

## DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

**Your Voice, Your Choice: Exploring an approach to elicit how children with speech, language, and communication needs feel about their school learning and support experiences**

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# **Your Voice, Your Choice: Exploring an approach to elicit how children with speech, language, and communication needs feel about their school learning and support experiences**

**By**

**Ashley Daniel Bloom**

**Ph.D. Psychology**

**July 2018**



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**July 2018**



***A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the subject of Psychology***

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## **Certificate of Ethical Approval**

Student:

AShley Bloom

Project Title:

An exploration of how the views of children with additional needs can be elicited and evaluated regarding the interventions that they experience.

This is to certify that the above named student has completed the Coventry University Ethical Approval process and their project has been confirmed and approved as High Risk

Date of approval:

24 February 2015

Project Reference Number:

P31595

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Finally, I would like to thank the children, services, and everybody else who participated within this project. This project was only made possible through your commitment and goodwill towards helping those who need it the most.

## **Abstract**

A children's outreach service requested a method to elicit the views of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) about their school learning and support experiences. Educational services are coming under increasing pressure to respect children's rights by enabling them to participate in decisions that affect them. In addition, it has become necessary for services to find ways to account for costs and demonstrate impact in a period of austerity. However, a review of the literature identified a lack of empirically-based methods with which to elicit voice from this population that both respect children's rights and are practical for services and users.

In order to meet the outreach requirement and in consideration of the literature, the study created and set out to answer the following two research questions:

*How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with speech, language and communication needs at school?*

*Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adult's perception of those experiences?*

Underpinned by a critical realist framework, the Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit (YVYC) was created to explore relational and contextual interpretations of children's affective lived experiences in school. Cases compared seven children's views with adults who were responsible for implementing their learning and support structures. Data were subjected to a combination of thematic and cross-case inductive and deductive analyses. An iterative action research process enabled design modifications to the YVYC tool kit.

Findings revealed that the YVYC tool kit offered unique insights into the children's affected experiences in all cases. The tool supported children to explore how they felt about



their school learning and support experiences through overcoming some of the barriers of communication and enabling them to reflect upon their experiences. Primarily, this was through scaffolding competence, reducing anxiety, and affording children with a voice without forcing them to vocalise. The tool was also found to support safeguarding and provide an account of well-being; information that is traditionally hard to obtain from this population, but vital to promoting children's rights and addressing social-political concerns regarding mental health in schools. Uniquely, the tool kit revealed how misconceptions can silently work to limit the capacity of education services to meet the needs of the children while alternative explanations offer stakeholders a more harmonious way forward.

Overall, this project provides a comprehensive theoretical and practical foundation for the workings of a holistic elicitation tool kit method. It demonstrated that it provides an opportunity for children with SLCN to express their views in matters that affect them, when otherwise they may not have the opportunity.

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## **Table of Abbreviations**

ASC – Autism spectrum condition

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CU - Coventry University

DfES – Department for Education and Skills

EHCP – Education, Health and Care plan

HLTA – Higher level teaching assistant

OFSTED – The office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills

PECs – Picture Exchange Communication System

SEMH – Social, Emotional, and Mental Health

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SENco – Special Education Needs Co-ordinator

SLCN – Speech, Language, and Communication Needs

SLT – Speech and Language Therapy

TAC – Team around the Child

ToM – Theory of Mind

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRPD - The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - The United Nations Children’s Fund

## **Appendices on USB stick**

Appendix 1A: Case One – Researcher Observations of Billy

Appendix 1B: Case One – YVYC tool interview with Billy

Appendix 2A: Case Two – Researcher Observations of Aaron

Appendix 2B: Case Two – YVYC tool interview with Aaron

Appendix 3A: Case Three – Researcher Observations of Tina

Appendix 3B: Case Three – YVYC tool for Tina

Appendix 3C: Case Three – YVYC tool interview with Tina

Appendix 4A: Case Four – Researcher Observations of Lionel

Appendix 4B: Case Four – YVYC tool interview with Lionel

Appendix 5A: Case Five – Researcher Observations of Nathan

Appendix 5B: Case Five – YVYC tool interview with Nathan

Appendix 6A: Case Six and Seven – Researcher Observations of Nina and Helen

Appendix 6B: Case Six and Seven – YVYC tool interviews with Nina and Helen

Appendix 6C: Case Six and Seven – Parent interview with Nina and Helen's mother

# **1 Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1.1 Introduction to the chapter**

This chapter provides an overview of how the project was initiated and developed. An explanation for why the project was formed is presented within a context of the changing political and social landscapes. A brief explanation of why the researcher became involved in the project is provided next, followed by a definition of how speech and language difficulties are understood within this project. Finally, a rationale provides an explanation as to why the research is so important.

## **1.2 History of the project**

Coventry University (CU) was asked by a local children's outreach service to develop a technique for eliciting the views of children with additional communication needs about their school support experiences.

There are six outreach service organisations spread across a local region made up of 14 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) teachers and support assistants.

Together they support students aged 4-18 years where schools feel they need additional help to meet the needs of children. They identify themselves as working teachers, who offer support that is grounded in successful classroom practice. The majority of their service is paid for by the local authority and free at point of contact.

Requests can be made when students:

- Receive SEN support
- Have or are being assessed for an Educational, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

- Have emotional or mental health needs that impede their curricular access
- Are working academically at a level two or more years below that expected
- Have physical needs or issues with access.

In response to such requests, the outreach services report that they offer a number of services such as:

- Observations of classroom practice
- Shared action planning and strategy implementation
- Support for inclusion, access and transition
- Support with differentiation and planning
- Preparation of resources
- Modelling of good practice
- Team Around Child (TAC) and EHCP support
- Support for parents
- Disability awareness input
- Access to pathways for Dyslexia, Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs (SEMH), and autism spectrum conditions (ASC).
- Support with implementing advice given by other agencies, such as Educational Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Speech and Language Therapists, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHs).

Prior to initiating the project, meetings were held with three of the lead outreach practitioners to identify their concerns and understand their requirements from CU. They revealed that the service was coming under increasing pressure from the local authority to provide evidence about the service's impact and effectiveness. They were facing budget

cuts which would have resulted in them having to reduce their staff numbers and therefore the amount of support that they could offer to local schools. Feedback about the service had mainly come from service users (teachers/SENCOs), where questionnaires were sent out to explore outcome efficiency. However, some members of the outreach service had become concerned that they were not accounting for the voice of the child.

Several outreach practitioners identified that they had tried to elicit the voice of the children (see Chapter 3) but that they found it fraught with complex and multi-faceted challenges. They explained that many of the children who received their support had additional communication needs, and often other disabilities<sup>1</sup> which meant it was difficult for them to articulate how they felt verbally. In addition, much of outreach support is based around advising adults on how to more appropriately support children. As such, they rarely work directly with the child which means that the child seldom knows that they are the recipient of outreach support. Asking how they feel about this elusive support and its direct impact upon them is therefore not possible.

### *1.2.1 Outreach Requirements*

Coventry University was asked to research a method to address this need. They informed the researcher that they requested a method with the following requirements:

- Adaptable for a range of ages 4-18 years
- Suitable for children with a range of SEND, particularly communication difficulties

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the terms ‘additional needs,’ ‘disabilities’, and ‘difficulties’ are used interchangeably within this thesis.

- Seeks children's views of their experiences of school across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains.
- Is fun and non-threatening
- Evaluates how children feel about their interventions and support strategies
- Evaluates whether a child's enjoyment of school has increased as a result of support
- Helps practitioners to understand what children think help them to learn
- Time sensitive (takes less than 45 minutes to administer)

## **1.3 National and Local Context**

### *1.3.1 Children's voice*

The idea of providing children with a voice represents a modern shift in the way children are perceived socially, culturally and politically (Alderson, 2016; Cockburn, 2013; Kehily, 2009). There is an increasing expectation that children should participate in decisions that affect them (Franklin and Sloper, 2009). Partly this has been driven by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which proposed a number of Articles upholding the rights of children to be included. Other organisations have also put increasing pressure on government bodies to ensure that service users are included in the planning and delivery of services. For example, UNICEF (2012) fight for every child's right to be heard through political and social lobbying. And, as a result, changes to legislation and policy documentation, especially within health, social and educational sectors, have emerged. The SEND code of practice (2014) and the Children and Families Act (2014) are prime examples of this; documents which have been changed to obligate services to consult children and their parents in decision making processes. However, as



Chapter Two demonstrates, the concept and progress for the participation of children, especially those with disabilities, has been slow and is far more complex than might first appear.

### *1.3.2 Accountability and Impact*

In a time when government spending is restrained, it has become increasingly necessary for services to defend and demonstrate their worth (Ashton and Roberts, 2006). In turn, this has put pressure on service providers to develop measures with which to exemplify their value. Traditional quantitative measures, such as the questionnaire method that the outreach practitioners have used, work towards generating data that justifies their costs. They are relatively quick to obtain results without significant capital investment. However, they do not take into account how children feel about the realities of the strategies implemented on their behalf; nor does it provide them with the opportunity to determine their own support. It would be helpful to understand how and why certain strategies that outreach suggest work from the child's perspective, while others do not because it would enable limited resources to be targeted more precisely and acknowledge the importance of children's rights. This demands a deeper and more meaningful elicitation method which explores the contextual conditions pertinent to the child. Ultimately, this should lead to a deeper and fairer understanding than simply asking whether or not outcomes were achieved from an adult perspective to satisfy an external audit (Weeks, Hill, and Owen, 2016).

## **1.4 Researcher's involvement**

This research project was originally created in order to explore the issues and determine the means to resolve the problem identified above on behalf of the outreach services. Starting as an MSc by research, it grew into a PhD due to the scale and depth of data required to properly answer the research questions. After conducting the literature review (Chapter 2), it quickly became evident that this was a problem that many services were faced with. Conversations with social services, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational psychologists, clinical psychologists and other professionals who provide services to support children revealed that they are all faced with the same pressures to demonstrate children's voice, and evidence the impact and value of their service but they lacked the methods and the time to fully commit. And, this mirrors findings that other authors have concluded (Franklin, 2013). Indeed, the researcher's attendance at international conferences revealed that this is part of a broader challenge of respecting children's rights facing all practitioners working with children and not just an issue within the UK.

The researcher worked as a SEN teaching assistant, a specialist SEN teacher, and psychological researcher within the field of education for over 10 years before beginning this project. Having studied and been trained in the fields of psychology, inclusion and education, the researcher was aware of the practical challenges of including children with disabilities in decision making. Practicality is a crucial component to this project that all outreach practitioners highlighted during preliminary meetings and underpins the focus on finding a way to elicit the voice of children that is both accurate and useful. The researcher was keen to explore a method that was beneficial to both services and service users that surpassed the writing of this thesis.

## 1.5 Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN)

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (2016) describe speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) as an umbrella term when someone has difficulties across one or more aspects of communication including:

- Problems with producing speech sounds accurately
- Stammering
- Voice problems, such as hoarseness and loss of voice
- Problems understanding language
- Problems using language
- Problems interacting with others

The Communication Trust (2017) provide a valuable explanation:

*“Children and young people with SLCN have difficulty in communication with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.”*

Difficulties can impact on a child’s progression as a result of an interaction between within child and contextual factors (Lindsay and Wedell, 1982). This definition includes the ‘needs’ of both the individual and what society needs to do to support their inclusion. It represents a social model of disability (see Chapter Two for an explanation) and serves to reinforce the view that whether or not a child’s needs become a barrier to achievement depends upon how schools organise their environments to address those needs.

Specifically, this places responsibility on schools to consider and adapt their environments because they are responsible for affecting the child’s learning, communication and socialisation (The Communication Trust, 2017; Plotnikoff and Woolfson, 2011). It is this definition of SLCN that the project adopts.

## **1.6 Research rationale**

The rationale for this project emerged from the need to provide a method for a local outreach service to elicit how children feel about their school and support experiences. Outreach's initial request illuminated a larger problem where services are obligated to include the voice of the child but are struggling to do so for reasons identified in Chapter Two (Franklin, 2013). Government led reports indicate that approximately 10% of all children in the UK (1.2 million) have long term persistent SLCN (DfE, 2017; Law et al., 2012). And, up to 22% of all pupils identified with Special Educational Needs (SEN) support or with a statement of SEN or an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan identified as having a SLCN as their primary needs in state-funded schools.

Communication is fundamental to children's development, children need to both understand and be understood (The Communication Trust, 2017). This project is of the utmost importance as there are considerable numbers of children with SLCN but a lack of existing methods with which to elicit voice from them (see Chapter 3). The aim is therefore to create a method that will accurately represent the voice of the child about their school and support experiences; that has the potential to support services to meet their legal requirements to include children in matters that affect them; and to promote accountability and demonstrate impact in a time of austerity.

### *1.6.1 Project structure*

The next chapter provides an overview of the literature that the Outreach service's elicitation request emerged upon, defining the concept of children's voice. Chapter 3 critically evaluates current elicitation methods against outreach requirements and the newly conceptualised model of children's voice as well as providing the projects aims and research questions. Chapter 4 presents the research paradigm, reveals the design of a novel elicitation tool and justifies the project's choice of methods. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 present the findings within an iterative series of case studies. Chapter 8 offers a cross-case analysis in order to evaluate and compare and contrast the findings across all cases. Finally, Chapter 9 advances and discusses the findings against the wider literature and, in the process, generates a deeper level of knowledge.

## **2 Chapter Two: Literature Review Part 1 – Children’s Voice**

### **2.1 Introduction to the chapter**

Chapter one explains that a local authority outreach service requested the development of a tool kit that was capable of eliciting the voice of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), in order to evaluate the support that they provide from the child’s perspective. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the importance and significance behind the request and then to explore and define the theoretical framework upon which the project was founded.

### **2.2 Literature search strategy**

A literature review was conducted according to approved principles (Clark and Braun, 2013). This began purposely broad in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of the many issues made relevant by the outreach request. Psychological journals and online papers from the United Kingdom were prioritised. However, relevant literature from books, reports, policies, legislation and other sources were accessed across multiple disciplines from various geographical regions as the researcher progressed.

Primarily, searches were conducted using several databases including, EBSCO Host, PsychINFO, SCOPUS, Google Scholar and Coventry University’s own literature search engine, ‘Locate.’

The search for literature began in September 2013 but continued throughout the project due to the iterative nature of the project. Specific key words helped to focus the search

parameters, such as, ‘Children’s Voice’, ‘Participation’, ‘Childhood’, ‘Children’s rights’, ‘Listening to Children’, ‘Methods of Children’s Participation,’ and ‘Including children with SLCN and disabilities in research’. Several authors and academics were also contacted directly in order to reveal relevant research studies that may have otherwise been overlooked.

Particular focus was paid to articles and information where the research methodologies involved asking children about their views about their experiences of school. Ascertaining how authors achieved reliability during elicitation was of special interest. Several organisations were contacted directly and helped to reveal additional papers to focus on, notably The Communication Trust and UNICEF.

## **2.3 Conceptualising Children’s Voice**

The concept of providing children with SLCN with a platform through which to voice their thoughts, feelings and preferences about their school and support experiences, represents a modern shift in the way children and those with disabilities are perceived. In order to understand the concept of children’s voice, it must be evaluated against the wider political and societal ecology within which it emerged.

### *2.3.1 Interpretations and implications of children and childhood*

Childhood is characterised by a number of implied and defined understandings. Partly, it infers a biological state but it also attributes a social status which influences how children are perceived (Alderson, 2016). Children’s status has changed throughout history. Changes in children’s status depend on the dominant political and societal discourse of the era; for

example, the idea of children as citizens with equivalent rights has, at various points of time, been both advocated and dismissed (Cockburn, 2013).

Cardinal de Berulle, a well-regarded French Cleric in the seventeenth century, proclaimed that childhood ‘is the most vile and abject state of human nature, after that of death’ (Heywood, 2001, p.9). Paradoxically, the Victorians spoke about the child as pure, virtuous and innocent (Heywood, 2001). Such highly provocative and contradictory perspectives are useful in recognising the transient concept of childhood. However, it also demonstrates that our interpretations of childhood are a largely socially constructed phenomenon and its associations and connotations change over time, vary between ethnic groups and are situated within culture (Kehily, 2009).

It should not be forgotten that it is adults who define children’s capabilities or incapacities which are then used to determine which aspects of society they are permitted access to or restricted from (Alderson, 2016). As Stables (2008, p.1) asserts and others agree, “...how we think about [children] does affect how we deal with them” (Cassidy, 2012). This recognition has particular significance to this project because it demonstrates profound implications for the way in which adults perceive, and therefore support, children.

### *2.3.2 Modern perceptions of children*

During the early twentieth century and with the emergence of the developmental psychology paradigm for studying childhood, children became predominantly viewed as adults in training (Kehily, 2009). Children passively progressed along pre-defined stages of development, attaining cognitive, physical and emotional competencies, until they reached



the desired destination, being adulthood (Kehily, 2009). As one author remarked, children were viewed as ‘less than fully human, unfinished or incomplete’ (Jenks, 1996, p.10.) This fostered a discourse of children being innately incompetent and incapable, who needed protecting from the world, while at the same time restricting them as equal members of society (Qvortrup, 1994). Children were constructed as lesser citizens with little to offer, marginalised and, as a result, were provided with fewer civil rights (Kay and Tisdall, 2012). In this respect children were disempowered by the expectations that adults held over them, a theme that continues to be relevant, particularly for children with disabilities (Franklin, 2013).

More recent research acknowledges biological immaturity but challenges the assumption that children have little to offer society (Cassidy, 2012; Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence., 1999; James, Jenks and Prout, 2005). A growing number of studies have shown that children are able to contribute in a variety of ways (e.g. Badham and Wade, 2010). As a result, instead of identifying children as a group with limited significance, they are constructed as already being whole citizens with intrinsic value (James, Jenks and Prout, 2005). This interpretation drives an alternative discourse that considers children as competent social actors with their own attitudes and experiences to offer, and as citizens they can be afforded their own rights (Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence, 1999).

### *2.3.3 Children’s rights*

The United Nations on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), was designed to establish the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that children are entitled to. The Convention aimed to help change “the way children are viewed and treated – in other

words, as human beings with a distinct set of rights instead of passive objects of care and charity” (UNICEF, 2016). Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) specifically states two obligations that are particularly relevant to this project;

*All children have the right to express their views regarding matters that affect them.*

And

*All children should be provided with the opportunity to be listened to regarding matters that affect them.*

A number of UK legislative proposals and government backed initiatives have underpinned this vision, including the Children’s Act (1999; 2004), The Human Rights Act (1998), Every Child Matters (DfES, 2001, 2006, 2005), and the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2014). Amongst other aims, they sought to empower children by affording them the right to be consulted on and participate in decision making processes regarding matters that affect them.

These policies made it clear that children cannot be assumed to be incapable of sharing in decision making and that alternative provision must be made to establish their views.

Article 2 of the UNCRC (1989) further states that there should be no discrimination for children who have a disability and, of specific importance for children with additional communicative needs, Article 13 asserts:

*“The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.”*

It confers the promise that standard methods of communication are not a prerequisite for attaining the views of the child. Instead, it places the onus on the organisation to ensure that they are equipped to provide the necessary support to meet the needs of individuals in order that they are afforded the same opportunities as typically developing children.

#### *2.3.4 The social model of disability*

Alongside the rights movement for children, a ‘social model of disability’ emerged (Oliver and Barnes, 2012; Shakespeare, 2006). The model challenged existing dominant discourse; that of the ‘medical model of disability,’ which identified children’s difficulties as impairments located within the child. In schools, the medical model led to children being identified, assessed and categorised with a particular ‘deficiency’ before being segregated to a considered appropriate special school (Woolfson, 2011). Saying someone had a particular disability said nothing about the kind of educational help that they required but the idea of mainstream schools supporting children with disabilities was rare (Woolfson, 2011). The curriculum was believed to be fixed to a homogeneous group of children who should learn what was taught; if they were unable to learn then the problem lay with the child. However, it was found that categorisation and segregation left the child stigmatised for the rest of their lives (Woolfson, 2011). Children who had been assigned to special educational schools

were excluded from achieving high status occupations or social mobility (Tomlinson, 1982).

In contrast, the social model distinguishes between impairment and disability; ‘impairment’ is seen as a person’s physical, cognitive, behavioural, emotional, sensory or communicative limitations, while ‘disability’ can be seen as the oppression or restriction experienced by those with the impairment (Woolfson, 2011). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006, no.5) aptly summarises this interpretation as:

*‘...the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.’*

It confers the understanding that the challenges those with disabilities face may not be wholly caused by the impairment itself but by those with whom they interact and by the environmental circumstances within which they inhabit. The focus shifts from the individual onto the context which is seen as affecting and influencing people’s lives with the power to increase or reduce the disability that they experience. For schools and children with disabilities, this relocates the concept of the deficit being located within the child and places it as a responsibility for schools and local services to overcome. Ideally, this means services work together to assess the impact of the impairment on the child’s ability to access education while ensuring appropriate provision (Woolfson, 2011).

### *2.3.5 Social inclusion versus integration*

The social model of disability champions the principles of inclusion in education. Social inclusion requires the school carry out a process to assimilate the child, irrespective of their difference, so that they are recognised as equal to other pupils (Frederickson and Cline, 2015). It involves the restructuring of the school, changing the environment, adapting curricula and materials, improving teacher skills and procedures so that it becomes more responsive (Frederickson and Cline, 2015). A central aim for inclusion is to eliminate exclusion due to negative attitudes towards those with disabilities or perceived lack of ability (UNESCO, 2009: 4). This project is underpinned by that aim and is representative of this researcher's attitude towards those with disabilities.

In contrast, integration confers the idea of schools making limited additional arrangement to their organisations to include children with disabilities (Ainscow, 1995). Woolfson (2011, p174) asserts that children could be “supposedly integrated, i.e. placed, in mainstream class, without any interaction with their peers, effectively still quite segregated.” Therefore, while inclusive schools will reorganise their structures to accommodate the child regardless of needs, schools that simply integrate pupils will leave their structure unchanged and assume the child will adapt into the school environment (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

### *2.3.6 Participation and Empowerment*

The concepts of participation and social inclusion are linked but take on different meanings. Where social inclusion involves children being enabled by others to take part, participation involves children assuming more active roles within their organisations. In accordance with the social model of disability and the rights movement, participation was seen as the

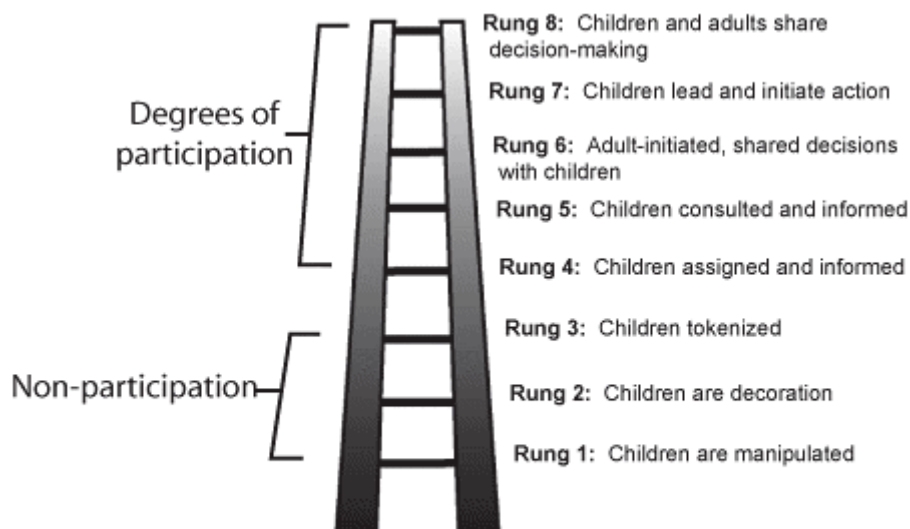
gateway through which to empower children by affording them more influence over decisions that affect them (Lansdown, 2011; Theobald et al., 2011). Often, participation is talked about as being either ‘active,’ referring to the act of empowering children to express their views and influence decision makers to bring about change or ‘passive,’ referring to children simply engaging in an activity (Boyden and Ennew, 1997). However, there is much confusion over the meaning of participation and what it represents. For instance, children participate in sports, groups and games and so it naturally infers positivity. But equally, children can be ‘forced’ to participate, for instance as labourers or soldiers, not because they have a right to choose to do so but because they feel obligated to participate (Lundy, 2007; Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Such extremes demonstrate that participation can be “an enabling and liberating force and thus empower, or it may be a restrictive force and disempower” (Lundy, 2007 p.145).

Children are required to participate at school but whether that experience is empowering or disempowering depends on the context. For example, children are increasingly involved in determining areas of their learning, such as, joint individual target setting, and choice of extra-curriculum activities (Gersch, 1996). However, Kellett (2011) provides a disparaging account of children’s participation in consultation. She describes activities which were framed in adult language with adult metrics that excluded harder to reach groups. Essentially this represented a form of tokenism in order to secure funding for projects which required child input. Worse still she asserts, were “biased consultation exercises that manipulated and exploited children’s views in order to secure a particular adult perspective or a hidden agenda” (p.3). Kellett (2011) hints towards the crux of the matter; despite the increasing social agenda, legislation and political frameworks put into place to support

consultation, child input is dependent on adult perceptions and the constructions they hold about the child.

There are several models that have attempted to illustrate the path towards empowered participation. Hart's (1992) 'Ladder of Participation' represents it as levels on a ladder; the first three steps demonstrate non-participation, while steps four to eight show incremental levels of participation (**Figure 2.1**).

*Figure 2.1: Hart's (1992) Ladder of participation*



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Hart's (1992) model was seen as a useful evaluation tool in some circumstances (Pridmore, 1998). However, it was criticised for assessing participation as a sequential process within which higher levels were only achievable once lower levels had been reached (Reddy and Ratna, 2002). It also failed to take account of the diverse contexts within which participation takes place, such as in schools (Hill, 2006). Essentially, this is because Hart's (1992) model assumes that participation is binary, but the reality is that levels of

participation and decision making are constantly shifting on any given task or project (Kirby and Gibbs, 2006). Leverett (2008) offers a more pragmatic account towards enabling empowering participation through asserting that it must not be an end in itself, otherwise tokenism is likely, but more importantly should ‘*result in improvements to children’s quality of life.*’ This project aims to support services by giving them the opportunity to enable children to participate at the highest rungs on Hart’s ladder for the purpose of improving their quality of life.

### 2.3.7 *Person Centred approaches*

The person centred paradigm emerged to ensure that the needs of the child are placed centre-stage, rather than becoming lost in the systems that seek to serve them (Holburn, 1997). It draws on concepts from several psychological paradigms, most heavily humanism (Rogers, 1979). Humanism considers individuals as motivated by a need to self-actualise, to grow and fulfil their potential. The theory stresses the importance of the rights of people to make their own choices about what is best for them, but considers that the way a person develops is influenced by the way they are treated and socialised (Aspy, 1988). Rogers (1979) argued that people have immense resources for self-understanding and are guided towards actualisation through a valuing process that enables them to develop a strong sense of self-concept and self-esteem. The process requires the person to be considered as a whole, as opposed to a sum of parts and deficits.

Person-centred approaches to education attempt to shift power from the professionals to the users. Educators are urged to consider a holistic picture of the child, paying particular attention to their interests, experiences, skills and relationships as opposed to focusing on



their deficits (Merry, 1995). Adults are urged to look at the world from the child's perspective and accept it for what they see. For those with disabilities, person-centred approaches are particularly enabling and are increasingly reflected in government policy. For example, 'Aiming High for Disabled Children: Better support for families' (DfES, 2007) describes those with disabilities as experts in their own lives and impairments and suggests that support designed alongside them will better meet their needs. Similarly, the SEN Code of practice (2014) highlights the importance of eliciting and understanding the views of children in order to encourage the feeling that they are valued at school.

Person-centred approaches have been adopted into school planning processes, including annual reviews, target setting, one-page profiles, transition planning, individual education plans and more recently the Education, Health and Care plans (EHC) which replaced the ageing SEN Statementing process as a way of providing a more child-centric approach to assessment (Children and Families Act, 2014).

### *2.3.8 Local Authority responsibility*

Despite an increase in political and social policy around ensuring the rights of children are respected, evidence demonstrates that children's consultation rights are not respected equally (Woods, Parkinson, and Lewis, 2010). Specific groups of children, typically those considered the most vulnerable such as those with disabilities, and therefore most likely to access local authority services, are less likely to be consulted about those services (Curtis, Grier, and Hunley., 2004; McLeod, 2007). Where children have communicative or cognitive impairments, consultation is further restricted (Morris, 2003).

That being said, as legal requirement catches up with social justice, Local Authority services are increasingly being held to account. For example, the schools regulatory body Ofsted (2013) began monitoring the capacity of schools to take pupil's views into consideration during the inspection process. And, the SEN Code of Practice (2001, 2014, 2015) recently updated several of its policies from recommending pupil involvement with planning and review processes to obligating them, "Local Authorities **must** ensure that children, their parents and young people are involved in discussions and decisions about their individual support and about local provision" (SEN Code of practice, 2015). However, this too has been shown to be inconsistent (Fox, 2016). Fox analysed 21 psychological advices written by Educational Psychologists and found that the voice of the child represents a very small part in most EHC reports and in many it was non-existent. This was further highlighted within a recent government survey into service user's experiences of the EHC planning process, which found that just 55% of parents and young people agree that their wishes and views were included (DfE, 2018). This is likely attributable to the many challenges around eliciting the voice of those with the most severe needs, particularly, a lack of empirical methods with which to support those with SLCN and cognitive needs (see Section 2.5 for review). Given that approximately 10% of all children in the UK (1.2 million) have SLCN (Law et al., 2012) and over 20% of children with an EHCP have SLCN as their primary needs, the importance of this project cannot be overstated (DfE, 2017).

The Outreach services that approached Coventry University for help, like other children's services discussed, were coming under increasing pressure to demonstrate how they could include children's voice in the evaluation and impact of their work yet they had little access or knowledge about elicitation methods suitable for those with SLCN and other disabilities.

### *2.3.9 Children's Voice defined*

Exploring the underlying context that led to the request from the local outreach service helps to reveal that children's voice is part of a universal equality movement. Perhaps the universality of the concept explains why there is no single accepted definition for children's voice. Kellett (2011, p. 6) explains it as the 'right to free expression of views that may, or may not, be linked to participation.' Couldry (2010) refers to it as recognising that children have the capacity and entitlement to be instrumental in making narratives about their own lives. Others equate it to a form of advocacy (Dalrymple, 2005). Indeed, it is all of these things and more. The areas discussed above provide a framework for the concept of children's voice. In this project the term 'children's voice' is defined as an archetypal construct that refers to the views, rights and understandings of the child and their right to express themselves in active participation in matters that affect them for the purpose of empowerment and the improvement of their quality of life.

## **2.4 Benefits of listening to children's voice**

The importance of children's voice to those with disabilities goes beyond an ideological model of social change, morality and political agenda. Evidence demonstrates that where children are given a platform for their voice to be heard effectively, a host of benefits to the child, the services and the wider community follow. Listening to children helps to raise the confidence, motivation and aspirations of children while also positioning children in society alongside adults more equally (Cheminais, 2008). It has also been found to increase empathy, communication skills, and cognitive skills, encourage responsibility, allow

resources to be better targeted and enable the child to take control of their own lives (Badham and Wade, 2010; Robinson 2014).

#### *2.4.1 Self-Determination*

Empowerment and autonomy, explained by the opportunity to make choices and decisions that affect one's quality of life are key principles of self-determination. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) concerns the interplay between people's motivation and social-contextual factors (Ryan and Deci, 2017). The theory relates to how social-context supports or restricts people's basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy, the fulfilment of which is considered essential to universal healthy human functioning.

Research with children with disabilities links self-determination status to a number of positive outcomes, including the attainment of improved academic results (Wehmeyer et al., 2012); capacity to contribute more actively to their educational and transition planning (Fowler et al., 2007); higher quality and general life satisfaction, and more positive experiences in early adulthood (McDougall et al., 2010; Shogren et al., 2014)

SDT is particularly relevant to this project as it plays a crucial role in promoting the rights of children with disabilities to have agency over their lives within schools (Shogren and Turnbull, 2006). The theory reasons that children with disabilities have the same basic psychological needs as all other pupils (Grolnick and Ryan 1990). In order to develop self-determination, adults must provide children with opportunities to acquire and then practise behaviours that help them to meet their needs and experience self-efficacy (Eisenman, 2015).

Essentially, fostering SDT into pedagogy appears to have a significant impact on learning for all children (Wehmeyer et al., 2012). Children who engage in consultation and participatory practices, and who are given opportunities to exercise their own expertise, develop higher levels of self-determination (McNeilly, Macdonald and Kelly, 2015). Conversely, thwarting these basic needs leads to diminished self-motivation and greater ill health (Ryan et al., 2006).

#### *2.4.2 Prevention, Intervention and support services*

Due to increasing concerns over the numbers of children who fail to reach their potential at school, or end up not in education, employment or training (NEET), a report was carried out to review evidence from a series of prevention and early intervention initiatives designed to improve the life chances of vulnerable children, including those with disabilities (Walker and Donaldson, 2010). The authors note that many of the initiatives they investigated failed to evaluate child views as part of their measure for successful outcomes, indicating that children's rights are still not universally adhered to, but success for a given programme was more likely found when children were given opportunities to offer information about their skills and abilities, provide opinions about possible interventions and support services and help organisations to make informed decisions (Walker and Donaldson, 2010). These findings agree with other accounts asserting that consultation with those with disabilities can be meaningful and effective (e.g. Todd, 2003; Woolfson et al., 2007). Likewise, research elicited from the perspective of children with disabilities showed that being respected and included in consultations such as these, can positively influence their well-being (Foley et al., 2012). Listening to children with disabilities and involving them in decision processes may act as a buffer against the risk of them later becoming NEETs.

Alternatively, it could just be a correlation that the most effective initiatives also consider a child's voice. Regardless, this project presents an opportunity to work with those who are most vulnerable and typically fall through the net.

#### *2.4.3 Allegiance*

There is some evidence that children who are involved in consultancy processes foster allegiance for the intervention or support programme. Goepel (2009) compared the perceptions of four Year Six children with SEN with their parents and teachers in order to identify shared understanding of the children's needs across their IEPs. Parallel questionnaires and interviews were carried out to explore the views of the children's strengths and weaknesses and to elicit how they felt about the support on offer. Little information was provided regarding the SEN difficulties or details about how the interviewer managed to communicate effectively with the children. However, through case studies the author showed that where the needs of the children were perceived most closely between the parties, children tended to value their IEPs and approach their learning targets more positively. Conversely, where there was disparity, there was confusion and the children tended to be less engaged, which made the purpose of the IEP less effective. The author relates this to 'allegiance;' that a child's attitude towards a target or persistence with interventions is strengthened when they are involved in decision making processes. The concept appears important to creating a learning environment that is both empowering and motivational (Goldthorpe, 2001).

#### *2.4.4 School wide benefits*

UNICEF (2015) encourages schools to take part in an initiative called Rights Respecting Schools (RRS) which aims to embed children's rights into the school ethos, stressing the

importance of providing a voice in matters that affect them. Over 4,270 schools are involved and commit themselves to following principles set out by the UNCRC (1989). Children learn about their rights and are encouraged to work in partnership with adults across school wide issues to make child-centred informed decisions. In an evaluation of the approach, Sebba and Robinson (2010) conducted interviews and surveys on children and staff from thirty-one schools and reported on fewer incidences of bullying, more positive relationships and more respectful attitudes to learning. In a separate study, Covell (2010) showed children had higher levels of engagement and made more positive comments about their schools, such as feeling cared for, respected, listened and valued, than those children not attending schools promoting RRS. These studies demonstrate that observing children's rights and integrating children's voice can make a positive impact on many areas of children's experiences in schools. That being said, neither of these studies identified impact on individual hard to reach groups, such as those with additional communicative needs who may struggle to be heard over the voices of their typically developing peers. In addition, the use of standard interview or survey schedules used in these studies, are generally accepted to be ineffective at eliciting the voice of those with complex or communicative needs (e.g. Woolfson et al., 2007). Regardless, the findings are suggestive of the potential impact that a properly integrated children's voice approach can have.

## **2.5 The challenges of eliciting voice from children with SLCN**

Despite a growing body of research on the importance of recognising children's voice in decisions that affect them, there is still a significant gap between discourse and reality (Robinson, 2014). This is particularly the case in terms of enabling and permitting children with disabilities the opportunity to share their views in order to actively shape the support available to them (Aubrey and Dahl, 2006; Franklin 2013). The gap widens when children struggle to communicate verbally, or are perceived to have cognitive needs (Morris, 2003). Yet, this group are more often subject to intervention through assessment, planning, and review processes than other children are (Marchant and Jones, 2003). Certainly, many local authorities have struggled to meet their duties to ensure that the views and feelings of children with complex needs are heard (Dfe, 2018; Franklin, 2013). This was a sentiment mirrored by a government initiated SEN and Disabilities green paper (2013) demonstrating that children with disabilities feel frustrated by a lack of the right help at school. In practice, the capacity for services to recognise and follow the principles of children's voice is restricted and obstructed by a number of underlying barriers.

Recently there have been several reviews on the participation of children with disabilities. Franklin (2013) outlines a number of key barriers that emerged from the evidence base, highlighting: negative perceived capabilities (Willow et al, 2004); a lack of communication methods, information and time (Marchant and Jones, 2003); and a lack of opportunities and experience to develop the skills for both children and practitioners (Franklin and Knight, 2011; Burke, 2010). These barriers are not restricted to particular fields either; health, education and social worker professionals report similar difficulties (Davey et al., 2010).



### *2.5.1 Negative perceived capabilities*

In a series of studies, Morris (2003) sought the views of disabled children, including those with communication and cognitive impairments, and identified the barriers she encountered. They included: the primary contact's (Teacher/SENCo/Teaching Assistant) lack of knowledge of the child's communicative needs; the assumption that the researcher would only seek information from a parent or staff member as opposed to seeking knowledge from the child; and the concept that the child would be unable to provide any useful information.

Within schools, adults make most of the choices. A child's level of participation is decided by the adult's perceptions of the child's ability to participate. Where children are disabled, they are still often portrayed according to the medical model of disability; i.e. by what they cannot do as opposed to what they can do (Rabiee et al., 2005). This view perpetuates the concept of the disabled child as incapable and can be reflected in the attitudes that professionals display, which in turn restricts the children's access to opportunities to engage in participatory activities (Franklin, 2013). As a result, instead of communicating directly with children, the voice of the disabled child is often represented by professionals or the children's parents (Armstrong, 2007).

Those who are very young are also caught within this remit and subject to the same process of disempowerment. Noble, (2003) indicates that the opinions of young children with SEN are rarely requested, and even when they are, the process is often tokenistic and their views ignored. Those who have both a disability and are young are doubly disadvantaged (Dickins, 2011). These perceptions have some grounding in the evidence base with studies showing a child's capacity to engage in decision making requires the ability to reflect (e.g. Chapman and Tunmer, 1997; Quicke, 2003). Quicke (2003) asserts that before children reach Years 5 or 6 (aged 9-11) there is little point asking for the child's viewpoint about

how they learn because they are unable to reflect upon the question. Others question the very legitimacy of the idea of the child as an expert in their own learning development and point towards the notion as an ‘urban legend’ (Kirschner and Merrienboer, 2016).

Kirschner and Merrienboer (2016) show how the relationship between what people say about how they learn and how they actually learn is weak and argue that the individually preferred way of learning is often a bad predictor of the way people learn most effectively, critically asserting that what people prefer is often not what is best for them. Asking a child to choose a preferred food is exemplified, stating that they will likely choose chocolate over fruit. Evidence supports the supposition, noting that in a meta-analysis of studies learners who reported preferring particular instructional techniques, for example visual over audio methods, typically did not derive any instructional benefit from experiencing it. The article is provocative and challenges the reader to consider that a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 1973) is gripping proponents of children’s voice fuelled by rumour and belief rather than empirical evidence. There is certainly a cautionary tale to tell about the importance of respecting research rigour over ideology. However, denying the fundamental rights of children as citizens, or forbidding them from experiencing expertise within decision making processes acts to treat them as largely incomplete or, worse still, incompetent and as such irrelevant in matters that affect them (Borgne and Tisdall, 2017). Taken to its logical conclusion, this perception gives legitimacy to exclusion policy (Woolfson, 2011).

Notwithstanding these rights based criticisms, the perception that some children may be considered unable to reflect upon their learning experiences is valid. The problem lies in power differentials that result from assuming this viewpoint and it represents a substantial barrier to participation (Cockburn, 2005). Social justice must be based upon a solid empirical grounding if it is to gain universal acceptance. Research is beginning to demonstrate that even very young children are capable of giving their views in areas of their

learning provided they are supported with the properly adapted tools (Day, 2010) (see Chapter 3 for a full evaluation of tools).

### *2.5.2 Lack of opportunities and experience of decision making*

Disabled children report that being supported to communicate is vital to start making choices and gain independence from an early age (Bignall and Butt, 2000; Franklin, 2013). Children's experience at being listened to, their involvement in making decisions and the context within which that takes place affects their ability to participate. Lansdown (2006) asserts that restricting the opportunities for children to experience decision making will result in a lack of capacity to do so which is used to further justify the reason not to include the child. Children then come to internalise the belief that they are incapable rather than assume it is because they have been denied the opportunity (Willo, 2002). She asserts this is particularly pertinent to those who have disabilities, because often they have been socially excluded and as such regularly have their capabilities underestimated. Limited life experiences restrict the child's understanding and from this disempowered position it is more challenging for children to take part in participatory processes.

### *2.5.3 Lack of information, skills and time*

One of the central obstacles that challenge children's voice is that professionals lack an understanding of the child's rights (Lundy, 2007). In a large-scale research project evaluating the impact of rights on the children's experiences, Kilkelly et al., (2005) found that there was limited awareness of the rights of children across services, including implementation of Article 12 (the right to have a voice). Lundy (2007) argues that respecting children's views is not just a model for good pedagogical practice but a legally

binding obligation, although this latter point is questionable. Certainly, with the introduction of the new SEN Code of practice (2015, p. 22), the legality of listening to children has been made paramount by obligating Local Authorities to include children, and crucially note that they “must **not** use the views of parents as a proxy for young people’s views.”

This increases the pressure on services to establish methods of eliciting voice and represents an additional level of importance for this project. Yet, there has been minimal help guiding practitioners, leaving them often unsure how to carry out the requirements, especially for those who have communication or cognitive disabilities (Norwich and Kelly, 2006).

Indeed, this factored into the reason why a local Outreach service approached Coventry University for help eliciting the voice of children with SLCN, which in turn initiated this project.

Morris (1998b) showed that in a study of children with limited verbal communication living in residential homes and schools, minimal effort was made to find alternative methods of communication. Within the field of social work, Franklin and Sloper (2007, 2009) demonstrated that a lack of skills, training, knowledge and experience in consulting and communicating with those with disabilities prevented children from having a voice. It is not helped by the limited number of adults who understand that forms of communication are not just oral (Stalker et al., 2010).

More recently, there have been a growing number of guides that aim to support practitioners and those with disabilities to understand children’s communication difficulties and help organisations to include children in participatory practices (e.g. Dalzell and Chamberlain,

2006; Knight et al., 2006; Roulstone et al., 2012). However, professionals consistently report that time with a child is restricted, and the processes involved to elicit the voice of a child with disabilities are complex, resulting in fewer opportunities to engage in participatory processes (Morris, 2003; Franklin 2013). These limitations were echoed as primary concerns by the local outreach service in meetings with this researcher.

#### *2.5.4 Lack of communication methods*

A central step in ensuring a child is able to participate within their own education is providing a way for the child to express his or her views. Yet there is a lack of research identifying the most effective methods that enable those with disabilities, and particularly those with communication or cognitive needs, to participate (Clark, 2005; Marchant and Jones, 2003; Morris, 2003).

## **2.6 A theoretical model for eliciting children's voice**

The literature review has provided a psychological, political and social-contextual theoretical framework within which to develop a tool kit for the purpose of eliciting the voice of children with SLCN, in order to evaluate their school and support experiences. This chapter conceptualised children's voice according to a number of prominent themes identified from the research and a new definition was presented to secure its understanding in this project. The next chapter will critically review existing tool kits in the context of this understanding in order to seek a method that can successfully elicit the voice of children with SLCN.

The review identifies a number of benefits and barriers towards the processes involved in children's voice, specifically in consideration of those with SLCN. Listening to the views of children, promoting active participation and encouraging children to become involved in decision making processes about their learning is seen as a crucial step in recognising children's rights, increasing autonomy and creating better schools (Rudduck and Fielding, 2006; Robinson, 2014). However, it is important to acknowledge that despite the best intentions of policy makers, educators and children's voice advocates, there are many children, particularly those with communication difficulties, who still do not have these liberties (Franklin, 2013; Norwich and Kelly., 2006; Norwich and Eaton, 2015; SEN Green Paper, 2015). Barriers must be challenged and addressed in order to ensure that children with disabilities have their rights respected and their voices heard in matters that affect them.

Be that as it may, it is important to be methodical and rigorous in the process lest the danger of 'moral panic' or the 'chicken soup' effect occurs; where children's voice is regarded as unquestionably good and to be adhered and endorsed by all, a common side effect of children's rights discourse (Sloth-Nielsen, 1996). Lundy (2007) warns that children's rights research often generates goodwill but one of the side effects is it can dissipate when rhetoric is put into practice. She asserts this is particularly the case where the effect of the process challenges dominant thinking, generates controversy or costs money. Practicality is important.

In this researcher's experience in schools, in a period when resources are stretched, it can be easier to label a child as being incapable rather than to discover and practise ways to include them. Conversely, this only serves to render the barriers invisible, relinquish responsibility and risks the child becoming lost in the system that seeks to serve them (Woolfson, 2011).

Clearly, services need support in order that they can overcome these barriers within a pragmatic context and this represents the foundations upon which this project was built.

### **3 Chapter Three: Literature Review Part 2 – Tool Kit Reviews**

#### **3.1 Introduction to the Chapter**

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 established that due to changes in political and social policy, services are under increasing pressure to include children in matters that affect them (e.g. SEN Code of Practice, 2015; The Children and Families Act, 2014). In light of these changes a local government Outreach service requested a method capable of eliciting the voice of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) so that they could evaluate the support that they provide from the child's perspective. The previous chapter conceptualised children's voice and identified the benefits and underlying challenges that eliciting the voice of the child represents. Research questions were established to focus the project on finding or creating a method that could meet the project's aims. The purpose of this chapter is to critically analyse existing methods of elicitation and determine whether or not they could be implemented within this project or else to conclude that a new method may be required.

#### **3.2 Critical Analysis of methods for eliciting children's voice from those with SLCN**

Any tool kit method identified or created must meet the requirements of the Outreach services in order to be considered practical while also adhering to the conceptualised principles of children's voice in order to move towards a participatory system that represents equality. In the introduction it was explained that a series of meetings with Outreach service practitioners laid out the requirements for an elicitation method (See Chapter One). Likewise, the previous chapter identified the empirical concepts and



challenges of eliciting children's voice (See Chapter Two). Any elicitation method must also ensure that the voice of the child is represented accurately lest it risks becoming tokenism (Kellett, 2011).

### *3.2.1 Quality assessment framework*

In order to examine the effectiveness of individual tools and methods for the purpose of eliciting the voice of children with SLCN, an assessment framework consisting of domains that represented the Outreach requirements and the literature on Children's voice were established. These elements presented in Table 3.1 are not intended to represent an all-inclusive list of factors, but instead to represent critical aspects that are important to the Outreach services or have emerged from the literature.

***Table 3.1: Quality assessment framework outlining Outreach requirements and Children's Voice concepts.***

#### **Outreach Requirements**

- Adaptable for range of ages (4-18) with communication difficulties and disabilities
- Seeks children's views of their experiences of school across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains
- Easy and well-timed to administer
- Fun and non-threatening
- Evaluates how children feel about their interventions and support structures
- Evaluates whether a child's enjoyment of school has increased as a result of support
- Helps practitioners to understand what children think help them to learn

#### **Children's Voice**

- Respects children's rights
- Promotes social inclusion
- Personal centred approach
- Underpinned by the social model of disability
- Empowers the child
- Enables active participation

### *3.2.2 Literature search*

A further literature search was carried out using the databases PsychINFO and EBSCO Host. Search terms included 'Children's Voice methods,' 'Listening tools,' 'Participatory tools,' 'Evidence based methods,' and 'SEN communication tools.'

Inclusion criteria included studies which utilised assessment tools or methods to listen to the voice of children with disabilities, and particular focus was given to participants with SLCN. Six elicitation techniques were selected for critical analysis against the quality assessment framework because they most closely matched the criteria. These included, The Diamond Rank Sorting Task, Focus Group elicitation, Talking Mats, The Mosaic Approach, The Ideal School Drawing Technique, and In My Shoes.

### *3.2.3 Diamond Rank Sorting Task*

Nock (2009) conducted a pilot study with children (aged 7 -11, n = 4) with a range of children with moderate to severe learning difficulties to obtain their views about their preferred learning experiences. Nock was a member of an outreach service team and it therefore serves as a useful example of the type of information that outreach were trying to gain as well as the practical challenges this project needs to resolve.

The study was built upon an adapted version of Thomas and O'Kane's (2000) diamond ranked sorting task and involved asking children to sort activities into what they felt was most important to their learning. Nine activities were written on post it notes by the teachers who administered the method. The children arranged the post it notes according to which activities they liked most at the top, and disliked at the bottom, forming them into a

diamond shape. The study did not address how much help the children required when ordering the preferences, however, data revealed interesting insights into the activities that the children showed a preference for which challenged the status quo. For example, several of the children were not experiencing their preferred learning activities. In one case the author reported about being unsure whether the child was reporting on enjoyment or an effective learning experience. There is a danger of disparity between what a child enjoys and what helps them to learn (Kirschner and Merrienboer, 2013). Utilising parallel alternative methods to try to confirm the child's responses, or re-administering the task at a later date might have established whether a child's preference affected his learning experience

Overall, Nock reported that the children were enthusiastic and enjoyed the kinaesthetic nature of the task. This agrees with O'Kane's (2008) assessment of the technique stating that 'active' forms of communication requiring sorting activities are more effective and engaging for children rather than the 'passive' communication that takes place during typical interviews. Despite the relative success of the study, the author reported that the task was too time consuming, a fairly common complaint for practitioners seeking the voice of the child (Franklin and Knight, 2011).

An additional concern about this study arises because the adults conducting the sorting task constructed the categories that the children were allowed to make preferences about. It has been established that adults and children perceive experiences differently (see Chapter 2), which may have restricted this study to an adult prioritised account. With that said, some of the children had severe communication and learning difficulties, and the categories appeared to provide assistance and structure, enabling the children to have a voice where otherwise they might not have had one. Therefore, it represents a significant step forward

towards achieving children's voice. Ultimately, although Nock's findings were unpublished and restricted to a single setting, it provided a nuanced account of the dilemmas that arise when seeking the voice of children with communicative and learning disabilities.

The Diamond Rank Sorting Task appears to require a high degree of reasoning ability; children must be able to reflect upon an activity and then rank its importance against other experiences all presented to them at the same time. This might restrict those who have more severe cognitive needs. An interesting alternative to the above study is to incorporate photographs instead of statements of pieces of paper. The visual nature of the photographs may be preferable to those with cognitive difficulties because, amongst other benefits, it does not exclude those who find reading and writing difficult (Woolner et al., 2010).

### *3.2.4 Focus Groups*

Focus groups are a type of group elicitation that provides an alternative to the one to one interview method that many elicitation methods are based upon. Some authors argue that focus groups offer a dynamic that is less threatening because they reduce the adult-child power relationship, lessen the influence of social desirability, provide more anonymity due to the group which encourages involvement, and promote a sense of self value through diverse responses (Boyden and Ennew, 1997; Vaughn et al, 1996). For children with learning difficulties it is argued they are particularly enabling because they offer validation through peer support (Cambridge and McCarthy, 2001). Others argue that focus groups may be more prone to social desirability effects because children are pressured into expressing ideas in front of peers, that a false consensus can be reached due to the

dominance of a few, and that there is often a restriction of subject matter due to issues of confidentiality (Beresford, 1997; Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009).

Tobias (2009) explored how a mainstream secondary school supported children with autism spectrum conditions (ASC) to inform future school policy through the use of focus groups. Two groups of children with ASC (n = 12, aged 14-16), and one group of parents (n=5) took part in the study. Separate focus groups were held between the parties. Parents were engaged with interview questions about challenges and support mechanisms they felt their children experienced at school. For the children's group, elicitation about their views of school were sought by contributing and drawing on imaginary students with the descriptions "successful, unsuccessful and with ASD." The sessions were video recorded which gives weight to the authors findings as it permits 'retrospective analysis' (Edwards and Westgate, 1987) and helps to overcome audible inconsistencies (Coates and Vickerman, 2010). It was concluded that support was most useful when it addressed transitions, provided mentoring, and met the needs of the individual (Tobias, 2009).

Including parental input in this study, helped to triangulate the children's responses. The central difficulty with focus groups, and especially those made up with children with additional needs such as SLCN, are that groups cannot be represented evenly. Children have histories that impact the group dynamic and place restrictions on its members. As one group of authors put it 'focus groups are inherently unpredictable' (Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009 p. 62).

### 3.2.5 *Talking Mats*

Talking Mats are a ‘low tech’ visual tool kit that can be used as a way to express the views of people with communication or learning difficulties (Murphy, 1998). The process typically involves placing a mat in front of a person and introducing a single topic (e.g. activities). Open-ended questions are asked and the participant chooses symbols that might represent an array of activities and places them on the mat as a record of the response. Children place the representations under a symbol (thumbs up, neutral or thumbs down). Talking Mats has had some commercial success and has been used in a variety of contexts, such as defining outcomes, mental health assessments, out of school activities and transitions (Cameron and Murphy, 2002; Macleaman, 2010; Germain, 2004).

Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford (2005) used an adapted version of Talking Mats to determine the views of 18 children (aged 6 -18 years) with communicative, cognitive, and physical disabilities in order to evaluate outcomes of social care and support services. Before the authors interviewed the children, they obtained background information from carers about the children’s abilities. This led them to include questions on eight themes within areas such as looking after the child. In addition, they also learnt that some of the children used familiar communication devices, which were then made available during the interview sessions with the children.

Interviews with the children were facilitated with laminated symbol cards. For example, for the statement “How do I want my doctor to talk to me”, the child could respond with any or all of the following responses: “Wants his doctor to talk to him in a way he understands”, “Doesn’t want his doctor to talk to him”, “Doesn’t mind.” They also carried blank cards in case more symbols were needed.

The authors attempted to check for the children's understanding of the method through preliminary questioning. On the one hand, this helped improve the reliability of the method, but on the other, the process led to the exclusion of a child from the research, which reaffirms the notion of the child as incapable and restricts generalisations that the study can claim.

Overall, it was reported to be easy to administer, non-threatening and fun for the children. In addition, because the content was variable for children who had different cognitive abilities, it was reported as being inclusive and flexible; essential when meeting the needs of disabled children (Murphy, 1998). The authors assert that the method 'worked for all children' in relation to finding out their choices. Clearly, this does not mean the method will work for everyone, as those with disabilities are not a homogenous group and the level of communicative needs within the study was unclear. Indeed, one study found that Talking Mats was no more effective than individual interviews for children with moderate language delay, while for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism and Social Emotional Behaviour Communication Difficulties (SEBCD) it was found to increase the elicitation of views, and increase attention and interaction of on-task behaviours (Coakes, 2006).

Talking Mats provides an excellent example of adaptability and potential to overcome children's communicative barriers. However, it has not been formally evaluated and the level of evidence is therefore only suggestive (Law, 2010).

### 3.2.6 *The Mosaic Approach*

The Mosaic approach was originally designed to elicit the views of children under five years old (Clark and Moss, 2001). It combines visual methods such as cameras, tours and map making of the children's environment, as well as observation and interviews to provide a number of ways within which to explore a child's world. This makes it possible to triangulate qualitative data which offers a more robust approach than any single elicitation method (Willig, 2008).

Beresford et al., (2004) adapted the technique for use with a group of five children (aged 6-14) with ASC. She was interested in finding out what aspects of their lives the children viewed positively and negatively. Interviews were conducted with parents, teachers and children, and informal observational data were recorded, which mirrored the triangulation effect of the original project. In order to alleviate social anxiety during the interview, the children's parents were provided with individualised social stories to rehearse with their children regarding the upcoming study. To prevent further distress caused by the face-to-face nature of the interview process, the research session was based around a craft activity that used photographs of activities and people, previously taken by the children in order to make a poster.

It was reported that the children enjoyed the activity and that the photographs helped to focus the research on the here and now (Beresford et al., 2004). In addition, the interviews were said to be mostly successful in eliciting the children's views and that these views differed from the perceptions of others which questioned the status quo. The study promotes the importance of representing items concretely through the use of photographs as opposed to symbolically, as symbols may mean different things to different people. It also



utilises methods for keeping participants calm during the interview process, which is important to ease anxiety. However, elements of the method are unclear, for instance the manner by which the authors were able to encourage and measure the impact of the use of social stories at home. Furthermore, asking the children to photograph what matters to them is beneficial in terms of more accurately representing the child's voice, but might be impractical in terms of providing usable information upon which practitioners can act; the study did not outline how the information would be used upon completion. In addition, the elicitation method was only carried out on one occasion, showing only a snapshot of that child's views. The authors suggest that repeat visits with the children would have allowed for further, more in depth-exploration.

### *3.2.7 The Ideal School Drawing Technique (DIST)*

Williams and Hanke, (2007) used an adapted version of 'Drawing the Ideal Self Technique', (DIST) (Moran, 2001, 2006) to seek the views of 15 pupils (aged 6 -14) with ASD to establish what they felt were the most important features of school provision. DIST is underpinned by the concept of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955) to gather pupils' constructs; believed to reflect how people think, make sense about the world and explain behaviour. The authors argue that PCP is useful at evaluating the hard to reach voice of children with disabilities because personal views cannot be rejected and therefore must be respected. This assertion can be equally applied to all children when adhering to the rights and principles of children's voice.

The original DIST required children to sketch two pictures; one of the sort of person they would not like to be and one of the sort of person they would like to be in order to explore how they perceived themselves (Moran, 2001). In the adapted version, pupils were asked

to consider the school's current and ideal provision (William and Hanke, 2007). This was supported with semi-structured questions, designed to elicit the children's experiences of school, the classroom, other children, adults and themselves. It was reported that children showed a sophisticated understanding of school ethos and the impact of this on their own well-being. However, Williams and Hanke (2007) conceded that some adult interpretation was necessary in order to identify 'the most relevant' features of school provision and their impact on their school experiences.

The DIST method appears to provide a structure that enables children to express their views using a combination of drawing, talking and writing. The authors reported that the technique was practical, time-efficient and popular with children and adults. However, it also reported that because of its PCP nature its use is limited to those who receive the appropriate training. In addition, it may be unsuitable for those with more severe learning difficulties (due to having to reproduce abstract images from memory), those with motor co-ordination difficulties (due not being able to draw their thoughts accurately), and those who struggle with language processing (as their drawings may be misinterpreted).

### 3.2.8 *In My Shoes*

In My Shoes (IMS) is a software package which was originally developed as a tool for interviewing in cases of suspected child abuse (Calam et al., 2000). Recently, it has been trialled in a variety of contexts and is marketed as helping professionals to communicate with children or adults with disabilities about their experiences, views, wishes, and feelings in a variety of contexts. An interviewer sits next to the child and guides them through a

structured interview process choosing up to nine modules with accompanying symbols such as emotions, places and people. Two days training is required before using the programme.

Barrow and Hannah (2012) trialled IMS on eight children aged 9 to 15 years who had a diagnosis of ASC. All but one of the children attended mainstream schools. The authors sought to identify the children's views about help received in and outside of school as well as their participation in decision making processes. Their rationale for using the programme included: its flexibility; a sequential nature to the modules; audio guide prompts; adaptability to the individual; use of the child's own vocabulary to label feelings, people and settings; and the facility to log the child's responses.

The authors reported that all children responded positively to the use of the computer programme, and note that it seemed to relax them. They assert this was due to the three-way interaction process between the child, interviewer and computer. In particular, they note the visual aspect of the method was useful in focussing the children's attention.

Provided transcripts demonstrate free-flowing conversation, and children were asked a variety of questions, such as, what clubs they were involved with and who helps them in school. However, audio or video recording were not used which makes it difficult to validate their findings. They also noted that some of the children found the voice of the computer distracting and found it difficult to relate to the representational symbols on the computer.

### 3.2.9 Conclusions

A summarised table illustrates considered suitability for each method's use in this project

Table 3.2: Summary of tool kits reviewed and their considered suitability

<i>Method</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<i>Diamond Rank Sorting Task</i> (Nock, 2009)	Children (aged 7 – 11) sorted activities into a diamond shape of what they felt helps them to learn.	❖ Data revealed insights that can challenge the status quo	❖ Limited experiences children can talk about
<i>Focus Groups</i> (Tobias, 2009)	Group elicitation task. Children (aged 14-16) were asked about their views of school and to draw interpretations.	❖ Parental interviews helped compare children and parental views ❖ Video recording enabled retrospective analysis.	❖ Subject to inherent problems of focus groups
<i>Talking Mats</i> (Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford, 2005)	Physical visual tool that asked open ended questions about children's (aged 6 -18) ideas of successful outcomes. Symbols represent the conversation on a mat.	❖ Background knowledge helped with the interview process	❖ Preliminary questions can exclude children ❖ Open ended questions can be difficult for children with cognitive/communicative difficulties to answer
<i>The Mosaic Approach</i> (Beresford et al., 2004)	Combines variety of methods e.g. photos, tours, map making, observations and interviews. Sought to find out what aspects of their lives children (aged 6-14) viewed positively and negatively.	❖ Triangulation of different data supported validity of the project. ❖ Interviews were based around a craft activity to relax children. ❖ Photographs helped focus the children and were more concrete than symbols. ❖ Views found differed from status quo	❖ Practicality of asking children to take their own photos questionable
<i>The Ideal school drawing technique</i> (Williams and Hanke, 2007)	Based on PCP principles. Children (aged 6 – 14) asked to draw a picture of most important features of school provision.	❖ PCP provides strong theoretical background for findings. ❖ Semi-structured interview questions supported the process. ❖ Children's drawings showed sophisticated understanding of school ethos and the impact of this on their own well-being	❖ Adult interpretation necessary to interpret drawings. ❖ Requires several days training
<i>In My Shoes</i> (Barrow and Hannah, 2012)	Computer based tool trialled on children (aged 9-15) to identify views about help received in and outside of school.	❖ Software programme said to be flexible and adaptable to the individual ❖ Uses emotional faces and symbols ❖ Uses open ended questions	❖ Requires several days training ❖ No audio or video recording taken.

This tool kit review demonstrates that, although the tools identified provided methods of gaining insights about children's experiences, they failed to meet the requirements set out in the quality assessment framework criteria. Most notably, none of the tools offer a comprehensive way of exploring how children with SLCN are affected by school and support processes, which directly impact their experiences of learning in the classroom. Furthermore, the studies offered only a single snapshot of the children's experiences at a particular point in time. This is a crucial consideration both in terms of validity of responses and creating a tool kit method that offers educational services a way to make informed decisions in regards to support in context.

This review helps to highlight a clear gap in the research in terms of suitably robust and transparent methods to elicit the voice of children with SLCN about their school learning and support experiences. This is a conclusion that other researchers have found (Franklin, 2013) and provides a strong rationale for the creation of a new tool kit.

### **3.3 Project Aims and Research Questions**

With the current and previous chapters in mind, a primary aim was created:

*To establish a tool kit capable of supporting children with speech, language and communication needs, to explore their school learning and support experiences.*

A secondary aim was already created to monitor the capacity of the tool kit to reach a shared consensus:

*To examine how closely the children's views harmonise with the perceptions of those who have responsibility for implementing support.*

The importance of upholding the rights of the child is of paramount importance to this study's ethos. Yet, practitioners must also be satisfied that the toolkit meets their needs. There is little point creating a method that is of no practical use once the thesis has been completed. This presented a conflict of interests, and the researcher's own struggles can be seen woven into the narrative as the thesis unfolds. Nor is it surprising; in case studies involving twenty-two parent, teacher and child relationships that sought to review IEPs, Alasuutari (2013) explores the discursive 'multifaceted' complexities within which participation operates. She compared the process of communication between the different parties as a 'field battle in which all kinds of counter-discourses are mobilized to defend the existing positions and interests in the changes that the potential reform causes them... and consequently, the result may differ a lot from the original ideals (p.254).'

The aims of this thesis can be better understood by the following research questions:

1. *How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with speech, language and communication needs at school?*
2. *Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adults' perception of those experiences?*

In order to answer the research questions and meet the objectives, a tool kit must first be created. Chapter four reports upon the design and execution of this tool kit.

## **4 Chapter Four: Methodology**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter critically examines and explores the research methodology that was employed within this project. The research paradigm and purpose are discussed initially, followed by the design of a novel tool kit that was created. Next, an account of the action research cycle and case study framework that this study employed are considered. Finally, participant recruitment, ethics and reliability, and validity considerations are discussed.

The research project was initiated with three outreach service providers who support children with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). It aimed:

*To establish a tool kit capable of supporting children with speech, language and communication needs, to explore their school learning and support experiences.*

*To examine how closely the children's views harmonise with the perceptions of those who have responsibility for implementing support.*

The study set out to empower children and practitioners by establishing their views throughout the project and exploring methods for enabling them to participate in the research process. For convenience the project's research questions are reiterated below:

1. *How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with additional communicative needs at school?*
  
2. *Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adults' perception of those experiences?*

## 4.2 Timeline

Purpose	Activity	Completed
Initial consultation with Outreach services to identify concerns and requirements from CU	Meetings with three lead outreach practitioners	September 2013 – February 2014
Action Research Cycle One (Pilot YVYC tool)	Participant recruitment	February 2014
	Data collection	March – June 2014
	Data Analysis/Write up	June – September 2014
Consultation with outreach services to evaluate results	Meetings with three lead outreach practitioners	October 2014
Action Research Cycle Two	Participant recruitment	January 2015
	Data collection	February 2015 – July 2015
	Data Analysis/Write up	September 2015 – March 2016
Action Research Cycle Three	Participant recruitment	September 2016
	Data collection	December – March 2017
	Data Analysis/Write up	April 2017 – October 2017
Additional Data Analysis	Cross-Case Analysis	January – March 2018
Write up	Completion of write up	July 2018

## 4.3 Research paradigm and purpose

The research paradigm that best describes the underlying assumptions taken in this study is that of *critical realism*, which provides a modern approach to the ontological, epistemology and axiological philosophical concepts. Critical realism delivers a path between the extremes of positivism (the search for objective truth), and interpretivism (the belief that



there are no objective and extrinsic facts within society) (Sayer, 2000; Tekin and Kotaman, 2013).

Proponents of positivism argue that an external, measurable reality exists independently of any interpretation or analysis of it. Within this paradigm the researcher is an outsider and should bear no influence upon the study (Tekin and Kotaman, 2013). In this way, objectivity can be quantified and research studies generalised to a given population (Noblit and Eaker, 1987). However, the positivist approach can be criticised for ignoring the complex nature of human interaction and attempting to categorise phenomena into a one-dimensional linear framework (Lor, 2011; Noblit and Eaker, 1987).

The alternative view, interpretivism, argues that there is no single truth or reality, only different interpretations of phenomena understood through an individual's perspective. Social reality can be viewed as being different to actual reality due to the relations and interactions between them. Research within this paradigm aims to understand the meanings of these social realities for those who experience them (Noblit and Eaker, 1987). Lor (2011 p.19) states, 'knowledge that results from the process is not universally valid but contextual and restricted to the particular time of the interaction.' Arguably, such views provide limited practical execution because they show no way of demonstrating how one set of factors rather than another plays a role in bringing about particular outcomes.

Unlike the interpretivist view, critical realism argues that there is an actual 'reality' independent of what is observed but, due to the uncontrollable nature of social structures and systems, it is not always possible to observe this reality. Instead, an interpretation of the event is gained but that interpretation might be viewed differently by different people

and data acquired through research might not necessary grant access to this reality (McLeod, 2011; Pawson and Tilley, 2008; Robson, 2011, Willig, 2008). As Easton (2010) points out, observation is fallible and as such revealing a full understanding of an event is unlikely. Within critical realism, dominant narratives are accepted as if they were real but, through exploration and analysis, are examined for the operation of power and challenged according to the practices and outcomes that they permit and prohibit. Allowing children with disabilities a voice has been demonstrated to be a fairly recent phenomenon (see Chapter Two). Up until recently, narratives such as ‘adults know best’ prevented those children from being heard. The modern concept of childhood has increasingly enabled some to have a voice on issues that affect them but the degree and extent to which children’s views are adhered to is questionable (Franklin, 2013; Kellett, 2011.)

As it cannot be assumed that a particular truth can be revealed in its entirety, critical realism depends on gathering data that helps to identify alternative explanations. Gathering data from different perceptions becomes crucial to understanding a particular phenomenon (Easton, 2010). This is a philosophy that synchronises with the principles of person-centred planning, the psychological underpinning of the SEN Code of Practice (2015), as it involves empowering children by placing them centre stage, hearing their voice and giving them responsibility within decision making processes. As such, critical realism can be seen as providing the researcher with an approach that permits the study of social phenomena in real life situations through holistic manners for pragmatic purposes (Robson, 2011; Tekin and Kotaman, 2013). Ultimately, it permits research and learning from individuals in order to understand and improve upon their experiences (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). And, this represents the crucial purpose of this research project.

## **4.4 Research Design**

### *4.4.1 Action Research*

In co-ordination with a critical realist underpinning, action research enables the researcher to delve into the action in order to explore and interrogate conceptualised truths that emerge through the application of the tool kit. Action research provides a holistic approach to solve real life problems and works well with the pragmatic principles of critical realism (Carr, 2006).

Action research is a way of creating knowledge in the context of practice and requires the researcher to work collaboratively with others (Huang, 2010). It involves a ‘spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action’ (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1990, P.8). It is concerned not only with understanding social situations, but with addressing problems to effect a desired change. Coghlan and Brannick (2005, P.4) describe the goals of action research as to make the ‘action more effective while simultaneously building up a body of scientific knowledge.’ It is highly appropriate where problem solving and improvement of practice is sought, and where the aim is to investigate the experiences of a small number of participants in depth (Hart and Bond, 1995).

Action Research has been criticised for not representing itself clearly, for instance by not aligning itself to a particular research philosophy and by taking a somewhat cavalier approach to the way it can be carried out (McWilliam, 2004). The researcher is free to make use of a variety of research methods rather than proposing a particular method. As a result, it has gained a reputation as an ‘anything goes’ approach (Dick, 2006). However, the

flexibility of action research can be seen as its fundamental strength; the attitudes and experiences of the researcher cannot be separated from the design or fieldwork processes but are part of the context and should be critically validated. A trade-off of the action research approach is that the researcher might lose control in some of the decisions about the project (Robson, 2011). Ideally this would serve to promote equality between researcher and collaborators; however, as becomes clear within the narrative of this project, the reality is far more complex.

Recently, action research has become much more prevalent in research (Ismail, 2009), perhaps driven by the emergence of the trend for inclusion (Robson, 2005). Ismail (2009) provides a persuasive argument for including those who are to be researched, saying that it enables a group within a particular social setting to ‘collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution’ (Bryman, 2008, P.387). Sharing of information enables the researcher to make alterations to the methodology as more is discovered about the context and participants. Hart and Bond (1995, p.40) list seven criteria, which they argue differentiate action research from other methodologies:

1. It is educative
2. It deals with individuals as members of social groups
3. It is problem focussed, context specific and future orientated
4. It involves a change intervention
5. It aims for improvement and involvement
6. It involves a cyclic process, with research action and evaluation being interlinked
7. It is founded on a research relationship in which those involved are participants in the change process.

There are a variety of action research approaches depending on the purpose of the study. This study sought to raise awareness of the marginalised and so an empowering action research design was utilised over the course of the project (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). According to this approach, problems are negotiated with those with less power and acknowledged and explored through a variety of media in the interests of promoting positive change (Hart and Bond, 1995). This enables the researcher to form close ties with a number of stakeholders.

There is a synergy between critical realism and the principles of action research that facilitates a highly pragmatic method for conducting this study. Critical realism underpins the researcher's core beliefs and helps to explain and understand the various processes underlying practices within schools, drawing out values and belief systems held regarding the children that they support. Meanwhile, action research provides the iterative theoretical framework that will develop the tool kit and will carry out the research study from conception through to completion.

## **4.5 Your Voice, Your Choice: tool kit creation**

The literature reviews covered in Chapters 2 and 3 identified a clear gap in existing research regarding the adequacy of tool kits capable of eliciting the voice of children with SLCN needs which also met with Outreach service requirements, and the principles of children's voice. As a result, a novel tool kit was created for the project.

## 4.6 YVYC tool design decisions

### 4.6.1 Theoretical considerations

Ensuring that tool design decisions draw upon theory is important to understand why it should work (Middleton et al., 2006). Equally important, is that the tool is practical for the professionals who wish to use it. Primarily, this refers to the Outreach service practitioners who requested the tool. However, the literature review revealed a paucity of tools across multiple fields and, given the political and social push towards inclusion, this research will likely be helpful for other services and schools that are looking to support children with SLCN.

Initial design decisions were considered in relation to the quality assessment framework that other tools were evaluated by (see Chapter Two). This was updated to include factors that emerged from that review (see updated QAF framework in Table 4.1). Other factors also influenced the design including: the researcher's own teaching experience working with children with special educational needs, teachers, outreach feedback, supervisor advice, and expert deliberation from educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.

Table 4.1: Quality assessment framework outlining Outreach requirements, Children's Voice, and literature reviewed benefits.

#### **Outreach Requirements** *(As identified in Chapter 1)*

- Adaptable for range of ages (4-18) with communication difficulties and disabilities
- Seeks children's views of their experiences of school across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains
- Easy and well-timed to administer
- Fun and non-threatening
- Evaluates how children feel about their interventions and support structures
- Evaluates whether a child's enjoyment of school has increased as a result of support
- Helps practitioners to understand what children think help them to learn

### **Children's Voice** *(As identified in Chapter 2)*

- Respects children's rights
- Promotes social inclusion
- Personal centred approach
- Underpinned by the social model of disability
- Empowers the child
- Enables active participation
- Works towards benefits and overcoming challenges of implementation

### **Literature reviewed benefits** *(As identified in Chapter 3)*

- Flexible for the individual
- Data aims to reveal insights that can challenge the status quo
- Audio or Video recorded
- Identify contextual background knowledge about the child
- Interviews should involve manipulating items
- Photographs to help focus children's memory and promote concrete ideas
- Basic emotional faces are more easily recognised
- Mixture of open and closed questions

#### *4.6.2 Physical or software based*

An initial question in designing the tool was whether or not it should be physical or software-based. There is growing evidence of the benefits of using computer-based technology for children with disabilities as a form of communication enabler, particularly for those with ASC (Aresti-Bartolome and Gacia-Zapirain, 2014). Computer-based technology is believed to compensate for some areas of difficulty and support students with additional needs because it is possible to create controllable and predictable environments, offer multisensory information, foster autonomous work, be motivating and reinforcing, encourage attention and lessen the frustration from making mistakes (Aresti-Bartolome and Gacia-Zapirain, 2014). Certainly, the 'In My Shoes' software programme that was reviewed in the literature review (p.62) demonstrated some of these benefits (Barrow and

Hannah, 2012). However, there are some who argue that the use of technology can isolate children with disabilities, particularly those with ASC who might have problems with social communication (Powell, 1996).

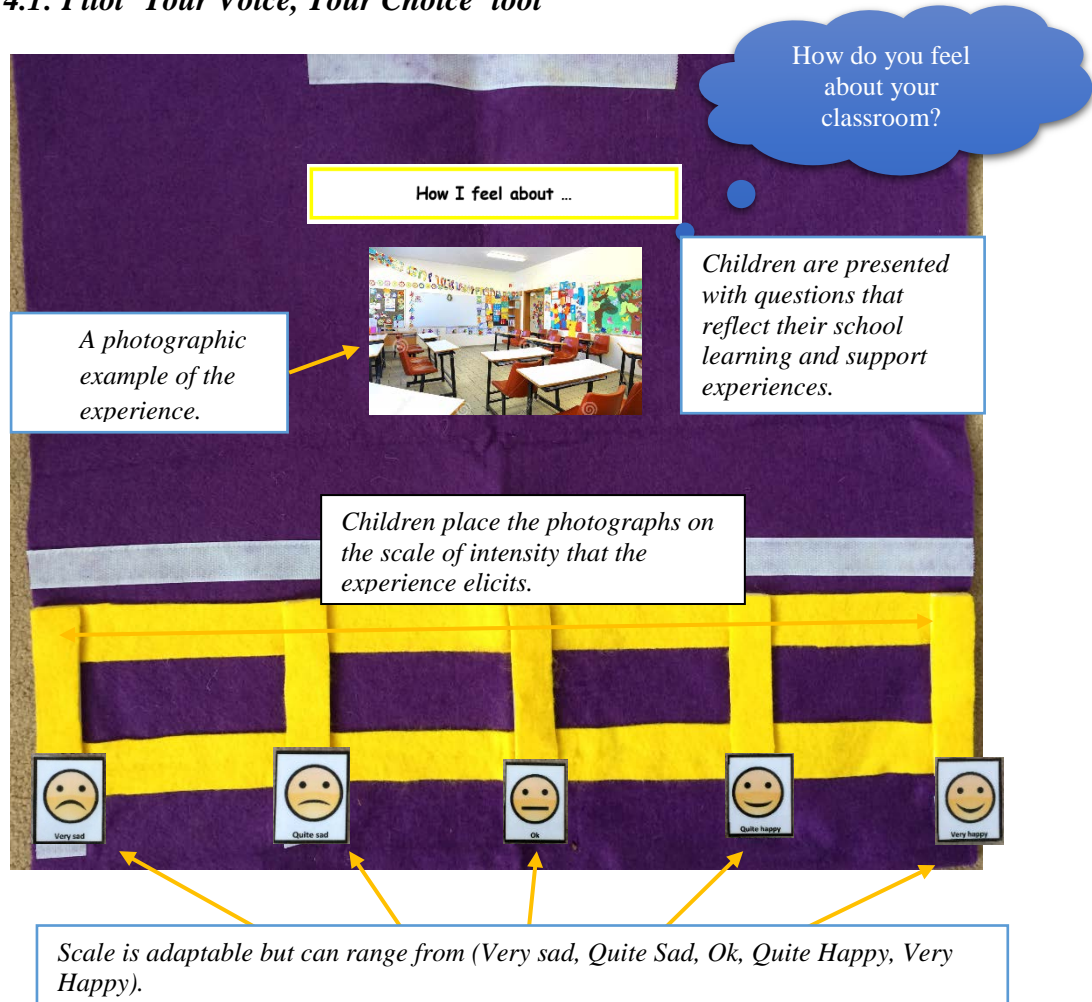
During meetings with several members of the Outreach services, there were mixed reactions about whether or not the tool should be physical or software-based. Several practitioners showed preference towards a software-based tool, while others reported that they felt the children on their caseloads would prefer a physical form of elicitation method because they would be more used to manipulating objects, and familiarity is believed to be important in tool design (Wickenden and Kembhavi-Tam, 2014). However, it is also plausible that outreach practitioner views may be based upon whether or not they are comfortable with technology based applications. Several examples of physical tools were reviewed earlier, such as, The Talking Mats (Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford, 2005) and Diamond Ranking Sorting tool (Nock, 2009). These provide examples of children engaging effectively which adds to this argument. A decision was made to focus on the development of a physical prototype of a tool with the intention of evaluating its potential as a computer-mediated tool in subsequent research, which lies outside the scope of this thesis.



## 4.7 The YVYC pilot tool

A pilot tool kit was created (Figure 4.1). In consultation with children participants and outreach practitioners, it was decided that the tool kit should be called ‘Your Voice, Your Choice’ (YVYC) in order to reflect the central premise of the project; to enable children with a way to voice their experiences, ultimately giving them an opportunity to get involved in effective decision-making processes.

**Figure 4.1: Pilot ‘Your Voice, Your Choice’ tool**



## **Tool features explained**

The literature review revealed the importance of having a non-verbal, visually-based flexible method that utilised a combination of multi-sensory stimuli that could be manipulated to fit the needs of the individual (Kellett, 2011). YVYC was designed as a child friendly, fun, adaptable, multi-sensory engaging platform to help children to tangibly explore their feelings about their school and support experiences.

### *4.7.1 Premise*

The tool comprised a purple felt mat (45 x 45 cm) with a yellow ladder horizontal layer at the bottom and Velcro bases on areas that the children could interact with. The colours were purposefully chosen to be identifiable by children with red-green colour blindness. The ladder system is present in many schools and was therefore believed to act as a familiar system of grading (Airey et al., 2002). Emotions were provided at the bottom of the mat and were purposefully kept basic for the initial pilot tool. Responses included, Very Sad, Quite Sad, Ok, Quite Happy, and Very Happy.

Children could be asked a number of pre-conceptualised questions relating to topics within their learning, social and emotional and support experiences. These were represented by photographs or symbols which the children could place on the scale according to how a particular experience made them feel. Their answers were recorded on a score sheet which was individualised for the child (e.g. Appendix 1).

#### 4.7.2 *Photographs*

Asking children verbally about their experiences is restrictive. Photo elicitation offers an alternative to verbal-only methods and is believed to stimulate new thoughts and memories prompted by, although not necessarily contained in, the images (Collier and Collier, 1986). Photographs are preferable to symbols or statements because they do not exclude those who are unable to read, are less abstract, and they help to focus the child on the present (e.g. Beresford et al., 2004). These were sought across a range of social, behavioural and learning domains for each child participant. Illustrations were also used where photographs were not able to be taken (Appendix 11).

#### 4.7.3 *Modifiable familiar scale*

The pilot tool included a 5- point Likert scale representing Very Sad, Quite Sad, Ok, Quite Happy, and Very Happy. The scale was chosen because it enables measurement of the intensity of the emotion experienced. It was theorised this would be sensitive to the subtle changes that children might feel across their learning and support experience. It mirrors successful traditional ways of exploring children's self-reported pain intensity where incremental changes in pain intensity can make a significant affect to children's lives (von Baeyer, 2006). The changes can also be evaluated over a period of time, in relation to an intervention. For example, on administration of the tool pre-intervention, a child might express that he feels very sad about a particular experience. A follow up administration of the tool might reveal the child feels quite sad. This provides a way to identify both large and small improvements which may otherwise go unnoticed yet are important to children's lived experiences.

The horizontal ladder and smiley face is widely used in schools, and even very young children (aged 4) tend to be familiar with them through games (e.g. Snakes and Ladders), stickers or cartoons (Airey et al., 2002). Fewer increments can be selected to make the scale simpler, with the simplest being Sad and Happy. Alternatively, if an existing method was familiar to the child, such as, Thumbs up or Thumbs down, then the emotions could be replaced and this idea has been successfully previously demonstrated (Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford, 2005). A modifiable scale allows the researcher and practitioners to adapt the tool to a child's age, needs and prior experiences, which was identified as being important to the process of eliciting voice (Kellett, 2011).

#### *4.7.4 What questions did the YVYC tool seek?*

A central requirement of the Outreach services was identifying how children felt about, and were affected by, their school and support experiences across a range of social, behavioural and learning domains. This is particularly beneficial because the school context affects a variety of emotional experiences that influence teaching, learning, behaviour and social processes (Schutz and DeCuir, 2002).

Psychological and neuroscience fields show that the emotional consideration of particular experiences is essential to children's motivation, interpersonal resources, and cognition (Immordino-Yang, Gardener, and Damasio, 2016; Lewis, Haviland-Jones, and Barrett, 2007). Positive social-emotional variables such as, positive interactions with teachers, positive representations of self and non-rejected peer status can predict academic success (e.g. Bernard, 2006; Denham et al., 2003; Howes and Smith, 1995). Whereas, negative emotional experiences in childhood are consistently associated with: poor academic

attainment (Currie et al., 2012), early cessation of education (Lee et al., 2009), unemployment, suicide risk, substance misuse, early pregnancy and criminality (Valiente, Swanson, and Eisenberg, 2011).

More specifically, anxiety is associated with poorer school outcomes on test performance, grades, and school completion (E.g. Duchesne, Vitaro, Larose, and Tremblay, 2008). Anger is thought to reduce achievement because it negatively affects higher order cognitive processes (such as, problem solving, memory and strategic thinking) (Pekrun, Elliot and Maier, 2009). Both anxiety and anger are believed to decrease motivation for learning and engagement in classroom activities as well as disrupting children's ability to recall material (Linnenbrink, 2007). Sadness and anxiety are components of the withdrawal system which interfere with children's motivation, leading children to avoid challenging school experiences that are perceived to lead to negative outcomes (Davidson et al., 2000). Emotions also affect relationships as the quality of peer and child-teacher relationships are associated with educational outcomes (Jerome, Hamre, and Pianta, 2009). Children who are often angry find developing and maintaining relationships in the classroom more difficult (Pianta, Cox, and Snow, 2007). Meanwhile, anxious children are more likely to have difficulty relating to peers, be rejected and show aggression (Bruch, 2001). Cognitive psychologists argue that children's experiences of negative emotions can lead to a fixation of the cause of the emotion, causing cognitive resources to be diverted from educational capacities to alternative areas, distracting the child from learning (Valiente, Swason and Eisenberg, 2011). From an interpersonal perspective, children with negative emotions are more likely to miss out on the benefits of working with others (Davidson et al. 2000).

There is a general lack of research on associations with specific positive emotions. This is likely because negative emotions are perceived as being responsible for disruptions in children's development, and so receive more attention, again highlighting the dominant discourse associated with the medical model of disability. However, positive emotions have been shown to encourage the child to engage with their environments, which are likely to broaden cognitive awareness, their potential for solving problems, and provide academic benefits (Rothbart and Bates, 2006; Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions, such as joy and interest, encourage attention, which is a key factor in promoting learning and achievement (Ladd et al., 1999). Joy also encourages the desire for play and creativity which are fundamental mechanisms that promote children's learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Other research shows that joy, hope and pride positively correlate with children's academic self-efficacy, academic interest, effort and overall achievement (Pekrun et al., 2004). From an interpersonal perspective, joyful children are more likely to engage in free time social play at school and form friendships that can provide social and academic support (Spinrad et al., 2004).

Overall, it appears that negative emotions, particularly anxiety, sadness and anger, detrimentally affect school experiences through a combination of reducing cognitive resources, adversely effecting motivation and hindering interpersonal relationship development. In contrast, positive emotions, such as joy, hope and pride, appear to be related to more positive school experiences. Eliciting children's feelings about their school and support experiences will provide insight into how they are currently affected by those experiences. The resulting information should help practitioners understand more about those learning experiences, and adjust practices to provide more positive experiences.

#### *4.7.5 The challenges of eliciting emotion*

The rationale for eliciting how children feel has been stated above. However, emotions are notoriously difficult to study. Baumeister and Bushman (2007) define the experience of an emotion as “a subjective state, often accompanied by a bodily reaction, (e.g. increased heart rate) and an evaluative response, to some event” (p.61). Eliciting this subjective state is challenging, especially for those with cognitive or communicative disabilities who may be unable to verbally discuss it.

It is theorised that the YVYC tool can reduce the barrier for children to verbally describe how they are feeling (if they are unable) by offering them photographs and emotional choice responses. However, the process of asking a child to interpret and evaluate their own emotional state still involves a cognitive dimension that requires self-reflection and self-awareness skills (Beresford, 2012). Studies on children’s theory of mind (ToM) support the concept that language plays a key role in acquiring understanding of emotion (Milligan, Astington, and Deck, 2007). This may impact the ability of those with communication or cognitive disabilities, such as those with autism spectrum conditions (ASC), where theory of mind is believed to be impaired (Baron-Cohen, 1995). However, the YVYC tool has been designed to be adaptable and flexible, altering its structure to accommodate the child. This structural design draws on Vygotsky’s (1956) zone of proximal development theory. The widely accepted theory postulates that pupils can be guided by a more knowledgeable other enabling the pupil to complete a task which ordinarily, would be outside of their competency (Ibid). The YVYC tool is hypothesised to act as a scaffold to support the pupil as they are led through the zone of proximal development, enabling those children who struggle to typically communicate with the

opportunity to have their voices heard. Bandura's social learning and motivational theories (1994) are also relevant, as individuals will avoid situations which they feel will exceed their capabilities but will engage in ones that they feel able. The YVYC tool is designed to adapt to and develop these capabilities, encouraging children to take part in activities which they ordinarily may feel are outside of their competency.

In addition, prior to administering the YVYC tool with a child, additional background knowledge from the school and carers will be sought to help foster known communication methods which previous studies have shown support the elicitation process (Beresford et al., 2004).

A further difficulty in trying to monitor and scale emotions is their fluid nature. This is especially true for young children who are more likely to be biased towards the immediate present, rather than summative judgements covering a period of time (Wigelsworth et al., 2010). As a result, when asking young children how they feel about a particular experience, they may be more likely to give a negative response if they have recently had a bad experience, even if they typically have a positive experience. Kahneman and Krueger (2006) explain that perceptions are a more accurate gauge of actual feelings if they are reported closer to the time of, and in direct reference to, the actual experience. To mitigate this, the YVYC tool will provide photographs of children's actual experiences to try and stimulate a more accurate reflective response while also ensuring that experiences have happened recently.

A further difficulty emerges in consideration that emotions are not binary and people may have mixed feelings about particular experiences (Perlman et al., 2008). For example, a



child might feel happy about receiving additional support in a subject but sad that it means they have to miss out on their favourite P.E. class to have it. During the preschool years, it is believed that children do not tend to recognise that they can have multiple emotional reactions (Gnepp, McLee, and Domanic, 1987). As a result, eliciting an emotional response from the very young or those with developmental delays might provide only a partial account. However, the purpose of the YVYC tool is not simply to gain a binary affective response which is limited to the parameters of the tool. Its purpose is to overcome the difficulties that children have communicating about how they feel, in effect a structural conversational assistant. The photographs and scale will provide sensory information eliciting their affective experiences, but the administrator (the researcher) will aim to supplement the child's choice by asking probing questions about the child's responses.

## **4.8 Data collection: YVYC Tool Kit method**

The YVYC tool is theorised to enable children with SLCN the means to explore their affected school learning and support experiences. However, using the YVYC tool in isolation, as previous studies have with other tools, is reductionist and fails to take into account contextual information. It also places one set of views (either the child's or the adult's) as more important than the other whereas this project seeks to promote equality of representation across the school system. Instead, the YVYC tool in combination with other methods (collectively known as the YVYC tool kit) will seek to include contextual information by representing how adults around the child feel about the child and their experiences. This should provide a far better exploration of voice within a contextual framework because it is more representative of social phenomena (Robson, 2011; Tekin and Kotaman, 2013). It also accentuates the philosophy of critical realism which should enable access and understanding of learning from individuals in order to improve upon the reality of their experiences (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

The importance of keeping the YVYC tool kit practical and accessible for services and schools is paramount. Data collection methods were purposefully considered with this in mind. During meetings with Outreach practitioners it was revealed that their support practices relied on gathering background information about the child's history, discussions with key staff, and observations of the child in their school environment. This represents an exploratory approach that many consultants adopt when approaching a problem in order to understand more about the perceived difficulty (e.g. Woolfson, 2016). However, it was equally important that the data collected had an empirical foundation.

Semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, questionnaires, observations, official documentation and the researchers own reflections were used to explore the contextual experiences about the child from different perspectives. These were designed to help answer the project's second research question:

*To examine how closely the children's views harmonise with the perceptions of those who have responsibility for implementing support.*

Each of these methods and their rationale are discussed below.

#### *4.8.1 Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured interviews are frequently conducted within the fields of educational research (Grieg, Taylor and Mackay, 2013). They are useful because they are a relatively flexible method of data collection, which helps the researcher to react to important and emotive issues that might present themselves during the interview process (Grieg, Taylor and Mackay, 2013). Questions were put to adults close to the children, who influenced and made decisions about children's teaching, learning and support experiences. They were intended to identify how adults who supported children perceived the children's difficulties, strengths, and learning needs around the facets of social communication, learning and current interventions (Appendix 2). Audio recordings would permit for transcription and analysis.

#### *4.8.2 Informal discussions*

In addition to the more structural interviews, informal discussions were also to be considered part of the tool kit. They were mostly carried out with the Outreach practitioners, teachers, teaching assistants and SENCOs but also external professionals, such as Educational Psychologists, Speech and Language therapists and Occupational therapists, when the opportunity presented itself. The informal discussion or interview technique can be advantageous to more formal methods because the researcher would be free to gain information about the child's experiences in a more naturalistic manner (Grieg, Taylor, and Mackay, 2013; Holmes, 1998).

#### *Official documents*

Merriam (1988) likens the process of looking for data from documents as 'mining.' A range of documents would be gathered as part of the YVYC tool kit process in order to better understand the child's background, schooling ability, special educational needs, health needs, individual education and behaviour plans, outside practitioner involvement and any other correspondence that might highlight the child's school experiences. These documents would provide an additional layer of information towards ascertaining an adult perspective of the child's experiences, triangulating the adult and child accounts.

#### *4.8.3 Observations*

Researcher observations of the children are an important part of the YVYC toolkit and should serve to illuminate the child's experiences from a different perspective. They are also an important process for individualising the YVYC tool for the child's needs, in terms of generating the experience-based questions and then representing those experiences with

photographs. Observation strategy was conceptualised by the children's research principles of Greig, Taylor and MacKay (2013, p148). They define observations as watching children individually, in relationships and in different contexts, and asking:

- What do they see?
- What do they feel?
- What do they think?
- What do they do?

An initial difficulty that arose came when deciding whether to adopt participant or non-participant observation (Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009). The former involves entering the children's world by engaging with them and sharing in their experiences to better understand them, while the latter method requires the observer to remain separate from the child, simply watching and gathering data as a separate agent. The outreach practitioners carry out non participant observations. The researcher initially intended to replicate their method; it makes practical sense to use existing methods that are already in place. It was hoped that this would reduce the interaction between the researcher and the child, limiting the risk that the researcher might influence the child resulting in more naturalistic observations (Grieg, Taylor and MacKay, 2013).

As well as general observations identified using the above framework, specific information would be sought within the same topics and experiences that the children would later be asked on using the YVYC tool. To this end, a structurally-based observation schedule was created (Appendix 7) based on a time sampling technique (Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009) and updated to include the Outreach practitioners' approach as well as several additional authors' input (Spradley, 1980; Grief, Taylor and MacKay, 2013). Time sampling refers to time periods within which the researcher is recording data. It is useful when studying

behaviour over a prolonged period because it is less time consuming than alternative approaches like coding (Grief, Taylor and MacKay, 2013). Traditionally, it has been criticised for taking behaviours out of context; however, the researcher envisioned that these moments would be useful to write a more comprehensive account of context.

#### *4.8.4 Research Journal*

A critical reflective journal was kept to log events that were considered significant while the researcher was in the schools gathering data for the YVYC tool kit (Borg, 2001). These informed the researcher's interpretation of the other adults' perspectives.

## **4.9 Case Studies**

### *4.9.1 Case study rationale*

The development of case studies can be successfully combined with the foundations of action research and the philosophical underpinnings of critical realism. Case studies create in-depth accounts of situations with the aim of identifying why things are the way that they are (Easton, 2010). Case study methodology clearly distinguishes itself from the experimental approach where purposeful attempts are made to separate the phenomenon of interest from its context by attempting to control the environment. Instead, phenomena are represented within the social and contextual conditions pertinent to the case. Yin (2014, p.16) offers a useful modern definition of the method:

*“A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.”*

Simons (2009) states that the key reason for carrying out case studies is to demonstrate accountability, furthering the development and acquisition of knowledge. They can be especially useful for developing theory and evaluating programs and processes because they are both flexible and rigorous (Baxter and Jack, 2008). More recently, case studies have helped to develop conceptually-based interventions and programmes before moving on to carry out costly evaluation trials (Byng et al., 2008; Craig et al., 2008). In this way, they identify and provide an account of the conceptual and implementation features that are made apparent in a real life context (Power et al., 2004).

Yin (2014, p. 4) states that although there is no specific formula for when it is appropriate to use a case study, the more the research questions seek to explain ‘some present circumstance’ the more appropriate it is to use the method. He adds that the method is particularly useful when the research questions require an extensive and in-depth description of some social phenomena.

This project used case studies as an evaluative process to identify the effectiveness of the YVYC tool kit as an elicitation method, with which to explore how children with SLCN felt about their school learning and support experiences.

#### *4.9.2 Contextual considerations*

The literature review revealed the multifaceted complexities within which participation and voice operates (e.g. Alasuutari, 2013). A strategy was required that could evaluate the effectiveness of the YVYC tool and subsequently inform decision makers about children's voiced experiences. A central difficulty then arises in deciding upon how to balance the various perspectives. Whose voice should be privileged, the outreach service, the children, the parents, the researcher or a wider scientific audience? As Simons (2009) sceptically notes, "evaluation is inherently political, concerned with the distribution of power and the allocation of resources and opportunities in society (p.376)." The YVYC tool kit may reveal issues that have consequences and whose interests are or are not best served through the evaluative findings. To address potential evaluative bias the case studies can be used to illustrate different facets of the same school issues through the exploration of the multiple perspectives (Simons, 2009). This will help to demonstrate a more holistic and realist account of the individual circumstances that are affecting the children's lived school experiences and identify where discordance arise. Case studies are well suited to carry out these comparative explorations because each individual case can be examined using a variety of data sources which the YVYC tool kit incorporates (Baxter and Jack, 2008).



#### 4.9.3 *Case study design*

The research design should provide a model that outlines what questions to study, what data are relevant, and how those data will be collected and analysed (Yin, 2014). This study has outlined the framework that will be used to develop the YVYC tool kit by using a combination of action research and case study strategy. However, it requires the steps that guide the researcher towards answering the research questions.

Within the literature, advice on the methodological steps involved in carrying out case study design is littered with opposing theoretical concepts and interpretation (Bromley, 1986; Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). Perhaps the most known and comprehensive approaches have been documented by Stake (1995) and Yin (2013, 2014). The approaches that they employ differ quite considerably but they both strive to ensure that the phenomenon in question is explored in-depth through a series of robust methods.

Both Yin and Stake classify case studies according to their purpose. Yin (2014) categorises case studies as being either explanatory, exploratory or descriptive<sup>2</sup>. Alternatively, Stake (1995) describes them as being either intrinsic, instrumental or collective<sup>3</sup>. However, in many respects these categories appear somewhat arbitrary and Yin (2014) warns that often case types will overlap. That being said, they help to focus the study towards answering the research questions (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> Explanatory, Exploratory and Descriptive case studies refers to whether the researcher's primary interest is exploring, explaining or describing a phenomena.

<sup>3</sup> Intrinsic refers to exploring one case for its own sake. Instrumental involves using a case to gain insights into a particular phenomenon. Collective refers to a number of instrumental case studies.

Within the current research study, the case studies were primarily intended as being ‘exploratory’ because they were designed to evaluate the effectiveness, capacity and feasibility of the YVYC tool to elicit the voice of children with SLCN about their school learning experiences and the support that they receive. There are elements of explanatory, descriptive and instrumental characteristics within the cases but the central purpose of the project is focussed upon laying down preliminary investigative and explorative foundations for the YVYC tool kit that will lead to future studies.

Case studies can be carried out individually, as in a single case design, or through a series of individual case studies, known as a ‘multiple’ case design or as collective case studies, cross-case studies, comparative case studies and contrasting cases (Yin, 2014, Stake, 1995, Merriam, 1998). Single case studies are highly restrictive in terms of the uniqueness of the findings, the number of potential participants and the artificial conditions that are created (Yin, 2014). On the other hand, multiple case studies are widely believed to be preferable because they offer considerably more benefits than any single case study method unless a unique set of circumstance requires a single case approach (Yin, 2014; Stake, 2005; Hancock and Algozine, 2006). Essentially, multiple case studies offer more observations of the phenomenon, which increases the chance that what is being observed is reliable, therefore increasing the robustness of the study (Herriot and Firestone, 1983; Yin, 2014). This study can be considered a multiple case design because it sought to analyse clusters of individual cases (children with SLCN) in comparable contexts (children’s schools) in order to identify the effectiveness of the YVYC tool kit to elicit and evaluate children’s voice about their school learning and support experiences and reveal a more accurate account of what life feels like for the children in their schools (Figure 4.2).

*Figure 4.2: Multiple case study procedure (Yin, 2014)*

Some materials have been removed due to 3rd party copyright. The unabridged version can be viewed in Lancaster Library - Coventry University.

#### **4.10 Addressing case study concerns**

As with action research, the case study approach is highly flexible but is also met with a degree of scepticism and misunderstanding. Case studies have been typically criticised for not employing sufficient rigour in describing design and procedural components, an inability to generalise and not adequately dealing with reliability and validity (Baxter and Jack, 2008). These concerns have been comprehensively addressed in this project as follows:

##### *4.10.1 Employing rigor in design and procedural case studies*

In order to ensure a reliable methodological process, the case studies followed Yin's (2014) recommendations to address specific elements of the design, which he identifies as: the propositions, its unit of analysis, the logic linking the data to the propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings.

## *Propositions*

Propositions can be viewed as being similar to hypotheses in quantitative research and help to provide a focus to the case study by placing limits upon the research (Yin, 2014, Baxter and Jack, 2008). Stake (2005, p.16) likens them conceptually to relevant “issues” that the “reader needs to know” (p.17), but essentially, their purpose is to guide the data collection, analysis and discussion. It is not necessary for exploration-based studies to have propositions, but the researcher found them useful to provide a purpose with which each case study could be followed and held accountable (Yin, 2014).

Two propositions emerged as a result of initial meetings with the regional outreach service practitioners, a review of the literature, the development of the research questions, and creation of the YVYC tool kit.

*Proposition 1: The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.*

The YVYC tool is a novel communication aid that the researcher has designed using a combination of evidence-based literature, the researcher’s own knowledge and experience as a special educational needs teacher, consultation with experts and supervisor input. It is hypothesised that the YVYC tool will help children to communicate more successfully because it is built upon a theoretical consideration of ideas designed to remove several communication barriers and foster sensory reflection. That said, given the vast range of individual differences and the complexity of communicative and cognitive needs, it is acknowledged that that the tool is unlikely to work with all children. The case studies will evaluate not only if the YVYC provides an alternative way of voicing the children’s

experiences, but will also seek to identify in what circumstances it does and does not work, building up a database with which to make theoretical considerations.

*Proposition 2: The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders*

Furthermore, the responses that the children provide through the YVYC tool in combination with the information gained from alternative perspectives, will seek to identify a more accurate representation of what the child is experiencing at school for the benefit of all parties.

#### *Units of analysis and triangulation*

The units of analysis define the main unit to be studied and analysed within the case (Yin, 2014). Within this study, each case stemmed from the individual child with SLCN and feelings about his or her school and support experiences. Several authors recommend placing boundaries on the case to focus the data points and ensure the research objectives are achievable (Yin, 2014; Stake 1995; Baxter and Jack, 2008).

An embedded approach was used which helped to orientate data collection around specific data units within each case. The embedded units were the responses from the child on their own experiences (via YVYC tool), proximal adult perceptions of the child's general

learning and social and emotional experiences (via semi-structured and informal interviews/ documentary evidence) and researcher perceptions of those experiences (via observations and research journal). These data sources were identified as salient because they helped to triangulate the experiences of the child offering up a holistic interpretation of contextual events.

### *Logic linking the data to the propositions*

Yin (2014) advises that it is important to consider a general analytic strategy before beginning data collection, which helps to link the case study data to the concept of interest and direct the data analysis. This was challenging as the researcher was new to the field of qualitative research and action research / case study methods. In addition, and as has been stated previously, the project was highly exploratory. The YVYC tool was untested and it was not known how much or what type of data might emerge from the data units.

Therefore, the primary analytic strategy relied upon pursuing the theoretical propositions that the case study was based upon (Yin, 2014). In this way, the central role of each case study was to demonstrate whether or not the YVYC toolkit was effective (or not) at providing an alternative way (than simply being directly asked) for the child to share their school and support experiences. Similarly, each case was evaluated to establish whether a more detailed account of the child's experiences was realised through the gathering of multiple perspectives compared to current information that was available.

### *Criteria for interpreting the findings*

In a review of common misconceptions about case study research, Flyvbjerg (2009) highlights a bias towards verification, which he defines as “a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions, so that the study therefore becomes of doubtful scientific value” (p.234). This relates to the idea that the case study approach is unable to apply scientific methods that provide a balanced inference from the data collected. However, an increasing number of researchers strongly disagree arguing that the case study method has its own rigor, it is just very different to that of quantitative methods (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Yin, 2014; Stake, 2005). In addition, subjectivity can occur in all research methods regardless of whether they are carried out quantitatively or qualitatively (Burawoy, 1998). Unlike quantitative studies, where probability is used to interpret and validate findings, the primary strategy used within the case study approach is to identify and address rival explanations (Yin, 2014). Rival explanations help to identify potential threats or influences that might account for particular observations or inferences made within the data that might challenge the propositions. The more rivals that have been considered and rejected, the more robust the findings are considered to be. A broad range of rival explanations were identified and considered within this study. Several of these rivals only became realised in the later action research cycle processes and are presented in Table 4.2 below.

**Table 4.2: Rival definitions, application to this study and method of countering adapted from Yin (2014).**

Type and definition of rival	Application to current study	Method to counter rival
<i>The Null hypothesis</i> – The observation was a result of chance circumstance only.	The children do not understand the emotions or experiences offered.	Children will be provided with a screener prior to administration to test their emotional understanding.
	The elicited responses from the children using the YVYC tool do not accurately reflect their experiences.	Information about the child's experiences will be triangulated from multiple perspectives to check for concordance.  Interviews will be audio recorded and reflected upon for consistency.  <b>Action research cycle 3 only:</b>  YCYC tool interview will be re-administered after a period of time.
<i>Investigator Bias</i> – Experimenter effect in the field.	The children's elicited responses are likely to report positive emotional responses to questions because that is what they believe the researcher wants to hear.	Triangulation of responses improves validity (YVYC interview, practitioner responses, documentary evidence, researcher observations, and parental responses).  <b>Action research cycle 3 only:</b>  Interviews will be <b>video</b> recorded and reflected upon for consistency.
<i>Direct Rival</i> – An intervention other than the target intervention accounts for the result.	Information elicited from the child using YVYC could have been elicited using standard forms of communication. YVYC offers no unique method.	Analysis and evaluation will seek out discrepancies between child and practitioner perspectives as a result of the YVYC elicitation.
<i>Implementation Rival</i> – The implementation process not the substantive intervention accounts for the results.	The YVYC tool was not set up or carried out appropriately for the child.	The YVYC tool will be individualised to meet the child's needs.
<i>Rival Theory</i> – A theory different from the original theory explains the results better.	The theories that the YVYC tool are built upon are not responsible for eliciting or not eliciting information from the children but are due to other reasons.	Reflections and evaluations will compare individual and cross-case results with the literature.



### *The issue of generalisation*

A classic criticism of case study research is that the researcher is unable to generalise beyond the findings of a particular case because the sample cannot represent a larger population (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2011; De Vaus, 2001). This argument depicts the traditional positivist view that statistical interpretation is essential for generalisation to occur. It represents a significant threat towards answering the research questions because the YVYC tool kit would be of limited pragmatic use outside of the observed parameters if it was judged to only work (or not) on a select number of cases explored within the project. However, it is worth remembering that generalisations are only one type of scientific approach by which society accumulates knowledge and that others should not be devalued in their approach towards scientific innovation (Flyvbjerg, 2009).

With that in mind, Yin (2014) provides an alternative concept. Generalising from quantitative experiments tends to include multiple experiments that have replicated the phenomenon under similar conditions and he argues a similar approach can be used with case studies. However, within this model, instead of generalising to larger populations, case studies are generalized to their theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). Within this project, each individual case study will predict the same propositions, referred to as literal replications. If all cases turn out to be predicted, then it represents a persuasive argument for the original propositions. If some cases turn out to not predict the propositions, then this too will be useful as they can be used to predict theoretical replication, i.e. to predict circumstances when the propositions are unlikely to be found. Yin (2014) asserts that if some of the cases are contradictory then the initial propositions must be revised and re-tested with another set of cases, mirroring the way that quantitative researchers deal with

conflicting experimental findings. In this way, the goal of the researcher is to “expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to extrapolate probabilities (statistical generalisations)” (Yin, 2014. P.41). Analytic generalisation offer the ability to generalise to similar contextual circumstances; lessons learned from one case study may then be applied to similar contextual situations.

Stake and Trumball (1982) describe a comparable approach called “naturalistic generalisation.” Naturalistic generalisations are conclusions that people come to as a result of comparing the case to their lived experiences and beliefs, enabling the reader to judge whether or not it can be applicable to their own situations. These generalisations can serve to empower practitioners and children to decide for themselves whether or not the YVYC tool might be effective in their own contexts by examining similar cases. This project will utilise these techniques, giving the researcher the ability to generalise findings from the project to a higher conceptual level than any individual case could by itself. The generalisations will aim to offer the outreach practitioners, schools and other child services a practical evidence base with which to make informed decisions as to whether the YVYC tool kit is suitable.

#### *4.10.2 Reliability and Validity*

Reliability and validity are described by several authors to be especially challenging for case study researchers (Cohen, et al., 2007). This is partly due to a disparity over semantics within the qualitative fields, with some seeking alternative terminology to establish

authenticity by determining the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of their research (Krefting, 1991).

This researcher followed Yin's (2014) understanding that case study research belongs to a wider empirical remit and can be held accountable by the more stringent standard tests than the traditional qualitative remit. Table 4.3 below adapts Yin's (2014) case study tests of reliability and validity to this study.

**Table 4.3: Tactics to ensure reliability and validity (adapted from Yin, 2014).**

Tests	Questions raised for current study	Case Study steps taken
<b>Construct Validity</b> Identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the YVYC tool kit accurately identify the voice of the child?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Triangulation</li> <li>Established chain of evidence</li> <li>Key informants reviewed the case study reports.</li> <li>YVYC tool responses were checked by child.</li> </ul>
<b>Internal Validity</b> Seeking to establish a causal relationship, whereby certain conditions are believed to lead to other conditions, as distinguished from spurious relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are inferences made within the case studies accurate?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pattern matching (cross case analysis)</li> <li>Explanation building</li> <li>Address rival explanations</li> <li>Triangulation</li> <li>Member checking</li> </ul>
<b>External Validity</b> Defining the domain to which a study's findings can be generalised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the study follow a strategy that will enable generalisations about the YVYC tool kit?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generalisations based upon analytic strategies that provide contextual concordance.</li> </ul>
<b>Reliability</b> Demonstrating the operations of the study, such as data collection procedures, can be repeated with same results.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are the research procedures transparent?</li> <li>Have the processes been well documented?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used case study protocol</li> <li>Developed case study database</li> <li>Developed YVYC tool procedural manual</li> <li>Transparent data collection and analysis</li> </ul>

Finally, Widelsworth et al., (2010) note that children will be more likely to give socially desirable results; that is, their emotional response may reflect what they think the researcher or school wants to them to feel about an experience rather than how they genuinely feel.

However, by triangulating the children's responses within the YVYC tool with the wider collection of data from other adults, it is expected there should be some overlap perceptions. Where disparities are observed, greater evaluation will be paid to those responses.

#### *Reflexive account*

In addition to the above steps, action research required the researcher to critically reflect on all elements of the research process and findings and deliberate upon why certain decisions were made (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011). A critical reflection section can be found at the end of each action research cycle and was helpful in the consideration of changes that were made to improve the efficacy of the YVYC tool kit.

### **4.11 Participant recruitment**

Six outreach service centres (the same ones that initiated the project) across the West Midlands in the UK were contacted by e-mail and asked if they would like to put children forward to become involved with the project. Out of the six, three responded that they would. Together, they provide support to a number of local schools in the area for children with additional needs.

A limited number of exclusion criteria were considered. Firstly, whether or not there should be an age or ability-based cut off for children to be able to express their views on the YVYC tool was considered, but it was concluded that this could exclude those who needed it most. Instead, it was decided that any child who was displaying difficulties accessing the curriculum and had an SLCN would be considered. This was justified by the literature which suggests children with communication and cognitive difficulties are most at risk of not having their voices heard (e.g. Carroll and Sixsmith, 2016; Franklin, 2013; Morris,

2003). A further condition was that children should be experiencing an intervention or support programme that had been put in place by the participating outreach services. This was created to test whether the YVYC tool could help children to express their feelings about how specific or more general interventions were affecting their school experiences.

The sampling method can be best described as purposive, which is well suited to the small-scale nature of this research (Robson, 2011). Purposive sampling has been criticised because participants are likely to be chosen that further the researcher's agenda. To counter this, participants were proposed by the outreach practitioners and because no children were rejected from the study, researcher bias was minimised.

As no population-based sample logic was used, there was no need to carry out a power analysis to determine an appropriate sample size (Lipsey, 1990). There is little guidance on the number of cases considered to be sufficient for research of this nature. As such, the researcher continued to recruit participants until factors of time restricted further data collection. Within this study, the researcher was aware that the more observed cases that could be explored, the more confident and accurate the generalisations would be considered to be (Yin, 2014).

A total of twenty children (aged 4 – 18 years) from six mainstream and special schools took part in the study across three action research cycles. From these twenty, seven case studies were written up within this thesis. These seven were chosen because they provided a wide-ranging example of age, needs and gender, and demonstrated the tool to succeed and fail in a variety of contextual and individual circumstances. The seven case studies were also the most detailed of the twenty cases; they had managed to triangulate data from multiple sources and were therefore more likely to accurately construct and compare individual's perceptions. It is important to note that cases were not selected on whether or not they were

considered more or less successful at eliciting responses from the children with the YVYC tool. Indeed, out of the seven cases chosen to be written up, two of the seven children (Aaron and Tina) were unable to access the tool in the way it was presented; it is important to evaluate reasons for this. Whereas, every other child who participated (the remaining 18) was able to access the tool. It was not possible to retain all cases for analysis due to time pressures. A summary of the twenty children's needs and difficulties are summarised in the table below (Table 4.4), and a more comprehensive account of the seven cases can be located within the case study chapters (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7.) All participants were considered to have SLCN, but many also had co-morbidities across physical and intellectual domains. Participants' needs and difficulties varied as did their severity and included those with: specific language impairments (SLI), autism spectrum conditions (ASC), attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), general and specific learning difficulties, downs syndrome, visual and hearing impairments, alcohol foetal syndrome and a number of other physical and mental disabilities which will be more closely examined within each of the case studies. As a result, the project includes participants from a wide age and ability range, which helped to determine in what circumstances the YVYC tool kit was effective, or in what individual and socially contextual circumstances the YVYC tool kit is seen to be successful.

Due to the vulnerable nature of the children, coupled with Outreach's direct contact with their parents and schools, initial contact was considered less intrusive if it came direct from the Outreach practitioners. Consent and additional information was therefore passed on to schools by the outreach practitioners (see Appendix 3). Once consent had been provided, the researcher met with the child and their primary contact who tended to be either the school SENco or class teacher. During this initial meeting, the researcher discussed what would be involved in the project including practicalities, such as observation slots and

children's routines. Table 4.4 identifies a summary of the children's backgrounds, practitioner reported needs and difficulties.

**Table 4.4: Summary of children's background, practitioner reported difficulties and needs in each action cycle**

<b>Action Research Cycle One</b>				
<i>Case</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Summary of children participants difficulties</i>
Billy	14	M	Year 9	Diagnosed with verbal dyspraxia. Reported speaking, listening, and attention difficulties. Concerns raised over social interaction, increased aggression, literacy and numeracy skills.
Aaron	4	M	Reception	Diagnosed with Down's syndrome and a related hearing impairment. Severe learning difficulties within social, language, motor and developmental areas.
<b>Action Research Cycle Two</b>				
Nathan	8	M	Year 3	Recently classified as Child in Need. Undergoing assessment of autism. Refusal to engage with learning.
Lionel	9	M	Year 4	Statemented and diagnosed with ASD and ADHD. Emotional self-regulation difficulties. Refusal to engage with learning.
Tina	5	F	Reception	Diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome resulting in auditory, visual and learning difficulties. Reported to have language, attention and listening needs.
<b>Action Research Cycle Three</b>				
Nina	13	F	Year 9	Diagnosed with ASD in Hungary. English is an additional language (EAL). Reported language and learning difficulties. Numeracy and verbal difficulties.
Helen	13	F	Year 9	As above. Helen and Nina are identical twin sisters and were described with largely the same needs and difficulties.
<b>Not written up into case studies</b>				
Rita	4	F	Reception	Communication and language skills prime concern. Comprehension, attention and listening skills limited. Understands two-word commands only.
Lina	16	F	Nurture group	Significant learning, social and emotional needs. Receptive and expressive language difficulties. Concentration and attention difficulties.
Meg	16	F	Nurture group	Moderate learning difficulties. Delayed language development, dyspraxia, difficulty coping with change. Psychotic episodes.
Sue	15	F	Year 10	Complex learning difficulties. Cerebral palsy. Poor cognitive skills. Under developed language, academic and social skills and understanding behavioural requirements in environment.

Sasha	18	F	6 <sup>th</sup> Form	Complex learning difficulties. Difficulties with balance and co-ordination associated with immature motor development and motor function also affecting speech.
Jody	12	F	Year 8	Disordered receptive and expressive language skills. Poor fine and gross motor skills. Reduce vision affecting depth perception. Highly anxious.
Teddy	13	M	Year 8	Global developmental delay. Extremely anxious with occasional aggressive outbursts.
Cher	13	F	Year 8	General and complex learning difficulties. Listening and comprehension skill difficulties.
Mark	12	M	Year 8	Moderate learning difficulties. Suspected autism but diagnosis ongoing. Word finding difficulty requiring time to respond.
Lionel	14	M	Year 9	Global language and communication difficulties. Immature social interaction skills.
Tony	8	M	Year 4	Diagnosis of autism. Concerns over lack of interaction with peers and adults.
Jim	8	M	Year 4	Suspected autism. Aggressive responses have increased during the past year. Concern over attainment especially within literacy and numeracy.

## 4.12 Ethical considerations and standards

The importance of ethical practice is fundamental to all research undertaken with children.

Ethical standards were applied to this study based on the code of conduct written by The British Psychological Society (2009) and the Standards of Conduct, Performance, and Ethics (HPC, 2009). Further guidance was obtained from several other sources (Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2013; Wood, Giles and Percy, 2009). The project and all letters sent to parents, carers and practitioners were approved by the Coventry University Ethics Committee. In addition, the researcher provided an enhanced certificate from the Criminal Record Bureau.

Consent and information forms addressed confidentiality, the right to withdraw at any point, voice recording and feedback. Video recording consent was requested for action research



cycle 3. Information regarding the project and the participant's role was provided in written form (Appendix 3). Informed consent was provided in writing from parents or carers (Appendix 3) and was accompanied by a simplified child briefing (Appendix 4). This was supplemented with telephone calls and e-mails between the outreach practitioners, the researcher and the schools. On one occasion, the researcher was contacted by e-mail from a parent in order to provide additional information prior to granting consent (Appendix 5).

It was important to ensure that participants had time to consider information regarding the project and what would be involved. To this end, the research process was discussed with the schools and children by an outreach practitioner, which was then followed up by the researcher explaining additional details of what would be involved. In addition, the researcher spent several days with the children within their respective schools, monitoring whether they would feel happy to take part in the individual interview process. This was in accordance with a number of techniques advised when conducting research with children with learning disabilities (Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2013). Ongoing care and consideration was ensured through regular liaison with school contacts who took responsibility for child participants during the research process. Some children who were very young or those with complex difficulties were accompanied by their teaching assistants during the YVYC interview process. Case studies were written up using pseudonyms to keep the identity of the children confidential.

As previously stated, this study was conducted in order to obtain and evaluate the views of children with SLCN for the purpose of creating a more inclusive local outreach children's service. This presented an initial conundrum as the powerful can be seen as researching the

powerless, and power imbalances have been well documented within learning disability research (e.g. Merrick and Roulstone, 2011). However, the critical realist perspective helps to promote a child-centred understanding by readdressing the balance of power back to children from the adults who construct the reality of school for them.

#### 4.13 Data collection procedure/ YVYC tool kit procedure

To limit the potential for a disorderly and abstract data collection process, a procedural strategy was established to ensure that every case followed the same approach (Yin, 2014). This consisted of a number of phases detailed below and began after ethical consent had been achieved.



##### **Starting point for the YVYC tool kit for each case**

*Phase 1:* Met with child key contacts. Carried out interviews with key contact. Gathered documentary evidence on the child's background (e.g. SEN statement, IEP's).

*Phase 2:* Carried out additional interviews with key adults around the child.

*Phase 3:* Researcher observations were carried out of the child over two to three days.

*Phase 4:* The YVYC tool was individualised for the child's needs. This included gathering the relevant experienced based questions and taking photographs. And, adapting the tool with emotions and a scale that it was expected would be understood by the child.

*Phase 5:* The YVYC tool interview was administered to elicit the child's voice about their school and support experiences.

*Phase 6:* Information was transcribed and entered into the NVivo database.

*Phase 7:* A thematic analysis was run on the data looking for evidence to support or disprove the case study propositions.

*Phase 8:* Case study compiled.

##### **End point of case**

### **Data collection considerations**

Throughout the cases, data collection depended on what was accessible. Some schools were more hesitant about sharing documentary evidence, such as statements of SEN or IEPs.

Some adults were wary about giving details about the histories of the children involved or insisted on having a TA by their side during the interview process. This was notably the case in two situations whereby the children had a background of being placed into care as a result of abuse. In this instance, the researcher was directed to talk with the school's welfare officer who advised how to proceed. Other schools were restrictive about carrying out observations and only allowed access on several occasions. This meant the amount of time that the researcher spent in each school and the depth of data gained about each child's experiences from the various perspectives varied. With some cases, the researcher was able to gather sufficient data in several days, while with others the researcher took multiple trips to the school to observe particular experiences and gather necessary data. The methods used were meant to represent a real life exploration and, as such, are subject to the same challenges that present themselves to practitioners and researchers alike (e.g. Grieg, Taylor and MacKay, 2013). As with the YVYC tool itself the data collection methods were reflected upon within each action research cycle as components of the 'toolkit' in order to explore their effectiveness to work alongside the tool (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). This led to refinements and developments within the data collection methods as a whole.

## **4.14 Data analysis methods**

### *4.14.1 The Action Research process*

This study was underpinned by an action research methodology. As such, it is important to recognise and evaluate the action process that occurred. Herr and Anderson (2005) urge that the findings should be able to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the questions posed but it is up to the researcher to determine how to represent them. Within this project, data analysis took place within and across the case studies in clusters. The results of the findings provided successive knowledge generation about the research questions and how to improve the YVYC tool kit.

## **4.15 General Analytical Strategy**

### *4.15.1 Theoretical propositions*

Yin (2014, p.142) advises that the “best preparation for conducting case study analysis is to have a general analytic strategy.” The purpose of which is to link the case study data to areas of interest, then these areas of interest provide the direction for analysing the data. Within this project, two of Yin’s (2014) guided general analytical strategies were followed; relying upon the theoretical propositions and examining rival explanations.

For reader ease the theoretical propositions have been copied below:

*Proposition 1:* The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.

*Proposition 2:* The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.

Because the project's research questions provided the foundation of the propositions, the purpose of the analysis can be seen as a way to demonstrate whether the research questions have been answered. As such, the case studies can be shown to be both guided by and held accountable to an applied theoretical understanding of the YVYC tool kit.

#### *4.15.2 Examining rival explanations*

Rival explanations were considered alongside the theoretical propositions during the data collection phase and yielded analytical properties. These were searched for during data analysis. By actively searching the data for evidence of a rival, the researcher could acknowledge the risk of that threat, and determine if it impacts conclusions and implications about the tool kit.

#### *4.15.3 Data analysis strategies*

Yin's (2014) analytical strategies helped to keep the analysis focussed on the propositional outcomes and to be mindful of potential rival threats in interpretation; however, there is a lack of detail regarding ways to analyse and organise the data. With this in mind, the researcher initially considered adapting a number of approaches, for example, grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and ethnographic methods (Miles, Huberman, and Saldanna, 2014). However, whilst these approaches are well documented and offer an accessible, if prescriptive, approach, their analytical techniques are inflexible to the varied data collected and epistemological and ontological nature of this project. Coeffey and Atkinson (1996) assert that there is no single way of carrying out qualitative analysis and this resonates with other pragmatists who promote the concept of using "the right tool for the right job" (Patton, 2002).

Instead, the researcher chose to adopt Yin's (2014) case study analytical strategies with Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2013) thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a popular analytical approach with no clear agreement on procedure. In this respect, it shares a commonality with the action research and case study approaches that are adapted specifically to work within this project. As such, it is subject to some of the same advantages and disadvantages. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the point that often thematic analysis lacks transparency, and if it is unknown how researchers analyse their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, then evaluation of results and comparisons with other projects are problematic. However, thematic analysis is advantageous over alternative qualitative analysis because it is free of any philosophical affinity, which enabled the researcher to maintain a critical realist position (Braun and

Clarke, 2013). Combining the approach with Yin's (2014) account helped to analyse and interpret the data in a way that both acknowledged the children's experiences and searched for a wider contextual reality. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.81) aptly describe this as working to "unpick or unravel the surface of reality." This joint approach offered a way to incorporate analysis within a case study and provided an adaptable and practical way of reporting on meaningful patterns, which was otherwise lacking from any single account.

#### *4.15.4 Computer-assisted data analysis: NVivo 11*

The researcher used the software package 'NVivo 11' to store all raw data. Yin (2014) advises that when using computerised methods, particularly in case study research, it is important to input data on the complex behaviour that is happening within the context of the phenomena, advising the conversion of all evidence into the software package. As such, the researcher scanned and included all collected data into the data base including: observational notes, interviews, field notes, documentation, YVYC tool results, audio and/or video recordings and researcher reflections. In this way, a case study database was built up enabling the researcher to easily move back and forth between the raw data and the analysis. An additional advantage of the database is that it provides a record of the researcher's evidence, improving transparency for the reader (Yin, 2014).

### **4.16 Data analysis stages**

Case analysis began once sufficient data had been collected for the individual case studies to answer the theoretical propositions. Ideally, in qualitative research, data collection



continues until the point of saturation i.e. the point at which the researcher no longer identifies any salient information (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006). However, this project's primary aim was to establish the effectiveness and feasibility of the YVYC tool in the field rather than provide an exhaustive narrative account (Fusch and Ness, 2015). As a result, sufficient data were collected to provide analytical accounts of multiple cases with which to support the decision making process. It is acknowledged that this may have resulted in a trade-off in terms of depth and detail, which may have reduced validity of the secondary aim; to explore how closely the children's views harmonise with the perceptions of those who have responsibility for supporting their needs. These considerations are discussed further in the discussion chapter (see Chapter 9).

Data analysis took place in stages and is described in the sections below.

### ***Stage one - Familiarisation with the data***

The data collected for each case was stored within NVivo 11, listened to on multiple occasions and transcribed by the researcher into words that were clear to the reader (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014). Incomplete words, utterances, such as "ers", pauses and irrelevant talk were typically discounted. An exception to this was the interviews carried out with the children where it was considered important to include all vocalisations to capture the voice of the child and demonstrate the challenges the children had communicating.

Yin (2014, p.132) notes that a helpful starting point when carrying out data analysis, particularly where the researcher is new to the case study approach, is to "play" with the data looking for interesting patterns and concepts. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) advises

keeping a copy of the research concerns, theoretical framework, central research question, and goals of the study, on a one page summary to keep focus on coding decisions. Both of these strategies were adopted. Initial thoughts were highlighted within the NVivo 11 software with the researcher's reflections written as memos.

### ***Stage two: Applying a coding framework***

During this stage, participant data for each case was grouped into sub-categories within their respective cases in Nvivo 11; practitioner perspectives, which comprised of teachers, support assistants, and professionals working alongside the children; parent perspectives (where applicable); researcher perspective; and child perspective, which comprised of the YVYC tool elicitation. These sub-categories made initial analysis more effective because it highlighted the various interpretations of the children's experiences. It also helped to code one perspective first, then compare and contrast this against a second, reflecting the intent of the researcher to construct the child's world according to different perspectives. Bazeley (2007) instructs that contrasting data in this way ensures for maximum variety in concepts. In addition, it created the case study structure, which was built up around the perspectives.

A coding framework underpinned by a consideration of the theoretical propositions and rival explanations of the project was created. Codes were assigned to words or phrases that represented a summative, salient or essence capturing portion of the data for each participant (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saldana, 2013). Coding occurred line by line in a systematic way across each case by highlighting and capturing segments of relevant text. Coding into NVivo in this way, allowed the researcher to retrieve and classify similar data chunks.

### ***Stage three: Searching and reviewing themes***

Initial codes were collated into a more refined number of themes. Themes were identified as groups of reoccurring patterns or similar codes that revealed propositional evidence about socio-cultural constructs and contexts, conceptual processes, or the discourse around the child. Determining the importance of a theme involved assessing whether the pattern said something meaningful and important towards answering the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes were re-reviewed to check if they worked in relation to the coded extracts and supervisor input helped to refine them if required.

### ***Stage four: Creating a thematic map/network***

Thematic network maps were created to represent the perspectives more accessibly for each case. The networks provide an outline of plot points for the accompanying research narrative (Miles, Huberman and Saldana, 2014).

#### ***4.16.1 Cross case analysis***

A cross case analysis was carried out on the whole data set after all of the individual case studies had been completed (Yin, 2014). Its purpose was to aggregate data by comparing and contrasting findings in order to determine whether the project's research questions had been answered.

The cross case analysis was produced by using the analysis produced in the individual case studies and re-examining the data to produce word tables (Yin, 2014). This was analysed alongside the original data to appropriate themes, which covered similar issues. The cross

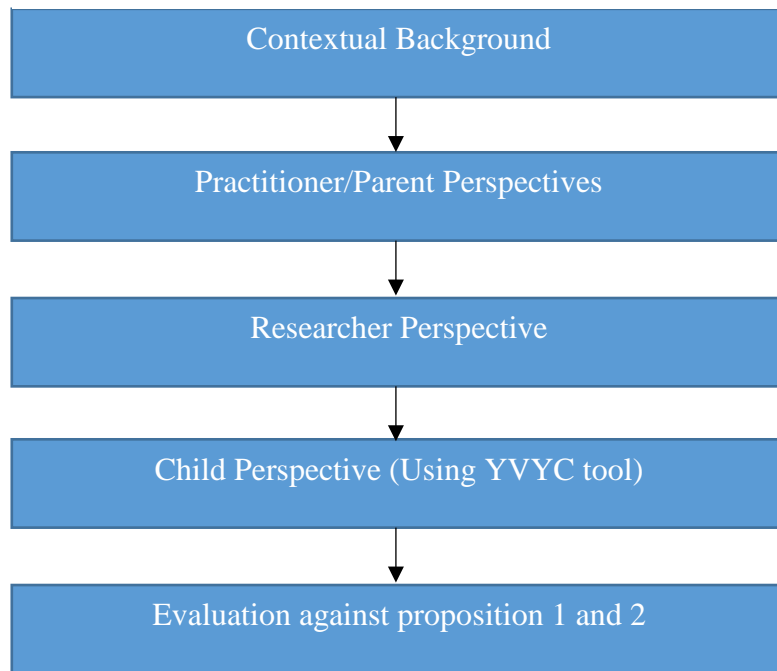
case analysis gave rise to a range of questions about the nature of the similarities and differences between the difference cases. These included:

- What are the key patterns that occur in each of the cases?
- What might be responsible for these patterns?
- What is surprising about these patterns?
- How can these patterns be explained?
- What does the data say about the underlying ideas, assumptions, ideologies and conceptualisations about the YVYC tool kit?
- How did the children interact with the tool, and how did the researcher interact with the child?

#### **4.17 Creating the case study structure**

The case studies were composed by utilising a comparative structure (Yin, 2014) framed by the propositions. Each case followed the same sequenced structural layout (Figure 4.3).

*Figure 4.3: The case study structure*



Cases began by providing a brief background account of the child's history, the reason for their inclusion in the project, and documented support structures. This was followed by an analytical account of the practitioner's, researcher's, and parent's interpretations of the child's experiences. The child's experiences were demonstrated and analysed through the elicitation of the YVYC tool. Each account was subjected to the analysis outlined in the above stages, which was accompanied by a selection of rich and detailed extracts supporting inferences, which were also considered against the wider literature. A comprehensive case evaluation and reflection completed the case report.

Following completion of a cluster of case studies, evaluation and reflection in light of the analyses was carried out. This informed the action research cycle, which provided the rationale for the YVYC tool improvements within the next iteration.

The researcher was mindful of the difficulty in making sense of long narratives within cases, and describing the similarities and differences between them (Miles, Huberman, and

Saldana, 2014). As a result, alongside the narrative, a number of summary tables and diagrams were used to depict the organised data and theoretical insights generated within each case.

### *Reporting the case studies*

Yin (2014) cautions that no single report will serve all audiences at the same time. Case studies are reported for a particular audience and audience needs will vary. This research began at the request of a regional outreach services centre made up of policy makers, research funders, practitioners and other professionals many of whom do not specialise in psychological research. They will be interested in whether or not the YVYC tool kit is effective in relation to their requirements. On the other hand, academic audiences are likely to be interested in how it draws links with previous research, the relationships between the cases and whether rigorous methodological steps have been followed. The case studies within this project reflect an academic audience, but where schools requested additional information about children involved in the project, a summary case study was provided.

## **4.18 Case Study protocol**

A further step that Yin (2014) recommends to ensure reliability is to carry out a case study protocol. A case study protocol is a way of keeping the research focussed and is especially useful in multiple case designs where lots of data are being collected from different sources (Yin, 2014). The protocol includes four areas: 1) an overview of the case study process; 2) data collection procedures; 3) data collected questions; 4) a guide for the case study report. For the reader this provides a methodological summary and its inclusion demonstrates the researcher's attention to transparency (Table 4.5).

**Table 4.5: The case study protocol adapted from Yin (2014)**

Protocol Areas	Element of research study	Case study protocol
An overview of the case study	Project background, aims and research questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach services felt unable to gather information about how children with SLCN felt about their support experiences.</li> <li>• CU was commissioned to create a tool to try and overcome this barrier.</li> <li>• A pilot tool kit (Your Voice, Your Choice) was developed and was based upon a number of theoretical and experimental design features.</li> <li>• RQ 1: How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with additional communicative needs at school?</li> <li>• RQ 2: Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adult's perception of those experiences?</li> </ul>
	Case study propositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposition 1: The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.</li> <li>• Proposition 2: The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.</li> </ul>
	Theoretical framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple clustered case studies pursue the theoretical propositions that the YVYC tool is based upon.</li> <li>• The clustered case studies drive the action research cycle towards developing the effectiveness of the YVYV tool and thereby answering the research questions.</li> </ul>
Data collection procedures	Ethical procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all necessary consent documents have been understood and signed.</li> </ul>
	Preparation prior to fieldwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify primary contact who has responsibility for the child at school.</li> <li>• Meet primary contact and child and discuss practicalities.</li> </ul>
	Data collection plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initiate phases 1 – 5 in order to gain data from the child, the proximal adults and the researcher's perspectives.</li> </ul>
Guide for the case study report	Outline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each case report will follow the same format (see p.114)</li> </ul>
	Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A version of the case study will be provided to schools and parents if requested.</li> </ul>

## **5 Chapter Five: Action Research Cycle One Findings**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a methodological framework within which data would be collected and evaluated for the YVYC tool kit. Data were gained over three action research cycles, with a corresponding chapter for each cycle. This chapter presents data from the first action research cycle and comprises a cluster of two case studies, which were used to pilot the YVYC tool kit. These are presented to the reader in full to maintain transparency. As previously explained, cases were evaluated against the propositions and should be kept in consideration. For reader ease, these are pasted below.

*Proposition 1:* The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.

*Proposition 2:* The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.

### **5.2 Case One – Billy**

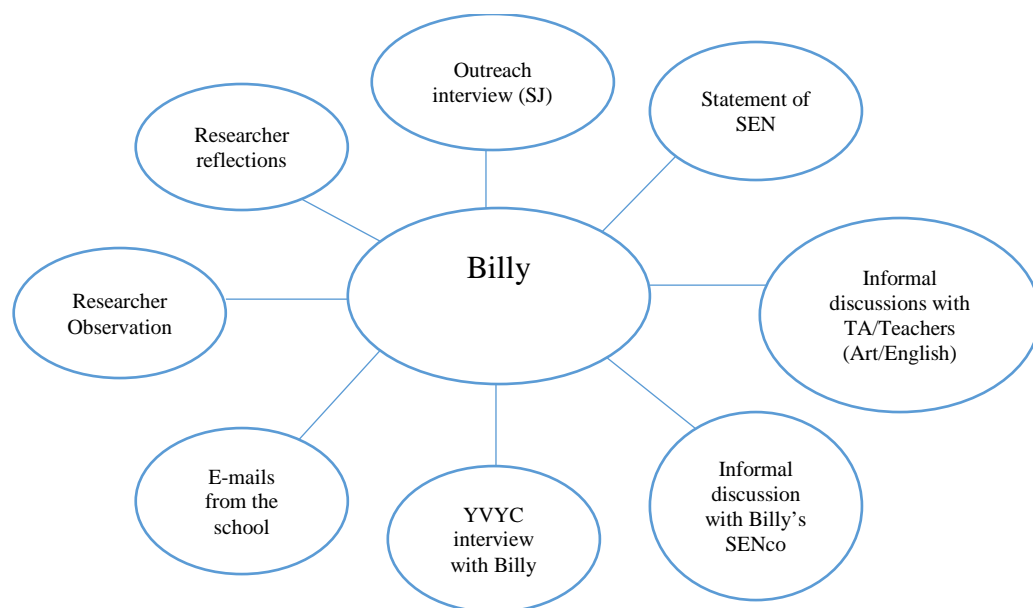
#### *5.2.1 Background*

Billy was aged 13 years, 5 months at commencement of the study (January, 2014). He was in Year 9 and attended a mainstream school. He had four siblings. Figure 5.1 summarises the data that were collected to investigate Billy's school experience. Billy had a reading age



of 11 years and comprehension age of 10.5 years. At the time Billy was accepted into the project, he had an attendance rate of 92.5% which represented a small increase on previous terms. His statement of special needs indicated that he had moderate learning difficulties associated with verbal dyspraxia resulting in under-developed speaking and listening skills, poor literacy and numeracy ability, and low attention and social interaction skills. As a result, he had been provided with a teaching assistant to support him for 12.5 hours per week. He had a slight stammer and had recently begun a speech and language intervention which was suggested and implemented by the Outreach services.

*Figure 5.1: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Billy's school learning and support experiences*



### *5.2.2 How do practitioners perceive Billy's experiences at school?*

Billy was perceived to “enjoy drama, art and sports (TA)”. Several teachers described him as being “sociable, amiable and able to make good relationships (SENco),” although an outreach practitioner reported that what she understood from the school was that they “were concerned about him socially, not coping (SJ).” It was also mentioned that he “responded well to praise and liked to be given responsibility (Statement of SEN)”. A number of school concerns were highlighted; these included Billy’s “reading and comprehension of text...numeracy...short term memory and attention (SENco)”, “lack of learning progress (English teacher)”, and concern over his “low confidence (Art teacher)”. Particular focus was placed on his perceived lack of speech and language skills, “he struggles with speaking and...finds it hard to communicate with other people (SENco)”. All of the practitioners that were spoken to, noted that that he “tended to be anxious” (Researchers reflections), especially in “new situations (SJ)” and several noted that he “was more confident in one to one situations <and> gets on better with adults than peers (SENco)”. As a result of these concerns, Billy had been involved in a school implemented small group numeracy and 1:1 reading group for several months but it was reported to be ‘showing no progress (SENco).’

Billy was referred to the outreach services by his school because his parents “had expressed concerns that he was very angry at home and seen outbursts from him, and that was unusual (SJ)”. The school SENco was told by Billy’s mother that he “gets very aggressive and angry at home and will hit out at family members (SENco).” As a result, “Mum is unhappy with Billy’s behaviour” but she also noted that these aggressive instances “only occurred at home, and were directed at his mother and sisters (SENco).”

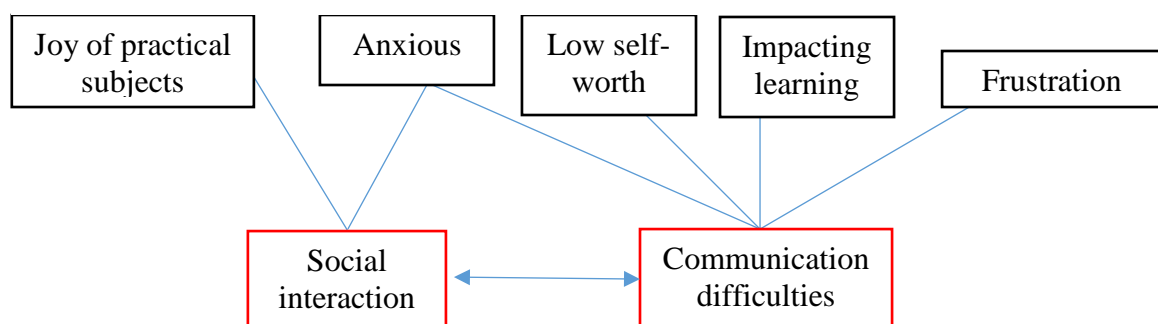
An outreach practitioner (SJ) observed Billy on several occasions and suggested that one of the causes of his frustration was likely to be his inability to communicate his needs, and this

was exacerbated because he didn't have "much opportunity to speak and his biggest issue according to his statement, is his learning difficulty, is his speech (SJ)." As a result, they recommended that Billy joined a speech and language class, advising that the aim of the group was to "give him more confidence in using his own communication skills back at school (SJ)." In addition, SJ wanted to "teach the support staff what he has done here, and the kind of things that he should be practicing in class, and the sort of strategies that will help him to do that." The class took place at a special needs school and required Billy to be taken out of lessons and driven by his TA to a different school.

### 5.2.3 Practitioner perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the practitioner (school/outreach) account of Billy's experiences are communication difficulties and social interaction (see Figure 5.2). Themes for each perspective analysis were constructed through a staged process which were described in Section 4.16. This resulted in a network model for each perspective (practitioner/researcher/child). Some examples of the data analysis process for Case One and the rest of the cases are provided in Appendix 12.

**Figure 5.2: Practitioner perception thematic network model**



These themes appear to present a mixed perception of Billy's needs. On the one hand, a medical model of disability is apparent because much of the talk from the school was suggestive that Billy's problems lie within his "short-term memory and attention (SENco) which meant that he showed a "lack of learning progress (English teacher)." The school SENco was keen to point out that Billy's anger problems were not demonstrable at school and explained that he has never been aggressive at school (Researcher's reflections), implying that his anger was indicative of something going wrong at home rather than school. This serves to disassociate the school's responsibilities by suggesting that Billy's problems lie within himself, as opposed to something within the school environment that might be restricting Billy's capacity to emotionally flourish, or access the learning and teaching.

On the other hand, SJ (outreach practitioner) argued that a lack of "opportunity to speak" is negatively affecting his communication skills which indicates her belief that school are not meeting Billy's needs. This represents a divergence in both how the school and outreach perceive and look to address his needs, with outreach viewing his disabilities within a social model of disability.

Socially, Billy was described as "sociable, amiable and able to make good relationships (SENco)" but outreach perceived that the school "were concerned about him socially, not coping (SJ)," and many teachers relayed that they considered him to be anxious (Researchers reflections) which represents further conflicting reports. SJ hypothesised that it could be a result of "frustration due to a lack of opportunity to talk at school," which referred to his opportunity to be included in vocal communication in class (Researcher's reflections.) There is some evidence to support such a suggestion; a government initiated

SEN and Disabilities green paper (2013) found that children with disabilities feel frustrated by a lack of the right help at school. It would be helpful to determine where these perceptions are accurate and inaccurate within the YVYC tool interview with Billy in order to achieve a more concordant account of his needs. If Billy is able to demonstrate his frustration, it might occur through selecting negative emotional responses within his choices in the YVYC tool.

#### *5.2.4 How did the researcher perceive Billy's experiences at school?*

The researcher was told by the SENCo that “Billy was anxious about the observations due to the attention he might receive from his peers”. On another occasion, the researcher was asked to return on a different day because Billy was upset that morning and it would be inappropriate to work with him in his current frame of mind (Researcher's reflections). The SENCo believed the reason behind the upset was due to a family argument but she was unsure as to its nature. This hints towards the need for the YVYC tool kit to identify holistic challenges.

Billy was observed by the researcher over two days. Observation checklists were carried out in two lessons, one week apart in an Art lesson and a speech and language therapy lesson (Appendix 1B). In his Art lesson he sat with peers and appeared to be relaxed. He was particularly engaged in his art class throughout the lesson and tried to remain on task; this was the case even when others were distracted and were involved with disruptive behaviour. Indeed, when that disruption took place close to his vicinity, Billy looked awkward, seemingly very aware that their behaviour was inappropriate and not wanting to be associated with it. There were multiple instances when he spoke with his peers, although the majority of these instances were initiated by his peers. He was asked several questions

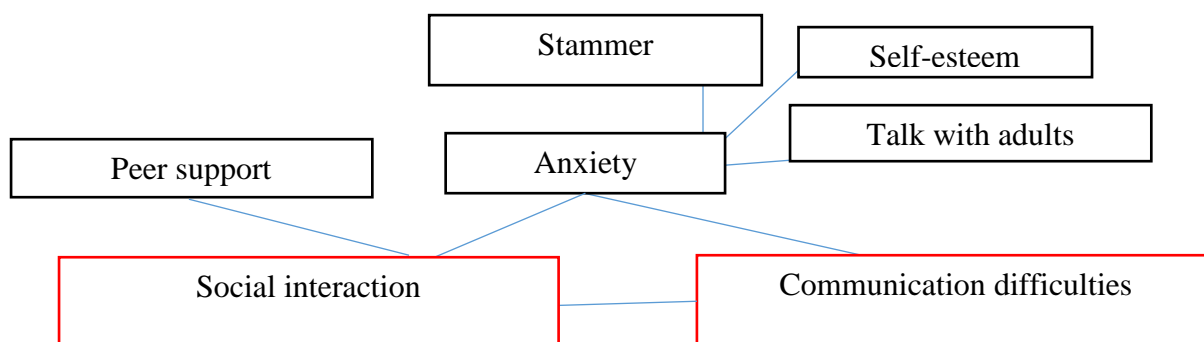
during the lessons, and teachers encouraged him to talk by asking thoughtful questions, while pausing to allow him to respond. However, all questions were met by Billy lowering his eyes and mumbling something incomprehensible in obvious embarrassment. There were several instances where Billy felt unsure of what to do with his tasks and he did not ask his teacher for help.

The researcher also observed Billy in his speech and language intervention session at a differently located special school. This was the second time Billy had attended. His TA sat next to him in a classroom with 17 other children in the same year group. The session lasted 50 minutes and involved working together as a group to solve a crime. Billy appeared to be engaged and on task for the majority of the lesson. However, he often displayed behavioural anxiety, for example by looking down and away from the teacher or engaging in non-purposeful motions (Barsevick and Llewellyn, 1982); these behaviours were particularly evident when he was asked a question. Additionally, while he did interact and communicate with his TA and class teacher on a number of occasions, he did not choose to engage with his peers, even when the class teacher asked children to work together on a task.

#### *5.2.5 Researcher perspective analysis*

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher's account of Billy's experiences include: Social interaction and Communication difficulties. See Figure 5.3 for a breakdown of the thematic plot points.

*Figure 5.3: Researcher perception thematic network model*



The practitioner account suggested that Billy got on better with adults than his peers.

However, observations showed that he looked more anxious when talking with adults and particularly when he was asked a question. For instance, on one occasion Billy got stuck on a drawing task in his Art class. He kept glancing between his work and his teacher, then at others around him and appeared to be too nervous to ask his teacher, or anyone for help. In this instance, his peers saw that he was stuck and gave him some advice on how to proceed, which progressed his learning. In several other instances, he verbalised to his peers that he needed help and sought confirmation that what he was doing was correct. He was unable to communicate that he needed help to his teacher but this did not stop his peers from recognising his need for help through his body language and they responded to his need. Occasionally, he did vocalise his need for help though to his peers. His stammer was evident but his peers gave him time to speak and it didn't stop him communicating nor did they have much difficulty understanding him. In effect, he (and to some extent his peers) had learnt strategies to avoid needing to ask for their teacher's help, instead learning and supporting each other (Bandura, 1977).

Billy may be unwilling to ask his teacher a question in front of the class because of his stammer, which was more noticeable when he was under social stress, such as when the teacher asked him a question in front of his class and he visibly became particularly anxious (stammer increased and his hands were shaking) (Researcher's reflections). People who stammer can find it hard to talk and express opinions and sometimes get stuck communicating (Roulstone and McLeod, 2011). The Bercow Report (2007) showed that amongst other indicators, a stammer can negatively affect the development of a positive self-esteem, participation in class activities, and promote anxiety. In addition, the report showed that many teachers do not know how to deal with stammering difficulties. Clearly, his class teacher wanted to include Billy in the lesson, but was unsure how to go about doing it without causing him anxiety. He was proud to show his finished artwork to his teacher when he had a quiet moment with her, which suggests he respects her input and seeks positive affirmation.

Billy's body language was suggestive of someone with low confidence. He appeared hunched over, refrained from eye contact and mostly only spoke when he was spoken to. Reduced eye contact does not support the development of communication skills, reducing his ability to attend, listen and take turns, and to engage and maintain engagement with others (Boucand, Millard, and Packman, 2014). Similarly, this same study shows that strategies to avoid social interactions, speaking or stammering may contribute to the development of more stammering behaviours, reduced self-esteem and confidence and increased impact of the stutter over time. Yet, for Billy this was, for the most part, only visible with teachers in the context of adult conversations, especially in public. In a group situation with his friends, he was more relaxed and jovial and more willing to engage in eye contact, such as in his art class where he joked and shared learning with his friends (Researcher's reflection). Of particular note, his stammer was far less noticeable when



talking amongst his friends than with adults in front of other children. This might suggest that Billy finds adults threatening, or that he feels unable to communicate with adults in front of his peers who he is not as comfortable with; perhaps they mock his difference. The YVYC tool elicitation might show this if he chooses positive or negative emotions associated with those experiences.

#### *5.2.6 How did Billy perceive his own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

The tool took 40 minutes to administer in Billy's school on a one-to-one basis with the researcher. Billy was given the preliminary screener test (Appendix 6) and had no difficulty answering the questions correctly. He was asked how he felt about 36 of his school based experiences and could choose to answer using the options of *very sad, quite sad, ok, quite happy, and very happy* (See full transcript in Appendix 1B).

#### *Subject evaluations*

Billy reported feeling happy or very happy about the majority of his subjects. Some subjects were described with passion:

#### **Billy:**

*"I like reading quite a bit...so I'll put quite happy"*

*"Roald Dahl books"*

*"I love Art"*

*"I love P.E"*

*"I do like lots of practical stuff"*

The only subject which he said made him feel quite sad was ICT, although he did state that he enjoys going on computers, just not the ICT lesson itself.

#### *5.2.7 Social and emotional communication*

Billy said that he felt happy playing football, talking to friends, going on school trips, working by himself and working with others. Occasionally he appeared a little conflicted, reporting that he was happy to work one-to-one with his teaching assistant although he also raised some reservations:

**Billy:** *“They can help me <which> is good but bad because I would like to work with my friends instead of my teacher.”*

Enjoying working with his friends is a theme that repeats itself across other areas of questioning, as is a sense of anxiety with those around him:

**Interviewer:** *When you are in a lesson, and you are working with others, how does that make you feel?*

**Billy:** *Very happy*

**Interviewer:** *Okay, and what is it about working with others that make you feel very happy?*

**Billy:** *Because I’m allowed to be with my friends.*

For several questions, Billy felt unable to express his emotions within the confines of the tool (very sad ---- very happy) but he was confident enough to suggest an alternative method. He asked for the researcher to add the emotion ‘nervous’ on a piece of paper, and

stated he felt quite nervous about arriving at his speech and language intervention. Feeling anxious is an emotion that Billy directly expresses throughout the interview towards a number of other school issues.

#### 5.2.8 *Speech and language intervention*

On the topic of his speech and language intervention, he reported that he felt quite sad and nervous about arriving at the special school, about working with others once at the school, and about the limited time that he spent there. Though, interestingly, he also said he was very happy about the intervention once he was there, and about taking part in activities of the class. Some of the more abstract concepts, such as ‘confidence’, ‘opportunities for talk’, and ‘listening,’ which were areas of concern raised by the practitioners, produced less clear results when asking these questions directly:

**Interviewer:** *When you go to <your> Speech and Language <intervention>, does it make you feel more confident?*

**Billy:** *I don't know*

**Interviewer:** *Do you feel it is helping you?*

**Billy:** *Yes*

And

**Interviewer:** *When you go to (your SLT), do you feel you are given the opportunity to talk lots?*

**Billy:** *Yea. \*Places ok on toolkit\**

**Interviewer:** *You are not too sure? Maybe you feel you are given some chance to talk but would like more?*

**Billy:** *Yes*

And

**Interviewer:** *Do you feel you are able to listen well when you are there? Does it help you listen when you go?*

**Billy:** *Okay but I don't understand everything*

It was not always clear if Billy understood the question when words and phrases were used that Billy was not familiar with. And, sometimes the researcher inadvertently used questions in a way which was leading, which might have further confused him. For his speech and language intervention, he did state that he “had lots of fun and we all worked together as a team” which suggests he enjoyed working together with others, despite feeling nervous about it. Furthermore, he stated that he would like it if he was able to go to the intervention more often which suggests he finds the support useful.

#### *5.2.9 Frustration concerns*

Several questions were posed to Billy in response to concerns from practitioners and parents about his anger. In response, he talked about his home and specifically his frustrations towards his sister.

**Interviewer:** *What do you find normally makes you angry?*

**Billy:** *...if I'm playing my Xbox...if I'm on a level I can't do and my sister plays and shouts loud, really loud...And if I get knocked out <of the game> and I lose I get angry. Because I try and try.*

Billy associates his anger with his sister because she distracts him when trying to concentrate on his computer games. Further questioning clarified the issue:

**Interviewer:** *Is there anything at school that stops you learning?*

**Billy:** *If I try and do some hard work and I know what to do and then I forget what I'm on about and then I forget what I was going to write. And then when I'm writing and I look back at it and I think it doesn't make any sense.*

**Interviewer:** *That must be difficult...Does that get annoying sometimes?*

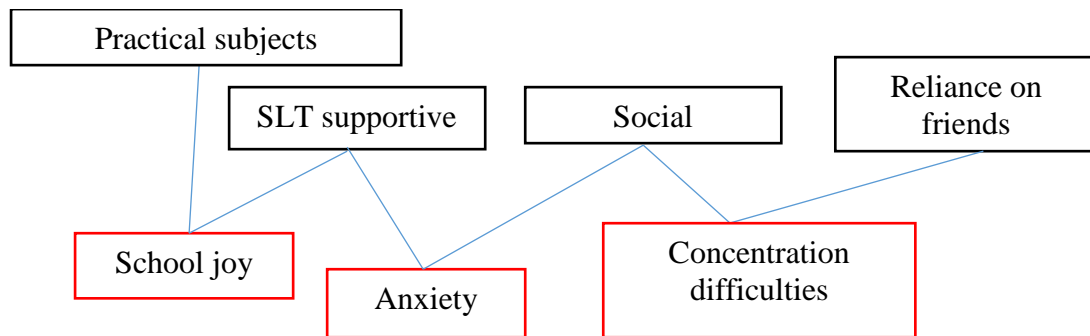
**Billy:** *(assumes question relates to homework)... So I go upstairs because my sister plays...her game and she's either really loud, or she turns the T.V. up and I get distracted.*

Billy is voicing that he feels unable to concentrate on tasks in situations where loud noise is present. This is further discussed in the analysis below.

#### *5.2.10 Billy's perspective analysis*

The central themes identified from an analysis of Billy's elicited experiences include: school joy, anxiety, and concentration difficulties (Figure 5.4).

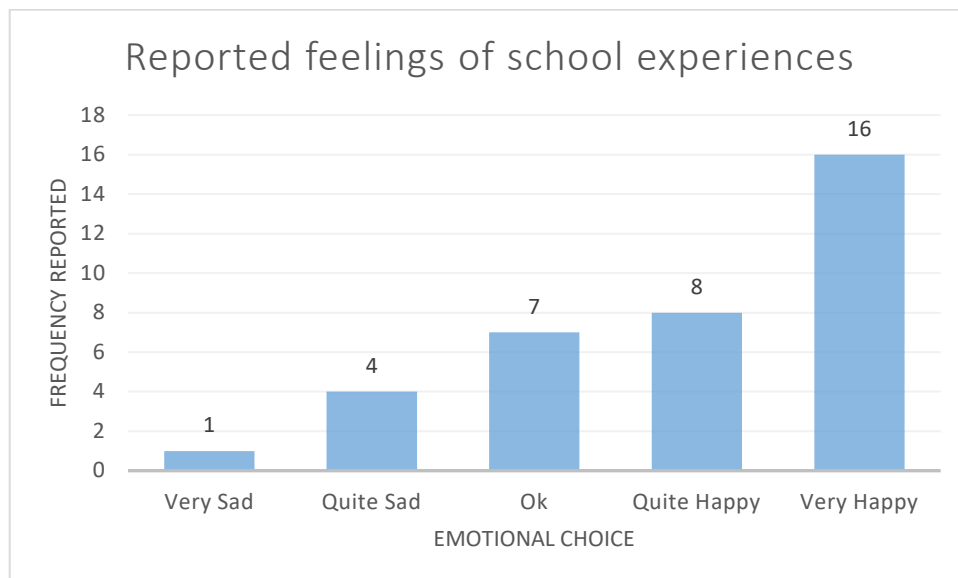
*Figure 5.4: Billy's perception thematic network model*



Billy was nervous at first during the interview, but his stammer lessened as he became increasingly confident throughout the session. This would agree with research suggesting a link between stammer severity and task confidence (Roulstone, 2011).

As can be shown from Figure 5.5 below, Billy reported that he enjoyed the majority of his school experiences.

*Figure 5.5: Summary of elicited responses within the YVYC tool*



Billy responded with far more positive emotions than negative experienced emotions. Out of 36 questions asked during the tool kit conversation, 24 of them (66%) showed him to be

either quite happy or very happy. In only 5 of the 36 questions (13%) did Billy report feeling sad.

He showed that he enjoyed school generally, which came across through the number of positive emotions he responded with. He also believed that the speech and language support was useful which gives credence to its introduction, and is of particular value to the outreach practitioners. He tended to show most enjoyment towards subjects that were less theoretical and required less talk, such as Art, P.E and Football, stating that he preferred ‘lots of practical stuff.’ These subjects may present less stressful talking environments which played to his strengths and were therefore more comforting. Indeed, the onetime Billy used the term ‘Very Sad’ was to describe how he felt about the experiences of being made to read out in class in front of his peers and this is not surprising given that he has verbal dyspraxia and a stammer.

Billy was able to go beyond simply matching his experiences to an emotional scale and was able, for many of the questions, to provide thoughtful insights about particular experiences and issues. For instance, when asked about his TA support he asserted:

**Billy:** *“They can help me <which> is good but bad because I would like to work with my friends instead of my teacher.”*

This shows that Billy was using the tool kit to help him reflect upon his experiences. He implied that while TAs do help him, he also gets support from his friends and he places their importance highly. This runs contrary to the practitioners’ impression that Billy gets on better with adults than children. It highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and communication which are critical to the learning and social emotional development of children (Lucariello, et al., 2015). Developing successful relationships with

peers and adults is dependent on an individual's ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings through verbal and nonverbal behaviour (Durlak et al., 2011). His friends seem to understand Billy's non-verbal behaviours to support him, which is important because sometimes Billy felt unable to talk to his teacher in his class. Yet, it appears that often Billy is often "not allowed to be with my friends."

This ties into the theme of anxiety, as Billy voices that he feels nervous in a variety of experiences, such as being asked a question in class, working with others at his SPLT whom he does not know, being asked to read out loud in class, and worrying that others will not want to work with him:

**Billy:** *Makes me nervous because if I get it wrong... Quite nervous... I hate reading out loud because I get nervous... but only if they wanted to work with me.*

These are all social activities and evidence suggests that people who stammer have higher levels of social anxiety (Yaruss, Coleman, and Quesal, 2012), in which the anxiety is more likely a consequence as opposed to the cause of the stammer. Speaking to others is an important social skill and experiencing involuntary disruption (as a result of a stammer) will likely result in increased fears. Given these feelings, it is rational for Billy to feel worried when he is faced with the prospect of feeling embarrassed and frustrated when attempting to get his opinion across in a group of faster speaking people (Yaruss, Coleman, and Quesal, 2012). It can be argued that the increased anxiety is a logical reaction when dealing with physical symptoms, such as blocking and repetitions of sounds associated with stammering, and, as a result, he has learned strategies, such as avoiding speaking and negative potential social reactions (Yaruss, Coleman, and Quesal, 2012).

The final theme that was picked out considers Billy's concentration difficulties and relates to parental and school concerns that he is aggressive to family members. Several important



phrases provide an insight into Billy's frustration. In relation to listening in class, he said "...I don't understand everything"; in relation to concentrating on his Xbox, he said "...and my sister shouts loud, really loud...and I lose I get angry. Because I try and try." In relation to stopping his learning he said "if I try and do some hard work and I know what to do and then I forget what I'm on about and then I forget what I was going to write...and I look back at it and I think it doesn't make sense...I get distracted." He is clearly communicating that he finds it difficult to concentrate on tasks when too much is going on around him. He explains that this is particularly frustrating when his sister shouts during his Xbox gaming, and he gets angry as a result in his home environment. At school, Billy does not show this anger through aggression, but he still experiences the same frustration. The researcher's observations assumed that he was engaged in his art class and appeared to try and remain on task even when others were distracted. During these periods the researcher noted that he appeared "awkward, seemingly very aware that their behaviour was inappropriate and not wanting to be associated with it." However, instead Billy was likely demonstrating his unease at trying to concentrate with the difficulties going on around him. One explanation for this can be found when viewed within a Demands and Capacities framework (Starkweather and Gottwald, 1990). All children have finite intellectual, emotional and practical capacities to draw on. Evidence from Starkweather and Gottwald (1990) shows that when the capacities of children who stutter are over extended by demands made on them, stammering becomes more severe, and frustrations can affect learning and behaviour. According to this framework, Billy is voicing that he feels unable to process information when too much external stimuli is occurring around him. This is likely leading to an increase in stress and frustration.

At the end of the session, Billy reported that he enjoyed the tool kit interview and provided several further suggestions about how it could be improved including: making the mat

bigger, creating a nervous sign and repositioning the Velcro. This demonstrates that Billy was confident enough to assert himself with adults in a situation where he felt safe and enabled. Creating an environment that fosters this confidence is vital to building on Billy's strengths.

*Evaluation against proposition 1: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.***

The analysis of Billy's experience with the YVYC tool supports proposition 1. The tool encouraged Billy to reflect on his experiences, and enabled him to consider how he felt across a variety of specific and general school learning and support experiences.

He was able to voice that he generally enjoyed school, and found the support that was on offer to be helpful. However, he was anxious about a number of social experiences, particularly where demands were put on him to speak in public. To prevent this anxiety he learned strategies that supported his learning, such as relying on peers, rather than utilising teacher help. In addition, he showed that he had frustrations associated with difficulties in concentrating on tasks when multiple external stimuli were present.

Many of Billy's more comprehensive responses were elicited after he physically manipulated the photographed experiences in his hands, before considering an associated emotion. In this way, the tool acted as a bridge to access a higher level of communication than might otherwise have been possible. In addition, because of the flexibility of the tool,

Billy was not tied to a specific answer, he was able to change his mind about how he felt, and did so on several occasions as his thoughts adjusted.

The ease and accessibility of the tool meant that Billy appeared to relax into the interview fairly quickly and, as a result, his stammer reduced. Building a rapport through discussing areas of interest, such as football, was helpful in achieving this state.

The tool also seemed to empower Billy. He was highly enthusiastic about suggesting ways to improve it, including new emotions, larger icons, and adopting a different way to explain how the tool works to other children. This enthusiasm supports the idea that he was fully engaged and committed to the responses he provided. These are facets that promote competency and autonomy and are associated with fostering self-determination (Ryan and Deci, 2017); a key theoretical contribution to the YVYC tool.

*Evaluation against proposition 2: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.***

In agreement with proposition 2, constructing and comparing Billy's school and support experiences across practitioner (teacher/SENco, outreach), researcher and Billy's own view using the YVYC tool elicitation, revealed a more comprehensive understanding of Billy's current educational experiences, strengths, challenges and needs than if any one of these methods had been used in isolation. For ease of comparison, a summary of these views has been formatted into the broad headings of communication and social interaction (Table 5.1).

*Table 5.1: Summary of practitioner, researcher and YVYC perspectives*

<i>Practitioner Perspective</i>	<i>Researcher Perspective</i>	<i>Billy's perspective (YVYC elicitation)</i>
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication difficulties impacting learning</li> <li>• Frustration at lack of opportunity to talk</li> <li>• Low-self worth</li> <li>• Enjoys practical subjects</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stammer heightened in stressful situations limiting access to learning</li> <li>• Low self-worth</li> <li>• Enjoys practical subjects</li> <li>• Persistent trying to focus</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys school and the majority of his subjects</li> <li>• Finds school support helpful</li> <li>• Preference for practical subjects</li> <li>• Concentration difficulties leads to not understanding work and frustration/anger</li> <li>• Anxious about talking in public</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxious</li> <li>• Adult relationship preference</li> <li>• Likes responsibility</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxious with adults</li> <li>• Prefers peer interactions</li> <li>• Utilises peer support strategies to overcome challenges</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxious about meeting new people</li> <li>• Prefers working with his friends than adults</li> </ul>

The highlighted colours represent agreement between the three perspectives giving weight to the concept that the practitioner, researcher and Billy share a common perception in some areas. Each perspective shows Billy's preference for practical subjects and the presence of anxiety in certain situations. However, both practitioners and this researcher saw the primary concern for Billy as a lack of communication skills, which was stopping him learning. This constructs Billy's difficulties as a barrier that prevents him from learning effectively. Whereas, through giving Billy a voice about his own school experiences, it became clear that Billy did not talk about his communicative abilities as stopping him from learning. Instead, he asserted: "if I try and do some hard work and I know what to do and then I forget what I'm on about and then I forget what I was going to write...and I look

back at it and I think it doesn't make sense...I get distracted." Billy constructs his needs as an external problem; he tries to concentrate and carry out his tasks but is distracted by external stimuli, which leads him to lose his attention and get confused and angry. This knowledge presents an opportunity for the school to intervene at an environmentally strategic level and support Billy, for instance, by improving classroom management to reduce external noise, or by presenting individualised learning material in a simplified visual format that builds on Billy's strengths. It represents a positive argument for the need of the tool at schools because they were unable to understand Billy's emotional outbursts. The tool successfully provided potential insights into the sources of these frustrations.

The comparisons also showed that Billy felt nervous about asking for teacher help in the classroom, and this was because he did not want to talk in front of others, probably due to his speech stammer. This led him to rely upon peer support. It would be helpful if teachers were trained to recognise Billy's stammering needs and support with appropriate methods (The Bercow Report, 2011).

A final point that the YVYC tool kit revealed was Billy's anxiety towards having to go to a different school for his speech and language intervention. In an inclusive school, support services are brought to the child rather than removing the child from the school (Smelter, Rasch, and Yudewitz, 1994). And, although Billy said he enjoyed the SLT intervention once he was there, the act of withdrawing him from his school supports the concept of integration rather than inclusion (Woolfson, 2011).

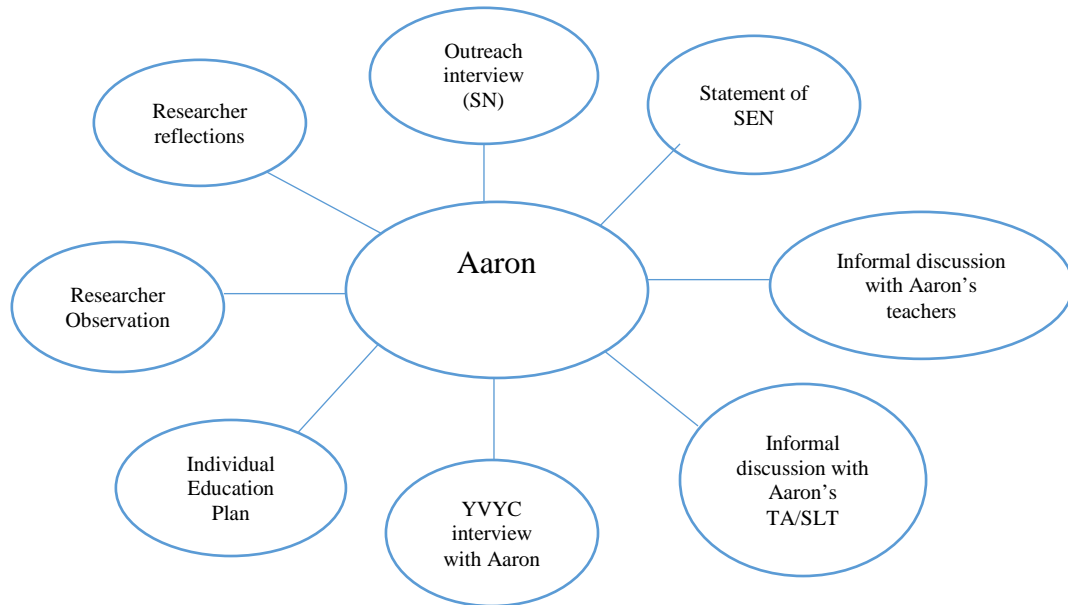
## **5.3 Case Two – Aaron**

### *5.3.1 Background and documentary evidence*

Aaron was the youngest of the seven children. He was 4.5 years old when participating in the research and attended a mainstream nursery school. Aaron had been diagnosed with Down's syndrome and had several health related difficulties including congenital heart disease and a hearing impairment. His statement of SEN indicated that he had severe learning difficulties in the form of social, language, motor and developmental delay. It also identified that he was able to understand a range of two but not three word instructions, he could sign some words and verbs but not combine them, and that he could imitate some words but with pronounced speech errors. His individual education plan (IEP) stated that he was particularly interested in football, cars, construction resources, large wooden blocks, music and books. He was registered with a number of professionals including a speech and language therapist (SLT), consultant paediatrician, educational psychologist, the hearing impairment team and an occupational therapist. He could vocalise but used Makaton and visual symbols to help him communicate.

For a six month period a TA had been working with Aaron at his school on a 1 to 1 basis to support his language, attention and listening needs. This support had come as a result of a recommendation that the local Outreach services provided.

**Figure 5.6: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Aaron's school experiences**



### 5.3.2 How did practitioners perceive Aaron's experiences at school?

Practitioners appeared to share a perception about Aaron that his “speech and language abilities were his primary concern (TA)” impacting his learning and social development. This was highlighted on both his special needs statement and IEP. Aaron was to be “staying down a year to complete his reception year in the nursery school” due to concerns that he would be “unable to cope in a mainstream reception setting (TA).”

In discussions with his TA and other nursery staff, he was described as being “sociable, friendly and happy in the company of his peers (TA)”. Their focus was on helping Aaron to develop his communication skills, to better integrate him into small groups and to assist with visual symbols to help his learning (IEP statement). Concerns about his attention were also raised by some nursery staff, asserting that this was a problem in terms of “not being

able to sit on the carpet for long periods (Teacher)”; while others noted that it was “improving upon previous years (TA).” For instance, his TA stated he was now able to “maintain attention long enough to join in with group activities, whereas before he would have been disruptive (TA).”

An outreach practitioner emphasised that they trained Aaron’s school to implement a workstation, to use “visual symbols...<have> objects of references, (and) photographs of reference (SN)” which have been designed to assist communication. His TA noted that Aaron’s “behaviour had significantly improved during the six months that she had started working with him.” Previously, she said, “he was often oppositional but since the school had implemented the various interventions that Outreach had advised upon, Aaron’s behaviour had improved and was no longer a cause for concern (TA).”

A speech and language therapist (SLT) attended the nursery once a week, with a central purpose to increase the number of instructional words that Aaron could understand (IEP). This was in line with the designated support needs on Aaron’s statement of special needs. She believed “his speech had improved slightly over a period of six months, but was still very much a cause for concern (SLT)”. She advised the researcher that keeping instructions short and utilising praise worked best with Aaron, a sentiment that was also relayed by other teachers (Researcher’s reflections).

Because the researcher was unsure whether or not the YVYC tool would be effective with Aaron given the severe communicative and cognitive difficulties observed and discussed, the researcher presented the concept of the tool to his TA and the SLT at his school as well as SN (outreach practitioner), all whom doubted that the tool would work for Aaron. SN revealed that “because of the age...and the level of learning disability” eliciting information about Aaron’s views would be very difficult. Aaron’s TA advised that the tool would have

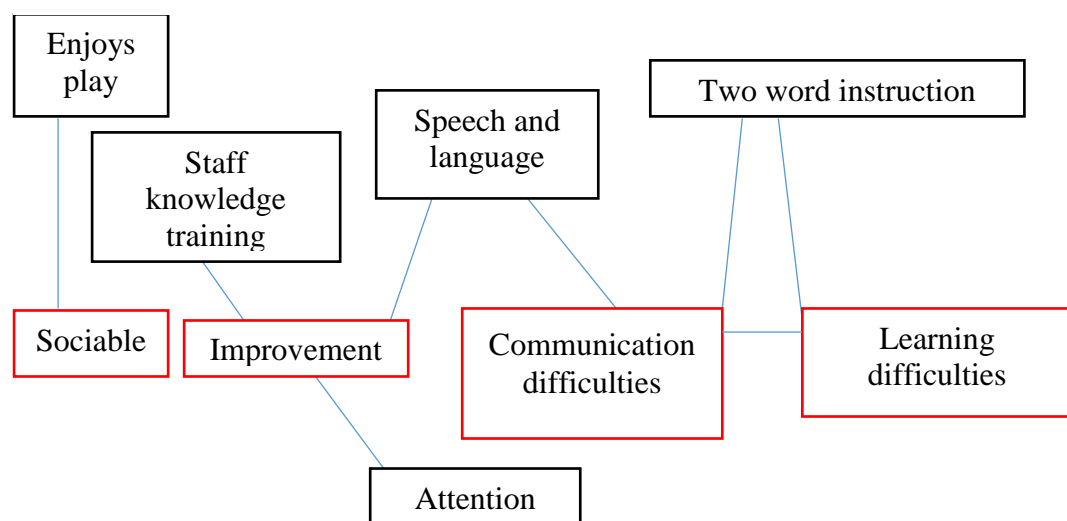


to be made more basic by removing the “a little, ok, and quite a lot” signs and just keeping the happy and sad face. Even then she doubted it would work “because of the level that Aaron operated at (TA)” but stated she was happy to give it a try.

### 5.3.3 Practitioner perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the practitioner accounts of Aaron’s experiences are *improvement*, *sociable*, *communication difficulties* and *learning difficulties*.

**Figure 5.7: Practitioner perception thematic network model**



Practitioners were quick to identify Aaron as being “social, affable and friendly (TA).” He was perceived as someone who enjoyed playing with other children and was “happy in the company of his peers (SN).” Likewise, practitioners appeared to have a good knowledge of his preferred play activities citing “football, cars, construction resources, large wooden blocks, music and books (TA; IEP).” This can be collaborated by directly asking Aaron

during the YVYC interview, to identify if he agrees with these preferences by showing him photographs of those experiences.

Much of the informal discussions centred on Aaron's general improvement over the past six months "...TA was keen to point out how much he has improved since she began supporting him (Researcher's reflections)." Outreach had stated that they provided training for how to meet Aaron's communication, language and learning needs (SN). As a result, the school had created a "personalised workstation, and provided visual supports (TA)". This effect was reflected in practitioner discussion as they described Aaron's attention and behaviour as improving over this period, as well as his speech due to SLT impact (TA; SLT).

Practitioner documents and discussions showed that the school were very aware of Aaron's communication difficulties (IEP; Researcher's reflections.) In order to help support him, they shared knowledge with each other that he struggled with instructions "over two words" (SLT), and "supported their communication with him using sign language" (Researcher's reflections). Overall, practitioners seemed to perceive Aaron holistically, taking into "account his interest, his personality and his needs, rather than as someone with a disability (Researcher's reflections)." As such, he appeared to be well supported in his environment.

Despite a general positive discourse of Aaron's school experiences, there was little encouragement towards the idea that Aaron might be able to voice how he felt about his own experiences of school due to his high level of cognitive and communicative difficulties. And, in this respect, he was seen as being incapable due to his disability (Rabiee, Sloper, and Beresford, 2005). Aaron falls into a remit of being both very young and disabled leading him to be doubly disadvantaged (Noble, 2003).

#### *5.3.4 Tool kit conversation perspective analysis*

Aaron was not able to use the tool to communicate how he felt about his school experiences in the way that it was designed. Because no views were elicited, it was not possible to establish themes.

As theorised in Chapter 3, to be able to use the YVYC tool to express experiences, an individual must utilise a cognitive dimension that requires self-reflection and self-awareness skills (Beresford, 2012). This cognitive dimension is neither widely researched nor well understood. Some studies show that language plays a key role in understanding emotion (Milligan, Astington, and Deck, 2007). If we acknowledge this, then Aaron may have had a difficulty in understanding the researcher's language and associating it with an emotion. In other words, perhaps he simply did not understand what happy and sad meant.

Alternatively, the researcher may have not set up the tool to effectively meet Aaron's needs. The researcher wanted Aaron to look at a photograph of an experience, then determine an appropriate emotional response (happy/sad) before placing that card in the appropriate place on the mat. In hindsight, the researcher spoke many words trying to explain the tool, more than his three word instructional limit (SLT; Statement of SEN) which was likely beyond Aaron's current ability and probably confused him further. Instead, questions should have been shorter, and more time should have been allowed for Aaron to answer. In addition, it would have been useful to input his PECs into the interaction as this was what he was used to. It may have helped to have had a real object (like his car) in front of Aaron, rather than just a photograph which would have been something more familiar to him.

A final theory that may have contributed towards the unsuccessful elicitation attempt could be a lack of Aaron's previous experience at reflecting on his experiences. Children's experience of being listened to and involvement in decision making affects their ability to

participate (Franklin, 2013). Lansdown (2006) explains that restricting the opportunities for children to experience decision making will result in a lack of capacity to do so which is used to further justify the reason not to include them. The practitioner and researcher analyses showed that practitioners at Aaron's school believed he was incapable of voicing his views and, as a result, he had limited experiences at developing expertise in that role. In light of this research attempt, the concern is that Aaron was reaffirmed as being incapable and therefore not permitted further elicitation attempts, rather than trying again, using different methods.

*Evaluation against proposition 1: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.***

The analysis of Aaron's experience with the YVYC tool does not support proposition one. The tool failed to offer Aaron with an alternate way to voice his school learning and support experiences.

*Evaluation against proposition 2: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.***

Because the YVYC tool failed to meet proposition one, it is difficult to conclude that it met proposition two. However, through examining the perceptions of the practitioners and the

researcher, a partial understanding of Aaron's school and support experiences are established. These views have been condensed into Table 5.2 below to identify concordance.

*Table 5.2: Showing a summary of practitioner, researcher and YVYC perspectives*

<i><b>Practitioner Perspective</b></i>	<i><b>Researcher Observations Perspective</b></i>	<i><b>Aaron's perspective (YVYC elicitation)</b></i>
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech and language difficulties impacting development</li> <li>• <b>Attention</b> and listening skills improving but still preventing learning</li> <li>• Limited to 2 word instruction.</li> <li>• Visual symbols help his learning and communication.</li> <li>• <b>SLT helping to improve communication, especially around instruction.</b></li> <li>• <b>Prefers to play with football, cars, books and wooden blocks.</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher difficulty understanding his communication</li> <li>• Enjoyed independent learning</li> <li>• <b>Enjoyed playing with wooden blocks and books</b></li> <li>• Struggled with <b>attention</b> over extended periods</li> <li>• Enjoyed being given responsibility</li> <li>• Required TA assistance with some activities</li> <li>• <b>SLT focussed on perceived needs.</b></li> <li>• Teachers had a shared understanding of Aaron's needs</li> <li>• Practitioner view supports the idea that Aaron is incapable for giving views.</li> </ul>	<p>Aaron was unable to use the tool to effectively provide his views.</p>
<p><b>Social Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workstation with photographs to show what he wants to do</b></li> <li>• <b>Sociable, friendly and happy in the company of his peers.</b></li> <li>• <b>Encouraged to integrate with small groups</b></li> <li>• Behaviour and attention improving</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social Interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workstation to foster independent learning</b></li> <li>• <b>Able to socially interact with other children effectively</b></li> <li>• <b>Appears happy</b></li> <li>• <b>Encouraged to integrate with peers</b></li> </ul>	

Similar perceptions can be seen between the practitioner and researcher observations. The school demonstrated inclusive practices within the nursery and were observably highly supportive of Aaron. The outreach training, use of visual symbols, TA and SLT appeared to be helping Aaron access his environment. This has likely had a positive effect on his behaviour, attention and language skills.

Practitioners were correct when they doubted that Aaron would be able to give an opinion on his experiences but only in this instance. There is a danger that this view supports the discourse that those with disabilities are ‘not going to be able to tell you anything’ (Franklin, 2013). This perception reinforces Aaron’s position as being incapable (Qvortrup, 1994) and also removes responsibility from the practitioners to ensure that they find an alternative method to elicit the child’s voice. This was the first attempt at eliciting how Aaron felt and should not be the last efforts towards empowering Aaron to voice his own reflections.

#### *5.3.5 How did the researcher perceive Aaron’s experiences at school?*

Aaron was observed over a period of two days. Specifically, observation checklists were carried out during morning registration, a number counting group session, an afternoon independent learning session and two 1 to 1 Speech and Language intervention sessions (see Appendix 2A). The researcher was especially interested in how his SLCN were affecting his experiences, as this was a primary problem raised by practitioners.

Aaron appeared to get the greatest pleasure and was most engaged during independent learning, where he was free to walk around sections of the nursery and make his own choices about what to play with. On occasion, practitioners encouraged Aaron to try out

various activities but he seemed content to do this independently. This included: playing outside on a climbing frame with his peers, playing with a selection of wooden blocks, and looking at several books. These instances of play on a single activity ranged from several seconds to up to 3 minutes before he moved on to something different.

He struggled to keep focus for extended periods on formal group tasks, for instance, where children were expected to sit down on the carpet for up to 25 minutes during registration.

During this session, the teacher asked questions to a group of 8 children about their weekend while they each received a fruit snack. Aaron was able to provide a brief answer, which the teacher was able to mostly understand and reciprocate using short sentences and the help of Makaton. Afterwards, Aaron appeared disinterested in remaining on the carpet and listening to the rest of the children give their answers. Instead, he walked away and sought other activities and interests, requiring teacher intervention to bring him back to the group on several occasions. At these times, Aaron was receptive, before shortly losing interest again. Aaron was not alone in losing attention, as several other children also lost interest and played with objects around them.

Aaron visibly got excited in moments when he was given responsibility. For instance, his teacher asked him to complete a daily activity which one child was chosen to carry out each day. He had to match the photos of the members of his group with their name tags by placing them on the wall, which he completed with a small amount of help from his TA.

Observing the one-to-one, 15 minute speech and language therapy intervention, Aaron appeared happy and engaged throughout. Games were used, such as placing a ball in a pot, to encourage Aaron to practice vocalising sounds. A sticker reward was given to him when

he completed the task which he responded well to. The SLT used Makaton while speaking to facilitate communication while keeping her instructions short. She was also able to demonstrate how he often failed to understand 3 word instructions, such as “put the doll on top of the table” but would recognise 2 word instructions, such as, “make dolly jump.”

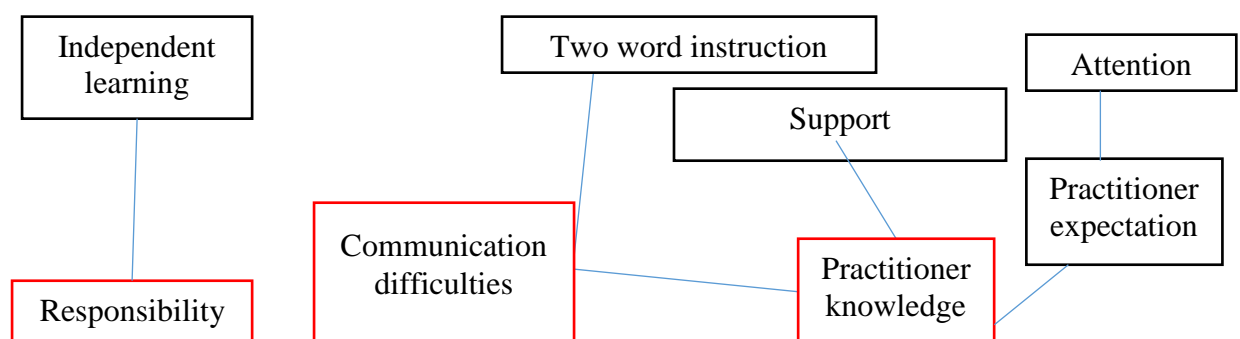
The researcher found it very difficult to understand what Aaron was trying to communicate. His verbal speech lacked clarity and without knowledge of Makaton, the researcher had to rely on practitioners to understand Aaron directly. In contrast, practitioners, especially his TA, were much more successful at understanding his verbal and non-verbal communication, although they also found it difficult.

### 5.3.6 Researcher perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher’s account of Aaron’s experiences include: *responsibility*, *practitioner knowledge* and *communication difficulties*.

See Figure 5.8 for a breakdown of the thematic plot points.

*Figure 5.8: Researcher perception thematic network model*





Observing Aaron's facial expressions, he demonstrated joy when he was being given responsibility for organising the name cards (Researcher's reflection). Aaron also demonstrated a preference towards being given independence when he was asked to choose his own play, and happily showed he could interact with a range of material, without adult input, choosing activities which mirrored practitioner perceptions outlined previously. However, adults were within proximity if he required help or got stuck on specific choices. For instance, there was an occasion when he could not find his wooden blocks; his teacher recognised this and found them for him (Researcher's reflection). When he chose to, Aaron played with other children and demonstrated that he was able to socially reciprocate appropriately, for instance, by understanding the requirement to take turns during activities. Similarly, when the teacher gave him responsibility for registering the children (a matching photo task), he was delighted and tried to work through the task independently before getting stuck, at which point his TA supported him. A further example of promoting responsibility was provided by the design and set up of a workstation to foster independent learning. The school seem aware of Aaron's needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2017), and, as a result, Aaron "appeared happy at school overall (Researcher's reflections)."

Aaron's communication difficulties made it difficult for outsiders, like the researcher with no background history of Aaron's needs or communicative methods, to understand. However, practitioners were far more successful at understanding his vocalisms, sign language and non-verbal cues, especially his TA who spent the most time with him. As such, the TA support and methods that outreach had trained others in, appeared to be helping to meet his communicative needs, giving credence to the outreach services that set up the strategies.

Practitioner knowledge observably helped to support Aaron's communicative needs. For instance, he chose to play with wooden blocks and cars, which the practitioners identified as an interest, demonstrating that practitioners are aware of his interests. Similarly, when he was spoken to, it was coordinated with PECs, short verbal instructions and sign language. This required training and an understanding of Aaron's needs which appeared to the researcher as common knowledge amongst the practitioners that were observed. The exception to this was evident during the registration group session, where Aaron and several other children lost interest due to overly high attention expectations. The average attention span for a 4 year old is about 7 minutes compared to the 25 minutes that the children were expected to sit down for (Conners, 2001) which indicates a need for an urgent change.

#### *5.3.7 How did Aaron perceive his own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

Aaron's support assistant advised that the tool kit should be simplified as she was unsure if he would understand it in its current state. After observing Aaron, the researcher drew the same conclusion. Only two of the emotions were included for Aaron to choose from, Happy or Sad and a neutral value, OK. In addition, the support assistant also recommended that she sit in the session due to her familiarity with his communication needs and this too was agreed. A final point that the TA made was to use the Makaton signs for happy and sad, alongside the images which the researcher learned.

The YVYC interview lasted only 5 minutes before it was stopped (See Appendix 2B for full audio transcript). Aaron appeared engaged and focussed during the time and he enjoyed the novelty of the tool kit, manipulating the cards and playing with the Velcro but he did not appear to understand the researcher's instructions or the TA's relayed instructions with Makaton.

This was first evident in the screener test,

**Interviewer:** ...*Okay, this is Bart Simpson, have you heard of Bart Simpson?*

**Aaron:** *Ye*

**Interviewer:** *Good. Bart is going to show us how to use this game.*

**Aaron:** *Ye <places finger on Bart>*

**Interviewer:** *That's Bart that's right*

**Interviewer:** *If I place Bart over here, this means he is really happy. Can you see that sign there? Can you see the smiley face?*

**Aaron:** *Ye*

**Interviewer:** ...*So we are going to have a little practice. (Pause) Bart is feeling really bored, "Oh I'm really bored!" I'm going to put Bart over here <Interviewer places Bart on the sad emotion>, he is really sad, he is bored. (Pause) Oh, he gets to go on his skate board! Do you know what a skate board is? <Pause> Bart loves skateboards. Where shall we put Bart? <Pause> Let's put Bart over on very happy, very happy. Good, excellent. <Pause>*  
*Oh no! Bart fell off his skateboard! He hurt his knee. Now he is very sad. Where shall we put Bart? Over here...on very sad.*

Aaron responded with 'ye', but he did not look in the appropriate direction towards the happy face. Instead, he remained distracted by the picture of Bart Simpson. The researcher continued to tell the screener story but this may have been too much information in one go, as evident by the lack of response from Aaron.

The researcher stopped the screener and tried a different tactic by asking a question about toys, known items that Aaron plays with.

**Interviewer:** *I want to know, Aaron... How do you feel about playing with toys?*

*<Interviewer shows photograph of toys> Do you feel very sad, or very happy when you play with toys? (Pause) Sad or happy? Which one does Aaron feel?*

**Teaching Assistant:** *He is signing for car*

**Interviewer:** *Do you feel happy or sad when you are playing with the car?*

**Aaron:** *Car*

**Interviewer:** *Is that happy or sad? (Pause) Not too sure. This is quite tricky isn't it?*

**Teaching Assistant:** *The concept of a child like Aaron telling you their emotions is hard even though it <the tool kit> has been simplified.*

The researcher asked Aaron about toys and Aaron correctly noticed a picture of a car within the illustration, evidenced by his signing. However, he failed to understand the connection between the car and his own emotions. Alternatively, he failed to understand the sentence or semantics of what the researcher was asking him to do. At this point, the researcher felt unsure how to proceed and felt pressured by the TA, who made it known that she did not believe Aaron could complete the task, to stop the interview. However, Aaron did not appear distressed and was quite happily playing with the cards. As a result, the researcher tried a final question:

**Interviewer:** *Aaron when I listen to music..\*hums a song\* It makes me very happy.*

*How do you feel when you listen to music? Do you feel happy or sad?*

**Aaron:** *\*Indistinct sound\**

**Interviewer:** *I think what I might do is leave it here. But Aaron you were so good and helped me very much.*

At this point the researcher stopped the interview because it was evident that Aaron was unable to complete the task.

## **5.4 Evaluation**

The purpose of this reflection and evaluation is to determine what elements of the YVYC tool kit were successful from the first two case studies. The YVYC tool kit was designed and considered against by the creation of a quality assessment framework, that was underpinned by outreach requirements, children's voice and the literature on reviewed elicitation tools and methods (see Chapter 3). Table 5.3 has been highlighted to show which aspects of the YVYC design are considered visible and effective in the two case studies. At the end of each action research cycle, new requirements, insights and theory might be added to the table as the combined cases are reflected upon. These may be subsequently considered in the next Action Research Cycle.

*Table 5.3: Highlighting aspects of QAF within which the YVYC might be effective*

**Outreach Requirements** *(As identified in Chapter 1)*

- Adaptable for range of ages (4-18) with communication difficulties and disabilities
- Seeks children's views of their experiences of school across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains
- Easy and well-timed to administer
- Fun and non-threatening
- Evaluates how children feel about their interventions and support structures
- Evaluates whether a child's enjoyment of school has increased as a result of support.
- Helps practitioners to understand what children think help them to learn

**Children's Voice** *(As identified in Chapter 2)*

- Respect's children's rights
- Promotes social inclusion
- Personal centred approach
- Underpinned by the social model of disability
- Empowers the child
- Enables active participation
- Works towards benefits and overcoming challenges of implementation

**Literature reviewed considerations** *(As identified in Chapter 3)*

- Flexible for the individual
- Data aims to reveal insights that can challenge the status quo
- Audio Or Video recorded
- Identify contextual background knowledge about the child
- Interviews should involve manipulating items
- Photographs to help focus children's memory and promote concrete ideas
- Basic emotional faces are more easily recognised
- Mixture of open and closed questions

Case One (Billy) demonstrated that the tool helped provide Billy with a way to express his views and feelings about a number of school and support experiences which was illustrated through the creation of a thematic network (School joy, Anxiety, and Concentration difficulties). The comparison between Billy's, the practitioner's and the researcher's perceptions offered a more consistent insight into Billy's world, for instance, showing that he had anxiety in social situations and that he preferred to work with his friends rather than

adults as was presupposed. It also showed that he got frustrated by external noise which affects his concentration and is likely responsible for his aggressive responses at home that the school and parents shared concerns about. Ultimately, this information can help his practitioners and parents consider how they might change their environments to better meet Billy's needs. It provides the beginnings of evidence that supports the theory that the YVYC tool can offer a structure which helps children with SLCN to discuss their learning and support experiences.

Although the YVYC tool failed to effectively provide Case Two (Aaron) with a way to express his experiences, the methodological process of investigating alternative views was insightful. It demonstrated that, despite the school's observable inclusive and supportive practices, such as developing a shared understanding of Aaron's needs and providing appropriate training strategies that support his communication and learning needs, there was an underlying discourse of incapability that may have unwittingly hindered his potential to develop expertise as a reflective and autonomous individual. This challenges the status quo because without encouraging Aaron to actively participate in decision making processes the school are demonstrating integration rather than inclusion (Woolfson, 2011). For Billy, he was constructed by practitioners in a way that considers his difficulties as coming from within himself, whereas Billy constructs his difficulties as being due to external difficulties. As such, the YVYC tool kit is showing signs that it can illuminate accepted and latent contextual truths which are likely impacting learning and/or social development.

## **5.5 Critical Reflection and modifications**

Action Research is sympathetic to real world research and the constraints of that world (Carr, 2006). The design of the project allowed the researcher to take complex constructs and make sense out of them in a systematic way while trying to capture some of the nuances of what is going on in reality. Much of this understanding was carried out through reflecting on the researcher's experiences.

The tool required significant preparation time prior to carrying out interviews with the children. This involved data gathering from documents and practitioners about the background experiences that the children were involved with across a broad range of school areas such as: subject lessons, extra-curricular activities, support interventions, and IEPs. Photographs had to be taken of the children's experiences which were laminated and fastened with Velcro, in order for the children to manipulate them onto another piece of Velcro on the mat. Information had to be organised into a manageable format with which to interview the children at a later stage. This took the form of a questionnaire list that could be ticked off (as either Very Sad, Quite Sad, Ok, Quite Happy, Very Happy OR Sad/Happy) depending on the child's answers on the tool kit.

One of the caveats that the outreach practitioners voiced in the pre-experimental meetings, was limited time. Outreach advised that, ideally, the children's tool interview should not take more than 30 - 40 minutes to administer. The quicker it took to administer, the more often outreach asserted that they would be willing to use it; a point which in hindsight runs adverse to the notion of children's voice (see Chapter Two) and instead, reflects a tokenistic outlook that Kellett (2011) describes. The first attempt with the tool, interviewing Billy, took 40 minutes to administer and several hours to set up. While Aaron's took just 5 minutes with an equal setting up time, because it proved unsuccessful. In Billy's case a lot



of detailed information was gathered and, in this researcher's opinion, this represented a more accurate amount of time required to properly interview a child about his school and support experiences.. However, the substantial preparation prior to the interview took far longer (e.g. gathering background information) and depended on how easy it was to access the information. Taking photographs was often difficult due to ethical considerations and data protection meaning the researcher could not take photographs of the case children with other children. Instead, illustrations had to be relied upon. As a result, some experiences did not translate well to the question cards, such as, *how do you feel about talking with friends*, or *putting your hand up in class to ask a question*. Billy was able to understand most of the illustrations and photographs that were presented to him, but he found it difficult to answer some of the more abstract, open-questions, such as whether he felt more *confident* in certain situations. Further, iterations are needed to resolve in what ways vocabulary can be made accessible, and to have different ways of explaining the tool and the process, to avoid the confusion that Aaron was presented with.

The additional workload needed to be carried out prior to the tool interview was unavoidable if it was to be properly adapted for the individual, and research suggests this is a fundamental stage when eliciting the voice of the child (Beresford et al., 2004). In addition, once the initial preparation stage is complete, subsequent administrations will be quicker as existing resources can be used. Where schools or services choose to administer the YVYC tool themselves, they can build up a repository of photographs and so require a much shorter set up time with different children.

Sourcing age and developmentally appropriate materials was challenging. The requirement for the tool that outreach set was that it should be adaptable for children between the ages of 4-18 years. A member of the outreach team was concerned that the pilot tool appeared to

cater too much for primary school children, as it included bright colours, a primary style text, the mat was made of felt, and it required Velcro manipulation. The researcher was mindful of any suggestions put forth and shared these concerns with the children prior to the interview. It was important for the nature of the project that the children and practitioners were both integral in helping to shape the design of the tool.

Billy and Aaron were the first children to test the tool and it was explained to them that it was in an early stage of development and that their ideas would shape future iterations. Billy took this role seriously, and was keen to demonstrate several ideas about how to improve the tool after his interview. He said that he enjoyed carrying out the tool and thought it was helpful, even becoming visibly excited at times during the process. He suggested making the mat bigger to allow the photographs and emotional faces to be seen more clearly, creating a nervous sign so to have more choice to express how he felt, and to reposition the Velcro on the mat so that the user can place the cards in a different way. The fact that Aaron was not able to use the YVYC tool provides an early indication that in its present state, the tool is not suitable for some children. This conclusion was expected given the vast degree of individual differences, but generalisations around suitability will not be possible until more children are interviewed in subsequent iterations.

Feedback from the children, practitioners and my supervisors was collated and reflected upon. The main points that were acted upon were:

- More response emotions were added to the tool in order to give the children a greater choice when explaining how they felt about their experiences.
- The YVYC tool was made bigger and more accessible.
- Observations were to be carried out using a mixture of participatory and non-participatory methods.

- Physical objects would be provided for children perceived to have severe communicative and cognitive difficulties
- Children's own communicative devices (e.g. PECs) will be better implemented into the tool.

These changes led to the creation of a revised tool kit which was tested in Action Research 2 (see Appendix 8).

#### *5.5.1 Procedural reflections*

During initial observations, the researcher sat at the back of the class and tried to remain incognito, asking to be identified as an observer of the whole class to avoid the child participant feeling singled out and threatened. The observation schedule allowed the researcher to sample specific dimensions within a lesson or a period of the day every 5 minutes for up to 1 hour, such as task attention, emotional state, social communication, learning and class behaviour (for a full list of dimensions covered see Appendix 7). These dimensions ran in parallel to what would be later discussed with the child during the YVYC tool interview and would serve as an element of the evaluative comparison for the purpose of triangulation. In between these sample time periods, the researcher was free to write notes on special areas of interest.

During the action research one process, it became apparent that this form of observation as a key instrument of the tool kit design was not working effectively. The non-participatory strategy involved keeping interaction and conversation with the child to a minimum. This meant that when it was time to carry out the YVYC tool interview, a strong rapport had not been fully established. Rapport is considered essential to attaining the emotive information

that the tool seeks to elicit (See Chapter 4). Originally, it was hoped that the researcher would be able to build a relationship after an initial period of non-participatory observations had been completed but this would have required committing more time to working in the school than the researcher could afford. Therefore the researcher adopted a mixed participatory approach to the observations in action research two and three. This enabled the researcher to build up a relationship from the moment of introduction by working alongside and often helping the child with their work while also allowing time to complete the observation schedule. The drawback to this approach was that less information could be written about the child during each observation. However, it was felt the benefits of building up a relationship in a short period of time for the purpose of developing a more trusting rapport during the YVYC interview process, far outweighed the negative implications.

## **6 Chapter Six: Action Research Cycle Two**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the first action research cycle which consisted of two case studies (Billy and Aaron). Within Billy's case study, it was demonstrated that he was successfully able to use the YVYC tool in a way that enabled him to explore how he felt about his school learning and support experiences. In contrast, Aaron was not able to use the tool and possible reasons for this were explained. Be that as it may, both case studies showed that a more comprehensive account of children's experiences of school was provided through observations carried out by an outsider (the researcher).

As a result of action research cycle one, in light of Billy's, practitioners and supervisor recommendations, and a re-evaluation of the literature, several modifications were made to the YVYC tool kit. These were:

- More response emotions were added to the tool in order to give the children a greater choice about how they felt about their experiences.
- The YVYC tool was made bigger and more accessible.
- Observations were to be carried out using a mixture of participatory and non-participatory methods.
- Physical objects would be provided for children perceived with severe communicative and cognitive difficulties
- Children's own communicative devices (e.g. PECs) will be better implemented into the tool.

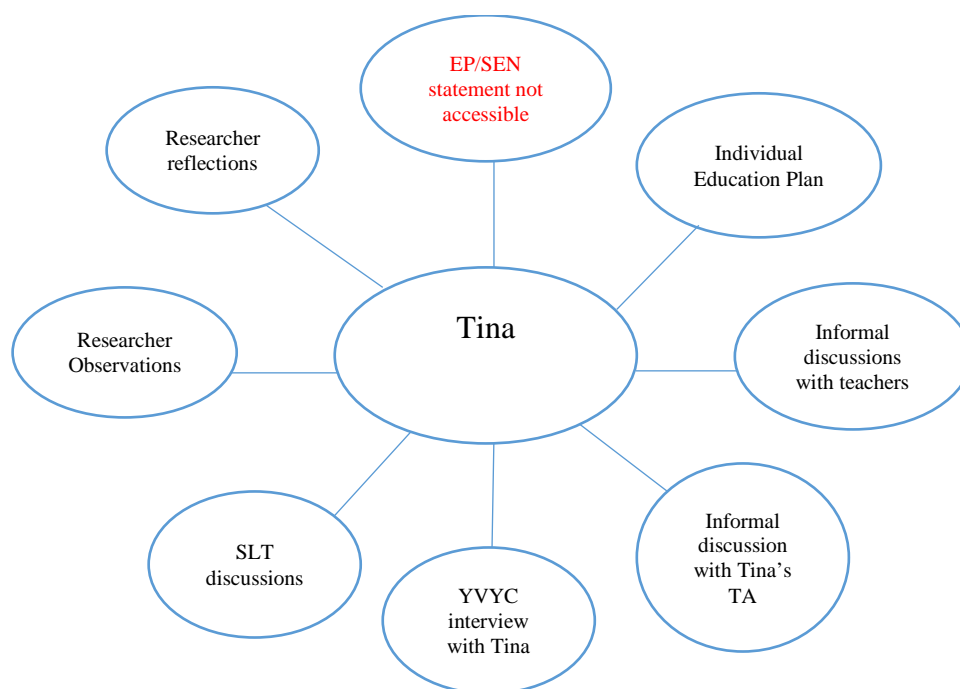
A further three children were recruited for action research cycle two. Each cycle provides more observations of the YVYC tool kit in action, helping to answer the research questions. As with the previous chapter, the case studies were first individually analysed against the propositions.

## **6.2 Case Three: Tina**

### *6.2.1 Background and documentary evidence*

Tina is aged 4 years 10 months and attended the same mainstream nursery school as Case 2 (Aaron). Her statement of SEN was not accessible but her IEP indicates she has moderate learning difficulties based around her communication abilities. This is focussed on her comprehension and language needs. She has recently been assessed by a number of professionals including a consultant paediatrician, a SLT (Speech and Language Therapist), Educational Psychologist (EP) and Orthoptist; however, access to these documents was not made possible. Tina receives an SLT session once per week designed to increase her comprehension and language abilities. This session was set up by the Outreach services. Other school interventions included small group work and 1 to 1 sessions aimed at increasing her attention and listening skills. She has a part-time Outreach TA to support her communication.

*Figure 6.1: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Tina's school learning and support experiences*



### 6.2.2 How do practitioners perceive Tina's experiences at school?

Tina was described as “having a friendly nature” and “enjoyed dressing up, particularly as a policewoman (TA).” She was said to be particularly interested in “cooking, books, play-dough and music (TA; IEP).”

Tina's primary concern was perceived by practitioners to be her “communication and language capabilities” (Researcher's reflections) which was similarly identified within her IEP. Other areas of concern were highlighted around her “attention and listening skills and numeracy and literacy skills” (TA). Her TA said that “Tina is unable to understand the concept of numerals up to 5” and “shows limited control when writing, for instance, she is not able to write her name.”

Further discussions with her SLT revealed that “she learns best through Makaton signs and visual symbols”, and TEACCH was also used according to her IEP.

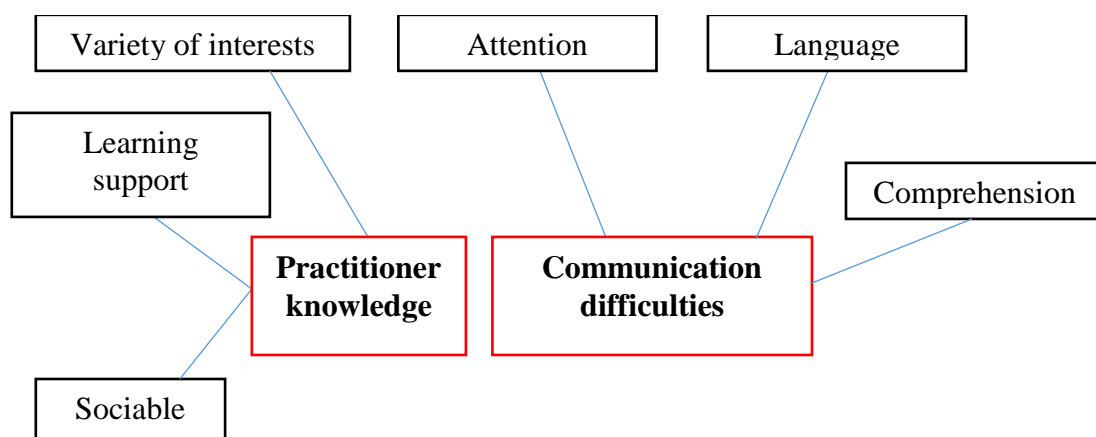
The SLT reported that the focus of “Tina’s interventions are to try and improve her vocalisations, by stopping her cutting off the end of words which lead to a difficulty in understanding her speech.” The SLT asserted that she believed Tina to have “dyspraxia, although this has not yet been officially diagnosed.”

Throughout this experience, practitioners frequently compared Tina with Case 2 (Aaron) in terms of the similar barriers to communication and understanding that they share (Researchers reflections). However, Tina was said “not to have any behaviour issues (TA)” and was reportedly “good at listening to instructions (TA).” In addition, as with Aaron, the researcher was advised that “only a very basic tool would work with Tina due to her limited comprehension (SLT).”

### 6.2.3 Practitioner perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher’s perspective include: *practitioner knowledge* and *communication difficulties* (Figure 6.2).

**Figure 6.2: Researcher perception thematic network model**





Tina was identified straight away as “having a friendly nature (TA)”. Staff at the school had a good idea of her preferred interests, for example, within “dressing up...cooking, books, play-dough and music (TA).” The YVYC tool should be capable of confirming these interests when interviewing Tina. The staff also appeared aware of her communication and language needs (Researcher’s reflections), and the SLT was quick to point out how the interventions are addressing her “difficulty verbalising the end of words.” This was also made evident on the IEP which suggests a sharing of knowledge of both needs and interests.

In the researcher’s reflections, it was noted that “Tina was described and perceived by practitioners as being similar to Case 2 (Aaron) both developmentally and socially.” This was because they both shared communication needs which restricted their verbal speech as well as cognitive needs that affected global learning (IEP). As such, like Case 2, Tina was suspected by practitioners of being incapable of using the YVYC tool, or as her SLT commented, “only a very basic tool would work with Tina due to her limited comprehension”. Again, this demonstrates an incapability discourse identified in action research one (Rabiee et al., 2005a; Noble, 2003).

#### *6.2.4 How does the researcher perceive Tina’s experiences at school?*

Tina was observed by the researcher over a two day period at her nursery school. An observation checklist was carried out during two specific sessions, an SLT intervention and independent learning (See Appendix 3A). Particular attention was paid to her ability to communicate with and understand others, which was a primary area of difficulty identified by the practitioners. This would help to provide an indication of her capacity to utilise the

YVYC tool more successfully than Case 2 (Aaron) who she was compared to by the practitioners.

During her SLT intervention, she was engaged and on task for the whole session (25 minutes). The SLT used a variety of visual symbol cards, e.g. “Put your finger on the bike”, to test Tina’s comprehension and Tina was able to recognise most of these. However, the SLT warned that Tina’s comprehension levels were “limited to basic objects, and that she had to be “careful to keep instructions to a maximum of two word commands, such as put mummy on the chair (SLT)”. The observation checklist showed that she was interested, happy and calm throughout this intervention.

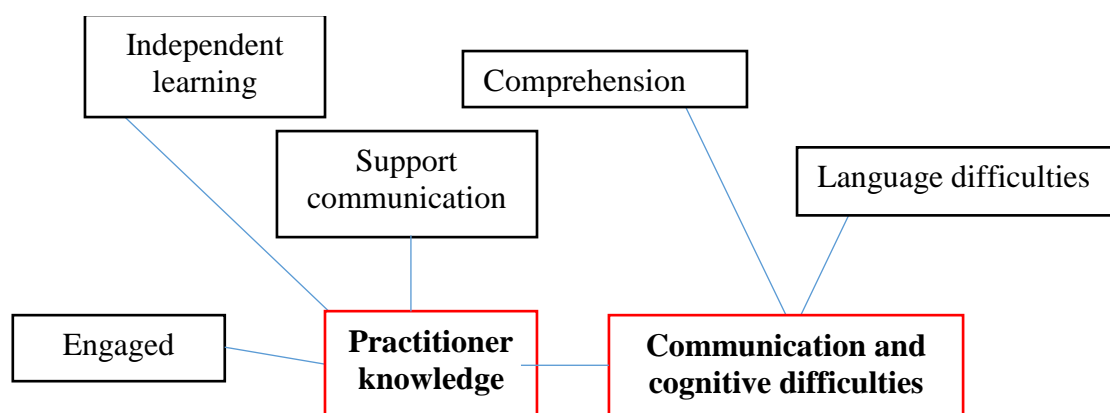
Likewise, during independent play, Tina appeared consistently happy and was most content when she was able to choose her own activities; she chose to dress as a policewoman. However, unlike her peers she did not choose to interact with other children or adults. Teachers did attempt to talk with Tina on several occasions over the 30 minute period, and she reciprocated using vocalisms and Makaton.

During a small group task (25 minutes), Tina was able to remain on task for the majority of time where she worked with her TA on a drawing activity. Communication was consistently initiated by the TA and Tina was able to verbalise a response accompanied with Makaton, although this response was rarely understood by the researcher. The TA was able to understand Tina significantly more but had to clarify meaning at times.

### 6.2.5 Researcher perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher's account of Tina's experiences include: *practitioner knowledge* and *communication and cognitive difficulties*. See Figure 6.3 for a breakdown of the thematic plot points.

*Figure 6.3: Researcher perception thematic network model*



It was particularly good to see that Tina was consistently engaged and enthusiastic at her nursery school. She was always smiling and seemed happy to take part in whatever task was set over the two days spent observing her. This suggests that the school are meeting her immediate needs (Ryan and Deci, 2002). This was further demonstrated during the SLT sessions, where the practitioner were aware of Tina's difficulty vocalising the end of her words and kept sentences and instruction small, in order to give Tina time to respond and process what she was being asked. This agrees with her IEP and suggests that the school are aware of strategies that seem to be successfully supporting her to communicate. The introduction of the SLT at the school, through recommendation by Outreach, is further evidence of the school's attempt to provide an inclusive environment for Tina. The use of

Makaton helps facilitate Tina's poor verbal ability and the researcher saw several staff members communicate with her in this manner. The school used PECs when Tina did not understand what was being asked of her which offered her additional help at times, but Tina's individualised workstation which was mentioned in the IEP was not directly observed.

The researcher also observed Tina choosing to dress up as a police woman which collaborates with the practitioners regarding her interests. Practitioner knowledge is observably supporting Tina's needs both in terms of her communication and individual needs.

#### *6.2.6 How does Tina perceive her own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

The new version of the YVYC tool was introduced to Tina in a quiet room. Her TA was sat next to her to help her feel relaxed and assist with verbal communication and Makaton. After discussion with her practitioners about simplifying the YVYC tool and in light of my observations, Tina was offered the simplified version of the tool which included only the Happy and Sad emotional choice with a selection of questions, photographs and illustrations about her experiences that had been identified (see Appendix 3B). In addition, and in reflection from action research one, her PECs were on hand with a TA sitting next to her to facilitate communication. Also within action research one, Case 2 (Aaron) was not able to use the YVYC tool effectively and given that he was perceived to share similar communication and cognitive needs with Tina, it was hypothesised that a physical object rather than an illustration or a photograph might help Tina to visualise her experience more readily. As such, she was also provided with a policewoman's hat with the observational

knowledge that this was a known object of interest that might overcome some of the difficulties discussed with Aaron.

The session lasted for three minutes (see Appendix 3C). During this period Tina was happy to engage with the YVYC tool, and she particularly liked manipulating the Velcro, the hat, and the emotional cards, but it was felt that Tina did not understand what was being asked of her. A section of the conversation is transcribed below:

**Interviewer:** *I want to know what you think of reading \*Researcher shows Happy and Sad cards\*. Do you think reading makes you happy? \*Researcher and TA sign for happy\* Yay, I like reading! Or do you think reading makes you sad?*

*\*Researcher and TA sign for sad\* (Pause) So, does reading make you happy or sad? (Pause) Which one of these?*

**Tina:** *\*Tina points at happy\**

**Interviewer:** *Happy? Okay, good girl. Okay, so reading makes you happy.*

At first, it seems Tina understands what she is asked. She points to the card with a happy face, even though she does not vocalise the words. However, further questions reveal that this not to be the case.

**Interviewer:** *...Does this policewoman's hat \*Researcher shows the physical object of the hat\*...when you dress up in things like this...does it make you sad \*signs for sad\* or does it make you happy \*sign for happy\*?*

**Tina:** *\*points at sad\**

**Interviewer:** *It makes you sad? Does it? So that means when you put it on you feel sad?*

**Tina:** *(No response)*

It was hoped that using a physical object would prompt Tina into either displaying an emotional response or help her express whether or not she felt happy or sad using the cards in front of her. However, Tina pointed to the card with the sad emotion when asked about wearing the hat, despite her visibly showing excitement at it in the past. This ran contrary to both the practitioner's and researcher's observations. At this point, the researcher stopped the interview because it was determined that Tina was unable to complete the task.

### ***Tool kit conversation perspective analysis***

Tina was not able to use the YVYC tool to communicate how she felt about her school experiences. As such, no themes could be extracted.

It was not clear whether Tina was unable to comprehend the questions, the emotions or was not experienced enough to reflect on how she felt about her school experiences. One of the concerns highlighted in action research one, was that children might require a physical object to help them relate to the experience, but this additional factor made little impact. In addition, the researcher and TA used sign language to try and communicate language and intention. PECs were on hand but the cards used represented the same illustrations as the researcher's sad/happy cards and were therefore not needed.

It would have been insightful to have been able to access Tina's special needs statement, and the EP report to understand more readily how Tina's communication and language

difficulties were affecting her psychologically. This will be discussed alongside the rest of the cases at the end of this chapter.

*Evaluation against proposition 1: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.***

The analysis of Tina's experience with the YVYC tool does not support proposition one.

The tool failed to offer Tina with an alternate way to voice her school and support experiences. In this instance, the changes that were made to the tool (e.g. changing the size of the tool, and providing a physical object of her experiences, bigger tool mat, and using sign language) did not help Tina to express her emotions about those experiences.

*Evaluation against proposition 2: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.***

As the YVYC tool failed to meet proposition one, it is difficult to conclude that it met proposition two. However, through examining the perceptions of the practitioners and the researcher, a more complete understanding of Tina's school and support experiences are established. These views have been condensed into Table 11.1 to identify concordance.

Table 6.1: Summary of practitioner, researcher and YVYC perspectives.

<i>Practitioner Perspective</i>	<i>Researcher Observations Perspective</i>	<i>Tina's perspective Your Voice, Your Choice Perspective</i>
<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication skills around verbal language capabilities of prime concern</li> <li>• Visual symbols and PECs helped to foster communication</li> <li>• Frequently compared to Case two (Aaron)</li> <li>• Enjoys dressing-up, cooking, books, play-dough, and music</li> </ul>	<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researcher difficulty understanding Tina's communication</li> <li>• Enjoyed independent learning</li> <li>• Visual symbols and PECs helped to foster communication</li> <li>• Enjoyed dressing as policewoman</li> <li>• SLT focussed on perceived needs</li> <li>• Practitioners had a shared knowledge of Tina's needs</li> <li>• Practitioner view supports the idea that Tina is incapable for giving own views</li> </ul>	<p>Tina was unable to use the tool to effectively provide her views.</p>
<b>Social Interaction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No behaviour problems</li> <li>• Sociable and friendly</li> </ul>	<b>Social Interaction</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No evidence of Tina choosing to interact with others</li> <li>• No behaviour problems identified</li> <li>• Appeared engaged and content throughout</li> </ul>	

Some of the practitioner perspectives about Tina's school experiences were also observed by the researcher. These include her difficulty communicating verbally, the use of PECs and visual supports to address her communication needs, her interest in dressing up, and observable behavioural difficulties. Other areas were not observed, such as the idea that



Tina is sociable. I saw no evidence of Tina initiating interactions or conversation with peers and this may be due to her difficulty communicating verbally.

The school were observed to be trying to address Tina's needs as set out in her IEP, and practitioners that I spoke with had a shared understanding of those needs. However, they also shared the concept of Tina being incapable to share her experiences which identifies with the discourse discussed previously (Qvortrup, 1994). This was Tina's first attempt at expressing how she felt about particular experiences and, as with Aaron, should not be the last. Experience cannot be discounted as a key part in the ability to reflect upon our experiences (Ljungdahl, 2012).

## **6.3 Case Four: Lionel**

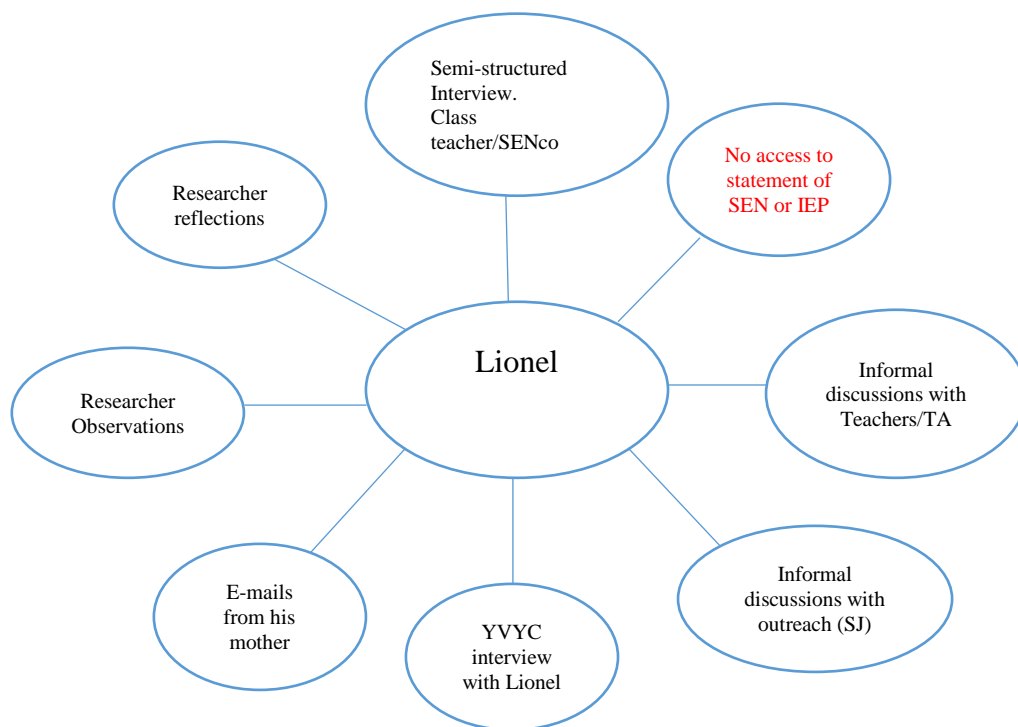
### *6.3.1 Background*

Lionel was aged 8 and attended Year 3 of a mainstream primary school when he was accepted to become involved in the project. The school had recently been subject to an Ofsted inspection and, as a result of which, it had been placed into special measures. Lionel had recently been statemented with a diagnosis of ASD and ADHD. However, the school did not permit the researcher to access these documents to examine them further. Up until recently, he had been assigned a CAMHS worker for his behaviour but funding was cut. He had a maths, reading and comprehension level of 3a, which is considered beyond expectations for a child of his age.

Lionel's mother e-mailed the researcher when Lionel was approached by the school with the opportunity to take part in the project (see Appendix 3). She wrote that, although she was willing for Lionel to take part, her son was 'horried at the thought.' She believed that

it was the thought of his routine changing at school that might be the cause of these thoughts, explaining that he has Asperger’s Syndrome with traits of ADHD. She believed if I sent further clarification about what would be involved he may ‘come around to the idea of doing it.’ The researcher responded and wrote a personalised e-mail to Lionel explaining the process in more depth, and clarifying that he does not have to take part in the project, or if he chooses to do so, he can withdraw at any time. The mother replied saying he would like to give the project a try. Figure 6.4 shows data that was collected and analysed within this case study.

**Figure 6.4: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Lionel's school learning and support experiences**



### 6.3.2 How do practitioners perceive Lionel’s experiences at school?

The primary concern for practitioners was Lionel’s difficulty to “control his behaviour” (Outreach practitioner, SJ). Discussions with school staff reported that his anger problems

manifested in times of “social stress” (TA), for example, when he feels that his “friends have been wronged (Class Teacher)”. His class teacher, who was also the school SENco, reported that he would “lose his temper” quickly. However, she also reported that he “doesn’t struggle to access the curriculum at all” and is a “higher achieving child in all areas.” This could be confirmed, at least within his maths, reading and comprehension scores which were higher than average.

There have been many different supply teachers covering Lionel’s class which his class teacher believes resulted in “uncertainty.” In particular, she advised that Lionel had a “rather hostile relationship” with his previous supply teacher. She asserted that she was brought in to the school to address behaviour with the whole class not just Lionel because “at that point they weren’t learning anything.” Providing examples, she said that whole class strategies had been put into place, such as teaching the class how to learn and work independently. She says the strategies are having a positive effect because they are at a stage where they can now “teach him, rather than control him. He’s ready to learn.” As a result, she says “Lionel is a changed child...he is just fabulous” and “I don’t think you could pick him out as a child with ASD and ADHD.” She “believes very little is wrong with Lionel.” Instead, she asserted a controversial assessment that his parents are pushing for labels, “possibly for the ASD sum of £500 per month.”

Several specific strategies were noted that have been given to him “for controlling his anger and he’s not half as angry as he was (Class Teacher).” These include “breathing strategies...a chewy tube in his drawer which he can access (Class Teacher).” She was keen to note that “it’s not just things that I’ve implemented, it’s things that outreach have suggested.” She explains that “staying calm and not shouting” and “an understanding that

he does need time to be on his own” were important and were recommended by outreach. She notes that “because I’m calm with him, he’s calm with me.” Other strategies included a “timeout area with a box of activities to help calm him down, and things like Play-Dough, and straws (Class teacher).” Despite these strategies, occasionally Lionel is reported to have “off days (Class Teacher).”

His interests were said to be in the areas of maths, history (especially military), computing, Xbox, and reading (Class teacher). She also said that he had “lovely ideas” but that he struggles with the “physical act of writing” and finds hand writing difficult while asserting that “it’s much neater than it was when I first started” (6 months prior). In addition, she believed that he enjoyed indoor activities in preference to outside ones; that P.E was “hit and miss” and “while he can catch a ball, he is unable to ride a bike without stabilisers,” suggesting a lack of co-ordination in some areas.

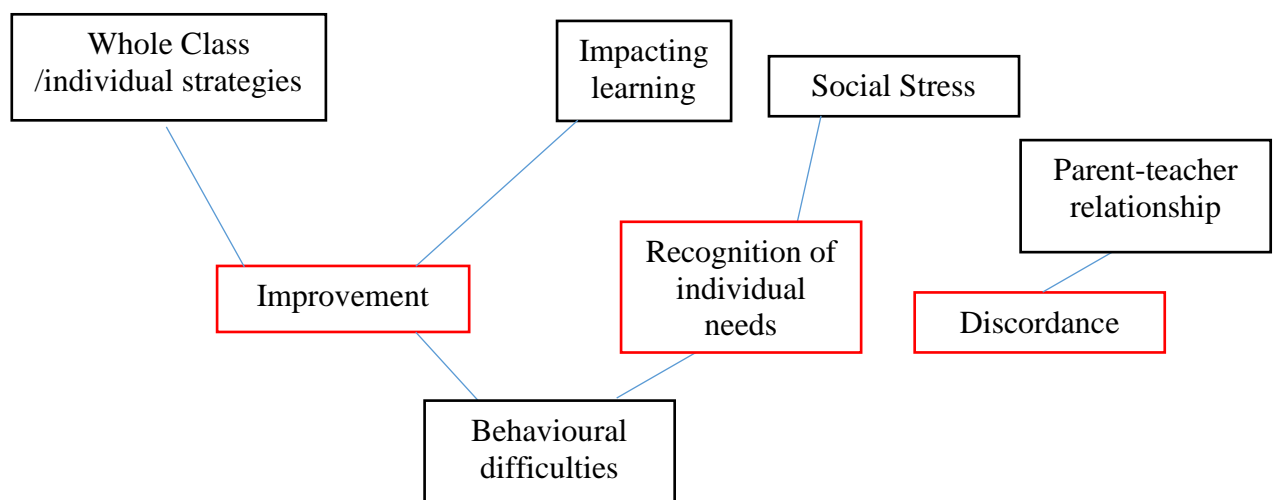
Regarding friendships, his class teacher reported that he has “two friends in particular, who are very loyal and happily plays with them in the playground, but if he doesn’t like somebody, he really doesn’t like them”.

Asking about Lionel’s potential to access the YVYC tool, the teacher responded that he is “very eloquent. His range of vocabulary is very good...that comes from his reading.” When probed about whether he was nervous about meeting new people, she proclaimed, “No! He would talk your hat off. He’s a real character, I love him...I will miss him next year.”

### 6.3.3 Practitioner perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the practitioner account of Lionel's experiences are *recognition of individual needs*, *improvement*, and *discordance*. This is demonstrated in the network model in Figure 6.5.

*Figure 6.5: Practitioner perception thematic network model*



Much of the talk around Lionel's school experiences are focussed on his recent perceived behavioural and learning improvements as well as a more comprehensive understanding of his individual needs since the class teacher was employed. The researcher's reflection notes that, after speaking with his teacher and teacher assistant, "there is a strong belief that Lionel's behaviour has massively improved since his new teacher arrived." The class teacher was keen to explain that outreach "have given me different ideas, different strategies to help and support him. But mainly what they have done for me is to reassure me that what I'm doing with him is good and that it's working." These, she believes are positively affecting Lionel's ability to manage his own behaviour. The strategies can be explored with Lionel within the YVYC tool to identify his own interpretation of their effectiveness.

There is some disparity between the class teacher's interpretation of Lionel's needs and those of his parents, as understood by the class teacher. For instance, his teacher disputes the idea that he struggles to access the curriculum at all, and believes Lionel's needs are minor. This suggests that his class teacher feels that the school is managing to meet all of Lionel's educational needs. If this is the case, it should be expected that Lionel will demonstrate positive emotions about his school experiences during the YVYC tool interview. Further, she suggests that his parents are simply after the additional monetary support that comes with a diagnosis of ASD. Given that his parents were "quite willing for Lionel to take part (Mother's e-mail)" and likely persuaded him to become involved with the project, this controversial statement is unlikely to be justified. Regardless, it suggests that the relationship between the teacher and parent is not harmonious.

It will be insightful to use the YVYC tool to see how Lionel identifies his experiences, and whether or not he sees himself as someone with needs and in need of additional support, or if he agrees with his class teacher that "very little is wrong."

Lionel was reported by his class teacher, his TA, an outreach practitioner and several other teachers to have difficulty managing his emotions, particularly in times of social stress. Indeed, his class teacher asserts that he has a "short temper" which can lead to physical confrontations, although she advocates that it tends to be in situations where he is defending his friends "because he is very kind hearted". Lionel's teacher clearly cares a great deal for him and defends him even in the face of adversity. An especially insightful recollection by his class teacher described an instance that sheds light on how this affected her practice.

*"Because we are in special measures, we have monitoring visits...Lionel was having an off day, the inspector walked in, he was under my table but he still had a whiteboard, he still joined in with the lesson, even though he was under my table*

*and behind my chair...I think at first she wondered if I knew where he was, well I knew exactly where he was and the fact that he was joining in even though he had sort of isolated himself from all the other children. But he was still joining in.”*

This extract explicitly demonstrates an example of how his teacher’s attitude and perception of Lionel manifests itself within her teaching practice. She understood his demand for space in a time when he felt under stress, and instead of reacting negatively to a potentially incendiary circumstance where she is under observation, she puts his needs first. This teacher-child relationship will be explored within YVYC tool to see if this has helped Lionel manage his behaviours from his own perspective.

#### *6.3.4 How does the researcher perceive Lionel’s experiences at school?*

The researcher observed Lionel over a period of two days. Particular focus was placed on his behaviour and anger management, as this was the outreach’s original reason to become involved and an area where strategies had reportedly been set up. An observation checklist was carried out in two lessons, Literacy and History, as these were the only lessons that the researcher had the opportunity to fully observe (see Appendix 4A).

The Literary lesson was led by a supply teacher who typically covers this period and is known to the children. Lionel chose to sit by himself whereas all other children chose to sit next to a peer. They were asked to write a story independently about their weekend but there was little direction about how the children might carry out this task. The observation checklist showed that Lionel was rarely on task during the 50 minute lesson but this was shared by many other children who were similarly off-task. The researcher’s reflection noted “Lionel appears disinterested in his work; he is persistently looking around the room or staring into space.” However, the checklist also revealed that he appeared calm

throughout the lesson and no instances of anger were observed. This remained the case even when Lionel was cautioned several times by the teacher for speaking without putting his hand up, as were several other children who were consistently talking amongst themselves.

During his History lesson, led by his class teacher, he was asked to write about his experiences of a war museum that the class had recently visited. The observation checklist showed that he was on task for most of the 50 minute period, and this was the case even when other children appeared to be off-task. Again, he chose to sit by himself even when his teacher suggested that he could work with others if he chose. Throughout this lesson, he appeared to not want to interact with his peers or with his teacher, although his teacher did try to engage him in conversation about his work on several occasions to which he responded. He appeared quite content to work independently, and, on several occasions, used a dictionary to help him write his story. He finished his work in the History lesson and, when asked to read a book, instead just sat quietly still.

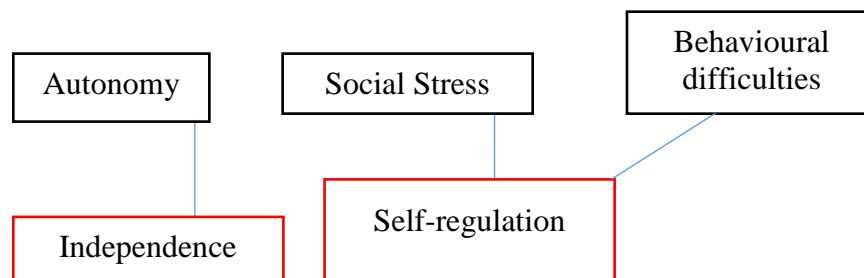
As with the previous lesson, the observation checklist showed that he appeared calm consistently through his History lesson with no observable anger difficulties. However, when the lesson finished, the researcher witnessed him slap another child in the face. Although events leading up to the altercation were not observed, it emerged that Lionel was seeking to defend his friend who had been insulted by another boy. No further details could be determined.



### 6.3.5 Researcher perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher's account of Lionel's experiences are *self-regulation* and *independence*. This is demonstrated in the network model in Figure 6.6.

**Figure 6.6: Researcher perception thematic network model**



For the majority of the observations, Lionel appeared to be calm and showed no behavioural concerns over and above what other children in his class at various times also demonstrated. These instances were likely due to general classroom management challenges rather than specifically due to a need which was going unnoticed in Lionel himself. Indeed, at times, he showed that he was able to remain calm and focussed on his tasks, even when he was being disciplined or when other children were being disruptive. Both of which might be considered potential stressors for someone perceived as having a “quick temper (Class teacher).” This suggests that, generally, at school Lionel is able to use appropriate strategies that help him self-regulate and manage his behaviour.

He appears to prefer to sit by himself than with peers even when all other children were sitting with somebody else. This could be a trait of his ASC (National Autistic Society, 2017) or a strategy that he has learned or that has been suggested to him to help reduce his

social anxiety. Alternatively, he may simply value his independence. This does not observably stop him being able to access the curriculum, for instance, he completes his story on time and willingly chooses to use appropriate tools to assist him, like the dictionary. However, if he is being made to feel isolated rather than choosing to sit by himself then this might suggest a difficulty relating to forming relationships that should be addressed (Williams, Gleeson, and Jones, 2017). The concept of Lionel needing time alone is shared with his teacher, who asserted that Lionel will sometimes seek out isolation, which might be a strategy Lionel has learned to keep himself calm by avoiding potentially stressful social situations.

To exemplify this point, the researcher witnessed Lionel hitting another child. This situation arose as a result of a social interaction that happened at the end of the lesson, when children were transitioning to go out for their break, and Lionel was reportedly defending his friend. However, neither his perceived wronged friend nor the other child resorted to violence. It should be remembered that Lionel has a diagnosis of ASC and ADHD; and one of the core features of autism are difficulties that can lead to feelings of frustration, confusion, anxiety or lack of control, resulting in a behavioural response (Autism Speaks, 2017). If it is accepted that behaviour is a form of communication (National Autistic Society, 2017), then Lionel is voicing his extreme concern through behaviour rather than words. Lionel may have learned to retreat from people to places in his classroom where he is isolated to prevent himself from expressing this type of aggressive behavioural response. Within this discourse, his aggressive reactions might also be considered an automatic response in the moment not a choice he is making. These types of behaviours may seem extreme to people without autism especially if he feels unable to talk about it. Given that people with autism may lack some of the abilities and tools that typically developing people

have to manage stressful situations and to talk about them afterwards, it is hoped the YVYC tool will enable Lionel to consider his experiences directly and help him to recognise his own behavioural responses in specific experiences, ultimately with the intention of helping him to self-regulate in future experiences.

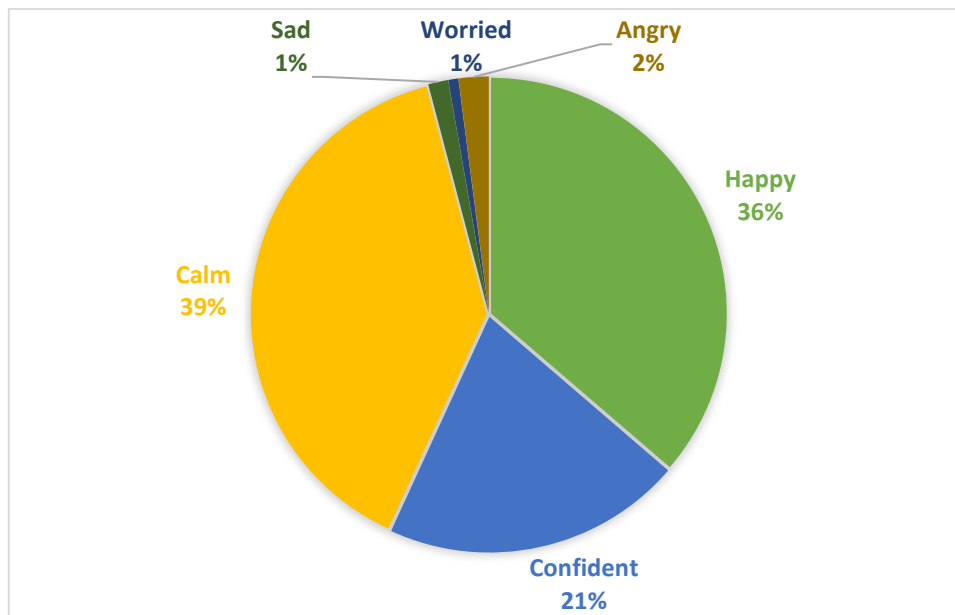
#### *6.3.6 How does Lionel perceive his own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

Lionel's practitioners had advised that he would have no problem accessing the YVYC tool, and my own observations agreed with this conclusion meaning all six emotions (Happy, Sad, Calm, Worried, Angry and Confident) and the full scale range (not at all, a little, quite a bit, very, and extremely) were included in the YVYC tool set up (see Appendix 8).

The YVYC tool was introduced to Lionel in a quiet room on a 1 to 1 basis (results are presented in Figure 6.7.) It took 26 minutes to complete. Lionel was asked a total of 23 questions across subject areas (n=9), social and emotional, communication (n=6) and specific interventions (n=4), as well as several general interests (n=4) that observations or discussions with practitioners had brought up.

Lionel was first administered the YVYC pre-screener test to check his emotional understanding and to confirm he understood how to use the tool which took 6 minutes. He was able to answer all 8 screener questions accurately suggesting he would have no difficulty discussing the further 23 subsequent questions that related to his own school experiences (see Appendix 4B for full transcript). Of the total 23 questions, 96% of his responses were associated with positive emotions.

*Figure 6.7: Emotional responses elicited across all topics*



#### *Subject evaluation*

Lionel reported feeling positive across all of his subjects. He predominantly expressed his experiences within his subjects as making him feel very happy, confident and calm but he rarely provided additional information. However, for Literacy he rated himself as feeling only a little bit positive within these emotional constructs and was able to explain reasons behind this:

**Lionel:** *I hate my handwriting. My handwriting is rubbish.*

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think that is?*

**Lionel:** *Problems.*

**Interviewer:** *What sort of problems?*

**Lionel:** *\*Pause\* <He looks uncomfortable>*

**Interviewer:** *Is it things you are working on?*

**Lionel:** *Yea*

*Social and emotional communication*

Out of the six social and emotional communication questions put forward to Lionel, he expresses various degrees of being happy, calm and confident with the exception of coming to school, where Lionel explained that he felt quite sad.

**Lionel:** *...because I like my lie-ins. I don't like my lie-ins on weekends but only on school days.*

**Interviewer:** *What about after you have woken up and you feel a bit refreshed and then you go to school?*

**Lionel:** *\*Keeps the same emotional cards\**

He shows that he is confident in his capacity to answer questions in front of the class,

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel when you are asked a question in class by your teacher, this could be any teacher?*

**Lionel:** *\*Selects extremely confident\**

**Interviewer:** *Extremely confident wow.*

**Lionel:** *Because I know the answer straight away*

And when working in a group,

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel when you are working with other children in a group?*

**Lionel:** *\*Selects extremely happy, calm.\**

**Interviewer:** *Oh that is good to know.*

**Lionel:** *Confident because I can give them ideas.*

However, he suggests that he can get angry during social situations, such as when he talks with his peers, “Sometimes I can get angry because they just say something when I am speaking.” In contrast, he asserts when working by himself he is “very calm”, and when working 1 to 1 with his class teacher, that “she is good at helping” him which helps him stay calm.

#### *Specific interventions*

Lionel was asked about a number of intervention strategies that were reported to be used by his practitioners. Lionel showed that when his teacher was calm, it also made him feel extremely calm and happy. Likewise, breathing strategies, and the use of a chewy tube made him feel calm.

**Interviewer:** *Next one is chewy tube? \*Shows a photograph image\**

**Lionel:** *\*selects extremely calm\* because before there was someone who left the school. He made me angry..he said \*inaudible\* if I find him he's dead.*

**Interviewer:** *The chewy tube helps you relax though?*

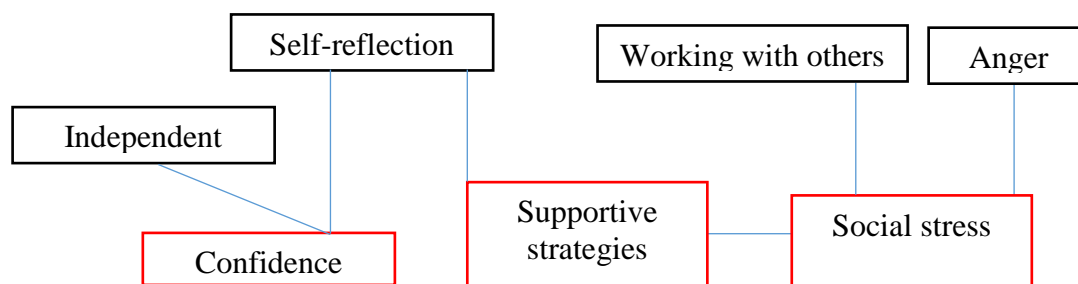
**Lionel:** *Yea*

Lionel's seems to relate the use of his chewy tube to a situation where he got angry about another child who has now left the school. Clearly, the object elicited a painful reminder of a previous experience, but it also demonstrates that the use of the chewy tube strategy was a helpful one in calming him down in a stressful situation.

### 6.3.7 Lionel's perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of Lionel's elicited experiences include: confidence, supportive strategies, and social stress (Figure 6.7).

**Figure 6.8: Lionel's perception thematic network model**



Lionel expresses and identifies himself as someone who is confident about his performance at school. This can be shown through numerous assertions that he is calm, happy and confident throughout the majority of his experiences. Indeed, confidence is a theme that repeats itself throughout the interview. Lionel portrays himself as a highly competent student and chooses to back up his emotional choices with phrases that support his thinking.

*“I am very intelligent...top of my class...Because I know the answers straight away...confident because I can give them ideas.”*

Equally, he is able to reflect that there are areas that he feels that he is underperforming in.

**Lionel:** *I hate my handwriting. My handwriting is rubbish.*

**Interviewer:** *Why do you think that is?*

**Lionel:** *Problems.*

Lionel was not able or willing to talk about what problems he was referring to when the researcher used follow up questions, but he believes that he has difficulties that are preventing him from writing to a quality that he would prefer. This perception was expressed by his class teacher who reported that although he has “lovely ideas”, he struggles with the “physical act of writing.” This could be a source of frustration for Lionel, as he feels that he has a lot to say but struggles to get it written down.

The theme of social stress becomes apparent as he reflects upon experiences where he had to work as part of a group, saying that “sometimes I can get angry because they just say something when I am speaking.” Alternatively, when working by himself, Lionel chooses to select very calm which suggests he prefers to work alone and this would correlate with the researcher’s observations. Unfortunately, he feels unable to clarify his point, but he is clearly aware that in certain social situations which involve interacting with others, he has feelings of anger which are particularly identifiable when others interrupt him. Being interrupted can be a trigger for distress in children with autism (Baron-Cohen et al., 2006); however, it is possible that although it may feel like anger at the time, Lionel is actually reacting angrily to feelings of anxiety. People with autism typically experience heightened anxiety which comes from a variety of sources, particularly social situations (NAS, 2017). Anxiety can evoke a fight or flight response causing feelings of weakness and incompetency leading to a reaction of anger, which Lionel might consider to be a more useful strategy that reasserts a position of strength. This more readily meets his identity as



someone confident, intelligent and “at the top of my class.” Providing Lionel with alternative strategies in social situations when he feels uncomfortable, might help to prevent the perceived anger (NAS, 2017).

Some supportive strategies currently provided by the school that Lionel identified as helping him calm down include: breathing strategies, the use of a chewy tube and his class teacher remaining calm. Lionel reports these to be effective which provides good evidence for their continued use.

Lionel said that he found the YVYC tool “helpful” but that it could be improved by “maybe a bit more options next time...more emotions...more options to explain myself easier.” He also noted that “I was feeling sick” and felt the researcher’s suggestion about asking him how he felt before the YVYC tool next time would be useful.

*Evaluation against proposition 1: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.***

The analysis of Lionel’s experience with the YVYC tool supports proposition 1. The tool encourages Lionel to communicate and reflect upon his experiences, and enables him to consider how he feels across a variety of specific and general school learning and support experiences.

He was able to voice that he generally feels confident about his school subjects and found support strategies that had been put into place by the school useful in helping him stay calm.

Lionel was able to communicate that he felt angry in certain situations, for instance, when he was interrupted by others but this anger might be caused by anxiety towards socially complex situations, which leads to stressful interactions, particularly for Lionel who has a diagnosis of autism. At times, Lionel appeared unwilling or unable to provide more detail about why he felt certain things, such as why he felt he had problems with his handwriting. This may have been because he did not want to talk about his difficulties with the researcher, seeing as the researcher was a fairly new face. Alternatively, this may have been the first opportunity Lionel had to discuss his experiences and he requires further time and experience to reflect on his feelings.

Many of Lionel's conversational responses were elicited after he manipulated the photographed experiences in his hands. In this way, the tool provided a way to access a higher level of communication than might otherwise have been possible. He also made use of all six of the emotional constructs, enabling him a greater freedom to voice how he feels, although his recommendation to include more options suggests that he felt it was insufficient. At times during the interview, Lionel appeared to lose concentration which suggests the interview went on for too long for him. If it was to be re-administered, it would have to be made shorter.

*Evaluation against proposition 2: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.***

In agreement with proposition 2, the YVYC tool kit helped to reveal a more detailed account of Lionel's school and support experiences than was previously accessible (Table 6.2).

*Table 6.2: Summary of practitioner, researcher, and YVYC perspectives*

<i>Practitioner Perspective</i>	<i>Researcher Perspective</i>	<i>Lionel's perspective (YVYC elicitation)</i>
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioural difficulties linked to anger</li> <li>• Assumes that Lionel does not have ASC/ADHD (no problem accessing curriculum)</li> <li>• Improvement due to recognition of Lionel's needs</li> <li>• Whole Class strategies</li> <li>• Individual strategies</li> <li>• Interested in Maths, History, computing and reading</li> <li>• Struggles with writing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys writing history story</li> <li>• No observable behaviour difficulties</li> <li>• Appears able to access the curriculum</li> <li>• Utilises appropriate strategies to complete his work.</li> <li>• Able to remain calm during lessons</li> <li>• Struggles with writing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feels positive across most subjects (calm/happy/confident)</li> <li>• Confident in his own abilities</li> <li>• Recognises areas he has difficulties (writing)</li> <li>• Strategies that help him stay calm are effective</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social stress can cause anger</li> <li>• Uncertainty causing distress</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social stress led to physical attack.</li> <li>• Prefers to work independently</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social interaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feels angry when he is interrupted by others</li> <li>• Prefers working alone than with others</li> </ul>

The practitioners (class teacher, TA, outreach), researcher and Lionel demonstrate a similar perspective across many areas. Everyone agrees that Lionel is able to access the curriculum: enjoys his subjects, especially History, struggles with writing, is utilising

strategies that support his leaning and emotional needs, and finds some social situations as they can give rise to perceived angry instances.

Practitioners talk about Lionel as being “quick to temper” and associate him with having anger issues. Indeed, Lionel describes himself using the same type of language, “Sometimes I can get angry because they just say something when I am speaking.” As previously discussed, people with autism may have trouble communicating verbally that they are having trouble and experience strong internal sensations of tension which manifest as anger (NAS, 2017). As a result, Lionel may actually be experiencing anxiety which looks like anger. Research suggests that children may come to perceive themselves how others perceive them in a self-fulfilling prophecy (Jussim and Harber, 2005). This means if people around Lionel talk about him as being angry, he might come to think of himself as an angry person and act that out.

His class teacher demonstrated that she understands his needs. She provided him with the autonomy to take space when he needed it and gave him learning strategies (e.g. reading a dictionary), she has shown him relatedness in forming a strong connectedness with him, and she supports his competency needs with strategies to encourage Lionel to self-regulate his own behaviour (Ryan and Deci, 2008). Some of these strategies outreach have recommended and affirmed. The YVYC tool has picked up their effect through Lionel expressing that they made him feel calm. In other words, this provides evidence that outreach and teacher strategies are working from Lionel’s perspective. It is important that this knowledge is shared with the rest of the teaching staff, including support staff, enabling them to support him throughout the school, at times when he is not with his class teacher.. However, he might also benefit from a form of emotional coaching which allows him to better understand his emotional reactions and identify that what he is feeling might be

actually anxiety in order to prevent the type of outburst that resulted in his physical reaction (Rose, Gilbert, and McGuire-Sniekus, 2015).

Overall, giving Lionel a voice through the YVYC tool enables him to make it known that his needs are not affecting his ability to do well at school, that is to say, they do not represent a barrier for learning.

## **6.4 Case Five: Nathan**

### *6.4.1 Background*

Nathan was aged 9 years, 1 month when he was accepted into the project in June 2014. He attended a Year 4 mainstream primary school. Nathan was classified as a Child in Need due to neglect by his birth mother with whom he lived. At the time of acceptance, he was undergoing an assessment for “suspected autism” (outreach service referral form) and was on School Action Plus for increased support. National Curriculum levels showed that he was working below the levels expected for someone of his age (reading level 1a, writing 1a, maths 2c and science 1c). He was involved with a number of outside agencies, including Occupational therapy, Physiotherapy, Speech and Language therapy, Educational Psychologist, Paediatrician and a Social Worker and was being referred for statement assessment.

It was documented that Nathan was referred to the Outreach services over three central reasons: he showed poor eye contact with adults and peers, he had no specific friendships and did not seek others out, there was an increasing number of occasions where he refused to engage with the learning and refused to work even on a 1 to 1 basis (Outreach referral form, June 2014).

#### 6.4.2 How did the practitioners perceive Nathan's experiences at school?

*Figure 6.9: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Nathan's school learning and support experiences*

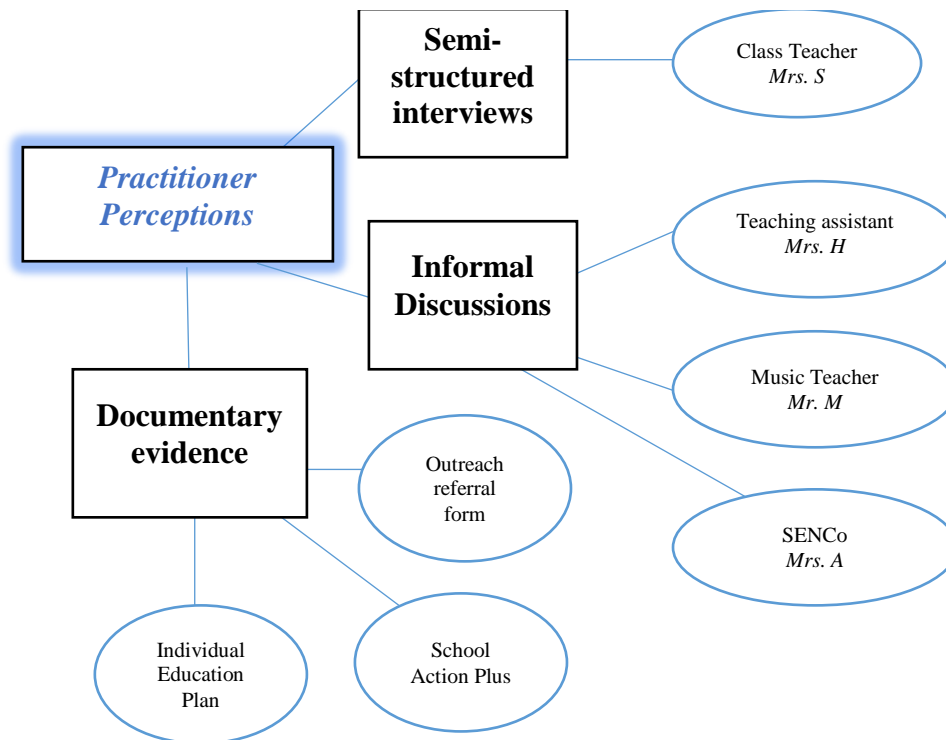


Figure 6.8 shows how practitioners perceived Nathan's experiences at school. Nathan was described as being more capable than his attainment demonstrated, "he is actually a lot brighter than you would think when you look at his work (Class teacher)," although she also described him as "somebody who sort of has Autistic Spectrum tendencies" because he "doesn't like eye contact, doesn't seem to relate to the other children particularly well." His difficulties were seen as being magnified by an absence of a supportive family network.

*"...but the majority of his problems, I would imagine, are caused by his home background...He's from a very neglected deprived background (Class teacher)."*

*“...a lot of it is outside circumstances has exacerbated the problems that he has*  
(Class teacher).”

*“Nathan has no support from Mum.* (Teaching assistant)”

*“Support from home would make a huge difference to his self-esteem and*  
*confidence.* (School Action Plus.)”

Poor support from home was perceived to impact all areas of his social, learning and behavioural outcomes, “Reading is extremely poor. Writing is very weak for his age...a lot of the time he refuses to participate... In a different family he would probably be an average ability child. So he is under achieving by quite a long way (Class teacher).”

The class TA reported that Nathan “refused to work or talk to her for months.” Likewise, his music teacher reported that he had “behavioural difficulties” for a while because he had to “get used to me,” which he assumed was because Nathan was unsure if “I would be back.” The music teacher attributed this to the “number of different supply teachers that had taken music over the past 6 months.” He believed Nathan was now “enjoying music.”

His class teacher, who had taught him over the past 9 months, believed that he “doesn’t trust people, he doesn’t like to relate, react, with anybody he doesn’t really know” and that it had taken her a long time to build up a “really good relationship” with him where “he will look me in the eye, he will laugh at things I say.” But she was concerned that when he moves class and is placed with a new class teacher at the end of the year that “he is going to go right back” and that it will take him a while to “feel safe” again (Class teacher).

In discussing his strengths, his class teacher described him as being “artistic” and “loves working with clay” because he liked using his hands. She asserted that art is the only subject where “you can see him get fixated on it and he will work until he’s finished. Everything else he loses interest.” She reflected that he enjoyed P.E. but that his movements appeared stiff which she again associated with his home life, “I think he just sits at home...and there is certainly no input at all from his mother.”

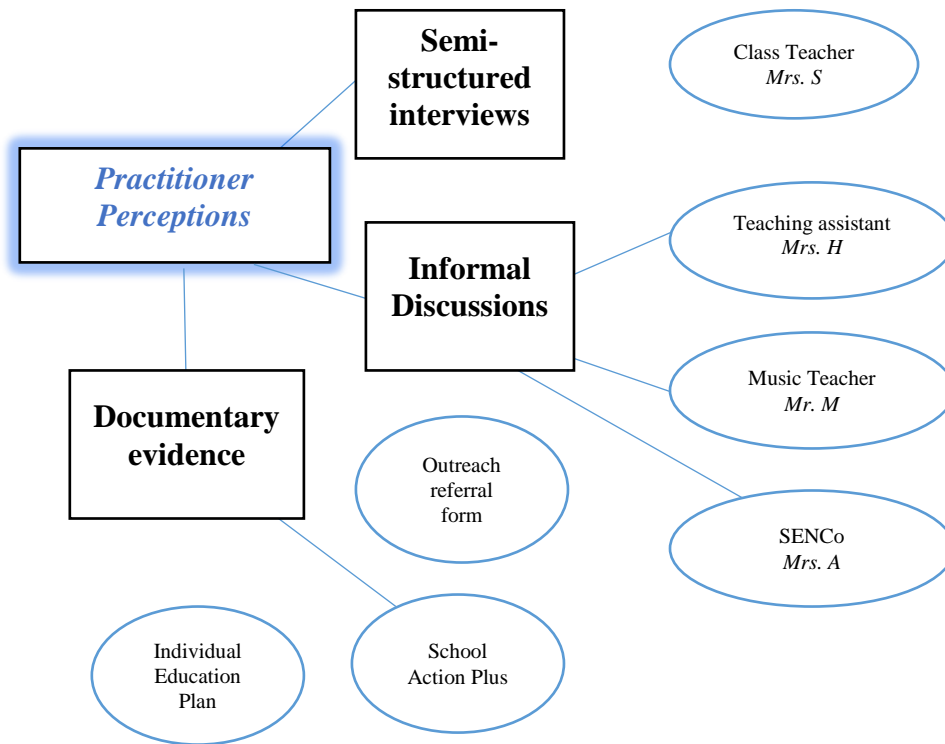
Discussing his current additional support, his class teacher said that Nathan attended an infant’s phonics programmes five times a week because “he is not ready for the phonics work that we do in the juniors.” He also received 10 minutes of 1 to 1 support a week from his TA with whom he worked on reading and spelling. However, his class teacher, outreach and TA perceived that the “interventions were having no impact (class teacher).” Instead, his class teacher believed that “the thing that makes a difference with him is...feeling secure...It takes him a long time to get to know people, to feel that he can risk talking...I think he expects to fail...probably not used to attention, or anyone taking any notice of him.” She explained that this could be why he “tends to react awkwardly to receiving praise in front of others, especially during assembly.”

Asking about the prospect of Nathan working with the researcher to carry out the YVYC tool interview, his class teacher asserted that she thought “it will depend on how he reacts to me.” She provided an anecdote about when she first became Nathan’s class teacher, and the difficulties she had getting him to answer the register. On first meeting her class, they informed her that “He (Nathan) won’t answer you, he won’t speak to you...he can be a naughty boy.” She said this continued for two months, and that sometimes she would tell



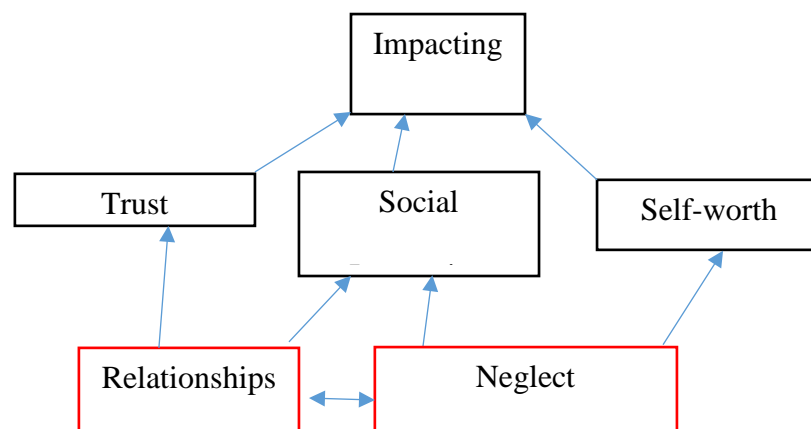
him he would have a “detention if he did not reply and in those cases he would respond.”

Eventually, he began to speak to her but “he might not speak to you at all...I imagine to start with for someone he does not know his answers will be very minimal...he has to trust.”



#### 6.4.3 Practitioner perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of the practitioners’ account of Nathan’s school and support experiences are: *relationships* and *neglect*.



The practitioner accounts provided by his class teacher, TA, music teacher and documentation, share common themes of *neglect* and *relationships*, identifying Nathan as having minimal support from his home environment, and implying that he is highly sensitive to relational change. This is consistent with his recent classification as a Child in Need, which is defined by the Children's Act (1989) as:

- Being unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by a local authority;
- Their health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without the provision of such services

The practitioners associated Nathan's neglect as having a negative effect on his learning and well-being at school. Relationship difficulties and a low self-worth were talked about frequently, as was the difficulty of trusting new adults. All of which were perceived to be detrimentally impacting his attainment. These are commonly associated narratives which are used to talk about children in need or care (Munro, 2011; Winter, 2015).

There is also a suggestion that Nathan is perceived to have ASC (Class teacher, Documentation), but that any difficulties that present are made worse due to a lack of support from his home environment, "He comes across as somebody who sort of has got Autistic Spectrum Tendencies. Doesn't like eye contact, doesn't seem to relate to the other children particularly well but the majority of his problems, I would imagine, are caused by his home background (Class Teacher)." As such, Nathan is seen as being negatively

affected by a complex interaction of developmental difficulties and environmental factors. However, there is an alternative account that practitioners may be missing. Heather Moran (2010) provides a revealing paper outlining that some children who may appear to have autism, actually have attachment problems because the “presenting problems may appear very similar (p.44).” She explains this is problematic because if the child is placed in the wrong diagnostic category, they may be excluded from the appropriate interventions. For instance, the importance of and focus on developing and strengthening emotional relationships for children with attachment difficulties is paramount (Moran, 2010).

The relationship between Nathan’s mother and the class teacher is strained. The class teacher appears angry with Nathan’s mother for her lack of support, “There is lots of input from outside agencies but you don't ever see his mum in school... there is zero support for anything he does in school.” Similarly, Nathan’s mum appears to be regularly disgruntled with the school, “...mum was on the phone again the other day ranting and raving saying those are going to cost me a fortune and somebody has broken them (Class teacher).”

Nathan’s mother was referring to his glasses that had been broken. However, it shows that from the class teacher’s perspective, she believes Nathan’s mother to be uncaring about Nathan’s welfare. It also serves to highlight an alternative narrative that may have been overlooked. Nathan’s mum may be struggling to cope financially and emotionally, and is in need of additional support from the school and local services to help her cope and better support Nathan. Research shows that parents of children in need often suffer from mental health difficulties (ADCS, 2016). While Nathan’s mum’s actual views could not be elicited, as she could not be contacted, blame seems to be pointed solely in her direction rather than a consideration of how the school might interact with mum and local services in

a more helpful way to help her feel included and supported, ultimately to better support Nathan.

The second theme, relationships, is related to the first. Significant importance is placed on the idea that it takes time before Nathan will trust a new person.

*“...in the last 3 to 4 weeks, he and I have built up a really good relationship...But that has taken since September (8 months) (Class Teacher).”*

*“He has to trust (Class teacher)”*

*“It took a while for Nathan to get used to me...because he was unsure if I would be back (Music Teacher).”*

These extracts tie into the previous hypothesis that Nathan may have attachment difficulties. Secure attachment develops through patterns of interaction with parents and carers who are able to meet their child's needs, through caring, trusting and loving them (Bowlby, 1999; Gerhardt, 2004; Ryan, 2012). These early attachment patterns appear to provide a template for later relationships. Moran (2010) notes that a key feature in all attachment problems is a behavioural pattern in which a child will 'push' others to test the boundaries and see how strong their relationship with others is. Nathan's music teacher said that he believed he had "behavioural difficulties" for a while because he had to "get used to me." Nathan was testing to see if his music teacher would stick around as his teacher, because he had been taught and left by a "number of different supply teachers that had taken music over the past 6 months." Alternatively, it is entirely possible that Nathan has both an attachment

difficulty and has autism. Appropriate diagnosis may help the school to more appropriately meet his needs in the future (Moran, 2010).

#### *6.4.4 How did the researcher perceive Nathan's experiences of school?*

Nathan was observed by the researcher over a two day period at his school. An observation checklist was carried out in two specific lessons. A French lesson, which was led by a higher level teaching assistant (HLTA), and a music lesson led by a specialist music teacher (see Appendix 5A). These lessons were not specifically chosen to be observed but were presented as opportune periods to observe two full lessons.

The French lesson took place in the afternoon. At the start of the lesson, the teacher directed the class to complete a previous piece of written work independently. The observation checklist revealed that Nathan was on task for 40% of the 40 minute period observed. However, the checklist also showed that many of his peers were similarly off task. During Nathan's off task periods he and two peers, whom he sat next to, cut out paper to create masks and spoke with each other, neither of which were required nor directed in order to complete their work. The researcher noted that quite a few children "looked disinterested and undirected for large portions of the lesson". Limited attempts were made by the teacher to re-engage them or check to see if they understood their tasks. It was also observed that "the teacher appeared anxious throughout the lesson" which may have been due to the researcher's presence or a general feeling of unease of teaching. It was unclear how many children successfully managed to complete the work by the end of the lesson. It was noted that "general noise levels were particularly high" which likely made it difficult for children to concentrate. Nathan did not complete the task nor was this checked by the

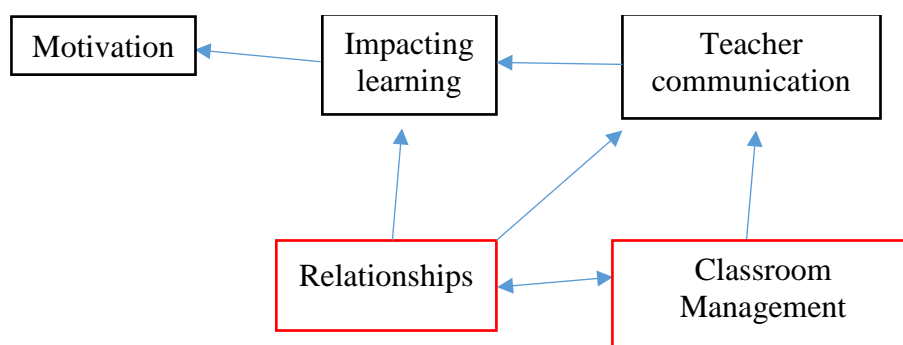
teacher. As the lesson neared the end, Nathan and his peers changed their behaviour from talking amongst themselves to sitting still with their fingers on their lips, eager to be let out first for break, showing what they thought was expected of them.

In the music lesson, the observation checklist revealed that Nathan was on task for 78% of observable instances within a 45 minute lesson. The teacher directed the class to each pick up a musical instrument and use it independently, before asking them to stop. Nathan “enjoyed choosing and testing out different instruments for several minutes (Researcher’s reflections).” The teacher then directed them to perform some basic beats and rhythms in small groups. However, at this point, it was noted that “at first Nathan appeared awkward and embarrassed and moved away from the group, however, after some quiet encouragement by the teacher Nathan joined in with his group and appeared happy and proud when he got to perform to the rest of the class within his small group”. The children in the class took turns, performing and listening during the directed tasks. Throughout, the researcher noted that Nathan appeared “interested, happy and calm, and clearly seemed to enjoy his music lesson.”

#### *6.4.5 Researcher perspective analysis*

The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher’s account of Nathan’s experiences include: *classroom management* and *relationships*. See Figure 6.9 for a breakdown of the thematic plot points.

*Figure 6.10: Researcher perception thematic network model*



*Relationships* and *classroom management* were the two central themes that were identified within this analysis, and they were shown to be interacting with each other to impact Nathan's learning and support experiences.

Classroom management refers to the variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organised, focussed, attentive and on task (e.g. Lewis et al., 2014). The researcher's observations revealed that the teaching in the French lesson did not meet the standards that are typically expected for qualified teachers (DfE, 2013). To some extent this can be explained because the teacher taking the class was a HLTA rather than a qualified teacher, and would not have undergone the same level of training. According to a BBC investigation, schools are increasingly using cheaper options, rather than employing supply teachers due to budgetary cut backs (BBC, 2010). However, the National Union of Teachers asserts that they should not be used as replacement teachers (NUT, 2017). Because the HLTA took the class on a weekly basis, it was a cause for concern that was observably impacting not only Nathan's but the other children's learning as well. Of primary concern was the lack of demonstrable expected positive attitudes and behaviours, and minimal task direction which meant many of the children were off task. Nathan was

not directed to work on his task nor was he confronted about his cutting out a mask and talking behaviours, but then neither were his peers. This could have been perceived as another example of Nathan refusing to participate, a construct that the school identify with Nathan, but an alternative explanation is that Nathan is choosing to do things which are motivating for himself in the absence of directed teaching. The teacher is clearly in need of additional support because she also appeared anxious throughout the lesson, although this may have been magnified due to the researcher's presence.

The theme of relationships is seen through the observation of Nathan's Music lesson. Nathan was on task for the majority of the lesson; he was engaged and completed what was expected of him. Partly, this was driven by Nathan's motivation for music. But there was also a positive connection between the music teacher and the other children, and notably with Nathan. Firstly, the teacher allowed the children autonomy by allowing them to pick their instruments and play independently, which adheres to the motivational concept of self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2002). He also provided clear instructions that showed the class what to do. Tasks were challenging but not overly challenging and seemed to be at a level that built on their previous experience. When Nathan felt nervous about participating within the group, seemingly refusing to participate at one stage, the teacher quietly spoke some words of encouragement that provided the confidence Nathan needed to complete the task. Interpersonal relationships and communication are crucial to the teaching and learning process and their social-emotional development. The result, in this case, was that Nathan was able to complete the lesson successfully which also worked to foster his competency needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000).



#### 6.4.6 *How did Nathan perceive his own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

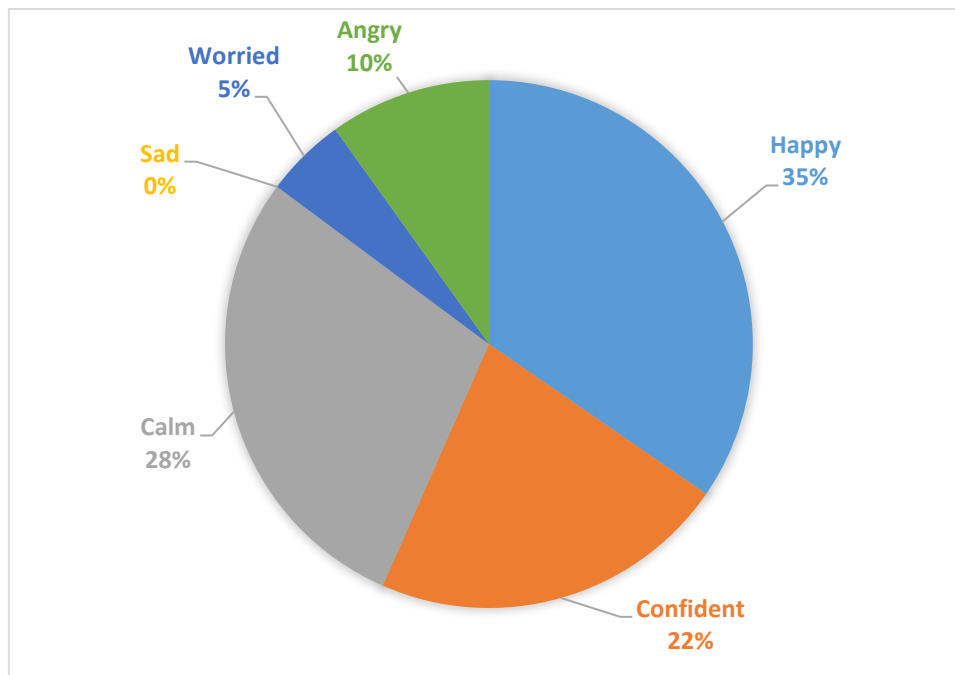
##### *Personalising the YVYC tool for Nathan*

The researcher's observations did not reveal any notable instances that might prevent him from accessing the full range of the tool. However, his class teacher had warned that Nathan may not talk due to trust issues. In addition, Nathan was due to be assessed for ASC, and research supports the concept that children with ASC can struggle to understand emotions (Baron-Cohen et al., 2009). That being said, the project was built upon high expectations and therefore presented all six emotions (*Happy, Sad, Calm, Worried, Angry and Confident*), as well as the full scale range (*not at all, a little, quite a bit, very, and extremely*) within the YVYC tool set up. Nathan's interventions, as described by his class teacher and the documentation (IEP), were also included within the photographic and illustrative experiences for Nathan to explore his feelings around these areas (see Appendix 5B for full transcription).

##### *Results*

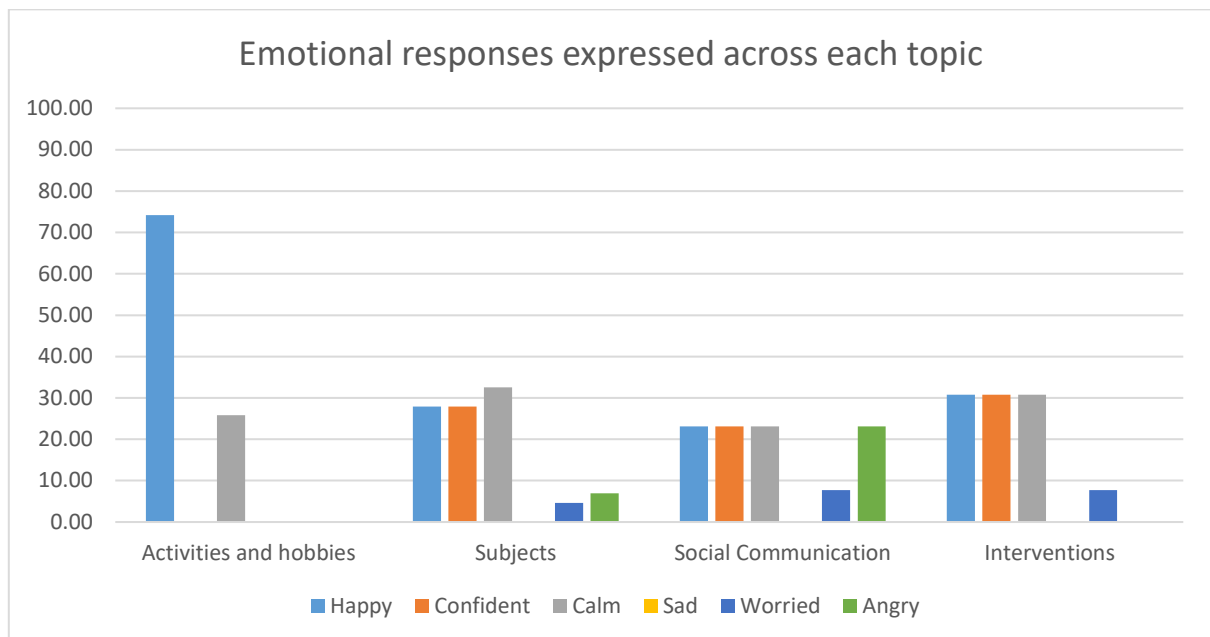
The YVYC tool was administered to Nathan on a 1 to 1 basis in a quiet room in the school and took a total of 25 minutes. Nathan was first administered the screener to check his emotional understanding and confirm that he understood how to use the tool, which took 8 minutes. He was able to answer all screener questions accurately suggesting he understood how the tool worked and the various emotions. He was then asked a further 30 questions across four topic areas, general activities (n=7), subjects (n=10), social and emotional (n=6), and interventions (n= 7). Of the 30 questions asked, 85% of his responses were associated with positive emotions, within the constructs of happy, confident, and calm (Figure 6.10).

**Figure 6.11: Emotional responses elicited with the YVYC tool**



Responses were broken down further into their topic components and are illustrated in Figure 6.11.

**Figure 6.12: Emotional responses elicited within the YVYC tool in each topic**



### *Activities and hobbies*

Nathan responded with happy (76%) and calm (24%) responses to all of the questions about his activities and hobbies, such as listening to music, reading and playing sports. When asked about his favourite book, he identified that he liked “Spiderman.”

### *Subject evaluation*

Nathan reported feeling positive (happy 29%, confident 29%, and calm 34%) about the majority of his subjects. This was especially notable when asked about art and music, where he answered the questions with enthusiasm.

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about Art?*

**Nathan:** *Umm...happy! \*He selects extremely confident, happy and calm and places the cards on the tool.\**

**Interviewer:** *Wow. Do you feel you are good at art? I have heard this.*

**Nathan:** *Yea. I did a picture of a house.*

Nathan reported feeling negative emotions towards Literacy, in which he stated that he was quite worried, especially about the “writing” element. For Drama he chose to select very worried, but he did not disclose reasons behind this. Science and Geography seemed to provoke Nathan to use “Extremely Angry” to explain how he felt about the subjects but further questioning failed to reveal reasons behind this choice as well. Instead, Nathan could only explain it as “Because I don’t like it...I just don’t like it.”

### *Social and emotional communication*

Across this topic of six questions, Nathan reported feeling the highest levels of negative emotions. Working by himself in class, working in a group with others, and having to answer a question in front of his class, all evoked feelings of various degrees of anger and worry. However, Nathan chose to select that he felt happy, confident and calm about going to school and working 1 to 1 with his class teacher.

### *Interventions and support strategies*

Nathan reported that several of the interventions and strategies that were supposed to be happening were not occurring.

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about working 1:1 with teaching assistant on reading and spelling? Twice a week?*

**Nathan:** *I don't read to anyone, I read to myself.*

**Interviewer:** *Just yourself?*

**Nathan:** *Ok.*

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about using your stress ball?*

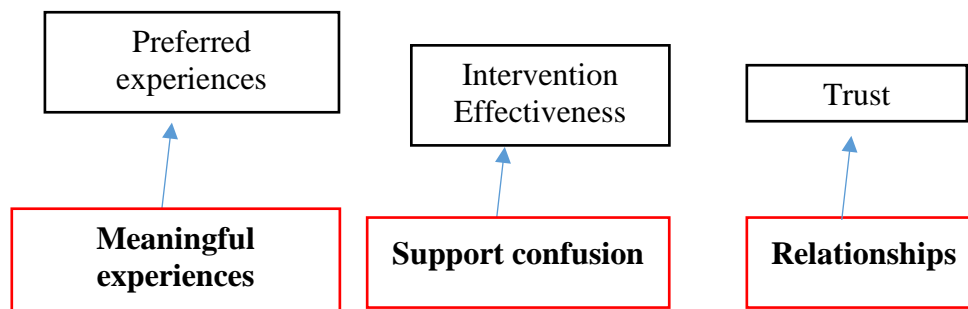
**Nathan:** *Don't have one*

However, he did confirm that he was having a weekly 1 to 1 timetabled intervention with his TA which made him feel worried.

#### 6.4.7 Nathan's perspective analysis

The central themes identified from an analysis of Nathan's elicited responses include: *relationships, meaningful experiences* and *support confusion* (Figure 6.12).

**Figure 6.13: Nathan's perception thematic network model**



Nathan was enthusiastic about the interview to begin with. The majority of his responses were positive. He chose to select happy, calm and/or confident across most of his experiences (85%). This suggests that overall Nathan is happy with his school experiences. He appeared to enjoy the screener exercise and was aware that people might feel more than one emotion at a time, as he regularly chose to select multiple emotions to describe experiences over the course of the elicitation.

Nathan, answered all questions and did not refuse to participate which his class teacher, had raised concern over; although, after 15 minutes, his attention started to wane. This suggests that the tool is capable of overcoming his refusal barriers. However, whereas previous participants had utilised the YVYC tool as a structure to help them talk about their feelings in more depth, additional conversation from Nathan was limited. For instance, he provided little information about why he felt a particular way when probing questions were asked.

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about science?*

**Nathan:** *Angry?*

**Interviewer:** *Ok. How angry?*

**Nathan:** *\*Selects extremely angry\**

**Interviewer:** *Extremely angry! How come you feel extremely angry about science?*

**Nathan:** *Because I don't like it.*

**Interviewer:** *Ok. Fair enough. What is it about it you don't like it?*

**Nathan:** *Because... \*Pause\**

**Interviewer:** *Is there a teacher you don't like or? \*Pause\* Is it just don't like science generally?*

**Nathan:** *I just don't like it.*

**Interviewer:** *Ok. Fair enough.*

The times when Nathan did offer additional information were when he spoke about experiences that were particularly meaningful to him or that evoked strong emotional reactions. These included, enjoyment of reading, where he revealed his favourite book was “Spiderman,” and Art, where he “did a picture of a house.” These were areas that practitioners had also noted were experiences he particularly enjoyed. Similarly, when discussing why he felt extremely worried about Literacy, he said that it was because of the “writing.” It suggests that Nathan is motivated, and therefore more likely to engage rather than refuse to participate in experiences that have interest or meaning to him.

Understanding these areas in more detail could be a key opportunity to help Nathan participate more successfully in his school lessons; for instance, by differentiating his work to a level that is individually meaningful by building on his interests.

The second theme was identified as support confusion. His class teacher explained, and his IEP showed, that Nathan attended the infants for phonics 5x a week; that he had a stress ball; and that he worked 1 to 1 with a teaching assistant on his reading and spelling, and weekly times tables. However, Nathan reported that “I don’t go over there” (to infants for phonics), that he does not read to anyone “I read to myself,” and that he has no stress ball. On the other hand, he did say that he works 1 to 1 with a teaching assistant on his weekly times tables. Therefore, there is some confusion between what support practitioners have said is provided and what Nathan understands he receives. It is possible that Nathan may have denied going to infants because he felt embarrassed or that this was incongruent to his belief system (Rogers, 1979). Taking Nathan out of his class of Year 4s and placing him with Year 1s is not inclusive, and will likely elicit feelings of incompetence that run contrary to the principles of self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2017).

Regarding his belief that the 1 to 1 reading does not occur, it is possible that Nathan is not receiving the intervention on regular occasions due to support constraints. His class teacher reported that “...we have got a lot of children on special needs registers. And we haven’t got a great deal of support.” It is possible that available TA support is spread too thinly to achieve what was designed with his IEP. Nathan has no statement of special needs, which means his support is not written into legislation by local services but is dependent on what the school can provide, which is in turn restricted by budgetary constraints. The only support that Nathan does recognise is the 1 to 1 weekly session with a TA to work on his times tables, although he chooses select the emotion “a little bit worried” to describe this experience. Overall, the interventions and strategies that are believed to have been put into place for Nathan appear to be inconsistent and ineffective from his viewpoint and are not supporting his needs.

A final theme, relationships, at first appears confused. Nathan selected that he felt \*extremely angry and worried\* about working in groups with others, but \*extremely happy\* about playing football, which he stated as his favourite sport. This is a team game which suggests he is happy to play with others. Likewise he selected that he is \*extremely happy and extremely calm\* about talking to his friends, and about being in the playground. This suggests that Nathan does have friends who he plays with, and this supports the researcher's observations of him in his French lesson, choosing to sit next to peers and make masks with them. However, when Nathan thinks about working with children who are not his friends he feels extremely angry and worried. He also has these feelings about working by himself. Alternatively, working with his class teacher made him feel \*extremely calm\*. These responses support the idea that Nathan has formed attachments not only with the class teacher but also with a select group of friends. Outside of this small circle, or when he is by himself, he shows worry and anger.

*Evaluation against proposition 1: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school learning and support experiences.***

The analysis of Nathan's experience with the YVYC tool supports proposition 1. The tool provided Nathan with an alternative way to explore and describe how he felt across a variety of general and specific school and support experiences.

Concerns from his class teacher that Nathan might refuse to participate did not materialise although he did begin to show inattention after 15 minutes, which shows the YVYC tool



was able to overcome this potential difficulty. He answered the questions by matching the photographs or illustrations of his experiences with the emotional cards (happy, confident, calm, sad worried, and angry) and scaled it (not at all, a little, quite a bit, very, and extremely) within the confines of the YVYC tool. But rather than feeling able to explain his affective experiences in any depth, he mostly responded with just the emotional cards. On the one hand, this represents a significant weakness of the YVYC tool. It suggests that the level of detail elicited is determined by the ability or motivation of the children to express themselves vocally. However, it also shows that vocal communication is not required to get some information. Areas that he did feel able to talk about were focussed on experiences that were particularly meaningful to him, such as Art. He also explained that he has a friendship group, struggles to work by himself, and feels confused by the strategies and intervention that are perceived to be implemented. This represents significant progress over and above what information was previously known about how Nathan felt about his school learning and support experiences.

Future elicitations could help to draw out underlying reasons for his feelings to see if they can be replicated, and explore how to help him feel secure across his school activities.

*Evaluation against proposition 2: **The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.***

In agreement with proposition 2, constructing and comparing Nathan's school and support experiences across practitioner, researcher and Nathan's own view using the YVYC tool kit revealed a more comprehensive understanding of Nathan's learning and support experiences

than would otherwise have been accessible. A summary of the analysed views have been presented below (Table 6.3).

*Table 6.3: Summary of practitioner, researcher, and YVYC tool perspectives*

<i>Practitioner Perspective</i>	<i>Researcher Perspective</i>	<i>Nathan's perspective (YVYC elicitation)</i>
<p><b>Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Neglected home environment root cause of Nathan's difficulties</li> <li>Suspected ASD also impacting learning, socialising and behaviour</li> <li>Art and music seen as the only subject which he particularly enjoys</li> </ul>	<p><b>Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effectiveness was dependent on classroom management</li> <li>Nathan responded best when he was provided with direct instruction, was challenged, and was intrinsically motivated</li> <li>He enjoyed music</li> </ul>	<p><b>Learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels positive across most subjects</li> <li>Particularly enjoys Art and Music</li> <li>Sometimes recognises areas he has difficulties in (writing)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social and emotional communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty relating and trusting others</li> <li>Feeling safe is important and difficult for him</li> <li>Class teacher built up a trusting relationship with Nathan</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social and emotional communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpersonal relationship between teacher and Nathan crucial to motivation</li> <li>Attachment problems</li> </ul>	<p><b>Social and emotional communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feels angry and worried when working in groups</li> <li>Working 1 to 1 with his class teacher helps him feel happy/calm/confident</li> </ul>
<p><b>Support Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Phonics at infants 5x per week</li> <li>1:1 support TA for reading/spelling/times tables.</li> <li>Stress ball</li> <li>Feel that the interventions are not effective</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None observed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Support Strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confused and worried over school support</li> <li>Weekly 1:1 times tables was the only intervention recognised</li> </ul>

The highlighted colours represent agreement between the three perspectives within each section (learning, social and emotional communication and support strategies). His class teacher identified that he liked Art, while his music teacher said he liked Music. The researcher was able to observe his enjoyment of Music and Nathan chose to select that he felt extremely happy, confident and calm in Art and Music during the elicitation, which was also one of the few occasions where he added a conversational element to his selection, saying “I did a picture of a house.”

Practitioners (class teacher, Music teacher, TA, and documentation evidence) all reported that he had difficulty relating to and trusting others. And, Nathan revealed that he feels angry and worried when working in groups of people he is unsure about. His class teacher believed that she had managed to build up a trusting relationship, which now helps and supports his learning, and Nathan showed that he does feel her support makes him feel calm. Similarly, the researcher’s observations showed that interpersonal relationships with the teacher were extremely important for Nathan as his music teacher was able to utilise his relationship with Nathan to encourage him to work with the group when he might otherwise have refused.

Regarding his support strategies, his class teacher and his IEP showed that he should be having a number of interventions to support his needs. However, the researcher was unable to observe any of them on the occasions present. In addition, Nathan appeared confused when questioned about several of his interventions and the only intervention that he recognised was his 1 to 1 support from his class teacher. This might explain why his practitioners reported that they found the interventions to be ineffective.

Nathans appears to present with social anxiety, whether this is caused by attachment problems or autism is important to his treatment (Moran, 2010). However, there is a danger that his needs are being pathologised. Nathan's class teacher seemed a little confused about how to meet his needs. On the one hand, she seemed to understand that he "needs to trust, he needs to get to know people and is very wary of everybody." While on the other, she seemed to think that punishment was an appropriate way of forcing him to talk when he was refusing to speak "if you don't answer the register you have got a detention...and he would." Similarly, she suggests that "the majority of his problems, I would imagine, are caused by his home background (Class Teacher)." This has the effect of placing the responsibility for his difficulties outside of the school's remit, which serves to dissociate their importance to successfully overcoming his barriers and meeting his needs. It also reveals a further difficulty with the YVYC tool kit. Without parental input, information is decidedly one-sided. It didn't permit the exploration of what learning is happening at home or how he is prevented or enabled in his home environment. Nor did it give his parents an opportunity to give their side of the story. As such, although the YVYC tool kit pointedly was able to explore the confusion around Nathan's support experiences and his relational problems, it leaves the school and outreach with an incomplete account of what is going on.

#### 6.4.8 *Evaluation*

At the end of action research one, a number of modifications were made to the YVYC tool kit. These will be explored according to how successfully implemented and effective they were considered within this second action research cycle.

- More response emotions were added to the tool in order to give the children a greater choice about how they felt about their experiences.

The original YVYC tool presented children with only the Happy and Sad constructs. Version Two, provided six, which included the additions of Worried, Confident, Calm and Angry. New emotions were added to the tool in order to elicit a wider range of emotional responses from the children. Partly, this was in response to Billy's (Case One) feedback that he felt he could not express himself within the confines of Happy and Sad. But the literature also supports the concept that anxiety and anger lead to a decrease in motivation for learning and engagement (Linnenbrink, 2007). Similarly, the researcher was interested in taking a strengths based approach to identify whether certain positive experiences would help children feel confident and calm, to better understand what helps them to succeed (Fredrickson, 2001). Lionel and Nathan made use of these additional emotional choices, and as a result, it was possible to learn more about their school experiences than if only Happy/Sad was available.

- The YVYC tool was made bigger and more accessible.

Another of Billy's recommendations was to make the tool larger. The researcher felt that this had limited direct impact on the elicitation but it did allow for larger photographs, illustrations and emotional choice cards to be laid out on the mat at the same time.

- Observations were to be carried out using a mixture of participatory and non-participatory methods.

Rather than trying to remain separate from the children, the researcher was able to interact which was helpful. It meant that the researcher was free to engage with the children and promote a trusting relationship from the start. This was particularly important for Nathan who, as a Child in Need, had trust difficulties and was said to have difficulty trusting new people. This worked to encourage Nathan to cooperate with the researcher instead of refusing, which he was said to be likely to do. One of the caveats of this approach is that the outreach practitioners do not use observations in this manner, meaning they would either have to adapt their methods or not have access to the same level of detail as the researcher if they were to use the YVYC tool themselves.

- Physical objects would be provided for children perceived with severe communicative and cognitive difficulties

In light of the tool failing to work for Aaron, a policewoman's hat was provided for Tina as it was felt she was of a similar competence level. This failed to help elicit her school experience on this occasion. However, future iterations will continue to use a physical object in circumstances where competency is questionable, to identify if it helps other individuals.

- Children's own communicative devices (e.g. PECs, Makaton) will be better implemented into the tool.

Makaton was used, and PECs was made available to use, in the YVYC tool with Tina but was not required because the researcher's own version of Happy/Sad mirrored the images

provided on Tina's PECs. Affording her more time to explain her answers also had no success.

#### *6.4.9 Critical Reflection and Modifications*

As with action research cycle one, the tool required significant preparation time before the interviews were carried out with the children. Preparation time did decrease slightly as the researcher became more adept at the processes, such as gathering information, and building up typical illustrations that represent children's experiences. However, photographs had to be taken of each child's school environment, and their background experiences had to be understood to be properly recorded on the YVYC tool question sheet. Therefore, it is likely that there will always be a significant element of preparation time required before administration is possible.

Feedback from the children, and the researcher's supervisors was collated and reflected upon. The main points that were acted upon were:

- The addition of 10 more emotions (Afraid, Disgusted, Excited, Proud, Surprised, Joking, Ashamed, Tired, Frustrated, Confused) bringing the total to 16 (see Appendix 10).

When asked what he felt of the tool, Lionel reported that "it is helpful." When asked how to improve it, he suggested providing "more options...more emotions...to explain myself easier."

The 10 additional emotions were chosen because they reflected the six basic emotions (Ekman, 1999), emotions that were more complex but still developmentally appropriate (e.g. proud, ashamed) and emotions that are important for everyday functioning (e.g. tired, joking). These were selected because typically developing children recognise and

understand them between 2 and 7 years (Bretherton and Beeghly, 1982; Ridgeway et al., 1985).

- Removal of the emotional screener test.

Nathan had a mixed reaction to the YVYC tool experience. At first he was visibly excited, however, after 15 minutes he appeared to increasingly lose attention. He reported the tool to be “extremely easy” but when asked if he felt “it is useful?...good for other children?” He replied “No.” He said that he thought it “takes too much time.” Given that the emotional screener took 10 minutes out of his 23 minute interview to administer, it was deemed inappropriately long. Outreach also held concerns over the time it was taking. The screener was originally conceptualised as a way to ensure that children could understand emotions in order to use the tool. However, on reflection, this supposition was doubly flawed. Firstly, simply having a screener suggests that if a child is unable to complete the test then they will be excluded from the project; this runs contrary to the original inclusive nature of the project (e.g. when Aaron and Tina failed the test they were still administered the YVYC tool). Secondly, the screener works by asking children to follow a fictitious character (Bart Simpson). A story is read out about how Bart is racing on the road with his skateboard and having a great time. He then falls off and hurts his knee, before his mother sees him hurt and gives him a hug and some chocolate. Children are asked to track how they think Bart feels using the YVYC tool emotional cue cards during various high and low points in the story. Both Aaron and Tina failed the test which supports its inclusion. However, recognition of other people’s emotions is a complex multi-modal area of psychology that lies outside the capacity of this project to explain sufficiently (e.g. Baron-Cohen et al., 2009; Xavier et al., 2015.) For these combined reasons, it was decided to drop the screener test within action research 3.



- Checking how children feel before and after the interview instead of asking them directly what they think about the tool.

Lionel also said that it would be a good idea if the researcher added in an option about how children feel before they carry out the interview, because he was “feeling sick.” Lionel provided a valid point; children may perform differently on tasks depending on how they feel before them (Duchesne, Vitaro, Larose, and Tremblay, 2008). The researcher theorised that it will also provide an opportunity to identify how effective they believe the YVYC tool is by asking them at the end of the interview, rather than what they think of the tool directly, reducing the potential for social bias.

- Interviews with the children would be videoed rather than audio recorded

During the interviews with the children, it was difficult for the researcher to fully observe and record the whole situation. The researcher was concentrating on noting down the child’s responses and ensuring the questions were adhered to. This meant that certain aspects of the interview were missed, especially body language. For children with SLCN, who might find it difficult to communicate their feelings, body language is especially important to attend to because it can help to determine gestures, facial expression which help to determine how the individual is feeling, if they are paying attention and listening, and if they understand (Roulstone and McLeod, 2011).

## **7 Chapter Seven: Action Research Three**

### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter six gives an account of the cluster of three case studies (Tina, Lionel, and Nathan) that made up action research two. As a result of these, several more modifications were made to the YVYC tool kit. These included:

- The addition of 10 more emotions (Afraid, Disgusted, Excited, Proud, Surprised, Joking, Ashamed, Tired, Frustrated, Confused) bringing the total to 16.
- Removal of the emotional screener test.
- Checking how children feel before and after the interview instead of asking them directly what they think about the tool.
- Interviews with the children would be videoed rather than audio recorded

A further two children were recruited for action research two.

## 7.2 Case Six and Seven– Nina and Helen

*Figure 7.1: Types of data collected and analysed to explore Nina’s and Helen’s school learning and support experiences.*

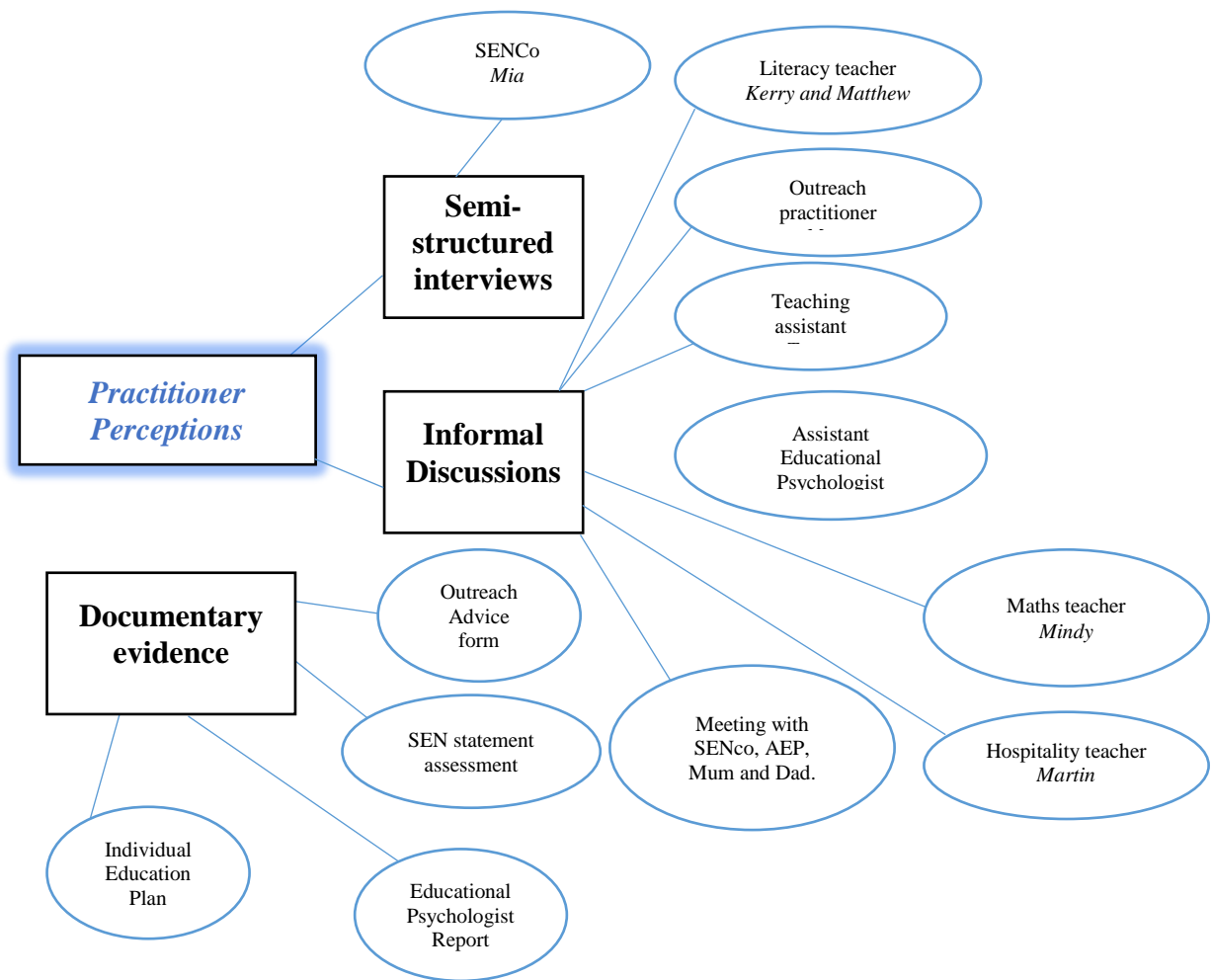


Figure 7.1 provides a summary of data collected to explore Nina’s and Helen’s school learning and support experiences. Nina and Helen are identical twin sisters and lived with their mother and older brother at the commencement of the project (March, 2015). They were aged 13 years 11 months and attended a mainstream secondary school within Year 9.

Due to the fact that the children have similar backgrounds, and that the adults frequently discussed and compared them, their cases have been combined to prevent repetition.

The children resided with their Hungarian mother and English father in the UK where they were assessed (aged 3) as having delayed speech but received no provision due to relocating to Hungary (EP Psychologist Report, 2012). Unidentified language and learning difficulties led to them being assessed and diagnosed in Hungary with atypical autism (ICD 10 code F84.9), defined where a child displays some but not all of the typical features of autism. Aged 10, the family moved back to the UK and around this time their parents divorced.

A UK assessment of their special needs (Statutory Assessment Report, 2013) which included verbal and numeracy test within the BAS3 found both children to be in the very low range. However, the report noted that the tests relied heavily on pupil understanding of language which made it likely that they would have performed higher if they had been assessed in Hungarian. The assessment found they did “not display significant autistic traits on medical examination” but they were impulsive and had no awareness of danger. That being said, because their current level of attainment was above the LA guidance level, special provision was decided not to be required over and above what the school should be able to provide.

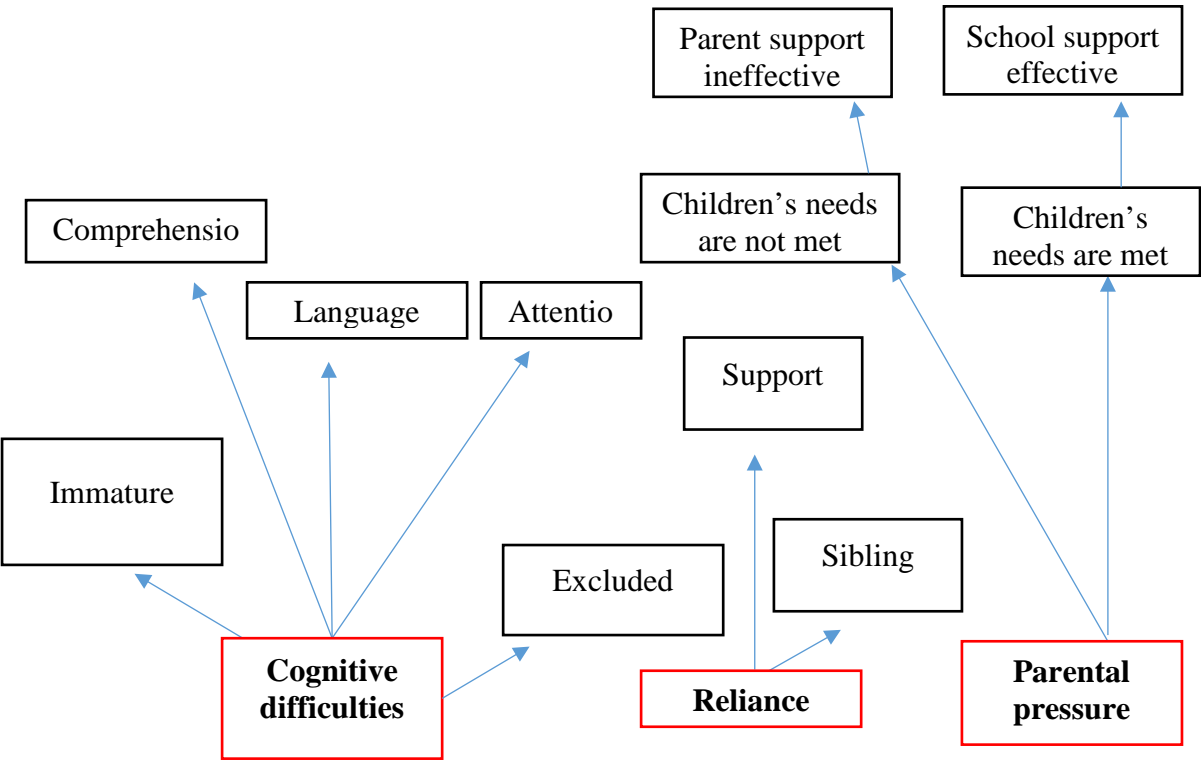
A number of support interventions were documented to be implemented by the school to try and increase the children’s numeracy and literacy skills. Despite this, due to ongoing parental concerns, the school involved a local Outreach service to help meet the children’s needs. An Outreach referral form (January, 2015) notes that concerns were primarily

related to weak literacy skills, especially reading, a lack of self-confidence and limited independent work skills.

*Practitioner perspective analysis– How did the practitioners perceive Nina’s and Helen’s school and support experiences?*

Data were analysed and a number of prominent themes were identified relating to Nina’s and Helen’s school and support experiences. These were collated into a thematic network map (see Figure 7.1), and labelled as: cognitive difficulties, reliance and parental pressure.

*Figure 7.2: Practitioner perception thematic network model*



### *Parental pressure*

Nina and Helen's practitioners perceived the children's school and support experiences through a mixed lens. The Statutory Assessment process acknowledged that although both children have "learning difficulties, in particular in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills," it did not find sufficient evidence that special provision had to be provided because their "current level of attainment is above the LA guidance level (SEN statement assessment, 2013)." Several practitioners provided accounts that agree with this evaluation.

**Matthew (English teacher):** *"I mean their writing is good, and their language is good compared to a lot of first language English speakers."*

**Researcher:** *"So you don't find that a barrier as far as learning is concerned?"*

**Matthew (English teacher):** *"Not particularly because it doesn't discourage them from trying. They will still try out more advanced vocabulary even if they are making some mistakes in other areas."*

And,

*"Nina is always willing to read in lessons and she always contributes her ideas and thoughts in class discussions...works to the best of her ability and she produces some very good work. Once Nina knows what's expected of her she can work independently (Learning Support, Mrs Nicholls)."*

Observation forms completed by an Outreach practitioner (Mary; Observation form, 2015) noted that during several lessons "both girls were attentive and followed instructions throughout the lesson and were able to complete all the activities successfully with some

support. They asked for help if they needed it...but otherwise worked independently...Socially both girls seemed happy and confident with their peers.”

The language used supports a narrative that the children have some difficulties but are supported to access the curriculum and are happy. However, during a meeting about their educational welfare with the children’s parents, the SENco (Mia) and the assistant educational psychologist (Tim), a more complex relational interaction emerged. My reflective log notes; “Nina and Helen’s parents are concerned that something is wrong with their children compared to their peers and were unhappy that more was not being done to support them.” The school SENco (Mia) asserted that the girls did have some difficulties, but that the school had spent “significantly more time and resources” trying to help the girls than other children who are “probably more in need.” Mia revealed that she “felt pressured” to support the children over others because of the parent’s ongoing and continued persistence that more needed to be done.

### *Cognitive difficulties*

Several teachers constructed the children’s difficulties through an understanding of poor cognitive ability. Some made reference to a limited attention, “...they are daydreamers (Literacy teacher, Kerry),” and, “I would say the major barrier to their learning at the moment is that they have somewhat May Fly minds (Literacy teacher, Matthew).” Others implied that the children had a poor memory, “...difficulty retaining information has a big impact on <their> learning (Maths teacher, Mary).” This meant that, “They lose focus...when tasks are being explained,” and as a result they require “re-explanation (Literacy teacher, Matthew).” However, their hospitality teacher (Martin) suggests that

both girls have low self-confidence, asserting that they are “better than they think they are...if they feel they can’t do something, they go passive.”

Helen’s and Nina’s perceived cognitive deficit was seen as being largely responsible for negatively affecting their learning because it had been identified as restricting their potential. An alternative discourse identified by a TA (Sunni) implied that the children are “easily distracted by peers”, which results in them “missing what they are told to do” as well as being “reluctant or refusing to try (TA, Sunni).” Sunni also stated that she believed the girls “should not be in their current English group” because she felt that the rest of the group were “bringing them down.” This suggests a lack of effective classroom management that might be negatively impacting the children’s learning rather than specific deficits that come from within the children.

An additional discourse can be located through references made about the children’s language skills. For instance, Mary (Outreach Services) reported that in her observations she perceived them as struggling with the “understanding of worded questions.” Likewise, Kerry (English teacher) is not sure whether their difficulties are caused by “language comprehension or a lack of ability.” An EP assessment (Educational Psychologist Report, 2012) of their verbal ability identified them to have a “limited vocabulary”, which gives credence to the idea of language acting as a barrier to their learning. The report also states that the children speak “using complicated expanded phrases, with lots of grammatical mistakes, and often interpret language in a literal manner.” This raises the question about whether or not they are being provided with effective support to help them comprehend the written and spoken language used in their classrooms. For example, Martin (Hospitality teacher) reported that there are “some language issues around specific cooking terms.”



There was also an assumption that the children were developmentally delayed. “It was something that an 8 year old would conjure up and it did illustrate how they can be quite immature with things (Mia, SENCo).” The dialogue serves to exemplify that Mia considers the children’s actions to be associated with typically younger children. Likewise, Tim (AEP) identified the children as being “very juvenile” and that certain age specific material is “a bit beyond them.” While their maths teacher (Mindy), describes them as being “immature at times.” This mirrors parental perceptions which are described later in this case study.

An overlooked concern emerged when Tim (AEP) explained that the children had told him “they were strange and weird and...different to everybody else.” He explained that he thinks “that is when the name calling started”, in other words, Tim believes the children were being teased because they were different but he “think(s) that is the developmental gap.” Furthermore, he asserts “not that Nina and Helen have learned how to deal with it, but that the year group have accepted that is the way they are.” This implies that he believes the teasing has stopped, not because Nina and Helen have a better relationship with their peers, but because the year group have come to perceive the children as being different and accepted it. The perception children have of themselves is vital to their self-concept and not fitting in with their peers might be damaging to their well-being (Petanidou et al., 2014). These issues were closely explored during the YVYC tool interview with the children.

### *Reliance*

A final theme of reliance was identified because several practitioners discussed the idea that Nina and Helen were dependent on each other, socially, emotionally and academically; “to the extent that their relationship is negatively affecting their development as individuals (Researcher’s reflective log)”.

*“Nina like Helen rely on each other to catch up when completing written work. This is problematic as if one has the work wrong...both end up with inaccurate/incorrect work (Hospitality teacher, Martin).”*

*“Nina is described as inseparable from her twin...she becomes overly restless and nervous when apart from her sister (EP Report, 2012).”*

*“Nina does work well most of the time, but she seems happier to hang back a little and use her sister to check that her work is ok (Enterprise Teacher).”*

I noted in my reflective log that Mia (SENco) and Tim (AEP) “appeared particularly keen to encourage their parents and class teachers to separate the children.” Tim felt that this would “increase <their> individual differences and their self-concept.” This involved advising teachers to sit them apart in lessons. The idea of encouraging the two siblings apart from each other can be seen elsewhere.

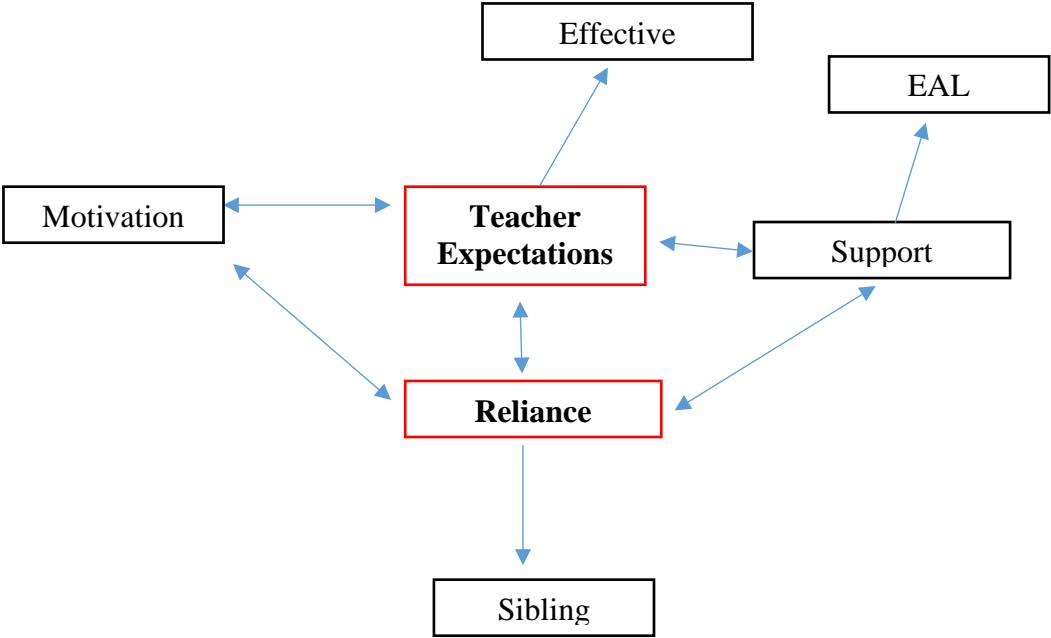
Alternatively, it could be argued that the close relationship of the sisters is acting as a supporting crutch, “Nina is slowly beginning to master Photoshop with the help of Helen,

which is giving her more confidence in lessons as she is beginning to understand the work more and what is needed of her (Learning support).”

*How did the researcher perceive Nina and Helen’s experiences of school?*

Figure 7.3 reveals how the researcher perceived Nina’s and Helen’s school learning and support experiences. Nina and Helen were observed a total of six times prior to the first administration of the YVYC tool, and a further three times after the second administration (see Appendix 6A). The central themes identified from an analysis of the researcher’s account of Nina and Helens experiences include *teacher expectations* and *reliance*.

*Figure 7.3: Researcher perception thematic network model*



The researcher discovered a complex interaction of themes that emerged by observing Nina and Helen across the two time points. Both Helen and Nina appeared motivated, happy and on task for the majority of the time in their observed lessons. And this remained despite disruption in the form of shouting, mobile phone usage, and irrelevant talk from other children that took place in many of these lessons.

### *Reliance*

One of the concerns identified in the practitioner perception analysis was an over reliance on their sibling relationship. They “rely on each other to catch up when completing written work. This is problematic as if one has the work wrong...both end up with inaccurate/incorrect work (Hospitality teacher, Martin).” This copying behaviour was observed across several lessons but was most notable in a science lesson where the children were asked to complete a spontaneous independent test. I noted that they appeared “quite confused and worried” and were “frustrated” in the lesson. They sat close to each other and copied each other’s work with minimal effort made by the teacher to challenge the behaviour. The TA (Tracy) attempted to support the children by reading out the test questions to them individually, but the children appeared to not understand some of the language and vocabulary used, and regularly asked “what does that mean” and “I don’t understand.” At the end of the lesson, the teacher (Zoe) explained to the researcher that she felt “some of the material is too hard for the children but it is out of her hands.” The implication was that the teacher knew that the work was not suitable for the children’s current understanding, but that she was being forced by the school to deliver the curriculum in this way regardless. It was likely that she was accepting the copying behaviour because it was a strategy that the girls had learned to help them cope with work far too challenging for either one of them alone. I noted this strategy was used in other lessons, such as a

Maths lesson where I observed Helen “got frustrated about a teacher question which she did not understand” and asked Nina to explain it to her. This was reciprocated in other lessons observed. Of critical importance, this strategy was not as prevalent in lessons that were taught at a level that they could understand. For instance, in a hospitality, enterprise and photography lesson, the children worked mostly independently and although they sat next to each other, they did not copy from each other to carry out their instructed tasks. The researcher reflected that in these lessons, the teachers expressed their language and presented material in ways that the children could understand; it had been broken down into bitesize chunks, instructions were provided sometimes visually on the IWB to remind the children what to do, and TA support was effective and available when required.

#### *Teacher expectations*

Attached to the theme of reliance was a theme labelled classroom expectations. During a hospitality observation, the teacher (Martin) was observed demonstrating high expectations by expressing his belief in Nina and Helen and providing support and feedback throughout the lesson. He instructed the children that they must create a pizza through individual manageable tasks (knead dough, create base, find and place ingredients, turn oven to correct heat, write down what they had done). These tasks provided the children with choices and they were capable of carrying them out independently, with some help from their TA, which meant it was meeting their autonomy needs. This acted to nurture their fundamental need to feel competent and autonomous (Ryan and Deci, 2002). After the lesson, he informed the researcher that “the girls are better than they think” which demonstrates his high expectations and contrasts with some of the comments from other teachers. Research shows that children tend to enjoy learning and do better when they are intrinsically rather than extrinsically motivated and this lesson was an excellent example of this in action (Deci and

Ryan; Anderman and Anderman, 2014). Similar strategies were utilised by the enterprise and photography teachers, which was where the observation checklists also revealed that both the girls and the rest of the class were most engaged and on task.

On the other hand, in an English lesson, the researcher noted that the environment “was highly ineffective at engaging the children and did not promote a learning environment.”

This was partly due to a lack of instructional direction and ongoing disruption from several boys. However, teacher attitudes and expectations towards the children, especially Nina and Helen, were low and post lesson comments reflected this (e.g. “somewhat May Fly minds” (Literacy teacher, Matthew).” Further low expectations were encountered in a Maths lesson, where probability was being taught. At one point the teacher asked Helen to provide an example of something that will never happen. Helen responded with the answer “be rich” and her teacher corrected that it was “unlikely” that she will be rich. This acts to perpetuate Helen’s feelings around her potential and results in her having low aspirations which research shows.

### *7.2.1 How did Nina and Helen perceive their own experiences of school via the YVYC tool elicitation?*

#### *Personalising the YVYC tool for Nina*

My own observations did not reveal any concerns that might prevent Nina or Helen from accessing the full range of the tool. Therefore, all 16 emotions were presented (*Happy, Sad, Afraid, Angry, Disgusting, Exciting, Calm, Worried, Proud, Surprised, Joking, Ashamed, Tired, Frustrated, Confused, and Confident*), as well as the full scale range (*not at all, a little, quite a bit, very and extremely*). Learning, social and emotional, interventions as identified by practitioners and documents and were included within the photographic and

illustrative experiences to help the children explore their feelings around these areas (see Appendix 10).

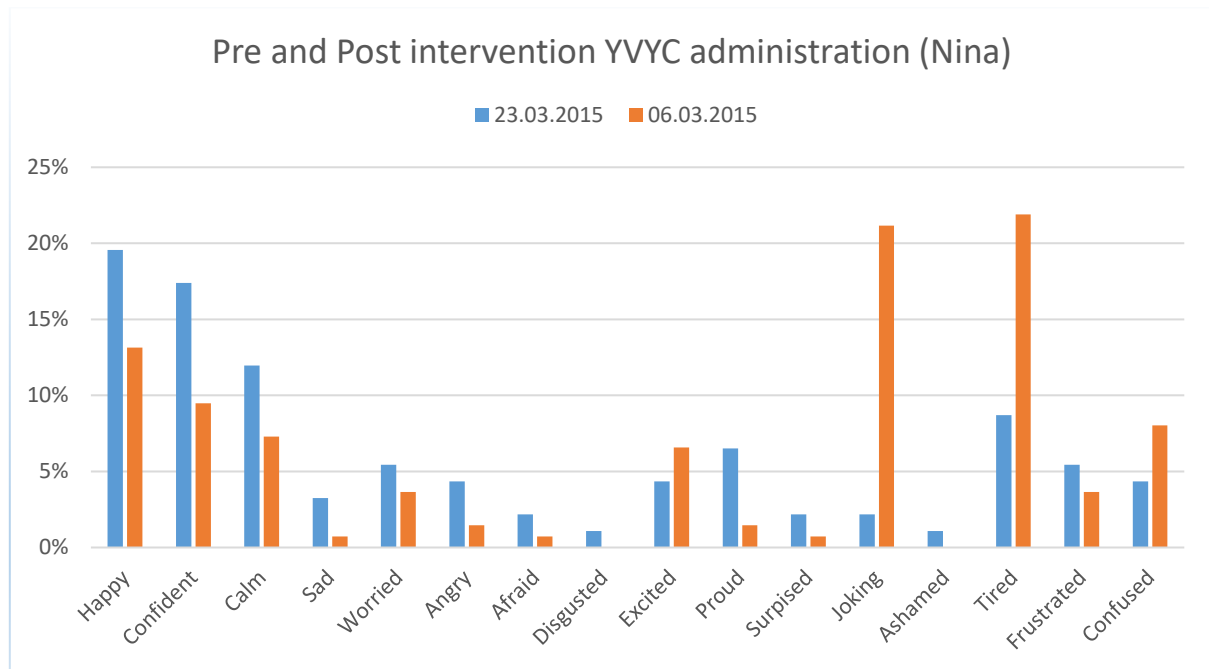
### *Overview of results*

The YVYC tool was administered separately to Nina and Helen on a 1 to 1 basis at two time points, once in March (2015) before a planned emotional literacy intervention with Tim (AEP) and again four months later in July (2015), when the intervention had been completed. The first administration asked 23 questions about the children's school and support experiences (Activities and Hobbies n=2; Subjects n=9; Social Communication n=8; Interventions n=4) and took 28 minutes (see full transcripts in Appendix 6B and 6C). The second administration asked 17 questions (Activities and Hobbies n=3; Subjects n=9; Social Communication n=6; Interventions n=4) and took 23 minutes (see transcript in Appendix 6B). Analysis of the YVYC results for Nina and Helen were examined separately and are presented below.

### *Nina*

The bar chart below (Figure 7.4) compares Nina's affective responses at the first and second administration time points. Of the 23 questions asked in the first administration, 60% of Nina's responses included five positive emotions: Happy (20%), Confident (17%), Calm (12%), Proud (7%), and Excited (4%). This dropped to 37% three months later at the second administration (Happy 13%, Confident 9%, Calm 7%, Proud 1%, and Excited 7%). Whereas, Joking increased from 2% to 21%, Tired from 9% to 22%, and confused from 4% to 8%.

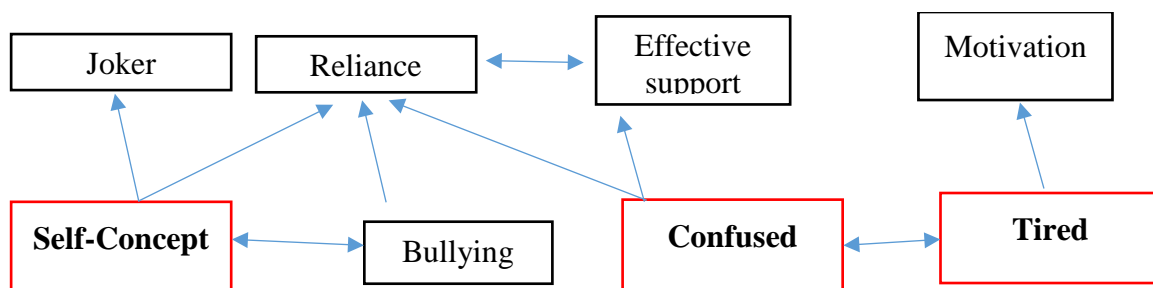
**Figure 7.4: Emotions used across the YVYC tool in pre and post administration**



### 7.2.2 Nina's perspective analysis

The main themes identified from an analysis of Nina's elicited responses are self-concept, confused and tired (see Figure 7.5).

**Figure 7.5: Nina perception thematic network model**



Nina was able to articulate how and why she felt particular emotions towards the provided experiences for the majority of the questions. She was able to select and express multiple emotions and showed that she understood that she can feel negative as well as positive



emotions for certain experiences. On the second interview she was presented with her responses from her first interview and thoughtfully considered what had changed. Prior to both interviews, she said that she felt “Happy” and “Excited” and consistently smiled and engaged with the task.

### Self-concept

Nina’s responses revealed several areas of concern that are negatively impacting her self-esteem and self-concept. She has a low perception about her intelligence and ability, which was identified when she was questioned about her subjects.

#### **Food technology:**

*“Oh! I love it!...I feel quite a bit happy, calm because I do not mess up...So I’m surprised why because I’m good at it but I don’t know why.”*

#### **Maths:**

*“Worried, a little because I don’t know if my GSCE will be good...I’m horrible at it.”*

#### **Science:**

*“They talk intelligent, and I do not get intelligent...I don’t know if I’m intelligent.”*

#### **P.E.:**

*“And worried that I won’t do it right...And I’m worried because I don’t know why I’m worried. So I’m worried because I’m worried.”*

Even when Nina feels she is good at something, such as food technology, she does not attribute that success to her own ability. Attributing failure to low ability often leads children to give up when they encounter failure which may explain why Nina was sometimes seen by practitioners as refusing to work (Aronson, and Juarez, 2012). These feelings are causing Nina anxiety across her school experiences. In addition, Nina feels

socially excluded stating that she feels sad “because no one wants to work with me...just Helen.”

These negative thoughts that Nina was having about herself were mitigated when she worked with Helen.

**Nina:** *I like working with just Helen. If I am just working with Helen then I feel calm, quite a bit calm; happy, a little bit happy. And confident, quite a bit confident. Because when I'm confident with Helen, I can do anything.*

**Researcher:** *That's a nice feeling to have. She is like your backup is she?*

**Nina:** *Yea. I need to protect her. Not she needs to protect me. I need to protect her.*

**Researcher:** *What about if it wasn't Helen? What about if it was other people? If Helen was not there and you had to work with others. How would that make you feel?*

**Nina:** *Worried that they want to do something to me.*

**Nina:** *... Afraid, a little bit afraid, because I don't know if they are making fun of me or something. And quite a bit embarrassed because...if I answer wrong then I be embarrassed.*

Nina shows that when she is with her sister, she feels confident and “can do anything” which acts to make her feel less anxious in situations where she is uncertain.

Of particular alarm, she highlights a bullying and safeguarding concern and identifies her role within the sibling relationship as protector from other children whom she is worried “want to do something to me” which made her feel “afraid.” Nina states “I don’t know if they are making fun of me,” which could relate to social communication or language comprehension difficulties, both of which have been identified within practitioner and researcher perceptions. That being said, the primary concern is that the school believed that the bullying had stopped but the YVYC elicitation clearly showed that it continued. The following exert reaffirms this position.

**Researcher:** *How do you feel about arriving at school in the morning?*

**Nina:** *I do not want to come to school and I don't know why. Afraid, that someone will bully me because some of them does.*

**Researcher:** *Does that still go on?*

**Nina:** *Yes a little bit yea.*

**Researcher:** *Is the school doing anything to try and help you with that?*

**Nina:** *Umm. Yes. <shakes head negatively>*

When the researcher asks if the school are trying to help, Nina said yes, but the video

clearly captures her shaking her head negatively. Practitioner perceptions felt that Nina and Helen were too reliant on each other and were keen to separate them, but the YVYC demonstrated that Nina finds safety in their relationship both academically and socially. Separating them will likely increase the anxiety Nina feels in these situations.

**Researcher:** *Would you like the school to do any more about the bullying?*

**Nina:** *Mmm. <nods positively>. But they don't do it I think just talk to us...they (the bullies) say these things like "Do you think you're pretty? Or "Do you think you're ugly?" Or "Do you think you are stunning?" And the L word ..you know girl and girl. And they say "Do you think I'm pretty?" and I say I don't know. And she says, they say like "do you think you are ugly?". I say, I don't know. And "do you think are stunning?", and I say I dunno. And they say "That doesn't make any sense." And they keep doing it.*

Nina felt that the intervention the school provided to stop the bullying was not effective and clearly Nina is still receiving verbal abuse that is causing her anxiety. The perpetrators targeted Nina's self-image which will only further negatively impact her self-concept.

**Researcher:** *Right okay. Maybe I'll have a word with the school. Do you want me to?*

**Nina:** *Umm I don't know. If I tell them then maybe they will get after us.*

**Researcher:** *Yea its difficult isnt it? But if it is making you feel bad?*

**Nina:** *Umm. I'm not bothered about it. My mum says that I shouldn't, I should just ignore it. And I have Helen with me.*

This presented the researcher with an ethical and professional dilemma. Nina was concerned that involving the school further would lead to repercussions from the perpetrators and she was therefore hesitant for the researcher to disclose what had been said. This view was reinforced by her mother who had told her that the bullying behaviours should be ignored. However, safeguarding policy under the Children Act (1989) states that a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection concern when there is 'reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm.' As the researcher, I was concerned for Nina's well-being and therefore, at the end of the interview, persuaded Nina that I should talk to the school discreetly, in order to come up

with a better solution to tackle the problem. In response, the school SENco (Mia) said that she would once again talk to the girls responsible. However, the follow up administration of the YVYC tool revealed that although the bullying had decreased, it had not stopped entirely.

**Researcher:** *...last time you said that you are picked upon by some of the girls*

**Nina:** *Uhh oh yea! A lot.*

**Researcher:** *Is that still going on?*

**Nina:** *They just swear at us and stuff. <Smiles like showing it is not so important>*

**Researcher:** *So it still goes on?*

**Nina:** *Yea.*

**Researcher:** *Right. I was hoping that would stop by now. I spoke to school (Mia) and she said it was not as bad as it used to be.*

**Nina:** *<Nina is looking down at the ground and appears sad>*

**Nina:** *Well they do swear but they don't pick on us they just swear.*

**Researcher:** *So it's not a bad?*

**Nina:** *Umm. Yea. <Looks still very troubled>*

Nina was still clearly troubled by the bullying behaviours and almost seems resigned to it.

This information was again relayed back to the school but due to time constraints no further contact could be made with the girls to see if the bullying had stopped.

## Confused

It has been determined that a number of practitioners constructed Nina's school experience with a perception that she had cognitive difficulties which were preventing her learning effectively. Using the YVYC tool Nina explained that she felt confused across a range of subjects including reading, science, English, and spelling. However, she felt that her confusion related to a combination of teachers not being able to understand her and her not being able to understand them rather than problems coming from within herself.

### English lessons:

**Nina:** *"...quite a bit confused...because I don't get some of them"*

**Researcher:** *Do you find it difficult to understand the teacher?*

**Nina:** *Yes.*

**Researcher:** *Do you think there is anything they could do to help you understand?*

**Nina:** *Speak more...like...more not like confused*

**Researcher:** *So a bit more simple*

**Nina:** *Yea <points to self and appears frustrated>. Try to understand me*

**Researcher:** *Because sometimes you find it difficult when they speak too quickly?*

**Nina:** *Yes, yep. <Nodding>*

This suggests that the language her teachers are using is often difficult for her to understand.

But it is important to recognise that Nina feels that some teachers understand her needs

more because they adjust their language and material to her level.

## Tired

A further concern about Nina emerges with the number and intensity of times that she uses the word “Tired” to describe how she feels about her experiences. This becomes especially prominent during the second YVYC administration where 12 of the 17 questions asked are associated with the word and leads her to state that “every lesson is tired.” Nina does not provide an answer as to why she is so tired but states that she “needs more sleep” and “I don’t even know why.” At one point the researcher asks if Nina has been up late and while she denies that she has, the video recording of the interview shows her laughing at her answer, suggesting otherwise. Away from the camera, Nina explained that she regularly watches YouTube videos late without her mother’s knowledge and this was confirmed by Helen in a subsequent interview.

Tiredness can be problematic at school because studies show that when teenagers do not get enough sleep they can suffer from mood swings, poor concentration, low academic performance, mental health and behavioural issues (e.g. Pagel and Kwiatkowski, 2010). Practitioners reported concentration difficulties which would likely only be made worse due to Nina’s lack of sleep. The YVYC revealed a likely association between her reported

levels of tiredness and increased confusion between the first and second interview which supports this view. The extract below demonstrates that she believes her tiredness prevents her from working effectively by herself, and contributes to her reliance on Helen.

**Researcher:** *The next one is working by yourself in class. Last time you put that you were a little bit sad, confident, quite a lot frustrated. Is that the same do you think?*

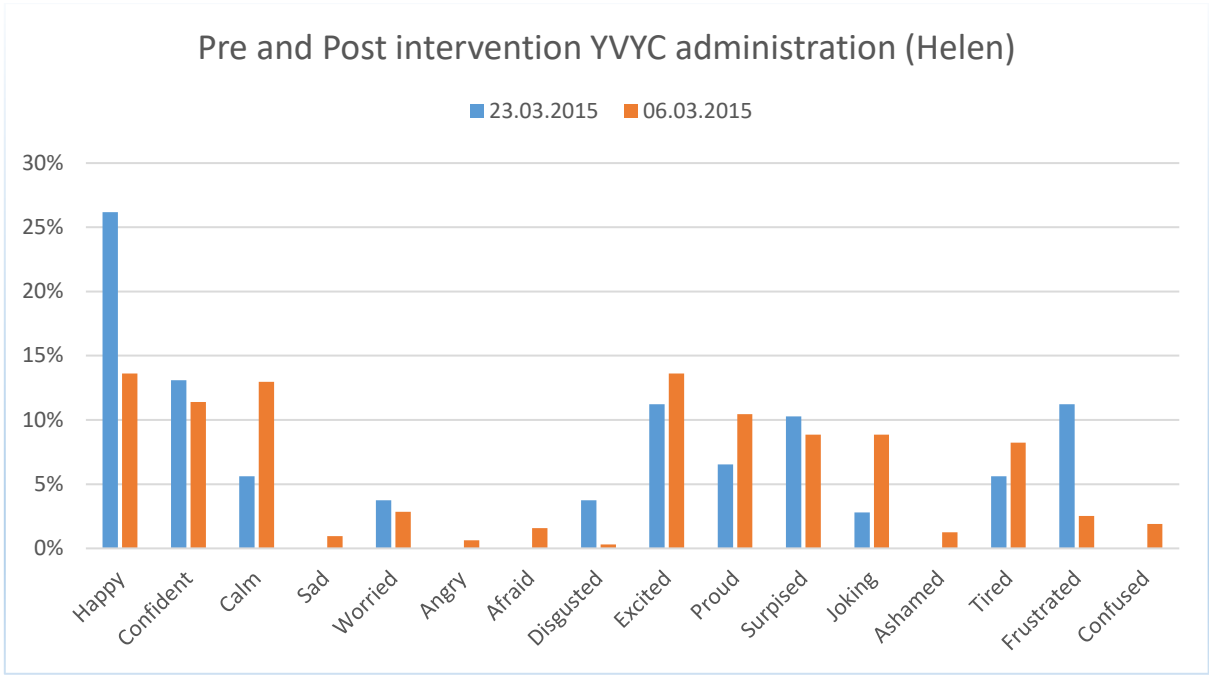
**Nina:** *Tired, very tired. Because I do not like when I'm working alone. If I'm working in groups, I can leave the work to them.*

Nina becomes more reliant on Helen, the more tired she feels as she feels increasingly incapable of completing her work by herself.

### *Helen*

The bar chart below (Figure 7.6) compares Helen's affective responses at the first and second administration time points. Of the 21 questions asked in the first administration, 63% of Helen's responses included five positive emotions: Happy (26%), Confident (13%), Calm (6%), Proud (7%), and Excited (11%). This was maintained at 62% three months later at the second administration (Happy 14%, Confident 11%, Calm 13%, Proud 10%, and Excited 14%). Of particular interest, her levels of frustration dropped from 11% to 3% during this period.

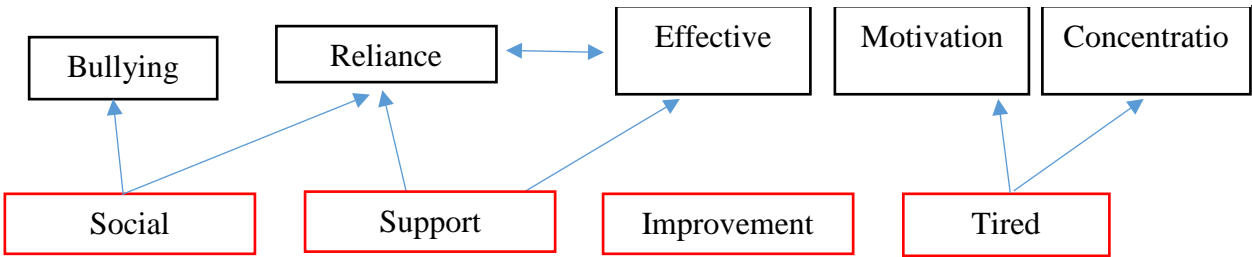
**Figure 7.6: Percentage of emotions used across the YVYC tool in pre and post administrations**



***Helen’s perspective analysis***

The main themes identified from an analysis of Helen’s elicited responses are social protection, support, improvement, and tired.

**Figure 7.7: Helen perception thematic network model**



Like Nina, Helen was capable of discussing how and why she felt particular emotions towards the provided experiences for the majority of the questions. She was able to select and express multiple emotions and showed that she understood that she can feel negative as

well as positive emotions for certain experiences. She became particularly expressive about subjects that were meaningful to her, such as, Art, where she stated that it made her feel “extremely confident and extremely happy...because I feel like I’m flying.” On the second interview she was presented with her responses from her first interview and reflected on what had changed. Prior to both interviews, she said that she felt “Happy,” “Excited” and “Proud” to carry out the YVYC interview and was engaged throughout.

### *Social protection*

As with Nina during the first administration, Helen shared that she felt “Afraid, Worried, Tired and Sad” about coming to school because “some people tease me, bully me.” Helen identified her role as “trying to protect my sister from being sad,” and explained “that’s why I want to go to every lesson with her.” The protector role was mirrored by Nina, who instead saw herself as the protector of Helen. Both children were clearly anxious about coming to school due to the bullying behaviours and, as a result, they mutually relied on each other for social protection.

For Helen at the follow up YVYC administration, her fears about coming to school had decreased. While she maintained some of the same negative emotions, they had decreased in severity and she instead stated that she felt: Excited, Calm, Confident, and Proud. An explanation for her change in attitude can be located in the extract below.

**Helen:** *Well I have friends to talk to and my sister. We have fun, we play a lot. And talk to the teachers...*

**Researcher:** *So you feel you are fitting in more at school?*

**Helen:** *Yea <Nods yea>.*

Helen suggests that she has developed friendships, is able to talk with the teachers more openly and generally is having more fun at school. And, although she does not state that the



bullying has stopped, her choice of emotions and the language that she used, suggested that it no longer caused her great anxiety.

### *Improvement*

This positive change between the two administrative time points can be located elsewhere. Where Helen reported that she felt “frustrated” in Maths because “It’s really hard,” in the second YVYC account she said that she felt happy, excited, and confident and explains that she felt this way “because I’m always beating the class in tests.” She asserts that she finds it easier now because “I’m always listening to the teacher” and that her teacher “helps me” which makes her feel “confident.” This pattern was noted throughout the interview because Helen picked more positive emotions. The extract below reveals that Helen appeared to be much happier about school generally.

**Researcher:** *How do you feel now? So I have asked you lots of questions, you have given me lots of really good answers.*

**Helen:** *Mmm. Surprised, proud, excited, confident, happy, and calm.*

**Researcher:** *Good. Well done.*

*Wow so that's quite a change from last time I came to see you, isn't it?*

**Helen:** *<Nods yes> Uh hu.*

**Researcher:** *Do you feel much happier now?*

**Helen:** *<nods yes>*

**Researcher:** *So the school is doing a good job?*

**Helen:** *Yea*

### *Tired*

Despite the general improvements in how Helen feels about her school, there are some concerns about her levels of tiredness. During the first administration Helen uses the construct of Tired twice whereas in the follow up session she uses it 11 times. She explained that this was due to “late nights” where she was “on the computer” and watched videos on “Youtube” which agrees with Nina’s account. When questioned whether or not

her mother was aware of her late night computer habit, she responded with “sometimes.” For Helen, tiredness presents itself as a problem when discussing several of her experiences, notably P.E. In the first administration she said that sports made her feel quite calm; this drastically changed in the second administration where she said that it made her feel “Angry...because I’m so tired.”

Her tiredness levels might also be affecting her capacity to concentrate in lessons generally. For instance, in Literacy she originally felt “very Proud,” but in the follow up interview she felt “tired, confused.” Helen noted that she felt more confused about Literacy than she was several months ago and believed that it was “because it’s getting harder.” However, it is equally possible that as Helen becomes increasingly tired, she is finding concentrating on the work more difficult. Indeed there was an observable difference in Helen’s energy levels and physical appearance in the first and second interview, as identified on the video.

### *Support*

Helen was able to give an account of what type of support helped her to learn more effectively. She stated that the after school Nurture group intervention made her “happy” and “excited” and that she was learning about “similes, verbs and adjectives.”

Understanding is a word that Helen uses on several occasions to express its importance in relation to her feeling supported. For example, she named specific teachers such as, Martin (hospitality) whom she felt made “me happy and understand things” because they “make people confident in working.” Her teaching assistant made her feel “happy and proud” and helped with her understanding. She reported that her paired reading intervention made her feel Proud, Happy, Confident, Joking, Calm, Excited and Surprised. She also found

working with the AEP made her feel similar positive emotions because he “always helps us, and understands us and he is kind.”

On the other hand, Helen states that “I don’t understand being alone. I don’t work very well when I’m alone. I don’t understand anything.” She chose negative emotions connected to these feelings, such as being afraid, sad, ashamed and frustrated. Whereas, when working in a group, Helen feels “Proud, Confident, Calm, Excited...Confident.”

She was also able to explain what elements of support might further help. For instance, she explains that she does not like reading because “there is no pictures in it.”

#### *Emotions can be temporal and contrasting*

In the second administration Helen chooses a wider range of emotions and uses the word “sometimes” to describe that she might feel multiple positive and negative emotions about a given experience. The extract below provides an example of where Helen changes how she feels about a subject in light of the passage of time and her own emotional maturity.

**Researcher:** *The next one is numeracy or maths. You said you felt extremely frustrated.*

**Helen:** *Yea but now sometimes I'm confused, sometimes I'm calm, sometimes I'm happy, sometimes I'm confident, sometimes excited, tired, afraid, proud and suprised and worried.*

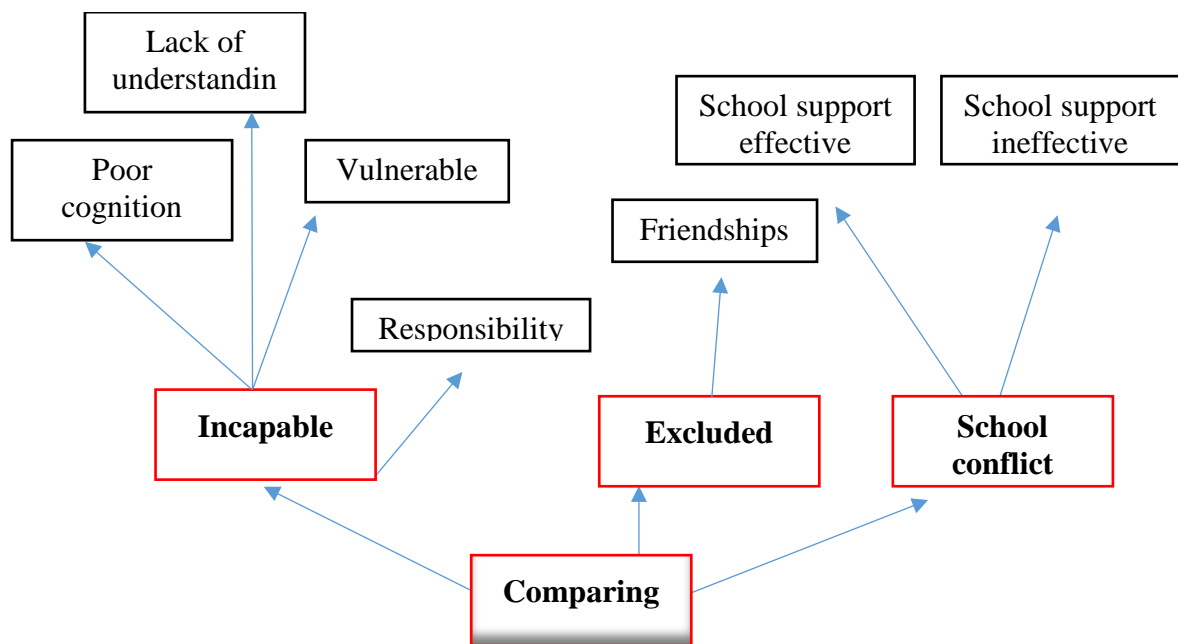
The YVYC tool can be seen as helping Helen to develop a wider vocabulary of emotions to be able to reflect on her experiences. She appears to have gone through an emotional developmental milestone, and now understands that sometimes emotions change.

***Parent perspective – How did the parents perceive Nina’s school and support experiences of school?***

Nina and Helen’s mother (Leia) was interviewed in July, 2015; shortly after the second YVYC tool administrations had taken place with her children. A full transcript of the 1 hour interview can be found in Appendix 6C.

The main themes that were identified were: *incapable*, *excluded* and *school conflict* (Figure 7.7). An overarching theme labelled comparing was apparent across all of these themes.

***Figure 7.8: Parent perception thematic network model***



***Incapable***

Leia disagrees with the practitioner’s account that language is presenting as a barrier to Nina and Helen’s learning, “...when you speak to them they are fluent...when it comes to exercises they are behind my Hungarian students, even the small ones. This is I think really

important because they say that the language barrier...I don't think there is a language barrier." Instead Leia constructs the twins as being incapable. Sometimes this relates to a perception of poor cognition within memory and attention:

*"I send them for a litre of milk and I give them money...but they come back with something but not milk. Fourteen years old...they see new information and new input, completely overrides. They don't do it to piss me off or anything...when they leave they really want to buy milk but they get there and there is a new input...and everything is out the window."*

At other times, Leia identifies them as having a difficulty processing what is asked of them:

*"...they used to get homework they not know what to do. And I said, did the teacher explain to you? I guess they did. I mean the teacher explained, but they didn't understand. And by the time they got home...they didn't know what to do. They don't know what they have to do unless you tell them."*

Some lessons she seems to suggest are pointless as she feels the girls will never be able to understand certain concepts, "...science is a lot of theory. When you have to calculate the mass multiplied with the speed. I don't think that they will ever understand that."

Leia is convinced that there is something medically wrong with the girls and this view is maintained despite recent assessments from local services, including the Educational Psychologists and CAMHs who refuted the original diagnosis of autism in Hungary.

*“...I still think there is something not working as it should...if it’s autism or whatever...I don’t care. I just know that they are not like. I teach many many children over nearly 10 years now and just interacting I know.”*

As a result of this strong belief that the girls are incapable, Leia feels that the girls are vulnerable:

**Leia:** *“I... can’t do everything. You can’t theatre like that...with their understanding situations in films and things. For example, I was criticised for letting them watch CSI type things. Not really bad stuff, but they do not understand that it can happen.”*

**Researcher:** *They don’t associate it with real life?*

**Leia:** *No. Not at all. And for little kids, it’s ok...you know that Little Red Riding Hood gets eaten...But I said in real life you die. They don’t understand. If you ask them not to talk to strangers...And I ask them, what would you do if someone says Mummy’s got some? Oh yea give us cake!*

And therefore are in need of protection:

*“The worry is they will not be able to do the GSCE, and what kind of work they can do and can they fend for themselves when I am not here.”*

In addition, Leia feels strongly that their difficulties will prevent them from achieving worthwhile employment when they finish their education:

**Researcher:** *Do the girls ever talk about what they are going to do after school?*

**Leia:** *Yea. They are interested in childcare. I don't know if their abilities they can have that kind of responsibility of what is required from them. I can imagine them not working independently but with others. So they are themselves supervised but they are very very good with small children...maybe because they can build a bond. Maybe because they are closer to their level."*

*"...This kind of behaviour is from a 5 or 6 year old."*

Leia implies that the girls are stuck at a developmental level of a younger child, and as such, she perceives and treats them as young children. She is fearful about whether or not they will grow into independent adults and as a result regards them with low aspirations. These low aspirations were made apparent when the researcher observed Helen exclaim in her Maths lesson that she will never "be rich."

### *Excluded*

The second theme mirrors what the girls were expressing through the YVYC tool. Leia feels that the girls are excluded at school, "...they don't like team games because they feel excluded, nobody wants them in their team." The feeling that the girls are being excluded appears to be having a negative effect on the girl's sense of identity:

**Leia:** *"...they told me that they really really want to fit in now. And they will try to behave in a way that they don't stand out.*

**Researcher:** *Do you think they feel like they stand out generally? And they have to make an effort to not stand out?*

**Leia:** *Yea. Many times, they said...especially Helen, she says she wants to go home to Hungary because she is not liked here, nobody cares for her. And at home she's got friends, which is not true...maybe she imagined that. But they didn't have friends for the same reason, they were always just shut out."*

The implication is that the girls feel that they are excluded, and this is because they identify themselves as being different from their peers. They reason that to fit in, they must stop being themselves and act according to a way which they think might be more socially acceptable. However, the YVYC tool hinted that although Helen used to feel this way, she now feels more accepted and included at school.

### *School conflict*

The theme of school conflict is illustrated through Leia's mixed responses towards how she feels the school are supporting Nina and Helen. At one level, she believes the school support is "really good. I am happy...the attitude they have, not just to SEN children but to all children...and to get more of that is a good thing." She was particularly impressed with the after school English club, "they quite like it, they were always there...I think it was a big help. It would be nice if it carried on." This feeling was shared by the children themselves. And, she reveals that when she spoke with her children about their school support "...they were both positive." The language Leia used suggested that she was generally happy with the school. However, she also portrayed the support as being sub-standard. For instance, Leia explains that she had the opportunity to sit in on one of her children's lessons and while she praised the class teacher as being "a very very good teacher," she felt that the supporting TA was ineffective at meeting her children's needs, "...the support should be different but what she did (the TA) was just exactly the same. So you say the same thing twice, why would you understand for the second time, if you didn't understand the first time? There was no alternative explanation or anything...maybe her role was just giving the books out." Leia felt the TA was just repeating the teacher's instruction and not helping the children to understand or process what they had to do. This



is likely because Leia has stated that she does not believe that there is a language barrier, but that the children have a processing or comprehension difficulty.

Similarly, she was unsure what support the Assistant Educational Psychologist (AEP) provided, “I just really don’t know what he did.” In particular, she disagrees with the school and AEP interpretation that the twins should be separated. Instead, Leia felt that “if they are strong together that’s what you have to use for the cognitive skills...they don’t really have a problem being apart anyway...it’s just they feel more comfortable when they are together and I think you should use that if it helps them learn. I think that is where our opinions differ.” Leia does not believe that her children should be separated, which runs contrary to the belief the school holds.

### *Comparing*

The over-arching theme, comparing, was present across all the themes. Leia consistently discussed Nina’s and Helen’s experiences by comparing them to those of other children around her. As with the practitioner accounts, Nina and Helen were perceived through a joint identity and there is little talk which illustrates their individuality, “they are fluent...they are behind my Hungarian students...they don’t understand that logic (Leia).”

Leia felt the girls were incapable because she was primarily comparing their abilities to that of her high-achieving elder son and niece, “And because I have Tony, as well, the brother...I knew something is not right...their niece was here. She is 8 months older and worlds apart. It’s just another thing why I am so worried about them...just to know that they wouldn’t recognise what other would, it is much much greater danger there.”

When the girls receive homework, such as spelling practice, she feels that the twins should be able to understand it, “I can imagine that these words...with the normal kids, they understand.” These feelings are perpetuated by her son’s successes “...I know where Tony was in Year 10. They are nowhere near.” This leads Leia to question their prospects post school, “I don’t know their potential...I mean with Tony I know his potential...I know exactly but with them it’s so hard to tell...he is so exceptional...he could be prime minister.” “I feel that they are learning, they are getting ahead but much slower than the others, much much slower.”

***Evaluation against proposition 1: The Your Voice, Your Choice tool will help children who have SLCN by providing them with an alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences.***

The analysis of Nina’s and Helen’s experiences with the YVYC supports proposition 1. The tool provided them with an alternative way to explore and describe how they felt across a variety of general and specific school and support experiences.

They were able to reflect on their experiences and provide explanation and discussion in response to their chosen YVYC emotional selection. This was particularly evident during the second administration whereby the children had to consider their previous answers and adjust their thoughts according to their recent experiences. Like the previous cases, the children tended to manipulate their emotional and experience cards before providing a verbal response. Once again, the results suggest that the YVYC tool provided a structural aid to help the children communicate more easily and openly about the experiences that affected them. Helen utilised a wider selection of emotions on her second administration

compared with her first, which suggests that she felt more comfortable to explore her emotions over time and with practice.

The YVYC tool has shown that it can elicit safeguarding concerns. It helped to provide evidence that the girls were being bullied; information that ran contrary to the school's assumptions. The children voiced that the bullying was negatively affecting their experiences of school and well-being, and this likely contributed to a decreased capacity for them to learn. For example, both girls stated that it was their responsibility to protect the other by staying together. Nina appeared to be especially affected, and it likely impacted her self-concept as she describes being fearful about coming to school, joining other groups or saying the wrong thing. In addition, both girls identified that they did not understand the language that some of the teachers and children were using which made them feel misunderstood and confused. This was made highly visible with Nina's comment "They talk intelligent...and I do not get intelligent." The affect that the combination of these environmental factors had on the girls meant that they became increasingly reliant upon each other for social and academic support. However, exceptions were notable. For example, the girls felt more independent and comfortable within their Hospitality lessons, where their teacher (Martin) had expressed high expectations to foster the children's capacity for growth (Dweck, 2006). Both children noted the importance of being 'understood' and of understanding others. Teachers who "understand" them were regarded in high esteem, such as Martin, and this feeling was crucial to their learning and sense of support.

When the girls were interviewed again three months later, both children reported that the bullying had decreased and their emotional responses matched their verbal explanations.

Helen appeared happier generally with school and this was likely attributed to her becoming more secure within her own friendship group which acted as a buffer against the bullying (Kendrick, Jutengren, and Stattin, 2012). However, both girls showed a dramatic increase in their reported tiredness levels which may have been contributing to a decline in their capacity to concentrate in class.

**Evaluation against proposition 2:** *The Your Voice, Your Choice tool kit will help to reveal a more detailed account of children's experiences of school through perceptual comparisons with stakeholders.*

In agreement with proposition 2, constructing and comparing Nina's and Helen's school and support experiences across practitioner, researcher, parent's and Nathan's own view using the YVYC tool kit revealed a more comprehensive understanding of their educational and support experiences than would otherwise have been accessible. A summary of their analysed views have been presented below (Table 12.1).

**Table 7.1: Summary of practitioner, researcher, parent and YVYC tool perspectives.**

<i>Practitioner Perspective</i>	<i>Researcher Perspective</i>	<i>Nina's Perspective (YVYC)</i>	<i>Helen's Perspective (YVYC)</i>	<i>Parent's Perspective</i>
<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak literacy skills (especially reading)</li> <li>• Limited independent work skills</li> <li>• Cognitive difficulties</li> <li>• Language difficulties</li> <li>• Needs are not significantly more than others.</li> <li>• Low expectations from some teachers</li> </ul>	<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academically reliant on each other</li> <li>• Classroom management critical to their understanding</li> <li>• Motivation dependent</li> <li>• Language difficulties</li> </ul>	<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys specific lessons and teachers who are caring</li> <li>• Low perception about her ability and intelligence</li> <li>• Feels anxious working alone.</li> <li>• Feels confident working with Helen.</li> <li>• Feels confused by language used by others.</li> <li>• Tiredness affecting school wide experiences.</li> </ul>	<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys specific lessons and teachers who are understanding</li> <li>• Improved over time</li> <li>• Tiredness affecting school wide experiences.</li> </ul>	<b>Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incapable when compared to other children, especially her own son.</li> <li>• Cognitive difficulties</li> <li>• Developmental difficulties</li> <li>• Low expectations</li> </ul>

<b>Social and Emotional communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliant on each other</li> <li>• Lack of self-confidence</li> <li>• Developmentally immature</li> </ul>	<b>Social and Emotional communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially reliant on each other.</li> <li>• Appeared happy and confident</li> </ul>	<b>Social and Emotional communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying impacted her self-concept.</li> <li>• Feels she must protect her sister.</li> <li>• Social communication difficulties.</li> </ul>	<b>Social and Emotional communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying impact.</li> <li>• Feels she must protect her sister.</li> <li>• Social integration increased positive feelings toward school.</li> </ul>	<b>Social and Emotional communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feels the children are excluded from others</li> <li>• Does not believe the children should be separated</li> <li>• Feels the children have a low opinion of themselves.</li> </ul>
<b>Support Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture group</li> <li>• Paired reading</li> <li>• Parental pressure</li> <li>• TA support</li> </ul>	<b>Support Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TA helicopter support</li> </ul>	<b>Support Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speaking more clearly helps understanding</li> <li>• Repeating information helps</li> <li>• Visual information helps</li> </ul>	<b>Support Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurture group made her happy</li> <li>• Importance of being understood.</li> <li>• AEP intervention had been positive</li> <li>• Visual information helps</li> </ul>	<b>Support Strategies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are vulnerable and in need of protection</li> <li>• Not able to work independently</li> <li>• Nurture group was effective but concerned it won't carry on.</li> </ul>

This joint case study reveals the perspectives of the school and support experiences of Nina and Helen. There are several areas in which these perceptions are shared equally, as well as a number of significant differences. Practitioner and parent perspectives tended to construct the children's experiences by attributing their difficulties to cognitive and developmental difficulties that came from within the child. This view pathologizes the children and represents a medical model of disability. As such, it repeats a narrative that has become familiar in many of the cases discussed in this thesis. Generally, practitioner and parent attitudes towards the children's abilities were low, particularly from their mother who negatively compared them to their more able brother. And, there is suggestion that Nina accepts this narrative and believes that she is of low ability and unintelligent which continued to negatively impact her self-concept. However, neither Nina nor Helen used pathological discourse to describe their experiences. Instead, through the YVYC elicitation, they tell a story of anxiety as a result of bullying and confusion over language comprehension. This prompted them to become reliant on each other both socially and academically, which the practitioners observed as a concern. While it clearly cannot be

acceptable for Nina and Helen to copy each other's work, splitting the children up without providing an alternative will likely foster the anxiety and confusion that they already feel.

## **8 Chapter Eight: Cross Case Analysis**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provided an account of the seven case studies used to explore the YVYC tool kit. This chapter presents a cross case analysis which draws on the principles laid out by Yin (2014). Individual case studies are positioned and explored for their links and patterns between all the cases. The process involves creating word tables that captures the central findings from all seven case studies against the two essential components of the quality assessment framework (QAF); the outreach requirements and the children's voice concept. Particular focus was paid to data which helped to answer the project's research questions.

- 1. How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with SLCN at school?*
- 2. Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adult's perception of those experiences?*

### Cross Case Analysis One: The YVYC tool is evaluated against the QAF Outreach requirements

Name (Age Gender) (AR Cycle)	Perceived strengths and needs <i>(School, <b>researcher</b>, and <b>parent</b> interpretation of child's difficulties and strengths).</i>	Adaptable to age and communicative needs <i>(Removes barriers of age and needs)</i>	Easy and well-timed to administer <i>(Speed/difficulty of administration and organisation)</i>	Capable of eliciting views across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains. <i>(Provides information on child's school experiences)</i>	Engagement with the tool <i>(Child maintains interest and enjoys the process)</i>	Evaluates interventions <i>(Provides information on child's school intervention experiences)</i>	Change in attitudes towards school over time <i>(Follow up administration reveals affective differences)</i>	Proposition one accepted <i>(YVYC helps children who have SLCN by providing alternative way of exploring how they feel about their school and support experiences)</i>
<i>Billy (14, M) (AR 1)</i>	<p>Diagnosed with verbal dyspraxia. <b>Presented with associated stutter.</b></p> <p>Concerns over speaking, listening, attention, social interaction, literacy and numeracy skills.</p> <p>Increasing aggression hypothesised due to inability to communicate his needs.</p> <p><b>Resilient</b></p> <p><b>Appeared more comfortable conversing with peers.</b></p> <p><b>Gets very aggressive and angry at home and will hit out at family</b></p>	<p>Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering appropriately.</p> <p>Stuttering decreased during administration.</p> <p>Billy's needs did not prevent him from accessing the tool.</p>	<p>2 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs, illustrations.</p> <p>45 minutes to administer on 1 to 1 basis.</p>	<p>Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple to conversations.</p> <p>Results showed he generally enjoyed school and highlighted individual areas of strength and weakness.</p> <p>Abstract questions were difficult to answer e.g. Do you feel you are able to listen well when you are there?</p>	<p>Appeared fully committed to the process.</p> <p>Fully engaged throughout the administration.</p> <p>Reported that he enjoyed the tool activity and offered ways of improving it for future children.</p> <p>Rapport building through discussing areas of interest helped Billy relax e.g. football, computer games.</p>	<p>Reported feeling sad and nervous about being moved to a separate school for SLT but was happy once he was there.</p> <p>Shows preference for learning with groups of peers rather than with TA.</p> <p>Showed he was generally happy with his interventions</p>	N/A. Tool only applied once.	<p><b>Yes.</b></p> <p>Encouraged reflection on his experiences.</p> <p>Showed he was happy generally but anxious in certain circumstances e.g. speaking in public.</p> <p>Physical manipulation of the photographs with researcher acted as a bridge to access higher communication level.</p>
<i>Aaron (4, M) (AR 1)</i>	<p>Diagnosed with Down's syndrome.</p> <p>Severe learning difficulties within social, language, motor and developmental facets.</p> <p>Able to understand range of two but not three word instruction.</p>	<p>YVYC tool was adapted and individualised to its most simple form, however it was not able to overcome Aaron's barriers despite support</p>	<p>2 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs, illustrations.</p> <p>5 minutes to administer before the</p>	<p>Aaron was unable to make his views known either to the researcher or to his support assistant using the YVYC tool.</p>	<p>Appeared fully committed – he enjoyed manipulating the cards and the Velcro on the mat despite not being able to appropriately voice his feelings.</p>	N/A. YVYC failed attempt	N/A. Tool only applied once.	<b>No.</b>



	Supported by practitioners successfully through sign language	assistant also being present.	interview was stopped.					
Tina (5, F) (AR 2)	<p>Diagnosed with foetal alcohol syndrome resulting in auditory/visual difficulties.</p> <p>Moderate learning difficulties focussed around comprehension language, attention and listening.</p> <p>Supported by practitioners successfully through sign language</p> <p>Suspected verbal dyspraxia.</p> <p>Learns through sign language, visual symbols and TEACCH.</p> <p>Persistently engaged and on task.</p>	<p>YVYC tool was adapted and individualised to its most simple form, however it was not able to overcome Tina's barriers despite support assistant also being present.</p> <p>Trialling a physical object (policeman's helmet) still did not help to elicit Tina's views.</p>	<p>1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs, illustrations.</p> <p>3 minutes to administer before the interview was stopped.</p>	Tina was unable to make her views known either to the researcher or to her support assistant using the YVYC tool.	Appeared fully committed – she enjoyed manipulating the cards, the physical object (policewoman hat) and the Velcro on the mat.	N/A. YVYC failed attempt	N/A. Tool only applied once.	No.
Lionel (8, M) (AR 2)	<p>Statemented and diagnosed with ASD and ADHD.</p> <p>Emotional self-regulation difficulties. Social stress.</p> <p>Refusal to engage with learning material in some circumstances.</p> <p>Reported by class teacher to not struggle to access the curriculum and to have a good emotional understanding. Appears independent and confident.</p> <p>Horried at the thought of change because of his ASC/ADHD</p>	<p>Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering appropriately using the tool kit.</p> <p>Stayed calm throughout the interview – no evidence of refusal.</p> <p>ASD/ADHD traits did not hinder the interview.</p> <p>Lionel's needs did not prevent him from accessing the tool.</p>	<p>1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs, illustrations.</p> <p>Administration: 26 minutes to answer 23 questions on 1 to 1 basis.</p>	<p>Provided emotional responses which led on to some conversation.</p> <p>Reluctance to discuss some of his difficulties in detail e.g. his writing problems.</p> <p>Results showed he was generally confident about his school subjects and showed areas of strength and weakness.</p>	Appeared content and engaged throughout the interview but reported to not like the YVYC tool activity, stating it was too long.	Reported a number of supportive strategies that he was using including: breathing strategies, chewy tube and his class teacher staying calm.	N/A. Tool only applied once.	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Encouraged reflection on his experiences.</p> <p>Showed he was happy generally but social situations sometimes caused him stress.</p> <p>Physical manipulation of the photographs with researcher acted as a bridge to access higher communication level.</p>
Nathan (9, M)	Recently classified as a Child in Need due to neglect which is having a negative effect on learning and well-being.	Capable of listening to questions about his experiences and answering	1.5 hours preparation time needed to organise experiences	Provided emotional responses which led on to minimum conversation.	Completed the tool but often appeared impatient with the activity.	YVYC tool showed some support confusion over what support Nathan felt he was receiving e.g. that	N/A. Tool only applied once.	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Some elements of reflection but lack of conversation</p>

(AR 2)	<p>Undergoing assessment of autism.</p> <p>Refusal to engage with learning.</p> <p>No reported friendships.</p> <p>Difficulty trusting others</p> <p>Motivation crucial to engagement</p> <p>Financial difficulties</p>	<p>appropriately using the tool kit.</p> <p>He did not refuse to engage with the tool kit although he did show impatience.</p>	<p>into photographs, illustrations.</p> <p>Administration took 25 minutes to answer 30 questions.</p>	<p>Results showed he was generally happy at school with specific preference of music and art.</p> <p>Area of biggest negativity was around social and emotional communication e.g. working by himself, with others all evoked anger and worry.</p>		<p>he does not read to his TA, only himself.</p>		<p>made it unclear how effective this reflection was.</p> <p>YVYC tool not able to explore reasons behind negative issues without conversational element. Incomplete picture.</p>
<p>Nina</p> <p>(13, F)</p> <p>(AR 3)</p>	<p>Diagnosed with autism Hungary (but refuted in UK)</p> <p>Numeracy and Verbal difficulties</p> <p>Impulsive, no awareness of danger</p> <p>Self-confidence and independence concerns</p> <p>Cognitive/developmental delay</p> <p>Low expectations</p> <p>Appeared confident to communicate</p> <p>Incapable/vulnerable</p>	<p>Capable of listening to questions about her experiences and answering appropriately using the tool kit.</p> <p>Verbal difficulties did not impact ability to interact with the YVYC tool</p> <p>Appeared confident in her answers</p>	<p>1.5 hours joint (Nina and Helen) preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations.</p> <p>First administration took 28 minutes to answer 23 questions.</p> <p>The second administration took 23 minutes to answer 17 questions.</p>	<p>Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple conversations</p> <p>Able to select and express multiple emotions showing that she understood she could feel negative and positive emotions at the same time.</p> <p>Highlighted her concerns e.g. anxiety about working alone.</p> <p>Safeguarding information discovered (bullying)</p>	<p>Appeared fully committed to the tool.</p> <p>Fully engaged throughout the administration.</p> <p>Reported that she enjoyed the tool activity.</p>	<p>Reported positive feelings towards teachers who she feels understand her.</p> <p>Shows positive emotions towards some school based interventions e.g. shorter instructions, extra English lessons, paired reading, having a TA.</p> <p>Showed she was generally happy with her interventions</p>	<p>Feelings mostly consistent over 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p> <p>Reported feeling considerably more tired between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p> <p>Bullying reportedly decreased on 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p> <p>Began to identify as the “joker” within her peers at the 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Nina’s ability to converse after considering her emotional reflections helped the researcher to understand why she felt the way that she did.</p>
<p>Helen</p> <p>(13, F)</p> <p>(AR 3)</p>	<p>Diagnosed with autism Hungary (but refuted in UK)</p> <p>Numeracy and Verbal difficulties</p> <p>Impulsive, no awareness of danger</p> <p>Self-confidence and independence concerns</p>	<p>Capable of listening to questions about her experiences and answering appropriately using the tool kit.</p> <p>Verbal difficulties did not impact ability to</p>	<p>1.5 hours joint (Nina and Helen) preparation time needed to organise experiences into photographs and illustrations.</p>	<p>Provided emotional responses which led on to multiple conversations</p> <p>Able to select and express multiple emotions showing that she understood she could feel negative and positive emotions</p>	<p>Appeared fully committed to the tool.</p> <p>Fully engaged throughout the administration.</p> <p>Reported that she enjoyed the tool activity.</p>	<p>Provided an account of what type of support helped her to learn more effectively.</p> <p>Positive feelings towards teachers who she feels understand her.</p>	<p>Reported feeling considerably more tired between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p> <p>Bullying reportedly decreased on 2<sup>nd</sup> administration.</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>Helen’s ability to converse after considering her emotional reflections helped the researcher to understand why</p>

	Cognitive/developmental delay Low expectations Appeared confident to communicate Incapable/vulnerable	interact with the YVYC tool  Appeared confident in her answers	First administration took 20 minutes to answer 21 questions.  The second administration took 28 minutes to answer 20 questions.	at the same time.  Highlighted her need to stay with her sister based on protection  Safeguarding information discovered (bullying)  Particular expressive over areas meaningful to her (e.g. Art)		Shows positive emotions towards some school based interventions e.g. shorter instructions, extra English lessons, paired reading, having a TA.  Showed she was generally happy with her interventions	Feelings about her school experiences have improved over the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> administration.	she felt the way that she did.
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### Cross Case Analysis Two: The YVYC tool is evaluated against QAF children's voice concepts

Name (Age Gender) (AR Cycle)	Respect's children's rights <i>(Offers a way for children to express their views and the opportunity to have their views listened to)</i>	Promotes social inclusion <i>(Elicits information that can help foster inclusion rather than integration)</i>	Person centred approach <i>(Able to express a holistic picture of themselves)</i>	Proposition Two accepted
Billy (14, M) (AR 1)	Information was provided at a level understood and reciprocated.  Used two emotional responses to express himself (Happy, Sad) and the scale effectively. Appeared empowered to input his own emotions into the tool.  Able to discuss how he felt and provide conversation in addition to emotional responses.	Demonstrated he was happy at school but did not like being moved out of his school for SLT intervention.  Explained he felt anxious about asking for help in front of others in the classroom.	Background information helped to understand Billy's needs prior to administration.  Range of experiences discussed. Billy had opportunity to talk about issues not covered by the researcher's questionnaires e.g. playing on his Xbox, which was important to him.	<b>Yes.</b>  Highlighted agreement between the school, researcher and Billy over a number of areas (e.g. enjoys practical subjects, anxious in social situations).  Billy shows he has difficulty learning and concentrating when there is lots of external stimuli. This can lead to him getting frustrated.
Aaron	Information was <b>not</b> provided at a level understood.	Failed to elicit voice: continued the status quo	Background information helped to understand Aaron's needs but not to an extent that would help	<b>Partially.</b>

(4, M) (AR 1)	YVYC tool kit revealed that practitioners perceive Aaron as being incapable of voicing his feelings.		overcome them e.g. researcher was unable to utilise Makaton to facilitate communication.	Outsider perspective helped to confirm inclusive practices that the nursery engages in e.g. shared knowledge of Aaron's needs.  Show shared knowledge of his interests, e.g. preference for wooden blocks, and books. However, lack of Aaron's input limits conclusions to adult perspective.
Tina (5, F) (AR 2)	Information was <b>not</b> provided at a level understood.  VYC tool kit revealed that practitioners perceive Tina as being incapable of voicing her feelings.	Failed to elicit voice: continued the status quo.	Background information helped to understand Tina's needs but not to an extent that would help overcome them with the YVYC tool.	<b>Partially.</b>  Some agreement between researcher and practitioner's perceptions over communication needs, such as use of PECS, and interests e.g. she enjoys dressing as a policewoman. However, lack of Tina's input limits conclusions to adult perspective.
Lionel (8, M) (AR 2)	Information was provided at a level understood and reciprocated.  Able to use six emotional responses and the scale to express himself.	Demonstrated he was happy at school generally but social stressors can cause anger and physical confrontation.  He expressed that his difficulties do not affect his ability to access the curriculum except in certain areas (e.g. writing).	Background information helped to understand Lionel's needs prior to administration.  Range of experiences discussed. Lionel had opportunity to talk about holistic experiences that were of interest to him e.g. military history.	<b>Yes.</b>  Much agreement between Lionel's responses and researcher/practitioner perceptions. E.g. social stress, preference of working alone, difficulties with writing.
Nathan (9, M) (AR 2)	Information was provided at a level understood and reciprocated. However, reciprocation was minimal (i.e. mostly using the emotional cards provided).  Able to use six emotional responses and the scale to express himself.	Concerns about Nathan refusing to participate did not materialise – the YVYC tool was able to include him.  He showed some interventions the school had put in place were incongruent to his self-beliefs e.g. having to go to infants to do literacy – they were excluding him from the rest of his year group.	Background information helped to understand Nathan's needs prior to administration.  He demonstrated a preference to converse on areas that had meaning to him e.g. Art and Music.	<b>Yes.</b>  Much agreement between practitioner, researcher and Nathan e.g. enjoys Art and Music, finds social situations difficult, working 1:1 with teacher is helpful.  However, also shows he is confused and worried over school support which might explain why practitioners feel support is ineffective.
Nina (13, F) (AR 3)	Information was provided at a level understood and reciprocated. Nina was able to converse and use the tool to help her talk about various issues.  Able to use 16 emotional responses and the scale to express herself (e.g. Happy, Confident, Calm, Sad, Worried, Angry, Afraid, Disgusted, Excited, Proud, Surprised, Joking, Ashamed, Tired, Frustrated, Confused). She was also able to express feeling positive and negative emotions about a single experience.	Nina was concerned about being separated from Helen, which the school were trying to promote. She said that she relied on her socially and academically.  Contrary to practitioner perception, Nina explained she felt confused across subjects because teachers did not understand her. Where teachers did understand her she felt more supported (e.g. adjusted their language and material to her needs).	Background information helped to understand Nina's needs prior to administration.  Nina was able to demonstrate her interests across multiple areas e.g. with cooking. She also explained other areas that she disliked but was forced to do by her mum (e.g. Karate).	<b>Yes.</b>  Parental account helped understand Nina's and Helen's feelings about their experiences in context more comprehensively.  There was some shared understanding of their experiences e.g. enjoying practical versus theory based learning where there is less academic language used. However, school were unaware of bullying issues which YVYC tool highlighted.

<i>Helen</i> <i>(13, F)</i> <i>(AR 3)</i>	As above.	As above.  Helen felt she had to protect Nina from school bullies which explained why she felt she had to be with her often.	As above.	
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## **8.2 Concordance and Discordance**

A word table was created showing perceptual comparisons that the YVYC tool kit discovered between practitioners, parents, the researcher, and children across all cases (Table 8.1; highlighted yellow = concordance; highlighted red = discordance). A cross case analysis of the word tables were used to search for themes relating to concordance and discordance across the case studies). This related to the ways in which adults and children expressed a harmonised or disharmonised account of children's school and support experiences. The theme draws from several related concepts identified within the literature review, such as perceptions of children with disabilities, inclusion versus integration, and participation and empowerment but this project also sought to expand upon current understanding.

Table 8.1: Cross Case analysis table showing concordance and discordance explored across all cases studies (*concordance = yellow/ discordance = red*)

Name (Age Gender) (AR Cycle)	Practitioner perspectives	Researcher perspectives	Parent perspectives	Child perspectives (YVYC tool)
Billy (14, M) (AR 1)	Communication difficulties - restricted learning Anxious, low self-worth - Preferred adult interactions Frustrated - Due to lack of opportunity to talk/ Or for unknown home reasons Enjoyed practical subjects Support - TA and SLT supporting his needs	Communication difficulties - difficulty expressing himself with teachers, preferred peer interactions Resilient - used peer support to overcome challenges Focussed - despite disruptions from others Anxiety, low confidence - Struggles to interact with adults Enjoys Art	N/A	Enjoyed school - particularly practical subjects (happy). Anxiety - About talking in public, meeting new people, going to SLT intervention at SEN school Frustration - concentration difficulties due to external stimuli Support - TA, SLT helpful but preference for working with his friends Resilient - Despite challenges
Aaron (4, M) (AR 1)	Communication/Learning difficulties - restricted learning, attention and listening improving but restricting. Interests - preference of play with football, cars, books and wooden blocks Sociable - Interacts friendly with others Support - improving behaviour/attention - TA, visual symbols, workstation.	Communication difficulties - restricted learning, restricted verbal interactions with researcher Practitioner knowledge - shared awareness of Aaron's interests (wooden blocks, books, cars) and needs is supportive but see him as incapable in some areas. Independence - enjoys choosing his own activities but assistance was available Responsibility - Enjoys helping others Struggled with attention over longer periods Support - TA helpful, workstation, Makaton, PECs, encouraged to integrate Socially able to interact, appears happy.	N/A	N/A
Tina (5, F) (AR 2)	Communication/learning difficulties - within attention, comprehension, language, numeracy and literacy Sociable - friendly Practitioner knowledge - Known variety of interests (e.g. dressing up, cooking, books) Learns best through Makaton, visual symbols and TEACCH approach Support targeted- aware of her communication and language needs (SLT points out interventions are addressing her difficulty verbalising the end of words)	Communication difficulties - restricted verbal interactions with researcher, staff able to mostly access through Makaton. Engaged- no difficulty holding her attention for 25 minute period while 1:1 Practitioner knowledge- a shared aware of Tina's interests and needs (dressing up). Support helpful - Visual symbols, PECs helped to foster communication between adults and herself but see her as incapable in some areas. Appeared happy - no behaviour problems observed but did not observably interact with others		
Lionel (8, M) (AR 2)	Behavioural/emotional difficulties - anger problems in times of social stress Class teacher argues he does not have ASD/ADHD despite diagnosis (no problems accessing curriculum).	No observable learning difficulties that are stopping him access the curriculum Dependent on class management Anger triggers - social situations	Feels anxious about change due to ASD/ADHD.	Enjoys school - positive emotions across subjects (calm/happy/confident) Confident- comes across as confident in his own abilities.

	<p>Practitioner knowledge -improvement due to recognition/understanding of Lionel's needs (e.g. Breathing strategies) and whole class needs</p> <p>Interests - military history, good ideas</p> <p>Struggles with writing</p> <p>Uncertainty causes distress</p> <p>Support – Several strategies support him (breathing tubes, space, breathing strategies)</p>	<p>Self-regulation – Utilises taught or self-learned strategies to complete his work. E.g. sitting by himself, working independently.</p> <p>Struggled with his writing</p>		<p>Reflective- recognises areas he has difficulties (writing)</p> <p>Support strategies- Aware of which strategies help him stay calm. (e.g. teacher staying calm, chewable, breathing strategies)</p> <p>Social stress – feels anger/anxious when he is interrupted by others.</p> <p>Independent – prefers working alone than with others.</p>
<p>Nathan (9, M) (AR 2)</p>	<p>Behavioural/Emotional difficulties - refusal to engage with learning. Peers think of him as a “naughty boy.” Possible ASD.</p> <p>Relationships – difficulty, trusting and relating to others. Taken time to build trust with class teacher</p> <p>Neglect – Child in Need, learning needs exasperated by home environment</p> <p>Interests – Art and Music, artistic, creative, likes practical things.</p> <p>Support is effective – Phonics at infants, 1:1 support TA reading/spelling/times tables. Stress ball.</p>	<p>Classroom management – Learning was dependent on classroom management.</p> <p>Motivation – He observably enjoyed music but not his French lesson.</p> <p>Relationships –relatedness (SDT) with teachers important esp for a Child in Need.</p> <p>Support – none observed.</p>	<p>Financial concerns</p> <p>Regularly disgruntled at the school</p>	<p>Mixture of emotions across experiences - Meaningful subjects</p> <p>Angry – in science (“I don’t like it”) and geography</p> <p>Reflective – showed that he was aware of some of his difficulties (writing).</p> <p>Interests – Spiderman, Art, Music</p> <p>Social and emotional communication – Working by self, with others, answering questions evoked anger and worry</p> <p>Support – Happy to work with his teacher. But confused and worried over school support generally.</p>
<p>Nina (13, F) (AR 3)</p>	<p>Cognitive, language difficulties – language comprehension, attention, literacy skills (especially reading)</p> <p>Developmental delay – limited independent works skills, immature, impulsive, lack of awareness of danger</p> <p>Reliance - on each other, on support</p> <p>Low expectations from some teachers</p> <p>Lack of self-confidence</p> <p>Parental pressure - Appeared happy and needs are not significantly more than other children but provided because of parental pressure</p> <p>Support</p>	<p>Teacher expectations – no shared consensus or understanding of needs.</p> <p>Classroom management – Independence increase/reliance decreases when worked at level understood and work is practical</p> <p>Reliance – Academically and socially reliant on each other</p> <p>Resilient – continue to try despite disruption/lack of understanding</p> <p>Motivation dependent – e.g. observably enjoyed cooking</p> <p>Language comprehension – possibly within academic language areas</p> <p>Appeared happy and confident</p> <p>Support – TA helicopter support appeared helpful</p>	<p>Comparably Incapable, cognitive difficulties, low expectations – compared to her son/other students, cognition difficulties, of self-care, lack of general and specific understanding, of having responsibility, against real world threats.</p> <p>Developmental delay – Vulnerable, prevents independence, needs constant support, career prospects are limited.</p> <p>Excluded – lack of friends</p> <p>School conflict – Does not think language is a barrier to Nina/Helen learning. She feels unsure how to help her children, feels school could do more</p> <p>Self-Concept – children have a low opinion of themselves</p> <p>Support – Likes the attitude the teachers have to all SEN children. Happy with the after school English club, helpful. TA ineffective at meeting children's needs. Unsure what AEP did. Does not think Helen/Nina should be separated.</p>	<p>Enjoys specific lessons (Food technology) and specific teachers who are “caring” and “understand her”</p> <p>Self-concept – Low perception of her abilities and intelligence. Anxious about working alone</p> <p>Bullying affecting her well-being. Adopted a role as the joker of the group. Excluded /isolated by others</p> <p>Reliance – confident when working with Helen.</p> <p>Asserts she is the protector of her sister.</p> <p>Confused – in reading, science, English and spelling due to comprehension/language difficulties.</p> <p>Tired – negatively affected all experiences</p> <p>Support</p>
<p>Helen (13, F) (AR 3)</p>				<p>Enjoys specific lessons (Art) and teachers who are understanding to her needs.</p> <p>Self-concept – Bullying impacted well-being but improved between first and second YVYC administration, maturity.</p> <p>Tiredness – affected school wide experiences</p>

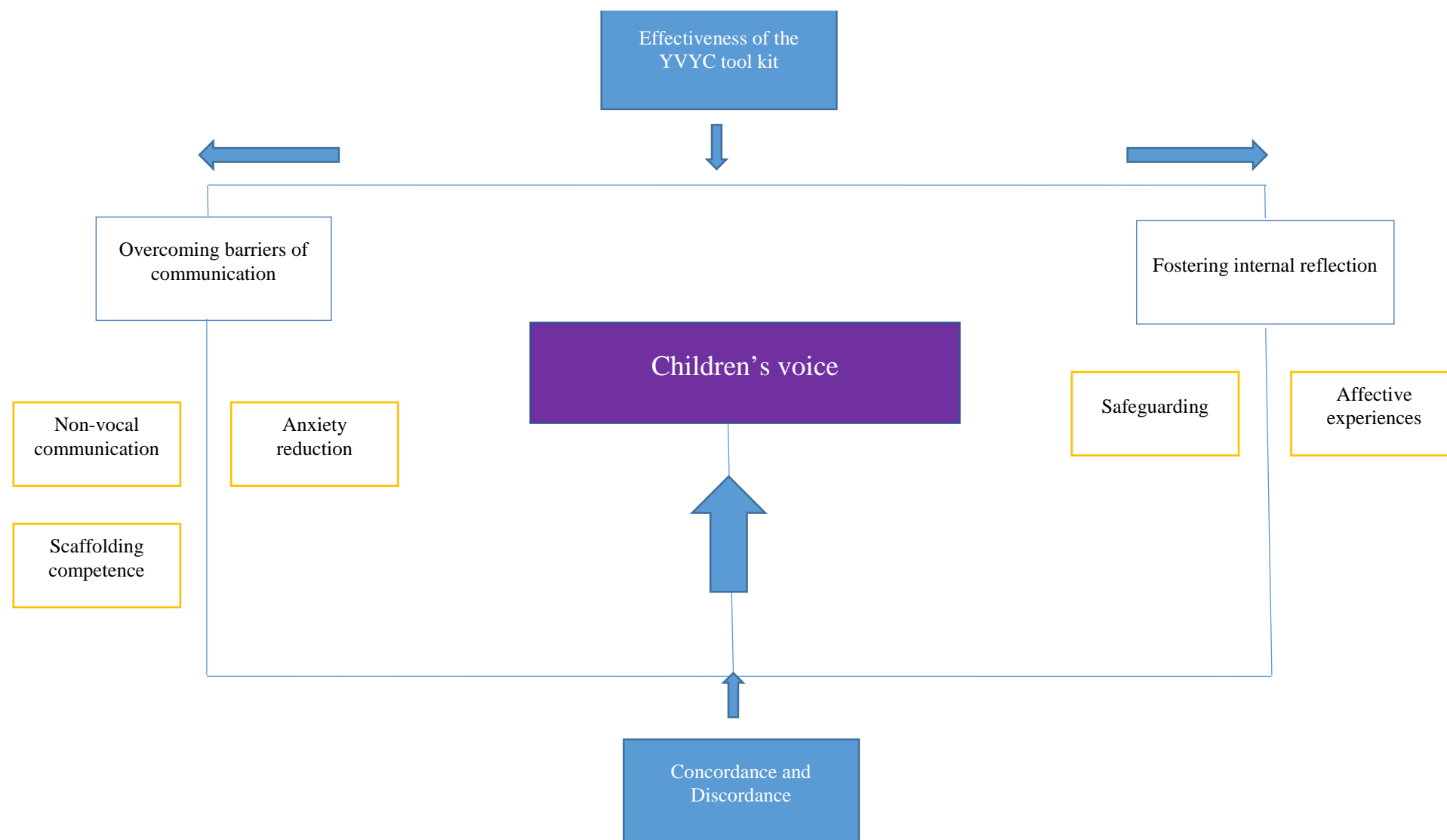


				Protector – feels she must protect her sister from bullying Understanding – Does not work well alone because feels she doesn't understand but happy to work in a group. Support – Nurture group made her happy, AEP intervention positive, visual information helpful. Stresses importance of being understood
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### 8.3 Summary of Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis has provided a synthesis of the results. It has brought together all 7 cases enabling patterns to be highlighted across the whole data set. From these, global themes were identified (see Figure 8.1). These were explored and evaluated in detail in the next chapter.

*Figure 8.1: Thematic map showing how the effectiveness of the YVYC toolkit and concordance of recipients interact to promote children's voice*





## 9 Chapter Nine: Discussion

### 9.1 Introduction

The YVYC tool kit was created to elicit the voice of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) to enable them to express their affective views of their school learning and support experiences. Seven children's experiences with the tool were analysed and written up into case studies in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. These case studies were clustered and evaluated within three action research cycles, which enabled consecutive design iterations of the YVYC toolkit. Upon completion of the case studies, a cross-case analysis in Chapter 8 enabled the search for a more exhaustive analysis and evaluation across all cases. This chapter will discuss the findings, identify and address patterns in relation to the wider literature and ultimately answer the project's research questions.

1. *How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with SLCN at school?*
2. *Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adult's perception of those experiences?*

A critical evaluation of the study and is then presented. Implications, limitations and reflections follow.

## 9.2 Central findings of the project

A cross-case analysis were carried out in the previous chapter (Yin, 2014). This produced the central findings of the project, which were identified and discussed within two overarching theoretical concepts that the YVYC tool kit was shown to operate within (Figure 8.1); ‘Overcoming barriers of communication’ and ‘Fostering internal reflection’. It is important to re-iterate that the YVYC tool kit was designed as a comprehensive holistic method of elicitation. Therefore, while the tool itself is the primary method of generating ‘voice’ from the children, the entire YVYC tool kit (gathering background knowledge about the child, individualising experiences to reflect background knowledge, and establishing researcher, practitioner and parental perceptual comparisons) were instrumental when determining to what extent the research questions have been answered.

In regard to answering the first research question: *How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with speech, language and communication needs at school?* The YVYC tool kit was found to be effective at:

- Overcoming some of the **barriers of communication**, which can prevent children with SLCN and other needs from voicing their school and support experiences. A number of sub-themes were identified within this, including **non-vocal communication, anxiety reduction, and scaffolding competence**.
- **Fostering internal reflection** is defined by the effectiveness of the tool to enable children to reflect upon and voice issues of importance to them, and is made up of the sub-themes of **safeguarding and affective experiences**.

The second research question was: *Is there concordance between the children’s elicited experiences and the adult’s perception of those experiences?* The YVYC tool kit helped to reveal a more comprehensive understanding of the child’s contextual

environment through bringing together perceptual variations. These were identified through an examination of **concordant and discordant** interpretations of contextual and relational issues, experiences and ideologies.

### **9.3 Central Theme: Overcoming barriers of communication**

The YVYC tool kit was designed to create a method that was capable of eliciting the views of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). These were identified within Chapter One as relating to:

- Problems with producing speech sounds accurately
- Stammering
- Voice problems, such as hoarseness and loss of voice
- Problems understanding language
- Problems using language
- Problems interacting with others

The cross-case analysis revealed that the YVYC tool was observed to be effective at overcoming or reducing some of the barriers of communication for some children within these areas, but it was not successful in this respect for all children. Specifically, themes relating to overcoming barriers of communication were identified as non-vocal communication, anxiety reduction and scaffolding competence.

#### *9.3.1 Non-vocal communication*

Vocal communication was not found to be a pre-requisite for use of the YVYC tool kit. In other words, those who participated did not have to express themselves vocally to express their views. Instead, the cross-case analysis revealed that children could convey meaning

about their school and support experiences by utilising the provided emotions and scale to express how affected they were by their experiences. All of the children sometimes chose to only express themselves using the emotional cards:

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about talking to friends?*

**Billy:** *\*Selects very happy.\**

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about school trips?*

**Lionel:** *\*Selects very happy, very calm.\**

**Interviewer:** *How do these sports make you feel?*

**Helen:** *\*Selects calm.\**

The capacity of the YVYC tool to elicit non-vocal voice meant participation was still possible for those who appeared reluctant or anxious to converse, or simply when children did not know why they felt an emotion, yet still recognised that they felt it.

Nathan provided an example of a child who was reluctant or unable to provide verbal information despite the researcher's efforts.

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about science?*

**Nathan:** *\*Selects extremely angry\**

**Interviewer:** *...How come you feel extremely angry about science?*

**Nathan:** *Because I don't like it.*

**Interviewer:** *Ok. Fair enough. What is it about it you don't like?*

**Nathan:** *Because ...*

**Interviewer:** *Is there a teacher you don't like or? \*Pause\* Is it just don't like science generally?*

**Nathan:** *I just don't like it.*

The researcher was warned that Nathan would likely refuse to talk because he had “refused to work or talk...for months (class teacher)” and was said to often refuse to talk to people he did

not know particularly well. However, Nathan was able to engage with the activity while offering limited vocal communication throughout his interview. This meant that his views were elicited and a clearer picture of how he felt about his school and support experiences emerged. For instance, he showed that he disliked working in groups, that he got worried working with his TA, and that listening to music calmed him down. He felt very happy around animals, and Art and Music were his preferred subjects. In contrast, social situations like working in groups made him feel angry. Triangulation through the supporting features of the YVYC tool kit, such as the researcher observations and proxy perceptions, agreed with his feelings across much of the discussed areas, supporting the validity of his sentiments without requiring the necessity of further detail. As a result, the case study was able to explore how the school might use the information to differentiate his work more successfully (e.g. by focusing on his relational needs and motivational interests). However, without more information, the limits of the YVYC tool became apparent. For instance, it was unclear why he felt so angry, disliked social situations, and felt unable to talk to others. The answers to these questions were hypothesised and discussed within the case study using knowledge that was gained from the additional perspectives drawn out by YVYC tool kit. In this regard, the YVYC tool kit, as a complete method, was able to fill in some of the gaps around these questions. However, without more detail from Nathan, this was largely intuitive deduction and not a true representation of his experience, which represents a threat to the principles of children's voice.

That being said, the fact that the YVYC tool can offer children the opportunity to voice their affective experiences without requiring them to verbalise contributes to its inclusive nature. This is an effective feature of the YVYC tool that should not be overlooked. Some children are not able, are unwilling or are uncomfortable communicating vocally. Yet, the YVYC tool



shows that vocalisation does not necessarily prevent access to their views albeit it does so at a less nuanced level than if the recipient engages in vocal conversation.

There is an important caveat to this conclusion. The two participants who had the greatest difficulty communicating vocally were unable to voice their views at all. This observation is explored in the next section.

### 9.3.2 *Scaffolding competence*

As hypothesised in the design of the tool (see Chapter 4), the YVYC tool provided a structural format that enabled some children to operate at an emotional and cognitive level that was higher than they would otherwise have been able to access if unsupported, consistent with the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978). As a result, it was possible to raise the capability level of the children in order to elicit their voice.

Billy's SENco and parents were concerned about his anger and frustration, yet were unsure as to the reasons for it, "He shows no anger issues at school but at home has many (SENco);" "Mum is unhappy with Billy's behaviour as he is hitting out and angry especially towards his siblings (SENco)." The school had tried talking to Billy but this had not revealed anything (Researchers reflective log). Yet within the structural framework of the YVYC tool kit, Billy was enabled to express himself. Similarly, Nathan's teacher identified him as being likely to refuse to participate, yet he too was enabled as was shown in the previous section. Lionel provided an account of his experiences, and guidance supported his capacity to reflect upon them. Some of Nina's and Helen's practitioners and their parents saw them as being cognitively and emotionally immature, but again they were able to give a very comprehensive

account of their school and support experiences and demonstrate a range of experiences which they too reflected upon, including that they were being bullied which ran contrary to practitioner perceptions.

The concept of scaffolding can help to explain how the YVYC tool encourages children's voice. Vygotsky (1956) believed that teaching and learning are best when it proceeds ahead of development because it "awakens and rouses to life the functions that are in the stage of maturing." These functions can be located within the zone of proximal development and can be created for any domain of skill. This brings into question what skills children were required to exercise in order to utilise the YVYC tool. Although caution must be taken as this line of thought suggests that those who were unable to use the tool were incapable or incompetent, a discourse that is challenged in subsequent sections of this discussion (Borgne and Tisdall, 2017).

From a procedural viewpoint, the researcher (more-capable adult) firstly modelled how to use the tool, by providing examples of how the researcher might feel in similar situations (Bandura, 1977). This was not scripted but conversed, for example; "If I was to think about how I feel right now, I would say that I feel happy because it's a sunny day. I feel *very* happy so I pick up happy and place it on the 'very' position. What might you select if I ask how you are feeling now?"

Participants were required to *attend* to the researcher and the YVYC tool; to *retain* the information they were being told; to *reproduce* what they had observed and apply it to their own circumstance; and finally they were required to have the *motivation* to engage with the researcher. These observations also fit with the assumptions and necessary conditions of

Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory on modelling. However, the YVYC tool also placed additional demands on children; they were required to think about how they feel across specific and general experiences. This is a reflective skill which likely utilises a combination of cognitive and emotional skills and processes, including the recall of memory (Bereford, 2012). The extract below explains how a combination of ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bandura's (1977) social construction theory encouraged children's voice.

**Interviewer:** *So how do you feel about sports? \*Shows photograph of the sports hall.\**

The researcher supports Nina's recall of memory by providing a photograph of the sport's hall, the place where she goes for sports. This provides a visual cue that may support memory retrieval (Grady et al., 1998).

**Nina:** *<look of disgust on face>. Ugg! I hate sports.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay you hate sports. Which emotion would you pick out when you think about sports? So you've got angry, sad, afraid, worried, frustrated, tired \*shows rest of emotions\**

Once the memory has been accessed, the researcher supported her to think more deeply about which emotions relate to her feelings. The provision of emotional cues directs her attention towards her affected experience rather than having to retrieve emotional labels first lessening cognitive load.

**Nina:** *\*Selects Sad\*...Sad.*

**Interviewer:** *There is no right or wrong answer \*pause\*.*

**Nina:** *Sad because I don't want to change all the time.*

**Interviewer:** *Okay, how sad do you feel?*

The researcher validates Nina's initial reaction and gives her time to reflect on the intensity of that feeling.

**Nina:** *\*Places card on little bit sad\**

The recollection of her memory about how and why she feels sad about sports stimulated another associated memory around sports, that of Karate.

**Nina:** *After school Karate is baaad.*

**Interviewer:** *Oh you have to do that, do you?*

**Nina:** *Yea. I don't wanna but mum said "I should." <gestures pointed finger angrily towards camera> Grr Mother. <She looks unhappy>*

This stimulated another memory towards feelings of her mother, whom she felt was forcing her into pursuing an activity that she really did not want to. In practice, the YVYC tool broke down the skills and processes required to think about her experiences into manageable chunks, which led to multiple associated reflections. The researcher's role within the YVYC tool was to guide the participants through the zone of proximal development while encouraging the recipient to master the skills required to utilise it competently (within reflection, attention and articulating emotions). Information and suggestions were also used to help the children express themselves which furthered practice and understanding. This learning can be observed in follow up sessions when the researcher re-administered the

YVYC tool to Nina and Helen. In the first interview, they were reliant on looking at the emotional choice cards, asking questions about the emotions, and placing the cards on the corresponding spot on the mat. However, in the second interview they were more adept at talking about their emotions without needing to see or feel the emotional cue cards. The purpose of the YVYC tool can be seen as simplifying the child's role in the elicitation process, working to help the child learn and mature the skills (in reflection, attention, and articulating emotions) to a point where they can perform the YVYC tool tasks (attending to the questions, selecting appropriate emotions) independently.

Despite this simplification process, both Aaron and Tina were unable to access the tool.

**Interviewer:** *\*Shows photograph of toys\* Do you feel happy or sad when you are playing with the car?*

**Aaron:** *Car*

**Interviewer:** *...Does this policewoman's hat \*shows physical object\*...when you dress up...does it make you sad...or does it make you happy?*

**Tina:** *\*Points at sad\**

Aaron appeared to assume that the researcher wanted him to repeat the name of the object in the photograph. This is quite likely because he was used to carrying out similar tasks within his speech and language intervention, which the researcher observed. He was able to retrieve the memory of the car but he did not appear to understand what was meant by the terms happy and sad. Or he failed to understand the purpose of the task. Research shows that recognition of basic emotions (happiness, sadness, fear, and anger) typically occurs between the ages of 3 – 4 years (Bullock and Russell, 1985). As such, he may simply not have reached the developmental and cognitive milestone required to recognise these emotions given his additional needs.

The same reasoning may be applied to Tina. It is important to note that that real world objects, like the policewoman helmet provided to Tina, have been evidenced to retrieve memory more efficiently than photographs (Snow et al., 2014). This is likely because the human brain has evolved to perceive and interact with real objects not images and represents an additional avenue of future research (Norman, 2002). The fact that this did not help her with the task, suggests that memory retrieval was not the issue, instead both Aaron and Tina failed to connect their emotions with their experiences in a manner that the researcher required. Instead, this represents an example of demand characteristics (Orne, 1959), where both children have responded in a way they thought would please the researcher but were unable to complete the task.

In a comprehensive review of over 3000 articles relating to child participation and competence development, Ljungdahl (2012) found that there is a correlation between children's participation in learning environments and the acquisition or development of skills, capability or competence. This begs the question: Is the failure to elicit voice from Tina and Aaron due to a lack of competence or a lack of experience afforded to them? Further research is needed to determine the answer as it is not yet known whether certain abilities are required in order to participate, or if participation develops certain skills (Ljungdahl, 2012). However, there is a connection between competence and participation, and it is not a one-way causal relationship.

*“Because of the age...and the level of learning disability (TA about Aaron).”*

*“Only a very basic tool would work with <Tina> due to her limited comprehension (Outreach practitioner).”*

The extracts above reveal how practitioners at Aaron's and Tina's nursery and outreach providers perceived their capabilities. It demonstrates the discourse of 'competency bias' (Hinton, 2008), which pathologizes children for a lack of competence rather than adult's lack of competence in enabling children to participate (Borgne and Tisdall, 2017). The problem with this discourse is twofold. Firstly, there is a concern that Aaron and Tina (and children like them) will continue to be excluded from elicitation and participation type activities because the failed YVYC tool activity confirmed existing beliefs. This in turn restricts them practising the required skills. Secondly, Aaron's and Tina's rights are inadvertently made irrelevant because practitioners do not know how to access the children's voices.

### *9.3.3 Anxiety reducing*

This theme explores the ways in which the YVYC tool kit acted to reduce the anxiety that many of the children felt leading up to the elicitation and expressed during it.

Out of the seven participants, five (Lionel, Billy, Nathan, Helen, and Nina) were perceived to have or found to be present with symptoms of anxiety. Lionel's mother e-mailed the researcher prior to the start of the project stating that, at first her son was "horried at the thought" of taking part in the project. This was addressed in subsequent e-mails and he consented to take part in the project, however his underlying anxiety was apparent. He was diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition (ASC), and practitioners, the researcher and Lionel himself identified that he had elements of social anxiety (Autism Speaks, 2012). Similarly, several of Billy's teachers reported that he was anxious in new situations and Billy corroborated this in the YVYC tool interview, showing that he felt anxious across a number of school and support experiences. Nathan was classified as 'a child in need', a classification

with anxiety-based implications (Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015), and was also undergoing an assessment for suspected autism. Practitioners said he often refused to work, which the research suggests may be due to anxiety (Kearney, 2008). Likewise, the YVYC tool showed that Nathan felt worried across a number of school experiences. Finally, both Helen and Nina were identified by practitioners with a “lack of self-confidence,” and revealed anxiety within their YVYC tool interviews.

Given the high prevalence of anxiety and associated behaviours within the data, several issues were considered. The first of these concerned the effectiveness of the YVYC tool kit to facilitate the reduction of anxiety prior to and during the administration process. The second is explored in a later theme of affective experiences, (see p.288) around the capacity of the YVYC tool to identify subjective emotional mental health more generally.

Researchers who carry out research with children often talk about the requirement to alleviate anxiety or set children at ease (Backett and Alexander, 1991; Faux, Walsh, and Deatrick, 1988; Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2013). In the Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford (2005) experiment, which was discussed within the literature review, an adapted version of the Mosaic Approach was used to find out aspects of children’s lives that the children felt positive and negative about. Prior to the experiment, the authors provided individualised social stories to children’s parents to rehearse the upcoming experiment with the children in order to reduce their anxiety. One of the criticisms that the authors noted about this approach was that they were unable to assess which children had (or the degree to which they had) accessed the social stories. However, they also used a craft-type activity involving photographs, which the authors stated was observably more successful. Other researchers



affirm the benefits of using drawings or artwork to achieve the same result. Punch (2002) highlighted the importance of providing children with time and enabling them to change or add to their expression of elicitation, again to make them feel at ease.

The importance of reducing anxiety within participatory elicitation methods with children is assumed and rarely explained but it is worth clarifying in order to establish why it is important, and how effective the YVYC tool kit was at reducing it. Essentially, anxiety is an anticipation of, or a reaction to, a perceived threat (Gabi, 2017). It is a normal physiological reaction to stress. When a person perceives a threat, the body is alerted and is sent into a state of fight, flight or freeze mode; a survival instinct. When this happens, the part of the brain responsible for rational thought is ‘switched off’. Of particular concern is that responses can be learned, meaning if the fight, flight or freeze response is activated in a particular situation one time, it can be triggered in a similar situation in the future, leading to the person feeling anxious even when there is no real danger (Gabi, 2017; Immordino-Yang, 2016). Children with disabilities are more often subject to assessment, planning and review processes than other children and which can be an anxiety producing experience (Dickins and Williams, 2017). Anxiety has been shown to decrease motivation and disrupt children’s ability to recall information; central processes that were observed to be critical for children to access and reflect upon their experiences within the YVYC tool (Linnenbrink, 2007; Linnenbrink, Ryan, and Pintrich, 1999). Therefore, in order for children to have the best chance of providing an accurate representation of how they feel about their experiences, addressing anxiety is vital to achieving reliable results.

The cross-case analysis helped reveal observations about the YVYC tool kit showing that it reduced anxiety through a number of specific design considerations:

Time: Research supports the concept of giving children time, both in terms of getting used to the idea of taking part in research and during actual participation (Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2013; Dickins and Williams, 2017). Several weeks before contact was made between researcher and child, the children were approached by a school contact to identify whether or not they felt comfortable taking part in the project. If they agreed, the researcher subsequently also spoke with the child about the project. The researcher also spent two to three days (more time was spent with the children in AR 2 and 3), typically across several weeks getting to know the child, and working alongside them. This process is considered important to build trust and rapport (Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2013).

Adaptability: Prior to carrying out the YVYC tool interviews with the children, background information about perceived needs, home environment, interests, culture, communication preferences, and strengths were explored in a similar manner to which other researchers have advised (Beresford et al., 2004). Researcher observations within the child's school environment added to this information and provided an additional perspective to understand the child's context which is often omitted from research that aims to elicit children's views.

As a result of this information, the YVYC tool could be adapted across a number of areas. The number of emotions used ranged from 2 in action research one to 16 in action research 3, and the scale of the tool was altered depending on perceived competency of the child (ranging from a simple choice of Happy/Sad, to Not at all, A little, Quite a bit, Very, and Extremely to achieve a more nuanced expression of emotional intensity). Adapting the scale and emotions to the child's perceived competency helped to minimise task anxiety because it was aimed to be optimally challenging, being neither too easy nor too hard, which promotes

motivation (Anderman, and Anderman, 2014). The YVYC tool kit could also be adapted during the interview. For instance, Billy's YVYC tool (see Case One) was configured to include Happy and Sad, emotional constructs that could be scaled across the measures of, Not at all, A little, Ok, Very, and Extremely. This was originally chosen because it was unknown whether or not he could cope with more difficult emotions as practitioners had voiced that he struggled to communicate how he felt. However, during the interview Billy noted that he felt unable to express himself within the confines of those constructs:

**Interviewer:** *So when you are at your speech and language lesson, so try and picture yourself there. How do you feel about arriving there? About leaving your current school and going to Westcroft?*

**Billy:** *Ok but nervous. Do you know what you should do - you should get another like there, like nervous or something. \*Billy points the mat and explains that I need a nervous emotion card\**

**Interviewer:** *Because you don't feel sad about it? You feel nervous?*

**Billy:** *Yea*

**Interviewer:** *Okay that's really good to know*

**Interviewer:** *\*Researcher writes nervous down on a blank piece of paper and adds it to the emotional cards>. This says nervous where would you put it on the mat?*

**Billy:** *Quite nervous.*

Bringing additional blank cue cards enabled Billy to voice how he wanted to interpret his experience which personalised it to his liking. This served to bolster his confidence and

empower him. He felt able to voice additional comments in ways to improve the tool kit, such as making the mat bigger, demonstrating his growing competence.

The use of Velcro on the cue cards provided an additional layer of adaptability because it meant that children were free to change their minds:

**Interviewer:** *The next one is geography.*

**Lionel:** *\*Selects quite confident, very happy\* \*Lionel changes his mind and rearranges his cards on the mat\**

**Interviewer:** *Yea, you can change your mind, that's fine.*

Lionel was supported to change how he wanted to express himself and, as a result, he was given the autonomy to do so without seeking the researcher's approval during the rest of the interview. For those who got the opportunity to use the YVYC tool twice (Nina and Helen), they were able to change their minds in light of more recent experiences:

**Interviewer:** *Okay, last time when we talked about sports, you said you felt quite a lot calm about sports. Is that still the same now?*

**Helen:** *<Shakes head - no>*

**Interviewer:** *No? You have changed your mind now? What do you feel now about sports?*

**Helen:** *<Nods - yes> Umm.*

**Interviewer:** *Did you say you played badminton and softball?*

**Helen:** *Yea . Now we just running and badminton.*

**Interviewer:** *So how do you feel about those now?*

**Helen:** *Tiring,umm. Angry.*

**Interviewer:** *Ok how angry would you say you feel about it?*

**Helen:** *Quite a bit angry. Tired.*

**Interviewer:** *How come you feel quite a bit angry about it now?*

**Helen:** *Because I'm so tired.*

**Interviewer:** *Do you find you're tired a lot at the moment?*

**Helen:** *Yea*

**Interviewer:** *Is that because you are on the computer a lot in the evenings?*

**Helen:** *Yea*

**Interviewer:** *Does your mum know you are on the computer a lot in the evenings?*

**Helen:** *Sometimes.*

Providing the opportunity for children to change their minds produces a double effect. It both serves to empower children by enabling them to take responsibility for their own tool results, but it also gives an opportunity for further talk. In this example, enabling Helen to change her mind has led on to an explanation and new insight into her late night computer habits, which is caused her increasing tiredness levels, information that the school did not know about.

Familiarity: Background information was also used to individualise the tool kit to include familiar points of reference. For instance, it was discovered that Lionel liked military history, which was used to develop rapport and foster verbal communication.

**Interviewer:** *...How do you feel about school trips?*

**Lionel:** *\* Selects very happy, very calm.\**

**Interviewer:** *What is your favourite type of school trip?*

**Lionel:** *I don't know, probably my favourite school trip ever in my life is the one we just had last week.*

**Interviewer:** *Oh a military musuem, wasn't it?*

**Lionel:** *Yea. I think you know why I like it?*

**Interviewer:** *Is it because you like military?*

**Lionel:** *Yea. \*Talks in detail about what he saw at the musuem\**

Similarly, finding out that Nathan was particularly anxious around people he didn't know prompted the researcher to spend additional time with him prior to the interviews to help him feel at ease. Evidence supports the concept of getting to know children prior to carrying out research with them to reduce anxiety (Grieg, Taylor, and MacKay, 2008). This background gathering phase was instrumental in individualising the tool kit specifically for the child, providing them with a sense of familiarity.

Photographs: When anxiety is high, it is easier to think and communicate with pictures or photographs rather than words (Tami, 2018). Photographs that matched the experiences of the children were mostly taken by the researcher and where they were not able to be taken, illustrations were used instead (see Appendix 11). For example, Billy's and Aaron's speech and language interventions were photographed, as were the children's schools, their playground, classrooms, their teachers, the sports hall, and the lunch hall. Public experiences, such as working in a group, were provided through illustration due to data protection issues, as were more abstract experiences like putting up your hand to ask a question in class. Children's toys were photographed in the case of Aaron, and a familiar object was provided for Tina (policewoman's hat). In response, children could use pictures

of emotional cue cards (faces with various emotional expressions) to express how they felt which reduced the pressure to find the right words to respond with.

The photographs also meant that children did not have to maintain eye contact with the researcher as they could divert their attention away from the researcher and onto the photos and the mat. This is an important feature especially for those with ASC who typically present with an anxiety-based inhibition towards looking at and following the eyes of adults (Szatmari et al., 2016). Lionel had social anxiety and as a child with ASC, was also observed avoiding looking at adults in the eye. This was also witnessed with Billy. The researcher observed in one of his lessons that “he appeared hunched over, refrained from eye contact and mostly only spoke when he was spoken to.” The YVYC tool enabled the children to access the tool in a way that they were comfortable with. It did not force them to talk or expect them to look at the researcher which helped them to concentrate on their reflective thoughts, rather than worrying about complying with social norms.

Relationship building: A further concept that was identified within the cross-case analysis was the propensity of the YVYC tool kit to reduce anxiety through relationship and rapport building. Gathering background information about the children represented one component of this as it helped to identify interests that could be discussed within the interview.

The researcher’s role as facilitator was also important. The interactional process of the YVYC tool between child and researcher can be seen as being akin to therapy in nature. Rogers (1957) conceptualised therapy not as a treatment, i.e. something which is done to the child, but instead as an opportunity for growth. This underpins humanistic therapy, which aims to help individuals develop a stronger sense of self by accessing and understanding their

feelings. The YVYC tool can be shown to mirror this approach by providing children with an opportunity for growth because it looked at the whole child and helped them to observe and reflect upon their own behaviour.

**Researcher:** *So you feel quite a bit frustrated about Art. And why is that?*

**Nina:** *Because I'm not good at it.*

**Researcher:** *But you want to be good at it?*

**Nina:** *Yes. I try my best. I know how to do little people from plasticine... \*pottery?\**

**Researcher:** *The next one is Art. How do you feel about Art?*

**Helen:** *Confident. <extremely confident> And happy <Extremely happy>*

**Researcher:** *Extremely confident and extremely happy. And why is that? What is it about Art that makes you feel those things?*

**Helen:** *Because ...\*incomprehensible\* I feel like I'm flying or something.*

**Researcher:** *That's a nice description, a lovely image.*

Another key element of the humanistic approach is to have unconditional positive regard, which typically refers to the care that the therapist has for the user and is characterised by warmth, acceptance and being non-judgmental. This helped to ensure that the researcher was not seen as the authority figure in the relationship, which allowed for a more open flow of information and is considered a key characteristic when supporting the recipient towards personal growth (Shirk, Karver, and Brown, 2011).

However, approaching the interviews in this manner may have also increased the likelihood of children displaying social desirability bias (Miller et al., 2015). This refers to the tendency



for participants to provide an answer that they consider more socially acceptable than his/her true feeling.

**Researcher:** *So we were looking at confident - do you know what I mean by confidence?*

**Billy:** *A bit yea.*

**Researcher:** *So when you were at <SLT intervention>, do you feel that going and practicing your speech and language, does it make you feel more confident? \*pause\* Are you happy doing it? \*pause\* Do you think by doing it makes you more confident to talk?*

**Billy:** *Ok - I like going. Actually very happy.*

**Researcher:** *You feel it's happy you by going?*

**Billy:** *Yea*

**Researcher:** *Good*

The passage above was taken from the researcher's first YVYC tool interview attempt. The researcher was adapting the tool, testing to see if Billy understood the term confidence and exploring feelings Billy had about his experiences, however, listening and reading the passage back, it becomes clear that Billy did not understand what the term meant and felt pressured to provide an answer that he felt the researcher was looking for. This represented a threat to the validity of the YVYC tool in its capacity to elicit an accurate representation of the child's voice and this threat is present throughout all of the interviews. However, their responses were repeatedly listened to through the audio or video transcription process, and triangulated against practitioner and researcher observations, which meant that bias was minimised.

Engaging: During the first two action research cycles, children who successfully used the YVYC tool were asked how they felt about the tool. Billy said that it was “good,” Nathan reported that it was “Easy. Extremely easy,” Lionel said that “it is helpful.” The researcher recognised that these responses might be socially desirable biased, and so during the final action research cycle (cases Nina and Helen), instead of asking what children felt about the tool, they were asked how they felt at both the start and at the end of the interviews. Nina replied that while at the start of the interview she felt “happy, excited” at the end she felt “Calm. Quite a bit calm because I explained it. Proud, a little bit proud because I like mentioned help things and stuff.” Helen picked out the emotions \*Extremely Happy\* at the start, and at the end picked \*Confident, Calm and Surprised. \*

The exception to this account was Nathan who showed excitement during the first 15 minutes but then rapidly lost interest. When asked whether he thought the tool was useful and good for other children, he replied “No.” Responding to further questions relating to how he felt it could be improved and whether or not it took too long, he said that it “takes too much time.” Nathan’s elicitation took 23 minutes, 10 minutes of which was taken up with the pre-screener test which sought to explore his emotional understanding. This was subsequently removed in Action Research 3 in order to give more time to exploring the children’s views on issues that matter and ensure that attentional demands were not too high.

Overall it appeared that the children enjoyed and were engaged by the YVYC tool which helped foster happiness rather than anxiety. The researcher’s reflections support this conclusion as the majority of the children especially appeared to enjoy physically manipulating the cards and placing them down onto the mat, which helped to make the elicitation process fun and non-test like. This was also evident for Aaron and Tina who,

despite not being able to access the tool, visibly enjoyed playing with the photographed cards, the emotional cue cards and the Velcro.

## **9.4 Central Theme: Fostering internal reflection**

Children's voice was conceptualised within the literature review as an archetypal construct that refers to the views, rights and understandings of the child and their right to express themselves in active participation in matters that affect them for the purpose of empowerment and the improvement of their quality of life. This central theme utilises that definition to address in what ways the YVYC tool kit could effectively enable children's voice. The cross-case analysis identified a number of ways in which the YVYC tool can be considered effective and these are classed as sub-themes, labelled *affective experiences and safeguarding*.

### **9.4.1 Safeguarding**

*“When ...safeguarding systems fail, it is often because the voice of the child has not been heard (CQC, 2016, p.9).”*

A report entitled 'Not Seen, Not Heard' (Care Quality Commission, 2016), carried out a review of the arrangements for child safeguarding and health care for looked after children in England. Carrying out 50 inspections, they looked at how services in a local authority worked together to provide early help to children in need, improve the health and well-being of looked after children, and identify and protect children at risk of harm. Their primary

recommendation stated that “listening to children is the paramount safeguarding activity.”

However, they found that all too often the silence was “deafening” (p.9).

There were several instances where children disclosed information through the YVYC tool that could be seen as safeguarding concerns.

**Interviewer:** *How do you feel about arriving at school in the morning?*

**Nina:** *Tired, quite a bit tired. Because I do not want to come to school and I don't know why. Afraid, that someone will bully me because some of them does.*

**Interviewer:** *Does that still go on?*

**Nina:** *Yes a little bit yea.*

**Interviewer:** *Is the school doing anything to try and help you with that?*

**Nina:** *Umm..yes. <Shakes head negatively>*

**Interviewer:** *Would you like the school to do any more about bullying?*

**Nina:** *Mmm. <nods>. But they don't do it I think just talk to us...And they keep doing it.*

**Interviewer:** *Right okay. Maybe I'll have a word with the school. Do you want me to?*

**Nina:** *Umm I don't know. If I tell them then maybe they will get after us.*

**Interviewer:** *Yea, it's difficult isn't it? But if it is making you feel bad?*

**Nina:** *Umm. I'm not bothered about it. My mum says that I shouldn't, I should just ignore it. And I have <Helen> with me.*

And,

**Interviewer:** *...How do you feel about arriving at school in the morning?*

**Helen:** *Afraid, worried and tired and sad.*

**Interviewer:** *So those are all fairly negative emotions. Why do you think it is that you feel that?*

**Helen:** *... I feel sad because some people tease me, bully me...*

It was stated in the case studies (see Chapter 7) that under the Children Act (1989), a bullying incident should be addressed as a child protection concern when there is cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer harm. This information was revealed as a result of the administration of the YVYC tool and it demonstrates that the tool can raise awareness of safeguarding concerns. It served to raise awareness of the detrimental impact that the bullying was having on the girls, which ran contrary to school and parental assumptions. Both girls elicited high negative emotions when discussing these issues.

A recent project that sought to explore the emotional well-being of adolescents with a disability revealed similar findings (Kelly, Kelly, and Macdonald, 2016). Incidents of bullying were recounted by 11 of 37 children who participated, which the authors noted “emerged as a main contributor of triggers for feelings of sadness, depression, and also fear (p.66).”

Bullying is prevalent in the lives of many children with disabilities (Marchant et al., 2007) and was revealed during this project. Disabled children are at a significantly higher risk of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect than typically developing children (Sullivan, Vernon and Scanlan, 1987; Jones et al 2012). Those with learning difficulties and speech and language difficulties are considered particularly at risk. In a report on behalf of

the NSPCC, Miller and Brown (2014) note that a significant barriers is a lack of holistic assessment for these groups. The YVYC tool kit has the potential to reveal these incidences because it provides children with opportunities to communicate using alternative methods to which are traditionally available. As such, it could be used for children where there are safeguarding concerns and represents an important project implication.

#### *9.4.2 Affective experiences*

This theme was identified around the effectiveness of the YVYC tool kit to explore children's affective experiences.

The rationale for eliciting how children feel in relation to their school learning and support experiences was discussed within the methodology (see Chapter 4). Research shows that emotional experiences affect children's motivation, interpersonal resources, and cognition (Immordino-Yang, Gardener, and Damasio, 2016; Lewis, Haviland-Jones, and Barrett, 2007). For instance, positive emotions encourage children to engage with their environments (Rothbart and Bates, 2006; Fredrickson, 2001). Whereas negative emotions, such as anxiety, sadness and anger, reduce cognitive resources, motivation and hinder interpersonal relationship development (Duchesne et al., 2008; Jerome, Hamre, and Pianta, 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Pekrun, Elliot, and Maier, 2009).

The extracts below demonstrate that by evaluating school and support experiences through the YVYC tool, children were able to communicate areas which affected them either positively or negatively. This information can help to highlight which contextual conditions supported them to feel positive emotions or what barriers meant that they felt negative emotions.

### Relationships as facilitating and exacerbating learning influences

Relationships of the children were found to affect them in ways that facilitated and/or exacerbated their learning experiences. These were in relation to their peers, siblings, teachers, parents and other professionals.

Studies have found that children's self-reported feelings show that forming good friendships is an important influence on determining the happiness of children's lives (Bradshaw et al., 2013; Children's Society, 2012; Kelly, Kelly, and Macdonald, 2016). Developing positive peer relationships is considered crucial in helping children to form their identity, develop social skills, foster self-esteem and establish autonomy (Currie et al., 2012).

In a health-related study, children with a "neuro-disability," identified relationships with peers, friends and family as being key to ensuring good mental health and emotional well-being (Allard, 2014). However, children with disabilities often face additional barriers, such as less developed language and communication skills, which may make it more difficult to create and maintain friendships than typically developing children (Solish et al., 2010).

Within the YVYC tool, children were asked a number of direct and indirect questions that led to insights about their relational feelings about their peers, teachers and parents. When children were asked how they felt about working with friends or with groups, it provoked an array of responses. Nathan said that he felt "Angry! \*Selects Extremely Angry.\*" Lionel responded with "\*Very Calm\*...confident because I can give them ideas." Billy said that he felt "Very happy...because I'm allowed to be with my friends." Lionel reflected that although he likes being with his friends he can still "sometimes...get angry because they just say something when I am speaking." Likewise, Billy showed an element of self-doubt, when asked if he would be willing to work with peers other than friends, he responded "Well yea, if they wanted to work with me. But if they didn't, I wouldn't want to."

Nina said she felt “Quite a bit frustrated...and a little bit sad because no one wants to work with me...just Helen (Nina). When she does work with others she feels “Worried that they want to do something to me...afraid...because I don’t know if they are making <fun of me> or something...embarrassed because...if I answer wrong (Nina).” In other words, most of the children are acutely aware about their special needs, and this can lead to feelings of embarrassment and fear about other children mocking them. In Nina’s case she reacts by only wanting to work with Helen. “I like working with just Helen. If I am working with Helen, then I feel calm...happy...confident. Because when I’m confident with Helen I can do anything (Nina).” This represents a safe environment for her and is consistent with Maslow’s (1970) Hierarchy of Needs that highlights certain needs should be met (such as safety and belonging) before an individual achieves their full potential. Whereas Helen, does not seem to hold these same fears, and feels “surprised and excited” about working with others, although she did note it did not occur as much as she would have liked.

These extracts demonstrate that peer relationships explored within this project were highly complex and emotive. Their peer experiences could be a positive factor, fostering children’s confidence, happiness, and calmness in the classroom, or they could be negative and provoke anger, frustration, sadness, and anxiety. All of which have been shown to have consequences on learning. Often this interaction was more complex. Billy’s feelings depended on his interpretation of others acceptance of him. Lionel liked joining in with groups but recognised his anger due to lack of self-regulation under certain conditions. Nina felt excluded and so sought solace with her sister. Meanwhile, Helen liked joining in with groups but felt like she had to “try...and protect <her> sister, from being sad.” Nathan knew he felt angry but was unable to explain why, which must have been frustrating.

Teacher relationships were also revealed. Nina identified supportive teachers as being “caring...funny... They understand me (Nina).” Likewise, Helen noted that they made her



feel “Happy and proud...and understand things.” Billy recognised that working alongside his TA was “good because they can help” and “I can tell her what I feel.” Nathan showed that he felt “\*Extremely Happy, Calm, Confident\*” when he worked with his class teacher. Similarly, Lionel explained that his class teacher was “good at helping” and made him feel “confident and quite a bit calm.” It was difficult to uncover precisely what it was these teachers did to foster positive emotions, and more research is needed to consider how the YVYC tool kit could reveal this facet. However, the tool responses suggested that teachers who understand the needs of the children and make them feel confident and calm are considered with the most positive emotions. In contrast, children did not tend to discuss negative emotions about teachers, and this was likely because they were concerned about possible repercussions. However, Nina did note negatively of a teacher that she “sometimes speak a bit complicated” which provided insight into the need for her teachers to better take into account her language needs.

A final point to make is that the YVYC tool can reveal insights into the parent-child-(sibling) relationship. For instance, Lionel said that it was “mum who gave me that <breathing> strategy” which shows mum acknowledged and was trying to help him self-regulate. Billy talks about his anger towards his sister “...my sister...shouts really loud...I need to go upstairs and they said I should count to 10 backwards” suggesting his relationship with his sister is difficult and he has been given a strategy to help self-regulate. The tool was not designed to question the children’s relationship with their family as it was originally focussed upon the school environment. However, the influence and importance that family had on the children was apparent. This became more obvious with Nina and Helen because parent interviews enabled a more comprehensive exploration. Nina’s relationship with her mother appeared strained. She stated that “...mum doesn’t know me very well;” that she was forced to participate in school karate despite telling her mum “I don’t wanna”; and that she “said I

should read, I got angry and didn't do it." Likewise, Helen claimed that "I don't buy food because my mother doesn't let me." Taking into account their mother's interview (see Chapter 7), and discussions with school, the twins' mother seemed to hold a controlling influence over the girls which the YVYC tool kit provided insights into. But this was not malign; on the contrary, their mother was concerned because she believed "something <is> not working as it should...if it's autism or whatever (Mother)." As such, she saw the girls as incapable and in need of protecting. The YVYC tool kit revealed these contrasting viewpoints which teachers rarely have insight into. The critical realism philosophy that was woven into the YVYC tool kit methodology is made apparent and helped to clarify and articulate the various underlying factors that were affecting the children. But future iterations should go further and include questions about the home environment to explore these areas in more depth.

### *Emotions as facilitating and exacerbating learning influences*

*"Emotions are, in essence, the rudder that steers thinking (Immordino-Yang, 2016)."*

It has been established that the YVYC toolkit provided a structural framework that utilised emotion to access children's voice. Recent advances in the neuroscience fields are giving weight to this approach, as they start to show that the influence of emotions on learning is critical. Immordino-Yang (2016) asserts that learning is dynamic, social and context dependent because emotions determine how, what, when, and why people think, remember and learn. For example, it is now considered neurobiologically impossible to form memories, engage complex thoughts or make meaningful decisions without emotion (Fischer and Bidell,

2007). Put simply, people only think about what they are emotionally invested in. This has important implications for education services. It demands answers about the ways contexts act to encourage or discourage children to learn meaningfully, and how teachers can influence children's emotions in the classroom. One study that utilised functional magnetic resonance imaging found that when mathematicians saw equations that they believed were 'beautiful' and elegantly formed instead of 'ugly' and awkwardly formed, they activated the same sensory, emotional brain region that activates during experiences of perceptual beauty, like when admiring a painting (Zeki et al., 2014). Such evidence supports the concept that meaningful learning is about helping children to connect their skills with emotional, subjective meaningful experiences (Immordino-Yang, 2016). The YVYC tool shows it can help do just that because it works to help communicate children's affective learning experiences for educators.

The YVYC tool provides insight into how emotions were associated with how children thought about their learning experiences. These could be positively regarded:

*"\*Happy\*...Because I do like the practical stuff like in science (Billy)."*

*\*Selects extremely Confident, Happy and Calm\* about art. "I did a picture of a house (Nathan)."*

*"Oh! Love it! I don't like the (theory based) lessons but I love the cooking...I feel quite a bit happy, calm because I do not mess up (Nina)."*

*\*Selects extremely calm, not at all worried, or sad." "I go on their <computers> when I'm angry (Lionel)"*

Or they could negatively regarded:

*"I hate my handwriting. My handwriting is rubbish (Lionel)."*

*“\*Selects extremely frustrated\* “...It’s <Maths> really hard (Helen).”*

*“I hate reading out in class. I get nervous (Billy).”*

*“Quite a bit confused <about English lessons>...because I don’t get some of them...(Nina)”*

This information can be fed back to the teachers and lessons can be planned around the individual emotive interests of the child to maximise meaningful experiences and foster learning. Future iterations of the YVYC tool kit need to consider ways in which the tool can dig deeper and explore these areas of interest in more detail. For example, what is it about the “practical stuff” in science that makes Billy happy? Or why does going on computers help Lionel to calm down? Similarly, why does Helen feel extremely frustrated in Maths? What is it that she finds really hard? Such information will help educators replicate successes and help them to prevent negative learning experiences.

### *Well-being as facilitating and exacerbating learning influences*

The YVYC tool kit went beyond mapping emotional and meaningful learning. It also mapped well-being. Well-being is often paired with the increasing demand to respect children’s rights (UNICEF, 2007). Research has shown a consistent decrease in the well-being of children, particularly within the UK (UNICEF, 2007) and an increase in mental health issues (Mental Health Today, 2017). As a result, well-being is starting to become increasingly recognised and prioritised within international and national policies (DfE, 2017). The YVYC tool kit was not purposely designed as a well-being measure but as a way to gather information on children’s affective school learning and support experiences. However, through the analysis of the children’s school experiences, insights have been provided in this arena. Given the importance and influence of well-being on educational

performance, learning and development (Lionelriello et al., 2015), its potential to provide information about children's mental health should be assessed as part of the tool's considered effectiveness. The definition of well-being remains disputed (Selwyn, and Wood, 2015). It has been associated with the quality of people's lives (Dodge et al., 2012), and is often used interchangeably with the idea of happiness and general life satisfaction (Allin, 2007). Likewise, happiness is often interchangeably used to describe the term subjective well-being (SWB) (Boniwell, 2012); a branch separated from 'objective' well-being that argues people should assess their own well-being because fundamentally the only way to know if someone is happy is to ask them.

It has been argued that the degree to which a person experiences more positive and less negative emotions is believed to determine their happiness (or SWB) (Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, 1999). Given that the YVYC tool provides an overview of children's school and support experiences, the majority of children appeared, for the most part, to demonstrate more positive than negative emotions which suggests that they are experiencing positive well-being (at least within their school environment).

However, Boniwell (2012, p. 49) asks an important question: "Is happiness enough for a good life?" The question originates from an alternative philosophy that proposes well-being consists of more than just happiness. Instead, it resides within the actualization of human potential (Waterman, 1993). This resonates with a definition provided by the World Health Organisation which explains well-being as the "realisation of one's physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual potential" which in many ways epitomizes the humanistic approach that the YVYC tool was built upon. Utilising this definition, the researcher argues that the YVYC tool demonstrates well-being through a model proposed by Dodge et al., (2012). The authors argue that stable well-being occurs when people have the psychological, social and physical resources that they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or

physical demand. They demonstrate this approach through a seesaw diagram (see Figure 8.2).

*Figure 8.1: The Well-being See-Saw (Dodge et al., 2012, p.230)*

Some materials have been removed due to 3rd party copyright. The unabridged version can be viewed in Lancaster Library - Coventry University.

When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their well-being and vice-versa (p.30). It resonates with the YVYC tool because the model is dynamic. Children's emotional answers provided a direct insight into their current well-being, which is typically not visible to educational services. This was most observable with Nina and Helen who discussed that they were being bullied, and associated with feelings of sadness, fear, and confusion but all of the children described areas in which they felt both positive and negative emotions.

Ninety percent of school leaders have reported increase in number of students experiencing anxiety and stress over the last five years (National Children's Bureau, 2016). Amongst other mental health concerns, this has led CAMHS to become overwhelmed and just one in four children with a diagnosable mental health problem gets access to the treatment that they need (Ibid). It has been argued that greater focus on prevention through early identification and intervention is critical to address this crisis (Frith, 2016). Schools are believed to provide a good environment for promoting good emotional wellbeing and identifying early behaviour changes and signs of mental needs (Cowburn and Blow, 2017).

In a recent government green paper on mental health (DfE, 2017), the Government have proposed that every school should have a designated lead in mental health by 2025. Amongst other things, they will be responsible for helping schools spot children who show signs of mental health problems. However, the report says nothing about how they will explore the mental health needs of those with disabilities, particularly those with SLCN. Yet, children with disabilities are at a higher risk mental health difficulties (Parry-Langdon, 2008). The YVYC tool kit has shown that it can reveal a child's well-being. Therefore, it offers schools an excellent opportunity to raise mental health awareness for children with SLCN. Future research in this area would help to solidify this hypothesis

## **9.5 Central Theme: Concordance and Discordance**

The cross-case analysis showed perceptual comparisons between practitioners, parents, the researcher, and children (Chapter 8, Table 8.1). Themes relating to concordance and discordance across the case studies were explored. This related to the ways in which adults and children expressed a harmonised or disharmonised account of the children's school and support experiences. The theme draws from several related concepts identified within the literature review, such as perceptions of children with disabilities, inclusion versus integration, and participation and empowerment but this project also sought to expand upon current understanding.

### 9.5.1 *Concordance and Discordance*

*“...how we think about [children] does affect how we deal with them (Stables, 2008, p.1).”*

The findings discussed in the previous central theme show that the YVYC tool is effective in multiple areas to provide children with a way to communicate how they feel about their affective school learning and support experiences. However, as discussed in the literature review, the voice of the child does not sit in isolation (Kellett, 2011). ‘Concordance and discordance’ revealed a complex, interwoven, relationally contextual account of how individual and environmental factors act to silently influence the child’s affective lived experiences (e.g. Alderson, 2016).

### 9.5.2 *Concordance*

The cross-case analysis revealed that adults hold an array of assumed truths about children. In some areas these were mutually agreed and were positive and constructive. For example, schools tended to have a good understanding of children’s interests, and these tended to be accurate. For example, Billy was assumed to “enjoy drama, art and sports (TA);” Nathan to enjoy “Art and Music (Class teacher),” and Nina and Helen were said to enjoy Cooking “They like it and they like their teacher (Nina’s and Helen’s Mother).” These were confirmed by the children themselves within the YVYC tool and were also observable by the researcher, giving weight to the findings. Some of the language that the children used was particularly positive and evocative around their interests:

*“...my favourite school trip ever in my life is the one we just had last week (Lionel)”*

*“I feel like I’m flying or something (Helen)” <About Art>*



*\*Selects Extremely happy\* about Music and Art (Nathan)."*

These statements demonstrate the extremely positive impact that can occur when schools are able to match children's personal interests with their learning experiences. It also reflects the relevance of the neuroscience research discussed within the previous section (Immordino-Yang, 2016). Children tend to enjoy learning and perform better when they are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated to achieve (Anderman and Anderman, 2014; Deci and Ryan, 2002). Children who are intrinsically motivated will work on specific tasks because they find them enjoyable rather than for a contingent reward, such as praise or a prize. In contrast, children who are extrinsically motivated engage in learning to get a good result or to avoid punishment. Intrinsically motivated tasks are also positively associated with fostering achievement, perceived competence and is negatively related with anxiety. This is likely because it bolsters self-efficacy (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2006); effectively increasing the confidence and competence a child has in successfully completing a task.

Aaron was believed to enjoy playing with "cars, books and wooden blocks (TA)," Lionel was said to like "history, especially military (class teacher)." In fact, practitioners were correct about predicting many of the children's subject preference and interests across all 7 of the cases. Where Aaron and Tina were unable to elicit their voice on preferred interests, the researcher's observation supported the practitioner's assumptions within this area.

### 9.5.3 *Discordance*

The perceptual analysis also revealed areas of discordance between the adults' and children's interpretation of the children's experiences. These could largely be traced back to themes found within the literature review which having completed this project now take on a fairly binary view of the concept of children with disabilities. In the literature, perceptions appear juxtaposed. Children are viewed either as passive, vulnerable, incomplete people (Kehily, 2009; Jenks, 1986) who are marginalized and disempowered (Kellett, 2011; Franklin, 2013). Or they were heralded as competent social actors (James, Jenks and Prout, 2005). Schools were considered to be either inclusive or exclusive in nature (Woolfson, 2011). Teachers were either empowering or disempowering children. The findings from the project suggest that these binary interpretations are overly simplistic and do not take into account contextual conditions that were revealed through the use of the YVYC tool kit.

Within this project children mostly identified and constructed themselves in ways that either agreed, disagreed or partially agreed with how they were perceived by adults. Billy was seen to have difficulties that restricted his learning. His school was "concerned about him socially not coping, and parents...expressed concerns that he was very angry at home (Outreach practitioner)." His statement of SEN stated that he had moderate learning difficulties associated with verbal dyspraxia, and his teachers described him as having a "short term, memory and attention (Class teacher)." In essence the majority of the talk around Billy was that his problems were impairments located within the child. He was identified through a discourse that draws from the medical model of disability. As such, he was portrayed by what he was unable to do as opposed to what he could do (Rabiee, Sloper and Beresford, 2005).

Unexpectedly, even the researcher was susceptible to this discourse and observed Billy through a similar lens, likely because the information that was provided to the researcher (e.g. IEPs, interviews) portrayed him in this manner. Billy shared some of these views showing that he feels “nervous” talking in public or meeting new people. However, the YVYC tool also enabled Billy to explain an alternative discourse. He stated ““if I try and do some hard work and I know what to do and then I forget what I’m on about and then I forget what I was going to write...and I look back at it and I think it doesn’t make sense...I get distracted.” Billy showed that he understands that he finds it difficult to concentrate but that this could be due to a mixture of internal, external, environmental, and contextual forces which are impeding his capacity and cause him to lose attention, get confused and frustrated. It presents the YVYC tool kit as a way to shift the status quo away from an assumed identity and force a re-evaluation in light of the child’s voice.

Sometimes this re-alignment was more complex. Experiences and identities were often constructed in shared agreement across the perceptual comparisons, yet this was not necessarily positive. For example, Nathan was thought of as having behavioural and emotional difficulties and considered a “naughty boy” by his peers and some practitioners, because “...a lot of the time he refuses to participate (Class Teacher).” He was also seen by some to have difficulties relating to and trusting others. Nathan revealed through the YVYC tool that he felt \*Extremely Angry and Worried\* when working with other adults, or in groups with other peers; in effect, he mirrored the expectations that were held over him. The exception to this was his class teacher who made him feel \*Extremely Calm.\* Likely, this was because she was aware of his needs and understood how to meet them “the thing that makes a difference with him is...feeling secure (Class teacher).” As a Child in Need, Nathan

needed a close relational attachment as well as other needs, which his class teacher understood, and altered her expectations and the environment to help Nathan succeed.

In a similar narrative, Nina and Helen were identified with cognitive and language difficulties that restricted their learning and placed limitations on their attention “...the major barrier to their learning...is that they have somewhat May Fly minds (Literacy teacher)”. Some described them through a developmentally immature discourse that saw “the children’s actions to be associated with typically younger children (SENco).” As such they were seen as having limited independent skills as well as being unaware of “real life dangers” (SEN assessment report). Their mother highlighted that she believed that their career prospects were limited, as did a class teacher who stated that Nina will never “be rich,” and that “there is something not working as it should...autism or whatever... (Mother).” Nina and Helen reflected this identity within their YVYC tool interviews.

*“I’m surprised why...I’m good at it but I don’t know why. (Nina)”*

*“I’m horrible at it (Nina).”*

*“I do not get intelligent...I don’t know if I’m intelligent (Nina).”*

*“I don’t understand being alone. I don’t work very well when I’m alone. (Helen)”*

A negative account of the perception of their own abilities was more prevalent within Nina’s account than Helen’s, which may relate to her diminished well-being (Dodge et al., 2012) but both girls demonstrated a lack of self-belief. In this respect, the YVYC tool kit showed that even perceptual concordance can reveal a context of disharmony. Children have a tendency to take on the expectations that are held over them, and these affect their opportunities to learn, their motivation and their learning outcomes (Dweck, 2006). Teachers and parents

hold expectations about the abilities of the children in their care (Jussim and Harber, 2005; Jussim, Robustelli, and Cain, 2009). Most expectations about a child's ability are based on the child's previous performance and may be an accurate representation. This can be exemplified within Aaron's and Tina's practitioner account where they assumed correctly that the children would not be able to voice their views in the YVYC tool "because of the age...and the level of learning disability (TA)." Aaron's and Tina's nursery and staff members were found to offer a highly inclusive environment; they assimilated the children and were recognised as equals to other pupils (Frederickson and Cline, 2015). However, they also saw Aaron and Tina as being incapable to provide a voice (Qvortrip, 1994) and reinforced the concept that those with disabilities are 'not going to be able to tell you anything' (Franklin, 2013).

Sometimes this is acceptable, exposing children to concepts too challenging might be disheartening. However, expectations that are too low or beliefs that are inaccurate can be harmful (Jussim, Robustelli, and Cain, 2009). Nina and Helen's mother, for example, appeared to both pressurise the school and the girls themselves to achieve more, while at the same time asserting that there is something medically wrong with them; it is not clear what her expectations of the girls attainment are. Yet the SEN assessment stated that their needs, while observable, were not significantly above their peers; the school SENco argued that there are others "more in need"; and their hospitality teacher suggested that they are "better than they think they are." The YVYC tool kit showed that the girls were being pulled in different directions, emotionally and academically, but research supports the needs of the children for safety, security and predictability (Maslow, 1970).

If false expectations are communicated to the child, whether that be through vocal or assumed ways, then the child might start to act in ways that confirm the adult's expectations (Jussim and Harber, 2005). These low expectations are integrated into the child's identity

and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Ibid). Nathan was, in the past, seen as the ‘naughty’ child so assumed and acted out that role to maintain his identity, which only began to dissipate when his current teacher provided an relationship and environment that challenged that dominant view and met his needs. Nina was seen as being the most immature and incapable of the twins and she revealed her negative self-beliefs in the YVYC tool. It is likely no coincidence that in the second administration of the YVYC tool, she begins to adopt the role of class joker, which fits the immature identity that has been assigned to her “I’m funny at that lesson; ...Funny...I am funny; Joke because I make them laugh, of cause.”

The findings in this section explicitly demonstrate why a child’s right to voice is so important. Adults have the power in schools to label children within an assumed identity. Children’s rights, facilitated by the critical realism assumptions and methodological rigor of the YVYC tool kit can be seen as the remedy with which to exert pressure against the status quo (Federle, 1995).

## **9.6 Summary of findings**

Taken as a whole, the cross-case analysis findings and discussion shows that the YVYC tool kit can be effective in the following areas:

- Overcoming some of the barriers of SLCN
- Reducing the need for vocal communication
- Supporting children’s cognitive and emotional competence to reflect upon their affective school and support experiences
- Highlighting and reducing anxiety
- Adapting to the needs of the child

- Monitoring subjective well-being
- Providing a safeguarding account from the child's perspective
- Engaging and empowering hard to reach children through fun participation
- Exploring, facilitating and encouraging learning within relationships, emotions, and well-being
- Evaluating perceptual accounts of assumed beliefs for their positive and negative impact
- Providing schools and services with evidence from the child that support strategies are either effective or ineffective

## **9.7 Impact, Implications and unique contributions**

This project emerged from the need to provide a method for a local outreach service to elicit how children with SLCN feel about their school and support experiences. The outreach service, which was made up of six organisations within a local authority, supported students where schools felt they needed additional help. Practitioners within outreach revealed that the service was coming under increasing pressure from the local authority to account for their costs and demonstrate impact in a time when budgets are being tightened. They were also keen to uphold the principles of children's rights. However, the implications of the findings reach further than the outreach service alone.

The literature review identified that one of the central barriers of eliciting the voice of the child was a lack of research identifying the most effective methods, especially for those with communicative or cognitive disabilities (Clark, 2005; Marchant and Jones, 2003; Morris,

2003; Franklin, 2013). This project provides a comprehensive account of an elicitation method for children with SLCN. It has formulated, designed and subsequently developed a psychological theoretical base for the workings of the YVYC tool kit, which has been iteratively explored in seven case studies, across three action research cycles. The researcher is not aware of any other research projects which have afforded this level of detail to the design and development of an elicitation method that targets this population.

The cross-case analysis and discussion revealed a number of ways that the YVYC tool kit can be considered an effective way to elicit the school and support experiences of children with SLCN, but it is also important to consider what the implications of the tool kit might have pragmatically.

Kellett (2011) warned that consultation with children has been marred by tokenism where consultation was required to secure funding or views were manipulated and exploited to secure a particular adult agenda. This research project demonstrates the advantage of, and recommends the use of a third party children's advocate (in this project it was the researcher) to oversee the administration of the YVYC tool kit, who is removed from the school system and therefore free of assumed truths. However, it should be cautioned that even the researcher sometimes became inadvertently influenced by preconceptions and any advocate should be aware of these effects.

Despite these precautions, the problem remains that listening and consulting with children will tend to tilt towards tokenism because adults can choose to ignore what they hear or exclude their decisions if it is incongruent to their own beliefs (Kellett, 2011). However, the YVYC tool kit also goes some way to addressing this problem by illuminating assumed truths



and bringing together differing views to form a more comprehensive understanding of what and how different perceptions are affecting the child's lived experiences. This works at its best when parents are involved in the perceptual comparisons because schools rarely understand their viewpoint, yet they hold a significant influence of children's affected experiences. Nina and Helen's case exemplified this point explicitly as teachers, parents and children held misconceptions about each other, which worked to negatively influence the affected lives of Nina and Helen. This knowledge can be brought together and presented to all parties in the search for a more equal and harmonious change that focusses on meeting the needs of the children.

This project shows that the YVYC tool kit offers services with the opportunity to meet their responsibilities to respect children's rights, while at the same time providing information that can be used to implement and defend planning decisions. In this way, it adheres to a number of principles and obligations that are set out in the UNCRC, (1989), specifically: Article 2, 12, 13 of the UNCRC (1989), and the SEN code of practice (2015). Taken together, these assert that:

- Children **must** be provided with the opportunity to be listened to regarding matters that affect them
- There should be no discrimination for children with a disability.
- Children should have the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas in any format that meets the child's needs.

This is important from both a societal perspective, as it provides services with the opportunity to be inclusive. And from an empirical perspective because research shows that schools that

respect children's rights by including them in decision making perform higher on scores of well-being and achievement (Sebba and Robinson, 2010; Covell, 2010). Indeed, the tool demonstrated that it can reveal well-being and safeguarding insights that would have otherwise gone undetected, such as the bullying that Nina and Helen endured.

This project also shows that the YVYC tool kit can be used to offer services with a way of demonstrating accountability and impact from the child's perspective. This was a central requirement which was requested by outreach practitioners. It provides a framework within which to ask children directly how they feel about a particular strategy or intervention.

Where outreach had specifically suggested an intervention, like in the case of Billy going to a speech and language intervention at a separate SEN school, he was able to explain that he felt "nervous" about going but that it was "good" once he got there because he "had lots of fun as well and we all worked together as a team." These data can help schools and services determine whether or not interventions and strategies are understood and enjoyed, as well as to what degree they are impacting the child in positive or negative ways; information which can be used either to justify their continuation or to re-formulate a new plan in light of the findings.

Establishing how children felt about more abstract interventions and strategies was more complex. The outreach practitioners had said that often the service that they offer involves training other teachers in differentiation, demonstrating awareness of needs, modelling good practice, and supporting implementation advice given by other agencies. These could not be directly assessed by asking the child. However, the YVYC tool suggests that it can monitor affective experiences over a given timeframe which works to build up a picture of how

children feel in light of changing contexts (see Helen and Nina case study Chapter 7). When background knowledge is also understood about a child, abstract implemented strategies, such as teacher training, improved differentiation, and classroom management can be associated with affective experience changes. Nina and Helen both received the YVYC tool interview twice, and over this period of time they revealed some experience changes in light of contextual change. This is important because it is a reminder that emotions are transitory and contextually dependent, which agrees with interpretations from neuroscience fields (Immordino-Yang, 2016).

A final point to make on the impact and implications of the YVYC tool kit involves the fact that it may not be effective for all children (at least in its present state). Both Aaron and Tina failed to effectively use the tool to express their views and the research is unclear as to whether this was due to a lack of competency or a lack of experience-based issues (Ljungdahl (2012).

## **9.8 Critical evaluation of the research process**

This research project followed a novel design that combined the underlying assumptions of critical realism, the iterative nature of action research, and the exploratory power of case study methodology to answer the research questions. Part of this process involved designing and modifying the YVYC tool kit which was made up an elicitation tool to gather the views of children with Speech, Language, and Communication Needs (SLCN) about their school and support experiences, but it was supported and advanced by gathering the views of the adults around the child. The process was multifaceted because reality in schools is complex and interpretable. This section critically evaluates the process.

## **9.9 YVYC tool kit processes**

### **Observations**

Observations of the children during their school and support experiences were purposefully built into the YVYC tool kit. Their role was to provide an outsider's perspective (the researcher) that would provide a third-party account of the contextual experiences of the child. Originally, it was determined that these would be non-participant observations to both mirror the way Outreach practitioners were carrying out their observations and reduce the risk that the researcher might influence the child's behaviours. However, during the first action research cycle (Cases Aaron and Billy), it was found that the non-participatory method was impractical. The relationship between administrator and child was found to be critical to understanding the child's interests and communication preferences. This was most visible with Aaron; practitioners were better able to understand his needs and communicate with him using a combination of PECs and Makaton, while the researcher held no such understanding. As a result, the researcher adopted a combination of participatory and non-participatory approaches, which meant that the researcher was able to develop an understanding of the children and build trust while also being able to carry out the observation checklist. One of the criticisms of this more hands-on approach is that the researcher likely altered the behaviours of the children. However, given that the children were already aware of the researcher's presence because they were introduced during the process of gaining ethical consent, then behaviour change would likely occur regardless. Triangulation through eliciting views from practitioners, and the child's own interpretations using the YVYC tool, minimised this effect because changes in behaviour could be identified.

## **Adult interviews**

Interviews were designed to capture how adults thought children felt about their school and support experiences. They were intended to identify how adults perceived the children's difficulties, strengths and learning needs. However, multiple challenges presented themselves. Gathering parental views was extremely difficult; only Helen and Nina's mother agreed to carry out a researcher interview. Difficulty in recruiting parents is not unusual amongst populations of hard to reach groups. This was unfortunate because the analysis of their mother's account revealed insights into Helen and Nina which were invaluable and would otherwise have gone unknown to the school and the researcher. For instance, the reason their mother pressurised her children to such a degree was because she was comparing them to their high-achieving more able brother, which skewed her expectations. She also told the researcher that the school is "really good. I am happy...the attitude they have, not just to SEN children but to all children...and to get more of that is a good thing." This was relayed to school who believed that she was angry at the lack of support the school were providing, despite feeling themselves that they were doing everything they could to support the children. In other words, it offered a way for both parties to address their misconceptions, and instead focus on how to better support the children.

Interviews with practitioners also had their challenges. Interviews followed a relaxed, semi-structured format, which was deliberately flexible to allow discussion to develop naturally, mirroring the way outreach operated. Informal discussions were also used to gather information in this way. However, information that was elicited varied hugely between each case, which meant analysis between the perceptions was difficult. In hindsight, it would have been preferable to have developed a more comprehensive interview schedule that mirrored the questions that the children were asked more closely. This would have ensured that a more detailed account of the child's experiences was established in each case. A downside of

this approach would mean giving up some of the flexibility, and the practical underpinnings that the YVYC tool kit was built upon.

## **Generalisations**

One of the case study criticisms that was addressed in the methodology (see Chapter 4) was the misconception of not being able to generalise beyond the particular case because the sample cannot represent a larger population (Cohen, Menion, and Morrison, 2007; Thomas, 2011; De Vaus, 2001). Yin (2014) advised that rather than thinking about the cases as a sample, they should be thought of as the opportunity to shed empirical light on theoretical concepts. The analytical generalisations upon which the project's implications are assumed were based upon a theoretical base which both corroborated and modified existing concepts that support the YVYC tool (Yin, 2014).

The theoretical propositions presented in the case studies were empirically enhanced by the case studies findings. Most of the case studies predicted the same propositions, referred to as literal replications, which represents a persuasive argument for the original propositions (Ibid). However, because some of the cases turned out not to predict the propositions then it must be accepted that the YVYC tool kit may not work for all children. That being said, these cases are still useful because they predict theoretical replication, in other words, they can be used to predict in what circumstances the propositions will likely not be accepted again (Yin, 2014).

In the case of Aaron and Tina, it cannot be wholly determined why they were unable to use the tool kit. But it likely relates to an interaction between a lack of competence and lack of experience (e.g. Ljungdalh, 2012). Also discussed was Stake and Trumball's (1982) naturalistic generalisations. These refer to conclusions that people come to as a result of

comparing the cases to their lived experiences and beliefs. The generalisations and assumptions made in this project aim to offer services and schools with a practical evidence base with which to make informed decisions as to whether they feel the YVYC tool kit is suitable for children in their own contexts. However, given that it is the adults who will have access to this project and they are subject to the power differentials discussed earlier, it would be beneficial if a child friendly account which explains the YVYC tool kit was created, which explains how it works. Presently, this is outside of the researcher's timescale but represents an avenue of future research.

### **Practical limitations**

It was outlined within the introduction, that the researcher was determined to create a method of elicitation for children and services which was practical. However, it is worth reasserting that despite the best of intentions when rhetoric is put into practice the challenges may overcome the perceived benefits, particularly when it challenges dominant thinking, generates controversy or costs money (Lundy, 2007).

Time/Cost: The YVYC tool kit requires a significant initial time investment and there is a cost to that. Most of this time was invested in exploring the backgrounds of the children, interviewing and discussing children with practitioners, and observing and working alongside them. In addition, photographs and illustrations of the children's experiences took time to capture, print, laminate and Velcro. Preparing the questions that were to be explored within the YVYC tool took time to individualise. However, this process was lessened for children in the same school (e.g. Aaron/Tina and Helen/Nina). In addition, once this initial set up had been established, subsequent administrations were quicker (i.e. for Helen/Nina). Schools and

services which are able to build up a repository of photographs for children will find much less time is required in this area.

Collaboration: Gathering background information required working with multiple professionals each with their own time constraints and work-related agendas. Working with children, outreach practitioners, specialist teachers, speech and language therapists, educational psychologists and others was helpful. Multiple perspectives meant many more design considerations which helped to maximise the possibility of the tool working for a wide range of needs. However, this was at times problematic, in terms of trying to ensure stakeholders felt valued when decisions were made.

## **9.10 Conclusion**

In light of a request by a children's outreach service, an original elicitation method was designed and created to explore the learning and support experiences for children with SLCN. Services are increasingly expected to include children in decisions that affect them, an agenda underpinned by children's rights legislation and research suggesting the social, academic and well-being benefits. However, the literature demonstrated a paucity of methods with which to elicit voice from those with disabilities, particularly those with SLCN. Research also highlights that how we think about children affects how we deal with them which has consequences for their learning and support experiences.

In order to meet the outreach requirement and in consideration of the literature, the study created and set out to answer the following two research questions:



*How effective is the tool kit at eliciting the school learning and support experiences of children with speech, language and communication needs at school?*

*Is there concordance between the children's elicited experiences and the adult's perception of those experiences?*

Out of twenty children (aged 4 -18) who trialled the YVYC tool kit, seven children's (aged 4-14) experiences were written up into case studies, chosen because they provided wide-ranging examples of needs and context while also demonstrating the tool both succeeding and failing. Needs included, but were not limited to, those with: autism, ADHD, foetal alcohol syndrome, Down's syndrome, mild, moderate and severe learning difficulties, children with English as an additional language, and children in care.

Exploring the cases within a critical realist framework, children's affected experiences were compared with the perceptions of the adult's in charge of supporting them in order to better understand their contextual lives. The addition of the researcher's observations permitted an outsider's perspective allowing a viewpoint that was separated from considered truths.

Perceptions were subject to thematic analysis and written up within the cases. These were clustered into action research cycles which enabled the development of the YVYC tool kit in light of evaluation and reflection. A cross-case analysis revealed patterns across all the cases which helped to answer the research questions.

It was found that the YVYC tool kit was effective at supporting most children with SLCN to explore their school learning and support experiences. It was theorised to do this by overcoming some of the barriers of communication and by fostering internal reflection. For example, children were able to communicate without needing to vocalise, it reduced anxiety which represented a barrier to assessment and reflection, and it scaffolded competence, which was theorised to support children to reflect upon their emotional experiences when otherwise

they may not have been able. The tool fostered communication through encouraging children to reflect upon their experiences by providing them with an array of emotional responses to photographed and illustrated experiences. This revealed how they felt across a number of relational, learning and support areas which could be used by services to focus dwindling resource provision and consider how to better support children social-emotionally. However, it also unexpectedly served to illuminate safeguarding concerns and general subjective well-being, both of which are primary concerns of political and social agenda.

#### *9.10.1 Research contribution*

The contributions of this research are heavily intertwined from theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives. The central and most important contribution is the development of the YVYC tool kit for children with SLCN, which is unique to this project. It is the only communication tool kit (that the researcher is aware of) that has been theoretically and iteratively grounded within a psychological and pragmatic framework. The YVYC tool kit operationalised the principles of children's voice, which was conceptualised in the literature review and aimed to respect children's rights, promote social inclusion, and offer a person-centred approach towards elicitation. It also had to adhere to Outreach service requirements. The original pilot tool design drew from many theoretical concepts, such as, Vygotsky's (1956) zone of proximal development and scaffolding to support learners; the importance of familiarity (Aiery et al., 2002); the benefits of using photographs over voice (Beresford et al., 2004); and the implications of emotions on learning (Immordino-Yang, Gardener, and Damasio, 2016). These theoretical considerations were explored and added to as new information was identified across the cases. This was only made possible due to the unique crafting of the methodology, which utilised action research for the purpose of tool

development. This enabled the tool to be designed and updated in light of new observable evidence. In other words, this project demonstrates and offers to others a practical way to create and evaluate theoretical research in the field in a way that meets service and client needs. This is important because services are increasingly being expected to demonstrate effectiveness, to be accountable, and to make use of empirically gathered evidence bases when working with clients (Woolfson, 2013).

In addition to the above, the assumptions of critical realism coupled with the implementation of cross-case analysis offered a unique component to this methodology within the context of children's voice. It offered a way to observe and explain the various perceptual differences that lie at the heart of the school context. Within this framework, the tool kit was able to reveal attitudes and assumed beliefs, which were, unknowingly, having an impact on the lives of children. In other words, the critical realist approach of this research provided a deeper level of understanding about what is happening to children who typically go unheard in our schools, enabling a consideration of ways to support them more successfully.

#### *9.10.2 Researcher's recommendations*

1. The YVYC tool kit was designed with a focus on recognising the increasing importance that emotions play on learning as crucial in affecting motivation, self-efficacy and achievement. It was also designed to follow humanistic psychological principles that assert children are experts in their own lives. These two points are paramount to services utilising the YVYC tool effectively as opposed to a tokenistic approach that has often mired the children's voice movement (e.g. Kellett, 2011). Used in this way, the tool has

demonstrated that it can provide teachers and services with information that they can use to better support children.

2. The YVYC tool kit encourages children with SLCN to reflect upon areas of their school learning and support experiences, which would likely otherwise go unknown. Part of the process involves identifying and revealing how adults perceive the children that they support. The research in this project demonstrates that adult perception has a substantial impact upon the child and can be both positive and negatively influential. There is potential for the child's views to be incongruent and/or challenged by the more powerful adult. Understanding how to effectively manage these conflicts was outside the remit of this thesis, however, training will likely be required to successfully understand how to implement positive change effectively in these circumstances (Kelly, Woolfson, and Boyle, 2015).
3. The YVYC tool will be suitable for most but not all children with SLCN. Those with the most significant cognitive barriers are most at risk of not being able (or enabled) to access the tool. In this project Aaron and Tina were unable to use the tool. There is a danger that practitioners will assume children with complex needs like Aaron and Tina lack the required skills to express their views because they are seen as incapable. It should be reiterated that there is no research consensus that supports this thinking. Equally likely, is that exposing children to participatory opportunities enables them to practice skills which stimulates necessary cognitive components that reflective thinking requires (Borgne and Tisdall, 2017). That being said, the practicality of teaching children with the most complex needs to elicit their views is complex and represents a critical area for future research.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Example scoring Sheet responses

#### Scoring sheet for responses for YVYC tool for Billy (Pilot)

<b>Topic: Activities</b>	<b>Very Sad</b>	<b>Quite Sad</b>	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Quite happy</b>	<b>Very happy</b>
<b>Instruction:</b> <i>How I feel about these activities</i>					
1. Playing with toys					
2. Listening to Music					
3. Reading books					
4. Playing sports					
5. Using the interactive white board					
6. Using the IPAD					
<b>Instruction:</b> Cont..					
7. Music					
8. Art					
9. Practicing writing my name					
10. Practicing my numbers					
11. Practicing my sign language					

<b>Topic:</b> <i>Social/Emotional</i>	<b>Very Sad</b>	<b>Quite Sad</b>	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Quite happy</b>	<b>Very happy</b>
<b>Instruction:</b> <i>How I feel when I am working...</i>					
12. At my Workstation (show image of)					
13. With ... (show picture)					
<b>Instruction:</b> <i>How I feel about these things</i>					
14. Being in the playground					
15. Eating lunch					
16. Going to school in the morning					

<b>Topic:</b> <i>Support</i>	<b>Very Sad</b>	<b>Quite Sad</b>	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Quite happy</b>	<b>Very happy</b>
<b>Instruction:</b> <i>How I feel about my speech and language work...</i>					
17. Being in the headmistress office					
18. Working with ... (show picture)					
19. Practicing my speaking					
20. Practicing my listening					

## Example scoring sheet for responses for YVYC tool for Lionel (AR 2)

Learning	Not at all			A little			Quite a bit			Very			Extreme		
8. Art	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g. Clay -> using hands															
9. Literacy/English	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
10. Numeracy/Maths	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
11. Science	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
12. Geography	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
13. Drama	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
14. P.E	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
15. ICT	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															
16. Music	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm	Happy	Confident	Calm
	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry	Sad	Worried	Angry
Further info e.g.															

## Example scoring sheet for responses for YVYC tool for Nina (AR 3)

How do I feel when I am...

	Not at all				A little				Quite a lot				Very				Extreme			
Going to school in the morning	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi
Working by myself in class	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi
Working as part of a group	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi
Working 1:1 with adult support	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi
Asked a question in class by Teacher	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi
	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang	Hap	Sad	Afr	Ang
	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr	Disg	Excit	Calm	Worr
	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha	Prou	Surp	Jokin	Asha
	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi	Tired	Frus	Confu	Confi

## **Appendix 2: Questions put to adults around the child**

### **Questions to teachers/outreach about the child and support**

#### **Participant:**

Age: \_\_\_\_ Year Group: \_\_\_\_ DoB: \_\_\_\_ Reading Age: \_\_\_\_ IEP:y/n SEN statement:  
y/n

1. How does the participant struggle to access the curriculum?
2. What are the participants perceived strengths and weaknesses?

#### **Support**

3. How are the outreach department/school supporting the participant to access the curriculum?
4. How are the support interventions built into the participant's school day?
5. How is it expected that the support intervention will affect the participant? (socially, academically, contextually, behaviourally)
6. Are there any perceived challenges in implementing the support intervention?

#### **Reflections**

## Appendix 3: Letter to parents/carers

### Letter to Parents/Headteacher and informed consent

Dear Parent/Carer

I am conducting a PhD research project based in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Coventry University. [Headteacher's name and/or Outreach centre professional] has given his/her permission for me to conduct a new piece of research that will enable children a voice in decisions that affect them. I am now looking to recruit children to take part in the project.

I have described the project in detail on the attached Information Sheet, and I would be very grateful if you could read it and decide if you would be happy for me to approach your child to see if they would like to take part.

All the children will be fully briefed about the purpose and nature of the research in a way that they will understand, and they can change their mind about taking part at any point. You can also decide to withdraw your child's work from the study. I will conduct the research on school premises and I have an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau clearance.

If you are happy for your child to be approached to take part in the project, please sign and return the response slip at the bottom of this letter to the school as soon as possible. If you do not return this slip your child will not be asked to participate.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this and I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours faithfully

Ashley Bloom.

---

*Please tick the boxes and complete the rest of the slip as indicated. Your unique code is:*

☐

I am the parent / guardian of the child named below.

☐

I have read and understand the information sheet for Ashley Bloom's study into enabling children a voice in decisions that affect them, and I am happy for them to participate in the project.

Signed:

Date:

Child's Name:

Contact Phone Number:

---

*Office Use Only*

Received by Researcher (sign and date on receipt):

## **Information Sheet**

**1. Purpose of the project**

The aim of this study is to promote inclusivity within schools. A tool kit named 'Your Voice, Your Choice!' has been developed which helps children express their feelings and thoughts towards school. It is used to assess how support affects children, leading to more targeted provision while enabling them to take responsibility for their learning.

**2. Why has my child been chosen?**

Children who are aged 4-18 and experience additional support have been chosen to take part in this study.

**3. Does my child have to take part?**

No, participation is voluntary. However, the project will give them a chance to express their opinions on how their education is being delivered. This information can be used to help meet their learning needs.

You may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. If you choose to withdraw, all personal information about your child will be destroyed.

**4. What do they have to do?**

The project is being conducted at your child's school in a safe and relaxing environment. Using the 'Your Voice, Your Choice' toolkit, your child explores how they feel about different aspects of school life (e.g. activities, subjects, social and communication, and school support). Photographs of familiar objects, settings and scenarios are placed on a mat to promote recollection of memory and your child will choose from a number of emotional responses that reflects their thoughts. This takes approximately 20 – 40 minutes and may be repeated at a later date. Responses may be video or audio recorded in order to explore non-verbal communication but all data is completely anonymised.

**5. What are the risks associated with this project?**

There are no perceived risks in completing the tasks. If pupils feel uncomfortable at any point, the task will be stopped.

**6. What are the benefits of taking part?**

'Your Voice, Your Choice' has been described as fun and exciting by previous children who have used the tool kit. It empowers children and provides insight into their views and preferences which so often go unheard. Results will help practitioners design more tailored support programmes at your child's school.

**7. What if something goes wrong?**

Children are fully briefed on the project and informed that they can stop at any time. If you are unhappy about the conduct of the study please get in contact with either myself or my supervisor, whose details are given at the end of this briefing. If you have serious concerns

you can contact Prof Jane Coad, ([aa9737@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:aa9737@coventry.ac.uk)), who is the Faculty Chair of the Ethics Committee.

**8. Data protection and confidentiality**

Data given will be kept completely confidential and secure. It will be used solely by me. At the end of the project all personal data will be anonymised and/or destroyed.

**9. What will happen with the results of the study?**

The results will be written up and presented as part of my PhD Research Project. If the results are novel, it is possible they will be presented at academic conferences and/or written up for publication in academic journals but any personal data will be kept anonymous.

**10. Who is organising and funding the research? Who has reviewed this study?**

The research is organised by Ashley Bloom, who is undertaking a PhD Research Project at Coventry University, Health and Life Sciences Department. The project is being funded by Coventry University. This study has been approved by the Coventry University Ethics Committee.

Further information/Key contact details of researcher, supervisor and key contacts:

Ashley Bloom  
[blooma@uni.coventry.ac.uk](mailto:blooma@uni.coventry.ac.uk)  
(PhD Researcher)

Prof. Clare Wood  
[aa0065@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:aa0065@coventry.ac.uk)  
(Lead Supervisor)



## Appendix 4: Participant Consent

### Participant Consent

- Can you help me by being part of a project that encourages children to make their own decisions?
- There is a game involved that asks questions about your school.
- You just need to try your best but if it gets too tricky, we can stop.
- Sometimes, I am going to record what we say, but this will be kept anonymous.
- Have you got any questions?
- Are you ready to start?

Circle thumbs up for yes or thumbs down for no.



Name:.....

Class:.....

DoB:.....

## Appendix 5: E-mails with Lionel's mother

Great news. I look forward to meeting <Lionel>. It will probably be just after the Easter Break now.

Please let me know if you would like any further information or if either of you have any further concerns once the project starts and I'll be happy to address them.

Best wishes,

Ashley.

---

Mon 31/03/2014, 16:06

Hi Ashley,

Its done the trick, <Lionel> now wants to give it a go. Will return the slip to school tomorrow.

Many thanks

<Mum>

---

Mon 31/03/2014, 11:27

Hi <Mum>

Thank you very much for your e-mail and interest. I understand that <Lionel> might be feeling a little bit anxious about undertaking the project and I'll happily try to ease these worries:

Hi <Lionel> - My name is Ashley and I'm running the project and thank you for thinking about getting involved. The reason we would love for you to be involved is because we believe children do not get enough choice about what they do at school. Too often children are told where to go, when and for how long. Often, they are not even asked if they enjoy doing what they are being asked to do. After all, you know yourself better than anyone else! What would help you feel more confident at school? Is the school doing everything it can to make sure you are happy? Or do you feel you would like to change something? With help from child researchers, such as yourself, children all over <The West Midlands> and hopefully the UK will have a bigger say in what is done to support them at school.

There are several parts to the project:

Part 1: I meet you with someone you are familiar with at your school and only when you feel happy about it.

Part 2: I come in to a few of your lessons to just see what is currently being done to support you in class. Nothing formal, no tests!

Part 3: You become the researcher. I will bring in a game that involves you taking photos of things you like or don't like.

Part 4: Using the photos and through the use of the game, we create a picture of what you enjoy doing and what you don't enjoy doing. This will then be used to help support you in the future, to make sure you are doing more of the things that you feel is best for you. Also, you will help by telling me how we might improve the game for other children.

The project is entirely confidential and anonymous. Also, it is completely voluntary, so if you want to give it a try and then decide later that you don't like it and want to stop, that is okay too.

I hope I eased some of your concerns and look forward to hearing from you if you decide to proceed. If you have any other questions, please feel free to ask.

Best wishes,

Ashley Bloom.  
Coventry University.

Reply all

Fri 28/03/2014, 16:05

Hi Ashley,

My name is <Mum> and my Son <Lionel> has been asked to take part. Whilst my Husband and I are quite willing for <Lionel> to take part, he was horrified at the thought. I think it is the thought of his routine changing at school. <Lionel> has been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome and traits of ADHD.

He has read the letter, but I think he does not quite understand. I thought that if you could send him an email with what he has to do in a more simple form, he may then come around to the idea of doing it.

We wish for <Lionel> to take part, but at the end of the day the decision is his so fingers crossed.

Many thanks for your time

<Mum>

## Appendix 6: Screener story for YVYC pilot

### Screener story for Your Voice, Your Choice! (Pilot)

#### Story of Bart



This is Bart. He will show us how to use the Your Voice, Your Choice! If we place Bart at the very right side of the mat it means he is very happy. If we place him at the very left side, it means he is very sad. Bart can also feel quite sad, ok, and quite happy by moving him here.

I am going to tell you a short story and I would like you to put

Bart on the mat depending on how happy or sad you think he is.

Bart is feeling really bored. He has not been able to go out all day because it's been raining.

*I'm going to place Bart on quite sad*

When the rain stops, Bart gets on his skateboard. He is moving very fast and is really enjoying himself. *Where should we put Bart on the line?*

All of a sudden, a car jumps out in front of Bart and he falls off his skateboard and crashes into a wall. He has hurt his knee and scraped his elbow. *Where should we put Bart on the line?*

Bart's mum sees that he is hurt and runs over to him. She gives him some chocolate. This makes Bart feel a bit better, but his knee is still hurting. *Where should we put Bart on the line?*

After a long day Bart returns home and watches his favourite T.V programme. He feels much better now. *Where should we put Bart on the line?*

## **Screeners scoring to Your Voice, Your Choice (Pilot)**

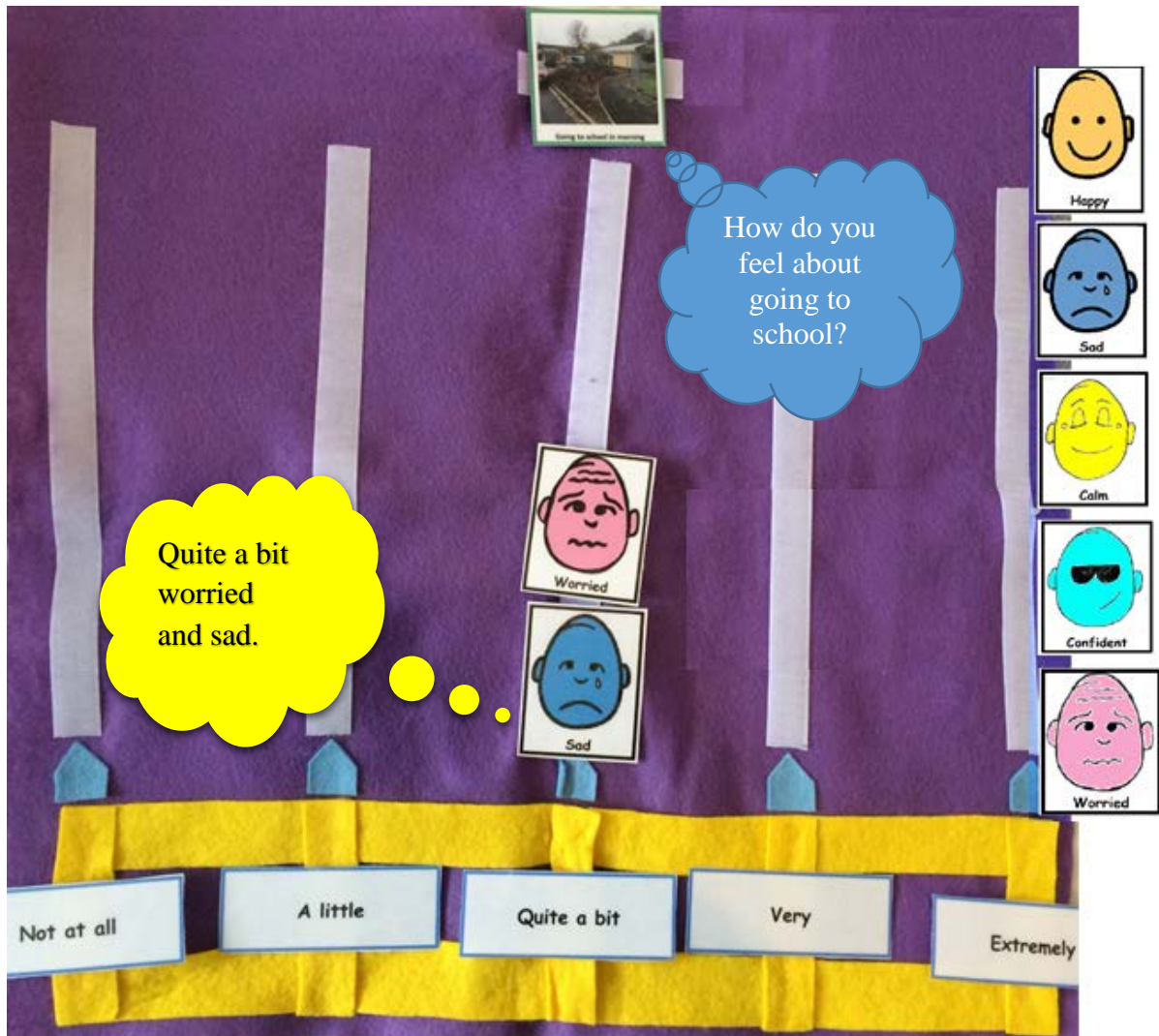
<b>Topic:</b> <i>Introduction Story</i>	<b>Very Sad</b>	<b>Quite Sad</b>	<b>Ok</b>	<b>Quite happy</b>	<b>Very happy</b>
<b>Instruction:</b> <i>Bart's Story</i>					
Moving fast on his skateboard					
Crashes and hurts himself					
Mum gives him chocolate but knee still hurts					
Goes home and watches T.V.					

## Appendix 7: Observation checklist (pilot)

<b>Time</b>																	
<b>Task</b>	On Task																
	Off Task																
<b>Emotional State</b>	Interested																
	Happy																
	Calm																
	Excited																
	Anxious																
	Sad																
	Angry																
	Bored																
	Disinterested																
<b>Choice</b>	Offered choice																
	Not offered choice																
<b>Learning</b>	Working by self																
	Working with peers																
	Working with Teacher																
	Working with TA																
<b>Location</b>	At Desk																
	Walking around																
<b>Communication</b>	Teacher talking																
	X talking with peers																
	X talking with TA/Teacher																
	X disruptive talking with peers																
	X disruptive talking with teacher																
<b>Other Children</b>	Other chn off task																
	Other chn disruptive																

	Other chn on task															
	Co-operatively working															
	Working by themselves															
<b>Resources</b>																

## Appendix 8: YVYC tool design changes for post AR 1



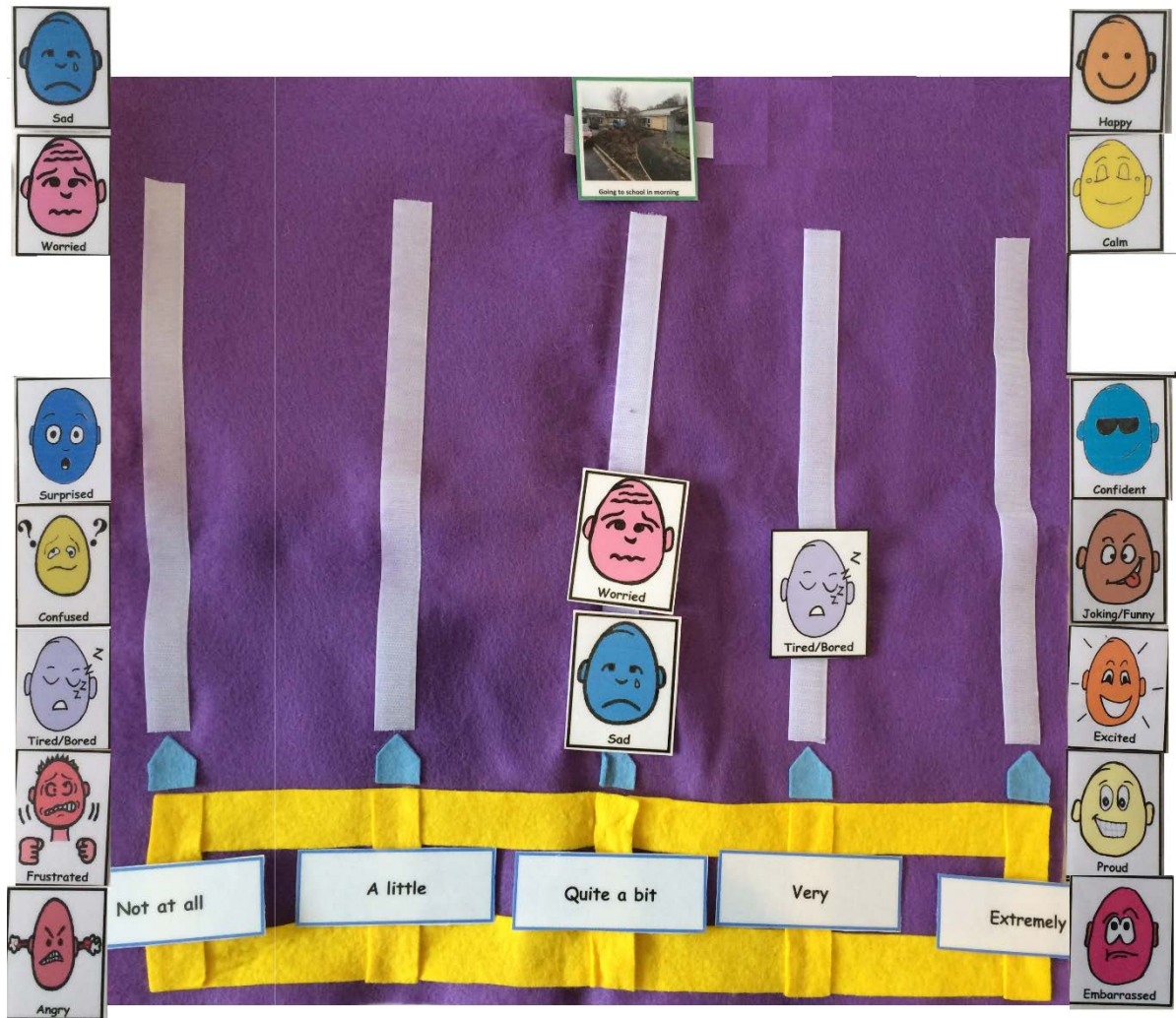


## **Appendix 9: Observation checklist design for AR 2**



	Other chn disruptive																
	Other chn on task																
	Other chn Co-operatively working																
	Other chn working by themselves																
<b>Resources</b>																	

## Appendix 10: Additional emotions added to the YVYC tool for AR 3



## Appendix 11: Examples of illustrations and photographs used in the YVYC tool

### Topic: Warm up



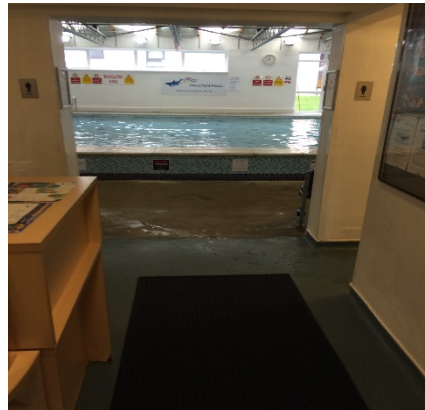
Me



Me



Horse Riding



Swimming

### Topic: Subject/Attainment



**Spelling**



**Reading**

**Topic: Social and Emotional**



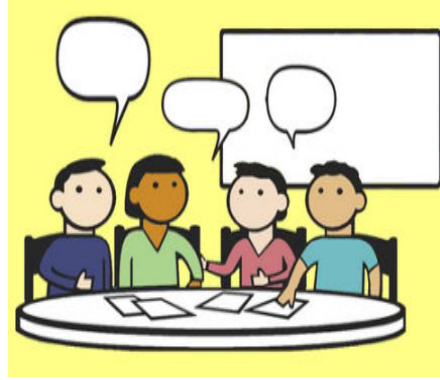
**Going to school in morning**



**Your Classroom**



**P.E**



**Working as a group**



**Lunch and Snack room**



**Being in the play ground**

## **Appendix 12: Example of data analysis strategy used to inform the case studies**

This example refers to Case one (Billy). It shows the analytical process the researcher took and represents the strategy used across all remaining case studies. Each case study includes three perspectives; the practitioners (teachers, outreach members, other professionals); the researcher; and the child (which uses the YVYC tool). These perspectives were subject to analysis which also produced a thematic map included in each case study.

The below stages demonstrate the analytical strategy in action and are described in more detail in Section 4.16 of the Methodology Chapter.

### **Practitioner Perspective**

Practitioner perspective was attained through collecting data from documents (SEN statement/IEP), teachers, teaching assistance, outreach professionals and a speech and language therapist).

#### ***Stage one - Familiarisation with the data***

Data collected from and about Billy were entered into Nvivo 11 and re-read many times.

#### ***Stage two: Applying a coding framework***

A coded framework was applied to the data. Data was put into their appropriate categories (e.g. data representing the perspectives of practitioners/researcher/Billy's YVYC tool elicitation were collated).

Practitioner perspectives were coded first which were then used to compare and contrast against the researcher's views and then Billy's. Codes were given to phrases/sentences that were considered salient. These were identified in Nvivo 11 and started purposely broad:



## Combined practitioner

Name	Files	References	
1. Background	0	0	
Outreach involvement	1	2	
Intervention aims	0	0	
Addressing concern	1	1	
Future targets for Billy	1	1	
Giving responsibility	1	2	
Increase confidence	1	1	
Opportunity to talk	1	4	
Staff training	1	2	
Recieves additional support	1	3	
Mixed emotional perceptions	0	0	
Communication	3	6	
Social interaction	3	4	
Negative emotional perceptions	0	0	
Aggression	3	4	
Anxious	1	2	
Learning difficulties	1	1	
Combination of difficulties	2	4	
Difficulty with maths	1	1	
Difficulty with reading and comprehension	1	1	
Low attention	1	1	
Poor attention	1	1	
Short term memory	1	1	
Positive emotional perceptions	0	0	
Attendance improving	1	1	
Enjoys ICT	1	1	
Enjoys physical activity	1	1	
Enjoys practical activities	1	1	
Enjoys social situations	1	1	
Enjoys visual activities	1	1	
Likeable	1	1	
Likes drama	1	1	
Likes sport	1	1	
Not afraid to ask for help	1	1	
Receptive to praise	1	1	
Responds well additional help in small groups and 1 to 1	1	1	
Rival Threats	0	0	
Threats to the intervention	0	0	
Cancellation of sessions	1	2	
Early in the intervention	1	1	

### *Coded for Aggression*

“Mum says Billy gets very aggressive and angry at home and will hit out (SEN Statement)”

### *Coded for Learning Difficulties*

“He has a short-term memory and low attention (SENco)”

### *Stage three: Searching and reviewing themes*

Initial codes were collated into refined themes. For instance, the initial aggression code was transformed into the theme frustration. Learning Difficulties was transformed into Impacting Learning which more closely matched the data. Subsequent themes and an example of how they were collated from the data and are shown below.

The below extract is taken from a semi-structured interview undertaken with an outreach practitioner (SJ):

SJ: We got the referral for <Brandon>. They were very concerned. They were concerned about him socially, not coping and parents had expressed concerns → **Anxiety, not coping** that he was very angry at home and seen outbursts from him, and that was unusual → **Aggression**. So that was the start of it. So I went in and did initial observation with key staff and then did 3 observations of him in core subjects and R.E because that just how his time table worked out. His R.E group is a much bigger group, **he's in quite small groups** → **small groups**. Smaller than the group that he's coming to here (to do the speech and language lesson). For literacy and numeracy I watched him. My biggest observation was I didn't feel that he had much **opportunity to speak** → **School environment/Opportunity to speak** and his biggest issue according to his statement, his learning difficulty, is his speech. Not his articulation but his social **understanding of language, his syntax and that kind of thing** → **Language understanding**....Now unfortunately, although its meant to be going on all term this half term he has only been once because their have been other...we **have had to cancel our session for illness, extraordinary assemblies, and last week was sport relief so...we are not quite in the routine** → **Practical difficulties**. So this is very early on in the intervention. That's as far as we have got. Then we will see where this goes into next half term and then review and see where we want to go from there.

The below extract are taken from semi-structured interview and notes undertaken with the school SENco and his TA:

#### **Joy of practical subjects:**

“...enjoy drama, art and sports (TA)”

“He likes Sport” (SENco)

“responded well to praise and liked to be given responsibility (Statement of SEN)”.

#### **Anxious:**

“He is anxious at first but 1 to 1 he is more confident (Outreach practitioner - SJ)”

“They were very concerned. They were concerned about him socially, not coping and parents had expressed concerns that he was very angry at home and seen outbursts from him, and that was unusual. So that was the start of it” (Outreach practitioner - SJ).

“I’m sorry but <Billy> won’t be in school next week, he is not coping with school at all” e-mail from SENco).”

“Anxious with strangers...” (SENco)

“He has rather low confidence” (Art teacher)

“All the practitioners that were spoken to highlighted that Billy tended to be anxious” (Researchers reflections)

He was especially anxious in “new situations (SJ)” but “was more confident in one to one situations <and> gets on better with adults than peers (SENco)”

### **Impacting learning:**

“lack of learning progress (English teacher)”

“he struggles with speaking and...finds it hard to communicate with other people (SENco)”

He is “showing no progress” in his small group numeracy and 1:1 reading group over several months (SENco).

### **Frustration:**

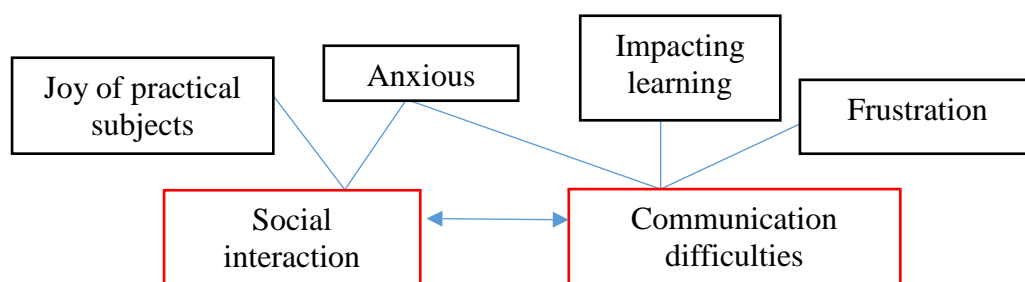
His parents “had expressed concerns that he was very angry at home and seen outbursts from him, and that was unusual (SJ)”

He “gets very aggressive and angry at home and will hit out at family members (SENco).”  
“Mum is unhappy with Billy’s behaviour”

These instances “only occurred at home, and were directed at his mother and sisters (SENco).”

An outreach practitioner (SJ) observed Billy on several occasions and suggested that one of the causes of his frustration was likely to be his inability to communicate his needs because he didn’t have “much opportunity to speak (SJ; Researcher’s notes)”.

These themes were then collated into global or general themes. In Case one, Social Interaction and Communication Difficulties were chosen because these themes represented practitioner perspectives most accurately. The final thematic map is shown below.



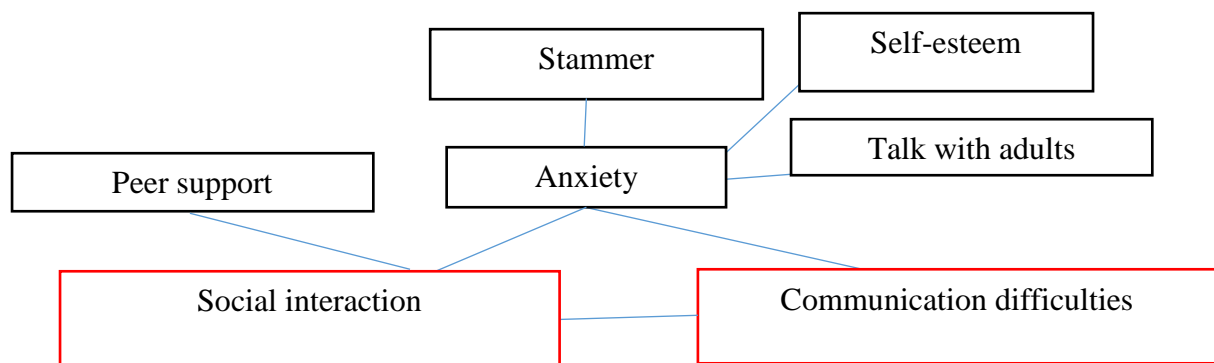
## Data analysis of the researcher's perceptions

Analysis of the researcher's perceptions were carried out in a similar way as the practitioner account. Data was collected through observations and self-reflections and these were subject to thematic analysis. An early example of a pilot observation schedule and reflective account are provided below. These were collated to generate themes and an example of how themes emerged from that data is represented below.

Researcher Perception			
Name	Files	References	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas for tool development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficult to observe B's emotions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	0	0	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mixed emotional perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicating with his peers</li> <li>Enabling or disabling observable factors for B to use the YVVC tool</li> <li>Evidence of encouragement to speak</li> <li>Logistics for intervention</li> <li>Numbers in class</li> <li>Working by self or with peers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1	7	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative emotional perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anxious</li> <li>B did not seem to want to join in</li> <li>Billy confused</li> <li>Disorganised directions provided by adults</li> <li>Happier in Art than SLT lesson</li> <li>Limited opportunity for talk</li> <li>Off task</li> <li>Reluctance to be centre of attention</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	0	0	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Postive emotional perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>B confident to show off his work</li> <li>Communicating with researcher</li> <li>Communicating with teacher</li> <li>Emotional state during observation</li> <li>Engaging lesson</li> <li>No obvious sign of anger</li> <li>Not easily distracted</li> <li>On task</li> <li>Peers allowing additional time for B</li> <li>Taking responsibility</li> <li>Teacher allowing additional time for B</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	1	2	

- Start of lesson seemed fairly frantic. Lots of shouting and running around. After several minutes the teacher settled everyone down. The lesson lasted 50 minutes.
- B sat with three others, there are twenty children in the class. → Peer support → Social interaction
- Teacher asks the children to continue their work from a previous lesson. This required each child to get out their books at the correct page and continue on their drawings/colouring in of fruit.
- B is talking to his friends to ask advice about which colours he should use.
- He is interacting with the group he is with but is obviously awkward (glances towards me, embarrassed looks) about me sitting too close, perhaps worried that his friends will realise that I am observing him, as such I move further away.
- B asks another child to sharpen his pencil for him and that child did it.
- B is happy to share his crayons with the rest of the group – Peer Support → Social interaction
- There is no detection of anger.
- The teacher came over to observe B work and suggested some changes, which B is happy to put in place without question. → Social Interaction
- At once point the teacher asks B “what colour is a banana?” And B does not seem to know the answer. → Talk with adults → Communication difficulties

This led to the thematic map copied below.



### **Data Analysis of the child's perceptions (YVYC tool)**

Likewise, analysis of the child's perceptions were carried out using the same thematic analysis technique described previously. Part of the extract is demonstrated below along with some examples of how themes were located. Like with the other data, these were collated in Nvivo 11. An example of this is shown below.

## Child perception (YVYC)

Name	Files	References
<b>Negative emotional experiences</b>	0	0
Amount of time spent at SLT intervention	1	1
Anger influences	1	1
<b>Anxious</b>	1	2
Anxiety about getting things wrong	1	1
Anxious about what others think	1	1
Anxious about working with others	1	1
Extreme emotion	1	2
Requires confirmation that no one is going to see responses	1	1
Arriving at school	1	1
Asked a question in class	1	1
Difficulty concentrating	1	3
Going to speech and language intervention	1	3
ICT lessons	1	1
Learning influences	1	1
Reading out loud in class	1	1
Working with others at SLT intervention	1	1
<b>Neutral emotional experiences</b>	0	0
Geography	1	1
Home environment	1	4
Opportunity to listen at SLT intervention	1	1
Opportunity to talk at SLT intervention	1	1
Talking with SLT intervention teacher	1	1
Working with TA	1	1
<b>Positive emotional experiences</b>	0	0
<b>Rival Threats</b>	1	4
Open ended questions are difficult	1	2
Researcher leading question	1	1
Unclear if child understands meaning of question	1	6
Unclear whether child understandings meaning of emotion	1	1
<b>YVYC overcoming communication difficulties</b>	0	0
Rapport building	1	6
YVYC Overcoming poor vocalisation	1	3
YVYC questions prompt child's self-reflection	1	6
YVYC structure prompts further conversation	1	7
YVYC tool enjoyment	0	0
YVYC Tool flexibility	1	2
<b>YVYC recommendations</b>	1	3
Child thinking of ways to help develop the tool	1	4

Times-pan	Content
6:03.2 - 6:22.3	I: The next one is school trips. How do you feel about school trips? P: <selects very happy> → Happy → School joy
6:22.2 - 6:24.2	I: How do you feel about going on the computer? P: <selects very happy>
6:24.1 - 6:29.0	I: How do you feel about talking to friends? P: <selects very happy> → Happy → School joy
6:28.9 - 7:04.4	I: How do you feel about sports? That one is quite general - I don't know if you have a preference for certain sports have you? P: Yea. *indistinct* I: Is there one you like best? P: Yea football and basketball and volleyball.

	<p>I: Do you play in any teams?</p> <p>P: No</p> <p>I: Just like playing?</p> <p>P: Yea</p> <p>I: I remember you saying you like playing in goal don't you?</p> <p>P: Yea -</p> <p>I: And you're a Man Utd supporter!</p> <p>P: Yea.</p> <p>I: Me too</p>
17:29.5 - 17:46.7	<p>I: The next one is if you had to work 1 to 1 with a teacher in class how would that make you feel?</p> <p>P: *indistinct* *Selects quite happy*</p>
17:46.6 - 18:01.8	<p>I: Next one is if you had to work by yourself. So if your teacher asked to do something yourself?</p> <p>P: I like it.</p> <p>I: You like working by yourself?</p> <p>P: Yea - then I can concentrate *stutters over the word*. →Stammer → anxious</p>
18:01.7 - 19:03.3	<p>I: The next one is your teaching assistant. Because I think you have a TA?</p> <p>P: Not in all classes.</p> <p>I: So when you are with them..</p> <p>P: &lt;moves cards around&gt; I don't know.</p> <p>P: *places on ok*</p> <p>I: What do you feel is good about working with them? And what is bad about working with them?</p> <p>P: *indistinct stutter* Good because they can help me but bad I would like to *stutters* work with my friends instead of my teacher. → Talking to friends → Reliance on friends</p> <p>I: Ok. So you would rather work in a group of friends rather than with your TA? That's fair enough. Excellent.</p>
21:02.6 - 21:30.8	<p>I: If you are asked to read out loud in class</p> <p>P: I hate hate reading out in class. I get nervous &lt;Very sad&gt; → Anxious</p> <p>I: That's good to know - it's really common as well. I get nervous when I'm asked to read out loud. I think a lot of people do.</p>
35:23.2 - 40:00.0	<p>I: Is there anything at school that stops you learning?</p> <p>P: If I try and do some hard work and I know what to do and then I forget what I'm on about and then I forget what I was going to write. And then when I'm writing and I look back at it and I think it doesn't make any sense. → Attention → Concentration difficulties → Social interaction</p> <p>I: That's interesting. That must be difficult sometimes.</p> <p>P: Yea</p> <p>I: Does that get annoying sometimes?</p> <p>P: (He must think I am still talking about at home) So I go upstairs because my sister plays like her game and she's either really loud, or she turns the T.V up and I get distracted *indistinct*</p> <p>I: Yea that can be distracting when you are trying to work and someone is blaring out TV.</p> <p>I: Or singing..</p> <p>P: Oh singing!</p> <p>I: Does that get on your nerves</p> <p>P: Yea a bit. → Frustration with sister → Attention/Concentration difficulties</p>



And led to the generation of central themes for the child's perceptions.

