checking how I planned to phrase things with their mothers and key staff prior to our interviews or play sessions. More crucially, I always asked my participants to check my understanding of things they had said to me or others before or during our sessions. I realised I could not just rely on language to do this, given some of their cognitive-processing differences, thus I often communicated through alternative media such as drawing, Lego, dolls, animal figures, sounds or gestures. I also had to bear in mind they may have acquiesced with my statements to please me, or because they were worried about getting into trouble had their opinions differed to mine.

4.12.6 How I used and adapted IPA

The data I collected from my observation work, informal chatting with members of the school community, field notes, reflective diary, and interviews with my main participants' mothers and teachers contributed to my understanding of the research context. I also used that data to build a picture of each, main participant and help make sense of their one-to-one sessions. I had volumes of data spanning 10 months and much of it consisted of observation and field notes in notebooks. Therefore, given my study timeframe, it was not possible to apply the IPA categorisation process to all sets of data, as it involves a highly protracted process. Moreover, I did not feel it would add much value to do so, given the

purpose of collecting these data sets was to help me contextualise my main participants' behaviours.

I had interacted with all participants in their school environment on psychological and emotional levels during my research, thus it felt ontologically important to engage with data analysis in the same vein. Given I had spent a considerable period of time immersed in the research field, I wanted to remain connected to my data holistically, rather than focusing on one specific aspect of the data at a time from a detached point of view. Therefore, when auditing one set of data, I spent considerable time re-reading and cross-referencing it with other data sources to try to help me understand it. This was an iterative process involving all data sets and supported my journey to creating a full picture of each child's school experience. The process by which I analysed my data is explained step-by-step below.

4.11.6.1 Step one: Re-immersion in observation data

Before embarking on auditing and transcribing participant interviews, I decided to re-read all my general observation field notes and reflective diary to re-familiarise myself with the school context and any significant events I observed during my 10 months there. This re-immersion phase provided a background frame of reference for interpreting participants' individual views, as I was reminded of the details of the school environment and different people's behaviours. I made a note of anything that stood out from my earlier observations based on the fuller understanding I had at that point, post data-collection.

4.11.6.2 Step two: Auditing and transcribing teachers' and mothers' interviews

Next, I carefully listened to and audited all my voice-recorded interviews with my main participants' mothers and teachers (see example of mother interview audit in Appendix 12 and full teacher interview audit in Appendix 13). I decided to transcribe the things the adult participants had said which seemed relevant to each child participant based on my knowledge of them from our interview/play sessions, what their mothers had said, and my observations of them in school. I decided to audit and transcribe elements of my interviews with the adults first, as I felt this re-contextualisation process would support Stage One of my analysis by reminding me of all the different perspectives relating to each child's story. I felt I needed to be immersed in all the nuances of experience before tackling participants' session data.

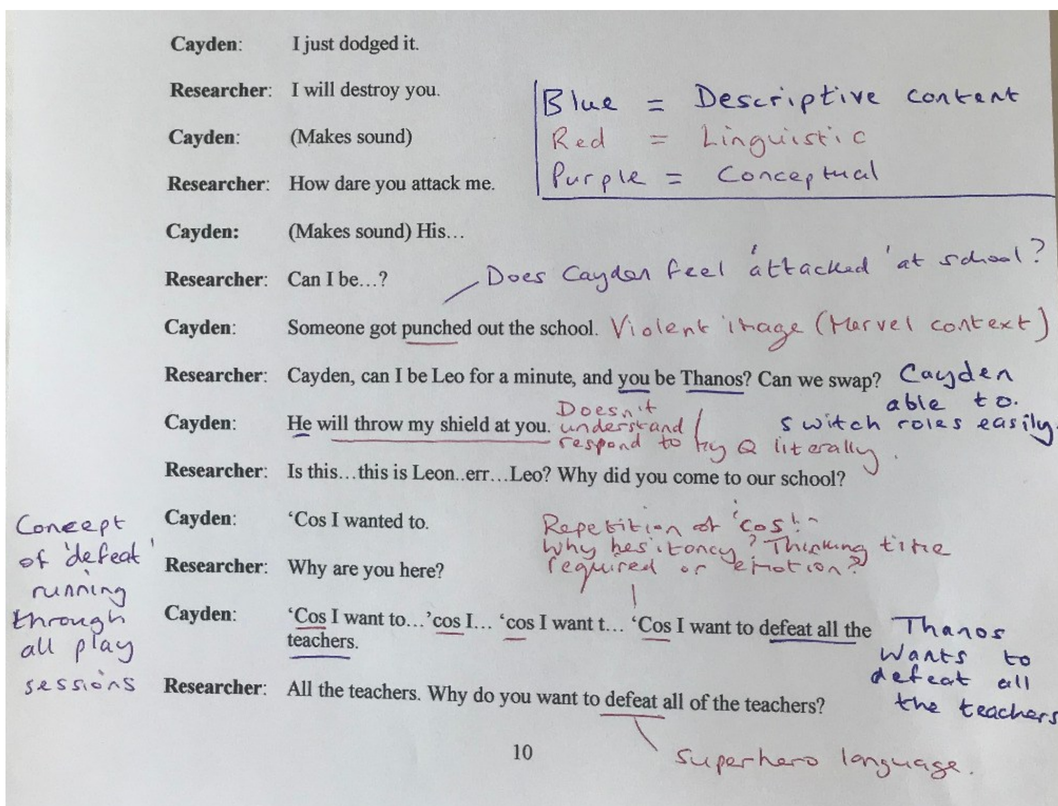
4.11.6.3 Step three: Transcribing main participants' sessions

I then focused on auditing and transcribing each participant's interviews/play sessions one at a time. Given I had 17 interview recordings across my main participants (as well as five school staff interviews), in addition to eight months' worth of observation data, I decided to transcribe and micro-analyse one pivotal interview for each main participant which I felt encompassed as many thematic strands observed across all their interview recordings as possible. To decide this, I audited the interview recordings for each participant (see Marie's interview audit in Appendix 14, as an example) and counted how many times the same themes came up across each interview. The interview that featured the most themes in common was chosen as the pivotal interview. Staying true to the idiographic approach, I

focused on the analysis of one interview transcript at a time, beginning with the last interview I had transcribed, as that was still fresh in my mind.

4.11.6.3 Step four: Initial notes

Following a prolonged period of checking and re-checking the accuracy of the transcript against the audio recording, I spent further time re-listening to the audio recording and re-reading the transcript, until I felt fully present in the world of my child participant. I then set out to encode the transcript using Smith et al.'s. (2009) recommended categorisation process (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual content). Below is an extract from Cayden's transcript, as an example. He and I were playing a game and in role, as superheroes.



Cayden: I just dodged it.

Researcher: I will destroy you.

Cayden: (Makes sound)

Researcher: How dare you attack me.

Cayden: (Makes sound) His…

Researcher: Can I be…?

Cayden: Someone got punched out the school.

Researcher: Cayden, can I be Leo for a minute, and you be Thanos? Can we swap?

Cayden: He will throw my shield at you.

Researcher: Is this…this is Leon..err…Leo? Why did you come to our school?

Cayden: 'Cos I wanted to.

Researcher: Why are you here?

Cayden: 'Cos I want to…'cos I… 'cos I want t… 'Cos I want to defeat all the teachers.

Researcher: All the teachers. Why do you want to defeat all of the teachers?

10

Handwritten annotations:

Blue = Descriptive content
Red = Linguistic
Purple = Conceptual

Does Cayden feel 'attacked' at school?

Violent image (Marvel context)

Cayden able to switch roles easily?

Doesn't understand / respond to my Q literally.

Repetition of 'cos' – Why hesitancy? Thinking time required or emotion?

Concept of 'defeat' running through all play sessions

Thanos wants to defeat all the teachers

Superhero language.

Picture 1: Initial notes on Cayden's transcript

I found identifying descriptive and linguistic content to be straightforward, but it seemed harder to identify conceptual content. This third stage required a more emic stance, on my part, whereas the descriptive and linguistic stages seemed to require a more etic stance. On reflection, I think I, as an IPA novice, was not exactly sure how far to use my own positionality and experience to locate my participants' experience, at this early stage.

Other epistemological issues began to emerge as I progressed through the categorisation process. I was being positioned, as the researcher, in a third person perspective which felt discordant with the dual emic-etic position I had taken when collecting my data. I did not feel 'in' the analysis process; conversely, I felt thrust outwards by the mechanistic nature of the task. The analysis approach required me to focus on one specific aspect of the data at a time from a detached point of view. In Gestalten terms, it felt as though I was dealing with the parts of the phenomenon, but not how the parts related to the whole (child). For example, it seemed the linguistic category could only be read as part of a wider situational context. Why a participant might have uttered a particular phrase at a particular moment during a play session may have been evident to me based on what I had observed two months previously. By looking at what participants said (descriptive), how they said it (linguistic), and what it meant (conceptual), each part of the phenomenon became isolated, positioning them more as 'noumenon', in the Husserlian sense. Before I formally began to analyse my data, I felt I had a degree of tacit understanding of my participants' experiences, given I had been immersed in the research context for so long. For ethnographic researchers using IPA, as an analysis tool, this is an important issue, as the

process of bracketing off and focusing on a phenomenon as a noumenon, is rather at odds with the immersive nature of ethnography.

4.11.6.4 Step five: Identifying Significant Events

Therefore, I felt I needed to develop a more narrative approach to analysing my participants' transcripts - a means to conceptualise the whole child in context. Thus, I decided to tell the backstory of each transcript (see example in Appendix 15), as a preface to interpreting it. Next, instead of laboriously trawling through the whole transcript line by line searching for conceptual content, I decided to read each transcript to see if there was a central theme based on my contextual knowledge and understanding of the participant. However, after some trial and error, this strategy felt too nebulous, and I did not feel I could thematically qualify my participants' experience by using my contextual knowledge alone. It may have engendered account bias.

IPA theory encourages researchers to consider innovative ways of adapting the methodology to suit their needs (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2009). It sits within an interpretivist paradigm which recognises the central role of the researcher in making sense of the participant's experience (Smith, 2004). In the spirit of these two tenets, I decided to adapt some of the recommended IPA practices to suit my epistemological position and research aims. Consequently, I explored using the Critical Incident Technique (CIT; Flanagan, 1954), as a method to help identify 'flashpoints' within each transcript. I had used CIT in my master's research and found it helpful in pinpointing significant events that

were thematically linked. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2009), suggest identifying ‘critical events’ as a means of organising emergent themes in terms of the ‘temporal moment where they are located’ (p.98).

Flanagan (1954) originally defined a critical incident as ‘any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act’ (p.327). These kinds of happenings have been defined by other scholars as ‘events’ (Sahlins, 1985; Sewell, 2005), ‘critical events’ (Das and Singh, 1995) or ‘critical moments’ (Bourdieu, 1988). The CIT helps researchers understand the key things people should do when engaged in certain activities to have the best chance of achieving their goals. Although Flanagan (1954) originally used CIT to determine the critical requirements of pilot behaviour within aviation contexts, it was quickly picked up across a range of disciplines (Butterfield et al., 2005). Schluter et al. (2008) suggest that, in health research, the term ‘significant event’ may provide a more appropriate emphasis than ‘critical incident’.

I concurred with this view, and adopted the same terminology, as the emphasis needed to be on what my participants felt were significant experiences to them. For me, these flashpoints became an important tool to illustrate moments in which participants were able to reflect on and share their experience of school, and this helped focus me phenomenologically on my research questions. The process of identifying Significant Events in the transcripts also helped cut out some of the white noise and guide my identification of thematic strands. They varied for each participant and were often dictated

by my contextual knowledge of that participant. However, sometimes the apparent white noise in the transcripts was important data, depending on the context of the child. For example, the cat noises Marie made, as part of our role play in one session, felt an important part of how we connected intersubjectively, although difficult to assign a conceptual meaning to. I interpreted her behaviour as a means either for her to feel more comfortable within our interaction, or as an invitation to me to connect. However, I could only infer these things based on my contextual knowledge.

Below is an extract taken from the table in which I recorded the Significant Events within Robert's pivotal interview transcript. I use this here to illustrate the extrapolation process. In the example below, I identified 20 Significant Events spanning his transcript (full transcription in Appendix 22). Robert imagined there was an angel and demon on either side of his shoulders in school. The demon would make him do 'naughty' things in the classroom.

Table 7: Extract from Robert's Significant Events table

Robert		
Significant event	**Descriptor**	**Supporting quotes from transcript**
SE 1	Scrunch up paper to be better [behaved].	(p.2) *'I was getting annoyed…I tried to hold it in but then had to scrunch up a piece of paper so I…could be better'.*
SE 2	I rage out.	(p.3) *'You rage out, have a tantrum, do nothing and work, and throw something across the room…'*
SE 3	Two separate audiences in my head.	(p.3*) '…they're quite real; they're two separate audiences in your head'.*
SE 4	Lion has loudest voice, but I listen to white horse more.	(p.4) *'This has a louder voice [lion], but listen to this one [horse] most of the time…'*
SE 5	Lion is loudest when I am annoyed.	(p.4) *'When you get annoyed…He's like…argh…I want to throw something…'*

SE 6	White horse stands up for me.	(p.5) [The horse says] *'Don't throw something across the room'.*
SE 7	I talk to myself.	(p.6) *'Sometimes I actually speak in real life. Not to my imaginary self. I say, "I really want to hit someone and show my anger, but I don't want to"'.*
SE 8	Making paper aeroplanes helps.	(p.6) *'Or sometimes I make something with it – a paper aeroplane' [referring to scrunched up paper]* *'…helps me not destroy something – like a pencil – snap it in half.*
SE 9	Descriptions of angel and devil.	(p.7-10) My devil is: dark red, fire, lion, lightening, two arms and hand in air and mouth wide open, bad, ferocious, terrifying, called Loud Roar My angel is: wavy water, wildlife, pony, waterfall, prayer hands, harmonic, polite, good, called Unicorn.
SE 10	My body would be pure harmony [if Robert and angel combined forces against devil].	(p.11*) 'His body would just be pure harmony…His emotions too. It would all be balanced.'*

4.11.6.5 Step six: IPA categorisation of Significant Events

After identifying the Significant Events within each transcript, my priority was to try to scrutinise these events further by scaling them back to the things themselves (Heidegger, 1927/2011). Therefore, I focused on the descriptive, linguistic and conceptual features (from the IPA categorisation process) of each significant event. This process did not detect much more information in relation to the descriptive or conceptual categories, as the significant event identification process had covered this. However, there was a gap in my language analysis, and the IPA approach helped me identify nuances. Below is an example of language analysis for Robert's transcript.

Table 8: Extract from Robert's language analysis table

Context	Language use	Page in transcript	Conceptual interpretation
How Robert felt when teacher taking assembly spoke about stress.	*'Stressed, frustrated and…really trying not to be angry.'*	3	Sense of suppression in verb form 'really trying not to'.
Robert talking about what happened when devil voice in his head won the battle.	*'Then you rage out, have a tantrum, do nothing, and work, and throw something across the room…'*	3	List-like structure creates a bouncing effect from one action to another, as if set on trajectory for an inevitable destination.
What demon says to Robert.	*'I want you to be miserable, unhappy and scary and ferocious and angry and hitting people'.*	5	Use of 'and' four times without pauses seems to suggest an over-whelming sense of pressure. Can hardly catch his breath.
Researcher asks Robert what would happen if Robert and angel combined forces against devil.	*'His body would just be pure harmony' [referring to himself].*	11	Use of noun 'harmony' as adjective suggests balance and peace. Use of adverb 'just' and adjective 'pure' to help define 'harmony' – creates intense feeling and sense of release.
Researcher asks what Loud Roar (devil) was saying to Robert when he was not allowed on year 4 expedition.	*'Hit people. And I did that and then I strapped myself to the chair because I didn't want to hurt anyone. And I ripped myself out of it and I threw it at the teacher'.*	12	Run of strong verbs 'strapped', 'ripped' and 'threw'. Plosive sounds in first two verbs suggest possible uncontrollable, violent feeling in Robert.

Next, I distilled my language analysis and the Significant Events into emergent themes. I highlighted these sections of the main participants' interview transcripts in different colours for each theme and noted the theme name in the left-hand column. I then re-looked at these themes within the context of the whole transcript, as well as the narrative backstory to the transcript I had created for the participant. In keeping with my conceptual framework and Foucault's revolving door rationality, it was important to intersect all angles of the phenomenon to be able to understand it, as a whole. All thoughts were recorded down the right-hand column of the transcript.

4.11.6.6 Step seven: Developing emergent and superordinate themes

Once I had analysed each pupil participant's transcript, I sought to triangulate the emergent themes with all other data sets (all interview audits, observation/field notes, and my reflective diary). I used the emergent themes from participants' transcripts, as a starting point for triangulation, and aimed to locate further evidence (or not) of these initial themes. Inevitably, many more themes emerged across all data sets which I tabularised for each participant. Below is an extract from Cayden's emergent themes table.

Table 9: Extract from Cayden's emergent themes table

Data source	Evidence	Emergent theme
Shadow observation notes, 30.1.19	Cayden says he wants to go home to Denise. '*I want to go home*' (says this several times throughout lesson).	Needs to escape school
Observation notes, 12.6.19	Cayden in toilets washing his hands for a protracted length of time during P-BL lesson.	
Significant Event 3	Denise asks Cayden if he was '*mucking about*' in toilets and he says '*Yes*'.	
Play session, 12.6.19, p.13	I ask Cayden '*How did Cayden feel when he was told off by Denise about going to the toilet and messing about?*' Cayden: (Slight pause) *Sad*. Me: *Sad? Ahh. Why did Cayden feel sad?* Cayden: *Hey, shall we go to…do you know River Dart is?* Me: *The River Dart? I do know where the River Dart is.* Cayden: *Let's go to the River Dart.* Cayden wants to '*escape*' from his school and retreat to '*Woodlands*' [theme park].	
Play session 19.6.19	'*Chucked*' out of school and into spaceship because Thanos there.	
Play session 26.6.19	I ask Cayden why he has gone into spaceship half of mat. He says, 'H*e needed to leave the school'*.	
Play session 17.7.19	Big resistance to going into school half of board again. Cayden says it is '*cold in P-BL studio*', but '*warm in the spaceship'*. He pretends to jump out of the school and into Starlord's spaceship.	
Post-session notes, 17.7.19	Cayden: *'Elaine, just go back to Starlord's* spaceship' [leave school half]. *We go back to Legoland at Cayden's request.*	

	I ask if I can put Cayden back into school half of board and he half shouts 'No!' Lots of resistance from Cayden about being in school on Lego mat…wants to go to Legoland.	

Using the findings within each participant's' emergent themes table, and the triangulation with other data, I then distilled all this into superordinate themes.

4.11.6.7 Step eight: Moving onto the next case

I then repeated steps three to seven individually with all my other main participants' data. Following IPA's idiographic approach, I tried to 'bracket off' my thoughts from the analysis of the previous transcripts (Smith et al., 2009).

4.11.6.8 Step nine: Looking at patterns across cases

Once I analysed each (main) participant's data at an individual level, patterns and connections were looked for across my participants. I followed the recommendation of Smith et al. (2009) of laying out the emergent and superordinate themes of the participants and looking across to explore any correlative themes as well as instances of higher-order superordinate themes.

Inevitably, this process involved the reconfiguring and relabelling of themes, as I fine-tuned my interpretations conceptually. To aid this process, I looked back at the original sources of data to re-immerse myself in the detail of my observations and interview experiences. This helped to authenticate my assertions and keep me focused on IPA's commitment to

the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009; 2022). I not only looked at the individual words/parts of the section of the data set but also considered my interpretations in the light of the whole research experience. This analysis was then refined further into group superordinate themes (see section 5.6.3) in relation to participants' school experiences. Regarding which transactional supports worked best across participants, I quantified this data using a pie chart, and tables which listed all transactional supports the group had in common (see section 5.6).

Table 10 below is an abridged example of how I collated evidence for the superordinate themes across participants in relation to their school experiences.

Table 10: Extract from master table of group themes

Master table of group themes		
Superordinate theme	**Evidence**	**Source**
Clearer learning structures needed: *Not clear of classroom task*	**Cayden**: i) I ask Cayden why he is cutting out a 'D' shape. '*Because Denise* [teacher] *told me to*'. ii) Draws superheroes around his bird in Animal Rights project … '*to defend it'*. iii) Inappropriately designs a Captain America costume for Shakespeare play. iv) Teacher asks Cayden to go to sink to get paper towel to clear white board. Cayden arrives at sink but then seems not to know what to do. v) Teacher (Scott) '*Even if you got him to write a question, he would not understand what it was for*'. vi) Nothing of substance to mark in his book. Not explained anything about why he has chosen to make what he has. Just full of doodling. **Robert**: i) Not sure what to do in English. Looks at a girl's work and copies in his book. ii) '*Robert finds planning stage of projects difficult*.' **Marie**: i) Sits for a long time drawing squiggly lines on mini whiteboard in P-BL lesson and looks worried. ii) In English, struggles to start writing her story.	 Field notes, 30.1.19 OBS notes, 26.3.19 OBS notes, 20.5.19 OBS notes, 12.6.19 Scott's interview Denise's interview Shadow OBS notes, 1.2.19 Denise's interview Shadow OBS notes, 4.2.19

	iii) Marie states to Hal (teacher) she sometimes feels confused in P-BL.	
	Debbie:	
	i) '*I like this school, but sometimes I feel stressed…When something is hard, and I don't understand…Sometimes I just get really sad*.'	Shadow OBS, 8.2.19
	Cayden:	
Wandering around classroom	i) Regularly wanders between tables.	OBS notes, 18/1/19
	ii) '*Even with current level of provision* [conducted grouping in P-BL], *just seems lost*'.	Scott's interview
	Robert:	
	i) '*Robert wanders around studio, so he doesn't get caught*' [not doing writing component of work].	Denise's interview
	ii) Wandering around studio, looking at peers' iPads.	OBS notes, 27.3.19
	iii) Wanders over to display board and takes his work down to look at it. Wanders over to timetable on wall and removes from wall.	Shadow OBS notes, 1.2.19

4.12.7 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in IPA research involves researchers examining how their own belief systems, judgments and practices may have incidentally affected the research. It is 'the turning back of the experience of the individual upon her or himself' (Mead, 1934, p.134). Reflexivity requires a 'continuing mode of self-analysis' (Callaway, 1992, p.33) and general acceptance of the fact that researchers are dynamic parts of the qualitative process and actively influence the outcome of the project (Berger, 2015). It is important researchers acknowledge that their actions and decisions will inevitably impact the meaning and context of the experience under investigation (Horsburgh, 2003).

Bearing this in mind, and in addition to the considerations cited in section 4.4.3 when discussing my positionality, I asked if my two university supervisors could act as 'critical friends' and conduct 'mini audits' (Smith et al., 2009, p. 184) of my annotated transcripts

and thematic abstraction processes. This checking of the validity of my interpretations reminded me to critique my stance at every stage, as a reflexive researcher, a stance critical to qualitative research (Finlay, 2008). I also consulted Patton's (2022) reflexive questions such as What do I know? How do I know what I know? What shapes and has shaped my perspective? I applied these questions to the triple hermeneutic, thus I also asked them in relation to the audience of this thesis, as well as my participants. I recorded these epistemological self-discussions in a reflective diary, as mentioned in section 4.4.3. I then had the opportunity to share and reflect on my thinking, as part of regular meetings with my supervisors within a contained and safe space.

In the next chapter, I explore the main findings from this study, as well as provide mini reflections for each participant.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on what I did with each pupil participant and what I discovered about their school experience through using individualised transactional support methods. I follow the same structure in how I present each participant's findings. Firstly, I provide the background context to each participant, including relevant information such as cognition and learning needs. Secondly, I present diagrammatical overviews of my sessions with each participant, including illustrative pictures. Thirdly, I describe the key transactional supports used with each participant, and what they helped reveal in terms of their lived experiences. To avoid repetition in describing the same transactional supports used across participants, I provide examples from individual cases to highlight the range of methods I used. This leads to tabularised information presenting the Significant Events identified within each pivotal interview transcript, as well as the resulting emergent and superordinate themes for individual participants using all data sets. Lastly, I reflect on what worked and did not work for each participant and why that might have been.

This is followed by a section highlighting convergences and divergences across participants. I analyse which transactional supports were most commonly used and which had to be developed, as bespoke methods for individual participants. This is followed by an analysis of the superordinate group themes in relation to my main participants' school experiences.

This leads onto a general discussion in Chapter Six of how my findings across all cases relate to the extant literature in this area of the research field.

Whilst there were common features for the participants in this study, this was not a homogenous group. Thus, some findings are more specific to individuals, reflecting both the idiographic and universal aspects of pupil experience across the group. Quotes from all participants are used throughout to illustrate the themes.

There was some variation in the number and length of individual sessions across my participants. This happened either because an individual participant required more session time for me to find a way to connect with him/her (Cayden, for example), or sessions were curtailed, due to a participant not feeling able to connect with me in the moment for various reasons.

For contextualisation purposes, there were three teachers, one or two LSAs, and approximately 120 pupils in the P-BL studio at any one time. There were three teaching spaces with carpeted areas for the children to sit on when with their assigned teacher. The children were assigned to a group according to how independent their learning approaches were: coached (independent pupils), choreographed (semi-independent pupils) and conducted (nurture group). The pupils were not assigned to groups by ability. Theoretically, you could have pupils with good academic skills in a conducted group, due to their lack of independence. The Head of P-BL (Scott) stated they assigned children to groups based on

the teachers' observations of how the pupils worked in class and recorded their thinking in their books.

Other lessons such as English and maths were situated in open-plan, studio spaces – no walls separated these teaching spaces. Class sizes were slightly smaller than average school class sizes.

5.2 Participant: Cayden

5.2.1 Data overview

The sets of data I gathered on Cayden comprised eight months of observation and field notes of him in class, around school and in the playground; voice-recorded interviews with four of his teachers (Denise, Mike, Hal and Scott; interviews audit in Appendix 13); a non-voice-recorded interview with his mother (extract from interview notes in Appendix 16); a non-voice-recorded interview with his sister (extract from interview notes in Appendix 17); and five, voice-recorded Lego play sessions between him and me (details of all one-to-one sessions in section 5.2.3, and full transcription of Session Two in Appendix 18). I interviewed Cayden's sister, as she was a pupil at the same school as Cayden and was described by their mother as being close to him.

5.2.2 Cayden's biography

Cayden started at the research school at the age of five. When my research began, he was

in year three (within Phase Two) and aged seven. He was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder towards the end of the research period, because of a parental referral. His older sister attended the same school.

According to his mother, Cayden's first school referred him to the Child Development Team because of him obsessing with propellers on toy aeroplanes, running up and down repetitively, not giving strangers much eye contact, being difficult to engage, and having slow language development. Even though Cayden's speech had improved with the speech and language therapy (SLT) intervention earlier in his life, when I worked with him, he would speak very quietly and often indecipherably (mother's statements, Appendix 16).

I experienced Cayden as an enigma at the beginning of my research. It took me longer to unpick what might be happening for him in school and how best to communicate with him compared to my other pupil participants. He sometimes answered questions up to an hour after I asked him them, due to a language processing delay. He often appeared to be in a world of his own. I observed him singing to himself the theme song from 'The Lego Movie' in a P-BL lesson, and the theme song from 'Bob the Builder' children's TV programme on his way to lunch (section five, Appendix 19). He would repeatedly stare out of the big windows in the P-BL studio and often muttered to himself '*I want to go home*'. I also observed him remark to teacher, Denise, that he wanted to go home (section six, Appendix 19).

Cayden's special interests were Minecraft, rollercoasters, Marvel superheroes, Lego and 'Guardians of the Galaxy' (GOG). GOG is a movie series involving characters with superpowers in which the protagonist Starlord, the 'goodie', battles Thanos, the 'baddie'.

Cognition and learning

Cayden did not respond to many questions posed by others unless there was a concrete focus. For example, he would not respond to a question such as 'Cayden, do you like being in this school?', but could respond to something along the lines 'Cayden, what colour pencil are you using?' However, he would only respond to this question if he was intrinsically interested in colouring in at that point in time. More positively, Cayden could follow simple verbal instructions in the classroom, if part of established routines, such as putting his hand up when a teacher instructed the class to 'Stop' (section 19, Appendix 19). He also could follow his peers' cues when it was time for the class to put their reading books away and stand in line ready for the next lesson (section 19, Appendix 19).

Cayden enjoyed role play conversations between fictional characters using small figures or different coloured Lego bricks, often adopting an American accent for the voices and acting appropriately in role (see Appendix 18). However, Denise remarked she could have conversations with Cayden, but it was always on his terms (see Appendix 13).

Cayden's teacher, Hal, commented in his interview '*I think he's…he [Cayden] seems very happy in school, but I don't think he's…in terms of his learning, he's not getting much from*

school generally' (see Appendix 13). In the classroom, tracking activities, following teachers' instructions, and completing tasks were very challenging for Cayden. He was not able to complete tasks without one-to-one adult support (see Appendix 13). Use of time-sampling between 9.32am and 10.37am on 18.1.19 revealed he could only spend two to three minutes engaged in work at a time. Denise remarked in her interview:

> *'When he comes to carpet, he never hardly makes much eye contact…You really have to be like Cayden, Cayden, Cayden…I need to get him sorted first…To get him to do any writing, he hasn't got any focus to do it….He was doing the printing of the square shapes and he was like dab, dab, dab, not looking. He really needs that nurture 1:1 and quiet room to do it, but we have not got that facility or the staff to do it.'* (Appendix 13)

Cayden had not been assigned a one-to-one LSA by the school. Three out of the four teachers interviewed felt Cayden needed one-to-one support from a designated LSA in the classroom to help him complete tasks and track activities. All four teachers interviewed about Cayden felt he was not coping in the type of setting he was in and needed a more specialist placement such as in a school designed for autistic pupils. They also felt they did not know how to best support him or access his views about school (teachers' comments, Appendix 13).

5.2.3 Overview of sessions

By observing Cayden in class and talking with his mother, sister, school staff, and him during lessons, I decided to try to find an angle of connection with him through Lego play and GOG, as these were some of his main areas of interest and accessible to us in his school. I read up on GOG and watched the first film of the series, so I was familiar with the story

and characters. The use of GOG constituted my first transactional support for Cayden, as without it, I would not have had a medium through which to explore his thoughts and feelings about school.

I had recorded a list of questions that had arisen, as a result of observing Cayden's behaviour in school, and hoped to address them across my sessions with him. These questions focused on issues such as why Cayden used to stare out of windows for long periods of time muttering '*I want to go home'*, why he rested his head on some girl's shoulders in lessons, and how he felt in school generally, as he appeared not to be engaged most of the time.

Diagram A below provides an overview of my five sessions with Cayden.

SESSION ONE (27.3.19, 47.12 min):

Cayden and I flick through a Marvel magazine, and he identifies some favourite characters of his. He builds Starlord's spaceship with Lego. We role play spaceship battles with verbal sound effects and dialogue. I play Thanos and Cayden plays Starlord's spaceship.

In role as himself and represented by a Lego brick, he rests his head on Quoran's shoulder (female character in GOG).

SESSION TWO (PIVOTAL) (12.6.19, 22.01 min):

Cayden re-builds Starlord's spaceship with Lego. I ask if we can split the building mat into two halves: one half for school and the other for Starlord's spaceship. He agrees.

We play GOG game again. Thanos attacks the school. In role as Thanos, Cayden says, '*I want to defeat all the teachers…because they're mean*'. There is strong resistance from Cayden about entering the school half of the board – he wants to remain in GOG half.

He plays the role of Denise (teacher). She tells Cayden (me in role as him) off for trying to '*escape*' school and this makes him feel '*sad*'.

SESSION THREE (19.6.19, 20.03 min):

Cayden re-builds and splits Lego board in same way as previous session without prompting. During the play, Cayden jumps out of the school window and into Starlord's spaceship to go to 'Legoland'. Thanos attacks school and fights one of Cayden's foes, Leo. Cayden to Thanos: *'Don't kill them* [teachers]'. Cayden resists going into school half of board again. He says it is '*cold*' in P-BL studio, but '*warm*' in the spaceship. Thanos wants to kill teachers because they are mean to Cayden. Leo is killed. Cayden and I pretend to go to Legoland (adventure park in UK).

SESSION FOUR (26.6.19, 11.41 min):

Cayden builds spaceship again and demarcates school and GOG ship halves. He places himself in a maths lesson. Thanos comes to school and attacks child, Bobby. Cayden plays part of Leo. Teachers not allowed to help fend off Thanos.

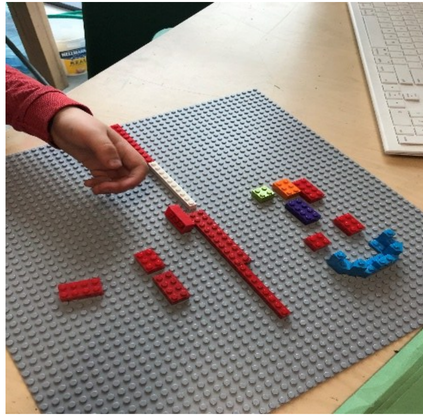
We go to Legoland again and I pretend to buy some GoG figures. Cayden has superpowers when in Starlord's spaceship.

SESSION FIVE (4.7.19, 22.51 min):

We talk about which superpowers Cayden would have if a superhero: '*web*', '*shooting*', and '*invisibility*'.

Cayden feels '*good*' in Starlord's spaceship. School feels '*mean*' because Thanos is there. However, it is still mean if Thanos is taken away. Thanos is defeated. Cayden takes us to imaginary Legoland (theme park). I ask if I can put Cayden back into school half of board and he shouts '*No*!'

Diagram A: Overview of Cayden's sessions



Picture 2: Cayden's Lego board. Starlord's spaceship on right (blue bricks = control panel) and school on left of central line (red bricks)

5.2.4 Key transactional supports

I highlight the key transactional supports, which seemed to engage Cayden and elicit his thoughts and feelings the most, in the next section.

5.2.4.1 Writing questions down on paper

One of the central problems I needed to overcome when working with Cayden was the fact that he did not respond to 'why' questions and displayed auditory processing delay. Given what I had learned about elicitation methods from my literature review, I considered using Talking Mats, the Incredible 5-point scale, Comic Strip Conversations, 'thoughts aloud' (drama device involving a character speaking their thoughts out loud), and emotion cards, as methods to enable Cayden to respond to more complex question forms. However, I subsequently noticed in lessons and had been told by his teachers that he was a quite good reader. Therefore, instead of using symbols and emotion cards in our first session, I decided to experiment with a much simpler method involving writing any questions down that had

cropped up in the play for Cayden to read and then articulate verbal responses to. In later sessions, I pre-prepared questions I felt were relevant to my line of inquiry at the time.

In my first session with Cayden, I wrote down questions such as 'Why does Cayden like to draw superheroes?', 'If you could be a superhero, which one would you be?', 'Why did you draw a bird for the exhibition? (the bird picture was seemingly irrelevant to the work he was doing in class and the P-BL project), and 'When Cayden looks out of windows, what does he see?' He replied '*Because it's so awesome*' to the first and third questions above (see Appendix 20a). 'Everything is awesome' is a catchphrase from the film 'The Lego Movie'. He immediately followed this first statement by stating '*In the Lego…at the end of The Lego Movie, Duplo come*'. I had not mentioned The Lego Movie at all, thus wondered if Cayden was just echoing the catchphrase from it, or whether he thought the things I asked him about were, in fact, 'awesome'.

5.2.4.2 Sandwich Method

I tried to use different versions of the Sandwich Method (used in counselling), as a means to soften my questions and protect Cayden when he was in a vulnerable position. The Sandwich Method involves surrounding a difficult statement with two positive/empathetic statements. For example, in Cayden's second session, I asked him how he felt when Denise told him off for being in the toilets. I flew a Lego piece representing me over from the school half of the Lego board and placed it in Starlord's spaceship.

> **Me***: So, I wanted to come and speak to Cayden. How did Cayden feel when he was told off by Denise for going to the toilet and messing about?*

Cayden*: Sad.*
Me*: Sad? Ahhhh. Why did Cayden feel sad?*

I inverted the Sandwich Method by placing an empathetic statement in the middle of my three lines. The intonation of my 'Ahhhh' lowered, as the sound progressed, and I would argue evoked the sense that I felt sympathy for Cayden. This is one of the methods I used to build rapport with all my participants.

5.2.4.2 Splitting Lego board into two halves

In preparing for my second session with Cayden, I had the idea of splitting the Lego building board into two halves: one half for Starlord's spaceship and one for his school. I thought this might open up the possibility for Cayden to be 'in' his school, as part of the play, and we could explore how he felt there. However, Cayden vehemently refused to step out of Starlord's spaceship and into the school half of the board. This was a problem, as I wanted to ask him about a recent incident involving one of his teachers, Denise, where she admonished him for spending too long in the toilets during a P-BL lesson. I wanted to ascertain how that had made him feel.

5.2.4.3 Role-reversal: Cayden becomes teacher and Thanos

To get around the problem of Cayden refusing to come into the school half of the board, I flew a Lego piece symbolising Denise over to Starlord's spaceship and asked if he would role-reverse with her to which he agreed. I asked him if he (in role as Denise) was mean to Cayden, and he answered '*Sometimes*'. I then asked why she was mean to him and Cayden

answered '*Escape*'. When I inquired about what he meant, he clarified that Denise told him off because he wanted to escape from the school. I asked him how he felt when Denise told him off for 'mucking about' in the toilet and he replied '*Sad*'. I then inquired as to why he felt sad, and he suddenly changed the topic of conversation and asked, '*Do you know where River Dart* [local country park] *is*?' (see Appendix 18). I wondered if this was a place he would rather be at that point in time and was perhaps avoiding my question, given I was probing his feelings.

I proceeded to ask Cayden if he could swap roles and become Thanos, and he agreed. As myself, I asked him why he had come to the school. He replied, in role, that he '*want*[ed] *to defeat all the teachers*… '*cos they're mean*'. He stated he was in Starlord's spaceship ''*cos he wanted to escape*' the school. Cayden stated he needed to escape the school to go into space and then go to Woodlands (a local theme park). I attempted to take the Lego brick representing Cayden out of the spaceship and put it onto the school half of the board, but he strongly resisted and appeared to panic (pp.410-411 in Appendix 18).

5.2.4.4 Inter-synchrony

To be able to establish synchrony with Cayden in sessions, I attempted to use various methods such as vitality-matching (adult matches child's energy level), vocal modulation (pitch, volume, tempo, and sound elongation), and selective mirroring, as well as exaggerating Cayden's behaviour through my own body language and use of sound/language. The intention was to engender a light-hearted playfulness, as well as

validate Cayden's own behaviour. I have taken the following extract from my first session with Cayden, as an example, as I feel there were moments of strong synchrony between us in this session. I have annotated the transcript, highlighting how and when I implemented vocal techniques and altered my body language. These devices were not planned for in advance – they evolved, as the session progressed. I made notes immediately after each session about how I adapted my body language during key moments.

Illustration 1: Extract from Session One transcription

(From 32.27 minutes in recording)

Key:
Black font = transcription
Red font = vocal techniques used by researcher
Blue font = body language used by researcher

(Whole sentence) High pitch, quickened tempo and less defined speech (almost slurring), word-elongation in places, suppressing laughter, playful and teasing expression. Smiling, leaning forwards.

Slow down from here

Me: *Let's put Cayden in the spaceship. Where would you sit?*

Cayden: *I would sit on the controls.*

Me: (Slight snigger) *Would you sit on the controls? That's funny. But they wouldn't be able to see the monitor.*

Emphasis on 'monitor'

Cayden: *Why not?*

Me: *'Cos you'd be sitting on it.* High pitch quickened and less defined speech, word-elongation in places, suppressing laughter, playful and teasing expression. Stiffened facial muscles, raised eyebrows, widened eyes.

Cayden: (Sniggers)

Me: *I think that's funny though.*

Cayden: (Laughs) *Would it crash?*

Elongated, lowering intonation, strained tone, very high-pitched, increased volume. My body language: widened eyes, raised eyebrows, smiling and making exaggerated 'o' shape with mouth.

Slight pause before 'crash', roll 'r' in 'crash', voice breaks, very high-pitched, rising intonation, playful expression, emphasis on 'crash', increased volume.

Me: *I think it would crash*. (Pause) *Ah, they'd go 'Oh no* (Cayden sniggers), *we can just see a boy* (emphasis on 'boy') *…we can't see out!'* (makes sound of explosion)

(Cayden sniggers, researcher laughs and Cayden sniggers again)

Commentary

On listening to the above transcription and re-reading my post-session notes, I noticed I had intuitively used vitality-matching in response to Cayden asking if Starlord's spaceship would '*crash*'. There was nuance in how I deliberately rolled the 'r' when repeating the word 'crash', breaking up my vocal cords, and delivering it in a very high-pitched, louder and playful way. Cayden appeared to very much connect with this, enabling us to build rapport and develop the storyline. I commented '*I think that's funny though*' because Cayden had sniggered and smiled which I interpreted as him finding the situation of him sitting on the spaceship's controls funny. This was a deliberate invite to him to comment further, which he did, and an intention on my part to engage him through humour.

As part of establishing synchrony with Cayden, the social timing of my interactions with him was vitally important, too. I noticed I paused after I remarked '*I think it* [spaceship] *would crash'*. I remember deliberately and intuitively leaving a gap for Cayden to fill, but he did not. I, therefore, filled the space with further comedic commentary – '*Ah, they'd go*

"Oh no [Cayden sniggers], *we can just see a boy*"' – to which he seemed to respond positively by sniggering again.

Social timing

Social timing in the context of my research also involved intentionally timing my interactions with my participants to create a particular effect or transactionally support them. Below is the same excerpt from Cayden's transcription, as above. There were moments during this interaction where I deliberately timed my questions/comments to aid his understanding and maintain the flow of the dialogue. I have highlighted two sentences in red and analyse their significance below.

Me: *Let's put Cayden in the spaceship. Where would you sit?*
Cayden: *I would sit on the controls.*
Me: (Slight snigger) *Would you sit on the controls? That's funny. But they wouldn't be able to see the monitor.*
Cayden: *Why not?*
Me: *'Cos you'd be sitting on it.*
Cayden: (Sniggers)
Me: *I think that's funny though.*
Cayden: (Laughs) *Would it crash*?
Me: *I think it would crash* (Pause) *Ah, they'd go 'Oh nooo* (Cayden sniggers), *we can just see a boy…we can't see out!*' (Makes sound of explosion).
(Cayden sniggers, researcher laughs, and Cayden sniggers again)

The first line I have highlighted in red '*I think that's funny though'* exemplifies two strategies I used to engage Cayden. When Cayden suggests he should sit on the controls in the spaceship and I remark that is funny, I was concerned he might think I was laughing at him for making such a silly suggestion for where he should sit in the spaceship. Thus, I immediately aimed to prevent this by stating '*I think that's funny though*'. Likewise, when

we discuss in the ensuing lines the spaceship would probably crash, I pre-empted Cayden might have been concerned had the ship crashed or may have thought I considered it a bad outcome, as he paused after I stated, '*I think it would crash*'. Therefore, I interjected with further comedic commentary '*Ah, they go "Oh nooo…*'. This made Cayden laugh and the flow of the dialogue resumed.

5.2.5 All transactional supports used with Cayden

In Box 4 below, I present a list of all the transactional supports I used with Cayden to enable him to partake in our sessions together and elicit his inside views.

Box 4: Transactional supports used with Cayden
1. Areas of specific interest and resources: Marvel colouring book/magazine, context of Guardians of the Galaxy imaginary play. Lego mat and Lego bricks. 2. Writing questions down for Cayden to read. 3. Splitting the Lego building board into two halves. 4. Role play and role-reversal: Cayden became Denise (teacher) and Thanos and improvised in role. 5. Hot-seating (drama device): Cayden was asked questions when in role as Denise and Thanos. 6. Thought aloud: Cayden spoke his thoughts, as himself, in and out of Starlord's spaceship. 7. Re-phrasing and repeating questions. 8. Selective mirroring of Cayden's action (p.15 of Daniel et al., 2022). 9. Verbalising the action. 10. Establishing synchrony with Cayden and mirroring his energy levels (vitality-matching in first interview at 32.46 min, as an example). 11. Social timing. 12. Using closed, as opposed to open-ended questions. 13. Vocal modulation: pitch, volume, timbre, and length of sound. 14. Mirroring Cayden's behaviour in an exaggerated manner back at him.

5.2.6 Emergent themes

As I explain in my methodology chapter, I identified a pivotal session for each of my main participants that I felt incorporated most of the thematic strands from their other sessions and transcribed it in full. I then broke the script down into Significant Events (SE) and

distilled these flashpoints into emergent themes. For Cayden, I decided that our second play session (full transcription in Appendix 18) was the most revealing in terms of what he was able to share about his school experience. I identified eight SE in this session which I present in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Cayden's Significant Events

Significant Event	Descriptor	Supporting quotes
SE1	Teachers are mean to Cayden	(p.10/11) Me: '*Why do you want to defeat all the teachers?'* Cayden: *'Cos they're mean'; 'They tell Cayden off'*
SE2	Need to escape from school	(p.11) Me: *'Why is Cayden there…?'* [in Starlord's spaceship] Cayden: *'Cos he wanted to escape'* [from school]
SE3	Wants to go to Woodlands	(p.11) *Me: 'Why did Cayden need to escape the school?'* Cayden: *'To go out into space and then go to…Woodlands'*
SE4	Need to stay in Starlord's spaceship	Me: *'Shall we imagine that we take Cayden out of the ship?'* (Cayden panics) Cayden: *'I've got to get back to Starlord's spaceship'* (p.12) Me: *'Can you choose another piece for Cayden'* [Lego brick] Cayden: *'No more pieces'* [repeats twice]
SE5	Denise tells Cayden not to escape	(p.12) Me*: 'What do you say to him* [Cayden]*?'* Cayden (in role as Denise): *'Don't' escape'*
SE6	Denise told Cayden off and he felt sad	(p.13) Me*: 'How did Cayden feel when he was told off by Denise?'* Cayden: *'Sad'*
SE7	Fantasy and reality merge	(p.12) Me*: 'When Cayden escapes, where does he go?* Cayden: *'Starlord's spaceship'* (p.7) C: *'There was a real Thanos outside my house'*
SE8	Cayden rests his head on Quoran's (GOG character)	(p.14) Me: *'What does Cayden do in the ship?'* Cayden: *'I'm going to rest my head on Quoran's shoulder'*

I then extrapolated emergent themes from Cayden's SE. These are presented in Box 5 below.

Box 5: Emergent themes from Significant Events
1. Teachers are mean 2. Need to escape school 3. Starlord's spaceship is a sanctuary 4. Makes physical contact with females

5.2.7 Superordinate themes

Next, I re-visited all my raw data (observation fieldnotes and interviews) for Cayden to locate any evidence of these themes elsewhere. I assimilated the evidence from the other data sources to corroborate the emergent themes but also derived new themes from my analysis (see emergent themes table in Appendix 19). I finally distilled these themes into superordinate themes, as presented in Box 6 below.

Box 6: Superordinate themes for Cayden
1. Not understood by teachers 2. Learning objectives are not clear 3. Teachers are mean 4. Need to escape school 5. Starlord's spaceship is a sanctuary 6. Makes physical contact with females 7. Lack of contact with peers

5.2.7.1 Superordinate theme: Not understood by teachers

In her interview with me, Cayden's mother said about him '*He feels like a little dot…He feels out of it here* [school]' (see Appendix 16). However, Cayden's teachers appeared not to feel he was unhappy in school. When asked if she thought Cayden was happy in school, Lou (teacher) commented '*I think he is probably. Because he's never known anything else*' (see Appendix 20b). Cayden's general disposition and actions seemed to reinforce this

perception, given he spent most of his time in lessons seemingly in a world of his own with a half-smile on his face (see Appendix 19).

However, my close observations of Cayden in school and our play sessions together seemed to tell a different story and were more in line with his mother's perception of his school experience. I consistently observed him staring out of the studio windows for lengthy periods of time muttering to himself '*I want to go home'*. Furthermore, Cayden continually stated he wished to remain in Starlord's spaceship in our GOG games and refused to enter the school half of the board, remarking in Session Three that the P-BL studio was '*cold*', whereas the spaceship was '*warm*' (see Appendix 20c).

The school SENDCO had not met or observed Cayden in class and had only met Cayden's mother during one TAF (Team Around the Family) meeting in school. Denise reported that no SEND strategies had been handed down to her from the school's SEND team to help support Cayden and she had not seen an ILP (Individual Learning Plan) setting out his needs. Hal (teacher) stated in his interview '*There is a lack of formal understanding in staff and there has been limited Ed Psych [Educational Psychologist] involvement*'. He further explained how staff had been '*trying things*' with Cayden, but they were not working, as he could not engage. He stated, '*I feel there is a level of intelligence, but can't get through to him to engage it*' (see Hal's interview comments, Appendix 13).

5.2.7.2 Superordinate theme: Learning objectives are not clear

Upon observation of Cayden in his lessons, as well as asking him what he was doing in lessons, it became apparent he often did not know why he had been asked to do things by teachers, or what generally was going on. He designed a Captain America (Marvel character) costume for the Shakespeare play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' the class was performing, as part of a P-BL project. This seemed completely inappropriate, given the context of the play, and Cayden did not appear to know the relevance of his costume to the play when I asked him.

Similarly, in a P-BL lesson, I asked Cayden why he was cutting out a 'D' shape from some material to which he replied, '*Because Denise told me to'*. He was not able to connect his action to its learning purpose. Scott (teacher) remarked '*Even if you got him to write a question, he would not understand what it was for*'. Whereas Hal commented **'***He can't remember what he did five minutes ago*' (section 11, Appendix 19). However, in her interview, Denise stated that Hal used to use a visual schedule with Cayden which helped him follow class instructions such as '*These are the things you need for this task*' (see Denise's interview comments, Appendix 13).

Another interesting observation I made of Cayden was during an Animal Rights P-BL project when he drew superheroes around a bird in his exercise book. When I asked him why he had drawn the superheroes around the bird, he explained '*To defend it'*. I asked why he had drawn a bird and superheroes, and he said '*Because they are friends'*. Cayden did not

respond when I asked, ‘*What has it got to do with animal rights*?’ (section 11, Appendix 19).

Picture 3: Cayden’s bird drawing

5.2.7.3 Superordinate theme: Teachers are mean

Early into my observation of Cayden, I witnessed Denise ask him if he had been ‘*mucking about*’ in the toilets, and he said ‘*Yes*’. As part of our exploration of this incident in Session Two, he stated that Denise was mean to him because he wanted to ‘*escape*’ (the school), and this made him feel ‘*sad*’ (section 17, Appendix 19)

In Sessions Two and Three of our play sessions, Cayden also stated the teachers were mean to him in school. In Session Two, I asked him if could swap roles in our play and be Thanos which he agreed to. I then asked him (when he was in role as Thanos) why he had come to the school. Cayden replied, ‘*to defeat all the teachers… ‘cos they’re mean’* (see Appendix 18 and section 16 in Appendix 19).

Further, in Session Five, Cayden stated the school was '*mean*' because Thanos was there. However, when I removed the character of Thanos in our play, he stated the school was still mean (see Appendix 20i).

Cayden's mother was not aware that Cayden thought some of his teachers were mean, and that he had felt sad, on one occasion, because of this. She also was not aware that he paced up and down in the playground alone at breaktimes.

5.2.7.4 Superordinate theme: Need to escape school

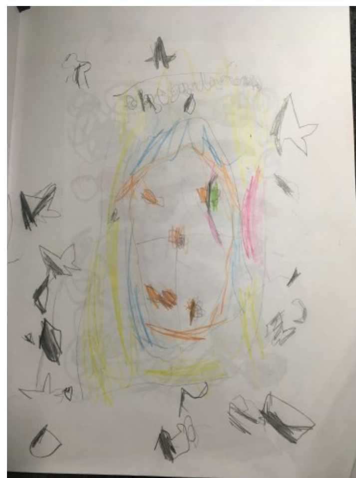
Throughout our play sessions together, there was consistent resistance from Cayden about entering the school half of the Lego board when requested to do so on many occasions. In Session Two, I asked him '*Why is Cayden there…?*' (in Starlord's spaceship) and he replied, '*Cos he wanted to escape* [from school]' (section 12, Appendix 19). Further, as part of our play in Session Three, I asked Cayden why he had gone into the GOG half of board, and he replied he needed to leave the school.

From what Cayden said and did across our sessions, it appeared he wanted to '*escape*' the school and fly off to '*Woodlands*' or '*Legoland*' (adventure theme parks). Thanos would '*chuck*' or '*punch*' him out of the school, he would land in Starlord's spaceship and then fly off (section 12, Appendix 19). In Session Five, Cayden requested that he '*…just go back to Starlord's spaceship*' and leave the school half of the board. When I asked if I could put Cayden back into school half of the Lego board, he shouted '*No!*' (section 12, Appendix 19).

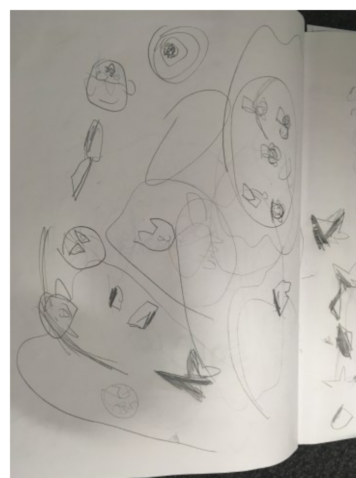
5.2.7.5 Superordinate theme: Starlord's spaceship is a sanctuary

As corroborated by Denise, I observed Cayden drawing Starlord's spaceship in his exercise books, on whiteboards, and on paper almost daily. The following three photographs feature drawings in Cayden's P-BL exercise books.

Picture 4: Starlord's spaceship in middle



Picture 5: Starlord's spaceship in middle



Picture 6: Starlord's spaceship top right-hand corner

I also observed him build an imaginary spaceship out of stacked chairs in the corner of a back room off the P-BL studio. He commented '*This is my spaceship'* (section 10, Appendix 19). Cayden demonstrated great familiarity with all the characters and events in GOG and knew each character's exact position in Starlord's spaceship. There was a pervasive sense of Cayden belonging to this space, as if one of the movie characters himself, in the way he would always position himself with the crew in the ship. Moreover, Cayden would consistently remain in the spaceship on the Lego board during our play sessions and showed acute agitation at any suggestion that he should come out of that area and into

the school half of the board. The following extract from Session Two's transcription highlights this phenomenon:

Cayden*: I've got to get back to Starlord's spaceship.* (Urgent tone) *Can I…I've got to go back to Starlord's spaceship…jump.*

Me: *Ahh. Does Cayden not want to go out into…into here to talk to Denise?*

Cayden*:* (Eyes dart about) *No.*

Me*: Okay, let's imagine then…can you choose another piece for Cayden? Imagine that like his ghost has come to talk to Denise.*

Cayden*:* (Breath speeds up, body tenses) *No more pieces…pieces for Cayden.*

Me*: Which piece?*

Cayden*: No more pieces.*

The emphatic repetition of '*No more pieces'* at the end of this excerpt is striking: the monosyllabic structure and abrupt nature of the improper sentence seems to reflect the tension Cayden was feeling inside about having to enter the school half of the board. This would seem to indicate he did not feel comfortable in school or certainly within this representation of it.

5.2.7.6 Superordinate theme: Makes physical contact with females

Throughout my observations of Cayden in lessons, I witnessed him make physical contact with girls many times. This always seemed to provoke annoyance in them, as displayed through their frowns, and by pushing Cayden away. I observed him touching a girl's fluffy collar, blowing on another girl, trying to rest his head on a girl's arm and shoulder, and attempting to cuddle another (section three, Appendix 19). Cayden pretended to rest his head on Quoran's (female character in GOG) shoulder during our first play session. When asked how it felt doing this, he replied it '*feels good*' (section three, Appendix 19).

Furthermore, Cayden's sister reported that he used to '*hug her around her neck all the time*', as well as regularly approaching her and her friends and hugging them (section three, Appendix 19).

5.2.7.7 Superordinate theme: Lack of contact with peers

During my eight months observation of Cayden, I witnessed him wandering between tables in the classroom or galloping up and down in the playground with no-one to play with (section two, Appendix 19). I regularly observed him pacing up and down on a raised embankment area of the playground. The image of a caged zoo animal always popped into my mind. In the classroom, teachers did attempt to engage Cayden in more structured activities with groups. However, in his interview, Hal remarked Cayden would initially engage with activities, but then wander off (Hal's interview comments, Appendix 13).

I often observed Cayden smiling to himself, even when a classmate had rejected him. In a P-BL lesson on 18.1.19, I noted '*Cayden wanders between tables…looks around smiling…Laughs to himself when girl shrugs him off her*.' Similarly, after he touched a male pupil standing next to him in another P-BL lesson, I recorded the field note '*Cayden has smiley expression when boy reacts defensively towards him'* (section nine, Appendix 19).

5.2.8 Reflections on Cayden's findings

What worked?

The major breakthroughs I experienced with Cayden were writing questions down for him to read during our play sessions and splitting our Lego playboard into two halves. Without a doubt, writing my questions down for Cayden sped up his processing time, as seeing the written form seemed to help him overcome his problems with auditory processing. However, this strategy did not solve his difficulty with comprehending 'why' questions. The only way I could get around this was through role play, particularly role-reversal. However, as an experienced drama teacher, I did not want to assume that just because Cayden was able to engage in projected, small world play that he would be able to role-reverse, in role. According to the literature on cognition and learning in autism, the ability to switch to a more allocentric stance, as opposed to egocentric, can be challenging for many autistic individuals (Frith and de Vignemont, 2005). However, I discovered Cayden could easily adopt the perspectives of Denise (teacher) and Thanos and improvise verbal responses to my questions in which he talked about himself from the perspectives of others. This was quite remarkable.

I attribute this success to several elements which I feel all needed to be in place at the same time. Firstly, Cayden was operating in a comfortable, familiar field (superheroes and GOG) to which he seemed ordinarily to '*escape*' throughout his average day in school through repeatedly drawing Starlord's spaceship. More importantly, he and I had built up rapport and trust over several months. Our ability to inter-synchronously connect was pivotal to

this trust-building process – creating a kind of dance in the way we mirrored one another's behaviour.

Furthermore, this trust-building also centred on the fact that I always asked for Cayden's permission to move characters around the board or enact situations. I consistently attempted to minimise the potential for him feeling out of control or uncomfortable. Lastly, but possibly most importantly, having the security within the game of being able to fly Denise over to our demarcated safe space, rather than talk to her in the school half of the board was highly significant. It seemed to enable Cayden to talk on his own terms, even though he was speaking about himself, in role as Denise.

What did not work?

Cayden demonstrated difficulty comprehending why-type questions and exhibited delay in his auditory processing and response time (which varied in length). This presented the challenge of not knowing how best to time and phrase my questions; thus I often misgauged this in the beginning. Asking Cayden the following questions in my first session with him 'Why does Cayden like to draw superheroes?' and 'Why did you draw a bird for the exhibition?' failed because they were too abstract. The first question included his name which helped clarify who the question was directed at. However, both questions started with the adverb 'why' which was too abstract for Cayden and, consequently, lost on him. Instead, I needed to focus on something more tangible within Cayden's immediate frame of reference and ask questions about his school experience in context.

5.3 Participant: Robert

5.3.1 Data overview

The sets of data I gathered on Robert comprised eight months of observation and field notes of him in class, around school and in the playground; voice-recorded interviews with four of his teachers (Denise, Hal, Mike, and Scott; see Appendix 13); a voice-recorded interview with his mother and him in school; interviews with him and his mother at home (mother's was voice-recorded; interview notes in Appendix 21); and two, voice-recorded interviews between him and me in school (details of all interviews in school in 5.3.3 and full transcription of Session Four in Appendix 22). Robert's brother attended the same school, but I chose not to interview him about Robert, as I felt I had enough information from Robert's mother, his teachers, and Robert himself, given his level of articulacy, once engaged. I also had visited Robert in his home.

5.3.2 Robert's biography

I visited Robert and his mum at home for an initial meeting to gather information about Robert and his needs (see Appendix 21). I decided not to record the chat when Robert was present in case he felt inhibited, whereas his mother presented as very confident and happy to be voice-recorded. According to Robert and his mother, issues began to emerge once Robert started nursery. He kept falling, due to problems with his balance (often bumping his head), and was not '*very sociable*'. When he started primary school, things

significantly deteriorated, and Robert was excluded many times for anti-social behaviour (see Appendix 21).

Both Robert's parents were Latvian, but Robert was mostly fluent in English (see full interview transcription in Appendix 22). He was in year four (aged 8) when I started my research at the school and had joined the school two years previously. His older brother attended the same school. Robert's mother came forward in response to the Principal's invitation to parents to take part in my research, even though he did not have an official autism diagnosis. However, he was considered autistic by staff and his parents, given his social communication differences and needs, and regular emotional outbursts.

Emotional outbursts and the nurture group

Robert was a member of the Nurture Group in school which was run by a teacher, Mike, in Phase Two, and reserved for those students who needed time out of lessons for emotional and/or sensory regulation. He would often be sent to the nurture room by teachers during lessons, as he was inclined to explode in class. Denise (teacher) stated she did not know why Robert '*lost it in class*'. Hal (teacher) felt he '*got frustrated with something'* but did not '*understand why'*. He felt Robert could not '*deescalate*' situations '*effectively*' when another pupil or member of staff annoyed him (teacher interviews audit, Appendix 13).

Cognition and learning

Robert was quite independent and, whenever I questioned him about why he was doing certain tasks, he mostly knew. For example, in our second interview, I asked him about the poster he was working on in P-BL exploring the topic of nationality:

> **Me**: *Hey Robert, what are these?* [Reading from poster] *Je m'appelle Robert…*
> **Robert**: *Erm, that's French and Greek is to ónomá mou íne Robert. I'll just get*...[Looks on iPad] *Translate*…[Shows me iPad]
> **Me**: *Oh, I see there's a translation.*
> **Robert**: *So, Greek…so, Czech…*

However, Robert also spent quite a lot of time wandering around the studio space, seemingly off-task or not sure what to do (section nine, Appendix 23). Denise felt Robert did this '*to avoid getting caught'* for not having done the writing component of his work in P-BL (see Appendix 13). Robert chatted to peers in his class but did not seem to work collaboratively with others – he mainly worked alone on tasks. In one English lesson, I observed him sit at table away from his English group, still with his coat on, and singing to himself. He also was the only child not to sit on the carpet for the class story (section three, Appendix 23). Hal felt this was attributable to Robert's '*low self-esteem'*, '*lack of confidence in his own abilities*', and '*self-image'* (see Appendix 13).

Robert's special interests were archaeology, constructing robots, Marvel characters, colouring-in, riding his BMX bike, and making jewellery.

5.3.3 Overview of sessions

I experienced Robert as articulate and comfortable chatting to with me about most things (see Appendix 22). Therefore, I discussed using informal, semi-structured interviews, as a possible means to capture his views with him and his mother, and they both agreed it was appropriate.

Diagram B below provides an overview of my one-to-one interviews with Robert and my joint interview with Robert and his mother.

SESSION ONE (2.2.19, 1.5 hrs):

HOME VISIT. Both Robert and his mother are present. Mother talks about Robert's birth and infancy, including early school experiences, which are largely very negative. Excluded from primary school on many occasions, regularly defecated himself at school, hid under tables, did not trust any adults to touch him.

Mother speculates about possible causes of Robert's anger outbursts at school, citing a higher-than-normal level of testosterone as a possible source. Reports Robert is still soiling himself at school and regularly chewing a blanket at home.

Robert wants me to see his bedroom (mother escorts me there). He shows me his toys and prized possessions.

SESSION TWO (27.3.19, 23.33 min):

P-BL LESSON. I chat to Robert alongside him working in P-BL. Class task is to design a poster promoting idea all nations are equal (see Robert's poster in diagram below). Robert offers an inaccurate definition of 'stereotype', does not know the project's driving question, and cannot answer my question 'Does your picture tell me why people are equal?'

Robert states too many teachers tell him what to do at same time and this '*stresses*' him out. He would prefer it if he could approach teachers when he needed help. He recalls an incident where he was wrongly accused of blowing a classmate's work off a ledge. Resulted in him ripping up the classmate's work because he felt so angry, but then felt '*shameful*'. Robert shares he likes his present school, particularly the visual timetable.

SESSION THREE (27.3.19, 22.37 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Robert and his mother in school during lunchtime on same day. We focus on why Robert thinks teachers in P-BL lessons continually check if he knows what he is doing in lessons (as this aggravates him). Mother feels he should be afforded '*more trust*' by teachers and just one teacher (Hal) should be giving out instructions to Robert, not several.

I ask would it help if teachers spoke to his angel and demon at beginning of lessons and he says '*It would be the best*.'

Robert talks about an '*invisible audience'* and '*demon*' in his head which tells him he is bad at English. This stresses him out and leads to him not participating in lesson. He divulges he also has an '*angel*' telling him to behave.

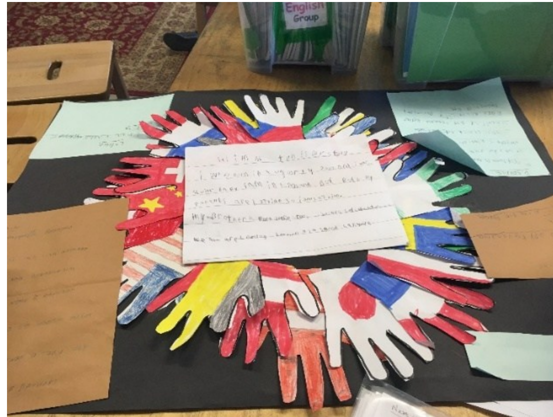
Robert reports he gets annoyed by the misbehaviour of other pupils within the nurture group which forces him to sit outside the room.

SESSION FOUR (PIVOTAL) (24.5.19, 46.40 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Robert focusing on his angel and demon. I present him with toy animals, and he chooses a white horse for angel ('*kind, helpful, and you get to ride their back which is fun*') and a lion cub for demon ('*ferocious, angry, vicious, afraid, keeping fears'*). Demon has the loudest voice, but Robert listens to angel the most. Robert adopts role as demon, and I ask it what it tells Robert. Demon says, ' *I want to throw something across the room*'. Angel tells him not to.

I present question sheet and Robert writes answers on it. He describes his angel with following words: white, wavy water, wildlife/nature, pony, waterfall, praying hands with closed eyes, harmonic, polite, good. His demon: dark red, fire, lightning, lion, two arms in air with mouth open wide and roaring, bad, terrifying, ferocious. Angel is called '*Unicorn*' and would be Captain Marvel if a Marvel superhero character. Demon is called *'Loud Roar'*.

Diagram B: Overview of Robert's interviews



Picture 7: Robert's P-BL poster from Session Three

The picture above depicts Robert's P-BL poster exploring the concept of nationality and is referred to in his second interview. Each hand represented a different nationality, and the countries flags were drawn onto the hands. The rectangular paper laid on top of the hands featured biographical detail hand-written by Robert and included information about his Latvian identity and place of birth.

5.3.4 Key transactional supports

5.3.4.1 Angel and Demon work

The most significant transactional supports I used with Robert were hot-seating (drama convention used to question fictional characters) and role play to help explore the imaginary personas (an angel and a demon) he claimed to be inside his head – '*the invisible audience'* (see Appendix 22). It felt important to explore how the angel and demon entities inter-related in Robert's head, as they could give some clue about why he often exploded in class.

I asked him to describe the personas in our fourth session. Robert chose a white toy horse to represent his angel, and a toy lion to represent his devil (as it became known by our fourth session). He stated:

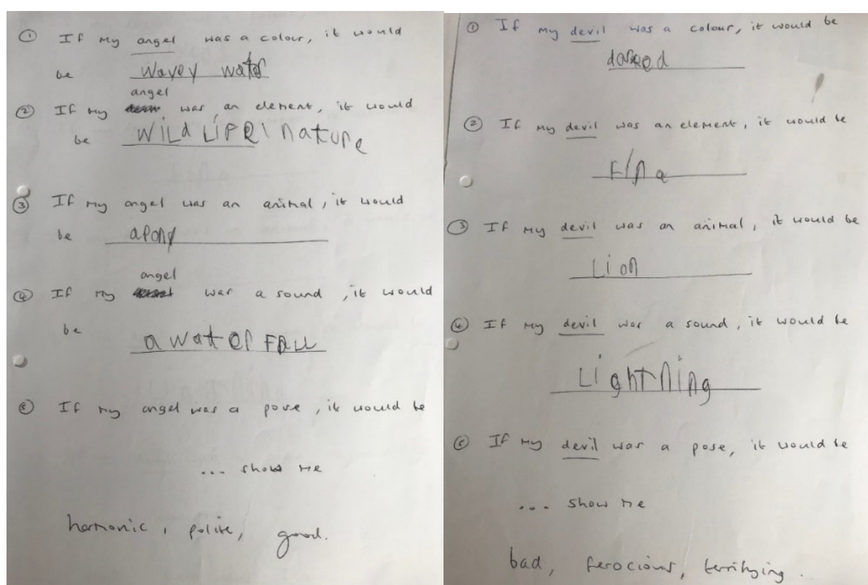
> [Talking about the white horse initially] '*Kind, good, s...s…sometimes you're happy, fun, fantastic, brave, conquering fears. And this (lion) is ferocious, angry, vicious, afraid, keeping fears and – and all the other things, that this is opposite… a white horse. I chose this because this an animal that is very vicious and this one is like a unicorn*.' (see Appendix 22)

I asked Robert whether his angel or devil had the loudest voice, and he answered his devil did. I also asked:

> **Me**: *When does devil have a really loud voice? In which situations? What happens?*
>
> **Robert**: *When you get annoyed. He's like… argh I want to throw something…* (see Appendix 22)

5.3.4.2 Question sheet using symbolism

I prepared a question-and-answer sheet for Robert to complete in relation to his imaginary angel and demon asking him to describe them through different symbolic forms: colour, element, sound, and physical pose. I phrased the questions, as in this example: '*If your demon was a colour, what would it be*?' This device was very useful in building up a picture of how Robert experienced these two voices in his head and what issues in class troubled him. Below are the question sheets with his answers on.



Picture 8: Robert's question sheets

This scaffolding of support enabled Robert to divulge much more detail about his inner experience than I feel would have been possible had I just asked him outright to describe his angel and demon. I feel this transactional support worked with Robert because he was able to think in abstract concepts, was a confident speaker, and very able to effectively communicate his needs when asked in a non-confrontational and supportive manner.

5.3.5 All transactional supports used with Robert

In Box 7 below, I present a list of all the transactional supports I used with Robert to enable him to partake in our sessions together and elicit his inside views.

Box 7: Transactional supports used with Robert
1. Resources: bag of toy animals and peg dolls, question and answer sheet, 2. Use of symbolic forms to describe angel and demon: colour, sound, element, animal, gender, physical pose, and three adjectives. 3. Angel and demon role play. 4. Hot-seating: Robert answered questions, in role, as angel and demon. 5. Re-phrasing and repeating questions. 6. Selective mirroring of Robert's voice and body language.

7. Establishing synchrony with Robert and mirroring his energy levels (vitality-matching).
8. Using closed, as opposed to open-ended questions.
9. Vocal modulation: pitch, volume, timbre, and length of sound.

5.3.6 Emergent themes

I selected Robert's fourth interview, as our pivotal session, and identified 20 Significant Events (SE) within the transcript (full transcription in Appendix 22). I present these in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Robert's Significant Events

Significant Event	Descriptor	Supporting quotes
SE1	Scrunches up paper to be better behaved	(p.2 of transcript) *'I was getting annoyed…I tried to hold it in, but then had to scrunch up a piece of paper so I…could be better'*
SE2	Robert rages out	(p.3) *'You rage out, have a tantrum, do nothing and work, and throw something across the room…'*
SE3	Two separate audiences in Robert's head	(p.3) *'…they're quite real; they're two separate audiences in your head'*
SE4	Lion has loudest voice, but he listens to white horse more	(p.4*) 'This has a louder voice [lion], but listen to this one [horse] most of the time…'*
SE5	Lion is loudest when he is annoyed	(p.4) *'When you get annoyed…He's like…argh…I want to throw something…'*
SE6	White horse stands up for him	(p.5) *[White horse says] 'Don't throw something across the room'*
SE7	Robert talks to himself	(p.6) *'Sometimes I actually speak in real life. Not to my imaginary self. I say "I really want to hit someone and show my anger, but I don't want to"'*
SE8	Making paper aeroplanes helps	(p.6) *'Or sometimes I make something with it – a paper aeroplane' [referring to scrunched up paper]* *'…helps me not destroy something – like a pencil – snap it in half*
SE9	Robert's imaginary devil is: dark red, fire, lion, lightening, two arms and hand in air and mouth wide open, bad, ferocious, terrifying, called Loud Roar. Angel is: wavy water, wildlife, pony, waterfall, prayer hands, harmonic, polite, good, called Unicorn.	(p.7-10)
SE10	Robert's body would be pure harmony [if Robert and angel combined forces against devil]	(p.11) *'His body would just be pure harmony…His emotions too. It would all be balanced'*

SE11	He strapped himself to the chair	(p.12) *'I strapped myself to the chair because I didn't want to hurt anyone. And then I ripped myself out of it and I threw it at the teacher'*
SE12	He didn't want to throw a chair	(p.12) *'But I didn't want it to happen'*
SE13	Robert can overcome his devil for a short period of time	(p.12) *'Sometimes you can actually overcome your devil and remove him from your mind for like half an hour and then he returns'*
SE14	Teachers asking him what he's doing triggers him	(p.13) *'Sometimes you get asked to do one thing, and then on the way there you get asked to do another thing, then by the same teacher you get asked another time and then by a different teacher you get asked to go another place and then, and then there's another teacher there, and they ask you to go another place. And you can't do four, five things at once'*
SE15	How Robert's angel and devil talk to him is like a chart	(p.14) [His angel is at the top of chart and devil at the bottom] *'Just…every day it's getting a bit more and then a bit more a bit more a bit more until you reach the top. And then you go on the bad chain and then you climb back down to the bottom'*
SE16	Robert can become enraged very quickly	(p.14) *'It can be five minutes until you – ahhhh – bad'*
SE17	He is like a kangaroo	(p.15) *'You feel good, satisfied. And then you feel bad because it's someone's work [that R destroyed]. Sometimes you're pretty much a kangaroo. You're jumping down to one place, up and then down, up, down, up in about one second, both lines'*
SE18	Robert wanted to research a rhyme, but the teacher wouldn't let him (Robert only knew one part of rhyme and wanted to know more)	(p.16) *'I asked the teacher that I got told off with…and then I asked if I could research them. And then, hey, so no, and then I – I just randomly figured out that I wasn't allowed to colour, by sums. And then that made me blow up'*
SE19	There were reasons why Robert hit people	(p.17) *'Because other people were annoying me, how I was telling them maths questions that were actually right and they kept on saying "Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong" to me and that triggered my lion to go down down and then I hit someone. And then I threw some tape at the teacher. Then I got sent up upstairs to do a lesson. And then…that's what triggered the…'*
SE20	Telling the teachers would help, but he always forgets	(p.18) [Researcher: *'Is there anything you could do to help?'].* Robert: *'Telling the teachers, but I always forget to do that and then I get in trouble'*

I extrapolated emergent themes from Robert's SE. These are presented in Box 8 below.

Box 8: Emergent themes from Significant Events
1. Two audiences in his head 2. Emotionally eruptive 3. Possesses some strategies for self-regulation 4. Teachers' behaviours are triggering 5. Not sure how to ask for help

5.3.7 Superordinate themes

I then assimilated the evidence from the other data sources to corroborate the emergent themes but also derived new themes from my analysis (see emergent themes table in Appendix 23). I finally distilled these themes into the following superordinate themes which are presented in Box 9 below.

Box 9: Superordinate themes
1. Managing anger is difficult 2. Not sure how to ask for help 3. Teachers are a pain 4. Isolated from peers 5. Internal world is inaccessible

5.3.7.1 Superordinate theme: Managing anger is difficult

> *'I strapped myself to the chair because I didn't want to hurt anyone. And then I ripped myself out of it and I threw it at the teacher'* (further elaboration in Appendix 23).

Essentially, the Significant Events extrapolated from Robert's pivotal session indicated there was always a trigger behind Robert's emotional outbursts. For example, teachers repeatedly asking Robert what he was doing in class or being blamed for something he had not done by a peer or teacher. This seemed to lead to an internal escalation involving an imaginary battle between his angel and demon. This process involved him metaphorically jumping up and down a chart like '*a kangaroo*', resulting in a final eruption, as his demon

conquered all the other voices in his head (see Appendix 22). He then would either throw something across the room or at someone or destroy something within his immediate environment. This outcome often resulted in him being removed from a lesson (sections one and two, Appendix 23).

In one lesson, I witnessed Robert become very frustrated by the fact that other pupils were being allowed to play maths games on iPads by a cover teacher, yet he was not. He felt this was iniquitous. The teacher did not respond to Robert when he pointed this out and kept telling him to get on with his work. Eventually, the situation escalated and ended up with Robert throwing a die at the teacher, who then requested he was removed to the Nurture Group (section one, Appendix 23).

There was a real sense of how situations in school would escalate for Robert through his use of elongated sentence structures and repetition. In our fourth session, Robert stated his demon would say things to him in his head such as '*I want you to be miserable, unhappy and scary and ferocious and angry and hitting people*'. The repetition of the conjunction '*and*' four times, without pauses, here seems to suggest an over-whelming sense of pressure building inside Robert. His sentences often spilled out at speed and were very list-like.

In his last interview with me, Robert compared his emotional swings to a kangaroo:

> '*You feel good, satisfied. And then you feel bad because it's someone's work* [that Robert destroys]. *Sometimes you're pretty much a kangaroo. You're jumping down to*

> *one place, up and then down, up, down, up in about one second, both lines'* (p.429 in Appendix 22).

Further, Robert described the tussle between his angel and demon as an oscillating '*chart*' and how he rode his '*pony*' up the '*chain*', but when he got annoyed, he would descend back down the chain into '*the baddest mood'*. And it would keep on '*repeating and repeating*' (see Appendix 22). Mike (nurture teacher) commented:

> *'I've watched him get angry in situations… like there's a misunderstanding that only he sees. He's in a battle with himself…One minute he's wonderful, he's talking and warm, but next session he is indifferent, troubled by something, aloof and grumpy. Changes within a two-hour time frame'* (see Appendix 13).

However, Robert did have some strategies for avoiding emotional eruptions in lessons (although perceptibly destructive) which were to scrunch up pieces of paper and re-flatten them, make paper aeroplanes out of paper, or snap pencils in half (see Appendix 22). I did observe him on one occasion look at a female peer's work and copy the content into his book (section eight, Appendix 23).

Halfway through our fourth interview, I asked Robert what he thought would happen if he and his white horse (angel) combined forces to tackle his lion (demon). He replied '*His body* [Robert's] *would be pure harmony…his emotions too. It would all be balanced*' (p.427 in Appendix 22).

5.3.7.2 Superordinate theme: Do not know how to ask for help

During my shadow observation of Robert in lessons, I witnessed him appearing not to know

what he was meant to be doing and, subsequently, expressing behaviours which seemed to suggest he did not know how to ask teachers or peers for help. He appeared outwardly frustrated. I observed him swinging on his chair, putting his coat over his head or face, fiddling with and snapping pencils in half, licking a maths textbook, ripping a page out of a textbook and kicking it onto the floor, stabbing an open textbook and table with a pencil, and lying across a table during a lesson. On another occasion, he aggressively shouted, '*What am I doing*?' to a peer when a teacher was located nearby (sections one and two, Appendix 23).

During Session Four, I asked Robert if there was anything he could do to help himself in tricky situations and he stated, '*Telling the teachers, but I always forget to do that and then I get in trouble*' (p.430 in Appendix 22).

5.3.7.3 Superordinate theme: Teachers are a pain

Robert shared in our second interview together that he would feel incredibly angry when teachers in the room (five teachers/LSAs in the P-BL studio at any one time) kept asking him what he was doing in lessons.

> *'Sometimes you get asked to do one thing, and then on the way there you get asked to do another thing. Then by the same teacher you get asked another time and then by a different teacher you get asked to go another place and then, and then there's another teacher there, and they ask you to go another place. And you can't do four, five things at once. Five or four things at once.'* (p.428 in Appendix 22)

In the quote above, it is as if Robert is literally bouncing from teacher to teacher in the way the process repeats itself. The repetition of the last sentence suggests a sense of over-

whelm for Robert about an apparent expectation he feels teachers have of him to be able to multi-task.

5.3.7.4 Superordinate theme: Isolated from peers

Robert would often work alone in lessons. If a teacher placed him on a table with peers, there was minimal contact between him and them. In my shadow observation of Robert, I witnessed him sit at a table away from his English group, with his coat still on and singing to himself. Furthermore, he was the only child not on the carpeted area for the class story (section three, Appendix 23). In Hal's interview, he stated that Robert '*struggles to build friendships with others' and 'doesn't think anyone will be his friend other than his brother*' (see Appendix 13). Robert only played with his brother and a couple of his brother's friends at breaktimes - no other peers.

5.3.7.5 Superordinate theme: Internal world is inaccessible

Throughout my time observing Robert in school, I was aware of only one teacher (Mike) trying to probe beyond the surface behaviours Robert displayed to try to understand what was causing such angry responses in him. In one maths lesson, Robert ripped a page out of his schoolbook and the cover teacher responded by saying '*Right, you've damaged school property. That's a red dot now*' (dot related to a behaviour management policy and how teachers recorded pupils' misdemeanours). Robert scowled in response to the teacher requesting '*Can you stop that please*?' Robert then scowled at a peer to which the teacher responded '*Now stop that please. It's unacceptable*'. This teacher in question repeated

'*Stop*' five times in close succession in response to Robert's actions (section two, Appendix 23).

In my interview with Mike, I asked if he knew about Robert's angel and demon and he said he did but had not explored it with Robert. To his knowledge, no other teachers in school were aware of this phenomenon. I asked Mike if he thought staff could use Robert's angel and demon to help him in any way and he suggested that '*Phase Two development could involve a shared practice of strategies that worked* [with students] …*some staff training'* (see Appendix 13). This statement suggested Mike felt staff training could incorporate staff sharing good practice with one another in relation to strategies that worked with individual pupils.

I asked Mike what he thought Robert needed and he replied, '*A laugh and physical contact*' (see Appendix 13). Scott, Head of P-BL, also felt using humour to de-escalate situations with Robert was effective (see Appendix 13). Whereas in Robert's third interview, I asked him if teachers could speak to his angel and demon before he started work to see how they were feeling and he replied, '*It would be the best*'. Robert's mother was not aware of his imaginary angel and demon (interview audit notes, 27.3.19).

5.3.8 Reflections on Robert's findings

What worked?

Transactionally, it was more challenging for me to understand how Robert was accessing his learning in the classroom compared to understanding his emotional world. This was because I focused more on trying to understand what led him to become so angry in lessons, as this seemed the most pressing issue for him, his mother and staff. Instead of using the strategies I did, I could have just asked Robert directly what caused him to explode in school, and he could provide intelligent responses. However, I do not feel I would have gained such a rich picture of his internal world had I not used role play, hot-seating, and symbolic forms to represent his experience, given the detailed imagery that was acquired.

All in all, it seemed Robert's inner world could have been more accessible to school staff had they simply asked him and used more creative methods to explore his thoughts and feelings. It would seem the Nurture Group teacher was missing a golden opportunity to connect more inwardly with Robert through the modality of role play and symbol-use (Robert's angel and demon). If staff had been made aware of Robert's angel and demon, perhaps more understanding of what firstly triggered Robert in lessons, and how this then escalated into full-blown meltdowns, could have developed. Robert was clearly open to the possibility of working with staff on his angel and demon, but staff were not aware of them.

What did not work?

As stated above, understanding how Robert was accessing his learning in the classroom was more difficult to understand. Generally, I asked him straightforward questions about how he understood certain aspects of his learning experience. For example, I asked him if he could recall the driving question for the P-BL project he was involved in, but he could not. However, this did not really help me understand how he understood the project from within, as I soon discovered less academically-able, non-autistic pupils also struggled to recall the driving question (field notes, 25.1.19).

5.4 Participant: Marie

5.4.1 Data overview

The sets of data I gathered on Marie comprised eight months of observation and field notes of her in class, around school and in the playground; interviews with four of her teachers (Denise, Hal, Colin, and Scott; see interviews audit in Appendix 13); two phone interviews with her mother (one voice-recorded; audits in Appendix 12) and a brief face-to-face meeting with her in school; three direct sessions between Marie and me in school; and one joint interview with her and her best friend, Debbie. Details of all sessions with Marie in school are in Appendix 14 and section 5.4.3. The full transcription of Session Two can be located in Appendix 24.

5.4.2 Marie's biography

Marie had an autism diagnosis, had attended the research school since it opened, and was in year five (aged nine) when I conducted my research. Her mother worked as an LSA at the school and in the after-school club in Phase One.

Marie's specific interests included Horrible Histories (television and book series); the Georgians; Jane Austin novels (which her father would read to her); Lego, particularly building houses; her dolls house; miniature figures; cats and drawing cat people (see mother's comments in Appendix 12).

Cognition and learning

After some trial and error by the school, Marie had been placed in smaller groups in lessons which she felt suited her much better due to there being fewer pupils and less noise (Colin's comments, field notes, 21.5.19). I observed Marie working independently on a range of class tasks, and, generally, she could follow a teacher's instructions (section nine, Appendix 25). In one P-BL lesson, I observed her follow Hal's instruction to her and a group of six pupils to '*Go and get [their] journals*' (observation notes, 4.2.19). Marie was able to collect her journal from a box and return to her desk to record the learning objectives for the lesson from the board. She did not require any prompting. However, Denise did state in her interview that Marie needed to '*follow written instructions more*' (see Appendix 13).

According to Colin, Marie's form tutor, she was good at reading which she liked but was working at a lower age-related expected level in English. In maths, she was working two years below her age-related expected level (field notes, 21.5.19). Her least favourite subject was maths, and she felt she struggled in every lesson (interview audit, 10.7.19, Appendix 14). She tended not to work with other pupils in lessons and did state to her mother at home '*I don't say anything. I never talk in P-BL*' (see Appendix 12).

Marie's mother explained Marie sometimes would struggle to reflect on her negative experiences once they had happened. When she was in a good place, it became much more difficult to answer questions about those negative experiences as she was then out of the moment. She also stated Marie needed processing time. She provided an example of Marie's uncle asking her questions, but Marie did not look at him or interact in any way. However, later on, she approached him to answer his questions (see Appendix 12).

Marie would 'freeze'

I did observe Marie have a couple of emotional meltdowns during my time at the school. Out of my four participants, Marie was the one who often would completely freeze emotionally and not respond to teachers at all. This seemed to be triggered by things unexpectedly changing in her environment and which teachers had not prepared her for. Marie's mother stated that Marie was extremely sensitive to tones of voice which she felt needed to be '*gentle*' and '*soft*' if Marie was to trust them (see Appendix 12). I did observe Marie noticeably recoil in response to a P-BL teacher's direct questions to her about her

work (section two, Appendix 25). Sometimes, Marie struggled to answer me, if I questioned her directly (interview audit, 19.6.19, Appendix 14).

Friendships

Marie was best friends with another of my participants, Debbie, and in the same base camp. However, Debbie had been placed in higher ability groups to Marie. Both Hal and Marie's mother described the girls as very close (Hal's comments in Appendix 13 and mother's comments in Appendix 12). According to Marie's mother, Marie was often '*led*' by Debbie. Marie's mother felt the teachers almost branded them together, seeing Marie's preferences as the same as Debbie's. For example, she reported that Hal had mentioned to her that animals were one of Marie's favourite things. Whereas, in fact, animals were one of Debbie's favourite things, not Marie's (see Appendix 12).

Marie was part of a friendship group consisting of Debbie and a boy from the same year group (mother's comments, Appendix 12). They often played together at break times and seemed to get along very well (observation notes, 4.2.19). Marie also was close to her older sister, who often helped her with her homework, according to Marie's mother (see Appendix 12).

5.4.3 Overview of sessions

For my first sessions with Marie and Debbie, we decided it might be a good idea to interview them together. Given they were best friends and often struggled with social communication, the girls felt they could provide support for one another.

Diagram C below provides an overview of my one-to-one interviews with Marie and my joint interview with Marie and Debbie.

SESSION ONE (26.3.19, 19.39 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Marie and Debbie at lunchtime. I ask them what their favourite lessons are and what they are good at in school. Marie says very little compared to Debbie. I take picture of Marie's artwork for P-BL project (draft in book) and ask her about it. No response. I ask Marie if we should use 'Yes/No' answering method to help her engage with my questions, but she does not want to. I ask if Debbie can help. Debbie and I start chatting about Marie's work.

Debbie starts to look out of window and pace up and down room. I suggest she leaves, as she appears to be displaying anxiety, and she does. I give Marie the choice to leave, but she says she does not mind if she stays or goes. I ask if when Marie feels uncomfortable in class, she can ask a teacher or friend for help, She says she cannot. Marie becomes reluctant to answer my questions, thus I start voicing possible options for her and she nods or shakes her head. Me: '*Is it tricky telling someone how you feel?*' Marie: '*Yes*.' Me: '*Is it tricky because you're frightened of what they think?*' Marie: '*No*.'

I ask to look in Marie's P-BL exercise book. She refuses. I ask if anything is going well in school, and she says '*Lots*'. I ask if she understands work set by teachers. She answers '*Always*' (I give her options to choose from). She feels school was not so good two years ago. She was in a big group for lessons, but now it is better, as she is in smaller groups.

SESSION TWO (19.5.19, 53.19 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED (PIVOTAL) INTERVIEW in school at end of day. We look at pictures of cat characters from film 'The Cat Returns' and selection of cat images from internet I have printed off. Marie chooses a non-film picture to represent her own home cat and decides to draw cats to represent herself at home and school instead of cats I have offered (pictures below).

We role play her home and school cat. I ask her questions about her home and school cats. Home cat is '*evil*' and called '*Bob cat'*; school cat is '*fluffy*' and called '*Bob tail'*. She states she sheds her school cat's fluff and leaves it at school gates each day until she lies in it at beginning of each new day and it re-attaches to her. She would feel '*naked*', '*sad*', and physically and emotionally cold without her fluff in school. Fluff is described as: '*purple*', '*silent*', '*a cat'*, '*fire*' (as warm) and made by Marie. She draws what she would look like (as a cat) if she had to go to school without her fluff.

Marie draws cats to represent her best friend and teachers Denise and Colin. I ask her to apportion sections of the pie chart to who she prefers to work with in lessons (group of peers, immediate friend, Debbie, on her own, or with a teacher). Half is apportioned to Debbie, equal dimensions to group, friends and teachers and a tiny slither to herself. I also ask if she can choose colours to represent how she feels working with the various people. She chooses purple for Debbie but struggles to ascribe colours to the others.

SESSION THREE (19.6.19, 11.47 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW in school during lunchtime. I present a soft toy from home to focus on cat fluff from last session. I draw school on paper and ask if Marie needs anything else to make her feel safe in school other than her fluff. I ask if we can pretend my toy is her cat fluff and she speak in role, as the cat fluff. Marie suddenly stops responding and becomes visibly uncomfortable (breath changes, strained face, head down, stiffens whole body). I ask if she feels scared and she nods. I apologise for making her feel scared and quieten and soften my voice.

Long pauses in between me attempting to put her at ease and see if she can express what she is feeling in the moment through different mediums (drawing on paper, verbal description, shaking or nodding her head to questions). Marie tells me through nods and shakes: my questions made her feel scared; my questions were not confusing; she did not want to speak as her fluff. Marie signals she wants to stop talking about fluff. I ask if it is scary talking about fluff and she says yes. I ask where coldest part of school is – no answer. Very long pause. I ask if we can draw symbols to represent fluff and Marie refuses. I terminate session, as Marie has frozen.

SESSION FOUR (10.7.19, 41.26 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Marie in school at end of day. I ask if she can draw a picture of her best day at school. I explain she can draw imaginary best day, if can't recall any real ones. I lay out pictures of cats and 'Cat Return' characters on table, as stimuli, if needed. I pretend to be getting on with some work, so she does not feel under any pressure to complete quickly.

I ask Marie about her drawing: she describes drawing eyes in one section; eating dinner next to a mountain in another; being stuck at maths (every maths lesson – '*I don't understand it*'); performance of Jack and Beanstalk; Marie dreaming in English about '*angel*' cat (she was writing a story about angel cat); Marie at home on sofa with Simmy.

I ask Marie to draw a picture of her worst day at school. She draws much more quickly this time. She draws herself with a pineapple on her head. Eclipse happening, moon explodes, and lava comes out. Cat's exploding. Marie states all (her imaginary) cats exploded on her worst day at school. I ask how it feels when cats explode? Marie makes a sad, whining noise. Marie does not draw herself in her worst day picture. She explains pineapples '*are evil*'. The Great Pineapple Lord lives in a temple but came to get Marie. I ask if the pineapple was something in school, what would it be? Marie states '*Maths textbooks*'; pineapple comes down to suck her brains out because maths is so hard. Exploding cats have eaten pineapple (made cats explode).

Diagram C: Overview of Marie's sessions

5.4.4 Key transactional supports

5.4.4.1 Yes/No columns on mini whiteboard

In one P-BL lesson, Marie appeared not to understand the class task. Hal asked her if she knew what to do in quite a loud voice. Marie visibly recoiled and Hal, subsequently, struggled to elicit a response from Marie regarding her understanding of the class work. He continued to re-phrase his questions, but this seemed to create more tension in Marie. I suggested we tried using a mini white board that was already on her desk and drew two, equal columns on it with a marker pen. If Marie wanted to reply 'Yes' to a question asked by Hal, I asked if she could place a dot on the Yes side of the board, and a dot on the No

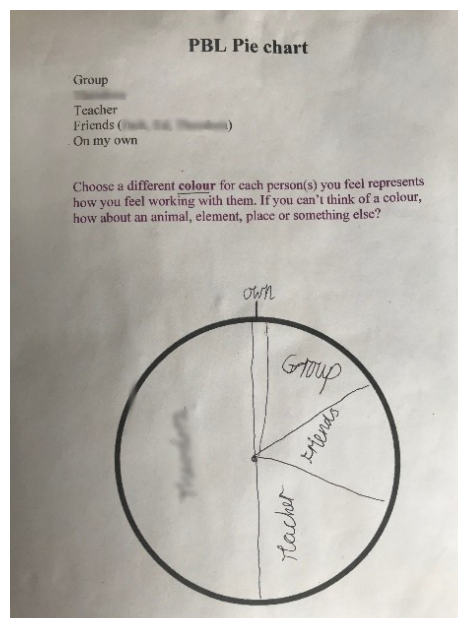
side if she wanted to reply 'No'. If she was not sure, she could place a dot on the dividing line between columns. This method worked effectively and helped Hal and I ascertain exactly what the problem was for Marie.

This method removed the pressure on Marie to articulate full sentences in response to teachers' questions. However, it was rather time-intensive for the adult involved and limited in terms of how much information could be acquired about *why* Marie felt or thought the way she did. Further, the topics of discussion were adult-generated, and, therefore, one could not guarantee important to Marie.

5.4.4.2 Pie chart

Given the perceived limitation of the Yes/No method, I wanted to see if there was a method that both provided a holding frame for Marie and allowed for more active involvement. I considered using the 'Three Houses Approach' and Hill et al.'s (2016) 'Graffiti Wall' method (referred to in section 3.4.4) but was concerned Marie might have found the literalness of the direct questioning and having to initiate processes of expression somewhat difficult. Thus, I thought of using a pie chart to ascertain information about who Marie liked working with in lessons, and whether she liked working in groups. I prepared the pie chart in advance of my session with her, and, then in the session, asked her if she could divide the pie chart into segments according to her preferences. This method seemed to provide the visual holding form we needed and removed the pressure on her to think up a way to express her views.

I also asked if she could ascribe colours to represent how it felt working with the various people represented in the chart and wrote this instruction on the sheet. She apportioned her best friend, Debbie, 50 percent of the chart and identified the colour purple for her. She then apportioned approximately thirds to working in groups, with friends or a teacher. Working alone was allocated a tiny slither (see picture below). Marie struggled to ascribe colours to anyone else, stating the exercise was too difficult.


PBL Pie chart

Group
Teacher
Friends ( )
On my own

Choose a different **colour** for each person(s) you feel represents how you feel working with them. If you can't think of a colour, how about an animal, element, place or something else?

Picture 9: Marie's pie chart

Similar to the Yes/No method, the pie chart had a limited scope because it could only quantify Marie's experiences, not qualify them with reasons for why she felt this way or that.

5.4.4.3 Cats and drawing

The most successful transactional supports I used with Marie were the use of drawing and

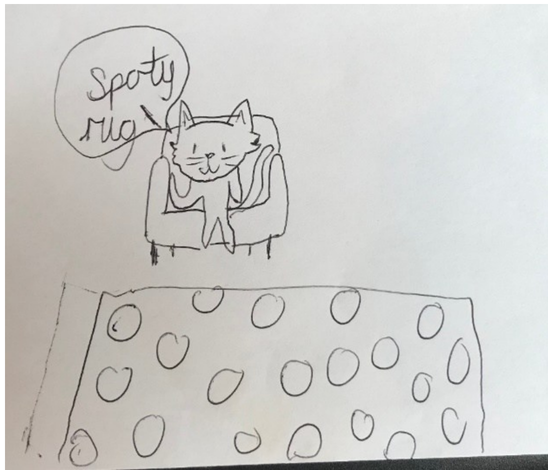
cat images. I had ascertained through discussions with Marie, her mother, and Debbie that Marie loved cats. She had a cat at home and spent a lot of her free time drawing cats. I wondered if this could be a suitable vector through which to explore her experience of school, as cat drawings and images could provide a focal point for us to talk about her feelings, rather than me asking her directly, which seemed to intimidate her.

Thus, I decided to use cat images from a Japanese Anime film called 'The Cat Returns' which I knew Marie had seen and enjoyed. I printed out all the main characters from the film and cut them out. I also ensured I had drawing materials in case Marie wanted to draw her own cat images. I asked her which cat image she felt represented herself, her best friend, Debbie, and the teachers at school. I also asked if these characters wore items of Georgian fashionwear (a specific area of interest for Marie), what would it be, as well as what they might be thinking (depicted in thought bubbles above their heads).

Picture 10: Work area with resources (Session Two)

In the picture above, the real and fictional cat images printed from the Internet are laid out on the table, as well as the images Marie drew of herself. Additionally, there are drawings of her best friend, Debbie, and two teachers, Colin and Denise.

The pictures below depict Marie's drawings of teachers, Denise and Colin.

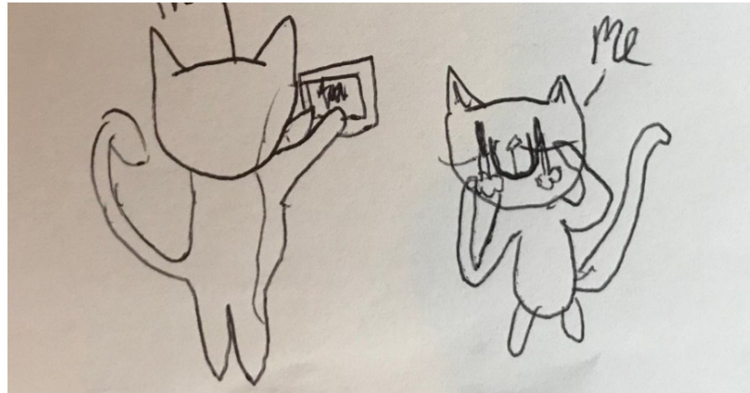


Picture 11: Drawing of Denise (Session Two)

Picture 12: Drawing of Colin (Session Two)

Marie drew Denise sitting in her teacher chair on the carpeted area of the P-BL studio where pupils ordinarily would be gathered to discuss work, as a class. She misspelled 'spotty' in her speech bubble (describing the rug in the picture). It is interesting that Marie chose for Denise (as the cat) to identify the rug, rather than labelling the object herself, as she had done with Colin's book and coffee cup. Colin was depicted as a crayon in Marie's drawing of him, with a book in one hand, and coffee cup in the other. Marie stated he liked those things. It took her four attempts to spell the word 'coffee' on her drawing. Colin being depicted as a crayon and holding a book suggested literary and creative qualities, although Marie did not explicitly state this.

Marie also drew herself and Debbie, as cats, in school, and these images are depicted below.

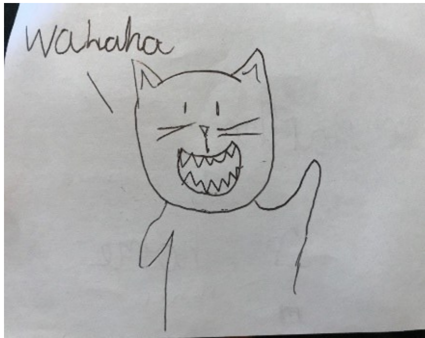


Picture 13: Drawing of Marie and Debbie. Marie on the right
(Session Two)

Marie explained in her interview that Debbie was on a computer in her drawing and '*typing up cat poo cookie'.* She explained this was a '*cookie…But, instead of chocolate chips, it* [*has*] *cat poo'*. Marie also stated that Debbie *'typed in "cats that look like frogs" and "cats that look like dogs" and "cats that look like masks"'* (into the search engine on the computer). She reported this incident happened in a lesson at school that day, and it made her cry *'because it was so funny*' (p.441 in Appendix 24). Dynamically, it could be said her drawing echoes how staff and her mother reported they saw Marie and Debbie: Debbie, as the doer, and Marie, as the follower.

Towards the end of Session Two, Marie decided to draw cat images of herself. Even though she did not use 'The Cat Returns' images to represent people, they provided some common ground for us to chat about. Marie did choose a cat image to represent her pet cat at home,

however. Marie's drawings of herself, as cats at home and school, are featured in the pictures 14 and 15 below.

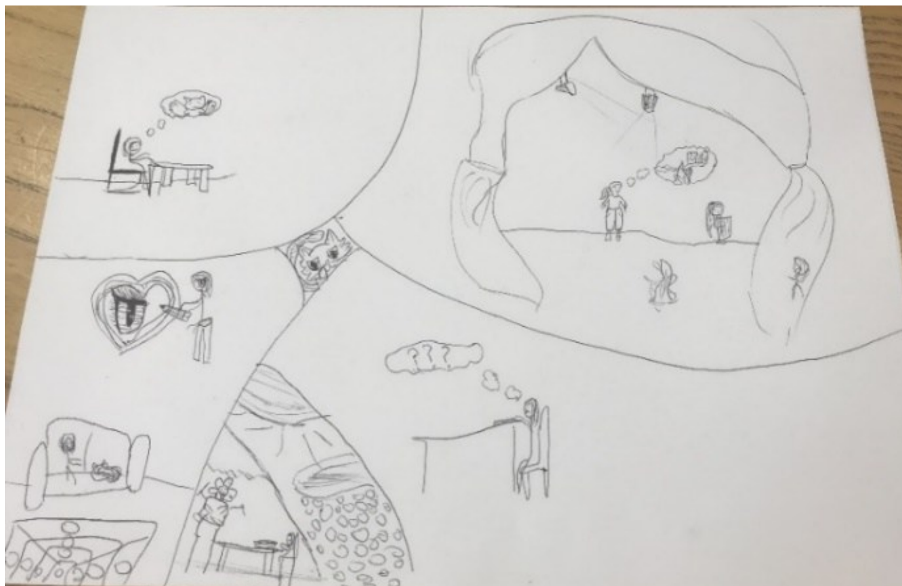


Picture 14: Marie's home cat

Picture 15: Marie's school cat

I invited Marie to role-play these two cats to learn more about them which she did.

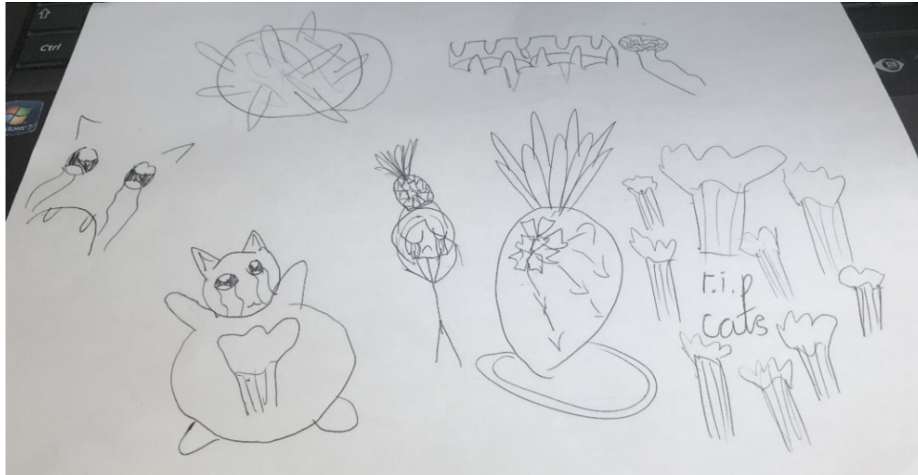
In our fourth session, Marie also drew her best and worst days at school. Her best day is featured below in picture 16.



Picture 16: Best day at school (Session Four)

Marie compartmentalised her drawing into different areas with a variety of things going on: her drawing eyes in one section; eating dinner next to a mountain in another; being stuck at maths (every maths lesson – '*I don't understand it*'); a performance of 'Jack and the Beanstalk'; dreaming in English about '*Angel'* cat (she was writing a story about a cat called Angel); and her on the sofa with her cat at home. Marie drew herself as a little cat peering through the drawing. There is a sense of envelopment and being at the centre of things, as her cat is placed just-off-centre in the picture. It is interesting that Marie included being stuck in maths as part of her best day. Perhaps suggesting a sense of its perennial presence in her daily school life.

Picture 17 below features Marie's worst day at school. She stated she had drawn herself with a pineapple on her head, and that pineapples were *'evil'*. She also drew an eclipse of the moon. The moon exploded and lava came out and then cats exploded everywhere. I asked her which cats exploded at school, and she stated all of them. In response to being asked how it felt when the cats exploded, she made a sad, whining sound. Marie did not place herself in the picture, as she had done for her best day at school. She stated that '*the Great Pineapple Lord'* lived in a temple but came to get Marie. I asked if the pineapple was something in school, what would it be, and Marie stated '*maths textbooks*'. She stated '*The pineapple comes down to suck Marie's brains out'* because maths is so hard. The exploding cats had eaten the pineapple which had made them explode. '*Lord Pineapple goes to all schools to get children'*.



Picture 17: Worst day at school (Session Four)

It can be said that her first drawing includes softer, more curved lines, as well as a dreamy quality, whereas her second picture features harder edges and has an explosive quality. The image of her brains being sucked out by a pineapple is quite violent and suggests the extreme pressure she felt in relation to maths work.

5.4.4.4 Role play and inter-synchrony

Marie and I successfully role-played her two, imaginary cats in Session Two which became our pivotal session. I asked her questions about them, and she answered me, in role. There was a long verbal exchange (see Appendix 24) through which Marie, and I communicated qualitatively differently compared to the rest of our dialogue. These exchanges were quicker, more monosyllabic, and the cadential ebb and flow resembled more of a dance in the way our intonation peaked and troughed and seemed to tease the other.

I micro-analyse an extract from this narrative sequence below and suggest how Marie and

I established inter-synchrony. I held up Marie's 'home cat' drawing and moved it around, as I improvised speaking as that character, intuitively adopting a harsh, American accent (how I imagined it would speak).

NB: I mis-read Marie's spelling of 'Wahaha' on her drawing for 'Whaha' at the time, thus that is how I pronounced it during our role play. The character Bob is Marie's school cat.

Me*: You're Bob. Why are you evil at school?*

Marie: (Rapid reply) *Because Bob.*

Me*:* (Match Marie's intonation) *Because Bob?*

Marie*: Because Bob.*

Me: *Is Bob evil?*

Marie*:* (Rising intonation) *No.*

Me*: No? What does Bob mean?*

Marie*: Bob means…*(rapid) *bobbidy bob bob bob.*

Me*: Bobbidy bob bob bob?* (Slight pause and then declarative tone referring to picture of home cat waving) *I go Whaha! Whaha!* (Pitch and volume rise on second Whaha and syllables are elongated)

Marie*:* (Slight pause) *Bob*

Me*: Whaha!*

Marie*:* (Rapid reply) *Bob*

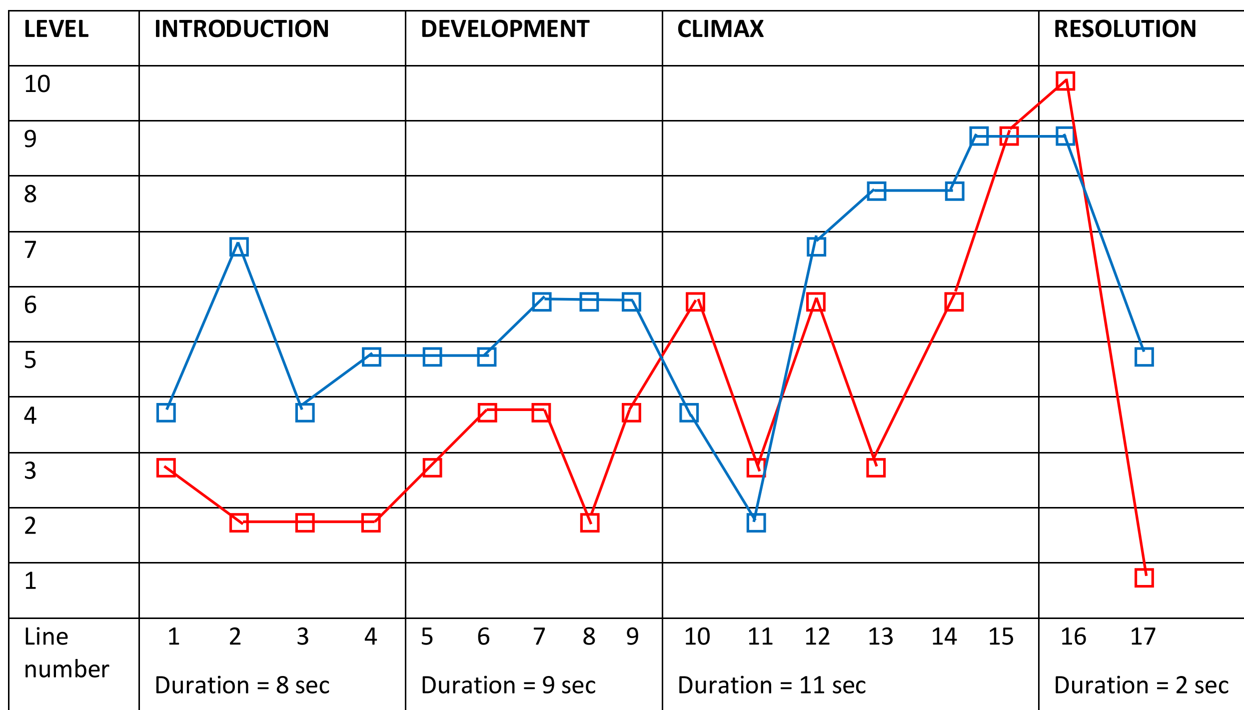
Me*: Whaha!*

Marie*:* (Scream-like but subdued. I laugh at same time) *Whaaaa*

Me*: Whahaaaa…oww!* (I laugh) (Referring to an imaginary spade Bob uses in the garden at home) *Diiiig…*

In Graph 1 below, I showcase the inter-synchrony I believe Marie and I established by exemplifying the patterns of our recorded pitch and speed, as we progressed through the above dialogue. On analysing the volume variance in the recording, Marie's volume level remained consistent, while mine increased significantly on the '*Whaha*!' exclamations towards the end. As Marie's volume did not increase with mine, I have not included it on

the graph, as I believe the musicality of the pitch variance between us in lines 10 to 15 better exemplifies inter-synchrony.



Pitch = ☐ Speed = ☐ **Graph 1**: Plotted expressions within dialogue

Table 13: Narrative development

INTRODUCITON	DEVELOPMENT	CLIMAX	RESOLUTION
1) **You're Bob. Why are you evil at school?** 2) Because Bob 3) **Because Bob?** 4) Because Bob *Bold* = Researcher *Non-bold* = Marie	5) **Is Bob evil?** 6) No 7) **No? What does Bob mean?** 8) Bob means bobbidy bob bob bob 9) **Bobbidy bob bob bob?**	10) **I go Whaha! Whaha** 11) Bob 12) **Whaha!** 13) Bob 14) **Whaha!** 15) Whaaaa!	16) **Whahaaaa… oww!** 17) **Diiig**

The first important feature of our interaction and one which I would argue helped scaffold and prepare for the upcoming narrative climax is my acceptance of Marie's apparently non-sensical response to my question '*Why are you evil at school*?'. She states, '*Because Bob'*

(Bob was the name of her school cat). I could have replied '*Because Bob*?' in a puzzled tone, wearing a confused facial expression (as I was indeed confused by her response), but, instead, I repeated what she said and mirrored her intonation, only raising the pitch very slightly at the end, as one does when asking a question. I also adjusted my facial expression by raising my eyebrows and widening my eyes, which I hoped would denote a sense of openness to her. I intuited she did not know what to say in reply to my question '*Why are you evil at school?*', thus did not want to apply any additional pressure on her. Therefore, when she repeats '*Because Bob'*, I accept this statement and loop back to a previous comment she made about Bob being evil.

My second affirmation of Marie occurs when I pretend to be the home cat she has drawn and exclaim '*I go Whaha*!'. I jiggled my head and torso from side-to-side, widened my mouth and eyes, raised my eyebrows, and delivered my words as if goading Marie, whilst waving the paper with the drawn cat on it from side-to-side in tandem with my body. I believe this sense of playfulness and acceptance enabled Marie to feel safe within our interaction and laid down the foundation stones for our narrative climax to emerge.

Co-regulation (explained in section 3.4.3.4) continued to be supported further into our dialogue. The graph in Figure 4 illustrates how our narrative sequence climaxed, and our respective vocal pitches and speed mirrored the climax, as they both rise exponentially towards the end of the sequence. As Marie's volume did not increase with mine, I did not include it on the graph, as I believe the musicality of the pitch and speed variance between us in the last six lines better exemplifies inter-synchrony. To explain, Marie said the word

'*Bob*' (her school cat's name) quietly and using a low pitch, whereas my vocal pitch was high, as I exclaimed loudly '*Whaha*', as her home cat. As depicted in the pictures above, Marie's school cat has a very small, closed mouth, and closed body language, with clasped hands. It's cartoon-like persona, with the shiny glint in each eye, hints at a sense of containment and being well-behaved at school. Marie's cat voice mirrored this: low-pitched and quiet. Whereas, her depiction, as herself at home, was very different: open body language, with one arm waving suggesting friendliness and a huge grinning mouth full of teeth.

I feel 'the dance' begins on the tenth line above, as I loudly exclaim '*I go Whaha!*' (and wave the picture of her home cat about). Marie hesitates slightly and then quietly responds. There are various possible interpretations of the nature of her response. I feel the immediate vocal contrast could symbolise how she saw herself in school: as meek and quiet. It could also have been an immediate sensorimotor response to my playful (loud) challenge. The ensuing exchange resembles a ping pong match, as we hurl high/loud versus low/quiet verbal utterances to and fro. Marie then suddenly breaks the high tension of the 'Whaha/Bob' sequence, and we reach the sequential climax in the last two lines. We howl together and then I introduce the anti-climax with the word '*Dig*'. I delivered this through a very low-pitched, bellowing voice, and elongated the vowel sound. Both Marie and I laughed as the sequence climaxed - there was much joy, mutual playfulness and respective tease at this point of the interaction.

I would argue the point at which we vocally crescendo is an example of a vitality-matching (Koppe et al., 2008), as Marie's pitch, speed and energy levels all align with mine in the moment. Vitality forms only relate to the 'how' part of actions, not the 'what' or 'why' parts (Stern, 2010). I feel Marie unconsciously understood that the 'how' of our 'Whaha/Bob' exchange possessed a playful, dual-like quality and intuited my invitation to her to engage in a verbal dance through my body language and prosody.

The next excerpt (see Appendix 24) illustrates how our conversation settled into a less playful exchange to more everyday conversation later in the session. We discuss the imaginary fluff Marie imagines she wears in school.

> **Me***: And do you feel it around you in the day, the fluff?*
> **Marie***: Ahh – it's the thing that makes me feel really warm.*
> **Me***: Yeah? And what? You feel like that if you don't have the fluff?*
> **Marie***:* (Whispering) *I feel cold.*
> **Me***: You feel cold. Literally cold? Or emotionally cold?*
> **Marie***: Both.*
> **Me***: Both. Ok. Wow – this fluff sounds important. I see, and does the fluff protect you from anything?*
> **Marie***: Hmm – no, it just makes me feel warm.*

I feel this more everyday exchange was only made possible by us communicating through bi-directional, co-regulatory play earlier in the session which appeared to build trust and ease between us.

I also submit that, at times in this session, I talked quite a lot, as Marie remained silent. On the surface, it may look like I was dominating the conversation. However, I feel my

continuous chit-chat potentially helped fill in the uncomfortable gaps in our dialogue, preventing Marie from feeling under the spotlight. I also think there was a little nervousness and apprehension on my part about upsetting her, as I had witnessed her becoming upset a few times in the classroom already. I consciously did not want her to feel any pressure from me to immediately comprehend what I was asking, hence I frequently repeated and re-phrased my questions. Ironically, my approach may have been pressurising for another autistic pupil, but it seemed to work for Marie, as she did not clam up in any way, and was able to share a great deal in Session Two. I did experience her clamming up in our third session, thus gained some measure of how the two experiences compared.

5.4.5 All transactional supports used with Marie

In Box 10 below, I present a list of the transactional supports that enabled Marie to partake in our sessions together and elicit her inside views.

Box 10: Transactional supports used with Marie
1. Areas of specific interest: cats, drawing, cuddly toys, Georgian fashion, Jane Austen characters. 2. Resources: pictures of cat characters from 'Cat Returns', Georgian fashion and Jane Austen characters, a fluffy toy seal, coloured crayons, paper, pencil, rubber. 3. Role play and hot-seating. 4. Pie chart: apportioning segments on chart according to who Marie liked working with in lessons most. 5. Establishing synchrony with Marie and mirroring her body language and energy levels. 6. Marie nodding her head for 'yes' and shaking for 'no'. 7. Using closed, as opposed to open-ended questions. 8. Re-phrasing and repeating questions. 9. Vocal modulation: pitch, volume, timbre, and length of sound. 10. Social timing.

5.4.6 Emergent themes

I selected Marie's second interview as our pivotal session and identified 22 Significant Events (SE) within the transcript (full transcription in Appendix 24). I present these in Table 14 below.

Table 14: Marie's Significant Events

Significant Event	Descriptor	Supporting Quotes/Evidence
SE1	Home cat has an evil voice [Cat symbolised Marie and the cat being evil was unexpected]	(p.4 of transcript) Me*: 'What kind of voice has it got?'* Marie: *'I'm evil'*
SE2	My school cat is cartoon-like and perfect-looking	(p,4) Marie draws her school cat. It has a huge head, big, staring eyes, upright tail, hands clasped together, smiling, well-presented
SE3	Marie and I bond and build trust	(p,6) Rapid sound and cat name exchange.
SE4	Marie seems to associate imaginary cat fluff with happiness	(p.6) I ask Marie if her school cat's tail being upright equates being happy. She replies '*Fluff*'
SE5	Marie describes her school cat as fluffy	(p.7) Me: *'Can you describe your school cat?'* Marie: *'Fluffy'* (whispered and elongated)
SE6	Marie's school cat cannot be evil because it is fluffy	(p.8) Me: *'Why can't this cat be evil at school?'* Marie: *'Because of fluffy'*
SE7	Marie's school cat's fluff is real	(p.8) Me: *'Is the fluff real or pretend?*' Marie: *'Real fluff'*
SE8	When Marie goes home, she leaves her fluff at school gates	(p.8) Me: *'What happens to the fluff when Marie goes home?'* Marie: *'She sheds.'* Me: *'Where does he leave it?'* Marie: *'At the school gates'*
SE9	Marie's fluff awaits her return to school	(p.9) Me: *'What happens to the fluff? Does it blow away in the wind?'* Marie: *'No, it just sits there'*
SE10	If Marie went to school without her fluff, she would feel naked	(p.9) Me: *'What would that feel like, going to school without the fluff?'* Marie: *'Naked'*
SE11	Marie needs her school cat to have its fluff	(p.10) Me: (if fluff blew away in wind and not at school gates to put on) *'How would you feel then?'* Marie: *'What if home cat went to the shop and bought some fluff?'*
SE12	Marie feels so sad without her fluff	(p.10) Me: *'So, what would you feel like…without the fluff?*' (Marie draws another cat) Marie: *'I'm so sad'*

SE13	If Marie's fluff were a sound, it would be silence	(p.11) Me*: 'I wonder what sound fluff would be?'* Marie: *'Silence'* (whispered)
SE14	If Marie's fluff were an element, it would be fire	(p.12) Me*: If your fluff was an element…'* Marie: *'It would be fire because its warm'*
SE15	Marie made her fluff	(p.12) Me: '*Can this fluff go on anyone or just Marie?'* Marie: *'Just me'*
SE16	Marie feels emotionally and physically cold without her fluff	(p.12) Me: *'You feel cold. Literally cold? Or emotionally cold?'* Marie: *'Both'*
SE17	Marie does not like working on her own in lessons	(p.17) (Marie apportions segments to pie chart according to who she likes to work with in lessons) Me: *'So, are you saying you don't like working on your own that much.'* Marie: *'No.' (*In context, Marie means 'yes')
SE18	Marie feels a bit better with her fluff on when working in a group	(p.19) Me*: 'But now Marie cat's go her fluff on. What does it feel like to be in the group now? Better or worse?'* Marie: *'A bit better.'*
SE19	Marie's fluff makes her feel not so shy around other people	(p.19) Me*: What is the fluff's job in school?'* Marie*: 'To Make me feel not so shy around other people'*
SE20	Marie's fluff seems to feel real	(p.19) Me: *'There isn't any fluff. You haven't any fluff on, so what do you use instead to make you feel less shy around other people?'* Marie: *'Imaginary fluff.'*
SE21	Marie cannot explain what wearing her fluff feels like	(p.20) Me: *'Do you imagine the fluff on your arm? Your leg?'* Marie: *'I don't know how to explain'*
SE22	Marie does not feel shy when somebody talks to her	(p.20) Me*: '…when somebody talks to you, do you sometimes feel shy?'* Marie: *Not really.'* *Me: 'But, did you say before that the fluff helps you not feel so shy? So, you sometimes feel shy or not?'* Marie: *'Not, not, um, not usually'*

I extrapolated the emergent themes from Marie's SE. These are presented in Box 11 below.

Box 11: Emergent themes from Significant Events
1. Marie feels vulnerable at school 2. Projects different personas at home and school 3. Dislikes working alone in class 4. Feels vulnerable in groups

5.4.7 Superordinate themes

I assimilated the evidence from the other data sources to corroborate the emergent themes but also derived new themes from my analysis (see emergent themes table in Appendix 25). I finally distilled these themes into the following superordinate themes which I set out in Box 12 below.

Box 12: Superordinate themes
1. Imaginary cat fluff helps in school 2. Displays emotions externally 3. Only works with Debbie 4. Not sure how to ask for help 5. Learning needs to be clearly structured

5.4.7.1 Imaginary cat fluff helps in school

A highly significant phenomenon emerged during my second interview with Marie which her mother was not aware of. Marie reported she thought her imaginary school cat was '*fluffy*', and stated she wore fluff to keep her physically and emotionally warm when in school, as well as not feeling so scared, or seemingly shy to others (see Appendix 24). Her fluff seemed important to her, as I asked her what would happen if her fluff blew away in the wind, and she answered home cat could buy some more for school cat.

> **Me**: *If we took school cat's fluff off and it blew away in the wind…How would you feel?*
> **Marie**: *What if home cat went to the shop and bought some fluff?* (see Appendix 24).

Marie seemed to see the need to replace her fluff in this imaginary scenario. She described her fluff as '*silent*' in our second session which seemed to mirror how she drew her school cat's mouth and hands: closed shut, without expression, suggesting a more closed persona

in school. This revelation, coupled with the fact Marie imagined '*shed*[ding]' her fluff at the school gates on leaving each day, signalled she may have been adopting a role in school – a role that seemed to protect her. This need for protection was evident in her comments in relation to working in groups in P-BL lessons. She stated she felt '*a bit better*' when she wore her fluff (p.443 in Appendix 24). There was a general sense that Marie felt vulnerable without her imaginary fluff: *'I feel under attack when I am having a bad day at school and lose my fluff'* (see Appendix 24).

The violence in the image depicting Marie's worst day at school felt significant, given Marie stated a pineapple would come down and '*suck her brains out'* because maths was '*so hard*' (section 14, Appendix 25). She remarked the exploding cats in her drawing had eaten pineapple which made them explode. This description evoked a sense of Marie feeling under attack at times in school and possibly why she felt she needed imaginary fluff to protect her.

The fact that Marie's school cat was pristinely presented with large eyes reflecting the light in the same way teeth sparkle on television advertisements seemed to indicate she possibly felt the need to present a perfect image in school. It was cartoon-like, had a small mouth and its hands were clasped together. Whereas her home cat wore a huge grin filled full of teeth, was waving, exclaimed '*Wahaha*', and was described as '*evil*' by her possibly suggesting more relaxed self-expression and openness (cats in Pictures 14 and 15).

5.4.7.2 Superordinate theme: Displays emotions externally

During my observation of Marie in school, I witnessed her physically recoil, rolling her eyes, and whimpering in response to challenging situations on several occasions. These challenges often were caused by teachers or me asking her questions too directly. On one occasion, Hal questioned Marie directly about the classwork he had set in a P-BL lesson, but Marie did not respond (section two, Appendix 25). Similarly, in my third interview with her, I experienced her externally display her emotional upset at being questioned about her imaginary fluff. She placed her head upon her arms on the desk, her body stiffened, and her breathing deepened, sped up and became erratic. It was very clear she was upset (post-interview notes, 19.6.19, and Appendix 14).

5.4.7.3 Superordinate theme: Only works with Debbie

On one occasion, I observed Marie being unexpectedly split up from her best friend, Debbie, in a P-BL lesson and asked by Hal to work in a different group. She proceeded to put her head down upon her folded arms on her desk and appeared to be crying, with her top lip curled up (section one, Appendix 25). Hal did not appear to notice this. This response could have been attributable to the unexpected change or reflected Marie's discomfort at being split up from Debbie. Denise remarked in her interview with me that Marie and Debbie seemed to be in their '*little zone*' together in P-BL and Marie was '*not very social with other children except Debbie*' (see Appendix 13). Furthermore, Hal noted in his interview with me that if Marie became anxious or upset, she found it '*difficult to engage and interact*' with others, needing control of who she was with (see Appendix 13).

In several lessons, I observed Marie resisting teachers' requests for her to work with others. She fell silent when invited to discuss the thematic content of an assembly with the person next to her whilst sitting in an assembly (section eight, Appendix 25). I also sometimes observed Marie not responding to peers when they tried to engage with her (section eight, Appendix 25).

It was clear Marie did not enjoy working in big groups. On one occasion, I asked her how she felt when in a big group and she replied '*Scared*' (section 13, Appendix 25). Her mother reported in a telephone conversation that she said to her 'I don't say anything. I never talk in P-BL' (phone interview, 4.4.19, Appendix 12). However, as a result of the pie chart exercise in our first interview, it became apparent that Marie did not like working on her own in lessons either (see Picture 9).

5.4.7.4 Superordinate theme: Not sure how to ask for help

In my second session with Marie, I asked her if she could ask a teacher or friend for help whenever she felt stuck with classwork, and she replied she could not (section 11, Appendix 25). I asked her if she found it difficult telling someone how she felt and she answered '*Yes*.' In a P-BL lesson, Hal set Marie the task of drawing images in response to the question 'What should a child have?' (in life). She sat for a long time drawing squiggly lines on a mini whiteboard and looked unsure what to do (shadow observation notes, 4.2.19). I also observed her struggle to begin to write a story in an English lesson on the same day (shadow observation notes, 4.2.19). I never witnessed Marie asking any teacher or peer for

help in the whole time I observed her. Yet, when quizzed about the work on the occasions she appeared stuck, she either did not respond or stated she did not understand what to do (see Appendix 25).

In the P-BL lesson in which Hal and I experimented with using the Yes/No response method, Hal asked Marie if she felt confused in P-BL sometimes and she answered '*Yes*' on her board (section five, Appendix 25). This suggested she was not confident in asking for help, or did not know how to, considering I never observed her doing so.

5.4.7.5 Superordinate theme: Learning needs to be clearly structured

Colin, Marie's Base Camp Leader and tutor, described a routine he had developed with Marie he felt was helpful to her. He would write on the class whiteboard each morning what the class were doing that day and Marie would arrange Velcro-backed images/symbols on a visual schedule. If there was not a suitable picture to represent the specified activities, Marie would draw one. Colin felt this helped Marie embed the order of activities each day (field notes, 21.5.19).

As part of a P-BL project exploring Animal Rights, Marie had decided to paint a picture. Hal stated he had suggested to Marie to split her painting canvas into two halves to represent a '*split world*'. He felt Marie needed an '*initial idea to build on*' (see Appendix 13). Similarly, Scott reported Denise told Marie what to do and when to do it (see Appendix 13).

5.4.8 Reflections on Marie's findings

What worked?

Without a doubt, the most successful moments within my sessions with Marie were those where the focus of attention was diverted away from her and onto a third party (Debbie), entity (imaginary cats) or objects (cat drawings and pictures). She seemed most relaxed when drawing and could easily talk about the content of her drawings and what she felt they represented.

What did not work?

There is a clear distinction between Session One and Session Two in terms of how much Marie was willing to share (see Appendices 14 and 24). In Session One, I asked her questions directly about her school experience and this led to her clamming up. Whereas in Session Two, we were focused most of the time on Marie's special interests and questions about school were asked vicariously through a third object (her cat drawings).

Furthermore, the purpose of my third interview with Marie was to try to discover more about her imaginary 'fluff', as it seemed to play a significant part in how she coped in school. Unfortunately, it ended up a very difficult interview and had to be abandoned. There were several possible causes of this. Firstly, I may have confused Marie by making the role play exercise too abstract. I started our interview by asking if we could imagine the fluffy, cuddly toy I had brought in from home represented her cat fluff. However, the toy

was a seal, albeit very fluffy, but not a cat. I also asked if she could speak as the fluff but represented by the seal. This symbol may have been too removed from the concept of a cat or how she viewed her fluff. I had unwittingly twice-removed the symbol from reality – I feel this was too much for Marie to comprehend. Moreover, I launched straight into talking about her fluff at the beginning of the interview with little warm-up chat which, on reflection, was needed to re-establish her trust in me. On listening back to the recording of the interview, I also feel my questioning was too direct this time.

Marie's mother and I reflected on what happened in this interview afterwards and she wondered if Marie had felt she was in trouble for having fluff and had done something wrong. She also suggested I may have been getting '*too close to the bone'* with Marie which could have triggered the stress response. By too close to the bone, Marie's mother meant it may have felt as though I was peeling her layer of protection (fluff) away (post-interview discussion with mother in school, field notes, 19.6.19).

5.5 Participant: Debbie

5.5.1 Data overview

The sets of data I gathered on Debbie comprised eight months of observation and field notes of her in class, around school and in the playground; interviews with four of her teachers (Hal, Scott, Denise and Colin; see Appendix 13); a phone and face-to-face interview with her mother (extracts from interviews in Appendix 26); three direct sessions between Debbie and me in school; a session with her mother present in school; and one

joint interview with Debbie and Marie (details of all sessions in school in section 5.5.3, and full transcription of Session Four in Appendix 27).

5.5.2 Debbie's biography

As in Marie's case, Debbie had attended the research school since it opened and was in year five (aged nine) when I conducted my research. She already had a diagnosis of autism (aged seven), along with her three older brothers and father (mother's comments, Appendix 26). As stated earlier, Debbie was best friends with another of my main participants, Marie, and in the same base camp as her.

Cognition and learning

Debbie had been transferred to a year six class for literacy, as she was above aged-related expectations in English (mother's comments, Appendix 26). Debbie's mother felt the teachers assumed she was more independent than she was because she was good at literacy. According to her mother (and observed by me), Debbie loved reading and writing, particularly reading Jacqueline Wilson novels. She had struggled with reading until year one but found motivation and interest when she started competing to read more advanced material with a friend (see Appendix 26). She 'hated' physical education, particularly football, and found catching balls very difficult (interview audit, section 5.5.3). She was at the age-related expected level in maths (informal chat with maths teacher, field notes, 8.2.19).

Most teachers I spoke to about Debbie felt she was coping quite well in school (see Appendix 13). Denise felt Debbie and Marie were very '*insular*', as '*both need*[ed] *to do the same*' and be '*involved*' in what the other was doing all the time. She felt Debbie listened to her but had to look elsewhere. Denise also felt Debbie would never tell her if somebody was getting on her nerves in a lesson. Both Hal and Scott expressed the opinion that Debbie understood the concept of P-BL. Scott felt she '*could work with her own ideas*', whereas Hal thought she '*needed structure to follow*' (teachers' comments, Appendix 13).

Sensory needs

In her first interview with me, Debbie's mother explained that Debbie had various sensory sensitivities and needs. She was sensitive to noise and particular items of clothing. Her mother bought her a '*sensory bag*' which she thought might help Debbie regulate. It contained items such as fiddle toys and ear defenders. However, Debbie did not use these resources very much, and her mother felt this possibly was either down to her feeling she may stand out at school or the change using the resources involved caused her too much anguish. Debbie would often stim (attempt to regulate her sensory systems) by pacing up and down, whilst muttering to herself in school. Her Occupational Therapist felt this was a sign she was becoming stressed (mother's comments, Appendix 26). I did witness this behaviour on several occasions, and it seemed to coincide with stressful situations such as her not knowing what she was meant to be doing in a lesson, or feeling confined in a space (section four, Appendix 28).

Out of all my main participants, Debbie seemed to internalise or mask her emotions the most. On the surface, one might have assumed she was coping well, however, if one scratched beneath the surface, it appeared she was not coping so well, at times. Hal felt Debbie was able to '*mask her autism*' (see Appendix 13).

Special interests

Debbie's special interests were cats, videos of cats being rescued and reared, dinosaurs, animals, dolls, doll houses and reading. She shared her favourite days at school included trips to the local aquarium and planetarium, and when it snowed. Her mother felt these were favourite experiences because they were largely '*sensory*'. Debbie enjoyed playing outside with Marie and a male friend during break times at school, particularly playing games which involved pretending to be cats, wolves and dinosaurs (mother's comments, Appendix 26).

5.5.3 Overview of sessions

Diagram D below provides an overview of my one-to-one interviews with Debbie and my joint interview with Debbie and Marie.

SESSION ONE (26.3.19, 19.39 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Debbie and Marie in Head of Phases' office. I ask them what their favourite subjects are and what they are good at. English is Debbie's favourite subject, but she also likes maths and P-BL. She feels her writing '*just flows*'; she has ideas in her head; it feels good to finish a project, she '*can just relax*'. I ask Marie if she can talk about her artwork, but she is unable, so I invite Debbie to describe it, which she does. We chat about the art piece and Marie begins to contribute.

Debbie starts looking out of window. I ask them about P-BL. Debbie is enjoying writing her monologue in P-BL. She starts to pace up and down room. I suggest she leaves, as she is becoming anxious. I give Marie the choice to leave, but she says she does not mind. I ask why she thinks Debbie became anxious and she says straight away Debbie does not like being in a small space for too long.

SESSION TWO (21.5.19, 31.41 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED PLAY SESSION with mother present in school English studio at end of day. We look at a picture of Debbie's cat, McKenzie, from home. I ask Debbie to choose two cats from printed pictures to represent how she feels at home and school which she does. I take out peg dolls and toy animals and ask which animal she likes best. She chooses a toad.

We construct an imaginary P-BL studio with props and toy animals. I ask Debbie to put herself in the scene. She chooses the toad to represent herself. She puts herself in Denise's teaching space at a computer. Debbie chooses animals to represent individual teachers and some children. We role play imaginary situation in which Head of PB-L, Scott, interrupts class twice to give instructions. I ask Debbie to voice out loud what character Debbie might be thinking and feeling. Debbie replies '*That is not Scott*' (referring to toy animal). I re-phrase my questions, but Debbie struggles to answer. I ask if she would prefer to write or draw her ideas on paper. She continues to struggle with the symbolism and repeats '*That's a penguin , not Hal*'.

We role play a second scenario in which Denise asks Debbie if she could do some acting in the play. Debbie says acting feels too scary and chooses a cat to represent the fear. She describes the scariness as red, a shark, fire, heavy footsteps. I ask Debbie to construct a picture of her best day using props. She struggles to make the scene, as it's too abstract. I ask if she would like to draw how her best day made her feel, and she chooses her home cat instead. Becomes too noisy in classroom, leading to agitation in Debbie. We stop.

SESSION THREE (28.5.19, 4.44 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Debbie in P-BL kitchen during a lesson. We flick through Debbie's P-BL work folder and look at her work on 'Animal Rights', in particular, her lion monologue which explores a day in the life of a lion trapped in a zoo (written in first person from the lion's perspective). I read an extract from it and ask her questions about the lion and what it might be thinking. Debbie's teacher asked her to break monologue into three parts, but Debbie does not know why, only that they should be linked somehow. She writes some more of the monologue.

We also discuss videos on animal rights she has watched.

SESSION FOUR (PIVOTAL) (12.6.19, 38.16 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW in P-BL kitchen and continues in playground. Debbie shows me how to draw a rose and then shows me her costume design drawings for play 'Much Ado About Nothing' (part of P-BL project). Debbie states Denise told her to design a mask and veil. She says she and Marie enjoy hand-sewing.

I ask if Debbie can role-reverse with her synthetic cat tail (that she has worn in class for past three days) and she agrees. I ask tail why Debbie puts it on her. Debbie, as tail, responds '*For fun*'. She states sometimes people touch her tail and it makes her feel angry. I ask the tail how Debbie is feeling about being in year 6 and tail replies '*Excited*' and explains Debbie will transfer to another school building where there will be '*playing things*' which is exciting.

Debbie asks to move from P-BL kitchen, so I suggest we change location to outside. We move to playground and sit down. She remarks, '*Oh that's an awful sound!*' in response to a drilling noise in the street. We chat about two incidents: when Denise did not notice Debbie needed a feather in class and Debbie's fright when Denise suddenly whistled to get the classes' attention. We discuss her P-BL assessment form which she seems to fully understand. I ask her to describe on paper how it feels to be at school and home. Underlined words are her favourite things at home and school.
School: cold in winter, cold in summer, noisy, crazy, <u>friends</u>, bullies, <u>class reader (teacher reads), reading</u>, hate P.E, <u>singing assemblies</u>, likes invasion games. Home: <u>family, jelly cat, her pet cat</u>, calm, cosy, does whatever she wants sometimes, cold in summer, warm in winter, nice.

SESSION FIVE (10.7.19, 18.51 min):

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW with Debbie in school playground during a lesson. I show Debbie her written ideas from last session to remind her of what we did. I ask if Debbie can draw herself, as a cat at home, then a second cat for how she is in school (if it changes) and what her cat looks like on returning home at the end of the day. I ask her to write words to describe her home cat on her picture. She writes: 'Sleepy, tired, lazy and happy'. For her school cat, she writes: 'Happy more awake but still sleepy. Ready'. Her second home cat looks tired, and she includes the word 'hungry' to describe it. I ask her which cat she prefers to be, and she states, 'Home cat at the end of the day, as I can just relax'.

I ask Debbie to draw the 'easiest thing about school'. She draws a cat reading. I ask her to draw the most difficult thing about school and she draws a worried-looking cat wearing shorts. She writes PE next to cat. I ask if she can draw speech bubble coming out of cat's mouth, what would it say? She says, 'It's tiring'. I ask Debbie to write a second speech bubble answering my question 'Why is it so tiring?' She writes 'We do things that get our bodies tired'. I ask, 'How does it feel to be tired?' Debbie writes 'Sweaty, sleepy and lazy'. Debbie states Colin (her base camp leader) does not know she hates PE. She did enjoy dodgeball the previous day. She found it easier, as lots of people.

Diagram D: Overview of Debbie's sessions

5.5.4 Key transactional supports

5.5.4.1 Role play

The idea of using role play with Debbie was to try to explore why she became so annoyed when teachers suddenly changed the activities in P-BL after stating the pupils would be completing them in a certain way or order. Picture 18 below features the imaginary P-BL studio Debbie created out of everyday objects and toy animals in Session Two.

Picture 18: Peg doll small world play images (Session Two)

Debbie can be seen at the top of the picture represented by a toad sitting with Marie (Ostrich) and a respective friend (giant sea turtle). Hal (penguin) and Denise (giraffe) stand in the foreground, whilst Scott can be seen at the top far left corner of the table, as a kangaroo. Classmates (peg dolls) can be seen in the middle of the picture, sitting around a symbolic table (phone). The ruler and recording device were used to demarcate the studio space.

Debbie struggled to comprehend the symbolism of the imaginary situation. It would seem her literalism, which is associated with an autism diagnosis, was possibly responsible for this phenomenon. The toy penguin representing Hal and toy kangaroo representing Scott appeared to be too abstract for her – all she saw were toy animals but heard me stating '*This is Hal*' or '*This is Scott*'.

The two cats looking alarmed in Picture 19 below were chosen by Debbie to represent her

at school, whereas the cat lounging on the floor in the centre of the picture represented her at home. Using printed-out cat images for Debbie to select worked better than the role play.

Picture 19: Toy animals and cat images (Session Two)

5.5.4.2 Debbie's pretend cat tail

During the ensuing weeks after my play session with Debbie and her mother, I noticed Debbie had started wearing a short, synthetic cat tail in school where a tail would normally hang on an animal. This felt a significant event, as I knew she felt a deep affinity with cats, and it was a very unusual thing for a pupil to wear in school. I pondered if Debbie viewed her tail as part of her identity in school, and whether it could act as a conduit through which to discuss her feelings about school, as my first attempt at using dolls and animals had been unsuccessful.

In the following excerpt (full transcription in Appendix 27), it is evident that Debbie could

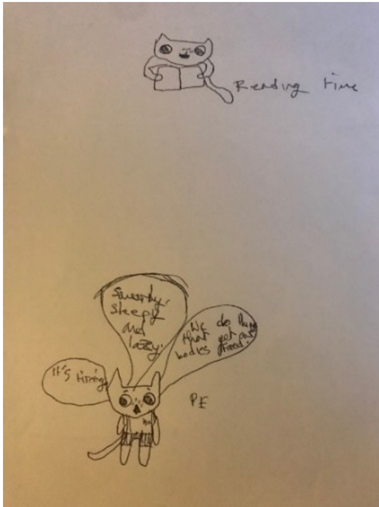
role-reverse with her pretend tail and talk about herself from its point of view. She even corrected my improper use of the possessive pronoun 'your' (when referring to her tail), replacing her use of 'my' with 'me' (as in, she *was* the tail).

Me: *And, has anyone touched your, touched your tail?*
Debbie: *Yes!*
Me: *Mmm… when did that happen?*
Debbie: *Well, sometimes I find that, sometimes people want to touch my tail for no…and want to touch me for no reason* (giggles)*, my tail..*
Me: (Laughs)
Debbie: *I am the tail.*
Me: (Mock, gruff voice that Debbie giggles along with) *You are the tail! Um, so how did that make you feel tail, when somebody touched you that shouldn't have touched you?*
Debbie: *Angry.*
Me: *Angry. Did Debbie say anything to the people, tail?*
Debbie: (Pause) *I don't think so.*

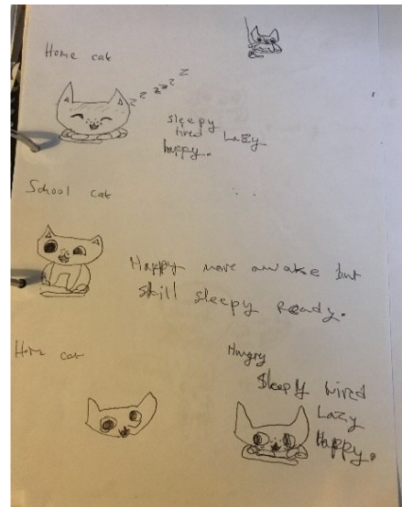
I decided Session Four was our pivotal session, as Debbie was able to share how she felt about certain aspects of her school experience such as her least favourite lesson (PE). However, I did not get to the bottom of why teachers telling her to do one thing and then changing their minds halfway through intensely annoyed her. I needed more research time to delve into how her pretend tail could have been utilised, as a medium of communication.

5.5.4.3 Drawing

Pictures 20 and 21 below depict the cat drawings Debbie drew to represent how it felt to be at home and school.



Picture 20: Top cat 'easiest thing'; bottom cat 'hardest thing' (Session Five)



Picture 21: Herself at home, school, and home again (Session Five)

Picture 20 shows the 'easiest thing about school' for Debbie. She drew a cat reading. I asked her to draw the most difficult thing about school, and she drew a worried-looking cat wearing shorts. She wrote 'PE' next to cat. I asked if she drew a speech bubble coming out of the cat's mouth, what would it say, and she stated, '*It's tiring'*. I asked her to write a second speech bubble answering my question 'Why is it so tiring?' She wrote '*We do things that get our bodies tired*'. I asked, '*How does it feel to be tired?*' Debbie wrote '*Sweaty, sleepy and lazy'*.

In Picture 21, Debbie depicted herself as a cat at home, a second cat for how she was in school (if it changed), and what her cat looked like on returning home at the end of the day. I asked her to write words to describe her home cat on her picture. She wrote: 'Sleepy, tired, lazy and happy'. For her school cat, she wrote: 'Happy more awake but still sleepy. Ready'. Her second home cat looks tired, and she includes the word 'hungry' to describe it.

I asked her which cat she preferred to be, and she stated, '*Home cat at the end of the day, as I can just relax*'.

It is interesting to note the first home cat in Picture 21 has its eyes closed, is snoozing (as there are 'zs' coming out of the cat), and looks quite serene. Whereas the PE cat looks somewhat perplexed, as represented by its larger eyes and widened mouth resembling an 'o' shape.

5.5.5 All transactional supports used with Debbie

Below is a list of the transactional supports that enabled Debbie to partake in our sessions together and elicit her inside views.

Box 13: Transactional supports used with Debbie
1. Areas of specific interest: cats, drawing, dolls, toy animals. 2. Resources: pictures of cat characters from 'Cat Returns', A4 plain paper, coloured crayons, pencil/rubber, synthetic cat tail, Debbie's P-BL file and costume designs. 3. Role play and role-reversal: Debbie role-reversed with her synthetic cat tail. 4. Hot-seating: I asked Debbie questions when she was in role as her pretend cat tail. 5. Thoughts aloud: I asked Debbie what thoughts her cats might have had at home and school. 6. Establishing synchrony with Debbie and mirroring her body language and energy levels. 7. Using closed, as opposed to open-ended questions. 8. Re-phrasing and repeating questions. 9. Vocal modulation: pitch, volume, timbre, and length of sound.

5.5.6 Emergent themes

I selected Debbie's fourth interview as our pivotal session and identified 21 Significant Events (SE) within the transcript (full transcription in Appendix 27). I present these in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Debbie's Significant Events

Significant Event	Descriptor	Supporting Quotes/Evidence
SE1	Teacher decides what Debbie does in P-BL	(p.1 of transcript) Me: *'Was it Denise's idea for you to design a costume with a veil and a party mask, or did you?'* Debbie: *'Yeah. Denise says all to do.'* (p.5) Me: *'Whose idea was it to make masks?'* Debbie: *'Denise said to make masks'*
SE2	Having to complete work to a deadline makes Debbie feel stressed	(p,2) Debbie states stress was put on her in P-BL. Me: *'So, what stress do you think was put on you?'* Debbie: *Time, time, time, just time.'* Me: *'Things have to be done by a certain deadline?'* Debbie: *'Uh-huh'*
SE3	Can role-reverse with her cat tail	(p.3) Me: *'Tail, where did Debbie get you from?'* Debbie: *'In a box in her brother's room'*
SE4	Wears her tail for fun	(p.3) Me: *'Tail, why had Debbie put you on?'* D: *'For fun'*
SE5	Would like to be part cat	(p.3) Me: *''Tail, do you know why Debbie likes you?'* D: *' …because she wants to be part cat or something'*
SE6	She feels very annoyed and angry when people touch her tail	(p.3) Me: *'How would you feel if someone pulled you off her?'* D: *'…quite annoyed and unhappy because if people keep on touching me…it makes me very annoyed.'* D: *'Angry'*
SE7	She does not tell people when she is feeling angry about them touching her tail	(p.3) Me: *'You didn't hear her say anything, tell them off or anything?'* D: *'No'*
SE8	Mainly wears her cat tail at school	(p.3) Me*: 'Does she wear you all the time at school?'* D: *'Umm, yeah'*
SE9	She sometimes hides her tail at the back of a chair, mainly in assemblies, so others do not touch it	(p.3) D: *'…sometimes I hide…in the back of a chair…in assemblies and things.'* D: *'I don't like people touching me'*
SE10	Feels excited about starting year 6 because it will be situated in Cargo (another nearby building), and it has playthings in it	(p.4) Me: *'How do you think D is feeling about next term?'* D: *'Excited.' 'Year sixes are going to go into Cargo next year.' 'It's going to have more playthings in it'*
SE11	She does not tell her peers to stop touching her tail when she feels annoyed	(p.4) Me: *'What do you want to do when someone touches you for no reason?'* D: *I want to say "Stop. Not yours!"'*
SE12	Can express a need to me	(p.4) Me*: 'We could go outside and chat?'* D: *Can we move?'*

SE13	Notices and appreciates nature	(p.5) D: *'Oh, hello little wagtail.' 'It wags its tail outside'*
SE14	Sensitive to a drilling sound in playground	(p.5) *'Oh, that's an awful sound'*
SE15	Bottles up her frustration then she cannot do things as planned	(p.5) Me: *'You were standing next to Denise, and she was talking to another child, how did you feel then?'* D: *'I felt frustrated…because I didn't know how to do the thing, and then, I didn't really want to do the thing'*
SE16	Understands she is more sensitive to sound than other people	(p.6) D: *'I'm more sensitive to sound than other people'*
SE17	Does not think her teacher is aware of her sensitivity to sound	(p.6) Me: *'Do you think Denise knows you're sensitive to sound?'* D: *'No'*
SE18	Understands her P-BL assessment form	(p.6) (Debbie refers to her assessment form) D*: 'One: I have written the date and learning objectives and neatly underlined with a ruler. Two: I have researched and recorded a description and information about my project in my journal'*
SE19	Describes her home	(p.7) *'calm', 'nice', 'do whatever I want (sometimes)', 'cosy', 'cat', 'family', 'jelly cat', 'cold in the summer' and 'warm in the winter'*
SE20	Describes her school She likes 'singing assemblies' when Colin reads to the class, and reading at school	(p.7) '*noisy', 'friends', 'crazy', 'bullies', 'hate PE… and invasion games', 'cold in the winter and 'cold in the summer'* (because of the fan) On p.8
SE21	Thinks her friends are one a good thing about school	(p.7) Me: '*Anything good here Debbie, at school?'* Debbie: *'Friends*'

I extrapolated the emergent themes from Debbie's SE. These are presented in Box 14 below.

Box 14: Emergent themes from Significant Events
1. Classwork is not negotiated with her 2. Identifies strongly with her synthetic cat tail 3. Bottles up her frustration 4. Sensitive to her environment 5. Cherishes her school friends

5.5.7 Superordinate themes

I assimilated the evidence from the other data sources to corroborate the emergent themes but also derived new themes from my analysis (see emergent themes table in Appendix 28). I finally distilled these themes into the following superordinate themes which I present in Box 15 below.

Box 15: Superordinate themes
1. Displays emotions externally 2. Understanding symbols can be difficult 3. Environmental changes can trigger stress responses 4. Not sure how to ask for help 5. Can sometimes assert needs in school 6. In tune with her best friend

5.5.7.1 Superordinate theme: Displays emotions externally

I observed Debbie pacing up and down in school on several occasions when experiencing stress. During my play session with her and her mother, she suddenly stood up and began to wander around the tables in an agitated manner when I was probing her about how she experienced stage-fright in school (section four, Appendix 28). Moreover, in Session One, Debbie resorted to pacing up and down in the interview room and looking outside the window into the playground when she felt the room was too claustrophobic.

I also observed Debbie display clear signs of sensory over-whelm and frustration in lessons or my interviews with her. On various occasions, I witnessed her face flushing bright red with agitation; her cover her ears in a lesson when the noise level got too high; vigorously tap the floor with her foot; wear a deep frown on her face when pacing; rest her head on

a table; and tighten and squirm her facial muscles (section 14, Appendix 28).

5.5.7.2 Superordinate theme: Understanding symbols can be difficult

As identified earlier, Debbie, her mother and I enacted an imaginary scenario in which Scott was going to stop the class and give the pupils some instructions (Session Two). I pretended to enter the studio space, as Scott (it is not clear on the recording if I used a toy animal to represent him).

> **Me** (In role as Scott): *Stop everybody. Erm, no I just need to give you some more instructions. Can you make sure that if you are the chrome book group, you go to the second link not the first. Sorry can you just get off the computer a minute?* (Out of role, as Scott) *Stop. Right…pause. I'm not Scott anymore. What we're going to do is if you touch Debbie's head, what'd she be thinking right now…in this situation?*
> **Debbie**: *That is not Scott!*

Debbie's literal response clearly indicated she was having trouble interpreting the symbol (toy animal) I was using to represent Scott in the drama. During the same play session, she also found it difficult to represent her classroom symbolically using random objects.

Debbie's literalism extended to other situations. For example, in Session Five, she struggled to understand what I meant when I asked her how her home cat had changed after being at school. I meant emotionally, but Debbie thought I meant physically. She seemed to get stuck on the literal changes, rather than focus more on emotional or symbolic aspects of her cat which I had requested (section two, Appendix 28).

5.5.7.3 Environmental changes can trigger stress responses

Out of all my main participants, Debbie seemed to be most sensitive to her environment and would experience discomfort at loud noises (drilling near playground) or unexpected changes to lesson plans. In Session Four, she exclaimed '*I'm more sensitive to sound than other people*' (p.454 in Appendix 27). During my shadow observation, a male pupil suddenly ran out of English studio shouting '*I hate this school!*' I questioned Debbie about how she felt after seeing this and she said:

> *'It was really scary…I don't like being shocked…I feel small…My insides feel all jumbled up…I'm supposed to be reading now, but I don't feel like it after that. I don't feel nice'* (section 17, Appendix 28)

5.5.7.4 Superordinate theme: Not sure how to ask for help

Even though Debbie was able to put her hand up in response to a teacher's questions to a class, Debbie found it difficult to approach a teacher when she was stuck with the work. I observed her hovering behind Denise, on one occasion, not able to tap her on the arm or call out to grab her attention. Denise had no idea Debbie was behind her or needed her attention (section 13, Appendix 28). In my shadow observation of her, I noticed she did not know what to do in P-BL and could not apply the 'SNOT' (Self, Next person, Other person and Teacher) strategy pupils were meant to employ when stuck with classwork. Debbie commented in a P-BL lesson:

> *'I like this school, but sometimes I feel stressed…When something is hard, and I don't understand…Sometimes I just get really sad.'* (shadow observation notes, 8.2.19)

5.5.7.5 Superordinate theme: Can sometimes assert needs in school

Even though Debbie often struggled to ask for help in lessons, I did observe her assert her needs on several occasions. On one occasion, I witnessed her tell two boys sitting opposite her in a P-BL lesson they were being immature and annoying, as they were '*laughing at fart sounds*' and '*shouldn't be doing that at year six!*' (section 21, Appendix 28). Further, in our fourth session, Debbie was able to tell me she needed to move to another space when she began to feel uncomfortable (see Appendix 27).

5.5.7.6 Superordinate theme: In tune with best friend

Debbie seemed very in tune with Marie and was able to identify the cause of Marie's upset on several occasions. When Marie was upset in a P-BL lesson, on one occasion, Debbie stated it was because Marie was unexpectedly missing from the audience list on the class whiteboard and felt confused (section seven, Appendix 28). To my knowledge, Marie had not explained this to Debbie; Debbie had deduced this for herself.

5.5.8 Reflections on Debbie's findings

What worked?

Debbie's ability to role-reverse with her pretend cat tail (as well as subject pronouns) seemed an extraordinary event, given her autism diagnosis. Plausibly, this may have been due to the fact that she was an avid reader and loved writing monologues from an individual character's point of view. Novels often switch between character perspectives

and subject pronouns which readers imbibe, as part of the function of reading. Debbie also displayed pronounced empathy and emerging theory of mind when describing how she imagined a lion would feel trapped in a zoo, as part of writing her monologue in P-BL: '*Today, I woke up to the forever lasting screaming of children who aren't patient and only want toys, food and their parents' attention*' (see Appendix 20h).

Had I more research time I would have liked to have delved deeper into how Debbie identified with her cat tail, as, potentially, it could have acted as an intermediary between her and her teachers when she found it difficult to articulate how she felt about her learning in lessons.

What did not work?

Debbie was able to role-reverse with her pretend cat tail in Session Three but not able to manage role-play with dolls and toy animals, as part of projected play in Session Two. The ability to think more allocentrically (seeing things from others' points of view) in this moment presented a challenge. The fact that Debbie could role-reverse with her cat tail seemed possible because she was more intrinsically connected to her cat tail. The tail already had a familiar identity to her over which she had control. She also was being required to speak about herself which she was an authority on and already comfortable with, even though it was a step removed in the sense of speaking about herself in the third person.

5.6 Findings across participants

5.6.1 Use of transactional supports across participants

In Table 16 below, I present all the transactional supports used with my pupil participants to show which ones they had in common or not.

Table 16: Use of transactional supports across main participants

Transactional support	Cayden	Robert	Marie	Debbie
Child's special interest	✓	✓	✓	✓
Drama methods:				
Role play	✓	✓	✓	✓
Role-reversal	✓	✓	✓	✓
Small world play (with Lego/dolls/toy animals)	✓			✓
Thoughts aloud (character speaks their internal thought processes out loud)	✓			✓
Hot seating (question a character)	✓	✓		✓
Question forms:				
Re-phrasing and repeating questions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Using closed questions	✓	✓	✓	✓
Writing questions down	✓			
Question sheet		✓	✓	
Nodding and shaking head for yes/no			✓	
Yes/No columns on whiteboard			✓	
Developing synchrony:				
Selective mirroring of child's action in play	✓			
Selective mirroring of child's body language	✓	✓	✓	✓
Verbalising action in play	✓			
Vitality-matching	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocal modulation (pitch, volume, timbre, and length of sound)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Social timing	✓	✓	✓	✓

Being guided by the child's own special interests, drama methods (mostly role play), skilful questioning, and the art of synchrony are the transactional supports that worked best

across my pupil participants. However, each of these supports could not simply be replicated from participant to participant. Conversely, each support had to be adapted and refined to meet the nuanced needs of each child. For example, how I adapted my voice and body language when playing with or chatting to my participants depended on the unique relationship I had with each of them, as well as following my intuition about how best to engage with them. I discuss this in more depth in Chapter Six.

The transactional supports which were developed and used with only one participant (writing questions down, nodding and shaking head, Yes/No columns, selected mirroring of child's action, and verbalising the action in play) were support methods that evolved naturally in the moment and were highly-tuned to the particular needs of individual participants. Therefore, they would not necessarily work with other participants. The data show there was more variance in the question forms I used with my participants compared to role play and inter-synchrony, and mainly for Marie and Cayden, who often struggled to converse in everyday conversation.

5.6.2 Summary of transactional support use across participants

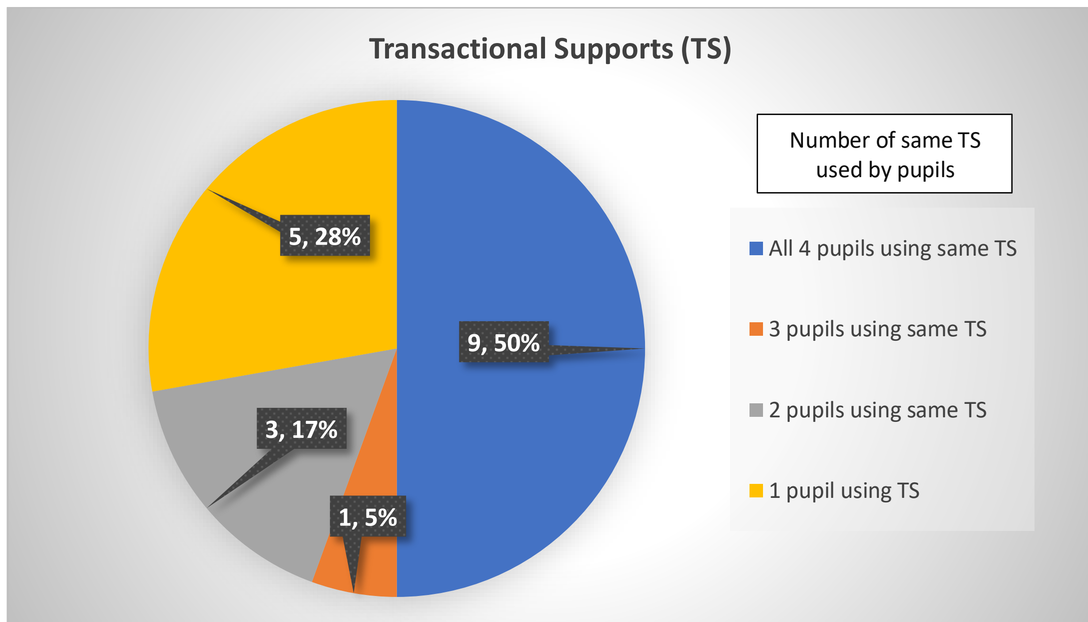


Figure 5: Summary of transactional support use across participants

Out of a total of 18 transactional supports (TS) used with my participants, half were successfully used with them all. However, 28 percent of TS were used with only one participant. This would suggest that, whilst some TS seemed to work with all my participants within this small sample, well over a quarter of all TS had to be developed in completely unique ways to meet the individual needs of participants. Moreover, the percentages steadily decrease, as the number of TS in common decreases. This would seem to suggest a bias towards participants needing more bespoke TS, although there were a considerable number also in common.

5.6.3 Superordinate group themes in relation to school experience

Once the case-by-case analysis was completed, I identified thematic patterns across cases

which led to the analysis and grouping of superordinate themes at a group level. For trustworthiness, only those themes evident in two or more participants' data (i.e., 50 percent) are reported. The superordinate themes across cases are recorded in Figure 6 below.

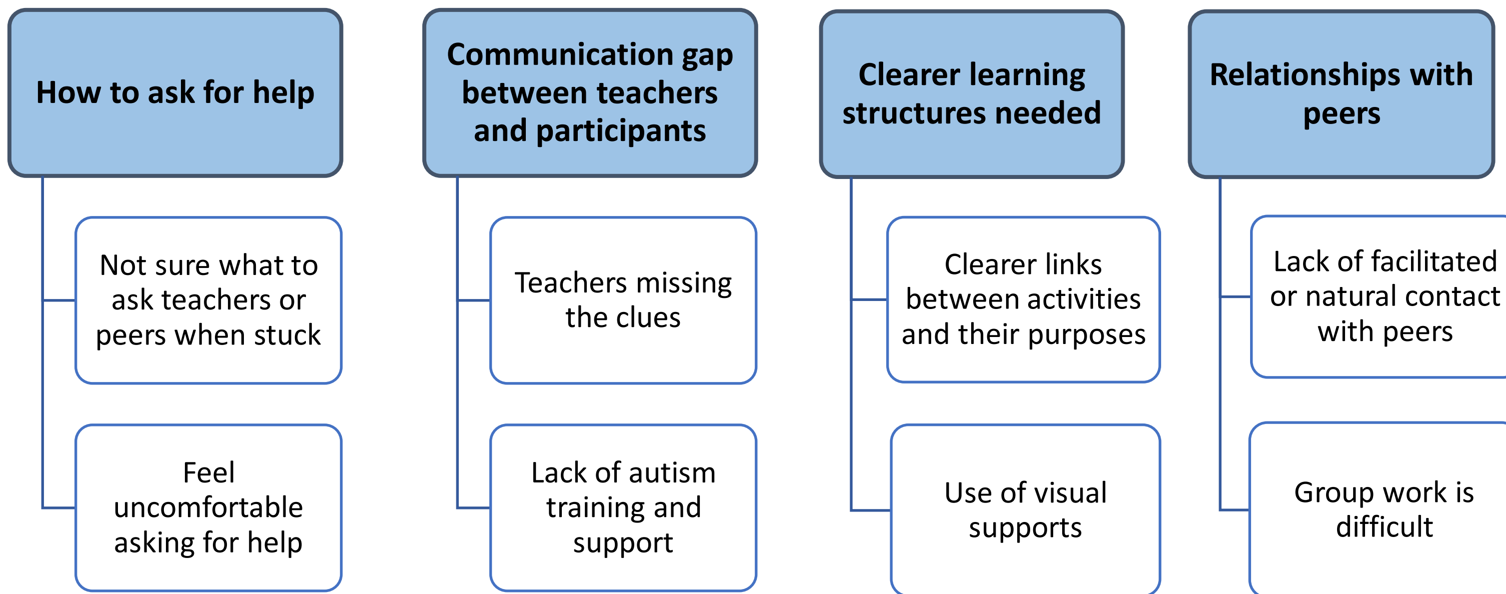


Figure 6: Superordinate group themes in relation to school experience

5.6.3.1 How to ask for help

It would seem a key issue for my participants was their inability to ask teachers for help when they did not understand what to do in class. This also extended to not knowing or feeling able to ask peers for help or guidance with classwork. Table 17 below presents the subordinate themes relating to the superordinate theme ‘How to ask for help’, and which participants they pertained to.

Table 17: Subordinate themes relating to superordinate theme ‘How to ask for help’

How to ask for help				
Subordinate theme	**Cayden**	**Robert**	**Marie**	**Debbie**
Not sure what to ask teachers or peers when stuck	✓	✓	✓	✓
Feel uncomfortable asking for help			✓	✓

Not sure what to ask teachers or peers when stuck

In the eight months I observed Cayden, Robert and Marie in school, I did not witness them ask a teacher or peer for help when they were stuck in class. Robert reported he always forgot to ask teachers for help, and, on one occasion, I witnessed him aggressively shout, ‘*What am I doing*?’ (in relation to the work) to a peer when the class teacher was nearby. Marie simply felt she could not ask a teacher or friend for help whenever she was stuck with the classwork.

Feel uncomfortable asking for help

I witnessed Debbie hovering behind Denise in one lesson, not able to tap her on the arm or call out to grab her attention. Denise was unaware of Debbie’s presence, or that she

needed her help. It was not clear whether Debbie felt uncomfortable asking Denise for help or just did not know what to say.

For Marie, she did not wish to engage in either paired or group work, finding group work '*scary*'. She often struggled to respond to teacher's direct questions. Therefore, having to ask for help from others seemed to create anxiety in her.

5.6.3.2 Communication gap between teachers and participants

It would appear that my participants were not able to ask their teachers for help or communicate to them they were stuck with the work. This caused some teachers to miss the clues that suggested they were not coping. The results across all participants indicate that the teachers in the school were often mistaken in the way they interpreted the participants' personalities, behaviours and needs. The data clearly shows that all the teachers often were not aware of how the participants felt about their learning and being in school, and the views they did hold mostly had not been cross-checked with the participants themselves, their parents and/or siblings in the school. For example, both Debbie and Robert felt annoyed by the inconsistent way in which class instructions were delivered by teachers (as they saw it); Cayden felt the teachers were '*mean*'; and Debbie commented that Colin (her Base Camp Leader) did not know she hated PE. Teachers not being aware of these feelings sometimes caused my participants to explode or internalise their annoyance to their detriment.

Table 18 below highlights the subordinate themes in relation to the superordinate theme 'Communication gap between teachers and participants' and which participants it pertained to.

Table 18: Subordinate themes relating to superordinate theme 'Communication gap between teachers and participants'

Communication gap between teachers and participants				
Subordinate theme	**Cayden**	**Robert**	**Marie**	**Debbie**
Teachers missing the clues	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lack of autism training in staff	✓	✓	✓	✓

Teachers missing the clues

Many of the teachers in this study appeared to miss important clues about why participants behaved in the way they did. Denise critically remarked that Marie and Debbie were '*insular*' and needed to be continually involved in what the other was doing. She did not seem aware that the girls supported one another and perhaps had defaulted to this pattern of behaviour because they were not being supported enough individually. Further, Hal commented that when Marie felt anxious or upset, she found it difficult to engage and interact (see Appendix 13). Although Hal acknowledged Marie needed an alternative method of communication to understand *why* she was upset, he did not seem to know how to go about it. As he and I discovered in one lesson, an alternative communication method such as a simple 'Yes/No' system for answering could help Marie communicate when in a moment of distress.

It was evident Denise missed some clues in relation to pupils' behaviours. For example, she remarked that Cayden drew Starlord's spaceship all the time in lessons but did not know

why. She felt it merely was a case of him '*doodling*' (see Appendix 13). Cayden's data seemed to suggest otherwise and that he continually drew Starlord's spaceship, as a form of escape, in a bid to be somewhere other than school.

Similarly for Robert, in a maths lesson, he ripped a page out of his schoolbook and the cover teacher admonished him by responding with '*Right, you've damaged school property. That's a red dot now'*. He ripped the page out because he was feeling angry about the perceived inequity in how he was being treated compared to other students in the lesson. This behaviour was a clear sign that Robert was upset or not on task, but the underlying function of the behaviour was not evident to the teacher, nor was Robert able to communicate it. Robert reported he often scrunched paper up and flattened it out again in lessons, to regulate his emotions. However, no teacher indicated they recognised this as a sign of distress in Robert.

Lack of autism training and support

It was apparent from my observation of my participants in school and from what many of their teachers said in their interviews with me that there was a significant lack of SEND and autism training and support for staff in the school. The school SENDCO felt staff required further training in de-escalation techniques and understanding communication, attachment theories, and the impact on young people of their socio-economic environments (see Appendix 13). Mike stated they needed '*more training for staff'* in school, *'support, expertise and experience from other schools',* and *'more one-to-one staff*

to support children like Cayden'. Denise stated the school did not offer any in-house training on autism, and that the SEND department suggested support strategies for SEND pupils, but they were not always practical. She also felt the SEND department was not checking strategies were being carried out by staff. Mike felt more understanding of what each student needed was required by staff, rather than the '*old model of "Well, you have the most experience in that department, so you go there*"'. Whereas Hal felt it was up to the parents to drive the child's needs to be recognised in the school (see Appendix 13).

The school SENDCO had not met or observed any of the participants in class or around school, all of whom had recognised SEND diagnoses and/or learning needs. Denise reported that no SEND strategies had been handed down to her from the school's SEND team to help support Cayden, and she had not seen an ILP setting out his needs.

Furthermore, it was apparent that some members of staff required more autism training. Denise stated in her interview *'When he* [Cayden] *comes to the carpet, he never hardly makes much eye contact. You really have to be like Cayden, Cayden, Cayden.'* Giving eye contact can be very difficult for many autistic people, as often they need to look away to focus on processing someone's language, rather than having to focus on interpreting facial expressions, as well as language (Senju and Johnson, 2009).

5.6.3.3 Clearer learning structures needed

The majority of teachers I interviewed stated that most participants required additional structures to support their learning compared to their non-autistic peers. There was not enough evidence to include Debbie in this shared theme, as two teachers seemed to have differing opinions: Scott thought Debbie could complete work based on her ideas alone, whereas Hal felt she required clear structure to follow (see Appendix 13).

Table 19 below lists the subordinate themes relating to the superordinate theme 'Clearer learning structures', and which participants it was relevant to.

Table 19: Subordinate themes relating to superordinate theme 'Clearer learning structures'

Clearer learning structures				
Subordinate theme	**Cayden**	**Robert**	**Marie**	**Debbie**
Clearer links between activities and their purposes	✓	✓	✓	
Use of visual supports	✓	✓	✓	

Clearer links between activities and their purposes

Other than Debbie, all my participants seemed to struggle to understand why they were completing tasks in lessons and how they related to the overall learning objectives (particularly in P-BL where several age groups came together and learning structures were far more complicated). Robert, Marie and Cayden were not able to tell me what the driving questions were in relation to the P-BL projects I observed them involved in, or how the tasks they were completing related to them (see Appendices 19, 20f and 20j).

Marie had been told by Hal to split her painting into two halves, each half symbolising a theme in relation to the project the class was exploring. However, Marie was not clear about why each half represented what they did, and how they related to the overall driving question of the project (see Appendix 20f). Further, in one P-BL lesson, Hal set Marie a task to draw images in response to the question 'What should a child have?'. She sat for a long time cowered over her whiteboard drawing squiggly lines (section four, Appendix 25). Likewise, Cayden clearly did not know what he was meant to be doing most of the time in lessons, in addition to how tasks related to the overall learning objectives.

Use of visual supports

Two out of four participants required more visual supports to aid their learning compared to their peers. Staff either had been or were in the process of using visual supports with these participants. Colin helpfully provided Marie with a visual timetable at the beginning of each day to aid her understanding of what each day entailed, and Denise stated Cayden had responded well to pictorial schedules in the past. Robert spent a lot of his time wandering in lessons and his father, a class LSA, had to keep him focused on class tasks. He also kept forgetting to ask teachers for help; thus a clear, visual prompt (or some other method) may have helped him to remember.

5.6.3.4 Relationships with peers

This superordinate theme explores relationships with peers and the difficulties participants

experienced because of pragmatic and social communication difficulties which acted as a barrier when interacting with peers.

Table 20 below lists the subordinate themes relating to the superordinate theme 'Relationships with peers', and which participants it was relevant to.

Table 20: Subordinate themes relating to superordinate theme 'Relationships with peers'

Relationships with peers				
Subordinate theme	**Cayden**	**Robert**	**Marie**	**Debbie**
Lack of facilitated or natural contact with peers	✓	✓	✓	
Group work is difficult	✓	✓	✓	

Contact with peers

Three out of four participants only played with their siblings, each other, or the same peers each day. I occasionally observed Cayden interacting with one, male classmate, but this was limited to class time. During breaktimes, he would run up and down, in a pace-like fashion, in the playground on his own.

Robert would often work alone in lessons. If a teacher placed him on a table with peers, there was minimal contact between him and them. In Hal's interview with me, he stated Robert '*struggles to build friendships with others*'. Robert only played with his brother and a couple of his brother's friends at breaktimes, no other peers.

Group work is difficult

The only participant I observed working as part of a small group was Debbie. All my other participants appeared to resist group work or showed little interest in interacting with their peers. Marie stated, *‘I feel a bit better with my [cat] fluff on when working in a group’*. In several lessons, I observed Marie resisting teachers’ requests for her to work with others. Marie’s mother stated in a phone conversation between her and me that Marie did not want to talk in a group situation, but she did not know why specifically. Marie had told her she did not know why either; it just made her feel uncomfortable (Appendix 20g).

On separate occasions, I observed Hal place Robert and Debbie in a small group of peers to work on an activity, but this did not appear to be prepared for – conversely, both occasions appeared to be spontaneous actions. I did not observe any other teacher-facilitated group or paired work involving my participants during my research.

5.6.4 Summary of group themes

The data shows that some participants were being helpfully supported by key members of staff to access the curriculum by them adapting some aspects of the environment and classroom tools. However, most of my participants did not seem to know how to communicate their needs or ask for help in school. Moreover, their teachers seemed both unsure of the clues they were looking for and constrained by their lack of time to give it their full attention. This led to frustration on both sides and seemed to be constituting a Double Empathy Problem. This was illustrated by Nick (SENDCO) when he remarked that

sometimes '*the SEND students*' go back to the studio setting to '*hide*' (which was easier, given its busyness). He stated he thought it was harder for them to hide their behaviours in the Hub (SEND resource base), as they were more on display within the quieter space (see Appendix 13). Perhaps a more pertinent question may have been 'From what did the pupils feel they needed to hide?'

The teachers' inability to sometimes read my participants' behaviours and detect the clues they were often unconsciously offering them seemed down to a lack of training and support in the areas of SEN and autism, as well as some structural gaps in how the school's SEND team were supporting children with SEN in the school. These gaps existed not only in how my participants' behaviours were being interpreted by staff, but also in how they were supporting their learning. For example, Denise expressed a concern that non-specialist form tutors were responsible for writing SEN pupils' ILPs in the school and felt they should have been written by the SENDCO instead. Moreover, with more autism training and support, perhaps staff would have been in a better position to include my participants in group work and facilitate the formation of friendships with peers or other autistic pupils. Staff expressed a need for clearer direction from the school's SENDCO and SEND department, as well as opportunities to share good practice amongst themselves in relation to which support interventions and strategies were working best with the SEN pupils in their respective care.

Notwithstanding the teachers' lack of training and support with identifying SEN pupils' needs, one of the biggest problems seemed to hang on the fact there were so many pupils

in each studio space that it was virtually impossible for the teachers to keep track of what all pupils were meant to be doing. This aspect of classroom management felt out of the teachers' control. Further, lack of time designated to teachers within the school on a day-to-day basis to enable them to properly address SEN needs across pupils compounded the issue. Metaphorically speaking, it felt as though the teachers were constantly chasing their tails. Denise illustrated this when she commented she found P-BL '*stressfu*l' and felt she had '*too many things going on at once*'. Hal echoed this statement when he remarked that he hadn't known the pupils so well that academic year, as they were 'rotating round so much' and there was a lack of consistent adults (see Appendix 13).

These findings are discussed at individual and group level in relation to the existing literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the two areas of my findings I discuss are the generic and individual transactional support methods used to elicit my autistic participants' views on their school experience, and what their shared experiences revealed. I draw on the transactional supports and themes identified at group level, as these will be relevant when transferring knowledge to other educational contexts. I also discuss individualised transactional supports, as this was the focus of my main research question.

The structure below is followed when discussing my findings in relation to the wider literature and my research questions:

1. How I positioned myself in relation to my autistic participants to enable them to reflect on their school experiences
2. Transactional support methods used across participants:
    - Special Interests
    - Role play
    - Inter-synchrony
    - Skilful questioning
3. Individual transactional support methods
4. My participants' experience of their mainstream school

This study sought to explore how four, primary-aged pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses could be enabled to reflect on their experience of a mainstream school using individualised transactional support methods. As previously mentioned, most qualitative studies attempting to elicit the lived experience of autistic people have predominantly used semi-structured, oral-based interviews conducted with adults or older youths who were highly verbal (Tesfaye et al., 2019). These approaches potentially limit data elicitation from sub-populations such as autistic individuals with co-existing cognitive and/or communicative challenges (Nicholas et al. 2019). Further, it seems most of the data collection methods developed for autistic participants were created before the researchers had met them. Some modifications had been made to the methods once participants' needs were ascertained. However, I wanted to go a step further and try to position myself in ways that allowed autistic children's own interests, and communication needs and preferences to dictate how data collection methods were developed for and with them.

6.2 Research questions

The main research question of this study was:

1) How can pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses be enabled to reflect on their experiences of a mainstream school using individualised transactional support methods?

Subsidiary questions:

2) How should adults position themselves in relation to autistic pupils to enable them to reflect on their school experiences?

3) Which transactional support methods work best to enable autistic children to share and reflect on their inner perspectives?

4) What is the experience of autistic pupils attending a mainstream school?

I did not set out to measure the efficacy of specific methods to increase engagement and/or ameliorate some of the cited difficulties with learning and social interaction in autism such as executive functioning (Hill, 2004), thus this element of my findings and subsequent discussion is relatively small.

6.3 Adult positioning

In addressing my second subsidiary research question, I found one of the most important aspects of working with my young participants in the way I did was the time needed to get to know them, what they liked and did not like, as well as establishing common ground, as a basis on which to build our interactions. Additionally, the process of gathering many perspectives on my main participants and their experiences enabled me to circumvent aspects of the Double Empathy Problem (DEP; Milton, 2012), as I was able to triangulate what people who knew them well said about them with what my participants said or did. As Chown (2014) suggests, there are no criteria of an autistic ontological state to assist non-autistic people to develop understanding of other (non-autistic) minds. Thus, I had to

give up my assumptions about any shared meanings, and make sure my translations were understood at the most basic levels by checking and re-checking my interpretations.

However, as Garfinkel (1967) highlights, it was important to be aware of potentially filling in the gaps in my perception to gain a full picture of a context or situation. For example, when Cayden stood staring out of the P-BL studio windows muttering ‘I want to go home’, I was aware I should not assume this was because he was unhappy. Wellman (1990) argues that the knowledge of other minds is not based upon empirical correlations between outward signs and mental states because ‘there is no set of observable activities in self or other that consistently correlates with inferred mental states’ (p. 95). However, the presence of the double hermeneutic through an IPA-approach can go some way to alleviating the DEP, as the researcher is working doubly hard to try to understand a participant’s inside view (Howard et al., 2019).

In terms of how I tried to position myself, as the adult, when working with my pupil participants, I describe it as inter-synchronous, and explain what I mean by this when discussing how I used inter-synchrony and role play based on my participants’ special interests in sections 6.4.1, 6.4.2 and 6.4.3 below.

6.4 Transactional supports across participants

Building on my participants’ special interests, drama methods, inter-synchrony, and skilful questioning were the transactional supports that worked best in enabling all participants

to share aspects of their inner worlds which were otherwise inaccessible to school staff and, in some cases, their mothers and siblings.

It is difficult to prise apart the four transactional support methods to be able to dissect them individually, as they were inter-dependent entities, and worked in conjunction with each other. It will be important to bear this in mind, as I discuss each transactional support separately. I provide many examples of how I used key transactional supports from Cayden and Marie's cases, as these participants needed the most support, and, therefore, the ones I feel I learned the most from.

6.4.1 Special interests

Special interests (SI) have been utilised by researchers and educators in school settings in previous studies, but mostly to measure whether tasks became more motivating for autistic pupils using their SI (Davey, 2020). There appears to be a gap in the literature, particularly in relation to primary-aged school children, regarding studies that have explored how SI can be used, as a tool specifically to elicit pupils' views on their general experience of a school or for self-identification purposes. Moreover, the previous transactional support models and research methods either completely allow a child to lead an interaction, as in the case of Intensive Interaction, for example, or are overly adult-led, as in the case of studies aiming to increase autistic pupils' engagement in tasks and social interactions using their SI (e.g. Gagnon, 2001; Porter, 2012; Jung and Sainato, 2015; Davey, 2020).

Jung and Sainato (2015) employed the use of children's SI (Disney characters), as motivators, to encourage the participation of autistic pupils in games with their non-autistic peers in a school. Whereas Gagnon (2001) developed a visual aid (Power Cards) to assist autistic students to make sense of 'social situations, routines, the meaning of language, and the hidden curriculum wherever [they went]' (p.1). In the example she provides on p.1 about her pupil, Claudia, and her obsession with Big Bird (character from 'Sesame Street' children's TV programme), Gagnon's ulterior motive for developing a Power Card with Claudia is to keep her on task in lessons as opposed to incessantly singing the Sesame Street theme tune. It would seem the social situations, meaning of language, and hidden curriculum being promulgated by Gagnon through her use of Power Cards are phenomena framed by a non-autistic public criterion (definition of 'public criteria' in section 3.3.6). The focus also seems to be on inculcating Claudia into the rules and systems of the adult world, rather than experience and understand her autistic world from her point of view (as it was not ascertained as part of the process).

By contrast, my study was designed to have no pre-agenda for how my participants' SI were to be initially used with them, as I wanted to strike more of a balance between who was leading who in our interactions. I tried to use my participant's SI as an invitation to explore what they thought and felt about things that were important to them. I did offer them my interpretations, but it was not a one-way process, as I would argue is the case in the cited studies above. I was joining in – as though taking a turn in a game of chess - within the frame of a game, but, ultimately, the aim was for the child to lead the process. For example, in my second play session with Cayden, I asked him what he was going to do in

Starlords's spaceship, as part of our game, and he responded he was going to rest his head on Quoran's shoulder (p.412 in Appendix 18). At this point in the session, it suddenly struck me that Cayden often rested his head on girls' shoulders in the classroom, and that could be an interesting phenomenon to explore through the character of Quoran. I asked him why he did that and if Quoran thought it was 'funny' too, as he stated he did, but he immediately changed the topic. I intuitively felt this exchange had run its course and followed his lead to change the subject.

The bi-directional nature of my conversations with my pupil participants, particularly with Cayden, enabled us to co-construct shared consciousnesses on specific occasions through our intersubjective relatedness (see reference to Merleau-Ponty (1962) in section 2.3.1). However, I cannot justify an argument for dialogism (Holquist, 1990) in relation to how I built relationships with my participants. As Holquist (1990) states, 'At the very basic level… dialogism is the name not just for a dualism, but for a necessary *multiplicity* in human perception' (p.22). My participants and I did not enter one another's consciousnesses, as dialogism would require. It was too difficult for my participants to enter mine, given their complex communication differences, and one could argue potentially too difficult for me to enter theirs in some ways given my non-autistic positionality. Thus, I needed to start with where they were at, not with my agenda - the way they were using their own consciousnesses to survive and deal with the pressures they seemingly were experiencing in school. This constituted part of how I positioned myself, as the adult.

From an ontological point of view, I tried to interact with my autistic participants in a dialectical way. To illustrate the dialectical way in which I used my participants' SI, I refer to the example I provide in section 5.2.4.3. I would compare how I entered Cayden's area of special interest to that of a Russian doll: a world within a world within a world. The 'container' world he and I were situated in was the context of Guardians of the Galaxy. The world within this one was Starlord's spaceship which appeared to be his favourite metaphorical place of retreat in school. However, I had to create another world within this inner world when Cayden demonstrated strong resistance to entering the school half of the Lego board, which I encouraged him to do, so we could explore the toilet incident during which he was admonished by his teacher, Denise. As a solution, I flew a Lego piece symbolising Denise over from what we perceived as the 'real world' (as represented by the school half of the Lego board) and placed it into Starlord's spaceship (Cayden's 'safe' space). At this point, I crossed symbolic worlds: the real (in the sense Denise was brought in from an outside context) and Cayden's inner world of retreat within Starlord's spaceship. Thus, I was able to continue my line of inquiry, but by doing so on Cayden's own terms and within a level of safety. Consequently, he was able to role-reverse with an imaginary Denise (a piece of Lego) and pretend to be her speaking about himself. This level of engagement echoes Davey's (2020) finding that joint interaction increased between a male pupil and his TA through discussing the pupil's special interests.

6.4.2 Role play

There do not appear to be any studies within the literature which solely utilise role play with autistic pupils to elicit their views on their lived experience of school. However, there are studies which have specifically used role play, as an intervention method, with autistic children, and which have been conducted either in school contexts or community-based centres (Tse et al., 2007; Leaf et al., 2009; Neufeld and Wolfberg, 2010; Leaf et al., 2012a, b; Ferguson et al., 2013; Gutman et al., 2014; Beadle-Brown et al., 2018; Iswari et al., 2019; Stratou et al., 2023). However, the purpose of using role play in these studies was predominantly a means to enhance the autistic children's social skills framed within normative models of behaviour (similar to the research utilising autistic children's special interests to enhance their social skills). Studies utilising role play, as a research method, mainly involve adults or peers modelling social etiquette (i.e., turn-taking, maintaining eye contact, and making appropriate reciprocal statements) in conversations with autistic participants and the participants then being asked to replicate the learned skills in subsequent role plays (e.g. Stratou et al., 2023).

The drama teacher whose use of process drama with autistic children most resembles how I used drama, as part of my research, is O'Sullivan (2014, 2015). Process drama is a method of teaching and learning drama where both the students and teacher(s) are working in and out of role to explore a problem, situation, or theme through the use of the artistic medium of unscripted drama (O'Neill, 1995). In one of O'Sullivan's drama groups, the children (aged nine to eleven) were introduced to a fictional world in which they imagined they worked

in a famous toy store in Toyland (perceived as a common interest for her participants). The working method for the drama involved the three teachers (teacher-pupil ratio of 1:3) building an ongoing narrative, in and out of role, in their weekly sessions, and posing problems for the students to solve within the context of the drama. The children were encouraged to lead the direction of the drama as much as possible, and through this play medium, were supported to explore a wide range of their personal and social skills, as well as their *being* in the actual world of the drama. However, the children were not supported to explore their actual being in the real world. Of course, the intended outcome of O'Sullivan's (2014) project was different to mine and focused on enabling the children to 'initiate and sustain conversation with peers and teachers in role to achieve specified drama outcomes' (p.3). By contrast, I set out to use the medium of drama and role play to see if my autistic participants could reflect on the experiences they had had and were having in their real lives which, by and large, they could.

Other than Beadle-Brown et al. (2018), O'Sullivan's (2014, 2015) use of process drama with autistic children and young people, particularly in relation to the child-led component, appears quite unusual, as there still is a predominance in many drama handbooks and academic books (Ramamoorthi and Nelson, 2011) designed for autistic pupils to focus on them practising social skills in ways that will help them mould their behaviours to fit socially-accepted norms. Furthermore, some of the role play exercises used to develop social awareness merely involve the pupils simulating everyday life. For example, if a pupil was adopting the role of a teacher trying to keep a class in order by exclaiming 'Stop that endless chatter!' and wagging their finger in the air, as if telling off a class, the pupil would

not be entering the full persona of that teacher; they would be only simulating surface behaviours.

The sort of engagement I was trying to develop involved exploring a type of metaxis engagement (Davis, 2014, pp.52-53) which involves the actor being in the role as themself and as the character - these modes of being merge in the moment, as the role is enacted. As I understand it, Metaxis is about bringing the role into yourself; bringing the character's body to fit into your shoes, as it were, as well as putting your own feet into the character's shoes. Thus, one is living through rather than acting out.

Having read about Metaxis many years ago when I was still teaching drama, I was curious to know if there was an emerging metaxical element to how I used role play with Cayden (and Marie, to some extent, when she role-played her imaginary cat characters). For example, Cayden adopted the role of Thanos, and I would argue was speaking both as himself and as the fictional character. I believe he was engaged in both projected and personal play: he both was the character and projected onto the character simultaneously. It felt as though the character of Thanos was standing for Cayden, but Cayden also became him in the drama. However, I do not feel this metaxical element was so evident with Robert and Debbie when they spoke in the 'hotseat' as an imaginary angel/demon or cat tail. They did not play the character through voice or body language, as Cayden and Marie did.

The power of the metaxical element for Cayden was that his role play (as Thanos) provided a layer of protection, as he was able to say what he liked about his teachers without

admonishment, as he was not saying it, as Cayden, but as the 'baddie' of Guardians of the Galaxy. As Courchesne et al. (2022) found with their participants, refusal to answer an interview question was often linked to questions about negative emotions, for example, 'What makes you sad?' or "What worries you?". As Vicker's (2017) proposes, role play allows participants to make choices, exploring situations and relationships with an emotional safety net. As she sees it, it is not them making mistakes, but their character(s) within the drama.

Moreover, by adapting my role play to include role reversal (in the sense that my participants talked about themselves from another person/character's point of view), some of my participants demonstrated an emerging ability to take on another person's perspectives, as Fein (1984) suggests role play can facilitate for non-autistic children. To exemplify, Cayden showed early signs of being able to see Denise's point of view when he stated, in role as her in Session Two, that she had told him off for being out of the lesson too long because he wanted to 'escape' the school. Moreover, nuances began to emerge in relation to how my main participants' thought and felt about their school experience that otherwise were not accessible to us and challenges the premise of Preece and Jordan's (2010) assertion that autistic CYP struggle to identify and express emotions. In role as Thanos in Session Five, Cayden was able to state he wanted to '*defeat all the teachers…because they [were] mean*'. I inwardly conjectured whether Thanos attacking the school was a projection of how Cayden, himself, felt about his school. He stated he felt the school was mean because Thanos was there. However, when I asked him how the school would feel if I removed Thanos, he again stated '*mean*'.

Further, Cayden also stated in Session Five that he was in Starlord's spaceship because 'he wanted to escape' the school. I was able to triangulate this and the data with what Cayden said in role, as Denise, further into the same play sequence in Session Two, as it painted a similar picture: Denise was mean to Cayden, and this made him feel sad. I believe Cayden was only able to cognitively reflect on his experience in this way because our dialogue was situated in a familiar and fun context, and, therefore, less abstract and very motivating for him. As Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, situated learning is learning that takes place in the same context in which it is applied. Therefore, new knowledge becomes *embedded knowledge* (Donaldson, 1978) and is centrally coherent to a child. Another factor I would attribute to the success of Cayden being able to role-reverse with Thanos and Denise in the way he did was the fact that our drama was one step removed from the real world, as we were playing within a fictional realm and, therefore, the emotional impact of being asked difficult questions was somewhat reduced.

However, the use of role play with my participants was not always successful. Sherratt and Peter (2002, p.157) suggest when doing drama with autistic CYP to ensure representational objects look like what they are supposed to be. In my second session with Debbie and third session with Marie, both girls struggled to see the objects (a toy kangaroo and seal) as representing a person and/or concept. The object substitution was too abstract for them to comprehend. In Debbie's case, it might have made more sense had I used a photo of Scott, as opposed to a pony, and, in Marie's case, either a piece of fluffy material resembling cat fur, or a picture she had drawn of her imaginary cat fluff.

In our role play in Session Two, Debbie also struggled with using general classroom objects symbolically to represent classroom furniture, or to demarcate the imaginary space (such as pencil cases or rulers). In these examples, my participants' learning was not being situated in contexts to which they related or recognised. I had not built the play narrative with them enough and been guided by what they felt made sense to them. In Marie's case, my approach also evoked anxiety in her, as I started the session by focusing on her and her fluff instead of focusing on her special interest. It is interesting, however, that Cayden was easily able to comprehend abstract object substitution (for example, a piece of Lego to represent a GOG character), and this illustrates the importance of assessing each child's needs individually, as what may work for one child may not for another. This is the problem with much of the social skills research undertaken with autistic children - the cognitive assessment tools such as Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales (VABS; Sparrow et al., 2005) cannot always detect such nuance in how different autistic children perceive the world, and why my method of assessing each child's individual needs over a period of time was so important to understanding them.

To conclude, contrary to Chang et al.'s (2014) premise that drama interventions are likely to be more successful for children with higher social interaction and communication skills, this study shows that the flexible use of drama-based methods, particularly role play, within contexts of which autistic children are the experts and intrinsically interested in, can enable some to verbally reflect on their experiences. As I did not use standardised measurement scales to measure my participants' communication skills before and after my study, the main way in which I measured the success of my data collection methods was

through data triangulation. By comparing what I observed my participants do in lessons for a prolonged period before and during data collection with what their mothers, teachers and they, themselves, told me, I would claim the use of role play with all participants had some positive outcomes.

Similar to Stratou et al. (2009), my study shows that the use of role play can enable some autistic pupils to initiate and maintain conversations, understand and express feelings, and, in Cayden's case, concentrate for longer. As echoed by Sherratt and Peter (2002), my findings suggest drama methods can enable some autistic children to identify theirs and others' emotions. Further, I would cite the ability in all participants to adopt fictional roles which led them into the practice of social skills and aligns with Kempe and Tissot's (2012) findings. I would argue the benefit of using role play with autistic pupils in the way I did was that we were able to *explore* how they were living, as opposed to merely *practising* how they were living, as most other researchers using role play with autistic children seem to focus on.

6.4.3 Inter-synchrony

The successful use of role play and other aspects of how I inter-related with my participants were underpinned by the principles of inter-synchrony (see section 3.4.3 on inter-synchrony). Within the context of intersubjectivity, inter-synchrony can be defined as aligned behaviours that occur in social interactions between people in a variety of social contexts such as when conversation partners match their gestures, facial expressions and

language in time while communicating (Louwerse et al., 2012). Physiological and neural synchrony are related to empathy, rapport, and engagement in the social unit (Palumbo et al., 2017). However, inter-synchronous connection with others has been cited as problematic for many autistic people due to sensory integration issues (Ben-Sasson et al., 2019).

During my research, I experienced what I felt were moments of inter-synchronous connection with participants, Cayden and Marie, that I feel can only be described as a kind of 'dance' between us. These moments are outlined in sections 5.2.4.4 (Cayden) and 5.4.4.4 (Marie) and will be discussed in relation to the literature on inter-synchrony. In general, I found I intuitively drew upon prosodic elements of speech to be able to intersubjectively connect with my participants such as vitality-matching (matching a child's energy levels), and voice modulation (pitch, tempo, timbre, and volume). I also exaggerated and selectively mirrored some aspects of my participants' body language and facial expressions to enable intersubjective connections between us.

6.4.3.1 Prosody and body language

In section 5.4.4.4, I describe an interpersonal narrative composed of a four-part structure (Bruner, 1990) which Marie and I improvised in a role play in her second session, as the imaginary cats she felt represented her at home and school, and she had just drawn. I played her home cat and she her school cat. I would argue Marie and I were able to attain and maintain an appropriate state of arousal fit for the purpose of our interaction, in the

way Daniel et al. (2022) describes co-regulation. Co-regulation is the ability to mutually attain and maintain an appropriate state of arousal (the state of behavioural or physiologic activation) fit for a task or environment (Porges, 2018). I assert Marie and I were able to establish co-regulation because of a few identifiable actions on my part, and which I identify within my analysis in that section.

Firstly, I affirmed her contributions rather than corrected them, even when her statements and utterances were not clear to me. I feel this engendered a sense of safety for Marie and aligns with Geretsegger et al. (2015) and Porges' (2021) view that co-regulation is only possible if partners feel secure and can travel safely together through a familiar-enough narrative flow of play. This sense of co-regulatory travelling together seemed to support Marie to express and modulate her feelings and behaviours which concurs with Murray et al.'s (2015) view of the benefits of co-regulation.

Secondly, I assert that my use of vitality forms and subsequent vitality-matching enabled Marie and I to establish moments of co-regulated inter-synchrony. Some studies have explored the ability of autistic children to detect vitality forms in others (Hobson and Lee, 1999; Rochat et al., 2013) and found 'impairment' in intersubjectivity. In Di Cesare et al.'s (2017a) study, autistic children were shown short video-clips depicting two actors (with their heads omitted from the shots), one of whom moved an object (i.e., a can) with his right hand with varying force and speed toward the other actor. After the video clips, the children were asked to rate whether they deemed the actions to be 'gentle', 'so so', 'rude', or 'very rude' on a Likert Scale (which they had been trained in using). The study's findings

suggest that autistic children mostly detect extreme expressions of vitality, and 'lack a more nuanced perception of vitality forms that often characterizes [sic] everyday actions' (p.8). However, the researchers acknowledge that a limitation of their study is the fact that in real-life social contexts, besides hand and arm movements, other important information is present, such as facial expression, voice tone and body language/contact. I also would add situational context to this.

In respect of my interaction with Marie, she only began to align her vitality level with mine from the point at which I loudly exclaimed 'Whaha' (an extreme expression) which would suggest a similar finding to Di Cesare et al. (2017a). However, I would argue her form of engagement constituted vitality-matching and was only possible in that moment because she had detected I was accepting of her and what she was saying through the vitality forms I displayed earlier in our dialogue. For example, my matching of her intonation on '*Because Bob*', my reinforcement of her statement '*Bobbidy bob bob bob*', and my open and playful body language and facial expressions throughout. These vitality forms can be seen as precursors to our narrative climax and were situated in a context with which Marie was familiar and was free from pressure to respond to in a certain way (something she ordinarily struggled with in school). Similar to Di Casare et al. (2017a), meta-analyses have concluded that autistic children and adolescents display atypical synchrony in conditions rating both individual motor timing and social-motor-synchrony (SMS) (McNaughton and Redcay, 2020; Baldwin et al., 2021). However, most of the cited studies involve small sample sizes, thus generalisability is limited, and the experimental design methods do not situate the autistic participants in everyday situations in contexts with which they are

familiar and feel comfortable in. Contrastingly, I assert that this study did place children in situations with which they were familiar and comfortable and would argue this acted as an anchor to our discourses. However, I do recognise that my study also involves a small sample size.

6.4.3.2 Embodied semantics

Regarding the symbolism of the language Marie and I used within our inter-synchronous narrative, it was as if the words were not important, at times - it was *how* we said what we did that constituted our meaning-making. However, there was semantic symbolism within our discourse. For example, just prior to the moment at which the first narrative sequence cited in section 5.4.4.4 occurred, I asked Marie what kind of voice her school cat had and, after thinking for a while and some re-phrasing of the question by me, she stated '*Bob, bob, bob'*. The first 'Bob' was pitched as an A note, the second an E, and third 'Bob' was pitched as a middle C. Marie almost sang the 'Bobs', as they cascaded down the musical scale. The significance of Bob became apparent, as she named her school cat 'Bob' and her home cat 'Bobtail' later in our conversation. It is interesting how the plosive 'b' sound is curtailed by the brevity of the word length, creating a self-contained unit of sound. The gentleness with which Marie delivered the succession of 'Bobs' created the onomatopoeic effect of an entity gently bobbing up and down in space in a non-threatening manner. This seemed to mirror her school cat drawing and how she saw herself in school: a well presented and behaved character. There seemed a symbiotic relationship between the meaning of the word 'Bob' and how Marie used it prosodically to create extraneous

meaning in the context of our play. The word ‘Bob’ was not only used to convey the meaning of her school cat but also used to communicate an attitude both towards the figurative cat and, therefore, Marie herself, and me, as a play partner, with my own expressed attitude to Marie in the moment.

It has been difficult to locate any specific literature on embodied semantics in relation to inter-synchrony. The most comprehensive analysis of all the components of inter-synchrony is covered in a paper describing the method ‘Rhythmic Relating’ by Daniel et al. (2022). However, these researchers mostly focus on rhythm, prosody, energy, and non-verbal meaning-making, and do not relate these components of inter-synchrony to the symbolism of semantics. Studies investigating embodied semantics in the actions of non-autistic and autistic people mostly focus on functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) in relation to language use. For example, looking at how limbic structures in the brain are activated when an autistic person uses emotion-related words compared to non-autistic controls, or how sensory-motor areas of the brain used for producing actions are also used for the conceptual representation of the same action (Aziz-Zadeh and Damasio, 2008; Moseley et al., 2015). I would argue there appears to be a gap in the literature regarding symbolism in language and how it sits in relation to inter-synchrony. This is an area that could be further developed by researchers.

6.4.3.3 Social timing

Another key element of inter-synchrony I drew upon when interacting with my participants was dynamic social timing (described in section 3.4.3.3). The rhythm of our interactions occasionally fell into direct synchronicity and felt like we were two complementary players sharing different parts of a narrative yet following the same timeframe. This phenomenon can be exemplified by Marie's narrative sequence in section 5.4.4.4 and the illustrated piece of dialogue with Cayden in section 5.2.4.4. In the latter narrative, it was difficult to determine whether Cayden was displaying altered auditory temporal processing in response to what I was saying to him in our Lego game, given he paused at a crucial moment (after I stated '*I think it [his Lego spaceship] would crash')*. I was not sure if his pause was related to a concern on his part that him sitting on the controls of his Lego spaceship, in the imaginary sense, would cause the ship to crash. I did not want him to think I thought his idea was silly. Thus, I timed a comedic interjection expressed through a high-pitched, elongated vocalisation immediately after I stated, '*I think it would crash'* and Cayden sniggered. I feel the use of vitality forms and, more crucially, the timing of what I said enabled me to 'communicate near-future states and plan communicative acts just-ahead-in-time', as Daniel et al. (2022, p.3) proposes is one of the key tenets of co-regulation.

6.4.4 Skilful questioning

Similar to Young et al. (2005) and Courchesne et al. (2022), this study found that some autistic children struggle with answering inferential questions (e.g. see Cayden's example

in section 5.2.4.1). As Lewis' (2009) findings suggest, the use of closed questions (as opposed to open) and repeating questions helped increase the understanding and engagement of all my participants. An example of a closed question I used with Cayden in his second session is '*When you saw Thanos outside your house, were you frightened or happy*? (Cayden stated he had seen the GOG baddie, Thanos, outside his real house). If I had employed a more open question form such as '*How did you feel when you saw Thanos outside your house*?', I feel Cayden may have struggled to answer based on the question's breadth of scope, but need for specificity. The fact that Cayden was presented with only two options narrowed his focus and he opted for 'frightened'. However, the problem with this is that he may have felt compelled to choose either emotion when, in fact, he felt neither. Alternatively, I could have added 'or something else?' to the end of my sentence, but then I feel there would have been too many options for him to process, given his processing challenges. On reflection, it might have been better to combine my question with another transactional support such as emotion picture cards.

In addition to using closed questions, there was a need to re-phrase questions when it seemed my participants did not comprehend them. Courchesne et al. (2022) also highlights the need for question re-formulation. I feel the re-phrasing of questions supported my participants in two ways: firstly, it offered more concreteness and illustrated explanation, and secondly, it seemed to spur them on to respond. I sometimes needed to re-phrase things when I had not articulated something clearly enough in the first place and my sentences were either over-long or too abstract. For example, my questioning was less successful with Marie at the beginning of her third session when I re-visited the concept

of her imaginary fluff and how she felt it protected her in school (see session synopsis in 5.4.3) by asking her '*Are there other things you need to not feel scared* [in school]?' The form of this question was conceptually unclear, and Marie could not answer. It was not helped by the use of a negative ('not') mid-sentence, as it suddenly switched the focus of the question from one thing to another. I intuited Marie did not respond to this question possibly because of the association my question had with negative feelings. In this instance, I did not re-formulate my question but changed tack completely and focused on the nature of her fluff. This enabled our conversation to move on again.

Beresford et al. (2004) highlight the difficulty autistic children can have with abstraction within the context of meaning-making. I feel my participants were much more able to respond to inferential questions, or questions focusing on negative experiences when they were asked as part of role play which was framed by familiar contexts of intrinsic interest to them. This aligns with Booth and Booth (1996) and Tierney et al.'s (2015) assertions that concrete frames of reference are needed to ameliorate difficulty in generalising from experience and thinking in abstract terms. Cayden could answer my question *'Why did he* [Starlord] *turn evil*?' in our second session. He replied ''*Cos of the machine'*. He ordinarily struggled with *why* forms and I suggest this response was only possible because we had been talking, in detail, about Starlord at that point. Had I asked the same question out of nowhere, he may have struggled. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, role-playing with my participants provided a distancing device, and enabled questions focusing on negative aspects of their school experience to be less hard-hitting.

Problems with abstraction are not the only consideration for researchers aiming to elicit the views of autistic children through interview questions. Ha and Whitaker (2016) used the technique of Photovoice (children take photographs of things they deem important to them and are asked about them) and asked questions such as 'Tell me about your photos?' and 'What was the person(s) in the photo doing?' (p. 552). These question forms clearly worked for the children in Ha and Whitaker's study, but my participant, Marie, may have experienced the imperative verb form 'tell me' as pressurising. This highlights the importance of understanding individual participants and adapting strategies accordingly. To protect my participants when they were in vulnerable positions in our sessions, I trialled different versions of the Sandwich Method (sometimes used as part of talking therapies) with some success, as exemplified in section 5.2.4.2.

6.5 Individual transactional support methods

Nearly a third of transactional supports (TS) used with participants (5 out of 18) needed to be developed, as bespoke methods for individuals. I would argue this is a significant number because they were not adapted TS that had already been used with other participants - they were completely new TS that had to be developed for individuals. I also had to adapt and fine-tune my generic approaches further with individual participants such as how specifically to use role play, or structure, phrase and time my questions. This is an important finding considering the development of transactional support methods either as data collection tools in research or within schools to aid the learning and engagement of autistic pupils mostly occurs before interventions are trialled, and predominantly used

with all participants within sample groups, as opposed to using different methods with different individuals, depending on their unique needs (Tesfaye et al., 2019).

The visual TS I developed either for individual participants or which evolved from trial and error were use of a visual pie chart, Yes/No columns on a small, portable whiteboard, and drawing with Marie; writing questions down for Cayden to read; a question sheet exploring the symbolic nature of Robert's imaginary angel and demon and drawing with Debbie.

6.5.1 Yes/No columns

The use of the 'Yes/No' visual support with Marie (see details in section 5.4.4.1) evolved from the discovery that she required scaffolding for communication, as having to respond to direct questions from adults often evoked a 'freeze' response in her. This method was successful in re-engaging Marie when she was stuck, given the pressure to speak was removed. However, it was limited, as Hal and I had to exhaustively think up questions suitable for Yes/No answers – it was difficult to get to the bottom of what Marie did not understand in relation to the classwork. Additionally, the line of questioning was completely adult-led and not determined by Marie in any way. We could not be wholly sure we were asking the right questions. This problem resonates with Preece's (2002) view that the use of photographs and visual cues in his study limited the consultation to the range of photographs and symbols that were offered. As Brewster (2004) explains in relation to interviewing people with learning difficulties with little or no speech: 'A characteristic many of these [card sorting] methods share is a reliance on pre-selected

vocabulary; but how do you identify the specific vocabulary without "putting words into their mouths"?' (p.166).

I wanted to build on using the Yes/No method with Marie, as it clearly had epistemological limitations. Therefore, I considered using 'Talking Mats' (TM) (Murphy, 1998), as a visual communication tool. With TM, a set of symbols relating to a subject area are set out on a mat. Open questions are then asked in relation to the presentation of each symbol, for example, 'How do you feel about…?' A top scale is introduced, for example, 'Happy', 'Unsure" and 'Sad', and interviewees place each symbol on an area of the Mat that corresponds to their views, feelings or experiences about that symbol. My concern with using TM with Marie was that she did not like the spotlight being directly on her, and I suspected she might feel she was in trouble when discussing more negative aspects of her school experience (as her mother suggested in relation to the incident described in Session Three). This unease or refusal in some autistic children and young people to discuss negative emotions has been observed by other researchers (Booth and Booth, 1996; Richards and Crane, 2020).

For participant, Cayden, the potential difficulty of using TM centred on his inability to attend for more than a few minutes on a subject that was not intrinsically related to Marvel characters or Guardians of the Galaxy. I could have used Marvel characters, as symbols, to represent different aspects of his school experience such as using Thanos to represent the feeling of being told off by teachers, but this adaptation carried the risk of eliciting response bias, as Courchesne et al. (2022) found in their study in relation to picture card prompts.

Therefore, I experimented with developing other scaffolded forms of visual support for my participants. For Marie, I needed to divert my attention away from her and project it onto an object.

6.5.2 Pie chart

Cunningham (2022) successfully used the ‘Three Houses Approach’ (Turnell and Edwards, 1999) with autistic pupils to collect qualitative data in her study. The study involved group and individual interviews in which participants recorded their views in pre-drawn houses of good things, of worries, and of dreams. The strength of Cunningham’s study is that it provided a holding frame for the pupils to position their ideas within, and inferences could be drawn from the ‘dreams’ houses in terms of how they felt their school could be improved. However, the researcher had to scribe the contents of the houses for nine out of the eleven pupils which made me question whether all my participants possessed good processing and conversational skills, as well as a certain level of literacy.

Instead, I decided to trial the use of a pie chart, as a visual support, with Marie. Compared to the Yes/No column method, the use of a pie chart was more effective in capturing clear, quantitative data in relation to Marie’s preferences. All Marie had to do was apportion sections on the pie chart to the various people identified above it, and there was no reliance on an adult to be able to complete the activity. However, this visual method was not successful in capturing qualitative data such as *why* Marie preferred working with Debbie, as opposed to working alone, for example. I attempted to ascertain this

information by asking her if she could attribute a different colour to each person/group on the pie chart which she thought represented how it felt working with them. She was able to select the colour purple for how it felt working with Debbie. However, she was unable to attribute colours to anyone else. I conjectured two possible reasons for this: firstly, Marie may have associated the colour purple with Debbie, as that was their respective favourite colour, and secondly, the symbolism of my question was too abstract for her. It may have been more effective, at that point in our session, to introduce a range of cats (her special interest) with emotive expressions for her to choose from, as expressions of how it felt to work with particular individuals. This would have offered a more concrete approach and provided her with visual prompts. Moreover, she then may have been able to verbally justify why she had chosen the pictures, as the focus would have been more on the cats and how they looked, as opposed to on her.

It is important to highlight that the use of several, combined methods was needed to be able to elicit my participants' views, not just one or two methods. It has been suggested that this methodological approach enriches data (Darbyshire et al., 2005). The use of my pie chart was a complimentary method to the other methods I used with Marie, and only one small part of a substantial myriad of collected data.

6.5.3 Drawing

By far, the most effective medium to support the elicitation of Marie and Debbie's views about their experience of school was drawing. I decided to combine two areas of respective

special interest for the girls (cats and drawing) to see if they could phenomenologically explore how they felt about school through drawing different cats to represent different aspects of their experience. Similar to Happe and Frith's (2006) findings, both participants were able to draw coherently and contextually in relation to their lived experiences, and, as Jolley et al. (2013) found, they were able to express emotions such as happiness and sadness in their drawings.

In contrast to Blagrave (2017) and Warren et al. (2021), I did not separate my participants' drawing from their interviews. Given the problems many autistic children have with recalling personal event history (Anns et al., 2020), I was concerned that separating the two activities might create a disconnect between the intended meanings of their drawings and the views they shared about them afterwards. Instead, and similar to Williams and Hanke (2007), I worked spontaneously with the girls' cat drawings, as conversations unfolded naturally. The use of drawing was often woven into the fabric of our dialogue.

The benefit of drawing and talking with Marie and Debbie in this way was that I could capture nuances of their lived experiences by asking them to explain phenomena as they emerged. For example, in my fifth session with Debbie, I asked her to draw the most difficult thing about school for her, and she drew a worried-looking cat wearing shorts. She wrote PE (physical education) next to it. Rather than ask her why she had drawn this, which may have been too abstract, I asked if she could draw a speech bubble coming out of the cat's mouth and what would it say. She wrote 'It's tiring'. I then asked her to write a second speech bubble answering my question 'Why is it so tiring?' She wrote 'We do things that

get our bodies tired'. Through combining the media of drawing and writing in a concrete way, I feel Debbie was able to offer an ontological statement about the physical nature of her experience of PE.

This drawing method is similar to that used in Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994). Comic strip conversations can help autistic people understand concepts that they find particularly difficult by drawing as they talk and using these drawings to learn about different social situations. My method also aligns with Kusters et al.'s (2017) view that using images in this way increases the validity of findings by dealing with the 'monopoly of interpretation' (p.66), as the child can provide immediate feedback and thus avoid researcher misinterpretation.

Another benefit of drawing and talking in the moment was that the same drawing prompts were not used for both of my participants. This is in contrast to how many researchers have used drawing, as a data collection method, to elicit autistic 'voice' (Williams and Hanke, 2007; Humphries and Lewis, 2008; Warren et al., 2021). Blagrave (2017) identifies a limitation of her study is the fact that all her participants were given the same prompt 'Draw me a picture of what your APE [Assisted Physical Education] class with teacher ___ is like for you' (p.19). She felt the question was too vague and may have forced participants to focus only on a good or bad day in their class. Learning from this observation, I asked Marie in our fourth session if she could draw her best and worst days (see pictures in 5.4.4.3) at school and offered her the option of drawing imaginary best/worst days if she

could not think of real ones. I feel this specificity helped her share significantly contrasting views of her school experience.

Two studies that are comparatively closer in design to my own are by Courchesne et al. (2022) and Lewis et al. (2024). These researchers helpfully used a wide range of communication modalities in addition to drawing (speaking, writing, texting, using emojis, card/statement-sorting, photo-elicitation, 'walk and talk', and semi-structured interviews) with their autistic participants' based on their identified strengths. However, Courchesne et al. (2022) identified five themes to explore with the youngsters based on various frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory *before* engaging with their participants. Methodologically, this has a limitation in that the content of the interviews was determined by the researchers and not the participants, and, therefore, aspects of their experience they considered important may have been missed.

The strength of Lewis et al.'s (2024) study is the fact the research team based the choice of methods used with individual participants on the participant's stated preferences, interests and strengths. However, the methods were pre-selected for trial before the researchers met the children. The researchers felt their study could have benefitted from including an advisory group of neurodivergent CYP prior to data collection, who could have considered how to optimise interest and accessibility in their research methods. I would argue my approach enabled this process, as my participants showed me this, themselves, as part of our work together.

6.5.4 Writing questions down

Writing questions down for Cayden and the development of a question sheet for Robert were complimentary transactional support methods used in conjunction with role play and interview. Similar to Courchesne et al.'s (2022) findings, I quickly discovered Cayden struggled with inferential questions such as those fronted with the words 'how' or 'why'. The mitigation strategy most used by the interviewers in the above study in response to this barrier was either to repeat or rephrase their questions to make them more intelligible for the autistic pupils or use picture cards to ask the questions vicariously. As I experienced, re-formulating questions and offering options can incur the risk of a participant still not understanding a question and just repeating one of the options you have stated, as they are not sure how to respond. Before I trialled writing my questions down for Cayden and presenting them at strategically timed points throughout our play, I had hypothesised that he required a visual prompt to answer more complex questions, and answer within a certain timeframe, or he would forget our train of conversation. Using his reading ability, as a relative strength, the strategy of presenting him with written questions worked every time. However, writing questions down, as a visual support, may not work with the next autistic child. Neurodivergent children, as my sample illustrates, are highly heterogeneous in terms of their cognitive profiles, communicative styles, and interests (Masi et al., 2017), and thus, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

Furthermore, I prepared a question sheet for Robert (see section 5.3.4.2) for him to complete in relation to his imaginary angel and demon, asking him to describe them

through different symbolic forms: a colour, an element, a sound, and a physical pose. I phrased the questions for each component in a similar vein to '*If your demon was a X, what would it be*?' In searching the literature, I cannot locate any studies that have used this specific method to elicit an autistic pupil's views about a figment of their imagination. I found this device very useful in building a picture of how Robert experienced the two voices he reported were in his head, and what issues in class troubled him. By using symbols in this way, Robert was able to attribute a more tangible persona to each entity which helped our discussion about how the two entities interacted in certain situations in lessons, for example, when he was wrongly accused of something, or kept being asked what he was doing in lessons by different teachers. The stark contrast between his demon being a 'ferocious' and 'terrifying' lion and his angel being a 'harmonic' and 'polite' pony (Robert said he could ride the pony's back, which suggested it was a form of support to him) evoked a real sense of how much internal tussle he felt when the two entities were at odds with one another, often leading to violent outbursts in lessons and around school. It was as though Robert's demon was an embodiment of the dysregulation he felt, at times, and his angel had to counteract the impulses he experienced, as an embodiment of societal 'voice' - of the behaviour the adults around him expected him to display.

6.6 Participants' experience of school

In addressing the third subsidiary question of this study regarding participants' school experience, I address this question by dealing with the superordinate group themes one by one in the following section.

To explain the wider educational context of this study further, 73 percent of autistic pupils in England attend mainstream schools (NAS Education Report, 2023). This is set to increase, as Local Authorities (LAs) have been invited to sign up to the Department for Education's 'Safety Valve' programme. This programme encourages cash-strapped LAs to reduce specialist educational provision and integrate more CYP with complex SEND into mainstream schools, as it is deemed cheaper (Hill, 2024). Outcomes for autistic CYP are often poor, with low academic achievement, mental health issues, and school exclusion identified as some of the priority areas for intervention (Brede et al., 2017; Totsika et al., 2020; Toft et al., 2021).

Following a systematic literature review of studies which sought to elicit the views of autistic pupils spanning a 21-year period, Taneja-Johansson (2023) found that only 17 percent (n=10) of the 58 global studies reviewed included primary-aged children. Of this 17 percent, only five studies were conducted in the UK. Two of these studies focused solely on physical education, one study looked at the Forest School programme, one study solely focused on girls' experiences, and the remaining study included a range of SEN students (and the researcher does not differentiate between participants when presenting her findings). As my participants were all primary-aged, autistic children, the significance of my findings is important, given the comparative dearth of literature in this area.

The superordinate group themes emerging from my study were: How to ask for help; Communication gap between teachers and participants; Clearer learning structures needed; and Relationships with peers.

6.6.1 How to ask for help

All four participants in this study had trouble with asking teachers or peers for help in class. Spanning eight months of observation, I witnessed only Debbie attempt to ask a teacher for help, and this was unsuccessful, as she merely hovered behind the teacher's back seemingly unsure about how to gain her attention. Marie, would often 'freeze' when approached by teachers, stating she found group work '*scary',* and thus abstained from interacting with peers to ask for help in class other than her best friend, Debbie. Robert reported he always forgot to ask teachers for help, and, on one occasion, I witnessed him aggressively shout, 'What am I doing?' (in relation to the work) to a peer when the class teacher was nearby.

Moyse and Porter (2015) report similar findings in relation to the female autistic pupils in their study. One pupil struggled when teacher instructions were inconsistent, confusing or without rationale. Robert also experienced confusion and a sense of inequity when a supply teacher disallowed him from using an iPad in a maths lesson yet allowed another student without due explanation. This example of inconsistency suggested a lack of autism training in the individual teacher and fore planning on the part of school staff in ensuring all supply teachers had basic information about the SEN pupils in their care. One-page profiles or 'passports' are used in many mainstream schools which concisely list the essential (personalised) information teachers require to support autistic students across subjects such as where pupil prefer to sit in class or what visual supports they require to aid their learning.

Problems with executive functioning, slower processing speeds plus rigid and inflexible thinking (Attwood, 2007) mean many autistic pupils need support to succeed in the classroom. This seemed the case for Cayden, as most of the time he was not aware of what he was meant to be doing and was not able to ask anyone for help. Moyse and Porter (2015) speculate this issue may not be as obvious for autistic girls who use the strategy of 'masking' and internalising difficulties. It seemed Debbie and Marie did struggle in class but did not express their frustration to anyone (unlike Robert). There did not appear to be a system for teachers to regularly check in with SEN pupils to monitor their comprehension and ability to complete class tasks. This is in direct contrast to common recommendations for teachers of autistic children (Myles and Simpson, 1998). However, to understand this phenomenon from the P-BL teachers' perspectives (Hal, Denise and Scott), they reported not having enough time to devote to individual pupils, given they taught so many pupils across many year groups simultaneously, and had not received enough instruction from the SEND department about how to support these SEN pupils specifically.

For a pupil like Marie, regular check-ins by teachers may have induced a stress response. Thus, when struggling with the work or environmental factors, she required an alternative means of alerting staff. To ensure this transactional support worked, it would need to be developed in consultation with Marie, in the first instance, and subsequently with her parents and school SENDCO, if required. For Robert, perhaps he could have been provided with a laminated visual prompt to help him remember to ask teachers or LSAs for help. However, based on my personal experience, as a teacher, I would suggest the use of a visual aid would need to be role-modelled by an adult or, if Robert felt that was patronising,

perhaps he could have role-modelled how to use it to another student and/or adult. This would have helped embed the new piece of knowledge and skill. The important point in relation to the use of transactional supports in schools is that teachers need to be supported by SENDCOs to develop transactional supports alongside all key stakeholders (child, parents/carers, other teachers, and the SEND team), as is the case with the SCERTS Model (Prizant et al., 2006).

6.6.2 Communication gap between teachers and participants

This study highlights a communication gap between the autistic participants and their teachers. It would appear the inability on the part of all pupil participants to ask teachers or peers for help when stuck with classwork, or when dysregulated, seemed to give their teachers the impression they did not require assistance, and concurs with Moyse and Porter's (2015) findings. I also assert that this issue does not appear to be gender-specific and possibly could be experienced by all children with SEND, although I cannot generalise the latter from such a small sample. Some vital behavioural clues the participants displayed seemed to be missed by staff such as Robert ripping pages out of books and flattening them again (an attempt to self-regulate), Debbie pacing up and down (a form of 'stimming' and a sign of distress, as confirmed by her Occupational Therapist), or Cayden continually drawing Starlord's spaceship in all his exercise books or on paper (seemingly a vicarious means of escaping into another world). Denise did notice Cayden drawing Starlord's spaceship in all his books but was not sure how to interpret this behaviour or follow it up.

Likewise, Moyse and Porter (2015) found in their study that there were multiple daily instances with all three of their participants making small movements over prolonged periods of time, suggestive of sensory issues or anxiety. Furthermore, school staff in this study were not aware both Debbie and Cayden found loud noise distressing. I observed Cayden continually closing the door of the back classroom off the main P-BL studio which he stated was because of the noise. Similarly, Warren et al. (2021) and Tippett (2004) found the autistic pupils in their studies struggled with the noise within mainstream schools. Offering ear plugs, sensory breaks, and opportunities to move to and from break times at slightly different times to their peers may help to support pupils who experience the sensory aspects of the school in an unusual or extreme way.

There is a definite sense across all the data that Debbie was coping quite well on the surface at school. To an untrained, pedagogically inexperienced teacher (many LSAs took lessons in this school), Debbie was able to put her hand up in class and answer questions; a year ahead of her peers in literacy; able to work independently on tasks; comfortable working with both sexes and in small groups; able to generate ideas, particularly in English; and had relatively few emotional outbursts. However, through my interviews and play sessions with her, I tapped a contrasting narrative, and discovered she was not coping as well on the inside, which concurs with McCann's (2019) viewpoint. She would often feel '*stressed*' when she did not understand the work and found it difficult to ask for help from her teachers using the strategies they proposed such as 'SNOT'. Debbie's mother felt the teachers assumed she was more independent than she was because she was good at

literacy. It is important educators do not apply pedagogical assumptions to their autistic pupils' behaviour based on neuro-normative models.

Essentially, the evident communication gap between teachers and my autistic participants seemed to centre on four, interlinked issues: staff feeling they had not had enough training in autism; the SEN pupils' ILPs (Individual Learning Plans) were written by their form tutors, not the SEND team, and they were not detailed enough, or monitored by SEN-trained staff; the teachers did not have enough time to focus on individual students, given their crammed timetables and huge classes; and the pupils, themselves, struggled to communicate their needs. The lack of autism training for mainstream teachers is of concern, given more and more autistic pupils are being integrated into mainstream schools, instead of specialist settings. Only 39% of primary school teachers surveyed by the National Autistic Society (NAS) in 2021 had received more than half a day's autism training and, for secondary school teachers, this figure was just 14%.

The inclusion of autistic pupils is cited as one of most complex and poorly understood areas of education (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006; Jordan, 2005; Humphrey and Lewis, 2008). Emam and Farrell (2009) found primary school teachers were more likely to adapt their teaching style and behaviour to accommodate the needs of autistic pupils compared to secondary school teachers, as the pupils are with them most of the day. Whereas secondary school teachers only see pupils for a limited period, so often defer to LSAs for advice about how to deal with SEN pupils. Teachers generally lack confidence in their ability to support autistic pupils in mainstream settings (Cook and

Ogden, 2022). These issues fall in line with the current study's findings, as the primary-aged participants only saw their teachers once a day, given the different structure of their school. Like Emam and Farrell's (2009) study, this study found teachers did recognise the additional difficulties in emotional and social understanding faced by their autistic students, but they simply did not know how to ameliorate it, due to a lack of training. All teachers reported feeling frustrated at not being able to provide my participants (particularly Cayden) with the support they needed which is echoed by Tippett's (2004) findings.

All schools in England can seek guidance and training from the Autism Education Trust (AET website, 2024), and some have access to LA-run Communication and Interaction Teams (CITs) for advice about how to support autistic students. However, based on personal experience, there are long waiting lists for CIT consultations, and schools need money to pay for most AET training. Given most school budgets are being systematically cut by the UK Government, this is a problem. This also has drastically impacted the level of LSA support that schools can provide SEN pupils which seems to correlate with the huge rise in exclusion rates (comprising mainly SEN pupils). According to UNISON (public service union in the UK), pupils are missing out on essential support as teaching assistants increasingly provide cover for absent teachers, without lesson plans or help from other colleagues (UNISON website, 2024).

Another central issue for my participants was the fact that their Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) were being written by their form tutors, who were not SEND-trained. As (teacher)

Mike felt, it seemed all teachers needed to feed into the pupils' ILPs, as well as the pupil and his/her parents, and then the SENDCO write them up. Denise felt some of the ILPs lacked sufficient detail. She also indicated that some students did not have ILPs which was corroborated by some of the participants' mothers. As Porter (2015) argues, an assessment of needs for autistic pupils needs to include both parent and pupil voices. My participants' personal feelings were largely revealed during our interviews which reinforces the importance of pupil voice. Common practice in schools is to distil ILPs to one-page profiles/passports that each teacher (including supply teachers) uses to support autistic individuals, and which can be monitored and regularly reviewed by SENDCOs. The school SENDCO had not met or observed any of my participants in any lessons, and this would have impacted his ability to prepare well informed support plans. Given the fact that most teachers in this study reported they did not have enough time to stop and look at the autistic pupils' behaviour, this close observation would have been most helpful. Unfortunately, many academy trusts only share SENDCOs, due to the funding crisis, but often require several SEND-trained staff when the SEN pupil ratio is high in a school.

I would argue my participants' lack of social engagement often was seen by their teachers because of their differences and autism diagnoses, rather than from how they mutually interacted with them based on different (autistic and non-autistic) ontological states. Given the bias towards neuro-homogeneity in schools and society at-large, the lack of autism training in schools, and time the teachers in this study could devote to closely observing and analysing their SEN pupils' behaviours, my findings highlight the extent to which the Double Empathy Problem (DEP) was compounded by these factors. The DEP possibly was

being influenced by more invisible social forces within the school such as institutional framing which I describe in section 4.12.1.

6.6.3 Clearer learning structures

In line with Lindsay et al.'s (2014) findings, most teachers in this study stated that all autistic participants, apart from Debbie, required additional structures to support their learning compared to their non-autistic peers. Cayden, Marie and Robert often did not understand why they were completing tasks in lessons and how they related to the overall learning objectives (particularly in P-BL where several age groups came together and learning structures were more complicated). Attwood (2006) suggests it is necessary to make some major adaptations to how a curriculum is presented to allow autistic pupils to access it successfully. In Goodall's (2018) study, older pupils shared simple strategies and curriculum adaptations they felt would have helped make their time at mainstream school more successful which included instructions being broken down.

Apart from the use of visual timetables and prompts (which had been withdrawn from Cayden during the period I conducted my research), it did not appear that the participants' teachers were equipped with a wide range of strategies to help structure their learning. However, Colin, Marie's form tutor, did prepare a visual timetable at the beginning of each day to reduce her anxiety about what might be happening in school. This had been his own idea and not a recommendation passed on from the school SENDCO. Equivalently, one pupil participant in Warren et al.'s (2021) study wrote on the poster he had made, as part

of the data collection process, that he felt anxious as he first arrived at school in the morning, as he did not know what was in store for him. This concurs with Cunningham's (2022) findings that predictability and routine are important to many autistic pupils. Her pupil participants requested weekly and daily timetables with advance warning of change and simple, clear instructions of what they needed to do, ideally written down. Dann (2011) and Tippett (2004) also found visual timetables helped their autistic (pupil) participants. It would seem each of my participants needed their learning broken down and presented in a way that built on their individual strengths and communication preferences. For example, Cayden may have benefitted from having simple instructions written down, as his ability to read was a relative strength. However, not all teachers knew that this was a strength.

In addition to breaking learning down into manageable chunks and presenting it using visual aids, I observed two of my autistic participants requiring more structure between tasks and lessons, and during unstructured time. Robert mostly transitioned between lessons on his own and struggled to play with anyone other than his brother during breaktimes. Cayden repeatedly paced up and down in the playground (resembling a caged animal, at times) during breaktimes. This phenomenon is highlighted by Attwood (2006), who identifies the difficulty many autistic students have transitioning between one area of the curriculum to another. Moreover, Warren et al. (2021) report the staff in their study commented that the less structured transition periods (when going to assembly, playtime, snack time and so on) can lead to the most challenging times for pupils.

It was difficult to determine the function of Cayden's pacing up and down, as he struggled to articulate why. I can only speculate, as a parent of an autistic boy with similar sensory-seeking behaviours to Cayden, that perhaps he needed to regulate and/or defaulted to this behaviour, as he did not know what else to do in the playground. He may have benefitted from additional support to structure his breaktimes, and, as Howlin et al. (1999) recommend, assistance to develop the necessary skills to communicate and maintain relationships, if he wanted them. It has been suggested that friendships cannot be 'created' or manufactured but opportunities to forge them can (Male, 2014). A school staff member in Warren et al.'s (2021) study suggested that mainstream pupils should be further educated about autism, believing this was an obstacle for enabling positive experiences for some. Perhaps Cayden's teachers could have explored the possibility of creating a lunchtime club for pupils interested in Marvel films and characters. Cayden may have been able to engage in Lego or role play with peers with the help of some peer or adult support in place.

6.6.4 Relationships with peers

Childhood friendship, described by Bagwell et al. (1998) as a 'mutual relationship between two children in which reciprocal liking is quintessential' (p.141) featured strongly in the current study. Peer relationships were seen both as a challenge by my main participants, as well as a support system. Debbie and Marie appeared to support one another in the classroom (more so on Debbie's part) which, in fact, was deemed a negative aspect of the girl's respective school experience by teacher, Denise. She felt their insularity limited their

learning. It could be hypothesised that, had the girls more individual support in class, they may not have needed to rely on one another as much. Notwithstanding this factor, findings from the literature suggest that having supportive friends can act as a buffer against social problems (Poon et al., 2014), and this seemed the case for Debbie and Marie.

For some of my participants, my data revealed a mixed picture. For example, Marie recorded in her pie chart that she did not like working alone comparatively speaking, apportioning a much higher percentage of the chart to working in groups. This need to belong to a group, as an important part of an autistic person's wellbeing, has been posited by Milton and Sims (2016). However, Marie contradicted herself in one session when she stated she felt anxious about working in groups and aligns with research showing more able, autistic girls can find it difficult to form friendships - they want to have friends but do not have the innate skills to make it work (Attwood, 2007; Beteta, 2009). Other research highlights autistic people might be just as socially motivated as non-autistic people, but this motivation might be marred by negative experiences or be overlooked by non-autistic others (Sasson et al., 2017; Cage and Burton, 2019; Morrison et al., 2020; Cola et al., 2020).

Debbie and Marie enjoyed playing with their immediate friends at breaktimes. I witnessed Marie regularly skipping off to the playground and returning looking decidedly invigorated with a smile on her face. In Warren et al.'s (2021) study, when asked about their favourite part of their day, most pupils reported breaktime when they played with their peers. Contrastingly, other studies have found that autistic pupils spend only 40 percent of their playtime playing with others, as compared to 70 percent of playtime for non-autistic peers

(Locke et al., 2016). In Moyse and Porter's (2015) study, one female participant was observed sitting quietly on the edge of a group during breaktimes, apparently listening but not joining in, and reported she often felt 'lonely' and 'left on her own' by her peers (p.193). This sense of being an outsider and removed from one's (non-autistic) peer group, resonates with Cayden's playground experience, and Robert's in his lessons. Similar to Carrington and Graham's (2001) study in which one of their male participants was reported to constantly tug on girls' hair, Cayden would often tug on girls' hair or rest his head on their shoulders - much to their annoyance. This may have been caused by an inability to control his impulses, or due to a lack of social understanding. However, it clearly ostracised Cayden and, sadly, I did not observe any interventions by school staff to help educate him about this.

6.6.5 Summary of school experience

All participants in this study had significant inner experiences school staff were not aware of or did not utilise as part of interventions to support them. Three out of four mothers were not aware of these phenomena within their children either. Marie reported wearing a layer of imaginary cat fluff, as protection, in school; Robert shared he was often thwarted by the imaginary voices of an angel and demon living inside his head; Cayden seemed to be embroiled in imaginary battles between superheroes throughout his school day; and Debbie enjoyed the inner experience of feeling half cat, half human when wearing a synthetic cat tail. It strikes me that all these rich and diverse experiences could have been drawn upon and possibly experimented with in some way by school staff. As Robert stated

in one interview with me, he would have '*loved*' it if his teachers could have chatted with his angel and demon to try to help calm explosive situations of which he was at the centre. I feel there were many missed opportunities by school staff which could have helped bridge the communication gaps between them and my participants. However, one cannot see an opportunity unless one can see it. Various, complex factors were preventing staff from being able to do this.

Evidently, there were significant external pressures compounding the school's ability to support the autistic participants in the ways they needed such as the lack of governmental funding to be able to employ one-to-one LSAs, buy in bespoke autism training for staff, or the time constraints and difficult conditions the teachers had to work under. However, there were also factors in how the school's senior leadership team had structured the SEND department within the school. The fact that the SENDCO was not instrumental to observing SEN pupils in class and around school, or writing their ILPs on the back of regular TAF (Team Around the Family) meetings in school was a problem. The SENDCO was spread so thinly across the whole school and required a deputy to support him, but, again, funding was the issue. Teachers felt they lacked specific guidance for the SEN pupils they taught and this, undoubtedly, exacerbated the Double Empathy Problem (Milton, 2012) which is a phenomenon I would assert is fundamental to understanding how to support autistic pupils in schools.

6.7 Overview of discussion

Evidentially, research aiming to elicit the voice of autistic pupils using more creative methods still has a long way to go (Taneja-Johansson, 2023). However, it would appear across all areas of the research I have covered on the use of transactional supports with autistic pupils there remains a recurring and inherent problem which is limiting the accessibility and flexibility of the data collection methods being used. This problem centres on the issue of researchers deciding which methods to use before meeting their participants. Of course, it is important that researchers commence their studies equipped with an eclectic range of potential methods they could draw on according to how individual participants present. However, and as my study shows, the only way in which some communication barriers can be overcome with neurodivergent participants is if the methods used to elicit their voices are created, as bespoke methods, for and with them, as the data collection process evolves. I feel it is imperative that researchers invest in the pre-study stage for addressing the 'Double Empathy Problem' (Milton, 2012) by understanding participants' strengths and preferences and building trust before engaging in data collection. As Fricker (2007) suggests, neurodivergent children must be repositioned as creditable knowers regarding their own experiences and offered some degree of control over the research, thus democratising the process.

It also is important that support strategies and data collection methods used in schools such as the 'Power Cards Strategy' (Gagnon, 2001), or card-sorting activities need to ensure more emphasis is placed on enabling the child to be an active agent in determining how

adults are choosing to interact with them. Currently, it seems the emphasis is very much on what the adult should do to enable the child, rather than how an adult and child can work together to understand their respective autistic and non-autistic ontological states, which I feel would put them in a better position to support the child's development.

The experience of autistic children in primary settings using creative methods is explored by Conn (2014). In her book, she describes the experiences of interaction, friendship and play from children's own points of view. Apart from Conn (2014), this study seems to be one of the first in the UK to explore the general school experience of primary-aged, autistic pupils using transactional support methods which were co-developed with individual pupils. The pupil participants were able to engage in intersubjective discourses and reflect on their lived experiences of school through the symbolic use of drawing, dramatic role play, object substitution, visual supports, and symbolism with a high level of sophistication, at times. Robert was able to eloquently articulate his inner experience of the 'voices' (an angel and a demon) he reported to continually hear in his head, and Cayden managed to articulate how he felt about certain aspects of school which, according to his mother and school staff, had never been expressed previously.

This also is the first study, as far as I can see, to combine the use of special interests with role play to enable school pupils to *explore* how they are living, as opposed to merely *practising* how they are living. It contributes to the emerging body of autism research investigating the voices of autistic young people. The findings highlight the importance of adults positioning themselves in ways that allow autistic pupils' own interests, and communication needs and preferences to dictate how data collection methods are

developed for and with them, as a study unfolds. It is not just important to study what a child's experience of school is, but *how* the child's views on this experience can be best accessed.

Methodologically, I argue for elicitation methods that open up spaces for young people to comfortably inhabit through using emotional distancing frames. For example, using role play with pupils for whom this works within familiar contexts of intrinsic interest that is fun, inter-synchronous and collaborative can create these distancing frames and help pupils feel safe. Further, by underpinning these processes with the principles of intersubjectivity, I feel I have placed myself in a better position, as the adult researcher, to receive my (main) participants' beams of communication. Metaphorically speaking, we were able to meet in the middle of our respective subjective states which then allowed me to enter their worlds to lesser or greater degrees.

This study also highlights the barriers that education professionals currently are facing in schools, and which result in them not being able to individualise learning supports for autistic pupils in the way they need. The lack of governmental funding to be able to employ one-to-one LSAs and buy in bespoke autism training for staff, as well as the time constraints and difficult conditions teachers must work under, are some of the cited barriers in this study. There also were factors in how the school's senior leadership team had structured the SEND department within the school. It is my view that adults working with autistic pupils in schools need to view learning and their interactions as social processes whereby knowledge is co-constructed. Unfortunately, the predominance of the 'transmission'

model of education (adults transmitting knowledge to pupils) that currently prevails within UK schools seems to be limiting how much knowledge and understanding of autistic pupils' school experience can be acquired by the adults working with them.

The strengths and limitations, implications, recommendations, and contributions of this research are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws together the findings from my study and presents a summary of how my thesis contributes new knowledge to the area of the autism field focused on eliciting the voice of autistic children and young people. I conclude my thesis by firstly providing reflections on the research process and study design. Next, I reflect on how my research has addressed each of my four research questions, followed by presenting the implications of my research and recommendations. Finally, I consider the strengths and limitations of my study and suggest ideas for future research.

7.2 Overview of study and methodology

Based in Southwest England, this ethnographic study explored how to elicit the views of four, primary-aged autistic pupils using individualised transactional support methods. The school experiences of primary-aged autistic children is an under-researched area; thus the findings of this study are significant.

The theory of intersubjectivity, as a conceptual framework, underpinned this research which asserts that one's consciousness is co-constructed through visceral inter-relationships with others. Data was analysed using the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). However, some adaptations were made to the data

analysis process by incorporating The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), and using a less 'bracketed' approach phenomenologically to how phenomena were scrutinised, given the level of immersion experienced in the field.

To gain a full picture of each, main participant's contextual background, an etic (wider) lens was applied at the beginning of the data collection process. Fly-on-the-wall, non-participatory observation; semi-structured interviews with the autistic participants' mothers; and informal chats with school staff were undertaken. This immersion phase enabled a rich understanding of the inter-relationships within the various systems and sub-systems in the school community.

Through several one-to-one, semi-structured interviews and play sessions exploring the main participants' inside perspectives on their school experience, an emic (narrower) lens then was applied. The decision to situate the research within an emergent design frame allowed for a flexible methodological approach. This enabled the pupil participants to help co-develop some elicitation methods focusing on their special interests, as the research process evolved. This process then funnelled down to following lines of inquiry that felt worthy of further exploration, mostly based on what seemed important to each pupil participant.

Participants were positioned as experts on their experience, enabling their voices to be heard. The hermeneutics of suspicion and empathy were employed in how data were gathered and analysed. The challenge was to be involved enough, as an ethnographic

researcher, to be able to learn about and describe participants’ experiences but detached enough to be able to make the ‘”known” unknown’ (Everhart, 1977, p.1). I did this by taking a non-expert position and empowering participants to contribute to and often dictate the focus of our interactions.

7.3 Key findings in relation to research questions

7.3.1 Individualised transactional support methods

The transactional support methods that were successful in eliciting the views of all pupil participants in this study involved the participants’ special interests, dramatic role play, inter-synchrony, and skilful questioning. The participants’ special interests were used as symbolic anchors to explore their identities and experiences. For example, Marie used role play with imaginary cats to reflect how she perceived her school and home selves. The use of special interests and bespoke transactional supports in relation to participants’ preferred modes of communication and perceived strengths enabled the researcher to step inside the child’s world and see things from his/her point of view, reducing the potential for the DEP, as a barrier. Further, the metaxical element (being in-role and being yourself, at the same time) of the role play created emotional safety and enabled perspective-taking.

Mirroring participants’ body language, use of attuned voice modulation, and good social timing all helped foster trust and engagement, particularly for Marie and Cayden. Rephrased, concrete, and closed questions worked better than abstract or open ones.

However, generic elicitation methods still required nuanced adaptations for each participant according to his or her individual needs. These needs were ascertained *before* transactional support methods were developed which sets this study apart, as all other studies of this nature seem to involve the design of elicitation methods before the researchers have met the participants. Gathering varied perspectives prior to working with individual participants, as part of this study, helped offset the Double Empathy Problem (Milton, 2012), allowing cross-validation between pupil insights and stakeholder views.

A relatively high proportion of support methods - 28 percent - needed to be developed as bespoke supports in this study and included the use of a visual pie chart; Yes/No columns; writing questions for a participant to read; a question sheet exploring a participants' experiences symbolically; and drawing. Blending drawing with participants' interests allowed spontaneous expression, often yielding richer data than structured prompts. The visual aids helped scaffold communication, providing participants with more structured, less anxiety-inducing ways to express their thoughts and feelings.

The elicitation methods this thesis recommends could be applied to many contexts in which the views of autistic CYP are being sought. For example, towards planning Education Health and Social Care plans with local authorities, or when educational psychologists or social workers work with CYP to ascertain their needs and preferred communication and learning styles. Indeed, the underlying principles are relevant to any context in which there is a need to elicit the inside views of autistic CYP, for example in state residential homes or hospitals.

7.3.2 Pupils' school experience

Four superordinate themes emerged at group level in relation to how pupil participants experienced their mainstream school and are presented below.

1. An inability in the pupil participants to ask for help
2. A communication gap with teachers
3. The need for clearer classroom and free-time structures
4. Limited peer engagement

Most (pupil) participants struggled with the unstructured nature of their classroom environments and teachers reported that the pupils (particularly Cayden and Robert) did not understand the purpose of certain tasks, or how they related to the overall learning objectives. This was compounded by all four participants' inability to seek help using the school's system SNOT (Self, Next person, Other person and Teacher), or by any other means. There did not appear to be any systems or strategies for teachers to regularly check in with autistic pupils to monitor their comprehension and ability to complete class tasks.

The lack of staff training and strategic support from the school's SEND department, coupled with large class sizes and limited teacher time, made it difficult for teachers to provide the support the pupils required to thrive in school. This gap often manifested in teachers missing important behavioural cues displayed by participants signalling distress or confusion. All teachers in this study recognised some of the additional difficulties in emotional and social understanding faced by the autistic participants, but they simply did

not have the tools to address them, given their lack of training and allocated reflection time. As Robert stated in one interview, to have had his teachers chat with his ‘angel and demon’ to help him regulate his emotions in class simply would have been ‘*the best*’.

Regarding peer support for the pupil participants, this appeared inconsistent. Marie and Debbie had a strong bond but struggled socially beyond each other. Cayden and Robert found peer relationships difficult and sometimes exhibited misunderstood behaviours because of this. Interventions to guide appropriate social interaction were rare, despite some pupils’ desire for connection.

More and more pupils are being directed by local authorities in England to attend mainstream schools (McKinlay et al., 2022). Therefore, finding more creative and enabling ways to ascertain autistic pupils’ perspectives on their school experience seems vital. It is my view that adults working with autistic pupils in schools need to view learning and their interactions as social processes whereby knowledge is co-constructed. Unfortunately, the predominance of the ‘transmission’ model of education (adults transmitting knowledge to pupils) that currently prevails in UK schools seems to be limiting how much knowledge and understanding of autistic pupils’ school experience can be acquired by the adults working with them.

7.4 Implications, recommendations and contributions of research

I hope my findings can be used in some way to bridge the gap between theory and practice

for adults aiming to elicit the first-hand perspectives from a population of CYP, who are traditionally overlooked due to their perceived communication barriers. Historically, autistic individuals have been expected to make the effort to adapt to societal systems and conventions, rather than both sides making the effort. I wish for my research to help re-position the approaches adopted by (non-autistic) adults working with autistic CYP, so that they take a look back at themselves and their behaviours, and how they affect autistic sociality and ways of being. No doubt, this and focusing on how to meet young autistic people in the middle of dialogic discourses will help address the DEP, and the development of shared interactional expertise will become more possible (Milton, 2014). Lastly, I hope my findings can act as a counter-narrative to the deficit discourse on autism by showcasing the highly creative, playful and sociable ways in which autistic children can express themselves, if carefully facilitated to do so.

In the following section, I make two recommendations for any adult working to support an autistic child or young person to voice their lived experiences. My contributions to methodology and theory are explained after my recommendations.

7.4.1 Recommendations

1. Adults should theoretically and ontologically position themselves away from the deficit model of autism and accept that autistic individuals can express themselves and reflect on their lived experiences through creative, playful and social means. It will be important to position this approach in relation to teaching, learning and general wellbeing.

2. Key adults (e.g. parents/carers, SENDCOs, educational psychologists, clinicians, carers) working to understand autistic CYP's lived experiences should aim to create 'listening spaces' for them to express themselves within and frame the CYP as the experts on their own lives. The methods and media used should be guided by what CYP prefer, or wish to invent, before standard methods are applied. Co-creating symbolic forms based on the CYP's special interests through which they can vicariously explore their lived experiences could provide some emotional distance and layers of protection for them. Investing time in the process of active listening and building trust, at the beginning stages of building relationships, will form the basis of all subsequent communication with the CYP involved. This, in turn, will inform the strategies and interventions required to support them.

The following pointers are intended, as a general guide, to support any adult working to elicit the autistic 'voice' of a child or young person:

- Enter the child/young person's world through their special interest – let them guide you
- Build trust and rapport through this process
- Use an object(s) to project onto
- Develop layers of protection through the use of distancing frames (e.g. role play or symbolic object substitution)

The transactional support methods listed in Table 16 on p.254 could act as possible starting point or toolkit. However, it is important that anyone using these methods ensures they

are appropriate for and preferred by individual CYP – they must not be used for every autistic child or young person just because they are listed in the table.

Rationale for recommendations: This study's findings show that, if given the chance, pupils with complex communication differences and/or autism diagnoses can help adults to understand their needs through child-led, creative discourse and play. For example, Debbie was able to communicate how PE made her body feel, and Marie was able to articulate she needed a protective layer of 'cat fluff' in school to help her cope. Both revelations were only possible because of the journey they and I embarked on in co-creating spaces in which they could explore their inner feelings, and this process took time.

Further, the finding that pupils did not know how to, or were unable to ask for help, was an important one, and highlights the need for those seeking to support autistic individuals to develop individualised transactional support methods with them. The literature, moreover, shows that not enough is being done by educators, researchers and professionals to elicit the first-person perspectives of autistic CYP, and this is desperately needed to ensure their wellbeing and full and equitable inclusion in schools and society at-large.

7.4.2 Contribution of methodology

To the best of my knowledge, my study is the first in the UK (and possibly internationally) to exclusively explore how primary-aged, autistic children experience their mainstream

school through co-creating data collection methods with them, on individual bases. I did not generate the initial design prototypes, as the researcher. Instead, I employed a fuller model of participation by first ascertaining my participants' needs from a range of sources in relation to how they could share their lived experiences. The only procedural instrument I used at the beginning of data collection was to focus on participants' special interests, but where that led us was up to them, initially.

I feel I have developed IPA practice by exploring how to apply the double hermeneutic to autistic children's experience through the use of symbolic play and discourse, as well as visual support methods. Willig (2013) expresses concern that IPA focuses heavily on language, and Newman et al. (2010) suggest the epistemological assumption underlying hermeneutic phenomenology that language is integral to understanding experience needs to be reassessed when conducting research with autistic participants. I feel my methodological approach goes some way to addressing this epistemological problem, as some of my methods did not wholly rely on language-use. Or rather, how language was used within the context of embodied semantics provided ontological pathways for participants to express themselves.

Apart from MacLeod et al. (2014), who used IPA and the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) together with autistic students, my study adopts a novel approach in the way it incorporates the CIT into IPA data analysis, prefaced by narrative, contextual descriptions of my participants' experiences. I applied the IPA categorisation process (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual content of data) afterwards, as I felt starting with categorisation

positioned me too much in the third person and I was losing my emic lens. The CIT allowed me to pinpoint specific meanings within scripts by using my foreknowledge of my participant's whole contexts which aligned with my conceptual framework.

7.4.3 Contribution of conceptual framework

My study was framed conceptually by intersubjectivity. Studies of intersubjectivity in autism have been primarily based on autistic-to-non-autistic interactions and have highlighted difficulties such as reciprocating non-verbal cues (Hobson and Lee, 1998; García-Pérez et al., 2007) and shared intentionality (Tomasello et al., 2005). However, I would question the epistemological approaches to framing social interaction within some of these studies, as they seem to have been constructed through a 'coordination' model of engagement, as a means to form social consensus, rather than through the paradigm of intersubjectivity (explained in section 2.5).

I would argue the way in which I positioned myself intersubjectively with my participants enabled us to bridge the gap between our autistic and non-autistic ontological states with success. I did not enter the research field with 'a priori' agenda or pre-designed data collection tools, but, instead, tried to meet my autistic participants in the middle of bi-directional discourses by building on their strengths and creating spaces for them to inhabit in the ways they felt they needed to. This led to the production of exceedingly rich and dynamic reflections.

7.5 Strengths and limitations of study

The strength of my study is that it captures unique and in-depth first-person perspectives of primary-aged, autistic children over a sustained period. I was able to ethnographically immerse myself in the research context for months and months which helped me build a comprehensive picture of how all the inter-connecting parts of the school experience related to one another. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding this sort of research. Each child was willing to spend time with me to reflect on his/her school experiences in a range of diverse ways.

Further, the fact that the gender split across participants was equal is also a positive, as generally the ratio of male to female participants in autism studies is male-dominant, given the fact that more males are diagnosed than females (Loomes et al., 2017). The contribution to the research by all the pupils' mothers was very helpful indeed, as often what they (and their children) reported about their children's school experiences was different to how staff perceived incidents, as Fortuna (2014) also observes. However, a limitation to this study was the fact that my main participants' fathers were not able to partake in the research. Their participation may have offered contrasting perspectives to that of the participants' mothers.

As a parent of an autistic child with complex learning difficulties and ex secondary school teacher, my researcher position also was central to this study. The fact that I could empathise with the participants, their mothers, and the teachers in equal measure was a

strength, as my personal experience across all three domains helped with my data triangulation. However, my positionality inevitably influenced and shaped my interpretations of my data. With the same set of data, it is likely that another researcher, particularly someone living without an autistic child, would have arrived at a different set of interpretations and conclusions.

Whilst I endeavoured to maximise the scope of my study, inevitably, there were one or two limitations. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that my study involved a small sample size and, therefore, my findings cannot be generalised to the wider autistic population. It is acknowledged that IPA research cannot be used to generate nomothetic claims, although key emergent themes can be of use in moving understanding forward on a more general level (Smith et al., 2009). Further, had I aimed to conduct a generalisable study, I would have had to significantly alter its design by including a team of researchers, as it would not have been possible for me to build so many in-depth relationships over such a long period of time on my own. Consequently, I would have lost consistency in researcher observation across cases, and this probably would have weakened the strength of my study, given its intended idiographic nature.

Another limitation of this study is that it does not include the perspectives of those autistic children and young people for whom spoken language is not possible or is very limited. The views of these individuals remain poorly represented within the literature (Lebenhagen, 2020). Thus, future IPA research would do well to include this cohort so that a more balanced view of all autistic children's experiences of school can be captured.

7.6 Reflections on research process

As well as learning from my data, I learnt a great deal about the process of collecting that data, and there are things I would do differently if I were to do it again. In the following section, I highlight these areas.

7.6.1 Fieldnotes as a research instrument

I followed Wolfinger's (2002) 'salience hierarchy' (p.92) method in how I recorded my observations in the field by only writing about those things which stood out for me based on my evolving knowledge and beliefs. Simpson and Tuson (1995) recommend trying to cross-check one's interpretations with others who were present in the room. On reflection, I wonder if there was a means by which my fieldnotes could have been validated or enhanced by other parties. I could have word processed (and transcribed into appropriate media for my participants according to their needs) eventful sections of my fieldnotes for those present at the time to comment on, checking for their accuracy of recording and interpretation. With hindsight, I think this may have been a useful exercise to trial with open-minded teachers and LSAs in the school, but I would have needed to consider the potential risk of them feeling under scrutiny in subsequent lessons once privy to my recording processes. Moreover, I feel the same might have applied to my participants and, given I was verbally checking my interpretations of their responses with them throughout the data collection period, I am not convinced this method would have necessarily added anything.

7.6.2 Including a parent in a play session

One of my participants, Debbie, presented as being quite anxious within my first session with her and Marie, thus I spoke to her mother about how best to proceed. By the end of our conversation, we agreed it might be an idea to include Debbie's mother in my next session with Debbie, as a source of support, given she and Debbie had a close relationship and Debbie often confided in her. There certainly were pros and cons to this decision.

Firstly, having Debbie's mother present in the session did seem to reassure Debbie initially, as she smiled and joined in with our settling-in conversation. Debbie's mother was able to interpret some aspects of Debbie's behaviour that I was not sure about, given she knew her so well. However, on a couple of occasions, this also acted as a barrier to my phenomenological interpretation of Debbie's behaviour, as her mother's reading of the situations seemed assumptive and leading in places, as Debbie contradicted her now and again. Debbie's mother also would speak for Debbie, on occasion, thus limiting and skewing my data.

If I did include a parent in a session with a participant again, I would need to meet with them beforehand to discuss how best to handle potential scenarios together and set some boundaries.

7.7 Role of researcher

Throughout the research process, I reflected on any power imbalances and interactions

between myself and my participants. The fact that I was an adult, ex teacher and researcher, and non-autistic would have positioned me in a position of power in relation to my pupil participants. I used supervisions with my university supervisors, as a space to consider any power imbalances that arose and how to address these. I tried to counter this power imbalance by taking a non-expert position and trying to empower participants to lead discussions and play during their one-to-one sessions.

7.8 Suggestions for future research

Given the findings of my study, a general recommendation for future research conducted in the field of autism and education would be that studies focus on how to develop participatory methodologies with autistic children and young people, so they are centrally involved in the co-production of research, and can feel empowered to express their 'voices'. Involving people who draw on their own lived experience to help us think outside the normative box could have far-reaching effects on basic autism practices (Pellicano, 2020).

In terms of recommending specific research, there were two areas of interest which emerged from my study post-analysis. The first was in relation to embodied semantics, as I struggled to locate studies specifically exploring symbolism in language and how it sits in relation to inter-synchrony in autism. The second area of interest was in relation to role play and perspective-taking in autism. When participant, Cayden, role-played his teacher, Denise, he was able to articulate how he thought she viewed him (use more speculative

language, demonstrating a nascent capacity for perspective-taking. This research area seems worthy of further exploration in relation to ToM theory, given this area of cognition in autistic people is cited as under-developed (Nichols and Stich, 2003; Goldman, 2012).

7.9 Concluding note

With humility, I put forward my thesis in the hope that it may contribute in some way to answering the question of how best to achieve autistic children's active participation in autism research. For me, the most important finding of my study was that some autistic children, who are deemed by many adults as lacking in volition and intention and without the ability to voice their experiences, can develop highly creative forms of expression when given the space and opportunity to do so within child-led discourses framed by intersubjectivity. It is possible for non-autistic adults to forge intersubjective 'beams' of connection with autistic children. My study provides evidence that by embracing a more holistic conceptualisation of how autistic children can express their views, the deficit model of autism can be questioned.

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9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Auditing and reflection

1) Meeting with Debbie's mother (14/01/19):
- Said last bullet point on child consent form not clear – simplify language.
- Clarify on child info sheet where child would chat with me, with whom exactly, and no extra homework.

2) I raise a question about conducted, coached and choreographed groupings and check PB-L on Wiki. Find info on roles: teacher as facilitator, must structure proposed question/issue to direct student's learning toward content-based materials. Instructor must regulate student success with intermittent, transitional goals to ensure student projects remain focused and students have deep understanding of concepts being investigated.
3) Need to see School Learning Plan to see if P-BL goals in.
4) Phase Two Leader mentioned 'My Ways' framework, so need to fully investigate this.
5) School Principal mentioned High Scope (American approach) – need to research.
6) Look at 'ABC Does' website (Dave).
7) Need to look at Group Learning Plans, as referred to by several staff.
8) Need to ask P-BL team if they build in any learning how to learn strategies as they go? How to initiate inquiry, direct investigations, manage time, and use technology productively?
9) Observation: record exactly what you see, no interp. Example, 'All children seem to have a sense of purpose' – is this interpretation? How do I know this for sure? Just write down facts – boy on floor doing X; girl on stool near whiteboard doing X and so forth. Is it okay to record general impressions or reductive commentary? Need to explore in literature. Subjectivity: 'Very free environment' – another researcher may feel the environment to be chaotic.
10) Attended two planning meetings (in field diary). First 3 weeks were full immersion in context. First 2 weeks, general observation of whole P-BL set-up. Third week followed potential individuals to see how they were doing specifically. Decide at week 4 to shadow main participants (Cayden, Debbie, Marie and Robert) to help focus observation. Shadowed Cayden on 30/1/19 which proved very useful, as saw how his whole day panned out. This will take a week.
11) Lewis (2009) proposes using statements rather than questions for autistic participants, use closed questions if questioning and repeating questions may increase understanding. See notebook on 'capturing voice' (p.9). Morris (2003) suggests researchers should include autistic pupils in development of their interview schedule through piloting and adjusting following their feedback (could ask older students about schedules for younger participants).
12) See 'eliciting voice' notebook (p.13). Could use multi-modal approach to semi-structured interviews including provision of visual supports such as videos, pictures or social stories.
13) In systematic review of qualitative research methods of eliciting voice, no participants were involved in developing data collection methods.
14) Talking Mats (TM). Look at p.18 of 'eliciting voice' notebook. Could this be helpful for Cayden and Marie? Ask older students how best to communicate with C and M?
*Could I use TT to try to elicit general views: make a picture in P-BL or what does it feel like to be in playground? Draw own pics and add to TM? How to determine what pics to have.
Example of analysis from Stewart et al. (2018) paper:
All but one participant expressed dissatisfaction with some aspect of their lives on the main TM. For example, some participants were unhappy with their activities at home such as watching television: "watch TV", (stopped smiling, looked at TV, placed item on TM centrally, but slightly towards negative end) "not alright" (moved item to negative end of the TM scale) (P1).

Audit trail
Cayden:
1) Ellie, Cayden's sister, says fictional things to get Cayden to do tasks etc. She also helps him with h/w (mum can't do). I plan a chat with Ellie in school to ask about how she supports Cayden. Email mum 4/3/19.

2) Slow language development (mum - SLT findings). Speech is very quiet and sometimes inaudible/indecipherable. Cayden also does not respond to many questions unless concrete focus (mixing pencil colours). These communication challenges lead me onto thinking about how I can develop methods of data collection that get round this/can access his experiences from within. Talking Mats, use of colour gauges, 'Guardians of the Galaxy' role play, drawing cartoon strip and speech/thought bubbles all cross my mind. Cayden not responsive to my questions, 'Cayden, do you like being in this school?' Maybe question too abstract? Which aspect of school? Word 'feel' very abstract too. Need to ask specific questions, e.g. 'Cayden, what do you think about this room?' 'Do you like drawing?' 'What did Denise tell you to do today?'

On 27/2/19, I soon conclude that it's difficult for Cayden to answer my questions – language seems tricky to process for him. I write down 'Do you like being in this school?'. After a few minutes and further probing/re-phrasing of question (and after slight processing delay), Cayden answers 'A bit'. He reads my question off page quite well (for year 3). I then draw stick-person playground scene with him alone and group of children playing together. I ask him 'What is Cayden thinking in the playground?' He can retort immediately, and picture seems to aid communication and understanding compared to just language. He says, 'Lego Movie 1' and continues to name movies.

3) Cayden often appears not to be listening to teacher. Could I follow this up? If I ask him straight out' 'Do you listen to the teacher then they talk to class?', he may struggle to process this. Could I tell him in advance I will be asking him what teacher told him to do? He could tell me with words, draw what he thinks or something else? Some teachers have said Cayden does take things in you say, just looks like he's not.

4) Experimented with Lego building in March. I took in Lego mat and red box of Lego. Cayden showed me his Marvel colouring-in books that were in his bag and then asked if it was time for after-school club. Had to work on maintaining his interest but soon got him interested in building Starlord's spaceship on Lego mat. Helped by there already being a control panel in Lego box. Used single, different coloured Lego pieces to rep different characters. Cayden able to adjust his voice for characters and role-played well (see interview recording). I concluded that this form of communication would be a suitable vehicle to explore his perspectives on school. Maybe build a school for Marvel characters loosely based on PSCA? Need to extrapolate key themes from observations and first interview recording to know what to reflect back on when using Lego next time.

Plymouth School of Superheroes: which Marvel character would Cayden be and which characters would need to go to superhero school? Which characters would Cayden's sister, specific staff and pupils be?

Other interests: Minecraft – roller coasters, spawned pigs and parrots. Spaceships – Scavengers or Starlord's. What does Starlord feel when he is flying (Cayden pretends he's flying when swimming). Explore Xandar city or the Kyln (prison).

5) Key themes/areas to explore in 1:1 work:

- When Cayden says, 'I want to go home', what is he thinking and feeling?
- Why he lays his head on girls' shoulders? Does he prefer girls to boys?
- Why does Cayden keep closing back door?
- Looks out of window a lot.
- Does he know what to do in lessons?
- Does he understand learning objectives and how what he is doing in practice relates to this?
- How does he feel during break times?
- Can he tell me what the school rules are?

Appendix 2: Pupil assent form

CONSENT FORM

'How I learn at my school'

(My photo)

This is a picture of **Elaine Davis-Kimble**. She is a student at University of Birmingham and will be doing a project at my school, Plymouth School of Creative Arts, between December 2018 and July 2019.

My name is: ____

1) I have talked about Elaine's project with her and my parents and have agreed to take part in it.

2) Elaine may want to chat to me about school and observe me in some of my lessons and around school. I also might create different ways of telling Elaine what I think and feel about my learning, for example, through a picture or video.

3) When Elaine writes up her project, a 'pretend' name will be used instead of my real name.

4) The information Elaine gathers about me will be kept in a safe place at University of Birmingham.

5) I understand if Elaine feels I am at risk of harm, or may be a risk to others, she will speak to Mike Beard He is the Welfare Officer at my school.

6) I have agreed to take part in Elaine's project freely and understand I can stop being involved at any time, if I want to. If I want to withdraw, I will let Elaine know as soon as possible.

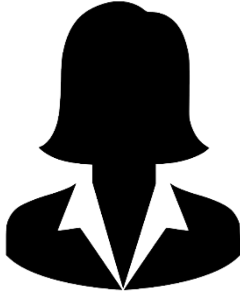
My signature to say I agree:

____

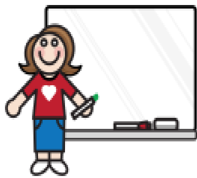
Date of signing: ____

Appendix 3: Pupil participant information sheet

About My Project



(My photo)



I am a student at Birmingham University.

I am doing a project

I want to know what some pupils at your school think about:

- Project-Based Learning

- How your school helps the pupils or not

(Picture of headteacher)

Dave, your headteacher, says I can do my project in your school

If you want to take part in my project, you can tell me what you think about your learning:

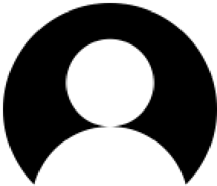
- by chatting to me
- writing a story
- making a video
- something else

I will be asking some other pupils in your school if they would like to be in my project.

- If you decide you would like to take part in my project, you will receive a certificate at the end of my project.
- If you want to take part, tell your parents or carers and they will give you a form to fill in and sign.
- If you don't want to take part, that's okay.
- If you have any questions about my project, you could write them down and give them to one of your teachers or your parents.

Appendix 4: Research information for school staff

PhD Research at PSCA



Hi, my name is **Elaine Davis-Kimble** and I'm in the second year of a full-time PhD at the University of Birmingham. I have taught drama and English in secondary mainstream schools since 1996. My PhD focuses on autism education. My interest in the autism field developed after the diagnosis of my own son (now aged).

My research focus:

'How do some pupils on the autism spectrum experience Project-Based Learning and asset-based approaches to teaching and learning in a mainstream school?'

*Asset-based approaches are similar to Growth Mindset in that they focus on developing pupils' strengths and interests, rather than filling in 'deficit gaps'.

What will I be doing?

- I will be observing autistic pupils in Phases 2, 3 and 4 engage in P-BL projects, and be in school most days until next April or so.
- I aim to develop creative modes of communication with my autistic participants if they find this helpful. So, for example, pupils may want to share their experiences of P-BL and asset development through vlogs, artwork or literary narratives.
- I will be interviewing Yr 11 autistic pupils about their experiences across the years.
- I will be interviewing a group of non-autistic pupils about their experiences of P-BL and asset development.

Consent

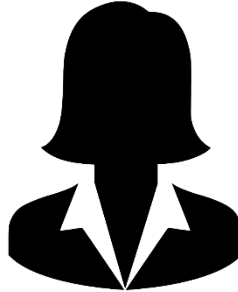
I am still in the process of selecting my participants and getting the paperwork out to parents. Once I know who my participants are, consent forms will be offered to the relevant staff. Participation in my research is completely voluntary.

My contact details: If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to email me: fjkdjflsflsjaljflkdsjflkjslk

Appendix 5: Information for parents/carers

ABOUT ME AND MY RESEARCH (Parents/Carers)

Hello! My name is **Elaine Davis-Kimble**



(My Photo)

I am a qualified drama and English teacher currently undertaking a full-time PhD in autism education at the University of Birmingham. I have a master's degree in special educational Needs: Childhood Autism.

PURPOSE OF MY RESEARCH

My research question is:

- How do some pupils on the autism spectrum experience Project-Based Learning (PBL) and asset-based approaches to teaching and learning in an inclusive, mainstream school?

AIMS OF MY RESEARCH

It is hoped my research will:

- Help some autistic pupils at Plymouth School of Creative Arts (PSCA) to find/develop voice in relation to their learning and develop ways of articulating their needs.
- Contribute to the wider literature on autistic pupils' experience of P-BL and asset development.
- Question whether the individualised approach the form of P-BL used by the school helps or hinders autistic pupils.

- Possibly, provide PSCA and other schools with additional understanding of how best to support autistic pupils in PBL projects.

- Explore the experience of autistic pupils compared to non-autistic pupils in the same school.

It is important to state that, whilst I really hope my research discovers helpful ways of supporting your child in P-BL projects, I cannot guarantee that this will be the outcome.

WHAT MY RESEARCH WILL INVOLVE

OBSERVATION

My research will begin with me observing your child in a range of school experiences. In lessons, I will focus on how your child experiences PBL and asset development by the ways in which s/he:

1. Is enabled or not to articulate his/her needs, ideas and feelings
2. Listens to and supports others' ideas
3. Turn-takes in whole class, small group and paired activities
4. Follows instructions given by others, particularly the teacher
5. Contributes ideas to discussions about the work. This could take the form of verbal contribution or your son/daughter could 'show' what s/he means
6. Manages the stage-by-stage P-BL process
7. Is able to concentrate and stay on task

INTERVIEW

If your child prefers, I could audio record them in an interview with me talking about their learning experiences in school. I probably would start with a special interest your child may have to break the ice. S/he also may want a member of staff present to help put him/her at ease, although I would aim to give your child space to say what s/he wanted without an adult present initially. The whole process would be dictated by your child.

DEVELOPING CREATIVE MODES OF COMMUNICATION

Once I have observed your son/daughter in a range of different learning situations, I will aim to meet with them to talk about their experiences of school. They may prefer to tell me through an alternative form to that of speaking such as artwork, a story, photos, and/or video and so on.

CONSENT

Prior to me commencing my research, I aim to meet with my child participants to explain the purpose of my research and to ensure they understand what they will be getting involved in.

Voluntary informed consent will be obtained from all parties involved in the research (headteacher, autistic pupils, non-autistic pupils, parent/carer(s), Learning Support Assistants and teachers). In agreeing to participate in this research, it is important for you to understand that you have the right to withdraw at any time during the study. However, if your child wanted to withdraw after the research had commenced, I may need to use your data if you withdrew two weeks after your first interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I would not share any personal information about your child with other students in the school or anyone outside of the school context, and the information would be held securely and anonymously in an end-to-end encrypted data storage facility at University of Birmingham. The data would be erased by the University after 10 years. Your child's identity would be protected and a number used instead of his/her name. Each parent would receive a summary of my research findings.

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email, text or telephone.

Contact details below:

Elaine Davis-Kimble

Email:

Tel:

Mobile:

Co-supervisor:

Dr. Kerstin Wittemeyer

University of Birmingham

Email:

Tel:

Main Supervisor:

Professor Karen Guldberg

University of Birmingham

Email:

Tel :

Appendix 6: Parent/carer consent form

CONSENT FORM (Parent/Carer)

'How do pupils on the autism spectrum experience PBL and asset development?'

Elaine Davis-Kimble, a doctoral student at University of Birmingham, is conducting a research project at my child's school, Plymouth School of Creative Arts, between December 2018 and July 2019.

Name of Pupil: ____

Form: _______________

(*Delete as appropriate)

1) I agree to my son/daughter/cared-for child, who is named above, taking part in Elaine Davis-Kimble's research project. I understand my child may take part in a recorded interview(s) with Elaine and be observed in some lessons and around school by her.

2) I agree to Elaine video recording my child in lessons, if she feels this would be beneficial to her study.

3) Elaine's research project will always ensure confidentiality. Numbers and pseudonyms will be used to protect my child's identity and any information given will not be shared with any other party or participant. The research data will be stored in an end-to-end encrypted data storage facility at University of Birmingham and destroyed after 10 years.

4) I understand my son/daughter's participation in this project is entirely voluntary and s/he is free to withdraw at any time. However, if my child withdraws two weeks after Elaine's first interview with him/her, Elaine still may need to use his/her data.

5) I have had an opportunity to speak to Elaine about her research and what will be involved for my child. I also have read Elaine's research information sheet.

6) I understand I can contact Elaine to discuss my son/daughter's participation in her research.

Contact details:

I am happy for Elaine to contact me if she needs to speak to me about her study. Please contact me in the following way(s):

☐ phone me on ____

☐ text me on ____

☐ email me on ____

Parent name: ____

Signature: ____

Date: ____________________________

Appendix 7: Staff consent form

CONSENT FORM (School Staff)

'How do autistic pupils experience P-BL and asset development?'

This research project will take place at Plymouth School of Creative Arts between December 2018 and July 2019. It will be undertaken by Elaine Davis-Kimble, as part of a Doctor of Philosophy course studied at the University of Birmingham.

Name of Participant: ____

1) I agree to take part in Elaine Davis-Kimble's research project. I understand I will take part in a recorded interview(s) and be observed in some lessons by her.
2) I understand this research project will always ensure confidentiality. A pseudonym will be used to protect my identity and any information given by me will not be shared with any other party or participant. The research data will be stored in an end-to-end encrypted storage facility at the University of Birmingham and destroyed after 10 years.
3) I understand my participation in this project is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.
4) I have had an opportunity to meet with Elaine and discuss her research and what it will involve. I also have read her research information sheet.

Should you need to contact me (the participant) regarding the research, please contact me in the following way(s):

☐ Phone me on ____

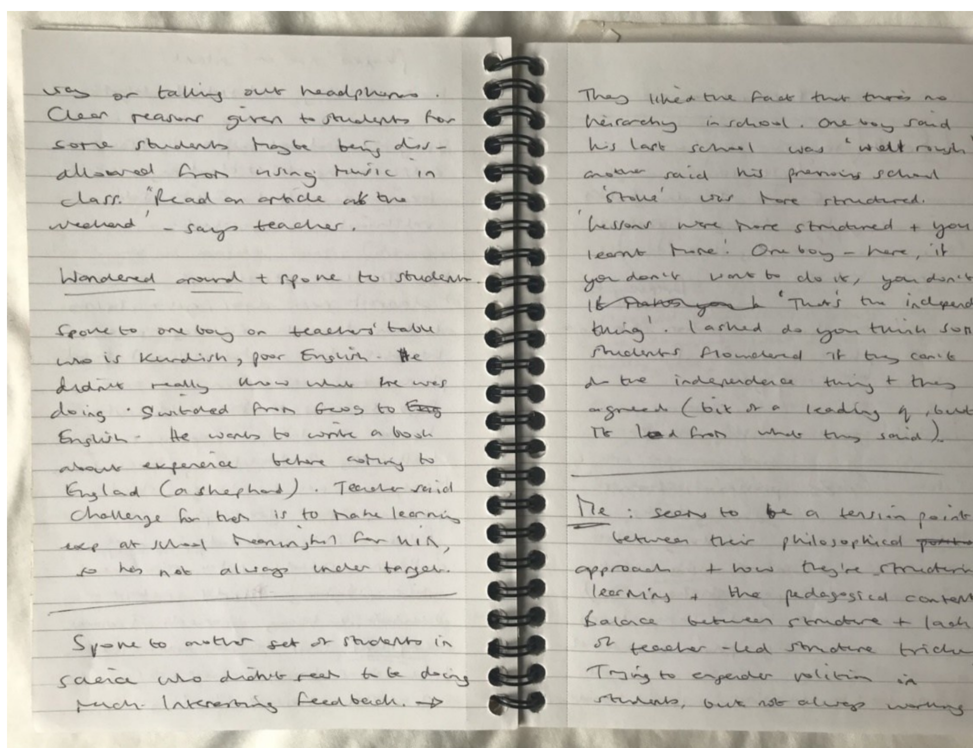
☐ Text me on ____

☐ Email me on ____

Participant's signature: ______________________________________

Date: ___________________________

Appendix 8: Examples from field notes (non-participant observation)


ways or taking out headphones. Clear reasons given to students for some students maybe being dis-allowed from using music in class. 'Read an article at the weekend' – says teacher.

Wandered around + spoke to students.

Spoke to one boy on teachers' table who is Kurdish, poor English. He didn't really know what he was doing. Switched from Geog to English. He wants to write a book about experience before coming to England (a shepherd). Teacher said challenge for them is to make learning exp at school meaningful for him, so he's not always under target.

Spoke to another set of students in science who didn't seem to be doing much. Interesting feedback. →

They liked the fact that there's no hierarchy in school. One boy said his last school was 'well rough', another said his previous school 'Stoke' was more structured. 'Lessons were more structured + you learnt more'. One boy – here, if you don't want to do it, you don't. 'That's the independence thing'. I asked do you think some students floundered if they can't do the independence thing + they agreed (bit of a leading q, but it led from what they said).

Me: seems to be a tension point between their philosophical approach + how they're structuring learning + the pedagogical content. Balance between structure + lack of teacher-led structure tricky. Trying to engender volition in students, but not always working

Extract: '*Spoke to another set of students in science who didn't seem to be doing much. Interesting feedback…They liked the fact that there's no hierarchy in school. One boy said his last school was 'well rough', another said his previous school Stoke was more structured. 'Lessons were more structured, and you learnt more'. One boy – here if you don't want to do it, you don't. 'That's the independence thing'. I asked do you think some students floundered if they can't do the independence thing and they agreed (bit of a leading q [question] about it led from what they said).*

Me [my interpretation]: seems to be a tension point between their [the school's] philosophical approach and how they're structuring learning and the pedagogical content. Balance between structure and lack of teacher-led structure tricky. Trying to engender volition in students but not always working.'

From Debbie’s (main participant) shadow notes

Extract: ‘*Upper school hanging out down below in dinner hall bit (Phase 1). Lots of noise everywhere. 5) T squinting a bit when looking at board – she’s furthest away in whole class. Children help child completing sum on board. 15 min into starter, T doesn’t seem finished. Rocks slightly in seat, kneels on chair. Teacher puts up hand to stop. T slow to put hand up. As teacher praises individuals for doing, T puts up hand while still chair. Looks flushed again. Rests head on hand. Can she hear what teacher saying? Has been on iPad, turns off and closes cover. Looks at screen, grooves in her chair, tapping a bit.*’

N.B. ‘T' stands for Debbie

Appendix 9: Extract from reflective notes

'Robert can be destructive and have violent outbursts (ripped student's artwork up in year 3; destroyed some stuff in nurture room when angry after nurture time in March 2019). Explained in interview with his mum that he gets stressed when teachers keep asking him what he's doing in class. Talked about Devil and Angel voices: '*invisible audience in your head*'. Devil tells him he's not good at stuff (in English).

I think it would be good to explore through role play what these voices are and how they influence how Robert behaves in class. Perhaps use two objects, one for devil and one for angel in role play. Can I experiment with talking to each one in turn to ask them questions about how they relate to Robert (Robert in role as Devil or Angel)? It seems important to explore this aspect of Robert's experience, as teachers may need to know about this phenomenon if they are to assess where Robert is at any one time in their lessons – could teachers talk to Robert vicariously through these entities? Take immediate pressure off Robert.

Robert interested in Marvel characters (Captain America, Thor and Iron Man). Could I use these characters to address his Angel and Demon? Could be fun and accessible to him? Plus, these characters have strengths that could be used to help devil side. May need more nurturing character. Talk about chimp brain with him (his mum bought him the book by Prof Steve Peters)?

I would need to observe Robert in English, as he says this is worst lesson for becoming stressed.

Could Robert create a poster (he did well with his poster design in P-BL Equal Rights project and could work independently) about how he feels and what he thinks when he gets stressed in lessons when teachers keep asking him what he's doing?'

Appendix 10: Parent interview/participant profile

Semi-structured Interview Schedule (January 2019)
Initial meeting with participant's mother **Name:** **Voice-recorded: Yes/No** General questions: 1) Does your son/daughter have any special interests? 2) Do they have any sensory issues? 3) How do they identify in terms of their gender? 4) School information: how do they feel about school? How long have they been at the school? Friends? 5) Is the research information sheet suitable for your child? Specific questions (arising naturally from interview):

Appendix 11: Teacher interview schedule

Semi-structured interview schedule

P-BL specific:

1) Could you take me through a P-BL project timeline in terms of assessment and monitoring?
2) How do you think the SEND pupils engage with P-BL work?
3) How do you build up knowledge of each child in your classes? How do you go about it?
4) Do P-BL staff build in any ‘learning how to learn’ strategies as they go? For example, how to initiate enquiry, direct investigations, manage time, and use technology productively?
5) How do you find the studio as a working environment?

SEND-specific:

6) How would you describe the SEND provision in the school, if describing it to an outsider? Do you feel it could be improved in any way?
7) My participants are Cayden, Robert, Marie and Debbie. How would you describe their needs?
8) Do you feel the school can support the needs of these children?
9) What do you think about the ILP system in school?
10) Have you had autism training in the past, specifically, at PSCA? Have you been given any guidance from the SENDCO about how to support the autistic pupils in your classes?
11) The nurture group seems interesting. What involvement, if any, have you had with it? What do you consider its strengths and weaknesses?
12) Can I ask what the Group Learning Plans (GLPs) are? How do staff go about using them?

Appendix 12: Audit of phone interviews with Marie's mother

26/1/19: (not voice-recorded) Special interests – Horrible Histoires, Georgians, Jane Austin. Terrible Tudors and Awful Egyptians. Loves Lego – princess stuff. Building houses. Mother 'Stereotypically girlie'. Marie will only wear dresses. Won't dress in sensible clothes for walk on the Moors. Loves being read to – things in the past. If going out for day, loves going to stately homes. Did have a doll's house. Got a fairy fort – wanted to play with knights and princesses/queens. Have a civil war – possibly reinacting Horrible Histories. Marie needs processing time. Example of Mother's brother asking Marie questions, no eye contact from Marie or interaction, but, then a bit later, she approached him to answer his questions. Very close to her older sister. Sister helped Marie with her h/w over half-term. Mother couldn't do that. Marie is very sensitive to people's tones of voice – need to use a gentle, soft tone with her.

4/4/19 (35.22 min, voice-recorded): I explain that I'm trying to discover a working form for Marie (GoG for Cayden and peg dolls for Debbie). I ask her if she has any ideas. Mother says Marie likes miniature toys and Lego. Not into a particular thing now. Does a lot of drawing. I ask if she draws anything in particular: cats and more realistic drawings now. Marie and her Dad adopt formal voices and replay bits from 'Pride and Prejudice'. Also, into Georgian dress.

Mother explains how Marie can sometimes not reflect on negative experiences once they've happened/from the past. Because she's in a good place, she can't answer. Mother uses example of sometimes fall out with a friend. Marie said, '*Debbie and I have not fallen out for years.*' When she's in a good space, she doesn't want to go there. If it's about sister, she can contribute. Mother learns more in those kinds of situations than asking Marie directly.

Mother says Marie can't access groups in P-BL very well. Just needs to work with one other person. She did work with Lisa and Debbie. Marie follows Debbie around a lot. Interesting comment about Hal (teacher) remarking to mother that Marie liked animals. Mother says, '*that's Debbie's passion, not Marie's*'. Marie's interests have been paired with Debbie's, the dominant character and it's like the teacher hasn't seen Marie.

Marie doesn't want to talk in a group, but we don't know why specifically. Marie doesn't know why really...she just feels uncomfortable. She tends not to work with other pupils in lessons and stated to mother at home '*I don't say anything. I never talk in P-BL*'. Marie very in tune with Debbie and vice versa.

Transcribed sections: [Mother talking about Marie] '*She's always liked miniature things…She plays with Lego an awful lot…She does like drawing…she likes drawing cat people…more realistic drawings now…She quite likes I suppose I'm just trying to think actually that some of the things that sometimes her and her Dad play…they take on quite formal characters…Pride and Prejudice…they talk in this formal way to each other which is quite funny. She quite enjoys taking on that type of character*.'

'*When she's in a good space, she does not want to go there with difficult or deep conversations about things…Sometimes if there are difficult conversations are going on around her, you know, if I'm talking to her sister…then she'll be in on the conversation because she wants to be involved. She wants to have her…I've got something to say here, I've got something to contribute…then you'll get a lot more out of her than asking her directly*.'

'*I've tried to talk to her about P-BL and she's said, "I do not talk to anyone."*' '*If she was going to do group work, it would have to be with one other person*'. '*Noticing how they play [Marie and Debbie], she's very much following Debbie…she's not consciously doing it, but she's taking on being not dominated but you know she's…even her interests…people are just assuming that her interests are…that someone else's are her only interest. They're not seeing her, they're only seeing the person she's with*'.

Appendix 13: Teacher interviews audit

Teacher Interviews Audit (voice-recorded)

DENISE, P-BL teacher

General points of interest:

- Finds P-BL stressful. Doesn't feel she's helped herself though by doing so many things. Got too many things going on at once. Making loads of different props. Not all making '*leaves*'. Noise stressful…it only takes ten people whispering and it's loud.
- Prefers immersion phase, as all doing same thing. Makes it easier for the those who need more support. It reminds Cayden to do things when he can see others doing what he's meant to be doing. Like 'walking through a maze' otherwise.
- Differentiate hardest part…making simpler. How to group, organisation. Behaviourally difficult sitting them all together.
- School doesn't offer any in-house autism training. SEN dept produces the ILPs and EHCPs and can suggest things, but not always practical. Difficult to remember everything.
- Doesn't seem like SEND dept checking strategies in plans are being carried out.
- What do my participants get out of P-BL? Debbie and Marie love painting, Cayden loves paint. Robert likes making but doesn't do writing first to support it.
- Do they get the driving question? Denise: '*I could remind them a bit more…I need to drone it into them*.'

Comments about Cayden:

- When Cayden was in back room, Denise could keep an eye on what he was doing. '*Can't get any independent writing out of him*.' When he did 1:1 independent writing, he had a 1:1. '*Can't have 1:1s in here*'. '*I think he could do with it*'.
- Drawing Starlord's spaceship all the time – doodling. Denise doesn't know why he does it.
- Me - '*How do you see Cayden's needs?*' Denise: '*When he comes to carpet, he never hardly makes much eye contact…You really have to be like Cayden, Cayden, Cayden…I need to get him sorted first…To get him to do any writing, he hasn't got any focus to do it….He was doing the printing of the square shapes and he was like (dab, dab, dab, not looking). He really needs that nurture 1:1 and quiet room to do it, but we have not got that facility or the staff to do it*'.
- Me – '*Is he able to engage with tasks, discussions, follow verbal instructions*?'. Denise asks if Tim (LSA) can help set him up with a task. But he wanders so quickly.
- Independent tasks he struggles with: can't do the planning phase of P-BL. Research, plan and then make. He gets onto making and then struggles to go back to planning phase. Writing element too tricky – independent writing. Denise has written it down for him to copy (manipulating his hands on a sewing machine). '*Any other way he could plan*?' Hal had a chart – visual schedule. Helped him follow instructions. '*These are the things you need for this task*.'
- Denise doesn't know if Cayden can read well. '*He's not in one of my reading groups'*.
- Not having 1:1 support: Denise thinks he could do with 1:1 support. '*A lot of them work better with 1:1 adult*.'
- Denise says she has heard he can talk about subjects well to other staff, but never to her. She can have conversations with him, but it's always on his terms. Write about what they're making…he's not focusing at all.
- Pictorial timetable would be good for Cayden. Visual timetable…Hal did a while back. First, you need to do this and then tick off on chart. Have activity already set for him to complete. Denise thinks it would be good to trial that system (me - but doesn't do it herself as a teacher??).
- Denise does not know that Cayden can get himself down to lunch on his own. Says he just follows everyone else when I suggest he can follow some verbal instructions. Note to self: it seems staff don't really know what his strengths are.
- The tables have changed shaped again, so it's not like he has his own table.

- Board in background from SEND department. Board not facing children. Some things (circle time) not applicable to Phase 2 on board.
- SEND dept strategies: No strategies handed down. 'I haven't looked at Cayden's ILP'. Densie keeps ILPs up to date with parents but doesn't seem to write them for each child in her base camp, yet she's supposed to.
- Me –' *What is the autism provision like in this school?*' Denise: '*I don't know about other phases. That's probably what's wrong with my group. There's probably too much need for helping*'. She teaches his sister in Yr 6 and asks him what's the difference between him and his sister and he can't answer.
- Ideal scenario: quiet space in back room works well, 6 or 4 at max. Less noise, less busyness. So busy in classroom, Denise doesn't notice when kids wander off and then it's too late. It's '*so itty bitty*', '*everyone doing different things'*, hard to track individuals.
- Looks through C's book: nothing of substance to mark. Not explained anything about why he has chosen to make what he has. Just full of doodling, Starlord's spaceship.
- If in Cayden's head, too much going on. Better in Mike's room, quieter.
- Denise doesn't know why he keeps drawing Starlord's spaceship.

Comments about Robert:

- Finds planning stage difficult as well – it's the writing. It would be interesting to see how they get on in English (she clearly hasn't spoken to English staff).
- Me: '*Why does he wander off?*' Denise: '*So he doesn't get caught*' [not doing the writing]. I witnessed Robert doing quite good writing in English.
- Making props was decided for Robert by Hal. He did not choose to do this.
- Robert just went off and made an orb for the play, but no-one told him to. Dad follows him around to put back on track.
- '*They all love sitting with one adult*.'
- Denise doesn't know why Robert '*loses it'* in class.

Comments about Marie:

- Denise was making hats with Debbie and Marie. They were '*in their little zone'*. Marie was skipping to lesson. Loves painting; her writing is beautiful; takes a long time over it. Not very social with other children except Debbie.
- Checking books is hard with their making. If they haven't written anything in their books, there's nothing to tick off against marking criteria.
- Marie could follow written instructions more.

Comments about Debbie:

- Very insular with them [she and Marie] both together. Both got to do the same, be involved with what the other's doing.
- No eye contact. Denise doesn't know why they don't give eye contact. Listening but looking elsewhere. They never come over and report someone's getting on their nerves etc…just in own world.

HAL, P-BL teacher

General:

- Big fan of 'stage not age' approach. Can help develop child's social awareness, able to interact more with children not of your own age, less stigma attached to working with pupils more of your own level of understanding. Allows more flexibility for our groupings and being a little more dynamic. But can be challenging organisationally – external outings etc. Huge range of children and need, some very able students who can work independently and then middle group. Difficult to put support in place for lower end of spectrum. Hasn't known kids so well this year, as rotating round

so much, so tricky. Lack of consistent adults…need to know where they stand in it. But, this year, it has been more child-led and they can't necessarily do that. All the adults involved in different projects, difficult to give kids consistency, checking in. Tried to counteract this with task planners…sheets with stage-by-stage tasks broken down, more '*scaffolded learning experience'*, more picture-focused. First and next. Lower end needed a lot more structure.

- Me: '*What do kids like doing most and least in P-BL?*' '*Free expression of creativity*.' Don't like to need to plan and assess. Prefer artistic side, not maths and English. Some find the independence required tricky. What to do next? SEND kids (autistic) can get more anxious around lack of structure.
- Me: '*How do you teach them how to learn?*' '*Show them examples*.' Emphasising the journey of a project, not product. Highlight learning going on in process. Sometimes this all gets lost when they must put a show on…performance, parents coming in, holding activities. How can we keep that focus all the way through is the challenge.
- Focus more on skills, rather than content. Following a design brief, analysing etc.

Cayden:

- Trying to work out common ground which keeps shifting. Soon as you begin to talk about work, he goes off. Changes from day to day; what works one day, doesn't necessarily the next.
- Lack of formal understanding. Limited Educational Psychology involvement.
- Very able older sister, so parents in denial about Cayden's needs.
- In his own world a lot and not interacting with what's going on around him. Need some blinkers on concentration, so he can focus on one thing in moment.
- Low level literacy. Focus the problem. He enjoys reading, good phonological awareness, can spell simple words. Most of a choice not to, multi-tasking difficult. Experimented with providing a highlighter for a line he had to write, so he had to focus on just that. Worked one lesson, but not next. Difficult to reach him. In one lesson, can write coherent sentence, then next just mark-making.
- '*He seems very happy in school, but I don't think he's…in terms of his learning, he's not getting much from school generally*.' Didn't get much out of year 3. Not really engaging much with his peers. Tried more structured activities with groups but comes over initially and then wanders off. Hal wants to trial Lego therapy next year.
- Frustration amongst staff, as they feel they're failing him now. '*Trying things, but not working, as he can't engage*.' Hal feels there is a level of intelligence but can't get through to him to engage it.
- He can't remember what he did five minutes ago.
- Up to parents to drive child's needs to be recognised.
- Cayden will have his own station in classroom next year. Same teacher all through day. Walls partitioning off space in studios. More traditional classroom model may benefit SEN students.

Robert:

- Biggest thing for Robert is his confidence in his own abilities and self-image. He knows everyone else is more able in his peer group. Struggles to build friendships with others. Low self-esteem. Often plays with brother or Dad. He doesn't think anyone will be his friend other than his brother.
- Outbursts: gets frustrated when something happens, and he can't understand why. Annoyed by someone else but can't deescalate effectively.
- Dependent on Sally. Maths finds hard. Depends on how day gone or task set.
- In P-BL, Dad there (LSA). Needs to separate out from Dad and learn to resolve things himself. Brother, Harry, moving up to new phase next year.
- Made some incredible progress, as in primary school, he was much more aggressive. Now able to talk through what's going on his head.
- Benefits of being in school: interacting with a huge number of people all the time. Difficult but good for him. He wants to be an archaeologist…aspirational. In P-BL, can make and see what he has achieved.
- ILPs: only see a glimpse of children in base camp, so difficult to write them. Don't see whole of student. Other teachers can feed into them, but more difficult to find patterns when you can only

go off what they say. ILPs not used enough, as so many. If only one teacher teaching them like in normal school, easier. Not enough focus on individuals.

Debbie: Can mask her autism but needs structure to follow.

Marie:

- When she is anxious or upset, finds it difficult to engage and interact.
- Needs control of who she's with.
- Animal rights: did picture of split world. Hal gave her idea for the poster. He feels that was good because she needed an initial idea to build on.

MIKE, Nurture Group Leader (telephone interview)

General:

- How 'nurture group' evolved (run in Mike's room). Phase leader asked him to work in school and set up a group (year ago), as encountered lot of problems with misbehaviour getting in way of students' learning. Trouble in year 6; very troubled children. '*Helping fight a fire*'. Identified children who needed breaks from environments where they were struggling. Difficult for teachers to manage behaviour on top of other children. Nurture group numbers increased massively over year. Time out for kids, 'doing things that will press the right buttons'. Only does so much though; need to be alongside in the classroom.
- Plan for future with nurture group: will be more of Thrive facility – social, emotional support. Need to shadowing children who moving away from nurture group (re-integration back into main classroom). Structure hub more next year. Try to wean kids of the nurture room.
- Me: '*What do staff need to know about these children?'* Precision teaching (Kelly); bullet points about children's difficulties, problems at home, trigger points, strategies that work to help them self-regulate. Giving staff a feel for the children from a more personal perspective. Allow kids to move away from the area. Knowing what works for each child.
- ILPs in school? History of it stretching back 20 years. In phase 2, ILP should be result of everyone's input and everyone looking at them. Now, too much in them…too much to focus on. Could be a useful tool but not really being utilised fully. Me: appropriateness of form tutor writing ILP? Mike doesn't realise they're written by tutors; thinks member of SEND team should write more qualified person.
- Purpose of time out at end of lessons, going outside in playground and kicking ball about etc (nurture group itself): for physical and emotional regulation and reward for good behaviour. If child manages to make the 'right' choices in class, they get reward of time out at end.
- Me: how do boys get on together in group? A lot better than they did originally. Developed some 'incredible friendships and spend their weekends together'. '*When it goes off, it's bad*.' Lots of animosity between them and low resilience. A few days off from school, get back and you feel like you've got to start all over again. Some of them find friendships very difficult.
- Me: if there was a bottomless pot of money, what would you do? Need more training for staff and in short term, need more 1:1 staff to support children like Cayden. Need support, expertise and experience from other schools.

Cayden: **'***He's so on the spectrum isn't he?' He's endearing and will help him through the difficult times…slightly comical side to him*'. Me: strategies that might help Cayden? Mike – '*1:1 support*'. '*That boy is in the wrong setting'. Lots of things could be done. He needs specialist provision to protect him.* '*He deserves a hell of a lot more than he gets.'*

Robert: '*I love Robert an awful lot, but I don't quite get him…One minute he's wonderful, he's talking and warm, but in the next session he is indifferent, troubled by something, aloof and grumpy…Changes within 2-hour timeframe.'* Mike tries to give him a second chance. He thinks Robert's thinking '*someone bloody get*

me out of here'. He does respond to warmth and inclusion. '*I don't understand him, talk to his mum about him a lot*.' Needs to be left alone sometimes, keep him safe. Other times, he desperately needs to talk, roller coaster of emotions. Sometimes rough and abrupt with other kids, winds them up; other times, gets on really well with them.

Me: '*Why does Robert flip in class?*' Mike: '*He seems to get so enraged at himself*.' '*So passionately wanting to belong…almost chivalrous side*.' Struggles '*like mad* with' language. Watched him get angry in situations… like there's a misunderstanding that only he sees. In a battle with himself. Robert has spoken to Mike about Angel and Demon on his shoulders. Me: '*What do you make of that?*' '*Amazing to have such language at his age*.' Most graphic form of decision-making. Can see a set of conflicting behaviours in him. Like his mum…bit volcanic….okay one minute, next don't cross.

Me: what does Robert need? Mike: '*Bit of a laugh and physical contact*.' Me: '*Could staff use Angel and Demon in any way*?' Mike: phase development could involve shared practice of strategies that work…staff training. '*We have a staff that is under-trained compared to anywhere I've worked at in my life*.'

SCOTT, Head of P-BL:

My questions focus on the development of P-BL in the school. The driving questions of projects are led by the adults. '*How are people and places different*?' Staff focus on linking project topics to the local community, and pupils are encouraged to ask what they want to find out about a topic. For example, '*How has industry changed along the River Tamar in the past 100 years?'* (high level question); '*How many fish are in the River Tamar?*' (low level question).

I switch focus to my participants.

Cayden:

- Scott states '*Cayden's needs are not met in P-BL.. I think it's too chaotic an environment for him…even our current level of provision he has which is like conducted [scaffolded support in P-BL], there's still an element of I'm going to show you what to do and then you do it…I've seen it when he has been left to that, and he just seemed lost. I think he needs someone sat with him more often…out of the business of the studio sat maybe in a small group with adult support kind of guiding through until the completion it.' 'Even if you got him to write a question, I don't think he would understand what the question was for or why it was important that he was making the question or whether he would even remember to follow it through'. 'I'd be lying if I said I knew what Cayden needs'.*

Debbie:

- '*Gets on really well with erm P-BL. I think she understands… I think she understands the concept of it…Marie doesn't necessarily. I know that she works with Denise…she [Debbie] seems to be able to come up with her own ideas. Marie can't. Marie would like latch onto what Debbie's idea is and then, so Denise tends to work with Marie, conducting her, telling her what to do each step of the way, but I've never really seen any progression with her. It's like, you know she's stuck in this loop of having to be told what to do and when to do it.*'

Robert:

- '*Him having access to his own equipment, so he doesn't have to share is particularly you know good. I also know that de-escalating him with humour like it works…pretend to be him for a moment and pull moody faces that tends to get him out of munk'*.

Marie: *'For Marie as well [as Cayden], it's just so busy'*. Scott talking about classroom environment.

EHC plans: '*The problem with the set-up now is 'cos we teach all of the kids, looking at the group learning plans or EHCP plans, there's so many of them to try and remember all of them is impossible. So, you try to remember the ones you work with'*. '*Schools ILPs are not fit-for-purpose'*. Whole staff get training on how to

fill out an ILP. *'It comes down to training'*. Scott has worked in other inner-city school (fewer registered pupils) where there is more dedicated time in staff meetings to focus on SEND. '*Staff [in current school] have asked for expert advice before, but the message was always you know we're designing our own in-house procedures, which has that been helpful would be the question I'm going to ask'. 'You just get stuck in this like bubble of like this is how we do things, but is how we're doing things particularly helpful*?'

Nurture group? '*It does free up the teachers to teach and does free up the stress and the anxieties around dealing with some of the more particularly unhelpful children. Not unhelpful children…children with unhelpful behaviours when they're stuck. What I am concerned about is that a lot of these children seem to be getting rewarded whether they're showing good or bad behaviour, and I think they're very switched on to playing a game*.' Scott cites inconsistencies across staff whereby a member of staff has said pupil should not be rewarded with nurture time due to misbehaviour in class, but Scott sees them in there '10 minutes later.'

NEIL (SENDCO):

General:

- Been at school for two years (p/t and f/t). At UGC as Head of PE. Did SENDCO training and got job at PSCA in second year of training.
- High level of need at school very clear. Studio setting not meeting needs of students. Been dealing with a reactionary phase as he came into school, not preventative. Would have liked to be working on CPD: de-escalation techniques and understanding behaviourist communication, attachment and impact on young people, socioeconomics, high number of students come from challenging background, empathy needed. Looking at slight cultural shift. There's the SEND hub in school now. Used to be Student Learning Support room. Invite given to room only, extraction model (EHCP targets etc). Moved away from it being a bit of a social hub. How did students feel about that? Students said that school will just end up being like other schools. However, Neil feels initially they didn't like change, particularly yr 11. But, got through more revision and work than before. More respect to the environment. Improved hub now. More structure put in place to support SEND students. School very unique. At least 150 students in school that would really struggle in most mainstream settings.
- Ofsted stated SEND team can identify need.
- Focus now: use EHCP funding to support SEND team. Understand what each student needs, rather than old model of '*Well, you have the most experience in that department, so you go there etc*'. Needs to be driven more by needs of students rather than teachers' skill sets.
- Trying to separate SEND and behaviour (obviously linked). If students can't get control of their behaviour, must go to another room upstairs (seclusion room, C3 level in behaviour strategy…behaviour not helpful to the group; need to be removed). On a good day in hub, can see group of Yr 10 SEND students doing an English lesson, group of Yr 9s and 10s who don't have full timetable working independently and a couple of pupils having time out with time out cards (through invitation only). Time out students can talk to member of staff to help calm them. Group extracted can be quite challenging. Could have come to school part way through year, so behind etc. Can have up to 10 time-out students. Out of 5 staff members in hub, only 2 qualified teachers, rest are HLTAs. Three staff members in hub (2 min): time-out person, one supervising independent students, teaching person (could be a TA). Not staff all on f/t contracts.
- Sometimes, the SEND students can go back to studio setting to '*hide*'. Harder to hide their behaviours in hub as on display in more quiet space. Neil feels staff are having to work on changing that tendency for some.

Appendix 14: Marie's interviews audit

Interview 26/3/19: (joint interview Marie and Debbie)

Both Debbie and Marie good at English. Debbie – 'I'm not good at maths'. Marie speaks less, quieter. I take picture of her artwork for P-BL project (draft in book). I ask Marie about it. She doesn't respond. I ask questions, nothing in return. She finds it difficult. I ask if Marie can use 'yes/no' process, she doesn't want to. I ask If Debbie can help. Debbie and I start chatting about M's work. It seems to relax her a bit. Debbie starts looking out of window; starts worrying she's missing out. Both become a bit unresponsive.

Ask them about P-BL. Marie likes it because she gets to paint. Debbie likes writing lion monologue in P-BL. Debbie starts to pace up and down. I ask if she feels trapped. I suggest Debbie leaves, as she becomes anxious. I give Marie a choice to leave, but she says she doesn't mind. I ask why she thinks Debbie became anxious. She says straight away Debbie doesn't like being in a small space for that long.

When Marie's feeling uncomfortable in class, I ask if she can ask a teacher or friend for help, she says no. I have to start voicing for her and she nods or shakes her head. Is it tricky telling someone how you feel? 'Yes.' Is it tricky because you're frightened of what they think? 'No'. I ask to look in her book. She doesn't want me to. I ask if anything going well in school. She says 'lots'. Do you understand work set by teachers? She says always (I give her a choice). She thinks it was not so good two years ago. She was in big groups for subjects and now she's in Claire's group. Helps being in small group, as easier to focus. The people stop her focusing in big groups. What does it feel like when there are too many people? 'Scary.' If you were animal, what would you be? Maries's body language starts to fold in. I ask if she feels scared now and she nods and says a muted 'Um-um'. She didn't tell her mum that she didn't like being in big groups. Marie's breathing increases and she shrinks a bit, as I question her. I terminate interview, as Marie seems to have had enough.

22/5/19: Transcribed interview

19/6/19: In Phase Head's room again. I show Marie fluffy toy seal. She feels seal and says Simmy (her cat) is softer. I get out drawings of cats from last interview. I bring up 'fluff' from last session, her saying she wears it at school and leaves it at school gates. If she didn't have fluff at school, she feels 'scared.'

I draw school on paper. I really focus on fluff and Marie quietens. School cat got more fluff than home cat. Marie's breathing gets heavier. I ask if I can ask fluff some questions. She becomes less responsive. I ask if she can go into role as fluff. On reflection, I ask her too many questions and bombard her with words. She then recoils; breathing intensifies. I ask if she feels scared, she nods. I stop talking. There is silence. I ask if she would like to draw instead. I ask if she could describe how she feels now to which she shakes her head. I ask if I can ask questions, and she can nod or shake head. I ask if my questions make her feel scared and she says 'no' - she got scared because she didn't want to be fluff and answer my questions. I suggest I become fluff and say she can ask me questions. She doesn't want to. I ask if she want to stop talking about fluff and she nods.

I continue talking about fluff. I ask where coldest part of school is and silence. She recoils. I ask if she wants to stop, she nods. Heavy breathing, rolling eyes back, flushed in face, head in arms, looks like going to cry. Silence. It becomes clear we can't carry on interviewing. I pack away. I see her mum in after school club straight away. She speculates Marie's clam-up might have been attributable to her feeling like she was in trouble because of her imaginary fluff; as though she had done something wrong. Also, suggested it could have been because it was getting 'too close to the bone.'

10/7/19: (at a wooden table at end of hall in Phase 1) Extremely noisy background. I ask if Marie could draw her best day at school, or if she had best day at school, what it looks like. She concedes and starts drawing straight away. I sit in silence whilst she draws. She spends a good 15 min or so on it.

I ask her about her drawing: the different sections were things that either did happen or would happen but on different days. Drawing eyes in one pic, then eating dinner next to a mountain, being stuck at maths (every maths lesson – 'I don't understand it'). Performance of Jack and Beanstalk; Marie dreaming in English about

the angel cat; she was writing a story about angel cat. Story about a cat who goes to find mashed potatoes in a temple of golden mashed potatoes in the clouds. The king sends her on a mission. King wanted mashed pot to eat. Marie at home on sofa with Simmy in pic. We are briefly interrupted by Cayden.

I ask if Marie can draw pic of her worst day at school. She draws straight away again. She draws much more quickly this time. Marie has a pineapple on her head. Eclipse happening, moon explodes and then lava comes out. Cat's exploding. Lots of exploding in pic. Worst day at school cat exploded. Which one? All. How does it feel when cats explode? Marie makes sad whining sound. Marie not in the worst day pic. 'Pineapples are evil.' The Great Pineapple Lord lives in a temple but came to get Marie. If the pineapple was something in school, what would it be? Maths textbooks, pineapple comes down to suck Marie's brains out. Because maths is so hard. She struggles every day. Exploding cats eaten pineapple (made cats explode). Lord goes to all schools to get children. 'God is a slurrer' word for best day; 'Sad cat' for worst day.

Appendix 15: Transcript backstory: Cayden

I arrive in the P-BL studio the week before to discover Cayden is in the toilets washing his hands (according to Denise). I look for him and find him in the toilets. He smiles at me when he sees me. He says straight away 'I'm seeing you after lunch'. Back in P-BL, Denise immediately asks Cayden on his return if was 'mucking about in the toilet'. He says, 'Yes'. Denise is quite stern with him. Asks him where his work is. He doesn't know.

Previous play session: Cayden and I flick through a Marvel magazine, and he identifies some favourite characters of his. Cayden builds Starlord's spaceship with Lego. We role play spaceship battles with verbal sound effects and dialogue. I play Thanos and Cayden plays Starlord's spaceship. In role as himself and represented by a Lego brick, he rests his head on Quoran's shoulder (female character in GOG).

Appendix 16: Extract from Cayden's mother's interview notes

23.1.19: Cayden had a couple of appointments with Child Development Team. Referral from school in first hometown. Attended Sure Start nursery from 14 to 18 months old. Obsessed with propellors on toys, running up and down. Strangers – no eye contact. Was difficult to engage him, slow language development.

Support from Speech and Language Therapy helped quite a lot. Cayden would be withdrawn at home if he had had a bad day at school.

Cayden had friend Bella – they loved each other so much. She adored him, but he moved schools. He felt accepted at last school but feels cut off here. Mother has seen friends come and go. It's confusing in current school. At last school, he only had one teacher and knew everyone. '*He feels like a little dot here…He feels out of it here*'.

Appendix 17: Extract from Cayden's sister's interview notes

18.3.19: Cayden plays out 'bits of movies' and adds invented or existing characters. There is a create-your-own mini figures activity at Lego shop – he built a spaceship once. Cayden has his own character that he made to look like himself and it's his favourite. In superhero world, he pretends to be himself. Sister: 'He could see himself as a superhero already'.

I ask could she think of a way I could engage him through Lego and Marvel characters. She said how about I invent a 'Plymouth School of Superheroes'? To learn their powers. If they don't have powers, they can learn other stuff. Which character is mean? Which one is nice?

He loves running, he can eat lots of chocolate/ sugar.

Cayden has been annoying people in Hal's basecamp. Puts his head on pupils' shoulders – does it to his sister and her friends. Sister doesn't know why. He used to hug her around her neck, but it does less now.

Sister and Cayden would make animations together at home and watch them.

Appendix 18: Full transcription of Cayden' second session

Present:	Cayden and researcher
Location:	Back room off P-BL studio in school (open plan fourth wall and ceiling)
Date:	12.9.19
Time:	Lunchtime, lots of background noise as Phase 1 children work below
Setting:	Lego building mat on table with big box of loose Lego. Cayden and I sit on chairs at table. Researcher's recording device and phone present. Cayden has a Marvel character magazine
Duration of recording:	22.01 min

Researcher: We'll build another spaceship?
Cayden: (Indecipherable name of character) X shaves his beard. (Indecipherable again) X shaves his beard.
Researcher: Pardon?
Cayden: Ummm
Researcher: What shape is his beard?
Cayden: I'm looking for a (indecipherable) stuck. I'm…(mumbles)…which one is Starlord?
Researcher: Can I do something here?
Cayden: This is Starlord.
Researcher: Ah, that's Starlord. Is this the spaceship again, is it?
Cayden: He sits on the right.
Researcher: I'm just gonna…what I'm going to do Cayden, if it's alright…
Cayden: And this is Rocket.
Researcher: Oh yeah.
Cayden: Then Rocket's…I'll put Starlord and Rocket in their seat.
Researcher: Ahhh…
Cayden: That's Starlord and that's Rocket.
Researcher: Right, Starlord and that's Rocket? Okay.
Cayden: Elaine, oh, Elaine…
(Cayden flicks through his Marvel magazine and finds Hulk)
Researcher: Oh my gosh, look at Hulk. You've got your book here, haven't you? Let me just take a lovely picture…can I just take a lovely picture of Hulk? (Cayden moves magazine toward researcher). Ah, he's awesome.
(Researcher takes photo of Hulk picture in magazine)
Researcher: Ahh…look I've taken a picture of Hulk. There he is, in your book.
Cayden: And…
Researcher: And…?
Cayden: (Makes a long indecipherable sound)
Researcher: Can I tell you wha…Can I tell you something? Is it okay if we use this side for Starlord's ship (pointing to Lego mat)? Cayden…
Cayden: This is…Elaine, this is…Drax.
Researcher: That's Drax? Oh, he's big isn't he, look.
Cayden: This is Quoran.
Researcher: Quoran.
Cayden: And…and this is Groot.
Researcher: And that's Groot. Yeah.
Cayden: And I'm trying to shave my beard…I'm trying to sh…hey, hey. Hey, I'm Cayden.
Researcher: And Cayden's in the ship as well.
Cayden: Nnnn…
Researcher: So, who's flying the ship? Who's in command?
Cayden: Starlord.

Researcher: And who you going to use as Starlord?
Cayden: (American accent) Hey guys, I'm trying to shave my beard. I'm trying to shave my beard.
Researcher: (Pointing to Lego brick on mat) Is this Starlord?
Cayden: No.
Researcher: Who's that?
Cayden: That's a random guy.
Researcher: Oh, random character.
Cayden: (Makes mock shaving sound) He's trying to shave his beard.
Researcher: (Laughs) Is he shaving is beard?
Cayden: (Mock shaving sound).
Researcher: He's going like that (makes shaving sound) (Pause) You'll have a beard one day. Do you think?
Cayden: And I'll shave it.
Researcher: (Laughs) And you'll shave it?
Cayden: He's trying…he couldn't shave his beard.
Researcher: He's trying to shave his beard. Why does he want to shave his beard, Cayden?
Cayden: He turned evil. And now he's turned evil.
Researcher: He's turned evil?
Cayden: Yeaahha…
Researcher: Oh no, why did he turn evil?
Cayden: Because of the machine.
Researcher: The machine…what machine?
Cayden: No, no, no…she's calling her friend ***** (indecipherable name)
Researcher: Which character's that? Who's she?
Cayden: (Makes sounds) Kick…kick in the face.
Researcher: Is she called Black Widow?
Cayden: Yeah. Kick in the face. Yeah.
Researcher: He's kicking her in the face, is he?
Cayden: He's shooting arrows at me. (Indecipherable speech) Ah Hulk. Hold the door…
Researcher: If you needed someone to defend you against the Black Widow…yeah…or him. Where's the Black Widow gone? (Slight pause) Or him…what's he called?
Cayden: (Speech indecipherable)
Researcher: If he was pointing arrows at you, who would you get to defend you?
Cayden: Em…Thanos.
Researcher: Thanos? Why would you get him to defend you?
Cayden: He will be alive to tell me. I am a blader…he's got a (indecipherable speech for a while). Iron Man…
Researcher: Iron Man? Yeah. Is he pretty strong then…?
Cayden: Yes.
Researcher: He seems to be…been able to attack (indecipherable speech).
Cayden: (Mutters) He's…Captain America's throwing his shield at me.
Researcher: Oh no!
Cayden: I deflected it back into his hand.
Researcher: Yeah?
Cayden: I deflect it down to the ground the shield.
Researcher: Do superheroes always attack you?
Cayden: They all attacked him because he's (indecipherable speech). He's throwing…he's throwing his axe and his hammer at me.
Researcher: At you or him?
Cayden: He's evil.
Researcher: He's evil, is he?
Cayden: He's throwing his hammer and axe at me. But I deflected…
Researcher: Ahhh.
Cayden: (Half singing) Captain America's got it.
Researcher: What's Captain America got?

Cayden: Ummm…Thor's hammer.
Researcher: Thor's hammer. Ahhh. Why's Captain America got it? Did he catch it?
Cayden: Yeah. He was trying to throw it to him.
Researcher: Yeah.
Cayden: He's throwing…he…I'm gonna. He's trying to stab Thor…he's trying to stab Thor with that.
Researcher: Yeah…okay.
Cayden: Captain America stop…Captain America stop it.
Researcher: So, you're flicking through a book and looking at all these characters, aren't you?
Cayden: (Makes a sound)
Researcher: Can we, can we look at the ship? (Pause) Cayden, shall we look at the ship? So, is this the control room?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Is that the control panel there? So, who's…who's this again? Who are these again?
Cayden: Starlord and Rocket, Drax, Groot and…
Researcher: Quoran…
Cayden: Quoran
Researcher: And this is Cayden?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: And, er, why's Cayden here on the right?
Cayden: 'Cos he sta…'cos he fell on… 'Cos someone threw him out of, chucked him out first.
Researcher: Somebody chucked you?
Cayden: At first. Out of the school.
Researcher: Out the school?
Cayden: Out of the school and I landed in here.
Researcher: Ahhh. You landed in the spaceship?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Why were you chucked out of school?
Cayden: 'Cos there was… 'cos Thanos was in there.
Researcher: Thanos was in the school. Could you put Thanos in the school? Let's imagine this is the school (referring to one half of Lego mat). What could be…who could be Thanos?
Cayden: And this could be…
Researcher: Who's this?
Cayden: Thanos.
Researcher: Thanos.
Cayden: And this is…and this is A…and this is…Abby.
Researcher: Abby?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Yeah. Who's Abby? A friend?
Cayden: Hal's base camp. Everyone in Hal's base camp (half laughs).
Researcher: Ah, this is Hal's base camp. Let me take a picture 'cos this is cool.
Cayden: (Says indecipherable word) …hahahaha…
Researcher: So, that's everybody in Hal's base camp and this is Thanos, so who's Thanos in P-BL?
Cayden: Err, he's evil (indecipherable speech).
Researcher: Is there a real Thanos in the school?
Cayden: There was a real Thanos outside my house.
Researcher: There was a real Thanos outside your house?!
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Was there? How do you know that? (Pause) Did you see him?
Cayden: Yes.
Researcher: You did? What did he look like?
Cayden: He was…shall I show you Thanos? (Flicks through pages of his magazine)
Researcher: Cayden, did you really see him, or did you imagine he was there?
Cayden: I really saw him.
Researcher: You really saw him, did you? How did that make you feel?
Cayden: (Points to picture) There's Thanos.

Researcher: There's Thanos. And when you saw Thanos outside your house…
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Were you frightened or happy?
Cayden: Frightened.
Researcher: You were frightened, were you? Did you tell your mum….or Dad?
Cayden: I punched him out.
Researcher: You punched him out, did you? Yeah?
Cayden: (Flicks through magazine and hums) Here comes Black Panther.
Researcher: Oh, Black Panther, I've seen a bit of that movie.
Cayden: Black Panther's looking at me.
Researcher: Ohh. What powers does Black Panther have?
Cayden: That's my girlfriend Elaine.
Researcher: Ohh. What's her name? What do you call her?
Cayden: (Mutters a name)
Researcher: I can't read it. Cassie Lang. Why's she your girlfriend?
(Cayden hums)
Cayden: She decided to be my girlfriend.
Researcher: She decided to be your girlfriend, did she? Cayden, what's Thanos doing in the classroom?
Cayden: Here. (Some indecipherable speech) Oh no…this is Hal.
Researcher: Who's that?
Cayden: Hal.
Researcher: That's Hal?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: What's Hal doing?
Cayden: Trying… (very quiet) trying…
Researcher: Trying to get Thanos, is he? Can I take a picture of that?
Cayden: (Makes fighting sounds) He punched Hal…(very quietly) in the face.
Researcher: (Gasps) Did he?
Cayden: (Mutters indecipherably) Everyone from Hal's base camp.
Researcher: Yeah. Where are...are you…is Cayden in there?
Cayden: No. He's with the Guardians of the Galaxy.
Researcher: Who is?
Cayden: Cayden
Researcher: Cayden. I see. So, he's not in Lou's basecamp?
Cayden: Hal's basecamp. Yeehah. (Using Lego to pretend characters are fighting) Oh no, Thanos is punching all of Hal's basecamp.
Researcher: And why does Thanos want to do that to children?
Cayden: (Sound of Lego smashing) Hal…Hal's not going to be happy. Get out of the toilet…die [or rhymes with Denise's real name?].
Researcher: Does Thanos know they're children?
Cayden: No…he does…kick, kick. Yeeah, whoah…hahaha. Now I'm going to get *****
Researcher: What is that that you're pointing to in the book? His arm? What is it?
Cayden: A gauntlet.
Researcher: A gauntlet?
Cayden: He's gonna get it now…stop it.
Researcher: What does he do with his gauntlet Cayden?
Cayden: (Talks inaudibly) Clicks his fingers.
Researcher: He collects his…?
Cayden: (Talks inaudibly) Fingers.
Researcher: Fingers! He collects his fingers? What do you mean by that?
Cayden: Clicks them.
Researcher: Huh?
Cayden: Clicks them.
Researcher: Ah, he collects them in there, does he?
Cayden: Clicks it.

Researcher: Clicks it. Right, okay. Was…can you tell me about Hal's powers compared to Thanos?
Cayden: (Makes sounds)
Researcher: Is that Thanos?
Cayden: No….no, Lee. Do you know Leo?
Researcher: Yes.
Cayden: Leo…Leo…Leo…this is Leo.
Researcher: Ohhhh.
Cayden: Kick in the face.
Researcher: There, you can see what's in there.
Cayden: (Plays with Lego bricks) I'm going to punch you in the face Thanos. Thanos, I'm going to punch you in the face Thanos.
Researcher: (Takes up Lego brick, in role as Thanos, uses American accent) Hey Leo, you think you're big and strong? You're no match for me.
Cayden: I'm just throwing my shield at you.
Researcher: Hey, I'm going to use my gauntlet. (Makes laser shooting sound with mouth)
Cayden: (Indecipherable speech)
Researcher: Here it comes again. (Makes laser shooting sound)
Cayden: Ah ha.
Researcher: You will never escape me. I am the most powerful being in this universe.
Cayden: I'm just throwing my shield at you.
Researcher: (Further fighting noises) Here's my gauntlet firing again. (Firing sounds)
Cayden: I just dodged it.
Researcher: I will destroy you.
Cayden: (Makes sound)
Researcher: How dare you attack me.
Cayden: (Makes sound) His…
Researcher: Can I be…?
Cayden: Someone got punched out the school.
Researcher: Cayden, can I be Leo for a minute, and you be Thanos? Can we swap?
Cayden: He will throw my shield at you.
Researcher: Is this…this is Leon..err…Leo? Why did you come to our school?
Cayden: 'Cos I wanted to.
Researcher: Why are you here?
Cayden: 'Cos I want to…'cos I… 'cos I want t… 'Cos I want to defeat all the teachers.
Researcher: All the teachers. Why do you want to defeat all of the teachers?
Cayden: 'Cos they're mean.
Researcher: 'Cos they're mean? Tell me about them.
Cayden: Cayden's in the Guardians of the Galaxy spaceship. In Starlord's spaceship.
Researcher: Why…why is Cayden there and not here?
Cayden: Err… 'cos he wanted to escape.
Reacher: Escape from school?
Cayden: Yeah (Slight pause). (Quietly) Take him out
Researcher: Why did Cayden need to escape the school?
Cayden: To go out into space and then go to like…and then go to Woodlands (local adventure park).
Researcher: Go to Woodlands. Does Cayden like Woodlands?
Cayden: (Quietly) Yeah
Researcher: (Louder) Does Cayden like Woodlands?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Does he like the big slides…the water slides there? Do you…do…
(Not sure of response from Cayden on recording, but presume he does like slides, as researcher proceeds as if he does)
Cayden: Yeaaahhh!
Researcher: Does Cayden go down all the water slides at Woodlands?
Cayden: Yeah.

Researcher: Ahhhh…. Yes. Thanos, you're a bully. You're no different to the teachers. If the teachers are mean, you're mean. So, how does that make you any better?
Cayden: (Indecipherable speech)
Researcher: Tell me how they're mean
Cayden: They tell Cayden off, and he escaped.
Researcher: Ah, the teachers tell Cayden off. What do they say…? Hang on, here is, here is…
Cayden: Yeah?
Researcher: Here isss…Denise. You be Denise. Here's…where's Cayden? Have you got Cayden…?
Cayden: He's in Starlord's spaceship getting away.
Researcher: Right. Shall we imagine that we take Cayden out of the ship…
Cayden: (Urgent tone) Can I…I've got to go back to Starlord's spaceship…jump.
Researcher: Ahh. Does Cayden not want to go out into..into here to talk to Denise?
Cayden: No.
Researcher: Okay, let's imagine then…can you choose another piece for Cayden? Imagine that like his ghost has come to talk to Denise.
Cayden: No more pieces…pieces for Cormac.
Researcher: Which piece?
Cayden: No more pieces.
Researcher: No more pieces. He wants to stay in the spaceship. Alright, I could ask Densie some questions. Can you be Densie? I'll ask her some questions.
Cayden: Okay.
Researcher: Do you want to be Denise?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Here's me (giggles). Denise, are you mean to Cayden?
Cayden: Sit down.
Researcher: How are you mean to Cayden? What do you say to him?
Cayden: Erm…don't (indecipherable word).
Researcher: Don't...?
Cayden: (Quietly) Escape.
Researcher: Escape. (Pause) When Cayden escapes, where does he go?
Cayden: Starlord's spaceship.
Researcher: But, when he's in school, he doesn't really go in a spaceship?
Cayden: He jumped out of the school and put his space suit on and flew off.
Researcher: And Denise, when Cayden went to the toilet before, and he was washing his hands for a long time, and then you told him off, how did Cayden feel?
Cayden: (Coughs a lot) Does this (becomes indecipherable).
Researcher: Can you tell Cayden how he felt when you told him off? Can Cayden answer from there? Or does he want to stay in Starlord's spaceship and answer? Can I go into the ship? Watch. Wheeeee! (Jumps Lego brick from school context to spaceship). Hi Cayden, it's Elaine, hi.
Cayden: How did you get in?
Researcher: I, I jumped from one universe to the other. Watch. Wheeee! Yeah? I'm…I've got powers. I can jump from there to there.
Cayden: Can't, can't die in space, Elaine.
Researcher: Pardon?
Cayden: Can't die in space, Elaine.
Researcher: Countdown in space?
Cayden: Can't die.
Researcher: (Surprised) You can't die in space?
Cayden: Elaine, how didn't you die…why didn't you die in space?
Researcher: 'Cos I've got superpowers. I can jump from this school to the spaceship.
Cayden: Oh.
Researcher: So, I wanted to come and speak to Cayden. How did Cayden feel when he was told off by Denise about going to the toilet and messing about?
Cayden: (Slight pause) Sad.

Researcher: Sad? Ahh. Why did Cayden feel sad?
Cayden: Hey, shall we go to…do you know River Dart is?
Researcher: The River Dart? I do know where the River Dart is.
Cayden: Let's go to the River Dart.
Researcher: Cool.
Cayden: (American accent) Starlord, can we go to the River Dart?
Researcher: Okay, put in the coordinates. Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.
Cayden: River Dart.
Researcher: Let's go to the River Dart. Okay. Ready? Shall we imagine it flies, Cayden?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Shall we get it ready though? Doesn't look ready for take-off, does it?
Cayden: Ready.
Researcher: Is it all ready? Are you sure? Is everyone in place?
Cayden: Yes.
Researcher: Right. Is Cayden ready? What does Cayden do in the ship?
Cayden: Erm, I'm going to rest my head on Quoran (Makes snoring sounds).
Researcher: You're resting your head on Q..? Ahhh. Why's Cayden resting his head on Quoran?
Cayden: Hey, hey, hey Drax.
Researcher: Oh, oh, Elaine's got a question for Cayden quickly before they take off.
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Cayden, you rest your head on girls' shoulders in school…
Cayden: Yes, I…
Researcher: And you're resting your head on Quoran's. Why's that?
Cayden: (Makes sound like 'Cos') I'm funny.
Researcher: You're funny.
Cayden: So, look at B…there's still some evilness in the girl.
Researcher: Cayden, do you think Quoran thinks it's funny you put your head on her shoulder?
Cayden: Yes.
Researcher: Does she think that? Yeah? Okay.
Cayden: He's jumping out into space.
Researcher: Ohh, we've got to go to the River Dart though in the spaceship. Is he coming with us or is he gonna…or has he been lost?
Cayden: He's evil.
Researcher: Ahhh. Quick, he's evil. We've got to lose him. Quick. (Makes sounds) Get ready for blast-off. (Makes engine sounds). Oh no, quick we have to eject it. (Makes swooshing sound) Off he goes. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 (Makes blast-off sound). Off they go. He's been left behind; he's not coming to the River Dart. Oh, (gasps) he's holding onto the ship. Is he holding onto the tail of ship? Oh, what's happened? Do you think we should get some guns? Do you think we should fire at him?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Shall we make some guns? Come on, let's…
Cayden: Let's…oh no…he's, he's flying away. Don't worry, Cayden will throw his shield at him.
Researcher: Ahhh.
Cayden: Don't count.
Researcher: Yeah?
Cayden: Hey… (Makes sounds).
Researcher: Is Cayden throwing his shield at him? Yeah?
Cayden: He… (Makes sounds). Let's make our video, Elaine.
Researcher: Do you want to make a video?
Cayden: Yeah.
Researcher: Do you? What of?
Cayden: (Indecipherable speech)
Researcher: The what?
Cayden: (Inaudible on recording)
Researcher: Yeah? Of this? What this? What shall we do then?

Cayden: Can I go to Starlord's spaceship, or…? Yeah. (American accent) Let's go to the River Dart. Whoah. Hahaha. I've got it. I'll ju…I'll jump out of the ship. (Makes sounds)
Researcher: Is that Cayden? Who's that up in…who's that?
Cayden: Killing…Dying in space.
Researcher: Ahhh. Who's getting him, look?
Cayden: It must be (inaudible).
Researcher: Who's trying to get Cayden? Who's that…the green Lego piece?
Cayden: It's my shield.
Researcher: Oh, it's Cayden's shield. Cool.
Cayden: There's Groot.
Researcher: Come on then. What we gonna do at the River Dart?
Cayden: (Indecipherable speech. Maybe something about getting into a cabin) We're here guys. There's Theo. What shall we do? Let's go…night night guys. Le…it's finished.
Researcher: It's finished? Ah, thank you. Oh, just started it again. That's it; all gone. Thank you.
Cayden: Can we watch it?
Researcher: You want to watch it?
Cayden: (Looking at videos on phone) Oh, that was the other one.
(C and R watch video on R's phone together)
Researcher: Hehehe…that's good, isn't it?
Cayden: I've got to go outside now.
Researcher: Is it time for outside?
Cayden: Yes.
Researcher: Oh, just got one last question, one last question.
Cayden: Yeah. What?
Researcher: Can you sit there? I've, I've just…back in the…just one last question and then it's time to go down. You've been brilliant. Back in the P-BL room. Can we put Cayden in? You can go back into the spaceship for a minute. So, here he is…
Cayden: I've got to go now. Bye.
Researcher: Ah, okay darling, alright. Hey, Cayden, that was great fun! Thank you. I'll see you another time, okay? (High-pitched voice) Thank you.

Appendix 19: Emergent themes table (Cayden)

Data Source	Evidence	Emergent Themes/Points of Interest
1) OBS, 18.1.19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19 Mother interview, Jan'19 OBS notes, 27.2.19	'Chewing sleeve', 'chewing sweater', 'chewing fingers', 'Jumps, spins, chews sweater' during break time.' 'Rocking about on carpet area' 'Chewing bottom part of black hoodie', 'Chews collar on polo shirt' 'Repeatedly running backwards and forwards on grassy bank' 'Used to obsess over propellers on toy plane'. 'Run up and down constantly' 'Chews on piece of wood'	**High sensory needs**: regularly seeking oral stimulation and proprioceptive feedback
2) OBS notes: 18/1/19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19 Hal's interview Scott's interview	'Wanders between tables' Wandering around playground on own; not connecting with anyone' 'Tried more structured activities with groups, but come over initially and then wander off' 'Even with current level of provision (conducted), just seems lost'	**Aimlessly wanders around space**
3) OBS notes: 18/1/19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19 Meeting with Cayden's sister, 18.3.19 Play session 1 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	In maths, 'Touches girl's fluffy collar' 'Touches girl several times. She tells him to stop and frowns'. 'Tries to rest head on Lisa's arm/shoulder' 'Touches girl, she pushes him off…Goes to touch girl again' 'Tried to cuddle a girl' 'Cayden blows on a girl' He comes up and hugs her and her friends Used to hug her round her neck all the time Cayden says it 'feels good' when he rests his head on Quoran's shoulder during play Cayden wears smiley expression when boy reacts defensively towards him	**Touches girls/rests his head on their shoulders** It feels good on Quoran's shoulder Touches male classmates, too
4) OBS notes: 18/1/19	'Miranda puts paint brush in his hand and he paints on poster'	**Teachers puppeteer Cayden**

Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	Denise takes his hands and operates sewing machine/cutting D shape	
5) OBS notes: 18/1/19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19 OBS notes, 27.2.19 OBS notes, 26.3.19 OBS notes, 14.3.19	'Still staring out of the window' 'Looks out of window' (x2 in close succession) 'Stands by window and stares out' Leans over bench towards window and stares out Looks out of window at end of lesson and sings 'Everything is awesome' from Lego movie Cayden sings 'Bob the builder' theme tune on way to lunch	**Staring out the window/singing to himself**
6) Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	'Cayden says he wants to go home to Denise' 'I want to go home' (says several times throughout lesson)	**Cayden wants to go home**
7) Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19 Denise's interview	Denise talks about reading activity. Cayden draws something in middle of his exercise book'. Shows me C's book: lots of spaceships throughout Denise doesn't know why he draws them	**Always drawing Starlord's spaceship**
8) Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	I observe Cayden staring into space throughout lesson	**Stares into space**
9) OBS notes: 18/1/19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	'Wanders between tables…looks around smiling', 'Laughs to himself' when girl shrugs him off her. 'He seems to be laughing to himself continuously' Standing in queue in P-BL: 'Cayden has smiley expression when boy reacts defensively towards him'	**Wears a smile, but is he happy?**
10) OBS notes, 26.3.19	'Cayden goes to corner of back room in P-BL where there are stacked chairs and says "This is my spaceship"'	**Cayden is in his spaceship**
11) OBS notes, 20.5.19 OBS notes, 26.3.19 OBS notes, 30.1.19	Cayden has designed Captain America costume for Shakespeare play they are performing Cayden draws superheroes around his animal rights bird…'to defend it'. Why have you drawn bird and superheroes? 'Because they are friends'. What has it to do with animal rights? No answer I ask Cayden why he is cutting out a 'D' shape. 'Because Denise told me to' Denise asks Cayden to go to sink to get paper towel to clear white board. C gets	**Cayden does not know what he is learning/doing**

  OBS notes, 12.6.19 Teacher interview audit Scott's interview Hal's interview	to sink and just hangs around seemingly not knowing why he's there Denise asks Cayden where his work is in PBL; he doesn't know Denise – 'Immersion phase, as all doing same thing. Reminds Cayden to do things when he can see others doing what he's meant to be doing. Like walking through a maze otherwise' 'Even if you got him to write a question, he would not understand what it was for' 'He can't remember what he did five minutes ago'	
12) OBS notes, 12.6.19 SE3 narrative interpretation Play sessions audit Play session 19.6.19 Play session 26.6.19 Play session 17.719	Cayden in toilets washing hands for prolonged period during P-BL lesson. Denise asks him if he was 'mucking about'. He says 'Yes' C feels the need to 'escape' from his school and retreat to 'Woodlands' 'Chucked' out of school and into spaceship because Thanos there Ask why Cayden gone into spaceship half of mat. Says 'he needed to leave the school' Big resistance to going into school again. Cayden says it's cold in P-BL studio, warm in the spaceship He jumps out of the school and into Starlord's spaceship 'Elaine, just go back to Starlord's spaceship' [leave school half]. We go back to Legoland at Cayden's request I ask if I can put Cayden back into school half of board and Cayden shouts 'No!' Lots of resistance from Cayden about being in school on Lego mat…wants to go to Legoland	**I want to escape school/school feels 'mean'**
13) All play sessions	Cayden always places himself, as Lego piece, in spaceship half of Lego mat	**Starlord's spaceship is safe**
14) SE3 narrative interpretation	Thanos [baddie] only ever seems to visit school half of the Lego mat	**School is not safe**

Play session 12.6.19	He won't come back into school half of Lego mat and talk to Denise	
15) Play session 12.6.19	I ask why are you mean to him and C says (in role as Denise) 'Escape'	**[Cayden's words] Denise tells Cayden off because he wants to escape**
16) Play session 19.6.19	Thanos wants to destroy all the teachers. Me: 'Why?' Cayden: 'Because they're mean'	**Cayden feels teachers are mean to him**
17) Play session 12.6.19	Denise tells Cayden off for going to the toilet and mucking about, and he says he felt 'sad'	**Cayden felt sad when Denise told him off**
18) Play session 26.6.19	Cayden asks if I know anyone in Lou's base camp. I mention two pupils. I ask if Bailey (pupil) is in Cayden's base camp. Suddenly, Thanos comes to school and starts attacking Bailey	**Thanos attacks specific base camp pupils**
19) OBS notes, 18.1.19 Shadow OBS notes, 30.1.19	Cayden puts his hand up in air when Miriam (teacher) stops class by raising her hand Cayden automatically lines up ready for class transition to English	**Can follow embedded class routines**
20) Interview with Denise Hals's interview OBS notes, 30.1.19	'Can't get any independent writing out of him.' 'I need to get him sorted first…To get him to do any writing, he hasn't got any focus to do it' Looks through Cayden's book: nothing of substance to mark. Not explained anything about why he has chosen to make what he has. Just full of doodling Multi-tasking difficult. Experimented with providing a highlighter for a line he had to write, so he had to focus on just that. In one lesson, can write coherent sentence, then next just mark-making Struggles with every task in English	**Independent writing is difficult**
21) Interview with Denise	Can't do the planning phase of P-BL. He gets onto making and then struggles to go back to planning phase. Writing element too tricky – independent writing	**Independent tasks are challenging**
22) OBS notes, 30.1.19	C thinks maths block with 10 ridges on equates 1 unit	**Abstract thinking is difficult**
23) Denise's interview Hal's interview	Hal had a chart – visual schedule. Helped him follow instructions. These are the things you need for this task. Hal corroborates Denise	**Visual aids help**
24) Hal's interview	He is happy in school, but not getting much out of learning experience	**Teachers think Cayden is happy**

Interview with Lou (Cayden's Basecamp Leader) Mother interview	Me: 'Do you think he's happy out there?' Lou: 'I think he is probably. Because he's never known anything else' Triangulate with 'He feels like a little dot', 'He feels out of it here'	

Appendix 20: Snippet transcriptions (miscellaneous)

a) Session One with Cayden (27.3.19)

Cayden: (Reading) *Why does Cayden like to draw superheroes?* (Pause) '*Cos…because it's so awesome.*

Me: *It's awesome?*

Cayden: *In the Lego…At the end of The Lego Movie, Duplo come.*

Me: *Ta-da! And there's the question.*

Cayden (Reading): *I did* (indecipherable)…*the bird. Why did Cayden draw a bird?*

Me: *Why did you draw a bird?*

Cayden*: Because it's* (singing voice) *awesome.*

b) Lou talking about Cayden (14.3.19)

Recorded in field notes.

Me: *Do you think he is happy out there* [in school playground]?

Lou: *I think he is probably. Because he's never known anything else.*

c) Cayden, Session 3 (19.6.19):

Me: *Cayden, is it warm or cold in here* [P-BL studio]*?*

Cayden: *Erm, it's cold.*

Me*: in Here?*

Cayden*: I'm going back to Starlord's spaceship.*

Me: *Is it warm or cold in the spaceship?*

Cayden: *Warm.*

Me: *Warm?*

d) Hal talking about Cayden

It's been a bit kind of frustrating to work out how to reach him because…I think he's…he seems very happy in school, but I don't think he's…in terms of his learning, he's not getting much from school generally.

e) Marie's mother, telephone conversation (26.1.19)

From recorded notes: 'Likes physical contact. Feels so capable by mum and not seen by teachers. "I don't say anything. I never talk in P-BL." Messy bedroom. "Don't tidy my room – I like it like this."'

f) Marie, OBS notes (27.3.19)

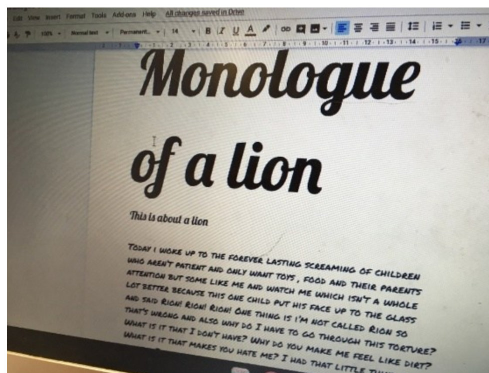
'When questioned, M [Marie] said idea for her painting (split focus) was provided by Hal (on computer). She can't answer my question "How does your painting answer driving question?" She shrugs her shoulders. She knows her painting is about children's rights.'

g) Marie's mother, telephone conversation (4.4.19)

From recorded notes: 'Had a friend last year - Lotta - [made] mini air raid shelter. I don't know why she won't speak in groups. Not sure she knows either…just that it doesn't feel right'.

h) Debbie's written monologue in P-BL

'*Today, I woke up to the forever lasting screaming of children who aren't patient and only want toys, food and their parents' attention*'. See first line on screenshot below.



i) From session audit notes, 7.7.19: 'Later, I ask Cayden if there was a feeling bubble above his head in the spaceship what would it say about how he feels in the spaceship. He says '*Good*'. I then move Lego brick representing Cayden to P-BL studio and ask same question. He says '*Now its not good. It's mean'*. I ask if it's mean in the school because Thanos is there (who he's playing at the time), and he says '*Yes*'. I then take Thanos out of the school and ask Cayden if the school is still mean and he says '*Yes*'. He then says Thanos is defeated and takes himself and others out of school to Legoland.'

j) From session audit notes, 27.3.19: 'I ask Robert how it feels to be both English and Latvian. I have to close question down by suggesting 'good' or 'bad'. He says it's good. I ask why and he gets lost answering question. Very noisy background indeed. I then don't pursue for some reason and move onto asking him what the driving question is. He can't remember and has forgotten it's on wall.'

Appendix 21: Interview notes – Robert and his mother

Interview with Robert's mother in her home (1 hour):

Robert had a traumatic birth – in intensive care for two days. Then 10 days in child unit (tube fed the whole time). Mother suffered a UTI infection and passed it onto Robert. Robert went into distress.

'*Okay baby*', cried when in pain, hungry or dirty. Until nursery, Robert fell down all the time, no balance. Bumped his head many times. '*Not very social at nursery*.' Started Lyra Green Primary School which was a very stressful time for the family. They couldn't get Robert any help. School excluded him so many times; there was a massive breakdown in communication. He was excluded for 5 days for anti-social behaviour: hiding under tables, soiling his underpants, did not trust any adults to touch him. 4-5 years old currently.

Started research school 2 years previously. Has experienced some incontinence every other day. However, improved social skills. Robert is behind by 2 years with reading and writing. Loves archaeology, robots, jewellery (rings, necklaces).

Appendix 22: Full transcription of Robert's fourth session

Present:	Robert and researcher
Location:	Head of Phase Two's office
Date/Time:	24.5.19/lunchtime
Setting:	A big bag of toy animals and peg dolls is available to Robert. Background noise – muted singing can be heard. Robert and researcher sit on chairs at a table. Researcher's dictaphone and phone present. Research encourages Robert to explore the toys.
Duration of Recording:	46 min 40 sec

Researcher [R]: Right, let's have a look at what we've got…Elephant…
Robert [Ro]: A lion, a (indecipherable), an elephant, a donkey…
R: There's like random ones… (singing) Twenty fourth of May 2019.
Ro: Twenty fourth of May?
R: May… I'm just singing so I know the date on the dictaphone. What do you think of this? Do you like? …Who's singing anyway? Is there something going on? Like a play?
Ro: No. The play is going to be in like two weeks.
R: Oh ok.
Ro: Well, not exactly two weeks.
R: (Rustling can be heard as the toys are unpacked) Right there's some peg dolls there…Um…Right, so we'll just take those out. Ok. So. So Robert, last time we chatted with your mum. We talked about the invisible (indecipherable verbalisation from Robert)… voice?
Ro: Audience.
R: The invisible audience in your head. The angel and demon. (pause) Oh – have you chosen these?
Ro: Yeah…(indecipherable)
R: Or have you just put them there? Do you? Do?...
Ro: (Referring to each prop chosen) Angel and demon.
R: Ah – Ok. You call it a demon rather than the devil? Do you prefer demon? Is that what you said originally? I must've misunderstood and thought it was devil.
Ro: Uh… it might be devil.
R: You can say demon if you prefer? Ok – can we just find out a little bit about them? So, you know when you're in the classroom – you were talking about – do you remember, you had what? One on one shoulder? And one on the other?
Ro: One… (high-pitched) one…one on…one on one part of the shoulder and another on the other.
R: And which… is there a particular side? Does the devil go on that side? The right side? And the angel on the left?
Ro: Yeah.
R: Yeah?
Ro: That order.
R: Or is it the other way around? Or doesn't it matter where they are? (Loud cheering can be heard in the background)
Ro: It doesn't matter where they are. Pretty much.
R: You just hear their voices…or? That's what you said last time… you hear them saying… talking to you.
Ro: No, you don't hear them. They're just in your head telling you not to do your work or something or…do your work. Like today, I was getting annoyed at… I… I tried to hold it in but then had to scrunch up a piece of paper so I couldn't… so I could… be better. Then I ended up colouring.
R: Yeah? Can you tell me a bit about today? When you felt annoyed?
Ro: Well. In the assembly that we just had. He said about things that make… that make you stressed and
that's exactly what I had.
R: So, is this John?

Ro: No…
R: Who took the assembly?
Ro: Yeah, the assembly was with…
R: Do you remember who it is?
Ro: Scott.
R: Oh Scott? Oh, you mean, sorry, you mean in P-BL? I thought you meant the big assembly in the theatre. Or you mean just where you were now? You call that assembly?
Ro: Just where I was.
R: Ahh yeah. So, you have…
Ro: We have assembly downstairs and sometimes upstairs.
R: Ah I see – In P-BL… Uh, is Hal still your tutor?
Ro: Yes.
R: Yeah yeah, he was just taking assembly – I see… And um, he was talking about getting stressed?
Ro: Yes.
R: So how did that make you feel?
Ro: Stressed, frustrated and… really trying not to be angry.
R: Ok. Were your angel or devil talking at that point to you?
Ro: Both.
R: Both? I'd love to hear what they…. So, is this (referring to prop) your devil that you're representing, yeah? I just want to say before we start, Robert, you know that the angel and the devil aren't real?
Ro: Yeah.
R: And we're just using them as a metaphor. Do you know what's meant by metaphor?
Ro: Well, they're quite real, they're just two separate audiences in your head. Then you rage out, have a tantrum, do nothing, and work, and throw something across the room…
R: Yeah… eh, but what I mean obviously is that the devil and the angel bit aren't real, it's just our little voices we have in our head. Yeah, we all have that don't we, it's just normal? I'm just saying that they're not real (laughs). There's not a devil and an angel in there, is there? So (referring to prop) is this your angel?
Ro: Yes.
R: A white horse. And this lion cub is the devil. It's interesting you've chosen the cub for the devil…and not the lion.
Ro: Oh.
R: No – no – well you don't have to change it. It's the same thing I suppose (researcher roars like lion).
Ro: I made it as this because this one (white horse) is kind, helpful and you get to ride their back which is fun. That's basically the devil (beat) the angel (laughs).
R: Mmm hmm.
Ro: Kind, good, s...s…sometimes you're happy, fun, fantastic, brave, conquering fears. And this (lion) is ferocious, angry, vicious, afraid, keeping fears and – and all the other things, that this is opposite… a white horse. I chose this because this an animal that is very vicious and this one is like a unicorn.
R: And which one has the loudest voice?
Ro: This…this one.
R: The lion has the loudest voice in your head?
Ro: Yeah.
R: Yeah?
Ro: But you listen to your angel more.
R: You listen to your angel more? Do you? Out of the two?
Ro: Not really – sometimes. This has a louder voice [lion], but you listen to this one [horse] most of the time.
R: And um, when does this one have the loudest voice? When is it really loud? (researcher roars like a lion and then laughs) When does devil have a really loud voice? In which situations? What happens?
Ro: When you get annoyed. He's like… argh I want to throw something…

R: Could you…Could you pretend to be him? (Robert roars) And I'll ask you questions? What to you tell Robert, demon? What do you tell Robert?

Ro: I want to throw something across the room.

R: Are you telling Robert to do that? Is that what you do?

Ro: Yes.

R: Why are you telling him to do that, demon?

Ro: Because I wanted Robert not to be happy, have a miserable life or something.

R: Why do you want him to be miserable? That's not very nice.

Ro: Because I'm a devil.

R: Mmm hmm. Could you be…. Is this a him or a her would you say?

Ro: I have no idea…

R: Or just unisex? Is this a him or a her? (Pause) Or just unisex? Both?

Ro: Uh – I have no idea.

R: Don't know. It hasn't got a sex then, ok. And, um, could you be him/her (horse) now? It? Um, do you stand up for Robert when demon is telling him to throw things across the room?

Ro: Yes. That's exactly what he does.

R: What do you say to Robert?

Ro: Don't throw…Don't throw something across the room.

R: Ok. And what do you say back? What does demon say back?

Ro: No, I don't want you to do that, I want you to throw something across the room.

R: Ah ok. So, what does demon say when angel says, 'don't tell him to do that.' What does it say?

Ro: It says… I want you to be miserable, unhappy and scary and ferocious and angry and hitting people.

R: And Robert, do you ever talk back to the devil voice? - I'm talking to you now, like proper Robert - do you ever talk back to the devil voice in your head?

Ro: Mmmm. Sometimes I actually speak in real life. Not to my imaginary self, I say, 'I really want to hit someone and show my anger, but I don't want to'.

R: So, you say that out loud?

Ro: Not out loud, I just whisper it to myself.

R: Mmm hmm. And how does it feel…?

Ro: Quite so often I talk to myself to stop it happening.

R: Yeah? So how do you stop it from happening?

Ro: I stop it… It somehow makes it stop happening…for some reason.

R: So, what…you telling the voice, the voice that says, when the demon says, 'throw that pencil at Michelle, throw that dice at Michelle'. How do you stop demon from telling you to do that?

Ro: I just sometimes scrunch up a piece of paper – like I said a couple of minutes ago – scrunch up a piece of paper and then re…re-flatten it.

R: Mmm hmm.

Ro: Or sometimes I make something with it – a paper aeroplane…

R: And why do you do that? Why do you scrunch the paper and then make something out of it or do something with it?

Ro: It's…it's…for some reason that stuff is fine to me and that helps me not destroy something – like a pencil – snap it in half.

R: Mmm hmm. And does that always work?

Ro: Yeah it…sometimes it doesn't work. Sometimes I'm just too mad and then I say that to myself, and I don't do it, but I still hit someone or something.

R: Mmm hmm. Ok. That's really interesting. I've just got these, um, little things about for you – let's just move these over there, Robert. On here, just wondered if you could describe your devil. And this is one for your angel. Alright, and it says… Can you read it, or would you like me to help with the reading?

Ro: I already know how to.

R: You read it already? So, if my devil was a colour and you put your answer there and your answer there, yeah? So that's number two… So, if it's a colour, what would the devil be? (Responding to Robert's writing). Ahh ha. Red. Ok. Dark red. Dark red, ok. If my devil was an element – so earth, fire,

water, air – what would it be? If your devil was air, fire, water or earth which one do you think it is? …I can help you with any spelling… Air, fire, earth or water for the devil that tells you to do bad stuff. What do you think? Mmm hmm – fire? Yeah? If my devil was an animal it would be a …. Could be anything on the planet earth, not just what's here…anything you like. A lion. Ok. If my devil was a sound, what would it be? Any sound that you've ever heard.

Ro: Ahhh.

R: This is your devil. Can you think of a sound?

Ro: Lightning.

R: Lightning – wow that's a great (makes a thunder sound) – thunder's the sound of lightning isn't it? Wow that was great. Ok. If my devil was a pose…do you know what that is? (Researcher demonstrates poses) So like you do a pose, and I say show me – can you show me? If your devil that tells you to do bad stuff was a pose what would it look like? It might – I don't know – it might look like (sound demonstrating pose) that, (demonstrates pose) or it might be that? Or… can you think?

Ro: (Makes an 'argh' sound whilst demonstrating the pose)

R: Two hands – two arms in the air with mouth open wide (both researcher and Robert make the 'arrgh' noise). Like that? Ok. Brilliant. Right, what about angel? If my angel was a colour – so here's angel…

Ro: He wouldn't be white because that's not really a colour…

R: But if you want it to be, that's ok. If you want it to be white that's ok. If that feels the right kind of colour.

Ro: It would be kind of wavy water…

R: Yeah? Translucent? Like colourless – no colour?

Ro: No…

R: No, not like that? Wavy, what would that be then? What kind of colour is that? What could be a good colour? Or you could just put wavy? (Pause) If you think wavy is better than a colour, you could call it wavy. Do you want to do that? If that describes it better?

Ro: Yeah, yeah.

R: Cool. Wavy water. Brilliant.

Ro: That describes it better.

R: Brilliant.

Ro: If my angel was an element it would be…

R: Air, fire, water or earth?

Ro: Is there an option of…Is there an option…

R: You can do (indecipherable)…

Ro: Ok.

R: It could be anything – any substance.

Ro: Wildlife.

R: Wildlife? Lovely. Ok.

Ro: That describes it, basically. (indecipherable)

R: Wildlife. Nature. Great.

Ro: Wildlife slash nature.

R: Brilliant. So, the next point – if my angel was an animal…

Ro: It would be…

R: Doesn't have to be one here – could be anything on the planet earth. Could even be made up – it could be a mythical creature.

Ro: It would be a… (long pause) pony.

R: Pony. Ok.

Ro: If my angel was a sound it would be…if my angel was a sound it would be… (long pause)

R: Do you want me to give you some examples? Or have you got one?

Ro: A waterfall.

R: A waterfall. Ok.

Ro: If my angel was a pose it would be…

R: Ah a prayer – holding your hands in prayer. Closing your eyes.

Ro: Or…

R: Hands out to the side – looking, yeah, very peaceful – very zen-like. So, let's have a look then, let's go back to the devil. So, you told me that…

Ro: If my devil was a colour it would be dark red, if my devil was an element it would be fire, if my devil was an animal it would be a lion, if my devil was a sound it would be lightning, if my devil was a pose it would be…

R: Arms up in the air – yeah, yeah.

Ro: (Roars)

R: So that's - that's how you've described your devil, now before we see the angel, can you think of three words, Robert, to describe your devil, based on this – what kind of thing is it? Based on how you've described it through these things? Can you think of three words to describe the devil?

Ro: It would be…

R: Do you want to have a look at them again? Dark red, fire, lightning…

Ro: What was it?

R: The question was – can you think of three words to describe your devil based on all of this that you've just come up with…(long pause) If you can't, that's fine.

Ro: Bad, ferocious, terrifying. And that's three.

R: Do you want to add any more or is that enough?

Ro: That's enough.

R: Right, now let's look at your angel. So, if angel was a colour it would be wavy water, if angel was an element it would be wildlife…

Ro: Wildlife slash nature.

R: If it was an animal it would be a …

Ro: Pony…

R: If it was a sound it would be a…

Ro: Waterfall.

R: A waterfall. And the (indecipherable) is the…

Ro: Harmony.

R: Harmony pose. What three words might describe your angel based on all of that?

Ro: Harmonic.

R: Harmonic. Yeah.

Ro: Polite. And good.

R: Good. Brilliant. Ok, just wanted to ask devil a question… So, let's put… oh yeah. Yeah. We can do that. That way, do you think it's that way? The other way around.

Ro: It's…

R: Just pop your hands around (laughs) there you go. You're putting them on your shoulders. You've got lion on your left shoulder and white horse on the right. There you go. Is that usually where they are?

Ro: They're always whispering into your ear, but this one's louder.

R: Yeah? Can I just ask devil a question? Do you want to give him – it – a name? Do you think devil has a name? Devil that is dark red, fire, a lion, lightning – has it got a name? Or do you think it doesn't have a name?

Ro: Ahhh…

R: Dark red, fire…

Ro: Loud Roar.

R: Loud roar. Devil's called Loud Roar.

Ro: Yeah. Angel's called Unicorn.

R: Ok. Loud Roar and Unicorn. Can I just ask Loud Roar a question? So maybe you could answer. Yeah? So, we'll put her to the side – it to the side. Loud Roar. Loud Roar? When do you tell Robert to do bad stuff?

Ro: When he's feeling kind of annoyed, angry – any emotion. When he just wakes up I will make him feel grumpy.

R: But why do you do that to him? Why?

Ro: Because I'm the demon on the shoulder that's what I'm supposed to do.

R: And can Robert get rid of you?

Ro: You can try.

R: I can try, or Robert can try?
Ro: Robert can try.
R: Do you think he'll succeed?
Ro: No.
R: No? What about if Robert and angel combined forces?
Ro: His body would just be pure harmony.
R: Your body? Robert's body would be pure harmony?
Ro: Yes. His emotions too. It would all be balanced.
R: Mmm hmm. Would they be able to overcome Loud Roar?
Ro: Yeah.
R: Yeah? Robert, would that be possible to do in classroom situation when you're feeling stressed? To combine your voice with angel? To overcome Loud Roar? Or do you think that's too tricky?
Ro: Way too tricky.
R: Too tricky. Hmm. And can you give some examples, I know you said before when John in assembly – sorry, Scott in assembly was talking about feeling stressed; that made you feel stressed. Can you think of…
Ro: No that didn't make me feel stressed.
R: That made you feel stressed…
Ro: No. Today in the classroom in maths I felt stressed.
R: Yeah? Why was that, Robert?
Ro: I got kicked out of expedition.
R: The expedition? Was that on at the residential?
Ro: No. Today.
R: Today? What expedition was that?
Ro: Our year 4 residential expedition and I was going to put this on and say that I'm a person and put myself on display and have a big sign up on me saying 'interactive human, not a cardboard cut-out'.
R: What – you did that in front of people?
Ro: I *would* have done that in front of people.
R: Ok. But why did you…why were you not allowed to go in the expedition?
Ro: I was getting annoyed and my dev… Loud Roar was speaking to me, and I just couldn't hear unicorn.
R: So, what was Loud Roar saying to you then?
Ro: Hit people. And I did that and then I strapped myself to the chair because I didn't want to hurt anyone. And then I ripped myself out of it and I threw it at the teacher.
R: Mmm hmm.
Ro: But I didn't want that to happen.
R: Mmm hmm. And Robert, what's interesting is, sometimes I have a devil and angel on my shoulders too.
Ro: Everyone does.
R: I think they do don't they? Do you think that everyone has a big devil that shouts in their ear?
Ro: Yeah. And sometimes, sometimes people have anger issues, and they only speak to their devil. Not to their angel.
R: Mmm hmm. So, have you got any ideas about how you could make angel's voice bigger? So, he (Loud Roar) doesn't dominate so much?
Ro: You could speak to him yourself. In real life or in your head.
R: What? You speak to him as Robert? Or angel speak to him?
Ro: And sometimes you can actually overcome your devil and remove him from your mind for like half an hour and then he returns back.
R: So how do you do that? How do you remove him from your head for half an hour?
Ro: Um. You just really try to listen to this and speak to him in real life and then and he's just like gone for half an hour.
R: And Robert, it sounds like Loud Roar is sometimes there and sometimes not there talking at you. What triggers him to be there and start saying these bad things? What triggers him?
Ro: In the negative emotions he will just come out and then roar in your ear.

R: Is this something that happens in the classroom or in school, or in life that triggers him?
Ro: He just rages in your head and then your brain says you're angry and then you – and then you have a rage throwing things around the room…
R: Mmm hmm. So, what's…
Ro: …shouting at people.
R: Yeah?
Ro: And sometimes you calm down and the devil is going away and your angel's back.
R: Mmm hmm. Ok. And Robert, what causes you…what causes the negative emotions to start getting, you know, to trigger him to start ranting and telling you to do bad stuff and telling you negative stuff. What triggers that whole process? What's the catalyst? You've used that word before… the catalyst? So, what happens in the classroom?
Ro: Well. Sometimes you get asked to do one thing, and then on the way there you get asked to do another thing, then by the same teacher you get asked another time and then by a different teacher you get asked to go another place and then, and then there's another teacher there, and they ask you to go another place. And you can't do four, five things at once. Five or four things at once.
R: Mmm hmm. And what made you angry in maths today.
Ro: Exactly that. And sometimes, I was thinking of this like a doll on lion right now and imagine this is you or me or everyone or something. This is you and you're riding a pony – happy smiley face – and this is when you're not on the pony and you're on the lion…
R: Mmm hmm. Yeah.
Ro: …you don't have the happy face.
R: You're putting her on the lion. It's like the grandma doll with the … and then you're putting her on the horse.
Ro: And then you become angrier and angrier. But if you're on this and riding it, you're going up the chain to… Ok. Basically, you became up here. Where the horse – where the pony – where the angel put you. So, when you're annoyed, you go all the way back down here and then go in the baddest mood and it keeps on repeating and repeating.
R: Mmm hmm. And swap over… So do you… can it fluctuate between devil…
Ro: Yeah…
R: …and angel quite a lot?
Ro: It's basically like a chart. Going from here, up to here…
R: Mmm hmm – all the way to the top. Ok.
Ro: Just…every day it's getting a bit more and then a bit more a bit more a bit more until you reach the top. And then you go on the bad chain and then you climb back down to the bottom.
R: So, does the chart span a whole day? Or days? Or weeks? Or five minutes? You know that chart – you go up up and then you – ahhh – explode. How long does it?...
Ro: Five minutes.
R: It can be five minutes before you (makes exploding noise).
Ro: It can be five minutes until you – ahhhh – bad. Or it can take a day until you're mad, and then a week or a year. It can take any time – like one second for you to be mad and then (roars) and hit someone or something.
R: So, Robert, what happened in maths today? Can you tell me a bit more detail? So, who told you to do this…
Ro: Sometimes. Sometimes in the weekends, you just… basically – (referring to toy) no this is not, I think that's balanced – basically, slowing down on a turtle, like you're balanced, you up in like a week and go down in like a month. You go down in a week and up in a month because it's pretty much like making. Destroying is easier than making – you can make something – you can destroy something in one second, or you can, when you're making something it can take weeks, days, months, years.
R: Yeah.
Ro: And sometimes it takes just like one second to be angry and…
R: And how does that feel. When it can take just one second to destroy something?

Ro: You feel good, satisfied. And then you feel bad because it's someone's work. Sometimes you're pretty much a kangaroo. You're jumping down to one place, up and then down, up, down, up in about one
second, both lines.

R: So, it feels like your emotions are jumping around like a kangaroo?

Ro: Yeah.

R: Do they go really high one minute? Then really low? Or is it a gradual..?

Ro: It's like (makes jumping noises) all around the place.

R: All around the place? Ok. Yeah?

Ro: Sometimes teachers, in that cycle of getting one place, getting told to go to one place, and then keep ongoing until five places and then you get told off for wandering around and not doing any work.

R: And Robert, can you tell me what happened in maths today? When you finished, just what was the last thing? So, who told you to do the first thing? Who did you have? Michelle or Claire or…?

Ro: No one because I just got told to do poems like, 'one two buckle my shoe, three four shut the door' or something like that…

R: In maths? You're talking about? Not English?

Ro: Yeah. Yeah maths kind of poems. Counting poems, things like 'one two buckle my shoe, three four shut the door' and…

R: So, who told you to do that?

Ro: Oh, I don't know. I don't really know people's names.

R: Was it a teacher that usually works here or a cover teacher?

Ro: No, a cover teacher I think.

R: Ok. So, then what happened?

Ro: That gradually made me go down and then when I, at the end of that maths session I was basically in colouring, which is almost my favourite thing.

R: Mmm hmm.

Ro: And going uh-uh-up…

R: So why – Can I just ask…

Ro: …and then when I got told off for wandering around at the middle of the lesson…

R: Down again.

Ro: Down again.

R: Can I just ask you, um, why you started to go down on 'one two buckle my shoe' poems?

Ro: Because I didn't, I pretty much didn't know anything except for one, teacher told me off for that…and then I asked…

R: Told you off for what, darling? What did you get told off for?

Ro: For not doing work. And then I asked the teacher that I got told off with, and then I, and then I asked if I could research them. And then hey so no, and then I – I just randomly figured out that I wasn't allowed to colour, by sums. And then that made me blow up.

R: Mmm hmm.

Ro: That's pretty much all that I can say.

R: Ok. That's really, really interesting. So, I'm just trying to figure out what other teachers were there. So there was the teacher who told you to do 'one two buckle my shoe' poems. Do you know why you didn't want to do that? Why you didn't want to do the poems?

Ro: I don't know.

R: (laughs) Can't remember? So then, who told you to do something next? Was it one of the teachers you know, like Claire or Danny? Or…?

Ro: No. Both of them were downstairs doing the exhibit. That was when I got kicked out and…

R: By the cover teacher?

Ro: No – Claire, told me not to go in the – no, Danny told me not to go in the exhibition and then that made me not want to do the maths poems, the counting poems, the 'one two buckle my shoe' poems. And then it got settled, I got told off, I only know one poem – half of one poem – and then…

R: But Robert, why weren't you allowed to go in the exhibition?

Ro: Because I was hitting people in it.

R: Uh huh. Is that what, was he – or it – was raging?
Ro: Yeah – was raging.
R: So why were you hitting people? Why did he come out then? Why was he telling you to do that then?
Ro: Because other people were annoying me, how I was telling them maths questions that were actually right and they kept on saying 'wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong' to me and that triggered my lion to go down down and then I hit someone. And then I threw some tape at the teacher. Then I got sent up upstairs to do a lesson. And then… that's what triggered the…
R: Yeah. You had to do the poems, and then you didn't want to do that.
Ro: And then I said, I said that I needed to research some maths poetry – the counting poems – 'one two buckle my shoe' poems…And
R: Why did you need to research it? Because you only knew…
Ro: Because I only knew half of one – 'one two buckle my shoe, three four shut the door, five six pick up sticks, seven eight I don't know'.
R: And how did it make you feel when you didn't know the poems?
Ro: It made me feel angry and then I asked to go…
R: To research? And she said no.
Ro: And then I went to the top and went back down, back down, and then, and then I figured out the year fours were doing colouring by sums, and then, or colouring by just colouring in some artwork. And then I was happy at the end and that's what made it a good maths lesson.
R: And do you know when you were told – ah, sorry when the kids or whoever they were were telling you got some wrong before the exhibition and you got cross and were hitting people.
Ro: Hitting the person who was saying that – (indecipherable).
R: Is there anything you could do to stop…like the…
Ro: Yes. Telling the teachers, but I always forget to do that and then I get in trouble.
R: Mmm hmm. So, you forget to, yeah, tell the teacher. (Robert sighs) Have you got any then? Have you got any ideas about what you could do to help yourself in those situations?
Ro: I have no idea anymore. I just need to… if you're here next week I could, I could have some ideas next week.
R: It'll have to be the week after because it's half term next week (laughs).
Ro: Oh.
R: You have a nice holiday. Ok.
Ro: Half of two weeks.
R: Three and a half days.
Ro: Wait – what?
R: Oh, half of two weeks – a week. Sorry, I thought you said half of a week. I just had a…
Ro: One week and a half. That's how much days until like Friday, and then we can have this meeting again.
R: Yeah. I'm just going to see if… Oh just one thing – if your devil was a Marvel character, who would it be?
Ro: Carnage.
R: Carnage?
Ro: Yeah.
R: And what if… You didn't give it a name did…
Ro: Yeah I did. Unicorn.
R: Unicorn. If Unicorn was a Marvel character who would it be.
Ro: It would be Captain Marvel.
R: Captain Marvel? Why Captain Marvel?
Ro: Ah because, that's basically… you listen to this more than carnage.
R: Ok. And do they ever talk to each other? Or do they just talk into your ear?
Ro: They sometimes talk to each other, have an argument and sometimes they get knocked all over the place and you go up, down, up, down, all over the place. As well as the kangaroo part and sometimes the turtle going (makes slow noise).
R: Mmm hmm. And last thing and then we're finished. So last thing is, so you know when you said when you colour in it calms you down.

Ro: Yeah.

R: It's difficult to colour in while you're like in a queue waiting to go in an exhibition. But I wonder if there's something else that gives you the same feeling you get when you're colouring in that you could do to try and calm you down.

Ro: Ah. Not really.

R: How do you feel when you colour in?

Ro: (Indecipherable) Paper aeroplane that could happen which is my favourite thing that's not going on computer games or something. That's the last thing I can say.

R: What's that sorry? That a paper aeroplane would be a good thing to make?

Ro: Yeah because that calms me down a lot.

R: Does it? Making a paper aeroplane. Ok.

Ro: There.

R: Finished. Phew! That was super amazing – I feel like I've learnt so much about your angel and devil. And you look exhausted now (laughs). Are you tired after all that thinking? Blimey – right.

Ro: I'll just get that – angel, demon…

R: Oh yes.

Ro: Right now, I'm positive, so yay.

R: You're on a unicorn. Good. Well, let's put them back. Shall we say bye bye. You behave yourself, you naughty naughty Loud Roar.

Ro: Or Carnage.

R: Or Carnage – maybe that's a better name, aye? Carnage. Right, We've stopped.

END

Appendix 23: Emergent themes table (Robert)

Data Source	Evidence	Emergent Themes/Points of Interest
1) OBS notes, 18.1.19 Shadow notes, 1.2.19 Hal's interview	English teacher says Robert 'self-loathes and hard on himself if he gets something wrong'. Has 'big meltdowns.' Swings on chair and puts coat over his head. Swings on chair, fidgets, and licks maths textbook. Aggressively shouts, 'What am I doing?' to peer (teacher nearby). Rips page out of school textbook; kicks paper on floor; puts coat over face. Stamps open textbook with pencil. Stands up, goes to throw coat on carpeted area, returns and stamps table with pencil. Throws die at maths teacher (Robert removed from lesson). Storytime: walks around table; lies across table; sits on table and swings legs; goes over to cover teacher and cuddles her. Banned from nurture group due to 'violent outburst' (Mike). Hal: 'Robert gets frustrated when something happens, and he can't understand why'.	**Robert finds it difficult to emotionally self-regulate** **He does not know how to ask for help**
2) OBS notes, 18.1.19 Shadow notes, 1.2.19 Mike's interview	Robert is taken to nurture room by English teacher during lesson. In there for long time. No attempt by teacher to engage Robert when teaching class. Robert rips page out of schoolbook. Teacher: 'Right, you've damaged school property. That's a red dot now'. Scowls in response to teacher saying, 'Can you stop that please?' Robert scowls at peer. Teacher; 'Now stop that please. It's unacceptable'. Teacher repeats 'Stop' five times in close succession. Mike: 'He struggles like mad with language. I've watched him get angry in situations… like there's a misunderstanding that only he sees.'	**What is going on for Robert on the inside?**
3) OBS notes, 18.1.19	Sits at table away from English group in lesson still with coat on and sings to himself. Fiddles with stack of pencils; puts finger in paint and smears on table. Only child not on carpeted area for story.	**Sense of self-elected isolation**

4) OBS notes, 18.1.19 Shadow notes, 1.2.19	Teacher approaches Robert and he scowls. Maths teacher – 'Robert, you're distracting people!'	**Robert thinks teachers are a pain**
5) Shadow notes, 1.2.19	Robert complains out loud other pupils can play iPad games, while he and other peers have to 'work' (teacher does not respond). Robert: 'This is useless [maths work]. How is this going to help me when I'm older?' Teacher: 'You need to concentrate'. Teacher forgot to tell Robert that he was having LSA for maths.	**Needs things explaining to him; he needs things to be fair**
6) Shadow notes, 1.2.19 OBS notes, 27.2.19	Hugs cover teacher in English. Hugs me three times in English. Robert gives me a cuddle.	**Likes hugging certain people**
7) Shadow notes, 1.2.19	Studio light flickers on and off. R: 'Why does the light keep going off and on? I ask how he finds that. R: 'Confusing'.	**Senses are affected by his environment**
8) Shadow notes, 1.2.19	Not sure what to do in English. Looks at a girl's work and copies.	**Can look at peers' work to help him know what to do in class**
9) Shadow notes, 1.2.19 OBS notes, 27.3.10 Denise's interview,	Wanders over to display board and takes his work down to look at it. Wander over to timetable on wall and removes from wall. Wandering around studio, looking at peers' iPads. Denise: 'Robert wanders around studio, so he doesn't get caught' (not doing writing component of work).	**Robert often wanders around studio**
10) Denise's interview 2nd interview & OBS notes	'Robert finds planning stage difficult.' I ask Robert what driving question of P-BL 'Equal Rights' project is, and he does not know.	**Finds planning stage of projects tricky**
11) Hal's interview	Hal: 'Robert struggles to build friendships with others.' Hal: 'He doesn't think anyone will be his friend other than his brother.'	**Struggles to forge friendships with peers**
12) Hal's interview	H: 'Don't see whole of student. Other teachers can feed into them, but more difficult to find patterns when you can only go off what they say.'	**Robert's Base Camp Leader finds it difficult to write his Individual Learning Plan (ILP)**
13) Mike's interview	Mike: 'One minute he's wonderful, he's talking and warm, but next session he is indifferent, troubled by something, aloof and grumpy. Changes within a two-hour time frame.'	**Robert can seem volatile to others**

	'Sometimes he's rough and abrupt with other kids, winds them up; other times, gets on really well with them.' 'I can see a set of conflicting behaviours in him.'	
14) Mike's interview Scott's interview	You can have a laugh with Robert, and it helps. Robert responds well to humour.	**Use of humour can help de-escalate conflict**

Appendix 24: Full transcription of Marie's second session

Present:	Marie and researcher
Date:	22.5.19
Location:	Head of Phase's office
Duration of Recording:	53.19 min

Researcher (R): Right okay, so you were saying, ah, Simmy's the most like…
Marie (M): This one.
R: That one – oh the big green eyes. That's really sweet, oh. I might write down this, so I don't forget which one you choose… So, I'll put Simmy, and I'll put Marie in. So, Marie, do you think there's a cat there that you're most like? Or do you think there isn't a cat there…
M: Ummm.
R: …that you most like. Or which of the remaining ones do you think you most like?
M: Hmmm. (Pauses)
R: There might not be one, eh? If there isn't one I've got some other things, some more cats. (Looks at print-outs) Would you like one of these ones? (Sound of chairs clattering) I'll take Simmy out… I like that one – it's funny – got quite a long tongue for a cat, don't you think? Long skinny tongue. Right put those ones there.
M: Cats actually have very skinny tongues.
R: Do they?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: I have never had a cat, so I don't really know, actually. Right, so… you know *The Cat Returns* don't you?
M: Yes.
R: So do I, 'cos my sons like it. So, look I've got all the cats. Do you remember their names? I did write them down. So, maybe that's the Barron. Do you remember his name?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: He rescues her. And her name's…not Hiromi – that's the friend. What was her name again?
M: Haru.
R: Har…Hari..Haria?
M: Haru.
R: Haru. Let me see if I can find Haru. Is that her there? No?
M: That's her.
R: (Looking through the cat images) There she is. Ahh. Do you want to put them back? Yeah, Haru as half-cat – when she's half-cat. Do you remember that one? Yuki? (Pause) There's the Barron. I did like a couple in case we needed a couple of the things. That is Haru, isn't it? So, that's a different one. And remember, what was it, Muta. Muta the big fat cat. And then Natoru. Ah that's the King cat – he's crazy. And Haru again, is that when she's transforming into the half cat? She's like 'Argh! I've grown some ears!' So that's the same as that one. Who's that? So that is Prince…
M: Loom.
R: Loom. Prince Loom. He wants, what? Does he want him to marry her?
M: No, no, no. He wants to marry her.
R: Ahh.
M: And he wants her to marry him.
R: Right Ok.
M: And she doesn't want to marry him.
R: (Researcher laughs) I don't blame her. Right. Ok. (Looking through images) Oh, there's two of those, look. There's Yuki, Yuki there. Oh – there's another Muta. And another Natoru, and that one, and then the King again. Now, you've got these ones. Is there a cat here – or it could be a human being – so it could be Harumi or Haru that you think is most like you? Including these cats. Who would you say you're most like? (Pause) I'll tell you what, could you do two versions? Could you do the cat you're most like in school and the cat you're most like at home.? And I wonder if there's any difference or maybe it's the same. What do

you reckon? (Pause) You've got those as well if you need those ones. (Pause) So which cat are you most like in school? And which cat are you most like at home? What do you think? (Pause) Or a person. And do you know what? If you can't decide you can draw your own. I've got a pen – you could draw your own. Would you prefer to draw your own? (Indecipherable – agreement noise) Does it not feel right? Do none of those work, do they not? Is that right? You draw what you…is this one going to be at home or school?
M: Home.
R: Home. So, you draw what – if you were a cat – what you'd look like at home. 'Cause I know you like drawing cats, you were drawing one yesterday weren't you? (Long pause while Marie is drawing) Wow (laughs) that's so cool. Can I just write, can you write on the back 'Home' – 'Marie at home' or just 'Home' and I know it's your 'home' cat. You've lovely writing again. You know when you write like that, you make me think of Elizabeth from Pride and Prejudice. I bet she writes with really lovely swirly, joined up writing. I hear you like the Georgians?
M: Mmm.
R: Yeah. Do you like this sort of dress? The formal dress…where's the day dress. The day dress yeah. Gosh, fancy having to wear that in this heat, though. Did they have to wear that in summertime when it was roasting hot? With corsets on? (Researcher makes gasping noise) No wonder they were fainting all the time. So, I hear you like *Pride and Prejudice*? Yeah? (Marie nods) Mr Darcy and Elizabeth…but anyway, you just reminded me about maybe how they'd write (indecipherable). (Marie continues to draw) Cool. Ok. So that's your home cat. Can I have a look? Is that ok? What's that?
M: (whispering) A spade.
R: (laughs) A spade? Why is there a spade there?
M: Because at home I shovel dirt.
R: You shovel dirt – the cat's dirt?
M: Hmmm.
R: Is it Simmy's poo?
M: Sometimes.
R: Do you? Is there other dirt you shovel? Or just the poo?
M: Umm, all of the dirt.
R: Ooh. With a shovel?
M: In the dirt factory.
R: In the dirt factory? Where's the dirt factory?
M: (Whispering) In the back garden.
R: (Whispering) Is it?
M: It's to make room for a patio.
R: Oh (laughing) it's to make room for the patio. And what do you do with the dirt when you've shovelled it?
M: Put it in a bucket.
R: Oh – and what do you do with it when it's in the bucket?
M: Umm…
R: Just leave it there?
M: Put other stuff in it.
R: Oh yeah that's good compost isn't it? Hey that is so cool – you're such a good drawer. Right, OK. What about your school cat? Do you think you're going to have to draw one? None of these look like how you feel at school? The kind of person you are at school? Nope? You're going to draw one. Do you want a bigger piece of paper? Yeah? There's big ones, look. There you go.
(Long pause while Marie is drawing)
Ooh. Wow. Do you want to put on the back 'the school cat'? (Pause while Marie is writing) Do we get a spade? (laughing) Marie a school - I wonder what you'll draw for school? (sounds of Marie drawing) Cool. Shall the cats talk to each other? Well, my cat wants to ask your cat a question.
M: OK.
R: Well, how should I talk? Do the voice and I'll try copy – what kind of voice has it got?
M: I'm evil (in low gravelly voice).
R: I'm evil? (Laughs)
M: I'm evil (in low gravelly voice).
R: What's the voice this one got?

M: Umm.
R: Look at it, that's your school cat. That's how you are at school. What kind of voice've you got? Do you think? What kind of voice have you got? (animated voice).
M: Hmmm. Bob bob bob (singsong voice, high to low note).
R: Cool.
(Cat voices are used for following conversation)
M: Bob bob.
R: Hey, how you doing?
M: I'm Bob.
R: Bob.
M: Bob.
R: Why have you got such a big head?
M: Because I'm Bob.
R: You Bob?
M: Bob is evil.
R: Bob is evil?
M: I'm Bob.
R: You're Bob. Why are you evil at school?
M: Because Bob.
R: (Match Marie's intonation) Because Bob?
M: Because Bob.
R: Is Bob evil?
M: No.
R: No? What does Bob mean?
M: Bob means bobbidy bob bob bob.
R: Bobbidy bob bob? (Slight pause and then declarative tone referring to picture of home cat waving) *I go Whaha! Whaha!* (Pitch and volume rise on second Whaha and syllables are elongated)
M: (Slight pause) Bob
R: Whaha!
M*:* (Rapid reply) Bob
R: Whaha!
M: (Scream-like but subdued. R laughs at same time) Whaaaa
R: Whahaaaa…oww! (R laughs) (Referring to an imaginary spade Bob uses in the garden at home) Diiiig…And why'm I waving?
M: Because…cats wave.
R: Do cats wave?
M: Yeah, cats wave.
R: Marie cat waves. When I'm waving, what am I thinking?
M: You're thinking why am I waving?
R: Ahhh…I like your tail. You've got a big, long tail and it's upright. Does that mean you're happy?
M: Fluff
R: Floss?
M: Fluff
R: Fluff? Is it a fluffy tail?
M: (Elongated and exaggerated syllables) Fluffy.
R: (Imitates) Fluffy! Look at your big eyes! (Marie releases breath) What kind of cat are you?
M: I'm a Bob cat.
R: A Bob cat. If you had to have another name for Bob, what would it be?
M: Hmmm…(pauses) Bobbididy bob bob bob.
R: Bobbididy bob bob bob. Can you put that into human language?
M: Erm, bob bob bobby bob bob.
R: Bob bob. Is Bob cat a ca…real cat somewhere?
M: Er, I think there's erm there is a breed of cat called a Bob cat.
R: Ah Bob cat, yeah okay. Wow, so let's have a look at these cats. This one, your school cat. Can you describe your school cat?

M: (Whispers and elongated) Fluffy
R: Fluffy. Ah more fluff than this one? Ah yeah look…
M: (Whispers) Fluffy
R: Loads of fluff. This one hasn't got as much fluff. Why's this school cat got more fluff?
M: Because fluffy.
R: Because fluffy.
M: (Whispers) Fluffy.
R: (Whispers) Fluffy. Is that how it feels at school?
M: Fluffy.
R: Fluffy
M: Fluffies.
R: Fluffies. And…why has this cat, your home cat, got its mouth wide open (laughs) and lots of teeth showing?
M: Because it's evil.
R: It's evil?
M: (Whispers) I'm evil…
R&M: (R and M whisper together) Evil…
M: (Crackling voice) Evil.
R: Yeah? Why can't this cat be evil…at school?
M: Because…
R: Because why?
M: Because of fluffy.
R: Because of laughing?
M: Because of fluffy.
R: Who's Fluffy? Bobtail? (Marie nods) Okay. So, Bobtail can't be evil like home cat because she's fluffy? (Marie nods) Ahhh…is the fluff real or pretend?
M: Real fluff
R: It's real fluff?
M: (Whispers) Made out of fluffs.
R: And does…'cos this is the same person really, isn't it? This is Marie at home and Marie at school.
M: (Whispers) Fluffy.
R: Fluffy. So, what happens to the fluff when Marie goes home? Look, she's leaving it at school…all this fluff…she goes like that.
M: She sheds
R: She sheds the fluff?
M: Mmhmm.
R: Where does she leave it?
M: At the school gates.
R: (Elongated) School gates! Okay. And why does she…why does she need fluff at school?
M: To be fluffy.
R: What does that mean, to be fluffy?
M: It means be really soft.
R: Be really soft. Okay…so is the whahaha (laughs) evil one not soft? Or is it soft still at home?
M: Still soft.
R: Still soft. Okay, but fluff gets shedded…shedded? Shed…at the school gates and you become that cat. Is that right? What happens to the fluff? Does it blow away in the wind?
M: No, it just sits there.
R: Just sits there. And what happens to it the next day when you come back to school?
M: Oh I just like lie in it and it comes all back on you.
R: Ahhh. What would happen if this home cat went to school like that? (Maries gasps) What would happen to Marie…without the fluff? Look, no fluff…what would that feel like? Going to school with fluff?
M: (Whispers) Naked.
R: Naked? Yeah? And, if you're, if you could put into two words, which isn't Bobtail or fluff (laughs), how it feels to be naked at school – I mean not literally, I mean without the fluff, what would those words be?
M: Hmm…very naked.

R: Very naked. So, you can't use the word naked.
M: Oh. (R laughs)
R: Other words that you can like synonyms like you do in English. Other words to describe nakedness when the fluffs gone. If you had to go to school like that, how would you feel? Two words. (Whispers) How would it feel?
(Long pause while Marie thinking)
R: Would it be easier to write them down?
M: (Upbeat) No.
R: No? Would it be easier to draw how it would feel? (Slight pause) So, if we took school cat's fluff off and it blew away in the wind, and home cat came back the next day and (whispers) there was no fluff to put on, could you draw a cat that you'd be, how would you feel then?
M: What about if home cat went to the shop and bought some fluff? (R laughs)
R: Let's imagine it's…er…so you can't buy it at the shop, so it's a real mess. So look, home cat has got to go to school like that…there's no fluff to put on.
M: Errrm…
R: Yeah. You could just choose that if you want? You're just gonna choose that? Ah okay…So, what would you feel like…without the fluff?
(Long pause with drawing sounds, no cat voices used in following conversation)
R: Oh wow!
M: (Indecipherable)
R: Oh (laughs) you lost your fluff. You going to go to school like that? So, what's the difference between those two?
M: Um. Really fluffy and (indecipherable).
R: So really fluffy and naked.
M: (Funny voice) And naked.
R: Ok. Let's…Alright let's try and understand what this fluff is.
M: (Whispering) Fluffy.
R: Fluffy. Ok. So could you imagine that the fluff is a colour. What colour would it be?
M: Purple.
R: Do you want to write it down?
M: (Whispering) Purple.
R: Now that just happens to be your favourite colour I know.
M: Purple.
R: Go on then, purple. Put purple. So, the fluff is purple. Ok. That's it. We can leave that. Purple. Yeah? That ok?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: We'll put it there. And then we're imagining…we're imagining Marie had to go to school, so hang on (sound of paper moving), left the fluff at the gate, came the next day, it wasn't there, this is how she'd feel. Now we're exploring what the fluff means to you. What is it? So, if it was a colour it would be purple, if it was an animal, what would it be? Any animal on the planet. It could be a bird, an insect, a fish – I don't know. Is there one that you can…think about the fluff…not how you feel here – we're trying to describe the fluff – what's the fluff like? What does it feel like? It's purple…If it's an animal what would it be like?
M: Cats.
R: Cats. Go on then, you write that…
M: Cats are fluffy.
R: Cat. Cats lovely. So, it would be cats…Ok. I'm getting a little drawing of a cat. (Marie draws). Oh, that's lovely. Ok. Cats. If the fluff – we're trying to understand what the fluff is, yeah? If the fluff was a sound…
M: Hmmm…
R: This is the fluff that you like to go to school with and if you don't have it, it makes you feel like that. You want to go to school like that, but you can't – what kind of sound might you make, or feel like… think of all the sounds in the world.
M: Hmmm… Mmmmmmm.
R: Like that?
M: Mmmmmm no.
R: Or is that you thinking? Is that a 'you thinking' sound? Oh – there's a siren. There's other sounds in the

room aren't there? I wonder what sound the fluff would be?
M: (Whispering) Silence.
R: Silence? Wonderful. Silence.
M: This is the picture…
R: Is silence a sound? Is that an oxymoron? (Laughs)
M: Kind of.
R: Silence. The greatest sound of all. I like that. Cool. Silence. Ok. If, and this is the last one, if your fluff – if you're going to school like that and feeling like that without your fluff – if your fluff, I'm trying to describe it, if your fluff was an element – so that's fire, earth, water, air – the four elements…
M: It would be fire because it's warm.
R: Fire because it's warm, I see. (pause) Nice drawing of a fire. Lovely, and can this fluff go on anyone or just Marie?
M: Just me.
R: Ah. Did Marie make the fluff?
M: Mmm. (whispering) I made the fluff.
R: You made the fluff. How did you make the fluff?
M: Like (whispering – indecipherable)
R: In the (indecipherable)? You magic'd it from thin air?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Ah.
M: (Whispering) magic.
R: And do you feel it around you in the day, the fluff?
M: Ahh – it's the thing that makes me feel really warm.
R: Yeah? And what? You feel like that if you don't have the fluff?
M: (Whispering) I feel cold.
R: You feel cold. Literally cold? Or emotionally cold?
M: Both.
R: Both. Ok. Wow – this fluff sounds important. I see, and does the fluff protect you from anything?
M: Hmm – no, it just makes me feel warm.
R: Just makes you feel warm. And why do you need the fluff at school, why do you end up feeling like that? If you haven't got your fluff?
M: Because.
R: Because?
M: Mmm – because.
R: (Laughs) Is that because it's too – is that because it's a difficult question?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Is that why you're saying because? So let me try and explain the question. So… do you feel you need your…you feel you need your fluff at school, yeah? You said otherwise you feel like that, yeah? Do you feel the fluff is actually real? Or imaginary?
M: Mmmmmmm…
R: Mmm – tricky question. Is it real, the fluff – or is it completely imaginary? What do you think?
M: (Breathing out heavily)
R: Tricky question? Is that a tricky question? Could it be both? Or is that silly?
M: It could.
R: Could be both do you think? Maybe. Ok. Alright. Now. We'll leave that for a minute. And could you choose a cat to be Debbie.
M: Hmm.
R: Any of them. And actually, at the end I'll tell you which one she chose because she did this yesterday (laughs). I will tell you which one it was – let's see if you get that one. But it's actually not what you think she thinks, it's what you think. If there was a cat that you think most – not looked like – most like Debbie, her character, which one might it be? Choose one – which cat is most like Debbie? (Pause) What do you think? (Laughs) It could be one of these? Or it could be a person? A person? Or a half cat half person? (Pause) Or do you need to draw one (laughs). You need to draw one? Oh, hope we don't run out of paper. (Marie picks up paper) Oh, you're going to draw her – none of these seem to represent Debbie. Let's see

what she looks like then. (Long pause while Marie is drawing) Oh back and front view? Oh, that's you? Laughs) Is that Marie? And that's Debbie?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: She's on the computer.
M: She's typing up cat poo cookie.
R: What's that? Cat poo cookie?
M: It's a cookie. But instead of chocolate chips it has cat poo.
R: Ooh.
M: And then she typed in 'cats that look like frogs' and 'cats that look like dogs' and 'cats that look like masks' and she also typed 'Marie's mask'.
R: Did she? Is this today?
M: Yep.
R: And why did she do that?
M: Just 'cos. Just 'cos - she wanted to.
R: 'Cos it was fun? Cool. 'Cos you make – are you going to make some props? Is this for the play?
M: We're doing masks.
R: Oh masks – are you going to make a mask?
M: Yep.
R: Do you know what it's going to be like yet?
M: I'm just designing it.
R: And which character is that for?
M: Um. I don't know yet.
R: Much Ado About Nothing? So, you don't know who the character is yet that you're designing it for. I see. Hey, you two look cool. And what's this? What's around your…what's this horseshoe thing?
M: No, I'm crying because it's so funny.
R: Oh, are you crying because what she's writing is so funny (Laughs).
M: The cats that look like frogs – that's so funny.
R: Ah – she likes frogs, doesn't she? She told me yesterday – she likes cats and frogs, but she likes frogs as well. Cool. Alright, can you choose a cat or a person to represent Di.
M: Hmm.
R: Denise. Who's Denise? (Pause). You need to draw? You're looking at the paper… (Sound of getting paper ready). You're good at drawing cats.
(Long pause while Marie is drawing)
Spotty rug? Is this the carpet space?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Why is she saying, 'spotty rug'?
M: Because it's a spotty rug.
R: And she's saying, 'spotty rug'. She looks a nice cat. Is she a nice cat?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Cool. Ok, what about Colin? We'll leave these cats for later.
M: Mmmm.
R: Is there one you can choose for him? You can draw if you want if it's easier? There you go. (Sounds of paper, long pause while Marie is drawing) Ooh. Is that a rocket?
M: No, it's a book.
R: Oh, a book. Cool. A book cat (laughs).
M: He's a crayon.
R: There's that story, isn't it? What's it called again? The crayons go on strike? Or something, is it? Do you remember that? There's a story isn't there, about the crayons? Do they go on strike? There's a book. Anyway. So why is Colin a crayon?
M: Because crayon sounds like Colin [real name rhymes].
R: Ah.
M: And Colin likes books and coffee.
R: Huh, there's the coffee cup. That's great. And how come you scribbled those out?
M: Because I didn't know how to spell coffee.

R: Oh, do you want me to tell you so you can put it in? Ok, so it's C O double F double E, that's it. Coffee. That is so cool. Right ok. There's just a couple of more things to do then it's after school, but you quite – you like that, don't you? I can see. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'm just going to take one picture to show – I'll forget what – where we were you know, if I don't take a picture of what you've done because I'll forget. Otherwise, I'll forget where we were in John's room. Right look, I've got this for you. Have you heard of pie charts?
M: Yeah.
R: You know pie charts are maths. Yeah? Pie chart? Have you done it in maths before?
M: I think so.
R: (Drawing on the pie chart) Could you – 'cos what we do – could I just take the pen? Imagining obviously that's the middle. Imagine a pie or a cake, we're going to make – give portions to – right imagining you're in P-BL, right, you're working in P-BL. Right, we're going to think about, ok, how much you like working in a group – either with Debbie or one-to-one with a teacher, or your friends like Jack, Ed and Debbie, or on your own. So you might really work in a group so much – that look – if I show you one. I've got a spare one actually, so you might do this. So, you might go 'oh my gosh, I like working in a group so much, I'm going to have that section (sounds of colouring in) to represent 'group'. And I'll write in there 'group'. See what I mean? That much of the pie means I love working in a group in P-BL. This bit is 'working on my own', so you just put 'own' see what I mean? Or that much, Debbie, that much a teacher – or whatever, see what I mean? Now I said to choose a colour to describe, but maybe that's too complicated. Maybe just do it like this to show how much you like working with different people.
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Yeah?
(Long pause, paper noises and drawing noises)
Wow. I see. So is this, oh, ok. So are you saying you don't like working on your own that much.
M: No.
R: And the teacher looks a bit bigger than 'friends' and 'group'? Yeah? You like working with Dor… And look at Debbie, half the circle. And are you working with her at the minute in P-BL?
M: Yep.
R: Yeah. You're working with Denise's group? Yeah? So how does that feel?
M: Um I like being in both of those. I like being in Denise's group and I like working with Debbie.
R: That's great. That's so cool. Right, we've got one more thing to do and we're finished. Is that ok to carry on? One more thing? (Marie nods) Right. (Smiling) So, sorry about the peg dolls. (Manipulates peg dolls) We're imagining they are pupils in P-BL. Ok? They're in a group. Ok? We're going to imagine that Hal has put them in a group, alright? And they're going to work on… Let's imagine that – going back to the animal rights project, ok. The project's animal rights, and he's asked them to think of all the reasons why you should care for animals. Why should humans care for animals? Alright, so that's the task he's given them. So, Marie didn't get put in a group, so Hal has suddenly said 'Marie can you join this group?' How would Marie feel about that?
M: Um. Ok.
R: Yeah, Ok. Now, thing is, Marie hasn't got her fluff. (Marie audibly exhales) What do you think about that? How would Marie feel, how would you feel without your fluff if you had to go work right in the middle of the group?
M: I'd be this one.
R: You want that one?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: So, you'd feel, how would you feel?
M: Mmmm.
R: Can you tell me in three words?
M: Mmm.
R: Or you could do positions or facial expressions with your face? Or you could… I'm going to put you right in the middle (laughs then uses gravelly cat voice) right in the middle without your fluff. What's it feel like to be in there?
(Pretending to be a student in the group) Marie? What should we do? Marie, I don't know what Hal said, what are we meant to do?
M: Why don't you ask someone else?

R: But you're in our group, you need to help us.
M: (whispering) Maybe I also forgot.
R: But you always know what to do, you're clever.
M: (whispering) What makes you think that?
R: Because you made that…you did that fantastic watercolour painting.
M: Mmm hmm. But that was when I knew what I was supposed to do.
R: Pardon?
M: That was when I knew what I was supposed to do.
R: Oh. Don't you know what to do now?
M: Why don't you ask someone else?
R: But I want to ask you.
(Researcher ceases pretending to be a student) Moving the cat away from the group. Marie's going off – she running out the door? (Laughs) Hang on a minute, hang on a minute. Let's bring school cat in, with fluff. How does that feel? Same or different? Same or different?
M: Um different.
R: How does it feel different?
M: Mmmm.
R: How does it feel different?
M: Mmmm.
R: That's what you were before (indecipherable). But now Marie's cat's got her fluff on. What does it feel like to be in the group now. Better or worse?
M: A bit better.
R: Bit better, yeah? So, I wonder – last question and then we're finished – what the fluff is for? The fluff that Marie wears to school and leaves at the school gates, what is the fluff for?
M: Hmm. Hmm.
R: Is it...to…help you feel safe? Or not?
M: Mmm kind of.
R: Kind of? Is it to help make you feel warm? (Pause) So, before, you said that having the fluff on makes you feel warm. Is that true? (Pause) Yeah, but you haven't really got any fluff – so it's imaginary isn't it? So, what is the fluff, um, 'cos when you took it away, look, when you took it away that's what happened. So, what does it do? If it's got a job, right last question, if it's got a job, what's the fluff's job? Could you draw it? You're really good at drawing – the fluff's job. I mean, it wouldn't be a cat this time, but it would be something. Want a little one? What is the fluff's job in school?
M: Mmm. To make me feel not so shy around other people.
R: Yeah? So how…if…'cos obviously you're not a cat, (whispering) well you might be really in disguise, I suppose but let's imagine you're not (smiles). There isn't any fluff. You haven't any fluff on, so what do you use instead to make you feel less shy around other people?
M: Imaginary fluff.
R: So, you do imagine it's there?
M: Mmm hmm.
R: Really? Do you imagine it's there? Like when you're going through, or your feeling shy, or someone's asking you something, or… Do you imagine the fluff's on?
M: Mmm. Well kind of. It's um.
R: It's kind of… Do you imagine the fluff on your arm? On your legs? On your head? Or do you not just…do you imagine it like there? Or is it just 'I've got fluff, I've got fluff, I'm safe' like that kind of thought.
M: Um. Neither.
R: Neither. So, what's it like?
M: Um. I don't know how to explain.
R: Hmm. Can you draw it?
M: No.
R: No. Too complicated? Ah. So, you imagine the fluff's there. So, if…if um. I know, hey, you know yesterday when I came up to you – it's eh, oh I haven't got it with me – I said, when I approach you in class and ask you questions how do you feel, and I had like different emotions, I had happy, anxious, distressed – and you chose distressed. That was the closest emotion that you felt described how you feel. Do you remember distressed? (Pause) Do you remember? Or do you not remember what you did yesterday?

M: I don't remember what I did yesterday.
R: I think, well you chose distressed but maybe in the rush you didn't realise what you were saying, but you said distressed. So, does your fluff not help you in that situation? You know 'I don't want to talk to you, I don't want to talk to you' – does your fluff help you in that situation? Or not? Or is that too hard a question? (Pause) Too hard a question. Ah – when somebody talks to you, do you sometimes feel shy? (Pause) No? Never shy?
M: Not really.
R: Not really. But did you say before that the fluff helps you not feel so shy…
M: Mmm.
R: …in school. Yeah. So, you sometimes feel shy or not?
M: Not, not, um, not usually.
R: Not usually. Ok. Well, I think we've done some really interesting work. What this has done, Marie, it's helped me understand a bit about how you feel in school. Rather than just tell me with words, to draw things is sometimes easier? Or to choose pictures or…yeah? So that's why I brought these props in, 'cos I think, and the paper, and the cats. Sometimes it's easier isn't it? To explore how you feel about school through this kind of thing. Ok. I think, I think that was great. Thank you. And you are just the best at drawing. This, do you think that's quite cartoon-like?
M: Kind of.
R: Kind of. Or not? Just you know, the eyes…is this the light reflecting off the eye?
M: The pupils.
R: Or is that something else? The little white bit.
M: Oh, yeah yeah.
R: That the light reflecting off the pupil. It's so clever. It's brilliant. Ok, lovely, I'll keep those. So that's really, really interesting. So, what we'll do, we'll pack away, alright, and then we'll go down and I'll take you down to afterschool club. We'll put those ones here. That's really interesting. And we'll pause it.

END

Appendix 25: Emergent themes table (Marie)

Data Source	Evidence	Emergent Themes/Points of Interest
1) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19	Marie split up from her best friend Debbie in P-BL and asked to work in different group. She puts her head down, curls her lip, and appears to be crying. Hal (teacher) does not notice.	**Appears to find unplanned-for change in the classroom difficult** **Can become lost in the business of the classroom**
2) Shadow OBS notes, 4.2.19 Interview 3, 19.6.19	Hal questions Marie directly about the work he has set in P-BL. She does not respond and physically recoils. Marie freezes when I ask her about her imaginary cat fluff [unresponsive, heavy breathing, hunched over]	**Can sometimes 'freeze' if asked difficult questions directly**
3) Interview with Marie and Debbie, 26.3.19 Shadow OBS notes, 4.2.19	I use Yes/No strategy when Marie starts to freeze. I trial Yes/No strategy on Marie's mini whiteboard (Marie puts dot on left side of board for Yes and dot on right side for No. 'Do not know' answers on dividing line. Marie engages in conversation at this point.	**Responds well to closed questions in form of Yes/No strategy on whiteboard**
4) Shadow OBS notes, 4.2.19	In P-BL, Hal sets Marie a task to draw images in response to question 'What should a child have?' Marie sits for a long time drawing squiggly lines on whiteboard, looking worried. In English, Marie struggles to start writing her story.	**Needs scaffolding to help generate ideas**
5) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19	Hal asks Marie if she felt confused sometimes in P-BL. She answers 'Yes' on her board.	**In P-BL, sometimes confused about the work**
6) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19	In P-BL, Hal asks Marie if she knows what driving question of the project means. Hal explains this to her when he finds out she does not know. After explanation, Marie's facial muscles and shoulders relax, and she looked less pensive.	**Visibly relaxes when she begins to understand the work**
7) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19	In dining hall at lunchtime, Marie sits with Debbie and one of male friends. She is energetic and laughs across table after making a joke. Contributes evenly to conversations. Marie plays chase with friends in playground.	**Seems happy and bubbly with my friends**
8) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19	Marie is silent when invited to discuss thematic content of assembly with person next to her in assembly.	**Does not engage in discursive pair work**

	Marie sometimes does not respond to peers trying to engage her.	
9) Shadow OBS, 4.2.19 OBS notes, 27.3.19	In English, Marie completes work on her own. Denise reports Marie goes into back room off P-BL studio and gets on with her painting straight away.	**Can follow instructions and complete independent work**
10) School Individual Learning Plan	'Marie likes to brace herself against things to make her feel safe. She will often brace against a wall or a table/chair.'	**Positions herself against something solid in lessons to feel safe** [No evidence of this in my observation work]
11) Interview, 26.3.19	I ask Marie if she can ask a teacher or friend for help if stuck in class and she says 'No'.	**Unable to ask a friend or teacher for help when stuck with work**
12) Interview, 26.3.19	I ask Marie if she finds it tricky telling someone how she feels and she said 'Yes.'	**Difficult to tell someone how she feels**
13) Interview, 26.3.19	I ask Marie how she feels when in a big group and she says 'Scared'.	**It feels scary being in big groups**
14) Interview, 10.7.19	Marie draws picture of her worst day at school: eclipse happening, moon exploding, and lava coming out; cats exploding everywhere 'making sad whining sounds'; Great Pineapple Lord lived in a temple but came to get Marie. I asks 'If the pineapple was something in school, what would it be? Marie: 'Maths textbooks. Pineapple comes down to suck Marie's brains out…Because maths is so hard.' Exploding cats have eaten pineapple (made cats explode). Marie: 'Lord goes to all schools to get children.'	**Feels vulnerable at school when having a bad day. Loses her fluff**
15) Phone call with Marie's mother, 4.4.19	Marie's mother explains Marie can sometimes not reflect on negative experiences once they have happened. Because she is in a good place, she cannot answer.	**Difficult to reflect on some experiences retrospectively**
16) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	I observe Marie needing to tuck P-BL stools under tables at exactly same distance from one another. Teacher says not to, and Marie becomes very upset.	**A need to control environment and will become distressed, if not allowed**

Appendix 26: Interviews with Debbie's mother

In-person meeting with Jan, 24.1.19: Debbie's father and three older brothers are autistic.

Debbie likes to write and read (Jacqueline Wilson books). Struggled academically until year 1 – very good teacher in year 1. Competition with friends provided motivation to read. No good at PE. Just got hold of her ILP, but no targets in it. Jan doesn't know what the numbers correlate to in Debbie's school report. She reports Debbie was given 130 spellings to practise at home, but they weren't related to the project she was doing at time. She thinks it would be better if she learned them in context.

Sensory sensitivities: Jan bought Debbie a sensory bag for school, but she didn't use it. Had ear defenders, fiddle toys in etc. Jan thinks she didn't use it because she might have thought it would make her stand out or it involved change. Debbie is not okay with touch; needs loose clothing. She feels over-loaded by noise – covers her ears. She regulates by walking up and down and stimming. Talks to herself when walking up and down – OT said it signalled her becoming stressed.

Interests: cats, dinosaurs, animals. Has a cat called McKenzie. Likes watching videos about rescuing cats and rearing them. Friends: Marie and Josh. They pretend to be cats and dinosaurs in play. Best days at school: day it snowed, going to the aquarium and planetariums. Sensory experiences. Liked going to lunchtime choir club, but kept forgetting to go, so was banned.

Phone call, 28.3.19: Debbie likes playing with dolls and doll houses. She has little imaginary conversations between them. Jan reports Debbie feels cross in school when Scott stops her in lessons – disrupts her flow. She has an idea in her head and then suddenly teachers change it. For example, she and Marie decided to make props for the school production in P-BL, but then suddenly teachers said they had to go on stage as well. Annoying when teachers say one thing, but do another.

Jan remarks her relationship with teachers seems really important. English is her favourite subject. Debbie has been moved up a year in English, as she is ahead.

Appendix 27: Full transcription of Debbie's fourth session

Present: Debbie and Researcher **Location:** P-BL kitchen and outside in the playground. **Date/Time:** 12.6.19, lunchtime **Duration of** **Recording:** 38 minutes

Researcher: Oh, I'd love to see you draw a rose, I've no idea how to draw a rose.
Debbie: It looks like this.
R: Ah! Oh, I've got some paper, look – let me get you some paper. Now, where is it? Here, you can use that if you want.
D: It just looks like that.
R: Oh, like that! You've got a big circle, then smaller circles, then circles and circles. Oh, that's lovely.
D: So, it kind of looks like a rose.
R: Yeah (pause whilst Debbie is drawing). Oh, nice.
D: It's just like that, basically.
R: Uh-huh, yes. Ah right, yes. Start like that, and then you've got other bits, yes that's so cool. So, this, this, shall I try? Oh no! Do you think I'll be able to do it? So, you started with a big circle. Oh, I don't know what to do now. Is it just lines? Is it like a spiral?
D: Yes
R: And it kind of goes in, oh mine doesn't look as good as yours. What do you think of mine? (laughs) I get a big nod. Do you want to give it a tick and say well done? (laughs) You can be my teacher. (Background voices, paper sounds)
R: Yeah, I get a smiley face! Yeah! Hey, so what's that? A costume? Oh, have you got a tick - have you been making a costume?
D: Erm, it's a costume design.
R: Oh my gosh! Wow! And which character is that for in Much Ado About Nothing?
D: Ummm, Beatrice.
R: Oh Beatrice. Isn't she one of the cheeky ones? Doesn't she and um…
D: She's one of the ones that gets married.
R: Uh-huh. She's also quite witty and clever isn't she? Didn't she banter on with, oh what's the character's name, begins with another B…
D: Umm, Benedict.
R: Benedict, yeah, they're funny those two aren't they, a bit older characters. Oh, I see, so that's Beatrice. So, did you decide to do the costume, the veil and the party mask or were you told to do that?
D: Um, so this is kind of like a checklist.
R: Ah, but was it Denise's idea for you to design a costume, with a veil and a party mask, or did you?
D: Yeah, Denise says all to do..
R: So, you have to design all of those, yeah?
D: Yes, unless we are doing something else.
R: Ah, okay. You didn't want to do anything else?
D: The costume is kind of the veil.
R: Ah, they go together, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, where's the veil on the picture? Where's the veil? (Laughs) Oh there, oh yes, she looks lovely. It's really lovely. So, are you happy making….are you going to make the costume, or are you just designing?
D: Just designing I think.
R: Uh huh. Is Denise going to make any of the costumes?
D: Mmmmm, Denise says next week she'll bring in her, um, sewing machine so we can sew the costumes. Marie's been wanting to do sewing the costumes, so that's good.
R: Oh right, okay, I hope she can do that, does she like using the sewing machine does she?
D: Uh-huh.
R: Yeah? Oh, are you going to draw something else?

D: She likes just sewing basically.
R: Yeah? (Pause) Do you like sewing Debbie?
D: Um, kind of, yeah, I like hand sewing. Marie also likes hand sewing, but I don't really like the sewing machine.
R: Mm. I wonder what you're drawing now, let me see… what is it? Is it another rose or something else? (Paper sounds) Do you mind if I take a picture of that? Otherwise, I'll forget it – would that be okay sweetheart?
D: Uh-huh.
R: It's so nice, your costume designs, wow, and the mask design. (Pause and paper sounds) Oh right, that's your plan.
D: (Sniggers) This cat has such short legs!
R: Oh my gosh, you and Marie are so into cats, aren't you?
D: Yes.
R: What's this? That's awesome. Oh my gosh, that is such a good drawing, what's that of?
D: That's my backdrop.
R: Oh, I see. Right, gosh, such neat writing. Is this all the P-BL stuff or is that something else?
D: Erm, what's the P-BL stuff?
R: No, what I mean, sorry is this the project or is that something else?
D: Erm, that was the Science Week that we did.
R: That was Science Week, ahh there's your monologue. Ah this was your evaluation. Ah okay. Is that your evaluation of how you did with your monologue, right? Did you have to evaluate your monologue, did you say?
D: My (couple of indecipherable words)
R: Oh, that's such a cool cat!
(Pause)
D: My writing changes.
R: Yeah?
D: Yeah. It gets better and worse. (Humming) I don't really know how to draw a basket.
R: That looks like one. So, what kind of cat would that belong to?
D: A cat like my cat.
R: Yeah? What's your cat called again? McKenzie? Yeah? Is it black with the white tips? On its paws?
D: Erm, McKenzie, erm, he, he only has a black tail.
R: Oh okay. Any white bits or totally black everywhere?
D: Um, he has white, like, he's kind of like a black and white cat. He's just like a black and white cat, but with a white tip.
R: Yeah a white tip at the end. Aww, aw he's so cute. So probably a tail like that would go on a cat like McKenzie.
D: Uh-huh.
R: You know like you say here, I think I was strongest when I did my planning, because I finished my project on time and it felt good, so then I had less stress put on me.
D: Yes.
R: So, what stress do you think was put on you at times?
D: Time, time, time, just time.
R: Time, what, things that have to be done by a certain deadline?
D: Uh-huh.
R: Yeah? How did it make you feel when they were saying, "You've got to have it done by next Friday!" and things like that? How did that make you feel?
D: I didn't really think I was going to get it done.
R: You didn't really think of what, lovely?
D: I didn't really think I was going to get it done.
R: Ahh, ok. What else have you got? (reading comments) If you did your project again, how would you change to make it better? Do it how it was done this time, but different, because now I know…have different ideas, so it would be easier. Oh, I see, oh lovely. (paper sounds) Your self- assessment, you've got your self-assessment thing here, let's keep that. (Pause, paper sounds) Cool. So, listen, I have some specific questions, oh yes, I wanted to ask about this. Um. (Paper sounds)

D: Uh-huh.
R: So (paper noises). Ahh, that's a nice tree, that's nice. Does that cat like the tree do you think? (laughs)
D: (Giggles) Uh-huh. Yeah.
R: You like drawing, you and Marie, don't you?
D: Uh-huh.
R: (Background noises). So, Debbie, let's see what you draw next. What is that? That's nice, what's that?
D: It's a costume.
R: Oh yeah, like you did on your mask, yeah. Could I, you know what you did on your tail…
D: Uh-huh.
R: Could I, could we play a game?
D: Okay.
R: Could you pretend to be the tail, and I'm going to ask you some questions?
D: Okay.
R: Does that sound okay?
D: Yeah.
R: I don't know what voice you would have for the tail if the tail could speak (laughs, and Debbie laughs, too). What voice might it have?
D: I dunno.
R: Dunno? Just a normal voice, or a different voice? Would it be a normal voice or Debbie's voice, do you think?
D: I'm just going to have my normal voice I guess.
R: Your normal voice. Well, first question then, I'm going to ask, because it's going to be a game about the tail, I'm going to say to the tail, *tail* - unless it's got a name, has it? Has it got a name?
D: No
R: Tail, why has Debbie put you on?
D: For fun.
R: For fun, yeah?
D: Mmmm.
R: Erm, how long has Debbie been wearing you, tail?
D: Erm, for, well there was yesterday and the day before yesterday, so counting today it's three days.
R: Ahh, okay, that's good. And tail, where did Debbie get you from?
D: Erm, I don't know, I don't know.
R: You don't know. Where she got you from?
D: It was just in a box, in a box in her brother's room.
R: Oh, ahh.
D: With this, like, other cat thing.
R: And tail, do you know why Debbie likes you?
D: Mmm. (Pause) I don't know - because she wants to be part cat, or something. I dunno.
R: Oh, wants to be part cat hey? Have you seen *The Cat Returns*? (Pause) Have you seen the movie, *The Cat Returns*, you know the Studio Ghibli one?
D: Mmm, yeah I think so.
R: Yeah, because that's Haru, isn't it Haru, the main character?
D: I don't know. But doesn't she turn into a cat?
R: She's, well she nearly does, she has the nose, and the head, and the tail.
D: And the paws.
R: And the whiskers and stuff doesn't she, and the paws, yeah.
(Pause)
R: Are you okay? What did you see?
D: Oh, just an empty playground.
R: Oh. So, I wondered if I could ask some more questions of the tail? It might get a bit noisy in here in a minute, we'll see how we get on. How do you think Debbie would feel, tail, if someone pulled you off her? How would Debbie feel if someone pulled you off her?
D: Well, I don't belong to anyone else, so I would feel quite annoyed and unhappy, because if people keep on touching me, it makes me very annoyed.
R: Yeah?

D: Because they, I don't belong to them, and..
R: What, you just belong to Debbie?
D: Well, yeah.
R: And, has anyone touched your, touched your tail?
D: Yes!
R: Mmm, when did that happen?
D: Well, sometimes I find that, sometimes people want to touch my tail for no…, and want to touch *me* for no reason (giggles), my tail..
R: (laughs)
D: I am the tail..
R: (Mock gruff voice that Debbie giggles along with) You are the tail! Um, so how did that make you feel tail, when somebody touched you that shouldn't have touched you?
D: Angry.
R: Angry. Did Debbie say anything to the people, tail?
D: (pause) I don't think so.
R: No? You didn't hear her say anything, tell them off or anything?
D: No.
R: No. Okay, and…do you know why Debbie wears you?
D: For fun.
R: For fun, just for fun. Do you think she feels okay….oh does she wear you at home? Does she wear you at home, tail? Or just at school?
D: Sometimes, not that much.
R: Ahhh. So, do you wear…does she wear you all the time at school?
D: Umm, yeah.
R: Yeah?
D: But sometimes, I hide.
R: Tail hides? What does tail hide?
D: Well, she gets hidden.
R: Oh, sometimes tail gets hidden by Debbie?
D: Yeah, in the back of the chair.
R: Ahh, and when does she hide you?
D: In assemblies and things.
R: In assemblies, and do you know why she hides you in assemblies?
D: I don't like people touching me.
R: Ahh, I see, yeah, I can understand that. Ah, oh it's come off! So how do you tie it, how does Debbie tie you around her? Oh, I see, so it's stretchy, oh, stretchy.
D: Yeah.
R: Aww. Do you sleep, does Debbie sleep with you tail, or does she put you away?
D: Puts me away, downstairs.
R: On the stairs?
D: Downstairs.
R: Downstairs, oh I see. Oh, and, um, tail…
D: (Giggles)
R: (Giggles) How do you think Debbie is feeling about next term?
D: Excited.
R: Excited, is that how she's feeling?
D: Yep, erm, year 6's are going to go into Cargo, and she's going to be in year 6 next year.
R: Oh, they're going into Cargo? A different building?
D: Yeah.
R: Do you think Debbie's excited about that, or has a different feeling about that?
D: Excited
R: Excited. Does, has Debbie been into the cargo building before, tail?
D: Yeah, when she was in reception.
R: Oh, I see, and did she like it in cargo?
D: Yeah.

D: Yeah? How will it feel to change, tail? How do you think Debbie will feel about the change of being from this building to cargo next term?
R: Exciting.
D: Excited.
R: Excited! Okay, cool.
D: (Inaudible word)…are going to change next term too.
R: Ahhh.
D: It's going to change because it's going to have more things in it.
R: Ah, okay, like what?
D: But year 6 will still be able to have break and lunch in it, um, it's going to change because it's going to have playing things, and like playthings (giggles).
R: (Laughs) What like, balls, or like scooters? What do you mean by playing things? Skippy ropes?
D: Things that, um, they like stick to the ground, kind of like monkey bars, but not monkey bars.
R: Oh, I know what you mean, like metal, like structures to climb on and things like that? Climbing frames?
D: Yeah, things like that, they're made of wood, but not climbing frames…because those things are dangerous I think, because (inaudible few words)
R: Ah, and are going to start playing in the playground round here, even though you're in cargo? Or will there be a playground over there?
D: Playground there.
R: Oh, so you'll have to walk down, for break-time you'll have to walk down there will you?
D: Yep
R: Really, because it will take five minutes to walk down, won't it?
D: And lunch. No, it doesn't take five minutes, it's just across the road.
R: Oh, okay.
D: Like, less than a minute.
R: Oh okay, so that should be good to get down. So, shall I see if I have any more questions for tail? If I, if I wanted to um, if you didn't know about tail, what would you ask…him or her? Is it him or her? Or it?
D: It.
R: It. What would you ask it, if you didn't know about it? If you wanted to know something about tail, what would you ask it, Debbie?
D: Erm, do you like people touching you?
R: Do you like people touching you, tail?
D: Yeah.
R: Do you like people touching you, tail?
D: No, not if I don't know them.
R: Ah.
D: And if a stranger touches, for no reason.
R: Yeah, and what do you want to do when someone touches you for no reason?
D: I want to say, "Stop! Not yours!"
R: Uh-huh. Anyone in the playground?
(Papers rustle, possibly some inaudible speech for a few seconds)
R: Yeah? Well, we could um, I just had a couple more questions, is that okay? Just a couple more questions?
Or we could go outside and chat?
D: Can we move?
R: Yes of course, let's do it. Of course we can. Show me the big, giant chair. Oh, my goodness! It's huge, isn't it! Gosh you'd get about three people in there, or four children, couldn't you? So, is it for storytelling?
D: Yes it's for like…(lots of sounds of voices)
R: Oh, a making space, or how lovely, it's got a few things there look. So where would you like to sit? Do you want to go outside for a bit? Out here? Luckily it's not raining, hey? (Outside sounds)
D: What?
R: Luckily, it's not raining. Where shall we sit then? You choose?
D: Oh, hello little wag tail!
R: Oh, it is a wag tail, yeah!
D: (Inaudible word) It wags its tail outside.

R: I know, I've seen those. Where would you like to sit? You choose.
D: Um.
R: Only got a few more things to do, won't be long. Shall we sit there? Oh, that's nice, right by the flowers isn't it. It's much nicer, what a great idea to come out here.
D: Oh.
R: Uh-ho, oh don't worry about that, I'll take it back. So, um, could you tell me, Debbie, about your project so far? Did you read, you know the Much Ado About Nothing, the play; did you read it as a class?
D: Err, no, but there was like a video on it.
R: Ahh, so you watched the film?
D: Because there was like…no….there was just like a short video on it.
R: Oh, okay.
D: And it was when we were in the acting group and we got a taster of all these things, yeah.
R: Oh, so you were in the acting group, were you?
D: I wasn't in the acting group, I mean, we were like, doing a day being in the acting group. It was like to see what one we wanted to do.
R: Ah, and that's when you chose to do designing and making.
D: Yeah.
R: Yes.
D: But I missed the day for designing and making.
R: Ah
D: Because I was doing something.
R: Right, okay.
(Drilling-type noise)
D: Oh, that's an *awful* sound!
R: It is an awful sound. I think they're cutting something with an electric cutter or something. We'll see how we get on. Um, what do you think children learn from putting on a play?
D: Um….how to act.
R: How to act, yes. Anything else?
D: How to design, how to make, how to do lighting and sound effects.
R: Okay.
D: If you're in the lighting and sound effects group.
R: Yeah? Anything else?
D: No…(hums for a few seconds)
R: It's going to get a bit noisier now, isn't it? As the kids come out now, isn't it? Do you think? I don't know if you'll be able to hear.
D: Nee, nee, nee, nee (humming)
R: You'll have to pick your voice up a bit! So, whose idea was it to make masks, was it Denise's or yours?
D: Denise said to make masks.
R: Yes.
D: You make masks, like you make masks in the fridge, and um, but we all had to research on the masks to come up with our own idea for our masks.
R: I see, and what happens if you didn't want to make a mask?
D: (humming) I don't know, you do something else.
R: Do something else. Okay, was there an option to do that. Can you say to Denise, "I don't want to do that, I want to make something else."
D: Yeah, like, can I make a leaf or something.
R: Okay, that's good.
D: I think. I don't know though.
R: Yeah, and today, when you were asking Denise for some help, because the feather you couldn't find in the feather box, and then you were waiting, and you were fiddling with the crepe paper, the yellow crepe paper. Do you remember, and you were standing by Denise, and she was talking to another child. How did you feel then?
D: I felt frustrated, because I didn't know how to do the thing, and then, and I didn't really want to do the thing, because it didn't look like it fitted in, so I didn't really like it.
R: Is that because you wanted the feather?

D: Yeah, because that was in my design, a feather. Feathers and roses in my design.
R: Yeah. So, what do you do when you feel frustrated?
D: Where did my book go?
R: Here.
D: Oh! Oh, so what do I do when I feel…
R: What do you do when you feel frustrated?
D: I don't know, I just feel frustrated.
R: Uh-huh. Do you get hotter, or do you like feel tense in your body, do you get tense in your body, do you turn away, or do you not show anything – do you just keep it all inside?
D: I just keep it all inside I think. I don't know.
R: Okay, and do you remember when Denise whistled to the class, she went (researcher does a short whistle), and it made you jump, like I made you jump there. How did you feel then, in class? Because you literally went – ooh! How did you feel, do you remember?
D: Um, yeah,
R: How did you feel?
D: I'm more sensitive to sound than other people.
R: Uh-huh.
D: Yeah.
R: Do you know what, I'm really sensitive to sounds, as well, no really, but like I have to leave rooms sometimes, and light, I get really sensitive to it as well. It's a horrible feeling. You know that sound up there (children running and shouting), it would feel painful, really painful. So…
D: It was a shock.
R: It was the shock, a shock. And do you think Denise knows you're sensitive to sound? You shook your head there, what does that mean?
D: No
R: No, okay, would you like her to know that? Do you think it's important for a teacher to know that you're sensitive to sound, or not really important?
D: I don't really know.
R: Don't know, I was just looking at this, what do you think all that means?
D: I think it might be important for other people, I don't know.
R: No. What does all this mean then?
D: Um, it's um…
R: The assessment form, yeah?
D: It does like, one: I have written the date and learning objective and neatly underlined with a ruler. Two: I have researched and recorded a description, and information about my project in my journal, inclusive of detailed drawings and annotations, yep?
R: Yep.
D: Three: I have explained how and why I'm going to make it, and what materials and resources I am going to use.
R: Yep?
D: Yeah.
R: Yep.
D: And then it's like, which one are you. These are like, you're like not very good, but you…
R: Is it here? With guidance..
D: Yes, it is like with guidance I can show clearly what I'm doing, and d, my plan shows what I'm making and why I'm making and solving a problem and why I intend to make why resources. X is like the best one there.
R: What does that mean, how I intend on making it with links to resources.
D: It's basically saying like what resources I'll use.
R: Okay, so where do you think you're going to put yourself then? Is it too loud, do you what to go in?
D: No, um..
R: Where do you think you're going to put yourself?
D: Well, you can put yourself kind of in the middle of all of these.
R: You think you'll still need a lot of guidance, do you?
D: So that's like..

R: Getting close to the day…yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. What do you think Denise will put?
D: I dunno.
R: Don't know. So why do you still think you need some guidance? Oh yes, you're filling in the 'why' bit now.
D: Because…(playground noises)..
R: Because sometimes I become confused. What do you become confused about, Debbie?
D: What I'm supposed to be doing.
R: Oh, okay, why do you think that is?
D: I don't know, I just…
R: Is it the way the teacher explains it, or do you think that um, something's happening to you that is making it confusing, or…?
D: I don't know.
R: You're not sure, okay. Hey, we're nearly finished. I just had one thing, that I thought might be quite interesting to do, but it's up to you. You know when you did your lion monologue?
D: Yes
R: And your lion…the story was of course that it was in the Savannah, it was free and happy, in its natural environment, do you remember? And of course, it was captured, and put in captivity, like a zoo or wherever it was, and then the monologue was about how it felt about not being in the Savannah anymore and being glared at by these people, laughed at, being on show, being different and being in an artificial environment – things like that?
D: Uh-huh
R: I thought it might be quite cool to imagine…if we did a short monologue about…you? So instead of a lion at home, it's kind of like a lion in the Savannah, and then coming to school is like going to a different environment, coming to a different environment? And I wondered if we could brainstorm a few ideas around that, and that would be the last thing to do.
D: Yes, sometimes I want the day to be over, and sometimes when it's quite a good day I like it.
R: Yeah? Okay
D: Sometimes it's just normal, normal.
R: Yeah? So, look, if we did Debbie at home, imagine the lion in the Savannah.
D: Uh-huh
R: And you're at home, what would you put around that, like the things that you feel or think when you're at home. What does that say? Calm. What's it like to be at home? (Pause) What can you do when you're at home, that you can't do at school? (Longer pause)
D: I think…(Debbie writing)
R: Do whatever I want (laughs) sometimes…okay, yeah?
D: Um..
R: What's it like being at home? What does it *feel* like?
D: Um..
R: Is it quiet, loud? Um, do you feel safe, unsafe? (Pause whilst Debbie draws/writes) Does that say summer? Cold in the summer, what does that say? Warm in the winter? Ahh, okay. Cat, yep, what things are important to you at home, apart from the cat, what other things are important to you at home? I don't know if there are any friends that are important to you, your parents, brothers and sisters or toys? Urr, might have special objects that you like?
D: There, done. (paper rustling)
R: Done. Right, last thing then. Now, Debbie at school. I wonder how this is the same, or different? (Debbie humming).
R: Now, what does it feel like at school, what things to you like? What, yeah…same thing.
(pause whilst Debbie draws/writes)
R: What does that say? Sometimes I…
D: Sometimes I …
R: Sometimes I like? Yeah, sometimes I like it, have PE, you like PE? Oh, *hate* PE, why?
D: Sometimes.
R: Sometimes. Why, I wonder.
(Pause and writing sounds)
R: You like invasion games, or don't like invasion games?

D: Hate PE from invasion games.
R: Oh, what kind of invasion games? I know the ones you mean.
D: Football! Urgh! I hate football!
R: Yeah? Why is that?
D: I just don't like it.
R: Is it the ball, kicking the ball that you don't like, kicking the ball that you don't like, or kicking the ball that you don't like?
D: Just like kicking the ball and things, I just don't like it, and sometimes the ball goes in people's faces, like *a lot* of the time actually, it went in people's faces – and it *hurts*!
R: Yeah, it can hurt.
D: And I don't really like basketball because I don't really like (inaudible word) much.
R: Uh-huh, okay, good – and you've got some lovely words up here, for how it is to be at home. What words might you put down here, for being at school? What does that say? Crazy? Cosy or crazy? Crazy, okay.
D: Um..(pause)
R: Noisy…bullies..
D: Um..(writing sounds)
R: Cold in the winter (Laughs) that's the opposite to there, isn't it? Cold in the summer. Cold in the winter. Cold in the summer. Gosh.
D: It's just cold!
R: Watch your knees, are you alright? Do you want to sit down there?
D: With the fan.
R: Ah.
D: But it's sometimes warm.
D: I don't know – it's cold and warm.
R: Uh-huh.
D: Some parts are cold, and some parts are warm.
R: Uh-huh.
D: It depends where you are.
R: Mmmm…it's quite a big open space isn't it.
D: Uh-huh.
R: And um, is there anything good? Anything good here Debbie, at school?
D: Yeah.
R: Yeah, what would you put?
D: How would you spell friends?
R: F-r-i-e-n-d-s. Let me see, let me see that I can read it.
D: It kind of looks like fruits.
R: (laughs) Do you want me to write it?
D: I'm on the sideways things. I'm sideways on the.. (inaudible word)
R: Ah, and you go like that. Anything else that's good?
D: Um…(pause and writing sounds))
R: So, you've got snakes and…what's that?
D: Singing assemblies.
R: Singing assemblies.
D: So, you can write there.
R: Reading.
D: You can write there is you want to.
R: No, I got it, because I'm see it on here you see it. What does that say? Something book?
D: Class….
R: Class book. What, when Hugh reads to the class? Oh sorry, Craig.
D: Craig.
R: Oh, I see, when Craig reads to the class. I see. Okay, and my last question, then we'll go in. Which is the most important thing there, and which is the most important thing there for you? Could you underline it? Maybe in green, in green, so it really stands out for me. What's the most important thing there, or that, what's the most important thing there? (Contemplative sounds from Debbie) Reading and class book?

D: Friends.
R: And friends. You are a star!
D: And singing assemblies.
R: Singing assemblies? You want that underlined? Where was that?
D: Yep
R: Good, okay, that is so interesting! That's taught me a lot about how you feel about school, thank you! We can go in now (laughs). Your mum will be waiting, actually, upstairs, so we'll go and find her, okay? I'll just pause that.

END

Appendix 28: Emergent themes table (Debbie)

Data Source	Evidence	Emergent Themes/Points of Interest
1) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19	Hal tells Debbie to split her lion monologue into three sections.	**Told by teacher how to structure lion monologue in P-BL**
2) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19	Debbie cannot connect with animal characters representing her and other people in school during our experimentation in play. She remarks, '*That is not Scott*', '*That's a penguin, not Hal*'. She also is not able to use everyday objects to symbolically represent classroom furniture.	**Symbolism of small world (role) play difficult to relate to…responds literally**
3) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19	Debbie becomes inaudible and uncomfortable when I ask her about acting and why it made her feel scared.	**Feels uncomfortable talking about her feelings**
4) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19 Interview with Debbie and Marie, 26.3.19	Debbie suddenly stands up and begins to wander around tables in Phase One area when our play session becomes too much. Debbie begins to pace up and down in room and looks outside window into playground when she feels the room is too claustrophobic. Her friend, Marie, explains.	**Paces up and down when she feels stressed**
5) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19	Debbie describes her best day at school was when she could choose what to do at end of previous term.	**Really enjoys choosing what to do in school**
6) Interview with Debbie and mother, 14.3.19	In play, Debbie finds it difficult to represent her classroom symbolically. She struggles to understand what I mean when I ask her how her home cat had changed after being at school. She gets stuck on the literal changes – no focus on emotional or symbolic.	**Seems to find translating reality into symbolic forms difficult**
7) OBS notes, 25.1.19	Debbie tells me Marie was upset in P-BL because she was unexpectedly missing from audience list on board and felt confused.	**In tune with best friend and knows why she has an emotional meltdown**
8) Interview with Debbie and Marie, 26.3.19	Debbie remarks when she is writing in English, her ideas just 'flow'.	**Can easily generate ideas when writing in English**
9) Interview with Debbie, 17.7.19	Debbie comments Colin (her Base Camp Leader) does not know she hates PE.	**Teacher does not know that Debbie 'hates' PE**
10) Phone call with D's mother, 28.3.19	Debbie's mother reports that P-BL teachers agreed with Debbie and Marie they could make props for their product design in P-BL, but then suddenly changed it to including acting.	**Finds it difficult when teachers agree to do one thing with her, but then suddenly change it**

11) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	Debbie sits at a table with four boys and one girl in maths. She sits next to a boy.	**Seems comfortable working with both sexes and in small groups**
12) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	Boy sitting next to Debbie in maths points out Debbie has made a mistake with her sum. She rubs her old answer out and he tells her what to write.	**Accepts it when a male peer tells her she made a mistake in maths**
13) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	Debbie hovers behind teacher. She does not tap her or call out to grab her attention. Debbie does not know what to do in P-BL. She cannot apply SNOT strategy (Self, Next person, Other person and Teacher).	**Finds it difficult to get help when stuck in lessons**
14) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19 OBS notes, 25.1.19	Debbie covers her ears in lesson when noise level is very high; taps floor with foot; wears a frown on her face; rests her head on table; tightens and squirms facial muscles. Me: 'How is the noise level?' Debbie: 'I find it noisy sometimes but just put up with it.'	**Sometimes, I am visibly distressed by noise levels in lessons, but I put up with it**
15) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	Debbie's maths teacher tells me Debbie lacks confidence in maths and, if she makes a mistake, it confuses her.	**Teacher thinks Debbie lack confidence in maths**
16) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	Debbie states to me in P-BL lesson, 'I like this school, but sometimes I feel stressed…When something is hard, and I don't understand…Sometimes I just get really sad.'	**Debbie feels sad when she does not understand what to do in school**
17) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19	A boy ran out of English studio shouting 'I hate this school!' I questioned Debbie about how she felt. Debbie: 'It was really scary…I don't like being shocked.' 'I feel small…My insides feel all jumbled up.' 'I'm supposed to be reading now, but I don't feel like it after that. I don't feel nice.'	**Deeply affected when a pupil emotionally erupts in class - interferes with her work**
18) Shadow OBS notes, 8.2.19 Observation notes,18.3.19	Debbie puts her hand up in maths in response to teacher's question. Puts her hand up in P-BL in response to Hal's question.	**Comfortable putting her hand up in lessons and answering teachers' questions**
19) Play session with Debbie and her mother, 21.5.19	When I ask Debbie to describe her 'scared' feeling as a colour, animal, element, and sound, she replies as adjacent.	**She feels scared (when having to discuss difficult feelings) as: 'red', 'a shark', 'fire' and 'heavy footsteps.'**
20) Shadow OBS, 8.2.19	Debbie: 'I really don't know what I'm doing…Singing really calmed me down you know.'	**Singing makes Debbie feel calmer**
21) OBS notes, 18.3.19	Debbie tells boys opposite in P-BL they are being immature and annoying, as they are 'laughing at fart sounds and [you] shouldn't be doing that at year six!'	**Able to tell two male peers they are making it difficult for her to concentrate on her work**